

Reiter Foothills Recreation Planning Committee
Meeting # 7
November 18, 2008 | 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Meeting Purpose: Present and discuss DNR's biological suitability analysis for recreation facilities and trails, and present and discuss DNR's composite of all suitability analyses. Committee discussion on factors defining a good recreation experience.

Welcome:

- Review agenda
- General housekeeping items

The committee discussed e-mail exchange of information (resources) and follow up correspondence. As the committee ground rules do not address e-mail specifically, members determined how they would like email to be used. Members agreed to use email for the purpose of exchanging resource information. Discussions regarding the merits/limitations of resources exchanged and specific strategies regarding use of the resources in recommendation development are better done in the committee meetings.

The November 15 Walker Valley Tour was postponed due to the lack of committee member participants signed up. The purpose of the tour is to share information associated with DNR's Recreation Program including motorized and non-motorized trails and facilities. Tour stops will include: trailheads, hardened trail features, education and enforcement approaches, gates and restricted access features. We will re-schedule the tour during January.

DNR Update:

Day-to-Day Management – Candace Johnson

DNR reaffirmed that many of the activities occurring out on the Reiter Foothills landscape are not acceptable to DNR. DNR is addressing some of those issues now, but the goal is to wait for longer term/permanent solutions until the committee makes its recommendations and DNR completes a recreational plan that is reviewed through the SEPA (State Environmental Protection Act) process.

- *How has the work on the route that accesses Index Wall holding up?*
DNR Response: The work at the ford across Deer Creek has held up well in the recent high water events. At this point in time, the challenge continues to be the accumulation of water in the area beyond the ford. DNR will continue to work with other departments, agencies, and the users as we implement interim measures in this area.
- *Are the root wads cabled in?*
DNR Response: No. The root wads have been positioned carefully and are well anchored.

Biology Suitability Analysis

The land suitability analyses DNR is conducting identifies and maps features within the planning area that have resource management considerations that need to be taken into account when planning long-term recreational facilities and trails. The categories of analyses the DNR is conducting in the Reiter Foothills Recreation Planning include geology and soils,

management, and biology. Information is mapped at the landscape scale for use as a tool by the committee to develop recommendations for areas in Reiter Foothills. The presentation at the November 18 meeting covered the biology criteria.

General Information:

Areas identified as low suitability for recreation during the biological analysis generally include habitats protected by the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and state priority habitats. Low suitability does not necessarily indicate recreation trails or facilities cannot be sited there; however, it highlights known factors in that area that require special consideration.

This is broad-scale information, and mapping and does not preclude site-specific analysis. All project-level proposals for recreational development will have to be reviewed on a site-specific level before they can be implemented.

Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

DNR signed an agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service in 1997. The HCP outlines strategies that guide DNR's management to protect wildlife species while allowing DNR to continue to manage landscapes and at the same time comply with Endangered Species Act requirements within the range of the northern spotted owl. There are four major strategies outlined in the HCP including riparian, northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and multispecies conservation.

Questions and Comments:

- *Is the HCP specific to recreation activities?*
DNR Response: The HCP outlines guidelines for management activities including timber harvest, but **all** management activities must be in compliance with the HCP on DNR trust lands within the range of the northern spotted owl.
- *Is DNR required to do an HCP when the agency plans an activity?*
DNR Response: DNR chose to enter into the HCP agreement. We laid out strategies to minimize or mitigate for impacts to species as we engage in ongoing land management activities.
- *Is this HCP amended as other species are listed?*
DNR Response: Modifications may be made, but many species are covered under the existing DNR state lands HCP.

Review Criteria

The following biological criteria were identified during the analysis process as being significant to recreation facilities and trails.

Wetlands & Buffers:

Wetlands play several significant roles including habitat, water quality protection, and hydrologic integrity. Wetlands are covered in the Riparian Strategy of the HCP. Wetlands are protected by buffers which vary in size depending on the size of wetland. Activities may occur within wetland buffers, but mitigation and protection measures often exist on all new roads and trails.

Questions and Comments:

- *On the wetland in the southeast corner of the planning area there is a fence? Why not reconstruct this fence outside the buffer area?*

DNR Response: DNR is meeting with a user group the weekend of November 22nd to repair the fence around this pond. The fence may be within the buffer area. We are undertaking interim measures to protect resources until there is a recreation plan in place to address these issues.

Committee Response: The user community is taking interim measures to protect the pond. We do not know if and where trails will be located in the future.

Committee Response: The fence was originally constructed about 12 years ago by a motorized user group with DNR's knowledge of the project. The fence has proved to work very well in protecting the wetlands integrity and allowing it to reestablish over time.

- *Regarding mitigation, what is an example of real mitigation measures?*

DNR Response: There are a variety of measures that can be undertaken, including trail surface hardening, elevated trail surfaces, soil stability with grass seed, and movement of activities elsewhere.

Committee Response: There could also be planting of vegetation to offset the areas disturbed.

- *Where will the money come from for implementing mitigation measures?*

DNR Response: The more we can avoid sensitive areas that require costly mitigation measures, the more area that can be considered for recreation use with available funding. More information about the DNR's recreation funding will be available at the Walker Valley ORV area tour.

Fish Habitat:

This data is a combination of SASI (Salmonid Stock Inventory data) data along with the DNR's Forest Practices fish ("F") stream data. Areas important for habitat include streams that contain fish as well as streams that have the required physical habitat characteristics and are connected to fish-bearing waters. There are three species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with critical habitat designations or proposed designations within the Reiter Foothills planning area:

- Chinook (king) salmon: The spawning areas include Wallace River, Olney Creek, and Skykomish River. Critical habitat has been designated on the Wallace River and a portion of Olney Creek. Fall migration occurs in Deer Creek.
- Steelhead salmon: The spawning areas include Wallace River, Skykomish River and Olney Creek. May Creek, Hogarty Creek, Deer Creek, and Wallace River are important for winter steelhead.
- Bull Trout: These are a cold water species and spawn in the North Fork of the Skykomish. Critical habitat is proposed on the Wallace River and Deer Creek. They are very sensitive to sediment. Foraging non-natal bull trout can be located anywhere coho salmon spawn (this is not as critical of a life stage for bull trout).

Other fish species present include coho and chum salmon, trout, and sculpin. There are two salmon hatcheries in the vicinity of the planning area. The Wallace River Hatchery raises chinook and coho. They use water from May Creek for their rearing ponds. The Reiter Hatchery raises steelhead. They use water from Austin Creek for their rearing ponds, with Hogarty Creek as a secondary source.

Questions and Comments:

- *Are there Bull Trout in Wallace River and Deer Creek?*
DNR Response: Yes, and they may be in other areas.
- *How far up Deer Creek do the species go?*
DNR Response: The map shown on the screen illustrates the extent of acceptable habitat for these species. The DNR protects the habitat regardless of whether or not there are fish present.
DFW Response: In a regulatory environment, habitat includes stretches of stream that have the physical characteristics and connectivity to fish-bearing waters
- *Why isn't the Skykomish protected as critical habitat?*
DFW Response: The federal services do not have that listed. Critical habitat is a specific designation for certain areas, which is designated when a Recovery Plan is written for a particular listed species.
- *Isn't the Puget Sound Partnership currently writing the recovery plan for the area?*
Committee Member Response: They are the lead group working on this assessment. It is a work in progress and their plan will likely end up as federal designations.

Riparian Areas:

Riparian areas occur along streams where you have direct interaction between aquatic and terrestrial environments. Riparian protection measures are designed to protect riparian habitat and riparian-obligate species, primarily through delineation of riparian buffer areas. Buffers are located along streams, and the widths of the buffers depend on the stream type. Some of the most important considerations regarding recreation include sedimentation, stream bank stability, and trampling of riparian vegetation.

DNR designs stream crossings and approaches to minimize impacts to riparian areas. All trail building activities within/over fish-bearing streams require a hydraulic project approval (HPA) permit from WDFW. Buffers along fish-bearing streams in this area average 170 feet on each side of the stream. Smaller streams are generally buffered 100 feet on each side of the stream.

Special Management Designations (Nesting/Roosting/Foraging - NRF):

This is being provided as a reference layer. Most of this planning area has a management designation of nesting/roosting/foraging (NRF) habitat. Any proposal within the NRF area will require biologist review. Under the HCP Northern Spotted Owl Strategy, DNR's role is to provide demographic support to federal lands, maintain species distribution, and to facilitate dispersal for owls. This is not an indication that this area is habitat now, but rather that this landscape plays a role in owl habitat management.

Questions and Comments:

- *Is this mitigation?*

DNR Response: Active forest management is allowed if it will maintain or develop suitable habitat on a percentage of the landscape. This is generally achieved through thinning activities. In the long term, 50% of the acres within each watershed analysis unit will contain stands that have owl habitat characteristics.

- *Does the HCP apply to private lands in this area?*

DNR Response: No, however many large forest land owners do have their own HCPs.

- *Mitigation may be difficult, because habitat is difficult to create and protect, and will take a very long time develop.*

DNR Response: Our goal is to create sub-mature habitat, not high-quality nesting habitat (i.e., typical “old growth”), though that will still take some time.

Northern Spotted Owl Nest Patch – Core Area & Buffers:

This is another designation covered by the HCP in the planning area. Nest patches are designated 500-acre pieces of land that have the most suitable owl habitat. They do not necessarily contain spotted owls, but were designated by choosing known owl sites first. Within the nest patch, no harvest activities are allowed in the core area. Some management activities are allowed in the buffer area if the forest stands do not currently meet sub-mature habitat conditions, *and* if those activities will enhance habitat conditions.

Questions and Comments:

- *Are there noise restrictions around nest patches?*

DNR Response: For known owl sites, there are restrictions that apply to noise. Those restrictions involve seasonal timing restrictions within a certain distance from a known breeding site.

- *Are there any known owl nest sites in Reiter?*

DNR Response: Surveys have been conducted, and there are no known owl sites in the Reiter area.

Suitable Marbled Murrelet Habitat:

This data indicates areas that are known areas of suitable marbled murrelet habitat. DNR has plans to develop a long term murrelet strategy for the northwest area – in the interim we identify suitable habitat as we plan activities and protect all known suitable habitat.

Comment:

- *The DNR is going to have to do a survey in the area.*

DNR Response: Our role is to protect the habitat. Many of our surveys are to find types of stands that are suitable habitat. As we plan an activity, we do site-specific analysis and if we encounter suitable habitat, we modify our plans.

Talus, Caves, Cliffs, Balds & Mineral Springs:

In addition to the habitats already discussed above, these are special habitats that require protection. In general, the areas may be buffered, and activities are avoided or mitigated.

Talus is rock rubble ranging in size from 1 inch to 6.5 feet in diameter. Talus provides habitat for several species of salamander, as well as small and medium-sized mammals, bats, and raptors.

In areas around talus and caves, the DNR avoids disturbance and avoids a change in the microclimate.

Question:

- *Is the Pacific Giant Salamander a species of concern in the Talus area?*

DNR Response: The salamander species that the talus procedure addresses are the Larch Mountain salamander and the Dunn's and Van Dyke's salamanders, which do not occur in this region. The Pacific Giant salamander is not specifically addressed by the HCP, but is still of general concern as an amphibian.

Suitable Mountain Goat Habitat:

This is not really addressed by DNR's HCP, but it was identified by WDFW biologists as a concern for this area. There is known habitat in the vicinity, based on historical use. Noise disturbance in these areas is the primary concern. Considering the location (high elevation) of the habitat, the most likely potential recreational activity that would be of concern would be snowmobile use at the higher elevations, which does not currently occur.

Sensitive, Threatened & Endangered Species (Plants & Animals):

In order to protect these species, DNR does not share the locations of these species (it is considered sensitive information, and cannot be released to the general public). This information is a consideration during the planning process and biologists will be consulted as DNR activities are planned.

Suitability Composite Map

DNR presented the maps containing a composite of all of the suitability analyses. The levels of suitability are layered, and committee members can discern areas that are generally more or less suitable for facilities or different types of trails when considering all of the information that has been synthesized.

Questions and Comments:

- *Will you be able to share the locations of existing trails in relation to the suitability data?*

DNR Response: We will overlay the trail information as the next step in December.

- *How did you determine the level of suitability ranking for each criterion?*

DNR Response: DNR consulted with specialists, scientists and other DNR staff as we assimilated the information. When considering trail types, some types of trails were grouped together, because in many cases trails are designed for multiple user types. We came up with the three main trail groups because, in most cases, that is how DNR currently manages trails for recreation.

- *Is that an agency wide policy, or something that can be determined per area?*

DNR Response: It is not an agency policy, we grouped some recreation uses in order to conduct this broad scale assessment.

- *How much time were DNR specialists able to devote to site-specific considerations in this case?*

DNR Response: As specific recommendations are developed, site-specific evaluations will have to be done.

- *Have you determined what is suitable or not suitable in an aquifer recharge area?*
DNR Response: If proposals are made for recreation use in these areas, we will consult with the water purveyor. The DNR has been in contact with Washington Department of Health (DOH) and with the City of Index Water Manager. Based on discussion with DOH we learned that there is not a watershed associated with Index's groundwater source and that there is no secondary water source required for Index. There are currently monitoring protocols in place. Monitoring is done every three years however purveyors can get a waiver to extend time between monitoring. DOH indicated that the monitoring taking place presently would in fact detect items such as petroleum. We are continuing communication with DOH and the City of Index.
- *Is there a DNR protocol for management activities and recreation activities within water recharge areas?*
DNR Response: The DNR doesn't have a protocol for recreation activities in aquifer recharge areas. We consult with the water purveyors and the regulators of the water systems. Snohomish County Code (at Chapter 30.62C) identifies uses that are prohibited or require the submission of a hydro-geologic report. We are continuing to work through this issue together with Index, Snohomish County, and DOH.
- *Snohomish County will have to identify recreation activities with regards to aquifer protection areas.*
DNR Response: It is the committees charge to work within existing regulations and framework.

Discussion of User Group Experiences

Committee members continued their discussion of what constitutes an ideal user experience for the following recreation uses: hunting, camping, shooting, climbing, mountain biking, 4x4 driving, and fishing.

Items of discussion are shown below:

Hunting

- Trails, facilities, and roads need to be identified accurately on maps to ensure public safety.
- Hunters need to be aware of the other public use in the area and where it is specifically occurring
- Mushroom Hunting- needs are similar to hiking, but with consideration of availability to forage for mushrooms off the trail

Camping

- Safety
- Quiet
- Solitude
- Clean
- Restrooms
- Away from main road/staging areas
- Overhead cover- trees

- Quite atmosphere to enjoy nature sounds
- Sense of privacy
- Water
- Sanitation
- Access to natural features
- Privacy between sites
- Defined camping area
- Drinking water source
- Dish wash station
- Quiet time 11pm-9am
- Environmental education forum
- Fire pits
- Picnic tables

Shooting

- 50-150 yard level area with a good backstop
- Gravel pits ideal
- Safe areas to target practice
- Signed area
- No cross-traffic
- Should be a designated area

Climbing

- Safety from falling debris (rocks, garbage) especially for users belaying (not hugging the wall)
- Sunny and warm with a cool breeze
- Short hike on a well built and maintained trail to climb site ~30 min hike
- Wag bags for sanitation
- Variety of difficulty and rates and lengths of rope
- Garbage clean up
- Clean, solid rock
- Let's all work together to protect the resource for all user groups
- Less than 2 mile hike to climb site
- Enough climbing for all day

Mountain Biking

- Similar to those of hikers (just on a bike)
- Views
- Natural setting
- Variation in elevation
- Narrow single track (minimize time on roads or double track)
- Single or shared use ok where appropriate

Cross Country (XC) Mountain Biking

- 15-20 mile ride
- Narrow single track

- Climb: sustained climbs of <8% for intermediates, <12% for experts, and up to 25% on short sections
- Descent: Extended downhill
- Loops or “lollipop” rides
- Elevation gain, as much as possible
- Viewpoints, especially at high point of ride
- Year-round riding option ~12+miles
- Good flow; meaning a trail with turns that are consistent in nature (swoopy), without fast, straight sections that dump you into tight corners.
- Backcountry destinations desirable

Freeride (FR) Mountain Biking

- 600-1200 feet of vertical change/gain
- Climb: sustained climbs to trailhead of <8% on road if necessary (shuttle option when appropriate, but not necessary)
- Descent: average grade in the range of 6% to 10%, with many short, steeper sections that provide technical challenge
- Narrow single-track
- Extended downhill
- Year-round riding option
- Good flow: meaning a trail with turns that are consistent in nature (swoopy), without fast, straight sections that dump you into tight corners.

Downhill Race Course for Mountain Biking

- More focus on natural terrain (limited or no man-made wooden features)
- Short, steep, technical (periodic fall line sections) sections followed by sustained contour trail to lengthen experience
- Fairly narrow single track
- Extended downhill
- Features such as steep rock faces (really steep, almost vertical), jumps, drops, log rides
- Year-round riding option
- Good flow: meaning a trail with turns that are consistent in nature (swoopy), without fast, straight sections that dump you into tight corners.
- Downhill race course that can be accessed by a truck to shuttle racers up to the top. Trail should be very rough, all downhill and about 4 minutes long when ridden by expert riders.

4x4 Driving

- Loop trails
- Varied terrain
- Large enough parking lot for trailers
- Separate trails with 4x4 trail width restrictions
- Restroom facilities
- Varied skill areas
- Trails for full-size/oversize rigs
- Trails for short wheel base

- Extreme sections w/bypass off camber side hill
- Steep
- Rocks
- Deep water/mud

Fishing

- Need to protect habitat in Reiter Foothills
- Clean streams, no sedimentation
- Open shoreline for casting
- Garbage disposal
- Sell stocked pond
- Area free of garbage/litter
- Healthy fish populations
- Have fish to catch

Review Action Items and Next Steps:

1) Information requests for future Committee meetings:

- Biology Suitability Matrix
- Additional information regarding water protection areas, as it is developed.
- Information regarding what is an ideal staging (parking/loading) area? What areas may be more suitable for staging areas in the Reiter Foothills landscape?
- Mapped locations and information about noxious weeds in this area.
- What does mitigation look like for recreational uses, what are the costs for various mitigation tools?
- What is the creek name below the power lines (close to Reiter Pond)

2) Committee members were asked to spend some time between now and the December 3rd meeting to begin brainstorming ideas about how recreation activities and facilities can be sited in the area. The challenge is to think about what the suitability analyses have shown and not being limited by current recreational use activities and locations. Members are encouraged to be thoughtful about all types of recreation and not favor one user type over another. The next step in recommendation development will be discussion of the big ideas on safe, enjoyable and sustainable recreational opportunities at Reiter Foothills.

For the next meeting, please review the composite maps distributed in November with the goal of identifying general ideas for recreational opportunities (trails and facilities, such as camping, staging areas, etc) and where they might occur. It may be helpful for you to identify these areas by drawing circles on the suitability composite maps to show locations and suggestions based on the maps and your knowledge of the area.

3) Please respond to the Doodle request for the Walker Valley Tour scheduling. We would like to finalize the date by our December 3 Committee meeting.

4) Please e-mail Mary with requests for information that will be helpful to you as you begin to consider options and locations for recreational uses in the Reiter Foothills planning area.

Committee Questions and Comments:

- *We should consider noxious weeds.*
- *For me, it is a huge challenge for the group to come up with recommendations at this stage; we really have to have more detailed data and information on impacts and mitigation options before we can move forward.*
- *Our job to make recommendations on proposed recreational activities; DNR will decide what is going to happen and what isn't. They are decision makers and will be responsible for doing detailed research and developing final recommendations.*
- *Are there things that we as the public can't be shown with regard to the threatened and endangered species maps?*

DNR Response: Yes, some specific locations cannot be shared.

- *Do we want to define the user interests and let DNR design where to implement in their plan?*

DNR Response: The planning committee will develop a recreation management recommendation for the agency to consider. A part of that recommendation will be a prioritized list of how (and generally where) to implement the proposal.

- *Peter Goldmark has won the election, any possibility that there may be priority changes in this process?*

DNR Response: This planning process is directed by legislature. We will continue this process as planned.