



Recreation Planning Committee Meeting Notes

May 09, 2017 | 6 to 9 p.m.

Deming Library, 5044 Mt. Baker Highway, Deming

In Attendance:

Committee Members

Ari Bezona	Doug Huddle	Mike McGlenn
Arlen Bogaards	Eric Brown - absent	Becky Peace
Bert Isaacson	Glenn Gervais	Walden Haines
Bill Lawrence	Kevin Vanderhorst	Buck Bouck - absent
Carole MacDonald	Lance Hansen - absent	Chris Tretwold for Wendy
Dana Johnson	Dan Probst for Mark Harding	McDermott

DNR Staff

Glenn Glover	Chris Hankey	Rick Foster
Dana Leavitt	Laurie Bergvall	Dave Symmank
Jean Fike		

Meeting Purpose: The committee conducted a mapping exercise on roads and access, held a discussion on forest roads, and identified relevant issues for recreation planning.

Welcome: Glenn Glover welcomed the group and did introductions, went over the agenda and reviewed the April 11, 2017 meeting notes, which were approved.

Public Comment: No public comments

Open Roads Discussion: Dave Symmank presented and led a discussion on private property and public access, management of forest roads, and costs of road maintenance. The key point addressed are summarized below.

Private Property and Public Access

- Many DNR roads cross private property in order to access state lands:
 - In many of these cases DNR manages the road and has established legal agreements, usually easements, which allow both the road and its use by DNR for timber management purposes
 - In cases where DNR does not actually own the road it will still have negotiated for the right to use the road and typically pays the landowner for that privilege
 - Many of these access agreements were created before significant consideration was given to recreation so they may only address management use and public access may not have been included
 - Landowners are now often unwilling or hesitant to include the right for public access when negotiating agreements because of concerns about fiscal impacts, damage to environmentally sensitive areas, liability, wildland fire, trash, and more

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- Even where roads may not currently be gated that doesn't necessarily mean that legal access for the public has been secured and as DNR researches its road use agreements additional road closures may become necessary

Costs of Road Maintenance and Public Use

- Working forests throughout the landscape require forest roads for management and harvest:
 - Most of the land that DNR manages in the planning area are working forests, managed to generate sustainable revenue for trust beneficiaries through timber harvest and other activities; recreation is an allowed use under the Multiple Use Concept only where it is compatible with the financial obligations of the department or where the trust is fully compensated for lost revenue
 - In order to access the harvest areas, forest roads are built, to a standard that supports log trucks and other operations vehicles with an anticipated maintenance requirement based upon those management uses
 - Once the forest roads were opened for logging vehicles, the public often begins using them for other purposes, such as access to recreation sites or as the recreation itself for pleasure driving
- Unlike the USFS which is being forced to greatly reduce its forest road inventory due to critically low funding, DNR has in the past been better positioned to maintain roads through funds generated by timber harvest. In the past 20 years, DNR has seen a significant increase of the recreating public accessing forest lands, but the funding for road maintenance has diminished.
 - Many of the units in the planning area have several harvest operations in place or under consideration, requiring many forest roads to be open for long periods of time
 - Public use of forest roads may seem to have a negligible impact but in reality each vehicle has an impact; when the public travels on roads that don't have active harvest, the public share of maintenance increases
- In this landscape block the forest lands are on an approximate 60 years rotation; with 60 years between major operational activities comes the opportunity to economically evaluate the need to maintain road infrastructure for the 59 years the road won't be used much verse the cost to decommission or abandon the road; decommissioning is a USFS term which does not apply to DNR management roads or to Forest Practices standards.
 - the decision to maintain or abandon a road is a site specific decision that considers economic costs, future needs, environmental issue, pre-existing users, and granted road use rights
- It is important to remember that DNR has an undivided loyalty to the trust beneficiaries and the construction and maintenance of roads are the trust's largest investment in infrastructure.
 - Public use creates a need for ongoing maintenance on numerous forest roads where it would otherwise be reduced or unnecessary
 - DNR understands the value of providing recreating opportunities on trust lands to the citizens of Washington State; the benefit to recreationists needs to be within DNR's trust mandate and balanced with protecting our forest for future generations; challenges occur when forests are over run, abused or the public's use of forest roads significantly exceed road maintenance allotments

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- As we all know by the current amount collected at the gas pump, the cost to maintain roads is expensive; recreation program currently provides about \$200k out of the gas tax to help fund road maintenance across the state which is a small fraction of the total cost and doesn't cover the cost of maintenance due to public use. A portion of the gas tax is provided to maintain recreation roads. NW Region allotment of the \$200K budget for DNR is about \$13K per year. This is a fraction of the cost of maintenance due to public use.
- In some regions where timber harvest is no longer common, there is not enough management dollars available to maintain all of the forest roads. Without an alternative funding source roads are being abandoned or closed to reduce the fiscal impact to the trusts.
- Key costs (derived from the NW Region of DNR) that were shared with the committee included:
 - Replacement cost of a forest road per mile is over \$116,000
 - Replacement of an abandoned road per mile is approximately \$79,200
 - Forest road maintenance cost per mile is over \$2,700 per year for a 25-year period
 - Abandoned road maintenance costs per mile is approximately \$1,200 for a 25-year period

A discussion followed the presentation that covered DNR's abandonment versus USFS's decommissioning process, how roads are maintained to or upgraded to forest practice standards when USFS manages a forest road that has shared use (with DNR), FEMA funding and how access in the planning area is being evaluated for getting into the different units.

Mapping Exercise – Roads and Access – The groups had different interpretations of what vehicles could be driven on the roads and if they can access them. One observation was that approximately 40% of DNR lands are behind gates (public and privately owned), which will be discussed at the next committee meeting. Many of the roads are passable by car, but that is questionable in places. There are issues with turning a truck and trailer around on the narrow roads, not so much on the drivability of them. Reimbursing the Trust for road maintenance was brought up and will be discussed at the next planning committee meeting also. Locating trailheads closer to paved roads reduces the need for travelling several miles on forest roads to get to a trailhead (potentially reducing recreational use of those roads). Sunday drives and picnic or scenic stop locations is important to the committee, that some roads are actually passable by 4x4 only and need to have the ability to drop off and shuttle mountain bikers.

General Discussion of Topics of Interest: Dana led a brief discussion on several subjects that covered large trailheads versus dispersed smaller ones, multi-use trails and trailheads, the idea of exclusive/segregated uses in the planning and ADA concerns.

Identify Relevant Issues to Planning Effort: The issues identified during the April meeting were collated and a discussion occurred around which issues have to be addressed as part of the physical planning to show up on the concept maps. The committee talked through each of the bucket lists, and identified issues to consider in planning recreation activities. Of the many discussion points, those pertaining to physical planning have been italicized below.

Develop Trails and Facilities

- *Access and parking, develop trails and facilities – area you are going to be providing access for*
- *Separation of users by unique access*

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- *Some specific area to provide some access*
- Accommodating people of lesser abilities
- Trail length, speed, etc. - remove from list

Dispersed Recreation

- *Target the shooting situation before it gets away from us; make sure you have a definitive area for that; has to be enforcement for that*
- Beauty and serenity
- Shooting boils down to safety.; make sure you have a definitive area for that
- All the user groups – any gravel pit has a TV that has been shot
- Comes down to an area – which they can self-police and keep that area clean; from an overall perspective that comes down to safety
- Fines for illegal uses

Economics and Quality of Life

Education and enforcement

- Signage at the trailhead and along the trails – coordinate multiple users
- QR codes
- Develop an internet plan
- Means you have to manage the road system that is already there to get people access; Shooting zones, target zones, hunting responsibly, etc.

Hunting and Fishing

- Use the trails that are there
- Manage the road system that is already there to get people access; shooting zones, target zones, hunting responsibly, etc.
- Not diminishing opportunities for hunting and fishing

Natural Resources

- Marbled murrelet strategy becomes part of Habitat Conservation Plan, part of plan
- *People are willing to sacrifice trails and development for preservation purposes*

Other

- Leash the dogs

Process and Agency Management

- How is this recreation we are coming up with going to fit into DNR's mandate of working forest? When a forest comes to a 60 year rotation – and the public is up in arms because DNR has to harvest – how is that going to fit? When we want to put trails on the landscape and we aren't going to be able to?
- It is one of the things I am hoping this group can help us with; how do we remind them that this is a working forest – the opportunity for recreation is there because this is a working forest

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- Recreation is one big money pot – it is an economic money pot – I am not sure what DNR gets for funding – it seems like DNR should be able to get money from another source rather than cutting timber in these areas
- So you are saying we should get money from somewhere else?
- Potentially – you are going to be putting a bunch of money into building these trails, then through the harvest these are going to be taken these out.
- That is not necessarily true. On Blanchard – I ride through a lot of clear-cuts, if there is a trail – there is a notice that trail is closed, then it is re-opened. I don't see it as a problem.
- So they don't set slash on that trail?
- That is part of the contract. They have gotten better about what is on the trail bed – they may still use most or portions of the trail, but they bring it back to what it was before. Now you still have the clear cut, but
- The education piece is huge
- The 60 year old stand delineation – was that set by the forest board? In order to make their target stands – sometimes it is 30 years old. If there is a policy set up that says less than 60 years old (there is not a set rotation age). 30 years ago WDFW went through an argument with DNR about riparian management zones and values.
- On the Mount Baker Highway – on the north side of the road there was a clear cut done on the side of the road – some were horrified – I think there is a real dearth of education to the public that could be served with signage – this is a how a forest works – it is a renewable resource – that is really good education – many people do not understand that.
- Signage of DNR's obligation of trust and the working forest – and experiences working in a working forest – closures and then the trail is going to be open and establishing more comfort with that model.
- To answer that – highway 410 – state when they are planted and harvest dates – in the areas that have 30-40 years of growth – when the clear cuts do happen – a dozen vehicles do park there. I am going to go recreate there. Signage on the side of the highway with large signs – harvested and planted when – shows in the different segments the different stages and take ownership of that.
- Is there a place in the plan about language for how a trail is replaced during logging?
- In the last couple/few years the trails have been fixed more after logging.

Access

- *Location of the trailheads in relation to the homes in the areas needs to be considered; that is something we need to be aware of*

Water recreation

- *Be able to get to water*
- *Access to views, launches and parking*
- *General water access – just a place to be – a picnic table for example*

Additional Topics for Recreation: The committee considered several topics for additional types of recreation for planning purposes.

Disc Golf

- Alexis Blue gave a briefing on what the sport is, what the needs of the community are, that include:
 - 18 hole courses are great; about 1.5 acres per hole
 - Three new disc golf courses are ideal – in the same area would be great

BAKER TO BELLINGHAM RECREATION PLAN
Washington State Department of Natural Resources

BakertoBellingham@dnr.wa.gov | www.dnr.wa.gov/BakertoBellingham

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- 10 – 15 minute walk of the first key pad from a parking area
- Pretty low impact
- Varying terrain is great; in between holes with varying terrain
- Next to camping is great

Rock Climbing

- Very few and far between
- If there is a rock face and you are building a trail near it, it will be found and will be used
- Might be something we should plan for; articulate it in objectives and strategies, but don't show anything on the map

Winter Recreation

- Whatcom snowmobiling club has requested snowmobiling in Racehorse Creek drainage
- Moving snowline – could change with various years
- Grooming should be an option
- Should be considering in the plan

Upcoming Meetings: July 24th Monday is the next meeting at Deming Library. September 19th, 2017 and October 10th, 2017 are the following meetings, both at Deming Library.

End of Meeting:

Meeting was adjourned at 9 pm.