

Baker to Bellingham Recreation Planning Public Meeting and Email Frequently Asked Questions

NOTE:

DNR heard additional questions specific to off road vehicle recreation, including around topics of noise, wildfire, trash, trespass, CO2 emissions and law enforcement. Going forward DNR's recreation planning process for trust lands in Whatcom County will not include motorized recreation opportunities so responses to those questions are no longer appropriate to this effort and are not included below.

UPDATED 4/3/18

- How will DNR fund ongoing maintenance and education and enforcement (E&E) staff for future recreation sites that the agency may develop as a result of this plan?
 - DNR receives dedicated funds for recreation from a portion of Discover Pass sales and fuel refunds to the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities Account. We also pursue grants through the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for non-motorized, motorized and non-highway road facility maintenance as well as for education and enforcement staff. We anticipate that DNR will fund future recreation opportunities in the planning area with a combination of Discover Pass sales and grant funding.

- Is DNR considering an access pass and if so what type of pass will it be?
 - Created by the Washington State Legislature in 2011 to support public access and recreation, a [Discover Pass](#) is required for parking or operating a motor vehicle on most state lands including DNR trust lands and natural areas. The DNR recreation program receives 8 percent of Discover Pass revenue. Additionally, off-road vehicles operating on DNR forest roads must be registered for street use or they require an ORV registration issued through the Department of Licensing.

- How are you taking into consideration the asbestos found on Sumas Mountain? How will you ensure that recreational activities do not put asbestos into the air?
 - According to the USGS and EPA there is naturally occurring asbestos in rock exposed by a large active landslide near the headwaters of Swift Creek on the west slope of Sumas Mountain in Whatcom County. At this EPA designated Superfund site, asbestos is present in high quantities in landslide sediment being transported by Slide Creek and continues into Sumas River. Asbestos can become airborne when this asbestos-containing sediment is disturbed, creating health-related risks. For this reason and others, DNR will not consider any recreation facilities on the western slope of Sumas Mountain, thereby

ensuring that there is no increased potential for disturbance of sediment or soils that may contain asbestos.

- Will there be access to Canyon Lake Community Forest Park? Access to Lake Whatcom Park? What about the Bellingham to Baker trail route? Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail? Other connections?
 - DNR and its Baker to Bellingham recreation planning committee is considering a number of opportunities for multi-jurisdictional, non-motorized trails as part of this planning process. Moving forward on specific connections would require further coordination between multiple land managers, sometimes including private landowners. For that reason, DNR will identify potential connections as part of the final plan, with additional investigation and collaboration to follow later to determine feasibility.
- How far will access roads, trailheads and trails be from private residences?
 - This planning process is higher level, identifying suitable areas rather than specific locations for trails or trailheads. In plan maps we have provided buffers around private property. These buffers are smaller for commercial lands and non-motorized trails but are larger for residential property as well as all trailheads. In the future as we do more detailed design work around specific projects, these preliminary buffers may grow, providing greater separation for landowners. Recreationists will continue to access recreation sites along existing forest roads where DNR can show legal rights to public access.
- There is a historic hiking trail on Sumas Mountain called Gold Mine trail. How will this planning process affect that trail? Can the trail be included in the plan and sanctioned so that it can be improved?
 - The unofficial Gold Mine route crosses the western and northwestern slope of Sumas Mountain, beginning on private property and eventually coming onto DNR-managed lands. Due to private property and access issues as well as the potential future designation of this area for marbled murrelet habitat protection, DNR is not considering developing or adopting existing trail-based recreation on the west side of Sumas Mountain.
- Why was there no opportunity for public comment at the start of the February public meetings?
 - We designed our two public meetings in February, as with the three previous, to capture the largest amount of public comments possible by interacting directly with attendees. We had six listening stations setup, where DNR staff recorded input about the draft concept maps as well as any other challenges and opportunities the public shared with us. We were very pleased to have over 350 people attend these two meetings and our listening stations allowed us to receive a great range of valuable feedback that will help guide the recreation planning process going forward.

- Where were meeting fliers posted? Did it include Kendall, Peaceful Valley, Columbia Valley, and EWRRRC?
 - A list of locations where the flyers were posted does not exist, however the highest priority was on high visibility/traffic areas of east Whatcom County including along SR 9 and SR 542.

- Why aren't there any members on the committee to represent the neighborhoods that border potential recreation zones shown in the concept maps and that could be affected by recreation?
 - The planning process did not begin with predetermined or anticipated locations for any form of recreation. DNR developed concepts and the location of possible recreation zones after extensive suitability mapping so selecting committee members based on areas of potential effect was not possible in advance. DNR evaluated committee member applications based upon recreational interest, geographic diversity and affiliation with groups that would aid in community outreach during the planning process.

- Why are you considering constructing new trails when there is already an extensive road network that recreationists can use?
 - Forest road-based recreation can conflict with DNR management obligations and can create safety, maintenance and trespass challenges. Directing high levels of recreational use onto these roads, except for crucial access routes to recreation sites, would only increase these risks for the agency. Additionally, roads typically do not provide the trail experience that most non-motorized recreationists are looking for on our working forests. Finally, using the extensive existing road system would not by itself address concerns we have heard regarding noise, enforcement and trespass.

- Can there be downhill mountain bike trails with road access to allow for shuttling and potentially for-fee shuttle services?
 - The recreation plan will not get to the level of suggesting specific trails or trail networks. However, it is possible that the advisory committee will identify certain types of trail opportunities such as shuttle accessible as desirable and specifically include those as objectives in the plan.

- How does DNR accommodate trails on a working forest? How do you reconstruct trails after a timber harvest or thinning?
 - In DNR's working forestland, recreation and forestry staff work together to reduce the impact of timber harvests on recreation as much as possible while meeting the legal mandate to generate revenue for beneficiaries. This may be as simple as communicating access restrictions or may mean a harvest plan designed to buffer a trail and minimize trail tread damage. In all cases, however, DNR works closely with volunteers from the recreation community, to maintain trails and repair damage caused by timber management activities.

- Why haven't you considered decommissioning unused logging roads and turning them into single-track trails?
 - Although DNR's road system may provide access to recreation facilities, DNR primarily builds and maintains these road networks for forest management purposes. Even in cases where DNR abandons roads, the roads are still available for reconstruction for future management needs and generally are not appropriate choices for trail routing although there may be exceptions.
- What will you do to mitigate the impact of trailheads on nearby homes?
 - This high-level recreation planning process will only suggest possible areas for trailheads rather than specific locations. Possible areas reflect a consideration of factors including: legal public access, proximity of neighboring properties especially residential, connections to potential trail networks, protected habitat, and streams and wetlands. In the future, the detailed planning and design of a trailhead would include careful consideration of the impacts of noise and traffic on neighbors in the planning area.
- What research exists on the effects of trails or trailheads on property values?
 - DNR has not researched the effect that trails may have on nearby residential property values. Some studies have found a positive impact (see Headwaters Economics and American Trails for more information) on the average value of houses adjacent to well designed, signed and maintained non-motorized trails in addition to the community health and economic benefits.
- Do you anticipate an increase in demand for emergency services from recreation-related injuries and if yes where will the money to support this come from?
 - It is difficult to predict what the future demand for EMS response will be at a yet to be designed recreation area. Historically, however, the use of best practices in the design, maintenance, signage and access to trail networks has been shown to reduce the need for emergency response when compared with areas of unsanctioned trails. Even in locations where DNR has heavily used recreation facilities, we have not heard concerns from local EMS providers that these are creating an unreasonable burden on their resources.
- How will shooting and alcohol use be regulated on state lands including trails and trailheads?
 - Chapter 332-52 Washington Administrative Code explains DNR's authority to manage target shooting and alcohol use at developed recreation sites.
- What will you do to prevent recreationists from entering and damaging rivers, streams and other sensitive habitat areas?
 - DNR will protect waterways and sensitive habitat through careful design of trails, routing trails away from sensitive areas as much as possible and providing enforcement from recreation wardens in areas of sanctioned trail systems.

- Will you be testing water quality before and after trail improvements in order to show success in improving water quality?
 - DNR uses careful trail design and construction to comply with all applicable state and local regulations to protect water quality from sediment related to recreational trails.
- Invasive weeds can be spread on feet, tires, and hooves and have already been found on Red Mountain. What will be done to ensure that recreation doesn't lead to a significant problem with noxious plants?
 - Disturbing soils and unintentionally introducing seeds when out recreating can result in noxious weed growth along the edges of trail corridors. DNR's recreation staff spend a lot of time on the trail network and when they find an invasive species, DNR works with trained recreation, conservation corps or forestry staff to eradicate it.
- What is your policy on electric-assist (e-bikes)? Are they managed as motorized or are they considered non-motorized and therefore allowed wherever bicycles are allowed?
 - Bicycles that include an electric motor for propulsion, even those that only provide assistance when the rider is pedaling, are currently managed as motorized vehicles and prohibited on trails that are closed to motorized use. E-bikes are allowed on DNR's extensive statewide network of trails for motorized use although the recreation plan for DNR land in Whatcom County will not include zones for motorized trails.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PRIOR TO 1/30/18

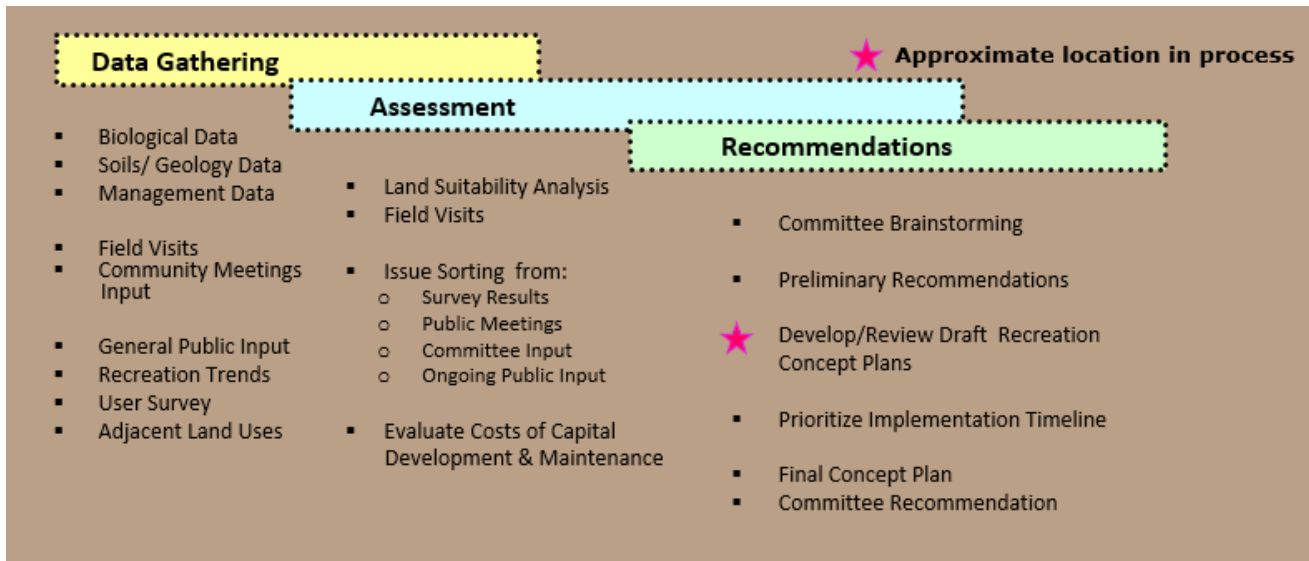
- What is a state trust land?
 - The Washington State Department of Natural Resources manages working forest trust lands that help to support public services, including public school construction, universities and emergency services. In addition to providing access to recreation, they also help protect against development, support clean air and water and maintain the highest environmental standards available. In these landscapes, you may encounter temporary trail and site closures for public safety during timber harvest activities.
- If your primary mission is to generate revenue for trust beneficiaries, how can you introduce recreation on any of these lands?
 - From generating trust revenue, to providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, DNR manages land for the public's benefit. In 1971 the state legislature passed the Multiple Use Act (RCW 79.10), which directs and allows DNR to provide recreation opportunities on trust lands when compatible with the financial obligations of trust management. With over 1,100 miles of trails on trust lands, we have shown consistently that managing timber and providing access for outdoor recreation can coexist. Take, for example, our Capitol State Forest, one of our highest timber producing forests with over 90 miles of trail. Here, and in other DNR working forests statewide, timber production maintains forest roads,

allowing visitors to access their favorite trailheads, campgrounds and picnic areas. The harvest management fee DNR receives covers costs associated with harvest and replanting but is not used to fund recreation.

- Why are you creating a Recreation Plan for DNR-managed trust lands in Whatcom County?
 - Following guiding principles of resource protection, compatibility with trust mandates, safety and user experience, DNR actively plans recreation opportunities the public can enjoy for generations to come. With over 86,000 acres of forestland in Whatcom County, DNR has seen growing demand for public access and authorized recreation of all types. We have simultaneously seen an increase in damage resulting from unauthorized activities. Through our planning process, which we have carried out successfully in other DNR recreation landscapes, we address many of these topics. The adopted recreation plan will include strategies, objectives and priorities to guide recreation development and management on DNR-managed lands for the next 10 to 15 years. This process includes extensive involvement of local recreation groups, the public and DNR volunteers, and follows an integrated approach to planning for the best management of quality recreational opportunities on DNR lands.

- Where have you done recreation planning for DNR land previously and how can I find those plans?
 - DNR has completed seven recreation plans for trust landscapes from 30,000 acres to 229,000 acres. Recreation plans for Whatcom County (Baker to Bellingham) and Teanaway Community Forest are currently in process. More information, including completed plans, can be found at <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/recreation/recreation-planning>.

- Have you already completed the Baker to Bellingham Recreation Plan? If not, where are you at in the process?
 - The Baker to Bellingham Recreation Plan is not complete and no decisions on what types of recreation to include or where recreation should be located have been made. We anticipate this part of the planning process will continue through at least May as we work to refine existing ideas and explore how to address objectives and strategies for implementation. An overview of the planning process is below:



- What has your outreach for this process looked like?
 - In early January of 2016 DNR announced the launch of this recreation planning process through a news release to statewide media, social media messages and paid advertising, blog posts, recreation email newsletter (distribution 10,000+), flyers posted at locations within the planning area, and a meeting with the Whatcom County Council. On January 19 and 20 of that year, DNR held two public meetings to kick off the planning process and gather public input. These meetings, in Bellingham and Lynden, had an estimated combined attendance of 450. DNR also created a web page <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/BakertoBellingham> to serve as a central source of information for plan documents and meeting schedules. In the summer and fall of 2016, over 1,300 people responded to a Baker to Bellingham recreation planning survey, intended to capture information about current recreation activities and desired future opportunities. DNR coordinated a second public meeting in November 2016, with more recently scheduled meetings planned for Feb 20 and 21, 2018, in Maple Falls and Bellingham. Throughout this process, DNR has provided status updates via the planning web page, email news, social media posts and at regular committee meetings in the Deming area.
- How did you select the Advisory Committee members?
 - At public meetings, via email notices and in local media, the department requested applications from individuals interested in volunteering for an advisory committee that would provide input to the department and help guide long-term recreation opportunities. DNR received 51 applications and ultimately selected 17 committee members, representing a broad range of backgrounds, recreation and environmental interests and knowledge of the area.
- What lands are you including in the Baker to Bellingham Recreation Planning process?

- The planning effort is looking at approximately 86,000 acres of DNR-managed trust lands in Whatcom County. Because this evaluation considers a range of criteria, from environmental factors to local geology, the acreage the agency identifies for potential recreation development in a final concept will be significantly less than this.
- What types of recreation are you considering through this process?
 - DNR is considering many recreation activities from trail-based uses to water access and soaring sports as well as pleasure driving on forest roads, wildlife viewing and more. The range of trail-based recreation includes hiking, trail running, mountain biking, horseback riding, motorcycling, ATVing, and 4x4 driving.
- Why are you considering ORV recreation in this planning effort?
 - Based on information from the 2018-2022 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, it is estimated that 11 percent of the statewide population participates in ORV riding or driving. This is a higher percentage than, for example, downhill skiing, horseback riding, or saltwater fishing. With over 2 million acres of forested trust lands, DNR is the largest provider of ORV recreation opportunities on state lands. Initial public meetings and an online survey DNR facilitated at the start of the planning process indicated that while not the top ranked recreation activity there was nevertheless significant public interest in providing official ORV trails in Whatcom County.
- Why did you submit a suggested zoning ordinance amendment to the Whatcom County Council?
 - Current county zoning prohibits the development of trails for motorized recreation on Commercial Forestry zoned lands, which encompasses all DNR trust lands in the county. This will prevent DNR from providing sanctioned and well-managed opportunities for these recreationists in Whatcom County, including county residents. However, the Whatcom County 2016 Comprehensive Plan, section 9F, reads in part: Coordinate with DNR to Provide ORV Opportunities - Recognizing that there will continue to be demand for ORV riding, the County should continue to assess its role in the ORV program.

Accordingly, DNR has suggested changes to county zoning codes that would be consistent with the comprehensive plan and create the opportunity for well-designed and constructed ORV trails.
- Are you proposing to build an ORV park?
 - No, DNR is considering possible networks of carefully designed and constructed trails, single and double track, that would be compatible with a working forest. Elements typically thought of as part of an ORV Park, including motocross tracks, spectator stands, and facilities for commercial competitive events, will not be in the recreation plan.
- What are the multiple concept maps, how did you create them, and how can I understand them?
 - The concept maps are graphical representations of potential recreation zones on DNR lands in the 86,000-acre recreation planning area. Each concept incorporates suitability

evaluation, provides alternative combinations of color-coded areas where motorized or non-motorized trails could be constructed, and serves as the basis for evaluating the benefits and challenges of different approaches. At each step DNR staff take internal knowledge, committee input, and public comment to refine previous concepts, generating new drafts until a final concept is adopted.

- How do you intend to approach factors associated with providing recreation including: noise, safety, fire risk, wildlife, water quality, enforcement, and traffic?
 - Careful consideration of environmental factors, such as impact to neighboring landowners and the natural landscape, is an essential part of the recreation planning process. One important tool, suitability analysis, creates graphical guidelines to assist in potential placement of recreation. DNR achieves this by using best available data to map and rank elements, including slope angle and stability, riparian and wetland buffers, threatened or endangered species, flood plains, rock pits and lease sites, and adjacent property mapping. Following this plan's adoption, development projects that may arise will include a more specific analysis of potential impacts and mitigation strategies as well as an environmental review process and an opportunity for the public to review and comment.

- How can I find committee materials and stay informed as the planning process continues?
 - Materials are available here (<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/BakertoBellingham>) and you can sign up for the Baker to Bellingham email newsletter here (<http://dnr.us8.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=686976a400749d61e09522350&id=c8cf71d34a>).

- What are the next steps for the recreation planning process and how do I comment?
 - DNR is continuing to refine the possible types and locations of recreation within the recreation planning area, as well as developing objectives and strategies for implementation. We invite the public to review draft concept maps and share input at community meetings we'll host on February 20 and 21 in Maple Falls and Bellingham respectively. The public is also welcome to join us for working Advisory Committee meetings, generally scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month through May 2018. While these are working meetings focused on committee discussion and tasks, each meeting has a period for public comment. The public can also email comments to BakertoBellingham@dnr.wa.gov. In fall of 2018, DNR expects to submit a draft recreation plan through a state environmental review process, which will provide another opportunity for public comment. DNR estimates the agency will adopt a final plan by year-end.

- After a Baker to Bellingham Recreation Plan has been adopted, how would implementation and development occur?
 - The completed recreation plan will include recommended priorities for the agency to follow as it implements tasks and projects. For projects not otherwise prohibited by Whatcom County codes, DNR will attempt to secure grant or capital funding to begin project planning, design and permitting. Subsequent trail or facility construction is also contingent on the agency's success in securing funding through either recreation grants or capital allocations.