



Recreation Planning Committee Meeting Notes
January 10, 2017 | 6 to 9 p.m.
Deming Public Library, 5044 Mt. Baker Highway, Deming

In Attendance:*Committee Members*

Arlen Bogaards	Glenn Gervais	Chris Tretwold (for
Bill Lawrence	Lance Hansen	Wendy McDermott)
Dana Johnson	Becky Peace	Mike McGlenn
Kevin Vanderhorst	Walden Haines	Ari Bezona
Eric Brown	Buck Bouck	

DNR Staff

Glenn Glover	Peter Harrison	Jean Fike
Rick Foster	Hyden McKown	Elizabeth Eberle
Dana Leavitt	Chris Hankey	Cory McDonald

Meeting Purpose: The planning committee heard from a trail running group, learned about the draft environmental statement (DEIS) for the marbled murrelet strategy, reviewed comments from the last community meeting and discussed the results of the recreation survey.

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

Public Comment: No public comment.

Cascade Mountain Runners Presentation: Dan Probst made a presentation that focused on ultra-running (up to 200 mile runs), a relatively new race called the Mt. Baker Ultra Marathon, the proposed trail corridor for the race and other events that he has been involved with. The trail corridor would cross through DNR-managed lands, for approximately 30 miles. It is envisioned to utilize a series of dirt roads and new trail that would be 36" wide and have a natural surface and would be built over several years. Ideally it would be a multi-use trail for mountain bikes, equestrians, hikers and for the Pacific Northwest Scenic Trail (Jeff Kish brought this idea up during the Q&A with Daniel). A major issue is the construction of a new bridge over the Middle Fork of the Nooksack River.

Long Term Conservation Strategy for Marbled Murrelet Presentation: Peter Harrison – DNR Wildlife Biologist, talked to the committee about the draft environmental impact statement for the marbled murrelet strategy. He focused on the recreation related aspects of the DEIS and displayed each of the alternatives and explained how recreation would be affected in each one. He reviewed the basics of DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Part of his presentation talked about the marbled murrelet, its habitat and how disturbances by humans can impact it during the nesting season (April 1 – September 23). The bulk of Peter's presentation was dedicated to the six alternatives. The 6 strategies for conservation measures as applied to recreation are:

- A – No Action Alternative
- C, D – No development of any new or expanded recreation facilities, trails, and recreation leases in special habitat areas, occupied sites and their buffers, including the 1/2 mile occupied site buffer within emphasis areas.

- B, E, F – Require consultation with US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) for any new or expanded recreation development inside certain sensitive areas.

There was a lengthy question and answer session following the presentation. With the DEIS being a sensitive subject for the planning committee, the Q&A session has been captured for the committee's review. The following comments summarize the discussion held between Peter, committee members, and DNR staff.

Ari – how would you know when you were recreating in murrelet habitat?

Peter - you wouldn't necessarily know. There is no signage.

Glenn – existing undesignated user built trails do not get grandfathered into these areas under these strategies.

Peter - we wouldn't permit a new trail to be built in these areas.

Kevin – how do you know they nest there if they don't build a nest?

Peter - there is an intensive 2 year survey protocol, visiting the nest sites up to 20 times a year during breeding season, listening and looking. The bird flies 50 mph. These areas have been surveyed for murrelets and we know the species is there.

Alternative B – new recreation construction requires consultation with USFWS. All maintenance or construction activities would follow the daily timing restrictions during nesting season.

Becky - would public have to follow timing restrictions once facilities are built?

Peter - that depends on the impact the users have.

Alternative C – no new development. Half mile buffer on occupied sites in a special area. Existing agency authorized recreation would be allowed. No conversion of non-motorized trails to motorized. Maintenance and improvements of existing facilities and trails would follow daily timing restrictions.

Alternative D – no development of recreation in murrelet polygons. No conversion of non-motorized to motorized trails. Maintenance of trails and facilities would follow daily timing and seasonal restrictions. It provides for establishment of high quality habitat. As the DNR does not harvest near Swift Creek, a polygon would be set aside and managed to develop high quality habitat.

Alternative E – combines C & D. Requires consultation with USFWS to build new recreation facilities and trail. Recreation sites would follow daily timing restrictions.

Alternative F – requires consultation with USFWS to build new recreation. Activities would be restricted by timing. Designed to develop high quality habitat areas. Timber sales would be managed to promote habitat.

Mike McGlenn – how many acres of the planning area is affected?

Peter - looks like about a 1/3 of the planning area. Planning area is about 86,000 acres, so about 20,000 acres affected. We can get back to you with a more accurate number.

Eric – how would USFWS manage all these consultations?

Peter – we work with them all the time, and would continue that relationship.

Eric – the timing of this is poor. We have zero authorized recreation in this planning area.

Peter – we need input from groups like this on these strategies for these reasons.

Mike – is there a preferred alternative?

Peter- we have no preference.

Project timeline – we are in the comment period until March 9th, when comments will be reviewed. Alternatives will go to the board of natural resources. The Board will submit one to USFWS. They will approve or deny and send it back to the Board. The Board will approve or deny.

Peter – this is the public comment period, we encourage you to talk to the Board of Natural Resources. Other beneficiaries have commented in person to the board. It seems to work well.

Mike – public comment period on the preferred alternatives? What if we don't like the alternative chosen, can we appeal?

Peter – there is no public comment period after an alternative is selected, I don't think. We'll double check and let you know.

Lance – do we have to wait until this process is done to develop recreation in these areas? Glenn – yes, but that's the time frame that we are in with this process.

Peter – a full range of conservation measures need to be considered. Option A will not happen. The bird is listed as threatened, and courts will not allow for a strategy if a range of measures is not considered.

Public – what is the bird listed as?

Peter – threatened. USFWS does a review every 5 years to determine if it should be threatened, endangered, etc.

Peter – lay out your most desirable trail plan, and then start inserting the constraints. I would be happy to come back and help you draft comments to the DNR.

Glenn – we will look at overlays on our tri-composite maps. Particularly when it comes to ORVs, these restrictions will have a bigger impact on ORV's. Timing restrictions will be difficult for ORV's – no noise during the nesting period would greatly limit recreation.

Kevin- there are already logging roads through some of these areas. How does that apply?

Peter – using existing roads is much less impact than a new trail area.

Mike – historically we have critical issues with USFWS. USFWS has no mandate to deal with recreation. They are very difficult to partner with.

Peter – DNR website has a draft EIS for your review. Public meetings are scheduled. This story map could be useful. Maybe local staff can send this link to the committee members.

Peter – a helpful comment would be – “we have trails planned through x # of acres. Please consider allowing these trails to be built...” You can ask for specifics.

Dana – Peter, it might be helpful to have you back after the committee has had a month to consider the strategies.

Eric – it would be great if we could come to a resolution and write a letter, with all the groups signing, as representation from this committee.

Kevin – this is going to hugely impact us. Far more so than other users.

Dana – next month will be our first conceptual look at the planning process. The challenge is, if we took each alternative, and overlaid onto maps, we would have 20 maps.

Eric – we don't have specific trail plans yet. It's all conceptual. We should address the alternatives as they are.

Mike – can we extend the comment period?

Peter – that's probably a reasonable request.

Glenn – it's likely the murrelet has habituated through the existing recreation occurring. But we don't want to add to the impact. In your comments, you can mention how impact is occurring on the landscapes already. You can ask the DNR and USFWS to consider the unauthorized existing recreation as authorized.

Eric – should we go talk to the Board of Natural Resources at the next meeting?

Peter – it wouldn't hurt.

Glenn – what is the urgency for the committee to address the board?

Peter – you can give a 3 minute oral testimony at the meeting. Longer, and you need to work through the DNR.

Chris Hankey – you have a new board and a new commissioner. It would be timely to get in front of the board with your concerns.

After the lengthy discussion, the committee decided to prepare a letter that the whole committee could sign and send onto the Board of Natural Resources. Members were encouraged to make individual comments on the DEIS to DNR's SEPA Center and send one or two representatives to a Board meeting and provide testimony on the effects of the long term strategy on recreation in Whatcom County.

Summary of Public Comments from Community Meeting: Dana went over the comments from the November community meeting with the committee. He reviewed the comments based on the stations used at the community meeting. They included:

- Economic Vitality
- Quality of Life
- Recreation Experience
- Conservation

Each section produced discussion over the comments; committee members observed that every group is aware of what it brings to the region as far as economic vitality is concerned, that the quality of life is often tied to economic vitality, that there were a lot of comments on motorized recreation, and conserving areas in the planning area may actually benefit from having designated areas for trail development.

Dana also had the committee look over the written comments submitted at the meeting. The committee talked about access, managing expectations as far as conflicts between uses, and how old growth is perceived by different people.

Recreation Survey Discussion: Dana reviewed some of the key sections of the survey and led a discussion with the committee on what the answers represent and how the committee will use the data in the next steps of the

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planning process. There were comments about water quality, the intent of the questions, and that at times the questions seemed limiting. Dana closed the conversation by explaining that the survey results wouldn't drive the decision making, but would be one of several factors to consider.

Homework Assignment: Dana passed out a set of maps to each committee member and explained the purpose of the assignment – to brainstorm with the various user groups and constituents on what recreation could look like and where it could occur. The results of this activity would be shared with the whole committee at the February committee meeting.

Looking Ahead: Dana talked about the planned activities over the next few months. Brainstorming, comment sorting and issue identification and prioritizing the issues comes next. The physical planning includes developing 3 options, which are consolidated into 2 alternatives by the June meeting. The committee will take the summer off and come back to work in September.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.