



Recreation Planning Committee Meeting Notes

November 1, 2016 | 6 to 9 p.m.

Rome Grange Hall, 2821 Mt. Baker Highway, Bellingham

In Attendance:

Committee Members

Arlen Bogaards	Doug Huddle	Becky Peace
Bert Isaacson	Eric Brown	Walden Haines
Bill Lawrence	Glenn Gervais	Chris Tretwold for
Carole MacDonald	Lance Hansen	Wendy McDermott
Dana Johnson	Mark Harding	Mike McGlenn

DNR Staff

Glenn Glover	Kyle Galloway	Laurie Bergvall
Dana Leavitt	Barbara Simpson	Elizabeth Eberle
Hyden McKown	David Way	Chris Danilson

Others present

Bill McKenna – State Director of Backcountry Horsemen
Tim Hart – neighbor
Kaylee Galloway – Representing Congresswoman DelBene’s office
Daniel Probst – Cascade Mountain Runners
Donna Kelleher

Meeting Purpose: The committee learned about the biological land suitability module and the tri-composite maps of the land suitability assessment. The group continued the discussion on existing recreation experiences.

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

Public Comment: No public comment.

Biological Suitability Module Presentation: Dana Leavitt led the presentation and discussion on the biological suitability module. Geology & soil suitability maps, as well as biological criteria maps were passed out at the beginning of the presentation to the committee. The biological criteria module was the last of the three modules the committee learned about.

Chris Danilson (Northwest Region Wildlife Biologist) provided background information on the agency’s Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), which is a negotiated permit between the federal agencies (NOAA Fisheries and USFWS), for those species that are threatened and/or endangered. The HCP, signed in 1997, provides a

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“conservation framework” for the business DNR is normally engaged in that is intended to minimize impacts to these species. At the time the HCP was negotiated, the primary species of concern were spotted owls, marbled murrelets and salmonid species. Other species of concern with any potential for future Endangered Species Act listing over the course of the HCP were also included. The procedures and policies stemming from the HCP weren’t developed with recreation in mind, so we’ve had to make some interpretations as to how the conservation principles of the HCP should be adapted for these activities. Due to a data sharing agreement with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the exact location nests, roosts, dens, or other specific animal locations cannot be shown. Instead, the maps display the general habitats of sensitive species on a landscape level. IN addition to the DNR’s HCP, the concern over the management of the North Cascades elk herd (the state’s smallest managed elk herd), elk/elk habitat were included as a biological criteria.

After reviewing the two ratings for suitability – low and moderate, Dana went over the data that was developed. The layers covered included:

- Wetlands – Very little wetlands in the planning area. Small area up in the North Fork. Rest are small areas dispersed around the landscape. When it comes time to do projects, the buffers may shrink or grow, depending on the critical areas for the county, depending on the size and quality of the wetland to meet the county’s critical area ordinance.
- Riparian areas – lots of water and fish (streams and rivers) in the planning area – varying width of the buffers.
- Elk habitat – moderate suitability for non-motorized, low suitability for motorized. No motorized recreation in the elk core habitat area.
- Caves, cliffs, talus, balds – spotted throughout the whole landscape. Low suitability to stay away from these areas.
- High quality and rare plant communities – sometimes mapped as a large polygon and sometimes mapped as smaller areas. These are also treated as low suitability.
- Sensitive threatened and endangered species (cannot be mapped, are considered at the landscape level).

The suitability matrix was reviewed showing biological criteria for single track and double track trails and recreational facilities.

Questions raised by the committee included:

- Is there a composite map of all the criteria put together? *Yes, after the questions we’ll review them.*
- This looks really bleak, can you do anything to warm it and fuzzy it any? *Look at the data by type to see if it will be excluded, for example riparian areas aren’t excluded, you just have to think about how to cross them. You may need a bridge.*
- At our last meeting, Christ Thomsen (Whatcom County Parks Department) was here to talk about the interconnectedness of the landscapes. Red Mountain has a big circle around it. What does that do for that potential? *Access is one of our concerns. Most of that is outside of our planning area. How the county looks at that is probably different than DNR looks at that. DNR will not close down facilities on somebody else’s land. Using the data that we have – the polygon you are referencing is a plant community of*

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exceptional high quality. There will be more discussion about this as we continue with the planning process.

- When data is considered out of date – the elk studies of 2002 for example. Is there updated information on elk for example? *That is a good question, without a good answer. The current plan was finalized in 2002. There have been political challenges that have impeded getting that plan updated. As a result, the 2002 is the “standing” elk herd management plan. The “core area” identified in the 2002 plan, is the area where most of the elk conservation work is occurring and continues to be reflective of where the majority of the population resides.*

Composite maps were reviewed, bringing all of the data together. The maps reflect single track non-motorized considerations and a second one for single track motorized, double track and facilities. They show that riparian areas dominate the composite maps with the elk habitat in the SE corner of the recreation area. Low suitability means more care and consideration has to be given to how recreation is developed.

Committee Member Recreation Presentations: There were two presentations by Bert Isaacson and Carole MacDonald.

Bert Isaacson – Gave a presentation on ATV’s. Used by a variety of people for a variety of uses – farmers, hunters, miners, recreationists. Ride in a variety of geographic areas in a variety of weather conditions wherever it is legal. Like a big enough area for a day of riding – 50 miles or more.

Carole MacDonald – Gave a presentation representing tourism and the impact recreation and tourism has on economics. Basecamp Bellingham Tourism.org and Recreation Northwest website represents tourism in Whatcom County. “Recreation and the economy in Whatcom County” – talks about the impact of recreation in Whatcom County – many millions of dollars – approximately \$705 million in spending.

Tri-Composite Map Presentation: Dana presented the tri-composite maps, going over the process for developing the maps, how they were divided by use and the implications of the resulting information. The four tri-composite maps include:

- Single track non-motorized – hiking, mountain biking and equestrian – least amount of limitations to it. More moderate than low suitability areas.
- Single track motorized – motorcycles. Restrictions get a little more intense.
- Double track - ATV and four wheel drive vehicles.
- Facilities (trailheads, parking lots, and campgrounds) – Restrictive to try to locate facilities in the planning area. There are areas available, it just takes a little more work – does the trailhead service one group or more than one group. Or do we work with another entity like County Parks? Are there opportunities for joint operations in the future? The good neighbor buffer blocks out much of the areas along the perimeter of the units, as does the geology.

Questions from the committee - what about existing trails in the purple area? Will those be grandfathered in or will those be closed down? *There is definitely no grandfathering. We will evaluate what is on the ground. In some cases the trails will be closed. In other cases it may be that with a little bit of work they could be brought up to*

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standards. This is a planning process – the existing trails may not even be what you all want to be in the planning project.

Advice for how to talk to our user groups? Look at all the ideas – are there issues for us to address? If this is a good idea how do we address it? But until we know what the good ideas are or a wish list – we don't know how to address those ideas. We will have some exercises in the New Year to work through this process. We need to realize what the ramifications are to making these decisions. Both as individuals and as a group. Get your ideas down, bring them to a meeting early next year, and then we will talk about them as a group. Look at the Snoqualmie Corridor Plan – or the Green Mountain -Tahuya Plan to get an idea of what the objectives were in those plans. These are all on the DNR website in the recreation page: <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/recreation/recreation-planning>.

Community Meeting & Next Steps: Dana went over the format for the upcoming community meeting. Two parts to the community meeting – first part is a short presentation and then three listening stations for people to learn about the suitability process. Second part of the meeting is listening stations on what matters most regarding outdoor recreation opportunities, the economic impacts/relationship to recreation and how recreation will affect your community?

Really want to have committee members there to show support of the plan and working with DNR at the public meeting. Dana will develop bullet points for the committee members for talking points for the public meeting.

The meetings will be at the Deming Library starting in January 2017. We will start talking about what is the big idea. January through March is a lot of exploration. Spring time start looking at physical planning and what does that mean going forward to start developing concepts.

Meeting was adjourned at 8pm.