



## Recreation Planning Committee Meeting Notes

October 11, 2016 | 6 to 9 p.m.

Rome Grange Hall, 2821 Mt. Baker Highway, Bellingham

### In Attendance:

#### *Committee Members*

Ari Bezona

Arlen Bogaards

Bill Lawrence

Dana Johnson

Eric Jacoby

Glenn Gervais

Kevin Vanderhorst

Lance Hansen

Becky Peace

Walden Haines

Mike McGlenn

Eric Brown

Doug Huddle

#### *DNR Staff*

Chris Hankey

Dana Leavitt

Hyden McKown

Kyle Galloway

Laurie Bergvall

Rick Foster

#### *Others in Attendance*

Christ Thomsen – Whatcom County Parks & Recreation

**Meeting Purpose:** The planning committee learned about Whatcom County’s park development plans adjacent to the planning area. The group continued the discussion on existing recreation experiences and talked about the field trips.

**Welcome:** Chris Hankey welcomed the group and went over the agenda. The planning committee approved September’s meeting notes with the addition of Mike McGlenn’s name to the list of attendees.

**Public Comment:** Alexis Blue talked about disc golf – how it is one of the fastest growing sports in the US and Canada with about 5000 courses. The concept of disc golf is well aligned with timber management.

Daniel Probst will come next month for the ultra-running users to talk about the proposed Bellingham to Mt. Baker Trail. He is a founding member of Cascade Mountain Runners.

**Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Department Presentation:** Christ Thompsen talked about the department’s mission, which is to enrich the quality of life for the community. Oversee 16,000 acres of lands, on 72 properties that include tidelands, parks, gardens, special use areas (East Whatcom Regional Use Center), and 65 miles of trails, as well as 8 senior activity centers and a firearm range (Plantation Firearm Range). He discussed the Lake Whatcom re-conveyance, Galbraith Mountain, South Fork Park, Canyon Lake Community Forest, Silver Lake Park and a new park in Maple Falls. Christ shared the department’s philosophy of recreation development being light on the land use, looking at non-motorized uses – hiking, biking, equestrian and how the planning of trails allows for working with neighbors if possible to have trail connections, such as with DNR. He talked about how

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the department funded projects through three funding sources – grants in NOVA categories, real estate excise tax, county operating budget, and fourth way is if someone donates resources.

Christ spent time answering questions from committee members covering a broad range of topics such as when coordination between the county and DNR (the planning committee) on connectivity for trails will occur – following the inventory work when the committee gets into issue sorting and physical planning, ORV use – County doesn't allow and would have to go through a planning process if any changes were to be made, hunting on the re-conveyance lands that are now county parks – they are not open to hunting (fishing is allowed).

**Committee Member Recreation Presentations:** Presentations were given by Arlen Bogards on behalf of Washington Trails Association (WTA), Ari Bezona on behalf of motorcycle riders, Eric Jacoby on behalf of sportsmen (hunters and fishermen), and Dana Johnson on behalf of Mt. Baker Motorcycle Club.

Arlen talked about Washington Trails Association and the hiking community. WTA preserves, enhances and promotes hiking opportunities across Washington. They had 4400 volunteers last year on trail projects. They work with DNR, USFS, WSP and County and City Parks. This year WTA is celebrating 50 years of protecting trails, and contributed 140,000 hours of trail maintenance last year – this equates to \$3.5 million of trail work and having 25% of all volunteers that are 18 and younger.

Arlen also discussed a recent WTA survey, which mirrored portions of the DNR survey. The take away messages from the survey included:

- Don't lock up any one area for single use but have a variety of uses on the landscape
- Better maps
- Variety and natural features are desired
- These lands provide good shoulder season areas
- Unawareness of where the DNR lands are

Ari Bezona presented for motorcycle riding in Whatcom County and covered three main topics: adventure, responsibility, and legacy. Some of the adventure they look for involve the challenge of riding off road, enjoying the beautiful PNW, being part of a community, variety of terrain, the challenge and having connectivity to other trail systems. Responsibility is addressed through safety and health, minimizing environmental impact and having a positive economic impact in the community. The legacy involves a growing sport, improving the perception of the motorcycle community and providing a positive and fun family experience. Looking into the future, means having:

- Motorcycle friendly recreation areas
- Organized parking
- Good maps
- Information kiosk
- More Support in Whatcom County

Among the questions asked of Ari were ones about the amount of trails needed – 50-100 miles would be ideal. Other points included using QR codes and map systems, that motorcycle riders have the ability to ride any terrain,

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as a first choice wouldn't want to share trails (with 4 wheel trails) that they prefer single track trails and that a volunteer base may exist but is not organized right now.

Eric Jacoby talked about representing a variety of recreationists - big game and upland bird hunters, berry and mushroom gatherers, fossil and rock hunters. The main problem with getting feedback from any group is that there are not a lot who focus on Whatcom centric groups. He talked about how difficult it is to gather information from people who tend to be secretive about their activities. Eric created a survey that didn't have enough responses to say anything profound. He noted that two thirds of the respondents were not Whatcom County residents. The questions drew quite a range of responses that were all over the board. Many people don't know what DNR's mandate is, they like to hunt and gather a variety of animals and plants, very few people consider their experience as perfect, and most people are concerned about over-crowding or finding favorable space for hunting on DNR lands. There were questions and discussion about the survey numbers, that hunters and gatherers think other groups are more organized, that passes may be the way of the future but may become cost prohibitive, and the kind of areas that hunters want the most – backcountry experiences to drive and hunt options.

Dana Johnson spoke on behalf of the Mt. Baker Motorcycle Club, which has been around since 1926. He gave a brief history of some of the events and places motorcycle riders go such as Walker Valley, Tahuya State Forest, Capitol State Forest and Elbe Hills. He mentioned the Cowbell Enduro as being the longest standing one in the northwest at 86 years. His presentation included several handouts and memorabilia, and observed that the more people you have in an area for riding, the harder it is to maintain the trails. There are several organizations supportive of motorcycle riding including the Stumpjumpers, NMA, and WOHVA. He noted that organized trail systems may not end the "hide and ride" mentality of current riders. Motorcycle riders need 100 miles of trails so people wouldn't have to ride the same trails twice over the weekend. People like to ride on Forest Service trail areas such as Foggy Dew and up in Canada. There over 3,500 ORV permits in Whatcom and Skagit counties, translating into a lot of users looking for a legal place to ride. Silver Lake and Red Mountain represent good places to ride because they are not being used by the people it was designed for. In the near future, issues with noise will go away – electric bikes are coming. Follow up discussion included the turnout at events – sometimes up to 200 people.

**Survey Results:** Dana shared some of the survey results with the planning committee. He noted that there was over 1300 results in the survey, responding to such questions as:

- Which activity would you like to enjoy on DNR managed lands: camping and hiking the top two
- What area do you like to visit most frequently: Not sure where they are, then North Fork were the top two
- When recreating how important are the following factors: Environmental stewardship and cleanliness >60%
- When people like to recreate: weekends, mornings, and afternoons
- How far do you drive to get to DNR managed lands: 40% 30-60 minutes
- How long is your visit: 30% 2-4 hours
- How much do you spend in Whatcom Co: 38% \$10 - \$50

### Discussion on the Field Trips:

Committee members talked about having the opportunity to do it right – many areas won't work, but many areas can work, that Slide Mountain is going to take real consideration on how to manage – once you announce it is open,

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it will be the flood gates and education needs to happen. There was an observation that there are many multiple-use trails on the land now and it is something that needs to be addressed. The idea of visiting an ATV area outside of the planning area such as Walker Valley ORV area was raised and further discussed at the end of the meeting. Education and signage was seen as a means of improving the experience. There was concern expressed with shooting on DNR-managed lands, which included there being a no-shooting ordinance in Whatcom County, indiscriminate shooting has resulted in the loss of hunting opportunities on DNR lands and the potential lead problem from shooting in the North Fork pit. The agency is addressing target shooting on a separate track, on a state wide effort. What is being discussed as far as trail miles is a big endeavor, and will take a lot of commitment from all sorts of folks. Part of the discussion focused on ways for obtaining funding for trail projects and who would work with DNR to accomplish installing trails. Reiter was used as an example of how a smaller advisory group meeting to help DNR staff run projects. There was an observation that the motorized community shouldn't have to travel 2-3 counties away to recreate; that there should be a good place for them to do that in Whatcom County. The discussion ended with a question whether the federal Clean Water Act would be covered as part of the planning process, which is not the case.

## Wrap-Up:

- Next year, the meetings will be at the Deming Library starting in January 2017.
- Public Meeting November 29<sup>th</sup> – 6-8pm, Bellingham Technical College, Settlemeyer Hall
- Doing a visit to one of the other ORV areas – committee can organize that. Work through Lance and Kevin.
- Next meeting is November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 6-9 PM at the Grange Hall.

Meeting was adjourned at 9pm.