

Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council Meeting

June 6, 2008

Sleeping Lady Mountain Retreat

7375 Icicle Road

Leavenworth, Washington

9:10 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.

Approved: October 22, 2008

Voting members present: Alan Black, Roger Hoesterey, Cherie Kearney, Bob Meier, Merrill Peterson (by phone), Elizabeth Gray (by phone during Dabob discussion), Wade Troutman. Ex-Officio members present: Stephen Saunders for the Department of Natural Resources, Jeanne Koenings for the Department of Ecology, Elizabeth Rodrick for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Members absent: Cheryl Schultz, Janelle Downs, Rob Fimbel for the State Parks and Recreation Commission, Jim Eychaner for the Recreation and Conservation Office

DNR staff present: Pene Speaks, John Gamon, Curt Pavola, Marsha Hixson, Anna Jones, Rex Crawford, David Wilderman, Don McIver (10:45), John Fleckenstein, Heather Kapust, Janet Kearsley, Birdie Davenport

I. Introductions

Roger Hoesterey introduced Harriet Bullitt, founder of the Icicle Fund, a charitable foundation supporting the arts and environmental protection in the upper Wenatchee Valley. Harriet has served on many boards, and is the developer, owner and CEO of the Sleeping Lady Mountain Retreat. Ms. Bullitt talked about the environmental features of the retreat and about the Icicle Fund.

Other attendees introduced themselves.

II. Minutes of the March 26, 2008 Meeting

Minutes of the March 26, 2008, were tabled, as there was no quorum present.

III. Old Business

Progress on Past Recommendations: Acquisitions Report – attached

Kapust reported that there were 15 acquisitions since the last meeting of the Council.

Stavis NRCA – Eleven smaller properties scattered throughout the south and southwest portions of the NRCA, all contiguous with NRCA and/or state trust lands, for a total of 94.64 acres.

Stavis NRCA – This property near Seabeck [near Guillemot Cove Nature Preserve (county park)] consisting of 130 acres, 13 acres tidelands, 1400 feet of waterfront, with one home and 7 outbuildings, and a small-scale commercial shellfish operation on the tidelands. This site could have become 26 home sites.

Woodard Bay NRCA – property of 90 acres. Negotiations with the landowner were assisted by the Trust for Public Land. The site had potential for 18 homes. The site was reconfigured through boundary line adjustment for the owner to keep two developed 5-acre parcels, and to maximize acreage and lake frontage for the NRCA. This area is also part of the bat flyway.

Kennedy Creek NAP - 38.88 acres in the southeast portion of the NAP, including a tidally influenced reach of Schneider Creek.

Zuckerberg added that the acres purchased at Kennedy Creek were pending harvest and ultimately threatened by conversion to home sites. There was a minor trespass on NAP land by the previous owner, Taylor United, for a logging road, and when their forester contacted DNR to remedy their trespass, we asked them if they would consider selling the land into NAP. The parcel went through the boundary expansion process and WWRP for acquisition funding and required negotiation on access for the appraisal to be suitable to the landowner. After a great effort by staff, we closed on the property and now protect the tidal reaches of Schneider Creek.

Washougal Oaks 4.6 acres – DNR acquired Columbia Land Trust (CLT) property within the established natural area boundary. The property is part of the NRCA portion of the site. CLT had acquired the property prior to natural area designation. DNR acquired the property for consistent management within the natural area. This action also allows CLT to use the funds for conservation action elsewhere. DNR anticipates having another landowner sign an agreement for a parcel in this area by the next Council meeting.

Heather discussed the current Washington Wildlife Recreation Program applications. The list includes:

Critical Habitat – Wanapum proposed NAP, Bone and Niawiakum NAPs, Columbia Hills NAP, Cypress Island NA, Ink Blot and Shumocher NAPs, Lacamas Prairie proposed NA, Trout Lake NAP, Washougal Oaks Natural Area

Riparian Protection Account – Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP, Dabob Bay NAP, Stavis NRCA, Woodard Bay NRCA

Urban Wildlife – West Tiger Mountain NRCA, Mount Si NRCA, Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area, Stavis NRCA, Woodard Bay NRCA

Dabob Bay Proposed Natural Area Expansion Public Meeting Report

[Merrill Peterson and Elizabeth Gray joined the Council via telephone.] Gamon reviewed what has happened with regard to the potential expansion of Dabob Bay NAP since the Council approved a staff recommendation at the March 2008 meeting. Gamon and Elizabeth Gray worked together to refine the potential expansion map to be presented at the public meeting, which was held on May 27, 2008 in Quilcene. Invitations were mailed to over 300 people. Several organizations were represented at the meeting. DNR staff presented the map and allowed time for public comment at “listening posts”. Comment sheets were also provided for those attendees who wanted to give written comments.

Speaks said that the Jefferson County Fire District is concerned about potential impacts to the taxing district which provides funds for fire fighting services. Their concern is that lost revenue, including potential loss from a decrease in property value of the shoreline properties, would impact their ability to provide service. Pavola mentioned that the state will make in-lieu-of-tax payments to the county.

Pavola gave a brief report of comments to date, which are mostly positive, and said that comments from the public meeting are still coming in to the DNR.

There was discussion regarding consideration of the economic needs in the area along with the ecological values.

Koenings suggested that the southeast boundary could be adjusted to include lands owned by a person willing to sell their land for inclusion within the natural area. Speaks indicated that that could be considered administratively.

There was also discussion about the primary features within the recommended site as that relates to which areas should be NAP vs. NRCA. Pavola said the Council's motion actually does include specific references to areas to be designated NAP and NRCA. Speaks indicated that the area along the shoreline in the Priority #1 area is appropriate for NAP. Saunders said he is very comfortable with a tiered approach: The Priority #1 area fits NAP; NRCA is the 2nd tier; then other programs take on the rest with non-profits and partnerships, and the potential for an Aquatic Reserve under DNR's Aquatic Resources Division, to build protection.

Meier asked where to put the focus of protection – on saltwater, rather than the working forests farther away? Are there unique things in the hatched areas or are they just buffers? He suggested focusing on the uniqueness of the areas. Koenings pointed out the Preserve Creek drains directly into the preserve, so it would directly impact the NAP. She also said the Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI) has a grant to protect the Tarboo watershed. Wilderman reviewed the ecological features of the Priority 1 area.

Gray repeated that the lines (as presented) are important over the long term. Koenings agreed. Saunders agreed that Preserve Creek should be included, but not the NE corner due to the remoteness and indirect impact. Gamon said that the corners were modified in his and Gray's collaboration. There is a difference of opinion as to how much is enough for protection. Kapust said that some landowners of tidelands want to sell to the existing NAP. There was general agreement that this boundary was not meant to exclude the tidelands.

Gray proposed that the boundary include the hatched areas as designed by Gamon. Hoesterey seconded.

Saunders suggested that the potential additions (the two hatched areas and the aquatic lands) could be considered separately.

Black indicated that the motion had been seconded and called for a vote on the motion. Ayes 5 with Troutman commenting that he was in favor, but not wanting to spend money on the "far away" portion until we have an acquisition plan; Meier abstained.

Black indicated that the floor was now open to amendments. Kearney moved that the boundary be modified to extend a point-to-point straight line [from the southern-most corner on the west side to the southern-most corner on the east side of the boundary as presented, so that the aquatic lands are included]. Troutman seconded. Vote was unanimous [no abstentions].

[Merrill Peterson and Elizabeth Gray disconnected from the meeting.]

Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP Management Planning

Davenport reported that the draft management plan is almost complete and will go out for public comment. Then it will be revised and presented to the Council. She has asked for internal comments about hunting, including access for game hunting. (Duck hunting is allowed.) She indicated access is a point of principle for local residents. Black said it is a point of principle for the Council, also, and asked what would change if the area were made an NRCA? Pavola responded that the site has an NAP-quality occurrence (part of the legislative mandate), and that public access is allowed by policy when determined by department to be "consistent with the purposes of this chapter." [RCW 79.70] The feature is the surge

plain, which can have public use as long as the timing is compatible. Black indicated there was an issue about a bike trail ten years ago. Kearney said she didn't mind debating potential uses; just don't change it to an NRCA. Hoesterey asked that since the feature of the surge plain had hunting as historical use, couldn't we just continue, but not advertise? Does it require access? Speaks responded that we needed this policy discussion before bringing the plan to the Council. Hoesterey said he liked the policy, and suggested that hunting and fishing enthusiasts are a source of conservation in America. Meier mentioned that he lived in the area and discussed the history and nature of its use, saying that he supported the common hunting and fishing practices. Wilderman said that we can define the sensitive area(s). Davenport discussed the wording to be used. She emphasized that safety is a big concern. The boat launch is a hand carry only launch. Meier said that kayaking use is increasing and must be addressed. There was further discussion of specific uses. Davenport then asked about a map and signage. The Council encouraged signage that indicates both where they can and where they cannot go, keeping to simple declarative sentences. Davenport said she would get the plan out for review and hopes to present it to the Council at the October meeting.

IV. New Business

IBA Designation Progress Report

Gamon introduced Don McIver, reminding the Council that the Natural Area Preserves Act was amended to provide a link to the Important Bird Area (IBA) program. McIver is currently working half time for DNR and half time for Audubon Washington. Gamon stated that the NHP and Audubon made a commitment to bring two IBAs to the Council and then to a public hearing. There were questions and discussion regarding the need to be clear about what an 'IBA' designation would mean and how it relates to 'NAP' designations.

McIver spoke about the background of IBAs, which started in England with Bird Life International over habitat loss and degradation. Audubon is looking to partner with existing organizations. In Washington, work began with Tim Cullinan (McIver's predecessor) in the late 1980s. So far, 53 IBAs have been identified. McIver has identified 13 as potential for pursuing with the Natural Heritage Program. Gamon said they are focusing on 2 as "doable" and then prioritizing several biennia worth of IBAs to bring to the Council.

McIver characterized IBAs as a way to prioritize conservation efforts, similar to the ecoregional assessments carried out by The Nature Conservancy, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Natural Resources, and others.

Hoesterey asked about outreach, including birding trails and creating interactive maps. Fleckenstein passed around the book *Important Bird Areas of Washington* compiled by Tim Cullinan.

There was further discussion of what is meant by "designation," and its comparison with natural areas, and how identification of bird-related values might affect management needs for natural heritage features. Meier asked about the legislation passed regarding IBAs¹. Kearney suggested following up, and adding to the definition. She said support for birds can be high, and suggested using that interest as a contribution to the economy, with bird festivals, etc., to blend people and habitat conservation.

¹ 1128-S.SL Session Law 2007, Section 308 – Department of Natural Resources, item (22): \$300,000 of the general fund--state appropriation for fiscal year 2008 and \$300,000 of the general fund--state appropriation for fiscal year 2009 are provided solely for staff support for the natural heritage program to integrate, analyze, and provide bird area information, and for state designations and mapping support, among other activities.

LandScope America

Gamon talked about the LandScope America project with National Geographic and NatureServe, and other partners. He encouraged the Council to go to www.landscape.org to view what is currently available. Council members asked about funding. Gamon indicated that the partners in this project have a team working on sustaining long-term funding for the project. Davenport said she was in a video done at Mima Mounds NAP. Gamon stated that this video will be available on *LandScope America* and that it was shot during Prairie Appreciation Day. It will demonstrate the conservation needs and opportunities and successes within the South Puget Prairie landscape.

V. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office – not present

Jim Eychaner sent in a report with an attachment: Please see the attached "applications received" report which includes the proposals for the coming biennium within the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.

In addition, please note that RCO is experiencing significant growth in the number of staff and has completed a reorganization plan. The reorganization is intended to result in improved efficiency and decreased grant manager workload.

Department of Ecology – Jeanne Koenings

Koenings reported that DOE had three applications for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.

State Parks and Recreation Commission – not present

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Roderick reported that they were working on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Section 6 proposals, and were successful in obtaining \$10 million for land acquisition in support of federally listed species.

Department of Natural Resources

Saunders reported the 09-11 biennium budget proposals have been submitted for executive management review. The proposals include an additional planner to help complete more management plans, funding for Natural Heritage to continue with the shrub-steppe inventory, staffing to help implement the Biodiversity Council's 30-year conservation strategy, and continuation and expansion of the IBA work. Natural Heritage and Natural Areas staff are also working more collaboratively with other programs in order to leverage opportunities, especially with the land transactions and agriculture programs.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report

Pavola reported that the program is again submitting a request to the Legislature for operating funds that follow the addition of new lands previously funded by the Legislature. This is a routine request based on our estimate of needed staff and other resources to manage new sites or significant acquisitions at existing sites. The Legislature has routinely funded some portion of this request, even though the amount has been small in tough budget years. Last biennium the request was \$2,507,000 and we received \$927,000. This biennium DNR is requesting about \$1.5 million.

Also, DNR has joined a strategic planning effort for natural areas through the Pacific Northwest Natural Areas Committee, which is a federal-state-private group hosted by the U.S. Forest Service regional office. The committee has been meeting since the 1980s, as an informal working group of natural areas practitioners. The effort has fostered partnerships among the participants. The strategic plan is meant to identify current challenges in the identification and management of natural areas and also the key “next steps” in the evolution of natural areas management, including how to better connect with the public.

VII. Natural Heritage Program Report

Gamon reported that the program is working on IBAs, LandScope America, and shrub-steppe inventory. Troutman asked if all shrub-steppe has been mapped. He suggested checking with the Conservation District. There is a tour this week with members of DNR’s Executive Management to make them aware of why shrub-steppe is important.

Gamon also said that work is proceeding on the ReGAP project, which will result in better distribution maps for vertebrates.

VIII. Other Business

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting is October 22, 2008, at the Natural Resources Building in Olympia.

Attachments:

Special Lands Acquisition Update
DNR WWRP Lands Acquisition submittals
WWRP Status Report (Jim Eychaner)
Natural Areas Report (Curt Pavola)

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Special Lands Acquisition Update

October 23, 2007 to June 4, 2008

CLOSED TRANSACTIONS:

During this reporting period, the Department acquired the following properties:

Stavis NRCA, Kitsap County

Speed	4.79 acres	\$ 63,000	11-14-07
Wallis	9.57 acres	\$ 71,500	11-27-07
Davis and Schoening	5 acres	\$ 45,000	12-21-07
Starwich and Ide	19.14 acres	\$ 109,000	1- 9-08
Yateman	4.77 acres	\$ 45,650	1-16-08
Herbst and Fay	10.6 acres	\$ 80,000	2- 6-08
Raymond Enterprises, Inc.	19.00 acres	\$ 95,000	2-13-08
Bekkedahl	3.7 acres	\$ 95,000	2-20-08
B. Bernhard	3.54 acres	\$ 85,000	2-27-08
Williams	9.53 acres	\$ 85,000	3-18-08
Milikan	5 acres	\$ 60,000	5-23-08

Eleven smaller properties scattered throughout the south and SW portions of the NRCA. All contiguous with NRCA and/or state trust lands. Several are crossed by Stavis Creek, an important salmon spawning stream, or Boyce Creek

Stavis NRCA, Kitsap County

Michel (Erewhon Tree Farm)	130 acres (plus 13 acres tidelands)	\$3,520,000	2-28-08
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Large Hood Canal waterfront property in W portion of the NRCA, including approx. 1400 feet of waterfront (350 feet low bank with bulkhead and boat ramp) and 13 acres of fronting tidelands. Waterfront area developed with a house, cottage, and seven outbuildings and a small-scale commercial shellfish operation on the tidelands. Most of the property is undeveloped, flat to steeply sloping. Over 50% covered with forest over 70 years old. Property has county road access and excellent views of Olympic Mts. and Hood Canal from many locations. Extremely desirable for redevelopment to waterfront and view homesites.

The Stavis NRCA encompasses the best example of Douglas-fir/western hemlock/evergreen huckleberry forest community in the world, as well as many other high quality wildlife habitats, including mature and old-growth forest conditions. This site, which surrounds the Kitsap Forest NAP, is designed to protect mature forest communities, high-quality freshwater wetlands, and wildlife habitat. It supports bald eagles, a great blue heron rookery, breeding mountain quail, chinook salmon, cougar, black bear, and habitat for cavity-nesting ducks. Stavis Creek, which runs through the site, is one of the best remaining Hood Canal salmon spawning habitats and is a designated recovery area for threatened Hood Canal summer chum.

Woodard Bay NRCA, Thurston County

Rutherford (with TPL) 90 acres \$2,400,000 1-22-08

Attractive residential development property (up to 18 homesites) in the southern part of the NRCA. Property contains mature mixed forest adjacent to existing NRCA lands, a lake used by waterfowl, a wetland, and gently rolling pastureland. The Chehalis-Western Trail runs along the western edge. TPL assisted in negotiations where landowner retained two developed 5-acre residential parcels, as reconfigured through a boundary line adjustment designed to maximize acreage and lake frontage for the NRCA.

A wildlife sanctuary only minutes from downtown Olympia, Woodard Bay NRCA supports a variety of native ecosystems including tidelands, old growth and mature second growth forests, and freshwater wetlands and streams. It provides habitat for shorebirds and songbirds, harbor seals, river otters, bald eagles, herons, osprey, red tailed hawks, barred owls, several species of bats, and other marine and terrestrial wildlife species.

Kennedy Creek NAP, Thurston County

Taylor #3 38.88 acres \$ 626,000 3-31-08

In SE portion of the NAP, including a tidally influenced reach of Schneider Creek. Undeveloped property including a significant amount of merchantable timber planned for harvest. Zoning allows conversion to home sites. Acquisition will help protect the quality of the sensitive estuarine core NAP.

This salt marsh area, which has developed on a peninsula between Kennedy and Schneider Creeks, is a diverse, good quality remnant of a larger tidal river marsh that includes a large area of tideflats, portions of two stream channels, and a area of upland forest which shelters the marsh. The preserve provides important habitat for wildlife, particularly shorebirds. Several important salmon runs return to the estuary, where they school and wait to mature and ripen eggs before spawning upstream in Kennedy Creek.

Washougal Oaks NAP/NRCA, Clark County

Columbia Land Trust 4.6 acres \$ 46,000 5-15-08

Located on SR 14 in SW part of the site. Covered with mixed forest including Oregon white oak. Acquired by CLT prior to DNR's approval of the Washougal Oaks Natural Area site. While CLT's management is compatible, purchase centralizes DNR's management within the boundary. CLT takes proceeds to purchase conservation lands elsewhere.

This new NAP/NRCA site is located along the Columbia River at the western end of the Columbia River Gorge. The site encompasses the largest contiguous area of high-quality native Oregon white oak woodland remaining in western Washington. The combination NAP and NRCA supports two state sensitive plant species (bolandra and small-flowered trillium) and two rare or threatened animal species (the slender-billed nuthatch and lower Columbia steelhead). Fish-bearing Lawton Creek runs inside a steep forested ravine through the heart of the site.

Project Funding By Program

Projects In Application Status Group(s)

Project #	Primary Sponsor	Project Name	This Program Amt	Other Program Amt	Sponsor Amt	Total Amt
Program: WWRP - CH						
08-1185 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Wanapum NAP 2008	1,511,685			1,511,685
WWRP - CH Total:				1 Projects		1,511,685
Program: WWRP - NA						
08-1175 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Bone River and Niawiakum River NAPs 2008	883,312			883,312
08-1176 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Columbia Hills NAP 2008	91,927			91,927
08-1177 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Cypress Island Natural Area 2008	2,820,825			2,820,825
08-1179 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Ink Blot and Shumocher Creek NAPs 2008	1,747,200			1,747,200
08-1180 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Lacamas Prairie Natural Area 2008	3,540,022			3,540,022
08-1184 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Trout Lake NAP 2008	1,672,440			1,672,440
08-1186 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Washougal Oaks NAP/NRCA 2008	2,164,522			2,164,522
WWRP - NA Total:				7 Projects		12,920,248
Program: WWRP - RP						
08-1157 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP Riparian 2008	719,670			719,670
08-1178 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Dabob Bay Natural Area Riparian	2,900,415			2,900,415
08-1183 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Stavis NRCA / Kitsap Forest NAP Riparian 2008	3,423,052			3,423,052
08-1188 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Woodard Bay NRCA Riparian 2008	1,295,700			1,295,700
WWRP - RP Total:				4 Projects		8,338,837
Program: WWRP - UW						
08-1181 A	Natural Resources Dept of	West Tiger Mt., Mount Si, and Rattlesnake Mt.	3,573,307			3,573,307
08-1182 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Stavis NRCA / Kitsap Forest NAP 2008	1,586,025			1,586,025
08-1187 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Woodard Bay NRCA 2008	1,036,455			1,036,455
WWRP - UW Total:				3 Projects		6,195,787
Grand Total:				15 Projects		28,966,557

CRITERIA: Managing Agency - All; Funding Board - All; Fiscal Year - All; Fed Fiscal Year - All; Program - WWRP/HCA/CH, WWRP/HCA/NA, WWRP/HCA/UW, WWRP/RPA/RP; Sponsor - Natural Resources Dept of; Child org projects? Yes; Project Name - All; Project Type - All; Project Manager - All; Project Status Group - Application;

Project Funding By Program

Projects In Application Submitted Status(es)

Project #	Primary Sponsor	Project Name	This Program Amt	Other Program Amt	Sponsor Amt	Total Amt
Program: WWRP - NA						
08-1175 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Bone River and Niawiakum River NAPs 2008	883,312			883,312
08-1176 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Columbia Hills NAP 2008	91,927			91,927
08-1177 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Cypress Island Natural Area 2008	2,820,825			2,820,825
08-1179 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Ink Blot and Shumocher Creek NAPs 2008	1,747,200			1,747,200
08-1180 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Lacamas Prairie Natural Area 2008	3,540,022			3,540,022
08-1184 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Trout Lake NAP 2008	1,672,440			1,672,440
08-1186 A	Natural Resources Dept of	Washougal Oaks NAP/NRCA 2008	2,164,522			2,164,522
08-1232 A	State Parks	Hoko River - Park Acquisition	315,000			315,000
08-1490 A	Fish & Wildlife Dept of	Teaway Ecosystem Phase 2	3,800,000			3,800,000
08-1826 A	State Parks	Admiralty Inlet Heritage Forest	3,900,000			3,900,000
WWRP - NA Total:				10 Projects		20,935,248
Grand Total:				10 Projects		20,935,248

CRITERIA: Managing Agency - Rec. and Conserv. Office; Funding Board - RCFB; Fiscal Year - From 2008 To 2010; Fed Fiscal Year - All; Program - WWRP/HCA/NA; Sponsor - All; Child org projects? Yes; Project Name - All; Project Type - All; Project Manager - All; Project Status - Application Submitted;

Natural Areas Program Report for the Natural Heritage Advisory Council

June 2008 Meeting

Budget Request

It is budget development time for state agencies again, and the Natural Areas Program has submitted the usual “maintenance” package that is intended to compensate the program for lands added to our management responsibility in the prior biennium. This budget proposal traditionally has been supported at some level by the governor and the Legislature, although in lean state budget years, as all expect this coming legislative session, the amount is a fraction of the request. This year’s request is upwards of \$1.5 million. Also, DNR is considering putting forth a proposal to increase our management planning capacity. Final proposals are due to the state Office of Financial Management this fall.

DNR Joins Regional Effort for Natural Areas Strategic Planning

DNR has long been a partner in the Pacific Northwest Interagency Natural Areas Committee, which is composed of the public and major private agencies that create and manage natural areas, including the Oregon and Washington Natural Heritage (Natural Areas) Programs, the USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy of Oregon and Washington, and the National Park Service. The committee has been hosted for some 30 years by the USDA Forest Services’ Pacific Northwest Research Station.

Recently, the committee decided to create a strategic plan to help identify current issues and needs for natural areas management. DNR is a sponsor of the early phase of the plan, “issues identification,” working with Reid Schuller at the Western Stewardship Science Institute in Bend, Oregon. This phase of the planning process should be completed before the fall NHAC meeting, and we plan to provide the needs assessment to the council for potential discussion during your October 2008 meeting.

The goals of the strategic planning effort include:

- Identify the “next steps” for natural areas assembly and management in the Pacific Northwest to maintain the long-term ecological health of natural areas as a network of important ecological communities and processes
- Determine untapped opportunities for public interaction with natural areas, such as environmental education and research
- Identify partnership opportunities for promotion of the value of natural areas and in connecting natural areas with the public and policy makers.

Region Reports

Northwest Region

Cattle Point NRCA: An onsite meeting was held at Cattle Point as part of a conceptual review for the design and installation of interpretative signs inside the “block house,” a concrete structure formerly housing generators for a Naval Radio Compass Station. In attendance were Luis Prado and Princess Jackson-Smith from DNR communications, Stan Kurowski and Alison Hitchcock from

the Region, Curt Pavola from the division staff, and our volunteer interpretive center developer, Susan Vernon. We found this on-site meeting, rather than an off-site meeting or phone conference, extremely valuable and productive as we begin the creative process of site interpretation.

The Northwest recreation crew was able to help out with spring cleaning of the site: walkway and parking grading, block house spruce up, trail work and blackberry removal.

Also, preparation of the EIS regarding relocation of Cattle Point Road by the Federal Highways Administration continues. The likely realignment of the road will have considerable impact on the western portion of the NRCA, and DNR has been actively involved in this process over the years, including formal requests for design changes and mitigation.

Cypress Island NRCA: Building demolition and facility upgrade projects for the Secret Harbor School acquisition are ongoing. The contractor, KPFF Consulting Engineers, has provided 46 pages of blueprints outlining the details of the process. SEPA documents will be available for public review shortly. Implementation of the new management elements from the Cypress Island Comprehensive Management Plan has started; and the reduction of group size from 25 to 12 people is impacting some organizations. Our annual Student Conservation Association (SCA) summer intern will be onsite in early June, providing an onsite presence during high-use months and also offering site interpretation.

DNR division and region staff recently met onsite to evaluate the range of options available for use of the Deepwater Ranch facilities in Secret Harbor, including public uses and facilities we might be able to support operationally and programmatically at the site, as well as assessing restoration needs for the area.

Morning Star NRCA: Exceptional snow loads have kept the NRCA inaccessible to all but the most intrepid cross county skiers and snowshoers. Weather permitting, we'll be flying in backcountry toilets to Ashland, Boulder and Greider Lakes in June. The road between Boulder Lake and Greider Lake trailheads is scheduled for abandonment this August. Our neighbors, Snohomish PUD, are in the midst of FERC relicensing efforts at Spada Lake. We have been reviewing their set of proposed recreation needs alternatives in light of impacts to the NRCA.

Dailey Prairie NAP: A meeting was held with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and representatives of the National Wild Turkey Federation to discuss the release of turkeys on private lands within 5 miles of the NAP. The plan is to release 50-70 birds for three successive winters beginning at the end of this year. The purpose of the release is to provide a spring hunt (April 15 – May 31) for the birds on the west side of the state. Our concerns about the release of non-native species into an ecosystem and the potential for migration to the NAP were not well received by the proponents. We did ask that the NAP be excluded from hunting in the WDFW hunting pamphlet, monitoring take place and that WDFW agents take action to remove the turkeys should they become a problem within the NAP.

Skagit Bald Eagle NAP: DNR Northwest Region is proposing that 250 acres of trust land immediately adjacent to the NAP be added to the site via the Trust Land Transfer program. The parcels' proximity to the NAP, coupled with values intrinsic to older forest, make the lands suitable for inclusion into the natural area. Both parcels are designated as nesting, roosting, and forage (NRF) under the department's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Due to the department's old growth policy, HCP requirements, access limitations, and the remoteness of the parcels, the properties can longer be managed efficiently for trust revenue.

Olympic Region

Volunteers: Four additional volunteers have been recruited for the Natural Areas Program, bringing the number of volunteers up to 16 for Olympic Region. Four of the volunteers for the program are professional wetland specialists and one a retired wildlife biologist. This spring Lisa Hallock of the DNR Natural Heritage Program taught an amphibian monitoring class for volunteers from both the Olympic and the Pacific Cascade Regions. The spring site steward training held this year was on the topic of old growth forest ecology and tree identification taught by Brian Bronznitsky, DNR intensive management forester.

Dabob Bay NAP: The Fish Passage Culvert Replacement Project Alternative Analysis has been completed. These plans will be reviewed with Hood Canal Coordinating Council biologists and the Hood Canal Fisheries Enhancement Group prior to selecting the alternative and creating final plans. Culvert replacement is slated for 2010. Work continues on the control of Scotch broom, periwinkle and blackberry. A second Dabob Bay NAP clean-up was conducted this year in conjunction with Surfriders and The Nature Conservancy. The project area was expanded to include the beaches located to the south of the preserve. This one-day cleanup by eight volunteers removed 1,168 pounds of garbage.

Devils Lake NRCA: The Maintenance and Operation team completed installing the cross bars on the corrals at the North and South Entrances. The initial planning for a trail relocation, new parking area, culvert replacement and interpretive signs has been completed. Three trail counters have been installed at the entrances to the conservation area to help us with site management and planning.

Pacific Cascade Region

Elk River NRCA: Progress is being made on a large fish passage and road abandonment (RMAP) project to be completed this summer. The engineer is nearly done with drawings and contract plans, and a technician, Luke Painter, has been hired to assist with permits and contract compliance.

Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP: A draft management plan has been finished and the key public use issues will be discussed at the June NHAC meeting. Grant applications have been completed for removing the fill blocking Preacher's Slough and replacing it with a bridge. A request was made to Grays Harbor County for vacation of the county-owned portion of the road and release of the easement they hold on another portion.

Mima Mounds NAP: A number of spring events at the NAP included an Earth Day work day, with Doug Sutherland and several division staff offering recognition for the efforts of our volunteers and two of our site stewards, and Prairie Appreciation Day. The Washington Native Plant Society had a study weekend in Olympia which included many natural area field trips including Mima Mounds. We also led field trips to a new rare plant location on a state trust land recreation site. Students from Grand Mound Elementary School conducted a journal/study day and pulled Scotch broom, which they thought was really fun because they didn't know it was work! Tall oat grass treatments were completed under contract with The Nature Conservancy and funded through the ACUB (Army Compatible Use Buffer) program.

Washougal Oaks Natural Area: Natural Areas staff and an Americorps crew member have been working hard at eradicating weeds at Washougal Oaks. Several acres of Himalayan blackberry canes were cut down in May and re-sprouted plants will be treated with herbicide later this summer. Vines of English Ivy, Vinca and a non-native clematis that are climbing up into oaks and conifers and blanketing the ground have been cut or hand pulled; the Ivy will be treated during the winter when other plants are dormant. Shining geranium, a relatively new weed for the state (as if we need any more!), was hand pulled on part of the site and we hope to spray more geranium in other areas as soon as possible.

Merrill Lake NRCA: Staff and Americorps members are working to improve campground facilities at Merrill Lake NRCA. Two new campsites will be added to accommodate the site's growing use and a new short trail to the lake from the campground will help keep campers from creating user-built trails and bank access. Also, native shrubs and trees will be planted between campsites to increase campsite privacy and along a stream to improve fish habitat. Outhouses will receive a fresh coat of paint and branches and leaves that fell during the winter will be cleared from campsites.

Southeast Region

Selah Cliffs NAP: In May, we completed installation of interpretive trail signs, which was the culmination of a very successful partnership with Lisa R. Anderson, one of our SE Region cartographers who has a knack for graphic design. Signs were installed at strategic locations along the new interpretive trail.



Next, we plan to repair breaches in a fence that runs along the northern boundary of the NAP to help prevent trespass by cattle. The installation of a new fence along the eastern edge of the preserve, which was completed last year, has greatly reduced the number of cattle that find their way onto the NAP each winter.

Camas Meadows NAP: In November 2007, DNR staff, contractors and RareCare volunteers worked together to outplant approximately 1,000 native grass and forb plugs to restore a channelized portion of the meadow. While most grasses were subsequently removed by elk browsing, outplanted forbs appear to be doing well.

In late March the recovery team for Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow (*Sidalcea oregana* var. *calva*) held a phone meeting to update others and to plan further recovery actions. We will likely be receiving funds from USFWS for invasive species control, thinning of saplings encroaching the meadow, GPS mapping of weed populations, creation of a stewardship handbook for neighboring landowners and inventory, analysis and summary of existing population data curated by the DNR and USFS.

Columbia Hills NAP: Together with State Parks, we hosted the third annual Wagons & Wildflowers event at Columbia Hills this spring. Despite mediocre weather and late blooms that did not coincide with the timing of this event, we had great turnout, with approximately 200 visitors in attendance. A good time was had by all.



Eastside Ecologist Priya Shahani plans to initiate a pollination study focused on Dalles Mountain Buttercup (*Ranunculus reconditus*), wondering if perhaps the seemingly low levels of pollinator movement among plants might be resulting in inbred seeds, contributing to the low numbers of seedlings observed in the field.

A few months ago we were tipped off on a possible geocaching site at Columbia Hills NAP. Jen Zarnoch did some investigating and discovered several geocaches on NAPs in the Southeast Region, including the one at Columbia Hills. We confirmed the location of the Columbia Hills geocache, which was in the middle of grassland habitat and due to the sensitivity of this site, decided to remove the geocache and return it to the owners. The owners of the cache were very cooperative and even posted a message to the geocaching website explaining why the geocache was removed. We will continue to investigate other geocaches on NAPs and NRCAs over the coming months, assess whether or not they are compatible with the conservation goals at the sites, and remove any that are located in inappropriate spots.

Finally, we are working on preparing a regulatory sign for installation at the main gate to Columbia Hills NAP which we hope to install this fall. This will be the first time there are clear guidelines posted for what activities are prohibited at the site and will be the first phase of a larger effort to install some interpretive signage at the Columbia Hills NAP in the future.

Trout Lake NAP: In March we conducted Oregon spotted frog egg mass counts with Lisa Hallock and several volunteers. Snow accumulation at Trout Lake in 2008 was unusually high resulting in one of the latest egg mass censuses conducted since surveys started in 1997, and egg mortality related to freeze damage was recorded at most sites. We found a decline in the number of egg masses at one survey site, but increases at two sites relative to last year. Overall, there has been a strong declining trend in Oregon spotted frog egg mass numbers at Trout Lake NAP since surveys commenced in 1997; this is consistent with other local trends (the Conboy population is also declining) as well as trends observed in other parts of this species' distribution. Among other possible drivers for this trend, chytridiomycosis has been detected in frogs at Trout Lake NAP. This disease has fatal effects on the individuals that it infects. Lisa Hallock and Priya Shahani will work together to prepare a more in-depth presentation on this issue for a future meeting.

We also recently conducted monitoring to evaluate the impacts of hunting activity at Trout Lake NAP. In fall 2007 we established photo-monitoring points in likely ORV access points, and photographed these locations just prior to opening day for elk hunting. We have now followed up with post-hunting photo-monitoring in these locations, and have observed no evidence of ORV use or any other negative impacts. Both before and after, we also walked several likely routes that might be used by hunters to access deeper portions of the preserve, again observing no impacts. We will be holding conversations with WDFW enforcement staff and neighbors before presenting a final report with our assessments to the NHAC.

We are working on the final phases of a wetland restoration project at Trout Lake, funded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service Wetland Reserve Program. The project, which will restore emergent wetland and scrub-shrub habitat, includes installation of an elk enclosure and the restoration activities over approximately 45 acres. Seed collection and propagation is scheduled to begin this summer, in support of a spring planting.

In addition, we just received notification that we have been awarded \$100,000 from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to control reed canary grass and conduct other habitat restoration activities at Trout Lake NAP. This project is part of the Columbia-Cascades Habitat Partnership, Phase I, and involves several partners, including The Nature Conservancy, Columbia Land Trust and International Crane Foundation.

Prepared by Region Staff and
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