



# Morning Star Trails Planning



## Morning Star Trail Planning Committee

### Meeting #1 Summary

February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017 6:00 to 8:00 PM

**Meeting Purpose:** To introduce Planning Committee Members and DNR supporting staff; outline DNR's recreation planning process and this Committee's roles in support of creating a Morning Star Trail Plan.

#### DNR Staff Introductions:

- **David Way** – Northwest Region's Natural Areas Recreation Manager and is the Morning Star Trail Planning Project Manager
- **Paul McFarland** – Northwest Region's Natural Areas Manager
- **Barbara Simpson** – DNR Parks Planner and Landscape Architect

#### Committee Introductions and Attendance:

As part of the Committee member introductions, they were asked to share with the group what their interest in the Morning Star area is and where they live in the Northwest. The DNR identified where everyone lives on a map of the Northwest. This map was used for scheduling of future meeting locations later in the meeting.

Frances Chiem – Representing Washington Trails Association (WTA)

Ken Masel – Representing Washington Trail Blazers

Rad Roberts – Representing American Alpine Club, WA Climbers Coalition, Cascade Climbers

Chris Hagen – Is the YMCA BOLD and GOLD Program Director

Marc Bardsley – Representing North Cascades Conservation Council

Thom Peters – Representing Alpine Lakes Protection Society

Holly Zox – Morning Star Volunteer Site Steward

Matt Speten – Morning Star Volunteer Recreation Steward

Matt Jensen – UWild Adventures Program Director

Gary Paul – US Forest Service Wilderness and Trails Coordinator

Ruth Milner – Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Mike Town – Representing Friends of Wildsky

Keith Brinkley – Filling in for Mike Schutt and works for the Snohomish County PUD

Julie Sklare – Absent (City of Everett)

Mike Schutt – Absent (Snohomish County PUD)

Kathy Johnson – Absent (Pilchuck Audubon Association)



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### **Public in attendance:**

Phil Roberts – USGS Soils Geologist

Mary Kay Els – Back Country Horsemen, Trail Dusters Chapter

Doug B - Back Country Horsemen, Trail Dusters Chapter

**Natural Areas and Morning Star Overview:** Paul McFarland presented an overview of the Natural Area Program and talked specifically about the Morning Star Conservation Area's background. He covered the several key components of the DNR's Natural Areas Program including: Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) Act, Statewide NRCA Management Plan, Guiding Program Policy, Low Impact Public Use and other People-Oriented Uses, Outdoor Environmental Education, Stewardship Activities, Conditional and Excluded Uses.

In general, the presentation highlighted the framework within which management decisions are made in the NRCA, with emphasis on the primary mission of all such decisions, that being the conservation mission for which the area was created.

As part of the background discussion, McFarland also clarified the distinction between Management Planning, as defined in the NRCA Act, and this RCO-funded trails planning process, which is limited in scope, and does not provide for consideration of uses/activities not already approved/occurring in the NRCA.

### **Question and Answer:**

- *Does non-motorized vehicles (a conditional or excluded use) include bicycles?*  
DNR Response: Yes, bicycles are non-motorized vehicles.
- *Who owns the partial section of land in the southern portion of the NRCA? If it's the US Forest Service, could DNR acquire or transfer lands to acquire?*  
DNR Response: The inholding in S4-T28N-R10E is USFS-owned. There are methods by which we could acquire or transfer into such property, but they tend to be complicated transactions, and difficult to consummate due to statutory framework.

**Trails Planning:** David Way presented overview information about the planning project. The project is grant-funded and has two main elements. The Committee process is one element and recommendations from the group will be used to write the Trail Plan. The other element of the project is that design and permitting will be done for at least one priority project that is identified as part of the committee process. When the DNR has a



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Trail Plan for the Morning Star, it is likely that the Morning Star will qualify better and be more competitive on receiving grants to do work in the area.

Way shared some obvious examples of where and why we are doing a planning effort. Examples included identified areas on the Known Issues Map that DNR created for the December 15<sup>th</sup> Public Meeting.

Some goals and objectives for the committee's planning were shared with the group. Way wanted to stress the importance of thinking about where trails and facilities should be located as opposed to where they have been located on the landscape in the past.

### Questions and Comments:

- *Is there a trail plan in place already?*  
DNR Response: There isn't a trail plan specific to the Morning Star area. The Region uses a document called the Northwest Region Recreation Inventory and Assessment (RIA) as the guiding document to support our recreation management. The current RIA doesn't even recognize the Sunrise Mine Trail, the Gothic Basin Trail, or others that the public actively uses.
- *Is there past usage data for each trail?*  
DNR Response: Not really. The DNR does receive information from the Watershed Patrol for those who register at Olney Pass and enter the Spada Lake area. However, data is somewhat questionable, as it is apparent that many visitors check multiple destinations and don't understand the distance required to hike to DNR's Greider and Boulder Lakes. The DNR periodically monitors trip reports on WTA's website to gauge trail conditions and usage too.
- *DNR should tap into other agency information from the shared trailheads to determine levels of usage*
- *Can you put up a database of the trails including name of trail, elevation gain, usage such as high, low, medium; quality of maintenance or issues?*  
DNR Response: Much of that type of information will be presented through this planning effort.
- *Request for copies of the Statewide Management Plan for the binders*  
DNR Response: DNR will provide.

**Planning Process Guidelines:** David Way shared the Draft Planning Guidelines. These guidelines identified the Trail Planning Vision, the Trail Planning Mission, and the Planning Committee Commitments. Committee members were asked for feedback on the draft guidelines. Committee members were also asked to think about the guidelines



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and come prepared to the next committee meeting with any proposed edits to the document.

**Project Schedule:** Barbara Simpson reviewed the project schedule with the group. She showed how the two elements of the project (planning process and the design for the priority project) will need to overlap to complete everything within the funding window of the grant.

Early stakeholder outreach occurred in the fall and included tribes, agency partners, organizations, etc. The public outreach open house was held in December, and the committee was formed in February.

Eight meetings are planned for the process with a potential field visit(s) in June.

**Committee Member Presentations and Future Meetings:** DNR would like to give each committee member the opportunity to present whatever they think is relevant information in one of the upcoming committee meetings. The Snohomish County PUD and City of Everett will be presenting information about the Spada Lake Watershed at the March meeting. A schedule was passed around the room in case any committee members would like to sign up now. Otherwise, DNR asks committee members think about it and sign up at the next meeting if they'd like to present to the group.

DNR also discussed scheduling of future meetings with the committee. The map showing where committee members lived was used to identify centralized locations to hold the meetings. The committee felt the Everett area works well for most everyone, but parking is difficult at the County building. DNR will try to seek other facilities in the Everett and/or Mill Creek areas to hold meetings.

The committee discussed general timing and dates for future meetings. The group felt the third week in each month would work pretty well. Some members can't make Wednesday or Thursday evenings, so the group decided that we should try to schedule future meetings on the third Tuesday of each month.

### Questions and Comments:

- *Do we want to open up currently unmarked parts of the NRCA to new trails?*

DNR Response: This is a question that this planning process will try to answer.



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- *Request for more information about the newly expanded area of the NRCA in the south. Where are the roads? What is the local knowledge of the area? Can you add this area to the enlarged maps*

DNR Response: We are pretty sure there is use occurring in areas recently added to the NRCA. We definitely want to bring such use on the books, like we are for Gothic Basin, Sunrise Mine trails, Static Peak, etc., so we can add it to inventory, include in this effort, and plan for in future management activity. New trails (i.e. new trail systems we might plan to build) are something we want to hear about and “bookmark” for future. DNR is still working at formatting the maps to cover the entire area. DNR will provide maps covering this area in the future.

- *Is there a cost share agreement with the USFS?*
- *Does DNR cooperate with USFS on maintenance*

DNR Response: Yes, USFS and DNR coordinate shared projects and tasks. For example, sometimes DNR resources stay at the USFS Verlot bunkhouse. The agencies are working together to implement improvements on the trail to Gothic Basin. DNR’s crews have done trail brushing and sign installation on USFS property on the Walt Bailey Trail, because of the property vicinity and access.

- *The USFS has draft South Fork Stillaguamish Vegetation Management Plan that calls for improvements to Walt Bailey and Sunrise Mine Trailheads. USFS will share these plans with the committee.*
- *Is there a plan for vegetation management to enhance trails?*

USFS Response: Yes, but mostly only impacts the trailheads. Examples: It would move the Walt Bailey Trailhead back about ½ mile where a new trail could be constructed to tie into the existing trail on Mallardy Ridge up to Cutthroat Lakes; a pre-commercial thinning is planned near the Sunrise Mine Trailhead, so the trailhead would move back towards the Mountain Loop Highway instead of rebuilding the washed-out sections of road.

**Additional homework:** Committe asked to review the December public open house results, and the online survey results in preparation for next meeting.

**Next Meeting is March 21, 2017, 6:00pm to 8:30pm**