



**Morning Star Trail Planning Committee
Meeting #6 Notes
August 15, 2017
6:00 to 8:30 PM**

Meeting Purpose: Complete Project and Objectives Prioritization; Review Plan Outline

DNR Staff in attendance:

Paul McFarland - Northwest Region Natural Areas Manager, and Morning Star Trail Planning Project Manager

Barbara Simpson – DNR Parks Planner, Landscape Architect

Curt Pavola – Natural Areas Program Manager

Jason McMillen – Recreation Maintenance Steward

Committee in attendance:

Ken Masel –Washington Trail Blazers

Matt Perkins - American Alpine Club, WA Climbers Coalition, Cascade Climbers

Thom Peters – Alpine Lakes Protection Society

Matt Speten – Morning Star Volunteer Recreation Steward

Marc Bardsley – North Cascades Conservation Council

Gary Paull – US Forest Service Wilderness and Trails

Kathy Johnson –Pilchuck Audubon Society

Mike Town –Sierra Club and Friends of Wildsky

Ruth Milner – WDFW

Chris Hagen – YMCA BOLD and GOLD Program Director

Julie Sklare – Everett Watershed

Public Guest in attendance:

Frank Fenimore

Approval of Meeting 5: Approved with one correction - page 3: The property is not within the NRCA. Clarity about legal access would require some research.

Committee Field Trips:

Ashland and Greider field trips informative. Work to do in both systems. Ashland system a good candidate for major campground/campsite and trail relocation. Work to do on Greider system as well, but not so much directly related to resource impacts.

Discussion

Collected worksheets and request for any remaining prioritized worksheets to be emailed to Paul.



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Question: Does state own mineral rights? Response: Yes, typically we do. The majority of mineral rights in NRCA's have been retained by previous owners. If the property in the NRCA was previously DNR-managed trust land, chances are good the trust retained mineral rights when the property was transferred into conservation status.

Most land within the NRCA came into conservation status after previous management as trust land, through the Trust Land Transfer program. Those portions that were in trust designations other than Common School Trust were first subject to inter-trust exchange to facilitate trust land transfer. In some cases those properties that were not originally Common School Trust land may have come into state ownership following seizure by Snohomish County for failure to pay taxes, as was the case with many thousands of acres of cut-over forest lands in Washington.

DNR retains mineral rights on the vast majority of land within the NRCA. There were a number of mining claims in the area now encompassed within the NRCA, or in areas adjacent to it. In general, mining and its associated activities include significant risk to resources. Proposals to conduct mining within the NRCA, where valid claims exist, would be evaluated for their potential to compromise the integrity, or ecological, geological, scenic, historic or archaeological values within the NRCA.

What about permit system as a project? Response: Our commitment in the grant relates to a "development" project. Establishing a permit system wouldn't meet that commitment, but it could be included as a committee recommendation in the plan.

How much funding is available for this project? Can a capstone project be the entire Gothic basin trail? Response: The RCO portion of funding for this grant is \$98,100. That money covers about 2.5 months of staff time for data collection and mapping, approximately 8 months of staff time for planning and design (being done in-house), and \$22,000 for work related to environmental review and securing permits. Work associated with the Gothic Basin trail could be the capstone project.

What is the end product of this process - does the committee make recommendations? Yes. One output of this process is the capstone project which is the development project commitment we made in the grant. The capstone project could be as expansive or specific as you the committee wants it to be. We are trying not to put sideboards on this process but open it up for all recommendations that are consistent with the statewide management plan. We are basically hoping that this meeting will be a brainstorming session leading to identification of several priority projects, one of which will be the capstone project. Another output of this process is a set of recommendations from the committee that will help prioritize our work, and guide our trails management efforts for the next ten to fifteen years.



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Is the worksheet categories list the background to select projects from? In looking at the list some items relate more to policy, some to maintenance and some are specific projects. Response: It would follow that projects/recommendations would come from, or be consistent with the goals and objectives identified in the category prioritization exercise. But, we also want to keep this project selection brainstorming session open beyond the boundaries of the worksheet, to ideas that may not have come up before.

One idea is to select one area such as Greider or Ashland to concentrate on, and stay away from addressing Gothic which is a much bigger issue. But use at Gothic Basin is entirely unmanaged at present, and there is critical need to address impacts associated with such use. A systemic plan for Gothic would be in the more complicated category of project, and may take more time than we have in this grant term to complete. But perhaps some initial effort at Gothic Basin such as sanitation facilities would fit as a capstone project.

What about an agency-wide effort to establish a permit system, which could be implemented for areas like Gothic Basin, where overuse has become a concern? Response: This would seem the appropriate route to establish a permit system, and would take time to evaluate and implement as part of agency policy development

Restoring areas damaged by overuse would make the most impact.

Suggest a separate plan for each trail system: Greider, Ashland and Gothic (i.e. a site plan for each system)

Question: What does the City think about pit toilets within the watershed? Response: Pit toilets are an open question in terms of whether they'd be acceptable in the watershed. It's also unclear as to whether the County would require permits for pit toilets, or whether they would be acceptable, even outside the watershed. This is a question we'd need to explore further before making a decision to implement.

How many toilets would a given site need? Level of use is definitely a consideration with pit toilets, in terms of numbers and longevity. Example: At Lake Serene when USFS eliminated camping and changed it to day use there was a noticeable reduction in need for pit toilets.

Where would pit toilets at Gothic be located? This would take some evaluation. Soils in the Basin itself are very shallow, and there is little cover with which to screen toilets.

How many toilets should be planned for a given area? Depends upon use - day use vs. overnight camping and # of users.



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Comment: For the capstone project I favor closing Gothic to camping - do we have an obligation to manage existing use? After all, at current level of use toilets may fill up and stop working then back to the original problem. What is our goal? We need to determine the carrying capacity of this landscape. What is our desired result regarding carrying capacity? Don't limit thinking about other solutions at Gothic such as closing camping and making it day use only, and a permit system.

The most heavily used trail is into the most fragile environment (Gothic Basin).

What about past coordination with the Forest Service? If there is coordination between agencies does that help with getting grants? Response: Yes, cooperative efforts between agencies counts in grant scoring, as does having a plan for an area, as opposed to proposals that are not part of a landscape level plan. There is also a momentum that can be achieved by success with this grant, which can help with future proposals.

How many projects can we select? Response: Committee is not limited in number of projects you may recommend, or in size or scope of any project. One thing to keep in mind is that depending on how ambitious the projects you recommend are, it may take multiple biennia to complete a given project. Generally, our model for capital projects is to do design and permitting in one biennium, and construction in the next. This is especially true in a landscape like Morning Star where the ability to work is seasonal, and we get one operating season per biennium as a function of how our fiscal years are structured. A simple project, like installation of a backcountry toilet or pre-engineered bridge can be done fairly quickly, maybe within a single biennium. More complicated projects, such as a site plan for relocation of trails and campsites in the Ashland Lakes system would take much longer, and may require construction in phases spanning more than one biennium, depending on cost/complexity.

Greider Lakes Trail - motion to make upgrading the trail along Spada Lake the capstone project. The size of the project seems to fit within the grant time frame and the tank traps make the trail less than ideal. Possibly include a bridge at the beaver pond too.

With this project idea it is important to the City and PUD that the trail continue to deter vehicle access, which was a big problem prior to road abandonment. Response: we could take measures to ensure against vehicle access.

If we choose Greider what do we do about Gothic? Response: If we don't pick Gothic as the capstone project, that doesn't mean we can't include work at Gothic as a priority in the Plan, and make progress on such work in parallel with the capstone project. For example, depending on permit requirements, we may be able to install pit toilets at Gothic Basin as early as next season. Again, we don't want the committee to feel constrained in terms of what projects to bring forward, or in how ambitious they are. We



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just want to be sure you understand the budget, staffing and operational constraints that will limit how quickly we can complete any given project.

We continue to work toward progress in Morning Star, even as this process unfolds. We have a ranked grant for work at Cutthroat Lakes system awaiting a capital budget. We won't know whether that work is funded until the legislature produces a capital budget.

Comment: Object to Greider as the capstone project because Gothic is much more in need of help especially needing pit toilets, design for restoration areas and campsites, signage and gathering data and study use levels.

Response: A holistic solution to Gothic will require more time than this current grant allows. – May be more realistic to choose a smaller project for this grant such as work at Greider as described above, or some discrete work at Gothic like toilets, and make the holistic solution for Gothic the top committee recommendation for work to follow.

Project Prioritization Exercise:

Brainstorming produced the following potential projects:

- Pit toilets that do not require helicopter operations to install or maintain
- Toilets at the trailheads
- Institute a permit system to control level of use
- Greider first 2 miles: water crossing structures and water bar/drain dip regrading
- Gothic Basin: Impact studies and information collecting to establish a carrying capacity
- Trailhead signage about pit toilets and pack it in/pack it out
- Work cooperatively with the USFS on Gothic Trail.
- Bridge over Bear Creek on the Grieder Lakes Trail
- Ashland boardwalk repair and campsite relocations
- Ashland Lakes Trail - Design/Site Plan for whole trail system
- Grieder Lakes Trail - Design/Site Plan for whole trail system
- Move campsites away from waterfront locations
- Close Gothic Basin to overnight camping
- Gothic Basin - Design/Site Plan for whole trail system
- Gothic Basin pit toilets, signage, designated campsites
- Backcountry pit toilets on all trail systems

Top 3 Projects:

Those in attendance suggested the following from which to select a capstone project:



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- A. Grieder Lakes Trail: (First 2 miles of trail is abandoned road.) Complete design and permitting for work on first 2 miles of trail. Focus on stream crossings and regrading drain dips to make the trail friendlier for hiking. May include completion of some work with current grant funding, depending on permitting process, but most, if not all of the water crossing installations would require future funding.
- B. Gothic Basin: Site Plan for: Sanitation, Restoration, Education, Signage, Pit Toilets, Campsite designation, and No-fee permit system to gather use information. A holistic solution to Gothic Basin will likely take more time than we have for this grant. If chosen as the capstone project, we would likely phase the work, and choose elements to work on now that would not likely be affected by a holistic site plan (e.g. toilet(s), signage).
- C. Pit Toilets throughout Morning Star NRCA. This would require a determination of where pit toilets would be acceptable, what style to employ, and whether permits are required. We could approach this as the capstone project, using funding available in the grant. We could also approach this on a parallel track, separate from the capstone project, in which case we'd be working within existing operational staffing and funding constraints (i.e. work on it as time and resources allow).

Final Project Decision:

Send email out to entire committee including those not here to solicit choice of capstone project from everyone. The project with the most votes will be the one we proceed with to fulfill our commitment under this grant. Projects not chosen could still be included in the Trails Plan, as Committee recommendations.