



**Morning Star Trail Planning Committee
Meeting #7 Notes
October 17, 2017
6:00 to 8:30 PM**

Meeting Purpose: Trails Plan Chapter 3: Implementation schedule

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

Committee in attendance:

Ken Masel –Washington Trail Blazers
Rad Roberts - 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
Kathy Johnson – Pilchuck Audubon Society
Ruth Milner – WDFW
Phil Roberts – USGS Soils Survey
Chris Hagen – YMCA BOLD and GOLD Program Director
Mike Schutt – Snohomish County PUD

Public Guest in attendance:

Mary Kay Els, BCH

Approval of Meeting 6 summary: Approved.

Thank you to committee

This meeting is the last planned meeting in the trails planning process. Thank you to the committee of citizen volunteers for their time and dedication to the planning process and to their participation in guiding the future of Morning Star.

We anticipate that we will reconvene the committee for a meeting to review the trails plan in draft form, sometime in early spring.

Gothic Basin

DNR: Question – how many of us have been to Gothic Basin? (all but two, some not for several years). Paul gave a powerpoint presentation of Gothic Basin describing pressing issues along the trail and up in the basin. The presentation included slides



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from Paul and David's 2015 visit and Gary's recent September 2017 visit. The trail starts out on USFS land from the Weden Creek trailhead. With exception of work done by WTA in two separate work parties in order to reduce public safety hazards, no DNR management has occurred on the Gothic Basin trail, which is entirely user built.

DNR: There are numerous safety and health concerns associated with the trail. A death occurred last year when a snow bridge over a creek collapsed and the hiker fell through. There is a significant network of braided trail throughout the Basin, much of which serves indiscriminate camping. Human and dog waste is common.

DNR: Gothic Basin was identified as the area most in need of attention by the Trails Planning Committee. We've fielded complaints by users related to the issues identified above. There were concerns expressed about Gothic Basin in the survey we did at the beginning of the Trails Planning process. There are known public safety hazards along the trail leading to Gothic Basin. By allowing public use in Gothic Basin absent considerations required in the NRCA Statewide Management Plan, we're out of compliance with our conservation-first mission in Morning Star. In light of this state of affairs, DNR staff present tonight propose a temporary, three year closure of Gothic Basin (and the Weden Creek trail) to conduct an assessment of whether public use is appropriate in Gothic Basin, and if so at what level and where. This would also allow time to seek funding for and begin implementation of restoration, and to seek funding and begin implementation of facilities development should public use be deemed appropriate. We believe this closure will allow us time for the kind of evaluation for public use required in the statewide management plan, and to "reset" in terms of public perceptions and expectations related to use in Gothic Basin. This proposed recommendation is our primary topic for discussion and feedback this evening.

Question: What is the practicality of excluding people? Response: We would need broad stakeholder support for the effort and it would be hard to keep everyone out. Like all of our rules in areas where our staff presence is low, we rely on the honor system for compliance.

Comment: I would support this action. A recent article on Gothic Basin in the Tribune's "Hike of the Month" is part of the problem. It results in too many people hiking in an area and overuse.

Comment: Outreach needed for success.

Comment: Put out real world pictures of what is occurring.

DNR response: Would have been nice to be on top of these problems years ago, but we are where we are, and must start somewhere.

Question: Weden Lake was overgrown miners trail – what about it?



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DNR Response: We don't know the current conditions since we have not inventoried that trail yet.

Comment: Need to educate users on Pack it in Pack it out and Leave No Trace. Educate groups like WTA.

Comment: Trash your trash and pick up your poop.

Comment: Thanks to DNR for thoughtful assessment and recognition that the resource is not being conserved. Climbers support and want pit toilets for the area. Look at Enchantments as model. Area was trampled and now the resources have come back. The key is enforcement. All it takes is one person to trash a place. Think about unintended consequences, closure of Gothic will pressure Sunrise Mine trail. I applaud you for taking on hard problems.

Comment: Minimize backlash by communicating closure idea. We know it will be a big challenge. Gear up to make the case for it.

Comment: Look for pinchpoints along the trail that can be blocked off ...ie cliffs, rivers.

Question: How many law enforcement officers does DNR have?

DNR Response: We have 6-7 DNR police officers statewide; 2 in the Northwest region, and 1 in this district stretched across several landscapes. We also have Education and Enforcement (E&E) wardens, who are grant-funded staff who have a limited commission and are able to issue citations. We've not historically applied for grants to fund E&E positions in the Natural Areas Program, but are looking at that for the next round of applications.

Comment: An E&E could be like a forest ranger. It goes a long way to have someone up there. Response: Having a formal Trails Plan that recommends having an E&E warden can help with obtaining grants.

Question: How long would closure be?

DNR Response: We're proposing a three year closure. The first year would allow time for assessment. We could also begin work to obtain funding for restoration, and even for development, should public use be deemed appropriate. Year two would be devoted to decision making related to whether, and if so where and at what level public use should be allowed, and for planning for restoration and development. Funding would come in time to begin implementation in year three, so that when Gothic Basin is reopened we'd be prepared with toilets, signs, and other improvements to help guide



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use and education users. (Implementation schedule handed out to committee and posted on wall for discussion).

Comment: I am pleasantly surprised – you guys listened to us. At first I was upset that we were not being heard. Tip of the hat to you.

Question: Is anyone against the idea of a temporary closure?

DNR response: We brought this to you tonight out of respect for the Committee process and all the work you've done. We definitely want to hear any concerns you have about this proposal.

Comment: There needs to be some work on this proposal. For example look at a permit system similar to the Enchantments. At first it solved the problem since camping required a permit. But now day use which is allowed without a permit, is becoming the overuse problem.

Comment: Concern about fee if implementation of permit system is decided.

Question: Is it appropriate to allow human use at all in this sensitive area?

Comment: In the Enchantments the latest push is to address day use by limiting it too – there is increasing support for limiting day use there.

Comment: Important to be ready with improvements if you proceed with closure. When the Discover Pass was implemented, there was an expectation that the public would “get something” for the fee they now pay, and some disappointment when they realized that was not the case.

DNR response: The Discover Pass was created by the legislature as a way to replace recreation funding the legislature had cut in an earlier biennium. It was not new funding to provide new services. The structure is State Parks gets 84% of Discover Pass revenue, and WDFW and DNR each get 8% of revenue. The Discover Pass is basically a parking pass. It does provide a steady stream of revenue, but also requires considerable staff time to ensure compliance (park rangers and other enforcement staff monitor vehicles and issue citations for non-compliance). It also provides no revenue to sites like Gothic Basin or Greider Lakes, the trailheads (parking lots) for which are on other ownership and thus not subject to the Discover Pass requirement.

Comment: USFS closed Silver Lake during its restoration.

Comment: During Monte Cristo closure the cabin was vandalized.



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Comment: I got my Christmas present (proposed temporary closure). I came here tonight prepared to continue to have to speak out for Gothic and was anticipating having to compromise again. This action is what I hoped for.

Comment: At some point we are going to have to bite the bullet on the permit issue. This is the beginning of need.

Response: DNR does not currently have a permit system on any of our sites or trails. Perhaps Gothic Basin is a place to consider permits.

Comment: Voluntary registration data from USFS is available for Weden Creek Trail.

Comment: Look at Middle Fork Snoqualmie example of DNR creating effective partnerships with Mountains to Sound Greenway, Washington Climbers Coalition, and Washington Trails Association. Think about leveraging partnerships and engaging the public in solutions. I support temporary closure to look at how to manage the area for the long term but do not support permanent closure.

Comment: In the current political climate there won't be more money if grants don't come through. It may become the norm to close landscapes. I was in Gothic Basin recently and I didn't think that it was that bad, not as bad as I expected it to be. I think the Enchantments are over-permitted. A lot of bedrock and shallow soils. Campsites in flood zones are the most sensitive issue. Gothic is rocky, fragile and the most popular hike in Morning Star. I'd be concerned that hikers hike in only to find it closed leading to a bad impression.

Comment: Permits like Enchantments are hard to get and exclusive, leads to better stewardship.

Comment: Permits even out use.

DNR response: If we close Gothic Basin, we'd close it at the trailhead, and advertise that to minimize potential for people going all the way out there to be turned around. As for funding: capital funding (including grants) has been pretty consistent the last several biennia. I don't think a lack of capital funding would suggest permanent closure.

Question: What is realistic funding?

DNR response: Funding varies by landscape and project, but over the last 3-4 biennia, NW Region Natural Areas has gotten in the neighborhood of \$300,000 to \$500,000 in capital each biennium, to pay for projects in several landscapes throughout the Region. A portion of that is generally allotted to work in Morning Star. Having a Trails Plan will also help with grant funding as well; existing plans boost grant scores because it



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demonstrates a thoughtful, considered approach to the work. Now that we have a Trails Plan that should help us in getting future grants.

Question: Who makes the decision on temporary closure and could you still do work if they say no?

DNR response: Region and Executive leadership will make the decision. We could still do work absent closure.

Question: If people are kept out how would you evaluate carrying capacity question?

DNR response: We would set an initial level based on best judgement. Usually we establish baseline first and then adaptive management measures. For example, I-90 is not built to capacity, it is built smaller, in-between.

Question: Is an Environmental Assessment possible?

Question: Can we reach out to UW or WSU for help in studying the scientific value?

After a break, committee discussion centered on the other elements of the 10 – 15 year implementation schedule. Went over schedule trail by trail. How to address resource impacts and when.

Question: What about Twin Falls?

DNR response: Currently closed. We aren't proposing to reopen. A lot of infrastructure including a new bridge would be needed to get there. The trail does not appear to be used much.

Comment: I can see reopening Twin Falls Trail for day use only.

DNR response: It's a slog down into the site from the Ashland Lakes trailhead. I'm told we used to access it from an old end-of-road landing off the Pilchuck Mainline, which was a shorter way in.

Question: How far in is the Pilchuck Road closure?

DNR response: I'm not sure where this old spur takes off, but the Pilchuck mainline is closed several miles downstream from there.

Comment: I agree with closure (of Twin Falls Trail).

Comment: Maybe you could allow an "at your own risk" type of access.



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DNR response: That's similar to our approach to the Bald Mountain Trail, which we show as suitable for experienced back country travelers only on our map.

Question: Would boardwalk be removed?

DNR response: We've already removed quite a bit of the old boardwalk, especially where it was failing.

Question: Is it safe to get in?

DNR response: It's doable. We've removed most of the failing infrastructure, and there are a couple of dicey segments where there used to be built structures along cliff bands. We see all the infrastructure as unsustainable, hard to maintain as safe. We looked for alternate routes but found nothing suitable. There's also Black Lily in the area, which is a rare plant.

Question: Can we make a note to reconsider? Leave primitive and unmaintained? Overnight is not good, dangerous off to left and campsites to right are wet.

DNR response: We'll make note of some interest in potential for reopening Twin Falls.

Question: Will installation of bridge(s) low in the Boulder-Greider trail preclude getting equipment further up the trail for other crossings?

DNR response: We've got a couple of bridge styles we like (e.g. the fiberglass bridge on the Ashland Lakes trail) that don't require heavy equipment for installation.

Comment: Concerning Gothic closure, we will run into same problem at Vesper. Use is increasing there too. Up to 200 people per day hiking in some days.

Comment: I agree, bump Vesper up the list in priority.

DNR response: The list of projects and timeline we're discussing tonight somewhat reflects the limits of our management capacity, and is definitely subject to change driven by such things as staffing, success in obtaining capital and grant funding, etc. It's hard to imagine there won't be changes as we move along, but we believe it's a fair representation of what we think we can accomplish in the next ten years if all goes well.

Question: What are the highest value, lowest effort items in the meantime?

Comment: I agree more heavy use in Vesper than Gothic by climbers. In 2015 use may have been as high as Gothic. Could ban overnight camping there. Vesper alpine area is smaller.



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Comment: Sperry has bad sanitation problem. Human waste. And it is in the watershed.

Comment: Vesper trail is in checkerboard with USFS, so need partnership with them. Where are good camp spots there?

Comment: Holly has mentioned Vesper as having much higher use.

Comment: Tie in with USFS closure of Sunrise Mine Trail for reconsideration. Part of USFS Vegetation Management Plan.

Question: About the large cedar down across the road into Cutthroat Lakes - when is it scheduled to be removed?

DNR response: Unknown. I'm sure it would be removed as part of the USFS Vegetation Management project they're planning in the area, but I don't know the timeline.

Comment: The USFS Vegetation Management project includes 3600 acres over ten years; not sure what first.

DNR question: It's my understanding that the type of climbing afforded by Static Peak is not as popular as that offered by Vesper and others. Is this a fair assessment?

Response: Yes, that's fair to say.

Question: Does your recommendation for three year closure of Gothic apply only to Gothic?

DNR response: Yes, only Gothic Basin.

DNR: Apart from recent engagement with WTA we have no active partnerships with other groups in Morning Star. Not because we don't recognize the need but because of lack of time to develop partnerships. WTA is an important stakeholder and we're hopeful of building on that relationship. It would be great if we could forge others as well.

Question: What about youth organizations?

DNR response: There are some great organizations out there. We have not spent time cultivating those.

Question: Can we expect follow up after tonight?



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DNR response: Yes, we will be in touch with you when we have a draft trails plan, and we may do some additional outreach related to decision-making in Gothic Basin.

Question: Do you have funding for Gothic now?

DNR response: The grant includes money for design/permitting on the capstone project (beaver dam and Bear Creek crossings on Boulder Greider trail). We also have enough funding to begin the assessment work at Gothic Basin. In this approach we'd need to seek funding for restoration and development work at Gothic Basin, which would come in the 2019-2021 Biennium if successful.

Comment: Regarding revenue, DNR get 25% management fee from logging, right?.

DNR response: Yes, DNR retains a percentage of trust lands revenue, which is used to manage those lands. That money pays for staff time to create and administer timber sales, for silviculture activities, etc. It's a "closed loop" revenue stream, and those funds cannot be used to fund recreation or conservation activities.

Comment: For E&E officers, uniform and radio makes a difference in terms of presence, similar to Forest Rangers.

DNR response: Friends of Woodard Bay is good example. Takes time to institute but extremely valuable assistance.

DNR: DNR needs more manpower in Natural Areas. We're currently operating at a level of funding that is about 35% lower than it was before we took a budget cut several years ago. We continue to work toward recovery in this area.

Comment: Place a sign that says "Registering will help to obtain funding for trails" at kiosk registration station. Level of use is an important metric in grant funding.

DNR response: I'd like to move to some kind of electronic registration (e.g. QR code with smart phone) that would eliminate the need to maintain registration by paper, which we're not staffed to keep up with.

Question: How do we advocate for getting a "Site Management Plan" for Morning Star?

DNR response: Some time ago the Legislature cut \$1.3m dollars in funding that allowed DNR to write management plans; as such we don't have the staff capacity to write site-specific management plans. Another important way the Committee can continue to help is in future letters of support to include with our grant requests, and showing support by coming to grant interviews. Ongoing support from users and other stakeholders is a very important element of grant funding.