



*"Volunteers, educators and stewards for birds
and habitat conservation"*

P.O. Box 502 Sequim, WA 98382

March 22, 2018

Clallam County Parks Department
223 East 4th St., Suite 7
Port Angeles, WA 98362
Email: parks@co.clallam.wa.us

Dear Director Winborn,

The Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society supports and applauds Clallam County Parks' creation of a long-term Master Plan Update for the Dungeness Recreation Area (DRA). We appreciate the opportunity to provide written comments.

Human and Wildlife Use

We fully understand and respect that the DRA is not a wildlife refuge. However, we believe that the County has a responsibility to provide and protect natural habitat for humans and wildlife. Although we understand both the importance of revenue generation and the County's interest in providing more fee generating RV camping opportunities in this park, the level of development proposed by the Preferred Plan exceeds the balance of uses that fit the land available to develop.

We recognize that bluff erosion and compliance with the Shoreline Management Act setbacks will push the road, footpaths and campsites inland over time, reducing the current areas available for camping. However, the proposed level of build-out impairs what draws users to the park.

The forested area in the northeast portion of the park should not be developed for the intensive uses shown in the Preferred Plan. It would cause irreversible damage and long-term loss to the ambiance and forest-protected quiet that attracts users. Forest and shrub areas buffer both human-to-human and wildlife-to-human uses, e.g. between the various camping uses, day hikers, vehicles and Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge activities. Fewer users will visit the park if it becomes a sparsely treed campground, surrounded by other RVs and campers. Not only would the size and quality of natural habitat decrease, but also the quality of human experience.

Expansion of Campgrounds

We recommend that you concentrate areas of human disturbance and congestion and limit their extent. The current group camp area is frequently underused and could be suitably expanded to add RV camp spots. There is space to the north of this loop that can also handle added spaces.

We understand the USFWS is seeking funding to redesign and expand the parking that largely serves the Refuge. Since that is County land and the USFWS will also include an increased capacity restroom building, it would make good economic sense to partner with them to develop a multifunctional footprint that will meet the needs of both the DRA and the Refuge.

Toward the southern portion of the area indicated as Camp Loop C in the Preferred Plan, uses with lower human impacts and a smaller footprint would be more appropriate than RV camping. This area has gentle slopes with fewer trees; walk-in camping or bicycle campers would be easier to integrate without extensive tree removal. Cabins could be sited along the road here, with tent campers behind. They could be served by expanding utilities from existing camp loops, decreasing the need for new utility work in existing forest.

Roads and Trails

Alongside the portion of the road within the forest, we recommend a path separated from the road to keep pedestrians and bicyclists safer in areas of poor visibility.

Visitors from Clallam County, Puget Sound counties, Washington State and beyond visit the DRA to view wildlife. They participate in organized walks led by Audubon volunteers to view resident birds and seasonal migrants. Wildlife-viewing walkers currently use several of the pedestrian and equestrian trails and viewpoints indicated on the Preferred Plan. This includes the forest and scrub-shrub trails throughout the park, the southeast slopes and knolls overlooking areas of grass, shrubs and marsh, the upland edges at the southwest, and viewpoints and trails allowing observation of shorebirds and marine mammals over the adjacent Strait of Juan de Fuca and toward the Dungeness Spit.

In the DRA southeast corner, we support improving the paths up to the existing knolls. These high points provide panoramic views north across the meadows, shrubs, marsh and seasonal wetlands to watch hawks and songbirds. Northern Harriers nest in the deep grasses there. In courtship display or hunting in the tall grasses, Harriers provide an impressive wildlife viewing experience to all who see them.

A path along the eastern property boundary would help provide access to these viewing sites. A footpath, which could be placed on an existing narrow berm, could be designed with small, gridded crossings over seasonal wetland watercourses. Horses should not be permitted on this narrow path, for both safety and structural considerations.

Added Day Use Parking

We ask you to consider a small 8-10 vehicle parking lot in the southeast corner of the park. This access point was developed for hunters, and is now used by birders, bikers, dog-walkers, and park maintenance. With the increasing traffic on Lotzgesell Rd, and the absence of a level shoulder, it's becoming increasingly difficult for day users to safely park their vehicles and then pull out onto the road when leaving.

Funding

We realize that county residents would likely be averse to paying entrance fees to use their county park; however, we feel that it is an option you should consider. We believe a direct

relation between protections of natural resources and providing a quality outdoor experience can be developed as a more attractive option than force-fitting revenue-generating facilities into natural spaces. There is an obvious economic relationship of county users and general-revenue funds available to the park. A pay-per-visit or annual fee system would further help underwrite DRA operations (as well as provide valuable data on park day use). As population grows in the county and the Pacific Northwest, the demand on this park will continue to increase. Facilities that will complement and attract day users together with overnight accommodations should be important parts of the mix. Day visitors, usually local residents and neighbors, form the core of the DRA's repeat users and advocates. They most value the long-term quality of the park experience. Their support will be the best, most valuable investment in the upcoming process of park planning and phased design improvements.

Collaboration

We look forward to working with the DRA's planners, ecologists and design consultants as you lay out the physical plans and make critical on-site decisions. Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society is also willing to work with the Parks Department to design an array of educational signage and kiosk materials. We would be prepared to seek grant funding from our Audubon sources.

DRA Bird List

Ten years ago, we provided information on the bird species seen in the Recreation Area for the DRA Master Plan. We are attaching an updated bird-species list. This list is not static as climate shifts, adjacent development increases, and habitat changes occur. We annually conduct several formal bird censuses in the DRA and adjacent lands that are accessible to us. We will provide this data to you, should you have use of it.

Again, we support your planning process and welcome the opportunity to contribute to it.

Sincerely,



Ken Wiersema
Education Chair

[Note: Our OPAS President, Bob Phreaner, is currently out of the USA, and unable to sign this letter. He is aware of our comments and supports sending these to you in his absence]

Attachment: Bird list for Dungeness Recreation Area [Clallam County Park]

Cc: Jennifer Brown-Scott, Project Leader WMNWRC
Margaret Maxwell, Friends of DNWR
Mark Ozias, Clallam County Commissioner