

Clark County Public Works, as part of building the Northeast 10th Avenue bridge and roadway project, is environmentally enhancing an area northwest of the construction site.

Clark County creates or enhances wetlands and wildlife habitat because federal, state and local laws require compensation, or mitigation, for environmental impacts from construction. There is not enough publicly owned property at the Northeast 10th Avenue construction site to fully mitigate for the project's environmental effects, which prompted the county to propose off-site mitigation.

The county-owned mitigation site, on the southeast corner of Northwest 179th Street and Northwest 41st Avenue, is 3.2 miles downstream on Whipple Creek from the bridge and roadway construction site. The mitigation site is along Whipple and Packard creeks and is expected to cost \$257,300 to build, including grading, planting and other on-site work.

Cascade Bridge of Vancouver is the county's general contractor for the bridge and roadway project. A subcontractor already has graded the mitigation site and added large logs, which will slow water flowing through the wetland and provide sheltered areas for fish during high flows.

Specifically, the project will:

- Create 0.29 acres of wetland through excavation, grading and planting of native vegetation.
- Improve existing wetlands on this site by planting 0.27 acres with native vegetation in wetland areas that have been dominated by non-native vegetation.
- Enhance 1.32 acres of riparian, wetland buffer and upland areas and 0.21 of upland area with native tree and shrub plantings.

The mitigation site encompasses about half of the 3.4-acre parcel. It was selected because it is within the Whipple Creek watershed and includes areas with degraded wetlands and poor-quality riparian habitat. The site has good potential to improve water quality and offers easy access for planting and maintaining the site.

Furthermore, this site will improve the connection between Whipple Creek and its adjacent floodplain by lowering the floodplain's elevation along 385 feet of Whipple Creek. This enhancement will increase how often water spills from the creek into its floodplain, as well as the size of the inundation area. During flooding that has a 50 percent chance of occurring in any year, the inundation area will be nine times larger once this mitigation project is complete.

Portions of the site have been dominated by reed canary grass for many years, contributing to the poor-quality habitat. Reed canary grass has an aggressive root system and produces a tall leaf structure that forces out native plants. Other portions of the parcel will be preserved, because they were planted with native vegetation and serve as mitigation sites for previous road projects.

Planting at this new mitigation site will begin as early as November of this year and will be completed by the end of February 2018. The site will be maintained as a natural area and protected under a conservation covenant, as proposed in the county's wetland/habitat mitigation plan. The county has specific performance standards it must meet over the next 10 years for plant establishment and survival.

Several federal, state and county agencies approved the wetland/habitat mitigation plan, including:

- National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- Clark County Community Development

A restored wetland typically takes about three years for planting and drainage changes to be effective. The project may look unsightly during and immediately after construction, but it will be more aesthetically pleasing once plants are fully established. More importantly, it will provide additional breeding, sheltering and foraging areas for birds, fish and other animals, reduce erosion and downstream flooding, and improve water quality in Whipple Creek.

Clark County Public Works has built several on-site and off-site mitigation areas for road improvement projects, including:

- A now-mature mitigation site along the south side of Padden Parkway, near its intersection with Northeast Andresen Road.
- A recently planted mitigation site along Curtin Creek, off of Northeast 119th Street about a half mile east of Northeast 72nd Avenue.

Public Works is aware that some residents believed the mitigation site at Northeast 179th Street and Northwest 41st Avenue was a protected wetlands bank that could not be disturbed, even for environmental enhancement. The county isn't sure what caused this misperception, but it could be because a different mitigation area was created immediately to the southwest (on the south side of Whipple Creek) in 2015 as part of slide stabilization project along the east side of Northwest 41st Avenue.

Regardless of the reason, Public Works will work to ensure that residents understand all aspects of construction projects, including off-site mitigation.



***Mitigation site at Northwest 41st Avenue and Northwest 179th Street, Aug. 4, 2017***