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United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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Dear Bill Bjerke/Clark County Parks Department,

We would first like to thank you for taking time to sit down with WDFW (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) and USFWS (United States Fish and Wildlife Service) to bring us up to speed on the Lewis and Clark Trail that is being proposed. An endeavor that will likely enjoy plenty of public support in concept and see significant use once it is complete. During the meeting you asked if both agencies would share their list of concerns, alternatives, and likely impacts if the trail was to be constructed on WDFW and USFWS Lands using the existing WSDOT (Washington State Department of Transportation) right of way, connecting the Vancouver Lowland Area to Ridgefield. We have attached a list of these concerns and impacts for your consideration.

WDFW and USFWS recognizes that outdoor recreation is very important to the local community in providing activities that support healthy lifestyles for all ages. However, the missions of our natural resource agencies and the Clark County Parks Department are quite different. WDFW and USFWS supports and allows most of the recreation activities that the Parks Department provides, but in a primitive and undeveloped manner that must be found compatible with our respective missions. As an example, WDFW allows hiking and biking on their lands, but without the development of formalized trails. In Contrast, Parks foster activities like hiking and biking by developing trails and associated infrastructure specifically designed for those activities.

User Conflicts

Constructing the Lewis and Clark Trail through the Shillapoo Wildlife Area and the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge would likely bring conflicts between differing user groups, place people in potentially dangerous situations, and significantly diminish the experience of all of the user groups that enjoy the area. Shillapoo is a very popular hunting area, providing some of the only public hunting opportunities available to Clark County residents daily, from September 1st through January 31st. If constructed on Shillapoo the trail will have hunting activities taking place in immediate proximity to bikers, hikers, and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Several years ago Clark County Parks restricted hunting on Park lands due to concerns related to hunting close to other (non-hunting) park visitors. Parks cited safety concerns and potentially degraded experiences of other outdoor enthusiasts as the reason for the no hunting restriction. The current proposal seems designed to place those activities together on the landscape and will reduce the outdoor recreation experience for all that use the area. This juxtaposition could lead to hunters being harassed (which is a misdemeanor offense). Similarly, Park visitors likely do not want a hunter next to them shooting a gun and a hunter does not want biker, hiker or dog walker next to them disrupting their hunting area. Additionally, the introduction of non-hunters into the popular hunting area could lead to safety related concerns. For example, bikers can move fast (20+ MPH) on paved trails and a direction that was once safe to shoot can quickly become unsafe due to the passing biker riding into the area unseen. The trail will simply bring more people into the area resulting in more conflicts with traditional users.

Natural Resource Conflicts

The Shillapoo Wildlife Area and the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge were established and are currently managed to protect and enhance habitats, to keep the areas from being developed, and provide areas that have minimal disturbance for sensitive wildlife species. Developing a trail through the Wildlife Area and Refuge will impact habitats from people going off trail damaging vegetation, dumping of garbage, creating access for illegal camps, and vandalism. The trail will also affect wildlife, especially sensitive species by bring more people into contact and into the vicinity of available wildlife habitats. The Vancouver and Ridgefield Lowlands are major wintering areas, migration corridors and breeding areas for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl and other bird species, that currently rest, feed, nest, and raise young where the proposed trail is to be constructed. People with dogs have the most impact on disturbing and injuring wildlife, often resulting in little to no use within 100 yards of each side of the trail. Since the proposed trial would travel almost 6.5 miles across WDFW and USFWS lands, this would result in almost 500 acres being impacted from its construction and use by hikers, dog walkers, etc. Currently the Wildlife Area and Refuge has restrictions on dogs and access onto the areas. WDFW and USFWS would implement the same or stricter regulations on the trail if it were constructed to minimize impacts as much as possible from the increased use to the area. There are also areas restricting all public access on the Refuge year round and during portions of the year on Shillapoo to protect sensitive species and lessen energy demands on migratory birds, and federally threatened and state endangered species. WDFW and the USFWS would still implement these closures when needed along the proposed trail. The introduction of potentially thousands of additional visitors to these areas is completely counter to WDFW's and USFWS's

mandate to maintain these habitats for wildlife. Homeless camps are also a concern along the trail route and figuring out who will clean up after them also needs to be addressed, after seeing how much garbage they produce and how often they occur currently along trails in the Portland area.

Both WDFW and the USFWS recognize the importance of getting people outdoors to recreate in multiple manners. However the Lewis and Clark Trail as it is currently proposed would impact user groups, habitats, and wildlife on both the Shillapoo Wildlife Area and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Clark County Parks and both WDFW and USFWS have different missions, and we feel that it is necessary to keep those undertakings separate, as there would likely be too much conflict if they were together on the same area. At this time, WDFW and USFWS recommends that the trail take a different route other than using the WSDOT right of way through the Shillapoo Wildlife Area and the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge.

Thank You,

Daren Hauswald

Shillapoo/Mt. St. Helens

Wildlife Area Manager

Christopher Lapp
Project Leader
Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge