



North Central Washington  
**Audubon Society**

# The Horan Natural Area

Envisioning the Future

November 2018



## A Short History and Use

The Horan Natural Area provides valuable bird and wildlife habitat on 100 acres of the Wenatchee River delta as it enters the Columbia River. Situated within the City of Wenatchee, the Horan supports a wide range of recreational and educational uses providing a unique addition to the city's many parks. The North Central Washington Audubon Society (NCWAS) places high value on the Horan Natural Area and wants to see the area improved to provide better wildlife and bird habitat as well as enhanced recreational and educational opportunities.

Historically, the Horan area was home to P'squosa/Wenatchi/Wenatchapum Native Peoples. It was a well-known regional council grounds since time immemorial. It was a gathering place for bands and tribes throughout the Pacific Northwest where matters of vital importance were transacted. Days in council were spent addressing developments, forming alliances and strengthening the relational bonds of bands and tribes throughout the area. Oral traditions describe exciting horseraces, extensive trading and bartering bringing people and communities together.

In 1886 European settlers established a trading post at the site. In contemporary times, the Horan supported a pear orchard and a golf driving range. In 1990 the Chelan PUD purchased much of the area from the Horan family to construct a manmade wetland as part of the licensing of Rock Island dam. The PUD developed a series of connected, steep-sided ponds along with a gravel trail system that extends throughout the area. Today, most of the area is owned by the Chelan PUD. The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission manages the Horan area through an agreement with the Chelan PUD. Some of the area (Figure 1) is privately owned by three entities.

The existing license of Rock Island dam with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission contains specific management direction for the Horan Natural Area. Examples of the specific direction are to manage the area for Wood Ducks and to implement a seasonal closure of the east side trail for protection of Bald Eagle nesting sites. The gravel trail system is maintained to provide easy foot access through the area. The complex of shrubs, black cottonwood and grasses/forbs provides a variety of habitats for birds, deer and other mammals.

The Horan has become a haven for runners, walkers, bird watchers and people who just want to get outdoors. The Horan is an internationally known bird “hotspot” and routinely has bird observations entered into the Cornell Labs eBird database. People travel from afar to visit the Horan and see the variety of seasonal birds that it offers.

In addition to land-based recreation, the sloughs along the east edge of the Horan provide a pleasant water-based trail system for canoes and kayaks. The water trails are used extensively by the Wenatchee Row and Paddle Club.

The Horan also provides needed continuity to upstream and downstream areas for animal migration and recreational opportunities. The Horan Natural Area is bounded by Walla Walla Point Park to the south of the Horan and Confluence State Park. Future land purchases upstream of the Horan will provide additional opportunities to enhance recreation and animal habitat in the vicinity.

## Current Conditions



While the Horan currently provides a rich environment for people, birds and animals, several problems exist. Surface water is an essential element for sustainable wetlands, pond environments and riparian plant communities. Much of the surface water that historically flowed into and through the Horan has been diverted or channels have silted in creating sheet flow rather

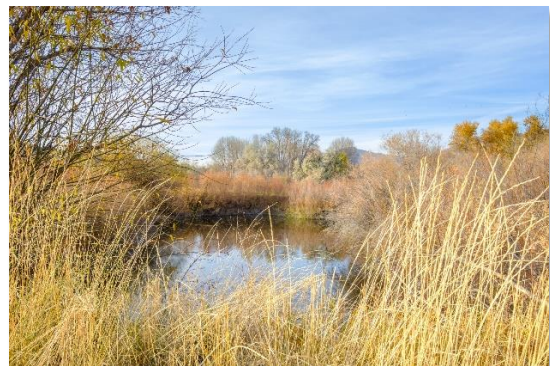
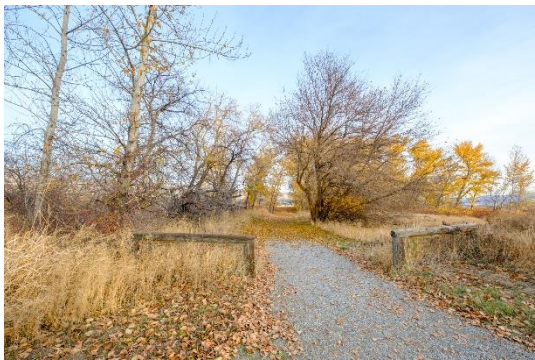
than channelized flow. Many of the ponds are disappearing and vegetation becomes established as they dry. Seasonal flooding forces closure of portions of the trail system. Maintenance of channels requires the cooperation of private landowners who sit upstream of the land owned by the Chelan PUD. Today, groundwater supplies the ponds and wetlands. As such, water elevations and continuity are influenced by natural seasonal runoff and regulated flows in the Columbia. A dependable water supply is essential to the long-term sustainability of wetland, pond and riparian habitats.

Weeds are a pervasive problem in Chelan and Douglas counties and the Horan has not escaped the invasion. To provide long-term health for upland and riparian plant communities, the weeds in the Horan need to be controlled or eliminated. A detailed inventory of the existing plant communities in the Horan is needed so that planning can begin to enhance native plants and control weeds.

The steep-sided ponds are disappearing. The original design of these man-made ponds focused on Wood Ducks and muskrats. In order to provide accessible habitat to a broader variety of waterfowl and shorebirds, the ponds need to be redesigned to have shallow banks and continuous water.

There is no known inventory of recreational use numbers or patterns in the Horan. It is common to encounter runners, walkers and general recreationists in the area. School and civic groups use the area on occasion. Parking is free at Walla Walla Point Park and restrooms are available in the Horan as well as the parks at either end of the area. Parking at Confluence State Park requires a Discovery Pass.

Although the area is easily accessible to the growing population of Wenatchee the value of the Horan is largely unknown and is under-used by local residents. The Horan offers north central Washington a wonderful opportunity for environmental education and increased recreation. Development of multicultural signage and education can play a vital role in expansion of the numbers of people using the area.



## Looking to the Future

The NCWAS sees enormous opportunity for making the Horan Natural Area a world class urban wild park. We hope to assist in planning efforts that could influence future environmental and social vitality of the Horan. We are looking at near-term planning activities as a means to create long-term solutions for this valuable area.

The City of Wenatchee is investigating development of a North Wenatchee Avenue bypass. Initial plans put the new road in the area of the existing railroad tracks on the west side of the Horan. The Chelan PUD is beginning to plan the relicensing of the Rock Island dam. Relicensing offers opportunities to mitigate effects of the dam. Both the City and the PUD staff have expressed interest in improving the Horan area during their planning. We are greatly encouraged by the shared views of the values the Horan offers and a willingness to work cooperatively to create long-term sustainable conditions in the Horan.

The NCWAS wants to help design the future of the Horan. As a first step, our view of the Desired Future Condition of the Horan is described below.

Our view of the future Horan is that within 50 years the Horan Natural Area will be:

- A self-sustaining mix of native wetland, marsh, upland and riparian forest habitats that support aquatic and terrestrial species.
- A site that honors the local indigenous history of P'squosa/Wenatchi/Wenatchapum through a living cultural monument. This may include reintroducing plants such as wapato/arrowroot, which once grew in the area, creating a native plant garden as well as establishing designated gathering areas for traditional plants used for basketmaking and medicine
- Free of weeds
- A diverse mix of pond and riverine habitats
- Hydrologically connected to surface and subsurface water sources to support wetland and marsh vegetation
- An accessible area that provides opportunity for bilingual educational experience and onsite environmental education
- A center for regional environmental education
- Linked to downstream and upstream landscapes for bird, wildlife, recreation and education opportunities
- An area supporting a mix of pedestrian and water-based, non-motorized recreational experiences

Achieving these conditions will take time and a vision that is shared by local residents, property owners and agencies with ownership or management responsibilities. Building a

network of informed citizens and key players is essential to the success of envisioning and implementing actions that lead to desired results.

Key players in this effort include:

- The City of Wenatchee, the Chelan PUD, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission and private landowners in the area.
- The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Tribes and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.
- Citizens of Wenatchee and East Wenatchee

Potential organizations that could greatly assist in forming the vision and helping implement actions to achieve the desired conditions include:

- NCW Audubon Society
- Our Valley, Our Future
- The Chelan-Douglas Land Trust
- The Trust for Public Land
- Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center
- State and county management agencies
- Wenatchee Row and Paddle Club
- Wenatchee School District
- Wenatchee Outdoors Club
- Wenatchee Sportsman Association

A shared vision of conditions in the Horan Natural area needs to be long-term - a 50-100 year view. Actions to influence the future need to happen soon as the City and the PUD actively plan infrastructure and dam relicensing. Both of these planning efforts offer the opportunity to meaningfully improve the Horan so it can be the world class resource we envision. With citizen awareness and opportunity to provide input and assistance, planning for the Horan can be a win-win for all of us. It seems entirely possible. The Horan is highly valuable now and can be even more valuable in the future. This is a chance to do the right thing for the people and the environment.





*Figure 1. The Horan Natural Area. Chelan County GIS, ownership parcels. Private ownership in shaded*