

The Horan Natural Area

Envisioning the Future

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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 while connecting parks to the north and south. 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 1872 Sam Miller began operating a trading post at the site. In contemporary times, the Horan supported a pear orchard and a golf driving range. In 1987-1988 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.

The Horan has become a haven for runners, walkers, and bird watchers. The Horan is an eBird "hotspot" with over 200 species recorded in the area. The complex of shrubs, black

cottonwood and grasses/forbs provides a variety of habitats for birds, deer and other mammals.

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.

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 the Horan has been curtailed. Many of the ponds are disappearing as they dry. Seasonal flooding forces closure of portions of the trail system. 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 and habitat mapping in the Horan is needed to develop a vegetation management strategy that encourages native, culturally important plants such as Indian hemp and Showy milkweed.

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 are looking at near-term planning activities as a means to create long-term solutions for this valuable area.

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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.

The of the Desired Future Condition of the Horan is described below.

NCWA Society's view of the future conditions in the Horan is that the area is:

- Hydrologically connected to surface and subsurface water sources to support wetland and marsh vegetation
- A mix of native wetland, marsh, upland and riparian forest habitats
- 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, creating a native plant garden as well as establishing designated gathering areas for traditional plants used for basketmaking and medicine
- Free of weeds
- Accessible and provides a 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
- Our Valley Our Future

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

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- NCW Audubon Society
- 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 take a 50-100 year view. With citizen awareness and opportunity to provide input and assistance to the City and the PUD, planning for the Horan can be a win-win for all of us. The Horan is highly valuable now and can be even more valuable in the future. This is a chance to build a lasting legacy of environmental stewardship and social responsiveness that will serve the Wenatchee valley for generations to come.

