

Proposal for Future Development of Rock Island Ponds

Gravel mining operations are expected to come to an end at Rock Island Ponds over the next several years, providing an opportunity to create a community resource, natural area, and business magnet.

Current Situation:

- Over the last 70 years or so, what was once a large gravel bar along the Columbia River has been altered to what is now a series of ponds and lakes of varying sizes and depths. Various fishes and birds have come to inhabit the water bodies, providing fishing and birdwatching opportunities.
- While the ponds already offer substantial recreational benefits, several issues have been identified that, if solved or if at least minimized, will enhance these values. In addition, other benefits could be created: outdoor education for schools, park and play areas, walking trails. For all facilities, attention should be given to providing points of access for mobility-limited users.

Long Term Goals:



Building of a sustainable fishery based on healthy populations of various species of fish. The fishery would provide recreational opportunities to all categories of fishers from children fishing for panfish to adults seeking trophy fish.

Enhancing the area as a destination birding site. It already hosts substantial populations of waterbirds, raptors, and songbirds which have come to use the area as it has changed over the decades. Birds require a mix of habitat attributes including available food, cover, and places to rest and feed safely. The things that birds need are fully compatible with other potential recreation values the ponds offer for the future.





On a landscape scale view, the property is large enough to support a truly wide variety of recreational opportunities. Looked at this way, the property can be viewed as a puzzle with different pieces being designated for different uses or mixes of uses. For example, one area may be the center of a more developed section with park areas designed for picnicking, volleyball, children playing and/or swimming in the water, etc.

Other sections, more remote from this more intensive use site, might be developed for quieter enjoyment including walking on paths in fairly natural settings to sitting by a pond and watching or listening to birds.



What We Propose:

- Creation of an advisory committee or working group to assist the Rock Island City Council in moving forward in a structured way to achieve the above listed goals. This entity would include interested citizens of Rock Island, representatives from various stakeholder groups, as well as professionals providing consulting on recreation, water quality, fisheries, and wildlife.
- Development of a plan to maximize the natural recreational opportunities the ponds area offers. This would include a map indicating how and where the various recreational opportunities will be sited within the area and Identification of the physical facilities needed for each use.
- Eventual creation of a healthy multi-faceted set of recreational values that will draw tourism dollars to the City of Rock Island.

Potential Sources of Funds:

Numerous state, federal, and non-profit entities are potential sources of grant funds that can be sought once a plan is under development.

WA State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grants (rco.wa.gov/grants)

Ducks Unlimited (DU) wetland restoration and enhancement project funds (<http://www.ducks.org/conservation/public-policy/nawca>)

Community Foundation of NCW grants (cfncw.org/grants)

Chelan PUD funding associated with their hydroelectric project FERC license requirements (<https://www.chelanpud.org/hydropower/licensing-and-compliance>)

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