

## **Powell Marsh WA Public Review Process (Aug/Sept 2013)**

### **Summary of Comments Received**

As an initial step in the renewed master planning process for the Powell Marsh Wildlife Area in August 2013 the DNR released four conceptual Powell Marsh Wildlife Area management alternatives and preliminary vision and goals for public review and comment. These wide-ranging alternatives were offered as a tool to help frame discussions and ideas at the re-start of the wildlife area's plan revision process.

As is standard practice for Department property planning, the purpose of this initial review is to gather the public's thoughts and ideas on the future management direction of the property and on what issues should be considered in the planning and environmental review process. This helps the Department's planning team as they refine or develop new management and use options for the wildlife area, and then, develop a draft proposed plan. When the draft proposed plan is completed it will be released for public review and comment before a recommendation is made to the Natural Resources Board. Comments received at the next review step, on the draft proposed plan, will be summarized in more detail and a response to comments will be provided.

We received a broad range of comments in a wide variety of ways and formats. Some people submitted comments at the public meeting while others did so by postal mail, email or online, and by phone. Many people used the provided comment form to record their thoughts while others did not. The following is a combined summary of the overall content (or themes) of what we learned from all comments received in the review process; it is generally organized by the topic headings on the comment form. A total of 70 persons submitted comments and there were 39 attendees at the people the August 24<sup>th</sup> public meeting. We greatly appreciate all who took time to tell us their thoughts about the future of the wildlife area.

#### **1. Uses of Powell Marsh WA**

Hunting and trapping are popular uses of Powell Marsh, but the property is used more for birding, viewing nature, and walking, hiking and skiing/snowshoeing.

#### **2. Favorite Characteristics of Powell Marsh**

The most favorite characteristics of Powell are its unique large, open landscape with diverse birds and wildlife and the viewing opportunities it affords.

#### Suggested Changes

Those who support a change in the marsh want the dikes/ditches removed and the marsh restored to the condition it was prior to development decades ago.

#### **3. Public Access**

People are generally happy with the current access, but nearly an equal number of commenters would like to see more hiking paths and with more loop trails, as well as more trails improved to provide better access to less mobile persons. Only a small number of people called for more vehicle access. Another common request was for easier carry-in boat access. Adding directional signage on access routes was also mentioned.

There is a concern that providing additional or more improved access and other amenities could significantly alter the current user experience.

#### **4. Refuge**

Just over one third of those who commented support eliminating the refuge. An equal number of people want to keep a refuge, but they are not concerned about the location of its boundary, or they support changing the boundary to allow year round access across the area. The remaining group, about one quarter of commenters, feel the refuge should remain as it is currently.

#### **5. Favorite Management Alternative**

People are fairly evenly split between the extremes, maximizing habitat and/or recreational opportunities (Alternative 1), and some level of restoration or minimal management (Alternative 4 or some version thereof).

There are multiple reasons for the strong showing of Alternative 1. The comments reveal that some people strongly support the enhanced recreational/access afforded by Alternative 1, while others support it because they want to see habitat for waterfowl, shore birds and other “open habitat” birds maximized. It’s clear as well that those favoring Alternative 4 or some “restoration” version of it do so primarily because they believe that is the best solution to the water quality concerns.

#### **6. Most Important Planning Issues**

The most important planning issue mentioned by far was addressing the water quality (iron floc) issue. That was followed by maintaining the existing open habitat and recreational uses.

#### **7. Information, Education and Viewing Opportunities**

*While this wasn’t a specific question on the response form a significant number of comments specifically mention this topic.*

A number of actions to enhance information –education-viewing on the marsh were suggested. They include adding interpretation signs at key locations and developing nature trails (with signs). However, there was no specific mention of adding formal interpretive programs. A number of people desire having a boardwalk to gain access deeper into the marsh, no specific location was mentioned. Some would like to see benches positioned at popular viewing sites. Constructing a viewing platform near the center of the property was suggested by others.

#### **8. Preliminary Vision and Goals**

Only a few comments directly related to the preliminary vision and goals. Those either supported the goals or want to see a goal of “restoring” the marsh to its pre-developed condition added.