

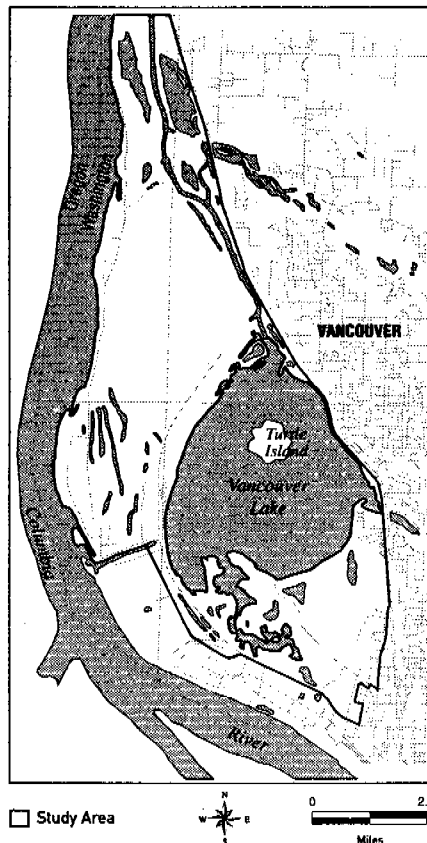


F O R Y O U R I N V O L V E M E N T

J U N E 1 9 9 6

VANCOUVER LOWLANDS COLUMBIA RIVER WILDLIFE MITIGATION PROJECT

The Bonneville Power Administration and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are working together to improve wildlife habitat in the Vancouver Lowlands area, near Vancouver, Wash. As part of that effort, a scoping meeting was held on April 9, 1996, at the Fruit Valley Community Center. Public comments were invited to help determine the focus of National Environmental Policy Act analysis, and planned project environmental impact statement. More than 70 people attended the meeting, and 20 letters and comment forms were received. Overall, strong support was expressed for the project itself and for the concept of preserving and improving wildlife habitat in the area (see following comment summary). A number of commenters also expressed concern that the window of opportunity to purchase the land might be limited.



PROJECT PARTNERS

BPA works with many others to develop an EIS. For this project we are working closely with:

- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Port of Vancouver
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Vancouver Lowlands Wildlife Mitigation Steering Committee
- Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority
- Northwest Power Planning Council.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

Wildlife Mitigation Program	July 1996
Draft EIS published	
Public comment period	July - Early August
Consider comments and revise EIS	Fall 1996
Publication of Final EIS	October 1996 Decision

P BPA c1Jun 00LC
BPA2819 1996
Vancouver lowlands Columbia
River wildlife mitigation proje



In response to that concern, BPA and the state have identified a more efficient way to meet NEPA obligations and still take timely advantage of land availability. A BPA "umbrella" environmental impact statement, "the Wildlife Mitigation Program EIS" is already under way. A draft will be published in July. The program EIS will be used to determine what kinds of activities are appropriate for wildlife mitigation projects throughout the Columbia Basin—including the Vancouver Lowlands project. Therefore, we have decided that a separate Vancouver Lowlands EIS will not be needed.

Meanwhile, BPA will provide funds for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to purchase the land, as long as no mitigation actions (beyond maintenance) take place until after the program EIS is completed and a decision made. BPA and the state are working on an agreement to ensure that the Project Management Plan for Vancouver Lowlands will follow the findings of the program EIS. The scoping comments submitted in the month of April 1996 on the Vancouver Lowlands project will be part of the management plan process and they will also be reflected on a program level in the program EIS. See "For More Information" for ways to continue to get information and to participate in the process.

COMMENT SUMMARY

The comments received at the meeting and in written communications are summarized below.

APPROVAL FOR PROJECT

- Many commenters strongly supported purchasing the land and preserving and improving habitat for wildlife, for both present and future values. Considerable community and environmental group support, from both private and public interests, was noted.
- The acquisitions were seen as key elements in a landscape of related wildlife habitat lands (many under public management) in the Vancouver Lake Lowlands and Shillapoo Bottoms.

████████████████████
"I want to urge the
Bonneville Power
Administration to take every
action possible to implement
the Vancouver Lake
Lowlands/Shillapoo Bottoms
acquisition programs..."

— private citizen
████████████████████

A commenter pointed to more than 7,000 acres owned and managed by public agencies in the area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the area is "the most important migratory bird habitat along the lower Columbia River." It was suggested that the lands would fare better under public management than private, as evidenced by past practices.



NATURAL RESOURCES/HABITAT

- Many comments focused on maintenance and/or restoration of natural habitat and wetlands, arresting any destruction of valuable wildlife habitat and minimizing human impact. Some stressed cleaning up the lake, and restoring willow and cottonwood forests that used to be present; or studying amphibian habitat, seasonal ponds, or geological or botanical sites.
- Bald eagles, great blue herons, sandhill cranes, shorebirds, songbirds and neo-tropical migratory birds were specifically named. One said the area provides nesting for bald eagles and great blue herons, and habitat for seven subspecies of Canada geese, including the dusky Canada goose (at historically low numbers).

“This area is the most important migratory bird habitat along the lower Columbia River...It will serve as the centerpiece of a 15 mile corridor of wildlife habitat readily available for viewing by more than a million people.”

— U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

- Some called for examining project impacts on existing wildlife, or on regional wildlife (Southwest Washington and Northwest Oregon); or weighing the needs of increasing

populations of migratory waterfowl against needs of those with diminishing numbers.

NATURAL VS. DEVELOPMENT

- Numerous commenters called for limits or prohibitions to future housing/development of county/city property; some expressed concern about potential nearby location of a jail, or about the possibility of a third Columbia River bridge that would depart from or exit the lands.
- Conflicts should be resolved between wildlife and human needs. Several advocated priority for wildlife, with minimal human use (see Recreation/Access); some suggested buffers between wildlife habitat and development or specifically protected areas (e.g., for nesting).
- Several commenters expressed concern for the impacts of management activities/the wildlife themselves/public trespass on crops or on farming practices in the lowlands. Support was expressed for area farming and agricultural values, for long-term leases/ability to manage and for an agency-operated farming program, rather than share-cropping.

TIMELINESS/REQUIRED STUDIES FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES

- A number of commenters wanted project managers to purchase land now, and to refine nature or scope of improvements later. Some were concerned about delaying the project for cultural resource studies, anxious

that other projects (e.g., the imminent development of Frenchman's Bar Park) might preclude the full range of project possibilities. One commenter noted that there "are pressures in Clark County to use the land for other things, so it will be necessary to act as fast as you can"

- Concern was also expressed that BPA perceives the merits of the project to be reduced by the presence of cultural resources. [The project was the subject of an environmental assessment; because a cultural resource district is located within the project area, and impacts were of concern, the more extended EIS process had begun.]

**"Be careful of our past, for it
walks with us, and is ever
beside us."**

— tribal representative

- One Tribal representative offered information on the developed cultural history of its people, and asked that project proponents be "careful of our past, for it walks with us, and is ever beside us." Others called for appropriate protection and management of cultural/historical/natural sites, or for an ethnographic study of the area, in addition to archeological work.

RECREATION AND ACCESS

- Access was often linked to recreation issues: level, kind, and intensity of recreation use, and interactions between people and wildlife. Some suggested limiting recreational access to activities with lower human impact (e.g., hiking and bird-watching), physically limiting access, or allowing access at certain times/seasons, with protection for nesting areas.
- Comments about freedom of access and needed closures were related to removal of fences, handicap access, wheelchair trails, lookouts, side road closures and use of all-terrain vehicles.

Many focused on recreational nature/walking/horse trails (not trails for motorized/ off-road vehicles, and not trails in wetland or nesting areas), and places for wildlife viewing. Regional bike trail development was suggested;

some wanted only foot traffic — no bicycles or horses.

Fishing was suggested; hunting drew numerous comments both pro and con. Some expressed strong interest in continuing public waterfowl hunting/pheasant hunting. Others were concerned about safety issues and questioned why anyone would preserve birds, only to hunt them. Controls on hunting activities (including dog training/trails) and boundaries were requested, with suggestions that non-hunting uses should be given due weight and adequate time, and that conflicting recreational activities scheduled at different times.

- Commenters did not support activities such as golf courses or motorboats; some questioned the need for a visitors' center, suggesting instead the Ridgefield Center.



“As development continues and critical habitat is lost, natural areas like the Vancouver bottoms will be of value well beyond its industrial cash value. Please act now to set this area aside for the benefit of wildlife.”

— private citizen

SECURITY/VANDALISM

- Many people expressed concern over site appearance and safety (e.g., flooding, dumping of trash, resource damage from unregulated public use, vandalism), with requests for rules, an on-site caretaker, regular patrols and related law enforcement.

PEST CONTROL

- Numerous pests were identified for control — starlings, blackberries, Canada thistle, tansy ragwort — and suggestions made for methods, especially non-chemical methods where possible. (Geese were identified both as a value and a pest.) A number of commenters advocated using non-chemical methods, if possible, to eliminate carp, and noted the importance of replacing them as a food source for eagles and other animals.

“...there are pressures in Clark County to use the land for other things, so it will be necessary to act as fast as you can...you should also be aware that there are many in Clark County who want the area maintained for wildlife.”

— Vancouver Audubon Society

TECHNIQUES/PRIORITIES/ MANAGEMENT/FUNDING

- Options #2 or #3 were preferred by several; Options #1 and #4 were seen as not meeting the need.
- Several suggested acquiring the Port of Vancouver property north of the flushing channel, to keep development out. Other acquisitions (e.g., shoreline along the river) were also suggested.

“This area should be protected for the preservation of wildlife.”

— private citizen

- Planning and management strategies should complement the planning and activities on adjoining properties; the EIS should examine economic impacts and partnering or donations. One commenter advocated explicitly regional (Oregon and Washington) planning; another, that farmers and non-agency people should be represented in planning.
- Some favored strong emphasis on non-game species (e.g., song birds and birds of prey), not just game species; or careful study to ensure compatibility of encouraged species. Some suggested natural seed plants, “green feed,” and native species for plant materials.

- The importance of sustained operations and maintenance funding was stressed; one commenter questioned the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's ability to fund/manage the project adequately, recommending instead the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the adjacent Ridgefield Refuge.

"Ask for volunteer help from local clubs."

"This area should be protected for the preservation of wildlife."

— private citizen

- Some commenters suggested educational or works skills employment opportunities, mentioning the use of kids/Scouts volunteers from local clubs or community groups, the Youth Labor Pool project to do mitigation/enhancement projects in the Vancouver Lowlands.

INFORMATION

- A number of commenters provided information for the EIS on wildlife (including the existence of important great blue heron and bald eagle nesting areas in the lowlands).
- Others offered their own or other resources: e.g., an EIS for the Frenchman's Bar/Vancouver Lake development plan; the Port

WHAT IS AN EIS?

BPA, as a federal agency, must study the environmental impacts, both adverse and beneficial, of a proposed project before it can take action. This policy is set out in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The act outlines a process that invites public participation in deciding the scope of issues in an environmental study.

NEPA requires that significant environmental impacts of a proposed project be discussed in an Environmental Impact Statement. An EIS must also include measures to avoid, reduce or compensate for adverse environmental impacts. A draft EIS is released for public review before a decision is made. (See project schedule.)

NEPA helps public officials make environmental decisions based on environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore and enhance the environment.

of Vancouver itself; a community-based "Habitek" plan (1980s); a preliminary EIS developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Fruit Valley bypass study.

OTHER

- Some miscellaneous comments/questions/information were offered on resources or issues outside the study boundaries, beyond BPA control, or beyond the scope of the project.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have questions or need more information about the BPA Wildlife Mitigation Program EIS, please call:

Thomas McKinney
Environmental Project Manager
Bonneville Power Administration
(503) 230-4749

If you have questions about the Federal role in the Vancouver Lowlands Project process, please call:

Joe DeHerrera
Fish & Wildlife Project Manager
Bonneville Power Administration
(503) 230-3442

If you have questions about the state's role in the Vancouver Lowlands Project process, please call:

Ray Croswell
Lands Coordinator
Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife,
(360) 690-7240

If you would like to be kept updated about the Wildlife Mitigation Program EIS, other related publications, and opportunities to comment, please fill out the enclosed, stamped postcard and we will add you to our mail list. Return your card to us at the following address:

Public Involvement Office
Bonneville Power Administration - CKP
PO Box 12999
Portland, Ore. 97212
or call toll-free: 800-622-4519

You may also request information on the Internet at comment@bpa.gov (specify this project in your request).

PO Box 3621 Portland, Oregon 97208-3621

DOE/BP-2883 JUNE 1996 750