



BENTON COUNTY SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM UPDATE

Public Access Focus Group

May 30st 2013 | 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Benton County Annex, 5600 W. Canal Drive
Kennewick, WA

INTRODUCTION

Benton County hosted a focus group meeting focused on shoreline public access options, ideas for priority areas for public access improvements, and possibilities of incentives to improve shoreline access.

The meeting was held at the Benton County Annex in Kennewick at 6 pm. Focus Group participants included:

- Matthew Cummings, Benton County Shoreline Advisory Committee member, Richland Rod & Gun Club, Yakima River shoreline property owner
- Michael Crowder, Benton County Shoreline Advisory Committee member, Benton County Parks Board, Barker Ranch
- Adam Fyall, Benton County Sustainable Development Coordinator, Parks Board staff
- Debbie Smathers, Desert Kayak & Canoe Club
- Micah Larsen, Member, Tapteal Greenway
- Scott Woodward, Member, Ridges to Rivers Open Space Network

In addition, the following County staff and consultants developing the Shoreline Master Program (SMP) facilitated the meeting: Susan Walker, Senior Planner and SMP Project Manager, Valerie Smith, Associate Planner, Lisa Grueter, BERK and Dawn Couch, BERK.

Purpose & Topics

The purpose of the meeting was to:

Create a common understanding of Shoreline Master Program requirements, identify possible locations for future public access that support adopted plans and any newly identified needs, and provide direction on an incentive-based approach that encourages new shoreline public access linkages while recognizing property rights.

The primary topics of the meeting included:

- Shoreline Master Program Guideline Requirements for public access
- Appropriate locations for public access
- Incentives for public access

Background Documents

To support a detailed discussion, the County and consultants provided information in advance of the focus group about the requirements of the SMP and some examples of public access strategies from other jurisdictions.

Department of Ecology's Guidance on Public Access in the Shoreline Program Planning Process

- [Shoreline Public Access Handbook Chapter 9](#)

Benton County's Shoreline Master Program Process

- [Shoreline Analysis Report](#)-April 2013
- [Shoreline Inventory Map Folio PDF Document](#), April 2013
- Results from the SMP Community Questionnaire [Open House Presentation](#)

Examples of incentives from other jurisdictions

- See Eastern Washington Planners Forum Presentation from January 2013, sent via email, and provided as Attachment A.

In addition Scott Woodward provided a recent Tapteal Greenway brochure, also provided in Attachment A.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

The participants discussed six questions as described and summarized below. The results of the discussion will be used in developing an approach to public access planning in the SMP update.

Public Access Approaches

1. There are two general paths a community can take to ensure there is sufficient public access to the shoreline:

- **Approach A:** Require every new development of a certain size (thresholds in SMP Guidelines) to have a minimum amount of public access based on the size of the development or other factors.
- **Approach B:** Develop a shoreline public access plan based on adopted plans but also new input. Use an inclusive process to identify areas where public access should be located, and use policies and incentives to direct new public access to those identified areas.
 - **Q1. What do you see as the pros and cons of Approach A?**
 - **Q2. What do you see as the pros and cons of Approach B?**
 - **Q3. Which approach do you think makes the most sense for Benton County and why?**

Pros/Cons of Approach A – each development provides

- Con: Retrofitting is what the County is looking at now—there isn't much room for "new development". For example the problem with physical access to the Yakima River—it's an existing problem, and the County has to find a solution to the issues with summer rafters, rather than worry about future development.
- Concern: In the past 3 years the river usage has gone up from 100 floaters a year to 500 floaters per day (seasonal weekends). This increase in usage has brought problems with parking, trash and

misuse of the private shoreline. Some people don't care about signage or illegal trespassing, and they don't value the natural environment.

- Some Solutions: Having preconceived access points where people want to go, and know of these locations. Maintenance needs to be prescribed in the plan, need to provide funding for existing infrastructure.
 - Problem with picking put-in and take-out locations on public lands is the distance and time people want to spend on the river. They don't want to have to spend an extra 2-3 hours on the river because the next pull-out area is 5 miles down from the pull-out area they want to use. (i.e. people are voting with their feet; we either restrict the use of the river or build a pathway where the people are already using area).
 - This doesn't directly address the illegal parking, trash dumping, underage drinking, and misuse of private property.
- Suggestion: Put money to targeted areas based on parks plans (like Approach B).
- Con: If access is disconnected it is not as useful as targeted public access. There would be added maintenance cost; participants worried about putting in access far away from population, with lack of maintenance - eventually no one knows where it is.
- Con: May raise property rights concerns for some.
- Con: Don't like 5-lot approach as threshold – not even neutral, don't like it.
- Pro: By keeping the requirement for future developers to provide access when they develop 5 or more lots would ensure we don't create similar problems to the one we are dealing with.
- Ways to require access for developments over 5 lots:
 - In lieu of fees
 - Requiring if they can't provide access on site that they work towards developing an off-site access point
 - Giving a density bonus to developers who provide public access in their development
- Pro: Maybe okay for larger residential developments. Okay if allow for in-lieu/off site – get more done than with 5-lot subdivision minimal access.
- Concern: Richland/Kennewick building along rivers and blocking views.

Pros/Cons of Approach B – targeted access based on a plan

- Pro: Agree with Approach B –organized, targeted, and focused – in 20 years there might be more need – so need to update over time.
 - Keep the plan updated. For example, regarding a condo development, a local jurisdiction wanted to require connection, but this was not documented in an adopted plan. It was only documented in a draft plan – need to update plan.
 - Ridges to Rivers Plan not adopted – shows connectivity – some generalization.
 - Need parks/open space plans to be updated/adopted
- Need SMP to be a well-reasoned plan we can defend to BOCC and explain to public.
- Pro: Better for financial reasons to maintain rational plan.

Preferred Approach for Benton County

- Agree with Approach B
- Do not miss opportunities for larger developments to provide coordinated public access on their properties to reduce impacts to the environment and provide amenities. Provide for:
 - In lieu of fees
 - Requiring if they can't provide access on site that they work towards developing an off-site access point
 - Giving a density bonus or some other incentive to developers who provide public access in their development, e.g. in the 5-acre zoning area

High Priority Areas for Additional Access

2. There are many planning efforts underway that address public access to the shoreline. For example, the Tapteal Greenway plan is referenced in several County and city plans (see Tapteal brochure sent via email – provided with summary in Attachment A). Benton County also has a Parks and Recreation plan as does each city.

- **Q4. What are the highest priority areas in Benton County for additional shoreline public access?**

High Priority Areas

- Snively boat launch – but need better access and parking– need to work with the City of Richland to get buy off on a plan.
- Tapteal Greenway and water trail – partially implemented to allow for more and safer access – more geared to kayakers as opposed to floaters – purpose is water recreation.
 - The Greenway uses its own funds to make improvements
 - Added Horn Rapids
 - Added Omaha
 - More sophisticated on portage
 - Needed shuttles for kayaks – put bike racks in ground to allow going back and forth – gives another option
 - All Tapteal locations have place to park legally
- Barker Ranch – great visual as you go by – don't take benefit away – figure out the access – game wardens should police more – tired of picking up garbage.
- The use of Twin Bridges is similar to a typical example on a college campus. Students make a short cut path on campuses – does University surrender and pave it? Relationship to tubers – picked Twin Bridges – legal water access but not legal parking area. Causing problems. Will County fight it or “pave the path”. Spot on radar screen.
 - Work with West Richland.
 - Tubers not interested in Tapteal map.
 - Increased law enforcement (maybe off-road vehicles for policing).

- Shuttling people back and forth, trash containers and parking- someone needs to be responsible for keeping the areas safe and clean.
- A lot of rafters drinking – that’s the volume – explosion in last 3 years – 100/year to 500/day
- Why? Recession and cheap? Or just fun?
- Need a formal boat launch spot – if going there it adds 1 hour to 3 hours to trip.
- People were parking at CID – illegal – enforcement issue.
- How much parking should be required?
- Difficult to find spot to add parking – mostly private – close to town.
- Use SMP to lay groundwork for solution.
- **Twin Bridges – this is the highest priority.**
- General Improvements to shoreline access:
 - Need parking for every access location.
 - What about a sign with phone number to call to get enforcement?
 - What rules can be enforced? Underage drinking. July 1 new state law about drinking and being on water.
 - Recreation and Conservation Office grant for off road vehicle – will grant funds to police for ORV? Okay if longer term.
 - Parking fee? Took away parking, now parking on bridge.
 - Example: Ambulance serving park with federal government (USFS) in Morrow County.
 - Need accountability and enforcement.
 - One month of enforcement could help curb activity – negate it or offer it?
 - Could we start charging for rafters and kayakers to use the public access points?
- What is the status of the Paterson area improvement project?
- View access needs consideration:
 - Lookout points; trails leading to river access, and along river; what can we do within shoreline jurisdiction to maintain view access?
- Twin Rivers location – too steep for kayaks/canoes – tubers throw over side.
- Hyde Road.
- **Other locations that are a priority for expansion, safety**
- Finley – concentrated population area near Twin Rivers Park, last hardened boat launches, fishing
 - Last place you can put in before Plymouth area
 - Rough currents on upstream slip –be ready
- **Finley “T”, – launch off of it? Is it public? Use it a lot. It’s perfect for small boat. Lots of parking.**
- People use Hover Park – rough area – might be pull in area.
- People use Plymouth.

- What about Patterson – Recreation Conservation Office grant? Last place to go in before Oregon.
- McNary upstream – physically impossible.
- Tapteal is downstream of Benton City.
- What about upstream of it?
- Benton Conservation District was looking into getting access into an area.
- **Chandler dump to Benton City – good water but no access – difficult to navigate and put in (upstream is rocky).**
 - Mapping out the gaps in public access i.e. There is no access between Benton City and Prosser. The Chandler Reach area would be ideal because the further North/ up the river you go, the more rocks and less likely people will use this area of the river for rafting.
 - Can the county buy a 5 acre parcel to create a safe and convenient parking and access area?
 - Better in Prosser – back bay.
 - Should find a public land where access is missing – primary goal – is there right of way?
 - Can in lieu factor in? If opportunity comes up can do something.
 - Issue is parking
- **Policy. Promote public access in places where there is demand or good water. The County should put in access by purchasing/developing public land.**
- Port Kelly – across river.
- Visual access is also important – see survey.
 - Richland putting up 3 story hotels next to water – alters view shed.
 - View corridors in County?
 - Hard to define what’s visually pleasant without being arbitrary.
- McDonald Ridge stretch between Benton City and Horn Rapids Park – around “2” on Tapteal – nice view in West Richland – there is no structure.
- Private land in West Richland.

Public Access Incentives

3. All Washington state counties have limited tools with which to encourage the provision of public access on private lands. Incentives to private landowners is one those tools.

- **Q5. Do you think incentives for private landowners to provide public access is appropriate for Benton County? Why or why not?**
- **Q6. What would be your recommendation for structuring incentives to increase public access while limiting without undermining the effectiveness of the County’s existing policies?**
- Not much value in lower Yakima – can’t further subdivide in much area – would you lose in visual access.
- Maybe lower Columbia in lower County.
- Don’t wait for a subdivision to come in – too passive. Instead target specific locations, e.g. Chandler, Twin Bridges.

- There was skepticism about development pressure - if there was pressure, then view issues.
- Riverbank restoration – grant for allowing access in exchange for stabilization.
- Example development of 8 lots – one location on river to avoid erosion – better river bank and riparian corridor – one better access – typically used for the development – written in covenants – should incentivize it especially in 5 acre.
- Prefer targeted access but should have option of above coordinated development being rewarded for common access.
- **Allow bonuses for access and for ecological function – option for people to come in and ask for it – don't miss an opportunity.**
- Lewis Clark Ranch area – West Richland.
- **In lieu of fund important, also for ecological function restoration.**
- **Need to focus in a location, e.g. Rural 5.**
- Encourage citizens to stick with the process and get what they need in SMP.

Closing Thoughts

- Enforce respect for Yakima and Columbia Rivers – respect for system (litter, parking, public access). Blessed with watersheds and viewsheds – use it or lose it. Need to respect the waters.
- Work with what we have and improve it, find a couple of other areas to take pressure off of system.
- Triathalons, swim across water, problems getting in swimming for training with boats and jet skis – can't be seen – need swimming areas (maybe more of a City topic).
- Inconvenient far away locations to safely swim. (Also a problem with kayaks and visibility.) Even half mile buoys. Howard Aamon Park has a swimming area. Maybe the lagoon.
- Two Rivers has a park with swimming area.
- Have a pretty good situation – have water trail with Tapteal. Moving along. 31 miles with great access points. Lot of good spots on Columbia. Hanford – there will be more coming.
- Protect/add access. Work with cities.
- Compared to a lot of communities have it pretty good and getting better.
- Lot of opportunities – how to make them all happen. Look forward enough – manage policies to make them happen.
- Education – if people don't have access they lose respect for what's there and love for it. See the value and you'll want to protect.
- Some of the best public access in the state. A few places need improvement. Keep access already there is good direction.
- Approach B – Targeted is definitely approach. Keep option open for incentives.
- Approach B – like it. Want to keep rivers in as natural states as possible.
- Not surprised to see Twin Bridges is top priority.
- Influence of jet boats on Yakima River? Waves hit banks – erodes. In early Spring with heavy flow. Restrict type of boats?
- Problems with wakes on Chandler Reach. Especially on high banks.
- Docks – what are laws on that? Especially can they be allowed on Yakima? Is it possible? (SMP will address where docks are allowed and will coordinate with any federal or state requirements. It was

noted that docks on a fast flowing river are not usually an investment that property owners would make.)

Attachment A - Email Materials:

- Public Access Presentation to Eastern Washington Planner's Forum, January 2013
- Tapteal Greenway Brochure