



**Rattlesnake Mountain
Shooting Facility**
Master Plan



March 2016



**Tri-Cities Shooting
Association**



**Benton County
Parks**

Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility

Master Plan

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Introduction

The Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility (referred to hereafter as “the Range”) is one of ten units within the Benton County Park System. The property is 1100 acres in area and lies north of Benton City in central Benton County.

Some of Benton County’s parks are leased properties, including part of the Range. Originally, the County leased about half of the Range property from the federal government through the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM) under a “Recreation and Public Purposes” lease that was originally signed in 1985. In 2010, the County completed the process of acquiring the patent for this land from the United States, though it is often still referred to as the “BLM land” distinguish from the remainder of the property and because old habits are hard to break. The other portions of the Range are the property of the State of Washington and are used by the County through the form of a use agreement administered by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). Unique to the Shooting Facility within the Park System is that Benton County subleases operations and management of the entire Range to a third party contractor – the Tri-Cities Shooting Association (TCSA).

In 2007 and 2008, Benton County undertook a comprehensive parks planning process that examined the Parks System both in its entirety and piece-by-piece. One of the chief recommendations of the *Comprehensive Parks Plan* (CPP) was to complete “master plans” for each of the parks in the System. The Shooting Facility was the first of the plans to be completed.

Setting, Use, and Need

The Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility extends along a generally north-to-south frontage of State Route 225. The Range is across the highway from Horn Rapids Park – a separate Benton County park; and is itself completely surrounded by public lands held by the federal government and the State of Washington. The Range is relatively isolated, and its nature of being disconnected from private lands or lands of intensive uses or facilities help to make for a safe and functional location.

Generally, the entire Range is positioned on a large hillside that is the northeastern flank of Rattlesnake Mountain. Within the Range, there is various topography, including hills, ravines, and flat areas. The soils are generally of the deep alluvial variety found throughout the area, with occasional rock outcrops and talus areas. There is no naturally-occurring permanent water on the Range, and the vegetative cover is uniformly upland shrub-steppe with sporadic and predictable localized weed infestations. A range of expected endemic wildlife can be found on the site, notably including elk, deer, coyote, and badger among the larger mammals.

The Range is sub-leased by Benton County to the Tri-Cities Shooting Association, who is solely responsible for its operations and maintenance. The Range is primarily used by the TCSA membership, which at the time of this plan numbered over 2,000 members. The general public is allowed to use the Range for a modest day use fee, and law enforcement is also allowed to train at the site. The TCSA sponsors a number of events and competitive shooting matches throughout the year that bring users to the facilities from outside the immediate area.

Master plans serve as a planning and sometimes as a budgeting tool for managers. Having an adopted master plan in place will allow the landowner agencies, the County as leaseholder, and the TCSA as operations contractor to understand what kinds of major projects are expected to occur on the properties over a twenty-year horizon. The plan is also a helpful tool in the grant application process, as it allows the TCSA and/or the County to demonstrate to potential grantors that they are proactive and deliberative in their development of the site.

The Master Plan also functions as a “Plan of Development”, which satisfies BLM requirements for a “patent transfer” of the federally-owned portions of the Range from the BLM to the County. The Plan of Development makes clear to all parties and the public what kinds of developments are planned for the property into the future and where those developments will occur, therefore helping to avoid natural resource, cultural resource, and deed restriction conflicts.

Comprehensive Parks Plan

In August of 2008, Benton County formally adopted the *Comprehensive Parks Plan*, and this is the guidance for Park System management and development both in regards to overall vision and philosophy and in regards to specific major projects. Regarding the Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility in particular, the CPP concludes that the Range “is hard to manage because of the lease situation”; and that the County “should pursue land conveyances from the BLM and DFW”. Five major actions cited in the CPP for the County to pursue relevant to the Range include:

- Pursue ownership of the property.
- Master plan for the Shooting Facility.
- Improve the main entry with consistent welcoming signs and landscaping.
- Improve parking, access, restrooms, and drinking fountains.
- New hunter's education facility.

All five of these core major actions called for in the CPP have been completed.

Process

In Spring 2008, the Park Board determined that, based on the CPP findings stated above and the ongoing growth at the Range, the time was right for development of a master plan. Over a three-month period, the Board worked with the TCSA, the public, and County staff to complete this Master Plan through an iterative process that included ample opportunities for scoping, review, and revision. The Master Plan has since been revised twice, and given the pace of successful implementation at the Range over the years, will probably continue to be revised on a 3-5 year schedule.

- August 11, 2009 – RMSF Master Plan (first edition) adopted by Park Board.
- February 19, 2013 – RMSF Master Plan (second edition) adopted by Park Board.
- March 8, 2016 – RMSF Master Plan (third edition) adopted by Park Board.

Conditions & Issues

The condition of the Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility is good. The TCSA maintains a functional, well-kept facility that provides a variety of opportunities for the recreational shooter in a comfortable setting. TCSA's safety and security record is excellent. The layout and the management of the Range combine to create a safe and accessible facility that is an attractive asset for the County and for the community.

Major issues of the past centered on bureaucratic hurdles and delays, which have been largely overcome with the purchase of the patent from the Bureau of Land Management. At this point, the main issue is just keeping up with the demands of the shooting public which has come to expect a high level of excellence at Rattlesnake Mountain.

Findings

The Park Board, Tri-Cities Shooting Association, affected agencies, and user public have made the following findings regarding major issues that lead to development of this Master Plan:

Regarding the Comprehensive Parks Plan

This Master Plan continues to advance all five actions cited in the CPP in regards to the Range, which have largely been completed already; specifically:

- Benton County has completed the “patent transfer” process with the BLM.
- Completing the Master Plan satisfies an action unto itself.
- This plan called for “dressing-up” the main entrance at the Rose-Iris Range and other similar entries throughout the Shooting Facility with consistent landscaping and signage. This has largely been completed.
- The additions of parking, access, restrooms, and other amenities have been completed, and more amenities continue to be added.
- The new hunter’s education facility has been completed.

Regarding Leases and Ownerships

An encumbrance in the past, issues with our landlords are largely the thing of history now. Benton County extended its use agreement with the State of Washington and completed its “patent transfer” from the United States.

Regarding Operations and Management

Communication between and among landlords, the lessee, and partners was more of a problem in the past, but these lines of communication have been improved and strengthened.

Benton County and Tri-Cities Shooting Association extended their Lease-Concessionaire agreement in 2010, ensuring the stability and consistent management of the Range for the next three decades.

Regarding Environmental and Cultural Resources

Cultural resource surveys of all of the proposed development locations were completed in 2009 as part of the patent transfer process. Care is taken in all of our developments and other activities to minimize disturbance of soils, landscape, and native biota.

Regarding Funding

The TCSA missed-out on a number of funding opportunities for improvements to the Range over the years because of the issues to leases and approvals related to natural and cultural resources concerns. Completion of this Master Plan and completion of the patent transfer (BLM) and use agreement (DFW) has put the TCSA (and the County) in a better position to be eligible for and more competitive in pursuing new grants in the future. The TCSA will continue to be self-sustaining and will receive no direct funding from Benton County, but the County may choose to partner on specific capital improvements at the direction of the Park Board and the County Commissioners.

Plan of Development

Operations and Management

Benton County has extended its concessionaire lease agreement with the Tri-Cities Shooting Association for operations and management of the Shooting Facility until the year 2040. The TCSA commits to providing regular reports about activities, events, projects, and issues pertinent to the Range; and will inform the County through its official point-of-contact before major development projects begin and when such projects are concluded. This includes all of the projects described below in this document – even though these projects are approved and cited herein, TCSA must still communicate its intent to proceed with projects ahead of time.

Benton County does not foresee providing any funding resources for expenses related to ongoing operations and management, though on a case-by-case basis, the County may elect to partner with the TCSA on projects if funding is available. In addition, the TCSA will be responsible for creation of a “toxic materials abatement plan/program”, mostly to address lead accumulation and the removal thereof.

Benton County will compile and distribute official contact information for each of the involved parties (landowners, leaseholders, concessionaires, and other third party agencies) at the first of each year, and whenever there is a change in said contact information. This is to reduce confusion and broken lines of communication. Also, a protocol needs to be followed in order to further assist communication. TCSA’s identified points-of-contact need to work directly with Benton County’s points-of-contact, respective of their concessionaire agreement; and the County will work directly with the landowner agencies, respective of their lease agreements.

Capital Improvements

The following abstracts represent all of the “significant capital improvements” to be made at the Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility over the 2016-2036 period. All of these improvements are tied to specific sites on the Range, and all of those sites will have been surveyed for cultural resources during the summer of 2009. This “Plan of Development” will be the record submitted to the Bureau of Land Management as part of this Plan revision in accordance with the County’s obligations to the BLM as part of the patent transfer process.. The TCSA and Benton County understand that if deviations from this record are planned, or if new developments are conceived, this Plan of Development will need to be revised and resubmitted to the BLM and the DFW. These abstracts correspond to an official large-format Master Plan Map that is not attached to this document.

Planned capital improvements to the Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility include:

Hunter Education Range :: The unfinished portions of this project carried-over from the 2013 Plan include:

- Install irrigation to support trees and grass;
- Plant trees and grass for aesthetics and dust control;
- Construct a multiple-purpose, multiple-discipline building containing classrooms, kitchen, restrooms, and storage;
- Provide electrical power to the site;
- Install lights for evening use of the range.

Entire Range - New Irrigation :: A new, shared well and large capacity storage tank will be installed to provide water for trees and grass at the High Power, Shotgun, and Primitive Ranges.

Rose-Iris Range House Expansion & Modification :: Add a 12-foot by 40-foot extension to the east side of the current Rose-Iris Range House to help minimize the congested area inside and provide more room for storage of equipment and vending machines. Also, replace the existing wood stove with a heating and air conditioning unit.

Pistol Bay Improvements :: Add electrical power to bays and shade structures. A new event building with restrooms will be added as the growth of the discipline continues.

Pistol Bay Access Gate :: Restore the Pistol Bay event gate access and emergency exit from the Pistol Bays on the BPA road at the southeast corner of the RMSF property.

Pistol Bays - New Parking with Electrical Hookups :: Level and tier ground east of the Pistol Bays building to provide parking and electrical hookups for recreational vehicles.

Primitive Range - New Power :: Electricity will be provided to the range.

Primitive Range - Pole Building :: Construct a pole building/cover to provide relief for Primitive Range youth and adult participants during inclement weather conditions. The building/cover will be constructed on previously disturbed ground.

Road Surfacing - Entrance to Shotgun Clubhouse, and up Canyon to High Power Range :: This is a difficult road to maintain in it's dirt/gravel state and is a source of dust mobilization. The road will be paved or resurfaced to improve durability and smoothness.

New Silhouette Range :: Construction of a new 200-500 yard silhouette range immediately to the north of the Rose-Iris Range.

New Indoor Range :: To provide a future indoor all weather shooting location for individuals and various shooting events that will ultimately bring in more of the shooting public and membership participants. To be constructed to provide year round all weather shooting for rim fire rifles and pistols, air rifles, and centerfire pistols. This facility will include proper ventilation, bullet traps, target holders, lighting, restrooms, and storage rooms. This project was in the original design plans for the Range and is being resurrected in this revision with the planning group working on details and evaluating the feasibility of obtaining grants.

New Archery Range :: Development will consist of two ranges. One will be for standard yardage distances, 10 through 60 yards with silhouette targets. The second will consist of (in conjunction with the Primitive Range) 3-D targets on a trail to simulate a hunting environment.

New Benton County Sherriff's Office Training Facility :: A new facility will be constructed on the Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility campus near SR 225 by the Benton County Sheriff's Office. This new facility will be operated by the Sheriff's Office.

High Power Range - Communications System :: A communications system with loudspeakers will be installed at the High Power Range to allow clear communication between all firing lines and the target pits in all weather conditions. Current communication is by commercially available radios which are frequently intermittent and difficult to use in windy conditions which often occur at the Range.

High Power Range - Electrical Upgrades :: Electricity will be run to the match offices at 200 and 900 yards, to support the new Communication System.

Site Wide Emergency Communications :: A site wide communication system will be installed between all the various RMSF ranges to support emergency communications including notification of fires and other emergencies that might affect personnel in all areas.

Revegetation :: For purposes of habitat restoration, weed suppression, and dust abatement; TCSA will work with Benton County and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to restore areas across the Range to a natural shrub-steppe condition with native plants and seed.

Rose-Iris Range - Main Entrance Improvements :: Vegetation and road surface improvements along main entrance driveway leading from SR 240 to parking area, possibly including a new flag garden. All improvements will occur in already-disturbed areas.

Completed Projects

Major projects that have been completed and closed-out since adoption of the first Master Plan in 2009:

- Hunter Education Range and Cover Construction (2011)
- Rose-Iris Range - Main Entrance Improvements (2011)
- New Rose-Iris Range Storage Facilities (2011)
- Road Widening Between Rose-Iris and Practical Pistol/Cowboy Action Range (2011)
- Sporting Clays Handicapped Accessibility Improvements (2012)
- Rose-Iris Range - New Restrooms (2012)
- Shotgun Range - New Clubhouse (2012)
- High Power Range - New Office/Storage Box at 900 Yard Line (2012)
- Rose-Iris Range - Centerfire Reactive Plinking Range (2013)
- Shotgun and Cowboy Gate Replacement (2013)
- High Power Range - New Flag Road (2013)
- Installation of Electronic Card Gate Access System (2014)
- Pistol Bays - New Bunchgrass Rifle Area (2014)
- Pistol Bays - New Additions (2014)
- High Power Range - New 400 and 500 Yard Firing Lines (2015)
- Rose-Iris Range Gate replacement (2015)

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