

From: Matney, Julie
Sent: Friday, July 08, 2016 1:50 PM
To: Cole, John <John.Cole@portlandoregon.gov>; Wright, Sara <Sara.Wright@portlandoregon.gov>
Cc: Roth, Emily <Emily.Roth@portlandoregon.gov>; Hendrickson, Nancy <NANCY.HENDRICKSON@portlandoregon.gov>; Walkiewicz, Marie <Marie.Walkiewicz@portlandoregon.gov>; Guderyahn, Laura <Laura.Guderyahn@portlandoregon.gov>
Subject: Peninsula Canal Trail

John and Sara,

BES and PP&R would like to make a recommendation to the Planning and Sustainability Commission regarding the Peninsula Canal Trail alignment.

Peninsula Canal is home to one of the largest remaining populations of native western painted turtles in the state of Oregon (Conservation Plan for Native Turtles in the Columbia Slough, 2012 Oregon Wildlife Institute). The western painted turtle is identified as "Sensitive-Critical" by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Therefore, the importance of Peninsula Canal to the present and future conservation of western painted turtles in the Portland Metro region is paramount. Western painted turtles are very sensitive to recreational impacts. Regardless of the alignment of the trail, a trail along Peninsula Canal will have a negative impact on the turtle population.

The Lower Willamette Turtle Working Group includes representatives from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Metro, City of Portland, Oregon State Parks, Clean Water Services, Port of Portland, and Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation. In 2012 the Working Group wrote a letter (attached) to Metro, Portland Parks and Recreation, and the Port of Portland. The letter voices the Working Groups' concerns regarding the negative impact the planned trail and resulting recreation would likely have on the native turtles present in Peninsula Canal and recommendations to minimize such impacts.

If the trail must be constructed, constructing it on the lowest flank of the levee (see attached map), avoiding line-of-sight to the waterway, would lessen the impact on the turtle population. Portland Parks and Recreation (per 6/6/16 conversation with Emily Roth) approves of this recommendation to move the trail alignment to the lowest point on the levee. Also, for your information, the most recent version of "Metro Trails Inventory" layer on the hub shows the northern part of the trail at the bottom of the levee, along Port of Portland property.

Julie Matney : [City of Portland Environmental Services](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/environmental)
(503) 823-2774 : julie.matney@portlandoregon.gov

Lower Willamette Valley Turtle Working Group

July 18, 2012

To: Leif Anderson, Metro
Emily Roth, Portland Parks & Recreation
Travis Ruybal, Portland Parks & Recreation
Robert Spurlock, Metro
Mark Witsoe, Port of Portland

From: Lower Willamette Turtle Working Group

RE: Sensitive turtle populations and the planned Peninsula Canal Trail

On June 7, 2012 Metro trails planning staff met with the Lower Willamette Turtle Working Group (LWTWG) to discuss the trail planning process and specifics related to the development of the Peninsula Canal Trail in northeast Portland. This collaborative meeting resulted in productive information sharing and identification of opportunities to better align trail and natural resource regional priorities, including conservation of Oregon's native turtles.

Peninsula Canal is home to regionally significant turtle populations. This letter identifies several concerns LWTWG members have related to trail development along the Canal and prioritized recommendations aimed at avoiding and minimizing potential adverse impacts of the planned trail development on Oregon's turtles.

The western painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta bellii*) and the western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*) are Oregon's two native turtle species and are classified by ODFW as "Sensitive-Critical". Both turtle species are considered semi-aquatic in nature, seeking out quiet backwater habitats with ample sun exposure and basking structures. Nesting occurs on the land in sunny, sparsely vegetated soils near suitable aquatic habitats. In recent years, research and field surveys have determined that Peninsula Canal is home to one of the largest remaining populations of western painted turtles in the state of Oregon (Conservation Plan for Native Turtles in the Columbia Slough, 2012 Oregon Wildlife Institute). These surveys have confirmed multiple age classes are present at the site, indicating the turtle populations are breeding and nesting successfully. Relatively few reproducing native turtle populations have been confirmed in the Willamette Valley, especially in urban areas where most upland habitats adjacent to suitable aquatic turtle habitat have been subject to development. Thus, the importance of Peninsula Canal to the present and future conservation of western painted and western pond turtles in the Portland Metro Region is further elevated.

The City of Portland and Metro have been working to close many gaps in the 40-Mile Loop Trail system. Our understanding is the trail alignment along Peninsula Canal dates as far back as the 40-Mile Loop Master Plan developed in 1983. While the LWTWG recognizes the multiple benefits of trails including access to nature, the planned alignment along Peninsula Canal raises serious concerns relative to native turtle conservation.

The planned alignment is on the top/centerline of the levee along the east side of the canal. Five easements are required to move to the design phase and four of these are acquired. The final easement needed is from the Port of Portland along the north end of the canal.



Western Painted Turtles in Peninsula Canal May 2011. Photo Credit: Oregon Wildlife Institute

LWTWG members are in agreement that the planned trail and resulting recreation would likely have many negative impacts on native turtles present in Peninsula Canal. As a result of surrounding land uses, this water channel has had essentially no public access to date, allowing turtles to prosper un-disturbed. Western painted and western pond turtles are very sensitive to recreational impacts. These species are relatively defenseless and depend on camouflage, hiding, and relatively undisturbed places to survive. When threatened, their main behavioral response is to quickly dive into the water. As a result of this flight response, natural behaviors/functions are disrupted, primarily thermoregulation, digestion, egg development, and shell health. Disturbance resulting from trails and recreation are considered a major threat to turtle conservation in the Portland Metro Area (Conservation Plan for Native Turtles in the Columbia Slough, 2012 Oregon Wildlife Institute). Expected negative effects from the new trail include:

- Loss of available nesting habitat from habitat conversion (e.g., conversion of existing gravel road to paved surface)
- Increased disturbance / interruption of basking behavior resulting from walkers, runners, and bikers causing repeated flushing of turtles from basking logs
- Increased interference with nesting attempts from trail users
- Disturbance from dogs of basking and nesting efforts
- Direct mortality from dogs (note: this has been documented in Portland)
- Disturbance from presence of anglers
- Direct injury and mortality from fishing by-catch
- Disturbance from boaters including kayakers
- Increased risk of illegal trapping and capture / removal from the wild
- Increased risk of exposure to non-native invasive turtles (e.g., red-eared slider) resulting from increased access

The cumulative effects of the planned trail have the potential to have significant negative impacts on these important remnant populations of native turtles. In order to avoid, minimize and reduce impacts to native turtles, the LWTWG would like to make the following recommendations. These are in prioritized order, with the most productive actions listed first.

Recommendations:

1. Consider an alternate route for a north-south connector trail between the Slough trail and the Marine Drive trail.
2. Recognizing that four out of five easements have already been finalized, the Port of Portland easement provides the best opportunity to take meaningful action to reduce impacts on the turtles. Eliminating and minimizing line-of-sight between the open water turtle habitat and the trail is the best way to avoid the myriad impacts listed above. For the length of levee within the Port tax lot, we propose dropping the trail down onto the east flank of the levee low enough to eliminate line-of-sight to the canal. This will create a “turtle refuge” along approximately 1000 feet of canal at the north end. The intended result would be to have a small portion of the channel free from continual disturbance. See attached map.
3. Although the easement has been finalized with the City of Portland Bureau of Maintenance, we suggest initiating a conversation with that facility about implementing the same design described in Recommendation 2 above for the length of their property. This would extend the north end turtle refuge another 800 feet.
4. Although the easement has been finalized with the Riverside Golf and Country Club, we recommend re-initiating a conversation with that facility about implementing the same design described in Recommendation 2 above for the length of their property. The levee would then be able to provide a visual barrier at the south end of the trail.

5. Whenever the trail is on top of the levee, we recommend a solid fence 6-12 inches from the ground be installed to provide a visual barrier while trail users are on top of the levee. One lookout point or a couple of wildlife blinds could be constructed in the fence to allow for wildlife viewing.

The LWTWG first and foremost desires that Recommendation 1 be implemented. In an urban area, it is extremely significant that native species classified as “Sensitive-Critical” not only exist, but are successfully breeding. Good stewardship of rare and sensitive resources is the only way to maintain the relatively high level of biodiversity Portland has experienced thus far within its boundaries. While allowing residents to experience nature is very important, it is equally important to consider the species that will be ‘experienced’. If the populations declines, stop breeding, or leave, user’s experiences will be less meaningful.

Understanding that there has been much work to come to this point for this particular trail project, the LWTWG feels that implementing Recommendations 2-5 above may be an acceptable alternative. Re-aligning the trail as much as possible while installing solid fencing next to the trail that would be installed on top of the levee would alleviate some of the visual disturbance issues. However, the LWTWG would like to reiterate that this alternative would not address the other indirect impacts to the population such as illegal capture, fishing by-catch, disturbance from dogs, release of pet turtles (disease and competition), and human off-trail disturbance. Cumulatively, these indirect impacts, with road kill mortality, have already led to the drastic decline of native turtles across the region.

Regardless of which trail alignment is constructed, we suggest the following Best Management Practices be implemented during the construction phase to reduce short-term negative impacts to native turtles in the area:

Construction Best Management Practices:

1. Reduce the size/width of this segment of trail if possible.
2. Build the trail of compact gravel instead of asphalt.
3. Construct the trail during winter months, while turtles are hibernating to reduce the number of turtles that will flee the site from sound, vibrations, and visual disturbance.
4. Use a qualified biologist to survey for turtle nests along the alignment before construction begins or install silt fencing or other barriers in mid-May to prevent turtle nesting within the construction area.
5. Install visual barriers (e.g., plantings) well before turtles emerge in the spring (typically March-April).

In addition, we recommend the following actions be implemented as part of the long-term site operations/maintenance plan to further reduce impacts to native turtles after the trail is built.

Recommendations for Trail Operation / Maintenance:

1. No dogs in this segment of trail.
2. No fishing allowed on canal.
3. Adequate signage displaying reasons for the above restrictions.
4. Closing the trail during the most critical turtle breeding/basking/nesting season (March 15th to August 1st).

The LWTWG is aware that any and all design considerations for this trail must meet with approval from the Multnomah County Drainage District (MCDD) because this is a federally certified levee. It's worth noting that in 2008, MCDD removed cottonwood trees along this levee to comply with federal standards. The presence of native turtles was known at the time and the District proactively placed the trees in the channel for basking habitat. This highlights the fact that local agencies have invested in turtle conservation at this site.

The LWTWG also acknowledges that some of our recommendations may be in conflict with trail designs intended to provide the ideal user experience.

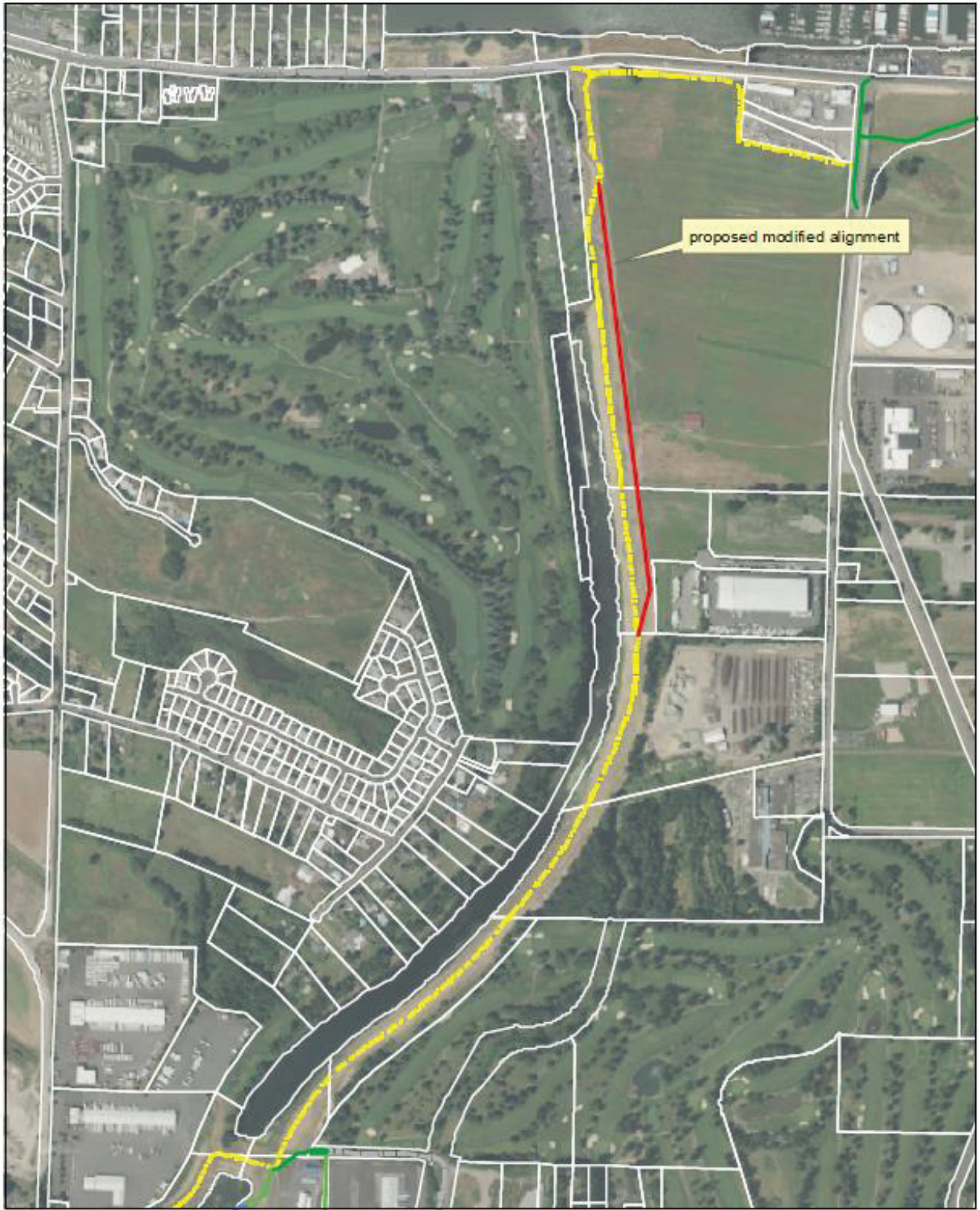
If you have any questions about the above comments or recommendations please contact me or another member of the LWTWG.

Sincerely,

Susan Barnes
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Co-Chair, Lower Willamette Turtle Working Group

CC: Dave Hendricks, MCDD
Byron Woltersdorf, MCDD

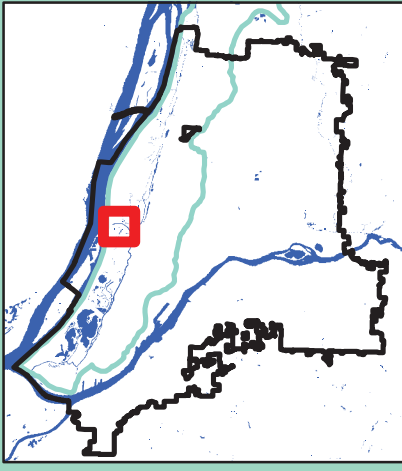
The Lower Willamette Valley Turtle Working Group was formed by agencies and organizations with an interest in conserving Oregon's native turtles and their habitats. Members include Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Metro (including the Oregon Zoo), the City of Portland, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department, Clean Water Services, City of Gresham, Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District, the Port of Portland and Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation.



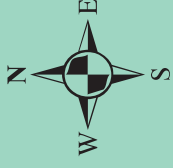
DRAFT

Proposed alternate trail alignment
Lower Willamette Turtle Working Group
6.29.12





Portland Parks and Recreation
and Bureau of Environmental Services
Proposed Peninsula Canal Alignment



1 inch = 825 feet



City of Portland, Oregon

July 6, 2016