



Informal Briefing to Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission
Chris Hathaway, Deputy Director
RE: West Hayden Island
August 14, 2012

My name is Chris Hathaway. I'm the Deputy Director for the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership and a member of the West Hayden Island Advisory Committee.

The Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership is one of 28 National Estuary Programs across the country. We implement on-the-ground actions – funding, coordinating, and implementing habitat restoration projects, monitoring ecosystem conditions, reducing toxic contaminants, and providing stewardship opportunities – particularly to students.

Our organizational approach is science based, collaborative, and focused on positive actions that can be implemented to protect and restore the lower Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to the Pacific Ocean.

I was asked a few days ago to speak to you today about the WHI process from an ecological perspective. I want to make a few key points.

West Hayden Island's ecological value cannot be over-estimated. The island sits near the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia River's and it's shallow water habitat and riparian forest edge provide critical resting and rearing areas for all Columbia River Basin salmon as they make their way through an otherwise developed stretch of the river. The interior includes a rich and complex diversity of high quality habitats for west painted turtles, bald eagles, dozens of songbird species and other wildlife.

Our organization's continues to belief that West Hayden Island's highest and best purpose lies in its restoration and conservation and its ability as an intact, 800 acre lower Columbia River island to provide ecological benefits to the region's residents, wildlife, and fish. The mix of size, location, and habitat complexity, diversity and health makes WHI truly special.

Both the Port and the City's current mitigation proposals fail to fully mitigate for the ecological losses associated with annexation and eventual development, much less meet the Advisory Committee goal of net increase.

The ecological success of the project hangs on the mitigation package. The City has put forward a robust and scientifically valid mitigation proposal, yet it still falls short, and appears unacceptable to the Port. The Port's mitigation package is not even in the ballpark, and unacceptable to the City. This project should not move forward without a comprehensive mitigation package – one that can be agreed upon by the City, the Port and the environmental community. Moving forward with competing mitigation packages is not a valid option – it violates the integrity of the Advisory Committee process and the City Council's stated goal.

Permanent protection of the 500 acres of open space is critical to the project. Concrete plans for establishing permanent protection need to be established and implemented as part of this process. A variety of options exist that will allow the Port the flexibility they need while also ensuring that the 500 acres are permanently protected as part of the annexation agreement.

Enhancement, maintenance and monitoring are critical preserving the ecological function of the 500 acres as well as any off-site mitigation.

Lopping off 300 acres for marine development will greatly lessen the island's internal resilience to invasive species and other threats. To ensure the 500 acres continues to function at a high level, and that any mitigation succeeds, will require long term enhancement, maintenance and monitoring commitments. These commitments need to be addressed as part of the process.

Natural resources should be protected until the Port has a development plan, and an approved project. No pre-development prep work that impacts WHI natural resources should be allowed to take place. WHI is too ecologically valuable to impact now for a development that is at best years down the road.

Strong meaningful BMPs are necessary to protect the environment during facility construction and operation. If an uncertain development plan, and long timelines precludes the development of specific, measurable, environmental bmps now, then a process should be established to ensure they are developed and implemented at the time of development.

Finally, we all want thorough yet efficient planning processes that eventually conclude. However, the upcoming Advisory Committee and WHI timeline is unrealistic and unfair to Advisory Committee members and the community. There remain significant policy differences in the zoning code and IGA. No development is imminent. And we are talking about the most important ecological parcel of land in the metro region. 800 acres of critical riverine island habitat.

The Port, the City, and the Advisory Committee have worked hard and well on this project. We appreciate the Port's willingness to engage and to fully participate. Ultimately however, the City has the right and responsibility to ensure that this project benefits the public good, that it benefits the citizens of Portland. More work remains to be done, much more work, before we get there.

Respectfully,



Chris Hathaway
Deputy Director
Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership