

Lot 1 and Nichols Basin Development Concepts
Hood River Valley Residents Committee
August 2013

Back to the Future: Recreating the historic Hood River delta



Before the Bonneville Dam, the Hood River joined the Columbia through a complex delta of braided stream channels flanked by shorelines dense with vegetation and mature cottonwood trees. It was heaven for fish. We can't go back to that time, but we can create something at Nichols Basin that mimics most of the habitat function of the original delta.

While far from a natural site, the fish experts at ODFW, NMFS, Bonneville Power, Hood River Watershed



Group and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs all agree: the Basin represents an outstanding habitat restoration opportunity. Between Bonneville and The Dalles the Columbia is an almost unrelenting channel of hard-edged riprap. In this stretch of the river, our basin is a nearly unique off-channel refuge and rearing site for migrating juveniles, making it a prime location for enhancement.

In 2010, the Port convened a Technical Advisory Committee to come up with habitat improvement ideas (see next page). We encourage the Port to reassemble this group and to reach out to other possible partners. In our conversations with these

agencies and groups, they have expressed not just enthusiasm, but a willingness to commit technical expertise and money towards the project.

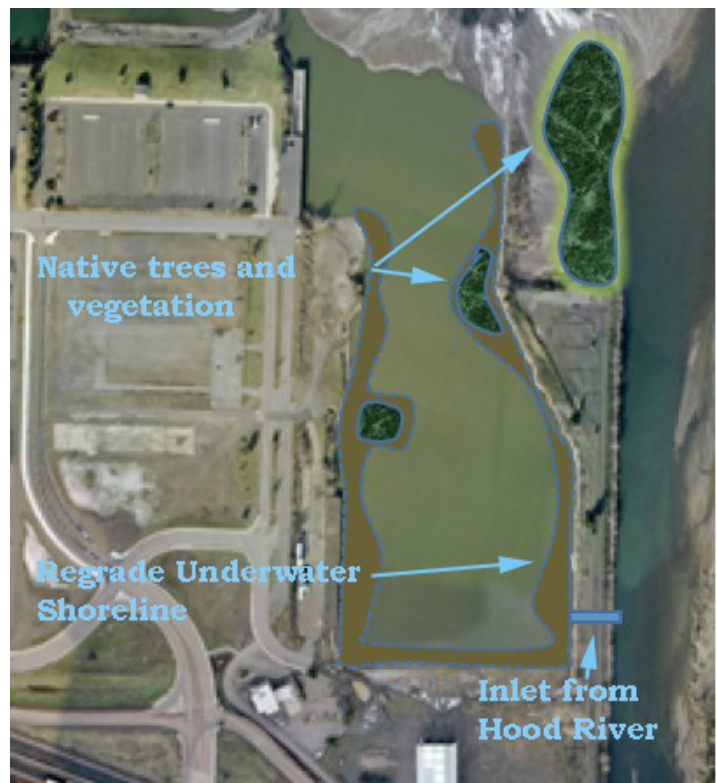
Along with the good we can do for the environment, it's also worth thinking about the good the environment can do for us. The Gorge is full of beautiful natural places but there is something incredibly inspiring about the idea of having one of them just two minutes walk from downtown Hood River. Recreating some version of the original delta landscape also speaks to a human need. Whether a worker on lunch break, a kid on a kayak or a weary driver pulling off I-84, a restored Basin will be a refuge for us too.

- Five Endangered Species Act listed runs of steelhead, Chinook and Coho salmon spawn in the Hood River
- ODFW characterizes the Hood River populations as being "high or very high" risk of extinction in the next 100 years
- Today's wild salmon runs throughout Columbia Basin are estimated at just 5% of historic levels.



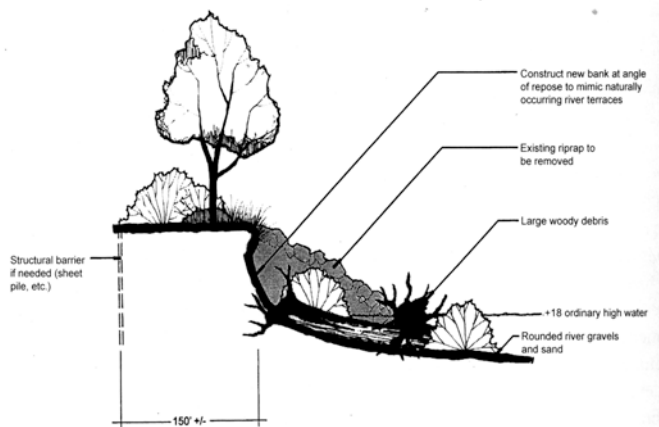
Concept Plan for Nichols Basin and the Southern Sandbar

- Perforate the Spit Road separating the Hood River and Basin to improve flow, temperature and water quality
- Create shallow water habitat along shorelines by adding fill in some places and sculpting new coves in others
- Re-vegetate the shore with native species, including trees to shade the water
- Let fallen and washed up trees decompose in place
- Bring in partners to provide technical expertise, regulatory guidance and funding opportunities
- Develop a management master plan so that world class recreation and excellent natural habitat can peacefully co-exist



Fish vs. Humans?

But will it work? Can a playground for humans also be a nursery for juvenile salmonids? Many large cities, including Portland and Seattle, have shown that it is possible to integrate significant human activity and meaningful river restoration. Even in those intensely urbanized environments, studies monitoring the effects of restoration projects have shown tangible and measurable wildlife improvements. The Basin also benefits from the seasonality of use by fish; the fish like it best in the cooler, higher pool months of fall, winter and spring, while we humans like it in the summer when it's hot.



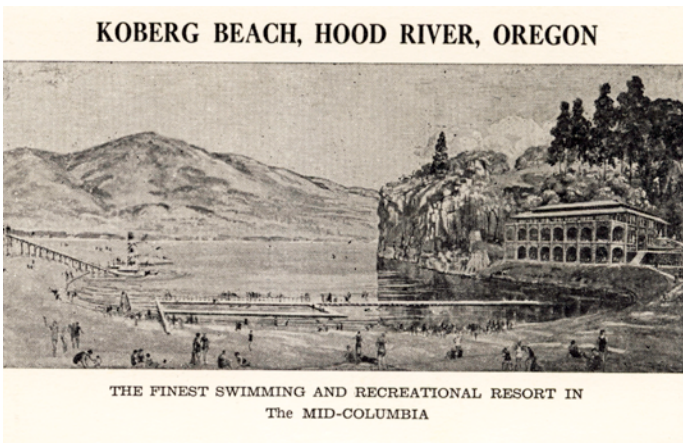
Case Study: Port of Bellingham

The Weldcraft Boatyard was a site not unlike Nichols Basin: an abandoned boatyard contaminated by years of industrial use but located in a waterway considered essential habitat for listed salmon. The project integrated sediment cleanup, habitat restoration and upland property development. For the habitat work, the Port collaborated with twelve different federal, state, local and tribal agency and non-profit partners including the Army Corps who created 2 acres of shallow marine habitat benches for free with the fill from the Corps' regularly scheduled navigation dredging work. In 2005, the American Association of Port Authorities presented Bellingham a national award for environmental mitigation.

The Port of Bellingham also created new public water access and improved habitat at the Marine Park beach where they removed 5,600 tons of concrete and replaced it with a 300-foot gently sloping sand and cobble beach. This project won the 2009 "Best Restored Beach" award from the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association.



Once upon a time - from about 1915 to about 1950 - a splendid outdoor resort and giant dance hall existed at Koberg Beach. It didn't just offer exhilarated fun, it offered it in a setting with a certain grandeur. It was a special place where memories were made. Those who visited Koberg as kids remember it with wistful affection. 2013 is very different from the early 20th Century. Our times will dictate a different aesthetic style but the spirit of Koberg -of a magical, beloved place- should pervade the design of the new park along the shore of Nichols Basin.



MAKE IT BIG ENOUGH. The population of the city is expected to double in the next 25 years. The park should be sized to meet future needs, not just today's. On a summer day, many of the current water access sites are already near capacity. We especially lack adequate beach area. We suggest expanding the park section to the western edge of 1st Street.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION. A beautiful site won't be used if it doesn't work, and utility makes a beautiful site that

much more beautiful. When designing the beaches and docks, consult the experts. Talk to people like Todd Anderson and Steve Gates who have real world experience. Much of the shore of the Basin will be devoted to water access and the challenge will be how to get people and their gear efficiently, safely and pleasurably in and out of the water. Apart from including a limited amount of drop-off parking and ADA access, we don't think this means turning the shoreline into a parking lot. Conveniently transferring equipment from a vehicle to the river is a design problem that has a more creative solution than cars down at Slackwater Beach.

PADDLESPOUT CENTER. The Basin's off-channel, wind protected location makes it an ideal spot for a dedicated SUP and Kayak center with lessons and rentals as well as public launches. Adding SUP/kayak storage facilities will allow City residents to walk or bike to the Waterfront rather than driving with their equipment every time.

But also SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. . . The park should include elements to appeal to those who do not sail, kite or paddle. Locals and tourists come in all shapes, sizes, ages and income groups; the public spaces should serve that wide demographic.



Wish List:

- Generous paths with inspired landscaping and educational/informational signage
- Four season design which functions well during busy and quiet times. Consider some covered space.
- Flexible community gathering spaces—Town square? Space for the Saturday Market? Concert venue? Bocce ball court?
- Sidewalk cafes, ice cream stands integrated into the park or arranged along its edge (can be seasonal or pop-up businesses)
- Plentiful seating –with a good view and under a shade tree
- Public Art
- Dogs welcome



Stewardship + Innovation

Lot 1 is the most visible development in the city and the capstone project for the Waterfront Business Park. This is the place to be ambitious. With projects like the Halyard Building, the Port has taken a leadership role in incorporating good design and environmental stewardship into economic development. We encourage the Port to build upon those achievements by making Lot 1 a cutting-edge model of Low Impact Development. The Port can do well by doing good. Many businesses will be attracted to locating at the Waterfront (even if it is more expensive) because high quality green development aligns with their brand and values.

Efficient Land Use

The most important component of the Hood River Valley Residents Committee mission is protecting farm and forest land. One of the best ways to do that is by encouraging dense, efficient development within the Urban Growth Boundary. The current concept plan utilizes more than 50% of the land area for parking. We believe Lot 1 can be developed more intensively without sacrificing quality if the parking issue is dealt with more creatively. We suggest a two-fold approach: 1) getting cars off the waterfront by encouraging alternative transportation 2) getting the parking off the land by stacking it in a structured parking garage.



Developer bonuses for alternative transit. Bike spaces, van pool parking, car share spaces all decrease number of required parking spaces.

Peak pricing: Tourists should pay to park during the peak season. Businesses can purchase parking spaces for employees or incentivize employees to use alternate transportation and avoid that cost.

Improving multi-modal options to the waterfront: Work with ODOT and the City of Hood River to improve bike and pedestrian connections from downtown.

Parking Structures: The 5,000 sq. ft Herryty green roof is a demonstration project, designed to showcase the beauty and variety of green roofs as well as the numerous environmental benefits vegetated rooftops provide. Captures 70% of runoff.

Create a parking district with in-lieu program. Businesses within the district can pay a fee in-lieu of a parking space. The funding goes towards building a large parking structure. The district could be extended into downtown to alleviate parking congestion in the summer.



Mixed Use

While we appreciate the challenges of successful mixed use at the waterfront (the viability of creating a vibrant neighborhood in such a small area, the potential for conflicts between residential and industrial uses, and the possibility of “dark condos” owned by rich out-of-towners) we ultimately believe it is possible and desirable. We would encourage an overlay zone for the waterfront that allows residential within certain constraints. Residential uses should be subordinate to the prime function of the waterfront which is to provide employment and recreational lands. In keeping with that priority, the ground floor of every building should be restricted to industrial and commercial uses and the upper floors limited to a fixed percentage of residential (25%).

Green Infrastructure

Whether it goes by the name “Low Impact Development” or “green infrastructure” the goal is the same: to design intensely developed landscapes that are as ecologically performative as they were in their pre-development natural state. This means things like handling all storm water on-site with no run-off and high energy-efficiency standards to reduce CO2 emissions.

These ambitious goals have been adopted through regulatory and incentive programs by many large cities—Portland being a standout example—but not yet in small town Hood River. There are many good models out there. The Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) is a certification system similar to LEED but it applies to developments like college campuses and industrial parks that have a variety of complex components.

The Port has the ability to lead the way with this development. Many of these systems work best and most economically at scale. For instance, on-site storm water management through systems such as bio-swales can be challenging for a developer working with a single one-acre lot. But since the Port is coordinating the entire project, bio-swales to service the whole development can be incorporated into the public park spaces as landscape features rather than taking up room on individual developable lots.

There is a misconception that sustainability has to hurt, that it is about giving up quality of life for the greater good. But most green infrastructure practices actually increase quality of life. Extensive tree planting on Lot 1 will reduce urban heat effect, intercept up to 30% of rain before it becomes run-off, capture CO2 emission and provide comfortable shade for pedestrians.



Recommendations:

ASK THE PEOPLE.

Start a serious public involvement process, especially for the design of the park and shoreline. The Port is a public body with a public mission, it's important to reach out to your constituents to find out their priorities. Waterfront projects are often contentious, the public involvement process can be used to build consensus and defuse controversy. A project as complicated and time-consuming as this needs community buy-in, maybe even fundraising leadership like WCPA provided for the Waterfront Park. The community involvement process is where you start building that support.

BUILD THE PUBLIC SPACES FIRST.

While it might be tempting to start with building infrastructure like moving roads and utilities to create “shovel ready” lots, the Port will be more successful—higher quality private projects will get built more quickly— if you build the public spaces first. Just as at the Waterfront Park, this development will be amenity led. If the public spaces aren't built first, the uncertainty surrounding them—if, when and how they will be built—will act as a drag on the rest of the Lot 1 development.

PLAN NOW FOR MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS.

Money for capital improvements is much easier to find than money for operations and maintenance. During the planning process, the Port should also develop an operations funding plan, especially for the eventuality that the Port no longer has bridge revenue. Some operations expenses can be addressed in advance by requiring low maintenance design solutions. In the county, all our local government entities currently manage their own park properties and struggle with funding maintenance—explore a collaborative partnership with other entities that creates lower expenses through economies of scale. You may also need to look at revenue models. Parking and recreational user fees are an option. Another avenue would be a Business Improvement District where the property owners at the Waterfront pay an extra property tax levy to fund maintenance of the amenities their businesses, customers and employees benefit from.

Hood River Valley Residents Committee

HRVRC is the oldest local land-use watchdog group in the state. For nearly 40 years, our mission has been to preserve the valley's farm and forest land and the livability of its urban areas. For more information about our work: www.hrvrc.org

Board members Heather Staten and Nick Kraemer prepared this report. They are happy to answer questions and to forward a list of the resources/experts (fish biologists, storm water specialists, etc.) they consulted.

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**Thank you to the Hood River County History Museum
and Arthur Babitz for the use of their
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