

STAKEHOLDER MEETING LOYALHANNA LAKE & CONEMAUGH RIVER LAKE MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Thursday, March 30th, 2017

2:00 PM – 3:30 PM

Saltsburg River Hall - 313 Salt St, Saltsburg, PA 15681

When the meeting is over:

Participants will leave with an understanding of:

- The proposed changes to the Master Plan
- The comments made during the scoping period and how incorporated
- How to comment on proposed changes to the Master Plan

US Army Corps of Engineers Pittsburgh District will leave with:

- Feedback from the stakeholders on the proposed changes to the Master Plan
- Input for how we can improve process for future Master Plans

AGENDA

2:00 PM WELCOME

Overview of Meeting Objectives

Introductions

Presentation of Master Plan Process & Proposed Changes

Clarification Questions & Answers

Group Discussion & Feedback on Master Plan Changes

Group Discussion & Feedback on Master Plan Engagement Process

3:30 ADJOURN

The Public Open House will then take place from 4:00-7:30 PM.

NOTES

What we'd love to hear today:

1. How certain objectives connects to your interests.
2. Ways we could, through partnerships, achieve both yours and ours objectives.

Questions and Responses:

Q: Are the land use classifications just a proposed change in terminology or are there actually changes in how the land can be used?

A: For the most part, there was simply some lumping of what used to be different land use classes into broader categories. Only a few land use classification designations also changed how a parcel of land can be used. The 'lumping' of land use classifications also loosened some restrictions that may have existed on the prior land use categories. Now, with many different prior land use categories, lumped into larger categories, you'll find that more opportunities have been created for more passive recreation throughout. (For example, game management can now be used for low density recreation; whereas before land designated for game management could only be used for game management.)

Q: What can be done in these Environmentally Sensitive Area? Can we do education programs?

A: Environmentally Sensitive Area means there is limited or no development, but there certainly could be opportunities for education programs in those areas.

Q: Can people ride ATVs on any of these lands?

A: No, ATVs are not permitted to be ridden on any of Corps, granted and outreach lands. Prohibited by Title 36, property leased also restricts ATV usage.

Q: Where does the Conemaugh River go?

A: The Conemaugh River flows and forms the Kiskiminetas River, when which then flows into the Allegheny and then Ohio.

Q: Can the Corps with the Master Plan do a bit of forward thinking so that you've already assessed where certain types of projects may go with minimal impact? Could having done this pre-work could USACE then expedite a study/EA when a request does come in?

A: Projects that are covered under the Programmatic Environmental Assessment and FONSI for this Master Plan can be expedited through the NEPA process.. The Summary of Recommendations, found on our website and shared at the public meeting, indicates which of these projects would likely require additional analysis. There are, however, at least 18 other Federal laws and executive orders that must be considered for all requests. These other Federal compliance requirements cannot be waived and often have designated timelines built into the law. In the case of the Endangered Species Act, for example, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is legally allowed to take up to 10 weeks to provide a response. Early coordination with the Corps on requests is welcomed and will ensure timely completion of proposed projects. The Corps is able to provide a written determination that the request is feasible for location on Federal land, a list of compliance requirements, and cost estimate even if construction isn't planned for several years.

Q: How will sedimentation be addressed? Whose responsibility? If this is an action others can/should take on - Will the plan articulate those opportunities (i.e. which actions will need an outside project/partner or where further studies are required)?

A: Sedimentation is not directly addressed with the Master Plan Effort. An updated sedimentation study/survey was just completed in the early CY 2017. The results of the survey will be used to determine impact on storage capacity and water management. Budget packages for sedimentation removal will also be developed for future O&M budgets.

Q: What are the increases in acres between existing and proposed attributed to? Are any of the increases in acreage show in the tables provided indicative of physical increases in the amount of acres being used for a particular purpose?

A: The difference in total acreages is due to the change in mapping technology. The initial acreage measurements are products of inaccurate mapping in the past.

Q: Are you proposing any significant changes in the land use classifications?

No, based on the feedback we received during the public engagement process, we heard that the public wanted to better maintain what we have rather than change to new use or add additional facilities in new locations.

Q: What does 'additional coordination required' mean on the summary of recommendations table?

A: The slide being referenced is related to NEPA documentation and shows individual activities discussed in the Environmental Assessment. Additional coordination means that dependent upon the activity, additional coordination and documentation will be conducted, as appropriate, for future projects that are the result of this revised Master Plan. The District or partner requesting the new activity/project would perform additional site specific compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and obtain any required permits for specific future projects/actions. A NEPA analysis would also be conducted to identify which actions covered within the Master Plan EA may be classified as a categorical exclusion and not require another EA and FONSI, and which actions would require additional analysis under a tiered NEPA document.

Q: Are they stocking any streams in the Portage area?

A: Portage, PA is located approximately (35) miles upstream of Conemaugh Lake. Streams stocked with trout near Conemaugh Lake include Tom's Run and McGee Run, both located near Blairsville, PA.

Q: Have you had comments about wanting increased access to Conemaugh River Lake?

A: We've received comments about access at Aultman's Run and Bow Ridge. We'd like to improve access at that area. However, the only way we can do it is with a partner. We've approached potential partners but haven't found the right partner yet to do that.

Q: You've likely had comments and requests for improvements needed to the Bow Ridge Area (currently only for handicap only). Would you consider making changes to that area?

A: At this point, Bow Ridge is accessible by foot traffic to the public but the boat launch and vehicular access are only available to visitors with a disability who have applied for and received a permit. There is room in the Master Plan for changes to making this area open to vehicular traffic for the general public, however the capability to make those improvements is dependent upon the cost of capital improvements (namely road ways and safety concerns). At this point, the Corps is not proceeding with implementing changes to this area but the Corps will continue to work with communities to explore options for mutually beneficial development opportunities at Bow Ridge.

Comments from Attendees:

DCNR:

There is a disconnect and delay between Corps process and most granting & planning processes. Project can't be planned for until the grant funding is obtained. Unfortunately, when the grant money is obtained, it often has to be used within a certain time frame and the Corps' environmental and real estate process takes too long, resulting in that grant money no longer being able to be used.

Corps' Response:

The Corps is open to considering project requests at any time and can provide a tentative approval and compliance requirements upfront. These considerations can be used in the planning process and completed when grant funding is obtained.

Comment:

Gibson Thomas

A proposed trail and sewer line falls in the middle of the Environmentally Sensitive Area. They've asked the Corps to review the plans for the trail, but it's taking too long to receive Corps approval and accomplish the trail project.

Corps' Response:

This proposal has several complicating factors to address including a conflict with another land use request. The nature and timing of the request adds time to the review process. Note: Discussions at the Stakeholder Meeting with Gibson Thomas provided an opportunity to discuss those complicating factors not disclosed here.

Comment:

Main Line Canal Greenway

Large concern with sedimentation and its effect on boating in the area. In some areas, kayakers cannot even get out without being a foot or two in sediment.

Corps' Response:

Sedimentation is not directly addressed with the Master Plan Effort, but recent efforts, including a sedimentation study/survey will allow us to inform the creation of Budget packages for sedimentation removal for future O&M budgets.

Breakout Group Discussions:

Land Use Classifications

- The proposed sewer/trail project will realize improved benefits to water quality in the area
- Conemaugh – has non-motorized rules, however local EMS need to practice rescue missions using motorized craft. Can this be added into master plans? Note: Practice rescue operation missions already being done*
- Concern – with the way low density recreation areas are currently described, people might think primitive camping is allowed anywhere. How will you manage/clarify that?
- Virginia Farms – disposal area? What to do with garbage?
 - Idea: Launch volunteer programs
 - Idea: Can be brought to dumpsters
- Removing the unlimited horsepower allowance could be a good idea to change for safety concerns (Loyalhanna woodlands)
 - *Corps' Response:* We currently limit horsepower in particular areas around the lake with buoys. Results of a study on the limiting horse power and number of boats study was completed which will guide the appropriate implementation of horsepower guidelines for the lake.

Specific Projects to Discuss

- Loop @ Indiana Co. Park – Conemaugh WPT access; Bike Safety Signage

Things We Missed

- Be mindful of West Penn Bridge and how the sediment affects the trail. The bridge was JUST resurfaced and then the Corps allowed the water to go over it and wash it out.
 - *Corps' Response:* We will work to see if there are any solutions that aren't Operations and water management focused but might be addressed within the Master Plan and land use management. In particular, we will be looking at the safety requirements to see whether another type of trail barrier may be used that does not catch debris during the high pool, causing destruction to the bridge.
- New Alexandria Park has been officially renamed as 'Gray Wing Park'. We need to make sure this is reflected in any maps or mentions of the park in our materials.
 - *Corps' Response:* We will update our maps and any other Master Plan materials that mention the New Alexandria Park.

RESULTING ACTIONS BASED OFF QUESTION & COMMENTS:

Based on the comments received above, the tasks below will be further pursued by the Corps. Many of the other suggestions and questions above provided feedback on which items need to be clarified or expanded upon within the Master Plan.

- Look at the timeline for Real Estate to form a better estimate of time and effort it will take for particular kinds of projects. Work to establish clear requirements that fit most cases, so interested partners can prepare ahead of time.
- USACE should work to have real estate staff engaged in the discussion at these project meetings so that they are better informed.
- Better coordination with Partners at the Lake Manager level. For example at Loyalhanna Lake & Conemaugh River Lake, if Paul is kept in the loop, he can give Real Estate a heads-up that particular parcels or analyses need to be looked at. This could help jump start the process.
- Work to outline proposed initiatives/where particular kinds of projects might be allowed and where not allowed. So that when proposal comes in, USACE and those writing the proposal know what can or cannot be done and where. (Suggestion by DCNR)
- Our lands are not well marked, consider marking our lands better so visitors know when entering them.
- It would be worth asking permission of the Pittsburgh District again or also exploring the possibility of posting live camera information on the conditional and level of the lake to the Project Facebook page rather than the website.
- If we're to prioritize projects at Loyalhanna Lake and Conemaugh River Lake, it's clear that building and connecting trails are of large interest to our stakeholders.
- Look at Breakout Group Discussion Notes (above), including:
 - Clarify within Master Plan where primitive camping is or is not allowed. Could assume from the way described that primitive camping would be allowed throughout the low density recreation areas.
 - Address Safety Concerns
 - Talk more with contacts interested in protecting the West Penn Bridge to see if there are any solutions that aren't Operations focused but might be addressed within the Master Plan and land use management.
 - New Alexandria Park has been officially renamed as 'Gray Wing Park'. We need to make sure this is reflected in any maps or mentions of the park in our materials.
 - Add ongoing cooperation between local EMS and Lake Manager for mock rescue missions to ensure that this can be continued in the future
- Launch more frequent stakeholder groups meetings as proposed at the Stakeholder Meeting. It was requested (by the Coast Guard) that the attendees at the Stakeholder meeting be provided a list of contact information for all of the other attendees at the meeting. The continuation of periodic meetings was also requested by Derry Township Municipal Authority.