

PARKS

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reconfigure the parking lot to provide more greenspace, better stormwater management and improved traffic flow.”

Don't expect construction on either project to begin tomorrow, next year or perhaps ever.

“These are potential park improvements to be implemented over the next 15-20 years,” said Ian Matthews, a planner for the department who has been shepherding the project. “The plan does not guarantee funding or that the proposed facilities will be constructed.”

Overall, the plan contains \$12 million in suggested improvements, including developing additional ADA-qualified fishing and kayaking areas near the marina, as well as a fenced off-leash dog area, a boat fueling station, nature play area near the beach and expanding the concession building.

Improvements to the parks day use area, administrative area, the campground and the Little Alps development are also in the plan. Eight additional yurts and rehab of the two existing ones to create a yurt village are also suggested.

The primary aim of redevelopment at Minam is to reduce parking conflicts and address overcapacity issues during peak river use season. Proposed improvements include expansion of the main parking lot and construction of an overflow parking area.

“The gravel parking area north of Minam Station should be removed and the area restored to natural conditions, with equestrian parking relocated to the overflow parking lot,” the plan states.

Other improvements



Contributed graphic

The most extensive improvement projects at Wallowa Lake State Park would be made in the marina area.

COME AND SEE

A public meeting to discuss a Master Plan Update for State Parks in Wallowa County 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 20, at Joseph Community Center, 401 E. 1st St., Joseph. An advisory committee for the plan will meet to review the plan 2 p.m. the same day at Joseph Community Center.

The public is welcome to attend the advisory

committee meeting; however, only comments from the committee will be heard at this meeting. Comments from the public will be heard during the evening session.

The Draft Plan can be viewed at wallowastate-parksplan.com. Comments may be submitted in person at the public meeting, via the website or directly to OPRD at ian.mathews@oregon.gov.

could include picnic shelters near the river, a viewing

area and improvements to the Minam Station building. Those

improvements are pegged at more than a half-million dollars.

SEWER

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Many of those come as a result of Joseph's discharge of treated water into Prairie Creek. That discharge is going to continue to be problematic, according to City Engineer Brad Baird of Anderson Perry and Associates Inc.

“(DEQ requirements) are going to do nothing but get worse in the future,” Baird said. “As long as you discharge into a body of water, you're susceptible to future regulations.”

Just a few of the new requirements included lower limits for chlorine; new ammonia limits that mean the city would have to add an additional treatment step; and a new step of monitoring dissolved oxygen in the creek.

The city must also meet multiple deadlines for various plans, compliance tests and reports over the next few years — the first due March 31, 2019.

The issue has been on the city's radar for some time. One option: Building a lagoon large enough to store all the treated wastewater in fall, winter and spring and irrigate in summer — eliminating discharge into Prairie Creek.

Discharged water is already used as irrigation water in the summer, a practice that suits both agriculture and the city and will most likely continue and be expanded.

Most of the new DEQ requirements would be built into the new lagoon system.

The lagoon conversion project is estimated to cost \$3.8 to \$4.2 million. It has

another benefit. Oversight by the city will require a Level 1 operator, rather than a Level 2 operator.

Level 2 operators are in short supply and difficult to recruit.

Bottom line: Sewer rates will have to be raised. Current sewer rates are \$27.60 with a \$5 monthly surcharge, making it \$32.60 per month. To qualify for loans or grants the city would have to raise their rates to show they could meet debt service for loans.

The city has avoided raising rates significantly because of strong resident protest. It has managed to keep sewer costs fairly flat, said Baird.

Now they are faced with bumping the rates by \$10 or more. Exact amounts are unknown and will depend on the loan and grant packages available to the city.

“Keep in mind... you haven't really done a wastewater project in 22 years,” Baird told the city council. “It's typical for communities that haven't done anything to be faced with these new requirements. You'll take a one-time hit and then, hopefully, problem solved for 20 to 30 years.”

Baird said if the city chose to repair the existing system — given the age of the system — it's likely the equipment would need repair again.

“I don't think throwing good money after bad is a good choice,” said councilor member Teresa Sajonia. “It's not going to be fun raising the rates, but there's no choice.”

Council members authorized Baird to finish the wastewater report now that he has the final specs from DEQ and will proceed to apply for a funding package when that is done.

FOREST

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served as a cooperating agent, which is a tool the county used to be part of the conversation.

“I'm not saying that this worked exactly as it was supposed to — it didn't,” she said. “But we have been able to supply our opinion and analysis of things.”

In fact, she believes the county's status in the plan wasn't always taken into consideration and listed the lack of coordination by the U.S. For-

est Service as frustrating and a major concern.

The county has worked on its objections to the revision along with its Natural Resources Advisory Committee since the plan was released to the general public several weeks ago. She showed the massive revision plan with various sections marked with tabs.

For example, in the county's view, the socio-economic portion of the document seemed overly worried about possible scenarios decades into the future if timber harvests were substantially increased. Roberts

called the views “erroneous,” and said, “I have it listed under my complaints about the plan as crap.”

“They're worried that if they take more timber off the three forests than we're used to having for the last 20 years, we'll all become crazed wild animals and suffer the consequences,” she said.

The commissioner explained that the report said the release of significant amounts of timber would put affected communities into a boom-or-bust cycle as harvests would decline after about 20 years.

Roberts noted that the forests grow at a rate of 700 million board feet per year, and a harvest rate of 300 million board feet per year should be sustainable.

“What it says to me is that, ‘you're on the bottom rung of the ladder; we've shoved you down that far, and we don't want you to take a step to the second rung.’ It's insulting to the people who live and work in these counties, and it's insulting to anyone with a modicum of intelligence who reads it.”

Roberts said the plan is full

of potential economic benefits if all aspects of it are adopted, but the Forest Service added the caveat that it is also dependent on budgetary and regulatory conditions.

Darilyn Parry Brown, executive director of the Greater Hells Canyon Council, said her group plans to file objections to the plan as well.

“It's unacceptable that the plans double the volume of logging on our forests while removing all meaningful and enforceable protections for old growth, critical habitats, federally listed threatened spe-

cies, roadless areas and riparian zones,” she said.

Brown called the plans “bad news” for the area and said that enforceable standards to protect rare and threatened wildlife, old-growth trees, native species and roadless areas.

“The Blue Mountains contain important and increasingly rare roadless areas that are hot spots for biodiversity and important wildlife connectivity corridors,” she said. “Without enforceable protections, it is only a matter of time before they are gone forever.”

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See you next year, Sept. 6-7-8, 2019

Sondra Lozier and the Event Committee

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