

CORPS *from A1*

source project.

The Master Plan is part of the Willamette Valley Project, a system of 13 multi-purpose dams constructed between 1940 and 1969. The dams are all operated under a single system to manage water in the Willamette River Basin.

The 13 dams sit on six different watersheds, meaning the Corps will write six master plans in all.

“Cottage Grove Lake is unique in our system because the Army Corps manages all of the recreation sites,” said Environmental Stewardship Supervisor Wendy Jones. “At other lakes, that’s done in partnership with either the county, the state or other entities. And there’s about 130,000 visitors per year that visit this lake.”

Dorena is different in that Baker Bay Park and Marina is managed by Lane County Parks under a 25-year lease. The Bureau of Land Management manages the Row River Trail along the north side of Dorena Lake and there are estimated to be about 150,000 visitors annually at Dorena.

Recreation for Cottage Grove Lake includes sites such as Lakeside Park, Pine Meadows Campground, Wilson Creek Park and Shortridge Park. At Dorena Lake, they include Harms Park, Schwarz Campground, Baker Bay Park and Bake Stewart Park.

“There are 10 plants and animals that are either federally listed on a state list or otherwise rare,” said Jones. “And these habitats are not only important for those rare species, but also the game species and larger mammals, as well as the common species that we want to keep around. Some of the habitat restoration projects that we do involve

prescribed burning, or invasive plant removal.”

As far as cultural resources, the program aims at protecting, preserving or trying to avoid impacts to cultural resource sites, which could include artifacts or any sites that are important to tribes, as well as historic resources.

Both Cottage Grove and Dorena dams, completed in 1942 and 1949 respectively, are considered historic resources.

“They are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places,” said Jones.

Dustin Bengtson, deputy operations project manager for the Willamette Valley Project, said that the primary purpose of the dams is flood risk management.

“We take our Dam Safety Program very seriously,” said Bengtson. “We’re constantly looking at the condition of these structures, understanding the risk and communicating that. And so, we’ll be rolling out with an update to the national inventory of dams that talks about the condition of these dams, the risks and how we’re managing those.”

The Corps’ management of Dorena and Cottage Grove lakes includes a wide array of responsibilities such as recreation, water resources, vegetation, mineral, cultural, recreation and fish and wildlife.

For the purposes of the Master Plan, public input was limited to these responsibilities.

Corps members noted that master planning does not directly address water quality, water supply, water level management, hydro-power, navigation, shoreline management or flood risk management. These topics are addressed in other planning documents such as the Environmental Impact Statement.

“That Environmental Impact Statement is where

we are looking at how we operate and maintain our dams and facilities over the next 20 years or so,” said Bengtson. “That is where we are looking at how we operate the system better in terms of water storage and water use for the variety of benefits and legal requirements that we have in the system.”

There are several federal acts to be considered in planning such as the National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Eagle Protection Act and National Historic Preservation Act.

The Corps’ plans for Dorena and Cottage Grove lakes were last completed in 1989. In the last several decades, there have been changes in land use, environmental conditions, legislation and how people recreate, which prompted the Corps to revisit the management plans and conduct the public input meetings.

Public Input

During public input on Saturday, the room was broken into groups and each was tasked with identifying different elements of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis.

Groups who focused on strengths of the lakes pointed to swimming, boating and fishing recreation and the quality of facilities. The Row River Trail and its facilities also received good marks as well as human interactions along the trail.

In all, nature lovers seemed pleased with the management of these aspects and spoke highly of camping opportunities in

the parks.

On weaknesses, participants noted safety issues such as instances of break-ins or vandalism and hoped to see illegal camping and fires dealt with. Trash dumping and the need to upgrade some facilities were brought up while others expressed a desire to address water access for kayakers and paddleboarders as well as improve boat ramp situations.

For opportunities, group members came up with ideas for education and outreach which could extend to local schools. Many comments pointed to the possibility of enhancing trails and public access while finding ways to improve recreation facilities.

Some questioned if there could be better water management to create more wetlands.

Under threats, the most common concerns were around water levels. Next to that, participants commented on maintenance and funding levels with the Corps. Other concerns were homelessness, illegal camping and environmental impacts causing loss of habitat.

Breakout groups next held focused discussions on natural resources, cultural resources and recreation, pinpointing areas on maps which represented “Rights, Blights and Might,” or positive aspects, negative aspects and future possibilities.

Out of these discussions, participants pointed to the need to put aside money to begin building new infrastructure and maintain aging facilities.

Many raised the need for wildlife preservation and animal habitat protection, along with dealing with litter and preventing a loss

of land value. One community member suggested assigning stewards to take responsibility for sections of roads or lakes to pick up the trash and keep the environment clean.

Safety issues came up again, mainly regarding homeless camping around the edge of the lakes. Dovetailing with this, fire safety remained a major concern.

Others discussed the idea of including more signage about natural and historical resources along the Row River Trail and wondered if old sites of settlements now in the lake bed could be marked.

Another group rose the issue of managing invasive vegetation and some talked about dealing with low water levels by building berms to keep water which could offset the acres of dead land in summertime.

Parking along the near shore of Cottage Grove Lake was also pointed out as being very dangerous and some raised concerns about mercury levels in the water.

From its Creswell meeting, the Corps shared that some of the main topics included improved/additional bike infrastructure at both lakes, finding more opportunities for interpretive learning and historical signage at both lakes and there was a general concern about water levels and boating infrastructure.

The input collected during the sessions will inform the Corps’ creation of new documents over the next year. Plan development has a scheduled deadline of September 2022, after which public review meetings will be conducted that October. A public comment period will also be held between October and November 2022. The final plan is to be delivered in May 2023.

Though the public sessions have concluded for this year, those interested in providing their own feedback for the current participation period may still do so until Dec. 10, 2021, by emailing info@coastforkplan.com.

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