

May 27, 2025

The following comments address the Draft Spring 2025 proposed projects for POW LLA's Long-term Plan. I attended the April 30 workshop at the Craig Ranger District, and appreciated the informative presentations and face-to-face time with staff. I am thankful for the opportunity to comment on these and other projects that impact public lands on Prince of Wales Island; lands I care about and use for subsistence and recreation.

Recreation

I was encouraged to hear that the Sunnahae Trail extension to the alpine is finally going to happen, after being told that it would in 2022. This trail extension has been long awaited, as it is one of the most used and beautiful trails on POW. The mucky stretch from the rock turnaround gets worse each year, so we are all looking forward to its completion.

I was happy to hear about the added canoe launches and improvements to the Sarkar Canoe Route, another well-used and popular trail system. This may be a trail head where a kiosk with a map and sign-in might be useful, as this is most often a multi-day excursion.

One Duck Trail is another well used trail because of its access to extensive alpine. I would like to see access to this alpine area for non-motorized use only. Hopefully the One Duck Trail rebuild will last more than a few years.

I saw no plan for maintenance of Canoe Pt. Trail, another well-used site accessed by boat. There are always blow-down issues, but the short trail extension beyond where the stairs used to go down to the creek was washed out. My feeling is that the stairs should have been rebuilt, as people are going to make their way down to the creek anyway, creating their own pathways with added erosion. I haven't been out this year, but will. I'm hoping the rotten and vandalized kiosk was removed. There's really no reason to sign into a trail that is less than half a mile.

I did not see Hatchery Creek trail improvements on the long-term plan. On a recent walk out to the falls, I noticed some trail work had been done along the boardwalk, but the viewing platform and especially the stairs to the creek are all but rotten.

I have heard of more local folks doing the Honker Divide the last couple of years, so that trail, including the cabin and portages may need some maintenance. I didn't see it on the long-term plan list.

I had hoped that deferred maintenance of other existing trails, signage, cabins, and other well-used recreation areas on POW would have been prioritized over the El Cap project, but now that it is mostly complete, hopefully these deferred maintenance projects can now be the focus. I wasn't clear why El Cap received such

priority when other projects around the island were in need. The new trail to the cave is a great improvement as is the viewing platform. I also enjoyed the cave tour. I'm not so sure about the crushed carbonate at the trailhead and parking area, as it tracks white dust pretty much everywhere.

Some of the maintenance work requires simple and relatively inexpensive fixes like cleaning, repairing, replacing, or removing rotten trailhead and trail signs, sign-in kiosks, boardwalks, viewing platforms, and road signs. These rotten and degraded structures really send the wrong message, namely that we don't care about the condition of our recreation areas and our island. This is not the message we want to send to residents or visitors using these public lands.

Reaching out to the public for photos and information from recreation sites in need of maintenance might be helpful as would recruiting volunteers. Areas I have visited recently that could use some "sprucing" up include some of the signs to Luck Lake, the Dog Salmon bear viewing area, Trocadero Trail, Hatchery Creek viewing platforms, Cable Creek sign, boardwalk, and platform, signs along the Stanley Creek Road, signs along the Polk Road, and sections of the Eagle Creek trail to Balls Lake and Eagle Creek Campground. I'm sure a group of interested trail and recreation users could meet and come up with a more expansive list.

I'm not a fan of adding more signs, just taking care of the ones that exist. I did take a trip out to Salt Chuck mine. It's a cool spot, once you get there. The interpretive signs and remaining artifacts and old equipment from the mine are super interesting. The signage on the way to the Salt Chuck mine site is very old and somewhat nebulous. There has been a lot of regrowth since the first signs were put up next to clear cuts many years ago, and they were mostly just brown camping signs with a tent on them with no real information or indication of where to go, especially when you get to the turnoff to go down to the gate itself.

I was surprised to see the upgrades to the Harris River Campground. During early POWLLA discussions there were comments made that the Harris River Campground was rarely used and that there were talks of decommissioning it. It is a nice campground, and hopefully being better utilized by the public. Perhaps immediate concerns, such as toilet upgrades, can be addressed without spending too much time and money on a campground that is not heavily used.

Eagle's Nest campground and Ball's Lake do get used throughout the year and I realize that it, as well as other campgrounds, involve cabin and toilet maintenance as well as trail work. All are a constant battle with the elements, with too few recreation staff members and funding needed to address these needs. I hope the future means hiring more employees dedicated to recreation. The real sense I get is that recreation will need to do more with less, which is unfortunate, especially now as we are seeing more visitors to the island. A coordinated effort to utilize volunteers might assist with some of the needed repairs and maintenance, as will reliance on funding from other sources.

There does need to be some public discussion about potential conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. With more people recreating in both summer and winter months, these conflicts may increase, and should be addressed before trails are designed, cleared, or brushed out either by volunteers with a specific use in mind or FS employees. Hopefully some tried and true approaches to user conflicts can be applied to recreation sites on POW so that both motorized and non-motorized users can enjoy their public land. I am thankful for some of the road closures to motorized vehicles, my favorite being the Cutthroat Road for cross country skiing and the 19 mile road. I also hope that a few alpine areas can be designated as non motorized access, perhaps those with existing foot trails such as the One Duck Trail, and certainly Sunnahae should remain non-motorized.

Watershed Restoration

At the workshop I heard encouragement that some restored watersheds had Watershed Condition Framework surveys available to the public for review. It will be helpful to review the assessment of the restoration work that was done on USFS designated Priority watersheds like the Harris, Twelvemile, Staney, and Luck. It's been quite some time, perhaps over 10 years since these restoration projects were initiated. The public needs to know that the work done on these watersheds did in fact help to restore them. The results of the surveys will go a long way to "selling" some of these expensive and heavy handed projects to the public.

Invasive Species Management

There has been longstanding opposition to the use of herbicides on Prince of Wales Island, especially any type of broadcast spraying. The feeling is that once herbicide application is allowed, however site and/or plant specific, it opens the door to continued and expanded use. The public should be informed of any chemical application to control invasive plants once the surveys are complete and a plan is in place. I did see that there has been ongoing invitations for the public to take part in public weed pulls, but as yet have not seen notification of such pulls. A private group on the island has organized a few of their own weed pulls, perhaps coordination with them is a possibility in the near future.

Fish Habitat Improvements

Red pipe replacements give hope to repairing some of the wrongs of past logging practices and road building. These projects are expensive, time consuming, and do for a time disturb areas. As with watershed restoration projects there should be evidence that these projects do in fact improve fish passage.

Open Craig Ranger District Office

I did not see this as a project or priority, but certainly would like to see the Craig Ranger District front office open to the public. It's been years, maybe 5 that the front

office has been closed to the public. Having someone there would go a long way towards improving the public image of the FS. I am not alone in my vocal frustration when trying to contact someone at the Craig District office, only to be redirected to Thorne Bay. Often times I just give up.

Timber

I realize timber is not a part of the POWLLA Long Term plan, and is now addressed separately, where, I do not know. Because clear cutting impacts the value of recreation and subsistence on public land as a whole, I believe it should be addressed in some fashion along with the rest of the POWLLA projects.

My concern for Prince of Wales Island has always been for the health of its forest ecosystem. Continued fragmentation and the cumulative impacts of logging and mining on private and public land are not being addressed and need to be. The negative impacts from continued land exchanges and selection of public lands by private and state entities needs more analysis for its harm to deer, fish, and other wildlife habitat. Bit by bit public land on Prince of Wales Island is being carved out for private use, which almost always means clear cutting old growth and losing habitat.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the management of our public lands. I am an advocate for public land, its many uses, and access to it.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.