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Columbia Crossroads

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Columbia Crossroads

by Chad Deitchley



Photograph courtesy of the Port of Portland

Potential port and new bridge portend big changes for quiet Hayden Island

Although often overlooked by residents of the urban centers that surround it, Hayden Island — located in the midst of the Columbia River between Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington — exemplifies the kind of diverse community that defines the metroscape. With a local population of well over 2,000 and a sizable retail shopping district, Hayden Island struggles to be recognized as a destination location known for a distinctive mix of commercial, residential, and natural attributes. Its

unique geographical position, however, offers both the possibility of prosperity and the threat of exploitation.

Hayden Island is situated at the crossroads of two major shipping and transportation corridors. Running east to west around the island is the Columbia River—a natural aquatic freeway responsible for transporting 11 percent of all U.S. corn exports among other indispensable bulk goods and manufactured commodities.

Running north and south through the island is Interstate 5—the largest over-

land economic corridor on the West Coast. Due in large part to its location at the south side of the Columbia River Bridge, Hayden Island and the outlying vicinity occupy a particularly vital stretch of the highway. According to Columbia Corridor Association Executive Director Corky Collier, 70 percent of commercial traffic through the region either enters or exits within five miles of the bridge.

Portland and Vancouver area commuters are well aware of the congestion problems that such heavy traffic can produce. According to 2005 statistics, the roughly 134,000 vehicles crossing the bridge each day create four to six hours of congestion. Adjusting for projected regional population growth, by 2030 that congestion is expected to extend up to 15 hours per day. Much more than a simple inconvenience, this congestion, aggravated by the architectural shortcomings of the current Columbia River Bridge, may result in an average of one collision per day. This rate is nearly double that of similar urban highways.

Overcrowding and accidents are only two among six major areas of concern currently being addressed by the Columbia River Crossing project. With origins dating back to 1999, the Columbia River Crossing project (CRC) seeks improvements in freight mobility, bicycle and pedestrian access, public transit options, and earthquake preparedness in addition to the mitigation of safety and congestion issues. After over 12 years of planning, analysis and cooperative work with various state agencies from Oregon and Washington, the CRC is planning to begin construction on a new Interstate Bridge sometime in late 2013.

Additionally, the proposed bridge is designed to provide greater and more efficient access to local businesses on Hayden Island. Featuring improved, closely-spaced interchanges with auxiliary

lanes leading to I-5 exit ramps, it is expected to reduce congestion in the area by approximately 70 percent while easing the flow of traffic to Hayden Island's numerous restaurants, hotels, and retail establishments. Of course, the potential economic benefits of an upgraded Interstate Bridge are not limited to the immediate area. Emphasizing the paramount importance of effective truck passage through the Columbia River Corridor, AFL-CIO Legislative and Communications Director Elanna Guiney regards the CRC project as a creator of both short-term construction jobs and long-term import/export jobs.

While most area experts agree that the present Columbia River Bridge is inadequate and that significant alterations to the surrounding highway system are necessary, many feel that the designs presently being pursued by the CRC fail to sufficiently address local land consumption concerns. Landscape Architect and Architecture Foundation of Oregon board member Carol Mayer-Reed maintains that the very I-5 interchanges that promise increased access to the businesses and residences of Hayden Island will also cause excessive and unwarranted damage to the community by expanding the highway system's footprint over a considerably larger area. As evidence of the gratuitous nature of this expansion, Mayer-Reed contends that an earlier bridge design was on the table but was not seriously considered by the CRC. By employing curved, rather than straight, merge lanes and by stacking these lanes over water rather than stretching them out over land, this design, proposed in 2010, would, according to Mayer-Reed, preserve six city blocks on each side of the highway. Under the current CRC project plans, these blocks will lie beneath 17 lanes of traffic.

In defense of the bridge project as it is presently going forward, CRC Project

The proposed bridge is designed to provide greater and more efficient access to local businesses on Hayden Island.

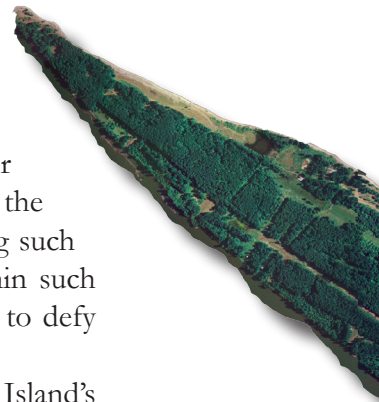
Manager Anne Pressentin cites several reasons for the ultimate abandonment of the 2010 bridge design. First and foremost, the abandoned plan would shift the proposed construction site upstream of its current location. This geographical change, coupled with the height of the proposed bridge, would potentially impede air traffic coming in and out of Portland International Airport and Pearson Airfield near Vancouver, Washington. The infrastructure needed to create the necessary highway connections would also impact the National Historical Site of Fort Vancouver. Furthermore, according to Pressentin, the 2010 architectural design failed to consider the high level of traffic in the area and the improved access to local businesses that CCA Executive Director Corky Collier considers an absolute necessity.

Mayfield Management Company (which owns and manages property on Hayden Island) spokesperson, Greer Kern, agrees that the local retail community must leverage the proposed CRC development to maximize commercial success and “continue to do good business.” However, the success or failure of the local economy is only one among many issues at stake as Hayden Island prepares for change. As the founder of the Hayden Business Alliance, Kern worked to mitigate elements of the CRC project with members of Hayden Island residents’ organizations such as the Hayden Island Neighborhood Network (or HINooN). In Kern’s opinion, Hayden Island’s business, residential, and environmental factions must come together to demand transparency from government agencies, like the CRC project, that aim to drastically alter the established infrastructure and ecological stability of the island. In short, the community must take advantage of the current changes

underway and work together to ensure a better Hayden Island for all parties concerned. However, the complexities inherent in balancing such a wide diversity of interests within such a limited physical space continue to defy any form of clear-cut consensus.

A general overview of Hayden Island’s geographic and demographic make-up clarifies these complexities. In general terms, the island is divided into eastern and western regions. The more affluent East Hayden Island is home to the Jantzen Beach Supercenter—a shopping mall that serves as the epicenter of the more than 150 consumer businesses, offices, and hotels operating on the island. East Hayden Island also supports an assortment of condominium complexes, houseboat moorages, and marinas. West Hayden Island, by contrast, is currently zoned Multiple Use Forestry. Comprised of 826 acres of mostly undeveloped land, it is the proposed site of a future marine cargo facility in development through the Port of Portland. Although only tangentially connected to the Columbia River Crossing project presently underway, this long-term industrial venture threatens to impact Hayden Island and the outlying region in dramatic a fashion.

Recognizing a shortage of viable waterfront property to support industrial development, Portland Metro brought West Hayden Island into the Urban Growth Boundary in 1983 — an event that precipitated the Port of Portland’s eventual purchase of the land in 1994. In order to sustain industrial growth, however, West Hayden Island — at present a part of Multnomah County but not a part of Portland proper—must be formally annexed by the city. Severely complicating this process of annexation are conflicting judgments concerning the land’s ultimate



value as appraised by Portland Metro. Today, the land is designated as both “regionally significant industrial land” and as a “regionally significant Habitat Conservation Area.”

This conflicted land-use assessment can be seen as indicative of the challenges facing Hayden Island as a whole.

A veritable jigsaw puzzle of mixed-use purposes, the island—both victim and beneficiary

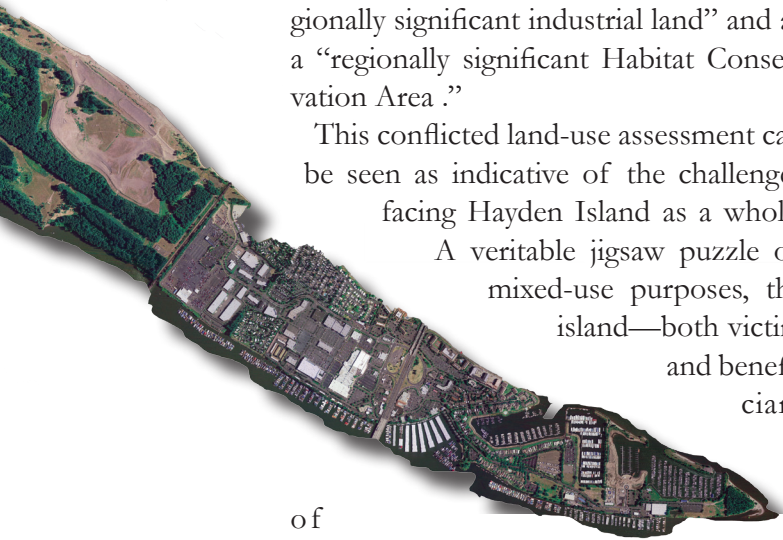
of its key location—must find a place for residential and commercial enterprises, while simultaneously leaving room for the wealth of natural diversity that sustains it as an ecosystem. Can all of these often-incompatible pieces be made to fit within the finite space of an island that measures less than three square miles in its entirety?

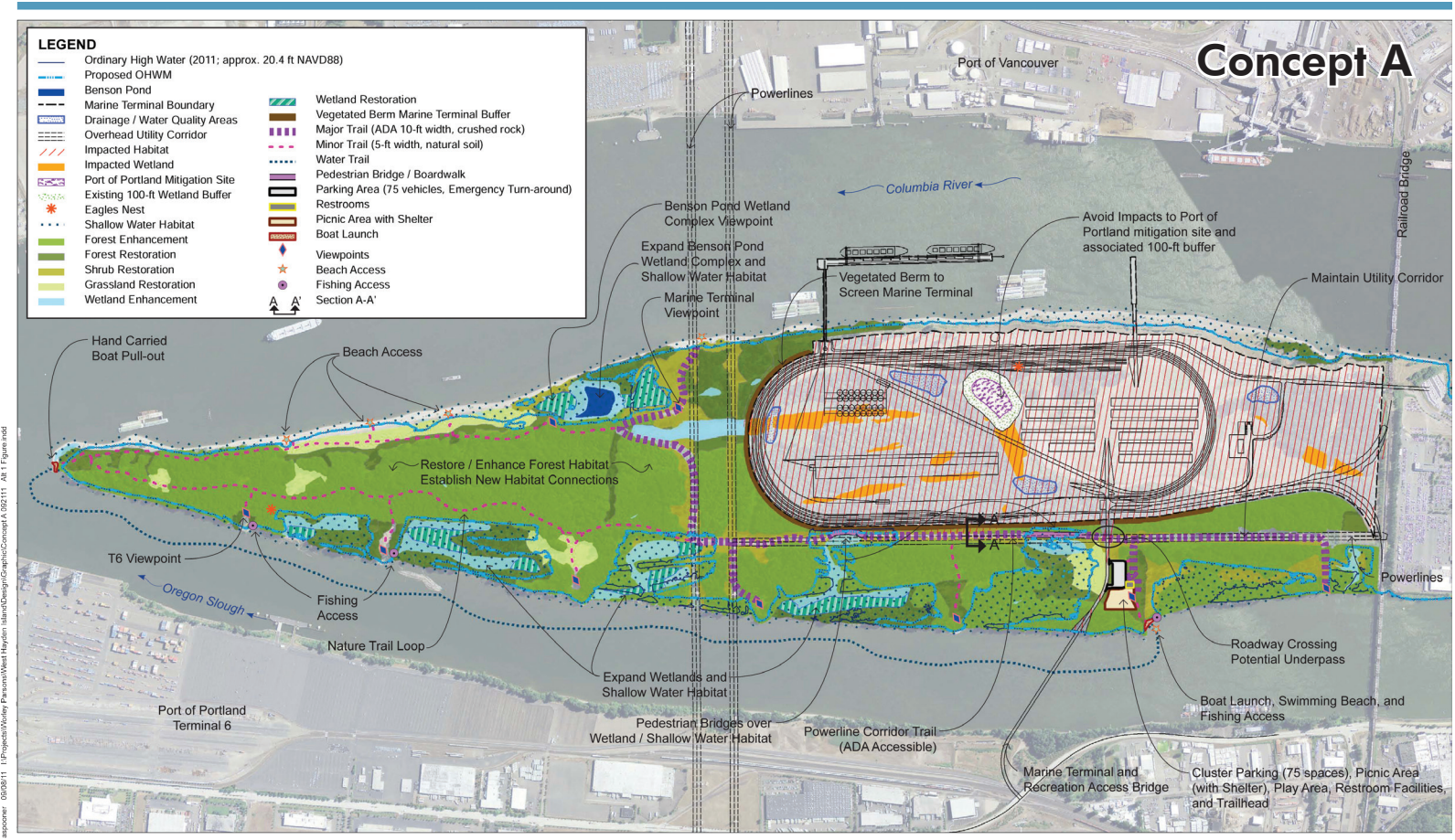
The contentious nature of this question is perhaps most profoundly realized by members of the Hayden Island Manufactured Home Community (HIMHC). Located directly between the future CRC construction site and the proposed West Hayden Island development, the HIMHC stands at the epicenter of the changes currently underway, and these changes have the capacity to impact the community in significant, life-altering ways. Accounting for a full two-thirds of Hayden Island’s overall population, the 1,300 residents of the manufactured home community include a disproportionate number of elderly, low-income individuals with elevated health issues. As founder of the Hayden Island Livability Project (a grassroots organization repre-

senting the interests of this community during these times of change), HIMHC resident Pamela Ferguson details the ways in which the infirm and disabled are particularly threatened by the industrial transformations that might soon engulf them. Central to these concerns are the uncertain fates of two nearby structures: the Hayden Island Safeway grocery store and the abandoned Thunderbird Hotel. Standing amid a maelstrom of commercial, residential, and environmental interests, the controversy surrounding these two buildings illustrates in microcosm the large-scale changes that promise to alter the very face of Hayden Island.

As the sole source of fresh food and prescription medication on the island, Safeway grocery is integral to the health and well-being of local residents. The store is important to the elderly and incapacitated members of the manufactured home community, many of whom are unable to travel farther distances to get the meat, produce, and medicine that they need. Under the current bridge and highway system plans being pursued by the CRC project, the Hayden Island Safeway would be demolished prior to construction. Despite public outcry from resident organizations such as HINooN and the Hayden Island Livability Project, the present CRC designs, including the demolition of the local Safeway, have recently passed a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Under federal law, the CRC project is now allowed to formally seek the funding that it needs to push the project forward.

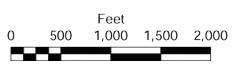
The FEIS acknowledges the negative impact the loss of the grocery store would have upon the surrounding community, but it also maintains that this impact is sufficiently mitigated by the improvements in transportation infrastructure that the new development will



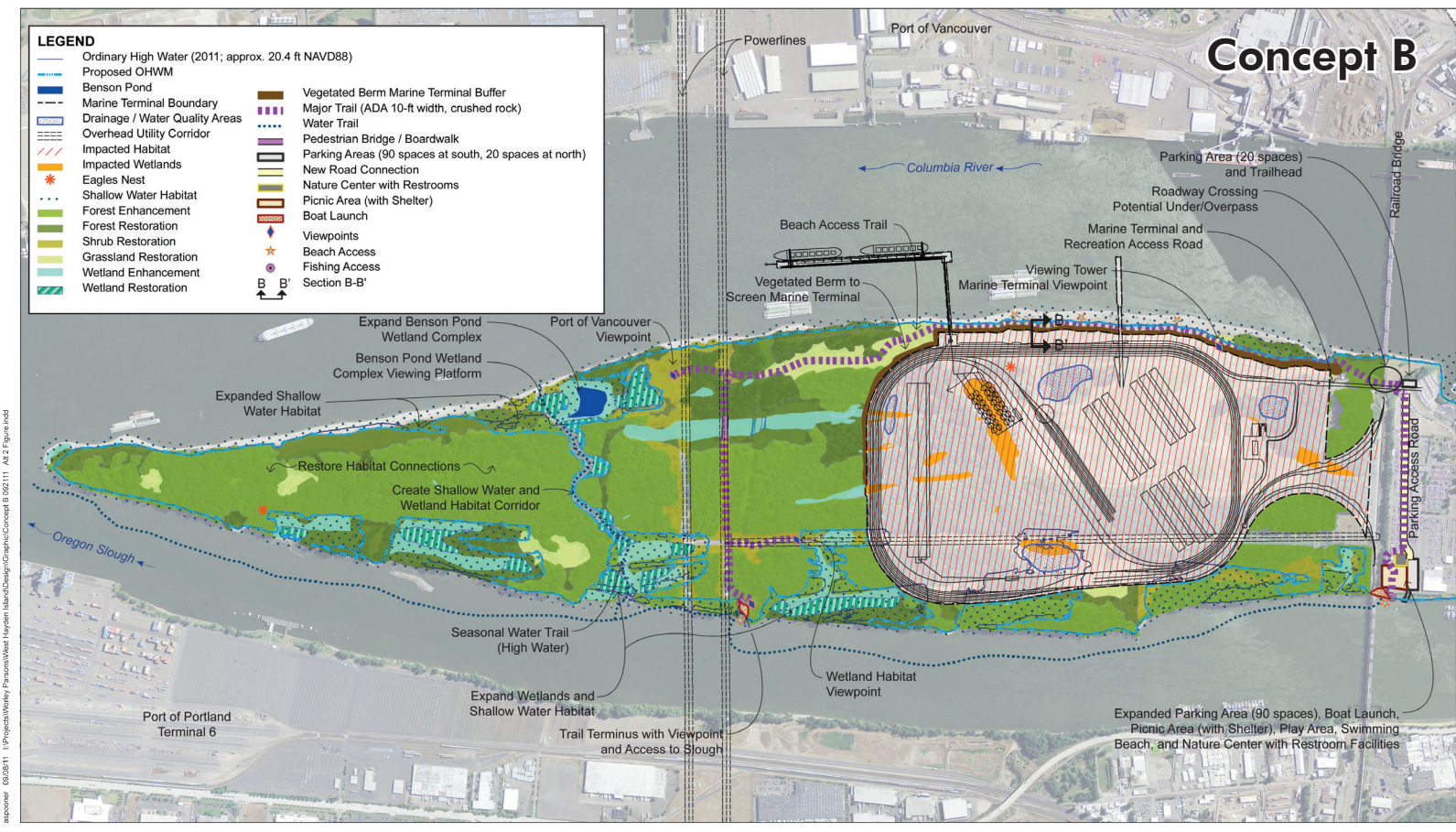


Concept A

- LEGEND**
- Ordinary High Water (2011; approx. 20.4 ft NAVD88)
 - - - Proposed OHWM
 - Benson Pond
 - - - Marine Terminal Boundary
 - - - Drainage / Water Quality Areas
 - - - Overhead Utility Corridor
 - ▨ Impacted Habitat
 - ▨ Impacted Wetland
 - ★ Port of Portland Mitigation Site
 - ★ Existing 100-ft Wetland Buffer
 - ★ Eagles Nest
 - ★ Shallow Water Habitat
 - ★ Forest Enhancement
 - ★ Forest Restoration
 - ★ Shrub Restoration
 - ★ Grassland Restoration
 - ★ Wetland Enhancement
 - ▨ Wetland Restoration
 - ▨ Vegetated Berm Marine Terminal Buffer
 - ▨ Major Trail (ADA 10-ft width, crushed rock)
 - ▨ Minor Trail (5-ft width, natural soil)
 - ▨ Water Trail
 - ▨ Pedestrian Bridge / Boardwalk
 - ▨ Restrooms
 - ▨ Picnic Area with Shelter
 - ▨ Boat Launch
 - ▨ Viewpoints
 - ▨ Parking Area (75 vehicles, Emergency Turn-around)
 - ▨ Beach Access
 - ▨ Fishing Access
 - ▨ Section A-A'

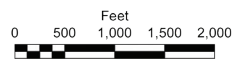


Concept A
Open Space, Habitat, and Recreation Concepts
West Hayden Island



Concept B

- LEGEND**
- Ordinary High Water (2011; approx. 20.4 ft NAVD88)
 - - - Proposed OHWM
 - Benson Pond
 - - - Marine Terminal Boundary
 - - - Drainage / Water Quality Areas
 - - - Overhead Utility Corridor
 - ▨ Impacted Habitat
 - ▨ Impacted Wetlands
 - ★ Eagles Nest
 - ★ Shallow Water Habitat
 - ★ Forest Enhancement
 - ★ Forest Restoration
 - ★ Shrub Restoration
 - ★ Grassland Restoration
 - ★ Wetland Enhancement
 - ▨ Wetland Restoration
 - ▨ Vegetated Berm Marine Terminal Buffer
 - ▨ Major Trail (ADA 10-ft width, crushed rock)
 - ▨ Water Trail
 - ▨ Pedestrian Bridge / Boardwalk
 - ▨ Parking Areas (90 spaces at south, 20 spaces at north)
 - ▨ New Road Connection
 - ▨ Nature Center with Restrooms
 - ▨ Picnic Area (with Shelter)
 - ▨ Boat Launch
 - ▨ Viewpoints
 - ▨ Beach Access
 - ▨ Fishing Access
 - ▨ Section B-B'



Concept B
Open Space, Habitat, and Recreation Concepts
West Hayden Island



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 000811 | I:\Projects\West Hayden Island\Design\Concepts\B 002111_Alt 2 Figure.mxd

provide. With more efficient traffic flow for both cars and busses and a light-rail extension running from downtown Portland to Vancouver, Hayden Island residents are encouraged to patronize one of four alternative grocery stores located in adjacent neighborhoods. According to Pamela Ferguson and the Hayden Island Livability Project, however, these stores are either too far away or too expensive to qualify as viable alternatives to the existing Safeway. One of the stores listed by the FEIS — a nearby Cash & Carry — functions primarily as a restaurant supplier and sells only in bulk. Others are simply not readily accessible, especially for elderly residents with limited mobility and/or physical disabilities.

While acknowledging that the store is a valuable asset to the community, CCA Executive Director Corky Collier views the loss of the Safeway as symptomatic of the larger issue of retail stagnation on Hayden Island. Citing low sales and economic hardship, Collier contends that the real problem is how to “lure customers to Safeway to justify its existence.” This sentiment is echoed by Metro Director of Planning Andy Cotugno, who points to the fact that the population of Hayden Island itself is insufficient to support its current level of retail goods and services. The expansion of I-5 is necessary to encourage economic growth and keep businesses alive. By taking additional measures to lessen its footprint on the community, the CRC project would, by necessity, also lessen access to area retail outlets like the ill-fated Safeway store. In other words, the very measures that could have saved the local grocery store will, unfortunately, require its demolition.

The second building of vital concern to the Hayden Island Livability Project and the manufactured home residents

that it represents is the shuttered Thunderbird Hotel. Located mere yards from the HIMHC, the property on which the building now stands will likely become the staging area for impending CRC construction. This decision, however, is far from finalized. Although it singles out the Thunderbird property as a probable staging site, the recently completed FEIS does not specifically identify any demarcated location for these activities. This lack of specificity has thus far spared the Thunderbird property from undergoing an in-depth environmental impact assessment.

The dearth of official scientific data on this issue is troubling to Pamela Ferguson and the Hayden Island Livability Project for a couple of reasons. First of all, the FEIS acknowledges that the land on which the Thunderbird Hotel presently stands is the former site of both a landfill and an auto service station. As such, it is known or suspected to contain pre-existing soil and groundwater contamination. Secondly, as one of the 23 Hayden Island properties older than 1980 currently slated for demolition, the Thunderbird structure itself is suspected to contain asbestos and other toxic materials that could be released into the environment upon the building’s demolition. At present, neither the CRC nor any other governmental organization has done due diligence to analyze the potential hazards posed by the building or the land upon which it stands.

CRC Project Manager Anne Pressentin maintains that an environmental review of the Thunderbird property is premature and that, until funding is acquired and a construction contractor is brought onboard, the staging area for the project will remain undecided. She goes on to assure residents that, wherever the spe-

cific staging area and construction site might be, best practices will be used to minimize dust, restrict hours of operation, and furthermore prevent the spread of potentially harmful contaminants into the outlying community. Such assurances have done little, however, to quiet the fears of HIMHC residents and the grave concerns of environmental activists such as Audubon Society of Portland Director Bob Sallinger.

Sallinger's efforts to protect the undeveloped area of West Hayden Island places him in direct opposition not only to the Port of Portland's plans for an industrial marine facility but to the coordinated efforts of the CRC project as well. For, in addition to its proposal of a bridge construction staging area near or on West Hayden Island, the CRC project is also an instrumental part of cost/benefit discussions that could result in the construction of an auxiliary bridge that would service West Hayden Island directly. If a marine cargo facility were indeed to find an eventual home on West Hayden Island, commercial trucking and railroad traffic in the region would certainly increase; and if the newly designed CRC bridge cannot adequately accommodate this increase, then a second bridge would become an unavoidable necessity.

The potential cost of such a bridge, estimated at more than \$100 million by the Audubon Society of Portland, will be added to the overall cost of West Hayden Island's annexation. By including West Hayden Island within city limits, the City of Portland would be responsible for providing the necessary infrastructure (electricity, gas, sewer, etc.) to support private development. Setting aside questions as to whether the City of Portland can afford such investments in the current economic climate, many critics doubt the overall

long-term profitability of a West Hayden Island industrial port. According to independent business consultant and Friends of West Hayden Island leader Timme Helzer, existing regional marine facilities such as the nearby Port of Vancouver are consistently underused. Helzter harbors real concerns that the proposed Hayden Island port might be obsolete before it begins operations.

At this early stage of the planning process, speculation about the marine terminal's long-term economic viability remains uncertain. Construction at the proposed location is years, if not decades, down the line. In the meantime, innumerable variables — including what, if any, private commercial interests might step in to fund, build, and operate the facilities in question — will continue to thwart accurate economic predictions. As Port of Portland Regional Transportation and Land Use Manager Susan Lahsene puts it, at the present stage, government officials are merely “planning to plan.”

This is not to suggest, however, that the Port of Portland is not taking the proposed development seriously. With the largest mineral bulk port on the West Coast and the third largest auto import port in the United States, the organization is familiar with the profitability that can accompany expansion. And positioned in the middle of the largest wheat export region in the United States, the Port of Portland is confident that the consistently lucrative grain market will continue to thrive and grow. According to Lahsene and the Port, an additional marine terminal on West Hayden Island would leverage the possibilities offered by the stable import/export market and promote economic growth in the region. This sentiment is echoed by AFL-CIO representative Elanna Guiney. Although it is too soon in the process to

... at the present stage, government officials are merely “planning to plan.”

determine just how many jobs will be created by the West Hayden Island project (or by the CRC project for that matter), Guiney is confident that local organized labor will profit significantly from this development. Not only is West Hayden Island one of the last available places for future marine facilities in the metroscape, but, because this area has been earmarked for industrial development for more than 20 years, Guiney contends that opportunities to exploit other sites have repeatedly been squandered.

As undeveloped waterfront land becomes a rapidly disappearing commodity, the inherent value of West Hayden Island becomes more and more apparent. In the eyes of Susan Lahsene and the Port, the area is an ideal location for a marine terminal because it sits on a natural deep draft channel in the Columbia River and provides ready access to railroad and interstate highway systems. To others, however, the true value of West Hayden Island does not lie in its proximity to major shipping corridors but in the vital role that it plays in the surrounding ecosystem.

In and of itself, West Hayden Island is a rich and diverse ecological resource. Designated a “Habitat of Concern” by Portland Metro, the area includes 39 acres of wetlands, over 100 acres of grasslands, and one of the remaining intact cottonwood bottomland habitats in the vicinity. It is also home to four species of amphibians, nine species of mammals, and at least 81 species of birds, including the American bald eagle. Furthermore, the shallow-water habitat near the island’s shore provides a crucial protective resting area for four species of migrating salmon.

Calling the location a “biological hotspot,” Bob Sallinger calls for preserving West Hayden Island in its entirety, creating a wildlife area and nature park that

protects indigenous animals and supports outdoor recreational activities such as hiking and canoeing. Although current plans designate just 300 of West Hayden Island’s 826 acres for industrial development, Sallinger insists that the island’s natural resources can no longer afford to be downsized. “We’ve already split it, split it, and split it; and each time we’re left with smaller and smaller pieces of intact natural areas. If we are really serious about protecting and restoring our river, we need to protect and restore places like West Hayden Island. We can’t cut them in half or two thirds again and hope that they’re still going to function. The system isn’t functioning now.”

Taking a larger view, this critique of mixed land use can be applied not only to West Hayden Island’s fragile ecosystem but also to Hayden Island as a whole. With commercial, residential, and environmental concerns all jockeying for superiority, one must wonder whether the small island can accommodate such a wide diversity of interests. In the end, however, it is the population of Hayden Island and the populations of the larger communities that surround it that will be most significantly affected by the changes currently underway, and so it is up to these populations to ensure that Hayden Island is governed responsibly and to the mutual benefit of all. As Timme Helzer and the Friends of West Hayden Island put it, “We believe that if the public is well-informed about the facts, they will come up with the solution that is in their best interest. We’re not sure that the politicians will do that. We think that the public will.” **M**

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If we are really serious about protecting and restoring our river, we need to protect and restore places like West Hayden Island.