



FY2011 RTCA Project Close-Out Report

Please respond briefly to the questions below.

GENERAL INFO.....

Date: November 28, 2011

Project Name: Dishman Hills Dream Trail, a project known as Connecting People to Nature. The intent is to connect the existing 535-acre Dishman Hills Natural Area with the 1400-acre Iller Creek Conservation Area over a distance of about two miles. The Dream Trail refers to connecting the existing natural areas including two smaller areas of 160- and 240-acres.

Primary Project Partners: Inland Northwest Trails Coalition (INTC) and Dishman Hills Natural Area Assn. (DHNAA) are the primary partners. The Dishman Hills Alliance (formerly known as the Dream Trail Team) consists of a broad range of about twenty recreation and conservation groups, companies and government agencies working together to protect the Dishman Hills.

Estimated Project Area

14 Trail Miles

0 River Miles

546 Park, Habitat & Open Space Acres to add to existing conservation areas of 2000-acres.

Project Status: The Connecting People to Nature project with the public Dream Trail as a primary objective has made important progress over the two-year period of the RTCA grant. The Big Rock 80-acres had just been acquired by DHNAA in June of 2009 on the south end of the Dishman Hills. The Spokane County Conservation Futures program had open nominations for properties in July of 2010 requiring identification of and proposal for target properties (Stone 160-acres and McCollum 136-acres). In conjunction with a WA State Dept of Natural Resources 160-acres, important public access to the Dishman Hills is provided from the west, in other words, the City of Spokane. Both Stone and McCollum are now successfully in the acquisition phase with scheduled close in April, 2012. A large parking lot, road improvements and trailhead to access Big Rock on the south end was planned, funded and construction is underway during the RTCA grant period. We include the Stone (160-acres); McCollum (136-acres); Big Rock + trailhead parking (90-acres) and the WA State Dept of Natural Resources property (160-acres) to arrive at 546-acres. There is still 1.5 miles of Dream Trail Corridor required to complete the Connecting People to Nature project. Property owner contacts have been made and the public and community leaders are aware of the project ensuring overall conservation and recreation opportunities are considered during land use decisions.

Recommended follow-up roles or tasks for project partners:

The RTCA project leader Alex Stone assisted with Conservation Options and Funding Options as well as overall facilitation of the DHNAA. The follow-up tasks include work on the issues identified in the 2011 Dishman Hills Retreat facilitated by Alex Stone including membership development, fundraising, stewardship programs, education curriculum development along with acquiring more land or easements to complete the Dream Trail - maybe another 300 to 500 acres. Connecting People to Nature refers to the wildlife corridor and might rely on fee simple purchase or conservation easements.

Total dollars leveraged to date and sources of funds:

About \$1.25 Million.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS.....

Economic Impacts:

The Economic Impacts of the Dream Trail project are Quality of Life enhancements such as protecting the public access to the Dishman Hills open space. The Dishman Hills is a low ridge line that separates the City of Spokane from the City of Spokane Valley. The protected area is undeveloped but has potential for residential development.

The proposed protected open space assures permanent wildlife habitat, enhanced native plant communities, opportunities for education, recreation use of many types and a pleasant view shed for the community to enjoy.

- Was a new business created in/ or re-located to your project area? No.
- Was an existing business enhanced? Business near the Dishman Hills will see more customers who are visiting the Dishman Hills. Companies in the area will have improved Quality of Life for their workers. REI and Mountain Gear have taken an active role in promoting the Dishman Hills for recreation of all types including for rock climbing. Local corporate sponsors are being recruited.
- Was tourism increased? The Dishman Hills is not a destination tourist attraction by itself but many will travel to the Dishman Hills for recreation or education opportunities within the region. The rock climbing is the best in the area. The hikes have views and wildlife viewing opportunities that are among the best in the region.
- Was there a reduction in public costs (i.e.: flood damage reduction, health care, etc.)? The development of the east slope of the Dishman Hills has contributed to storm water management and flooding issues along Chester Creek. The conservation areas will not increase the storm water runoff compared to residential development that was planned for the area. Over \$250,000 of private money was used to match Conservation Futures funding from Spokane County.
- Was there a change in property values? Yes, the property around the Dishman Hills is in demand and in this real estate market, the interest is exceptional due to the new conservation areas. Nearby residential lots will have desirable access to the new conservation areas. The downside is the Dream Trail project will pay more for land in the future because of the higher interest in Dishman Hills real estate.

Quality of Life Changes

The Quality of Life changes associated with wildlife habitat, recreation access and education opportunities have been the biggest effect of the project. The Dishman Hills Natural Area Assn (DHNA) is hosting more service days and volunteer activities that increase the pride and ownership of the community. Increasing recreation, social and nature viewing activities are very popular.

- Was there increased community interaction, socialization, pride? There is higher awareness of the Dishman Hills within the community leadership, the user groups and the real estate community. The service work has increased greatly including for the 2010 and 2011 REI Service Day, Reforest Spokane tree planting, trail work and fire restoration activities – all conducted by hundreds of volunteers. Much publicity has been generated by these volunteer projects. The different user groups are working well together and building relationships to resolve issues such as weed infestation and recreation conflicts.
- Was health and wellness improved? With the acquisition of conservation land and selected trail work, the Dishman Hills has experienced a large increase in recreation visits. Having nearby opportunities for hikes, biking, and skiing improves fitness; Connection to the natural habitat improves morale and spirit. Because the Dishman Hills are so close to the urbanized area, we expect recreation and fitness activities to increase dramatically as trails are built and additional land or trail easements are acquired.

- Wildlife and Plant Habitat: There are many native plants communities, wildlife and birds found in the Dishman Hills. With the additional protection including fostering acquisition of conservation land and easements, DHNAA hopes to increase the viability of the natural habitat and increase opportunities for nature study for fun and learning.
- View shed: Some will enjoy the protected view shed of the undeveloped hills from nearby neighborhoods and highways. The Dishman Hills are seen from most areas of Spokane.

Public Use, Enjoyment and Safety

- Has outdoor recreation use increased? At the start of the project, the total conservation land was about 2000 acres with poor access and dangerous trails. The project has resulted in acquisition of 90-acres already with an additional 290-acres selected for acquisition. DHNAA projects adding another 160-acres owned by the Washington State Dept. of Natural Resources along with another 200 to 500-acres over the next several years. The land additions will provide additional recreational access. The construction of a new 19,000 square foot parking lot and trail head on the south with plans for one on the west side. The trails and parking has increased use dramatically. Use is expected to rapidly increase in the future as new trails and trailheads are constructed.
- Was the safety of users enhanced? The safety was enhanced by the construction of high quality trails to replace rutted and steep trails. The increased use has improved security near the Sprague-Appleway corridor on the north side. More signs and education activities has improved compliance and increased the neighbors and users willingness to call law enforcement about criminal activities including illegal fires, shooting and drug use
- Was the safety of community/neighborhoods enhanced? The neighbors are taking a more active role in protecting the conservation area with signs and trail markers being added. The neighbors tend to provide user education – such as staying on the designated trails and keeping dogs on leash. The Spokane County Parks has a dedicated Parks Ranger who is willing and able to patrol the areas or respond as necessary. The neighbors and users are beginning to call on the Ranger more frequently. The frequent service days keep the transient camps from being established. Much of the education is distributed through the Dishman Hills Alliance.
- Total number of users (annual estimate): 50.000 users per year and increasing rapidly.

Other Resource Enhancements/Benefits

- Were cultural features (i.e.: historic structures/places) preserved or connected? There are few structures in the areas of interest. More important are the Ice Age Floods relics and variety of natural habitat. The Rocks of Sharon Ridge includes spectacular granite outcroppings and views in all directions. The access to this area has been secured in the last year along with a large parking lot.
- Were environmental conditions (i.e.: habitat, air or water quality) improved? The wildlife habitat including protecting a broad corridor to link the Dishman Hills conservation areas as well as link to the regional corridors connecting to Turnbull Wildlife Refuge and Mica Peak-Liberty Lake. The habitat has been improved by tree and shrub planting along with native grass seeding.
- Native Plants: There are a wide variety of native plants including rare species in the Dishman Hills. The habitat is varied and includes forests, wetlands, ponds, and meadows. Some of the areas are relatively undisturbed and some will require restoration of the native plant communities. The noxious weed infestations are being address and will take several years to correct.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY.....

The DHNAA was founded in 1966. The DHNAA owns about 800-acres in lumped on the north side near the busy Appleway-Sprague corridor acquired in the 1960s and on the south side on the east-west Rocks of Sharon Ridge acquired since the late 1900s. At the start of the RTCA project, the DHNAA had limited governance, community outreach, fundraising and real estate expertise. There was little ongoing stewardship. Strengthening the DHNAA was an important goal of the RTCA grant. Significant improvements in all weak areas were achieved during the two-year RTCA grant.

Which of the following attributes apply to Dishman Hills Natural Area Assn:

- Clear purpose: There has always been a clear purpose within the DHNAA to provide for recreation and conservation in the Dishman Hills. The current goal today has been refined to connect the existing conservation areas for wildlife migration and recreation trails. Education, recreation, stewardship, wildlife and native plant protection and recreation are included in the DHNAA mission. All benefit from the Connecting People to Nature project.
- Effective leadership and structure: The Board has increased in size from 5 to 12 in three years. New Trustees have passion, work habits and specific skills necessary to grow the DHNAA. The planning for delegating work to committees is underway. The likely committees include Governance, Nominations, Stewardship, Membership, Fundraising, and Education-Events.
- Strategic planning: DHNAA has an annual Retreat that Alex Stone facilitated in February, 2011. Specific goals for stewardship, membership, fundraising and events were developed.
- Effective public participation: The Dishman Hills Alliance is a large group of interested organizations that increase the public input. The Alliance includes users that typically are in conflict such as recreation users of different types (mountain bikers versus hikers) or native plant advocates versus horse riders that some believe introduce noxious weeds. The interaction results in solutions before there is a large problem. The publicity associated with service days and land acquisitions has increased the profile of the Dishman Hills.
- Fundraising planning: Fundraising is an identified weak areas of the DHNAA. Donations have increased about 250% over two years as projects have proceeded and the community realizes donations are necessary. The annual donations are still only about \$25,000 per year.
- Demonstrated Success: Service Days in 2010 and 2011 had 250 and 350 volunteers respectively. The DHNAA Celebrated 45 Years of Land Conservation on November 12, 2011 with an event sponsored by several organizations. DHNAA acquired Big Rock 80-acres along with a satellite 10-acre parking lot property. DHNAA sold the Big Rock property to the Conservation Futures program in 2011 and used the proceeds to build a new road, parking lot and trailhead and as matching money for another 160-acres known as the Stone Property. The Stone Property connects to the McCollum 136-acre property that Spokane County Parks moved up to be funded in order to provide public access. Closing on Stone-McCollum is scheduled for April 2012 if Spokane County Parks reaches an agreement on price with McCollum Brothers. DHNAA-INT won grants from National Park Service RTC, REI and The Access Fund. Mountain Gear has been a financial supporter as well. Additional land and easement projects are underway.
- Do you think you have a sustainable organization? The Dishman Hills Natural Area Assn is 45 Years old and has acquired a total of about 800-acres. The Dishman Hills Alliance (formerly known as the Dream Trail Team) has been integrated into the DHNAA activities. The DHNAA is now stronger than ever with broad community, political and conservation-recreation organization support. There is more publicity today than at any time in the DHNAA history.
- Network of tangible conservation/recreation resources: The Dishman Hills Alliance is a network of recreation and conservation organizations of all types. We also have strong support from government agencies such as Spokane County Parks, Spokane Regional Health District, Washington State Dept of Natural Resources, Spokane County Conservation District, and WSU Extension.
- Vision and goals of project have wide public acceptance: Yes, there is very high public support and awareness
- Key local individuals are actively pursuing project goals and actions: The network of key local leaders assisting is growing dramatically. Often the support comes from those who have heard about the Dream Trail and other projects through news reports or friends rather than direct contact from DHNAA.
- Partnerships are in place to achieve project success: DHNAA has key partnerships with INTC, Inland Northwest Land Trust, Spokane County Parks, WA State Dept of Natural Resources and others.

- Community leaders and agencies support project implementation: Yes, we have explicit support from the Spokane County Commissioners. Many community leaders and officials have visited the conservation area and can see the importance of the Dishman Hills as open space. Political support is favorable for implementation and success. For example, 36 projects were submitted to the Conservation Futures program for funding. Most were excellent but the two Dishman Hills projects were funded out of the top four along with the Big Rock project from earlier nomination process.
- New organizations have been formed to implement project plans: No.
- Resources, financial and other, are being allocated toward implementation: Yes, there is an increase in private financial support including large donors previously not identified. The DHNAA has taken a risky approach to committing financial support that depends on about \$100,000 in support by April, 2012. The results are uncertain at the time of this report. Regardless of the level of fundraising achieved, DHNAA will be able to generate the funds to complete the Stone+McCollum transactions in conjunction with the Conservation Futures program.
- Reasonable timeframes have been set for implementation: The Dream Trail project (now known as Connecting People to Nature) was initiated in 2003. So the timeframe has been much longer than anticipated. The longer timeframe was required to build trust with property owners and build community awareness and support. After the transactions in April 2012, DHNAA will determine a timeframe for further work in conjunction with partners and financial resources.

TAKE-AWAYS.....

Issues

Please identify any issues of concern regarding the future achievement of anticipated outcomes of the project.

A consequence of increased public awareness of the Dream Trail efforts, both property owners and prospective buyers place a higher price on the target properties. This may increase the cost of completing the project. Because of the requirements for appraisals to confirm the property sale price, the “comparables” used are depressed. The conflict between the very localized higher prices demanded and the lack of comparables causes tension between DHNAA and the property owners and between the Dream Trail partners some of whom want to strike now and others who want a lower price. The conflict over price is a serious issue that caused conflict in the current projects and will have unknown consequences as we move forward. The conflicts are not being publicized. The good news is that the land prices are still quite low at \$2,000 to \$10,000 per acre compared to urban land prices adjacent to the target properties.

Spokane conservation and recreation advocates do not have a history of high profile projects being funded (partially) by private donations. With ample open space – both private and public, and a strong Conservation Futures program funded by a small property tax, most community leaders and users feel like there is not a need for their donations. DHNAA is the only Spokane-area conservation organization that owns land and DHNAA focuses strictly on the Dishman Hills. DHNAA is trying to raise private funds at an unprecedented level to complete the project. Private fundraising to buy conservation land is unusual in this area and consequently support requires a high level of education about the particular opportunity. The \$257,500 DHNAA match to the Conservation Futures monies was a significant reason for the selection of Stone/McCollum as well as about \$200,000 donation of money and services for the Big Rock project. The success is dependent on raising private donations at modest levels compared to other communities.

Key Lessons

Please identify any key lessons learned that will help influence future projects in your organization.

The most important lesson is that a big conservation land project requiring coordination of DHNAA and government agencies along with the property owners takes a long time. Patience is required. But persistence is also required. The most successful negotiations in the Dishman Hills with property owners have been after the property owners die and the DHNAA is in line for a relatively quick purchase. Note this is because of the

difference of opinion over the valuation of the property. The recent success is based on work to regularly meet with property owners and user groups starting in 2003.

The Dream Trail supporters in particular and the DHNAA since 1966 have correctly identified important projects requiring both vision and hope. Most scoffed at the work required and noted the lack of certainty. Even so, the Dishman Hills Alliance continued to advocate for the Dream Trail project and now many expect the eventual success because of the broad community support. That is a big change from 2003 when all twelve of the Dishman Hills nominations to the Conservation Futures program were rejected as being unrealistic.

SUCSESSES: ON-THE-GROUND RESULTS.....

We will check back with you in five years to record successful trail and conservation statistics in a Report to Congress. If you have early successes to report from the past two years, please enter your numbers below.

Actual miles and acres conserved should be reported on the first line. The subcategories below the first line help define the total miles and acres; there may be some duplication of numbers in these subcategories.

0	TOTAL RIVER MILES	14	TOTAL TRAIL MILES		
___	Instream Improvements (miles)	6	Trail Built (miles)	535	Park land Improved (acres)
___	Nearstream Improvements (miles)	4	Trail Corridor Acquired (acres)	1400	Accessibility Enhanced (acres)
___	Recreation Improvements (miles or acres)	___	Trail Corridor Improved	546	Additional Park Land Conserved during the RTCA grant period.
___	Corridor Conserved (acres)	10	Trail Corridor Enhanced	___	Other
		___	TOTAL PARK ACRES		

Please submit your Close-Out Report to: Michael Linde; Leader, Partnership Programs; National Park Service; 909 First Avenue; Seattle, WA 98104; or michael_linde@nps.gov by **August 15, 2011**.

Completed by Jeff Lambert, Vice President, Dishman Hills Natural Area Assn.