

Purpose and Need Statement

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide for long-term access to the River 'S' Unit that addresses visitor demand and meets the operational and management needs of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex*. The proposed project is intended to achieve the following objectives: a) improve the reliability and mobility of public access to and from the River 'S' Unit, b) improve the USFWS's ability to efficiently carry out their operations consistent with their management goals within the Ridgefield Refuge Complex, and c) provide for a transportation solution that is sustainable for the resources on the refuge and the community of Ridgefield.

The specific needs to be addressed by the proposed project include:

Reliability of Long Term Public Access to River 'S' Unit: The existing road and bridge were constructed sometime in the late 1960's. The single lane road and

bridge are narrow and passage can be difficult for the passenger vehicles and buses accessing the River 'S' Unit. Access to the River 'S' Unit has been closed several times to conduct major repairs to the road and bridge and to allow heavier equipment to pass without conflicting with passenger vehicles. When constructed, the existing timber bridge had an anticipated life span of about 40 years. The bridge now requires routine maintenance and major reconstruction in the short term will be necessary to keep the bridge open to the public. These routine repairs can have undesirable environmental impacts and impede the ability of the public to access the refuge. In order to maximize the federal transportation funds available, long term solutions to access the River 'S' Unit should be examined.

Continuity and Efficiency in Refuge Operations: The USFWS maintains over 7,000 acres in the Ridgefield

National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The USFWS is mandated by law to manage refuge lands. These lands require routine maintenance operations in order to provide the highest quality of wildlife habitat possible. These operations include, grazing, mowing, invasive species removal, tree planting, flooding and draining wetlands, delivery of goods and materials, and regulating visitor and hunter use. All of the heavy equipment (farm tractors and implements and trucks with trailer equipment) used to conduct these operations is stored on the Bachelor Island Unit, accessible only by the River 'S' Unit bridge and road. Due to the single lane bridge, public traffic on the River 'S' Unit can be in conflict with the USFWS's ability to efficiently carry out their operations.

Sustainable Transportation Solution: The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge draws over 120,000 visitors per year (CCP, 2009). In 2012, there were approximately 73,000 visitors to the River 'S' Unit with 75,000 anticipated in 2013. While visitation is expected to increase, the USFWS has identified goals and objectives to ensure the quality of the experience on the refuge and the habitat itself can be preserved. A transportation facility that is both economically and environmentally sustainable is needed for the refuge to provide safe, accessible, and high quality wildlife-dependent recreation over the long term. Key elements of a sustainable transportation solution for the Refuge include reducing operations and maintenance expenses associated with the existing bridge, accommodating the projected increase in visitation and vehicle traffic, and encouraging non-vehicular access by enhancing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between the River 'S' Unit and the community.

* The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex is made up of several other refuges including: Steigerwald Lake, Pierce, and Franz Lake refuges further east on the Columbia River. Farming and maintenance equipment for all four refuges is stored on the River 'S' unit. An important function of the River 'S' access is to serve as the access road for the equipment used on the complex of refuges in Southwest Washington.



RIDGEFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE — RIVER 'S' UNIT ACCESS PROJECT

Project Update

JANUARY 2013

In 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published its Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. The CCP included a Transportation Access study completed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that was a preliminary review of alternatives providing access improvement to the River 'S' Unit. The FHWA and USFWS have completed preliminary development and screening of alternatives. A public open house will be held on January 31, 2013, to obtain comments on the range of alternatives and the screening process. The alternatives are on the second and third pages of this newsletter. The alternatives and screening criteria will be posted on the project website ahead of the open house so you may comment at the meeting or through the website.

What's Happened.

The USFWS and FHWA's Western Federal Lands Division office in Vancouver, Washington, have been developing a comprehensive understanding of land used, ownerships, rights of way, and environmental issues by gathering agency input, interviewing area interest groups, and soliciting public comment.

Since our last newsletter, FHWA produced an in-depth transportation analysis to assess the current access location, Traffic Impact Assessment of potential new River S access locations, Railroad Crossing Study, Existing Bridge Evaluation, Lake River Navigation Study. Additionally, we identified, developed, and performed initial screening on a range of alternatives locations. Since June 2012, FHWA considered 23 alternatives.

At the January 31 open house, the community will have an opportunity to review the alternatives and criteria and weigh in on whether there are additional alternatives or criteria that should be considered.

What's Next.

FHWA will refine the remaining alternatives that passed the initial screening and are being carried forward.

	Task	Timeline
On-Going Activities	Newsletter Update	January 2013
	Public Meeting on Range of Alternatives	January 2013
	Screening of Alternatives	Winter 2013
Completed Activities	Traffic Impact Assessments	Summer/Fall 2012
	River Navigation Assessment	Summer/Fall 2012
	Existing Access Railroad Crossing Assessment	Summer/Fall 2012
	Develop Range of Alternatives	Fall 2012
	Baseline Conditions Assessment	Summer 2012
	Stakeholder Interviews w/ Summary	Summer 2012
	Update Purpose and Need Statement	Summer 2012
	Top 8 Q&A from Outreach Efforts	Summer 2012
Existing Access Technical Memo	Summer 2012	

You're Invited: Get Involved. Stay Involved.

The FHWA is continuing to seek your input in this process.

Public Meeting

Thursday
January 31
4-6 p.m.

A brief overview presentation will be provided at 4:30 and 5:30 p.m.

Ridgefield Community Center

210 North Main Avenue
Ridgefield, Washington

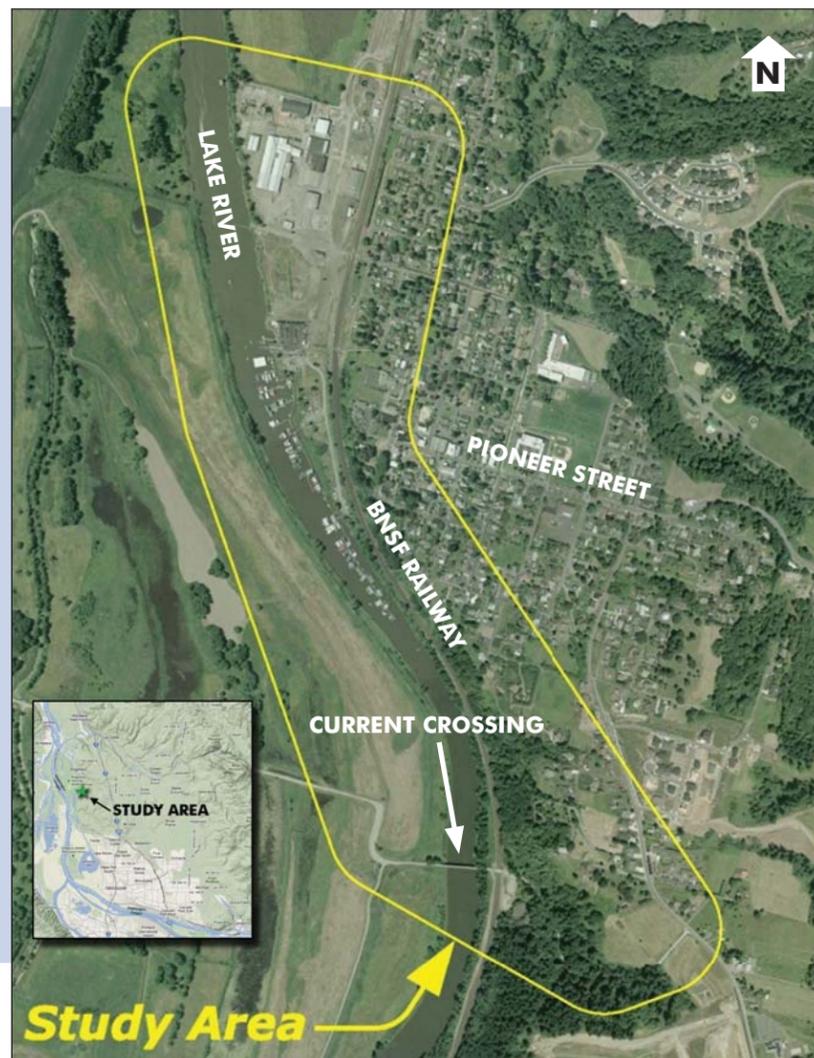


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LEVEL 1 ALTERNATIVES SCREENING

Alternative Description	Would this alternative provide safe and reliable, long-term public access to the River S Unit?	Would this alternative provide safe and reliable, long-term, year-round access for Refuge operations and maintenance?	Would this alternative reduce conflicts between passenger vehicles, buses and refuge heavy equipment?	Would this alternative improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and connectivity for the public to the River S Unit?	Is this alternative economically feasible?	Is this alternative technically feasible?	Does this alternative involve any known major environmental issues?	Does this alternative minimize or avoid use of private ROW?	Would long-term O&M be feasible for this alternative?	Does this alternative maintain existing navigation uses?	Screen Out	Carry Forward
Existing Access Options												
A. No build.	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○		✓
B. No improvement to the existintg access road, install new RR crossing for 3 track system, and replace bridge.	○	○	◐	◐	○	○	○	○	○	○		✓
C. Improve existing gravel access road to a consistent 18 foot width, install new RR crossing for 3 track system, and replace bridge.	○	○	○	◐	○	○	○	○	○	○		✓
D. Improve existing gravel access road to a consistent 18 foot width, grade separate road and RR, and replace bridge.	○	○	○	◐	○	○	○	○	○	○		✓
Main Street Option												
A. Utilize WSDOT ROW (Viewshed Park) to extend Main Street over RR and Lake River with a new bridge and improve city streets to accommodate refuge traffic.	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	✓	
B. Utilize WSDOT ROW (Viewshed Park) to extend Main Street (tangent) over RR and Lake River with a new bridge and improve city streets to accommodate refuge traffic.	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	✓	
Sargent Street Option												
A. Extend Sargent Street west over the RR and Lake River with a new bridge and improve city streets to accommodate refuge traffic.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	✓	
Mill Street Options												
A. Develop new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the south end of marina property and cross Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	○	◐	○	○	●	○	○	✓	
B. Develop new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the south end of marina property and cross Lake River with a new moveable bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	○	✓	
C. Develop new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the mid section of the marina property and cross Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	✓	
D. Develop new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the mid section of the marina property and cross Lake River with a new movable bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	○	✓	
E. Develop new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the north side of the existing boat ramp parking area and cross Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	✓	
F. Develop new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the north side of the existing boat ramp parking area and cross Lake River with a new moveable bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	✓	
Pioneer Street Options												
A. Utilize Port Access project with revised span layout to accommodate an intersection on the bridge to safely separate port and refuge traffic, extend refuge access over Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	○	◐	○	◐	●	○	○	✓	
B. Utilize Port Access project with a new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the north side of the existing boat ramp parking area and cross Lake River with a new moveable bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	○	✓	
C. Utilize Port Access project with a new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the north side of the existing boat ramp parking area and cross Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	●	◐	○	○	●	○	○	✓	
D. Utilize Port Access project with a new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the south end of marina property and cross Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	○	◐	○	○	●	○	○	✓	
E. Utilize Port Access project with a new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the south end of marina property and cross Lake River with a new moveable bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	○	✓	
F. Utilize Port Access project with a new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the mid section of the marina property and cross Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	●	◐	○	◐	●	○	○	✓	
G. Utilize Port Access project with a new road 18 foot paved from Mill Street to the mid section of the marina property and cross Lake River with a new moveable bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	○	✓	
Division Street Options												
A. Develop new bridge alignment and profile along Division Street and cross Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	✓	
B. Develop new bridge alignment and profile along Division Street and cross Lake River with a moveable bridge.	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	✓	
Cook Street Option												
A. Develop grade separated option at Cook Street that spans the RR, sewer plant, and then returns to grade before spanning Lake River with a new bridge.	○	○	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	✓	

Evaluation Key: ○ Fully satisfies purpose or specified criteria, or rates relatively low for impact. ◐ Partially satisfies purpose or specified criteria, or rates moderate for impact. ● Does not satisfy purpose or specified criteria, or rates relatively high for impact.