

Chapter 12

Recreation

12.1 Primary Issues

Outdoor recreation is an important part of life for many Maury Island residents. Beach walks, horseback riding, bicycling, and evening and weekend strolls are common activities enjoyed by the community.

The project site is privately owned and operated for the sole purpose of gravel extraction, as it has been since the 1940s. However, the low level of mining activity over the past 20 years has allowed informal and non-authorized use of the site for recreation. Many residents are concerned that reactivation of large-scale mining at the site would eliminate this use that they have become accustomed to.

The primary issue addressed in this chapter is:

- Would the project interfere with the public use and enjoyment of any formal or informal recreational sites in the area?

12.2 Affected Environment

12.2.1 Existing Recreational Facilities in the Vicinity

Notable recreational sites on Maury Island include Dockton Park, Maury Island Marine Park, Point Robinson Park and Lighthouse, and Vashon Golf Course.

Dockton Park is a 23-acre park located on the west end of Southwest 260th Street, on the north side of the island along Quartermaster Harbor. The park is about one-quarter mile northwest of where mining would occur. The park provides picnic areas, hiking trails, swimming beach, a boat launch, and moorage.

Maury Island Marine Park is a newly acquired, undeveloped county park on the southeast side of Maury Island, located along

the shoreline northeast of the Gold Beach community. The park is accessed by a 10- to 15-minute walk downhill to the beach from the parking lot. The park is also accessed via the shoreline for some residents of Gold Beach and Sandy Shores. The entrance is off of Southwest 244th Street.

Point Robinson Park is located on the east end of Southwest Point Robinson Road, about 1 mile northeast of the project site. The 10-acre park includes the Point Robinson Lighthouse, picnic tables, trails, and beach access.

12.2.2 Informal Recreational Use of the Project Site

People have accessed the site, largely without permission, and other undeveloped lands in the area for walking on informal trails, existing roads, and the shoreline; horseback, mountain bike, and motorcycle riding; and other activities. The project site contains no constructed recreational facilities, trails, or access since the property is managed solely for gravel production. People use existing dirt roads and informal trails to access the site. Recently, the applicant has taken steps to prohibit unauthorized use of the site. These efforts have included placing ads in the Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber and informing the King County sheriff's office of trespassing.

A brief survey conducted in January 1999 by the EIS consultant team identified residents' use of the site. Of the 24 people surveyed, the following uses were identified (the percents indicate the proportion of respondents who said they use the site for each activity):

- Horseback riding (75 percent)
- Wildlife viewing (42 percent)
- Walking trails (42 percent)
- Hiking (33 percent)
- Motorized or nonmotorized bike riding (33 percent)
- Beach walking (25 percent)
- Other uses (less than 25 percent each)

In addition, the dock area is popular for recreational scuba diving.

12.3 Impacts

12.3.1 Would the project interfere with the public use and enjoyment of any formal or informal recreational sites in the area?

12.3.1.1 Proposed Action

Impacts on recreation would be limited to the site and adjacent lands. Parks in the vicinity are not sufficiently close to be affected by traffic, equipment, or noise. Visitors to the Maury Island Marine Park would see barge traffic entering and leaving the site. This would not significantly alter the opportunities or experiences provided by the park. Many popular shoreline parks around the Puget Sound region have views of shipping and barging.

The site would not be visible from Dockton Park, Point Robinson Park, and the Vashon Golf Course, nor would it complicate traffic or parking for these areas.

The area available for informal recreation on the site would be reduced as the site is mined. At any given time, active operations would occur on up to 64 acres of the site (for mining and active reclamation areas). Some of the active area may require fencing per King County Code, but the applicant has not proposed to fence the site perimeter.

Land yet to be mined may be available for use, and reclaimed areas may be available for some use as well. The site is expected to be periodically inactive or operating at very low levels. During periods of inactivity, much of the site could be available for informal uses, although liability and safety issues would need to be addressed by the operator of the mine.

During inactive periods, the beach area would be essentially unchanged from current conditions and would provide opportunities similar to those currently available. During active, full-production periods at the mine, the shoreline would still be available for public use. The applicant plans to construct safety features in the conveyor system and dock (e.g., overhead protection) to allow for safe pedestrian passage under the facility along the shoreline.

Noise and activity at the mine may detract from the recreational experiences currently available at the site and adjacent lands. The

shoreline environment would be much more active, and people could see or hear barges and tugs, the conveyor system, exposed sand and gravel, and equipment and workers. Some of the mining would occur behind the shoreline bluffs or within the interior portions of the site and would be somewhat removed from the shoreline area.

The attractiveness of the waterfront for recreational boaters would be reduced. For example, the area provides an attractive place to anchor overnight for sailboaters (potentially guests of Maury Island residents), but with 24-hour barging, the area would not be as attractive for such use. However, many boaters currently use Dockton Park, since it has a marina. This is on the other side of the island along Quartermaster Harbor, so this use would not be affected.

Over time, mining and barging would become a common sight and, eventually, a part of the overall character of the area until the site is closed.

Safety concerns regarding public access include the active facilities and equipment that would be part of the working mine. In addition, the working “face” of the mine could contain steep slopes and unstable ground, and moving vehicles and equipment can be dangerous. While people would tend to avoid active portions of the mine, it is conceivable that people could venture into these areas without authorization. Workers would be present in active areas and would directly control access within the active mining areas. In addition, as described in Chapter 9, Land and Shoreline Use, several measures identified in King County Code specifically address public safety and prevention of public nuisances and hazards.

Diving opportunities along the site shoreline would be essentially eliminated during active mining periods.

12.3.1.2 Alternative 1

Reduced hours of barging would not greatly affect the way recreation would be impacted by the project. Early morning, evening, and Sunday walks for residents along the shoreline or on adjacent bluffs may be more peaceful since barge loading would not occur at these times. Recreational scuba divers would be able to dive on Sundays.

12.3.1.3 Alternative 2

As with Alternative 1, reduced hours of barge loading would reduce the distracting effect of noise and activity during evening and early morning hours and on Sunday.

12.3.1.4 No-Action

Under No-Action, the applicant is likely to continue to restrict public access to the site (except for beach access).

12.4 Mitigation Measures

12.4.1 Measures Already Proposed by the Applicant or Required by Regulation

- While two decades of low-level mining activity has allowed people to use the site, the site is a privately owned and operated gravel mine, and the applicant is not obligated to provide access for recreation. To the extent that liability issues can be resolved, the applicant would allow access to the shoreline.
- The applicant plans to construct safety features in the conveyor system and dock (e.g., overhead protection) to allow for safe pedestrian passage under the facility along the shoreline.

12.4.2 Additional Measures for Consideration to Further Reduce Impacts

To offset the reduction in accustomed (yet unauthorized) use of the site by residents, the applicant could allow recreational use along the perimeter or inactive areas of the site. For example, a trail and viewpoint could be established overlooking the shoreline and the site.

Since the site is private property, the applicant is not obligated to provide access or recreational use and may be restrained from doing so, since the applicant could be liable for public safety. To ensure safe operation of the mine and compatible recreational use, access would need to be controlled. Control measures could include fencing or posting of signs. More elaborate techniques to control access could include development of areas to attract or direct people away from active mining areas.

The applicant could coordinate with the community and King County to identify appropriate uses and to inform the public on recreational use of the property. Cooperation between the mine operator and King County (for Maury Island Marine Park) and the Sandy Shores and Gold Beach communities could produce some new recreational opportunities for the community.

12.5 Cumulative Impacts

Reduced recreational opportunities at the site would be additive to similar reductions that have occurred due to other mining activity on the island and continued development of private lands. Past developments in the area have altered recreational opportunities and needs. Developments include the subdivisions along the southern shoreline of Maury Island, along with overall infilling of residential properties throughout the island. These developments have removed lands available for public use, altered the natural shoreline condition, introduced people and associated disturbances in the area, and increased the demand for recreational facilities and shoreline access. Developed parks in the area have offset much of the opportunity lost due to residential growth, as well as meeting some of the increased demands for parks and open space.

It is expected that population levels and dwellings would increase on the island over time, along with the associated loss of private lands for informal recreational use and shoreline access, and the increased demand for recreational facilities.

Considered collectively with past, planned, and reasonably foreseeable future land uses, the proposal would not contribute to a major cumulative impact on recreation because of continued recreational opportunities on the island, including future development of Maury Island Marine Park.

12.6 Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

Mining activity could distract from outdoor uses of adjacent lands. However, the site is zoned for mining and has been owned and operated as a mine for over 50 years. Loss of recreational opportunities outside of shoreline areas is not considered a significant impact since the operator has not authorized such use, nor is the operator obligated to provide such use.

Recreational opportunities would still be available under the Proposed Action, including the use of Maury Island Marine Park.

Depending on the operator of the mine, and any agreements reached with King County or others to allow access, recreation may be available within inactive portions of the site. Areas potentially available include most of the shoreline and about two-thirds of the upland areas at any one time (including buffers, unmined areas, and reclaimed areas). Potentially, the final site (or completed areas) could be developed as a park or other recreational facility, although future use of the site is beyond the scope of this decision and analysis.

The several other areas used for recreation on Maury Island would remain available, including lands in the immediate vicinity of the site (e.g., Maury Island Marine Park, the shorelines of the Gold Beach and Sandy Shores communities).

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