

VIII. Acquisitions and Conversions Plan

The City of Olympia purchased the Grass Lake Refuge from a development company who assembled the land parcels for a housing development. The land parcels were not assembled on the basis of a refuge. As noted in the “Wetland Inventory and Habitat Assessment for Grass Lake Park”, the upland habitats include areas of high, moderate and low habitat value. Areas of low habitat value may have other values such as buffering the wetlands, screening noise and views and providing trail connections. Habitat values should increase with the management strategies outlined in the master plan. Some adjacent parcels are of high habitat and scenic value.

The master plan for Grass Lake is based on existing public ownership. The Grass Lake Refuge can adequately function without additional acquisitions. However, additional acquisitions would provide the opportunity for further enhancement and protection of the refuge. Thirteen adjacent properties were reviewed for what values they would contribute to the refuge. The analysis did not consider non-adjacent properties.

City ordinances and other regulations help to protect the refuge without additional acquisitions. Olympia’s critical area ordinance protects wetlands and requires wetland buffers. When undeveloped parcels adjacent to the refuge are developed the wetlands will be buffered from development. This should help to maintain wildlife habitat in the city and help to filter and buffer water entering the refuge. The Drainage Design and Erosion Control Manual for Olympia results in stormwater releases from new developments being managed. Flows into the refuge will increase as parcels are developed. Olympia’s tree protection ordinance will help to protect habitat and scenic values on properties adjacent to the refuge.

Park land is a public asset and should be managed as such with flexibility to address changing needs and conditions. Future planning and analysis may identify parcels that should be converted to non-refuge uses. Altering refuge parcels from urban wildlife habitat to other use is called a land conversion. All land conversions within the current boundary of the refuge must be approved by the Washington Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation because they are a co-owner of the refuge. An example of a conversion would be:

1. Land along the north perimeter might be converted to a neighborhood park.
2. Low or moderate value habitat might be converted to building lots with proceeds reinvested to purchase other new, open space parcels with greater habitat value. These new parcels could be adjacent to the refuge or other open space lands within the Olympia Growth Area.

Prior to any future City Council decision to convert refuge lands, staff must perform the following analysis:

1. Obtain land appraisals for the parcels being converted, including the new parcels to be acquired.
2. Obtain a wildlife or wetland biologist's evaluation of the habitat functions and values of lands involved in the conversion.
3. Obtain a wildlife or wetland biologist's recommendations on mitigation measures to protect the refuge from any degradation which may result from new land uses developed on the converted refuge parcels.

The Grass Lake Refuge lands are highly valued by the community. Future consideration of conversions must be carefully evaluated utilizing the information required above and other factors deemed necessary.