

DRAFT: MANAGEMENT PROPOSAL FOR THE
UNION BAY RESEARCH NATURAL AREA
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

1. DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 The Union Bay Research Natural Area (RNA) consists of the Ecological Research Area (ca. 34 acres) and the Unmanaged Wildlife Area (ca. 20 acres), as described in the Draft EIS of the Center for Urban Horticulture at Union Bay (1980:22), as well as the adjacent shorelines under University control. The precise boundaries are to be legally determined by the University and a map showing those boundaries placed on file.

1.2 The RNA is a resource of great value to the University as well as to the wider metropolitan Seattle community. The RNA contributes to the University's mission in the areas of research, teaching, and public service, as follows:

a. RESEARCH VALUE: The RNA is a laboratory for the study of ecological processes, in particular, it offers a unique opportunity for University faculty and students to investigate the powers of recovery of natural vegetative and wildlife communities in disturbed and highly polluted urban environments.

b. TEACHING VALUE: The research values noted above contribute directly to the training of advanced students in such fields as botany, zoology, forest resources, urban horticulture, landscape architecture, and environmental studies. The RNA also provides a diverse natural ecological system close at hand for introductory instruction in ecological topics as taught in a variety of natural and social science disciplines. Community-based environmental organizations regularly use this rich wildlife area for field trips and in other public educational programs.

c. PUBLIC SERVICE VALUE: The RNA is an open park-like setting with a commanding view of Mt. Rainier across the expanse of Union Bay. These landscape features are of psychological and aesthetic value for all who visit the area. The RNA is well known to local people for the diversity and unique quality of its wildlife, especially its bird life. These educational, aesthetic, and recreational values are shared with the community at large and constitute a substantial civic amenity provided by the University to the people of Seattle.

1.3 The value of the RNA derives from the following characteristics of the site:

a. It is a natural area. That is, plant and animal

communities are allowed to develop here subject only to 1) concern for the health and safety of people who use the area or who live and work adjacent to it, and 2) concern to preserve and enhance the natural qualities of the area. It is not, of course, a "pristine" natural area.

b. It is largely an open space. The central grassland with its shallow ponds is the heart of the RNA. Such open habitats are rare in western Washington and are unique within the city limits of Seattle. The grasslands and ponds support a great diversity of plant species and wildlife of great local and regional interest (Draft EIS 1980:70-90). The landscape and wildlife values of the RNA are in large part due to this open quality.

c. It is a diverse natural habitat. Not only are the grasslands and ponds supportive of an unusually diverse and distinctive flora and fauna, but the presence of three additional habitat types on the site further enhances the biological diversity of the area; these are, the swampy woodland of the Unmanaged Wildlife Area, the lake shore and offshore island marshes, and the emerging shrubby patches scattered throughout the area. This balanced mix of habitats should be preserved, not any single habitat type alone.

d. It is an accessible site. It is located on campus and near the center of the city of Seattle, a natural island in an urban sea. It is not fenced nor is public access restricted beyond what is essential to preserve its value as a natural area. Though this accessibility poses management problems, without this accessibility the site would lose much of its value for teaching and in public service.

2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Management of the RNA under these guidelines may range over a continuum from a passive role to more active management styles as follows:

Option a. Minimal maintenance. The area would be allowed to develop as it will. Management will only be permitted to the extent needed for protection of human health and safety (e.g., removal of hazards, fencing, major path maintenance) and protection of the site from external urban influences (e.g., water pollution in runoff, damaging human use, vehicles, noise).

Option b. Management to protect and enhance RNA values. The area would be managed to maintain and enhance existing vegetation, wildlife, and landscape values of the site. This management will require small scale disruption and disturbance associated with experimental trials, and more extensive activity over the site as a whole associated with tested management programs. It is difficult to predict what form management might take, but it might include activities such as introducing native

seeds and plant material, introducing or encouraging some species of wildlife, cutting, mowing, fertilizing, irrigating, adding soil and organic materials, altering drainage patterns leading into the site, removing undesired vegetation, path maintenance to control the patterns of access (close some, open others), adding fencing, etc.

Option c. Development to promote general biological/ecological research. The area would be managed to support general biological/ecological research. This might include: nurseries for propagation of plant material to support botany, forestry and urban horticulture; forest growth plots; fertilizer/herbicide trials; trial plots for reclamation; studies in turf management; teaching collections for native plants, food plants, herbs, woody plants; uptake studies of landfill toxins; trials for landscape processing of urban runoff or tertiary sewage; visual experiments in landscape design; demonstration gardens, etc.

2.2 We favor the second alternative as most appropriate for preserving and enhancing the recognized values of the RNA. The first task of the new management (see below, Section 3) is to develop a detailed management plan that should include but not be limited to the following regularly scheduled maintenance activities:

- a. coordination with physical plant of hazard removal, trail maintenance, and refuse pick-up,
- b. coordination with campus police of enforcement of posted regulations,
- c. supervision of approved research, teaching, and public service activities in the RNA,
- d. coordination with physical plant and/or volunteer work groups of annual vegetation control measures, to include cutting of willow, alder, scot's broom, and blackberry to retard the spread of woody vegetation; uprooting of loosestrife and other pond margin plants to keep pond margins at partially clear of perennial vegetation; and mowing or plowing of sections of grassland. These activities should be scheduled so as to minimize wildlife disturbance.

3. MANAGEMENT

3.1 The RNA must be actively managed by the University in order to preserve and enhance the values specified in Section 1.2 above. To this end the University should establish an administrative system and provide adequate funding to assure effective management of the RNA. We propose the following administrative structure to that end.

- a. Responsibility for the management of the Research

Natural Area will be vested in a Manager, appointed by the Director of the Center for Urban Horticulture subject to approval by the President of the University. The Manager should be a faculty member with a central commitment to the values of the RNA as defined above.

b. The Manager will appoint and chair a permanent Scientific Committee to assist in the management of the RNA. The Scientific Committee will consist of three members including the manager, all faculty with important interests in research, teaching, or public service aspects of the RNA. The Scientific Committee will meet as often as necessary, but no less than quarterly. The committee will receive, review, and decide on all proposals for research, teaching, and public service activities in the RNA.

c. The Manager, with the assistance of the Scientific Committee, will conduct the day-to-day operation of the RNA (see Section 2.2 above), prepare an annual budget for the management of the RNA, work directly with designated representatives of Physical Plant on matters of maintenance, bring new management proposals to the Director of the CUH for consideration by the UBAC, and present to the UBAC status reports as needed on actions taken and planned as well as an annual report.

d. The Union Bay Advisory Committee (UBAC) is appointed by the Director of the CUH to provide advice and assistance regarding the overall management and use of the RNA. The UBAC will have members from the University representing faculty, administration, and management of physical plant, as well as members from the neighborhood and community groups that use or have an interest in the RNA. The UBAC will normally meet bimonthly, but no less than twice per year. The UBAC will assist the Director of the CUH in development of RNA management policies and plans, review of RNA projects, and in community relations involving the RNA. Though the UBAC is strictly advisory, its members must be kept well informed so that their advice will have a significant impact on RNA management.

4. FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 We recommend also that the University with the cooperation of the CUH and under the direction of the Manager actively promote scientific knowledge of the RNA by establishing a special library collection in the CUH library of maps, documents, research reports, floral and faunal lists, and other relevant literature and publicize the collection to the University and metropolitan community. Appropriate research proposals using the site should be actively solicited. These measures will not only increase the value of the RNA as a scientific resource but also enhance its visibility and thus secure a wider recognition of its value.

4.2 A vision for the future: Centered around the concept of

ecosystem restoration--using the talent and extensive resources at the University of Washington in botany, zoology, forestry, environmental studies, urban horticulture, and landscape architecture--the area could be made into a national/international model of natural area restoration and management for vegetation, wildlife, and visual landscape values. With national recognition associated with dozens of research projects, scientific papers, restoration demonstration plots, and active educational programs concerned with natural area management, the natural area values would be proven.

7. Submitted to the UBAC, 14 May 1986, by the ad hoc committee:

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