

**WHATCOM COUNTY**

**Parks & Recreation**

3373 Mount Baker Highway  
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097



**Michael G. McFarlane**, Director  
**Christ Thomsen**, Operations Manager

## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Members of the Council and Executive Louws  
**FROM:** Michael McFarlane, Director  
**DATE:** April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
**RE:** Council Questions on the Plantation Rifle Range

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Below find a brief background on the Plantation Rifle Range and answers to questions posed by Council members. I have grouped the responses based on the issues raised.

Please note that lead reclamation and remediation is a more complex issue and staff would need additional time to fully work out a plan, process and costs. As long as we're operating the range, lead will continue to accumulate so operational considerations need to be determined first. The County is responsible under lease for the clean-up and it's highly unlikely another party, including the property owner, would assume that responsibility.

Please contact my office if you would like to tour of the facility and I'll be glad to make arrangements.

### **PLANTATION RIFLE RANGE COUNCIL ISSUES 4.4.19**

#### **Background**

The Plantation Rifle Range opened in 1971 on leased DNR State Trust Lands featuring a covered 15 station 300-yard outdoor rifle range. In 1975, a 25-yard indoor 12 station small bore and archery range was added. Additional amenities today include a classroom, a 12 station covered 100 yard outdoor pistol and small bore range and a single automated trap field. Classes and matches are held on site and rental firearms, ammunition and safety items are available for purchase. The range is open year round to the public and used by various agencies, organizations and groups during non-public hours. Parks & Recreation staff are certified under the NRA Range Safety Officer training program.

#### **Land Lease**

The range is located on property owned by Bertch Timberlands. The County has a 30-year lease for 8.45 acres and the surrounding 51.6 acre buffer area. This lease expires in January 2030 with a re-lease clause. Our current lease payment is \$3,500 annually.

This amount will increase to \$4,000 a year in 2020. The County has the obligation for payment until 2030. Upon termination of the lease, all improvements including buildings revert to the property owner (Bertch Timberlands). The County is responsible for lead abatement, clean-up and mitigation of the site. To determine the scope of cleanup work, permitting and costs, this item will require substantially more time and effort than this response allows.

### **Subletting & Assignment**

The lease requires approval of Bertch Timberland for any subletting and assignment to occur. Use is restricted to recreational firearms and archery range with related facilities without written permission of Bertch Timberland.

### **Grant Funding Obligations**

The County's obligations for any prior state grant funded improvements expired in 2017. Equipment and building improvements carry a 10-year obligation under the FARR grant program. This is the program our current grant funding is linked to. To date we have not used the \$294,400 in state funds and would need to notify the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) to release these funds if the improvements as proposed are not made. If the capital improvements are made with these funds, the County will have a 10-year obligation to maintain the improvements for public use. Under the current agreement, the roof/HVAC project needs to be completed in less than 90 days. The current work plan had the project scheduled for completion in June. Due to delays, the Department intends to request an immediate extension of the agreement from RCO to complete the work in this calendar year. These funds will not be available for the County to use after December 31<sup>st</sup> this year.

### **Transfer of Grant Obligations**

Grant obligations under FARR can potentially be transfer to another qualified registered non-profit shooting organization with approval of the RCO, Whatcom County and the other receiving party. The qualifying party would need to accept all liability, obligations and maintain the public benefit. As a condition of the lease, Bertch Timberlands would also have to approve the assignment/sublet. The only qualifying non-profit in the County on record with the Recreation and Conservation Office is the Custer Sportsman's Club.

### **Roof/HVAC Project Asbestos**

As part of the indoor range roof/HVAC replacement project, the asbestos in the present roofing material will be removed and abated as part of the contract.

### **Insurance**

The County does not have a separate insurance policy for the rifle range.

### **Use by Range**

Our system does not allow tracking by individual range or activity. Many shooters use multiple ranges on their visit. Observations indicate annual use is split approximately 50/50 between small bore and high power ranges. The indoor range is heavily used during inclement weather, for classes and specialized training purposes. In 2018, the range had over 15,356 visitations.

As a final item, approximately 50% of the range revenue is generated on the indoor/small bore range. In 2018, this would amount to \$129,000. Of that amount, nine contracted agencies generated \$103,000 of this revenue helping offset expenses. It is expected that without the indoor range component, this revenue will be substantially reduced or lost. We can continue to operate without the improvements until the HVAC fails, at which time we will need to close the indoor portion of the range. The County will still need to make repairs to the roof and maintain the building as a condition of the lease.

### **Brief Comparison of Plantation Range and Custer Sportsman's Club**

| <b>Plantation Rifle Range</b> | <b>Custer Sportsman's Club (Website)</b>         |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Public                        | Members Only                                     |
| Scheduled Hours               | Open 365 days/9:00 AM-9:00 PM or Dusk            |
| Indoor: 25 yd.                | None   |
| Outdoor: 100 yd. and 300 yd.  | Outdoor 200 meter (219 yds.)                     |
| Single automatic trap         | None   |
| Standard shooting             | Multiple competition and shooting configurations |