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ENTER AGENDA SECTION HERE- *Nate Monahan, Recreation Manager*

UPDATE ON PHASE 1 OF WETLAND SANCTUARY PROJECT

The first phase of the project will be a parking lot/trailhead on the east side of the BWS off Lexington Ave., directly across from the Lexington Athletic Complex. This phase will also include construction of a trail that will extend from the trailhead to the west and connect with the existing trail loop at East Lakes Park. Cost of this phase is estimated at \$765,000. Work will begin this summer/fall timeframe. See Attached Map

Below is a summary of the entire project.

Since the late 1990's the city of Blaine has made a commitment to purchasing and preserving open space areas within the city borders. Efforts have resulted in 13 areas totaling over 800 acres to be officially designated as Open Space. In 2008, the City implemented an Open Space Management Plan designed to control invasive plant species in the open spaces, promote restoration of native plant species and develop public use and appreciation of these significant areas. To date, management projects have been successful with the exception of two areas where projects have not been started as yet. One is a landlocked area that is waiting for development to make access feasible and the other is an area named Site 7 in the management plan. The NRCB has recommended a name change, which has been approved by Council. This site is now officially known as the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS).

BWS is approximately 500 acres in size and contains a mix of wetlands and uplands that are home to a diverse inventory of wildlife and native plant species, some of which are endangered or threatened. The location is north of 109th Ave. and west of Lexington Ave. in east Blaine. It is bordered on the north and east by Anoka county Ditch 53-62, on the west by residential development and extends south to 109th Ave.

BWS has been envisioned as a potential destination for nature lovers and an example of pre-development Anoka Sand Plain ecosystem. Beginning with control of invasive species, the project would restore the native diversity of plants and plant communities and add amenities such as trails and bird watching stations. The project would also include the construction of a

nature center, providing interpretative services and educational programs.

The project process began in January of this year with a request for proposal for conceptual design services circulated to qualified contractors. The City Council awarded a contract to Stantec, Inc. at the March 20 council meeting. Stantec has included Jason Husveth (Critical Connections Ecological Services) as part of their team for this project. Jason has completed numerous restoration projects in Blaine and is currently working on the wetland banking project located in the center of BWS. A conceptual design will be complete by mid-summer this year and will be unveiled for public viewing. Bids for final design will go out in late fall 2014 with construction expected to begin in 2015. Trail heads/parking areas and some trails will be in the initial phase with succeeding phases to include the various amenities, vegetation restoration and the nature center. Completion of the entire project is estimated for 2019 - 2020.

Funding for the project will be entirely from the Open Space and Trails Fund which is funded solely by Park Dedication Fees. The total project cost is estimated to be between \$950,000 and \$1Million. No General Fund tax dollars will be used for this project.

Under a separate project, the NRCB is initiating a second wetland banking project. The site is located at the north end of BWS and adjacent to the current wetland banking project. Two contractors submitted bids with the award going to Jason Husveth (CCES). The purpose of this project is to create additional wetland credits that will be banked and sold to generate revenue for the Open Space fund.

This additional revenue is necessary to maintain the improvements made to the open spaces in connection with the Open Space Management Plan. State Statute does not allow the use of Park Dedication fees for maintenance. Open Space improvements are reaching the point where future work would be considered maintenance. Having the revenue generated by the sale of wetland credits would mean no General Fund dollars would be used. It is anticipated that approximately 97 acres of credits would be created as a result of this project. At current market rates for an acre of wetland credit, the net revenue potential is about \$4Million.

The project is currently moving through the permit phase which could take a year or more. Work on the ground will begin no later than 2016, sooner if possible. Project completion is scheduled for 2020. Credits could be available for sale as soon as 2017.

Update to wetland banking project - 041015: The project has received conceptual approval

from all regulatory agencies except the Corps of Engineers. We are working through their process and hope to have the sign off by Nov./Dec. of this year (2015). Once that is in hand, work will begin on the restoration process.

Update on BWS - 041015: Bids for final design were received from 4 firms with the award going to Stantec. After review of the concept design final report the estimated budget for this project is now at \$2.5M. This includes the nature center. The city will be contacting local corporations for contributions and will also seek grants, such as the LCCMR grant, to supplement the open space fund. The fund currently has about \$1M and has been receiving additional park dedication funds. However, with the percent to open space reduced from 35% to 20% for the next few years there is a short fall in achieving the total goal. Revenue from the wetland banking project will not be available for a minimum of 2 years which is why supplemental sources of revenue are being pursued.

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The remaining trail segments, a trailhead off 109th Ave. and the nature center will be in succeeding phases over the next 5 to 6 years.

Information