



March 5, 2020



## **Memorandum of Decision: Selection of a Course of Action for Sitka Sedge State Natural Area Dike Improvement**

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) has been working with the Tierra Del Mar community and other stakeholders for nearly 5 years to resolve a number of issues with the existing dike at Sitka Sedge State Natural Area. We each have slightly different perspectives about the question, but almost everyone agrees the current dike's tide gate is in extremely poor condition and will likely fail in the not-too-distant future. Not acting is not a real option. Deciding how to act has been a complicated and difficult process. Among our shared goals are improving fish passage and habitat, flood protection, recreational access, and water quality. We have done our best to weigh the pros and cons of each option, giving top priority to our obligation to the future as park stewards and as a neighbor. To extent we can, we're looking out 50+ years to ensure the public investment meets these common goals.

Over the course of the last 5 years, we've been joined by consultants, neighbors and partners to study hydrological risks, ecological needs, recreational implications, effects on infrastructure and private property, and costs. We have shared the results through public meetings, the web, email lists, and a number of technical reports. Thanks to the community's willingness to share diverse perspectives, ideas, and concerns, we've focused our review on four broad options:

- 1) Take no action (leave the dike and tide gate how they are).
- 2) Install a modern tide gate on the existing dike to improve fish passage and the estuary.
- 3) Breach the dike and restore full estuary function.
- 4) Construct a new, taller, stronger "setback dike" with a small tide gate close to Tierra Del Mar, then breach the old dike to restore estuary functions for the rest of the marsh.

In the final stages of analyzing the options, we convened a technical team, which included community members. The team evaluated each of the alternatives across a wide array of concerns. This group helped us understand the effects of each of the options from a variety of perspectives, rather than just from our view as park managers. While there are no perfect options—all have their pros and cons—it is time to select one preferred option for further development. We prefer the option that will provide the most benefits to park visitors and the community for the longest period of time, and one of our leading concerns relates to the height and condition of the existing dike: it is barely taller than the highest tides now, and it will be overtopped if the sea level rises even a small amount.

After much deliberation and careful thought, OPRD leadership prefers the setback dike option. The evidence strongly suggests a setback dike balances ecological benefit, real protection for Tierra Del Mar, and the long life that justifies public investment. We understand people are nervous at the idea of breaching any dike, no matter how poorly it serves future needs. Our commitment to Tierra Del Mar is this: we are willing to invest in a long-term solution supported by data, even if it causes short-term anxiety or strains our relationship with the community.

This decision kicks off a substantial amount of work that will involve the community, our other stakeholders, and agency staff. We need a more complete understanding of the most ideal setback dike design, location, funding, permitting processes, and calendar. We're looking at a couple years' worth of work, at least.

OPRD will restart the technical advisory team to help review designs. OPRD will also hold public meetings on roughly the same schedule to keep communication channels open with you, Tillamook County and its Commissioners, and other partners. The region around the park will benefit from better cooperation between the state and county, and we will pursue agreements with the county to that end. As always, even if this isn't the decision everyone was hoping for, we will continue to work with you and our other partners on our common well-being.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Sumption". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" and last name "Sumption" clearly legible.

Lisa Sumption

Director, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department