

## Neighborhood Association

# Camp Bonneville's future?

### County council chairman suggests equestrian center, trails, veterans' home at former military reservation

Clark County Council Chairman Gary Medvivy says he'd like to see an equestrian center, horse trails and a veterans home at Camp Bonneville, the former U.S. Army base in the center of the Proebstel Neighborhood Association.

The military closed the 3,840-acre training base in 1995. It is a gorgeous piece of property, particularly the camp's central valley. The camp was transferred to county ownership in 2011.

Medvivy said Camp Bonneville has the potential to have "an equestrian center of excellence," similar to those in some other Washington counties.

"We've got the perfect location for it, perfect terrain," he said at a mid-January council meeting. "We have volunteers out there that ride horses on trails. They have experts that could design the trails for you."

Camp Bonneville has been closed to the public for decades.

In 2006, the Washington Department of Ecology defined the clean-up needed for unexploded ordnance, contaminated groundwater and other environmental issues. About \$83 million — mostly from the U.S. Department of Defense — have been spent on clean-up so far.

State officials are expected to declare the camp's clean-up complete this year, although that's disputed by many.

Kirk VanGelder, president of the PNA, said he's attended most public meetings about the camp since the 1995 closure.



**Gary Medvivy**

"From what I know, complete does not mean safe," VanGelder told the council. "To say that it is 100 percent complete and safe is a misnomer."

Rocky Houston, the county's parks and lands division manager, shared a timeline that showed Clark County preparing its ongoing cleanup maintenance and operations plan in 2025 and adoption of a camp master plan in 2029.

Medvivy said the Camp Bonneville clean-up and planning seems endless.

"This is a primary example of how bureaucracies can just go and go and go," he said.

Medvivy urged taking a 1998 Reuse Plan for the camp, hiring a consultant to update it, and then ask the public if they like it.

Houston told the council the Department of Ecology has determined that clean-up at Camp Bonneville is complete except for a groundwater issue. Clark County is working on the close-out documentation and the on-going monitoring plan.

"We could have a plan done and there is a surprise issue in regards to what Ecology says we have to do," Houston said.

County Manager Kathleen Otto told the council the county needs to be sure this time that clean-up of Camp Bonneville is complete.

"The county made mistakes," Otto said. "We made statements and we provided recommendations that weren't based on facts, which is why we pivoted to say we need to make sure this clean-up is done."

### Reports, opinions differ on safety of roads, trails

There are almost 50 miles of roads and trails in Camp Bonneville, and if they've been cleared of potentially dangerous explosives depends on who's speaking or which government document is being cited.

Rocky Houston, parks and lands division manager for the county, said the roads and trails have been cleared in a mid-January briefing to the Clark County council.

"Those things that were identified to be cleaned up, were cleaned up, such as, for example roads and trails," Houston said. "There was a physical review with a metal detector 20 feet and 20 meters on either side of existing roads. However, there wasn't a cleaning down 14 or 28 inches."

According to an April 2022 report from the Washington Department of Ecology following a January 2022 public listing session: "As the clearance of the roads was not necessary, actual clearance of the roads was not done due to their long-term use and because of regular road maintenance activities, including grading, and fill."

A federal Explosive Safety Board gave the Camp Bonneville roads and trails a "very low relative explosive safety risk," according to the report.

DOE also states fieldwork in 2002 by munitions experts on the roads and trails found 38 inert munitions scrap items in a buffer along the routes.

"These practice munitions contained no explosive components whatsoever," the report said.

Greg Shaw, a member of the county's Camp Bonneville Citizen Advisory Group, has acquired and read hundreds of documents and reports about the camp. "The roads and trails were excluded because of somebody's wistful hope that there has been enough heavy trucks along those roads that there would have been explosions if there were explosives close to the surface," Shaw said.

Proebstel Neighborhood Association 15640  
NE Fourth Plain Blvd. Suite 106, PMB 92  
Vancouver WA 98682

Camp Bonneville updates inside

**Next meeting - February 27**

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## Next PNA meeting, 6:30 p.m., Feb. 27, Proebstel Church



*Several forks of the headwaters of Lacamas Creek flow through Camp Bonneville's central valley.*

### Road safety...

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, after a site evaluation, wrote to the Department of Ecology in February 2013, "EPA would require that roads and trails be geophysically mapped and cleared to depth of detection, and a surface clearance performed in the buffer zone."

Shaw said the Department of Ecology discarded the EPA guidance.

It was "guidance in line with EPA requirements for munitions/unexploded ordnance cleanup at sites in Washington and across the United States," he said.

County and state staff repeatedly claim the roads and trails are cleared and safe for public use.

"Many others, including (Clark County) council members, have accepted these false claims without actual review of the quite definitive record." Shaw said.

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### Emergency preparation, Camp Bonneville on Feb. 27 PNA meeting agenda

A program on emergency preparation plus updates from the county sheriff's office and the Camp Bonneville Citizen Advisory Group are on the agenda when the Proebstel Neighborhood Association meets at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 27 at Proebstel Church, 18702 N.E. Fourth Plain Road.