

Mirror Pond, Bend Oregon Future Management

Introduction. For a few years many of us thought the proposal to dredge Mirror Pond was going nowhere. That changed dramatically a few months ago when public access was gained to the ad hoc Funding Strategy Committee .

The public was presented with a proposal to fund a dredging plan for Mirror Pond via a franchise fee increase on Pacific Power. The plan for dredging was considered a closed issue not subject to further debate.

I offered my initial reactions to this in a Guest Column in the Bulletin <https://www.bendbulletin.com/opinion/6779394-151/guest-column-mirror-pond-time-for-a-public> and in a letter to the editor in The Source(Dec 19th) <https://www.bendsource.com/bend/ArticleArchives?category=2124614>

In this communication I will expand on my arguments that the public should not fund Mirror Pond dredging.

At a fundamental level, public funding should require public support. Is public support justified for the current dredging proposal? I've used three approaches to answer the question.

1) A first approach is to consider investment opportunities within the City or within the Deschutes River.

What on this list would get your vote for a \$6.7M + investment?

City:

Transportation

Affordable Housing

Urban renewal

Emergency Services

- Sewer hookups
- Road repairs
- Growth management issues

River:

- Habitat restoration
- Flow restoration Upper Deschutes
- Fish passage

First to the City options; this list is obviously incomplete. Of note however, at the City Council goal setting exercise on January 16, 2019 as well as in the formal 2017-2019 Council Goals & Objectives no mention whatsoever of dredging Mirror Pond made the various lists.

The dredge proposal fails to make a list of the highest value City opportunities.

For the river options consider first that the dredging proposal yields limited benefits for only 1 mile of river for only 10-20 years. By comparison fish passage yields benefits for ~40 miles of river permanently. Restoration of instream flows yields benefits for ~45-90 miles of river again permanently. And as a bonus the latter two have significant returns on investment.

The dredge proposal fails to make the list of the highest value river investment opportunities.

2) A second method for evaluation is based on previously established **community goals** for management strategies of the pond. These were a product of the Mirror Pond Visioning Project.

<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2015R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/73804>

That was a robust multiyear joint effort by the City of Bend and Bend Parks and Rec. It followed on a decade of meetings, studies and debate over sedimentation, and what to do about it in Mirror Pond. The Vision

identified community goals for management of Mirror Pond. They are useful as a measure of public support of the current dredging proposal.

- *Goal one: No New Taxes for the General Public.*
- *Goal two: Reduce or eliminate need to dredge.*
- *Goal three: Provide fish passage and enhance habitat.*
- *Goal four: Enhance recreation.*
- *Goal five: Maintain Mirror Pond.*

Sparing the reader a detailed discussion for now, the scorecard for the current dredging proposal can be summarized using the graphic of the Vision Project. The dredging proposal earns an outright negative or a qualified negative for each goal.

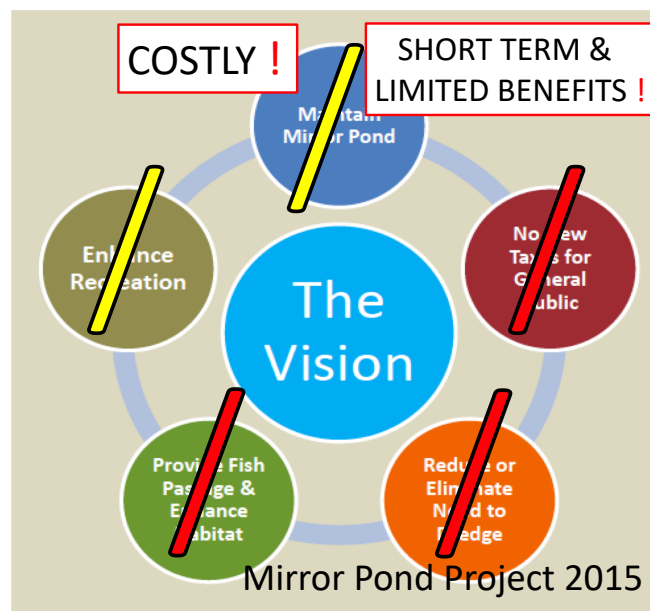


fig 1. Scoring the dredging proposal by community goals

Based on community goals, the dredging and financing proposal does not merit public funding. Discussion of cost and benefits follow.

3) A third approach is to weigh **costs versus benefits**. It is independent of the community goals framework.

First the costs. They are more than the publicized \$6.7M estimate when analyzed by standard economic techniques that consider immediate costs, costs in the future, usually 30-50 years for public works of this nature, and opportunity costs:

- **Direct line item cost \$6.7M**
- **Recurrent Dredge Costs ?**
 - 2019 cost estimates = 900% increase from 1984!
- **Opportunity costs:** ...Add Millions of \$
 - ✓ Other City projects
 - ✓ Environmental projects

Costs then should be weighed against benefits:

- **Time limited:** 80% of dredged sediment will accumulate again within 10 years, based on experience after the 1984 dredge as well as hydrologists' predictions. To illustrate the meaning of this, consider that the current proposal targets increasing depth of the pond by ~5 feet. If 80% refill occurs by ten years, then the net gain from the investment after ten years is ~ 1 foot only.
- **Improvement in view is debatable:**

We still have the same open expanse of water 34 years post 1984 dredge with views as "iconic" as ever - see photos below. What will dredging add to views now?
- **What % of Bend residents benefit from this expense?**

Actual enjoyment of dredging benefits (other than views), short lived as they are, will be a reality for only a small percent of Bend residents or visitors, e.g. west bank homeowners or kayakers.

- **The "stinking mud" fallacy.** The proponents of the current proposal have frequently referred to relief from "stinking mud flats" or the "stinking pile of mud" as an indication for dredging. The mud story is entirely erroneous reasoning, as the bottom of the pond has only been exposed when the pool level has been infrequently dropped by Pacific Power dam operations for a few days or weeks over recent years. Not only is that not characteristic of the pond under normal current circumstances, dredging will only make a difference at best for a few years until sedimentation again reduces water depth.



Photo by M. Tripp

Fig. 2 Mirror Pond January 12, 2019

Given the high costs relative to very skimpy benefits, the cost/benefit analysis again argues against public funding of the Dredge.

In conclusion, the current proposal to dredge Mirror Pond with financing through a Pacific Power franchise fee does not merit public funding based on any of three methods used to answer the question:

- 1) by the principle that public monies should be used for the best and highest value investment opportunities.
- 2) scoring against community goals

3) a basic cost/benefit analysis

It seems remarkable, even irresponsible, for the ad hoc Funding Strategy Committee and subsequent City Council and Bend Parks and Rec board to tell the public that this proposal should be acted upon and to boot with urgency. And the proposal on the table is for TaylorNW, one of the architects of the plan, to get an unbid contract for the dredging!

How did politics highjack science and prior public process conclusions, and proceed as if the public has no vote at this time?

It seems clear that the current proposal to dredge Mirror Pond and finance via a franchise fee should not receive public funding. A return to a transparent open public process is called for.

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January 28, 2019