



# United States Department of the Interior



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
P.O. Box 457 - 301 N. Third Avenue  
Ridgefield, Washington 98642

June 24, 2005

Wayne Yarnall  
ADA Build it Right, Inc.  
13820 NW 10<sup>th</sup> Court, Unit E  
Vancouver, WA

Mr Yarnall,

Thank you for your message concerning the accessibility of Cathlapotle Plankhouse at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). As you addressed in your letter, the existing bridge to the Carty Unit does not meet accessibility standards. It is the intent of the Refuge to replace the bridge with a structure that allows equal access for persons with disabilities. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is working with multiple partners to design a replacement bridge to allow safe universal access for all visitors. In 2002, the Service secured funding to replace the Carty bridge in conjunction with Plankhouse construction. Unfortunately, the bridge grant was rescinded. This year the Service has obligated funds for preliminary design work for a new structure. This design work will help the Refuge refine cost estimates for a supplemental funding request for the 2007 budget intended to replace the bridge.

Your message discusses the possibility of special dates for escorted trips to the Plankhouse site utilizing the road north of the bridge. Burlington Northern Sante Fe (BNSF) Railroad has supported periodic access via this road for select events. For major Plankhouse functions, BNSF has supplied a member of their law enforcement team with radio contact to the trains to escort vehicles over the tracks. It is the Refuge's intent to continue these escorted trips with BNSF's aid for special Plankhouse events. Access via this route for general visitation cannot be allowed due to safety concerns associated with crossing the tracks. Passenger trains along this stretch of tracks move at high speeds and do not sound horns for this crossing. The road to the north of the bridge has no safety features including lights, bells, or cross arms. The crossing is situated along gentle turn in tracks limiting visibility in both directions. And freight trains frequently stage over the crossing potentially trapping visitors at the Plankhouse site for indefinite periods.

I appreciate your message concerning access to the Plankhouse. It is the Refuge's desire to have the Plankhouse and its programs readily accessible as soon as possible. Please contact me at (360) 887-4106 if you have additional questions concerning this topic.

Sincerely,

Eric D. Anderson  
Outdoor Recreation Planner