



August 27, 2026

POSITION STATEMENT
Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge
August 2026

Subject: Proposed Port of Ridgefield Waterfront Development Plan

The Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge (Friends) welcome thoughtful community investment on the Ridgefield Waterfront. However, based on our evaluation of ecological risks and alignment with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) technical guidance, the Friends have serious concerns regarding the Port of Ridgefield's (Port) proposed waterfront development plan in its current form and its real potential to impact habitat and wildlife on the Refuge, directly and indirectly.

As the primary non-profit stewardship organization dedicated to supporting the Refuge, our duty is to safeguard the biological integrity, wildlife habitats, and dark-sky sanctuaries of this extraordinary natural resource. Development directly bordering a National Wildlife Refuge cannot follow standard urban commercial templates. While we express clear, substantive opposition to high-density residential concepts, multi-story structures, and high-impact parking near Carty Lake and Lake River, our goal is not to block waterfront revitalization, but to actively shape a conservation-first gateway model through constructive, collaborative engagement with the Port.

Key Position & Core Concerns

Our evaluation concludes that the Port's conceptual plan, as currently drafted, poses significant ecological risks to Federal trust species and migratory waterfowl that rely on Carty Lake and Lake River.

- **Avian Strike Hazards & Structural Disturbance:** Multi-story glass structures and unshielded nighttime illumination along the flight corridor create severe window-collision risks and light-pollution impacts within dark-sky foraging and resting habitats.
- **Habitat Intrusion at Carty Lake:** Continuous human presence, elevated vehicular traffic, domestic pet conflicts, and operational noise risk disrupting thousands of wintering waterfowl that rely on Carty Lake as a migratory and resting sanctuary.
- **Undermining Taxpayer Cleanup Investments:** Over \$90 million in public state and federal funds were invested in the cleanup of the Ridgefield Waterfront, Lake River, and Carty Lake and other Refuge property. This included approximately \$5 million specifically dedicated to cleaning up and restoring Carty Lake and another approximately \$15 - \$20 million remediating Lake River sediments and the shoreline. These cleanup measures were necessary to protect human health and restore ecological habitat. High-

FRIENDS OF RIDGEFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



August 27, 2026

impact commercial buildouts immediately adjacent to the important ecological resources risk undermining the long-term public benefit of those restoration dollars.

The Friends reached these conclusions through a careful, deliberate, and transparent process designed to give maximum legitimacy to our advocacy while maintaining open lines of communication with all regional partners. The Friend's position statement was informed by:

- **Civic Planning Monitoring:** Attending Port of Ridgefield and City Council meetings to track evolving design concepts and land-use proposals.
- **USFWS Technical Consultation:** Meeting with USFWS staff to evaluate potential ecological impacts and review the formal technical assistance letter submitted by USFWS to the Port detailing specific wildlife concerns.
- **Direct Port Dialogue:** Hosting Port leadership at our July 13 Board meeting to ask direct questions regarding proposed building heights, density, and environmental safeguards.
- **Community & Membership Engagement:** Gathering input from local community members, conservation partners, and our membership to ensure our stance reflects broad public stewardship values.
- **Meeting as a Board to Discuss the Friend's Position on the Proposed Development:** The Friends Board reviewed the steps taken by the USFWS to understand potential impacts and provide input and direction in preparing this position statement.

Essential Mitigation & The Refuge-Forward Vision

The Friends urge the Port and the City of Ridgefield to adopt a **Refuge-Forward Gateway Vision** that incorporates the following baseline standards into future site designs:

- **Low Density & Substantial Buffers:** Eliminate high-density residential units and multi-story lodging along immediate Refuge boundaries. Establish a continuous trail, with vegetated native buffers and view corridors along Carty Lake. Design to buffer and absorb light, noise, and human activity.
- **Mandatory Wildlife-Friendly Architecture:** Enforce bird-safe glass treatments, green rooftops, dark-sky compliant lighting fixtures (fully shielded, low-intensity), and strict height limits.
- **Operational Controls:** Implement clear pet-management mandates, noise-attenuation plans, and shoreline protection measures to prevent impacts to the Refuge and Lake River.
- **Interpretive Gateway Integration:** Reallocate site footprint toward passive parkland, non-motorized trail access, interpretive signage, and public educational space that connects visitors to the river and Refuge without disturbing sensitive wildlife habitats.

FRIENDS OF RIDGEFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



August 27, 2026

Path Forward & Collaborative Commitment

Following our July 13 meeting, the Port expressed a welcome desire to include the Friends in ongoing planning and design discussions, acknowledging that scale and sensitive design are essential to preserving Ridgefield's unique connection to the Refuge and maintaining community character. We appreciate the Port for extending its planning timeline through late 2026 to engage in deeper community dialogue.

The Friends welcome the opportunity to represent our membership and the conservation values of the Refuge at the planning table. We remain committed to working constructively alongside the Port, the City, USFWS, Tribal partners, and our community to ensure this unique waterfront becomes a regional benchmark for coexisting with the built and natural environment.