

Written Testimony Objecting to Type IV Land Use change for Metro North Tualatin Mountains
Properties

T3-2017-9165/T4-2017-9166/EP-2017-6780

submitted by Catherine Thompson, MD

I have always loved being outdoors in nature. I have backpacked, hiked, street biked and mountain biked and loved swimming. My ability to do those things changed forever when I was hit by a power boat a little over a year ago and the resulting injury required the amputation of a good part of both of my legs.

When I was finally released from the hospital and rehab, my spirit turned to nature for solace. I wanted to go deep into the woods. To be with large trees, birds, ferns, lichens and mosses just waking up from their summer slumber. I wanted to be with native creatures. I called Metro, the steward of some of the largest tracts of natural habitat in our urban area, to see where I could visit in my wheelchair. I was told that there are no wheelchair accessible trails in Metro natural areas. The few at the developed park, Blue Lake, were not what I was looking for.

According to SCORP, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan handicapped access trails has been a high priority since 1994 and the ADA act. SCORP goes back decades. The plan is produced by the state every 10 years, the current one covers 2016 to 2025. It is based on scientifically conducted randomized questionnaires and focus groups. It is designed to be the guiding plan for all recreational development on both public and private land.

At the time the Metro Master Plan for the North Mountain properties was being formulated SCORP identified top priorities for our tri-county as: increasing use of trails by seniors and minorities, repairing major trail damage, protecting natural features and routine upkeep of trails. In terms of new trails, more soft surface hiking trails was #7, Handicap access was rated #14, more mountain biking trails was rated #17. Most interesting was the proportion of people enjoying nature by different modalities. Visiting nature on foot: hiking, jogging, birdwatch, nature viewing was enjoyed by the vast majority. Mountain biking was just 11%. While enthusiasm for mountain biking has increased, participation in hiking and trail jogging has outpaced that use. Nationwide studies by the Outdoor Foundation showed that while mountain biking increased 0.9% from 2006 - 2016, hiking increased by 22% and trail running by 26%

None-the-less Metro has pursued a plan for mountains biking in all their recently developed property. Chehalem Ridge has only multi-use trails for mountain bikes, equestrians and hikers Newell Creek Canyon has a mountain bike only trail and a shared used trail. There are no pedestrian only trails. Metro's foray into handicapped access has focused on adaptive mountain biking.

Focus groups with underserved marginalized groups have consistently over 10 years shown these priorities- safety is at the top, and a desire for places that multigenerational families can go together, wheelchairs, toddlers and strollers in tow. Shared use trails built to mountain biking standards proposed for the North Tualatin properties cannot be shared safely. This is true not only for minorities but for the majority of those wishing to visit natural areas, the 85% showing up on foot.

Let's now consider the constituency for whom the North Tualatin Mountains was explicitly purchased. It was none of these human user groups just described. The Metro bond specifically prioritized the wildlife and their corridor, the watersheds, the trees and plants, the biosphere that we as humans have been eroding for millennia. When considering an appropriate level of human access to a natural area, what principles come to mind? Let's consider the emerging wisdom that moves beyond the idea of protecting endangered or threatened species to recognizing that even common creatures, like elk and deer have a

right to their homes. Conservation wisdom of the native peoples of the Northwest that consider each living thing to be sentient and deserving respect, that the water and the land have rights too.

This more robust approach has emerged at Metro for new purchases and projects. Land purchases are prioritized that improve connectivity for wildlife, connecting island preserves by purchase of intervening land, just like the concept of wildlife corridors did in the past. Diversity, equity and inclusion is part of the conversation about how these properties are developed. Finally after all of the planning is completed the final review is to be done by Indigenous people, as historic stewards of this very land.

At the Burlington Creek site, there is a unique preserve, a short distance down the gravel access road. It is the Ancient Forest Preserve, a remote extension of Forest Park managed by the Forest Park Conservancy. It is home to a grove of some of the oldest trees in our urban area. It is habitat for species that are adapted to this dwindling habitat. At certain times of the year it has been closed to humans in order to protect a bald eagle nesting site. Conservancy staff are worried about what will happen to this pristine area with the building of parking lots and facilities to accommodate large numbers of mountain bikers. The 85% on foot will for the most part find it too congested and too dangerous and will no longer be able to visit this grove. More important the increase in human activity will put pressures on the ecosystem. There is no plan for monitoring impact, there is no plan for enforcement.

Recent research has shown that for wildlife living adjacent to human development, the sound that creates the most vigorous flight reaction is the sound of the human voice. We have an obligation to protect our animal neighbors from our advances and our recreation, our voices and our intrusion into their spaces.

Are there ways there could be access to nature in these parcels while prioritizing wildlife and habitat? Yes. Perimeter only trails, wildlife viewing areas that are closed during breeding season, small groups of visitors with guides, teaching about the natural world, researchers studying the ancient forest habitat close to the city.

Our understanding of conservation, of equity, our place in the world is evolving. Let's use those principles, codified in Metro's contemporary approach to land management to reject this plan and ask Metro to devise a plan that is truly inclusive, prioritizing the species who live there, with measured access that makes it possible for all human visitors to safely enjoy, learn and value nature, the able bodied on foot, the disabled, the marginalized who would like a safe place to commune with nature.

I urge you to decline approval for this type IV land use change. It would formalize a plan to permanently and irreversibly degrade what was intentionally set aside as a natural preserve prioritized for wildlife. It would convert what has functioned as a natural area to a park, the most heavily developed use of our natural areas. It would crisscross that land with trails, fragmenting the interior habitat. It will degrade this sanctuary for wildlife and also make it unsafe and therefore inaccessible for 85% of the population. Trails described as shared use will devolve to a single, exclusive user group, the relatively small, affluent group that travels the farthest and the fastest, thereby creating the greatest impact per person. Finally, this master plan has no "management plan" to enforce restrictions necessary to protect the land and animals and no infrastructure to monitor the impacts of increased recreational use.

This North Tualatin Mountain is outdated. It is destructive. It is inequitable. Please continue your stated priority as stewards to prioritize our natural areas for the benefit of the wildlife who live there. Decline this land use change.