

Lord Hill Regional Park Update:

Description

Lord Hill Regional Park is a 1,463 acre park located in central Snohomish County between the cities of Snohomish and Monroe. Set in former timberland, the park offers users 32 miles of trails where park visitors can traverse uphill and downhill through the forest passing wetlands and ponds scattered within the park. The park is popular with hikers, runners, equestrians, mountain bikers, bird watchers, orienteering groups and native plant enthusiasts.

Parks is looking to establish a site and management plan for the park which includes an official trail plan, wayfinding signs and posts, detailed maps, and expanded parking solutions. The conceptual trail plan includes multi-use loops and single track trails dedicated to specific uses, including equestrian and mountain bike trails.

Timeline

May 2016 – Initial meeting with Friends of Lord Hill regarding proposed new equestrian trails in SE quadrant of Lord Hill Regional Park

June 2016 – Initial meeting with Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance and Burlington Bike Park regarding re-routing existing bike trails and proposed new bike trails.

OUTCOME: Burlington Bike Park decided Lord Hill location is not conducive to their vision. EMBA willing to look into re-routing existing single track bike trails at Lord Hill and scouting park to see if new trails would be feasible.

July 2016 – Joint meeting with Parks, Friends of Lord Hill and Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance to address conceptual proposals and collaborate with both groups

OUTCOME:

- FOLH concluded that they do not want to give up proposal of new equestrian trails in SE quadrant as they have been working hard on them, and they would prefer new mountain bike trails to remain in NW quadrant where existing tracks are located despite its close location to equestrian parking lot.
- EMBA to scout NW quadrant to see how existing trails could be made safer and how new trails could be designed to draw riders off of multi-use trails and onto single track bypasses for a safer ride.
- EMBA mountain bike skills course off the table, will work on re-routing existing trails for safety improvements and design progression trails and bypass routes .

September 2016 – First Study Group meeting held

GROUPS REPRESENTED:

Friends of Lord Hill – Joan Deutsch; Ron Schlupp; Chuck McArthur

Lord Hill Park Owners – Garry Pagon

Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance – Yvonne Kraus
Washington Trails Association – Jen Gradisher
Cascade Orienteering Club – Sherri Brady
Pilchuck Audubon Society – Kristin Kelly
Washington Native Plants Society – J. Dan Paquette
Snohomish County Parks and Recreation – Amy Lucas; Russ Bosanko; James Yap

DISCUSSION: Reviewed Goals and Objectives of original Master Plan and 1996 Update; Discussed issues and concerns of all groups involved in the meeting; STRAVA use maps and FOLH use maps reviewed

OUTCOME:

- Document drafted listing proposal support, proposal concerns and suggested solutions;
- FOLH to deliver history of trail building to Parks;
- Parks to draft conceptual Alternatives Maps based on use data, conceptual proposals and study group input;
- Larger outreach for next study group needed

November 2016 – Project website established

January 2017 – Second Study Group meeting held

GROUPS REPRESENTED:

Friends of Lord Hill – Rick Reed
Lord Hill Park Owners – Garry Pagon, Chuck McArthur, Ron Schlupp
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance – Yvonne Kraus
Backcountry Horsemen of Washington – Cathy Nelson, Jenny McCall
SnoCo 4-H Horse Program – Bonnie Davis
Washington Trails Association – Jen Gradisher
Pilchuck Audubon Society – Cindy Easterson
Washington Native Plants Society – J. Dan Paquette
Snohomish County Parks and Recreation – Amy Lucas, James Yap, Russ Bosanko
Snohomish County Parks and Recreation Board – Brett McKinley

DISCUSSION: Reviewed Stakeholder Input document and conceptual Alternatives maps

OUTCOME:

- Pilchuck Audubon and WA Native Plant Societies available to assist with plant surveys and bird surveys to help identify critical habitats and Parks to consider expanding off-limits areas;
- Backcountry Horsemen agreed that only concern with bikes is visibility;
- Attendees discussed a user fee for park to cut down on vandalism and to support operations and maintenance and requested that Parks include a design for ADA trail in the S&M Plan;

- EMBA suggested drafting MOU's and volunteer agreements for user group work parties;
- FOLH concerned about wet areas and bicycle degradation, that media attention resulting from update would increase misuse and garbage, and did not agree with decommissioning of the River View trail or the Hiker Only designation of River Trail despite degradation and drainage issues

February 2017 – Project website updated with conceptual Alternative Maps; Save Lord Hill Park and Great Sport Wrong Park organized

March 2017 – Save Lord Hill Park Facebook page and Great Sport Wrong Park websites go live; Equestrians not associated with Friends of Lord Hill, Lord Hill Park Owners or Backcountry Horsemen hold independent meeting at Snohomish Library and request Snohomish County Parks staff attendance. Director Teigen attends meeting on 3/20/2017.

April 21, 2017 – **Third Study Group meeting held**

GROUPS REPRESENTED:

Friends of Lord Hill – Rick Reed

Lord Hill Park Owners – Garry Pagon, Chuck McArthur, Ron Schlupp

Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance – Yvonne Kraus

Backcountry Horsemen of Washington – Cathy Nelson, Jenny McCall

Washington Trails Association – Jen Gradisher

Pilchuck Audubon Society – Cindy Easterson, Kristin Kelley

Washington Native Plants Society – J. Dan Paquette

Snohomish County Parks and Recreation – Amy Lucas

The group discussed wetland and stream locations, degradation of stream banks by non-authorized crossings, degradation of wetlands by hikers, bikers and equestrians. Parks provided revised Alternative Plan Maps and recent pictures of wetland, stream and drainage ditch degradation by all user groups. Parks also discussed the decision to close Wayne's World until repairs could be made and re-routes could be performed to prevent additional degradation to two separate wetlands.

- The group came to an agreement that the Critical Areas Study must be performed in proposed new trail and re-route locations, and that a targeted Critical Area reconnaissance should be performed for current and future planning purposes.
- Agreement was also made that the ADA trail should be pursued, since it got a positive pre-application meeting with the County's Planning and Development Services.
- The group also agreed that the Washington Native Plant Society should perform targeted plant surveys and the Pilchuck Audubon Society should perform seasonal bird surveys to gather important information that may not be picked up in a Critical Area reconnaissance. The Pilchuck Audubon expressed interest in pursuing the Parks RFP program to propose an Audubon Interpretive Trail.

- Friends of Lord Hill and Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance decided to meet separately from the study group process in order to understand each other's goals and concerns.

April 27, 2017 - Parks meets with Trails to Success director, Jeb Bolton to discuss repair and re-route options for Wayne's World. Parks decides to have Trails to Success perform the repair work as one of their projects. Parks also walks through the proposed re-route of the Spring Board trail away from the fenced utilities by the Everett Mountaineers.

June 11, 2017 – Trails to Success director informs Parks that repairs to Wayne's World wetland boardwalk were 80% complete and that completion and ramps will be performed in two weeks. Parks Ranger informs Parks Planner that he has completed the re-route of trail to avoid the other wetland and that the Everett Mountaineers have completed their re-route of the Spring Board trail.

Addressing Specific Public Concerns

"The plan is already in place" – Snohomish County Parks is in the early phases of planning updates to Lord Hill Regional Park based on the suggestions of the 1996 Master Plan Update and stakeholder input. All plans are conceptual and based on actual use data and input from the study group. The study group consists of members from local user groups and neighborhood associations including the Friends of Lord Hill, the Lord Hill Park Owners Association, the Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, Washington Trails Association, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, Cascade Orienteering Club, the Pilchuck Audubon Society and the Washington Native Plant Society.

The planning process and timeline moving forward will be based on funding availability and subject to County Council and Executive approval. Parks will be holding an Open House meeting for the public in late spring or early summer to discuss the Regional Park planning process and the early concepts for Lord Hill Regional Park, but will not have a preferred plan in place until after Critical Area studies have been performed, and the public has had a chance to weigh in on the resulting Site and Management Plan proposals.

"The Lord Hill Master Plan designates an Equestrian focused park" – The original Master Plan and the 1996 Update direct Parks to consider all non-motorized use in Lord Hill Regional Park when considering trail system expansion. There is no place in the Master Plan or the 1996 Update that declares the park as an Equestrian Park, but the plans do specify that horses and equestrian trails should be kept out of wetlands.

"Equestrians are being kicked out of the park" – Snohomish County Parks has spent almost \$200,000 in equestrian improvements at Lord Hill Regional Park in the last decade including establishing an equestrian only parking lot and repairing over \$60,000 in culverts on equestrian trails. Snohomish County is planning on designating over 600 acres to equestrian focused trails that will exclude bicycles on any trail not designated for multi-use.

“Parks is planning a Mountain Bike Skills Course and increasing use by 200,000 visitors a year” – This is a misconception that has surfaced from some opposition websites and has no grounding in truth. Snohomish County Parks has never stated that 200,000 additional annual users are expected, and will base all future plans and improvements on the current usage and the results of the Critical Area studies yet to be completed. The proposed progression trails are no different than a ski trail that designates the user experience and skills needed to utilize the trail, and should not be considered a skills course equivalent to Duthie Hill in King County.

The president of Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance was asked during a meeting how many annual mountain bike visits occurred at Duthie Hill and she responded approximately 180,000. Duthie Hill is an exclusive mountain bike and hiking park located in King County just off of I-90, a busy interstate mountain pass that offers visitors hundreds of miles of hiking, biking, equestrian and skiing trails along the highway close to Seattle.

Lord Hill Regional Park is a non-motorized, multi-use park located off of 2 minor arterials between the cities of Snohomish and Monroe, and is expected to get an additional 20,000 annual users by 2035 in its current state, based on average annual user counts and the county’s population forecast. The proposed mountain bike and equestrian designated trails will give users a more enjoyable experience, make the trail system safer for all users, and significantly reduce Emergency Agency responses by establishing a trail use system with waypoints and signage. This may make the park more attractive to additional users, but the available parking options will dictate the carrying capacity of the park, and a designated trail system will expand options for all users while reducing contact between types of use.

“Animals and Plants are not represented in the Study Group” - Parks has had the Pilchuck Audubon Society and the Washington Native Plant Society at the Study Group table from the very beginning. To say that fish and wildlife habitat has not been represented in the study group meetings is discounting the time and input their members have given to the project. Both groups have offered assistance to Snohomish County Parks and Recreation in conducting plant and bird surveys to include in the decision making once Critical Area studies have been performed.

“Parks is not ‘listening to the park’ and will allow mountain bike trails in wet areas” – Mountain bikers prefer to bike on dry trail conditions and would never design a trail through or into a wet area. Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance have demonstrated they are responsible stewards in the Paradise Valley Conservation Area and in other King County and Kitsap County park trail systems.

Parks and Recreation will be conducting Critical Area studies to locate and identify the sensitive areas in order to assist in determining which existing trails should be decommissioned or re-routed, and which proposed trails should be approved in all areas of the park. The original Master Plan and the 1996 Update both instructed Parks to consider trail degradation by all uses, and to prevent horses from accessing wetlands, so some existing multi-use trails may be decommissioned or changed to seasonal use or hiker only use. Other trails that lead to the ponds, streams and wetlands may be replaced with a shorter trail leading to a viewing platform as the Master Plan instructed.

“The mountain bike trails will route straight into ‘Wayne’s World’” – The proposed trails on both the “Alternative 1” and “Alternative 2” maps are drawn significantly oversized to assist in showing general locations on the map, and the proposed mountain bike trails will not be routed into Wayne’s World or other wetlands. In fact, if the trails on the maps represented actual size, then they would be 50 feet wide. Additionally, since it routes through wetlands and wet areas, Wayne’s World was closed for repairs to the boardwalk and re-routed to avoid an additional wetland. Parks is proposing to designate it Hiking Only trail in both revised Alternatives.

“Mountain Bike Trails will be allowed in Equestrian Areas” - Only by-pass routes to Multi-use trails are proposed in Alternative 1, which will give mountain bikers the option of bypassing the heavily used multi-use Temple Pond Loop and access the existing 12th Gear trail which is not used by equestrians. Parks has developed the Alternative Maps for discussion and study purposes only and expects a Proposed Alternative to come out of the public process once the Critical Area studies have been performed.