



Snohomish County

Parks & Recreation

6705 Puget Park Drive
Snohomish, WA 98296

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PARADISE VALLEY CONSERVATION AREA

Preliminary - Trails Management & Use Plan ***Planning Process & Design Summary***

Project Background

The Paradise Valley Conservation Area (PVCA) is located in southwest Snohomish County along Paradise Lake Rd just north of the King County line. The original 667 acre property was purchased from the Lloyd family in 2000. Funding sources for initial acquisition included the Washington State Salmon Recovery Grant Fund and Snohomish County's Conservation Futures Fund as well as grant matching funds from King County and the Martin Miller Fund. Restrictions, covenants and conditions were negotiated "to ensure that the Lloyd Family Farmstead property be retained forever in its open space and historical condition and to prevent any use that will significantly impair or interfere with the open space, wildlife habitat, and historical values of the property." To halt ecological degradation caused by inappropriate use, the PVCA was closed to the public.

The area has remained closed while Snohomish County develops plans to meet both conservation mandates and recreational needs. An Adaptive Management Plan, produced in 2004, provides a detailed site description and outlines diverse management objectives ranging from restoration opportunities and allowable uses to long term vision. Improvements such as signage and gates have been installed on the site to help prevent unauthorized use and further degradation of the area. A 2006 grant from the State Recreation & Conservation Office provided funding for the construction of a parking area, signage and other improvements.

In June of 2008, Snohomish County acquired an additional 126 acres adjacent to the southwest corner of the PVCA. The land was purchased from the Lloyd family using Brightwater Mitigation Funds and increased the total size of the PVCA to 793 acres. The additional parcel introduced significant new opportunity for Parks to meet both recreation and conservation goals. An expanded trail system with greater functionality and improved user experience was made feasible. Moreover, the potential size of internal "trail free" habitat areas was increased. While restrictive covenants were not placed on the new parcel, it will share a common management plan with the original PVCA property.

Planning Process

During the public process for the 2004 Adaptive Management Plan (AMP), conservationists, mountain bikers and equestrians were identified as the three main user groups at the PVCA. Significant disagreement existed between the groups regarding the appropriate level of use by each. To clarify and address conflicts identified in 2004, the Parks & Recreation Department has conducted numerous independent meetings with leaders and community members from each of the three main user groups. Site visits were also conducted with each group to identify specific opportunities and constraints.

The 2008 Trails Management & Use Plan (TMUP) addresses new site and user information as well as the additional 126 acre parcel. The TMUP provides details that will be used as an additional tool to manage the site. Each of the three main user groups provided feedback and suggestions throughout development of the TMUP. Public comments and suggestions were obtained during a public meeting held on September 9, 2008. Additional opportunity for public comment was provided through the County website.

The primary goal of the TMUP is to define a recreational use plan that balances a variety of user group needs while at the same time ensuring ecological protection and habitat conservation. The Plan includes trails and use areas for all “potential passive uses” outlined in the 2004 AMP. The plan will guide modifications to the existing trail system, new trail construction, as well as long term trail maintenance.

Over 19 miles of existing trails crisscross the combined PVCA parcels. Many trails are suitable for passive use and will remain open. To limit ecological impacts and create a user friendly trail network, some existing trails must be closed. Each existing trail was carefully evaluated to determine whether it should be closed or remain open. The following criteria were the primary basis for trail evaluation.

1. **Does the trail pose a threat to surface water or other natural features?** If a trail contained steep erosion prone slopes, crossed large wetland areas, or was subject to intermittent stream flow along its length, it was given a high priority for closure.
2. **Was the trail identified by one or more of the user groups as a valuable trail?** If a trail contained interesting features or was particularly liked by or well suited to a specific use it was given a high priority for preservation and/or enhancement.
3. **Does the trail serve a critical function in the overall trail system?** If a trail was determined to provide a critical link between different areas of the site or provide an essential recreational component, it was given a high priority for preservation and/or enhancement.
4. **Does the trail offer variety and/or a unique user experience?** If a trail exposed users to a variety of natural features or a special site feature, it was given a high priority for preservation and/or enhancement. Conversely, if a trail contained limited variety and lacked special features it was given a higher priority for closure.
5. **Would closing the trail expand the size of an internal habitat area?** If eliminating a particular trail or trail segment had the potential to increase the size of a trail free habitat area, it was given a higher priority for closure.

While trail use and approximate trail lengths are specified in the TMUP, the plan is intended to be adaptive in nature. The plan offers a flexible framework to construct and manage the trail system at the PVCA. As problems arise and/or new information becomes available, minor changes to the plan will likely occur. For more detailed information see the Management Guidelines & Plan Notes as well as specific improvements noted on the TMUP.

Design Summary - Phase 1

The intent of the Design Summary is to provide a narrative to aid understanding of the Trails Management & Use Plan (TMUP). It may be helpful to reference the TMUP drawing while reviewing the design summary.

The proposed trail network west of Paradise Lake Road provides a variety of experiences for all users. The plan includes trails suitable for all skill levels from beginner to advanced. In addition, large undisturbed habitat “islands” will be created by closing trails and reorganizing the overall trail system. Several foot-only trails offer hikers and wildlife seekers a quiet trail experience free of bicycle and horse use. Separate equestrian and bike trails minimize potential user conflicts and enhance the overall experience for both groups. A proposed bike only skills center offers cyclists a fast paced trail experience free of potential hiker/horse conflicts. Multi-use trails provide access to the site and expand loop options for all users.

The proposed plan for Phase 1 consists of a wide main trail with narrower loop trails extending from it. The main trail begins at the existing parking area, and extends southwest to the proposed mountain bike skills center. This 1.2* mile trail is routed primarily along an old logging road. A short segment of new trail will be constructed to connect the trail to the parking lot. The main trail will be relatively flat and free of steep hill climbs. A small picnic area is proposed within an existing clearing / disturbed area along the main trail.

The first branch off the main trail will be an interpretive loop open to foot traffic only. The 0.4* mile loop travels through high quality upland forest providing users with an easily accessible introduction to the PVCA. Proximity to parking offers school groups and other casual users a "quick hike" option. Interpretive signage will provide information about native vegetation and enhance the overall user experience. The loop is routed primarily along two established trail segments. A short new segment will be constructed to complete the loop. A spur trail near the middle of the loop allows hikers to access additional single track trail(s) without using the main trail.

A foot-bike trail is also proposed near the parking lot. The trail will create a beginner to intermediate loop that is short and easily accessible. When combined with the main trail, this 1.1* mile loop will offer a variety of trail conditions from smooth and straight to curvy and rough. This trail will link to additional single track and offer cyclists an alternative to the main trail access route.

The third trail to branch off the main trail is a long foot-horse trail. This trail connects with multi-use and additional foot-horse segments to form a perimeter loop around Phase 1. The trail begins on the plateau above Paradise Lake Road and continues through a variety of environments from young open forest to dense second growth woodlands. The trail passes several large wetland areas and traverses a variety of flat and sloping terrain. Much of the route takes advantage of existing trails, some of which have firm base material and a relatively wide tread. Several new segments will be constructed on the "additional parcel" to complete the route. Near the end of the perimeter loop users can follow a multi-use trail back to the main trail or chose a more challenging single track route through the northwest corner of the area. A significant portion of the perimeter loop offers equestrians a trail experience free from potential conflicts with cyclists. Several stopping points with picnic tables and/or overlooks are proposed along the route.

Near the entrance off 106th PI NE a foot-bike trail branches off the main trail. This intermediate bike trail extends south to the area known as The Cathedral. With the exception of a few new segments near the main trail, this trail follows an existing route known as the Lloyd trail. The trail is just under 1.0* mile and travels through mature second growth woodlands. A tight and twisty alignment with minimal elevation change offers an excellent cross-country experience. An established 0.33* mile side loop branches off the trail at the north end, offering additional intermediate to expert riding options. These trails can be combined with others to create a variety of loop options. The new segment connecting to the main trail also provides access to a parallel foot-only trail.

The foot-only trail running north-south from "The Cathedral" follows a trail known as the Ridge Trail. This 0.7* mile trail follows the crest of a steep slope and has minimal grade change. The trail leads users through a diverse forest ecosystem with an excellent variety of plant species. This trail can also be combined with others offering great opportunity for variety.

At the west end of the main trail cyclists and other users will find a number of trail options. In addition to the proposed mountain bike skills center, foot-bike trails and a multi-use trail emanate from this point. The diversity of trails proposed in this area offer options for all skill levels. Trails within and adjacent to this area can be combined in numerous ways to create a variety of different loops. Many trails in this area take advantage of established routes. Most will be enhanced and several new trails will be built. New trail construction will be confined to the "additional parcel".

The proposed mountain bike skills center, located at the end of the main trail, will provide a unique mountain bike experience. A web of established trails and several new trails will be utilized to create a collection of formal technical skill courses. The technical loops will offer beginner, intermediate and advanced riders the opportunity to build and exercise riding skills. A wide variety of technical trail features will be constructed including jumps, drops, boardwalks, berms, and teeters. Materials including stone, wood and earth will be utilized to fit the site's natural character. The proposed layout allows technical and cross-country trails to be combined in a number of different ways. A low-grade access

route will be established for emergency and maintenance vehicles as well as potential ADA access. A spectator area and restroom facility are also being explored for the skill center. A detailed site plan will be developed prior to implementation of the mountain bike skills center.

Design Summary - Phase 2

The intent of the Design Summary is to provide a narrative to aid understanding of the Trails Management & Use Plan (TMUP). It may be helpful to reference the TMUP drawing while reviewing the design summary.

The proposed trail network east of Paradise Lake Road will be limited due to the presence of extensive wetland and stream environments. To limit ecological impacts, the use plan for Phase 2 is focused primarily on foot-only trails. In addition, a multi-use route is being explored to connect the northern boundary of the PVCA to the trail network west of Paradise Lake Road. Before any of Phase 2 can be opened for public use, a formal road crossing must be installed near the existing parking lot.

The proposed Phase 2 trail system consists of a spur trail south of the parking lot and a larger loop to the north. The southern trail will be a foot-only interpretive trail. The trail will expose users to a variety of wetland ecosystems from forested to open water. In addition, the trail will explore a small section of Bear Creek. The proposed 0.7* mile trail terminates on a small knoll south of Meadow Lane. Interpretive elements and picnic facilities are being explored for this high-point overlooking the Bear Creek valley. The trail utilizes an established route along Bear Creek and will require new segments near the parking lot, and to the knoll south of Meadow Lane.

A second foot-only loop is proposed for the northern portion of Phase 2. This 1.25* mile trail exposes users to additional upland and wetland environments plus special features including an old growth cedar. A portion of the trail overlooks a large open wetland area. This section of established trail holds excellent opportunity for viewpoints and interpretive elements. The trail primarily follows established routes with several new segments proposed between the parking lot and Bear Creek Lane.

An additional spur trail is being explored along the northern boundary of the PCVA. This 0.25* mile trail will expose users to two stream crossings and an open water wetland system. It will also provide access to the north east corner of the site for monitoring and surveillance purposes. Established trail is utilized for most of the spur, with a new segment and boardwalk proposed at the east end. This area will require further exploration to determine feasibility and ensure protection of natural resources. In addition, a bridge or boardwalk will be required at all creek crossings.

In Phase 2, the feasibility of designating a portion of the north loop and spur trail as multi-use will be explored. Currently there is no official public access route from surrounding neighborhoods to the northern PVCA boundary. The multi-use trail would provide an important link to the main trail network west of Paradise Lake Road. The multi-use designation would only be adopted if a formal unrestricted public easement were granted through private property to the northern PVCA boundary. The TMUP specifies additional improvements required to open this trail. They include the construction of bridges and/or boardwalks suitable for horses over all wetland and stream crossings as well as installation of the Paradise Lake Road crosswalk.

** all proposed trail lengths are approximate*