

**STATEMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TRAIL ALLIANCE
IN REVIEW OF THE OFF-ROAD CYCLING MASTER PLAN
SUBMITTED TO THE PORTLAND PARKS BOARD
DECEMBER 19, 2017**

The Northwest Trail Alliance (NWTa) is honored to provide written testimony regarding the Off-Road Cycling Master Plan, a set of recommendations that directly impact the mountain biking community.

NWTa, founded in 1988, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational association and the leading mountain bike advocacy organization in the Portland metropolitan region. Our mission is to create, enhance, and protect mountain bike riding opportunities; to advocate for trail access; to promote responsible mountain biking; and to build, maintain, and ride sustainable trails. NWTa is actively engaged with the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Parks, the Oregon Department of Forestry, Metro, Portland Parks & Recreation, Clark County Parks, Tualatin Hills Parks, Washington County Parks, and the cities of Camas, Cascade Locks, Castle Rock, and Washougal.

NWTa's more than 1,100 passionate members help maintain hundreds of miles of trails on public and private lands throughout the Pacific Northwest, contributing more than 7,000 hours of volunteer labor annually. Our efforts facilitate outdoor recreation, which in turn reduces crime rates, improves educational outcomes, increases health and well-being, bolsters the local economy, and instills a connection with nature, accelerating society's environmental progress.

NWTa's Position on the Off-Road Cycling Master Plan

Two years have passed in producing the Off-Road Cycling Master Plan (ORCMP), and we have much gratitude for the resources put forth by the City, the efforts made by members of the Project Advisory Committee, and the engagement of the public in the process.

In its current form, the ORCMP is simultaneously promising and problematic: While the Plan presents welcome opportunities for off-road cycling within neighborhoods and alongside cycling corridors, its approach to Forest Park is hobbled by self-contradictory guidance. And, for a bicycle-friendly city, it sets a very low goal for trail mileage citywide and in Forest Park.

Our specific views and recommendations follow. Page citations refer to the *Off-Road Cycling Master Plan Discussion Draft*, dated October 17, 2017, available at <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/660835>.

Forest Park and the Off-Road Cycling Master Plan

With regard to Forest Park, the ORCMP recommends a comprehensive trail plan (Plan Recommendation 5, p66/PDF p69) while simultaneously making other recommendations that fall within the scope of, thereby limiting the potential contribution of, that comprehensive trail plan. The recommendations that hobble the comprehensive trail plan output are:

- The reservation of all high-use pedestrian trails, Wildwood and Maple (in their entirety), as well as all pedestrian-only trails in the Southern Unit, for exclusive use by walkers/hikers (Plan Recommendation 16, p67/PDF p70) and

- The Trail Improvement Concepts (p67/PDF p70).

Forest Park Trail Exclusions

Removing the trail exclusions from the ORCMP does not immediately expose Forest Park to increased mountain biking; they restate current policy set forth by the Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan (FPNRMP). However, retaining the exclusions removes 81% of the current trail system mileage from consideration by the comprehensive trail plan, forcing the opening of trails for mountain biking to be more ecologically and financially costly through new construction.

It is NWTAs recommendation that Plan Recommendation 16 (p67/PDF p70) remove all references to specific trails. Through a comprehensive trail plan, let professionals propose an equitable trail network, based on science, data, the experience of other cities, and transparent engagement with all stakeholders.

Just as we're opposed to a extensive ban on sharing existing trails, we're against permitting bicycles on all Forest Park trails. We believe the trails in Forest Park need a big dose of common sense, cooperation, and care. It is in everyone's interest that living power sources like hikers, cyclists, and equestrians come together, partnering with the City of Portland to decide what is in the best interest of each user group and trail.

Clarifying the Scope of the Forest Park Comprehensive Trail Plan

The recommendation for a Forest Park comprehensive trail plan (Plan Recommendation 5, p66/PDF p69) leaves much room for interpretation.

It is NWTAs recommendation that the text of Plan Recommendation 5 (p66/PDF p69) be bolstered to ensure that the comprehensive trail plan process fully addresses relative demand, typical outing length, and desired user experience for all users; current user demand and carrying capacity; trail design for all modes of use (if the citywide standards are not to be used); trail and lane decommissioning (for environmental improvement); migration from the as-built system to the desired outcome; and user management (notably directionality, shared use, and the like). NWTAs also recommends that the comprehensive trail plan process be expedited.

Forest Park Trail Improvement Concepts

Few of the Forest Park Trail Improvement Concepts will materially achieve the desired Plan outcomes to:

- Focus on serving youth, communities of color, and lower income residents (Plan Recommendation 1, p51/PDF p54)
- Prioritize beginner to intermediate, family-friendly riding options (Plan Recommendation 3, p51/PDF p54)

- Enhance cross-country cycling experiences, which are best suited to the topography and character of the park, ideally on longer contoured trails (Plan Recommendation 14a, p67/PDF p70)
- Focus on opportunities to create narrow to mid-width cross-country trails (Plan Recommendation 14b, p67/PDF p70)
- Create loops, ideally stacked loops, to provide a variety of riding options and lengths (Plan Recommendation 14c, p67/PDF p70)

None of the Trail Improvement Concepts received a majority of support from the public (source: *Portland Off-Road Cycling Master Plan Comment and Outreach Summary*, May 2017).

It is NWTa's recommendation that the Trail Improvement Concepts be positioned by the Plan as input for consideration by the comprehensive trail plan process (Plan Recommendation 5, p66/PDF p69), not as explicit Plan Recommendations.

Supporting details follow, with concepts listed in preferential order, most appealing to least:

Concept C: Improve Firelane 4 and Open it to Off-Road Cycling (p70/PDF p73) Creating a new shared-use, purpose-built, contour trail roughly 1 mile in length, forming a 2.6 mile loop with Saltzman Road and Leif Erikson Drive, Concept C goes furthest in achieving the Plan recommendations above.

Concept F: Improve Cycling Access to the Park from the St Johns Bridge (p71/PDF p74) Also creating a new shared-use, purpose-built, contour trail roughly 1 mile in length (assuming termination at Leif Erikson Drive), Concept F runs counter to the Plan recommendation to create loops. With Leif Erikson Drive and Springville Road, Concept F does form a 2.3 mile, partial loop.

Concept B: Open Firelane 7, Firelane 7A and Oil Line Road to Off-Road Cycling (p70/PDF p73) It's debatable whether the full loop of Concept B will be suitable for youth and families, depending on the design of the connection of Oil and Gas Line Roads to Leif Erikson (the final 100 to 150 yards of Oil and Gas Line Roads are quite steep). Also, Concept B stipulates improving fire access near Leif Erikson, which is at odds with the Plan recommendation for narrow to mid-width trail. Lastly, with the concept's primary access being Skyline Boulevard, it is less available to communities of color and lower income residents.

Concept D: Improve Firelane 1 and Build a New Trail Parallel to Highway 30 (p69/PDF p72) While the Plan makes the recommendation to "re-align and re-contour existing Firelane 1 to reduce erosion and improve user experience, safety and sustainability" (Firelane 1 currently reaches a maximum grade of 24%), the large-scale construction necessary to achieve a reasonable (from safety and user experience perspectives) grade (the ideal is 5% to 7%; see p102/PDF p105) would likely carry an unreasonably high environmental and economic cost, due to the surface disturbance of a much longer and, below Leif Erikson, wider firelane. Foregoing that reasonable grade, this portion of Concept D runs counter to the Plan recommendation to engage youth and families.

The Plan also makes the recommendation to “[b]uild a new trail that would ... travel southeast along the park boundary ...” with “[p]ortions ... located in easements outside the park.” It is our view that such an alignment will not help satiate the desire for off-road cycling within Forest Park. Perhaps more importantly, such an alignment completely misses the opportunity to reduce high-speed cycling traffic (with its potential for safety issues) on Leif Erikson Drive as it approaches the Thurman Street gate.

Concept E: Build a New Trail South of NW 53rd Drive (p71/PDF p74) Considered as part of a larger loop comprised of Concept D and Holman Lane, that larger loop runs counter to the Plan recommendation to engage youth and families. This is due to the grade of Holman Lane (9% average, 20% maximum) and Firelane 1 (currently 9% average, 24% maximum), as well as the significant transit on surface streets necessary to reach Holman Lane from Concept D’s proposed trail paralleling St Helens Road.

Of course, independent of Concept D, Concept E’s new shared-use, purpose-built trail runs counter to the Plan recommendation to create loops. Like Concept B, its location also makes it less available to communities of color and lower income residents. And at roughly 1 mile in length, Concept E alone would not be an attractive destination for riders outside the local neighborhood, due to the imbalance of travel effort to recreational return.

ORCMP and FPNRMP Reconciliation

With the advance of knowledge and best practices since 1995, there is a likelihood that the comprehensive trail plan process will produce recommendations that run counter to the stipulations of the Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan (FPNRMP). One example might be allowing cycling on an existing pedestrian trail in the Central Unit.

And more specifically, the Plan contains this built-in conflict:

- Design and develop any trail changes in ways that align with the goals and strategies in the Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan (Plan Recommendation 7, p66/PDF p69)

versus

- Focus on opportunities to create narrow to mid-width cross-country trails (Plan Recommendation 14b, p67/PDF p70).

The FPNRMP stipulates that cycling cannot take place on narrow to mid-width trails (FPNRMP p174/PDF p191).

It is NWTAs recommendation that the Plan speak to the process by which comprehensive trail plan output, and other Plan Recommendations that may run counter to the stipulations of the Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan, such as trail design for off-road cycling, are reconciled. NWTAs also recommends that the document *Trail Design Guidelines for Portland’s Park System* become the sole reference for trail design citywide, encompassing Forest Park.

Setting Reasonable and Effective Goals

Portland should aspire to, in the words of the Plan, “set a national precedent for integrating off-road cycling into an urban environment.” The Plan’s goal for its 15- to 20-year window is approximately 35 miles of trail (p19/PDF p22).

The plan’s current goals fall far below the off-road cycling reality of other U.S. cities. For comparison, cities notable for providing off-road cycling (Boise-Eagle, ID, Chattanooga, TN, Louisville, KY, Richmond, VA, and Tucson, AZ) offer from 0.2 to 1.6 trail miles per 1,000 residents.

At Portland’s growth rate, in 15 years time we’d need to have 526 miles of trail to score in the middle of today’s top-5 benchmark. In achieving our goal of 35 miles, we’d have reached but 7% of that benchmark, or 0.04 trail miles per 1,000 residents.

Forest Park contains 45 miles of pedestrian-accessible trails, excluding the neighborhood connectors. Oregon’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) data shows that the demand for single-track cycling is 24% that of walking and hiking (23 versus 96 of every 100 visitors; *Oregon Non-Motorized Trail Participation and Priorities*, July 2015, p18/ PDF p19), and the typical outing length for cycling is 3 times longer (approximately 75% of walkers and hikers prefer outings up to five miles, single-track cyclists, up to 15 miles; p26/ PDF p27).

Based the SCORP data, cyclists would have access to 32 miles of trails (i.e., not lanes) in Forest Park to be at parity with pedestrians. To accomplish this with the least environmental and financial impact, 72% of Forest Park’s current trail mileage would be shared use. Cyclists currently enjoy 2% of Forest Park’s trail mileage.

It is NWTAs recommendation that the Plan set a citywide goal for soft-surface, narrow to mid-width off-road cycling trails that achieves the low end of the spectrum for notable cities: 0.2 trail miles per 1,000 residents. NWTAs also recommends that the Plan set a goal, to be achieved by the comprehensive trail plan, of access parity between cyclists and pedestrians in Forest Park’s Central Unit.

Conclusion

Cycling — nationwide, the second most frequent form of outdoor recreation across all age groups, according to the Outdoor Foundation — has a significant bearing on the health and well-being of Portland’s citizens, and ultimately the livability of the city. Portland is an exemplar for on-road cycling, and with these changes, the Off-Road Cycling Master Plan will enable Portland to set a national precedent for integrating off-road cycling into an urban environment.