

Thornton Creek Alliance
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Seattle Park Board of Commissioners
Department of Parks and Recreation
100 Dexter Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98109

Greetings Park Board Commissioners:

We hope that after hearing all the points of view, and after your own experiences in meeting with the public, you will do the right thing for Seattle's few remnants of urban forest and save this one for the present and future enjoyment of our diverse neighborhoods and swelling population. Thornton Creek Alliance (TCA) strongly supports foot trails and ADA standard trails in natural areas. We want everyone have the lovely opportunity to enter our natural areas, walk through them, enjoy watching wildlife, and participate in forest conservation. These are gifts only a forest can give. How else will people of all backgrounds and income levels get to experience our forests first-hand if they are sliced up and modified to accommodate the various interests of successions of 'activity activists'?

Please note that the April 2, 2015 Parks staff recommendation to you has very little in common with the single perimeter trail and three-year pilot project that the city council unanimously approved last August. The Parks recommendation makes the mountain biking community and a subset of Cheasty neighbors happy, but it is not at all supported by another subset of neighbors, and it is generally condemned by Forest Stewards and everyone else who loves quiet study and restoration of these parcels of land that make up a scant 15% of Parks' property. Note also that the 'activity activists' have only begun arguing for the changes they want to make to Cheasty, changes that will require yet more clearing in this very narrow, steep natural area. Here is a quote from their web page, www.cheasty.org: "As a community we are committed to making the mountain bike pilot project successful **and advocating for the comprehensive trails plan with more mountain bike trails allowing progression opportunities** for users, ... [boldface added]. They are already pressing for several cross trails as well.

The December outreach meeting with the under-served communities must be considered invalid for the simple reason that there was no educational component. How could these communities be expected to know ahead of the meeting why natural areas have been preserved and developed in the first place? Of course they liked everything they thought was on the table when they had no clear understanding of what was being taken off.

Parks is recommending bike trails for the reasons given below. (By this logic no Seattle natural area is safe from consideration.) Yet, note that all of these goals can be achieved without bicycles in natural areas, and in fact, a great many more goals could be reached with bicycles omitted.

- The trail will provide recreational opportunities for currently under-served communities, providing families with the opportunity to experience nature and recreation in their own neighborhood.
- This project will provide a link between the Rainier Vista community and North Beacon Hill.
- The trail responds to environmental issues within the Cheasty greenspace and has been designed to work with the geology of the property.
- There is strong community support for the trail.

- Volunteer restoration work is a high priority for the surrounding community and there is a strong commitment to this project and the maintenance necessary to maintain the trails.
- Our City is experiencing unprecedented growth. We need to look at creative ways to provide recreational opportunities in our urban environment.

One has to wonder why the goals refer to a 'trail' when in fact two concentric trails, plus access trails, are now proposed, and even more are on the horizon. Additionally, these goals reflect no acknowledgement of the many considerations and reservations put forth by various PAT members or anyone else who contributed to the discussion. Ditto for the entire recommendation letter. How is this appropriate?

The underlying values-based philosophy seems to be that we'll allow a stubborn bit of nature in the natural area after we get done clearing out space for the recreational preferences du jour. This is a radical change from current city policies that put nature, science, and passive uses first. These policies could use more support from Parks, but they were actually working pretty well.

We certainly agree that Parks has done a lot of outreach around the Cheasty bike plans, and we truly appreciated the opportunity afforded by the Mini Summit discussion of natural area policies three weeks ago. However, the talk in the hall has been of 'inclusion illusion', and this Parks staff recommendation seems to bear that out.

TCA supports a policy of right activity, right place. Sports equipment, including bicycles, works well in a wide variety of park venues and elsewhere, but it does not belong in our natural areas which can be activated in much more appropriate ways. For example, we could begin now to build momentum for a 2016 'Seattle Summer of Nature', and invite everyone in to explore and learn about the hidden life of our natural areas.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Ruth Williams, President
Thornton Creek Alliance

THORNTON CREEK ALLIANCE (TCA), founded in 1993, is an all-volunteer grassroots, nonprofit organization of 100 members dedicated to preserving and restoring an ecological balance throughout the Thornton Creek watershed. Our goal is to benefit the watershed by encouraging individuals, neighborhoods, schools, groups, businesses, agencies, and government to work together in addressing the environmental restoration of the creek system including: water quality, stabilization of water flow, flood prevention, and habitat improvement through education, collaboration, and community involvement.



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