



Seattle Nature Alliance
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July 18, 2014

Dear Mayor Murray and Council Members Jean Godden, Sally Bagshaw, Bruce Harrell, Tim Burgess, Sally Clark, Nick Licata, Mike O'Brien, Tom Rasmussen, and Kshama Sawant:

The Seattle Nature Alliance is writing to express our concerns about the Cheasty Greenspace Trails and Bike Pilot Project and its implications for the use-policies of Natural Areas and Greenbelts. We believe the Cheasty Project should be cancelled and that the traditional use of Natural Areas as places managed for wildlife habitat, passive use, and intrinsic natural landscape qualities (1) should remain unchanged.

Natural Area Policy

Only 15% of Seattle park land remains as natural. The other 85% has been developed for active recreation and sports or designed as landscaped areas (2). We should keep this 15% reserved for the broadest and most inclusive demographic: passive use. All people need and deserve access to quiet nature. Specially designated Natural Areas should remain as safe and welcoming places for everyone. They should not be divvied up to specialized-user groups.

Seattle has a world-class reputation as a city with abundant nature, but we have these areas today because they were preserved for us. We should do the same for future generations. As we move toward a more densely-populated future, Seattleites will need natural spaces even more than today. Management of these spaces should continue in the wise tradition of reserving a core area of nature for passive-use only. This is the same principle that built our national system of Wilderness Areas, and the same idea applies on a municipal level for urban wild places.

Multi-Use—allowing specialized-user groups equal access to all spaces—will not work for urban natural areas, which are distinctly different from recreation areas in rural areas or in urban recreation parks, such as Green Lake. Shared pedestrian/biker use in heavily wooded areas like Cheasty, with limited sight lines, presents a significant safety hazard for cyclist-pedestrian collisions. Seattle's relatively small parcels of natural area do not have the carrying capacity to absorb intense, heavy use. In places where population is dense, Multi-Use results in user-conflict, over-use, safety concerns, and ultimately in ecological degradation. Use of natural areas should remain in reserve for the general population—passive-use only. It is fair, equitable, wise, and sustainable.

Cheasty Pilot Project

The Cheasty Pilot Project is off to a bad start, and it should be cancelled before things deteriorate further. The community was not involved sufficiently in the planning or approval process, and as a result, many individuals and groups in the neighborhood and across the city are extremely unhappy with the project, and with the Parks Department's handling of it. What little outreach occurred was misleading, with confusing portrayals of the plan—shown in some places with free-ride zones, jumps and structures installed directly through areas where Earth Corps had already done restoration and replanting (3), and in other places as a wide, flat family-oriented bike path (4). Inaccurate lists of supporters on the website gave the illusion of wide support where it did not exist. The proposal also exaggerated the forest problems, giving the illusion it was a dying place of crime and vermin, but the 2003 Cheasty Greenspace Vegetation Management Plan says,

“Cheasty Greenspace has notable wildlife value. Although it has a relatively large amount of edge habitat due to the geometry of the greenspace, much of the wildlife habitat value of Cheasty Greenspace lies in the preservation of some forested interior habitat – a rarity in an urban landscape. Another

important function provided by the greenspace is its potential to connect habitat fragments that might otherwise be isolated – possibly preserving persistence and increasing population sizes for some wildlife species.” (5)

The Cheasty bike park proposal has been very poorly-planned, with no baseline wildlife study, no environmental study, no visitor-study, and no parking plan. Yet, it threatens to become a precedent—a backdoor policy shift for natural areas citywide (6). This has happened so fast and so quietly that many people are not yet aware. Two years ago, when West Seattle suddenly learned a commercial canopy zipline was planned for Lincoln Park’s prized forest, the reaction was overwhelmingly negative (7). If allowed to continue, the Cheasty Pilot threatens to blow up into another community loss of confidence nightmare for Parks. But this time, outrage over the bike park plan will not just be coming from one community; it will be coming from the entire city (8).

The proposed Cheasty bike park’s misuse of volunteerism is equally disturbing. Allowing specialized-user groups to develop natural areas for their own purposes in return for eco-restoration services would effectively transform volunteerism into a quid-pro-quo arrangement - essentially changing park land from a designated natural area for all, into a specialized use recreation site “bought” by a few by some restoration effort. True conservation volunteers do not expect exclusive use rights of the land in return for their hard work. They restore and preserve the land for all of us.

Mountain biking is a wonderful sport and it should be supported to the extent reasonable for an urban setting. But biking does not require a forest. Across the country, cities are building bike skills-courses in reclaimed industrial sites, or in open fields (9). Many of the country’s most-popular mountain biking areas are in desert areas without even a single tree (10). But while bikes do not require forests, Seattle’s Nature does. Do not allow our forests to become just another used-up resource.

In Conclusion

Seattle must not allow its precious, rare natural areas to become active-sport playgrounds and places of discord between user-groups. We must maintain the wise tradition of preserving nature as it was preserved for us. The city should take responsibility for eco-restoration and not farm this out to organizations, individuals, or corporations in return for specialized-use privileges. Active sports should be supported and developed within the 85% of park land that has already been developed, but not allowed in the 15% of remaining natural area.

Thank you for considering our concerns.

Sincerely,



Seattle Nature Alliance:
Denise Dahn
Mark Ahlness
Trileigh Tucker

Sources:

- 1 - [Natural Areas - City of Seattle](#)
- 2 - [Trust for Public Land’s City Park Facts](#)
- 3 - [Map of pilot approved 1/9/14](#)
- 4 - [Flyer announcing public meeting](#)
- 5 - [Cheasty Greenspace Vegetation Management Plan](#)
- 6 - [Position statement from the Urban Forestry Commission](#)
- 7 - [As-it-happened coverage + video: Lincoln Park zipline proposal @ Fauntleroy Community Association](#)
- 8 - [Maintain foot traffic only policy within Cheasty Greenspace - petition](#)
- 9 - [Two-wheel revolution in Gallup, Gallup Brickyard Bike Park](#)
- 10 - [Moab Mountain Biking](#)

cc: Sandra Pinto de Bader, Rachel Acosta, Christopher Williams