

April 9, 2015

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners

Via Rachel Acosta

Dear Park Commission Members,

The Magnuson Environmental Stewardship Alliance is offering comments for your April 9<sup>th</sup> public hearing on the Cheasty Mountain Bike Park proposal.

We believe your actions on this proposal could have harmful impact throughout the city by diminishing the quality and functions of natural areas for people, destroying wildlife habitat, and reducing other ecosystem services. On balance it may actually reduce overall public health by adding stress inducers for pedestrians and eliminating tranquil, psychologically and physiologically restorative enjoyment.

We are also concerned that the funds could be spent more effectively on other natural area or park functions and that the bike proposal has a low cost/benefit ratio. If you look carefully at the proposed costs and implications you will see that the total would likely be in the \$400,000 range and perhaps more. It will likely far exceed value of any mountain bike community labor provided. Spent otherwise on natural areas, pedestrian trails, or other things it could provide more and if desired could be matched by other volunteer labor sources.

It seems imprudently premature to approve the proposal before the soon to come Natural Area and Green Belt Use Guidelines are developed. The bulk of input for those via focus groups and the mind mixer didn't support this sort of bike use and it is quite clear from them and other processes and surveys than the public prefers more tranquil uses such as by pedestrians only.

Evaluation of many aspects of the pilot are possible from the plans themselves, combined with available science, and local observations and should be enough to justify cancelling it.

Negative effects of fragmentation from the additional trails and their footprints is obvious. However it also needs to be recognized that having dual trails increases impact perhaps tenfold or more than would single trails. Whereas a foot trail foot print width is four feet plus trimmed space and single track bike trail width is two feet plus trimmed space the space between the separate bike and pedestrian trails would also be impacted. Thirty additional feet between trails adds about four impacted acres per mile of trail.

Much of the wildlife impact can also be judged in advance based on past observations wildlife at Cheasty and best available science on bird nesting behavior, wildlife flight and stress initiation distances, and so on. A good reference on this prepared with Park Department input is at: [http://wa.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/cos\\_audubon\\_bird\\_bmp\\_final\\_9.29.2014\\_0.pdf](http://wa.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/cos_audubon_bird_bmp_final_9.29.2014_0.pdf)

.It is clear that the bike plan would harm habitat and wildlife.

It has also become apparent that the group initially proposing the bike park represented less of the nearby community than was known when the pilot project was first considered.

It is also clear that most mountain bikers would prefer longer trails. Bikers cover about four times the distance of pedestrians per hour and at that rate would cover all of what's proposed for Cheasty in minutes. It might be good for practicing jumps etc. but won't be much of a natural area experience for them.

### **Monitoring**

If you do approve the main bike park proposal we hope you will require more effective monitoring than has been proposed. The present monitoring plan misses the key issues needed for deciding whether or how to expand a pilot program.

- One thing missing is social science study to determine things like: effect on stress reduction and psychological benefits for pedestrian users; effect on pedestrian use preferences – if they find it less attractive than areas without bike use etc.
- Another thing missing would be comparison of effect on wildlife with areas similar except for having the bike park. In other words ones with similar levels and age of vegetation restoration and pedestrian trail but lacking the bike component.
- The monitoring period should be several years long. It takes time for vegetation to grow and become established and full wildlife effects may not be apparent until vegetation reaches size and coverage levels requiring seven or more years of growth.
- The amount of labor from the biking community should be measured over several years and portions used for bike trails should be reported separately from that used for other elements such as vegetative restoration. It is generally easy to attract a high volume of volunteer labor for project initiation, but the number over the long term are likely to be less. Comparison with projections or promises would be needed for evaluating outcome.
- Vegetation monitoring seems to be lacking except for the wetlands and reports from forest stewards on damage to native plants. Outside of the wetlands there is no mention of quantitative measures such as monitoring plots, measures of diversity, measures of coverage, or markers of plant establishment.

### **Recommendations**

We recommend you allow only pedestrian use of Cheasty and believe there is adequate basis for deciding on the pilot now and ending the bike pilot project.

Should you disagree with that we recommend you wait for natural area and green belt use guidelines to be developed and approved, and reconsider before proceeding with the pilot.

If you do allow the bike park pilot we recommend you require additional more meaningful and informative monitoring to determine impact on pedestrian users and wildlife.

Yours truly,

Tom Kelly

Chair, Magnuson Environmental Stewardship Alliance