

A STRONG NO to the Proposed Off-Leash Site in Lincoln Park

We acknowledge that Lincoln Park is ancestral land of the Duwamish people.



We should not fence people out of this beautiful meadow.

If there is a single place in West Seattle where an Off Leash Area *does not belong*, this is it. Bordered by cedars, firs, brilliant yellowwoods, a magnificent redwood grove, and a rare beech grove, this beloved Olmsted-like meadow is a uniquely scenic spot in one of our most spectacularly scenic parks. Our civic forebears wisely left us this treasure. Fencing it off and graveling it over would be a shame.

Seattle Nature Alliance is ***strongly opposed*** to this proposal. We are not opposed to OLAs in general—we love dogs too, and we want to see them happy and healthy. But we won't be getting any more large, scenic parks like Lincoln, and we can't afford to ruin them. Building an OLA in middle of the park might benefit a select few, but it would negatively impact everyone else. Plus, it would displace wildlife, harm the environment, and be a massive eyesore.

In addition, the proposal violates the standards set forth Council Resolution 29628. Those include interfering with other established uses, impacting the total visual character of the park, potential for spillover into On-Leash Areas, being too close to environmental sensitive areas, and lack of adequate nearby parking. When Seattle first discussed having OLAs in public parks, these standards reassured people that OLAs wouldn't ruin our beloved parks. We have not forgotten those assurances.

The following are a just a few of the serious problems with the proposal:

Would not serve northern West Seattle

The location of the park makes it a poor choice. According to Google Maps, Westcrest OLA is only 2.9 miles east of Lincoln (not 3.5 as stated in the proposal). Most times of the day it is a ten-minute drive. What's more, Westcrest is huge. At 8.4 acres, it is the second-largest OLA in the entire city and comprises more than 30% of the total OLA acreage citywide. It's a very generous space. And if dog owners don't like it as much as Lincoln, they can make use of both. They can leash their dogs, walk for miles on Lincoln's beach and forest trails, and if the dogs need more exercise, they can easily take them to Westcrest OLA.

Would ruin a rare scenic site

The site would *severely impact the total visual character of the park*. It is a scenic meadow in the middle of a park that is famous for its views, and hikers on the forest and bluff trails would find one of the loveliest views along the way completely obliterated. Instead of gazing at a meadow against the woodland backdrop, hikers would look through a chain link fence to a bleak expanse of gravel. Instead of birdsong and the wind rustling in the trees, there would be endless rounds of barking. Instead of fresh air, there would be dog-park smells. Instead of the bench under the brilliant yellowwoods where people rest and enjoy the quiet view, there would be signage, a gate, dog waste bins, and people coming and going with their excited animals. At nighttime, instead of soft moonlight across the meadow, there would be harsh, glaring artificial lighting. (Lighting would also disrupt nocturnal wildlife, and if it extended all the way to the parking lot, it would impact a considerable corridor of wildlife habitat.)

Would sacrifice a many-use recreation site for a single-use OLA

The Lincoln Park Vegetation Management Plan from 2002 refers to the meadow as the Central Greensward, a designated Passive Use area. It should stay that way. Passive use is how most

people prefer to use all our parks (SPR Parks Legacy Plan, 2014), and contrary to the proposal's claim that there are "no established current uses," at the meadow, there are innumerable ways people (and wildlife) use the space. In fact, unlike the sports fields which are vacant for months at a time, the meadow invites a steady stream of dispersed, low-intensity, low-impact activity all year long. And not just from the immediate neighborhood, but from all over the city and beyond. Wandering, exploring, birdwatching, nature study, picnicking, playing with their kids, Frisbee, reading, lying in a hammock, landscape painting, photography, tai chi, yoga—the list is endless. Plus, it has long been a favorite place for professional photo and film shoots, "Shakespeare in the Park" performances, and weddings as well as outdoor preschools. People (and leashed dogs) of all ages and from all walks of life share this space. No one should be fenced out.

Dog ownership may have grown since the pandemic, but so has passive recreation. More and more, people are discovering that regular walks in nature are the key to health and happiness, plus, it's low-impact, free, and easy. City leaders should be encouraging passive recreation rather than discounting it. And if dog-ownership in Seattle really has grown "exponentially," as the proposal claims, it should be cause for concern. The more crowded Seattle becomes, the more problematic dog ownership will be, both for the dogs and for everyone else, and for the environment too. Already 50,000 pounds of plastic-bagged feces is sent to a landfill *every single day* from Seattle alone (Seattle.gov). And another 25,000 pounds are left unpicked in Seattle's outdoor spaces. Exponential growth would be unsustainable.

Negative effect on the environment

-Water, trees and plants

The site is surrounded by Environmental Critical Areas (wildlife habitat and steep slopes), but one of the most serious problems with the site has to do with water quality. Runoff from the meadow flows either to the west, entering Puget Sound via the bluff, or to the south, entering Puget Sound via the forest. The entire meadow is poorly drained, with clay and compacted soils (SPR Vegetation Management Plan, 2002), and in rainy weather, water pools near the beech grove and often spills over the bluff, draining directly into the protected cove with its important nearshore habitat. Water from the upper section of the meadow feeds a seasonal stream that runs through the forest and enters Puget Sound via a waterfall above the beach shelters. The seasonal stream, the wetlands, and the associated riparian plants and trees are critical for wildlife in the park. OLAs typically have significant amounts of unpicked dog feces—dangerous

to human, animal, wildlife, and marine life—and the contamination would spread via water both through the forest and down the bluff and end up in Puget Sound.

Attempts to divert the water or build a filtration basin—even if it were feasible considering the slowly draining clay soils—could divert or disrupt the flows, affecting the natural recharge of groundwater used by surrounding trees and/or depleting the water that currently feeds into the stream. Trees, plants, and wildlife in the forest all depend on this water, and this will become even more critical as the climate continues to warm. Any disruption of natural flows of water from the meadow could severely impact the groundwater and the riparian system which is vital to the forest itself. In addition, the Phantom Orchid—a native plant whose range in Seattle has shrunk so much that it is only found in Lincoln Park—grows nearby, and would undoubtedly be disturbed by construction and other activity related to an OLA.

-Wildlife

Environmental Critical Wildlife Habitat abuts the site on all sides, but it doesn't end there.

There may be a line on a map that places wildlife on one side and the meadow on the other, but in reality, wildlife uses the meadow too. There are many bird species including bald eagles, Cooper's hawks, barred owls, screech owls, woodpeckers, flickers, and ravens—some nesting in the trees bordering the site or nearby, others hunting in and around the meadow.

Many songbirds such as juncos nest in the long grasses around the groves adjacent to the site. Huge numbers of migrating birds depend on the area to rest, feed, and find water on their seasonal journeys. There are a variety of small mammals, amphibians, and invertebrates, and they are all valuable parts of the park's ecological health.

-Proximity disturbance: dogs vs wildlife

The OLA would not only physically eliminate the meadow and disrupt the immediate surroundings, the daily presence of large groups of dogs running and barking in such close proximity would make it difficult or impossible for many species to use the adjacent area. (It would do the same for people, too.)

OLAs do not solve illegal off-leash problems

There is no evidence OLAs solve the problem of illegal off-leash activity. Westcrest still has a problem with it, and so do the other parks with OLAs.

Parking

Parking is already extremely tight, especially in summer, with people coming from all over the region to swim at Coleman Pool, participate in cross-country events, large picnic gatherings, seasonal salmon fishing, and the congestion is made worse by the long ferry lines next to the parking entrances.

Conclusion

As we said, we love dogs, we really do. We've grown up with dogs, we've felt the warm companionship and the unconditional love. We respect that special bond that contributes to health and happiness.

But we all have a bond with nature that is just as important. Many people experience the same warm feelings from spending time in nature as we get from dogs. It's about wonder and connecting with other living beings and feeling a part of it all. Everything from birds to trees to fungi, the wild ones radiate their own version of unconditional love, and it makes us just as happy and healthy.

We should preserve as much as we can so everyone, now and into the future, will enjoy the treasure that is Lincoln Park.

See photos below. All were taken by Seattle Nature Alliance in or adjacent to the site. Most were taken in the last few weeks, and are of random people, events, or views observed while walking by.



The OLA meadow site on the left, the bluff trail in the middle and the steep bluff to the right. Most or all of the meadow visible in these and the following photos would be fenced and graveled.



If the Olmsteds didn't design Lincoln Park, it was because they didn't have to. Nature did most of it for them.





People enjoying the yellowwoods, year-round.





People enjoying the meadow: a couple embracing in the distance, a man and leashed dog, and a family group. Below, a steady stream of hikers on the bluff trail adjacent to the meadow.



Looking through the beech grove from the meadow to hiker on the bluff trail.



Looking inside the redwood grove from the meadow.



Baby barred owls discovering the meadow.



Baby barred owls in the meadow.



Raven family in the meadow.



Cooper's hawk eyeing a squirrel by the railing on the bluff, directly across the trail from the meadow.



Rare phantom orchid adjacent to the site.



Shakespeare in the Park performance, located next to the redwood grove.



Cross Country event - routes pass through or near the meadow. View of crowded parking lot during events.



Setting up for an event in the meadow near the redwoods.



Water pooling on the west edge of the meadow.



The water drains down the bluff and ends up here, a rare cove with quality nearshore habitat.

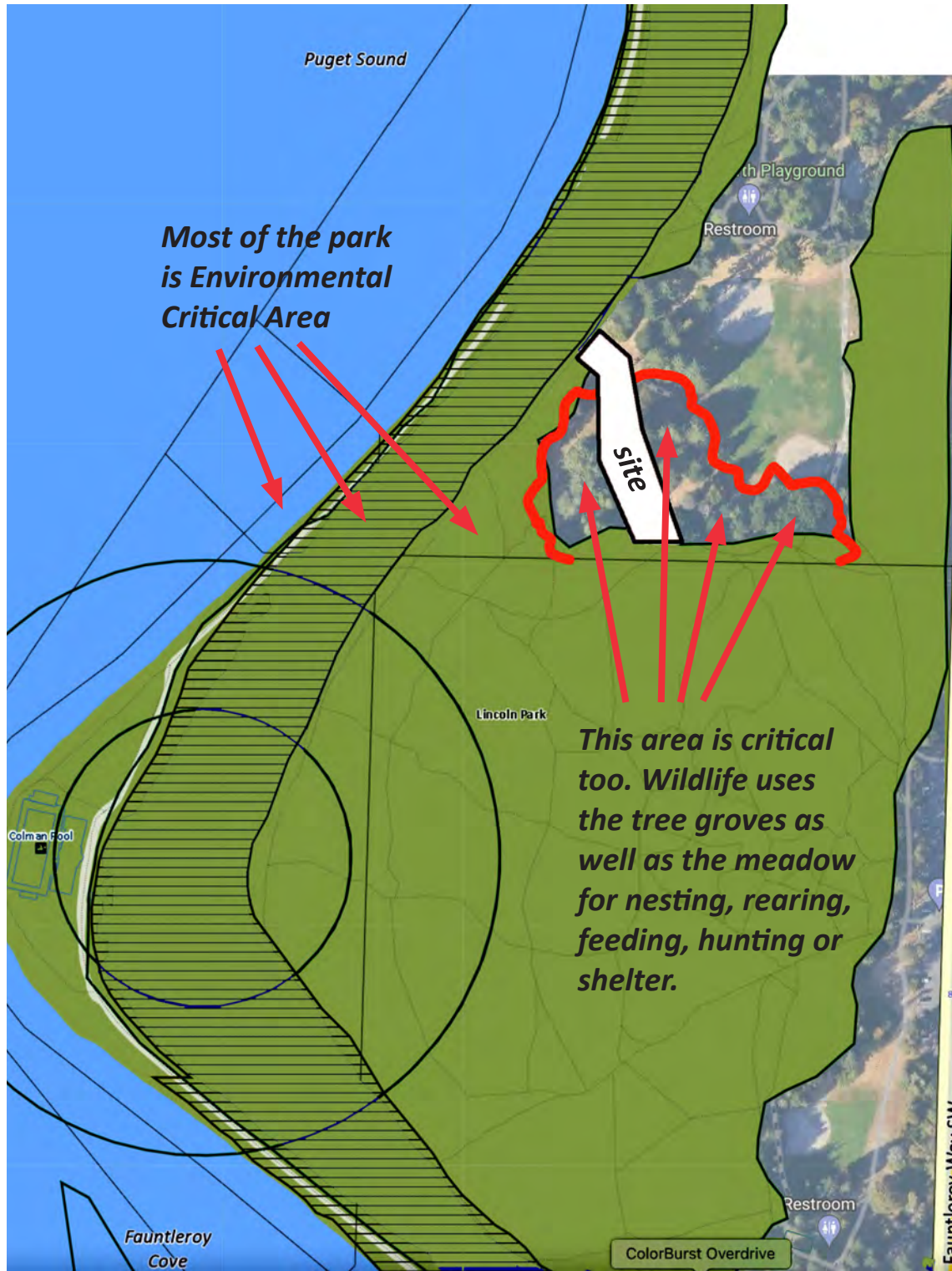


Natural drainage from meadow to bluff and stream (approximate).



Many species take advantage of the fresh water at the bottom of the bluff or along the stream. The quality of this water is undoubtedly much higher than many Puget Sound coastal urban streams that collect runoff straight from city streets.

Environmental Critical Areas shown in green and blue, with known additional critical wildlife sites outlined in red. Site shown in white.

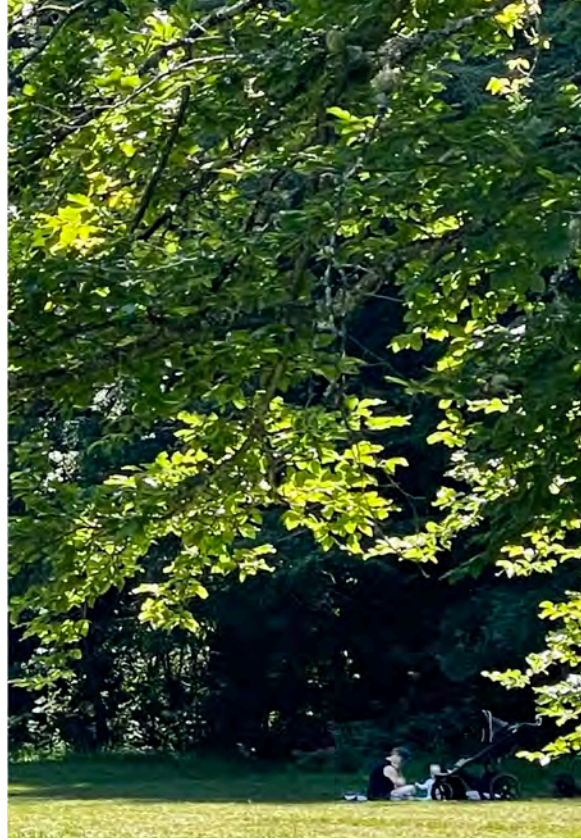
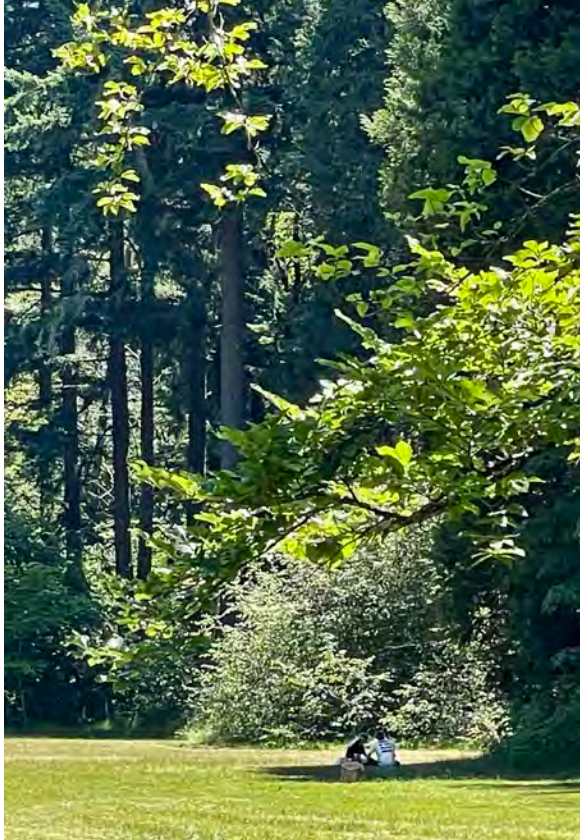


Illegal off-leash dogs on the protected nearshore habitat. It is obvious that OLAs have done little to alleviate the growing problem of illegal off-leash citywide. On the contrary, people seem more emboldened every year. The city must do more to fix this.



The same day of the above photo, these signs were posted just around the point on the south beach. Children played on the beach, seemingly unaware of the fecal contamination.





On two consecutive days, the meadow is enjoyed by a young couple in the shade of the redwoods, a mom with her baby relaxing on a blanket, two friends strolling with their leashed dogs, and a group of friends setting up a picnic. This was observed just by walking past — the meadow invites dispersed activity all day long, all year long.





Hiking on the bluff trail is a singular experience, leading through towering trees and a variety of views. The farther you go, the more at one with nature you feel. The meadow is a key part of the experience.



If Lincoln Park is not an Olmsted Legacy Park, it should be. It may be part fact and part lore, but it's said that when J. C. Olmsted first beheld Seattle's natural landscapes, he chuckled, saying in effect, "We've been working in cities across America to re-create natural effects as beautiful as these. You people don't need design. All you gotta do is not ruin it."

Google maps calculating proximity and drive times between Lincoln and Westcrest. 10 minutes.

