PORTLAND OFF-ROAD CYCLING MASTER PLAN

Project Advisory Committee Meeting #13

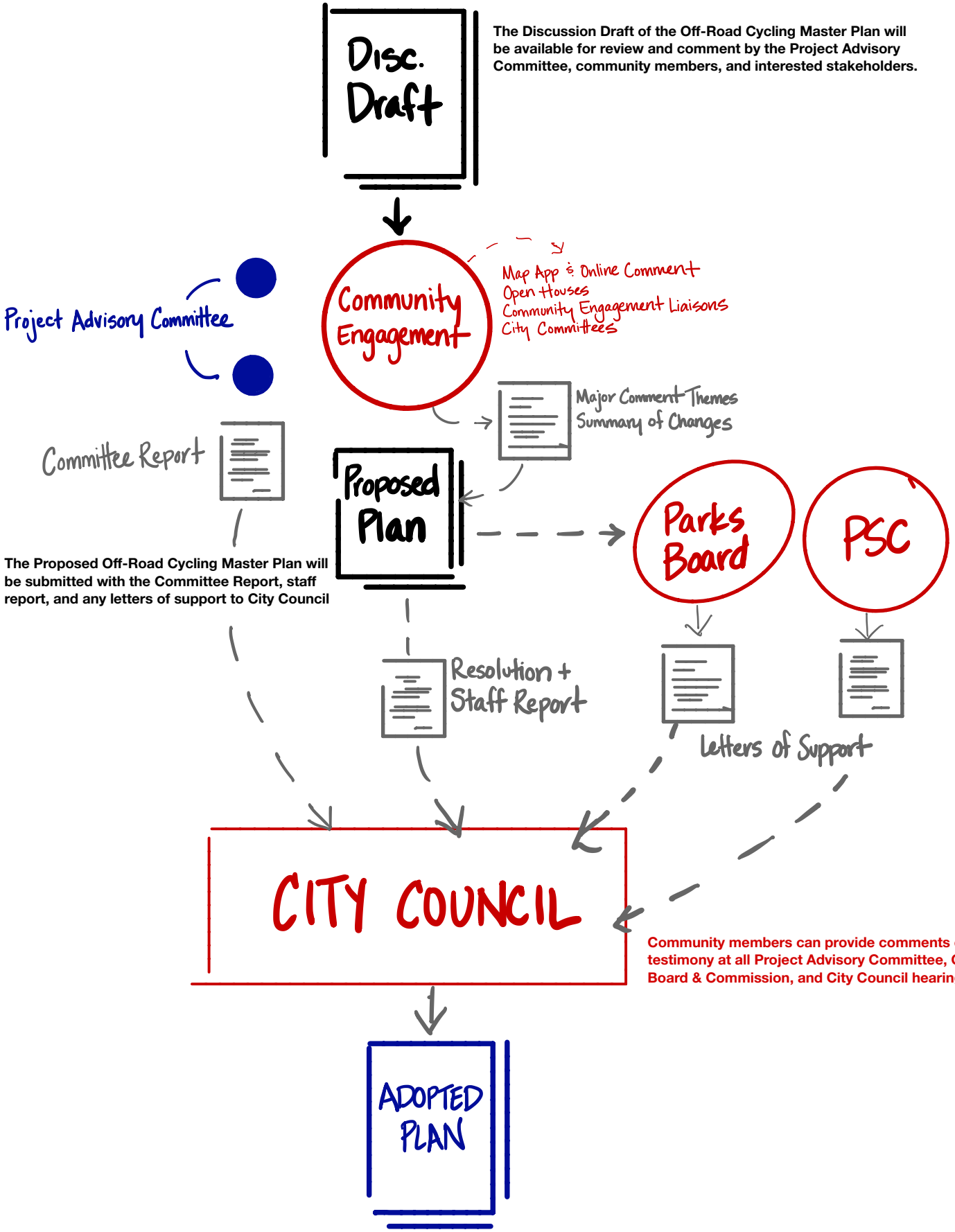
MEETING DATE: **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2017**
LOCATION: **1900 SW 4TH AVENUE, 7TH FLOOR**
TIME: **4:00 – 6:00 P.M.**

MEETING PURPOSE:

- Review and discuss draft recommendations for Forest Park, including trail concepts
- Discuss next steps and timeline to project completion/plan adoption

1. (Info)	**Welcome, Overview of Agenda & Project Updates** *Adrienne DeDona, JLA Public Involvement* *Michelle Kunec-North, BPS*	**20 minutes**
2. (Input Activity)	**Review and Discuss Off-road Cycling Master Plan Draft Recommendations for Forest Park:** • Planning • Management • Design and Development • Environmental Preservation and Restoration • Pedestrian Access • Emergency response and maintenance access • Off-road Cycling Access • Trail Improvements *Michelle Kunec-North, BPS* *Adrienne DeDona, JLA Public Involvement*	**1 hr &15 minutes**
3. (Info)	**Public Comment**	**15 minutes**
4. (Info)	**Meeting Wrap up/Next Steps** *Michelle Kunec-North, BPS* *Adrienne DeDona, JLA Public Involvement*	**10 minutes**

Off-road Cycling Master Plan
Final Review & Adoption Process



West Portland

Forest Park

At 5,172 acres, Forest Park is the City's most significant – and the nation's largest -- public urban natural area. Connected to the Pacific Coast Range, the park stretches for nearly eight miles along the northeast slope of the Tualatin Mountains. The park makes up some of the city's most valuable wildlife habitat and is home to multiple species of animals, birds, trees and plants. It helps filter our air and water and provides countless opportunities for recreation, solitude and learning. Because of Forest Park's unique natural resources, preservation and restoration of ecological function is critical and is the highest management priority for the park.

The Forest Park Conservancy, a nonprofit organization that advocates for and assists with stewardship of the park, works closely with the Portland Parks & Recreation to monitor trail conditions and organize volunteer restoration efforts.

Overarching Plans

A variety of Forest Park plans and studies set goals, standards, or strategies for recreational improvements in the park.

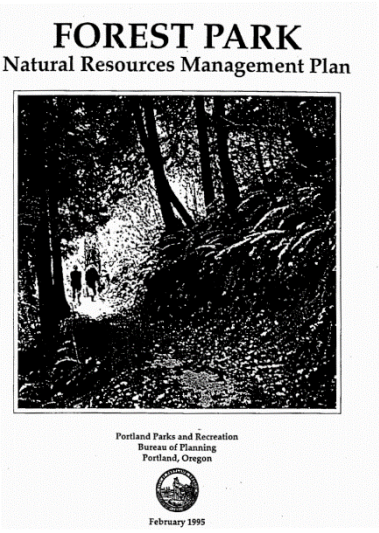
The Forest Park Natural Area Management Plan, adopted by City Council ordinance in 1995, guides land management decisions within the park, and balances goals within three management units: South, Central and North. The plan also includes unique trail design guidelines that supersede the citywide trail design guidelines, and sets management priorities for different units of the park.

The Natural Resource Management Plan establishes environmental review as the process for considering improvements not explicitly allowed in the NRMP.

Implementing any changes to trails in Forest Park, including changing allowed users, improving or changing the alignment of trails, closing trail segments, or building new trails, will require Type II or Type III environmental review pursuant to the Implementation Procedures identified in the Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan and codified in the Portland Zoning Code. Chapter 8. Implementation Procedures of the Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan establishes the applicability and criteria for these reviews.

The City and its partners have also developed a variety of surveys, reports and initiatives to support the management and enhancement of the park. For example, the City has established Desired Future Conditions for the park and uses Ecological Prescriptions as well as the Forest Park Project Objective Screening Tool to guide and select proposed park management activities and improvements.

These plans, reports and initiatives provide guidelines for trail construction or improvements. However, there is no comprehensive trail plan for the park. Community input through this planning process daylighted the need for comprehensive community engagement and planning for the entire trail system. Such planning could address the needs of all user groups, update trail planning to current best practices, and propose trail improvements to improve both the Park's ecological function and recreational opportunities.



The Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan guides land management decisions within the park. It can be found at: www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/103939

The Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative

The Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative is the Forest Park Conservancy visionary roadmap to restore and protect not just Forest Park, but its entire surrounding ecosystem totaling more than 15,000 acres. The Initiative's sixteen public and community partners work together to identify key projects, collaborating on solutions and bringing individual resources to bear to help accomplish specific GFPCI goals. These efforts range from such vital activities as invasive species removal and native re-vegetation projects, to environmental quality monitoring and public education and outreach.

RENEW Forest Park

Recognizing the need for a multi-pronged strategic investment vision Portland Parks & Recreation created the RENEW Forest Park initiative. It consists of three critical parts:

Restore Forest Park

An effort to transform the Park's ecological health by removing invasive plant species and restoring native plantings in their place.

Rebuild Forest Park

An effort to rebuild several bridges and culverts in the Park.

Reconnect Forest Park

An effort to create a recognizable entry point for visitors to discover information about the park's rich ecology, trails, plus opportunities to engage in stewardship and educational programs.

Existing Trails

Over 70 miles of trails and fire lanes traverse the park, providing opportunities for hiking, trail running, off-road cycling, wildlife watching, and other nature-based activities.

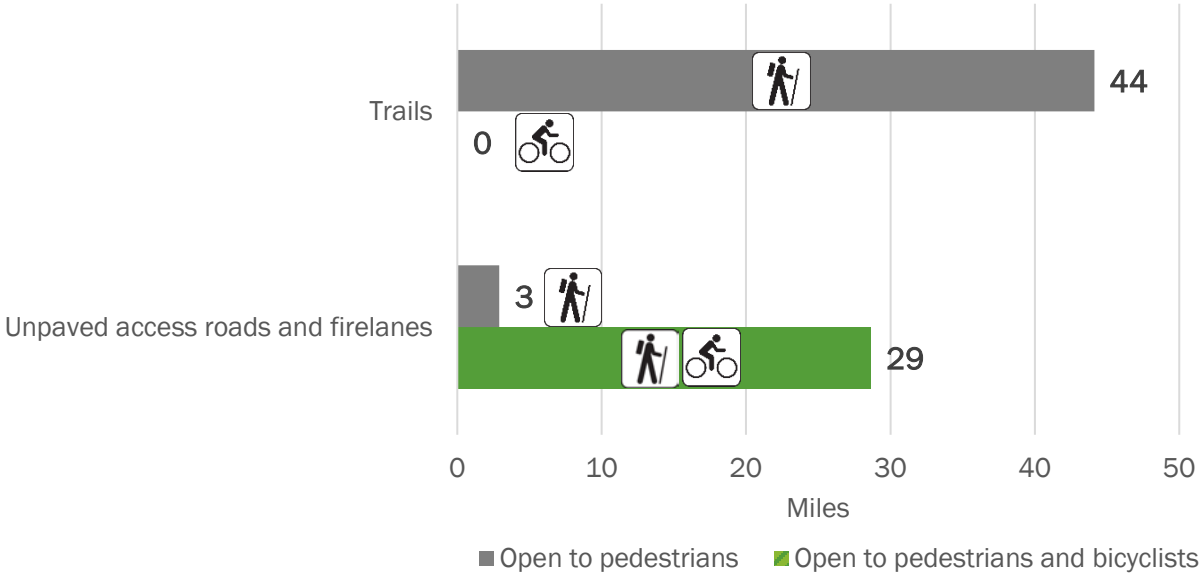
Approximately 28 miles of Forest Park's trails, service roads and fire lanes are currently open to off-road cycling, see Figure 13. However, these trails, road and fire lanes have limitations and do not always follow current best practices off-road cycling and resource management. For instance:

- Nearly all off-road cycling 'trails' are wide trails, fire lanes or service roads. People can currently ride a bicycle on gravel access roads (like Leif Erikson Drive) and on some wide trails within Forest Park. This was intended in the 1995 Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan, which limited off-road cycling to trails over 8 feet wide. However, people who enjoy riding bicycles on dirt trails are generally looking for narrower trails, which provide a more engaging riding experience. In addition, wide trails may have greater environmental impacts and can increase cyclist speeds, posing potential safety hazards.

- Many of the trails and fire lanes open to cycling are fall-line trails, meaning they run directly down a hill rather than contouring across it. Fall-line trails do not meet current best practices and frequently have erosion problems, resulting in environmental damage and an unenjoyable experience for people using the trail. Their poor design also makes them more challenging to ride safely.
- People riding off-road are generally looking for rides of 30 minutes to 2 hours in length, or about 3 to 15 miles. Other than on Leif Erikson, opportunities to ride longer distances in the park are limited, as many of the cycling trails do not connect to each other.

A fall-line trail in Forest Park

Figure 13. Current mileage accessible to pedestrians and cyclists in Forest Park



Implementation Process

Any future trail project will require environmental review and multiple approval and refinement steps before it can be built or implemented, see below. Community input is a critical component of each step. Trail design, construction and management would follow current best practices, which promote safety, sustainability and positive user experience.

1. **Conceptual approval**
   First, new projects must be conceptually approved by City Council in the Off-road Cycling Master Plan. Community members can provide feedback in the planning process and testify to City Council.

2. **Funding**
   Then Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) and the City would consider the new projects for funding through the capital improvement and budget processes. In this step, they would be measured against PP&R goals and against other park, recreation and citywide needs and priorities. Both the PP&R and City budget processes include opportunities for community input.

3. **Design**
   If a project is funded, the City could begin to design the project. Design work would involve detailing the proposed trail improvement, gathering community input, assessing environmental impacts (such as on wildlife, habitat and water), designing for the needs and safety of intended trail users, and identifying any needed mitigation strategies.

4. **Permitting**
   As part of the permitting process, the project would go through environmental review. The Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan designates environmental review as the way that new projects are assessed and (potentially) approved. The goal of environmental review is to safeguard natural resources and the ecological health of the park. It also requires public notification of proposed changes and allows for public comments and appeal of the decision.

5. **Construction**
   If the project is successfully permitted, construction or implementation can begin.

6. **Ongoing management**
   Managing existing or any new trails involves continuous maintenance; monitoring for unintended negative impacts on wildlife, water, habitat, or users; enforcing trail rules; and addressing any recurring problems.

Trail Improvements

Many off-road cyclists enjoy experiencing nature on natural surface trails of various levels of difficulty. The Off-road Cycling Master Plan recommends a variety of ways to create these types of riding experiences across the city. Forest Park, as the largest natural park in the region, offers the potential to provide off-road cycling experiences that cannot be created elsewhere.

The Off-road Cycling Master Plan proposes two high priority, two medium priority, and one conditional trail improvement to expand off-road cycling access in Forest Park while advancing restoration goals. These recommendations focus on:

- Achieving a net ecological benefit. This means avoiding negative impacts to the park's healthiest and most critical habitat and natural resources – the Northern Unit, interior forest, the Balch Creek and Miller Creek Watersheds, and other 'core preserves'.
- Creating narrow- to mid-width contour trails (i.e., trails that are 4 to 8 feet wide and that cut across hills rather than running straight down them) for off-road cycling. These types of trails best match the types of riding experiences desired, follow nationally accepted best practices, and have lower environmental impacts than the wider, steeper trails currently available.
- Connecting off-road cycling trails into longer riding loops.
- Preserving high-use pedestrian trails for walkers and hikers.

Implementing any of these improvements would require significant additional planning, community involvement and robust environmental review.

Recommendations

Forest Park

Note: All system-wide recommendations throughout this Off-road Cycling Master Plan also apply.

Management

1. Expand and enhance a comprehensive education and outreach program regarding trail rules and etiquette for all trail users. Improve signage for wayfinding and trail use expectations.
2. Increase resources and partnerships for restoration, management, enforcement and trail maintenance.
3. Monitor impacts of trails and recreation use on vegetation, wildlife and users.
4. Practice adaptive management, including trail closures, to address unintended negative impacts. Decommission unsanctioned trails.

Planning

5. Develop a comprehensive trail plan that addresses pedestrian, cyclist, equestrian, emergency responder, and maintenance access needs; trail maintenance and restoration, trailhead access and facilities; and identifies desired future improvements.

Design and Development

6. Recognize the role of Forest Park as a regionally significant ecological, recreational, and educational resource. Recognize that the unique natural quality of Forest Park makes it popular and cherished place to recreate, learn and reflect.
7. Design and develop any trail changes in ways that align with the goals and strategies in the Forest Park Natural Resource Management Plan, including the Goals for Trail Management, the Northwest Hills Management Plan, and the Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative.
    a) Use the Management Units (which divide the park into North, Central, and South management units) and the vision for each unit to guide planning and recommendations. Manage recreational use intensity on a gradient ranging from the most intense in the South unit to the least intense in the North unit.
    b) Avoid negative impacts to “core preserves”.
    c) Adhere to implementation procedures and approval criteria established in the Natural Resource Management Plan.
8. Design and develop any improved off-road cycling access in Forest Park in ways that meet multiple community and ecological goals and foster improved environmental and recreational conditions in the park.

Environmental Preservation and Restoration

9. Aim for a net ecological benefit through implementation of Plan recommendations.
10. Pursue opportunities to pair enhanced recreational access with restoration of habitat and water resources, particularly as established in the park’s Desired Future Conditions and Ecological Prescriptions.
11. Avoid adverse impacts to areas of park with highest ecological function and value, including the North unit, interior forest, the Balch and Miller Creek Watersheds, the Newton Wetlands and Doane Lake, and rare plant and animal communities. In other areas, plan any new trail alignments or trail management activities to result in the least adverse impact to sensitive habitat areas.

Pedestrian Access

12. Recognize the need for pedestrian-only trail experiences.

13. Do not convert the highest-use pedestrian-only trails to shared use.
14. Concentrate pedestrian only routes near major trailheads/access points as pedestrians tend to prefer shorter routes.

Emergency response and maintenance access

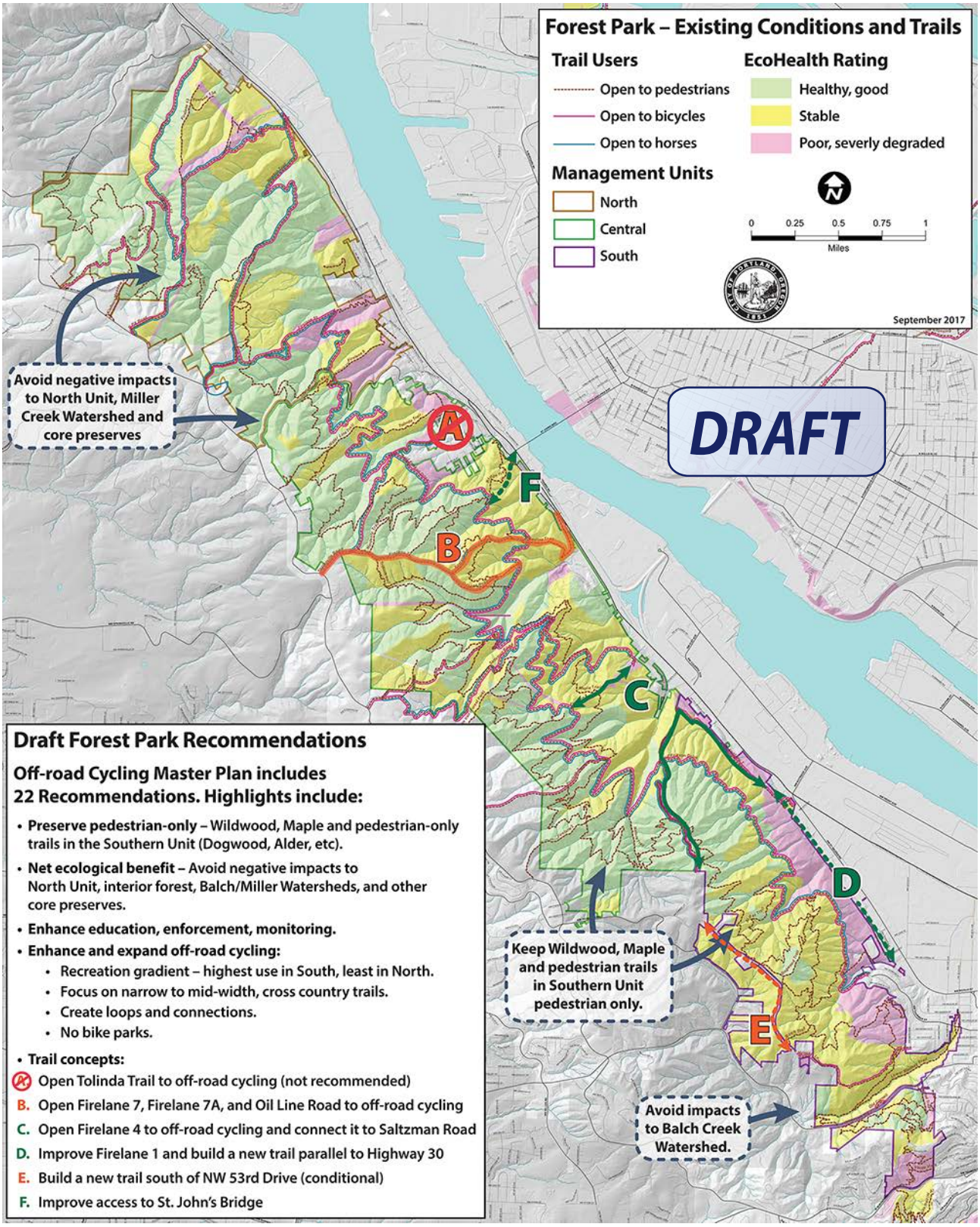
15. Maintain maintenance and emergency access routes in the Park.
16. Recognize that firelanes and maintenance access road (Trail Type N) were designed, constructed, and intended for use by emergency and maintenance vehicles, which impacts the grade, width, and surface of these routes. Although various walkers, runners, cyclists, and equestrians also use these trails, they are intended for park maintenance vehicles, fire trucks, and police cars.
17. Consider firelanes and maintenance access roads separately from the inventory of trails because of the differences in purpose, built characteristics, and management responsibility.
18. Where possible, improve contouring, surface, width, and clearing of these firelanes and maintenance access roads to provide a safer and more sustainable experience for all users.

Off-road Cycling Access

19. Continue to allow off-road cycling where currently allowed, unless the Off-road Cycling Master Plan recommends restricting access on certain trails for environmental or user-experience reasons.
20. Recognize cycling as a recreational activity that is appropriate within Forest Park, if provided sustainably, responsibly and in accordance the park's management goals.
21. Enhance and expand appropriate opportunities to ride a bicycle off-road within Forest Park, *see Trail Improvement Concepts below*.
    a) Enhance cross-country cycling experiences, which are best suited to the topography and character of the park, ideally on longer contoured trails.
    b) Focus on opportunities to create narrow to mid-width cross-country trails, which are currently limited.
    c) Create loops, ideally stacked loops, to provide a variety of riding options and lengths. *Note, the length of a typical cross-country ride is approximately 10 miles.*
    d) Do not build bike parks in Forest Park.
22. Support and build partnerships with park users and community organizations (including the Forest Park Conservancy, the Forest Park Alliance, and the Northwest Trails Alliance) for trail construction and maintenance, park restoration and enhancement, and education.

Trail Improvement Concepts

Figure 14.Trail Concepts for Forest Park



Concept D. Improve Firelane 1 and build a new trail parallel to Highway 30 (High Priority)

Firelane 1 travels 2.5 miles from NW Forest Lane, across Leif Erikson Drive to a trailhead on Highway 30 in the Southern Unit of the park. It is a wide trail that is open to cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. Nearby habitat is in poor-to-good condition.

This concept would improve Firelane 1 and create a new trail parallel to Highway 30/St. Helens Road along the park boundary. These changes would create an approximately 6-mile loop with neighborhood streets and Leif Erikson Drive, or a longer loop if combined with Concept E.

The alignment of Concept D's potential new trail parallel to St. Helens Road would pass through degraded habitat in need of restoration.

Concept D received the highest level of support during the Plan's community outreach. Construction of Concept D as a shared-use trail would provide pedestrians and cyclists, whether travelling from North Portland or Northwest Portland, a safe alternative to Highway 30/St. Helen's Road. It also offers opportunities to provide a connection from Northwest Portland to the proposed Forest Park Entrance and Nature Center and would offer a low-elevation trail experience for visitors.

As part of this concept:

- Maintain emergency fire access on Firelane 1.
- Re-align and re-contour existing Firelane 1 to reduce erosion and improve user experience, safety and sustainability.
- Connect Firelane 1 to the proposed Forest Park Entrance and Nature Center on NW St. Helens Road.
- Build a new trail that would connect from Firelane 1 and travel southeast along the park boundary, paralleling Highway 30/St. Helens Road. Portions of this trail could be located in easements outside the park. This trail could be narrow to mid-width (2-to-6-feet wide) contour trail and purpose-built for cycling. This new trail would be designed and built based on national best practices for safety and sustainability.
- Restore degraded habitat around the trail. This could involve planting native trees, shrubs and plants and removing invasive species.

Concept C. Improve Firelane 4 and open it to off-road cycling (High Priority)

Firelane 4 travels 0.55 miles east from Leif Erikson Drive and connects Leif Erikson to the Saltzman Road Trailhead in the Central Unit. It is a narrow trail that is currently open only to pedestrians. Though called a "firelane", Firelane 4 is not an established fire access route. It is located in a power line corridor, and nearby habitat is degraded. This concept would create an approximately 3-mile loop with Saltzman Road and Leif Erikson Drive with access from the Saltzman Trailhead.

As part of this concept:

- Rebuild the trail as a contoured trail that follows modern trail building best practices. The trail could be contoured to cut across the three powerline corridors, within the existing area of disturbance. Trail improvements would improve user experience and safety and reduce erosion and resulting impacts on streams.
- Restore degraded habitat around the trail. This could involve planting native trees, shrubs and plants, and removing invasive species.
- Allow people on bicycles to use Firelane 4. The trail could be designed as a purpose-built off-road cycling trail or as a shared-use trail.

Site visit of Firelane 4

Concept F (NEW). Improve cycling access to the park from the St. John's Bridge (Medium Priority)

Community members expressed a desire for improved cycling connections between Forest Park and North Portland, via the St. John's Bridge. Existing pedestrian-only access via the 0.4-mile Ridge Trail is steep, eroding, and needs improvement. Current cycling access is via Springville Road, an additional 1.8 miles from the uphill point of the Ridge Trail. This concept could include:

- Improvements to the Ridge Trail for pedestrians
- Creating a new shared-use trail that is contoured across the slope for greater usability and sustainability.
- Closing and restoring the Gas Line trail, which is a fall-line trail, for sustainability and to reduce trail redundancy.

Concept B. Open Firelane 7, Firelane 7A and Oil Line Road to off-road cycling (Medium Priority)

These fire lanes connect from Springville Road to Leif Erikson Drive in the Central Unit of the park. Currently, they are open to pedestrians and equestrians and must remain relatively wide for emergency fire access. The habitat around these trails is in stable or healthy condition.

This concept is recommended as a lower priority than Concept D and Concept C as the firelanes involved are open to additional user groups (pedestrians, equestrians, and emergency response/maintenance vehicles) and adjacent habitat is generally in healthy condition and would be impacted by building a new alignment.

This concept would improve the lower portions of Firelane 7A and Oil Line Road for all users (emergency responders, pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians). It would create an approximately 2.75-mile 'lollipop' loop from Springville Road, as well as other connections. It involves:

- Allowing people on bicycles to use these fire lanes. Improving the trail for safe and sustainable shared use.
- Limiting negative impacts to healthy habitat and restoring adjacent degraded habitat. Improving sections of Firelane 7A and Oil Line Road near Leif Erikson to improve fire access.
- Closing the Lower Gasline Trail from Leif Erikson Drive to Highway 30. This section of trail is unsustainable and prone to landslides
- Explore ways to improve the trailhead for Firelane 7.

Concept E. Build a new trail south of NW 53rd Drive (Conditional)

This new trail would be located parallel and south of NW 53rd Drive in an area with no existing official trails. It would connect Holman Lane and Firelane 1 in the Southern Unit of the park. Nearby habitat is in poor-to-stable condition.

This trail has potential to create an approximately 8-mile trail loop with Concept D, providing a longer and more easily accessible off-road cycling route than exists today. However, this Plan recommends implementing Concept E only if Concept D (Firelane 1) is successfully implemented, as:

- Holman Lane is an uphill directional trail. Building Concept D without a full directional loop may encourage riders to descend Holman Lane.
- Holman Lane needs improvements for trail sustainability
- The area of SW 53rd is within the Balch Creek Watershed, which may limit the feasibility of any trail connection, as impacts on the Watershed must be avoided.

Erosion on Holman Lane

This concept involves:

- Building a new directional trail in park land south of NW 53rd Drive. This trail could be a narrow to mid-width (3- to 6-feet wide) contour trail that is designed with cyclists in mind but open to pedestrians as well. This new trail would be designed and built based on national best practices for safety and sustainability.
- Limiting negative impacts to healthy habitat and restoring adjacent degraded habitat.
- Closing existing unsanctioned trails in this section of the park, which would improve the environment.

Considered but not recommended

Concept A. Open Tolinda Trail to off-road cycling

The Tolinda Trail connects Leif Erikson Drive to NW Germantown Road. It is a narrow, steep 0.8-mile trail currently open only to pedestrians. The trail is in a degraded area of the park in the Central Management Unit.

This concept involves:

- Allowing people on bicycles to use the trail, possibly only in an uphill direction. Improving the trail for safe and sustainable shared use.
- Restoring degraded habitat around the trail. This could involve planting native trees, shrubs and plants and removing invasive species. Trail improvements could also reduce erosion and resulting impacts on streams.
- Closing the Water Line Trail from Leif Erikson Drive west to NW Skyline Blvd. This section of trail is poorly designed, resulting in erosion and other problems.

This concept is not recommended because:

- The majority of the Tolinda Trail is a fall-line trail. This type of trail does not meet modern best practices and can be unsustainable for shared-use and for the environment.
- Recontouring the fall-line section of Tolinda Trail would result in significant impacts to adjacent healthy habitat during construction (see Forest Park Planning Principle #__).
- Opening Tolinda Trail to cyclists would not provide loop opportunities and would require cyclists to ride on Germantown Road, which lacks bike lanes and is rated as a “difficult connection” for cyclists (see Forest Park Planning Principles #___ and ___).