



Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council
P.O. Box 111
Maple Valley, WA 98038

February 14, 2017

To: Kelly Heintz, DNR/PARKS - Capital Planning and Land Management

Re: Black Diamond Area Stewardship Planning

Ms. Heintz,

Please accept the comments herein regarding Black Diamond Area Stewardship Planning herein as the official comments from the Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council (GMVUAC). The GMVUAC is over 40 years old. We are an elected council that covers an area comprised of over 18,000 Rural Area residents. The entire area considered in the subject stewardship planning falls within our area.

Executive Summary

We see providing scientific-sound forest management, an adequate urban-rural buffer, and opportunities for public recreation as three major facets of the subject planning:

1. Forest Management — We support County management of the forests on these lands for forest health and diversity and to maintain the Natural Areas within.
2. Urban-Rural Buffer — We support the County's stewardship of the property going forward to ensure it can effectively serve as an urban-rural buffer and to protect sensitive environmental resources, including wetlands, streams, and lakes. We wish these to be accomplished as the County strives to maintain opportunities for Public Recreation.
3. Public Recreation — We support the County encouraging multiple uses (e.g., hiking, horseback riding, and/or mountain bike riding) on the property. However, we strongly encourage the County to recognize where such multiple use is not appropriate or compatible to maintain Public Safety and provide enjoyment for all users.

A complete set of what the County to consider is included under Recommendations.

Stewardship Planning

We expect the subject planning to adhere to the Goals and Policies contained within the King County Open Space Plan (KCOSP).

In Section 1 .2 .2 Goals and Objectives of the KCOSP: Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas 2016 Update. Goal 2 states: “Grow and connect regional open space and natural lands, in order to protect habitat important for fish and wildlife and to provide recreation opportunities.” Protecting habitat is a stated part of this goal, such that the subject plan must recognize its primary importance.

Further in the KCOSP in Chapter Five: Operations and Stewardship under Section 5.2 Stewardship there is discussion, which elaborates on the meaning of “stewardship,” and a series of Policies to which the subject plan must adhere (underlining added for emphasis).

“For King County, the term ‘stewardship’ represents responsible management of the open space system to ensure public safety, provide appropriate public access and use, and protect a site’s ecological and recreational value through maintenance, monitoring, enhancement, and restoration.”

“SO-132 King County will manage open space sites to ensure that the land, facilities and natural resources are protected and that appropriate public use is safe and enjoyable. The public is expected to have access to the fee owned properties within the open space system for recreational, scientific, and traditional cultural use, but access may be restricted ... when safety issues warrant limitations on public use. Restrictions on some types of recreation uses may be required to achieve management goals. Access strategies for each site will be identified through management and stewardship plans and appropriate use determined via a public process.”

SO-135 King County will integrate habitat management and enhancement as a major component of its stewardship. Natural areas will be managed primarily to protect and restore ecological processes, conserve wildlife habitat, and foster native biodiversity. This focus may include management, enhancement and restoration of degraded natural areas to increase their ecological, wildlife habitat, climate change adaptation and resiliency, and educational values.

SO-136 King County commits itself to preservation, protection and conservation of native biodiversity and will demonstrate this in daily activities. Environmentally sensitive maintenance techniques and best management practices will be followed to the greatest extent possible at all open space sites.

SO-143 King County supports the integration of conservation principles into its management actions in order to conserve native biodiversity through policies for land and water resource management, climate change planning, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation.

SO-145 The conservation principles presented in King County's Ecological Lands Handbook and in the King County Comprehensive Plan provide broad guidance to focus and direct restoration activities to enhance natural resources and ecological value on open space sites. King County will strive to steward natural lands consistent with these principles, where applicable.

"Safety and enjoyment are high priorities on King County's Regional Trails System."

"SO-147 King County should maintain regional trails in a safe and secure manner. Ongoing maintenance should seek to ensure that trail surfaces are in good condition and that corridor landscaping is maintained to preserve trailside clearance, site lines, and user enjoyment."

Recommendations

Given these bedrock ecological principles and policies, we strongly urge the County to consider in the subject planning the need to ensure Open Space preservation and enhancement, maintain public safety, and provide enjoyment opportunities. Such consideration should include, at a minimum:

1. Keep trails to a manageable number. Unfortunately, it appears this has already been exceeded. Consequently, any new trails contemplated must be thoroughly evaluated. and, in many cases, not built.
2. Avoid confrontations between mountain bikers and hikers/horseback riders for the sake of Public Safety, as the two sets are not readily compatible. This is a significant issue that confronts public users today. Strong consideration should be given to establishing dedicated trails for specific user groups.
3. Pay particular attention to sensitive areas and their ecological importance. In many instances, this has not been the case so far when establishing trail locations. To preclude this from happening going forward, existing trails should be identified and categorized through a comprehensive Trail Inventory.
4. Strive to protect wildlife and natural areas. This will entail recognizing existing wildlife corridors already identifies by the County, as well as setting aside natural areas not containing trails.
5. Recognize the entire area under consideration is in the County's Rural Area and, while it affords opportunities for all, both urban and rural, it is still a Rural Area. We conduct biannual citizen surveys, and the most critical item mentioned by residents is to maintain the rural character of the Rural Area. This will be the biggest challenge of the subject planning, and possibly the most important to achieve.
6. Ensure the final product of the subject planning does not simply "rubber stamp" what exists on the ground today. If not, we expect this will be an exercise the Public will not support.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Steve Hiester (gmvac_chair@hotmail.com)

Chairman, Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council

cc: Councilman Reagan Dunn (reagan.dunn@kingcounty.gov)

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