

Dear Members of the Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council:

Thank you for your thoughtful, detailed comments dated June 11, 2018 on the Draft Black Diamond Area Stewardship Plan (the Plan) and the associated SEPA Determination of Non-Significance. I appreciate your in-depth review of this material. I have included your comments in italics below and provide a response for each.

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.*

The current trail system at Black Diamond Open Space is consistent with policy guidance and funding used to acquire the property. We agree that new trails must be thoroughly evaluated prior to approval and construction. The Plan provides a framework for evaluating new trail proposals.

As you know, some of the land at Black Diamond Open Space was acquired through the Four-to-One Open Space Program, and use of that land is guided by policies set in the King County Comprehensive Plan for that program. King County Comprehensive Plan policy U-188 says that King County may allow trails. Active recreation uses can not exceed five percent of the total open space area. Other parcels within the Black Diamond Open Space were acquired with other funding sources including Parks Levy, Conservation Futures Tax and others. Each of these funding sources have specific allowable levels of use and they are described in the Plan.

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.*

This is an important issue and King County Parks is working to develop solutions that are fair and do not exclude any one specific recreation use. The Plan identifies possible solutions, including acquiring additional open space land, constructing additional parking in separate locations of the open space, and trail connections and loops that naturally provide separation of uses and room to enjoy various types of recreation.

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.*

Protecting sensitive areas and their ecological value is a top priority for King County Parks. The Plan includes a thorough natural resources inventory. The most recent trail development was approved under the Programmatic Permit for Backcountry Trails. There were a couple of small areas of that new trail system that were constructed too close to wetlands. King County Parks' staff documented that, developed a mitigation plan and is working with partners to implement the plan. Also, we have recently done a complete inventory of all the trails at Black Diamond Open Space and Henry's Ridge

Open Space.

4. *Strive to protect wildlife and natural areas. This will entail recognizing existing wildlife corridors already identified by the County, as well as setting aside natural areas not containing trails.*

King County Parks does strive to protect wildlife and natural areas. The Plan provides an inventory of natural resources on the open spaces covered in the Plan.

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.*

King County Parks is working to balance all the guidance provided by our policies for County open spaces. We believe responsibly managed open spaces provide a valuable asset to the Rural Area and help to achieve the goal of maintaining rural character in the Black Diamond area.

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.*

The final Black Diamond Area Stewardship Plan documents existing conditions for the open spaces in the Black Diamond area and provides a framework for future work including trails and facilities such as trailheads.

You also provided additional detailed comments of which I respond below:

1. *Stewardship and managing multiple uses and recreation*

In your write up about stewardship, you bring up an important point about managing multiple uses and also the importance of making sure our lands are available to all non-motorized uses. This indeed is a tough balancing act. The Plan identifies some ideas for helping to separate some uses at Black Diamond Open Space while allowing for multiple uses including new trailheads and access points, equestrian parking on the west side of SR 169, acquiring additional lands that will give us more opportunities to accommodate multiple uses.

2. *Prioritize, above all others, the protection of natural systems and the maintenance and improvement of long-term forest health*

We are working to achieve these goals. The King County Comprehensive Plan states that multi-use sites include lands that have areas of environmental value, but also may accommodate extensive public access and active and/or passive recreation opportunities. We have all of that at Black Diamond Open Space. Any trails and amenities we build there will factor in the protection of natural systems and we are already working on improving the long-term health of the forest. This summer we have planned a forest thinning at Henry's Ridge Open Space and Ravensdale Retreat Natural Area that will improve the site's overall health and ecological function.

3. *Ten-year vision*

The Plan does look beyond the ten-year horizon, but we documented it as a ten-year vision to ensure we are monitoring our success along the way. The intent is to keep us current and make sure we are meeting our goals.

4. *Conflicts between mountain bikers and hikers/equestrians*

As mentioned above, we realize the importance of managing for multiple uses and making sure King County parks are available to all non-motorized uses. The Plan identifies ideas for helping to separate some uses at Black Diamond Open Space while allowing for multiple uses including new trailheads and access points, equestrian parking on the west side of SR 169, acquiring additional lands that will give us more opportunities to accommodate multiple uses.

5. *Pedestrian crossing of State Route 169*

This was identified in the Plan. Because it involves other agencies, there are factors that are outside of our direct control and it may be a goal that takes time to implement.

6. *Forest thinning must be followed by a rigorous noxious weed control program*

Noxious weed control is an important component of King County's forest thinning projects and is addressed in the Plan.

7. *Should the Plan "authorize" uses in the same areas that conflict?*

To address conflicts between different types of recreation, the Plan provides for a separation of uses on trails constructed through the Community Partnerships and Grants Program project (see Figure 8 in the Plan) and opened in 2017. Those trails were designed and built to standards appropriate for mountain biking and hiking. All other trails are open to all non-motorized uses. The Plan provides a framework for future trail projects.

8. *The Plan does not call out Open Space policies SO-135, 136, 143 and 147*

The Plan listed pertinent Open Space policies but not all possible policies that may be relevant. We will consider adding these policies to the Plan.

9. *Funds to implement the Plan are not identified:*

Currently, funding is not available to implement the Plan beyond our existing operating funds. The Plan is a powerful tool to advocate for funding, secure grants and build partnerships.

10. *The Plan must emphasize that the public has paid a terrible price for the 1996 BDUGAA and the 2014 Development Agreement:*

The Plan documents the development agreements.

*11. The County needs to define a clear vision of what we can do with the amount of parks, open space and other locations designed for public use:*

This is an important idea and beyond the scope of a stewardship plan for one area.

*12. Extreme care must be exercised when designating “multiple-use” sites, as horses and bikes do not mix and can and will result in safety concerns for all parties:*

This is an important idea and is beyond the scope of the Plan.

Thank you again for your thoughtful and thorough review of the Draft Black Diamond Area Stewardship Plan.