



WEST MULTNOMAH
Soil & Water Conservation District

DRAFT – STAFF RECOMMENDATION -- DRAFT

Multnomah County Planning Commission
Multnomah County Land Use Planning Office
1600 SE 190th Avenue
Portland Oregon 97233-5910

ATTN: Kevin Cook

RE: Metro Park and Nature's North Tualatin Mountains Access Master Plan
(Case File: T3-2017-9165 / T4-2017-9166 / EP-20176780)

Dear Multnomah County Planning Commissioners,

The West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District is a public service district dedicated to the conservation of soil and water resources for people, wildlife and the environment. Our service territory is that portion of Multnomah County west of the Willamette River, all of Sauvie Island including the Columbia County portion of the Island and a portion of Washington County that lies within an area in the north Tualatin Mountains known as Bonny Slope.

The West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District has reviewed Metro Parks and Nature's application for a *Quasi-Judicial Revision to the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan to adopt Metro's North Tualatin Mountains Access Master Plan* and for the necessary land use permits to develop park related parking, trails, restrooms and related amenities for Metro's Burlington Creek Forest.

The West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District supports Metro Parks and Nature's application with the caveat that Metro agree to accept permit conditions relating to three equally important issues (discussed in more detail below) that arose from our review of the application documents: (1) Soil Erosion and Water Quality, (2) Fish and Wildlife, and (3) Building Trust with the Local Community. Our general support stems from our view that Metro's Access Master Plan recognizes the importance of providing for core habitat and natural area at landscape level and balancing that need with the need to provide the public access to nature. Specifically, of the 1300 acres of Metro's forest ownership in the north Tualatin Mountains, the Access Master Plan leaves 970 of those acres as core habitat not subject to multi-use trail development and related parking, restrooms and other developed amenities. In contrast, the Burlington Creek Forest property contains the most common forest cover type in our region (Douglas-fir) – a forest type that is not threatened by the type of public use proposed in the Access Master Plan. In addition, the Burlington Creek Forest property already has a previous forest road infrastructure in place to help accommodate the proposed trail development; an infrastructure that Metro has made tremendous water quality

and watershed health investments in already with respect to road drainage and fish passage improvements at stream crossings.

Based on our experience in providing technical forestry assistance to private landowners in the north Tualatin Mountains, we also feel the application and Burlington Creek Forest trail and access to nature development does meet the County's conditional use criteria in MCC section 33.6010 and 33.6315, where the access development on these forested properties will not force a significant change in accepted farm or forest practices on surrounding lands and will also not increase the cost of forest management implemented by neighboring landowners.

As mentioned above, here are our recommendations for the permit conditions relating to Soil and Water Quality, Fish and Wildlife and Building Trust with the Local Community.

- **Soil Erosion and Water Quality** -- We are concerned that the proposed multi-use trails in the Burlington Creek Forest has the potential to degrade water quality in seasonal streams and the downstream wetlands from both trail construction and use. As the permitting process unfolds, we ask the County to be diligent in seeking the requisite design plans noted in the Multnomah County Code West Hills Rural Plan Area (MCC) section 33.5515 showing specificity in trail location and density. We also urge the county to enforce design standards related to the specific best management practices to control erosion, protect water quality and provide for fish passage at stream crossings outlined in MCC section 33.5520. In addition, a water quality monitoring plan should be a condition of approval for Metro's application to assure that they are limiting measureable erosion as outlined in Policy 5.12 of the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan (Chapter 5, Natural Resources).
- **Fish and Wildlife** – We also are concerned that the lack of baseline monitoring data about existing fish and wildlife use creates some uncertainty about Metro's ability to fully understand the impacts of the proposed trail development and intended use to fish and wildlife; specifically red legged frogs. In their application, Metro does provide a thorough summary (in Exhibit 24.A – Letter from Gary Shepherd, Senior Assistant Attorney, Metro, dated June 10, 2019) that addresses the potential threats to associated fish and wildlife in accordance to Policy 5.27 of the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan and Criteria for Approval of SEC-H Permit (West Hills Rural Plan Area code section 33.4570). However, the focus of Metro's June 10th summary is focused on the threat of direct red legged frog mortality on the proposed trails from mountain biking use. We feel that a much more important issue of concern to red legged frogs is habitat fragmentation, loss of continuous cover and new avenues for predator movement that arise from the proposed trails. We also want to emphasize that habitat fragmentation and loss of cover could occur in changes to the shrub layer of the forest ecosystem even though the forest canopy remains pretty much intact. It also needs to be emphasized that the red-legged frog population in the north Tualatin Mountains is unique for the species across its range and that there is very little understanding and data associated with how the red legged frogs – a federal species of concern and a state sensitive species of vulnerability– utilizes this habitat. Given there is no baseline monitoring, the best pathway forward is to monitor red legged frog populations use of the Burlington Creek Forest and more generally the north Tualatin Mountains on a go forward basis so as to better understand any impacts to habitat quality from trail development and use. Our recommendation is that the County make developing a population monitoring plan for red legged frogs a condition of approving Metro Parks and

Nature's application. The District is willing to help Metro develop such a plan because by necessity it will need to cover the greater forested landscape surrounding the Burlington Creek Forest, much of which is privately owned land. We anticipate the results of this monitoring plan will not only inform future management and public use of the Burlington Creek Forest, but our own work in providing technical and financial forest conservation assistance to surrounding private lands.

- Building Trust with the Local Community – We request that the County urge Metro to develop a formal advisory structure for the local property owners and residents that surround the Burlington Creek Forest so they can have meaningful interaction with Metro in the management, public use and monitoring of the Burlington Creek Forest. This request helps Metro meet the policy outlined in Chapter 1 (Citizen Involvement) and Chapter 5 (Policy 5.23: *Promote cooperation with owners throughout the entire watershed, regardless of jurisdictional lines*) of the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan. The last thing we want to see is continued polarization between Metro and those that reside proximate to the Burlington Creek Forest. We recognize that setting up this type of structure is unique in its idea and challenging to accomplish. The Oregon Department of Forestry's (ODF) State Forest Advisory Committee – which provides a forum for citizens and interest groups to discuss issues, opportunities and concerns, and offer advice and guidance to ODF's implementation of the Northwest Oregon State Forests Management Plan – is a model that comes to mind for serving this need; though for its application to the Burlington Creek Forest, it would be implemented on a much smaller scale geographically. The District is willing to facilitate the development of such an advisory structure so local residents feel they have a voice in Metro's management of the Burlington Creek Forest property.

We would like to close by thanking Metro Parks and Nature for being a leader in conservation for our region. It is commendable the Metro Parks and Nature staff are willing to share their expertise with partner natural resource agencies and organizations such as ourselves. Further, Metro Parks and Nature staff are often found serving in leadership positions in developing regional conservation strategic action plans and tools that support The Intertwine Alliance Regional Conservation Strategy. Such demonstrated commitment to natural resource conservation gives the District the confidence that Metro has the capacity and expertise to implement the North Tualatin Access Master Plan and the proposed trail development in the Burlington Creek Forest and any adaptive changes necessary to stem unintended impacts to water quality and fish and wildlife as documented by scientific monitoring data. We feel that the County's approval of Metro's application – with the conditions we recommend herein – captures the opportunity for all of us to better understand fish, wildlife and water quality interactions with recreational trail development and use.

Sincerely,

Terri Preeg Riggsby
Board Chair and Zone 5 Director
West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District

cc: West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Directors; Metro Parks and Nature