

Seattle Parks and Recreation maintains over 1,500 acres of land classified as natural areas and greenbelts, park sites that have been established for accessing forests and shorelines, connecting neighborhoods with trails and greenways, providing low-impact recreational opportunities in a dense urban environment, and practicing sustainable forest and habitat restoration. To create a vision for natural areas and greenbelts that will maintain the native forest ecosystem, protect public safety and enhance positive uses over the long term, Seattle Parks is seeking to develop values-based guidelines for their use. .

As part of the process for developing these guidelines, Parks hosted several events for people to learn about natural areas and greenbelts and provide input on how these precious resources should and should not be used.

These events included a series of three focus groups, each of which identified priorities and developed supporting action items to ensure the health and vitality of natural areas and greenbelts.

Seventy-six organizations, including 15 that work with historically underrepresented populations, were contacted via email and phone and invited to apply to participate in one of the focus groups. The application to participate in a focus group was also posted on the Seattle Parks website and shared through existing Seattle Parks listservs and social media. A total of 52 organizations participated in the two-hour focus group sessions held on March 19, 21, and 26, 2015.

All focus group sessions were conducted by a professional facilitator, and to ensure consistency among sessions, the same series of questions were posed to all three groups.

This document summarizes key themes that emerged during the focus group discussions. Notes from each individual discussion are included as appendices.



- Access for all and restoring wildlife habitat and forest health were typically higher priorities
- Participants had different opinions about what constitutes access (i.e., being inside natural areas vs. on the periphery of natural areas)
- There was general agreement that education and awareness are important and that getting people more involved will increase stewardship and care for these areas.
- Views on low-intensity recreation ranged from those who wanted no additional activities in natural areas to those who thought there was room for other uses (the most mentioned being biking). Other comments representative of the discussions included:
  - Natural areas and greenbelts are not homogeneous; more uses can be accommodated in some areas, while other areas (such as steep slopes) should not be accessed at all
  - Increasing use (through adding new uses) creates the potential for conflicts; separating uses needs to be considered
  - More uses could encourage more people to be involved and to become stewards
  - Keeping natural areas natural should be the guiding principle when considering adding more uses
- In general, the overwhelming majority of participants looked favorably upon acquiring more natural areas and greenbelts and tying them together when possible
- A number of participants cited development adjacent to natural areas and greenbelts as a threat
- Providing equitable opportunity all over the city for people to access natural areas is important, especially in low income areas where recreational opportunities are fewer

#### **4. Can you provide more specific guidance that would help Parks measure success?**

- Regarding accessibility for all:
  - Increased use by different ethnicities and different types of users
  - Reduced distances of closest natural areas and greenbelts from residence
  - Increased connections to natural areas
- Regarding public safety:
  - A reduction in the number of complaints and incident calls
  - Increased perception of safety
- Regarding restoring wildlife habitat and forest health:
  - Increase in acres restored
  - Reduced invasive species
  - Increased bird and insect counts and diversity
  - Maximizing ecosystem values (finding areas where restoration does the most good)
- Regarding opportunities for parks users to participate in the care and maintenance of natural areas and greenbelts:
  - Increased number of volunteers and volunteer hours
  - Increased diversity of volunteers
  - Increased participation by adjacent landowners and neighborhoods

- Increased numbers of new volunteers
- Regarding education and awareness:
  - Increased partnerships with schools
  - Increased participation by youth
  - Increased number of research projects in natural areas

**5. How should Seattle Parks balance the growing need and demand for creating recreational opportunities in natural areas and greenbelts with protecting natural resources?**

- Participants acknowledged the difficulty of finding the right balance, and the following represent a majority of participant viewpoints:
  - Classify or zone natural areas and greenbelts to identify areas where more recreation can occur and where preservation and protection need to be prioritized
  - There needs to be some way to measure (a checklist) if new or increased use will actually have an impact and what those impacts could be
  - Natural areas represent a small portion of overall park area and should not bear the brunt of increased demand
  - Balance or compromise is not always desirable; natural areas need to be protected
  - These areas belong to all people of Seattle and providing and encouraging access is part of the equation
  - Increasing awareness, education, and stewardship is an effective way to reduce impacts while meeting the growing needs of the city

**6. What unique educational and recreational opportunities do natural areas and greenbelts provide in a dense urban setting?**

- Participants identified a number of opportunities, including:
  - To expand environmental learning centers' mission to go beyond what is happening in specific parks
  - To introduce newcomers to how we value open space: partner with real estate agents to provide homebuyers with information about natural areas and greenbelts
  - To educate people about what they're seeing: better signage, specific to natural areas and greenbelts, and signage in different languages
  - To broaden efforts to involve underrepresented populations; most natural areas and greenbelts are in lower-income and more diverse areas of the city
  - To focus acquisition efforts on properties adjacent to natural areas that pose some kind of risk to natural areas (steep slopes, water quality degradation, development)
  - To create interactive youth- and adult-friendly programs, such as a passport program or marathon events.

## Appendix I – Focus Group #1 Discussion Notes – March 19, 2015

### Question 1: Your favorite natural area or greenbelt and what you value about it

- Low stress
- Health
- Access and equity
- Opportunity – urban opportunity for all of the above
- Open space
- Preservation
- Practical ecology
- Water quality
- Walking
- Sustainability
- Identity
- Environmental justice
- Wellness (physiological, spiritual, wholeness)
- Wonder
- Identity – who we are, what we love
- Habitat
- Native vegetation
- Authentic nature, unique
- Should be fun

**Question 2: Given this broad perspective and what you said you value about your favorite area, tell us what you think of the following goals and how they should be emphasized.**

- i. Ensure accessibility for all
- ii. Restore wildlife habitat and forest health
- iii. Improve public safety
- iv. Increase low-intensity recreation opportunities
- v. Provide opportunities to enjoy peace and quiet
- vi. Purchase land for Natural Areas and Greenbelts
- vii. Provide increased opportunities for Parks users to participate in the care and maintenance of Natural Areas and Greenbelts
- viii. Increase education and awareness

Comments on all:

- Because of the overlap, these 8 points are slices of the same pie. Wouldn't bother trying to prioritize. They are all important
- Our natural areas don't need to be homogenous
- Parks needs to start working with other agencies (SPU SDOT) to influence the development surrounding natural areas
- Development that is allowed to take place just outside the boundaries of natural areas affects natural areas
- Have to look at what's happening around the natural areas in order to protect the natural areas

Comments on ensuring accessibility for all:

- Can't emphasize access over restoration as you have to have access to restore a place, to know about a place
- Green spaces may have as much or more value that people don't directly access except for maybe viewing from a distance (ie, Heron nesting area)
- Accessibility should be defined as viewing from a distance or possibly only being able to access some areas
- How access is defined is very important
- Map should have overlay with defined critical areas because those are areas that should have minimal access (unstable slopes, wetlands)
- Public health community says we should get out walking – most important thing we can do.
- Transit to our natural areas is very important
- All people should have easy access to get to natural areas
- Think all action items are pieces of the same pie – accessible to all including people that are doing things we don't want them to do
- There are some places in City where there is not internal access to natural areas. Some people might be missing out on an opportunity if access is only peripheral, especially kids.

- We shouldn't be afraid of the woods. Why are people afraid of the woods? Lack of access creates a culture that promotes illicit behavior and activities. There will always be some people that will be afraid to go into the woods.
- Need to have places here where people feel like it's the woods. Not everyone needs to be able to go everywhere.

Comments on restoring wildlife habitat and forest health:

- Would disagree because think we should have areas that are not accessible to humans (for the water, wildlife,...)
- Carkeek – steep slopes down to salmon bearing areas – people should not be going there except for maybe restoration
- Restore wildlife habitat and forest health is the most important thing. If we don't have that, we don't have natural areas to enjoy.
- If you don't restore and protect, there won't be areas for people to access (or other 7 items on list)

Comments on improving public safety:

- If safety is a priority, what does that mean? Lights?

Comments on low-intensity recreation:

- Have to look at specific area and habitat (Low intensity on a steep slope is different than low intensity on flat field or trail)
- Not all area are homogenous; it make sense to preserve some areas and allow recreation in others
- Have to weigh issue of putting a trail in versus a social trail developing that is not well planned/positioned
- What is the sweet spot of allowing just enough access to maintain/encourage the support and preservation of natural areas while physically protecting the area
- Low intensity recreation could be viewing areas. Have view areas to areas you want to protect, including interpretation/signage to explain to people why they cannot go in the area.
- Walking and restoration (pulling weeds/replanting) are the two essential low impact recreation activities. The group expressed differing opinions on whether multiuse trails (biking and walking) can work and if they should be allowed in natural areas
  - Some in group thought uses – biking and walking - should be separated. Others thought it would be possible to have a multiuse trail.
  - Support bike trails in some natural areas. For example, Cheasty Greenspace is so fully degraded that partners are needed to make progress. Believe the bike community should be welcome at this table. We are talking about areas that are not environmentally pristine. A multiuse approach to these areas means it more likely that a sustainable group of stewards will be around in the future.

- Bike trails degrade the environment.
  - There is room for biking in some areas, not all.
  - One person described a negative experience on a multiuse trail at Duthy Hill Park. The person was so distracted by bicycling activity that they were not able to enjoy the natural area.
  - Accessibility for diverse uses
  - Should not allow bikes in areas where forest stewards have spent so much time restoring
  - Instead of letting bikes into areas where groups are restoring. Find areas that aren't steep slopes or wetlands. Let bike community come together to build trails in a separate location
- The discussion of multiuse trails and biking led to comments on enforcement:
    - The management challenge is that when there is one separate bike trail you get bikers using other trails also which is not safe or appropriate.
    - What is Parks plan going to be for enforcement? If bikes are only allowed on some trails, how do you make sure bikes only stay on certain trails?
    - It is already difficult for parks to enforce off lease rules. Shouldn't give Parks one more thing to enforce.
  - Communities right by the natural areas should have some kind of priority say in what happens in that natural area – add some kind of language to the guidelines about this.
  - Neighbors should have input, not priority is what happens in natural area.
  - Agree that neighbors should not have priority as some of these areas are regional attractions meaning people from entire county use the area.

Comments on increasing education and awareness:

- Must educate the children as they will be the future restorers

Purchase land for Natural Areas and Greenbelts:

- Purchasing land is number one priority otherwise we won't have it for future generations.
- Do need to acquire more.
- Change "purchase" to acquire because there is a lot of state property within City limits that could be preserved.
- Let's preserve what we have with lasting relationships with other jurisdictions

**Question 4: Can you provide more specific guidance that would help parks measure success?**

- Increased amount of volunteers and hours spent volunteering
- Increased opportunities to participate. Stewardship or docent trainings can be the biggest asset. Give people tools to be stewards of land. Parks would need to provide training. This is slightly different than measuring number of volunteer hours.
- Percentage of local property owners who are involved
- Not everyone can afford to live on rim of natural area
- Increased number of new people/new volunteers
- Measure crime rates before and after a new feature is put in a natural area. Gather data to support anecdotal statement that “improved” parks are safer.
- Need a programmatic response to public safety in our greenbelts from the mayor’s office
- Number of connections between green spaces as a measure of success
- Tracking exposure to natural areas in childhood to stewardship behavior later in life
- Numbers of acres being restored
- Educational awareness – Track number of students, volunteer hours and number of visitor contacts.
- Measure distance from natural area to where people live. This should be to a natural area, not just a green space or playground.
- In addition to tracking number of visitors, also gather profile information (where they are from). This information is particularly important as some of these areas are regional treasures.
- There is an economic value to natural areas and greenbelts that needs to be considered and measured.

**Question 5: How should Seattle Parks balance the growing need and demand for creating recreational opportunities in natural areas and greenbelts with protecting natural resources?**

- Viewing areas are a form of recreation (environmental education)
- Recreation is more than kicking a soccer ball
- Regenerative Design - maximize biological diversity
- Education can be recreation
- Use trail ambassadors, including for bicycling
- We need low-stress areas and environments on our lives
- There is an environmental benefit to getting people to be responsible – even bike trail ambassadors
- Providing opportunities for all types of recreation within City as not everyone can get out of the City to hike, bike, rock climb.
- Meet people where they are. For example, people are attached to phones. What about a GPS driven app that gives people more information about the area (i.e., salmon bearing creek, or additional hiking opportunities outside of the City).

- Need checklist/thresholds defining what kind of impact an activity will have, or if there will really be any impact. For example, in the arboretum a new trail is going in and taking out over 100 trees and we aren't hearing much about this, but in Cheasty no trees are being taken out and there is all kinds of alarm.
- Need more connections between neighborhoods (as opposed to barriers).
- Some kind of measure of development in surrounding area because what's going on in surrounding area impacts the natural areas and changes what may or not be an issues within the natural area.
- Natural areas in cities can be a portal or opportunity that encourages people to further explore wild areas outside the city. Proximity to natural areas is important.

**Question 6: What unique educational and recreational opportunities do natural areas and greenbelts provide in a dense urban setting?**

- Need to protect areas from surrounding uses
- Most classified natural areas are in areas of city with lower incomes. Need to open natural areas to people so people have a positive experience with the natural setting.
- Better information (and signage) on existing areas is needed before adding new areas. For example, many people don't know Camp Long is open to the public.
- Overall, Parks needs to improve signage.
- Parks need to exhibit cultural competency; there are a lot of recent immigrants who live near natural areas.
- Naturalize shorelines

### Question 1: Two words that embody what you value about natural areas

- Respite
- Preserving natural areas
- Connecting to nature
- Community
- Protection of native plants and wildlife
- Respecting nature
- Serving as a living classroom; science and nature
- Living classroom
- Ecosystem services
- Inspirational
- Mental and physical health
- Critical habitat
- Greenspaces
- Protect tree canopy
- Reduce light pollution
- Carbon sequestration
- Accessible to all
- Opportunity
- Places to teach and learn about stewardship
- Leftover pieces of land
- Recreation opportunities

**Question 2: Given this broad perspective and what you said you value about your favorite area, tell us what you think of the following goals and how they should be emphasized.**

- i. Ensure accessibility for all
- ii. Restore wildlife habitat and forest health
- iii. Improve public safety
- iv. Increase low-intensity recreation opportunities
- v. Provide opportunities to enjoy peace and quiet
- vi. Purchase land for Natural Areas and Greenbelts
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- viii. Increase education and awareness

Friends of Lincoln Park stated that restoring wildlife habitat and forest health (ii.) was a leading priority. Moutaineering Group stated that increasing low-intensity recreation opportunities and education and awareness (iv. and viii.) were leading priorities

Doug Critchfield redirected the discussion and said that he is looking for values that *this* group has. He asked the group what types of uses would emphasize those values. The values shown in the list on the survey are the parks mission statement – is there anything you think would emphasize those values? What are some projects you have that impact those values/or are impacted by those values?

Comments on improving public safety:

- Many in the group agreed that when public safety is discussed it's usually in reference to the homeless
- Another commenter stated that public safety to them covered a broad range of instances, like drug uses, meth labs, dumping, prostitution, etc.
- A few commenters felt that women and safety is being overlooked in regards to safety
- Safety is being overlooked in parks issues
- Violence among acquaintances or "victimless crimes"
- Feedback from schools show that kids don't utilize parks because they feel their personal safety is compromised.
- Natural areas are safer than other parts of the city
- Youth don't feel safe in parks

Comments on increasing education and awareness:

- In order to increase safety, education and awareness should be increased as well.
- Education and awareness connects to community building. It brings people there to engage with nature.

Comments on ensuring accessibility for all:

- Green spaces can't be adapted to build accessibility for all. If you're providing the space, you're not providing an accessible route to all of them.
- Open spaces don't necessarily mean "accessible"
- How do you define accessibility? What about wheelchairs and people needing ADA access
- Community garden; trails

Comments on restoring wildlife habitat and forest health:

- Number one most critical value
- We need to take care of what we have
- We need to connect the story to the community to increase awareness

Purchase land for Natural Areas and Greenbelts:

- The group didn't understand why this written as a value. They asked Susanne to clarify it's placement on the list of values. Susanne clarified that parks get proposals to purchase land for a variety of reasons. How do we prioritize our purchasing dollars and where should this be on a value level.
- As population increases, more impacts will be placed on natural wildlife. How do we keep this sustainable over time?
- Compared to Portland, the percentage of natural areas and parks is lower in Seattle – we need to take care of what we have.
- From a development standpoint, as population grows, the demand for current green space is going to increase. Critical areas haven't been available for people to build on but as the value of buildings increasing it might become more attractive for people to using this land for developing. Acquisition guidelines are important.

Notes: a responded commented that they had a hard time prioritizing the goals on the list and thought there was a lot of commonality. They felt the values were "consistent" and should not be competing. Another responded said they "felt uncomfortable" by the list and didn't feel the goals should be separated.

A respondent stated that they felt natural areas are already sparse and should not be further parceled out to special interests. They felt this excludes a vast majority of people who want to use them for passive use. In terms of parceling out green space, one comment was made that

The discussion turned towards low-impact and high-impact recreation activities in natural spaces.

- A commenter who works for city of Shoreline said they often turn down recreational opportunity requests like gold, geocaching, airguns and orienteering because they would jeopardize areas in the natural spaces. However, there a cement path was built on a pre-existing impacted pathway for bicyclists, dog walkers, etc. to utilize rather than affecting other high-impact areas.

- I have no opposition for activities; the question is where do you have them? As it is, there is not enough space for dogs. Maybe Parks needs to be acquiring more space for dog parks. Dog parks should not be place in fragile, natural areas.
- Parks needs to think about additional space for additional uses. Don't have recreational activities in natural spaces.
- People may want to recreate in natural areas. It's not the goal of the experience to play disc
- More activities should be offered in natural spaces as this is better for activating space and leads to less policing in natural areas.
- Con: more active use leads to more degradation of natural qualities i.e. trampling plants, bird loss
- Design degraded natural areas with recreation in mind.

Doug: How does this group active vs. passive use? Varying opinions

Passive use of a natural area

- Walking
- Biking
- Pedestrian
- Bird watching
- Wildlife watching
- Education
- Plants
- Biking – they're calling it passive. Different biking has different levels of impact.
- Paved use as a "through"; design solution to a problem (problem: bicyclists using natural areas improperly);
- Any use that the expectation of the activity is to remain on the trail (so, dogs off leash, sports going off the trail, or even disruptive noise are example of active use

Active use definition:

- Trampolining
- Hiking, running,
- Impact
- Any kind of presence is an impact
- Running to chase Frisbee (medium impact)
- Dog of leash (medium impact)
- Depends on the impact and if the natural area can handle that impact
- There are appropriate uses for certain areas more so than others i.e. wetlands, critical areas, etc.

A respondent shared the idea of a “rotating park schedule” which serves to help reduce the amount of impact one activity can pose on an area. An example of this would be a dog park or a recreational use area being active during certain times of the day rather than open all day.

Parks Goals: Parks and Rec goals should be addressing opportunities for youth. Accessibility, education and awareness will help activate youth in these natural spaces. The green spaces are values and valuable to youth. It is important to Education and awareness for youth. Making sure greenspaces are values and valuable to youth of neighborhoods is critical. Not just a tool but something they can value.

Community voices: the need to include communities and neighborhoods adjacent to the natural areas and green belts is crucial. Their input and awareness will help to maintain sustainability around natural areas and green belts.

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#### **Question 4: Can you provide more specific guidance that would help parks measure success?**

##### i. ensure accessibility for all

- Define “accessibility”: societal and social as well as physical. ADA guidelines. Open for all and use for all (this is parks definition)
- No exclusion
- Make sure these natural areas and green belts are geographically accessible. Especially for new acquisitions.
- Wildlife corridors should be strategically placed so that you are maximizing natural areas and their ecosystems.
- Building awareness: It is difficult to define these spaces. Inform what this green space is and why it is important. How can we education people about this pristine space, why is this important. Educate people how to use them.
- Provide infrastructure: trails, park entrance, parking, wayfinding, etc. which will support accessibility.
- Important to have pieces of land that don’t have trails going through them. People won’t understand this but it is important. Not every square foot needs to have a trail/path going through it. There is value to the wildlife and bird corridors, etc.
- Heavy law enforcement if you don’t educate
- Invasive species: a big threat to natural areas and greenbelts. It is also important to be sure that groups can safely access critical areas and non-critical areas to manage the invasive species.
- Just as important to consider non critical areas, as well as critical areas
- Bringing people in to work on restoration is a good way to increase accessibility and education

##### ii. restore wildlife habitat and forest health

- Bringing people in and allowing access. If you don’t provide access than kids, for example, can’t identify with the importance of maintaining these habitats and ecosystems.
- Have the right amount of access

## Education and Stewardship (7 & 8)

- Youth programs through the school help connect children to wildlife
- Middle school/ highschool have service requirements
- Safe partnering with organizations (trail maintenance)

### **Question 5: How should Seattle Parks balance the growing need and demand for creating recreational opportunities in natural areas and greenbelts with protecting natural resources?**

- Important to have “soft” and “hard” trails
- The Queen Anne greenbelt is good at connecting neighborhoods together
- Provide communities accessibility to parks via trails and awareness
- A checklist should be used on natural areas and greenbelts, similar to what Portland Parks uses on their checklist, to help determine where trails should go and what range of accessibility is offered for these spaces.
- Important to incorporate science into creating the guidelines and not base solely on values and goals.
- Youth programs that allow children to take field trips to green spaces.

### **Question 6: What unique educational and recreational opportunities do natural areas and greenbelts provide in a dense urban setting?**

- Community gardens/use
- Land acquisition
- Restoration
- Greenspaces
- The more Seattle grows the more people are not connected to their parks
- Key step is bringing community voices along and involved in park usability
- Urban parks are gateways to natural areas. They help connect people and youth to experience the outdoors.
- Building partnerships!!!

## Appendix III – Focus Group Discussion Notes – March 21, 2015

### Question 1: Two words that embody what you value about natural areas and greenbelts

- Wildlife
- Healthy ecosystems
- Wilderness
- Minimal maintenance
- Sanctuaries
- Respite from city life
- Preserve
- Perpetuity
- Diversity – Wildlife and the communities within they exist
- Exceptional wilderness experience
- Wildlife and plant habitat
- Educating the public
- “Passive access”
- Access to nature in the city
- Healthy people as a part of that ecosystem
- Urbanness and how we connect to them
- Natural history
- Education
- Sustainability
- Preservation
- Opportunity for environmental education
- Totally limited and we can’t get anymore
- Wildlife corridors
- Wonder and discovery

**Question 2: Given this broad perspective and what you said you value about your favorite area, tell us what you think of the following goals and how they should be emphasized.**

- i. Ensure accessibility for all
- ii. Restore wildlife habitat and forest health
- iii. Improve public safety
- iv. Increase low-intensity recreation opportunities
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- vi. Purchase land for Natural Areas and Greenbelts
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- viii. Increase education and awareness

- Several groups wanted key words to be defined: experience/appropriate access
- Heron Habitat Helpers and Seattle Urban Forestry Commission feels that low-intensity recreations should have the most emphasis

Comments on ensuring accessibility for all:

- The highest priority should be to ensure appropriate accessibility to all.
- What is appropriate access? Should there be only walking paths, or paved paths for ADA access?
- Some natural areas have steep slopes, you don't want kids walking up and down steep slopes
- Don't overwhelm natural areas with people
- Given the availability of other parks in the city, why are natural areas taking the population pressure?
- Parks underlying philosophy is to get as many people as possible into parks. We need to provide systems for everything. These natural areas should be cut up and stewarded by a different body.
- I believe natural areas and greenbelts should be kept for perpetuity; don't let them be dug up by kids. They'll be dug up by wildlife. Kids can dig and build at beaches; it's okay there because the waves wash it away.
- Wildlife and education should be part of perpetuity. There are many people in the modern world where many kids never get out of the city. They need to get out of the house and have a place to go to.

Comments on increasing education and awareness:

- There are educational opportunities for kids to be involved in the care and maintenance of parks. Some people get so focused on preserving these areas, kids don't get a chance to connect to nature.
- Basic health and nature impact on education is why we have these spaces. We should zone areas near natural areas so we preserve critical areas and allow more access in others.

Comments on improving public safety:

- Safety should not be the number 1 priority.

- The more interest and activity in a place the safer it will be. Neglected places is where safety is a problem
- Are signs a possibility? If people see something they are concerned with, they could call a number, if they feel their safety is an issue?
- There should be numbers to quantify safety issues. Some people just feel unsafe even though they are safe
- The more people who are walking through these areas, there are more eyes which promote a better perception of safety
- The natural areas at Magnuson park are perceived as unsafe because there is a lot of activity behind the buildings. When the blackberry bushes on the Burke Gilman were removed and reforested, people felt they owned it and became more involved.
- The parks legacy survey said people walk more than anything else in parks. When they need to walk, they don't go down Bell Street, they go to parks.
- Public is important but it should be evaluated carefully. People have gone into natural areas and created sight lines and cut out vegetation to address their fear of "enclosed" areas. In some natural areas, the goal is to have a lot of vegetation. If this native vegetation is perceived as a negative, then we are in trouble.

#### Comments on increasing low-intensity recreation opportunities

- We need to think about parks as a spectrum and realize that natural areas should be on the less intense activity end of the spectrum. We could add activities and space, but our natural areas are so limited, to change the focus of their use is concerning. Passive uses for hiking and communing with nature and education, birdwatching, and stewardship are in the current policy.
- Natural areas are already divided by multiple trails and sensitive to walking and bicycling. There is less than 20% of parks being preserved for natural areas.
- There are already designated nature preserves. We need to have the opposite: areas that are preserved for kids to interact with habitat. We have designated areas for dogs, but no equivalent spaces for kids.
- Social trails are different from inside trails. Dogs that are off leash destroy the habitat.
- We need to find a middle ground and individual park plans need to be considered. Not a blanket policy. Some natural areas are larger than others and have different needs and variables.
- There are other areas in other parks for kids. This is a backdoor approach to open natural areas to mountain bikes. Mountain bikers say they will maintain the area, but they should not be in natural areas.
- Kids like to dig in holes, play in water, sand, logs, and rocks. There needs to be a place for that kind of activity.
- Mountain bike use patterns cause more erosion, creating a habitat for weeds, and seeds get caught on dog paws and get spread around. This causes a lot of problems. We (King County) have signs we can give out for certain parks to encourage owners to clean their dog's paws.

- Trails that allow kids to use trails and parks are important. There are low income families that can't afford to visit the Cascades or the San Juans and these parks are the only places they can experience the outdoors.
- There is an intrinsic value to natural areas being left natural.

Comments on providing opportunities to enjoy peace and quiet:

- Younger populations need to have an appreciation for wildlife and plants. When you remove invasive plants and make it more inviting, people are drawn to natural areas.

Comments on restoring wildlife habitat and forest health:

- Number one most critical value
- Green Seattle Partnership set a 20 year goal to improve the canopy and remove invasive plants. If anyone knows gardening, it requires ongoing maintenance. We have to keep up on this. It's very important to maintain habitat.
- We need to restore both plant and animal habitats.

Comments on providing increased opportunities for Parks users to participate in the care and maintenance of Natural Areas and Greenbelts:

- This relates to all listed priorities that all people can benefit from
- Park goers need to be involved. Parks can't do it alone. It's a long term thing, not a one time thing.
- This addresses all of these priorities. The Nature Consortium brings 3,000 volunteers to the Duwamish Greenbelt. This is all supervised.
- People who grow up in surrounding areas of natural areas are the ones to preserve these places. This sense of stewardship can't be taught in schools.

Comments on acquiring lands for Natural Areas and Greenbelts:

- Many flood plains have been built upon. Parks should acquire property at the edges of natural areas and in flood plains. Eminent domain should be used in some cases.

**Question 4: Can you provide more specific guidance that would help parks measure success?**

i. ensure accessibility for all

- Surveys of attitudes when it comes to accessibility. Survey results should influence opportunities
- Who is using the parks now, who are we provided access for?
- Single use vs other uses. Increasing accessibility and the number of people who benefit

iii. improve public safety

- What is the number of incident phone calls, time of day, and how that information could be extracted

- Fewer phone calls

ii. restore wildlife habitat and forest health

- Partner with Audubon Society and measure bird counts
- Number of species, population size, diversity, nesting pairs
- A systematic bird count
- Baseline data counts, health and size, animals, health of slopes, water quality. This data should be made to the public for interpretation
- Parks must be responsible for collecting data (not dependent on Audubon volunteers). The data from Audubon is collective, not specific to each park
- GIS maps should be made available showing restoration levels, invasive species
- Maps that show measurements around natural areas (steep slopes, different types of habitats)
- Increased area of contiguous habitat area either through acquisition or redefining areas as protected habitat
- Determine if there is a statistical improvement or decrease. However, there should be definitions of what constitutes as an improvement.
- Collect baseline data (animal counts, slopes, size, etc.) and make that data public
- Reduction of noxious or invasive species
- Fewer buildings on steep slopes

iv. Increase low-intensity recreation opportunities

- Track who uses the areas and the types of uses they engage in
- Determine if there are uses that preclude other uses

vii. increase opportunities for Parks users to participate in the care and maintenance of natural areas and greenbelts

- Amount of participation in the community
- Input from people who live there
- Ensure non English speaking communities are involved
- Track involvement by different ethnicities

viii. Increase education and awareness

- Partner with schools (track what happens after restoration, wildlife coming back, etc.)
- Number of students participating
- Number of research projects
- Conduct attitude surveys about natural areas and greenbelts

**Question 5: How should Seattle Parks balance the growing need and demand for creating recreational opportunities in natural areas and greenbelts with protecting natural resources?**

- Is there a demand for use of natural areas besides bikes? How do we preserve having quiet and competing uses?
- People making policies just need to make a decision. You can't find a balance sometimes. Real leadership needs to make a tough choice. Compromise is always necessary.
- There needs to be no development, provide a cultural specific social asset for the community.
- Migratory species need places to stop. Species need to regenerate.
- All areas need to be protected, not just in Seattle
- Providing access for people is part of the balance equation.
- Not one size fits all, these places need to be set aside. We live in a city and people contribute to paying for these lands. We need to provide places for people. Urban areas are not pristine.
- Unused land in general parks like Carkeek or Discovery or Magnuson found a balance. Pressure from the surrounding population increases baseball fields, bike trails. Natural areas are being picked on because they are undeveloped with no advocacy
- When you develop or put things in natural areas, it is the end of the naturalness. It's only preserved until the next development comes along. We should keep it for nature and for kids to experience it.
- We have the opportunity to save the natural areas for the next 100 years. Oppose a sports lobby.
- Buying adjacent areas is great, but will not help the 120,000 people coming to our city. Park needs to put in additional uses. Once these areas are gone they are gone. Buy other things like substations.
- We can restore areas and keep the parks once they are bought. We should look at using these areas instead of putting a fence up and keeping people entirely out of it.
- Natural areas should not be walk through trails. It is a disservice for what these areas provide. Only certain activity should be allowed.
- Zone natural areas for different types of uses.

**Question 6: What unique educational and recreational opportunities do natural areas and greenbelts provide in a dense urban setting?**

- It would be great to partner with real estate agents and provide them with information about what is special about open spaces and how to protect them. Let's introduce newcomers to how we value open space.
- Take a big area, pull a piece off and say this is active recreation land. It won't be great for habitat, but the rest will be preserved forever. There will be a big fight but it's a way to save 95% by giving away 5%
- Broaden reach of environmental learning centers; they are currently too focused on the parks they are in. This will require increased funding for environmental education
- There is no need to reevaluate. This is Park's way to change current policy. An evaluation is needed to look at overall park activity. There are few acres that belong to natural areas.
- Parks should educate on how to best maintain these areas
- This is an opportunity for low intensity activities to connect with nature

- The more people there are, the more we need natural areas preserved. Every single study points to the need of more nature not less.
- Take areas of existing parks that are not being used for recreation and designate those as natural areas.
- There should be a neighborhood protection zone. Get rid of invasive plants and planting native plants. Take back public land.
- Need to get adjacent property owners more involved and educated. Convert more of them to stewards of these areas.

**Question 1: Two words that embody what you value about natural areas and greenbelts**

- Quiet and wonder
- Native plants and community
- Wildlife and birding
- Health and access
- Dogs on leash or no dogs
- Wildlife diversity
- Active and vibrant
- Place of worship
- Solitude and contemplation
- Physical and emotional safety
- Public and nature
- Restoration (physiological, physical, spiritual)
- Inspiring and access
- peaceful
- Enclosed
- Urban
- Canopy
- Stress reduction
- Ecosystem services

**Question 2: Given this broad perspective and what you said you value about your favorite area, tell us what you think of the following goals and how they should be emphasized.**

- i. Ensure accessibility for all
  - ii. Restore wildlife habitat and forest health
  - iii. Improve public safety
  - iv. Increase low-intensity recreation opportunities
  - v. Provide opportunities to enjoy peace and quiet
  - vi. Purchase land for Natural Areas and Greenbelts
  - vii. Provide increased opportunities for Parks users to participate in the care and maintenance of Natural Areas and Greenbelts
  - viii. Increase education and awareness
- The trick is to balance all of these goals, and stewardship is critical to keep these goals in sight
  - How much of the GSP designated lands tie into the 1500 acres left to restore?
    - Susanne's answer: This (map) shows areas that are in restoration. It shows the different colors of what phase is in restoration. What is great is that it shows much more is being done largely by volunteers. GSP work takes place in every park categories other than the downtown core. GSP uses 3 filters for work locations (not contingent on natural areas)...this will continue. What we develop in guidelines does not affect GSP.
  - We should recognize the complex ecosystems of humans and nonhumans. There is no hard rule.

Comments on ensuring accessibility for all:

- Concrete ADA accessibility or lights through the parks may come in conflict
- Accessibility for all implies trails. You can look at an area as viewable vs walkability
- There needs to be equitable distribution across the city of these areas especially areas of low income. We need to ensure burdened areas get their share of access to these areas including transportation access and linking these places with public transportation so that everyone can get there. These are not just for people who drive or live next to these areas
- Preservation is critical. People may not be able to access these areas but there is a benefit to preserving them
- You can have ADA accessibility in some areas, and in some areas you can't.
- Need to define the level of access; access to the periphery of an area is access.

Comments on increasing education and awareness:

- We need to maintain stewardship and increase education and awareness for children to connect with nature
- A wise old tree can teach things you won't find in supplemental use guidelines. We need to learn from and increase education and awareness.
- There needs to be an increase of education and awareness

Comments on improving public safety:

- Some people have a fear of crime in natural areas, but you don't want to cut down all growth to accommodate. Fear should not be the driver.
- There is a reality of people who live in these areas/greenbelts (homeless encampments). When people are able to access these areas there will be ramifications. Where will they be displaced? What is the city's response to people who weren't visible in the past and now being displaced and becoming visible? The viaduct has displaced a lot of people south of Pioneer Square to more visible places. There is a significant spike of homelessness in neighboring areas where safety is an issue.
- City departments need to clean up a lot of encampments. Sometimes there is a whole household set up inside. Chairs, fireplaces, and stereos are a fire hazard. You can also find needles and other dangerous items.

#### Comments on increasing low-intensity recreation opportunities

- Need to define what low impact use is
- We want low intensity activity but not everybody wants that
- We need the wild nature of the place. Low intensity use is still use.
- We have some absolutely irreplaceable natural areas. The city will grow as a legacy and it's our responsibility to preserve these areas. Unlimited or increasing access is going to lose them in perpetuity. We have the responsibility to keep the space in perpetuity to limit the access low impact. Focus on preserving wildlife habitat.
- The problem with low impact is that there are a lot of different opinions of what constitutes as "low impact".
- Low intensity episodes of use should be added. We shouldn't have 1200 people doing the same thing. Keep high intensity episodes out of natural areas.
- It doesn't matter if it is low intensity or high intensity. Pedestrian activities should be the highest impact you would get.
- Low impact bicycling and walking should count too. I respectfully disagree (with limiting low intensity to walking only).
- Low impact is not about walking or biking, it should be the impact on the environment. Bicycling can be low impact if there are separate paths for pedestrians or bikes.
- Low impact means dogs on leash. Off leash dogs are high impact. It makes it unpleasant to recreate in. Bicycling single track routes in Discovery Park are high impact from bicycles and now there are roads for them. I don't think bikes want to go into natural areas.
- Bikes are a great way to get to and from a park, but this goes back to preserving the areas. Separate trails impact out footprint twice and these places will become devoid of wildlife. Users want restorative and peaceful uses.
- We need to know what is in these areas before we can determine what the impact is
- Defining what low impact seems almost impossible given the diversity of land
- There will be a mix of impacts to natural areas
- We need a good robust policy for use of natural spaces. We don't need to sanction all uses in all natural areas. There should be restriction in some areas, and other areas for other uses.

- There are different impacts in different environments

Comments on providing opportunities to enjoy peace and quiet:

- Enclosed areas, what do they mean? Are there Alders or Thickets? There are different environments and each vegetation is used in different ways

Comments on restoring wildlife habitat and forest health:

- Getting neighbors out there to maintain and care for the areas is what will keep them preserved
- People should enjoy wildlife habitat. Studies show you don't need to go across the entire area to enjoy it. You can look at it and still enjoy it. Maintain the core access but don't fragment or degrade the area while you are there.
- Restoring habitat is important
- Restoring habitat and forest health is key
- The GSP has identified 10 more years to get 2,500 acres restored by 2025. We've restored about 1200 acres and need 1300 to go. There needs to be a 20 year plan that focuses on restoration and balancing maintenance. If I was an advocate, parks needs more money for maintenance.

Comments on providing increased opportunities for Parks users to participate in the care and maintenance of Natural Areas and Greenbelts:

- For a lot of reasons, there are barriers to care and maintenance. This is a big scale goal to what out what care means. There is a difference between stewardship and volunteers.
- There are some areas that would need work because they are too steep or they are wetlands and inaccessible to volunteers for safety reasons. We can't depend on them.
- There needs to be more opportunities. There are too many barriers.
- Seattle is getting old. Students need to be able to understand they are the ones that need to take care of these areas when we die. How are we going to get the next generation to jump in? People are retiring now and there is no replacement. All of our work would be for nothing if people don't step up and follow through. Young and enthusiastic graduates go on world tours and never come back to be forest stewards.
- We don't do much maintenance our natural areas, it's mostly up to volunteers. Will parks fund the maintenance of natural areas?
- There are some areas where volunteers and staff go out to help stewards and volunteer groups.
- What if we thought about this from a holistic point of view? What is the best action to engage stewards and take care of the lands better.
- Volunteers need to be reflective of the community, based on income, race, ethnicity, etc.
- There should be programs at community centers that focus on natural areas stewardship; associate areas with community centers

Comments on acquiring lands for Natural Areas and Greenbelts:

- Why would we purchase lands for greenbelts? We don't have the funds to fix, maintain, or restore. We should strategically purchase lands for natural areas or greenbelts. Create linkages from one block to another. We don't have good distribution. We need to look at returning areas to natural states. Congregate them, return developed areas to natural areas. It's a long term goal.

**Question 4: Can you provide more specific guidance that would help parks measure success?**

i. Ensure accessibility for all

- We don't want to overwhelm natural spaces as we do with restoration trails. Low intensity recreation opportunities take advantage of networks.
- Parks and King County measure distance communities have to a park or playfield or bike trail or any other recreation. It is hard to look at a map and assess what access people have to don't have.
- Increased number of public transit opportunities to natural areas
- Increased in number of visitors to natural areas
- Increased diversity of natural area visitors

iii. Improve public safety

- A list of natural areas or classified areas that has to be audited for people staying in that area or not staying in the areas.
- Increased feelings of being safe – perception of safety
- Translate perception of safety with unlimited sightlines and open spaces detract from wildlife. There is not wildlife. Unlimited safety is a defeat of wildlife habitat.

ii. Restore wildlife habitat and forest health

- There is encroachment when no one is watching. GSP is doing a good job with measures and quality.
- Number of areas restored
- Track canopy areas and make note when changes occur
- Measure trees before we cut them down
- Get a handle of wildlife. What exists and what does the baseline look like?
- Neighborhood bird projects. We have 18 years of bird population data and can track how park decisions impact populations in parks. City partners with wildlife groups to get data you need to know.
- Count class size and flight initiation of the year and cover different areas

iv. Increase low-intensity recreation opportunities

- There should be a social science survey to see how people feel about passive use. This is also be used to evaluate how people value areas.

- Measure things that are natural (diversity of visitors, number of jobs, number of new stewards)
- 

vii. Increase opportunities for Parks users to participate in the care and maintenance of natural areas and greenbelts

- Loss of places takes the wind out of volunteer continuity or stability to commit to volunteers
- Volunteers and users are reflective of the community. When you have people of all races and ethnicities you will truly have equitable access to your resources.
- Every community center should have a formal program that engages
- A formal mandate to offer classes in restoration or partner with forest stewards near education center.
- Repetition of volunteer hours. People who come back multiple times are the ones who become committed
- Forest stewards should have an area they are responsible for monitoring
- Increased amount of partnering activities. We need citizen science. Parks will never have the opportunity or budget to do it all

viii. Increase education and awareness

- Preschool students need to be engaged
- There is so much investment in education with preschool and families and education levies. How we leverage environmental education into that?
- We could track kindergarteners up to teenagers to see if there is an educational impact that translates to their adult life

**Question 5: How should Seattle Parks balance the growing need and demand for creating recreational opportunities in natural areas and greenbelts with protecting natural resources?**

- If Burger King has three trash bins then we can all have 3 trash bins (trash, recycle, compost). There are a lot of people which means a lot of trash.
- We want to get kids outdoors but we want to protect them. Letting kids climb trees on and off trail are part of the natural experience. There is a conflict in policies. There should a kids off-leash area.
- Kids climbing trees are high intensity
- Foraging – communities that use these natural areas for foraging need an area where they can forage.
- We inventory wildlife but we also need to inventory trails. Many people make their own trails. If you don't provide a trail that is accessible people will go everywhere. There are 100 trails where there could have just been one. 90% of people stay on trails.
- Seattle urban density is growing and we manage parks that are soccer fields and open space, but we are talking about wild types of places. We need to provide future generals how they get it right and wrong.

- Make wild areas, native plants and restoration plants a priority for maintaining habitat
- We should look at other places. Golf courses are huge and only few people use it. Mountain Bikes can go to those places rather than small natural areas.
- Curriculum and develop volunteer aspects, college, college bound high school students should be required to do community service. Especially those with an environmental science background.
- Curriculum could be developed around forestry and other types of things
- Consider a wildlife sanctuary area designation, where you do not go into wildlife areas except to do inventory and maintain it. Wildlife sanctuary's within wild natural areas where there are no trails.
- People are going to make trails regardless. I'm nervous about long term thinking about creating a sanctuary area.
- Parks needs to continue to have citizen involvement and oversight of policy to maintain balance
- Wetlands and ravines are physical barriers. If there are no trails people are going to be living in there.

**Question 6: What unique educational and recreational opportunities do natural areas and greenbelts provide in a dense urban setting?**

- How do you get a younger generation engaged. Let's think of recreation activities are fun for 6 year olds and make a commitment to that. When I was a kid I wrecked a forest but at the end of the day I love being in the forest. Who do you want to engage in long term care.
- There is room for a lot of low cost interpretative signage. People love that stuff because there is an education side. You can get a lot of people over time.
- What we have in Seattle are incredible natural spaces that serve as environmental learning centers. They foster having relationships with natural areas. Children take what they learn from learning centers and bring them back to school. Have volunteers partner with school based education programs to see what we can really get back.
- Community centers should not be lost in the conversation. We should expand beyond teenagers and include lots of adult programs.
- If everything on a map had signs we would have an easier time finding things. I bet the purple areas don't even say this is a natural area. This is an opportunity to educate people.
- Foster a natural area and greenspace marathon each year. Educate people on 427 greenspaces.
- Find a way to put spin on recreation. People don't know you can walk to Burien. With more people you need to find new ways to recreate.
- Madrona doesn't allow signs, something needs to change in parks institution and culture.
- The main message is the forest is not a nicety, it is essential. We are missing the boat by not partnering with economic development community
- There should be a parks passport program like the library. You could find stewards to stamp it or have a QR code in each park.
- We need to be able to touch nature or hear or see or feel nature.

- The best argument for keeping wild places is density. As the city becomes more and more dense, these areas become more precious.
- Start major junior ranger program at community centers, national parks, sponsored by businesses.

DRAFT