



MEMORANDUM

Date: 6/3/2015
To: Board of Park Commissioners
From: Susanne Rockwell
Subject: Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines

Requested Board Action

The Board will be asked to make a recommendation to adopt the Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines and the Project Impact Evaluation Checklist on July 23, 2015 after a briefing from staff and conduct a public hearing at the June 25 Board meeting.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines.

Background:

In February, 2015, staff briefed the Park Board on existing City and Department goals and policies pertaining to Parks' natural areas and greenbelts, and outlined the public engagement process for developing the Supplemental Use Guidelines. Parks has adopted use guidelines for individual parks and for Center City Parks collectively; per Parks policy, these Use Guidelines will supplement the Park Code.

Seattle's population is expected to increase by 120,000 people over the next 20 years. Seattle Parks and Recreation needs to continue to provide recreation opportunities for our changing population while also providing opportunities to contemplate and build community, and to preserve and enhance forest habitat, tree canopy and water quality. Stronger access, equity and exposure to our environment are needed in order to build a sense of responsibility and promote stewardship of these lands with the next generation.

The purpose of the Supplemental Use Guidelines is to provide a transparent tool to evaluate use proposals in Parks' classified Natural Areas and Greenbelts. (See map, Appendix B of the Guidelines.) The impetus to develop use guidelines came from the difficult process Parks, the Board and the community have been through regarding locating a new use – a bicycle trail – in the Cheasty Greenspace, one of Parks classified Natural Areas. We need to ensure that as an agency, we are meeting the needs of all of our residents and that policies reflect the changing needs of residents and long-term goals for the city and Parks.

The Proposed Guidelines

The proposed Supplemental Use Guidelines were developed from input gathered through Parks public engagement process (described in a subsequent section), combined with research on best practices in other jurisdictions, including Shoreline, Bellevue, Kirkland, Tacoma, Pierce County, Bellingham, Mercer Island, King County, Denver Metro area, New York, Baltimore and Portland. The guidelines include a values-based checklist

of criteria that will allow for low-intensity, passive and active recreation activities while minimizing adverse impacts on the environment.

Key elements of the Natural Area and Greenbelt Use Guidelines include:

- The Superintendent is responsible for the review and approval of activities to be considered.
- All new use proposals must submit a completed checklist in order to be considered; this includes Department of Neighborhoods' Matching Fund proposals, other community proposals, Parks projects and granting agencies.
- No use proposals will be considered for areas located in either Wildlife Sanctuary Designation areas or established Marine Preserve areas.
- The Use Guidelines are not meant to supersede the City's Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA) Code, SMC 24.09.

After a use proposal has submitted a completed the checklist, then the location for the approved use will be evaluated through Parks Planning and Development Division site analysis and public engagement process per Parks public involvement practices and policies, including review by the Board of Park Commissioners.

Public Engagement

During March and April, Parks launched a robust public engagement effort which consisted of several major components:

1. Media announcements and an Interactive Community Blog
2. Invitational Focus Group sessions
3. Mini-Summit - Panel Discussion and Open House

Seventy-six organizations, including 15 that work with historically underrepresented populations, were contacted via email and phone and invited to participate in one of three focus groups. Fifty-two groups/organizations participated in the focus groups in March, with 21 groups/organizations participating in the Open House portion of Parks' Mini-Summit in April, and over 100 individuals signed in to the event itself.

Everyone in attendance at the events cares about our natural areas and greenbelts. There was a lot of common ground and some key themes were expressed across the board; these include

- stewardship of the environment,
- access to wildlife and ecosystems, and
- creating opportunities for education and access.

Where individuals tended to differ was on the amount of activity that was appropriate. Some people felt that natural areas should be for quiet contemplation only (no loud voices) and a few wanted no access at all. The majority of those in attendance were supportive of access, education and recreational opportunities. Focus Group and the Mini-Summit summaries can be downloaded from the project website address provided at the end of this document.

Key Policy Issues

The central policy issue related to the Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines is how much, if any, recreation activity should be allowed in these areas. Some community members believe the natural areas and greenbelts should be completely set aside – off limits to all except wildlife. Other community members support walking trails only, while others view the natural areas as an opportunity for active recreation such as mountain bike trails and ropes challenge courses.

Recognizing the need to accommodate a rapidly increasing population within our limited parks and recreation land, combined with the educational value of allowing people an up-close look at nature, the proposed use guidelines strike a balance. Uses, including walking and biking trails and challenge courses, will be allowed while minimizing adverse environmental impacts. All proposals to add a new use in a Natural Area or Greenbelt will require a completed checklist (Appendix A to the Guidelines) which assesses the impacts to the environment of the proposal. Not all activities are suitable for all areas, and benefits of the activity should be greater than potential impacts to the site. As noted, no uses will be allowed in areas designated a Wildlife Sanctuary or in Marine Reserves.

The guidelines reference multigenerational activities and challenge course areas for recreation consideration. These are defined as:

- Multigenerational activity: activity that is conducive to, or relating to, several generations, as of a family, or society, and may include bicycling.
- Challenge course area: an area and/or activity that test one's ability, require personal development and/or team building, and consist of a variety or progression of elements, and may include a bicycle skills course or ropes course.

Following the Superintendent's approval of the Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines, Parks will revise the Bicycle Policy, with Park Board review, which does not allow bicycles in Natural Areas and Greenbelts.

Project timeline

- January 21 – June - Media announcements and email notices
- February 6 – April 8 – Interactive Community Blog/survey questions through MindMixer platform
- February – March - "In reach" events with Historically Underrepresented Communities
- March 19, 21, 26 – Invitational Focus Group sessions
- April 4 - Mini-Summit - Panel Discussion and Open House
- June - July - Public Hearing and recommendations by the Board of Park Commissioners

Additional Information

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Website

General project information and public engagement summary reports can be found at:
<http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/NaturalAreaGreenbeltUse/default.htm>

Supporting materials:

Attachment 1: Information from Other Jurisdictions
Attachment 2: Natural Area Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines
 Appendix 1: Project Impact Evaluation Checklist
 Appendix 2: Map of Parks Classified Natural Areas and Greenbelts

Attachment 1: Information from Other Jurisdictions

Parks staff conducted informational interviews via the phone with several of the jurisdictions listed below, in addition to online research. In comparing practices from other jurisdictions, one finds a range of approaches. Many cities make use determinations for their natural areas and greenbelts internally, with no formal set of criteria, but rather based upon the professional assessment of their staff.

City of Lakewood: Lakewood Colorado manages its natural areas and greenbelts on a case by case basis. Bear Creek Lake Park occupies 6,000 acres and contains active restoration habitat sites, walking and biking trails as part of the urban corridor, public swimming and camping areas, park rangers, and an education center. Certain areas are cordoned off seasonally, depending on the mating season of various birds and mammals in the area.

New York City: New York City has a 'Forever Wild Program' which is an initiative to protect and preserve the most ecologically valuable lands and aims to expand awareness, encourage stewardship and provide site protections. The program includes 51 sites and over 8,700 acres. Many of these sites are accessible by New York's subway system. Designation of sites is made internally by park staff. Sites cannot be developed into athletic complexes, boating marinas, nor ball courts. Allowable uses include extensive system of trails, and vehicular access on the edges.

City of Bellingham: The City of Bellingham allows for trail development in their greenway corridors that can accommodate walking, biking, running and horseback riding. Opportunities are to be provided for public benefit, for outdoor education and recreation, where public access is appropriate and is balanced with preservation goals.

King County: King County's Ecological Lands Handbook outlines management of ecological lands (natural areas) with the goals of conserving and enhancing ecological value, and accommodates appropriate public use that does not harm the ecological resources on site.

City of Mercer Island: Mercer Island manages Pioneer Park in an active manner, with different levels of activity occurring in the various quadrants of the park. Some areas contain steep slopes, invasive plants and stream corridors, while other areas have benefited from intentional habitat restoration efforts. Allowed uses include: walking, biking and horseback riding.

City of Tacoma: The City of Tacoma takes a variety of approaches in managing their natural areas and greenbelts, with management plans prepared individually for different park sites. Two examples include Puget Creek Natural Area and the Swan Creek Area.

At 52 acres, the Puget Creek Natural Area contains a creek with habitat for salmon and steep wooded hillsides. The management plan for this area protects the creek and the forests at the site and supports outdoor programs and activities such as environmental education and interpretation. This vision blends a desire for recreation and public access to nature with a need to steward and protect the wildlife habitat and resources found in the natural area.

Swan Creek Park is a 290 acre greenspace nestled on the boundary between East Tacoma and Pierce County (total acreage of 373) with a salmon bearing stream, wooded canyon, upland forest, paved and natural trails, a community garden, and mountain bike trails. The approach for this park plan was to dramatically reduce incidents of homeless encampments, to encourage positive use and users, to actively restore and protect habitat and identified rare species.

Attachment 2: Natural Area Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines

1.0 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of the Supplemental Use Guidelines is to provide a transparent tool to evaluate use proposals in Parks' classified Natural Areas and Greenbelts. The guidelines include a checklist of criteria that will allow for low-intensity, passive and active recreation activities while minimizing adverse impacts on the environment.

As Seattle's population increases, Seattle Parks and Recreation needs to continue to:

- Provide opportunities to contemplate and build community,
- Preserve and enhance forest habitat, tree canopy and water quality,
- Provide recreation opportunities for our changing needs, and
- Ensure equitable access to all park land, including Natural Areas and Greenbelts.

Access and exposure to our urban natural environment is needed in order to build a sense of responsibility and promote stewardship of these lands with the next generation. The Supplemental Use Guidelines and attached checklist (see Appendix A) will:

- 1.1 Limit the adverse impacts of proposed uses in our urban Natural Areas and Greenbelts, and their surrounding environment.
- 1.2 Provide criteria for determining the compatibility of activities within these areas, their design character and level of use; while providing access, opportunity and sustainability.
- 1.3 Protect and enhance the value of Natural Areas and Greenbelts as a regionally significant educational and recreational resource.

2.0 ORGANIZATIONS AFFECTED

- A. Seattle Parks and Recreation
- B. Seattle Public Utilities
- C. Seattle Department of Transportation

3.0 REFERENCES

- A. 1993 (Resolution #28653) Greenspaces Policy and Designated Greenspaces as part of the City's Open Space Policies
- B. 1991 (Resolution #28530) Urban Trails Policy Adopting the Urban Trails Policy as part of the Open Space Policies
- C. 1988 (Resolution #27852) Adopting Comprehensive Plan policies relating to open space throughout the City
- D. Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA) Code (SMC 24.09.020)
- E. Park Code (SMC 18-12)
- F. Park Policy and Procedure:
 - 3.F.1 060 P2.17 Viewpoint Designations
 - 3.F.2 060 P5.6.1 Tree Management, Maintenance, Pruning and/or Removal
 - 3.F.3 060 P5.9.1 Native Plant Policy
 - 3.F.4 060 P5.10.1 Wildlife Sanctuary Designation
 - 3.F.5 060 P5.11.1 Parks Classification System
 - 3.F.6 060 P7.11.1 Bicycle Use

- 3.F.7 060 P7.12.2 Rule Establishing Marine Reserves within Certain City Parks
- 3.F.8 060 P7.13.1 Use Management Guidelines for Parks and Recreation Facilities
- 3.F.9 060 P8.13 Environmental Policy

4.0 POLICY

The use of Parks classified as Natural Areas and Greenbelts is guided by references listed in 3.0, however, in case of conflict, they will be superseded by the guidelines of this Policy and Procedure.

A. Exclusions

- 4.A.1 These Use Guidelines are not meant to supersede the City's Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA) Code, SMC 24.09.; including peat settlement-prone areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservations areas and wetlands, as defined by the State Department of Ecology.
- 4.A.2 No use proposals will be considered for areas located in either Wildlife Sanctuary Designation areas or established Marine Preserve areas.
- 4.A.3 Use proposals for educational signage and entry way improvements, do not need to complete the checklist, but do need to be approved through Parks Planning and Development Division.
- 4.A.4 Habitat, urban forest restoration and maintenance work being conducted through the Green Seattle Partnership program are allowed outright.

B. Habitat

Consider use proposals that:

- 4.B.1 Enhance forest and habitat restoration efforts to maintain and enhance regional biodiversity.
- 4.B.2 Provide for wildlife habitat and migration opportunities; these proposals may include seasonal closures of a trail or portions of a trail, an overlook or education program due to mating and/or nesting season(s) or migratory routes of key mammals, fish and fowl.
- 4.B.3 Improve water quality and aquatic habitat opportunities.
- 4.B.4 Repair damaged and fragmented natural systems through parcel acquisition and/or expansion.

C. Education, Access and Public Safety

Public safety increases through positive use. Where appropriate, consider use proposals that enhance the value of Natural Areas and Greenbelts as a significant educational resource and that increase opportunities for access.

- 4.C.1 Increase formal and informal educational programing and partnership opportunities.
- 4.C.2 Strive for access points in close proximity to schools and Community Centers.
- 4.C.3 Provide access connections to school 'safe routes' and the City of Seattle's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans.
- 4.C.4 Foster volunteer and stewardship opportunities.
- 4.C.5 Provide for ADA view areas and trail access as feasible given the terrain and existing conditions and fiscal realities.

D. Recreation

Recreation activities are to be considered on a case by case basis, not all activities are suitable for all areas, and benefits of the activity should be greater than potential impacts to the site.

- 4.D.1 Increase access through a variety of trails, such as: walking trails, multigenerational activity trails and neighborhood connector trails.
- 4.D.2 Strive for equitable distribution of recreational opportunities where feasible across all areas of Seattle.
- 4.D.3 Where appropriate, provide for the opportunity for challenge course area(s), orienteering type activities, and future activities that may evolve.

E. Acquisition

Acquisition of Natural Areas and Greenbelts should continue to be a high priority for the City.

- 4.E.1 Preserve and reclaim Parks' property for public use and benefit, and ensure continued access to parkland for a growing population.
- 4.E.2 Continue to leverage grant funding for acquisition to the maximum extent possible.
- 4.E.3 Prioritize natural area and greenbelt acquisitions of parcels that expand land holdings and increase habitat continuity.

5.0 DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided in the context of this document.

Classified Natural Areas and Greenbelts: are those parklands defined as such in Parks Classification policy –

http://www.seattle.gov/parks/Publications/policy/parks_classification_policy.pdf

Low-intensity: development which through its low negative environmental impact either enhances, or does not significantly diminish environmental quality.

Access: permission or the right and encouragement to enter, get near, or make use of something or to have contact with something or someone.

Multigenerational activity: activity that is conducive to, or relating to, several generations, as of a family, or society, and may include bicycling.

Challenge course area: an area and/or activity that test one's ability, require personal development and/or team building, and consist of a variety or progression of elements, and may include a bicycle skills course or ropes course.

6.0 RESPONSIBILITY

- A. The Superintendent of Parks and Recreation or his/her authorized designee shall be responsible for the review and approval of activities to be considered.

7.0 PROCEDURES

- A. All new use proposals must complete the checklist in Appendix A in order to be considered; this includes Department of Neighborhoods' Matching Fund proposals, along with other granting agencies. Exceptions are those uses allowed outright in section 4.1.
- B. Use proposals that meet Parks' values, as outlined in section 4.0, may be considered for development on a case by case basis.
- C. Best location(s) for approved uses will be determined through Parks Planning and Development Division site analysis and planning, such as environmentally critical areas analysis, forest and habitat analysis, parcel restriction data review, and public engagement per Parks practices and policies.
- D. New uses and changes of use are to be presented to the Board of Park Commissioners for their review and recommendation.
- E. Revisions to the Natural Area Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines may be requested. Requests should be made in writing to the Parks Superintendent.
- F. The Parks Superintendent may confer with the chair of the Board of Park Commissioners on the revisions and the preferred public review process for requested revisions. The Parks Superintendent shall have final authority on changes to the use guidelines.

8.0 APPENDIX

- A. Project Impact Evaluation Checklist
- B. Map of Parks Classified Natural Areas and Greenbelts

APPENDIX A
PROJECT IMPACT EVALUATION CHECKLIST

1. No use proposals will be considered for areas located in either Wildlife Sanctuary Designation areas or established Marine Preserve areas.
2. Not all activities are suitable for all areas; benefits of the activity should be greater than potential impacts to the site.
3. Best location(s) for approved uses will be determined by Parks Planning and Development Division site analysis and planning, such as environmentally critical areas analysis, forest and habitat analysis, parcel restriction data review, and public engagement per Parks practices and policies.
4. Uses proposals for educational signage and entry way improvements, do not need to complete the checklist, but do need to be approved through Parks Planning and Development Division.
5. Habitat, urban forest restoration and maintenance work being conducted through the Green Seattle Partnership program are allowed outright and do not need to complete the checklist.

Habitat		Yes	No	Not Sure
4.2.1	Does the use proposal enhance forest and/or habitat restoration efforts?			
	Does the use proposal maintain and/or enhance regional biodiversity?			
4.2.2	Does the use proposal provide for wildlife habitat and migration opportunities?			
	Does the use proposal include seasonal closures due to mating seasons or migratory routes of key mammals, fish and fowl?			
4.2.3	Does the use proposal improve water quality and/or aquatic habitat?			
4.2.4	Does the use proposal repair damaged and fragmented natural systems through the acquisition of parcels that expand existing landholdings?			
Education, Access and Public Safety		Yes	No	Not Sure
4.3.1	Does the use proposal increase formal and/or informal educational programing and partnership opportunities?			
4.3.2	Does the use proposal strive for access points in close proximity to schools and community centers?			
4.3.3	Does the use proposal intend to provide access connections to school 'safe routes' and the City of Seattle's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans?			
4.3.4	Does the use proposal foster volunteer and stewardship opportunities?			
4.3.5	Does the use proposal provide for ADA view areas and/or trail access?			

Recreation		Yes	No	Not Sure
4.4.1	Does the use proposal increase access through a variety of trails, such as walking trails?			
	Does the use proposal increase access through a variety of trails, such as multigenerational activity trails?			
	Does the use proposal increase access through a variety of trails, such as neighborhood connector trails?			
4.4.2	Does the use proposal strive for equitable distribution of recreational opportunities?			
4.4.3	Does the use proposal provide for the opportunity for challenge course area(s), orienteering type activities, and/or other similar type activity?			
Acquisition		Yes	No	Not Sure
4.5.1	Does the use proposal preserve and/or reclaim Parks' property for public use and benefit?			
4.5.2	Does the use proposal leverage grant funding for natural area or greenbelt acquisition?			
4.5.3	Does the use proposal prioritize natural area and greenbelt acquisitions of parcels that expand land holdings and increase habitat continuity?			
Summary				
	Please provide a brief description of the use proposal detailing those items that are checked as 'yes' above.			

