

Cougar/Squak Corridor Planning Process Community Outreach Summary June 2015

Public Notification

King County Parks provided the following public notification for this process through news releases, web page information, mailings sent to park neighbors, posting meeting flyers on the park kiosk and email distribution lists.

Public Meetings

King County Parks initiated a public outreach process to facilitate recommendations for the use and recreation development of the Cougar/Squak Corridor; that process consisted of the following meetings (more detail about the meetings follows):

- Convening a 16 member steering group to assist with preparation for the for two public community meetings. The group met on April 29, 2015 and June 10, 2015 to review project details, provide feedback and verify findings.
- Hosting an initial community meeting on May 27, 2015 to present information about the park and to solicit ideas from the community about appropriate uses and amenities.
- Facilitating a design workshop on May 28, 2015 to synthesize information gathered at the community meeting and help King County Parks prepare draft recommendations for uses and amenities at the park. King County Parks' project staff, two members of the steering group along with staff from the Pomegranate Center participated.
- Holding a second community meeting on June 17th to review information about the park and present draft recommendations for uses and amenities at the park.

Community meeting #1, May 27, 2015

34 participants. Amy Brockhaus (Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust) welcomed participants. Kelly Heintz (King County Parks) provided a presentation about project background, goals, criteria and details about funding for parks and partnerships. Participants were asked to respond to the following question: *“What uses and amenities would you like to see at Cougar/Squak Corridor?”* ideas were recorded ideas on flip charts. Next, the group was divided into small groups to draw locations for the recommendations on maps; each group shared their ideas. The list of ideas for uses and amenities generated are as follows:

Young child interaction area	Camping
Environmental education facilities (improve lodge or new construction)	Wildflower and herb garden/education about native plants
Preserve natural beauty leave areas undisturbed for wildlife	Mix of trail uses/types
Equestrian use and corridor	ADA access
Hiking trails (variable skill levels)	Hiking use only
Interpretive signs/trails	Regional trail connections
Adequate parking	Bicycle trail for kids
Connectivity of trails	Directional signs on trails

Education/recreation programs/day camps	Guard towers and perimeter fence for wildlife protection
Loop trails	Hardened equestrian trails
Amphitheater/gathering place	No halfway houses or homeless shelters
Bathrooms, sitting areas	Disc golf
Stewardship opportunities	Canopy tour challenge course
Viewpoints along trails	Events and rentals of lodge

Specific ideas added during mapping exercise:

- Pedestrian/wildlife crossing across SR 900 connecting to Cougar Mountain
- Equestrian trail and additional parking along a Puget Sound Energy corridor in Cougar Mountain Park
- Power line trail on north side of Cougar/Squak Corridor Park
- Equestrian trails that connect from adjacent private neighborhoods and private roads
- Use of gravel roads from old campground for equestrians
- Add additional parking by acquiring adjacent private lands
- Add horse trailer space in parking lot
- Expand parking
- No bikes trails
- Bike loops using old gravel roads
- Public transit stop at park entrance

Common themes:

- Environmental education with a focus on youth
- Trails for a variety of skill levels including gentle trails for young children/older adults
- Connectivity for trails and wildlife to adjacent landscapes
- Multi-use if/where possible
- Public enjoyment of park
- Park visitors connection to nature

Design workshop, May 28, 2015

Participants at the design workshop identified the following project “DNA”:

- A special place for many people
- Provide access for many people to experience nature
- Multiple use where possible
- Provide multiple activities while also preserving habitat
- Increase utilization of an under-used park
- Create multiple ways of interacting with the park
- Regionally significant attraction
- Provide connections to adjacent landscapes for people and wildlife

Ideas added during the mapping exercise included designating zones for the park that range from undisturbed to areas for developed park facilities. Potential connections for equestrians were labeled with the understanding that they are not viable due to conflicts with adjacent land management. All participants agreed the upper half of the park would be designated for hiking, trail running and wildlife protection.

Draft Recommendations presented at the June 17, 2015 Meeting

The draft objectives and recommendations in this section are derived from community ideas, site analysis, funding requirements and policy guidance. Recommendations incorporate nearly all of the ideas generated from the community.

First Priority Actions
Support environmental education by improving/developing facilities, interpretive trails and signage
Leave some areas of the park undisturbed for habitat and wildlife connections between adjacent public lands
Implement partnership for canopy tour course
Provide hiking trails for all levels of visitor ability including very young, senior and disabled
Establish park zones – natural area, passive recreation area, active recreation area and special management area (habitat corridor)
Create gathering places such as children’s play areas, amphitheater, shelters and sitting areas
Develop loop trails where feasible
Future Actions
Research and advocate for pedestrian/wildlife connection across SR 900 to Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park
Work with appropriate agencies for potential connector trail along powerline
Pursue acquisition of adjacent lands for additional parking and access

Community ideas not included and rationale for that decision:

Parking areas and connector trail in Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park

- We are not planning for Cougar Mountain.

Equestrian and bicycle trails

- Most of the interest in horse access came from neighbors wanting to access the park across private property from private roads. We cannot support this type of access. This is not a public benefit. Private property owners do not want people accessing the park across their property.
- There are no trail connections to adjacent public lands making for a limited experience at Cougar/Squak Corridor.
- There are other horse access points in the vicinity such as Taylor Mountain, Squak Mountain with additional trails planned in the Raging River and Tiger Mountain State Forests. King County is investing in a new trailhead for improved horse access at Taylor Mountain. The majority of King County trails are open to equestrian use.
- It is not the highest use for the greatest good.

Camping

- Camping prohibits other uses in the areas it is provided. There is a greater interest in and need for day-use trails, interpretive signs, access to the creek for educational purposes, children's play areas, gathering and sitting areas at Cougar/Squak Corridor.

Disc Golf

- Disc golf is best suited for an open area where discs can be thrown safely a long distance to a series of basket targets. Cougar/Squak Corridor Park is a densely wooded park and there will be a high density of people and children in the area that could pose a safety hazard.

Community Meeting #2, June 17, 2015

26 attended. Kelly Heintz provided a presentation about project background, goals, criteria and draft recommendations. Meeting attendees were asked to respond to the following question: *“What are your ideas to improve the draft recommendation?”* ideas were recorded on flip charts at the front of the room. Comments and ideas for improvement are as follows:

I like the GoApe proposal and think the cost structure is good. Location is good.	Maintain wildlife corridors
Add the roads to the concept map with canopy tour	Draft recommendation reflects comments from first meeting
Support a variety of educational opportunities such as environmental and outdoor education	Keep future horse access in mind if conditions change
Provide a facility for indoor activities	Canopy tour cost share to County should be higher
Park zones are good. Keep activities away from neighbors	SR 900 needs a turn lane to accommodate the proposed uses of park
Need more parking	Challenge course is not a good fit for park
Expand nature play areas and make them interesting	KC is trying to do too much beyond environmental education – anticipate conflicts
Canopy course too expensive for most families and will determine uses of property	Pond area needs signage. More of the park should be untouched with no trails
Interpretive signage should include human and natural history	Consider incentives for non-car transportation
Draft recommendations are interesting	I enjoy challenge courses at other parks and think it is a good idea for this park
Solve traffic problems before developing the park	Concerned about canopy tour fitting in with the park. If it has to occur, separate it from trails
Focus on planned trail system first, acquire adjacent parcels	Need more loop trails

We received 17 email messages after the meetings with comments on the draft proposal and ideas for the park. Most reflected a broad consensus for environmental/outdoor education with use of the existing lodge or a new facility. There is strong support for providing trail connections to adjacent public lands and a pedestrian crossing to Cougar Mountain over SR 900. Many comments highlighted a concern about traffic on SR 900 making access to Cougar/Squak Corridor difficult during high-volume hours and the need for more parking at the park. Many of the comments expressed support for maintaining the natural beauty of the park and protecting wildlife habitat.

Next Steps

King County Parks will develop draft site management guidelines that will be available in fall 2015 for public review and comment. After public review, the site management guidelines will be finalized.