



## **Big Finn Hill Park – Trails Planning Update**

Big Finn Hill is a 220-acre multiuse park located in the northwest part of the City of Kirkland and just south of the City of Kenmore that serves as an active recreation site and as a wooded urban oasis with over 9 miles of trails. To the east of Juanita Drive, the park offers developed recreation facilities including little league baseball fields, a lacrosse and soccer field, a play area and picnic area, and multiuse trails. There is a large wetland and beaver pond in the southeast corner of the park. To the west of Juanita Drive multiuse trails meander through a Douglas-fir forest and connect with trails at St. Edwards State Park to the north. The trails are frequented by mountain-bikers, dog-walkers, and hikers.

### **Primary Park Uses**

Soccer/lacrosse, baseball, children's play area, picnicking, and hiking, mountain-biking and dog walking.

### **Park Access**

Park entrances are located at NE 138th St. from both Juanita Drive NE and 84th Ave NE. Two parking areas are available within the park area east of Juanita Drive NE and west of 84<sup>th</sup> Ave NE. The only parking west of Juanita Drive NE is on-street parking along NE 138<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Trail Planning**

King County Parks sought recommendations from the public on ways to enhance and improve the trails and trail uses at Big Finn Hill Park. King County staff gathered public input at two general meetings in June and August 2012.

### **The Big Finn Hill Park trails committee**

In September 2012, the Big Finn Trails Committee, comprised of Finn Hill neighbors, park users, hikers, mountain bikers and dog walkers, started meeting on a weekly basis and has acted as the advisory group to King County Parks.

The citizen committee members included:

Jeanette Leach	Joel Wood	Aaron LeFohn
Troy Kasper	Christy Carter	Jennifer and Matt Pruitt
Scott Edison	George Meredith	Dan Barton
Bill Hall	Mark Garnick	Jill Bartlett
John Cope	Tom Fitzpatrick	Janice Gerrish

King County Parks' staff:

Mike Crandell	John Turner	David Kimmett.
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The committee worked collaboratively to achieve consensus and to address all concerns raised during the series of meetings from September 2012 through May 2013. Multiple site visits were taken in the park to inspect existing conditions and to review and approve proposed trail enhancements. A small group of committee members made a field trip to Snohomish County's Paradise Valley Conservation Area to observe the trail network.

### **Trail recommendations**

Based on input gathered at two general meetings in June and August 2012 the committee identified the following major themes and trail issues that have been the key focus of the committee's agenda:

Trail mapping and inventory	Trail maintenance	Trail uses, layout and design
Juanita Drive crossing	Dogs on trails	Engaging youth
Trail connections	Access and parking	Beavers
Trail signage	Preserve natural character	Bike skills areas

The committee looked at every section of trail in the park to determine appropriate uses and to review and consider proposed changes and enhancements. In many areas, no changes will be made to the trails.

### **Goal**

Improve the trails and trail infrastructure, enhance the trail experience for all users of all ages, and preserve the natural character of the park.

### **Long term recommendations**

These respective issues will require further investigation.

### **Juanita Drive crosswalk**

With increasing trail use there is a critical need to provide a safe crossing of Juanita Drive. King County staff and a trail committee representative will participate in the City of Kirkland's Juanita Corridor Study to investigate the feasibility of a crosswalk that connects the east side and west side trails.

### **Parking on the west side of Juanita Drive**

There is no current recommendation to create a parking lot on the west side of Juanita Drive. There is an opportunity to work with the City of Kirkland to expand shoulder parking along 138<sup>th</sup>.

### **Trail connection to O.O. Denny Park**

Due to topography and soil conditions, a direct trail connection from Big Finn Hill Park to O.O. Denny Park is difficult. There is much interest in connecting the two parks. The Finn Hill Neighborhood Alliance is the best group to lead the effort to find a suitable route and to work with Kirkland Parks, Finn Hill and Denny Creek neighbors, and other stakeholders.

### **Dogs**

The current park policy is that all dogs must be on a leash at all times. There is no proposal to create any trails approved for off leash use or to create a dedicated off leash area. The recommendation is for dog owners to organize a group to develop a viable proposal for future consideration.

### **ADA accessible trail and boardwalk**

Currently there are no trails that are suitable for people with disabilities. The best site for an accessible trail is just south of Thoreau Elementary. A trail that meets the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards could be constructed to connect with a proposed boardwalk parallel to 84<sup>th</sup> NE. The boardwalk would keep all trail users of the road shoulder. Both the accessible trail and boardwalk would require dedicated capital funding and permitting. Together, they would make an ideal grant proposal for state and federal funding.

### **Short term recommendations**

These recommendations can be implemented immediately and phased over the next 3 years.

### **Accurate map of existing trail network**

Working with Parks staff, committee members completed a survey of all trails to help produce an accurate map of the existing trail network. These maps will be available at trailheads and posted on kiosks. Each trail intersection on the map is numbered to help users locate themselves on the trail network. Each intersection will have a corresponding numbered sign.

### **Trail signs**

Wood engraved signs will be installed at trailheads and key intersections. Each numbered trail intersection will be posted with a wood sign that corresponds to the trail map.

### **Kiosks**

A new kiosk has been installed on the west side just off NE 138<sup>th</sup>. Another kiosk will be installed in the future on the east side at a location to be determined.

### **Trail designation and standards**

The trails are designated as “backcountry trails” under King County Parks’ trail classifications. All trails will be maintained and constructed to U.S. Forest Service standards, as outlined in King County’s programmatic backcountry trail maintenance and construction permit. (See overview on page 6)

### **Trail maintenance**

Enhanced annual maintenance on all major trails will control vegetation encroachment and eliminate wet areas. There will be a north-south maintenance access trail on the west side to facilitate trail maintenance and site stewardship. Most of the existing shared use trails will be maintained in their current (2013) condition except for ongoing mitigation of wet spots. Bridges and boardwalks on trails where they pass through wet areas or over streams will be constructed of dimensional or milled lumber. Natural obstructions such as fallen trees or branches will be removed as quickly as possible by King County Parks staff.

### **Shared use trails**

All existing and new trails will be considered “shared use” or multi-use, and will be open to hiking, mountain biking, running and dog walking. There will be no designated or exclusive use on any of the trails. The primary goal is to minimize conflict while maintaining safe, open access to all trails for all users of all ages. Certain trails will have technical bike features targeted for beginner and intermediate riders but will remain open and accessible to hikers. Some trails may have baffle gates or other design elements to encourage slower bike speeds at trail intersections or other appropriate locations

### **Minor Trails**

These are short connector trail segments with no bike features. Individual fallen tree trunks up to 7 inches in diameter (or that can be trimmed to no more than 7 inches above grade) will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if they may remain in place to provide a natural bike feature without impeding foot traffic. While King County Parks' staff would have to remove large fallen trees, the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance would be responsible for normal trail maintenance.

### **New trails**

Certain existing trails that are poorly designed or sited will be decommissioned and replaced with properly designed and engineered trails and trail structures, such as bridges and turnpikes (elevated trails). This improves trail safety and accessibility. There will be two new trail loops with bike features on the west side.

### **Trails with bike features**

Certain existing and newly constructed trails will include bike features such as small jumps, log roll-overs, drops and log-rides. These trails will have technical features that make for a more challenging bike ride but would be designed so that the features are either optional or rideable by beginner and intermediate riders. While King County Parks staff would have to remove large fallen trees, the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance would be responsible for normal trail maintenance. Technical features will be approved by King County Parks before construction, and be constructed of natural materials (no dimensional or milled lumber). All bike features greater than 7-inches in height will incorporate a walk-around bypass for all foot traffic. All trails with bike features will be "walkable" and open to all foot traffic.

### **Bike skills areas**

Create three bike skills areas on the west side for beginner and intermediate mountain bikers, to include small jumps, log roll-overs, log rides, rock gardens and chutes.

### **Bike pump track**

Construct a 30-foot wide by 60-foot long bike pump track on the east side near the play area. The target users for this facility are young children who are learning to ride a bike. Many families who use the existing play area will also use this kid-friendly recreational feature.

### **Horses**

Trail use by local horse owners who live near the park and can ride their horse to the park will be allowed. The site is not suitable for horse trailers and horse owners who must trailer their horse will be encouraged to use other facilities in the region that can accommodate horse trailers.

### **Unauthorized trail construction**

Eliminate and remove unauthorized trails. Post signage to engage trail users who choose to build and construct inappropriate and unauthorized trails and trail features, such as jumps.

### **Youth**

Engage students and youth to help with trail stewardship. Finn Hill Middle School students were surveyed about the park and trails, such as how they use the trails and if they would help with trail improvements. For example, of 268 students surveyed, 35% hike and ride in the park, and 33% use the ball fields.

**Forest health and site restoration**

Conduct a forest health analysis of the unique stand of Pacific madrone trees on the west side. Where needed, other trees should be inspected to minimize hazard tree conditions. Restore the old homestead and orchard site by removing invasive blackberry. An ongoing invasive plant control program should be implemented to control English ivy and holly, and other non-native plants.

**Beavers**

The beaver pond in the southeast corner of the park is a unique natural feature and should be preserved. Trail users are encouraged to coexist with the beaver activity. Any trails that are seasonally flooded by the beaver pond will be closed. The beaver pond will be routinely monitored during the wet and rainy seasons.

**Friends of Big Finn Trails**

Establish an ongoing committee to work with King County Parks staff to carry out and implement trail improvements. Continue to work with volunteers from the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance and Finn Hill Neighborhood Alliance on trail stewardship.

**Next steps**

**July 1 - Public comments from June 20 meeting**

**July 8 – Final review of public comments**

**July 15 - Final trail committee recommendations**

**July 22 - Parks staff review of committee recommendations**

**July 26 – Final trail recommendations approved**

## **Overview -- Backcountry Trails in King County Parks**

### **Introduction**

Trails have become an integral part of outdoor recreation in King County. There is growing public interest in trails. Trails promote outdoor physical activity which enhances public health and improves the overall quality of life in the region. Trails also provide an opportunity for all citizens to experience King County's beautiful natural landscape of mountains, forests, streams and shorelines. King County Parks manages a system of both regional and backcountry trails.

### **Definition**

Backcountry trails are natural surface, non-paved trails intended for shared use recreation including hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, trail running and nature observation. Users of backcountry trails are looking for a natural experience with forests and trees, streams and wetlands, and birds and wildlife. Backcountry trails are designed to take advantage of the natural terrain. These trails are predominantly narrow paths through forested park lands but may also include existing maintenance roads as well as old logging roads. These trails are not intended for public motorized vehicle use.

### **Backcountry Trail Sites**

There are over 180 miles of backcountry trails on 26 King County Parks' sites. A backcountry trail site is one in which the public specifically seeks out in order to engage in a trail experience of hiking, running and riding in a natural setting across a variety of landscapes and terrain, and at varying lengths and distances. The steep 2-mile trail at Pinnacle Peak Park is the shortest while Cougar Mountains' 37-mile trail network is the longest and most varied.

There are backcountry trail networks at the following sites:

Big Bend Natural Area	McGarvey Park Open Space
Black Diamond Natural Area	Mitchell Hill Forest
Big Finn Hill Park	Moss Lake Natural Area
Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park	Pinnacle Peak Park
Cougar Mt. - Squak Mt. - Tiger Mt. Corridor	Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area
Dockton Forest	Ravensdale Retreat Natural Area
Duthie Hill Park	Ring Hill Forest
Grand Ridge Park	Rock Creek Natural Area
Green River Natural Area	Soaring Eagle Regional Park
Island Center Forest	Spring Lake - Lake Desire Park
Landsburg Reach Natural Area	Sugar Loaf Mountain Forest
Maple Ridge Highlands Open Space	Taylor Mountain Forest
Maury Island Marine Park	Tolt MacDonald Park

### **History**

Many of the open space park lands and forests acquired by King County Parks over the past 25 years contained an existing network of social trails, now referred to as backcountry trails. These trail networks were originally created by local hikers, equestrians and mountain bikers.

Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park, purchased in the mid 1980's, was the first backcountry trail network developed and managed by King County Parks in partnership with hiking and equestrian trail users. Other major backcountry trail sites were former private timber holdings (Taylor Mountain Forest, Grand Ridge Park) or Washington State Department of Natural Resources Trust Lands (Soaring Eagle, Island Center Forest).

### Trail Uses and Types

Backcountry trail uses include hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and running. At the present most backcountry trails are shared by all users. At some sites, trails have designated uses. Cougar Mountain has trails designated solely for hikers and equestrians, and Duthie Hill Park has trails for mountain bikers and hikers only. The Duthie Hill trails have advanced mountain biking features that are not found on shared use trails. Opportunities to develop interpretive trails and accessible trails for the disabled should be explored.

### Trail Standards and Sustainability

Backcountry trails shall be managed in a sustainable manner that protects natural resources, ensures safety, and requires minimal maintenance. Trails shall be constructed and maintained per United States Forest Service Trails Management Handbook (FSH 2309.18) and Forest Service Standard Specifications for Construction of Trails (EMH-7729-103).

### Trail Permit

Programmatic clearing and grading permit from DPER to construct and maintain backcountry trails that follow US Forest Service standards. These two publications, FSH 2309.18 and EM 7720-103, form the basis for King County's programmatic permit:

#### **United States Forest Service (USFS) Trails Management Handbook (FSH 2309.18)**

[http://www.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/Directives/get\\_directives/fsh?2309.18](http://www.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/Directives/get_directives/fsh?2309.18)

#### **Forest Service Standard Specifications for Construction of Trails (EM 7720-103)**

<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/acad/dev/trails/trails.htm>

The permit covers work in all areas except the following which would trigger separate permits from DDES:

- ✓ Category 1 and 2 wetlands
- ✓ Type S and F aquatic areas
- ✓ Any equestrian bridge, or foot bridges greater than 200 square feet
- ✓ Retaining walls greater than 4 feet
- ✓ Culvert installation on type S, F, N and O aquatic areas
- ✓ Stream bank stabilization as part of any trail project
- ✓ Fill placement in wetlands and aquatic areas
- ✓ Any structure that requires a building permit

### Trail Planning and Design

King County Parks will establish trail planning and design protocols to ensure that trails are properly located and constructed to meet the growing demand for trails. Backcountry trail infrastructure improvements, including trailhead facilities, parking lots, kiosks, signage, restrooms and shelters, will be identified through a planning process.

**Trail Connections**

King County Parks will collaborate with other public land agencies, non-profit trail groups and private landowners to create a connection of backcountry trails for all users throughout King County. New trail connections can be acquired through fee purchase of the land, or through voluntary dedication or sale of a trail easement.

**Trail Stewardship and Partnerships**

Ever since the first backcountry trails were established at Cougar Mountain, King County Parks has relied upon trail user groups to help preserve lands for trails and open space, to maintain and improve existing trails, and to construct new trails to meet the growing demand for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking. King County Parks partners with many trail user and advocacy groups including the Washington Trails Association, Evergreen Mountain Biking Alliance, Issaquah Alps Trails Club, Backcountry Horsemen – Tahoma Chapter, Enumclaw Forested Foothills Recreation Association, Friends of Rock Creek Valley, King County Executive Horse Council, Vashon-Maury Island Horse Association and the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust.

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