

OSU Research Forests Trailhead Alternative Transportation Strategy

Approved by Stephen Fitzgerald, OSU Research Forests Director

January 30, 2018

Introduction

Following OSU Research Forests' application for a Recreation Trails Program grant through Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, it was discovered that recreation developments are not in compliance with zoning requirements for the Benton County "Forest Conservation Zone." OSU Research Forests applied for and received a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) through the Benton County Land Use Commission. The most common concerns arising from public input on the permit application centered on issues with traffic on local roads and vehicular congestion at trailheads.

One of the resulting conditions for approval for the Conditional Use Permit was to: "Develop and implement a strategy to encourage alternative methods of transportation to trailheads to reduce vehicular traffic. Could include webcams of parking areas on website, parking fees, required carpooling, public information campaign, transit service, etc. Implementation of identified alternative methods would be completed within the applicant's three-year timeline <September 5, 2020>."

Goals

- Improve non-motorized access for local community members
- Address issues associated with visitors' vehicular use on access roads and at trailheads

Public Involvement and Strategy Development

OSU Research Forests formed an Alternative Transportation Working Group (ATWG) made up of visitors, neighbors, and representatives from the Benton County Health Department who met three times to provide a rounded perspective on what the issues are and how they might be best addressed. The goal of the ATWG was to develop recommendations to feed into the development of this strategy.

Simultaneously, an interagency group of land managers and other community organizations met to discuss shared issues with congestion at trailheads and local roads, and to come up with potential partnerships to work toward solutions. Additional conversations and coordination occurred as needed to investigate the feasibility of potential solutions. Potential action items were tested for relevancy and usefulness using an online survey of existing users. Several action items were discussed, investigated, and dismissed based on the results of this survey.

See [Appendix B](#) for a summary of the outreach and coordination involved in the development of this strategy.

The resulting recommended strategy has been reviewed, edited, and approved by OSU Research Forests Director Stephen Fitzgerald.

Strategies and Action Items

1. Share Information Effectively

- a. Implement the Alternative Transportation Trailhead Communication Plan ([Appendix A](#))

2. Promote Carpooling

- a. Amend forest group use policies to require carpooling when feasible (*Spring 2018*)
 - a. Develop reasonable policy regarding carpool requirements
 - b. Inform all known organized groups of change through personal contact by OSU representative
- b. Identify & coordinate permission for central carpool meet-up locations (*Spring 2018*)

3. Improve Parking Infrastructure at Trailheads

- a. Implement planned improvements to traffic flow at Oak Creek (*Summer/Fall 2018*)
- b. Implement planned expansion at Lewisburg Saddle and improvements at the trailer pullout to the north (*Summer/Fall 2018*)
- c. Design and implement traffic studies on NW Oak Creek Drive/Oak Creek Trailhead and Sulphur Springs Road/Lewisburg Saddle Trailhead. Use results of studies, in addition to other information, to identify next steps to address issues at those locations. (*Summer 2019 estimated completion*)

Note: City of Corvallis plans to continue improving trail conditions (add gravel, reduce mud) at Chip Ross Natural Area throughout 2018, which is anticipated to increase use of the Chip Ross parking area as access to the McDonald Forest.

4. Reduce Traffic during Busy Times

- a. Install webcam at Oak Creek parking area, consideration of other locations if successful, needed, and feasible (*April 2018*)
- b. Open conversations with Starker Forests with proposal to design trail to connect Baker Creek Trailhead and 800 Gate (underutilized parking areas) with southern portion of McDonald Forest through Starker Forests inholding (following 830 Road, 800 Road, or both). Will require Conditional Use Permit application to proceed with construction. (*Start conversations Spring 2018*)

5. Support Safe Non-Motorized Access to the Forest

- a. Partner with other organizations to plan, fundraise, and construct trails when feasible, connecting Corvallis with the McDonald Forest (*Start conversations Winter/Spring 2018*)
 - a. Work with Greenbelt Land Trust, OSU College of Agriculture leadership, City of Corvallis, and Benton County to explore the option for a trail connection between MLK Park, Ponderosa, and Oak Creek Trailhead
 - b. Work with Greenbelt Land Trust, OSU College of Agriculture leadership to explore the potential for Oak Creek Trailhead access through the OSU Sheep Farm

- c. Work with City of Corvallis to develop shared vision for 29th St./Timberhill access (including bike lanes, trails, and parking) prior to housing developments in that area
- b. Continue conversations with Benton County Public Works regarding speed control and the safety of non-motorized users on Sulphur Springs and Oak Creek Roads (*Continue conversations Winter/Spring 2018*)
- c. Advocate integration of bike lanes into the Benton County transportation plan (*Winter/Spring 2018*)
 - a. NW 13th/Highland/Lester to Chip Ross
 - b. NW Oak Creek Drive
- d. Install bike racks at Oak Creek, Lewisburg Saddle, and Peavy Arboretum with option of installing at other locations if successful (*January-March 2018*)

Note: This planning effort included an exploration with Benton County and City of Corvallis transportation staff of public transportation options including shuttles and altered bus routes to get people to trailheads. After considerable discussion, these action items were removed from consideration based on the high investment that would be required and the likelihood of low levels of ridership as reported in the survey.

Appendix A: Alternative Transportation Trailhead Communication Plan

Key Messages

1. The OSU Research Forests welcome all users and encourage personal exploration of each person's meaningful outdoor experience
2. Be creative in getting to the forest – hike, ride or carpool. If you are planning to meet up at the trailhead with others, meet up elsewhere and carpool instead
3. Expect some changes (parking enhancements, parking restrictions, and temporary closures) at Oak Creek and Lewisburg Saddle this year
4. Travel to and recreate on the forest with respect and responsibility to help ensure continued access into the future
5. For more information: link to webpage

Talking Points

Why is OSU doing this public information effort?

- Condition of approval for the Conditional Use Permit with Benton County to allow us to develop recreation facilities in the “Forest Conservation Zone.”
- Address issues associated with visitors' vehicular use on access roads and at trailheads, including safety, congestion, and access
- Develop tools to allow local community members easier non-motorized trailhead access
- This project is a result of collaboration – dialogue between multiple community members and local agencies. Implementation of this effort will also rely on collaboration and community support
- Many different ideas were discussed, evaluated, and screened for usefulness using an online survey. The policies and plans included in the strategy were identified as those most likely to address issues while still allowing recreation use by all people.

Assure welcoming and free access to the OSU Research Forests into the future

- Everyone is welcome to use the Forests in pursuit of a wide variety of meaningful outdoor experiences
- Many of the roads that access trailheads were intended to serve the research, teaching and forest management purposes of the OSU Research Forests, and were not designed to accommodate recreation traffic
- An increase in recreation traffic has put a lot of pressure on the access roads and parking areas at OSU trailheads. We expect recreation use to continue increasing into the future along with the population of Benton and Linn Counties.
- We are limited by topography and other factors in creating parking to accommodate all potential future use – parking is limited and will remain so into the future.

- We need your help in setting a cultural standard for getting visitors to trailheads with minimal vehicular use to protect free and open access to the forest.
- Your active participation counts. You have the ability to manage your own use in a way that promotes positive relationships with other users and neighbors, and promotes access for all groups.

Drive safely and courteously on local roads

- Trailhead access roads go through neighborhoods where people and wildlife live; expect cars pulling out of driveways, people and pets in the road, deer and other wildlife, etc.
- Local roads are shared by bikes, horses, pedestrians including kids and dogs, and wildlife. There is often little shoulder to get out of the lane of travel. Slow down when you encounter a person on foot, bike, or horseback and pass cautiously.
- Drive slowly and carefully and expect to encounter the unexpected
- When bicycles are using a shared roadway with vehicles (no bike lane), they follow the same rules as vehicles, and are afforded the same protections. Give bikes the entire lane, and pass only where indicated by dotted yellow lines.

Be aware and courteous at trailheads

- Park reasonably, only in locations which can easily and safely fit your car.
- Use caution when pulling out onto roads from parking areas and avoid backing out into travel ways.
- Drive and back up slowly and carefully, paying special attention to pedestrians, bikes, dogs, horses and kids.
- Only park within the designated trailhead parking area. If the trailhead is full, there is no room to park, and you will need to find another place to visit.
- Shoulder parking is only allowed when a vehicle can park with all four of its wheels located entirely outside of the white fog line.
- Visit the Forests only during open hours, between 5am-9pm. Noise from the use of trailheads before or after open hours affects neighbors
- At Oak Creek, parking is only allowed within the designated parking area. Parking along the shoulder, on neighboring properties, or at the Audubon society is not allowed.
- Be mindful of your dog by keeping them close to you or on a leash while you are preparing for your adventure at the trailhead
- McDonald Forest is multi-use, obey trail rules and usage. Be proactive about avoiding conflicts. Move to the side to allow faster traffic to pass, always have your dog under full control when encountering other users, and if you are on a bicycle, assume the people you are coming upon did not hear you and slow way down. Give pedestrians with dogs and people on horseback time to restrain the animals. This will go a long way toward ensuring recreation can continue in a positive direction for everyone.
- Plan to park where there is plenty of room for your horse trailer:
 - Lewisburg Saddle pullout (north of main parking area)
 - Baker Creek Trailhead (Sulphur Springs Trail)
 - Peavy Arboretum (Intensive Management Parking Area)
 - 547 Gate (across from Adair Village – north of 500 Gate)

Plan ahead and prepare

- Check the webcam to see if parking is available at Oak Creek before making the drive out there (to be live by April 31):
- Know before you go! Plan an appropriate route for your timeframe, fitness level, and experience level.
- Check the weather before you go, and dress appropriately
- Know about and respect forest closures or other current conditions by visiting: <http://cf.forestry.oregonstate.edu/current-activities>
- Make sure your cell phone is fully charged if you are using it for navigation
- Plan ahead and prepare to be self-sufficient for your entire trip. Bring all supplies you need, including lots of water, food, map and compass, weather appropriate clothing and all other necessary gear.
- Bring a detailed map, available for purchase at local businesses: <http://cf.forestry.oregonstate.edu/osu-research-forests-maps>

Change up your routine and try out some new locations!

- Try out some less-used parking areas to access your favorite locations, even during busy times
 - Chip Ross Park to access Dan's Trail – Note: Chip Ross trail improvements in progress in 2018
 - 800 Gate (northwest of Lewisburg Saddle) to access Alpha and Ridge Trails, and the 800 and 600 Road systems
 - Baker Creek Trailhead (Sulphur Springs Trail) to access the 800 Road system, Alpha and Ridge Trail, Baker Creek Trail. It is also a short run or ride west along Sulphur Springs Road to access the 700 Road system (Poison Oak).
 - C200 TH (Elizabeth Starker Cameron Demonstration Forest trailhead, including parking at fire station) to access the Firehouse Trail and Davies Nettleton Loop. (*tentative, dependent on obtaining permission from fire station*)
 - Intensive Management Trail and Woodland parking areas at Peavy Arboretum to access the Peavy Arboretum Trails and the 500 Road system.
 - 547 Gate (north of the 540 gate, across from Adair Village) to access Calloway Creek Trail
- Time your visits to avoid parking at these locations during busy times (Saturdays and Sundays between 9:00-3:00, and weekdays between 9:00-11:00 am and after work):
 - Oak Creek
 - 700 Gate (Poison Oak)
 - Lewisburg Saddle
 - Peavy Arboretum (500 Gate)
 - 540 Gate (across from Adair Village)
 - Dunn 400 Gate

Share your ride!

- It is a requirement of the OSU Research Forests that groups carpool to the forest when feasible
- If you are planning to meet up at a trailhead, plan to meet up somewhere else instead.
- Carpool to the capacity your vehicle can safely handle – for people, bikes, dogs, and car seats

- Meet up at one of these approved locations, and carpool from there (*locations tentative, based on obtaining permissions*)
 - Crescent Valley High School (weekends)
 - Churches between Walnut and 13th Street (2-3 churches)
 - MLK Park
 - Hoover Elementary School
 - Fairgrounds/Midge Cramer
- Space at parking areas (especially Oak Creek) is especially limited Saturdays and Sundays between 9:00-3:00, and weekdays between 9:00-11:00am and after work. If your group plans to visit the forest during those times, carpooling will reduce the likelihood of a group member being turned away for lack of a parking spot.
- Benefits of carpooling
 - Reduces issues with congestion at trailheads
 - Reduces use of fossil fuels, good for environment
 - Fun, social activity
 - Save money, wear and tear on your vehicle
 - Your car doesn't get as dirty
 - Makes it more likely that everyone in your group can get to the trailhead during busy times when parking spaces are limited

Instead of driving to your favorite trail, ride, hike or run

- Bike racks are located at Lewisburg Saddle, Oak Creek, Peavy Arboretum for you to use (to be part of the solution, consider sponsoring a bike rack to support recreation and trails on the OSU Research Forests)
- Access Dan's Trail by running, hiking or biking to the end of NW 29th Street.
- There are walk and bike friendly forest access points in town or close to town

What to expect at parking areas this summer:

- Construction at Lewisburg Saddle in Summer 2018 will increase capacity and improve safety. May result in limited access during construction.
- Construction at Oak Creek in Summer 2018 will make parking and turning around safer and more understandable. Will limit access during this time.
- Benton County has work planned for Summer 2018 on NW Oak Creek Road, which will also result in temporary closure of the trailhead.
- Benton County Sheriff's Department will be issuing tickets and towing vehicles parked illegally on NW Oak Creek Drive
- Future management of Oak Creek parking area is in the works, and will depend on the results of trailhead surveys and traffic studies, as well as consideration of OSU Research Forests access needs, and the interests of visitors and forest neighbors.

NW Oak Creek Drive parking restrictions:

- Bollards will be placed along NW Oak Creek Drive in March of 2018 to restrict parking in an unsafe location and to prevent blockage of road
- Placements of bollards is a requirement of the Conditional Use Permit process

- After a period of public education to familiarize people with the changes, Benton County Sheriff's Department will begin writing tickets for those illegally parked in April of 2018.
- If you would like to assure everyone in your group has a place to park at Oak Creek Trailhead, carpool from a central location in town.

Media & Distribution

Fliers

- Content: key messages
- Distribution: trailhead kiosks, local outdoor shops

Insert for large format maps for sale

- Content: key messages
- Distribution: insert into large format maps for sale; sold at local outdoor stores

Press Release

- Content: Background on effort, key messages, changes to expect
- Distribution: Gazette Times, Daily Barometer, Advocate, Barometer

Mailing/webpage/newsletter article/handouts

- Content: Talking points
- Distribution: OSU Research Forests newsletter, e-mail lists, handouts for local businesses and trailheads

Re-designed free map/handout

- Content: Key messages, direct trailhead traffic to meet goals, clarify trailhead access by use type
- Distribution: All trailheads

The Right Trail website

- Content: key messages
- Distribution:
 - April – integrate into existing language on individual trail webpages
 - Spring – Continue discussions with project partners regarding transition of website to mobile friendly (to promote more use of website and dissemination of talking points)

Photo submissions for prizes

- Content: submit photos to enter drawing to win prizes
- Distribution: Instagram, Facebook, e-mail (Jim gather prizes from businesses)

Personal delivery of key talking points

- Content: Talking points, general forest information and orientation
- Distribution:
 - Tabling at trailheads (Tia, Peter, student employees): students and volunteers, freebies, water, maps, assist with directions, info about forest, and talking points
 - Phone calls to group leaders, representation at club meetings: OSU representatives

- Outdoor businesses: (Jim, OSU staff)

Video (tentative – depending on time, staffing available)

- Content: Key messages, brief talking points
- Distribution
 - Develop script and ideas for shots (OSU staff), coordinate video development (Mary)
 - Pin on Facebook

Timeline:

1/31/2018:

- Bike racks, contact information installed at trailheads
- Alternative transportation strategy complete
- Oak Creek Education and Enforcement Strategy complete
- Oak Creek parking restriction signs (permanent) and supplemental information (temporary) signs posted; information regarding upcoming changes to OSU RF mailing list, on webpage, on Facebook

3/2/2018

- Press release, request for article
- E-mail, Facebook, webpage information distributed
- Phone calls to group leaders, representatives at club meetings, employees at outdoor businesses complete

3/7/2018

- Bollard placement on NW Oak Creek Dr. (hard deadline 4/31/2018); begin soft enforcement of new parking restrictions

4/15/2018

- Benton County Sheriff's Office begins patrols, issues tickets for new parking restrictions on NW Oak Creek Dr.
- Distribute fliers – trailheads and businesses
- Distribute maps for sale with inserts included
- E-mail, Facebook, webpage information distributed
- Press release, request for article
- The Right Trail website updates complete
- Trailhead staffing starts
- Photo submission for prizes starts
- Webcam at Oak Creek live (hard deadline 4/31/2018)
- Distribute video

Summer/Fall 2018 (dates TBD)

- Oak Creek and Lewisburg Saddle Trailhead improvements
- Public information for closures associated with construction

10/15/2018

- Trailhead staffing ends
- Evaluation of public information campaign effectiveness

12/31/2018

- Follow up educational strategies for 2019 and beyond identified

Appendix B: Alternative Transportation Strategy Development

Alternative Transportation Working Group (ATWG)

Meeting dates:

- 11/6/ 2017
- 11/30/2017
- 1/18/2018

Purpose:

The Alternative Transportation Working Group was a group of user community members, pulled together to develop a clear vision of community access desired for OSU Research Forests. The group intention was to develop a strategy that would improve access for the community, while addressing issues associated with vehicular traffic such as congestion and safety.

The goals of the ATWG were to:

- Identify issues related to access and congestion
- Identify, evaluate, and recommend potential solutions
- Develop recommendations to feed into OSU Research Forests alternative transportation strategy, as well as larger planning efforts involving other community organizations and agencies

Members:

- Jim Blount (mountain biker, trail runner, dog owner, member of Team Dirt, Manager of Peak Sports)
- Tia Gabalita (Arboretum neighbor, trail runner, dog owner, trail builder, race organizer)
- Mary Bernards (Vineyard Mountain neighbor, dog walker, mountain biker)
- Peter Idema (Soap Creek neighbor, trail runner, hiker, dog owner, previously BC Planner)
- Ken Fitschen (Assistant Outings Coordinator Marys Peak Group Sierra Club, hiker, trail builder)
- Jennifer Gervais (Oak Creek neighbor, dog walker)
- Rocio Munoz (Benton County Health Department Equity and Inclusion Specialist, representing interests of “new” users)
- Peter Banwarth (Benton County Health Department)
- Debbie Arguedas (Equestrian, OET member)
- Ryan Brown (OSU Research Forests Recreation and Engagement Program Manager)

Trailhead Transportation Interagency Strategy Meeting

Meeting Date:

- 11/15/2017

Purpose:

This interagency group was pulled together to identify traffic related issues shared among land managers, current projects in the works, and partnership opportunities to address issues. This meeting identified congestion hotspots, parking lot enhancements in the works, trail and bike lane developments

to connect residential areas with natural areas, public transportation and other alternative transportation ideas.

Attendees:

- Stephen Fitzgerald (OSU Research Forests)
- Laurie Starha (Benton County Natural Areas and Parks)
- Karen Emery (City of Corvallis Parks and Recreation)
- Jim Stouder (Benton County Public Works)
- Lee Lazaro (Benton County Transportation)
- Michael Pope (Greenbelt Land Trust)
- Rocio Munoz (Benton County Health Department)
- Peter Banwarth (Benton County Health Department)
- Adam Stebbins (Benton County Natural Areas and Parks)
- Tarah Campi (Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments)
- Ryan Brown (OSU Research Forests)

Trails from Town Interagency Meeting

Meeting Date:

12/12/2017

Purpose:

This meeting of land managers focused on examining current efforts and building trail links between residential areas and natural areas. The action items identified in this meeting have been integrated into this planning document.

Attendees:

- Laurie Starha (Benton County Natural Areas and Parks)
- Michael Pope (Greenbelt Land Trust)
- Jacqueline Rochefort (City of Corvallis Parks and Recreation)
- Phil Hays (Forest Recreation Advisory Council member)
- Ryan Brown (OSU Research Forests)

Trailhead Transportation Survey

Survey open date:

12/8/2017-1/1/2018

Participation: 491 individual responses

Purpose:

An electronic survey was conducted of current visitors to get an idea of how trailheads are being used and to identify action items or services that would be most of most use to visitors in meeting strategy goals. The survey was distributed through the OSU Research Forests e-mail listserv and Facebook page,

and was forwarded by partnering organizations involved in the project. A drawing for prizes was offered for survey participation. A total of 491 responses were submitted.

Survey results and notes:

See Appendix D for a full report of survey results. In casually comparing responses between this survey and a trailhead survey (using a statistically valid, stratified sampling strategy) conducted in 2009, there are many similar responses in terms of percentage of respondents by activity type, age group (though a bit older) and city of residence. The survey differed from the 2009 survey in that it captured more neighbors and fewer people living more than 5 miles away. It also differed in response to the frequency of visitation, as the 2009 survey captured more visitors who come less than once a month. This survey most likely represents engaged, more frequent visitors of the forest, as to be expected through the distribution strategy used. It may not have reached those who use the natural areas less often, are newer to using natural areas, or who are not directly engaged with a user community. With this bias in mind, the survey likely captures a representative sample of those responsible for the highest number of vehicular visits. Caution with comparing these surveys should be used, as the wording of the questions was sometimes different, the 2009 survey occurred 8 years prior, and the recent survey pertained to all of the natural areas near Corvallis, while the 2009 survey pertained only to OSU Research Forests.

Survey results were used as one factor in selecting action items to move forward on, based on the likelihood of use or level of support. A matrix (Appendix D) was used to list each potential action item, considerations of the Alternative Transportation Working Group, survey results, the amount of investment it would take, the expected effectiveness at meeting our goals, timeframe for the action, and the support available. This led the selection process for the recommendations included in this document. Several action items were discussed, investigated, and dismissed based on this evaluation.

Separate, Related Community Efforts

These items were brought up in the planning process as very important, and are captured here, though not incorporated into this strategy.

- Tie in with local interagency efforts to improve access for “new” users of the forest.
- Develop set of talking points for “new” visitors, focusing on “how-to” information.
- Meet with City of Corvallis, Benton County, and Greenbelt Land Trust to discuss trail and trailhead uses and conflict, and to develop compatible/complementary (not necessarily identical) policies and signage. Topics will include on/off leash dogs, e-bikes, mountain bikes, trailhead congestion, and others.

Appendix C: Survey Results

Appendix D: Evaluation Matrix