

OSU Research Forests Final Written Argument
Conditional Use Permit Application 2017
8/28/2017

OSU Research Forests request that the Benton County Planning Commission approve our application for a Conditional Use Permit to allow continued development of recreation resources in the Forest Conservation Zone, with the revised conditions of approval presented in this document. Concerns raised in public testimony and by Planning Commissioners have been addressed in written arguments. Concerns specific to Oak Creek have been addressed through collaboration with neighbors, and changes are reflected in the proposed Conditions of Approval. These changes were also reviewed and edited by Benton County Public Works staff.

Recreation use on the OSU Research Forests furthers the goals of the Forest Conservation Zone by raising awareness of forest science, management, and conservation with the local population of Benton County. This is a unique situation with active forest management occurring in the same location as a popular recreation area, with leadership and staff fully devoted to co-managing these two complicated resources. This intersection offers a valuable opportunity for the local community to engage with and learn about forest management and research in a tangible way.

The OSU Research Forests are obviously beloved and treasured by the community of Benton County, as shown by the outpouring of testimony in support of this application. The OSU Research Forests provide a service to the taxpayers of Benton County, without receiving funding from tax revenue. In fact, an argument can be made (regarding Conditional Use Review Criteria #2) that while use associated with the forest may impact some public services (namely traffic and congestion on a limited number of public roads), recreation access is also providing an invaluable and irreplaceable public service to the taxpayers of Benton County, without the associated tax burden.

Recreation use within natural areas in Benton County is expected to increase for a variety of reasons, and our goal is to be prepared to manage this increased use in a sustainable fashion. Designing trails and trailheads carefully reduces impacts to the natural systems, neighboring properties, and other forest uses, while directing people toward appropriate uses and activities, preventing damage from unmanaged use. While this will put additional trails on a map, it will not result in a large difference in the number of trails currently used (taking into account current use of unauthorized trails). New trails shown on a map is likely to contribute to some increase in use. However, increases in use will be occurring regardless of recreation developments, based on the population growth in the community. OSU Research Forests intend to be proactive at getting out ahead of the inevitable changes, as well as playing catch up to address changes already occurring.

Regarding vehicular use at Oak Creek:

OSU Research Forests staff corresponded with Oak Creek neighbors to jointly develop the conditions of approval presented in this argument. Nearly identical wording (OSU version incorporates edits from Benton County Public Works) was submitted in testimony by the neighbors.

OSU Research Forests request approval to move forward with recreation developments proposed in the CUP application, Phase II, simultaneously with implementation of Oak Creek parking improvements. Phase III trail developments were removed from the application, including most of the trails that would

be accessed from Oak Creek. Developments elsewhere on the Forest are expected to potentially increase use at Lewisburg Saddle, not Oak Creek. Further, OSU Research Forests has valuable partnerships with local organizations engaged in trail building. Delaying the implementation of trail building activities for over a year while waiting for the completion of improvements at Oak Creek (in addition to the time already waited in applying for this permit) would seriously jeopardize these partnerships and relationships, and impact not only OSU's ability to complete planned work, but ability to manage user behaviors.

The proposal to expand parking at Oak Creek was removed from this Conditional Use Permit application, partially out of respect for neighbors' concerns, partially because the site plan was not fully developed, and partially because of concerns with timeline for implementation. However, OSU Research Forests remain committed to providing access to the Forest for Benton County residents. Further, it is anticipated that eliminating current illegal parking without providing an appropriate alternative (expansion) may create issues at the site, even with the mitigations proposed. Over the span of this Conditional Use Permit, OSU Research Forests will monitor use and issues at the site, develop plans to address issues, and will likely submit a more complete and specific proposal to expand parking at Oak Creek in the next Conditional Use Permit application process.

Suggested changes to the Conditions of Approval

3. The following mitigation measures shall be completed within 3 years (a-c) or by January 31, 2018 (d-f).

- a. Improvements to Lewisburg Saddle parking
- b. A new vault toilet at Lewisburg Saddle
- c. Improvements to the horse trailer parking area north of Lewisburg Saddle
- d. Bike racks at popular trailheads (including Oak Creek and Lewisburg Saddle), of a number and type that can accommodate increased bicycle traffic as a means of transportation to the trailhead, in an effort to reduce car traffic (and accommodate reduced parking availability at Oak Creek). The number of racks to accommodate bike demand shall be reviewed annually.
- e. Post signs at the Lewisburg Saddle and Oak Creek parking areas with contact information to report illegally parked cars, loose dogs, and other safety hazards.
- f. Develop 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.

4. At Oak Creek, the applicant shall, at their own expense:

- a. By 1/31/2018:
 - i. Develop an education and enforcement strategy, including education actions by OSU Research Forest staff and volunteers. Modify existing cooperative agreement with Benton County Sheriff's Department to enforce parking restrictions at Oak Creek including the portion of NW Oak Creek Drive where bollards are installed. Enforcement is expected to occur periodically, at a frequency that provides sufficient deterrence.
- b. By 4/31/2018:

- i. Install break-away bollards along the east and west side of NW Oak Creek Dr. to prevent parking inside the fog line. Re-evaluate effectiveness periodically and add additional bollards on NW Oak Creek Drive if needed.
 - ii. Install signage as developed by OSU, Benton County Public Works and Benton County Sheriff's Department to inform visitors of parking requirements and support enforcement.
 - iii. Initiate installation of web-cam on-site to allow visitors to know if parking is available before driving to site.
- c. By 12/31/2018:
- i. Improved "loop" traffic flow with appropriate markings to allow vehicles to safely circulate through the site (minimize three-point turns, keep area clear for emergency vehicles, improve visibility, etc)
 - ii. Additional safety improvements, including re-grading, re-paving, signs, markings/delineations
 - iii. Maximize parking capacity within the existing footprint of the area currently used for parking on OSU property (approximately 13 marked parking stalls). Continue to allow shoulder parking for approximately 6 vehicles on OSU property and approximately 3 vehicles the appropriate section of Benton County NW Oak Creek Dr.

Planning Commission Requests for Additional Information

Conversation with OSU College of Agriculture

Developing parking on the OSU sheep farm (owned by OSU College of Agriculture) was considered, though not found to be a desirable solution.

Two potential locations were investigated.

Developing new parking to provide direct access into the forest through the sheep farm would require building a trail and creating a parking area and trailhead. While this might take some of the pressure away from Oak Creek, it would not eliminate the concerns with traffic to the site, as many people would continue to prefer Oak Creek as an access point. It would also create a new recreation facility to manage and maintain, long term, which OSU Research Forests does not have the capacity to take on at this point.

The idea of creating parking on the OSU sheep farm near the intersection of Cardwell Hill and NW Oak Creek Drive was also considered. However, it would require people to travel the final one mile without a car on NW Oak Creek Drive. People would likely continue to check for parking first at the main parking area before turning around and parking in this further satellite area, making it unlikely to address concerns with traffic. Additionally, people would then need to travel on Oak Creek Drive, which does not have an adequate shoulder or bike lane to facilitate safe non-vehicular traffic.

OSU Research Forest staff discussed potential for parking at the sheep farm with Seth Spencer, Farm Superintendent with the OSU College of Agriculture. He reported significant concerns regarding use of the sheep farm for Oak Creek overflow parking, including potential issues with security at facilities, parking along the road when the limited spaces are full, and the presence of a grassland reserve area in one of the potential locations.

Conversation regarding public transportation to Oak Creek

OSU Research Forests staff called OSU Transportation Services, and spoke with Mark Zandonella. He reported that the function of the Beaver Bus is to connect parking facilities on campus, as it is directly funded with parking fees. They are not looking to expand their mission at this time, even with additional resources.

A conversation with Adam Steele at the City of Corvallis reports that their transportation planning focuses within the city boundaries, and does not extend beyond the Urban Growth Boundary. At this time, there has been no discussions or momentum for stretching their resources beyond this limit. Further, all of their buses are full-sized, and would not be appropriate for the turn-around in development at Oak Creek.

Lee Lazaro with Benton County Public Transportation Services reported an interest in developing additional routes to trailheads in the future, with anticipated funding associated with the passage of a recent Oregon transportation tax bill. OSU Research Forests staff plan to sit down and discuss potential future routes with BC Public Transportation Services staff in October, and extend an invite to other land management agencies in Benton County.

Regarding after-hours contact number

While it is beyond the current capacity for OSU Research Forests to staff an individual to answer phones and manage immediate responses to visitor concerns, we will be implementing some changes to our existing phone line. The main phone line currently lists a phone tree of employees. We plan to change the welcoming message to allow the first numerical choice to be associated with reporting an issue or concern. When the user is routed to that phone line, the associated message will let people know how often the line is checked, when they should expect to hear a response, and who to call if it is an emergency. OSU Research Forests is also considering staffing students on weekends during the busy season to patrol closure areas, address parking issues, and potentially respond to issues reported on the phone line.