

# Why are these Changes Happening?

You may wonder why we are focusing on reducing traffic at trailheads and making changes in parking access at Oak Creek. These actions are a result of a thoughtful planning process that included many members of the public, as well as other local organizations and agencies.

Following our application to Oregon Parks and Recreation Department for a grant to build trails, we discovered that trail building and other recreation developments were not automatically allowed within the Benton County “Forest Conservation Zone.” We then applied for and received a permit to allow recreation as a conditional use” within the zone. [Click here to review the application materials](#) and decision, which includes a 5 year action plan for recreation development on the OSU Research Forests.

Last summer, many Forest visitors played a role in the review of the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) by offering testimony and attending Benton County Planning Commission hearings. The most common concerns from the public centered on safety issues with traffic on local roads and congestion at trailheads.

One of the resulting requirements attached to the Conditional Use Permit was to “develop and implement a strategy to encourage alternative methods of transportation to trailheads to reduce vehicular traffic.” As a result, the OSU Research Forests formed the 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 at trailheads and how they might be best addressed. The goal of the ATWG was to develop recommendations to feed into the development of this strategy.

## Permit Requirements

Several conditions of approval were included in the granting of the permit and are currently in progress. Here are some highlights:

- **Install a webcam** at the Oak Creek Trailhead to allow people to view parking availability before driving to the site (April 2018)
- **Develop a strategy to reduce traffic** and encourage alternative methods of getting to trailheads (complete) and implement (starting March 2018)
- **Install parking bollards along NW Oak Creek Drive** to prevent parking (March 2018) and create a plan to effectively enforce the changes in cooperation with Benton County Sheriff’s Office (complete)
- **Expand parking at Lewisburg Saddle** and install a vault toilet (summer/fall 2018)
- **Install bike racks** at Oak Creek and Lewisburg Saddle for people who choose to ride instead of drive to the trailheads (complete)
- **Post signs with contact information** at the trailheads (complete)
- **Improve safety at Oak Creek Trailhead** by paving, installing a turn-around, and marking parking slots (summer/fall 2018)



Bike racks were recently installed at the Oak Creek Trailhead

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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 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.

Ultimately, each potential action item was carefully evaluated by considering thoughts 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. Selected action items were included in the final [Trailhead Alternative Transportation Strategy](#).

We want to send out a giant **THANK YOU** to all of the folks who served on the Alternative Transportation Working Group as well as our local agency and community organization partners. This was truly a group effort, and we're excited about the impact that it will have on the forest community.

We also want to thank everyone who participated in the transportation survey as it gave us further insight into the routines of our Forest visitors and their opinions on the parking situation at our trailheads. From the responses, it is clear that many of our Forest visitors are already taking the initiative in carpooling and finding alternative ways to get to the trailheads.



Standing room only at the CUP hearing in 2017

## A Penny for Your Thoughts?

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 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, and a total of 491 responses were submitted.

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.

### Highlights from the survey:

- Most respondents drive themselves or one other occupant to the forest at least a couple times a week
- Highest use times are on the weekends between 9:00am -3:00pm
- Highest use times on weekdays are 9:00am-11:00pm and 3:00pm-7:00pm
- The most popular trailheads for are Lewisburg Saddle, Oak Creek at the end of NW Oak Creek Dr., and the Bald Hill Natural Area (Benton County)
- Visitors were least likely to use service such as public transportation or shuttles to trailheads and websites to meet up for carpooling
- Visitors were most likely to park at less used trailheads and visit at lower user times, use webcams to check trailheads before driving to the site, and use trails connecting the Forest to Corvallis