

Letter to Benton County Board of Commissioners

Fitton Green Natural Area

Posted on January 24, 2021

Benton County Board of Commissioners

Pat Malone, Chair Xan Augerot, Commissioner Nancy Wyse, Commissioner

Re: Fitton Green Natural Area

Dear Board of Commissioners:

A group of citizens have formed a team known as Oak Creek Valley Safety Action Group (OCVSAG) to discuss recent trends in the Oak Creek Valley (west of the Oak Creek Drive/53rd intersection west of Corvallis). As part of this effort, this letter aims to initiate a process that sustainably provides the citizens of Benton County and their visitors with a worthy recreational experience, while at the same time protects the Fitton Green Natural Area (Fitton Green) ecosystem and the safety and livability in the neighborhood.

Fitton Green has become a popular attraction for hiking, watching sunsets, and other recreational opportunities. As members of the Chinook Road District (CRD), we too have enjoyed the benefits Fitton Green provides and see it as a great opportunity for the citizens of Benton County and beyond to enjoy the beautiful environment around our neighborhood.

Since Fitton Green was opened to the public in 2003 many changes have occurred, including a parking lot at the end of Panorama, more houses have been built in the CRD, more hiking trails are provided by Crestmont Land Trust, and the Mulkey Creek “connector trail” though the Greenbelt Bald Hill Farm property has been completed. In addition, the single evacuation route for the neighborhood west towards Wren has been completed right through Fitton Green.

Despite the best efforts of Benton County and CRD dealing with the increased use, we are concerned that Fitton Green is becoming an example of a Natural Area (!) that is “loved to death”. Over the years, we have noticed several issues resulting from the heavy use of Fitton Green that we want to bring to your attention. Among others, we are primarily concerned about:

Public safety. Increased incidences of car break-ins and personal attacks have been observed. The high traffic leads to safety concerns about wildlife, pets, and foot traffic along the CRD road system. Benton County and the CRD have stepped up and completed the chip-sealing of the main access roads to the Natural Area (Chinook and Panorama, except the last 900 feet). However, the increased automobile traffic from visitors to Fitton Green has led to early damage to the road surface. More importantly, despite blind corners and steep sections, cars travel with higher speed leading to associated concerns for public safety. Similar concerns exist for roads outside the CRD taken by Fitton Green visitors, such as Oak Creek Dr. and Cardwell Hill. Increased wildfire risk. Especially concerning is the disregard of fire dangers, e.g., incidences of smoking, warming fires, and overnight camping. Furthermore, we are concerned about the single evacuation route towards the west available for all residents and visitors. Overflow parking along the road. Illegal parking has led to damage to roadside ditches, vegetation damage, and is of special concern when cars are parked over dry vegetation during

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high fire dangers. Rogue parking can also create traffic impediments during an evacuation and during medical or other emergencies for residents when their driveways are blocked.

Increased garbage/littering. We have seen a surge in littering, including cigarettes, bagged and unbagged dog poop, birth control devices, cans, bottles, large furniture, and hazardous materials.

The Fitton Green Open Space Natural Area Management Plan anticipated many of the concerns we have highlighted here and mentions specific action items to address them. However, our analysis suggests that these action items were either not implemented or were insufficient to address the negative impacts of the increased use.

Learning from the recent experiences with recreational use on other properties, e.g., Oregon State University's McDonald/Dunn Forests, we would like to initiate constructive conversations with the county on how best to proceed from here. As "neighbors of Fitton Green", we have firsthand knowledge and experiences of the activities involving the Natural Area and feel we have a lot to contribute. Obviously, in the long term a broader set of stakeholders needs to be included for any effort to be successful. In this context, we are developing a larger group effort as any decisions regarding Fitton Green should be vetted in the context of the Oak Creek Valley and include all citizens of this area, the city of Corvallis, OSU College of Forestry, and other landowners and users in Benton County and beyond.

To initiate the conversation, are you able to meet with a small group via ZOOM or preferably taking a socially distanced walk in Fitton Green? We would appreciate hearing from you in the next three weeks. Please contact us by responding to K### P### ###@gmail.com.

Thank you for all your efforts in support of Benton County.

Best wishes for 2021

Signed: