

Letter supporting the 100 Acre Wood Master Plan

From a resident *within* the Chuckanut Community Forest Parks taxing District

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Subject: Please endorse the 100 Acre Wood Draft Master Plan

Dear Parks and Recreation Advisory Board members,

I am writing to ask you to vote **YES** on the 100 Acre Wood Draft Master Plan. I live within the metropolitan park taxing district, voted for and paid taxes to secure the park for all Bellingham citizens' enjoyment. I am looking forward to the property officially becoming a city park.

The Draft Master Plan includes all the uses and addresses the sensitive ecological issues that I want a park master plan to address. My neighbors and I look forward to continuing to recreate responsibly in the park that we helped pay for, knowing that the City's professionals will protect the most sensitive areas and habitats that we also wish to protect.

The Chuckanut Community Forest Park District (CCFPD) is severely overreaching their mandate by making an unfounded case to reject the Draft Master Plan and create a restrictive nature preserve, eliminating important community uses that are consistent with the ballot measure and resulting conservation easement and Master Plan. Recent CCFPD commissioner public statements, an unsanctioned and unvetted privately conducted survey, and a biased and unnecessary tax-payer funded consultant report demonstrate repeated disregard of voter trust and show how far they've strayed from their duty to serve my neighbors and me. Please do not let this continue.

The following points detail some of my concerns with the CCFPD's overreach, as well as my support of the current Draft Master Plan:

Ballot language for taxing district:

When our neighborhoods voted in favor of creating the taxing district, the sentiment of the ballot language was for the community to continue recreating on the property as we had for decades.

The Statement For includes the following sentences:

- "Assuring its preservation as a park, forever. The alternative is that an unknown portion of the land may be sold."
Use of the word "Park," not "nature preserve" implies that this park's purpose is to provide the same level of recreation that neighbors have come to enjoy in this area.
- "As a park, the forest offers easy access to healthy outdoor recreation to five nearby Southside neighborhoods."
Numerous children living in the "five nearby Southside neighborhoods" need places like this to ride bicycles and play outdoors. The 100 Acre Wood park provides the only natural trails within cycling distance from these families' homes. To eliminate this activity and force these families to drive their children to another park is contrary to the codified intent of this park to provide "healthy outdoor recreation" within the vicinity of these neighborhoods.
- "The commissioners will assure its preservation,... leaving management to Bellingham Parks."
The commissioners have assured the preservation of the property, preventing it from being sold to a private developer. Now it's time to let Bellingham Parks professionals carry on with the park's management.

2014 conservation easement:

- Section IV.1.C specifically includes the use of mountain bikes

- Section IV.1.N specifically includes off-leash dogs

In their meetings the CCFPD commissioners have clearly stated they are no longer happy with the original conservation easement and desire to continue taxing residents and spend significantly more taxpayer money to rewrite it to their own selfish satisfaction. The original easement is clear and appropriately follows the tax-paying voters' wishes.

City's draft master plan

It is clear from comments during CCFPD public meetings that the commissioners did not like the City's public engagement process. Whether the commissioners like it or not, this is the publicly vetted and sanctioned tool the City uses for all city-wide projects. Citizens who take the time to respond on Engage Bellingham expect their responses to inform the city's decisions. While it is ridiculous for a tax district board to claim to better know the desires of people who did not respond to the city survey, it is a clear misuse of their elected position to claim that fantasy as a reason to attempt to change the outcome of the public process. This action simply reflects the personal wishes of a few members of a committee, not the several hundred community members who took the time to voice their opinions.

It is also clear that commissioners have personal biases against certain forms of recreation, which do not reflect the community at large harmoniously sharing trails between various user groups. I have used those trails for years and never had a negative encounter with another trail user.

There is no better way to raise a new generation of respectful outdoors visitors than to teach them in a community park how to share trails and respectfully enjoy the outdoors. If we ban kids on bikes from community park trails and force them to only ride at bike parks or pump tracks, they will never learn how to act in a shared trail environment. This is a clear intent of the "educational value" component that was written into the petition to get the taxing district on the ballot.

Stewardship plan:

The stewardship plan that the CCFPD commissioned with taxpayer money has serious flaws.

- It states "...there is a lack of site-specific data in this regard for the CCF."
- Many of the references used for the plan are not local. One local reference is "collated emails" from a commission member to Herrera staff. It is a breach of public trust for elected Commissioners to be feeding their hand-picked consultant cherry-picked emails to influence the outcome of the report.
- The report says children and photographers are disturbing to birds. This is strange.
- The report recommends eliminating over a mile of trails in the park, without site-specific data. The City has its own wetland requirements and mitigation strategies, and I trust the City's park professionals to develop and maintain a perfectly good trail and ecology plan.
- It also states, "there is little evidence to suggest that bikers cause more wear to trails, damage to vegetation, or negative behavioral responses in wildlife than other forms of trail recreation (Sprung 2003)." This is a clear example of the CCFPD using only the science that suits them, since the commissioners continue to seek to ban bicycle use in the park's trail network, despite their own biased report to the contrary.

Please don't allow the CCFPD commissioners to strong-arm the City into excessive restrictions on the 100 Acre Wood to create a nature preserve instead of the **metropolitan park** that was voted for. This is deceptive to voters and an egregious over-reach of their mandate, and frankly makes me want my tax dollars back.

The commission has done its job preventing private development and preserving the park as it has been used for decades. Management of the property should now be handed over to the City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department and the CCFPD should dissolve as described in the interlocal agreement.

Please vote YES to recommend the City's Draft Master Plan be adopted and put an end to the CCFPD's unethical actions.

Sincerely,

