



Grand Forest North mountain bike area proposal

Frequently Asked Questions:

Who initiated this idea?

Dating back to 2017, the Park District started getting requests from mountain bike enthusiasts and organized biking groups, such as the Gear Grinders, for trails to be built to mountain bike trail standards. This idea was assigned to staff to vet the feasibility, need, and impacts of such a trail. Staff, along with the Park District's Trails Advisory Committee, a group of citizen trail advocates, has been investigating whether this activity is appropriate on Park District land, and, if so, where to include it.

Why not just multi-use trails?

Mountain biking numbers have grown significantly on Bainbridge Island. Park District program enrollment has grown over 55% since 2016 to over 300 enrollments in District classes. The Gear Grinders' participation has grown over 35% to over 50 team members in the same time frame. These increases, along with recent efforts to encourage more hiking and bike riding, have also increased non-motorized use of the island's trail systems. Some of the trail systems are beginning to feel crowded; this proposal is an attempt to minimize user conflicts in the rest of the Grand Forest by establishing a riding area within the less trafficked portion of the Grand Forest.

Why here? (UPDATED April 14, 2021)

The Grand Forest North is an isolated piece of property with no critical areas ([see update below for corrections to this statement](#)). A critical areas study conducted by Ecological Land Services in July of 2019 revealed no wetlands ([see update below for information about the recently discovered small seasonal wetland](#)), steep slopes, or other critical areas present on the site. The entire site is impacted by traffic and traffic noise to the west by Miller Road, to the north by Koura Road, and to the east by Hart Lane. Further adding to the traffic impacts and neighborhood noise is the intersection of Arrow Point and Miller Roads in the southwest corner. The sloping and rolling terrain lend itself readily to downhill flow trails while not impacting environmentally sensitive areas. Other sites were considered, but removed from consideration due to sensitive areas, soil types, conservation easements, and heavy use from all trail users.

UPDATE: A small seasonal wetland was discovered in the northeastern corner of the property in April 2021. The critical areas study is being updated and will be posted to the website when complete. The location of the seasonal wetland is easily avoided in the proposal and no trails are proposed to be built

in it or the regulated buffer that surrounds it. The seasonal nature of the wetland is one of the likely reasons the June 2019 study missed it.

Were other sites considered?

Yes. Most other sites were more heavily used by all trail users, had sensitive areas, or would have more of an impact on wildlife because of the more remote locations. Other setbacks at the studied locations included grant restrictions, conservation easements, or land transfer restrictions on those properties. Sites investigated included Grand Forest East eastern slopes, Gazzam Lake Nature Preserve at the Westwood shore property, Sakai Park, and Fort Ward.

Will it be exclusive use for bikes? (UPDATED April 14, 2021)

NO. The perimeter trail will remain multi-use. Currently, the perimeter trail accommodates bikers, horse riders, and walkers; this would not change. The interior loop trails are proposed to be “bike preferred”, meaning they would be constructed for bike use so the trail would flow in a manner that controls speed and provides challenge to the rider. Bikes are proposed to ride the trails in one direction. Hikers could walk the trails in the opposite direction for maximum visibility, and a biker would not be coming up from behind and startling hikers. Site lines would be carefully laid out, so hikers and joggers are visible to the bike riders and the bike riders are visible to the hikers. Horses would not be allowed on the interior loop trails, only on the outer perimeter trail where they currently ride. Bikes would have the right of way on the interior loops but should slow down and make themselves known to pedestrians along the trail before passing, even coming to a complete stop if the situation requires it. Educational and rules signage informing users of the activities present will be posted at all controlled access points into the “bike preferred” area.

How will the interior loop trails be designed? (ADDED for further clarification April 14, 2021)

The trails are proposed to be built to a Class III standard, or 2-3 feet wide, and will be similar to the existing trails on site now. The interior loop trails would be designed for mountain bike trail riding, which are typically built-in undeveloped parks, sections of parks that are undeveloped, green spaces, natural areas, or properties in a more natural state. They are built to sustainable trail construction standards that do not allow water runoff to channel down the trail or be pooled in an unnatural way. This makes ongoing maintenance needs and impacts to the environment minimal. They appear and feel comparable to a regular hiking trail to the hiker, who will be allowed to use them as well. Sustainable construction standards are the same for either activity. The construction, however, does not “flatten” the trail as much, allows the rolling grades to remain.

What about safety for all users?

The interior trails will be spaced a safe distance from the outer loop trail and designed to control speed at intersections, have visible sight lines, and well delineated merging locations. The idea is to create an internal system so bikers will only access the perimeter trail when entering or exiting the site.

What type of biking will you encounter? What is the level of skill? The trails are designed to introduce riders to mountain biking and to provide for progression from beginner skills to some of the skills needed on intermediate trails. While the trails will be designed with kids and families in mind, riders of

all ages and skill levels will enjoy them. The trails will not have the features found on high-speed advanced mountain bike trails.

What about parking?

Parking is anticipated to be along Koura Road, near Miller Road. The plan does not intend to utilize Hart Lane. It is also anticipated that many will bike to the site via the recent Miller Road improvements or up the City's Mandus Olson trail right of way then down Koura Road to the site.

What about signage and trail etiquette education?

Signage will be posted informing users of the biking area, encouraging proper trail etiquette, and establishing use rules and guidelines for all users. The signage and infrastructure will clearly identify the "bike preferred" area so users are informed they are entering a biking area.

Will there be trees removed?

No, trail construction will be very similar to all Park District trails. The District routes trails around trees and in a manner to minimize and avoid negative impacts.

What about the wildlife?

The Park District has requested a wildlife report, from Ecological Land Services, of the site. The preliminary information suggests minimal long-term impacts to the type of wildlife present on this portion of the Grand Forest. Construction of the trails will have temporary impacts to the use, with most of the wildlife using the site today moving back to their normal activities once the trails and use are established.

How will this project be funded?

Funding for construction is anticipated to come from private donations.

How will these trails be maintained?

Park District staff, with volunteer support from the Gear Grinders, currently maintains the outer loop trail and will provide ongoing maintenance of the site. It is likely and supported by historical participation from the mountain bike groups that much of the maintenance will be conducted through volunteer efforts with the mountain biking community.

Why didn't I hear about this sooner?

The process for this proposal is consistent with Park District policy. Typically, a project proposal goes through a robust vetting process with many touches by the Board of Commissioners and staff to ensure the proposal provides a public benefit, fills a community need, is consistent with the Park District's mission, and is appropriate for the park or trail site proposed.

The Board's first touch on this topic was February 18, 2021. It was originally scheduled to be shared with the Board in March of 2020. The COVID-19 situation delayed the presentation because the Park District Board and staff felt that the issue was important enough to be presented and be discussed in a live, face-to-face meeting. Unfortunately, we have been prevented from meeting in person, and rather than wait any longer, decided to put the proposal on the agenda for a first look.

After hearing the presentation, the Board directed staff to investigate several items and report back at a future meeting. This is a very standard part of the public vetting process.

What is next?

The topic is scheduled to be revisited on May 6, when staff will be reporting back to the Board on their findings. Should the Board opt to proceed, a process will be decided upon in open public session and notice will be posted.

How do I stay informed?

Send an email to helen@biparks.org and request to be added to the meeting agenda distribution list, or you can request to be added to the general email list to be alerted of all future Park District Board agendas.

How do I get involved?

We appreciate your interest in this and other trail projects. The community's love for our trail system has only grown during these difficult times. If you are interested in volunteering once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and we get back to hosting our monthly work parties, or you want to become a trail steward of your favorite trail, contact us at info@biparks.org.