

# Fitton Green Open Space Natural Area Management Plan



Prepared for the  
**Benton County Parks Department**  
June 7, 2000



*David Reed & Associates*

***"There is a beautiful dream for our city, held by many of those who worked for I.V. Hill. This dream envisions up to 3,000 acres or so of close-in open space to be held permanently in that condition. Then, should the Philomath-Corvallis-Albany complex grow to 200,000 persons, each person would still be able to rest his eyes upon a natural scene, and to refresh his spirit, and be reminded that life is good."***

***Charles Ross, "Fragment of a Dream, "Sept. 22, 1979,  
at the dedication of Chip Ross Park.***

***"Corvallis and Philomath are blessed with a most interesting and varied physical setting. Every dictate of reason and desire tells us to retain permanently some of the green fields and wooded hills where we can see them daily and reach them easily."***

***Charles and Elsie Ross, Remarks at the Fitton Green  
focus group meeting, Nov. 18, 1999***

***"Benton County Parks Department serves the interests and pursuits of Benton County and residents by providing access to natural, historic, and recreational areas and conserving, restoring, and developing parkland investments."***

***Mission of the Benton County Parks Department,  
Benton County Comprehensive Plan, 1995***

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## **REFERENCES**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

### A. Why a Management Plan for Fitton Green?

#### Background

In 1979, at the dedication of Chip Ross Park in Corvallis, Charles Ross outlined a dream for a "western Oregon Greenbelt Fund" (Ross, 1979). His dream envisioned up to 3,000 acres of natural open space in the Corvallis urbanizing area:

"Our family loves this city, and its incomparable green setting. The undeveloped country that still remains around it is the Glory of Corvallis: the handsome hills and gentle meadows, the old oaks, the tangled wetlands near rivers and streams, the alternately smooth and rolling fields . . . .We see these landscapes around the city -- its one saving jewel -- going under an ever-advancing shadow of urban and suburban spread. We have only a few years to set aside permanently the open space that will retain a measure of our heritage from a bountiful Creator."

In 1988, Charles and Elsie Ross took the first step to fulfill their dream. They created and endowed the Greens Trust Fund to begin purchasing open space for a greenbelt program in Benton County, and specifically near Corvallis and Philomath. This decision by the Ross family is historically significant, because it not only led to the county's purchase of the first 85 acres of "Fitton Green," but also gave birth to the Greenbelt Land Trust. By 1990, the Trust was a vibrant non-profit organization, actively purchasing open space land near Corvallis and Philomath "for the purpose of maintaining livable communities."

In 1995, again with financial assistance from the Greens Trust Fund, the Greenbelt Land Trust purchased and donated an additional 183 acres of "Fitton Green" and in 1998, the Greens Fund financed the acquisition of another 40 acres. The site now consists of 308 acres.

A Stewardship Management Plan (Ferguson, 1995) was prepared for the site in 1995 to provide specific objectives and recommendations for land management. The plan outlined a framework for forest rehabilitation in response to logging activity that removed most of the merchantable trees from the site prior to county ownership. The report provides an excellent resource inventory and assessment of forest conditions and health for Fitton Green. Moreover, the county's implementation of the plan has resulted in extensive forest ecosystem restoration of the site.

#### Site Description and Significance

The site is located about one mile north of Philomath, less than one mile east of Wren, and about four miles west of Corvallis (see Map 1: Vicinity Map). The property lies west of Bald Hill overlooking the Marys River and the Willamette and Cardwell Hills Valleys, with outstanding views of Marys Peak, the coast range, and the communities of Philomath and Corvallis.

This open space site is exceptional for many reasons. With previous zoning, the land could have been partitioned into 40-acre tracts, and its character eminently changed. The site is a remarkable representation of the natural and cultural landscape of the foothills of the Coast Range and the Marys River watershed. Outstanding opportunities are afforded for environmental stewardship, education and research, and public enjoyment and appreciation. With these qualities, the site has the potential to become a prototype for public open space management in Oregon.

If indeed Oregon's land use policies are intended to encourage people to live in the cities, then Fitton Green represents the kind of public land that must be set aside and made accessible for community livability.

### **Purpose and Goals of the Management Plan**

The purpose of this Management Plan is to provide a comprehensive policy framework to guide future decisions regarding public access, preferred use, and visitor management of Fitton Green. The plan has been prepared within the context of managing the land as outlined in the Stewardship Plan.

This Management Plan also responds to the County's overall strategic mission – "making Benton County a better place to live" and the overarching goal to "promote a safe and nurturing environment where families and individuals can thrive and prosper." In particular, the plan addresses the mission of the Parks Department:

"Benton County Parks Department serves the interests and pursuits of Benton County and residents by providing access to natural, historic, and recreational areas and conserving, restoring, and developing parkland investments."

A major goal of the management plan is to provide public access and use that is consistent with the special resource values and qualities of the site, while at the same time minimizing potential impacts on adjacent property owners and neighborhoods

The plan also provides the basis for the County to make a land use application, which will be required to provide formal public access to the site.

### **Proposed Name**

Charles and Elsie Ross suggested the proposed name of the site, "Fitton Green." It is appropriate to accept this recommendation for two reasons. First, the naming rights have been retained by the Ross family, and secondly, through their generosity and legacy, the Greenbelt Land Trust was created, which has continued to acquire critical open space lands for the benefit of Benton County residents. "Fitton" is Elsie Ross's maiden name, and this site would be named in her honor.

## **B. Methodology and Organization of the Plan**

The planning process involved six major steps (Figure 1). Eight strategic issues and 32 findings provide the basis for the plan's policies and objectives. A brief management statement defines the purpose and role of the site as a framework for six implementing strategies and 25 actions.

### **Figure 1. Management Plan Tasks**

- Information Gathering
- Landowner Survey
- Opportunities and Constraints Analysis
- Preferred Role and Use of the Site
- Findings and Issues
- Management Plan Policies, Mgt Statement
- Implementation Strategies And Actions

An interactive process was designed to obtain a high degree of staff and public involvement throughout all planning phases, including participation from several groups of publics (see Appendix A: Acknowledgements). These groups included:

**Adjacent Landowners:** Adjacent property owners were surveyed to determine their interests and concerns.

**Resource Planning Groups:** Key stakeholders participated in several focus group and Park Advisory Board meetings. Representatives were from the County Park Advisory Board, Greenbelt Land Trust, Chinook Road District, City of Corvallis, City of Philomath, Wren community, adjacent landowners, local high schools, McDonald Forest, the Environmental Center, and Oregon Department of Forestry.

**Interested Parties:** Efforts were made to invite other interested parties to planning meetings, including surrounding neighborhood residents.

**Benton County Staff:** Throughout the process, county staff actively participated in the planning program including representatives from the parks, public works, engineering, and planning departments.



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## **CHAPTER TWO: Executive Summary**

The Fitton Green Management Plan provides a framework and overarching guidelines for managing the 308-acre open space site. The guidelines focus on both resource and visitor management, outline preferred public use, and include options and strategies for providing public access to the property. The Plan identifies critical management issues supported by findings of fact, and recommends a policy framework for decision-making including management policies and objectives and a management statement. To implement the plan, specific management strategies and actions have been formulated. This Executive Summary is an abstract of the Fitton Green Management Plan (see Chapters [6](#) and [7](#)).

### **A. Management Issues**

From evaluation and distillation of extensive information gathering including the resource inventory and extensive public input, these strategic issues were identified as the most important considerations in the planning effort.

1. The site is unique.
2. Access to the site and throughout the area is limited.
3. Forest restoration is a high priority.
4. High potential exists for education and research.
5. Residents value a variety of natural areas.
6. Resource protection must be balanced with use.
7. Neighborhood impacts must be minimized.
8. Potential exists for trail connections.

### **B. Management Statement and Policies**

The Fitton Green Management Statement responds to distillation of the issues and findings outlined above, and provides a vision of the preferred future. Management policies provide the basic framework for decision making including resource and visitor management.

#### **Fitton Green Management Statement**

Fitton Green will be managed as a demonstration open space area, for the purpose of applying progressive ecosystem management practices to protect, conserve, and restore the natural, scenic, outdoor recreation, and wildlife values of the site, while minimizing potential impacts to adjacent landowners and neighbors.

Emphasis will be placed on restoring the Douglas-fir/oak forest and oak savanna ecosystems through sustainable forest management, as well as accommodating passive day use recreation such as hiking, wildlife viewing, and scenic enjoyment. The site will provide environmental education and research opportunities.

Built facilities will be minimal, primarily designed to support access, parking, and visitor information. Connections will

be provided to the county's regional trail and open space system. The site will function as part of a secondary emergency escape route for the neighborhood.

The following policy statements provide specific management direction for fulfilling the vision and goals outlined in the management statement. The policies identify public recreation uses most suited to the site, guide public access decisions, and provide direction for the degree and location of infrastructure. For each of the policies, specific management objectives are outlined in [Chapter 7](#).

1. Restore, protect, and creatively manage the site as healthy mixed conifer, hardwood/oak forest and oak savanna ecosystems, as the highest priority.
2. Provide appropriate public access and recreation opportunities, while minimizing potential impacts on the site and to adjacent property owners and neighborhoods.
3. Promote environmental education and research, ecosystem management, and volunteerism.
4. Manage the site as a demonstration open space area.
5. Promote connectivity to the regional trail and public open space system.

### **C. Management Strategies**

Management strategies provide the directives for implementing the management statement and policies. For each of the strategies, specific management actions are outlined in [Chapter 7](#).

1. Update stewardship management planning.
2. Continue site restoration and rehabilitation objectives.
3. Provide formal access and improve recreation opportunities.
4. Establish an interpretive and educational program.
5. Monitor public use and traffic impacts and take corrective action.
6. Develop and promote a fire prevention program.

### **D. Plan Adoption**

The following steps are recommended for adopting the Management Plan:

1. Benton County Parks Advisory Board approves the Management Plan.
  2. Benton County Parks Department submits the Management Plan to the County Planning Department, with a request for a zone change from "Forest Conservation" to "Open Space" designation.
  3. Benton County Planning Commission reviews and makes a recommendation to the Benton County Board of Commissioners.
  4. Benton County Board of Commissioners considers adoption of the Management Plan and request for zone change.
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## CHAPTER THREE: Historical Perspective

This site has special historical values. Cardwell Hill Road extends across the northern portion of the property, and is an important part of Benton County's cultural heritage (see Map 2: Site Features). Additionally, over the last 150 years there has been a dramatic change in vegetation patterns, which provides insight to different cultural practices undertaken since pre-settlement times.

### A. Cardwell Hill Road

Corvallis historian Kenneth Munford (1994) describes the rich history of Cardwell Hill Road. Early settlers who accessed the pack trail along the Luckiamute River had difficulty connecting with Corvallis, the county seat. In response, the county surveyed "County Road 10" -- from Wren to Corvallis -- in 1854. "The road carried supplies and troops to and from the riverfront at Corvallis between 1856 and 1865, when Fort Hoskins was manned, first with regular U.S. Army troops, then during the Civil War with volunteers from California and Oregon." Although for most of its distance Cardwell Hill Road is unimproved and not accessible to vehicles, it is dedicated public right-of-way.

### B. Changing Vegetation Patterns

Considering the change in vegetation patterns since the time of pre-EuroAmerican settlement, the site represents a remarkable contrast in past use of the land. It has been well documented that early settlers were attracted to the Willamette Valley and its foothills because of the predominance of open prairie and oak savannas – essentially park-like, oak grove and grassland settings that were maintained through the widespread use of fire by Native Americans (Johannessen et al. 1971, Towle 1982). Though no precise descriptions of early vegetation exists for Fitton Green, the site likely mirrored these early prairie and open woodland conditions.

After fire suppression practices were implemented throughout the valley, open woodlands have mostly been converted to agricultural fields, or have been replaced by closed-canopy oak or mixed-species forests through successional changes (Habeck, 1961, Franklin and Dyrness, 1988). Some grazing of goats and/or other animals may have occurred on the Fitton Green site, also changing the open woodland vegetation pattern (Ferguson, 1995).

Clearing of the dominant conifer forest likely occurred on the Fitton Green site by the 1930s, leaving behind an oak forest. After initial expansion of the oak forest, conifers were able to invade most of the hillslope oak forest. Another cycle of intensive logging occurred over most of the site over a twenty year period prior to county ownership, which included harvesting of large oak and maple trees (Ferguson, 1995).

### C. Current Management

Today, guided by the 1995 Stewardship Management Plan, Fitton Green is managed by Benton County for its biological heritage as a sustainable forest. Emphasis is placed on restoring and rehabilitating the site and preserving 90-250 year old remnant oaks, maples, and conifers. As a part of this effort, an outstanding opportunity exists to preserve oak savanna vegetation that has been fast disappearing from the Willamette Valley. In addition to implementation of the stewardship plan, Benton County has been engaged in a number of other planning and resource management activities at the Fitton Green site:

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- A request to the Oregon Department of Forestry to develop a fire protection plan.

- Opening dialogue with the Chinook Road District's elected officers to address "good neighbor" issues.
  - Discussion with adjacent property owners and others concerning mutual objectives (e.g. Oak Savanna habitat protection -- with Willamette Industries; potential trail easements and public access options -- with other private landowners and the Greenbelt Land Trust).
  - A phased boundary survey and posting of boundary markers.
  - Posting of "No Hunting" and seasonal fire danger signs.
  - Ongoing maintenance activities including erosion control, drainage improvements, and litter management.
  - Support of education and research projects undertaken by Oregon State University and area schools.
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## CHAPTER FOUR: Inventory and Assessment

The Fitton Green site has a diverse natural environment created by exposure, topography, varied forest types and plant communities, good quality wildlife habitat, and a variety of ecological conditions created by natural and human disturbances. This chapter describes these site characteristics, examines land use planning and circulation considerations, and analyzes opportunities and constraints as a basis for determining the preferred role and public uses of the site. This information is then used to estimate future use and develop public access goals and options.

### A. Existing Natural Resources

Although a comprehensive resource inventory has not been undertaken for this site, substantial information was obtained from the Stewardship Management Plan, special studies conducted by Oregon State University, natural resource experts, staff knowledge of the site, and the consultant's analysis (see Appendix B: Resource Information Profile).

#### Site Description

Fitton Green is part of the Marys River watershed and the hills and ridges of the coast range (see Map 2: Site Features). The higher elevations (1200+ft) offer spectacular panoramic views of Marys Peak and the Marys River Valley, Cardwell Hills Valley, the Willamette Valley, and the Cascade Mountains. The site is linear in shape, extending in a north-south direction. A BPA power line defines the northern boundary, located midway up a south-facing hillslope, and terminates at a prominent ridgetop with a south-facing slope north of Philomath. The property narrows to approximately 180 ft in width near the south ridgetop that is largely privately owned and where a prominent residence is situated.

A first order stream flows northeast to southwest at the foot of the north hillslope just below Cardwell Hill Road. A number of other minor streams flow across the site typically from east to west, and several flow southward from the south ridgetop.

Former hauling roads have been abandoned, stabilized, and restored with native grasses. The north-south access road has been retained and designated for trail and maintenance access within the site. Access to the site is currently provided by Panorama Drive (county right-of-way) from the east, which extends into the heart of the site, intersecting with the trail near the western boundary. Cardwell Hill Road (county right-of-way) also provides non-vehicular public access from the east (Corvallis) and west (Wren and Kings Valley).

#### Vegetation Types

Logging – with varying degrees of intensity – has disturbed most of the site. Because of this activity and due to the lay of the land with variable exposure (predominantly south, north, and west-facing slopes), eleven vegetation types and conditions have been mapped for the property (see Appendix C: Vegetation Types). Past harvest methods included clearcutting, patch cutting, heavy thinning, and some stands were high-graded, yet there is also a stand of undisturbed hardwoods and unthinned conifer. In some areas, only merchantable softwoods were removed, while in others large oak and maple trees were also cut.

Three major vegetation types are characteristic of the Fitton Green site. Oregon white oak and grassland occurs on the south facing slopes at the northern end of the property and along the open ridgetop at the southern end. A mixed Douglas-fir and hardwood forest is present over much of the rest of the site. A riparian forest of oak and maple exists

along the fish-bearing stream parallel to Cardwell Hill Road. The following descriptions summarize Ferguson's 1995 mapping and analysis of vegetation types, except where indicated.

### **Oak and Grassland**

On the south-facing slope north of Cardwell Hill Road, oak and maple stands have established with patches of grassland and Douglas-fir depending on the exposure, soils, and moisture. Because Douglas-fir was beginning to overtop some of the pre turn-of-the-century oak in this area, and the most recent harvest selectively removed the conifer, the residual viable stand of hardwoods has a new lease on life.

The open and exposed ridgetop on the south end of the property supports a drought resistant community of grasses and shrubs with occasional clumps of Oregon white oak. The plant community is changing slowly as invasive species of rose, hawthorn, and thistle are becoming established in some of the grass areas. This process may eventually reduce the open grassland quality of the area. Due to moisture conditions, there is little likelihood of conifer encroachment in this area.

Although a formal vegetation analysis has not been done for the south hillslope, based on recent surveys of comparable sites, Fitton Green ranks among the top 20-30 high quality remnant upland prairie sites in the Willamette Valley, and among the top 5-6 sites in Benton County (Wilson, 2000). Of particular significance is the presence of native forbs, and in good quantity (Brainerd, 2000). In the Pacific Northwest, native grasslands are perhaps the most endangered habitat in western Oregon and Washington -- less than one percent of pre-settlement grasses now remain with significant effects on wildlife (Wilson, 1991). One of the survivors is the endangered Fender's blue butterfly that occurs in association with "threatened" Kincaid's lupine. Both the butterflies and lupines are found only in native grasslands in western Oregon (Wilson, 1991). The Fitton Green site has exceptional potential for establishing Kincaid's lupine in appropriate habitats on the site, as well as other projects to help offset loss of biological diversity in the Willamette Valley.

Additionally, the remnant oak savanna habitat provides an opportunity to showcase the fact that indigenous people burned portions of the Willamette Valley to allow for more efficient hunting, travel, and food gathering prior to the 1850s. In 1994, nine acres of the south ridgetop meadow burned from an escaped fire. Ecologically, the burn is significant because it emulates the historical process of fire disturbance, which served to promote open grassland and oak stands by eliminating competing shrubs and trees.

### **Mixed Douglas-fir and Hardwood Forest**

Variable mixed forest stands exist throughout the site depending on the type of previous logging methods and site conditions. In some areas, many viable hardwoods remain alongside Douglas-fir and grand fir that were left because they were too defective or small. The defective conifers will become wildlife snags. Brackenfern, grass, snowberry, and cascara have established in some of the openings created by tree removals. Forest regeneration (Douglas-fir and grand fir) is occurring in many of the disturbed areas.

In wetter areas, large, healthy white oak trees exist because they tolerate more moist conditions. In the southern part of the property below the ridgetop, deeper soils support a variable stand of oak, maple, and Douglas-fir. Some of the oaks are 150-250 years old, and Douglas-fir are up to 90 years old. Without some relief from the competing conifers, the older, less vigorous oaks can be expected to become overtopped and die. In heavily disturbed openings, especially where maple and oak trees have been removed, conditions are ideal for non-native vegetation including, blackberry, thistle, and Scot's broom.

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## **Riparian Forest**

The two most significant riparian forests include the seven acre area along the fish bearing stream at the toe of the northernmost hill, and within a wet bowl and drainage area north of the dry south ridgetop. Big leaf maple, oak, and ash stands exist in these areas with a thick understory of hazel and snowberry. These areas not only provide a distinctive landscape character, but also are important riparian wildlife habitats.

## **Ground Cover**

In a study of ground cover on the southern portion of the property, the most common ground vegetation was grasses (54% average cover). Shrubs had the second highest average cover (40%). Himalayan blackberry had an average of 16%, and ferns had the lowest percentage of 13% (Oregon State University, 1996-98). The concern here is that some of the native ground cover has been replaced by non-native plant species and without intervention will likely continue. No assessment of herb understory communities has been done elsewhere on the site.

## **Wildlife Habitat**

The property provides diverse and good quality habitat for a variety of wildlife species including blacktailed deer, squirrel, coyote, bobcat, fox, valley quail, ruffed grouse, and ring necked pheasant. (Ferguson, 1995; Oregon State University, 1996-98). A bird inventory identified a variety of birds including birds of prey, fowl, and perching birds. No wading birds or sea birds were present due to the absence of standing water. Migratory birds were not inventoried (Oregon State University, 1996-98).

According to Ferguson (1995), the site has a number of features favorable to wildlife including dense softwood, mixed stands of conifers and hardwoods, open stands of Oregon white oak with grass, and young shrub growth within a varied mix of forest types. He notes, however, that there are few large snags or rotting logs on the site. Therefore, preserving large hardwoods and cull softwoods will provide important perching and nesting habitats, and as they decay and eventually fall, they will provide dens and large course organics for soil regeneration.

The BPA power line, which extends across the northern edge of the property, is likely used as a wildlife corridor.

## **Habitat Connectivity**

The site appears to have relatively good connectivity to the regional ecosystem and natural processes outside its boundaries, with little fragmentation noted.

## **Habitat Recovery**

The site is in varying stages of recovery, responding to past disturbances including logging activity prior to county ownership. Areas requiring future management attention include bank erosion and drainage problems along the trail/maintenance access road. An unstable landslide extends across the access road from Panorama Drive inside the site's boundary, and will likely require remedial work should the road be designated as a possible future fire escape route for the neighborhood.

## **B. Planning Context**

Due to its size and resource significance, Fitton Green is an integral part of the fabric of the county. Therefore, land use decisions both within and external to the open space site are major considerations of this plan. Outlined here are the major planning factors that were considered in preparing this management plan.

### **Jurisdictional Boundaries**

The property is under the planning jurisdiction of Benton County. The site is located one half mile from the Philomath Urban Growth Boundary, and almost two miles from the Corvallis Urban Growth Boundary.

Other jurisdictions of relevance to the site include the Chinook Road District (see Map 3: Neighborhoods), which maintains Panorama Drive and other area roads that provide public access to the site from Corvallis, the Oregon Department of Forestry (Western Division) responsible for fire protection, and both the Philomath and Corvallis Rural Fire Districts. Law enforcement is provided by the Benton County Sheriff's Department and the Oregon State Police.

### **Land Use Designation and Zoning**

The Benton County Zoning Map designates the entire Fitton Green site as Forest Conservation (FC). Because the primary use of the site will be open space and outdoor recreation in addition to forest conservation, it appears appropriate to change the zoning designation to Open Space, conditioned on approval of this management plan.

### **Adjacent Properties**

Land use surrounding the site is largely forest and rural residential (see Map 3: Neighborhoods). A commercial forest is adjacent to the site to the north and east (Willamette Industries). Two rural residential neighborhoods exist in the vicinity - Chaparral Heights to the east, and Pheasant Meadows to the southeast.

Adjacent to the Fitton Green site, most of the properties are zoned Forest Conservation (FC). The exception is four adjacent properties to the east of the site above Panorama Drive, which are zoned Rural Residential (RR5) with a minimum 5-acre parcel size. The Chaparral Heights Subdivision is zoned Rural Residential-RR5 and the Pheasant Meadows subdivision is zoned Rural Residential-RR2 with a minimum 2-acre parcel.

### **Adjacent Ownerships**

Thirteen legal lots are adjacent to Fitton Green, with large ownerships surrounding most of the site to the north and west. To the east, one large, adjacent ownership (Richards) exists between the site and Bald Hill, a park managed by the City of Corvallis. Three small ownerships are adjacent to the site to the east, north of Panorama Drive.

## **C. Area Circulation**

Public access to Fitton Green and throughout the vicinity is limited, and the existing roads are unpaved. Cardwell Hill Road is a 60-ft public right of way, which is unimproved, gated for most of its distance and therefore only accessible to equestrians, bicyclists, and hikers. Panorama Drive currently provides the only vehicle access to the site, and although it is public right of way, the Chinook Road District maintains it.

Two adopted plans have identified fire and emergency access as a major concern near the Fitton Green site. The West Corvallis-North Philomath Plan (1996) includes Implementing Policy C-1-5: "Work with existing property owners to establish a new fire road and access to the County Open Space Park (Fitton Green)." And in 1999, the Philomath Transportation System Plan was amended to include the following:

". . . the Philomath Transportation Plan supports the goal of connecting its community to the public resource lands and trails to the north, particularly County owned Open Space lands. The access road will also fulfill a goal of the Chinook Road district by providing a secondary emergency access for the Philomath Rural Fire District and an escape route for their residents. Connection to this resource will provide more travel options to the residents of Philomath, Corvallis, and Benton County. Livability will be enhanced through this direct link to this recreation open space resource for the residents of Philomath."

If the County maintains the trail through the Fitton Green site so that it serves a dual function as an emergency escape road, it is apparent that fire road concerns could be addressed for the neighborhood and for fire protection agencies.

## **D. Opportunities and Constraints Analysis**

Analysis was made of the attributes, opportunities, and constraints of the site to determine its potentialities and limitations, including off-site factors (see Map 4: Site Analysis).

### **Attributes and Opportunities**

Attributes and opportunities of the site are determined by evaluating the qualities, characteristics, and resource values of the site.

### **Resource Significance**

Fitton Green is an exceptional public resource because of its biodiversity, scenic values, rich history, education and research potential, varied ecological conditions and disturbances, and forest ecosystem restoration goals. The site's oak savannas and grasslands are remnant landscapes steeped in valley history since pre Euro-American settlement. Panoramic views of the coast range, valleys and mountains are unexcelled.

### **Community Interest and Support**

Local surveys indicate residents have a high interest in and support for open space preservation, use and management. A 1991 survey found hiking and walking to be the most frequent recreation activity for Benton County residents. (Benton County Comprehensive Plan, 1995). A 1998 survey of Corvallis residents found high support for natural areas and open space, with nature and hiking trails among the top three needed recreation facilities (Corvallis Park and Recreation Facilities Plan, 1999).

### **Open Space Connectivity**

An outstanding network of natural open space areas could be created throughout the West Corvallis and North Philomath region, connected by a system of trails. Fitton Green could be a significant part of this interconnected open space system. The Benton County Draft Trails Plan proposes a trail connection that would extend from Bald Hill to the east through the Fitton Green site, connecting with Caldwell Hill Road on the property. The Greenbelt Land Trust prepared an Open Space Plan in 1998, which supports the county's Draft Trails Plan and also proposes protection of the ridge east of the site (Richards property).

Excellent potential exists for providing future trail connections between the Fitton Green site and the Marys River, Marys Peak, McDonald Forest, and Bald Hill.

### **Management**

Benton County is committed to progressive forest ecosystem management for this open space site. A conservation easement has been granted for a portion of the site to the Greenbelt Land Trust to assure protection of the land in perpetuity (see Appendix D: Conservation Easement). The county plans to grant an easement for the remaining parcels. The site is a candidate for Green certification, a program designed to certify forest landowners who practice ecologically based management. Three potable water wells exist on the site, and electric power is available.

### **Proximity**

The site is within close proximity of the communities of Philomath, Wren, and Corvallis. The existing on-site trail provides good access throughout the property. Several options exist for providing access to Philomath from the south, with two landowners willing to explore alternatives. The site could assist in providing fire and emergency access to the adjacent neighborhoods.

### **Adjacent Land Use**

Adjacent land use is compatible with open space management, and the ownerships are generally large in size and few in number. This will assist in minimizing potential impacts of public use and provide a good opportunity to form partnerships to meet mutual land management goals.

### **Education and Research**

Environmental education and research potential is high because of the variety of resource values and history of the site. The county's commitment to forest restoration and sustainable forest management also provides excellent opportunities to function as a demonstration and research area.

### **Legacy**

Acquisition history of Fitton Green is a legacy. Through the generosity of Charles and Elsie Ross and their subsequent seed money to create the Greenbelt Land Trust, to date approximately 1,000 acres of open space have been acquired in Benton County, including Fitton Green.

### **Constraints and Limitations**

While Fitton Green has some limitations and constraints, major constraints are considered to be off-site.

### **Access and Parking Constraints**

Vehicle access to the site is limited to Panorama Drive, an unpaved public right-of-way, which connects with a road system extending through the rural residential neighborhood between the site and Oak Creek Drive. This potential access route has generated concerns from some residents for increased traffic, maintenance impact on the Chinook Road District, and safety. The site is not directly accessible to the communities of Wren and Philomath. There are no county-maintained roads currently accessing the site. The site's topography is a limiting factor in the siting of adequately sized parking/staging areas. Two adjacent property owners have access rights through the site (Williamson and Stevens).

### **Edge and Boundary Conditions**

The site has a linear shape that narrows near the south-central part, which creates a special need to manage and control public use to avoid conflicts with adjacent properties. Several homes are within relatively close proximity of the site on the eastern site boundary. Rural residential zoning exists to the east and southeast of the site, which may create potential for conflicts with public access and use (although lot size is relatively large with 5 and 2-acre minimums). While parts of the site boundary are flagged, some parts are not legible due to deterioration of fences and line evidence.

### **Invasive Vegetation**

Himalayan blackberry, thistle, and Scot's broom represent some of the non-native vegetation that has invaded areas opened and disturbed by previous harvesting activities.

### **Site Hazards**

A recent escaped fire demonstrates the potential and concern for fire hazard associated with future public use of the site. An unstable landslide extends across the Panorama Drive access road inside the site's boundary, but access is not blocked.

## **Limitations for Public Use**

Because the site is in recovery and due to its resource characteristics, public use should be limited to low impact, resource-based use. In the future, it may be necessary to determine the preferred carrying capacity of the site in terms of balancing resource protection and human use.

## **E. Preferred Role and Uses**

### **Site Purpose**

An essential task of a resource management plan is to determine the preferred role and purpose of the site. With this information, a framework is provided for all major planning decisions. These decisions include determining the preferred use of the site, estimating the number of visitors that can be expected to use the site, identifying support facilities that will be required, and assessing management requirements. The following assessment was made to evaluate the preferred role and use of Fitton Green.

### **Acquisition Intent**

To understand the original intent of the acquisition, it is important to consider the vision of Charles and Elsie Ross who were original donors of a portion of the land, and the missions of both the Greenbelt Land Trust and the Benton County Parks Department. At a Park Board meeting November 18, 1999, the Ross's outlined their vision for the site:

"Corvallis and Philomath are blessed with a most interesting and varied physical setting. Every dictate of reason and desire tells us to retain permanently some of the green fields and wooded hills where we can see them daily and reach them easily. Walking the footpaths and wooded trails of the greenbelt would become our most popular recreation, and a passionate interest for many.

". . . Charles and I wish for Corvallis and Philomath an ample, permanent greenbelt that grows, a greenbelt that does more than assure 'livability' . . . but makes life here exciting and its future optimistic; a greenbelt that injects vibrancy into city life, provides stability for investment and immunizes against downtown decay. Success, we think, hinges a lot on actions of this generation. The time is now for townspeople to accord the greenbelt purpose a special place in their charitable giving. We need to remind ourselves that 'In the beauty of the land lies the dream of the future.' We are challenged to keep that dream alive, and it may be Now or Never."

(Ross, 1999).

As described in Chapter 1, the acquisition of Fitton Green was an extraordinary accomplishment spearheaded by the Ross's. Equally significant, however, was the fact that Fitton Green fulfilled the Ross's vision by launching the Greenbelt Land Trust as a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and acquiring future open space areas in the county. The mission of the Greenbelt Land Trust is to "Enhance the livability by protecting open space around Corvallis and Philomath."

In addition to the overarching mission of the Benton County Parks Department, this vision statement is found in the Benton County Park System Comprehensive Plan

"Three of the most recent acquisitions -- Fort Hoskins Historic Site, Jackson-Frazier Wetland Preserve, and Open Space Park property (Fitton Green), are significant historic and natural sites. The addition of these sites broaden the

responsibilities of the system beyond providing land and facilities for public use in leisure and recreation, into new areas that (1) preserve and restore historical subjects and cultural resources, and (2) protect, conserve, and preserve scientifically and ecologically valuable lands."

Thus, the vision of Benton County continues the legacy of the Ross's, working in concert with the Greenbelt Land Trust and others. Clearly, the acquisition intent of Fitton Green is grounded in a vision for a new and different kind of public land area - a special open space site that focuses on the heritage and biological values of the landscape, as well as the experiences, satisfactions, and benefits to the user. In this sense, Fitton Green is unique in the history of Benton County park planning and management.

### **Resource Values**

As described in the opportunities analysis above, Fitton Green has exceptional landscape and biological diversity, with high potential for demonstrating progressive ecosystem management. Panoramic views from the property are extraordinary. Remnant native landscapes exist on the site in the form of oak savanna and upland prairie reported to be among the highest quality habitats in the Willamette Valley. Outstanding potential exists for Fitton Green to serve as a demonstration recovery site, because of its past cultural disturbance. Opportunities for education, research, and volunteerism on this site are exceptional.

Although not on the County register of Historic Resources because it has not been adequately identified, Cardwell Hill Road is a significant historic resource as a supply route between the Willamette River and Fort Hoskins during 1856-1865. As discussed above, Fitton Green has a rich acquisition history and a cultural past having special significance.

Fitton Green is within close proximity of the communities of Wren and Corvallis, and is an important ridgetop landmark even closer to Philomath. A network of open spaces exists in the region including Bald Hill, McDonald Forest, and Mary s Peak.

### **Public Partnering**

Local surveys indicate there is widespread and increasing support for natural areas and open space preservation. The site has high potential for developing a partnership with adjacent property owners to manage the site to meet mutual objectives. Other potential opportunities include volunteer activities such as invasive vegetation removal and control.

### **Relationship to Other Benton County Sites**

Fitton Green is unique to the Benton County park and open space system because of its large size, contrasting upland and lowland qualities, and education potential as a forest restoration site. Fort Hoskins and the Jackson-Frazier Wetland have significant natural values, but are different in habitat type, size, and scale.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded that Fitton Green has a unique role and purpose within the Benton County park and open space system. Management emphasis should be placed on managing the site as a prototype of natural resource management and forest recovery.

### **Preferred Use of the Site**

Based on the above analysis for determining a preferred role and purpose of the site, the most suitable and preferred uses of Fitton Green are outlined in Figure 2. Emphasis should be on providing opportunities for resource-based outdoor recreation focused on environmental education and nature enjoyment. Infrastructure improvements should be minimal for the site.

## **FIGURE 2. Preferred Uses of Fitton Green**

- Day Use Activities Only - No Overnight Use
- Passive, Low Impact, and Simple Recreation Activities; Resource and Nature Based
- Emphasis on History, Education, and Research
- A Demonstration Project as a Model Forest Ecosystem Management and Restoration Project

### **Site Planning and Development**

Minimal improvements would be required to support the preferred uses for Fitton Green as outlined above. The existing main trail along the former north-south hauling road provides excellent opportunities to experience the variety of landscape settings and panorama views. Because of the ongoing forest recovery and resource restoration program, side trails are not recommended at this time. In the future, they will be considered to assist in directing public use in the most suitable areas.

Only basic improvements would be required to support visitor use of Fitton Green, including interpretive facilities such as signage and trailside exhibits, drinking water, and if use is justified, sanitary facilities. To keep the interior habitat intact, staging areas for parking and visitor orientation should be located on the periphery of the site, with no vehicle access beyond these nodal areas. A major benefit from this low-impact, simple-use focus is the ability to make continued forest ecosystem management a high priority for staffing and budgeting purposes. For the discussion on providing public access to Fitton Green, see the "Staging Areas" section under "F. Future Public Use and Access" below, including planning concepts and requirements.

### **F. Future Public Use and Access**

The previous section of the management plan outlined the preferred role and public use of the Fitton Green open space site. This section uses that information as a basis for determining the projected magnitude of use for the site. Using those numbers, indicators of the degree of increased traffic on area roads can be determined. This chapter also provides a framework and specific objectives for providing public access to and infrastructure for the site.

#### **Projected Visitor Use**

Several factors must be considered in developing an estimate of anticipated use of the Fitton Green site. These include the following.

- Type of recreation use
- Resource character, significance and attraction
- Degree of public improvements and amenities
- Distance and location of the site
- Availability of other sites and opportunities
- Management (rules, regulations, enforcement, etc.)
- Visitor data from similar resource sites
- Type of Recreation Use

The preferred use for this site is limited, low impact, and passive recreation activities that are nature-based. These will include hiking, scenic viewing, nature enjoyment and appreciation, nature study, and some equestrian use. Equestrian use will not be encouraged on this site because of the topographic constraints to accommodate parking facilities. Emphasis will be placed on education and research at the site.

### **Site Significance and Attraction**

Although the preferred use of the site is limited, Fitton Green is a unique resource with opportunity for high quality recreation experiences. With increased local knowledge of the site, it can be expected that local residents will value this site over time. On the other hand, given the character, topography, and size of the site, it is believed that there will be a fair degree of segmentation of users. They will seek solitude and nature experiences, and will prefer few visitor amenities.

### **Distance and location of the Site**

The site is considered to be somewhat remote in distance and location from nearby population centers -- unlike McDonald Forest or Chip Ross Park on the northern edge of Corvallis, and unlike nearby Bald Hill which is accessed by paved arterial roads and trails from both Philomath and Corvallis. The exception is the Philomath community, with the site visible from the downtown.

### **Degree of Public Improvements and Amenities**

There are no planned hard surfaced trails for the Fitton Green site, which will make the site function more as a natural open space area with a focus on nature recreation. No picnic facilities or other visitor support amenities are proposed except for very basics such as drinking water and possibly portable restrooms.

### **Availability of Other Sites and Open Space Opportunities**

Bald Hill, Chip Ross Park, and McDonald Forest sites provide similar recreation and open space experiences. They also are part of a close network of sites with interconnecting trails and varying experiences that offer more opportunities than Fitton Green, in many respects. These competing resources are more easily accessible to the Corvallis community, and it would be expected that these sites would continue to receive the bulk of the local demand for passive outdoor recreation experiences.

### **Site Management**

Benton County is committed to providing the management emphasis and support to guide and control the preferred use and user etiquette for Fitton Green. Emphasis on education, orientation, and public appreciation, it is believed, will deter those who seek more active, consumptive recreation experiences. Again, this will likely further segment and narrow the visitor use base for this site.

### **Visitor data from similar resource sites**

Of the public open space areas in the region, Chip Ross Park (adjacent to McDonald Forest) is considered to be the site that is most similar in resource attributes and public use. There are no built facilities, trails are unpaved, and a small staging area is located at the entrance to the park. Unlike Fitton Green, however, Chip Ross Park is not only very accessible to nearby Corvallis residents, but is also accessed by bicycle and foot from the Timberhill neighborhood and McDonald Forest. Although no traffic counts or visitor records are available for the park, Corvallis park staff estimate an average of approximately 20-25 visitors use the park per day (Whinnery, April 6).

Bald Hill, located a few miles to the east of Fitton Green, is a hillside park but is not considered to be similar to Fitton Green in terms of public use or attributes. Bald Hill has a paved trail and picnicking facilities, and the lower trail is used extensively for exercising. Bald Hill is also accessed by two major roads with convenient access to Oregon State University students and Corvallis residents, and is connected by a multi-use trail to the Benton County fairgrounds and Corvallis. No visitation records or traffic counts are available for this site, and it receives substantially more use than Chip Ross Park (Whinnery, April 6).

In reviewing the public use of these sites with City of Corvallis park staff, both in terms of visitor patterns and magnitude of use, informed estimates can be made for projected visitation to the Fitton Green site. It is emphasized that these are only informed estimates because of the lack of comparison data.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Visitor use is estimated for the first five years of public use of the Fitton Green site, when the site is recognized as formally open to the public. Based on the above analysis, it is concluded that the use of Fitton Green will average between 15 to 20 visitors per day with weekends receiving the predominant use. It is believed that the average vehicle trips per day to the site would be no more than 20 trips (see discussion below on how these trips might be distributed with multiple access routes and staging areas). This increase in traffic to the neighborhoods would be the equivalent of trips generated by slightly more than two residential homes on an average day. It should be recognized that this plan proposes multiple staging areas, which will distribute these vehicle trips over several area roadways.

It is also anticipated that due to the limited vehicle access proposed for the site, and given its resource characteristics, the average length of stay per visitor will be fairly long. Consequently, traffic should be distributed throughout the day, as well as assist in self-policing and visitor management. Corvallis park staff believe these visitor estimates are reasonable, based on their observations of and experience with public open space use in the Corvallis area (Whinnery, April 6).

Lack of comparative data suggests that every effort should be made to develop planning strategies for minimizing traffic impacts on area roads, to avoid concentrating access at any one location, and to monitor future use to Fitton Green and make adjustments as needed.

### **Access Goals and Options**

As described in the constraints analysis, access is limited to the Fitton Green site. For this reason, planning goals provide direction for Benton County to prepare an access plan as outlined here in Figure 3.

#### **FIGURE 3. Planning Goals and Criteria for Public Access to Fitton Green**

- Strategically locate staging areas to serve Corvallis, Wren & Philomath
- Disperse traffic impacts with a minimum of 3 staging areas and 4 planned in total
- Collaborate with landowners, neighborhood residents, and the Chinook Road District to minimize traffic impacts, and participate in road maintenance and improvements as required
- Encourage equestrian parking at alternative off-site locations
- Assure public understanding of the purpose and expected uses of the site
- Assist in providing an alternate fire access for the neighborhood

In addition to these goals, several criteria provide additional guidance for selecting a preferred access plan for the site.

- **Feasibility** - existing routes should meet technical and safety requirements; new routes must be cost feasible; staging areas will meet technical requirements (grades, etc.).
- **User friendly** - access routes should be legible; users can access the site at logical points of entry.

- **Management suitability** - assure access points address requirements for visitor supervision, control, safety, and security.
- **Neighborhood impacts** - assure neighboring residents that efforts will be taken to minimize impacts from traffic, noise, and potential trespass.

### Access Options

Three access options are identified that involve existing public rights of way and are considered to meet the goals and planning criteria above, but also require appropriate consideration of potential issues (see Map 5: Public Access Options).

1. **Cardwell Hill Road West** - To provide access to the Wren community, a staging area is proposed at the gated west end of the road. Approximate distance required to hike to the Fitton Green site would be one mile.  
Issues to Address: Location of a staging area to meet technical requirements; distance from the site; minimizing potential impacts to adjacent landowner.
2. **Cardwell Hill Road East** - To provide access to the Corvallis community, a staging area is proposed at the gated east end of the road. Approximate distance required to hike to the Fitton Green site would be one mile.  
Issues to Address: Location of a staging area to meet technical requirements; traffic impacts to residents; potential impacts to adjacent property owners near the staging area.
3. **Panorama Drive** - To provide the most direct vehicular access to the site from Corvallis; the road terminates at the site's east boundary.  
Issues to Address: Concerns of residents including increased traffic; also concern for grades, existing roadway width, and maintenance impact on non-maintained county roads.

Because no existing public right of way currently exists to access the site from the south (Philomath), four options have been identified (see Map 5: Public Access Options).

1. **Wooded Knolls 1** - This route extends Wooded Knolls Road in the most direct alignment to the site. An existing easement exists at the present termination of the road.  
Issues to Address: Concerns of adjacent homeowners; relocation of utilities in right of way; current condition of Wooded Knolls Rd.
2. **Wooded Knolls 2** - This route extends Wooded Knolls Road but circumvents existing residences.  
Issues to Address: Cost considerations --it is not the most direct route; current condition of Wooded Knolls Rd.; landowner participation including trail easement.
3. **Worth Way 1** - This route splits from Wooded Knolls Road and extends Worth Way directly to the site, with an alignment on the east boundary of the Worth property. This option has the second least cost.  
Issues to Address: Current condition of Wooded Knolls Rd.; landowner participation.
4. **Worth Way 2** - This route also extends Worth Way to the site, but in a circuitous alignment through the adjacent Sequoia property northward to the site.

Issues to Address: Steep grades and cost environmental impacts; current condition of Wooded Knolls Rd.; landowner participation.

### **Staging Area Concept**

The staging area concept provides an opportunity to go beyond simply providing a parking facility for access to the site. As conceived in this plan, the staging area would provide an opportunity to welcome and greet the visitor, and to provide information on the values and educational opportunities of the site. These functions would "set the tone" for management expectations including preferred public use, limitations of the site, and rules and regulations, through attractive displays, exhibits, and an interpretive structure (see Figure 4: Staging Area Concepts).

Based on the projected visitation to the site, the staging area will accommodate up to ten vehicles, to include parking for persons with different abilities. Support services such as drinking water may be provided as needed. No picnic tables or facilities will be provided. Because of unique values of the site, staging areas will be located on the perimeter of the site, and designed to minimize overflow parking. Boundaries will also be clearly marked and visible to the public prior to providing formal public access.

### **Trail Connections**

Because of the large land ownerships between Fitton Green and Bald Hill, every effort should be made to secure a trail easement to connect the two sites, working cooperatively with the Greenbelt Land Trust. These easements should be pursued as opportunities arise and working with private landowners, the Greenbelt Land Trust, and other interested parties.

### **Emergency and Fire Access**

According to Oregon Department of Forestry staff participating in this planning effort, rural residential development creates high fire risk in forested areas. Working with fire prevention officials, a secondary fire and emergency access could be provided to the neighborhood through dual use of the main trail through Fitton Green. The access route would include Cardwell Hill Rd East, Panorama Dr., and Wooded Knolls Dr. connecting the site with one of the four southern access options identified in this plan.

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## CHAPTER 5: Public Involvement

A three-tiered approach was taken to achieve public participation throughout this process. A variety of review and comment opportunities was provided for stakeholders with interests or potential concerns related to the management of Fitton Green. The outreach tiers included:

- Tier 1: Adjacent Property Owners: Two specific opportunities provided opportunity for adjacent landowner input: a mail-out survey and a focus group meeting.
- Tier 2: Planning Committee: A planning committee was formed to provide input from key stakeholders with varying interests and concerns, and an opportunity for input at a focus group meeting and invitation to all other public meetings.
- Tier 3: Interested Parties: A mailing list was maintained to invite all other interested parties to public meetings, including residents from nearby neighborhoods.

Five meetings were held between November 1999 and March 2000 (see Appendix E for meeting minutes and summaries):

- Meeting 1 - Benton County Parks Advisory Board Review Meeting: A presentation was given to the board outlining preliminary findings, issues, and a tentative policy framework for the plan, with review and comment. November 10, 1999.
- Meeting 2 - Planning Committee Focus Group Meeting: Key stakeholders participated in review and comment of preliminary findings, issues, and the draft policy framework for the plan. November 18, 1999.
- Meeting 3 - Landowner Focus Group Meeting: Adjacent property owners and representatives of the Chinook Road District and the Greenbelt Land Trust participated in a focus group meeting to review and comment on the draft management plan. January 20, 2000.
- Meeting 4 - Benton County Parks Advisory Board Public Meeting: Based on previous meetings, the draft plan was revised and presented to the board, with opportunity for review and comment from the board and interested parties. February 9, 2000.
- Meeting 5 - Benton County Parks Advisory Board Public Meeting: Public access goals and options were presented, as well as a revised draft plan, with a number of residents from the Chinook Road District in attendance. March 8, 2000.
- Meeting 6 - Benton County Parks Advisory Board Public Meeting: The completed draft management plan was presented to the Board, with interested parties in attendance. April 12, 2000.

In addition, county parks and engineering staff met April 7 with elected officers of the Chinook Road District. The purpose of this meeting was to engage the district in the management planning process by identifying issues and concerns, exploring how to mitigate concerns, and to discuss possibilities for the county to offset any traffic impacts

on district roads. District officials outlined plans to conduct a survey of their membership to further provide input to the management planning effort (see Appendix F: Chinook Road District Survey).

## **A. Public Involvement Results**

Outlined here are the major findings from the three-tiered public outreach program for preparing the management plan.

### **Adjacent Property Owners**

Seventeen surveys were distributed by mail to adjacent property owners, with a return of 65% (see Appendix G for questionnaire and specific results). A follow-up focus group meeting was attended by 22 landowners and several other interested parties.

### **Results**

According to the survey, adjacent property owners consider the top three planning goals and opportunities for the plan to be:

1. Conservation and scenic quality
2. Wildlife habitat protection
3. Passive outdoor recreation

Other goals were identified: "providing a link to community/state hiking trails system," "access without overburdening Chinook/Chaparral/Panorama Dr.," and "no desire for mechanized or high impact activities such as mountain biking and equestrian use except for especially manicured trails."

Adjacent landowners consider the top three planning concerns for the management plan to be:

1. Fire and emergency access/exit
2. Increased traffic on area roads
3. Potential vandalism to private property
4. Potential trespass to private property

Other planning concerns were identified: "parking and its location," "excessive litter," "consider sharing paving with the road District," "marking park boundaries," "dislike for requiring pets on leash," "concern that the site has not had enough time for reforestation," "concern for increased public use creating problems for the environment and property owners," "limitations of the survey," "need fences," "make pet owners clean up after their pets," and "parks are for pleasure not education."

At the subsequent focus group meeting for adjacent property owners, the major theme expressed was how to provide public access to the site, and how the county would manage and control visitor use and parking. The participants also gave pros and cons for the seven access options to provide access from Corvallis and Philomath. More specific information was requested concerning estimated visitor use of the site, number of vehicle trips expected on area roads, and capacity of the proposed staging areas. Concerns were expressed for the current construction and maintenance of roads in the Chinook Road District, and additional traffic load that might be added to the District's roads. Residents living adjacent to other roads expressed similar concerns. Process suggestions included involving the Chinook Road District board more directly in the planning effort, to actively include the Road District members, and to provide a fire prevention plan for the neighborhood and site.

## **Response and Conclusions**

From the survey, it can be concluded that the majority of adjacent property owners are not opposed to passive outdoor recreation use of Fitton Green. The top planning concern is for fire and emergency access for the neighborhood, which the plan can address by proposing the use of Fitton Green as an alternate fire and emergency access route. The plan should mitigate to the maximum degree possible the landowner concerns for potential impacts such as increased traffic, vandalism, and trespass.

From the focus group meeting, it is apparent that the county should work closely with adjacent property owners and neighborhood residents to minimize potential impacts from increased traffic on area roads. In particular, there is a need to balance and disperse access by providing multiple staging areas and access opportunities, thereby minimizing traffic impacts to area residents. Efforts for more direct involvement should be continued with the Chinook Road District, to include exploring ways for the county to actively participate in road maintenance and improvements corresponding to any increased traffic on roads maintained by the District. Some meeting participants were not aware that Panorama Drive, Chaparral Dr., and Chinook Dr. are public rights-of-way, even though they are not maintained by the county.

## **Planning Committee**

The Planning Committee, representing eleven groups considered to be major stakeholders, participated in focus group meetings and provided input to the planning process.

## **Results**

A number of themes were identified by the Planning Committee:

- Use should be passive-oriented and nature-based with limited improvements
- Equestrian use should not be eliminated, unless monitoring determines major impacts
- Good opportunity for telling local native and natural history
- Support for progressive ecosystem management and restoration, especially oak savanna preservation, and possibly prescribed burning
- Involve local schools in collecting resource information; student projects
- Need for public access from Philomath, including bicycle access
- Concern for the condition of Cardwell Hill Road
- Concern for off-road vehicles currently damaging resources in the area
- Emergency/fire access is important
- State Forestry Dept. not concerned about fire risk from public use; ban cooking fires
- Provide most suitable public access to the site; "do it right"

## **Response and Conclusions**

Generally, the Planning Committee supported the draft findings, issues, and policy framework for the plan, especially the emphasis on continued ecosystem restoration and management, and public uses that would not affect the pristine character and landscape qualities of the site. Emergency fire access was highlighted as a major need, and emphasis was placed on developing the most suitable public access plan with minimal impact on the surrounding residents.

## **Chinook Road District Residents and Interested Parties**

Approximately 40 residents from the Chinook Road District and other interested parties including representatives from the City of Philomath and others attended Park Advisory Board meetings. Discussion centered on the proposed options for providing public access to Fitton Green (see also Appendix H for correspondence from interested parties).

## **Results**

These general themes were generated by the stakeholders and interested parties:

1. Roads leading to the Panorama Dr. entrance to the site are considered unsafe by a number of residents of the Chinook Road District.
2. Some residents believe an increase in traffic from Fitton Green will affect livability of the neighborhood, including lowering of property values, vandalism, and safety. Some believe there is currently adequate access to the site.
3. Some residents are concerned with neighborhood opposition to the county providing access to the site.

## **Response and Conclusions**

Several residents of the Chinook Road District are clearly concerned with the potential for increased traffic on roads maintained by the District, and have identified specific safety concerns. These concerns include steep grades, blind corners and driveway intersections, unpaved roads, and a general feeling that the road is not designed for additional capacity. Other residents appear to be more concerned about how increased traffic might affect the livability of the area. They have cited concerns for vandalism, trespass, and other perceived impacts associated with public access to Fitton Green. On the other hand, some residents are concerned with neighborhood opposition blocking access to Fitton Green, and perceive safety is being used by some residents in a manner that fails to consider the broader public interest goal of providing public access to the site.

In response to these issues, the following information is provided:

Traffic Survey: Benton County conducted a traffic count on the Chinook District roads for seven days during the period of March 21 to March 28 (see Appendix I: Daily Traffic Count). Current traffic generation in the district was found equivalent to approximately 8 vehicle trips per day per residence, which is in the low range typical for single family residences (Olson, April 7, 2000). If ten vehicles accessed Fitton Green, the impact on the area's road system would result in 20 trips, or the equivalent of 2.5 dwellings. Under current zoning, four dwellings could be built on the Fitton Green site, which would generate approximately 32 trips per day. This is well below the range of estimated use for the first five years of operation for the Fitton Green site.

Existing Road Conditions: In recent years, property has been partitioned and new homes constructed within the Chinook Road District. Improvements to existing roads were not required by the county as conditions of approval for those land divisions. Under current Benton County Development Code requirements for future land divisions, no improvements to the existing road system will be required (Olson, April 7, 2000).

In light of this information, there is no evidence to substantiate the neighborhood's contention that Chinook Road District roads are unsafe. Therefore, there is no finding of fact to support elimination of Panorama Drive as a viable and logical access entry to the Fitton Green site, based on safety considerations. However, every effort should be made to work with the Chinook Road District to address particular concerns and issues of residents.

Effect on Property Values: In response to concerns for lowering of property values and neighborhood safety, this is contrary to documentation and professional experience related to public access and use of public park, open space areas, and trails. For example a study by Pennsylvania State University surveyed users and property owners for

three trails (California, Iowa, and Florida), and landowners "reported that the proximity to the trails had not adversely affected the desirability or values of their properties " (Pennsylvania State University, 1991). Overall, adjacent property owners had experienced few problems from the trails during the past twelve months. In fact, living next to the trail was better than they had expected it to be.

An evaluation was made of the Burke-Gilman Trail, a multi-purpose trail through residential neighborhoods in Seattle. The study determined that property near the trail is significantly easier to sell, and according to real estate agents, sells for an average of six percent more as a result of proximity to the trail (Seattle Engineering Department, 1987).

Unmanaged Use: Among park and recreation professionals, it is widely accepted that informal, unmanaged use of public lands typically results in significant adverse impacts on surrounding properties and owners. These impacts include trespass, vandalism, and other undesirable activities such as use of alcohol, drugs, and firearms. Therefore, it will be important to distinguish between neighboring residents' concerns for safety and capacity of Chinook District roads, and other concerns such as personal and property safety and lowering of property values. The latter concerns are not considered valid because they are not supported by experience and documentation.

Conclusion: Every effort should be made to address the concerns of the Chinook Road District residents with respect to potential impacts from increased public use of the Fitton Green site. It will also be necessary to strike a balance between the broader public interest and neighborhood concerns. In particular, it is important to distinguish between those who may be primarily resisting change and perceived future impacts on their "way of life," and efforts by the county to provide responsible, efficient, and logical public access to the site over public roads.

## **B. Public Involvement Findings**

Based on information provided by adjacent property owners, the Planning Committee, and interested parties, there is strong support for limited public access and use of the site, including no internal vehicle access.

Some residents in the Chinook Road District oppose the Panorama Drive access option, based largely on perceived threats to their "way of life." However, concern for increased traffic on neighboring roadways is common to all neighborhoods that might be affected by access options identified in this plan. For this reason, multiple access points have been proposed to distribute traffic impacts to the degree possible. It should also be recognized that eliminating logical access routes to the site would have the negative impact of shifting traffic burdens to other neighborhoods.

Moreover, unmanaged use of public open space typically creates the very problems that the Chinook Road District residents have identified as neighborhood threats. If the county does not provide formal, controlled and managed use of the site, including access along routes the public will be inclined to use, then residents indeed can likely expect adverse problems such as trespass, vandalism, and undesired uses of the site.

Finally, due to the limited use and improvements proposed for the site, it has been determined that projected use of the site will not have a major impact on the area's roadway system. In fact, estimated average daily use would be less than the equivalent of 2.5 to 3 households. Additionally, there is no evidence to support the perceptions of Chinook Road District residents that the roads in the District are "unsafe."

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## CHAPTER SIX: Issues and Findings

From evaluation and distillation of research efforts and information gathering, and extensive public involvement, eight strategic issues were identified based on the findings outlined in the previous chapters. Figure 5 summarizes the results of this distillation of planning information.

### FIGURE 5. Summary of Findings and Issues

- **ISSUE #1: The site is unique**
  - Fitton Green is reported to rank in the top 20-30 sites in the Willamette Valley that have high quality remnant upland prairie; it ranks among the top 5-6 remnant sites in Benton County. Native prairie has become one of the most endangered ecosystems in western Oregon.
  - Higher elevations offer spectacular panoramic views of Marys Peak, Marys River Valley, Coast Range, Cardwell Hill Valley, Willamette Valley, and the Cascade Mountains.
  - The site is characterized by diversity including exposure, topography, and varied forest types and plant communities, which provide a diverse and good quality habitat for a variety of wildlife species.
  - Cardwell Hill Road crosses the site and has historical significance as a supply route between the Willamette River and Fort Hoskins. The natural history of the site is also of significance.
  - Abandoned hauling roads provide excellent trail access throughout the site.
- **ISSUE #2: Access to the site and throughout the area is limited**
  - Much of Cardwell Hill Road is not improved, although it is public right-of-way; there are no plans for improving the roadway.
  - Most existing roads in the area are unpaved.
  - The site is not accessible from Philomath, and only Cardwell Hill Road connects with the Wren community.
  - Panorama Drive is a public road maintained by the Chinook Road District. The road passes through a rural residential area and provides the most direct access from Corvallis.
  - The site has potential for functioning as part of a fire and emergency road for ingress and egress for the neighborhood, which county and state officials and residents consider a high priority.
  - An unstable slide near the site's entry is a constraint to vehicle access through the site.
- **ISSUE #3: Forest restoration is a high priority**
  - The site was logged prior to County ownership and although reforested, forest restoration will be required over many years for

the site to fully recover from erosion, soil compaction, and invasion by non-native vegetation.

- A Stewardship Plan guides forest management and restoration activities.
- Implementing the Stewardship Plan represents outstanding educational and volunteer potential, including removal and control of invasive vegetation, and erosion control.
- **ISSUE #4: High potential exists for education and research**
  - Opportunities are abundant for environmental education and interpretation focused on forest restoration, natural processes including succession, plant communities, panoramic views, and history of the site and the region.
  - The site is an excellent laboratory for students and instructors.
- **ISSUE #5: Residents value a variety of natural areas**
  - A 1991 survey found hiking and walking to be the most frequent recreation activity for Benton County residents.
  - A 1998 household survey of Corvallis residents found high support for natural areas and open space, with nature and hiking trails among the top three needed recreation facilities.
  - Corvallis residents are also in favor of preserving wooded hillsides around Corvallis in their natural state.
  - The Greenbelt Land Trust (1998 Open Space Plan) recommends open space protection of the ridge east of the site.
- **ISSUE #6: Resource protection must be balanced with use**
  - Due to topographic constraints within and on the edge of the site, staging/parking areas should be very basic, small in scale, and not designed for equestrian staging.
  - Peripheral vehicle access and parking is preferred to internal staging areas in order to protect ecological values of the site and forest restoration efforts.
  - Most suitable recreation uses for the site are those that are resource-based, passive activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, and scenic enjoyment.
- **ISSUE #7: Neighborhood impacts must be minimized**
  - Most adjacent land ownerships are relatively large, but several smaller properties and homes are located along the east and south edges of the site.
  - The site has a linear shape, and narrows to only a few hundred feet in the central part, which increases the need to keep public use limited to passive and low-impact recreation activities.
  - A survey of adjacent landowners indicates their major concerns include fire and emergency access, potential for fires, increased neighborhood traffic, potential vandalism and trespass, and pets off leash. Other concerns include parking impacts, litter, adequate sanitary facilities, and impact on road maintenance.

- The Chinook Road District desires county participation in road maintenance and improvements for District roads that are proposed for public access to Fitton Green.
  - Several residents in the Chinook Road District consider roads in their neighborhood to be unsafe and oppose use of Panorama Drive for access to the site; others have concerns for how future access to Fitton Green may have negative effects on their "way of life."
  - Roads within the Chinook Road District currently meet county development standards.
  - Estimated visitation to the Fitton Green site will have less traffic impact than if the property were developed for housing under the existing zoning. Total average trips on area roads will be less than the equivalent of three residential homes.
  - **ISSUE #8: Potential exists for trail connections**
    - The Greenbelt Land Trust (1998 GLT Open Space Plan) describes the site as a "gateway to a regional trail system" which would connect to Cardwell Hill Road and eventually Marys Peak.
    - The GLT Open Space Plan recommends connecting the site with the existing trail from Bald Hill, which currently extends to the ridge east of the site; also recommended is a "view ridge connector" with McDonald Forest.
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## CHAPTER SEVEN: Fitton Green Management Plan

This chapter represents the policy framework and implementation plan for managing the Fitton Green site, in response to the issues and findings outlined in Chapter 5. Policies and objectives provide policy direction for decision making. A management statement provides a clear and concise description of the management purpose of the site. Specific management strategies and actions are outlined to fulfill the policy goals and objectives. A conceptual site plan guides planning and development decisions.

### A. Management Policies and Objectives

**Policy 1: Restore, protect, and creatively manage the site as healthy mixed conifer, hardwood/oak forest and oak savanna ecosystems, as the highest priority.**

1. Continue to implement the Stewardship Management Plan by applying progressive ecosystem management practices, including repair and restoration of damaged, weakened, or fragmented natural systems.
2. Improve breeding and feeding habitat for wildlife.
3. Control and remove invasive vegetation to the degree practicable.
4. Continue erosion control and abatement, especially steep banks along former roads.
5. Stabilize the slide on Panorama Drive to the degree practicable.
6. Prepare a stewardship plan for the Bolte tract.
7. In addition to the Smith tract, grant a unified conservation easement to the Greenbelt Land Trust for the Williamson, Bolte, and Moorefield tracts.
8. Manage the forest in a manner that will preserve future options to selectively thin for forest health and revenue purposes, applying sound ecosystem management practices.
9. Complete the site ecosystem inventory and assessment as a basis for establishing undisturbed "reserve" areas, and to develop criteria for prescriptive forest management practices; in the interim create a "reserve" zone for all riparian corridors.

**Policy 2: Provide appropriate public access and recreation opportunities, while minimizing potential impacts on the site and to adjacent property owners and neighborhoods.**

1. Encourage resource-based, day use passive recreation activities suited to the forest and savanna environment including hiking, wildlife viewing, and scenic enjoyment.
2. Provide adequate public access and staging areas while minimizing to the degree possible potential impacts on adjacent landowners and neighbors. Equestrian staging facilities should not be a part of the Fitton Green staging concept because of topographic constraints.
3. The threshold and decision for providing formal public access to the site will be based on the county's ability to provide multiple staging areas to disperse visitor loading with least impact to adjacent neighborhoods.
4. Actively participate with the Chinook Road District to offset costs of road improvements and maintenance equivalent to the increase in traffic

generated by the site. Should there be a significant increase in traffic in the future, the County will negotiate a change in the formula for participation.

5. The County will routinely monitor and review Fitton Green traffic impacts on roads maintained by others as a basis for determining cost sharing for maintenance and improvements.
6. Increase county policing of the region commensurate with increased public use and access to the site.
7. Limit vehicle access and staging areas to the perimeter of the site.
8. Design staging areas to minimize overflow parking outside the boundaries of the site.
9. Assure location, size, and scale of infrastructure for public use and access are suited to the ecological qualities and sensitivities of the site.
10. Provide opportunities to experience superlative panoramic views.
11. Achieve the most harmonious relationship between the natural environment and the design and choice of materials for supporting infrastructure including signs, interpretive displays, and restrooms.
12. Collaborate with adjacent property owners to site parking/staging areas.
13. Assist in providing a secondary fire and emergency access road for the neighborhood.
14. Minimize to the degree possible potential impacts of public use on adjacent landowners, including trespass and fire hazard; seek their participation in monitoring public use such as participation in a Neighborhood Watch program.
15. Establish a partnership with adjacent landowners to meet mutual resource management objectives.

**Policy 3: Promote environmental education and research, ecosystem management, and volunteerism.**

1. Create public interest in understanding resource management goals and activities through interpretive signs, exhibits, programs, and information distribution.
2. Actively engage schools, colleges, and universities in educational, monitoring, and research activities. For the first two years focus on completing a comprehensive inventory and assessment of natural resource values.
3. Work with volunteers and interested groups to help implement the Stewardship Management Plan including erosion control, removing invasive vegetation, trail improvements and maintenance, and marking legacy and wildlife trees.

**Policy 4: Manage the site as a demonstration open space area.**

1. Seek grant opportunities to support implementation of the Management Plan and Stewardship Plan.
2. Apply successful ecosystem management methods and practices to other applicable parts of the Benton County open space system.

**Policy 5: Promote connectivity to the regional trail and public open space system.**

1. Collaborate with the Greenbelt Land Trust and private landowners to obtain a trail connection with Bald Hill.
2. As opportunities arise, establish trail connections with this site and other regional public open space areas.
3. Work with adjacent property owners to maintain a cohesive ecosystem, and to avoid fragmentation of natural processes and impacts on off-site viewsheds when possible.
4. Collaborate with the local equestrian group to assure appropriate equestrian use of the site, and to foster regional trail connections.

**B. Fitton Green Management Statement**

The Fitton Green Management Statement distills the policies outlined above, and gives specific direction and purpose to management of the Fitton Green. The statement should be tested against all future decisions for the site, whether they are of a planning, development, or management nature.

**Fitton Green will be managed as a demonstration open space area, for the purpose of applying progressive ecosystem management practices to protect, conserve, and restore the natural, scenic, outdoor recreation, and wildlife values of the site, while minimizing potential impacts to adjacent landowners and neighbors.**

**Emphasis will be placed on restoring the Douglas-fir/oak forest and oak savanna ecosystems through sustainable forest management, as well as accommodating passive day use recreation such as hiking, wildlife viewing, and scenic enjoyment. The site will provide environmental education and research opportunities.**

**Built facilities will be minimal, primarily designed to support access, parking, and visitor information.**

**Connections will be provided to the county's regional trail and open space system. The site will function as part of a secondary emergency escape route for the neighborhood.**

**C. Management Strategies and Actions**

Outlined here are the specific management strategies and actions required to implement the Management Plan. The strategies provide overarching directives, while the actions are specific tasks to be undertaken.

**Strategy 1: Update stewardship management planning**

Actions

1. Evaluate progress of the 1995 plan implementation, update as needed, and develop specific forest policy and performance standards consistent with this management plan, including performance goals, targets, and monitoring protocols. Designate resource areas off limits to harvesting.
2. Prepare a consolidated conservation easement for the Williamson, Bolte, Moorefield, and Smith tracts.
3. Where boundaries are not fenced, define with markings to the degree that is practical.

## **Strategy 2: Continue site restoration and rehabilitation objectives**

### Actions

1. Work with adjacent property owners and the Willamette Valley Oak Woodland Project group to develop specific strategies for preserving and restoring oak savanna and grassland. Existing oaks should be given the highest levels of protection.
2. Explore working with volunteers to assist in removing and controlling non-native vegetation and reestablishing native ground cover.
3. Identify and mark wildlife and legacy trees valued for natural regeneration, stand structure, and wildlife habitat.
4. Continue to abate erosion on cut banks, improve water bars along the trail/maintenance access road, and examine feasibility of stabilizing the slide.

## **Strategy 3: Provide formal public access and improve recreation opportunities**

### Actions

1. Continue to work with adjacent property owners and neighborhoods to develop a plan for multiple staging areas to accommodate and distribute public access to the site. Seek to minimize potential impacts, and work toward mutual objectives that are consistent with land use policies.
2. Prepare land use applications required to formally open the site for public recreation use to include a change of the zoning designation from Forest Conservation to Open Space.
3. Formally designate and sign the access trail as the primary public access route throughout the site.
4. Develop a budget and funding strategy to secure financing for staging areas.
5. Improve the base and surfacing of the trail/maintenance access road.
6. Encourage passive recreation activities such as hiking, nature recreation, and nature study.

## **Strategy 4: Establish an interpretive and educational program**

### Actions

1. Create a theme e.g. "Learning from the Forest" and provide interpretive information at staging areas and throughout the site, with emphasis on the forest ecosystem management efforts and opportunities.
2. Use workshops, press releases, and workshops as methods for informing the public of forest management efforts.
3. Continue to outreach to Oregon State University and local schools to use the site as a laboratory for education and research, and to promote field trips, student projects and studies.
4. Create an archive of resource management events and activities and enter into a database program.
5. Explore special event activities to periodically celebrate the history and beauty of the site, using special shuttles to the site or if practicable, horse drawn wagons along Cardwell Hill Road.

### **Strategy 5: Monitor public use and traffic impacts and take corrective action**

#### Actions

1. Implement a sign-in sheet for visitors in order to track visitation; take periodic traffic counts on major roads, and work with neighborhoods to minimize impacts and offset maintenance costs.
2. Consider establishing "triggers" for reducing traffic impacts if necessary, such as revising county participation in sharing road costs if numbers should increase substantially.
3. Monitor use within the site to avoid impacts to adjacent neighbors such as trespass.
4. Aggressively enforce use regulations such as no firearms, motorized vehicles, or equestrian parking.

### **Strategy 6: Develop and promote a fire prevention program**

#### Actions

1. Work with Oregon Department of Forestry and rural fire districts to prepare a fire prevention program. Promote use of Fitton Green as a fire escape route for the neighborhood once the south access road is identified and is operational.
2. Work with the rural fire districts to develop a fire prevention and response plan for the site itself.

## **D. Conceptual Site Plan**

A conceptual site plan has been prepared to illustrate the general location of proposed staging areas and the main trail access, with dual functions for public use and a fire escape route for the neighborhood (see Map 6: Conceptual Plan).

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