



**Review and Analysis of King County Proposed Ordinance No. 2007-0353
 (Transfer 30 acres of Soaring Eagle Park to the City of Sammamish)**
 October 19, 2007

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Introduction

This document has been prepared for the City of Sammamish Mayor and Council, the City of Sammamish Parks and Recreation Department, King County Councilmembers and King County Director of Sustainability Rod Brandon. This document has also been prepared for the residents Sammamish and broader King County.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Proposed Ordinance No. 2007-0353. If approved, this ordinance will authorize the transfer of a 30-acre area of the currently 640 acre Soaring Eagle Park to the City of Sammamish for future development as an active recreation park facility. We hope the City of Sammamish and King County find our research, analysis and recommendations helpful.

About This Document

On September 12, 2007, Partnership for Rural King County (PRKC) was contacted by member organization Friends of Soaring Eagle Park and asked to support their position on Proposed Ordinance No. 2007-0353 which Councilmember Lambert submitted on September 4, 2007. On September 16, PRKC Board members met with Friends of Soaring Eagle Park representatives and told them we would not be able to take a position on the ordinance until PRKC had a full understanding of the issue.

This document provides an independent, unbiased, and comprehensive summary of our review of the proposed transfer and our recommendations in regard to the proposed transfer. We have sought earnestly to include all perspectives fairly and respectfully in our position regarding proposed ordinance No. 2007-0353. This document also includes explanations of County and City processes for the purposes of completeness and citizen understanding.

About PRKC

Partnership for Rural King County (PRKC) is a grassroots consortium of neighborhood residents, community associations, non-profits, outdoor user groups and educational agencies dedicated to conservation and support of rural communities and surrounding lands in eastern King County located in Washington State. Our geographic area of focus is the rural unincorporated areas and surrounding incorporated communities of the Snoqualmie Valley including, but not limited to Fall City, Sammamish, North Bend, Snoqualmie, Carnation, Redmond, Duvall, Issaquah, Grand Ridge and Preston.

PRKC empowers communities and community members by promoting balance between community, economy and the environment. We facilitate community and organizational networking, planning and resource sharing. PRKC priorities focus on sustainability and local support for:

- Working Forest Land
- Farms
- Outdoor Recreation
- Stewardship

PRKC understands that the challenges communities and governments face around growth always come down to finding balance with the needs of the people and the needs of the environment which sustains us. Finding compromise and making trade-offs is critical to achieving this balance. PRKC is wholly supportive of the Cascade Agenda, the Greenway Vision, and other private and public partnerships that help ensure a truly sustainable future for generations to come.

The Ordinance Process

“A proposed ordinance must be limited to one subject and may be introduced by a councilmember, by initiative petition by residents of the county or by institutional initiative by cities within the county. Regardless of the method of introduction, an ordinance must have seven days between its introduction and a public hearing unless it is an emergency ordinance. The public hearing must be held before council action. Once the council adopts an ordinance, the ordinance must be presented within five days to the county executive. The executive then has ten days to sign the ordinance, veto the entire ordinance or any object of expense in an appropriation ordinance or let the ordinance be enacted without signature. Once either the executive has approved the ordinance or ten days have elapsed without veto or signature, or the council has overridden a veto by six votes, the ordinance is enacted. An ordinance takes effect ten days after enactment unless it specifies a later date as the effective date.”¹

The PRKC Review

Our review of the proposed ordinance No. 2007-0353 was performed September 21 – October 06, 2007. PRKC leveraged the following methods of data collection:

- Project File Review at the City of Sammamish
- Meeting with City of Sammamish Mayor Mark Cross
- Informal interviews with King County Council staff
- Informal interviews with King County staff
- Requests for information from community members, current park users, clubs and organizations and facilities staff
- Daily walk-thrus of Soaring Eagle Park conducted by PRKC volunteers for the duration of the review period alternatively at approximately 10am and 4pm.
- A cursory study of field use and amenities

Additionally, PRKC performed an extensive review of the following documents and files:

- City of Sammamish Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan of 2004.
- King County Master Plan for Soaring Eagle
- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Master Plan
- King County Motion 9010 (5/18/93) that authorized funding assistance from IAC
- King County Motion 9714 (8/2/95) which adopted the Park Master Plan.
- Review of the Deed of Right for Conservation Purposes (6/14/00) - Section 36 (original deed filed 2/28/97)
- Review letter from King County Parks to IAC (6/20/00) RE: 6/14/00 Deed of Right

¹ From “Drafting Guide of King County Legislature”, November 2006



- Review letter from King County Executive to City of Sammamish (9/8/05) RE: Need for Park/Public Support
- Agreement for Project Grant From Habitat Conservation Account (10/21/91) (ID#91-210A) plus various amendments (1992-1995) RE: Beaver Lake Wetlands Project (aka Hazel Wolfe Wetlands)
- Amendment to IAC Project Agreement (3/1995) RE: Inclusion of Soaring Eagle into Project 19-210A
- Amendment to IAC Project Agreement (undated) RE: Project description with limitation on usage of 330 acres

As questions were raised, PRKC leveraged contacts with Sammamish Parks and Recreation, King County Parks, King County Policy and Planning and King County DDES staff for clarification and direction.

Drafts of this document were provided to King County Council Staff, the King County Executive's office, and the City of Sammamish Parks and Recreation Department for feedback before the document was finalized. Additionally, sections of relevant interest were provided to groups such as sports clubs, mountain biking clubs and Friends of Soaring Eagle to review and provide feedback.

We would like to note that City and County staff, as well as members of the community, were extremely helpful and quick to respond to our requests for information.

About Soaring Eagle Park

Soaring Eagle Park (Soaring Eagle) is a regional King County Park located in the unincorporated area to the southeast of the City of Sammamish, northwest of Fall City, and directly west of the central Snoqualmie Valley. Soaring Eagle encompasses a complete section of land, or approximately 640 acres with the exception of 6 acres that has been removed from the park and dedicated to other uses such City of Sammamish Water District water tanks and parking lot.

To the west, Soaring Eagle borders the incorporated areas of the Plateau Golf Club (195 acres) and the small developments of Ravenhill and Pine Crest. To the north, Soaring Eagle borders the small unincorporated development of Crosse Creek and eight vacant 20-acre parcels. Two of these parcels serve to separate the Evans Creek Natural Area Preserve from Soaring Eagle. To the east, Soaring Eagle is bordered by 5 and 10-acre homesites and vacant land accessed off of the Redmond-Fall City Road (State Route 202). To the south, Soaring eagle borders the Trossachs residential development (incorporated City of Sammamish).

Acquisition and Funding²

The King County Council adopted, by Motion 9015 in May 1993, the purchase of Section 36 (later renamed Soaring Eagle Park) which was owned by the Washington Common Schools Trust and administered by Washington State Department of Natural Resources. The stated purpose of this acquisition was for park and open space.

² Source: King County Council Utilities and Natural Resources Committee Staff Report, prepared by S. Warden, August 31, 1995.

Soaring Eagle was purchased for approximately \$8 million with Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) funds. King County Council Motion 9015 directed the County to seek state and local funds to reimburse REET with any acquired grant funding and set up procedural requirements for citizen review of the area. The citizen review component was the establishment of a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) to determine how to best use and preserve the area for park and open space.

State IAC wildlife habitat funds and the State's Habitat Conservation Account of the General Fund, totaling \$740,000, were transferred from nearby Saddle Swamp (later renamed Beaver Lake Wetlands and now known as the Hazel Wolf Wetlands) to reimburse REET for this project. The grant money from the State came with a requirement that the County grant to the people of the State of Washington a conservation easement on not less than 330 acres of Soaring Eagle's land. This conservation easement covers the most environmentally sensitive lands within Soaring Eagle and limits the types of development that can occur within this area of the park to low-impact uses for the benefit of wildlife.

The following cited language can be found in the undated Project Amendment which provides:

"... The project also includes the fee simple acquisition of a portion of Section 36 Regional Park. No less than 330 acres lying substantially within the area denominated "Conservation Zone" in the Section 36 Regional Park Master Plan (Council Interim Approved - 4/20/98) shall be used for conservation purposes. The Conservation Zone covers the most environmentally sensitive lands within the park. Future passive development is limited to light impact recreation activities such as pedestrian/equestrian trails, interpretive signage, picnic areas, and park access road and parking so as not to impair the habitat conservation qualities of the site."

Ecological Description

Soaring Eagle is located within the Snohomish Basin WRIA 7 and is comprised of a second growth mixed forest with a diverse variety of upland, riparian and wetland habitats. Soaring Eagle was last logged in the late 1930s.³

Soaring Eagle contains several habitat types providing both changing scenery for park visitors as well as diverse habitat for wildlife, including species listing as concerned by the State of Washington.

- Deciduous and Mixed Forests provide nesting and foraging for a variety of bird and mammal species adapted to rural and undeveloped habitats. Birds residing in the park include Song Sparrow, American Robin, Violet-Green Swallows, Downy Woodpecker, Red-Tailed Hawk, and Pileated Woodpecker. Mammals utilizing the park included Black-Tailed Deer, Townsend's Chipmunk, Mountain Beaver, Eastern Gray Squirrel, Douglas Squirrel, Coyote, Mountain Lion, Bobcat, Porcupine and Black Bear.

³ Bratnobar Lumber Company and the Weyerhaeuser Company stopped actively logging the Sammamish Plateau in the late 1930s.

- Riparian Forest provides valuable wildlife habitat due to its diverse structure and the availability of surface water as does Freshwater Marsh habitat. A variety of bird and mammal species, including Beaver and Muskrat, utilize these areas for breeding and rearing young along with food foraging as do amphibian species such as Pacific Chorus Frogs, Northwestern Salamander, and Pacific Giant Salamander.
- Wetlands and Bogs provide dense habitat for wildlife by providing cover, nesting areas, and forage for insect- and fruit-eating birds and mammal such as Black-Capped Chickadee, Deer Mouse, Raccoon, and Rufous Hummingbird, as well as amphibians.
- River and Stream habitat of the park serve as a tributary to Patterson Creek and as drainage for the headwater wetlands of Beaver Lake. Patterson Creeks is the second largest Coho Salmon producing stream in the Snoqualmie River Basin which also provides suitable habitat for Bull Trout. In addition, Beaver Lake contains resident Cutthroat Trout.

History

Back when Soaring Eagle was known as Section 36 and owned by the WA DNR, and long before any of the residential development at Trossachs and elsewhere on the Plateau, the existing trail network was established by equestrians and mountain bikers. This was a social trail network that was created without any trail planning or design, and extended far beyond the current boundaries of the park. Since 1998, the year King County Parks created a program to manage regional parks; trails have been maintained by King County Parks' staff with volunteers. The first thing King County Parks did was to conduct trail surveys in 1999 and 2000. In 2000, the Mountains to Sound Greenway partnered with King County and coordinated 307 volunteers who donated 1,540 hours and planted 24,292 trees in Soaring Eagle as part of the Greenway's 200,000 in 2000 Tree Planting Campaign. In 2003 and 2004, the department worked on the trail connection south of the water tanks. In 2004, the Mountains to Sound Greenway was hired by a developer to build a new trail connection just south of the water tanks located along the northern edge of Soaring Eagle. The developer had wiped out a popular trail that connected to Soaring Eagle. After much public pressure, the developer agreed to fund a new trail connection within the park. King County Parks' staff were in charge of trail design and layout. Since 2004, King County Parks has been working to correct this "inherited and adopted" trail network.

Access and Facilities

There are no roads inside Soaring Eagle. Soaring Eagle is currently accessed from five locations, both within and outside the incorporated area. Parking is limited to 32 automobile and three equestrian trailer spots and street parking in the surrounding neighborhoods. There are three portable toilet facilities. The Park has good trail and wildlife signage. Access points are at the following locations:

E Main Drive. Entrance serves as a primary access point and is a formal parking lot maintained by the City of Sammamish that accommodates 24 cars, three of these spots are equestrian trailer parking stalls with a turn-around. Residential street parking is also available. A single portable toilet is available for park users.

NE 8th. Entrance is a soft surface trail accessed through the Crosse Creek neighborhood on 259th Ct. NE. A single unmaintained portable toilet is located about 500 ft up the trail. Limited street parking is available.

Beaver Lake Drive. Entrance is a soft surface trail and small parking lot that accommodates 10 spaces. There is also a handicap portable toilet.

Trossachs Boulevard. Entrance is at the dead end of Trossachs Boulevard, a major residential arterial serving the Trossachs community. Residential street parking is available.

Private Property off of Hwy 202. Informal entrance is provided by private land owner for equestrian and other use access. Note: landowner is interested in exploring creating a permanent public access easement with the County.

Current Use

Soaring Eagle currently offers an extensive soft-surface multi-use trail system. These trails are used by a large number of regional and local groups and individuals including:

- Trail runners
- Dog walkers
- Mountain bikers
- Equestrians
- Neighborhood trail walkers
- Boy Scouts and other troops and clubs (Cub Scouts, Campfire, etc)
- Fire and Rescue training programs
- High School cross-country training programs
- Bird and wildlife enthusiasts
- Local schools for environmental education

Soaring Eagle is regularly used for organized events including:

- Regularly scheduled rides by the **Sammamish Saddle Club** from May through Sept. for organized regional social tours.
- Organized trail running competitions sponsored by **Northwest Trail Runs**.
- Regularly scheduled rides by mountain bike groups through the **BBTC**, local bike shops, and other bicycle groups.

Friends of Soaring Eagle, a community user group which works on trail maintenance has a membership base of 400 active members, 30% of which are regional users.

Trail Description

Soaring Eagle has 12 miles of multi-use soft surface trails.⁴ These trails have been mapped by local mapmaker Jon Stanley and the local Eagle Scouts.⁵ All the trails are shared for a variety of uses – from mountain bikers to hikers to trail runners to wildlife enthusiasts – and a culture of

⁴ Source: King County Parks

⁵ Map included in Appendix 2.

tolerance and appreciation has developed between trail users. The trails are extensive and technical enough to provide exercise for those that are physically fit, yet they are not too strenuous for those who are just starting an exercise program or are learning how to mountain bike or trail ride.

Maintenance⁶

New trail work is under the direction of and expert leadership of King County Parks staff. Trails are maintained solely by volunteers under the guidance of King County Parks' staff. Organizations that have contributed to rerouting, building and maintaining trails are:

- Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust
- Washington Trails Association
- Boy Scouts of America
- Western States Youth
- Friends of Soaring Eagle Park
- Microsoft (employee volunteers)
- Eastside Catholic School
- Mercer Island Synagogue

These organizations have provided 369 volunteers and 2653 hours for park trail building, rerouting and maintenance between January 2004 and September 2007. More work parties are scheduled for the remainder of 2007.

Park Development

Shortly after the County purchase of Section 36, the King County Parks Department performed a Project Program Plan (PPP). The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) produced a draft of recommended uses and zones dated November 16, 1994. There were several differences between the two plans, most notably the intensity of development on the active site. The CAC plan called for as many as 46 sports fields. The CAC called for lighting to be constructed only after pursuing lighting options at schools and suburban city and county parks first. The PPP plan called for a total of 8 sports fields and a very large informal active grass play area. The CAC recommended King County look at alternative ownership for park development funding. The PPP states that all acreage in the Section 36 should be retained by King County.⁷ A Master Plan for Soaring Eagle was created in 2000 which included 80 acres at the center of the park to be dedicated to active recreation with two roads bisecting the middle of the park and meeting at the active recreation area.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed for the Master Plan in September 2000. The EIS found that development of Soaring Eagle as proposed by the Master Plan would not only clear deciduous/mixed forest habitat but that there would be a shift of the wildlife species makeup from the current species to those most adaptable to human activities. In addition, noise, activity, and lighting would affect wildlife resulting in lower use of the park by

⁶ Source: King County Parks

⁷ Source: "King County Council Utilities and Natural Resources Committee Staff Report", prepared by S. Warden, August 31, 1995.

wildlife intolerant to human activity such as Pileated woodpecker, bobcat, and black-tailed deer. Streams would also be impacted by the development not only from an increase in sedimentation but from changes in surface water run-off patterns. Although development of the Soaring Eagle would provide additional athletic fields for the Sammamish Plateau, existing trails would be impacted and natural observation potential would be disrupted or displaced. In addition, neighboring property owners would be adversely impacted from increased traffic and noise.

In 2000, King County transferred a 6-acre portion of the park to the Sammamish Plateau Water and Sewer District for the construction of two 4 million-gallon water tanks to serve residents on the Plateau. The Water District's improvements included a trailhead, trail facilities, a short access road and a 24-stall parking lot. The wide, woodchip-covered trail which traverses the park is the Water District's pipeline and serves as a navigational landmark for park visitors.

With the exception of trail signage and limited restoration, little has been done in Soaring Eagle since the water tanks were constructed. Due to budget issues, King County has not actively pursued development of Soaring Eagle consistent with the Master Plan. In 2006 King County Parks failed to get funding for a capital improvement request to add a permanent restroom at the parking lot but other than this, King County has no plan to develop the park beyond its current status. However, the neighboring City of Sammamish has expressed interest in developing at least a portion of the park.

Some time in the early 2000s, the City of Sammamish started discussions with King County regarding the potential transfer of a portion of Soaring Eagle to the City for use as a local park. The City first proposed the transfer and development of 80-acres in the central portion of the Park to be accessed by a road transecting the park but later, due to resistance by the County, reduced its requested to 30 acres along Soaring Eagle's southern border with the Trossachs housing development. The initial proposal involved was for 20 acres for parking, restrooms and two sports fields. The proposal was subsequently changed in 2005 to encompass a larger area for the development of parking, restrooms, 4 to 5 sports fields, the construction of a 15,000 square foot public works/park maintenance facility for general city purposes and an equestrian arena. This latter proposed concerned County Executive Ron Sims, who stated in a letter in 2005 a willingness to transfer no more than 30 acres to the City, provided that:

1. The City agrees to a permanent passive 100' buffer on the South edge of property adjacent to the Trossachs residential development.
2. The County retains access road easement.
3. The City limits any maintenance facilities at the park for use solely to accommodate the maintenance needs of the park acreage transferred and such facility should be less than 2500 sq ft and not exceed 5000 sq feet.
4. Any maintenance facilities constructed are limited to solely those necessary to accommodate the maintenance needs of the transferred park acreage (no greater than

5,000 square feet) with no general public works maintenance activities or consolidated City park maintenance activities.⁸

Note that Executive Sims stated in that same letter:

“This transfer is a unique endeavor in conveying a portion of what is now part of a regional park in the rural area to a City for local active recreation. I am willing to support an effort to provide Sammamish residents with needed local recreation opportunities, while preserving the regional wildlife and passive open space values of Soaring Eagle Park. I know of no opportunities that would warrant the replication of this type of transfer elsewhere in King County. Given the regional nature of Soaring Eagle, the unique habitat value of the park, and the adjacent urban residential development, this transfer must in all events reflect a reasoned and conservative approach to potential development of the proposed City park, which are the basis for the conditions I have outlined above.”

In 2006, the City’s development plans for Soaring Eagle were slowed with the departure of the City’s Parks Director and voters’ refusal to authorize a park bond for the City. In 2007, the City again began researching park development of approximately 30 acres.

The Road Issue

Both the CAC and PPP recommended that no through road be constructed within Section 36 and noted that anticipated access will be from the south, via Trossachs Boulevard or from the west, through the proposed Beaver Dam development.

The heart of the City of Sammamish is along 228th Avenue with residential arterials connecting to 228th. The exception is the Trossachs neighborhood of approximately 1000 homes currently, with 700 additional homes planned. Currently, the growing Trossachs Development is somewhat isolated from suburban services in Sammamish and Issaquah; Trossachs residents have three rural road options to reach the city centers. Additionally there are two other large developments, Montaine and Alderra, neighboring Trossachs which are reportedly being considered for annexation to the City of Sammamish.

Soaring Eagle Park lies between the wide dead-ended Trossachs Boulevard and the core of Sammamish/228th. The City of Sammamish has explored bisecting Soaring Eagle along the water pipeline, similar to the way Marymoore Park in Redmond is split, with two roads that meet in the middle, but has not pursued this option. The Friends of Soaring Eagle are deeply concerned that Soaring Eagle will be divided by a major road along the pipeline at some time in the future which would adversely impact both the natural function and wildlife of the area because it would bisect the only east-west wildlife corridor in the Park and Sammamish Plateau.

It should be noted that the EIS study of 2000 assessed the impacts of a single access point along the southern border at Trossachs Boulevard SE/269th Avenue SE for the proposed Master Plan. A Traffic Study was conducted which showed that the park, if developed with sports fields,

⁸ Letter from King County Executive Ron Sims to the City of Sammamish dated 9/15/2005.

would generate approximately 600 weekday PM peak hour trips and 1060 weekend peak hour trips, resulting in approximately 2700 average weekday trips (a 35 percent increase in traffic) and 6,780 average weekend trips (a 75 percent increase in traffic) and a failing Level of Service “E” at the intersection of SE Duthie Hill Road/Trossachs Boulevard SE, an intersection currently having only a stop sign as opposed to a stoplight. The Traffic Study also noted that development of the park would result in an increase in safety hazards for pedestrians and bicyclists along Trossachs Boulevard SE. In addition to traffic volumes and safety, the total peak parking demand for the park could require 625 spaces with the Master Plan only providing 480 spaces, resulting in a deficit of parking which would amount to overflow parking within the residential streets of the neighboring Trossachs development.

Area Parks and Facilities

City Parks

In 1999, the County and City entered into an interlocal agreement to give five parks to the newly incorporated City of Sammamish. In 2004, the City produced a Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan which identified a shortage in parks as an issue for the recently incorporated City. This plan identified joint use of existing resources with schools and neighboring jurisdictions as primary way to meet park demand.

In August of 2005, the City of Sammamish invited representatives from the City of Issaquah, the Issaquah School District, the Lake Washington School District, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club and the Columbia Athletic Club to a series of meetings called the Sammamish Recreation Summit to discuss the current and future delivery of recreation services to residents of the Sammamish Plateau. The purpose of the meetings was to determine if recreation services could be provided more effectively, efficiently and equitably through collaborative and coordinated action. The PRKC Review team was unable to identify results put into action as a result of the Summit.

The City of Sammamish is currently focusing on upgrading existing parks, such as Pine Lake Park and East Lake Park and building new parks to serve community needs and interests. As parks are upgraded or developed, the City has been trying to address the need for additional facilities while balancing open space needs and functions. The following table provides a breakdown of facilities and park size:

	Beaver Lake Park	E. Sammamish Park	NE Sammamish Neighborhood Park	Pine Lake Park	Sammamish Commons	Ebright Park
ACRES	81.6	19.2	4	16.3	30	12
BB Court			X	X	X	X
Play Structures	X	X	X	X	X	X
Skate Park					X	

Soccer Fields		X		X		
Ballfields	X	X		X		
Tennis		X	X			X

Natural turf sports fields are located at Beaver Lake Park, east Lake Sammamish, and Pine Lake Park. Community fields (artificial turf) are available at Eastlake and Skyline High Schools and serve baseball/softball, lacrosse, and soccer.

Neighborhood Parks

Almost all, if not all, of the residential developments build in the last 10 years on the Sammamish Plateau have small neighborhood parks and play areas owned and maintained by the homeowners associations. These neighborhood parks are designed to serve the residents of the neighborhood and provide children’s play areas, open play fields and in some cases swimming pools, tennis courts, open fields and practice sports fields in convenient locations throughout the neighborhood developments.

Active Recreation Facilities in the Area

It is clear that our area has extremely high demand for sports fields. School clubs and programs and organized private clubs are growing to serve demand. The public demands facilities that are safe and have excellent facilities to serve community needs in all seasons. There are enough schools fields to exceed current demand but these fields require significant upgrade.

Organized teams prefer central locations for safety (parking at night is best in high-traffic areas) and proximity to quick access roads and even to eateries for after-game gatherings. Marymoor and Greenlake are examples of this ideal proximity.

Active recreation facilities in the area (within a 20 minute drive of Sammamish Town Center) are provided by County, City and State agencies as well as area schools. Additionally, most of the newer residential neighborhood parks have fields for neighborhood residents to use. The following table shows field counts by jurisdiction for fields currently installed:

Sport	County⁹	City¹⁰	State¹¹	Schools¹²	Private¹³	Total
Baseball	7	14	1	30	3	55
Soccer/Lacrosse/Football	20	4	10	23	2	58

⁹ Includes Klahanie Park and Marymoore Park.

¹⁰ Includes Eastlake Sammamish Park, Pine Lake Park, Beaver Lake Park, Central Park, Tibbetts Valley Park, Issaquah Baseball Fields, NE Sammamish Park, Lower Sammamish Commons, Ebright Park.

¹¹ Includes Lake Sammamish State Park.

¹² Alcott, Blackwell, Mead Margaret, McAuliffe Crista, Smith Samantha, Cascade Ridge, Discovery, Sunny Hills, Challenger, Endeavor, Grand Ridge, Clark, Cougar Ridge, Issaquah Valley, Sunset, Pacific Freshman Campus, Inglewood Middle School, Beaver Lake M.S, Pine Lake M.S., East Lake High School, Skyline High School, Issaquah High School.

¹³ Includes Deerfield Sportsfield, Pine Lake Community Center, Sammamish YMCA, Trossachs and Montaine.

Open Play Field (Frisbee, etc)	6	4	2	2	8	22
Total	33	29	13	83	13	135

City of Sammamish Field Trends

The following table shows that the City of Sammamish has been working to address field demand:

Year	Number of Fields Added/Upgraded	Total Acreage of Combined Fields
2004	2	Pine Lake Park
2005	5	Eastlake Community Sportsfield
2006	4	Skyline Community Sportsfield
2007	4	East Sammamish Park

New Facilities

The City of Sammamish is currently negotiating shared ball field development and use with the new Eastside Catholic. The Preston Ballfields, a new facility is under construction on Preston-Fall City Road & SE 86th. It will have 2 lighted artificial turf soccer fields and a youth baseball field in phase 1. A grass soccer field will be added in phase 2.

School Fields

Use and upgrade of local school active recreation facilities is identified in the Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan of 2004 as “critical” to achieving both the short and long term goals of the plan.

In Summer of 2004, the City of Sammamish entered into joint use agreements for development, maintenance, scheduling and operations of recreation facilities with the Lake Washington and Issaquah School Districts.¹⁴ It is not clear how these agreements impact or support the many private leagues and clubs that are needing fields.

The City of Sammamish Parks and Recreation Department is currently doing a study on all the local school fields and ranking them for upgrade potential. The study is expected to be completed sometime in November 2007. There are concerns about upgrading grade school fields because younger kids can be abusive to new facilities. The City is also looking at a field partnership with the new private Eastside Catholic High School and the new YMCA that are to be built (separately) off of 228th Avenue.

¹⁴ See Appendix XXX for full text of the agreements.

Field Maintenance and Rental

Field maintenance is a huge expense for local jurisdictions and private clubs. For example, the member-funded Issaquah Soccer Club (ISC), which serves the Sammamish Plateau, spent \$310,000 on field maintenance and repairs in 2006 on rented fields in addition to \$21,000 in rental fees. ISC expects maintenance and rental fees for 2007 to be approximately \$198,000.

Scheduling

Scheduling of fields is a challenge for large, well-established sports clubs and leagues and it is extremely time consuming and cumbersome for smaller or newly-established organizations. Fields are scheduled different ways depending on field ownership and lease contracts. Insurance requirements are a significant challenge to smaller teams. Informal teams, such as church and private school teams, often play without prior scheduling on available open-use fields.

The table below summarizes how fields in the area are scheduled:

Owner	Processes	Contact
City of Sammamish Parks and Recreation	Fields are scheduled by the City. Historical use preference given.	Joanna Puthoff, Facility Coordinator (425) 295-0588
City of Issaquah Parks and Recreation	Fields are rented to the Issaquah Soccer Club (ISC) and can be scheduled by other organizations when not in use by ISC.	www.issaquahsoccerclub.org 425-391-KICK
City of Bellevue	Fields are rented by the City of Bellevue. ¹⁵	BallfieldRental@bellevuewa.gov
City of Redmond	Fields are rented by the City of Redmond.	http://www.ci.redmond.wa.us/insidacityhall/parksrec/fieldrentals.asp
King County	Fields are rented by King County Parks. ¹⁶	Regional Scheduling (all fields except Marymoor): 206-205-5275 regional.scheduling@metrokc.gov Marymoor Park Scheduling: 206-205-3661 marymoorpark@metrokc.gov
State of Washington	Fields are rented to the Issaquah Soccer Club (ISC) and can be scheduled by other	www.issaquahsoccerclub.org 425-391-KICK

¹⁵ For City of Bellevue scheduling processes and procedures see www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/pdf/Parks/Athletic_Field_Scheduling_Guide.pdf.

¹⁶ For King County scheduling processes and procedures see http://www.metrokc.gov/parks/documents/Athletic_Field_Scheduling_Booklet_Final_07.pdf.

	organizations when not in use by ISC.	
Issaquah School District	Fields are scheduled through the Issaquah School District	www.issaquah.wednet.edu (fill out facility application form and bring in in-person). Contact: Cindy Schwinden, Facility Use Scheduler (mornings) (425) 837-7000.
Lake Washington School District	Fields scheduled by the City of Sammamish for weekdays and sometimes for weekends	Joanna Puthoff, Facility Coordinator (425) 295-0588
Local neighborhoods/private fields	Scheduling processes differ based degree of homeowners management; most fields are not schedulable.	Various

Sammamish Natural Areas and Trails

Combining all the City Parks and open areas, there are approximately 10 miles of natural area/soft surface trails located within the City of Sammamish. Outside the City limits, there are approximately 26 miles of soft surface trails and approximately 18 miles of regional trails, including the East Lake Sammamish Trail.

The City recently purchased 176 acres for \$1.5 million dollars from private property owners off Redmond Fall City Road to develop the Evans Creek Preserve for passive use only. It is outside the City limits, but under City ownership and it will be referred to as a City park. The City plans to build a 20-40 car parking lot and a trail network and expect users would be residents of Sammamish and others looking for trails.

In spring of this year the City also purchased the 17-acre Kipper property that allows for a trail connection to Beaver Lake Preserve.

Local Multi-Use Trails

Mountain biking and equestrian uses require large areas of land and extensive trail systems. Housing development over the past ten years has dramatically reduced the trails once used for these purposes. The areas now developed as Trossachs and Aldarra and the Issaquah Highlands were once covered with trails that were used heavily by regional hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians. Trails in Tiger Mountain park, which were also originally multi-use, have now been mostly limited to pedestrian traffic only.

Mountain Bike Use

King County recreation areas for mountain bike users are summarized in the following table:

Soaring Eagle Park	Extensive trail network for beginning, intermediate and advanced mountain bike riders.
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Tiger Mountain Park	Limited trail network for technical and advanced mountain bike riders.
The Snoqualmie Valley Trail	Extensive trail suitable to beginning mountain bike riders; trail surface (parts gravel) not preferable.

There are also three private areas open to mountain bikers:

Tokul	Trail network on private land currently owned by Hancock Timber Resource Group.
Griffin Creek	Trail network on private land currently owned by Hancock Timber Resource Group.
Tolt	Advanced trails on Port Blakely property; the parcel is currently up for sale.

Additionally the incomplete Grand Ridge Trail, when finished, will suit technical and advanced mountain bike riders if permitted. Clearly, Soaring Eagle is the park of choice for local mountain bike riders.

Equestrian Use

Horses riding and horse keeping in King County continue to be a hugely popular activity. Equestrians range from owners of national show horses and high-end performance horses to small farms and 4H and Pony Clubs. There are many places that offer lessons for children and adults, some boarding facilities and several private arenas and facilities on the Plateau. The equestrian lifestyle on the Plateau is under intense pressure from urban sprawl. As land prices increase, and previously rural properties are developed into housing tracks, equestrian trail systems have been continually segmented.

Equestrians face unique challenges because keeping horses is more of an agricultural undertaking than other sports. Additionally horses require long distances of continuous trails as well as large flat parking spaces for horse trailer and trail head and access points

Nearby recreation areas for equestrian users are summarized in the following table:

Soaring Eagle Park	Extensive trail network for equestrians of all levels. Limited access and horse trailer parking.
Tiger Mountain Park	Advanced riders restricted

	by time of year. Adequate horse trailer parking.
The Snoqualmie Valley Trail	Popular and used extensively by equestrians from King, Snohomish and Pierce Counties. Includes use of railroad grade and tree farm trails. Horse trailer parking at trail head by Fall City Arena and limited trailer parking at Dom Bosco Camp.
Bridle Trails	Heavily used by equestrians. Originally a full section but reduced by private development and utility right of ways. Active equestrian community resulting in extensive development of horse arenas and other facilities.
Fall City Arena	Heavily used for equestrians regionally for both arena and trail head access to The Snoqualmie Valley Trail. Trailer parking is adequate for both trail and arena use but maintenance is under funded.
Cougar Mountain	Access to a subset of trails available to equestrians. Parking is limited for horse trailers.
Squak Mountain	Horses can ride on the service road but the adjacent trail system is very steep and seasonally sensitive. Horse trailer parking is good.
Redmond Watershed Preserve	Extensive horse trails and recent connection to Catherine Taylor equestrian arena. Good parking for horse trailers and several trail access points.

Farrell McWhirter Park	Public Arena and small adjacent trail system. Good horse trailer park and arena entrance.
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Additionally the incomplete Grand Ridge Trail, when finished, will suit limited equestrian use if permitted and if trailer parking is provided.

Proposed Ordinance No. 2007-0353

On September 4, 2007, King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert proposed Ordinance 2007-0353 to the King County Growth Management Committee to transfer 29.9 acres of the southwest corner of Soaring Eagle Park to the City of Sammamish. The ordinance would allow the City of Sammamish to assume ownership and operation to develop additional recreational opportunities and facilities on the site in order to increase its value to the public. Under the agreement, the County would transfer ownership of the 29.9 acres within 30 days of execution of the proposed interlocal agreement.

If the ordinance is adopted, the City will propose a change to the Comprehensive Plan Update of 2008 to incorporate the transferred 29.9 acres.

Preliminary Development Plan

The City of Sammamish has completed preliminary wetland studies. Upon completion of the transfer, the City will begin work on a Master Plan for the transferred area. Preliminary plans are for the creation of a park, similar to the City’s new Elbright Park, which will serve as a gateway into Soaring Eagle Park with the following attributes:

Wetland and buffer	~2 acres
Wildlife network	~5.5 acres
Vegetative buffer	~2 acres
Existing trails	~1 acre
Parking, 1-2 sports fields, park facilities	~19 acres

Official Public Comment

As required by the King County Executive, the City conducted two public hearings. These hearings were done in an “open house” format in January 2006. The first meeting was conducted at Cascade Ridge Elementary School and the second meeting was at Inglemoor Junior High. Representatives from King County were present at these hearings but the meetings were conducted by the City. Both hearings were well attended, with approximately 100 or more concerned citizens attending and representing the complete spectrum of interests from non-development of Soaring Eagle to maximum development of the site for active recreation uses, primarily soccer and baseball/softball fields.

January 12th Open House public comments received:	In favor of proposal: 7 Not in favor: 9
---------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------

	Undecided: 1
January 18th Open House public comments:	In favor of proposal: 5 Not in favor: 6 Undecided: 0

A review of the Public Record at the City of Sammamish on September 27-28, 2007 found:

- 59 email letters submitted in support of developing an active recreation park
- 55 email letters submitted in support of leaving Soaring Eagle Park in the current state or making very minor upgrades with parking and restroom facilities
- 4 email letters submitted neither in support of active or passive park use but raising tangential concerns or suggestions.

PRKC Community Outreach

At first it appeared that the vocal public fell into two general camps: people that want more active recreation (in the form of sports fields) and people that want to leave Soaring Eagle in its natural state with minimal park development. Reading through the public comments and letters and through conversations with individuals and organization representatives, it is clear that the “camp” lines can not be rigidly drawn. People in favor of keeping the park the way it is tend to be very physically active and would like to see sports fields developed in more suitable locations. The sports field advocates generally don’t care about (or in some cases don’t like) the proposed location – they just need more fields on arterials and in central community areas.

It is worth noting that it is our observation that active recreation park users are well organized into clubs and associations, thus are easier to get information and comment from. The majority of passive recreation park users are not organized but rather form loosely overlapping and not well organized communities, the exception to this is Friends of Soaring Eagle Park. PRKC reviewed material and positions provided by Friends of Soaring Eagle Park which primarily includes open space advocates and passive recreation users. Friends of Soaring Eagle Park has approximately 400 active members.

PRKC requested, through the City of Sammamish Parks staff, material provided by sports clubs and associations, such as field studies, testaments to scheduling difficulties due to field availability/usability or use forecast/trends for the next several years. Teams/sports we explored for this review included:

- Eastside Little League (approximately 62 teams)
- Sammamish Little League (approximately 30 teams)
- Issaquah Soccer Club (approx 3500 members)
- Lacrosse, while fairly new to the area is a sport rapidly gaining popularity and the number of teams and clubs in the area will undoubtedly grow.

Public Concerns

Many common themes were identified as a result of our community outreach and review of public comments. They are captured below in no specific order.

General Active Recreation Concerns

Facilities:

- Existing sports fields (with the exception of Skyline High School and East Lake High) are of substandard quality with poor maintenance, mud and water/drainage issues, no lighting and no restrooms.
- Lighting is critical for field usability 6 months out of the year.
- All grass fields are out of commission from mid-November to May as play on soggy fields will ruin grass for the rest of the year.
- Natural grass School fields are closed to soccer except for September and October with few exceptions.
- Little League baseball is often practiced and played on soccer fields.

Scheduling:

- Scheduling of fields is very tight allowing no slack time for weather cancellations and causing practice times starting as late as 7:30pm for Jr. High aged kids.
- There is no single or easy method of scheduling school fields and park fields, thus scheduling is very time consuming.
- Games often must be scheduled for Sunday afternoon which is not convenient for families.
- Artificial turf school fields are closed to non-school teams until 5:00 pm and game events must be scheduled with schools having first pick.
- King County fields must be rented (Klahanie). School fields must be rented (ISD).
- Competition for time and space all year long with almost every sport, soccer, lacrosse, fall baseball, football, adult league soccer, and tournaments is extremely difficult and tedious.
- The number of regional teams are growing exponentially, placing more demand on our fields.
- Some communities have fewer fields relative to demand than we do and so their residents want access to our fields (Bellevue & Newcastle were cited as examples)
- We can't mix the little kids with the big kids, and boys' teams compete for space with girls' teams.
- The new fields at East Lake High and Skyline High are 92% booked.
- City of Sammamish Historical Use scheduling rights/process is burdensome on new teams.

Community:

- Locating active sports fields in neighborhoods and upgrading school fields is difficult because of neighborhood concerns about noise and lighting.
- We need to have fields located in the communities where the kids live to minimize commuting time and expense for families.
- Sammamish has the highest percentage of people under 18 years old in the State.

General Passive Recreation Concerns

- There are very few natural areas within the City of Sammamish; there is limited accessibility to the natural areas within the City limits and very limited trails availability to equestrian and mountain bike users.
- Mountain biking and equestrian uses require large areas of land and extensive trail systems.
- Development over the past ten years has dramatically reduced the trails available for mountain biking and equestrian use.
- Soaring Eagle is the only recreation areas for equestrians and mountain bikers on the Plateau.
- Natural areas are negatively impacted by noise and light pollution as well as use of automobiles, herbicides and pesticides on neighboring properties.

General Comments about Soaring Eagle Park

- Soaring Eagle is a regional park and serves users from Seattle and neighboring communities as much, or possibly more than Sammamish.
- Soaring Eagle is a good example of a diverse second-generation forest ecosystem and provides great learning opportunities for the community and local schools.
- Parking and restrooms at the Trossachs Blvd entrance would be a welcome improvement.
- The fact that the trails are maintained by King County Parks with the help of volunteers is testament to the regional support and love of this park.
- User groups have developed a culture of tolerance and appreciation for each other and share the trails without issue.
- User groups and Park Ambassador volunteers have self-policed the Park for years.
- There are drainage and water erosion issues on the trails.

Specific Concerns about the proposed Soaring Eagle 30 acre transfer (from active and passive user communities)

- Soaring Eagle is barely big enough now from mountain biking and equestrian perspectives, taking the trails on the 30 acres out will significantly impact the park experience. As population increases the use of these trails for current purposes is going to increase. Reducing total capacity dedicated to this purpose will have an enormous impact in the future as the remaining trails are forced to handle all trail activity.
- Soaring Eagles importance becomes greater as surrounding areas are developed; in 100 years this park will be a distinguishing feature of Sammamish – not many cities have a whole section of open space today.
- Access to the proposed 30 acres is off of Trossachs Blvd and is difficult to get to from Sammamish.
- Soaring Eagle is small from an ecological perspective there are concerns over wildlife displacement into surrounding neighborhoods.
- The 30 acre parcel provides an important trail connection to Beaver Lake, Klahanie and other local trails for commuting and recreation purposes.
- The development envelope of the 30 acres would extend far past the active park boundaries (noise, lights, impact on wildlife).

- Development of a park will bring more traffic into the neighborhood and affect street safety for resident children.
- There are neighborhood concerns about lights and noise.

General Concerns about Recreation in the Area

- Public comments identified additional shortages in tennis and swimming facilities and the need for a community center.
- Public comments noted that there is no off-leash dog park in Sammamish.

City of Sammamish Position

In line with the 2004 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comp Plan, the proposed 30 acres is an ideal proposal: it makes up for the deficit of park land in the City limits, it will not cost the City to acquire, it will potentially provide more sports fields to meet demand and it further develops partnership with King County Parks. The City sees their role in developing the 30 acres as creating a “gateway” into the rest of Soaring Eagle Park so it can be used by more people with diverse interests.

Public Suggestions for Alternatives

Many alternative suggestions were provided by both supporters and those in opposition to the Proposed Ordinance. They are captured here:

- City should partner with developers to build active recreation parks near retail centers on the Sammamish corridor and in new neighborhood developments for field location adjacent to transportation corridors.
- Upgrade and better utilize school fields, use artificial turf to maximize water issues and use innovated lighting that is not obtrusive to neighborhoods.
- Survey existing school fields/land and get more capacity with reconfiguration and additional field installation.
- Develop active/passive area N of 116th in Redmond (Sammamish Valley) NW of 60 Acres.
- Insist that only locally-based teams practice on local fields.
- Install multi-use fields in the new Sammamish Commons to be used for sports and other City and community activities (4th of July).
- Work with churches to locate fields on or near their property to utilize their large parking lots.
- Look into whether Sahalee Club or Plateau Golf Club would be willing to let the City develop active recreation facilities on their acreage for first use scheduling preference.
- Put in 1-2 more fields for the Beaver Lake sports complex at the corner of 244th Avenue SE and SE 24th Street.
- Help fund complete renovation/permanent upgrades to the Lake Sammamish State Park fields, possibly jointly with the City of Issaquah and the City of Bellevue.
- Put in 1-2 more fields down the road from Soaring Eagle at Cascade Ridge Elementary.
- Locate sports fields adjacent to the Cascade Ridge school (where future Trossachs homesites are designated) to share parking, playground facilities.
- Partner with Issaquah School District to develop 1-2 sports fields at Endeavor Elementary School (current field is mud/sand).

- Before potential annexation areas of Aldarra and Montaine are incorporated, require some portion of the 400 acres suitable for development on the properties east of 244th Avenue Northeast or close to the Issaquah-Fall City Road corridor to include an active recreation complex to support those neighborhoods.
- Talk to the Trossachs and Montaine Homeowner associations and look into whether there is place to add:
 - 2-3 fields on SE Duthie Hill Rd & 278th Ave SE
 - 1-2 open playfield at the south end of Montaine at 277th PL SE.

PRKC Analysis and Recommendations

The public is very supportive of open space, regional parks and trail connectivity as demonstrated in the August 2007 public votes supporting King County Propositions 1 & 2 and the overwhelming support of the recent Issaquah Parks levy. While suitable and schedulable active recreation facilities are greatly needed in our communities, it is the opinion of the PRKC Board and leadership that Soaring Eagle Park is not the best location for these facilities for the issues detailed below and supported in our formal review.

Thirty out of 640 acres may seem a trivial amount of land to provide to the City of Sammamish for active recreation but the truth is that development of active recreation facilities will change the nature of the Park. PRKC's primary concern is the setting of precedent and lack of clear County policies and guidelines. It is not a sustainable model to assume that regional County parks and natural areas are an inexpensive alternative for developing active recreation facilities to serve local communities.

The County and City are spending millions of dollars on regional habitat restoration projects, including downstream from Soaring Eagle at Patterson Creek and the Evans Creek Preserve. We need to ask: Why are we giving up irreplaceable habitat when we are already well aware of the costs required to repair the damage done by development? And why would we eliminate habitat in favor of sports fields when the cost in terms of both dollars and environmental impact would be much lower to bring existing fields to a level that would satisfy the needs of the City's residents? On the surface this transfer makes sense – it is thirty acres of “free” land. But it is the opinion of the PRKC Board that the City of Sammamish's gain would be a net loss for regional park users, for the environment and for the health and vitality of the region in the future. The proposed ordinance, in PRKC's opinion, is not wise use of public dollars or natural resource stewardship.

It is PRKC's opinion that the King County Council should not approve Proposed Ordinance 2007-0353 due to the following:

- It sets a precedent for future transfers and/or development of natural lands;
- There is no shortage of playgrounds in the area;
- It does not solve the active recreation field issues for the City of Sammamish;
- It would significantly alter park character and current user experience in the park;
- The ecological impact of development on the surrounding area is not yet understood;
- There has been no provision for gathering and considering regional input on this ordinance;
- It does not make good use of public funding;

- There are potential legal issues with the development.

Regional Park.

Setting of Precedent

Pressure on remaining open space, natural areas, and regional park land is increased dramatically as available land is converted to residential and commercial development. PRKC has concerns that a trend for active recreation development of regional open space/parks could develop. The 30 acre transfer of Soaring Eagle regional park will set a precedent for other incorporated areas to leverage regional parkland as an inexpensive and easy opportunity for development into active recreation.

Recommendation:

- 1) The King County Growth Management and Natural Resources Committee should look at including strong language in the King County Comprehensive Plan Update to secure the future of this and other regional parks and ensure no trend of active recreation development on natural park lands develops. Addressing the larger picture ties in to the global warming crisis and subsequent initiatives – removing forested land should always be a measure of last resort.
- 2) As funding for most of our open space and regional parks was granted with conditions of use and development, it is critical that King County Parks keep restrictions imposed by funders of public land readily on file for perpetuity. Currently King County Parks does not keep budget information for perpetuity.
- 3) The Proposed Ordinance should not be passed without including strong language that this transfer is unique and identify specified reasons why it is unique.

Regional Use

Soaring Eagle is currently used as a regional park. PRKC is deeply concerned that the public meetings that were held were not broadly publicized to allow for regional comment nor was input solicited from the regional community groups that regularly use the park.

There appears to be an assumption in the proposed ordinance that the park is not a popular destination because is not developed. Our review found that many local users enjoy Soaring Eagle Park for its hiking, jogging, and wildlife opportunities but, that the majority of mountain bike users are regional, coming from places such as Bellevue, Seattle, Kent, and even Everett. We found equestrian users are predominately from Sammamish, Fall City, Issaquah, and Maple Valley areas. There is surely some benefit to serving these communities of users to the local economy and this benefit can be further enhanced by increasing park visibility at the state level.

The City of Sammamish has done a fabulous job taking former King County parks and improving them. Pine Lake Park and Beaver Lake Park are excellent examples of park renewal under City leadership. While there is no doubt that the City of Sammamish would do the same at Soaring Eagle, consideration must be given to the fact that they would be turning what is currently a regional park into facilities that are limited to local interests and uses. Mountain bikers, equestrians and hikers from the area including Fall City, Bellevue and Greater Seattle would not have use of those fields. Should the City develop an active recreation park at Soaring

Eagle, Soaring Eagle’s value to regional users would diminish. Mountain bikers and equestrians have made it clear that the park is barely big enough for their activities as it is (less than 1 hour on mountain bike to ride the outer trail).

Recommendation:

- 1) Before any transfer takes place, King County Parks should request feedback from current regional users and organizations that have events in the Park. If public meetings are held, they should be located in Seattle, Bellevue, Redmond and Fall City and at convenient times (such as weekdays 7pm) for regional users to attend.

Community Value

As noted above, many of the users of Soaring Eagle Park are regional users with specialized activities and interests. Mountain biking is continuing to grow in popularity; there have been studies on the equestrian impact on the local rural economy.¹⁷ Since King County Parks has not had money to develop the Park, Soaring Eagle has evolved to serve the uses it is best suited for by the regional community. It occurs to us that the City of Sammamish and the local rural areas are in a position to reap economic rewards from the further development of the park as the premier mountain biking park of the region. Developing such a park at Soaring Eagle would save the County tax payers dollars on developing a new trail system and park as planned less than 2 miles down the road in Duthie Hill Park . Should the County investigate the offer from a neighboring land owner to provide a free public easement for equestrian access to the property, Soaring Eagle will become more of an equestrian destination for Plateau and regional equestrians. PRKC feels there are significant economic incentives to developing this park as a Special-Use trails park.

Public comment from local park users was clear on the need for a formal parking lot and permanent restrooms but no more. It is not clear if, in order for the City to develop the Park in such a minimal manner, City ownership is required.

Recommendation:

- 1) The City of Sammamish should explore the financial opportunity and local economic impact of turning Soaring Eagle into a quick and minimally developed “Special Use” regional trails park focused on serving trail-use activities; develop a plan with affected user groups to assess traffic, parking and other needs.
- 2) King County Parks should review the opportunity presented by a neighboring landowner to provide a permanent public equestrian access easement at no cost to the County.

Ecological Value

There is often a misconception that the value of forest land is measured in its suitability to human recreation and activities. As population density increases and surrounding development intensifies, the pure value of forest open space for cleaning air, absorbing water run-off, for fish and wildlife and for aesthetic value are amplified.

¹⁷ See www.metrokc.gov/exec/bred/business/Projects/Appendix.pdf.

The Sammamish Plateau is developing at an incredibly rapid rate; Soaring Eagle is the last remaining large tract of forest land on the Plateau. The County and the City are spending millions of dollars on downstream Patterson and Evans Creeks. We have concerns that development of upstream Soaring Eagle will compromise, to some degree, the success of those projects.

There are various economic evaluations of ecological services. For forestland some of the most accepted numbers are based on work by American Forests. Earth Economics (http://www.eartheconomics.org/resources/resources_publications.html) did an economic evaluation of King County ecologic services based on cover type last year for King Conservation District. They used American Forest numbers: they assess the ecological services value of forestland per acre per year at from \$16,403 to \$60,454 (depending on many variables). Utilizing a conservative \$37,000 per acre per year loss in ecological services, conversion of 30 acres to developed active park would amount to at least a per year loss of \$1,110,000 in ecological services.

Recommendation:

- 1) Before the transfer is completed, King County must fully understand the value of ecological services the proposed ordinance affects and determine how those services will be replaced.
- 2) The City of Sammamish must include in any development proposal the cost and design of infrastructure to replace those ecological services which can be replaced; those that cannot be replaced should be acknowledged and accounted for.

Active Recreation.

The active use development that the City of Sammamish proposes to build at Soaring Eagle Park includes playgrounds and sports fields in addition to parking and restrooms. The City is eager to provide these services to a section of Sammamish (the neighborhood of Trossachs, and if they are annexed in the future the neighborhoods of Aldarra and Montaine) that is currently somewhat removed from existing City owned playgrounds and sports fields.

Neighborhood Amenities

As noted in our review, there is no shortage of neighborhood playgrounds on the Sammamish Plateau. As developments have been built, so have playgrounds, sometimes within blocks of each other. In the neighborhood bordering the proposed transfer site, Trossachs, there are over 14 small neighborhood playgrounds, two large community playgrounds, and four playfields suitable for youth soccer. Five additional recreation tracts are currently under development. Seven of the playgrounds and two of the playfields are within a 15 minute walk from the actual location of the 30 acres proposed for transfer and development

Fields Shortages

Soaring Eagle provides an attractive opportunity to develop a park for the City of Sammamish. The community is demanding more and better sports fields and it is clear that those in favor of developing a section of the park want to develop primarily for additional fields. It is for this reason that a large portion of PRKC's review focuses on sports field availability and need.

As a result of recent incorporation and land prices, the City is significantly below the per capita national standards for active parks at 5.5 acres per thousand citizens.¹⁸ This calculation, however, does not take into consideration the considerable number of facilities within the city limits that are available to the public in the form of school and neighborhood amenities.

The City of Sammamish Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) recognizes this is an issue for near and long term. Consequently the Plan identifies partnerships with local schools, developers and community participants as essential to addressing the shortfall with partnered development of playgrounds, sports fields and other facilities. In 2004 the City entered into interlocal agreements with the Lake Washington School District and the Issaquah School District for joint-use, development, maintenance and scheduling of school fields. The City should be commended on its serious approach to acquiring park land since 2004 and the partnerships it lead to create the first-class community sports fields at Eastlake High School and Skyline High School.

PRKC reviewed data provided by the Friends of Soaring Eagle Park on observed field use over a two week period at peak times of use (weekdays 5:30pm and Saturdays 10am). The data, including photographs and team usage, did not support the conclusion that there is a field deficit in our area. Indeed the new fields, located a few blocks away from the proposed transfer site at Cascade Ridge Elementary, were not in use, nor was the brand new state-of-the-art facilities 10 minutes away at Pacific Cascade Freshman Campus during the observation period. Across Sammamish, observations of available baseball fields show fields at only 20% capacity, and of soccer fields at only 50-60% capacity. Upon looking deeper, PRKC's Review found that the field shortage is caused by under use of existing fields due to the following reasons:

- 1) Poor field quality including drainage issues and inadequate facilities (lighting, restrooms, etc);
- 2) Scheduling challenges for private/community clubs and teams including challenges with school policy, field availability and ease of scheduling/rescheduling.

Feedback of this Review from larger, longer established leagues was that scheduling is less of an issue than field quantity. Smaller, newer teams felt that scheduling difficulties are responsible for much of the field crisis.

Sammamish is not the only city in our region experiencing difficulty meeting active recreation demand. This shortage of quality schedulable fields is felt all over the region by organized clubs and leagues.

Recommendation:

¹⁸ The national standard for active parks is 10 acres per thousand residents. Calculation provided by Sammamish Parks is 220 acres of developed park land = 5.5 acres per 1,000 (based on a population of 40,000) and does not include school or neighborhood facilities.

- 1) The City of Sammamish should conduct a thorough review of the public suggestions for alternatives described in the PRKC Review.
- 2) The City of Sammamish, because of its interest in this issue, should take a leadership role and spearhead a regional comprehensive plan for active recreation. This could include creation of a task force comprised of representatives from Issaquah School District, Lake Washington School District, the cities of Sammamish, Issaquah, Bellevue and representatives of the clubs, leagues and teams most affected. The goal of such a plan would be to:
 - a. Jointly develop a vision for active recreation in the region;
 - b. Identify short term and long term objectives to meeting demand;
 - c. Figure out the role active sports clubs, leagues and teams can play as a partner in field development, maintenance and scheduling.
 - d. Streamline scheduling for clubs and organizations and develop a centralized scheduling solution that makes the best use of the fields;
 - e. Provide clear scheduling guidance and fair, reliable, predictable rules for scheduling prioritization;
 - f. Ensure the fields available are being used to maximum capacity (for example allow scheduling of school fields before 5:15pm, enforcement of cancellation policy and assurance that available fields due to cancellation are easily and centrally identified);
 - g. Prioritize and coordinate field upgrading to the level that the public demands;
 - h. Update the Interlocal Agreements with the School Districts.
- 3) The City of Sammamish should work out agreements for public schedulable access to existing and planned neighborhood facilities.

Lack of Policy/Vision

King County Parks has no clear policy or vision regarding park development and uses. Funding for King County Parks has been a constant problem and funding priorities and issues have placed parks within incorporated areas into city ownership. Although there has been clear priority on regional trails, it is unclear what the County's goals for its regional parks, particularly in the unincorporated areas, are. There is a significant difference between active and passive recreation uses. Ecologically fields are not much better than parking lots yet there is not clear guidance for decision making regarding potential development of public forested land for active recreation purposes.

Washington State Parks recently underwent a policy review to establish what uses and services should be State provided and which uses and services are local responsibilities. It is our opinion that the County would benefit from a similar exercise.

Recommendations:

- 1) King County Parks must develop a vision for its regional parks to ensure the incredible assets acquired the last two decades are well-understood and well-managed and to ensure a legacy from our generation to the generations of the future.
- 2) King County Parks should immediately develop clear guidelines for the conversion of passive to active recreation and use conversion only as a last resort.

- 3) King County must find ways to ensure the original intent of the purchase of open space remains intact for perpetuity.

Ecological Assessment

Through various programs such as Greenprint mapping and Public Benefit Rating System, King County has recognized the valuable contribution forested lands make to the sustainability of our region. In many cases the value of the ecosystem services (such as purification of air and water, storm water control, generation and renewal of soils, biodiversity, etc.) provided by forest lands far exceeds the value of ecosystem goods such as timber, fish and water. The quality, quantity, reliability, and combination of goods and services provided by the ecosystems within a watershed depend highly on the structure and health of the ecosystems within the watershed.

Healthy intact ecosystems are self-organizing, require no maintenance and do not depreciate in value over time. They can provide valuable ecological goods and services on an ongoing basis “in perpetuity” and without cost to humans, but only if these ecosystems are healthy and intact. A forest provides water control, flood protection, aesthetic and recreational values, slope stability, biodiversity and other services without maintenance costs.

The area proposed for this transfer, the southwest corner of Soaring Eagle, is an important component in a complex wetland structure that includes the natural areas of the Trossachs development, the Beaver Lake area, the Hazel Wolf Wetlands as well as Evans and Patterson Creek. This wetland complex is already stressed due to encroachment of human activity and development. Understanding the implications of developing the wetland area of Soaring Eagle Park must be taken in context of the entire wetland structure and not treated as small isolated class II and III wetlands.

Recommendation:

- 1) King County Parks must provide provisions requiring the study of the proposed development and resulting impact on the surrounding wetland areas and larger ecosystem and wetland complex.

Stewardship

As an organization that promotes stewardship and community engagement, PRKC is impressed with the level of volunteer engagement at Soaring Eagle. Since the year 2000, 967 volunteers have given 5323 hours to develop Soaring Eagle as a trail facility and wildlife preserve. Given that volunteers are typically current users, and the users feel strongly that taking 30 acres out of the park will negatively impact the multi-use trail experience, PRKC is concerned that these volunteers will feel betrayed by any action to turn part of the park into an active recreation area. At this time in our development as a region, we need more than ever to reconnect people to their responsibilities to participate in stewardship of natural and public lands.

Recommendation:

- 1) Before proceeding with the transfer and subsequent development of the 30 acres, King County Parks must engage the agencies and individuals who have supplied volunteer hours and get their opinions.

Other Questions

Annexation of the 30 Acres

Soaring Eagle is not within the Urban Growth Area (UGA) for King County and therefore cannot be annexed into the City until such time as it is included within the UGA.¹⁹ To revise the UGA boundary is a County-driven action and must be based on a land capacity analysis and buildable lands report which demonstrates that the extra land is needed to accommodate growth. Growth has usually been deemed land for residential/commercial development and not simply land for general purpose. If the County moved the UGA line out to allow for annexation, a potential challenge could be raised to justify this action. It is unclear to PRKC whether Policy U-104 was specifically drafted to facilitate the transfer of Soaring Eagle as it addresses park land and a maximum of 30 acres. If the site was included in a package annexation, (i.e. with Aldarra Estates), annexation would require resident approval. But, before annexation occurs, the site must be included within the UGA.

Recommendation:

- 1) Before proceeding with the proposed ordinance, the King County Council must determine its policy for giving unincorporated parks and open areas to local cities; this policy must not be created in a vacuum around a single issue because it, if not done well, will be manipulated and interpreted in extreme and unforeseeable ways under future development pressure
- 2) The King County Council must put protections in place to ensure that any action it takes with regard to Soaring Eagle and the precedent it sets do not provide opportunities to expand the Urban Growth Area boundary into the Snoqualmie Valley (for flood control), northwest unincorporated Issaquah (aquifer recharge) and west Fall City (fish and wildlife corridor) at some future date.

Development of the Site

Soaring Eagle is encumbered by a Conservation Easement. The conservation easement requires not less than 330 acres of the most environmentally sensitive lands within Soaring Eagle's boundary be limited in the types of development that can occur. Development must be limited to low-impact uses for the benefit of wildlife. There is ambiguity as to whether the intent of the 330 acre conservation restriction was "any acreage within the park" or the "specific acreage denoted by the Conservation Zone." The matter of a floating easement would be a matter for a Court to resolve if opponents of the development of the park sought to challenge the action.

Conclusion

PRKC would like to thank you for your time reviewing this document and considering this important issue. Questions addressed to info@prkc.org will be directed to the appropriate person.

¹⁹ See RCW 35.13.005/RCW 35A.14.005 – “No city or town located in a county in which urban growth areas have been designated under RCW 36.70A.110 may annex territory beyond an urban growth area.”

Appendix I: Soaring Eagle Area Map

Appendix II: Soaring Eagle Trail and Topo Map

Appendix III: Map of Existing Sports Fields

Appendix IV: Lake Washington School District and City of Sammamish Joint Use Agreement for Development, Maintenance, Scheduling and Operations of Recreation Facilities

Appendix V: City of Sammamish and Issaquah School District Interlocal Agreement Regarding Joint Use, development and Maintenance of City and District Properties