

THE FUTURE OF JACKSONVILLE'S FOREST PARK & WATERSHED

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

BACKGROUND

Today the Jacksonville Watershed/Forest Park's 1800 acres once again stands at a crossroads, the future of which will hopefully soon be determined and the results could greatly affect our City in the future. After studies by a Citizens Advisory Committee and an AD Hoc Forest Park Committee, the ADHOC created a detailed action plan and with approval of the City Council and the Jacksonville citizens, a decision was made to Retain, Manage and Maintain the Forest Park. In March 2009, a Jackson County land use change and related recreational elements were approved for a city park development on 1,677 acres of the total City owned 1,800 acres. The current challenge the City faces is "What is the best use of the approximately 800 acres in the northern half of the Forest Park, a large part of which is in the county approved Forest Park use permitted area"? This area is being scrutinized by-various interest groups, who have strong feelings on how the future of the Watershed/Forest Park's use should be defined. Ultimately, the Jacksonville City Council in concert with the citizens will make the decision on which course of action is best for the City. The City of Jacksonville and its residents are the owners of the land and will be the most impacted by decisions, financially, culturally, and/or practically, as the historic character of the City could change. To a lesser degree, residents and land owners in the near vicinity will also be affected by the consequences of a wise or unwise decision by the City. Importantly, the decisions could have long term effects on the recreational opportunities the Forest Park offers to all of Southern Oregon.

Facts and Major Issues for Consideration:

1. Funding for the Dam and Reservoir - The Dam and reservoir have significant problems and pending detailed engineering, study and review to meet the requirements of the State, the City has to examine its financial needs.
2. Non-motorized public park - As part of the City's Parks system, the Forest Park in the lower 880 acres has been established as a non-motorized public park.
3. Scenic, Natural Beauty, Streams and Forest -The Watershed/Forest Park contains some of the most striking open and scenic land in Southern Oregon and includes the major drainage for Jackson Creek which runs through Jacksonville. Also, large areas have major stands of timber, with mixed hardwood stands, and a 100-year old historic railroad bed is being rehabilitated as a major link in an emerging trail system. The pristine area should be protected from adverse and damaging activities.

4. MRA Staging Area Property - The Motorcycle Riders Association (MRA) owns a 40-acre parking lot property in the heart of the Forest Park. This provides ATV riders the ability to go through the park with motorized recreation, impacting the desired non-motorized use of the Park. The MRA also owns and maintains a 184-acre staging area on the northern area border of Jacksonville's Watershed. The MRA has long wanted to acquire some of the northern part of the Jacksonville Watershed in order to own trails that access public lands, such as BLM and other private property owners.

PROPOSAL GOALS

1. Resolve a land ownership issue of having a 40-acre parcel owned by the MRA located in the central lower portion of the Forest Park.
2. Protect the Forest Park with a conservation easement that allows recreation uses that are sustainably designed to protect the pristine areas in the park.
3. Assist in establishing programs to provide funds for the City to repair or decommission the dam and reservoir.
4. In accordance with the Comprehensive Plan, create a volunteer organization to assist the City manage and maintain the Forest Park. Assist in raising funds and providing a volunteer work force to build and maintain the park.
5. Consolidate the MRA owned land in the northern area of the watershed to separate OHV recreation from the non-motorized uses in the Forest Park.
6. In addition to the land swap of City and MRA, maximize the amount of funds from the sale of the 280 acres.
7. Reserve a large parcel of the Watershed to be available for sale by the city in the future to meet unexpected and urgent financial needs.
8. Protect the entire watershed of Jackson, Norling, and Cantrall Creeks from degradation of the land to insure control of erosion and provide clean water in the streams.
9. Initiate Conservation Easements consistent with the planned uses of the respective portions of the City's property.
10. Establish road and trail easements that provide beneficial access to and through respective areas

The following proposal offers a solution that provides for a compromise position and proposal that brings together and satisfies the objectives of all interested parties.

PROPOSAL

1. The City of Jacksonville will trade 280 acres of city land located in the Northwest section of the watershed to the MRA for the 40-acre MRA parcel located by the reservoir. In addition, a sum of money will be provided from the MRA. The exact amount to be negotiated between the two parties. Ownership of timber in the Northwest section would transfer to the new owners. Funds from the timber will be included in the negotiation process.
2. After the combined land swap/sale is complete, a conservation easement will be placed on the lower 1,080 acres of the Watershed, which would include the present 880-acre recreation area of the 1,800-acre Forest Park. This easement would protect and conserve the natural values of the land while providing sustainable recreation uses under the current recreation plan of the Forest Park which is part of the city park system.
3. The remaining approximately 480 acres in the middle and northeast section of the watershed should be retained by the city with sufficient deed restrictions and easements (Conservation and Access) to assure future uses are compatible with the values of the Forest Park and the historic town of Jacksonville.
4. A Stewardship Management Plan to create a late succession forest including erosion control and reduction, to be written and ratified by the city for the 280 acres being acquired by the MRA.
5. Exchange of mutually agreeable trail and road easements that provide OHV travel on sustainable and maintained trails, and vehicular use only on roads, and which will provide access to city and MRA owned lands that are otherwise inaccessible to the respective owners. OHV easements to be on the fringes of the Forest Park and result in a minimal impact on the Park.
6. The City shall encourage the establishment of a non-profit organization dedicated to assist the city in managing the Forest Park and raising funds for the Forest Park. A method of providing annual funds other than city finances for maintenance, enforcement, and development of Park projects will be critical to the success of the Forest Park. The Jacksonville Woodlands Association (JWA) has agreed in principal to bring the Forest Park under its purpose and mission on an interim basis and potentially as a permanent non-profit advocacy group for the Forest Park. Therefore a Forest Park Volunteers Committee organized under the JWA Board of

Directors will be established to coordinate Forest Park projects and programs with the City.

PROPOSED BY:

Watershed Stakeholders Group