

## **DESCHUTES COUNTY COMMITTEE ON RECREATION ASSETS**

### **June, 2008**

In October, 2007, Senator Ron Wyden convened Deschutes County's first ever recreation roundtable discussion. The meeting included a variety of active outdoor recreation leaders and enthusiasts, economic development leaders, and representatives from each Deschutes County community.

In November, Senator Wyden appointed the Deschutes County Ad Hoc Committee on Recreation Assets, co-chaired by longtime Bend La Pine School District official Peter Miller and Deschutes County Commissioner Tammy Melton.

### **BACKGROUND**

In appointing the Ad Hoc Committee, Senator Wyden identified the following three goals as reasons this effort is important to Deschutes County:

- **Economic Development.** At the roundtable discussion, Economic Development for Central Oregon Executive Director Roger Lee explained that our quality of life and extraordinary diversity of recreation opportunities most differentiates Deschutes County in the competition for new business relocations to the area. Brooks Resources CEO Mike Hollern noted the application of the 'creative class' thesis by Richard Florida, that the communities who work at creating diverse, active communities are best positioned to compete in today's economy.
- **Quality of Life.** Recreation opportunities not only attract businesses and new residents – they also sustain the quality of life for current residents. In the process, they help define the character of communities in the region.
- **Health and Wellness.** Improving the wellness and physical fitness of our citizens is a goal of modern health care, and a priority in his proposal to reform our health care system. Senator Wyden views Deschutes County as a potential testing ground for emphasizing healthy, fitness-promoting activities in the management of federal lands.

To achieve these goals, the Ad Hoc Committee identified several projects and the following over-arching principles:

- **Restore healthy forests in the high use recreation country bounded by the Deschutes River, Elk Lake, and the proposed Skyline Forest.** Forest health, and the likelihood of catastrophic fire, presents an urgent threat to the Cascade foothills/Mt. Bachelor landscape; this threat can only be addressed through a federal land management initiative.

- **Promote accessible, dispersed recreation to diverse activities and skill levels.** Where possible, the committee recommends that projects serve multiple activities and diverse ability levels. For example, a multi-modal trail linking Highway 126 to Smith Rock should serve cyclists, in-line skaters, joggers, walkers; new ski trails should emphasize beginner gradients; etc. Efforts to improve mountain bike opportunities should also seek to improve equestrian routes and opportunities.
- **Promote connectivity between the towns.** The development of river, road, trail, equestrian and multi-use paved pathways would provide recreation opportunities while strengthening the bonds between communities in the county.
- **Leverage project investment with user group contributions.** The partnership between the Forest Service and the Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA) illustrates how federal land management agencies and recreation user groups can collaborate to develop new trail opportunities in the area, thereby leveraging federal funding.
- **Green Print Plan Synergy and Coordination**  
The Trust for Public Land along with other project partners is conducting a Deschutes County “Green Print Plan”. The Green Print Plan will identify natural and recreation resources as well as green space *opportunities* within Deschutes County. The Recreation Assets Plan will identify specific areas for needed recreation facility *improvements*. The need for these planning projects was initially identified in the City of Bend 2030 Vision process. Both projects are significant for the citizens and visitors to Deschutes County and will lead to important community decisions affecting the future quality of life, health and wellness and economic development within Deschutes County. Each project will work with community members, decision makers and stakeholders to identify resource and recreation assets and opportunities. The two projects, while being carried out separately, will be coordinated and will share information, community input and creative energy.

Bend, Deschutes County and Central Oregon have received numerous outdoor recreation-related accolades, including:

- *Outside* magazine named Bend the Best Town in the Northwest for overall livability.
- *Mountain Bike* magazine labeled Bend the new mountain bike paradise.
- *American Cowboy* magazine includes Bend in its Top Twenty Places to live in the West.

The region should build on its strengths in order to continue attracting “amenity migrants” while providing sufficient opportunities for a growing population.

The Ad Hoc Committee has generated a targeted agenda of projects and efforts that will enhance the county's recreation assets in concert with the goals expressed above. The first section lists Phase I projects, the second section Phase II projects.

## PHASE I PROJECTS

The following Phase I projects reflect the strongest combination of community priority and practical feasibility.

- **Create a multi modal recreation trail along the North Unit Irrigation Canal from Highway 126 to Smith Rock.** The committee proposes that this project be the starting point for a multi-use recreation trail along the North Unit Canal from Bend to Smith Rock. The trail would be established with a dirt surface, with the longer term goal of establishing a paved route. In concept, initial development of a mountain bike and walking/jogging trail could later be upgraded to a paved recreation trail. The Smith Rock segment could be accompanied by the designation of back roads, creating a relatively short cycling loop from Redmond to Smith Rock. Where the canal crosses private lands, the project would require private landowner permission.
- **Develop new mountain bike routes connecting the Phil's network, Skyliners, and Shevlin Park.** This will enhance the existing trail system and sustain the economic, tourism, health, and social benefits mountain biking provides to the region. The committee notes the importance of considering new equestrian routes as part of this effort.
- **Develop a Community Ski Trail.** With the uncertainties of climate change, the variability of any given winter, and the near-perfect terrain opportunity, the committee recommends investigation of a community ski trail connecting the Dutchman Flat/Mt. Bachelor area with the Virginia Meissner Sno-park. Such a trail should be groomed and suitable for beginner skiers. It should facilitate access for diverse snow users, from snowshoers to skiers seeking ungroomed and groomed trails. A complementary goal is the establishment of a shuttle along Century Drive or the expansion of Mt. Bachelor's shuttle to include stops at Virginia Meissner, Wanoga, Swampy, Vista Butte, and Dutchman Flat Sno-parks.
- **Expand the Deschutes River Trail, both land and water-based.** The Bend Metro Parks and Recreation District seeks to develop an uninterrupted land-based trail from Meadow Camp to Tumalo State Park, as is described in the 2002 Deschutes River Trail Action Plan, with connections upstream on existing Forest Service trails to Sunriver. The DRTAP also includes a trail connection from Shevlin Park downstream along Tumalo Creek to its confluence with the Deschutes River and to Tumalo State Park. An additional link from the state park to the unincorporated town of Tumalo could easily be made as well. In addition, the Bend Paddle Trail Alliance seeks to establish the Deschutes Paddle Trail from the high lakes through La Pine, Sunriver, Bend, Redmond and beyond. The

BPTA project work plan includes the development of brochures, signage, and additional put-in and take-out facilities.

- **Resurface Skyliners Road and include a bike lane.** This road is heavily used by cyclists, roller skiers, and mountain bikers accessing the Phil's Trail network. This project involves widening and re-surfacing the road.

## PHASE II PROJECTS

Phase II projects reflect activities that complement and may occur simultaneously with the Phase I projects, as well as those that may be more long-term. They are arranged by theme.

### **Theme 1. Establish Deschutes County as a premier destination for road cycling and mountain biking.**

Relatively minor projects and efforts could dramatically increase the region's attractiveness for recreational cycling, increasing tourism and attracting greater participation by county residents. A concerted effort could enhance the connectivity between the triangle communities of Bend, Sisters, and Redmond, as well as tie in the Sunriver and La Pine south county areas. Connectivity currently is limited by the lack of back road alternatives to Highway 97 or Highway 20.

The following actions will contribute to achievement of this target:

- **Provide a paved route along the 41 Road between Bend and Sunriver.** Linking these two communities with a relatively flat, low traffic alternative to Highway 97, enhancing cycling and recreation opportunities for local residents and visitors. An initiative should also consider improving equestrian routes in this area.
- **Provide a paved route from Bend to Sisters.** This action was identified as a high priority by the regional cycling community and by the City of Sisters. There are several options for accomplishing this, from paving short stretches of existing roads to creating a bike path.
- **Identify key roadways that provide great cycling between Bend, Sisters, and Redmond.** This action will lead to two outcomes. First, the committee recommends that the county and communities seek a State Scenic Bikeway designation from the Oregon Park and Recreation Department, and seek grant funding for signage, bike lane paving and striping. Second, that the identified roadways receive unique consideration when repaving or other roadwork is considered, with the goal of adding road width and using smaller aggregate, creating a smoother, more cycling-friendly pavement.

- **Develop a new mountain bike trail connecting the Peterson Ridge network and Three Creeks Lake.** The Metolius Windigo Trail is too steep and subject to increasing conflicts between mountain bikers and equestrians. A new route would gain altitude gradually and follow a separate route from equestrians, thereby creating a significant riding opportunity for Sisters residents and providing signature mountain bike and equestrian opportunities for visitors.
- **Expand existing trail systems at Gray Butte and Horse Ridge, and create new parking at the latter.** The priority is to create additional, user-specific trails for equestrian, running and hiking, and mountain biking in the isolated mountain areas of east Deschutes County.
- **Develop Sisters as a bike tourism gateway to Central Oregon.** With installation of a few stretches of pavement, the Sisters community could become the gateway to Deschutes County communities for cycling and bike tourism. The following projects were specifically identified:
  - **Green Ridge to Camp Sherman.** A current cycling route involves riding back roads to the Indian Ford intersection of Highway 20, then up the Green Ridge Road (FS 11 Road). There are approximately 3 miles of dirt road between FS 11 and the Camp Sherman Road (FS 14). Pavement of this segment would enable a back road route between Sisters and Camp Sherman.
  - **Camp Sherman Loop.** Pave FS road 1270 to enable a paved loop around the Metolius River between House on the Metolius and Lower Bridge.
- **Improve cyclist safety at key Central Oregon highway intersections.** The committee identified Highway 97 at Terrebonne and Highway 20 at O.B. Riley Road in Tumalo as intersections that receive regular cycling use and that are excessively dangerous.

**Theme 2. Ensure that the Century Drive corridor provides accessible, diverse recreation opportunities to our residents and remains the major attraction of our winter tourism industry.**

Representatives from each community, and representatives of the cross country ski and snowmobile communities, all identified the easy winter access to Century Drive recreation areas, and the diversity of experiences available, as a key priority for the management of the region.

The committee makes the following recommendations:

- **Mount Bachelor.** Mount Bachelor ski area is the economic mainstay of winter recreation and tourism in Deschutes County. Units of government should seek opportunities to partner with Mt. Bachelor and Powdr Corporation to improve

public access, expand summer business and/or other opportunities, and solve challenges identified by the Powdr organization.

- **Expansion of the parking lot at the Virginia Meissner Sno-park.** Virginia Meissner provides accessible, quality cross country skiing just 15 minutes from Bend. It is used by the high school cross country ski teams and by people who have limited time to engage in outdoor recreation. The parking lot should be built to an appropriate scale such that the availability of parking is not a limiting factor to the ability to go skiing. Additional trails should be designed that both disperse skiers and improve access to beginner skier gradients.
- **Kapka Butte:** The committee discussed, and did not agree to, a recommendation concerning the proposed Kapka Butte parking lot serving the snowmobile community. The committee acknowledges that the constraint of snowmobile parking facilities has unintended consequences and has failed to resolve conflict between user groups. Consequently, the committee would suggest that the Forest Service explore other tools or approaches to resolve the conflicts in the most direct manner possible. The committee recommends the possible designation of routes as snowmobile in winter, and equestrian in summer.
- **Establish a sustainable, quality ski and snowmobile trail grooming program.** The committee supports opportunities to enhance coordination between the grooming efforts of the Moon Country Snowmobile Club, Mt. Bachelor, Tumalo Langlauf Club, and the new dog-friendly ski trail. This coordination could include a recreation web site that provides grooming reports, maps, and descriptions of groomed and ungroomed ski trails, snowmobile trails, and snowshoe trails. It could also identify mountain bike and equestrian routes.
- **Develop a cross country ski trail network between Edison Sno-park and the intersection of the 45 and 40 Roads.** This area is relatively low elevation, but in many years the snowfall is sufficient to warrant a 10 – 15 km trail network given the proximity of the area to Sunriver. The network could be designed in the broad, flat country at the base of the climb to Mt. Bachelor, enabling novice-suitable skiing. The area has many logging roads, which could be worked into an attractive trail network.
- **Create a dedicated dog friendly ski/snowshoe area.** The trial dog friendly ski/snowshoe area at Wanoga demonstrated the value of providing opportunities for groomed Nordic skiing with dogs. Such areas exist in other states, but this is the sole area in Oregon, and it attracted both local and non-local users. The Forest Service is working to identify a permanent location for this use, and the committee endorses the creation of a dedicated area for this purpose.
- **Century Drive:** The committee recommends that local governments consider adopting a policy to influence Federal decision making regarding Century Drive recreation sites. Such a policy would attempt to establish the following:

- The most important value of these recreation areas is the provision of accessible and high quality recreation opportunities. Anyone can leave Bend or Sunriver and be at sledding, snowshoeing, skiing, or snowmobiling areas within 20 minutes.
- Easy access means that residents and visitors are more likely to take up winter pastimes that promote physical and mental health.
- The division of terrain by Century Drive provides good segregation of potentially conflicting uses. For example, skiers and snowshoers at the Swampy and Meissner trail networks are unlikely to encounter snowmobilers; backcountry skiers can use different trails from those preferring groomed trails.

**Theme 3. Develop the Deschutes River to provide a wide diversity of safe floating experiences, from the high lakes, through La Pine and Bend, and on to the confluence with the Crooked River**

Expansion of the River Trail through Bend was noted as a Phase I project. The committee makes the following additional recommendations:

- **Implement other components of the Bend Paddle Trail Alliance plan.** Secure additional put-in and take-out facilities at the lakes and along the river and provide brochures and signage about how to best enjoy the variety of paddling opportunities in the basin.
- **River Access near La Pine.** Create a riverside park near La Pine for public enjoyment and increased access to the river between Wickiup Reservoir and Sunriver.
- **State Water Trail Designation.** Deschutes County should request that the Oregon Park and Recreation Department designate the Deschutes a State Water Trail. Such a designation could generate funding opportunities for facilities and add to the statewide status of the river.

**Respectfully submitted,  
THE DESCHUTES COUNTY COMMITTEE ON RECREATION ASSETS**

Tammy Melton  
Peter Miller  
Jade Mayer  
Matt Janney  
Ruth Williamson  
Dennis Oliphant  
Kreg Lindberg  
Bob Woodward  
Brad Chalfant