CITY OF LAKE OSWEGO

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# COUNCIL REPORT

**TO:** Jack Hoffman, Mayor
Members of the City Council
Alex D. McIntyre, City Manager

**FROM:** Kim Gilmer, Parks & Recreation Director

**SUBJECT:** Park Property Natural Area Management & Maintenance

**DATE:** November 8, 2010

## ACTION

The City Council requested information regarding the logistics and costs of improving maintenance of park natural areas. Staff will present this information at the November 16, 2010 study session. Dean Apostle, from MIG, Inc., who will also present preliminary information gathered for the natural area baseline analysis, which is a component of the Parks, Recreation, & Natural Area System Plan.

## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

In June 2010, the City Council received information and recommendations from the Second Look Task Force regarding the City's Sensitive Lands Code. One outcome of this lengthy review was a recommendation that the City improve maintenance of publically held natural areas. As a result, the City Council asked staff to provide an overview of current maintenance related to park natural areas, and possible options and costs for improving maintenance of these natural area properties.

## DISCUSSION

The following is background information for the November 16 study session. Additional information and clarification will be presented at the study session.

### Current Park Management & Maintenance

The Parks & Recreation Department manages a total of 601 acres of developed, undeveloped, natural area park property. Approximately 375-400 acres are natural areas. The park system includes large and small designated natural areas such as Springbrook Park, Ellen R. Bergis Natural Area, and Campbell Native Garden. It also includes a large number of "hybrid" park sites where natural areas are incorporated into a developed park such as in George Rogers or East Waluga Park.

Staffing consists of 1.5 FTE regular staff and .8 FTE seasonal staff dedicated to maintaining natural areas and open spaces. The tasks performed are shown in the chart below. Very little time is available for large invasive plant removal efforts. As a result, staff focuses on identifying and removing new invasive plant species (i.e. high priority species include Mustard Garlic, Field Bindweed, Japanese Knotweed, Thistle, Kudzu, and other new types of invasive plants). Parks Maintenance has a "no tolerance" policy for these species. According to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, prevention and treatment of new noxious weed introductions is the most successful, cost effective, and least environmentally damaging means of control. After initial introduction of a new invasive plant, there is a short period of opportunity for eradication and containment. Once permanently established, a new invader becomes a long-term management problem.

| **CURRENT MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES** | |
|---|---|
| **1.0 FTE** | ✓ Garbage & debris pick up<br>✓ Illegal dumping<br>✓ Trail and trailhead repair & maintenance<br>✓ Vandalism & Encampment removal/monitoring<br>✓ Signage, kiosk, bench repair<br>✓ Hazard tree removal<br>✓ Blackberry mowing<br>✓ Monitor & remove "high priority" invasive species |
| **0.5 FTE** | ✓ Supervise natural area maintenance activities<br>✓ Main public contact for natural area issues<br>✓ Hazard tree inspection & removal<br>✓ Coordinate work & contracts<br>✓ Friends Group contact person<br>**Note: this person serves as arborist for Parks & Rec sites well as street tree inspections* |
| **0.8 FTE (seasonal)** | ✓ Mow open spaces<br>✓ "High priority" invasive plant removal |

<u>Comparison with Other Agencies</u>

Below is a comparison of natural area staffing levels and budgets for various agencies in Oregon. It is difficult to compare on equal terms because each agency may provide a higher or lower level of maintenance per acre at different sites, and performs different tasks.

| **Parks & Rec Agencies** | **# NA Acres** | **Regular Staff (FTE)** | **Seasonal Staff (FTE)** | **Acre per 1 FTE** | **Natural Area Budget** | **Budget per Acre** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| City of Lake Oswego | 400 | 1.5 | .8 | 174 | $207,000* | $ 518/A |
| City of Eugene | 1,997 | 15 | 3 | 111 | $2,300,00 | $1,152/A |
| City of Portland* | 8,000 | 19 | 6 | 320 | $2,845,000 | $ 355/A |
| Tualatin Hills Parks & Rec District | 1,300 | 6 | 2.55 | 152 | $675,000 | $519/A |

**$65,000 annually is for hazard tree removal*

In addition, there are a number of typical natural area practices the Parks & Recreation Department is unable to perform due to lack of resources. These include management planning for the City's natural areas; grant writing for funding for restoration, wetland improvements, etc.; on-going monitoring of habitat improvement and restoration efforts; active coordination of volunteers and Friends Groups for habitat improvement; nor environmental education and outreach due to limited resources.

Past Management & Maintenance Accomplishments

Attached is a spreadsheet illustrating a variety of natural area activities occurring between 1995 and 2009 in the City's park system (Exhibit A). Below is a summary of these activities.

| SUMMARY OF PAST NATURAL AREA ACCOMPLISHMENT | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1995-2005** | **1995-2003** | **2004-2007** | **2008-2009** | **2010** |
| # Acres Purchased *(for habitat protection)* | 189 acres *$16,959,424* | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Americorps: Volunteer Work Parties | NA | 0 | 116 | 11 | 0 |
| Acres of Invasive Plants Removed | NA | 0 Volunteer<br>0 Contract | 32 Volunteer<br>30 Contract | 6 Volunteer<br>34 Contract | 0.5 Volunteer<br>0 Contracted |
| Acres of Habitat Replanted | NA | 0 Volunteer<br>0 Contract | 1 Volunteer<br>11 Contract | 0.25 Volunteer<br>18 Contract | 0 Volunteer<br>0 Contract |
| Acres of Wetlands Created/Restored | NA | 2 | 2.6 | 0 | 0 |

What is important to note is that in 2004 the City was awarded a federal grant through the Americorps program dedicated to natural areas. This allowed the Parks & Recreation Department to hire a .9 FTE temporary position to perform the following functions:

- Volunteer and Friends Group coordination for invasive plant species removal.
- Habitat monitoring for invasive plant species.
- Management plan development at Cooks Butte and Springbrook Park.
- Native plantings (restoration projects)
- Education and outreach (developed and managed a natural area webpage advertising work parties, providing educational info on invasive species, etc.; produced flyers/posters/handouts regarding environmental topics, conducted presentations).

This position worked in tandem with Parks Maintenance to collaborate restoration efforts and monitoring in areas of highest need, and to organize supplies and debris removal for volunteer activities. The Parks & Recreation Department was awarded a grant for an Americorps Member each year from 2004 through 2008. In 2009, the City was informed that the Americorps program was no longer offering the program due to funding reductions. As a result, the work done by the position has ceased.

Existing Condition Analysis

In August 2010, MIG, Inc. was hired to develop a Parks, Recreation, & Natural Area System Plan, which will become the 10-15 year vision for managing, maintaining, and developing the City's park system. One component of this project includes an existing conditions analysis for natural areas. The purpose of the analysis is to inventory all park natural areas and identify habitat types, ecosystem health and condition,

invasive plant species types, management issues, and suggested next steps. All park natural areas are to be inventoried, including natural area parks such as Springbrook Park, and natural areas in "hybrid" parks such as George Rogers or East Waluga Park.

The existing conditions analysis is approximately 70% complete. Luscher Farm, the Golf Course, and miscellaneous small sites have not yet been inventoried. The general ecosystem health for inventoried properties to date is listed below.

| Ecosystem Health Rating | % of Total Properties Inventoried |
|---|---|
| Good | 26% |
| Fair | 27% |
| Poor | 47% |

Good = 1/3 or less of the understory is covered by invasive species
Fair = 1/3 to 2/3 of the understory is covered by invasive species
Poor = More than 2/3 of the understory is covered by invasive species

These preliminary findings do have a bearing on the approach the City chooses to use in managing and maintaining its park natural areas. For example, the Portland Park &Recreation uses ecosystem health and natural resource function to determine its protection, enhancement, and restoration priorities and management actions. This provides the agency with management priorities for allocating limited resources, both staff and funding. Attached is an excerpt from the City of Portland's Natural Area Restoration Plan, 2010 and includes their management priority matrix, management strategies, and example of goals for specific natural areas (Exhibit B). You will note that Portland uses a water shed approach by prioritizing management and maintenance efforts on activities that improve water quality, riparian areas, and fish habitat, amongst other priorities. This information could be used as a model by Lake Oswego in establishing strategies, goals, and priorities for its natural areas.

At the November 16 study session, Mr. Apostle will provide a review of the existing conditions analysis, an overview of best practices for managing and maintaining natural areas, and possible options the City may consider. This information is intended to provide the City Council with a base of information for making future funding decisions for natural areas.

<u>Restoration Costs Per Acre</u>

The Parks & Recreation Department does, as funding allows, hire contracted labor from the City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services revegetation team (BES) for habitat restoration. The BES crew focuses primarily on properties that have the greatest value to improving water shed quality. As a result, most of the Lake Oswego restoration projects have occurred in parks along the Willamette River since 2004 (Tryon Cove, Foothills, Roehr, and George Rogers Parks). The crews remove invasive species and replant with native plants over a period of 3-5 years. These efforts require a long term commitment of funding to be successful as well as proper oversight, which has not always been the case. The approximate cost is $12,000 per acre over a five year period. That figure could be less if the property is not too degraded, or could be much more if severely degraded. In addition, this cost does not include costs for restoring wetlands or stream corridors. It is focused solely on invasive plant removal and replanting.

Based upon MIG, Inc.'s initial ecosystem health ratings, we could roughly estimate the total cost of improving the health of the City's park natural areas to a rating of "good" to be in the range of $3,600,000 over and above on-going natural area maintenance costs. This assumes contractors will do all of the labor, and does not include funding for staff oversight, contract management, or the on-going annual costs of maintaining all acres in a "good" condition from year to year. Nor does it take into account monitoring efforts following restoration to ensure the properties aren't re-infested with weeds and invasive species.

Attached is an example of how Portland Parks & Recreation estimates costs for improving property, and then maintaining it in a healthy state from year to year (Exhibit C). This model is useful in analyzing site specific costs since each site will present different management and maintenance challenges. The example was developed in 2006 and assumptions and costs most likely have been updated since that time. However, it does illustrate a methodical approach for estimating costs. Lake Oswego will need to move towards this approach to gain a better understanding of the long term costs involved in improving natural area health.

**ALTERNATIVES & FISCAL IMPACT**

It is clear that Lake Oswego will need to establish realistic goals for improving its natural areas, and make a long term commitment in staffing and funding to achieve those goals. Appropriating funds for a short period of time will not succeed in long term stability of the ecosystem, and will most likely be a waste of dollars in the long run.

In general there are three possible approaches to improving natural areas.

> Option 1 – Hire 1 FTE and provide funding for management, monitoring, contracted labor, volunteer coordination, and grant writing/grant project management.
>
> Option 2 – Enter into a memorandum of understanding with another agency that already has a natural area program to manage the City's natural areas.
>
> Option 3 – Hire contracted labor to perform site specific restoration.

Each of these options has its pros and cons. These will be discussed in more detail at the study session.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The November 16 study session will provide general information on options the City may consider, rather than specific options and costs. Staff would like to recommend the following information be presented to the City Council after the first of the year following completion of the existing conditions analysis.

- Strategies & Goals for restoring park natural areas, based upon a watershed approach.
- Prioritization matrix for determining management and restoration priorities
- Options for implementation, including costs, for managing, restoring, and maintaining natural areas based upon management priorities.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Exhibit A – Natural Area History of Activity
2. Exhibit B – Excerpt from Portland Parks & Recreation Natural Area Restoration Plan, 2010
3. Exhibit C – Portland Park & Recreation Cost Estimating Spreadsheet

Reviewed by:

Kim L. Gilmer

Department Director

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Finance Director

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City Attorney

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Alex D. McIntyre
City Manager