BEFORE THE METRO COUNCIL

FOR THE PURPOSE OF COUNCIL APPROVING THE NORTH TUALATIN MOUNTAINS ACCESS MASTER PLAN	)))))))	RESOLUTION NO. 16-4679 INTRODUCED BY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, MARTHA BENNETT, IN CONCURRENCE WITH COUNCIL PRESIDENT TOM HUGHES

WHEREAS, in May 1995, area voters approved ballot Measure 26-26, authorizing Metro to issue $135.6 million for bonds for Open Spaces, Parks, and Streams to purchase land in regional target areas; and

WHEREAS, in November 2006, area voters approved Metro's Natural Areas Bond Measure, authorizing Metro to issue $227.4 million for bonds to purchase land in regional target areas; and

WHEREAS, using bond measure funds, Metro acquired approximately 1,300 acres of natural area in the North Tualatin Mountains, including upland forests and streams that wildlife depend on; and

WHEREAS, in May 2013, area voters approved a five-year local option levy for the purpose of preserving water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and maintaining Metro's parks and natural areas for the public; and

WHEREAS, as part of implementing the operating levy, Metro Parks and Nature's five-year work plan includes projects for natural area restoration and maintenance, improvements for visitors, park maintenance, volunteer programs, conservation education and community grants; and

WHEREAS, North Tualatin Mountains was identified as one of the 2013 levy access improvement projects in the five-year work plan; and

WHEREAS, a stakeholder advisory committee was created and included staff from the Metro Parks and Nature team, staff and citizens from the Forest Park Conservancy, Forest Park Neighborhood Association, Trackers Earth, Northwest Trails Alliance, Oregon Department of Forestry, Portland Community College, Portland Parks & Recreation, Skyline Ridge Neighbors, Skyline School, Oregon Recreation Trails Advisory Committee and West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District; and

WHEREAS, in order to identify desired and appropriate visitor improvements, Metro and its partners conducted extensive stakeholder interviews and public outreach, including open houses; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, the North Tualatin Mountains Access Master Plan was developed by and with the oversight, input and review of the Metro Parks and Nature team, project stakeholders, members of the community; and

WHEREAS, the North Tualatin Mountains Access Master Plan recommends continuing to protect water quality and preserve core habitat areas, including upland forests and streams that wildlife depend on while providing safe access for visitors to experience the North Tualatin Mountains; and

WHEREAS, the Metro Council's approval of the North Tualatin Mountains Access Master Plan does not establish final design improvements, is not a final land use decision, and is not binding on local

governments, but rather provides recommendations to guide Metro staff and partner jurisdictions as they continue design work; NOW THEREFORE

BE IT RESOLVED that the Metro Council hereby approves the North Tualatin Mountains Access Master Plan, attached hereto as Exhibit A.

ADOPTED by the Metro Council this _____ day of _____, 2016.

Tom Hughes, Council President

Approved as to Form:

Alison R. Kean, Metro Attorney

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 16-4679, FOR THE PURPOSE OF COUNCIL APPROVING THE NORTH TUALATIN MOUNTAINS ACCESS MASTER PLAN

Date: April 14, 2016 Prepared by: Olena Turula, 503- 813-7542

BACKGROUND

The North Tualatin Mountains natural areas are a collection of four voter-protected sites north of Forest Park, totaling approximately 1,300 acres. The properties were purchased thanks to two voter approved general obligation bond measures to protect water quality, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities across the region. Collectively, the four sites preserve large blocks of upland and riparian forest, protect several streams, and provide habitat connectivity between Forest Park, Washington County and the Coast Range.

In the North Tualatin Mountains, former logging roads weave through forests that were previously managed primarily for commercial timber and agriculture prior to Metro's acquisition. Upland forests are mostly composed of dense stands of Douglas fir trees, planted about 20 years ago. Scattered patches of older forest are occasionally found, generally adjacent to streams; a few open areas remain where forests were cleared for agriculture or home sites. The North Tualatin Mountains are home to wildlife typical of young Douglas fir forests, such as deer, elk, birds, and amphibians; some of the streams support salmon and steelhead. Metro is actively restoring all four sites to improve forest health and habitat diversity, enhance wildlife habitat and protect water quality.

The natural areas levy, approved by voters in 2013, identified sites in the North Tualatin Mountains as opportunities to provide access to nature. This access master plan will provide a long-term vision and implementation strategy to guide future public use and development of the North Tualatin Mountains. This plan establishes project goals and objectives, outlines site resources and conditions, and summarizes the planning process. Employing principles of landscape ecology and landscape-level design strategies, this plan identifies access locations and approximate trail locations. It also presents a general plan for development of trailheads and strategies for implementing future development in the North Tualatin Mountains. Metro intends to develop access to the North Tualatin Mountains in a sensitive and balanced way that ensures healthy habitats and continued preservation of the many ecological benefits these sites provide for the region.

The access master plan was shaped by Metro Parks and Nature staff and extensive public outreach, including members of the community and stakeholders. A stakeholder advisory committee was established for the project and met five times to share technical expertise and insights into community needs and desires. The committee included staff and residents representing Forest Park Conservancy, Forest Park Neighborhood Association, Northwest Trails Alliance, Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Recreation Trails Advisory Committee, Portland Community College, Portland Parks & Recreation, Skyline Ridge Neighbors, Skyline School, Trackers Earth, and West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District.

Committee meetings, four community events, an open house for neighbors, conversations with community members, over twenty meetings with individual stakeholders and interested parties, and numerous comments submitted online helped to identify places to provide access, and where to prioritize

protection of undisturbed core habitat areas. Members of the public weighed in on what they value about the sites; they also shared their experiences of the sites and wildlife in the area. They provided insight into the types of activities they'd like to participate in, the types of trail systems they think are appropriate, and where they think access should be accommodated and prioritized. Over 500 comments were received through surveys, Metro's website, emails and informal conversations.

The proposed improvements will take place at two of the four sites, Burlington Creek Forest and McCarthy Creek Forest. The recommendation calls for new multi-use trails for hikers and off-road cyclists, and continued use of some of the former logging roads at the two sites. Equestrian riders will continue to have local access to former logging roads at both sites. Access improvements at Burlington Creek Forest are planned to be initiated first, with improvements at McCarthy made later as money becomes available.

The master plan proposes preserving 970 acres of protected core habitat at the four sites. No improvements are planned at two of the sites, Ennis Creek Forest and North Abbey Creek Forest, other than a provision for the future Pacific Greenway Trail through Ennis Creek Forest. In addition, the plan protects undisturbed habitat areas of 30 acres or greater in all four sites. Out of an existing 1,300 acres, this plan preserves nearly three-fourths as core habitat. This includes about 90 acres at Burlington, 350 acres at Ennis, 320 acres at McCarthy Creek Forest and 210 acres at North Abbey Creek.

The access master plan identifies opportunities to discover, learn about and experience nature at Burlington Creek Forest and the southeastern portion of McCarthy Creek Forest. The plan recommends continued use of 4 miles of existing logging roads in Burlington and McCarthy Creek forests, and proposes an additional 5.5 miles of new multi-use trails for Burlington Creek Forest. The recommendation includes trailheads at Burlington Creek and McCarthy Creek forests with non-flushing restroom facilities and parking areas to accommodate approximately 15 cars each.

The plan recommends protecting water quality by decommissioning over 3 miles of logging roads in McCarthy Creek, North Abbey Creek and Ennis Creek forests. The roads are a significant source of sediment in streams. Trail design and engineering will employ best practices for sustainable trail construction. Well-designed trails will limit impacts to streams and headwater areas by minimizing erosion, locating trails away from stream corridors and limiting the number stream crossings.

Off-road cycling is a growing trend statewide and in the metro region, and it is one way that people experience nature. This plan recommends providing off-road cycling opportunities at the North Tualatin Mountains. Based on available research, a definitive conclusion can't be made about whether experiencing nature by hiking or by off-road cycling poses greater impacts to wildlife. Many potential impacts to habitat such as erosion, trail widening, and ruts can be prevented using best practices for trail construction and management. The multi-use trails, for off-road cycling and hiking, will be family friendly and will be designed for beginning and intermediate riders. Trails will be designed to slow riders down using speed checks, such as short uphill sections, turns and obstacles. The trails will be monitored and maintained in partnership with trail user groups.

ANALYSIS/INFORMATION

Known opposition
During the community engagement process, concerns were raised regarding the compatibility of trails and off-road cycling in the North Tualatin Mountains with protecting wildlife habitat, especially for elk and red-legged frogs.

The point of view of the primary opposition to the master plan asserts that more wildlife studies should be completed prior to developing any trails in the North Tualatin Mountains and that the proposed trail development represents an existential threat to the viability of the area as a critical connection between Forest Park and the Coast Range.

The access master plan acknowledges that any trail or access to nature has some impact on wildlife. Metro's planning team made every effort to locate trails in such a way as to minimize such impact, and nearly three-fourths of the total acreage of the North Tualatin Mountains sites will have no trails at all. Trail alignments will be refined during the design and engineering phase.

In creating the access master plan for the North Tualatin Mountains, Metro relied on formal and informal studies of wildlife in the North Tualatin Mountains and similar habitats throughout the Pacific Northwest and also consulted with other agencies and organizations. There is an extensive body of scientific and academic literature on the type of habitat found in and around Forest Park, especially the second-growth Douglas fir forest habitats, found in the North Tualatin Mountains. We are confident that our efforts to restore quality habitat throughout our 4 sites in the North Tualatin Mountains will create and maintain diverse habitats for native species including elk, red-legged frogs and others. Metro also received input from regional conservation experts, such as the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), the Urban Greenspaces Institute and the Audubon Society of Portland.

Given the extensive studies that have already been done on site and concerning this type of habitat, it is unlikely that additional studies would produce significant new information that would affect management decisions. We focus our inventory and monitoring efforts on cases in which such information can empower better management decision-making and adaptive management.

Additionally, Metro intends to implement project-based monitoring to inform ongoing management of access and to ensure uses remain compatible with wildlife habitats.

In addition to the general concern about wildlife studies, concerns have been raised about elk and red-legged frogs.

Elk are found throughout the area in and around the North Tualatin Mountains, and neighbors raised concerns that access could negatively affect their movement patterns. Although the elk herd is not considered regionally significant by ODFW, it is highly valued by some members of the community and the North Tualatin Mountains master plan takes this into consideration.

The earlier preferred alternative recommended including a trail through the northeastern portion of McCarthy that would have offered visitors access to a viewpoint with stunning vistas of the Tualatin River Valley and Coast Range. To address concerns about elk that frequent a meadow in this area and because the extent of the potential impact of this trail on elk use at the meadow is unknown at this time, this trail is not included in this master plan. This trail may be considered in the future if further investigation compellingly demonstrates that access to the meadow is unlikely to affect elk persistence in the area.

While we have heard from the off-road cycling community that they generally support the master plan, removing the trail through the northeastern portion of McCarthy Creek Forest generated vocal criticism from members of Northwest Trail Alliance.

Amphibians, including red-legged frogs are known to move seasonally between Burlington Creek and breeding habitat on the opposite side of Highway 30, including the Palensky Wildlife Area (aka

Burlington Bottoms). Concerns have been raised by ODFW and others that the proposed trails in Burlington Creek Forest may negatively affect red-legged frogs and other amphibians.

Trail design and construction will minimize stream crossings, employ amphibian friendly crossings where needed, and minimize soil erosion and trail rutting. Access to the site will be controlled with an automatic gate. The site and trails will be closed at night, which is when seasonal movement of red-legged frogs typically occurs, and seasonal closures will be considered if monitoring demonstrates significant mortality on the trails. Restoration work at both Burlington Creek and Ennis Creek forests will improve foraging and overwintering habitat, including creating down wood and maintaining a diverse understory and tree canopy.

Legal Antecedents
North Tualatin Mountains is identified in the 2013 natural areas levy as an access project. Completion of this project is an effort to complete the legal obligation of the levy.

Anticipated Effects
Following adoption of the access master plan, the next steps in the project are to pursue land-use approvals and building permits from Multnomah County. Paralleling this effort, Metro Parks and Nature Planning staff will work with a team of design consultants to produce construction documents. The latter effort will lead to Phase 1 improvements which are expect to take place in fiscal year 2017-18.

Budget Impacts
The 2013 parks and natural areas levy funded this master plan work. Preliminary cost exercises estimate that construction of elements in Burlington Creek Forest will cost approximately $1.4 million, and elements in McCarthy Creek Forest will cost approximately $700,000. When design and construction documents are complete a phase 1 construction budget will be developed to match available dollars. Parks and Nature has identified $727,500 in FY 16-17 and 17-18 for design and construction from the 2013 parks and natural areas levy. Alternative funding sources such as grants may also be pursued to help provide additional funding for construction.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Staff recommends adoption of Resolution No. 16-4679, for the purpose of approving North Tualatin Mountains Access Master Plan as presented