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## Parley's Historic Nature Park Comprehensive Use Plan- Draft 8.30.09

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The Grassli Group



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# **Parley's Historic Nature Park**

## **Comprehensive Use Plan - Draft 5.10.09**

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The Comprehensive Use Plan is the basic guide for management of Parley's Historic Nature Park. This is the second step of a four-step Master Plan for the park. These steps include:

- *Baseline Conditions* - a review of existing conditions on the ground and of decisions, policies and stakeholders that have shaped the park's evolution and future direction.
- *Comprehensive Use Master Plan* - defining the goals for the park and the desired resource protection priorities and visitor experience.
- *Management Plan* - a guideline for management, maintenance, monitoring and decision making that highlights Best Management Practices and site-specific strategies.
- *Improvements Plan* - an action plan of recommended capital improvements, maintenance and research needs to achieve these goals.

The *Comprehensive Use Plan* is the outcome of understanding all of the resource protection needs and visitor experience challenges in the park. It is based on the *Baseline Conditions Report* and will be further detailed in the Management Plan. It sets the course for how different areas of the park will be managed for different goals, and what improvements can be made to better protect the park resources and enhance enjoyment by all visitors.

This document is considered a draft until the stakeholders and public complete their review and input on the plan and until the final *Baseline Conditions Report* is completed in Spring 2009.

## A. Guiding Principles

### 1. Park Significance:

Parley's Creek and the land that surrounds it at the mouth of Parley's Canyon has a special place in Utah history as a crossroads, a center of industry, and an important natural corridor. It is one of the largest and most diverse natural open spaces in the Salt Lake valley, and contains one of the most natural and contiguous riparian corridors in Salt Lake City. Its location and topography—a steep gully at the intersection of foothills, canyon and valley containing the largest creek entering Salt Lake City from the Wasatch Mountains—support significant aquatic, riparian, woodland, springs and wetlands and scrub oak-grassland habitats.

### 2. Park Purpose:

The 88-acre park was assembled to protect and interpret the natural diversity and cultural artifacts of this corridor along Parley's Creek and to provide an outdoor recreation opportunity in an urban setting. For decades, it has been identified as a critical link in open space and trail networks for the valley, at the junction of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail and the Parley's Trail.

### 3. Planning Constraints:

The park is managed within a framework of policies and standards, as outlined in the Baseline Conditions Report. In addition to City and County ordinances and plans, it respects the recommendations and needs of other agencies to the greatest extent possible, such as Salt Lake County Flood Control, the Division of Wildlife Resource.

The following are basic agreements that define our planning framework:

1. As this plan is the city's first master plan for an open space area, previous agreements or precedents in this open space park and others are subject to reconsideration.

2. The park requires management as a natural open space, with different standards and goals from City park management.
3. Unrestricted access will be re-evaluated in light of the equally valid goals of visitor experience diversity and resource protection.
4. Multiple-use recreation will be supported, including off-leash dog recreation, BMX, trail users, nature appreciation, and others.
5. Parley's Trail use will be managed to a standard compatible with the park and with other segments of the trail.
6. Protection of the riparian corridor and wetlands are the highest priority and will follow, at minimum, the recommendations of the City's Riparian Corridor Study.
7. All stakeholder concerns are respected and considered equally, and are balanced with the overall park goals.

### 4. Goals:

The park is managed within a framework of policies and standards, as outlined in the Baseline Conditions Report. In addition to City and County ordinances and plans, it respects the recommendations and needs of other agencies to the greatest extent possible, such as Salt Lake County Flood Control, the Division of Wildlife Resource.

The goals on the following page are the result of the Baseline Conditions Analysis and stakeholder and public input.

## Park Goals

	Goal	Vegetation	Wildlife	Hydrology	Cultural /Historical	Access	Amenities	Trails	Off-Leash Dog	Recreation
1	Protect riparian corridor and water quality	☐	☐	☐						
2	Protect and restore cultural and natural resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Resources</li> <li>• Plant Communities</li> <li>• Wildlife and Habitat</li> <li>• Biodiversity</li> <li>• Historical Sites</li> </ul>	☐	☐	☐	☐					
3	Restore damaged areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User-created trails</li> <li>• Culverts</li> <li>• Stream bank erosion</li> <li>• Hillside erosion</li> <li>• Historic properties</li> <li>• Noxious weeds</li> </ul>	☐	☐	☐	☐					
4	Maintain and enhance multiple uses with minimal conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Off-Leash dog walking</li> <li>• Regional trail connectivity</li> <li>• BMX</li> <li>• Cycling</li> <li>• Trail running and hiking</li> <li>• Water Access</li> <li>• Fishing</li> <li>• Nature Appreciation and education</li> </ul>					☐		☐	☐	☐
5	Identify additional locations for off-leash dog recreation.								☐	☐
6	Uphold management responsibilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limiting impacts on neighboring properties</li> <li>• Disaster prevention, including fire, flood, point-source water quality threats</li> <li>• Emergency and maintenance access</li> <li>• Ordinances, laws and policies.</li> </ul>		☐	☐		☐				
7	Formalize monitoring and adaptive management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientific Studies to Develop Monitoring Baselines</li> <li>• Implement Best Management Practices</li> <li>• Manage Users Based on Data</li> <li>• Multi-Agency Coordination</li> </ul>	☐	☐	☐	☐			☐	☐	☐
8	Establish and enforce rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law Enforcement</li> <li>• Self Policing and Volunteer Patrol</li> <li>• Zoning and conservation easements</li> <li>• Signage and interpretation</li> </ul>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐	☐
9	Develop consistent funding sources to implement goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agency Partnerships</li> <li>• Grants</li> <li>• Private Sponsorship</li> </ul>	☐	☐	☐	☐					☐
10	Broaden interpretation and community stewardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Opportunities</li> <li>• Restoration Projects</li> <li>• Clean-Ups</li> </ul>	☐	☐	☐				☐	☐	

## B. Comprehensive Use Plan

### 1. Parks and Open Space Management

Salt Lake City owns and manages a variety of land for public recreation, from traditional parks to open space lands. Some properties, such as Cottonwood Park and the International Peace Gardens along the Jordan River, have many features of a traditional park, but also include the more natural Jordan River corridor and trail system. In the past, most of these lands were managed to maximize recreational use. With a new City emphasis on sustainability, open space and managing natural systems, park management needs to be rethought to better protect natural resources and offer a wider diversity of recreation. Salt Lake City is purchasing open space lands, expanding its trail networks, and permitting more off-leash dog recreation areas. The new and evolving demands of an expanding population require a different approach. This plan proposes new management framework that can be applied to all city properties where public recreation is encouraged.

For decades, PHNP has been considered a park, allowing the unlimited recreation access that many parks have. This has seriously degraded portions of the nature park. Restoration to a more sustainable, healthy condition will take a substantial investment, likely in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. This cost could have been avoided and must be avoided in the future through active management and oversight of appropriate uses. The City is committed to managing it to a new standard, focused on resource protection in addition recreational use. There will be tradeoffs.

### 2. Visitor Experience and Resource Protection Framework

This master plan is the first in the city to utilize the principles of the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection Framework (VERP). This management framework was developed by the National Park Service to help address the challenges of visitor use and carrying capacity in light of protecting the special resources for which National Parks were established.

The VERP framework guided the Baseline Conditions Report, in documenting the natural and cultural resources that require protection and second and defining the ideal visitor experience. The current phase, the Comprehensive Use Plan, outlines the tradeoffs required to balance these often competing demands and propose solutions and compromises for each. The forthcoming Management Plan more fully defines how to implement each solution.

### 3. Spectrum of Alternatives

A range of alternatives was developed to meet varying goals of improving the visitor experience and resource protection, as shown on the *Spectrum of Alternatives*. The alternatives developed generally reflect a range of resource protection levels, with some consideration to how uses can be assigned to particular areas of the park to also help improve the visitor experience. The Resource Protection spectrum ranges from the least intervention and protection to the most. The Visitor Experiences spectrum ranges from maximizing single uses to maximizing use diversity and does not correlate exactly with the Resource Protection spectrum. Many techniques for improving the visitor experience improvements could be applied to any one of these alternatives,.

## 4. Prescriptive Management Areas

A new management strategy is proposed here, called *Prescriptive Management Areas*. This establishes a range from highly developed park amenities to highly protected natural preserve areas. *Prescriptive Management Areas* are applied here to PHNP's unique resource and visitation goals, but can also apply to traditional city parks and more remote, protected open space lands. Every park can be mapped according to these zones and maintained and managed accordingly. Designated use areas and trails clearly define appropriate uses to improve public safety, minimize maintenance and protect sensitive resources.

The following areas are proposed and applicable ones are shown on the *Comprehensive Use Plan* maps on the pages that follow:

### ***Prescriptive Management Areas:***

#### **Trails**

- Supports use on the trail only
- Self directed activities, like hiking, biking, dog-walking as directed by trail signs
- Moderately maintained and monitored to promote safety and reduce user conflict
- Lands adjacent to trail are managed to the standard of their prescriptive management area

#### **Active recreation area**

- Promotes and supports heavy use
- Often single-purpose recreation, such as sports fields, picnic pavilions in designated recreation areas
- Heavily maintained and manicured

#### **Passive recreation area**

- Promotes and supports moderate use
- Often self-directed activities, like Frisbee, informal sports games or leisure activities, like reading, painting, learning on improved sites such as turf, courts and improved areas
- Moderately maintained and manicured

#### **Off-leash dog area**

- Promotes and supports heavy use
- Designed and managed to promote off leash dog use
- Heavily maintained to mitigate impacts

#### **Natural area**

- Promotes and supports moderate use in natural setting
- Self-directed activities, like hiking, biking, or orienteering on designated trail or areas
- Moderately maintained to minimize resource degradation (such as reducing weeds, limiting erosion, improving water quality, managing flooding)

#### **Protection area**

- Promotes and supports light use in natural setting
- Self-directed passive activities, focused on the protected resource, such as hiking, education, interpretation, wildlife watching on trails or designated areas
- Maintained to enhance natural system (such as protecting habitat, restoring natural hydrology, adapting to natural changes over time)

#### **Restoration area**

- Discourages or restricts access and use from natural areas under restoration
- Actively restored, maintained and monitored to improve degraded natural resources or cultural features

#### **Preserve area**

- Restricts and discourages access and use in sensitive resource area
- Suitable for occasional use for stewardship or education
- Moderately maintained and monitored to conserve unique, high-quality natural resources or cultural features

## C. Decision Making

### 1. Criteria

Seven alternatives were proposed to meet varying interests and needs. These are shown in the *Spectrum of Alternatives, Comparison of Alternatives* and *Concept Maps* that follow.

To evaluate which alternative is the most responsible and responsive course of action, several questions should be considered:

1. How does it meet the plan goals?
2. How does it improve both the visitor experience and resource protection?
3. Is it sustainable long-term (environmentally, socially and economically).

A brief analysis of each alternative is outlined in the *Comparison of Alternatives*.

### 2. Challenges

The *Park Goals* are generally agreed upon. It is more difficult to prioritize them. The public is not in agreement on park priorities. Salt Lake City must take a leadership role in setting these priorities to effectively create and implement a plan. The following challenges must be considered:

#### **CHALLENGE 1:**

##### **Sustainable Resource Protection**

Parley's Historic Nature Park was originally acquired and developed with the intent of preserving the resources within it and creating a natural open space area. In the thirty years since its establishment, it has been managed in a hands-off manner, allowing certain use patterns and stewardship roles to emerge that do not fully meet today's standards for open space protection. The park's natural resources have degraded in recent years, and the pace of degradation will accelerate with the current increases in use. It is past a point that can be sustained without intervention.

In the past decade, the city has set new goals for sustainability, include the Riparian Corridor Ordinance, the Open Space Lands Program, alternative transportation (biking) and other programs in the Division of Sustainability. Natural open spaces such as PHNP have a new role and priority in achieving these goals.

The park is an urban open space. It is fragmented from its original landscape, compromising wildlife viability, biodiversity, and the landscape's ability to adapt to natural and human changes. It is subject to high human use and urban impacts, such as the highway, flood control, and water quality threats. Still, it is one of the largest, most intact ecosystems and one of the most natural, contiguous riparian corridors in city boundaries. It is a valuable habitat connection for many birds and aquatic life that can overcome these barriers. It is peripheral, not primary habitat, for many other animals that require larger spaces or more solitude.

We can justify many improvements for the sake of improving the ecosystem, but is a point of diminishing returns. Restoration is needed and refuge areas would help some species, but there is a point at which conservation efforts will likely outpace the gains. Similarly, the hands-off management off the past will likely degrade the ecology and biodiversity of the park further to a point where investment in restoration may be questionable.

The range of possible resource protection levels is shown on the *Spectrum of Alternatives*.

## CHALLENGE 2:

### Managing Competing Uses

Unrestricted recreation access is strongly valued here and in many other open spaces and parks, but it is a goal that cannot always be accommodated in light of protecting resources and ensuring a positive visitor experience.

As the park has been cleaned up, primarily through volunteer efforts, and become more popular, use has increased, as has user conflict. The second challenge of this plan is how to allocate recreation and use privileges.

There are limited alternatives for off-leash dog recreation in the Salt Lake valley. Salt Lake City maintains 8 off-leash areas within parks, but since they are primarily areas in developed parks, most PHNP users don't consider these substitutes for the nature park and trail experience of PHNP. Use has grown rapidly over the last two years since the Salt Lake City Council decision to designate an off-leash area in the park with the Off-Leash Ordinance. Many people have said they no longer use the park because the number and behavior of off-leash dogs and the ways that the natural resources have been impacted has diminished their enjoyment. The largest current user group – off-leash dog recreation – is the most vocal and opposed to any change that limits their current use patterns. The city is being forced to make some modification to use as Parley's Trail introduces another group – commuter cyclists and recreational trail users into the park. It can also decide how much it wishes to accommodate prior uses that have been compromised, such as environmental education, passive outdoor recreation, and family recreation.

The essential question is what level of multiple-use recreation is desired and what lengths should be taken to ensure this. The range of possible diversity of uses is shown on the *Spectrum of Alternatives*.

## CHALLENGE 3:

### Setting New Precedents while Acknowledging Prior Agreements

This is the City's first management plan for an open space / nature park and is setting some new precedents. This nature park needs a different management perspective, which is proposed in the *Management Strategies* on pages 14-15.

The newly formed Open Space Lands Program anticipates setting new precedents for lands they acquire and manage in order to protect the values for which the land was acquired. For example, there are currently no Salt Lake City parks or trails that are completely closed to dogs. Parks and trails are either designated "on-leash" or have portions designated for "off-leash." This plan may set new precedent with designations of "no dogs" or "no people."

Setting new precedent is particularly difficult because of the public process establishing the off-leash area in this park. When Salt Lake City Council approved an off-leash area here, through the Off-Leash ordinance, it set a number of conditions, including (but not limited to):

- One-year trial period with certain obligations on the part of FiDOs as the stewardship partner.
- Completing a master plan for the park to guide use
- Allowing temporary closures of sensitive areas to protect habitat

Of these requirements, only the trial period has been completed and approved by the city. While many off-leash dog users feel they "won" their rights to use the park because the ordinance was passed and the trial period completed, other conditions are still unfulfilled. The master plan is still underway, and temporary closures have never been executed, pending recommendations from the master plan.

Thus, many off-leash users perceive this master plan and its recommendations as a reversal of previous agreements. On the contrary, many people who support resource protection and desire areas for dog-free recreation feel this plan is finally fulfilling the promises of the Council.

For the off-leash designation, FiDOs was recognized as an official steward, poured volunteer hours into the park and set some of their own expectations for projects, including the donation of several park benches. They now feel conflicted that their stewardship efforts have been put on hold during this master plan.

Every decision in this plan could be seen as precedent for other open space areas and off-leash areas. Every decision that modifies a previous agreement for the park or a written city policy or unwritten city practice must be justified.

#### **CHALLENGE 4:**

##### **City's Responsibility Versus County Responsibility**

As the park is located in unincorporated Salt Lake County, but owned by Salt Lake City, responsibilities for the park and user expectations often are mixed. Salt Lake City and Salt Lake County have several agreements to jointly manage the park and its resources. The County provides law enforcement in and around the park, as well as animal control services and flood control on Parley's Creek. The City manages the park from a recreation standpoint. Enforcement and expectations have typically been low, but users are beginning to expect more to make park use more sustainable.

The park has essentially become a regional park for off-leash dog use. It supports high use from the neighborhood (Salt Lake County), as well as frequent use from county residents around the valley. Salt Lake County Animal Control often directs off-leash users to this park. Salt Lake City provides the majority of off-leash parks in the entire county. PHNP cannot be expected to

support a rapidly-growing, county-wide demand indefinitely. The County recently completed a Dog Park Master Plan and identified few new areas for off-leash dog recreation, and no open space areas that are effective substitutes for this park. Alternatives are needed and County support is essential.

Many of the proposed solutions require heightened County participation – parking enforcement, animal control, alternate recreation sites, and Parley's Trail management. This partnership must be strengthened and the City must prioritize these requests.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

This plan prioritizes the competing interests in Parley's Historic Nature Park. The solution lies somewhere on the following two spectrums: 1. a range of Resource Protection levels and 2. a range of Visitor Experiences, as shown on pages 10-11. While these ranges are interrelated, they do not directly correlate, nor are they exclusive to each other. A plan could both diversify the recreation and increase the resource protection.

There will be tradeoffs.

Some of the resource protection decisions can be justified more on the basis of providing a better visitor experience for those wanting a nature park experience than on the basis of significantly improving the ecosystem. Some natural areas will become lower priorities for protection in order to provide places for the recreation desired.

This plan proposes basic management strategies to help define priorities for certain areas of the park.

## D. Public Involvement and Input

The *Comprehensive Use Plan* is the second phase of the larger Parley's Historic Nature Park master planning process. This process is relying on regular input and review from a Project Team, including consultants and city staff, an Advisory Committee of stakeholders, and public outreach efforts. The *Comprehensive Use Plan* after completing and offering the Baseline Conditions to the Advisory Committee for review, to build a foundation for an informed discussion.

The foundation of the *Comprehensive Use Plan* are the Park Goals, which were formed by the project team, considering the *Baseline Conditions* and the issues identified by the public in that phase. The *Comprehensive Use Plan* was developed further through a two-day design workshop that included the Project Team, Advisory Committee, and public input sessions. The workshop began with the Advisory Committee reviewing the goals and resource analysis maps, then proposing ways to protect resources and create a better visitor experience. These ideas were integrated into refined goals and two conceptual maps redefining park use and management. The public was invited on park tour to learn more about the resources, followed by a question/answer session with the project team and Mayor Ralph Becker, followed by an open house to review the conceptual maps and goals. The workshop resulted in a draft *Comprehensive Use Plan*, which was sent to the Advisory for review and changes, then to the public through a variety of board and community presentations.

Numerous public comments were received at the workshop and through written comments afterwards. The public has been grasping the broad scope of issues to tackle, and the City's many different responsibilities to uphold. Many of the comments were based on single-issue concerns or on a limited understanding of what was actually being proposed. Also, lingering concerns over the location of Parley's Trail within the park, which is not up for debate, distracted from other important concerns. The comments were often in direct conflict with what City staff feels is necessary to maintain the park and its resources sustainably for the long-term.

A summary of public concerns in this phase to date will be included in the final *Comprehensive Use Plan*.



*Public open house and Mayor's Forum held on April 3, 2009.*

