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Notes for March 21, 2022 BOCC Wrap-Up Meeting
by Bill Serrahn, President
Friends of Skate Creek Park

Good morning Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you this morning. As I'm challenged as a public speaker, I am speaking from a script, which I have provided.

I recently attended **Seminary Hill Natural Area's** annual meeting. Seminary Hill will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year. Today everyone, including the political leadership, understands the value of this natural area to the community. Not so, 40 years ago where the City of Centralia planned to log the property. If not for the vision and persistence of a local conservation group, this natural treasure, in the midst of residential Centralia, would not exist.

Today, we face a similar situation in Packwood. We have a 175-acre **established public natural area** containing the last public access to lower Skate Creek, nearly ½ mile of the last undeveloped public Cowlitz River frontage, and nearly 4 miles of family friendly, all season, trails. This **established public natural area** has a variety of forest ecosystems and is wildlife habitat.

Like Seminary Hill, **Skate Creek Park** is now surrounded by private property and a growing residential area. As Seminary Hill was 40 years ago, **Skate Creek Park** is threatened with potential future internal development and forest harvesting.

In the 20th century, Packwood had a timber resource-based economy. In the 21st century Packwood has a increasingly recreation and visitor based economy.

Visitors chose Packwood to enjoy the natural world. The **Skate Creek Park** natural area has become a popular walking and bicycling destination in Packwood, enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. This **established public natural area** contributes to our quality of life and local economy and enhances Packwood's image as a mountain getaway location.

In 2009, many of us from Packwood attended the Washington State Parks meetings regarding the reclassification of their Packwood Property. We were assured that any future transfer of the property would include deed restrictions, preserving the property as open space, and preventing it being developed for high intensity uses such as overnight camping facilities.

This brings me to the question of why does Lewis County want this park?

- Do you want to protect and preserve this **established public natural area** which is becoming so important to the Packwood Community?
- Or do you hope to eventually build overnight camping facilities on the property? There is not enough acreage to do both.

The county parks revenue model, you are developing, suggests that you are hoping to fund county parks through fees - primarily camping fees. Of course, this model would incentivize the development of RV Parks on park properties.

We would hope Lewis County could see the tremendous opportunity in acquiring this established natural area as the crown jewel of its park system and pledge to protect it for future generations of humans and wildlife and not destroy it with roads and RV sites.

If you believe in the future, as with the **Seminary Hill Natural Area**, 40 years from now everyone will celebrate the vision and determination of the people and their leaders who saved this natural area for them.

I walk **Skate Creek Park** daily and talk with visitors from many places in the state, country, and the world as well as area weekend and full-time residents. I especially love the families with children. All are happy and enjoying the trails and the natural world. This is why we Friends of Skate Creek Park care, and why I am here today, hoping that you can understand the value in preserving this park as an undeveloped natural area for future generations.

We, the concerned community, insist on Washington State Parks and Recreation honoring the commitments State Parks made when they adopted the 2010 Upper Cowlitz Area Management Plan.

If you cannot accept the protective deed restrictions and will not develop a protective park plan prior to the transfer process, we request you withdraw your letter of intent to acquire the property.

Thank you.

I'm available for your questions or comments.

Bill Serrahn, President

Friends of Skate Creek Park (a 501c3 non-profit organization)