

PROJECT PROPOSAL

RIDGES TO RIVERS OPEN SPACE NETWORK OF THE MID-COLUMBIA REGION

July 2008

Background

In 2007, the Tapteal Greenway Association, with support from local government and non-profit organizations, requested assistance from the National Park Service to facilitate public open space planning through their Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program. The request was approved and the planning process is underway.

RTCA Assistance Program

The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, also known as the Rivers & Trails Program, or RTCA, is the community assistance arm of the National Parks Service. This program provides assistance to community and government entities so they can conserve rivers, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways. The RTCA program implements the natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation mission of the National Park Service.

Who We Are

The “Ridges to Rivers Open Space Network of the Mid Columbia Region” is a partnership of organizations and governmental agencies representing a broad spectrum of entities who advocate coordination of regional open space planning.

Participants to date are listed below. We are working to obtain full endorsement of this regional planning process from each of these and possibly additional organizations.

RIDGES TO RIVERS OPEN SPACE STEERING COMMITTEE

<i>City of Pasco</i>	<i>Columbia Basin Chapter, Washington Native Plant Society</i>
<i>City of Richland</i>	<i>Friends of Badger Mountain</i>
<i>City of West Richland</i>	<i>Open Space Coalition of Benton and Franklin Counties</i>
<i>City of Kennewick</i>	<i>Fun Fit and over Fifty</i>
<i>Benton City</i>	<i>National Park Service</i>
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>Benton Franklin Council of Governments</i>
<i>Franklin County</i>	<i>Washington Health Foundation</i>
<i>Tri Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau</i>	
<i>Benton Franklin Community Health Alliance</i>	
<i>Lake Lewis Chapter, Ice Age Floods Institute</i>	
<i>Tapteal Greenway Association</i>	
<i>Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society</i>	

Meetings

Our kick-off meeting was held in March 2008. Subsequent meetings (nominally monthly) have seen an ever-increasing participation. We have been working to define our vision and goals, to create a plan to implement these and to encourage participation by those who will most benefit the quality of this process and its success.

Accomplishments

We have worked together to establish a foundation for creating a regional open space network. This foundation includes: Vision, Goals, Mission and a Plan to achieve these.

Our Vision Is

A network of natural features and open spaces that complements residential and commercial development in the Mid-Columbia Region and:

- ◆ enhances our ability to attract and retain people and businesses that sustain our economy
- ◆ provides access and connections for recreation, education, and health
- ◆ preserves natural and aesthetic values

Goals

Preserve...

Preserve the unique regional identity that our ridges, rivers and other natural areas define for our community sense of place.

Promote...

Promote a Mid-Columbia Open Space Network to boost economic development in the region.

Enjoy...

Increase enjoyment and use of the Mid-Columbia Open Space Network.

Mission

The mission of the *Ridges to Rivers Open Space Steering Committee* is to produce and implement a plan for a region-wide network of open space based on citizen involvement, city and county planning policies, and regional recommendations.

Proposed Action Plan

The goals of the proposed Ridges to Rivers Regional Open Space Plan are to **preserve**, **promote**, and increase **enjoyment** of the unique natural, and other open spaces that are important to the region's communities and that draw new families, visitors, and sustainable businesses to this area. Potential actions to achieve these goals are listed below. Priorities and an overall timeline have yet to be established, and additional actions may continue to be added to accomplish the three project goals.

Goal 1

Preserve the unique regional identity that our ridges, rivers and other natural areas define for our community sense of place.

Actions

1. Develop a region-wide plan with implementation tools and recommendations for protecting open space in the Mid-Columbia region.
 - a. Establish a team with the necessary expertise to identify and implement open space preservation strategies
 - b. Research how other communities define their sense of place and how they represent it to community leaders and the public.
 - c. Develop an inventory of physiographic, geographic, ecological, cultural, economic, and educational features unique or special to this region (for example, Wallula Gap National Historic Landmark), and specifically identify those with recreational and natural value for conservation and potential connection to other regional resources (including "priority habitats" as defined by Washington State criteria).
 - d. Determine the most important elements of ridges and other features (for example, the public's view of the ridges vs. the public's view from the ridges; natural habitat and vegetation; trail corridors, etc.).
 - e. Develop a list of criteria for prioritizing landscape features for preservation and interpretation for the public, educators, and regional marketing efforts.
 - i. Acknowledge and support all open space values that define our regional identity
 - ii. Consider criteria such as: most unique, most visible, most threatened, proximity to existing open space, proximity to other features, etc.
2. Develop a comprehensive regional trail plan as a major component of the Ridges to Rivers Open Space Network.
 - a. Inventory existing community trail systems, and regional land and water trail systems

- b. Identify gaps and potential connections between existing trails; identify potential trail corridors that link ridges and rivers with the region's communities
 - c. Identify trailheads and other trail network facilities and amenities
 - d. Design a public process that gives citizens multiple opportunities to be involved in the development of the Ridges to Rivers Open Space Plan through a variety of outreach techniques such as public meetings, open houses, surveys, distribution of information through internet, presentations to community groups, workshops with city and county boards, councils and commissions.
 - e. Involve property owners who will be impacted by the plan at an early stage and work cooperatively with them to meet their goals as well as the goals of the plan.
 - f. Develop cost estimates for land acquisition, trail improvements, and other costs associated with the implementation of the open space plan and prepare a funding plan.
 - g. Engage public agency experts and possibly private consultants to develop specific strategies for preservation and trail construction/restoration and replanting to minimize the environmental impact of trail construction and provide for restoration of native flora in critical areas.
 - h. Establish a maintenance and operation agreement that allows for rapid response across jurisdictional lines
 - i. Develop enforcement protocol and dispatch maps
 - j. Incorporate the Plan into the City and County comprehensive plans and development regulations. Work with the cities, counties and private entities to preserve these features relative to their priority
 - k. Include a mechanism for review of the plan within a specific period after initial plan completion to monitor progress, assess the plan, and determine if new priorities should be addressed.
3. Conserve to the extent possible key plant and wildlife habitat that are part of our natural lands, and encourage their stewardship.
 - a. Develop a conservation priority matrix that considers parcel attributes and landscape features that support non-disturbing recreational access, conservation of priority native habitat associations, landscape and habitat connectivity, view shed and access for education activities, etc.
4. Develop funding strategies for plan implementation.
 - a. Determine mechanisms for preservation, including grant applications; voluntary land dedication/conservation easements from property owners; city/county funding from

- general revenue sources; city/county bond measures; Conservation Futures; land trades.
- b. Coordinate with volunteer organizations for donated materials, labor for construction of trail improvements, plantings, and related planned improvements.
 - c. Consider the value of an “Adopt-an-Acre” program and implement accordingly.
 - d. Develop guidelines for open space acquisition and management that outline the issues and public use that are compatible with conserving priority natural habitat.
5. Determine regulatory strategies for Cities and County to adopt to implement the plan.
- a. Develop policies that provide incentives for development practices that leave ridgelines and other high priority open space undeveloped, such as increased densities off the ridges.
 - b. Consider hillside regulations that reduce visual impacts of hillside development, for example grading standards, lower densities; building height restrictions, natural colors and building materials, etc.
 - c. Put mechanisms in place to provide credit to developers for land dedications made and/or trail improvements installed that implement the plan.
 - d. Amend land use plans to identify future trail corridors that should be incorporated in future development plans for affected properties.

Goal 2

Promote a Mid-Columbia open space network to boost economic development in the region.

Actions

1. Define a true community identity of the region’s open space network with input from political leaders, businesspeople, the Community Roundtable, and citizens using a variety of public outreach strategies
2. Support the community’s regional open space identity with marketing materials such as a logo, map/guidebook, brochures, website, quality of life video, and toll-free answering service. (Sponsorship arrangements can reduce costs of these efforts.)
3. Provide local and state organizations, businesses, and hotels with promotional material to distribute to residents, travelers, convention and sports delegates, journalists, and those relocating to the region. Examples: print and electronic newsletters and mailings; an open space website with links to other community resources, etc.

4. Request meetings with local editorial boards to convey the benefits of open space, and the mission of the Ridges to Rivers Open Space Network.
5. Package open spaces as a quality of life/healthy lifestyle enhancement to retain and recruit businesses and appeal to residents.
6. Promote the Ridges to Rivers Open Space Network as an economic amenity to attract hotels, restaurants, and other tourism-related businesses such as outfitters, tour guides, bike and boat rentals.
7. Stage annual open space festivals and events so they become points-of-entry for year-round experiences.

Goal 3

Increase enjoyment and use of the Mid-Columbia open space network.

Actions

1. Emphasize a healthy life style enhanced by recreating on regional and community open space lands and trails.
 - a. Connect the National and State health initiatives (Go Play Outside) with local activities emphasizing our open space opportunities.
 - b. Address child obesity issues with planned events that use our trails and open space areas
 - c. Develop an exercise network coordinating with cycling shops, health clubs and commercial active wear distributors to establish a “What You Can Do in the Mid-Columbia Region” document with consistent language.
2. Communicate our open space opportunities through education
 - a. Develop and implement a continuing “Good Stewardship Program” focused on the Open Space Network that connects people, especially youth, to priority habitats.
 - b. Engage local businesses and residents by presenting information on open space areas at social and service clubs, churches, sports leagues, schools. Consider using other non-traditional means of outreach.
 - c. Develop a Preservation and Education Plan for Ridges to Rivers Open Space Network areas and trails
 - d. Design and publish a region-wide WASL-based curriculum focusing on open space and recreation

- e. Offer stewardship programs to complement interpretation needs and maintenance challenges
3. Provide easy access and encourage use of the Ridges to Rivers Open Spaced Network
- a. Identify trailheads and staging areas in city centers that will connect mass transit hubs with Open Space Network trailheads and facilities.
 - b. Design interpretive signage for open space areas and trails that uses a consistent design vocabulary and standards
 - c. Provide uniform trail signs with destinations, mileage, and other key information
 - d. Develop trail brochures