

Voters to decide Pre's Trail future

By John Patton
Emerald Contributor

The effort to build a golf course in East Alton Baker Park has failed and a measure to protect the park from further development will be on the November ballot.

"The people of our metropolitan area want to keep some country in the city," said Pete Ruby, a teacher at Shasta Middle School and member of the Alton Baker Park Coalition, which is sponsoring the initiative.

Coalition members say the park is threatened by proposed expansion of the Ferry Street Bridge and use by the University.

"The park is an island of habitat in the middle of a sea of concrete and pavement," said Sharon Teague, a group leader and spokeswoman. "This initiative gives the public a chance to vote and voice its concern for the park."

The Lane County Board of Commissioners dropped plans for a park golf course after developers, in the face of community opposition, pulled out.

County commissioner Jerry Rust said he supports the coalition's initiative but said the county must go through a planning process to give all special interest groups an equal opportunity to voice their ideas about the park's future.

"This city needs to decide whether it wants a central city park or expand city development to include the Alton Baker Park area," he said.

The initiative would prohibit the altering of any trails or waterways within the park.

"It doesn't mean the park can't be maintained such as the fixing of trails or control of blackberry bushes," said Junior Robertson, a member of the coalition. "It means we oppose any significant

construction that would alter the shape of the park, especially the old landfill."

A field of wildflowers now covers an area of the park that served as a landfill until 1974.

The initiative would also set up a Citizen's Planning Committee to design and adopt a plan for passive recreational uses of the park.

The group has been working since November to collect the necessary 8,800 signatures. On May 14, the coalition announced it had acquired the signatures with two months to spare.

University students have used the park for field studies for decades. More than 200 species of wildflowers, 80 species of birds and 16 species of mammals make their homes in East Alton Baker Park.

University biology professor David Wagner leads public wildflower walks in the park every week. This spring, guides are leading more than 600 school children on nature walks.

Two possible alternatives to the expansion of Ferry Street Bridge could cut through the middle of the park. Plans by the county to expand Skipworth Juvenile Detention Center have caused University officials to consider construction of new practice fields over the old landfill.

"We knew proposal of the initiative would pressure the golf company to drop construction plans," said Robertson. "This initiative is actually an investment in the future to preserve the park for future generations."

Members of the coalition said they encourage returning University students to register to vote because many students will have changed their addresses.

"We are fortunate to have a piece of the wild in the city," Teague said. "We need to preserve the natural values we all enjoy within the park."

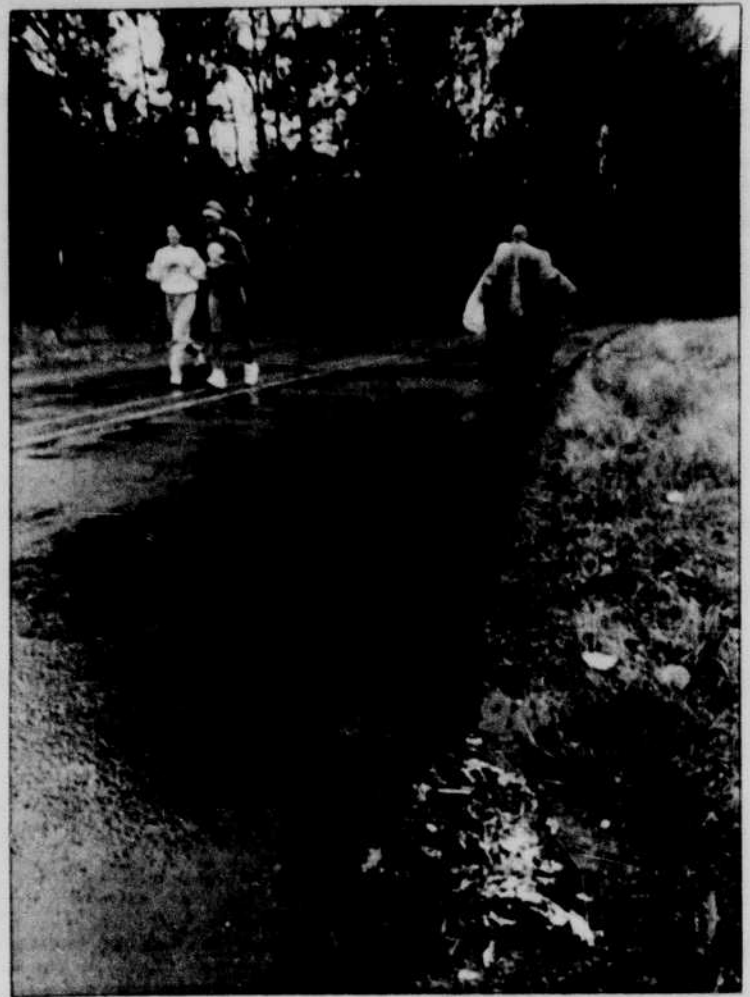


Photo by Jeff Paslay

Voters will decide if areas of Alton Baker Park should be open to development or if the park should be left as it is.



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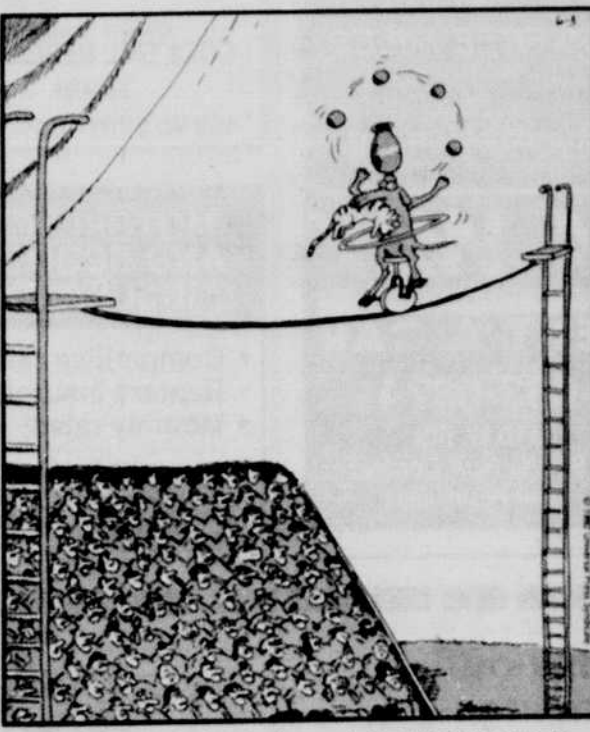


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By GARY LARSON



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