

Wildish Aquisition

Time to fulfill the original vision for Buford Park and Pisgah.

Wildish Land Company's filing of a Measure 37 claim to allow development on 1,400 acres next to Mount Pisgah (Lane County's Howard Buford Recreation Area, aka Buford Park) raises the question Lane County citizens have faced since early 1970s: Will we fulfill the park's original vision of including the Wildish lands in the park?



The 1973 Oregon Legislature authorized acquisition of the Wildish lands as part of a Willamette Greenway park purchase. Funding available at that time purchased the existing 2,300-acre Buford Park, now managed by Lane County Parks Division. Numerous public plans have supported this acquisition, including The Metro Plan (1980), the Buford Park Master Plan (1994), and most recently the Rivers to Ridge Open Space Vision (2003). All these plans were adopted or endorsed by elected officials of Springfield, Eugene, and Lane County.

A century from today, future generations will view public acquisition of the Wildish lands as a visionary community decision and a fantastic legacy of open space. Just imagine how different Eugene and Springfield would be if community leaders had *not* acquired the river front parks in the 1960s.

The 1,400-acre Wildish lands lie between the 2,300-acre Buford Park's extraordinary wildlife and botanical resources and approximately 1,000 acres of public land along the Middle Fork Willamette River. This acquisition would create a 4,700-acre complex of open space at the confluence of two major rivers (Coast Fork & Middle Fork of the Willamette) and provide an anchor of critical habitat and open space for our rapidly developing metropolitan area. Some of the potential benefits include:

- Conserving and restoring habitat in the dynamic confluence area for fish (including threatened Chinook salmon and winter steelhead) and wildlife.
- Allowing extension of river front bike paths to Buford Park/Mount Pisgah;
- Having a natural, easier-to-manage park boundary formed by the rivers.
- Improving water quality and reducing downstream flood impacts by restoring the area's extensive floodplain to filter, detain, and store and floodwaters.
- Providing environmental education and restoration research opportunities for students and scientists.

Thirteen ponds created by gravel extraction on the Wildish ownership, along with 12 ponds on public land at the confluence already provide good wetland habitat. These ponds and adjacent floodplains can be further enhanced to improve habitat and recreational opportunities (such as hiking, birding, horseback riding, canoeing, etc.).

Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah (FBP) led an effort to purchase the Wildish property in 1994. At that time, the appraised value was based on the land's zoning for sand and gravel and forestry, and was therefore much lower. The Wildish Company decided not to sell.

Over a decade has passed and it's time to look with an open mind at our options, especially the option of fulfilling the original plan to include *all* the Wildish lands in the park. We have initiated a dialog with the Wildish family, and they say they will consider the range of options from development as allowed by Measure 37 to sale of the entire parcel.

However, the community must come to a consensus that we support and are resolved to fund the acquisition. FBP is willing to raise funds, but the community and governments must help. We will need to lobby for funding from federal, state, local governments and solicit foundations and individuals. Here are a few possible funding sources:

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (which helped fund the Green Island purchase at the McKenzie confluence); Bonneville Power Administration (which acquires habitat to mitigate for losses from federal hydroelectric dams); Corps of Engineers (via a congressional appropriation for projects that implement the ongoing upper Willamette Floodplain Restoration Study); a voter-approved park bond measure; private foundation grants; a community fundraising campaign, which will demonstrate broad public support for the acquisition, that we are serious about this.

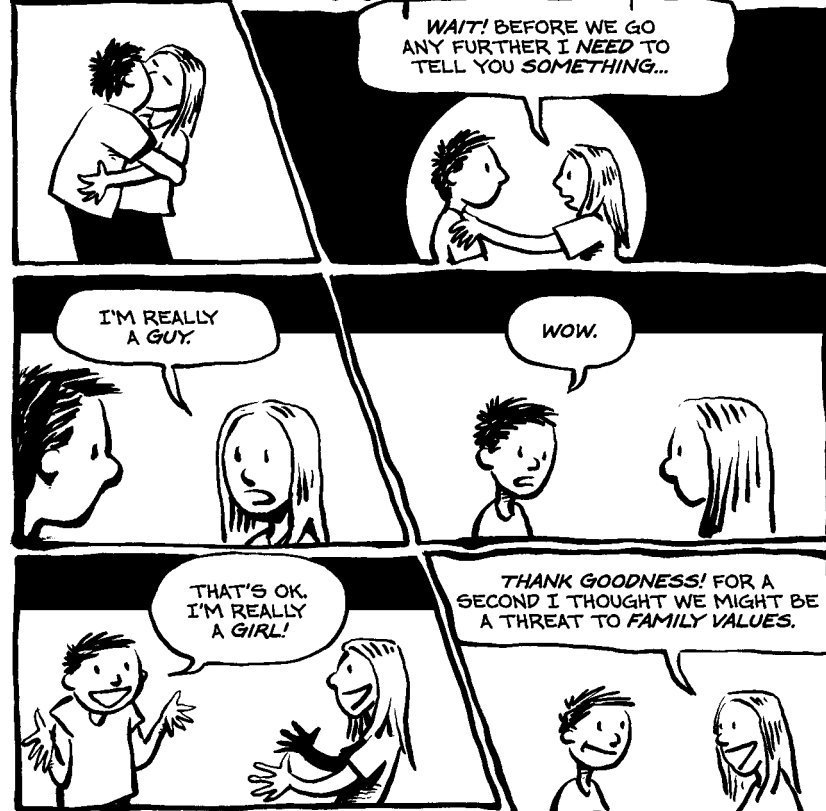
An acquisition effort may take a year or more. Negotiating an agreement with the Wildish family will be time-consuming and complex. Their rights as a landowner must be respected. Securing funding will require great effort. However, if we keep our eyes on this prize, present and future generations will enjoy an extraordinary open space resource that will help sustain the fish, wildlife and our area's livability as the metropolitan areas grows and develops.

You can urge the Lane County Board of Commissioners to support the Wildish acquisition by writing them at 125 E. 8th Ave., Eugene 97405.

Chris Orsinger is executive director of Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah. Contributions to support the acquisition effort can be sent to Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah, PO Box 5266, Eugene 97405. The non-profit organization's mission is to protect and enhance native ecosystems and compatible recreation in the Mount Pisgah area. FBP works in partnership with Lane County and other agencies to restore habitat, propagate native

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SATURDAY SILENCE

I'd like to thank *EW* for the story on the Wayne Morse Youth Project ("Saturday Silence") in the June 29 issue. I have been very impressed by the great work these young people have been doing, and the dignity and tenacity with which they have been working with Lane County to have the electricity restored for their free speech events. It's clear that the Morse Youth Project has in fact been a positive influence on the crowds in the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza, and that they have nothing to do with any of the problems in the plaza.

I would like to correct what might be a misperception created by some of the wording in the article. The article states that "the accusers in this case are the county commissioners who support a decision made by county employee David Suchart".

I want to make it clear that I am one county Commissioner who does not support the decision to turn off the electricity. I did not support the original decision to turn off the electricity, I have worked to have the electricity turned back on, I have urged the other Commissioners to change this decision, and I remain committed to assisting the Wayne Morse Youth Project in this cause. As I have stated in commission meetings, turning off the electricity is not fair to the Morse Youth Project, and has no effect on deterring any problems.

I will continue to work in support of the Morse Youth Project and common sense to have the electricity restored for their great work. Thanks for helping to keep the spotlight on this issue.

Pete Sorenson

Lane County Commissioner
South Eugene District

NEGLIGENT LANDLORD

I opened *EW*'s June 22 issue eager to read the cover story, "The Word from Woolley." I thought to myself, "Finally some input directly from the horse's mouth." I also thought it was a nice bit of fair and balanced journalism for *EW* to feature the perspective of one of the developers who owns many of the empty

buildings in downtown Eugene. Instead I found myself feeling insulted and further frustrated by the continuing lack of action to redevelop that area. If Woolley and The Ulum Group meant the article to smooth over some ruffled feathers in the "uneducable" Eugene community, I'm afraid in my case it failed.

Before I continue I should explain that while leaning left, in general I consider myself a political moderate and economic pragmatist. I understand there are a lot of market forces involved in the redevelopment of downtown I don't claim to understand. I'm not one of Eugene's stereotypical "hippies", nor am I a recent California transplant. I'm 30 years old, employed, an Oregon native, enjoy living near downtown, and have settled in Eugene for good. I've found Eugene, despite its shortcomings, to be a very nice place to live and work for several reasons, least of which being the input the community strives to have in its own operations.

That being said, I'll stick to what I do know as I continue with the "chatter" that has arisen on these editorial pages since Connor and Woolley announced their plans for development, and I will address this directly to Mr. Woolley: As I walk through downtown Eugene, I find many areas that don't belong to you are relatively successful, if not bustling. In fact, it often seems the farther a business is away from your properties the more successful it is. I wonder what's so different about the market forces in those areas of downtown?

I may be one of Eugene's uneducated chatterers, but it seems to me, despite market forces, you are a negligent landlord. One "nuance" I think most of Eugene can agree on to make Eugene a better city is for those areas to be redeveloped in a manner that will be successful.

If C&W can't do that, I think we as a community should pressure the city to take them over and find someone who cares and respects Eugene enough to get the job done.

William Kennedy
Eugene