

PRESTON MILL HISTORICAL PARK

PLANNING THOUGHTS

May 30, 2007

Background: The Preston Mill Historical Park was acquired in 1995 by King County, with heavy involvement of the Preston community. A conceptual plan for improvements at the site was completed in early 1996 and now in 2007, the County is providing a \$25,000 grant to the Preston Community Foundation to conduct a feasibility study on site improvements. This document is a first attempt at pulling together community thoughts on potential enhancements. These thoughts are built using the following: 1) the *King County Regional Recreation Area at Preston Statement of Vision* that was created by the Preston Community Club, the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust and the Issaquah Alps Trails Club before the site was acquired; 2) the *Preston Regional Park System Conceptual Plan* created by King County in 1996 and; 3) ongoing community discussions over the past decade.

Themes: There are four basic themes that should direct efforts to enhance the park site:

- Ecological Enhancement
- Historical Interpretation
- Passive and Low-Impact Active Recreation
- Connectivity to the Community and Regional Trail System

Process: It is important that the feasibility study and subsequent enhancements in the park be done in a manner that involves a broad mix of local residents. As a mill town built around the operations at this site, the Mill should become a focal point that brings together new and old residents to develop a facility that will not only connect them to the community's past, but connect them to each other and to the rural landscape that we are blessed to live in. This process should involve a Planning Committee that keeps the full picture in mind and several working groups that focus on particular themes. More information on working groups are in following sections of this planning document. Several community meetings and site visits should be conducted to involve as many community members as possible, beginning with a site visit immediately prior to the upcoming Preston Community Club meeting on June 4, 2007.

Ecological Enhancements: Improving the ecological conditions of the site are of high importance. A full study of potential enhancements should be conducted. It is recommended that an ecological restoration consultant be hired to do this work under the guidance of a "Restoration Working Group" that includes representatives of King County's Land and Water Division, the Preston Community, Snoqualmie Forum and the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust. Areas of study should include:

- Raging River: the park contains 2,000 feet of quality salmonid and steelhead habitat and much of the riverbank has been artificially armored. Study on the entire 100' riparian buffer should be done to see what conditions might be restored through activities including the of removal of fill material, clearing invasive plants and replanting of native trees and shrubs.
- Mill Pond: The Mill Pond offers intriguing opportunities for off-channel salmon habitat. Study should be done to look at lowering the pond and providing such habitat to salmon.

- **Additional Streams:** There are two additional streams that flow through the park and into the Raging River. These streams have been heavily altered in the past. Study should be done to look at better meandering, day-lighting, planting of native buffers and opening them to salmon passage.
- **Overall Vegetation:** All invasive plants on the site should be removed; only natives should be replanted.
- **Natural Area:** Study should also look at the Natural Area on the east side of the Raging River to see if any habitat enhancements should be conducted there. This area should remain completely natural and not include any developed public use.
- **Ecological Interpretation** should also be included on the site. There may be an opportunity to discuss historical conditions, the effect of past uses of the site, but should be done in a way that doesn't try to place blame on the past. Discussion should include salmon, wildlife connectivity, the Raging River and its importance to the Snoqualmie Basin, etc. The interpretive trail listed below may mix this theme with the historical mill theme. Study should be done of potential access or view platforms overlooking the Raging River. (Currently the Raging River is an almost unknown feature for visitors to the site, somehow it should be made more obvious while still providing protection).

Historical Interpretation: The Preston Mill offers one of the last opportunities in King County to interpret the small timber mill/community heritage that was so vital in the growth of King County. This should be a primary theme that is present in all aspects of the park. The intent is to interpret Preston, but also show it as an example of the hundreds of other vanished logging operations/communities of the region. It is recommended that a "Historical Task Force" be created that contains members of the Preston Community, local museums, the King County Rural Forest Commission and possibly representatives of old timber families. This group should look to involve any experts/stakeholders in this arena from outside the immediate community as they may bring resources that are not otherwise present. Potential areas of interpretation include:

- **Re-Creation of Mill Buildings:** It is unlikely that many of the buildings on the site are structurally sound enough to reuse. As shown in the 1996 Conceptual Plan, a larger building could be rebuilt just to the east of the parking area, in the location of the old mill building, that serves as a interpretive center, picnic shelter, comfort station, etc. The one building that may have some ability to be saved is the large concrete building in the center of the site, and uses of it should be studied.
- **Design Standards for all Structures:** It is advisable to build any new structures in a style that mimics the era. All kiosks, signs, etc should be constructed to some design standard that provides a connection to the historical use of the site.
- **Interpretive Trail:** As also shown in the 1996 Conceptual Plan, a loop trail in the central section of the site (between the kiln building and river, circling the mill pond) should build on a historical mill theme. This should be done via signage and placement of appropriate historical artifacts.
- **Interpretive Opportunities:** Just a few of the concepts that can be interpreted include: life in a mill community, small mill operations, logging railroads, mill pond operations, slough from upper mill site, tram connection to railway to Seattle, machinery/saws, kiln building, a small educational working mill operation and discussion of forests today.

Passive and Low-Impact Recreation: It is important that the site be usable by the public and not just be a story of the past. A regular use should be developed that will allow for a public presence on the site that will deter vandalism and bring the site to life. A “Recreation Working Group” from the local community should develop this theme and look at local and possibly low-impact regional needs.

- As shown in the 1996 Conceptual Plan, the western part of the park should be developed into an active play area. This could include room for informal Frisbee, kicking a soccer ball, etc. This may also include a small field for some type of organized sport, tennis and basketball have been discussed but there is some resistance to organized sports which are being offered at the nearby Preston Ballfield site.
- There is a strong desire, and need, to create outdoor areas for children to have the opportunity to engage in unstructured creative play to better connect them to the outdoors. Some type of extremely well done play area might be a regional attraction and should be explored.
- Passive recreation should also be provided via the interpretive trail and through placement of several clusters of picnic tables at various sites throughout the site.
- The community has also expressed strong interest in having access to the Raging River. The Recreational Working Group should work with the Restoration Group to identify opportunities for access for wading, fishing, trout stocking, gold panning and other low-impact use of the river in a spot or two. (It should be noted that developed and controlled access can be much less damaging to ecological resources than user built casual access. It is also important that kids in particular have some ability to touch a creek to build an appreciation for it).

Connectivity to the Community and Regional Trail System: It is important that safe and easy access to the site be provided for local and regional users. The following should be studied:

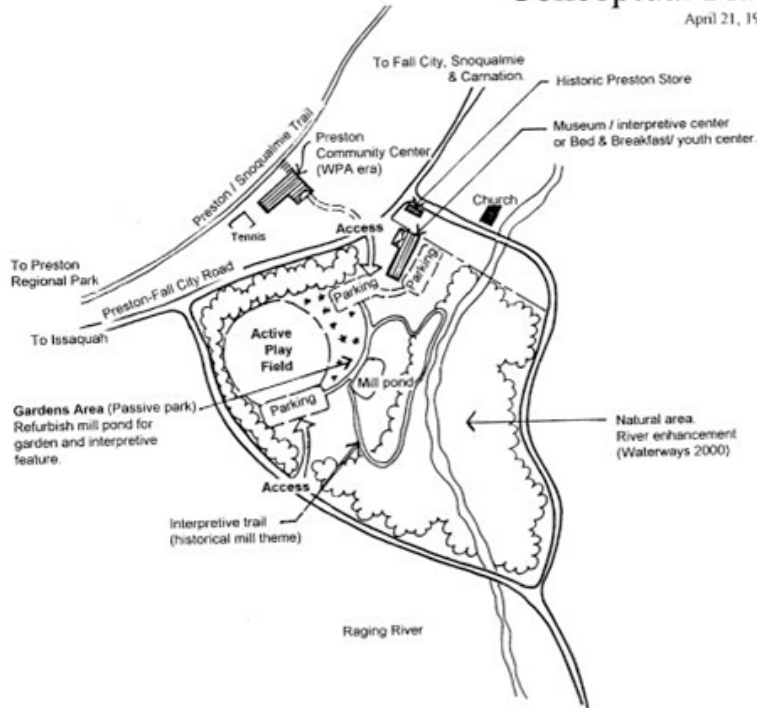
- Entrance off Preston-Fall City Road: Some analysis of how to provide a safer egress of the site should be done. Currently it can be hard to leave the site due to cars coming down the hill, through the curve at excessive speeds.
- Entrance off of the Upper Preston Road: The 1996 study shows an access road on the southern portion of the site. This should be looked at in more depth.
- Connect to the Preston – Snoqualmie Regional Trail: As this trail is connected to the rest of the regional trail network, this park should be connected to the trail and signed which would provide a great stop for recreational users on the trail (much as Mathews Beach or Gasworks Park do in Seattle). A great opportunity is present to connect the park via the old tunnel under the Preston – Fall City Road, up a new ramp or stairwell to the Community Center and up an improved stairwell to the north of the Community Center to the Trail. Some agreement with the Fire District for the trail may be required and study should be done to determine ownership of the trail beside the Community Center. If needed, this should be acquired by the county.
- Connectivity to the upper Historical District: the stairs that are currently present should be upgraded.

Preston Mill Historical Park and River Education Center

"The coming together of valley communities"
Issaquah, Snoqualmie, North Bend, Preston, Fall City, Carnation

Conceptual Plan

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