



MITCH GREENLICK
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 33

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Date: November 16, 2009

To: Council President Bragdon and Metro Councilors
Multnomah County Chair Wheeler and Commissioners
Washington County Chair Brian and Commissioners

Dear Friends,

I have worked for many years to protect the natural resources on the rural lands around Forest Park, which are critical to the health and vitality of the park. I supported SB 1011 in part because it provided a new tool to protect this precious natural area for future generations.

I support the Multnomah County Reserves Citizen Advisory Committee recommendations that all of the rural land in the West Hills be designated Rural Reserves. All of the rural land north of Highway 26 in Multnomah and Washington counties should be designated as Rural Reserves to protect farmland, forests, and natural features. Highway 26 and the combination of Rock and Abbey Creek floodplains provide excellent long term urban edges.

The Tualatin Mountains are part of the region's identity, a landmark visible for miles and from many directions. Forest Park is a vital link in the region's park system and green infrastructure, as well as a key contributor to the region's quality of life, and its health must be guarded. The Helvetia area holds valuable farmland that also provides cultural, historical, and recreational resources, a key contribution to the region's sense of place.

Greater Helvetia is home to orchards, Christmas tree farms, Community Supported Agriculture farms providing local food, and large farms producing traded sector crops. Its rural roads provide safe bicycling routes within easy reach of high tech employees. Views of Helvetia farmland, with the Tualatin Mountains behind, remind everyone driving on Highway 26 that Oregon values farms, forests, and natural resources. Our high tech firms use these resources to attract and retain the best and brightest employees -- people who could choose to live anywhere.

Forest Park is one of the country's premier urban forests, in walking distance of downtown Portland and easily accessible from the Tualatin Valley.

"Forest Park covers the entire hillside overlooking the confluence of Oregon's two major rivers: the Columbia and the Willamette. With the Cascades in the distance, two major rivers below, and broad valleys and the Coast Range behind, a more spectacular setting for a park is hard to imagine. The park is a major green spine linking the Portland metropolitan region with natural areas to the north and west and providing a stepping stone for species dispersal within the region. The park is one of the region's most prominent landmarks and has made a major contribution to the region's identity."¹

The rural areas around Forest Park provide a critical ecological link between the park and the Coast Range. Habitat in the Tualatin Mountains (including Forest Park) also provides an ecological connection between the Columbia River and the Tualatin Valley. As the region grows, healthy parks will become even more important to the region's quality of life.

The forest canopy on the Tualatin Mountains filters pollutants, controls erosion, and helps buffer stormwater. The southwest slopes of the mountains provide clean, cool water into the Tualatin Basin, helping the basin meet water quality standards.

The recreational, sense of place, and ecosystem service benefits of these resources accrue to residents and businesses throughout the region.

Traffic on the roads over the West Hills is a real problem. Cornelius Pass Road has serious safety issues. Germantown and Cornell Roads have physical limits at their eastern ends that restrict traffic flow. These roads are unsuited for commuter use, and we should avoid new urban development that will add to their burden. These are not just any roads – they are twisting rural roads that cut through Forest Park and cross an important wildlife corridor. Increasing traffic volumes make these roads increasingly unsafe for both drivers and for wildlife. High traffic volumes make Forest Park a less desirable place to walk, bike, run, and take the kids.

The West Hills are not suited for urban development. Their steep slopes and plentiful streams, combined with relatively impervious soils, make it difficult to adequately protect watersheds from polluted urban runoff and stormwater related erosion. These physical constraints also make efficient roads and good transit impossible. To build a more sustainable region, we need to locate homes and jobs within easy reach of good transit.

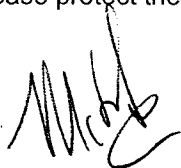
Small urban reserves in West Union (as long as they stop south of the Rock Creek floodplain) and to connect Area 93 to the City of Portland are acceptable, although I truly believe that Area 93 should also be converted to Rural Reserve. Urban Reserves in the Lower Springville area and on the northwest corner of the Hwy 26 / Helvetia Road interchange are not appropriate. Any undesignated lands around North Plains should be kept small, remembering that city's need for voter-approved annexation, which has limited their ability to expand.

The Hwy 26 / Helvetia Road interchange can serve north Hillsboro without development on the adjacent farmland. The presence of highways and interchanges cannot become a justification for more urban development.

Rural Reserves are not a perfect form of protection. But they can prevent urbanization of valuable resources for at least 40 years, providing space and time to use other tools such as public acquisition, conservation easements, and education programs to be implemented.

Please designate all of the Reserves study area north of Hwy 26 in Washington and Multnomah counties, including Helvetia and the Tualatin Mountains, as Rural Reserves. Farm and forest owners need the certainty of Rural Reserves, and we should not be shy about protecting Foundation quality farm and forest lands all the way to the outer edge of the Reserve study area. As most of you know I have been trying to move legislation that would make greater Forest Park and the Balch Creek watershed an area of special state concern. But if you make decisions consistent with my request in the letter, it will obviate the need to move that legislation.

The decisions you are making will make a strong statement about what this region values. Please protect these resources that make our region unique and sustainable.



Rep. Mitch Greenlick, District 33

¹ Forest Park Natural Resources Management Plan; Portland Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Planning, Adopted by City Council February 8, 1995. Page 9.