

## **Part III: Cottage Grove Recreation System: Needs & Issues**

### ***I Like***

*I like the tire swing  
Because it makes me sing.  
I like the slide  
Because it glides.*

***-by Alauna O'Brien  
London Elementary School, 1<sup>st</sup> Grade***

# **Cottage Grove Recreation System: Needs & Issues**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Residents of the City of Cottage Grove receive many benefits from the current park system. Benefits include improvements to air quality, water quality, habitat protection, flood control, stormwater management, wetland protection and compliance with federal and state environmental goals. By protecting the environment and providing recreational opportunities, parks provide many economic and social benefits. The following chapter lists some of environmental, social and economic values provided by parks are in Cottage Grove. Each section includes a discussion of specific parks that meet these identified values. Preservation of these values is one of the key needs addressed by the parks system.

The community's opinion of needs and issues facing the City's park system was reviewed in several unscientific surveys over the last several years. A review of the findings of these surveys follows the review of identified needs.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the deficiencies and issues facing the current park system. This list furthers the surveys' findings and includes other issues facing the City's parks system that have been identified by the state and other local agencies as well as by the Parks Advisory Committee.

## **B. ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC & SOCIAL NEEDS**

### **1. Environmental Protection**

#### **Air Quality**

Parklands improve air quality. Large, more heavily-vegetated parks, such as Cottage Grove's Willamette River Greenway, East Regional Park, North Regional Park, and Coiner Park, are particularly vital in meeting this need. Green areas provide respite from urban pollution. Vegetation can help to sequester local pollutants and consume carbon dioxide. Due to the vastness of paved surfaces (roads, parking lots, driveways) and rooftops, urban areas are warmer than the surrounding countryside. Natural areas and parks are oases within the city. Additionally, the sweet smells of spring flowers, evergreen trees and river water contribute to quality of life for urban dwellers.

If numerous shade trees are planted along the Row River Trail, this Greenway has the potential to function as a means of funneling fresh air into Cottage Grove. Tree planting along the trail has commenced due to the efforts of numerous service projects and Arbor Day activities.

## **Water Quality**

The creation and proper maintenance of parks, natural areas, and greenways can contribute to water quality. In addition to shading waterways and lowering water temperatures, their vegetative cover slows water movement and holds soil in place on banks, trapping nitrogen, phosphorus and urban toxins before they flow into the waterways. City-owned portions of the Willamette River Greenway, along with the North and East Regional Parks and Silk Creek Park, protect a small but important buffer of large shade trees along the waterways flowing through Cottage Grove. Water quality values at some of these parks are compromised by use of herbicides. Conversely, water quality values at these parks can be maintained or enhanced through maintenance of the tree buffer alongside the Coast Fork of the Willamette, Silk Creek and the Row River.



Coast Fork of the Willamette River

One of the Coast Fork's greatest water quality problems is high temperature, which limits the amount of dissolved oxygen available to support fish populations. The Coast Fork Watershed Council is currently conducting a watershed assessment. Results from their efforts are not yet available but will be a source of information when complete.

## **Greenway**

Cottage Grove is close to the headwaters of the 225-mile Willamette River. The Coast Fork of the Willamette River bisects the City, intersecting with the Row River at the northernmost limits of the City. This riparian corridor is protected through the Willamette River Greenway Program, which was established locally in 1967 and strengthened by statewide legislation in 1973.

Despite little to no funding for the Greenway program for two decades, Cottage Grove has remained, from the very beginning, a leader in the protection of the Greenway. The City has protected many acres of riparian lands through purchase of private property and

the creation of public parks along the Greenway over the years. Cottage Grove's completion of a Parks Plan will enhance its eligibility for inclusion in statewide distribution of federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF), which may be used to expand this network of riparian parks.

Much of the land within the Willamette River Greenway is under private ownership and already developed with residential or commercial uses. Consequently, the primary method of Greenway protection in Cottage Grove is through implementation of Zoning Ordinance *Chapter 18.46.17 -- Additional conditions - Greenway conditional use permit*. This code requires developers and landowners to receive Greenway Conditional Use Permit approval from the Cottage Grove Planning Commission for all new or expanded development within the designated Greenway.

Vegetative buffers along waterways help protect water quality and temperature, stabilize riverbanks, provide for aquatic wildlife habitat and serve as movement corridors for wildlife. Multiple scientific studies have been conducted to measure the minimum vegetative buffer width needed to protect ecological functions. (See appendix for more information on the types of ecological functions protected by varying buffer widths.) Most water quality functions, including temperature control, sediment removal and addition of woody debris into the waterway for aquatic habitat, can be provided with a buffer of mature shade trees. However, many terrestrial wildlife habitat and movement corridor functions need a much larger vegetative buffer (of over 200 feet); an even wider buffer is needed to provide adequate protection for large mammals and many birds.

Most of the Willamette River riparian buffer is within private ownership. The City of Cottage Grove owns significant portions of land along the west side of the Coast Fork, with limited land holdings on the east side. Much of the City-owned land is a narrow strip of large, healthy shade trees along the water's edge. The under story is dominated by invasive blackberry bushes. Restoration of native vegetation would also enhance water quality within this riparian corridor.

### **Fish and wildlife, threatened species**

In March of 1999, the Upper Willamette River Evolutionarily Significant Unit of Chinook Salmon was listed as Threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Historically, spring Chinook Salmon spawned in the Coast Fork of the Willamette River; however, Dorena and Cottage Grove dams currently prevent the migration of salmon to upstream spawning locations. Downstream from the dams, flow rates and high water temperatures impair the quality of spawning habitat. Preservation of parkland is one relatively inexpensive and effective means of protecting and enhancing water quality and fish habitat, better enabling Cottage Grove to fulfill its responsibilities to protect listed species and avoid future listings in the Willamette River basin.

The Willamette River Greenway, Silk Creek Park, North Regional Park and East Regional Park provide water quality values that help protect fish habitat for federally listed species.

### **Stormwater**

Natural areas, and to a lesser extent maintained grassy open spaces and fields, function as nature’s natural stormwater cleansing system. Trees break the fall of precipitation and hold bank soils in place, both of which reduce siltation. Groundcovers, including grass, slow the flow of water. Soils filter out contaminants as slow-moving water filters through the leafy debris and soil structure. Additionally, parks, both developed and undeveloped, provide large areas for siting human-made stormwater facilities that rely on a natural cleansing process. For example, stormwater retention ponds, grassy swales and artificial wetlands, all of which can consume a lot of space, can be part of the open space landscaping of parkland.

North Regional Park has potential to contribute stormwater and wastewater cleansing values. The location of Cottage Grove’s wastewater treatment plant within the park, its proximity to the confluence of the Coast Fork and Row River and its large size help make this an ideal location for human-made water cleansing features. Additionally, North Regional Park’s proximity to the Cottage Grove Speedway, the Western Oregon Exhibition fairgrounds and Middlefield Golf Course, all of which have the potential to contribute to localized water pollution, warrants greater scrutiny of the role this public land area can play in stormwater cleansing.



Bike trail on North Regional Park, golf course to left, river to right

Future parkland in developing areas of the City has the potential to include human made natural stormwater cleansing features as part of the landscaping and open space uses.

## **Flood control**

Left undisturbed, floodways and floodplains function as emergency drainage systems during floods. Development within the floodplain negatively impacts the volume of runoff into the waterways during floods, either altering or removing historic floodwater pathways. This same development is highly vulnerable during a flood event. The cost of repairing flood-damaged private and public infrastructure is born by the greater community in the form of higher insurance rates, public disaster relief aid and damage to the fish and wildlife habitat within the river ecosystem. These costs are largely preventable through the maintenance of vulnerable floodplain areas.

The Willamette River Greenway, Silk Creek Park, North Regional Park and East Regional Park contain floodplain protection values.

## **Floodplain and Riparian Ordinances**

Chapter 18.38.060 of the Zoning Ordinance protects riparian vegetation along the Row River, which is not protected under the Willamette River Greenway provisions in Chapter 18.46.170. Structures and other similar improvements are required to be set back 25 feet from the ordinary high water line or 15 feet from the top of bank, whichever is less. Improvements can be located closer to the Row River if it is demonstrated that the existing riparian vegetation does not extend into the setback and has not been removed in violation of vegetation maintenance standards. If vegetation is removed from within the setback, it is required to be replanted within a year with native vegetation. No more than 25% of vegetation may be removed.

The Row River and Coast Fork of the Willamette River are the only waterways in Cottage Grove with riparian vegetation protections. Silk Creek and other smaller streams are not addressed. The Riparian Vegetation – Row River zoning code is not well enforced either, as it is separated from other setback/development standards within the zoning ordinance in the “General Use Requirements” section.

Cottage Grove also has a Flood Plain Management Ordinance included in Chapter 18.39 of the Zoning Ordinance. The Flood Plain Ordinance is designed to protect public life and health and to minimize public monies spent on flood control projects and damage to structures. Maintaining and increasing the number of parks along the floodway helps keep development out of these areas, which both prevents the loss of life and property in the event of a flood, allows rivers to follow their historic flooding patterns which benefits fish and wildlife, and decreases potential damage downstream from displaced waters.

## **Wetlands**

According to the *Pacific Coast Joint Venture Implementation Plans July 2002 Draft Willamette Valley Plan*, between 41% (Gabriel 1993, in Bernert et al) to 87% (Oregon Natural Heritage Program 1998) of wetland and riparian habitat has been lost in the

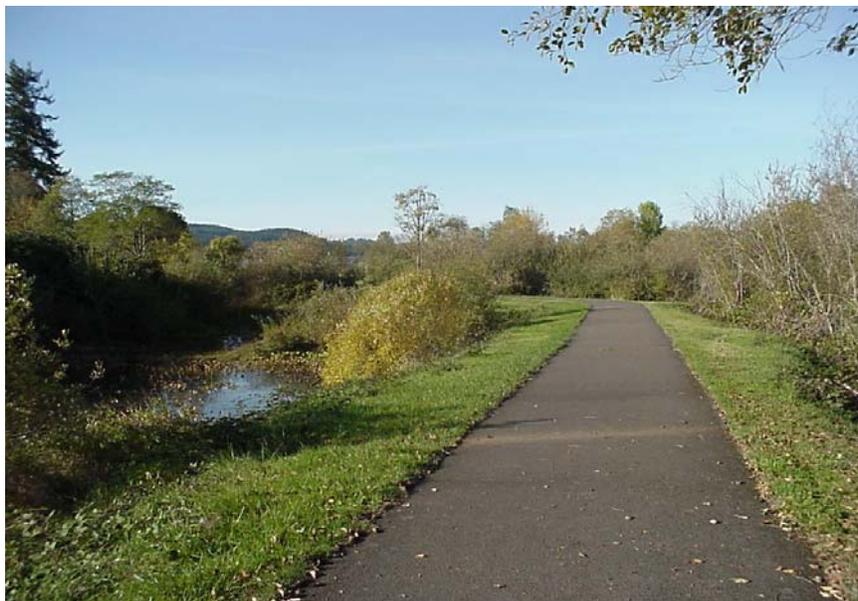
Willamette Valley due to flood control measures, urbanization, agriculture and introduction of invasive species.

Wetlands perform many functions that are vital to natural life functions of all species. According to the 2003-2007 SCORP, wetlands provide:

- “flood control and storm damage protection, which prevent loss of life and property;
- essential spawning, rearing, feeding, nesting and wintering habitats for a major portion of this state’s fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species;
- essential habitat for waterfowl using the Pacific Flyway and for the rearing of salmon and other anadromous and resident fish;
- water quality improvement through absorption and filtration of sediments, nutrients, metals, and toxic materials that would otherwise degrade groundwater or the quality of adjacent rivers, lakes and estuaries; and
- significant opportunity for public recreation, environmental and ecological research, education, scenic diversity and aesthetic value as open space.”

To move towards the goal of maintaining or restoring the numerous functions of wetlands, the Willamette River has been identified as a priority region/watershed for wetland acquisition and restoration in SCORP. The Willamette River is also considered an EPA Priority Basin and DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) Critical Basin.

Cottage Grove’s Zoning Ordinance does not restrict wetland development. Natural Resource Areas protect wetlands from development, thereby preserving some wetland habitat. East Regional Park, North Regional Park and portions of the schoolyards at Bohemia Elementary School and the Cottage Grove High School contain wetland values.



East Regional Park

## **Wildlife corridors**

Protection of wildlife corridors through the city and between varying ecosystems within the city helps sustain and replenish existing wildlife populations. The Row River and the Coast Fork of the Willamette River, along with their associated greenway parks and natural areas, function as wildlife movement corridors, connecting less developed county lands on either side of Cottage Grove to each other.

East Regional Park, with its numerous ponds, wetlands and river frontage, hosts a wide variety of wildlife. One existing impediment to wildlife movement within this waterway is the bicycle path through the East Regional Park. Instead of utilizing a boardwalk structure across the water, the path severs the waterway. Another impediment to wildlife movement in Cottage Grove is the lack of connectivity between the protected riparian areas at North Regional Park, East Regional Park and the Willamette River Greenway with upland habitat.

## **Statewide Planning Goals 5 and 7**

The City of Cottage Grove has not updated its Goal 5 and Goal 7 inventories since the original comprehensive plan was written in 1980. Both inventories have been prioritized for completion in the near future.

Under Oregon's Statewide Planning Goal 5, local governments must adopt programs that protect natural resources and conserve scenic and historic areas and open spaces, as these resources promote healthy environments and natural landscapes that contribute to Oregon's livability. Goal 5 specifies that each local jurisdiction must inventory the following resources: riparian corridors, including water and riparian areas and fish habitat; wetland; wildlife habitat; federal Wild and Scenic Rivers; State Scenic Waterways; groundwater resources; approved Oregon Recreation Trails; natural areas; wilderness areas; mineral and aggregate resources; energy sources; and cultural areas. Local governments are also encouraged to maintain current inventories of historic resources, open space, scenic views and sites. The Parks Plan meets Goal 5's primary planning requirement in determining the need for open space within the City and establishing standards for the amount, distribution and type of open space needed.

Oregon's Statewide Planning Goal 7 is designed to assist local governments in protecting people and property from natural hazards. Goal 7 requires local governments to adopt comprehensive plans (inventories, policies and implementing measures) to reduce risk to people and property from natural hazards. In adopting plan policies, local governments should consider: the benefits of maintaining natural hazard areas as open space, recreation and other low density uses; the beneficial effects that natural hazards can have on natural resources and the environment; and the effects of development and mitigation measures in identified hazard areas on the management of natural resources. In the fall of 2003, Cottage Grove staff will perform a natural hazards inventory to identify properties at risk from floods, landslides, earthquakes, wildfires and dam failure, as well as other

man-made hazards including threats to critical infrastructure and weapons of mass destruction.

## **Herbicides & Pesticides**

Studies indicate chemical pesticides and herbicides cause damage to the environment, water supply, children and all living things. Cottage Grove has a herbicide/pesticide application policy that precludes the use of certain pesticides, requires pre- and post-application notices at the application site and bans the application of chemicals during fruit-bearing season so as to protect the public from ingestion of treated fruit. The policy encourages mechanical control but allows chemical treatment in lawns and flowerbeds, along pathways and fence lines in the event of blackberries and around the bases of trees. Public Works employees have taken the initiative not to use pesticides/herbicides at parks where there is play equipment, including Coiner Park, Fort Harrison and West End. In these parks the lawns are instead treated on a bi-yearly basis with compost tea.

## **Water Consumption**

Water consumption in city parks can pose a problem during extremely dry periods. The existing sprinkler system in most parks is old and does not enable staff to water areas of the park separately dependent on their water needs. There are no decorative fountains, outdoor swimming pools or outdoor wading pools with high water demand, however, and the system's limited number of drinking fountains and toilets do not significantly contribute to water consumption.

## **2. Economic Benefits**

Parks, open space and recreation produce economic benefits, including:

- Attraction of tourists;
- Enhancement of real estate values surrounding parks and open space; and
- Attraction and retention of new business and industry.

Nationwide, parks have for a long time been recognized for their economic value to cities. According to The Trust for Public Land in its publication *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*, "Open space increases property values and the desirability of cities and towns. As early as the 1850s, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted justified the purchase of land for New York's Central Park by noting that the rising value of adjacent property would produce enough in taxes to pay for the park. By 1864, Olmsted could document a \$55,880 net return in annual taxes over what the city was paying in interest for land and improvements. By 1873, the park, which until then had cost approximately \$14 million, was responsible for an extra \$5.24 million in taxes each year."

The Cottage Grove business community recognizes the importance of parkland in the city's economic revitalization. The City of Cottage Grove, Cottage Grove Area Chamber

of Commerce, Economic and Business Improvement Districts and other groups of citizens continue to work to make Cottage Grove more attractive to tourists, to draw more dollars to the community while keeping intact the City's small town charm.

Recreation and tourism have become a focus for the area, partly due to the presence of six historic covered bridges, two flood control reservoirs with superb recreational opportunities at Dorena and Cottage Grove Lakes, the 18-mile Row River Trail, the Cottage Grove Speedway and surrounding forestland. In addition to tourism itself, Cottage Grove is broadening its economic base to include manufacturing of goods that blend well with a strong parks, recreation and tourism base. The Cottage Grove Target Industries Study Technical Advisory Committee ranked "nursery and greenhouse products" and "outdoor recreational products" as the two highest priority businesses to solicit in a Lane Council of Governments produced report dated June 2001.

### **3. Social Benefits**

Recreation has significant social benefits for children, adults and families, and as a result, benefits the overall community. The City of Gresham, Oregon, sums it up well: "Recreating together builds strong families, the foundation of a stronger society. Recreation provides opportunities for community involvement. Community recreation reduces alienation, loneliness and anti-social behaviors. Physical recreation contributes to a full and meaningful life. Regular physical activity is one of the very best methods of health insurance for individuals and communities. Relaxation, rest and revitalization through recreation are essential to stress management in today's busy and demanding world. Meaningful recreation activity is an essential source of self-esteem and positive self-image. Children's play is essential to the human development process. Leisure opportunities for youth provide positive lifestyle choices and alternatives to self-destructive behavior. Parks and open spaces bring beauty to an area while giving people satisfaction and improving their quality of life."



Play equipment at Harrison Park

According to a Carnegie study, when kids are asked what they would most like to do during their after school hours, access to parks and recreation tops the list. Since 40% of a child or adolescent's time is discretionary, access to safe and positive activities is essential to their social well-being. Fort Myers, Florida, has a Success Through Academics and Recreational Support program, which has been extremely successful. Mayor Smith of Fort Myers said, "As the mayor of a city that totally committed itself to using recreation and academic support as the vehicle for combating violent juvenile crime, I can tell you that it works...In my judgment it is the best, most cost-effective and most responsible position to take in the very complex search for solutions to juvenile crime."

In addition to helping kids and adults live a happier life, access to parks and recreation opportunities contributes to people's physical well-being. Sedentary lifestyles combined with unhealthy diets are creating a nationwide epidemic of life-threatening health problems for children and adults, including Type II diabetes, heart disease and obesity. The U.S. Center for Disease Control, the Oregon Health Division and Oregon Coalition for Physical Activity are promoting physical activity through recreational trail opportunities and are developing federal funding for such projects.

## **C. SURVEYS OF COMMUNITY NEEDS**

### **1. Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan**

Oregon State University's Department of Forest Resources recently completed a report entitled, "Oregon's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP): Demand and Needs Analysis," which found that the "highest use" activities for Oregonians are running/walking for exercise and walking for pleasure. The next most popular activities are bird watching and nature/wildlife observation. According to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, people demand most outdoor recreation opportunities be easily accessible in the communities where they live.

Cottage Grove is part of SCORP Planning Region 3. Region 3 participation rates exceed statewide averages in the following Outdoor Recreation Activities: biking, fishing from a boat, nature/wildlife observation, outdoor court games, picnicking, running/walking for exercise, soccer, softball and swimming in an outdoor pool. Twenty percent or more of the residents in the region bike, bird watch, observe wildlife, picnic, go sightseeing, run/walk for exercise and walk for pleasure.

Among these activities, Cottage Grove has fewer facilities than the statewide average for picnicking, softball, soccer, interpretive nature trails and outdoor swimming pools. Cottage Grove also has fewer facilities than the statewide average for basketball courts, equipped-play areas and outdoor swimming pools.

Cottage Grove, however, does provide more facilities than the statewide average for walking trails and golf course holes (private). Additionally, if South Lane School District (SLSD) lands are included in the recreational facility inventory, Cottage Grove meets or

exceeds the state average for baseball/softball, basketball and football/soccer fields. According to the 2003-2007 SCORP, Cottage Grove's experience is common, in that schools provide a substantial percentage of the outdoor recreation facilities statewide.

In comparing the 2002 recreation participation estimates with the 1986-87 Pacific Northwest Outdoor Recreation Study, the most significant “participation growth activities” in the state are Golf (+188%), Nature/Wildlife Observation (+170%), Non-Motorized Boating (+138%), Using Playground Equipment (108%) and RV/Trailer Camping (+95%).

## **2. Recent Local Surveys**

Between late 1998 and early 2000, two City Council-appointed parks committees (POSRAC and CPAC) held five community surveys regarding parks, recreation and open space needs in Cottage Grove. None of the five surveys was scientific. However, the five surveys, taken together, did reach children, young families, middle-aged community members and senior citizens, providing input drawn from a broad cross-section of Cottage Grove.

POSRAC (Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Advisory Committee) conducted one shopping area survey (in front of Safeway, Wal-mart, Price Chopper and in the downtown business district), attracting primarily middle-aged participants. POSRAC also surveyed 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. Community Development Department staff conducted one survey during Bohemia Mining Days in 2000, which predominately attracted young families.

CPAC (Comprehensive Parks Advisory Committee) conducted the Parks Partners Public Poll at the Cottage Grove Community Center, which predominately attracted socially-active community members. Finally, CPAC conducted a citywide Parks Pizzazz Community Survey mailed to every home in Cottage Grove. CPAC also took the survey to most public service organizations. Senior citizens participated in the Parks Pizzazz Survey at a greater level than any other demographic group.

A sampling of the comments received during these surveys include the following:

- 1) The five most frequently used parks in Cottage Grove are:
  1. Coiner Park
  2. Row River Trail
  3. Swinging Bridge
  4. North Regional Park
  5. Willamette River Greenway
  
- 2) In order of priority, the following park features are people’s top twelve park facilities and features priorities:
  1. Wildlife habitat, open space, ridgeline, water, and wetland preservation
  2. Picnic tables/shelters

3. Multi-use trails
  4. Handicap accessibility
  5. Large shade trees
  6. Flower beds
  7. Children's playgrounds
  8. Bench swings
  9. Skate park
  10. Swimming pool
  11. Climbing structures
  12. Pedestrian bridges
- 3) 78% of residents polled think the City should purchase and develop more parkland.
- 4) In order of importance, residents surveyed would prefer the City to develop:  
Community Parks (like Coiner)
1. Neighborhood Parks (like Fort Harrison)
  2. Natural Areas (like East Regional Park)
- Note: Mini Parks (e.g., Benny Hubbell) and Special Use Parks (e.g., the proposed Carousel Park) were not highly preferred by survey respondents.
- 5) Write-ins for specific park types that residents would like the City to purchase and develop include, in order of preference:
1. Mt. David
  2. Fenced dog exercise park
  3. Indoor recreation center
- 6) Residents under 60 years of age find play areas for children and youth contribute most to the quality of life in the City. Residents 60 years and older find preservation of open space contributes most to the quality of life in the City.
- 7) Children and youth would like the following recreational amenities to be provided:
1. Playground
  2. Swimming pool
  3. Skate park
  4. Climbing structures (jungle gyms for kids)
  5. Basketball courts
  6. Water park
  7. Volleyball
  8. Climbing wall (rock-climbing related)
- 8) Eight percent of park users feel unsafe in City parks. Additional lighting, formation of Neighborhood Watch groups, increased visibility from streets, and

increased police patrols were recommended by survey respondents for improving people's sense of safety in City parks.

- 9) In order of frequency, most park patrons reach City parks by foot, car and bike.
- 10) With limited funds, the number one priority for the City's parks system is maintaining existing parks.
- 11) To fund park maintenance, development and acquisition, residents prefer seeking grants, individual donations to a special parks fund, event fees and a parks system development fee (SDC) increase.
- 12) Volunteering and encouraging local service groups and neighborhood groups to adopt a park for maintenance purposes is recommended.
- 13) Residents would like to limit or curtail use of chemical herbicides and pesticides in City parks.



Biker on Swinging Bridge

## **D. NEEDS & ISSUES**

After reviewing the economic, social and environmental benefits generally associated with parks and the preferences stated by the citizens of Cottage Grove in the above surveys, the following needs and issues were identified in regards to Cottage Grove's parks and recreation system. These needs will be utilized to identify potential projects and recommend actions in Chapter 5.

### **1. Distribution of Park Land**

Certain residential neighborhoods do not have access to developed parks. For example, the northeast portion of the City has no access to a neighborhood park or school park.

The Northwest Neighborhood also has no access to either neighborhood or school parks, although Mt. David is accessible for some residents from the Northwest Neighborhood and has been used for informal recreation for generations. Development of Mt. David with residential housing as proposed by the current Comprehensive Plan Map designation would eliminate a valuable open space. Infill on vacant lots within developed neighborhoods will also decrease the amount of available open space for future park development.



Mt. David as seen from Northwest Neighborhood

## **2. Distance to Recreation Opportunities**

Cottage Grove has a wealth of surrounding federal, state, and county parklands, making access to natural areas, water recreation and/or hiking/biking/horse riding trails easier in Cottage Grove than in many cities. While these recreational opportunities are provided and maintained by other entities, they provide significant benefits to Cottage Grove residents with access to personal transportation. Residents with limited or irregular access to vehicles or with special requirements, including youth, senior citizens, people with disabilities and low-income residents, are relatively less able to participate in these outlying recreational opportunities.

The 1994-1999 SCORP found that traveling long distances to parks and recreation facilities undermines use by low-income households (under \$35,000) and families. As distance to facilities increases, participation declines. With an increasing number of two-income households, these barriers will likely become even more prohibitive. Placement of future recreational resources closer to population centers warrants special attention.

Tourists attracted to Cottage Grove's natural surroundings may pass on visits to Cottage Grove if the City is perceived as offering limited attractions and aesthetic beauty of its own. Drawing these visitors to City businesses makes the provision of park and recreation facilities inside the City economically attractive.

### 3. Cohesion

The 1974 Parks and Recreation Master Plan found that a variety of recreational facilities exist in the Cottage Grove area but that no overall sense of unity or pattern of parks and open space existed. In the years since, the City has made some progress toward a unified parks system. The Willamette River Greenway, North Regional Park and East Regional Park are connected to some degree by sidewalks and on-street bike paths. Most of the City's parks have uniform entrance signs, lending cohesion to the City-owned parks system. Coiner Park, however, the City's primary community park, lacks such signage. Signage directing travelers from one park to another is also lacking.

### 4. Connectivity

Some residential neighborhoods lack safe access to parks because of various physical barriers. Highway 99-South and the railroad tracks block safe access to Harrison Park and the new Cottage Grove High School from the east side of town. The same barriers block safe access to playfields at Lincoln Middle School, Harrison Elementary School and the Skate Park from the west side of the city. Scheduled improvements, including a stoplight-controlled intersection with cross walks at Highway 99, South 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Harrison Avenue, will better serve this end of town.

Access issues exist at East and North Regional Parks. East Regional Park has stocked fishing ponds, bike trails and jogging paths, and hosts the privately-run BMX facility. The only way to walk to the park using sidewalks, however, is through the old industrial park. This entrance is little known and hidden away. The main entrance into the park from Row River Road is not connected to the City sidewalk system, nor is there a marked or signed bicycle crossing to the park from the Row River Trail. North Regional Park has no access other than from a bike path extending to Middlefield Village. This park lacks both public parking and a connection to the City sidewalk system.



Ramp into River Terrace Park

## **5. Accessibility**

None of the City's parks are fully ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. Most of the City's picnic tables are usable by someone in a wheelchair, but do not technically meet ADA requirements (specifically toe and knee space). Likewise, City parks are lacking in benches with both back support and arm rests. Most pathways in City parks lack the required 80 inches of headroom. The Willamette River Greenway trail has the most compliance barriers concerning trails because of its narrow width, lack of firmness and numerous roots.

Public Works staff are aware of the need to improve access and opportunities for recreational use for all City residents. New park development projects and park furniture acquisitions will be made with access for people with disabilities as an important consideration. Significant cost barriers may impede development of park facilities.

## **6. Safety Concerns**

According to Parks Pizzazz Survey respondents, most residents feel safe in Cottage Grove parks with the exception of night-time park usage. According to the respondents, their safety concerns could best be addressed through additional lighting, the formation of Neighborhood Watch groups for parks, improving the visibility of parks from the streets and an increase of police patrols. Public Works staff has increased the feeling of safety in parks in recent years by physical design, such as high pruning of trees and lighting. The safety of Coiner Park, in particular, has improved. However there have been some unintended consequences of park alterations, such as eliminating soccer games in Coiner Park due to light posts in the field. Vandalism remains an ongoing issue at many public parks.

## **7. User Conflicts**

Certain parks are overused due to their small size or other factors. Over utilization can result in user conflicts and facility degradation. Coiner Park is the community's favorite park, but is crowded on weekends and during community events. The Park supports certain uses well, for example, the Grower's Market and playing children. Other activities, often provided in community parks, are not well supported, including certain athletic and reflective activities. Coiner Park also hosts the only picnic space open to reservations, which occasionally causes conflicts.

One source of user conflicts at Coiner Park is its small size. At just under seven acres, the Park is substantially smaller than the recommended NRPA standard of 30-50 acres. It is also well below the 1974 Cottage Grove recommended standard of 40-100 acres. As a result, conflicts arise from overuse.

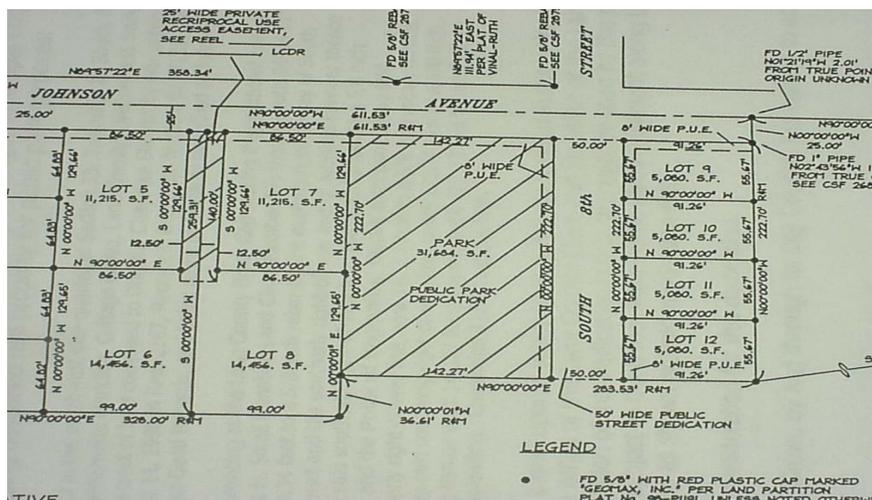


Coiner Park Gazebo, rebuilt in 2003

Using mini parks as neighborhood parks has also resulted in user conflicts. Whiteman Park, for example, functions as a neighborhood park for young children in the Northwest Neighborhood, but it also hosts the Genealogical Society. The noise created by playing children and skateboards can disrupt the quieter pursuits of community groups in the Veley House, which also shares the small park site.

## 8. Undeveloped Parks

Certain parks remain undeveloped or underdeveloped. For example, Stewart Orchard Park temporarily serves as open space and informal playing field. To serve as a neighborhood park, it should include playground and active recreation infrastructure. Whiteman Park's unsafe playground equipment has been removed and awaits replacement, pending decisions regarding the future of the Veley House, which needs major repairs. The Corridor Design Plan and Economic Feasibility Study for the Row River Trail was completed in January 1999. Since then, the Row River Trail has been surfaced, but amenities such as benches, trailhead facilities and nodal parks have not been installed. These underdeveloped parks have not reached their full use potential.



Plat of undeveloped Stewart Orchard Park

## **9. Governance**

Chapter 2.28 of the Cottage Grove Municipal Code lays the groundwork for a Committee for Care of Parks. This committee is supposed to have the charge of improving and beautifying city parks using money secured by donations or otherwise. The committee is inactive.

The City does not have a Parks and Recreation Department. No organized recreational activities are administered or funded by the City. Currently the City employs one year-round Public Works staff person to maintain parks. During the summer months, the Public Works Department employs additional temporary workers for park maintenance.

## **10. School Use Agreements**

Public schools provide 76% of all outdoor basketball goals, 68% of all football/rugby/soccer fields, 65% of all baseball/softball fields and 53% of all equipped children's playground areas statewide. Cottage Grove's schools provide the lion's share of community park facilities with most of the City's athletic fields and facilities for adult sports being located upon school grounds. Without an agreement between the South Lane School District and the City of Cottage Grove, it should not be assumed that school lands and facilities will always be available to the general public for the purposes of parks and recreation. The potential does exist for their more general use by the public.

## **11. Funding**

The 1994-99 SCORP found national, state, non-profit and local funding for recreation development and programs is in decline. Outdoor recreation is being subordinated to other social issues like crime, health care and education during budget appropriation processes. Yet demand for the number, quality and diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities is increasing. Remaining grant programs are highly competitive. In the last three years, the City of Cottage Grove has applied for five grants from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. None of the grants received funding. One of the issues the City is struggling with in attaining grant funds from outside sources is being able to demonstrate a strong local funding match.

The City does not have a Parks and Recreation Department. No organized recreational activities are administered or funded by the City. South Lane School District, Cottage Grove Recreation Association, Cottage Grove Tennis Association, Cottage Grove Speedway, Cottage Grove BMX and other private entities provide and fund active recreation opportunities.

## **12. Volunteerism**

Volunteers have played a large role in parks beautification over time. Individual volunteers make a noticeable impact. However, there is not a large, organized group of parks volunteers who can be relied upon to properly maintain the parks system.

Furthermore, because of the City's insurance restrictions, volunteers cannot perform maintenance activities that require the use of power tools. This lack of dedicated manpower hinders development of intensive uses.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

As presented above, the following issues present the greatest challenges to the future of the Cottage Grove Parks System:

- Distribution of parklands
- Distance to recreational opportunities
- Cohesion
- Connectivity
- Accessibility
- Safety concerns
- User conflicts
- Undeveloped parks
- Lack of separate governance
- Reduced funding
- Reduced volunteerism

In order to face these challenges, Cottage Grove must identify and prioritize its expectations for the future of the park system and establish standards for park maintenance and development. The following chapter provides definitions and standards for use in parks planning.