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Study Recommends Changes for Forest Park Management



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(Portland Parks and Recreation)

PORTLAND, Ore.-

The lush green canopy of Forest Park stretches for miles and miles atop the west hills of Portland. It's a daily refuge for Karen Serowick. "I love it. This is the best place in the world to run."

But a City Club of Portland report on the city's uniquely undeveloped 5100 acre park says the park isn't as healthy as it could be. While this gigantic park makes up 47 percent of the city's parklands, it gets only one half of one percent of the funding of Portland Parks and Recreation.

Better signage, and more thorough eradication of invasive plant species is also among the 65 page report from the civic organization. Garlic mustard, himalayan blackberry and English ivy are the biggest problems in the park. English ivy is the considered the poster child for invasive damaging species. The plant crowds out native plants and can snake up trees and choke the entire forest.

"There's a great concern about the health of the park," says Maragaret Van Valkenburg. She's an ordinary citizen and member of City Club. She chaired the year-long study of Forest Park. "We heard from many people that the park is not healthy."

One of the most unique parks in Portland and one of the largest urban preserves of forest land, Forest Park owes its very existence to City Club. A City Club Report in the 1940s urged the city to purchase the hill and canyon forest land in the northwest part of the city in the first place. Among the recommended changes is to turn what is current a city park over to the regional Metro government. Another option would be to form a regional parks department much like that for the Minneapolis, Minnesota area.

"Clearly the city has not been able to fund what is required to maintain Forest Park," says Van Valkenburg. "We heard over and over again that it's a regional park and it's user base is regional. So our conclusion, doesn't it makes sense to fund it from a regional funding source?"

It's the nature of this special preserved forested land that draws in Ian Schroeder from Clackamas

County to run here. He doesn't care who runs the park- as long as it stays natural and mostly undeveloped. "I'm for whatever it takes to keep this park the gem that it is," says the Milwaukie, Oregon man. "So whatever it takes."

The purpose of the City Club's report is to spur not only discussion-- but action and positive change here in Forest Park. The civic organization periodically makes recommendations to elected leaders about certain directions and policy areas. This committee report will be presented to the full City Club membership in June for a vote.

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