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## **Burglar alarm sounds about city's proud possession**

**By The Oregonian Editorial Board**

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A City Club of Portland committee issued a stinging -- and ringing -- rebuke last week to the city of Portland, specifically, the city's Bureau of Parks & Recreation.

True, the report is polite, eloquent and beautifully written. And it compliments the Parks Bureau's scientific expertise and dedicated staff. Nevertheless, the report, in effect, is a burglar alarm, loudly alerting Portlanders that one of our city's proudest possessions, the 5,157-acre Forest Park, is in serious danger.

Political neglect and inattention, invasive species, public overuse and off-leash dogs -- all these factors combined -- are gradually stealing what Portland has often described as its "crown jewel."

So severe has been the park's degradation under the city's supposed "stewardship" that the City Club committee flirts with a radical solution -- transfer of the park's ownership to a regional park authority, perhaps affiliated with the Metro government. This makes sense.

The report does not explain how the city, Metro or any other agency would find the money to restore, rehabilitate and protect the park, but it does build a persuasive case that the city's neglect is not just a question of money, but also of long-term political and budget priorities.

Astonishingly, the Parks Bureau doesn't have a single staff member devoted solely to the park. It spends only a tiny fraction of its budget on it, even though the park is 47 percent of Portland's park acreage.

The City Club as a whole won't officially debate the report's recommendations until June 4. But this report is a gift to city Commissioner Nick Fish, who is in charge of parks, no matter what. It should help him chart a course for his first full term in office.

The report shows that the city, while boasting about the park, has failed over many years to summon the political will -- and attention span -- required to safeguard it. Fish has to change that.

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