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Diversity in Forest Park

By Letters to the editor

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The City Club report on Forest Park is thought-provoking and has some good recommendations. But it also unfortunately includes this statement (on page 24):

"We know that an old-growth forest in western Oregon would be heavily coniferous. So a plan to reduce fire danger by focusing on deciduous trees is at odds with a plan to restore the park to old-growth conditions."

As environmental consultants who worked on the wildfire management plan for Forest Park, we proposed that the park of the future be thought of as three "old-growth" forest types. The first type is what is commonly thought of as old growth, dominated by large conifer trees such as hemlock, cedar and fir. The second type is a mixed Douglas fir-bigleaf maple old growth, where the maples are more numerous than the firs. Examples can be found in unlogged portions of the City of Corvallis watershed and elsewhere in Oregon and Washington. Maples can live 300 years or more, certainly qualifying as "old growth." The third type, often overlooked in Forest Park because of its limited extent and location away from major trails, is old growth Oregon white oak. Under favorable conditions, oak trees can live 500 years or more.

The important point for the City Club and park managers to understand is that Portland can keep wildfire risk at reasonable levels by maintaining and nurturing all three old-growth types in the park in their appropriate places given elevation and slope orientation. Trying to force the entire park to become dominated by old-growth conifer trees, as is called for in the 1995 Management Plan, is the wrong way to go both ecologically and with respect to managing fire risk.

DEAN APOSTOL

Damascus

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