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## New partnership expected to improve health of Forest Park

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Forest Park, an urban wilderness sprawling across 5,157 acres in Portland, is under increasing pressure from recreational users.

A new partnership between the **Portland Bureau of Parks & Recreation** and the nonprofit **Forest Park Conservancy** is expected to improve the park's ecological health, officials from both groups said.

The two organizations announced that they will merge efforts to maintain **the park's** more than 5,000 acres and restore 2,500 acres overgrown with invasive weeds for several years.

The partnership is one of the five management initiatives that **City Commissioner Nick Fish** announced June 17 to address ecological health and recreational concerns about the park after a **City Club of Portland report** said Portland had failed to properly maintain the park.

"We both support a healthy and sustainable Forest Park," said Fish, who is also Portland's parks commissioner, about the partnership. "We both acknowledge it's a regional resource and that it is at risk."

The agreement still needs approval from the **City Council**, but Fish said he is confident it will pass at Wednesday's meeting.

The partnership between the two groups dates back several years, but the formal agreement promotes the conservancy from the status of one of the Parks Bureau's 107 friends groups to legal partner, Fish said.

"They are an essential partner in addressing the problems we face in the Forest Park," Fish said. "We've taken this evolving relationship and have now memorialized it in writing; we've gone from dating to getting married."

Both groups will now communicate frequently, jointly seek new funding sources for the park and collaborate on trail and conservation work. Without the partnership, conservancy Executive Director Michelle Bussard said the park's health would continue to decline.

"The conservancy has been worried for quite some time about Forest Park," she said, adding that without the partnership, "I think we would continue to simply muddle forward without clear forms of communication and without affirmation of each other's role."

Bussard said visitors are likely to notice some of the changes made to the park because of the partnership, including improved trails and fewer weeds.

The agreement does not address recent recreational concerns for the park, including the debate over the addition of mountain bike trails. Fish said the Parks Bureau will make recommendations in September to the City Council based on a report to be issued by an off-road cycling committee established by the city.

Ultimately, Fish said, any decision on off-road cycling in Forest Park will be made by the City Council.

**--Molly Hottle**

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