

Waud Bluff vs. Greenway Trail

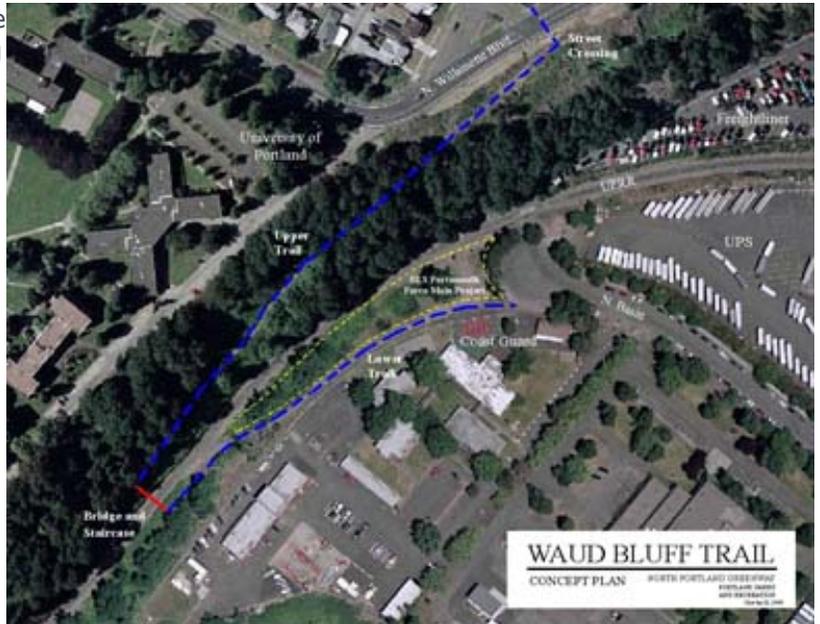
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Three bicycles rest against poles at the head of the Waud Bluff Trail, a rough but walkable trail leading down from North Willamette Boulevard into the industrial basin that is Swan Island. Located just south of the University of Portland, the overgrown path winds its way down the bluff, across the Union Pacific railroad tracks to North Basin Street.

Steep, informal, and a little treacherous in parts, city and local advocates hope that by 2011 new improvements will turn this path into a vital connection between the neighborhoods of Overlook, Arbor Lodge, and University Park to Swan Island.

The \$2 million project, sponsored by Portland Parks and Recreation and funded in part by a grant from Metro, will pave the pathway and create a pedestrian bridge and staircase to bring walkers and hikers safely over a set of Union Pacific railroad tracks and onto Swan Island.



Activists and trail advocates see the development as the first measurable progress toward realizing the dream of a North Portland riverside trail stretching from Kelley Point Park to downtown Portland called the Willamette Greenway.

"I want my grandchildren to appreciate the river," says npGREENWAY activist Paul Maresh as he walks along the trail. "I want everyone's grandchildren to appreciate the river." Maresh and his group envision a continuous line of bike tracks and walking paths that will, in the next 10 years, connect Cathedral Park with the Eastbank Esplanade as part of the larger Willamette Greenway Project.

Maresh descends the trail close to where Lewis and Clark are said to have turned back on their survey of the Willamette River. High atop the bluff, a statue stands on the university campus to commemorate the event.

The trail follows the course of the old road that once served a cluster of houseboats in an inlet that is no longer flowing.

"This was all a swamp when I was a kid," says Maresh as he stares out at the land east of Basin Avenue, now filled with family-wage employers like UPS and Daimler Trucks. "You used to see 50 to 60 geese. There were huge rafts of birds!"

Industry, transport, and nature have all had a difficult past in this area, and that uneasy relationship continues today as interests from all sides fight for the right balance of each.

North Portland's Forgotten Waterfront

The Willamette Greenway has been in city planning documents since 1979. Approximately 5,000 feet of empty waterfront lies between Cathedral Park and the University of Portland. This land was once industrial brownfield and fallow land and is mostly inaccessible by car. However, over the last decade environmental cleanups and land purchases have made possible the development of a North Portland leg of the Greenway Trail.

In the 1970s, the Portland Development Commission bought a 27-acre swath of riverfront south of St. Johns known as Willamette Cove. The land was later transferred to Metro as open space. Currently, Willamette Cove connects with a 41-acre former Superfund site owned by McCormick and Baxter and a property acquired by the University of Portland. The UofP purchased its 35-acre waterfront site from Triangle Park LLC in December 2008.

The university has publicly stated its support for the greenway trail on its property. The land has been cleared of industrial pollution, and early last year an illegal skateboarding squatter's park known as Pirate Town was razed.

Even though it may be possible to develop a trail extending from St. Johns to the UofP, no plans to build this stretch of the greenway trail have moved forward.

Advocates of the North Portland greenway trail complain they have endured delays and budget cuts for too many years.

"The trail gets put off on the parks department," says Maresh. "We see it as transportation and not recreation." At best, a completed Willamette Greenway may be as far away as 20 years, he adds. "I'm finding it frustrating that there is a strong public will for it, but it keeps getting put on the back burner."



Members of the surrounding neighborhood associations vented similar frustrations Dec. 16 at an open house hosted by Mayor Sam Adams and Commissioner Amanda Fritz. "We should not spend tax dollars on placating industrial interests not shared by wider Portland," testified Barbara Quinn, chair of Friends of Cathedral Park.

"Why did the Willamette Greenway plan fail?" asked Edward Jones of the Linnton Neighborhood Association. "We're worse off than we were when we started 20 years ago."

Bluff and Greenway: Long trail to hoe

However, some still see the Waud Bluff trail as a move in the right direction.

"I see [the Waud Bluff trail] as a neighborhood connection and a key piece of the North Portland greenway because of the topography of the bluff," said Francie Royce, co-chair of npGREENWAY.

About halfway down the Waud Bluff trail a large sign attached to a section of pink ribbon reads, "Trail closed due to safety precautions." The city recently closed what exists of the Waud Bluff trail through the month of January while the Bureau of Environmental Services completes a section of its massive sewer pipe project.

Although the BES construction of the massive sewer pipe has delayed completion of the lower part of the trail, George Lozovoy, landscape architect for Portland Parks, says BES is adding \$192,000 in funding to the project. Currently BES equipment materials and machines sit on the area where the trail will connect with Basin Street.

A construction bid for the upper section project will be selected by the spring of 2010, says Lozovoy. Planners hope for a fall completion of the upper section.

Of the \$2 million project, \$350,000 will go toward construction of a pedestrian bridge and staircase with a bike rail to span the Union Pacific tracks. Lozovoy says the trail's steep grade of about 14 percent will prohibit use by wheelchairs and those with disabilities.

"The vision we have for the trail is a link to the island for transit access and job access," explained Lenny Anderson of the Swan Island Transportation Management Association. Anderson co-authored the trail's grant. "A student can walk down the hill from the University of Portland and get on the [No. 85 bus] and be at the Rose Quarter in 12 minutes."

A public hearing will be held on the subject of the city's river plan, including the future of the trail network on Jan. 28, at 2 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 1221 SW 4th Ave., Portland.