

Benton County Open Space Public Meeting
August 27, 2025
(39 members of the public attended)

Greg Wendt (Benton County) made introductions and provided background information on the Badger Canyon DNR land potentially available for open space preservation and a mountain bike park. Ben Floyd (White Bluffs Consulting) shared a presentation about the property and the DNR trust land transfer process, followed by a Q&A session and public comment.

Presentation:

<https://bentoncountywa.municipal.gov/files/documents/DNRTrustLandTransferPublicMeetingPresentation1423123557082825PM.pdf>

Public Questions/Comments (answers in italics by Ben Floyd):

- Do we have any idea of the amount of ATV activity out there? How much resistance will there be to removing that activity? *There is informal usage in the fall, winter and spring, but there are other areas they can go to if this proposal advances. There would be signage put out to educate that group on appropriate and prohibited uses.* Michelle Mercer (Benton County) said she was able to do a site visit with the property owner who owns the irrigated agricultural lands south of the property and they are looking at continuing development of the Cottonwood area. She mentioned this proposed idea and they support ATV activity being stopped as it is a nuisance to the neighborhood, and they like the idea of mountain bike usage instead. We would likely have general support from the surrounding neighborhoods and the developers to eliminate ATV usage on the property. Juniper Dunes is a nearby opportunity for ATVs, and the preference is for people to go there or other more nearby suitable areas instead of using the DNR or private property. Ben mentioned the BLM property next to the DNR land could be an interim area that could continue to see ATV use.
- How was this spot picked over other public lands? *It was based on location and opportunity potential. It is public land that hasn't been slated for other uses, it has high quality habitat on it, fits with the open space goals, and protecting it would also be consistent with the Rivers to Ridgetops plan that was prepared several years ago for the Tri-Cities.*
- If the transfer doesn't happen, what would you see as the long-term use of this property? *We may try again if it doesn't happen the first time and if not, we could explore a lease. The long-term potential for this property would be open space, and it would likely stay as is if this process doesn't work out.*
- I assume the transfer doesn't involve county or city money. *Yes, except for long term management would remain with the county. Where does the money come from for a parking lot and maintenance? Primarily from volunteer labor and fund raising from Evergreen and community donations. We are trying to make this a partnership like Badger Canyon, and the county does oversight, and the community helps to make it*

happen. We can also pursue grant funding through the state RCO (Recreation and Conservation Office).

- Will this be county property? *Yes*
- Have you done any wildlife surveys? *Not yet but it would be a part of due diligence. We will consider the habitat effects from proposed trail improvements as well.*
- How much of the area has cryptobiotic lichen? *It is mostly in the upper northwest part of the parcel, and on the south face. The picture of it with the bikes is in the NW corner. That is just where it has been observed from limited reconnaissance.*
- The transfer, is it just a change in control of the land or will the county transfer land in exchange? *No, it's a buyout. The state legislature writes DNR a check and the county would receive the property for free.*
- It was stated at the commissioner's meeting that there may be trails for bikes, motorcycles and horses. *Motorcycles have not been in the plans, but mountain bike trails would be developed and maybe a multi-use trail as well, but motorcycles would not be used here. A consistent theme we have heard is that we need space for mountain bikers and that would be a primary use but there will also likely be some walking trails too. Class one e-bikes would be allowed but no other vehicles that cause wheel spin and/or erosion potential.*
- How do you think it would affect bike use on Candy and Badger mountains? *Adam Fyall said the commissioners and the Park Board have expressed the need for public property accessible to the mountain bikers. On Candy and Badger, it isn't great for biking with hikers there, etc. The idea here is that the county sees this as a place that is for mountain bikes. It may be open to hikers, but it will not be like Candy and Badger. The Park Board expressed this at a recent meeting.*
- What would the amenities be? *It would be likely a park and share resources with others like Badger and Candy. The Parks department has friends of Badger Mountain which is a strong partner, and all of the volunteers work together. Adam Fyall said the amount of people here at tonight's meeting shows strong support.*
- We have state patrol, which is on private land, is that going away? *Yes, eventually. White Bluffs Consulting recently prepared a habitat assessment and critical areas studies with mitigation report for a 30-40 acre parcel out there and that whole section is going through the permitting process through the city and other parcels are being sold, and those trails will go away eventually. The timing with this could work well as there may only be a few more years where state patrol stays open for biking.*
- What are the drawbacks? Do we just focus on this as our only option? *No, this is not the only option, and I know Evergreen local chapter has multiple projects going on currently and there are other plans for trails in other areas of the county, and they will still go forward. Pursuing this opportunity doesn't limit others, as I understand it. There is BLM property to be pursued in Badger Canyon and next to Candy Mountain, and maybe in other areas too.*
- If we get this piece of property is that all we are allowed? *The state is not really in a position to say you only get so much state land for recreation, and this is DNR saying*

they have a potentially surplus piece of property; it does not mean this is the end or our only option. Evergreen has developed several different areas around Ellensburg and Cle Elum to support mountain bikes and we should be able to do similar here if desired.

- We need to go after whatever we can and there was even talk of Juniper Dunes being up for sale. *Adam Fyall has been working on this open space issue for 25 years plus and has some great community partnerships and there is a commitment to keep doing them.*
- Where the property is facing the sun, can you speak to soil type and placing some trees out there? *It will be difficult to get water out there and we also do not want to change the native habitat conditions too much. I am hopeful maybe there is some gravel that can be put down to remove powdery dust in areas. You can design the trails to minimize some of the powder. But still, it is likely we will get some powder, and it may be like state patrol where you use it only certain times of year. I don't see plantings but maybe you could harden some of the trails to take away powder.*
- Can there be some improvements to trails so they can hold moisture better or design considerations? *Jesse Cunningham (Evergreen) said difficult building conditions can be mitigated by design, and we can test the soil. There are design features that can be built in but in the end, there is only so much you can do, and it may dictate the types of trails we can build.*
- Will you put up the open space map? *We looked at canals as open space corridors. In our evaluation we looked at the canal and the ridge below triple vista estates and the hillside next to it. Is there habitat around the canal areas? Yes*
- What happens if we have a designated area and show how many people are using it, will that help with funding? *It can, yes.*
- The land on Badger and Candy Mountains was bought through RCO grants.
- Has the county considered putting this as a conservation easement with recreation and habitat protection that would be similar to Badger and Candy? *Greg said yes - we will look at all the different options for preservation. Conservation easements will be considered. The County plans to prepare and submit this application, go through the process, etc.*
- Have you considered a land trust? *Yes, we are doing those evaluations as well.*

Ben asked for a show of hands for how many supported the county pursuing this opportunity, and there was unanimous support for the county to go forward with the land transfer process. There were 39 members of the public in attendance. The meeting summary along with the meeting presentation will be shared via email to attendees and also be posted on the County's Comprehensive Plan Update website.