

Marrowstone Preserve Update to the Community

February 1, 2019

Happy new year! I'm writing to share the latest update on the Marrowstone Island preserve project. Over the past few months, we've been getting to know the property and our new neighbors, gathering community input and preferences, and developing the preserve management plan.

We received a tremendous response to the community survey, with more than 170 people weighing in. Thank you to everyone who took the time to so thoughtfully respond. A diversity of opinions were expressed, and we are taking all points of view into consideration. We've also reached out with an introductory mailing to preserve neighbors, and held several neighbor meetings to share information and answer questions about the new preserve.

For many who are interested in this special place, this project is perhaps their first contact with Jefferson Land Trust. We'd like to take this opportunity to outline our land management approach, our ongoing role as landowner, and how we engage with the community around public use of our properties.

Management Plan Development Process

Every property owned by Jefferson Land Trust has a management plan that details priority ecological functions or features, a desired future condition, and long-term goals, objectives and short-term actions. Land use history, surrounding land use, priority ecological features, the presence of unique/threatened/sensitive plants or wildlife, threats to desired future conditions, known stewardship needs, and community priorities are considered in the crafting of each plan.

Collecting this information typically involves many parties and may include reviewing public records, gathering stories from previous landowners or neighbors related to land use history, working with relevant expert biologists, hydrologists, geologists, or foresters, working with restoration professionals, trail professionals, and of course Land Trust staff. These plans are reviewed and updated regularly to incorporate new information gathered during regular monitoring visits and management activities, and to adapt management approaches.

The Land Trust's long term management goals for the Marrowstone property are twofold:

1. Ecological: Manage upland forest and wetlands to maintain or improve ability to collect clean water and provide important plant and wildlife habitat.
2. Social: Provide low-impact public and educational access that allows community members to connect with the natural world.

Community Involvement

Community conservation – facilitating connections to the natural world and our collective sense of place – is one of the Land Trust’s core values. In order to understand community desires for the future of this Preserve, we reached out to Marrowstone Island residents and beyond with an online survey. The survey explored themes that included: desired level of area managed primarily for ecological goals, recreational access, educational opportunities, site amenities, multi-use management, Preserve naming and signage, potential volunteer roles in ongoing management, and a place to note concerns. This survey was not scientific in nature. Its aim was to help inform Land Trust staff as to current community perceptions, opinions, and priorities, with no prior ecological or site education.

The survey results, along with other sources of community feedback, play a valuable role in informing our preserve management plan. Community input is being used to help us evaluate:

1. The prescribed types and level of public access
2. How people want to connect with this place
3. What kinds of threats to the desired future condition are on people’s minds
4. Types of thoughtful site design or signage we may want to employ to designate allowed activities and wildlife areas

It is inevitable that individual preferences on these matters will vary, sometimes quite strongly. It is also very clear to us from the input received that we are all aligned around a shared desire to see this preserve thrive - for the benefit of both wildlife and people. Despite the differences of opinions we have received, the level of community interest in this special place has been truly amazing to see; we trust this shared commitment to place will serve as common ground and the basis of strong community stewardship of this preserve far into the future.

Site Design and Implementation

Next up, we plan to convene a science advisory group to review our initial management plan and site design to provide additional insight into balancing the needs of people, wildlife, and conservation values on this preserve. We will then be presenting the draft site plan, including parking and trail design, at the upcoming Marrowstone Island Community Association (MICA) meeting on March 18 at 7 PM at the Nordland Garden Club clubhouse at 320 Garden Club Road. All interested individuals are welcome to attend!

Upcoming work parties will continue to focus on removing noxious weeds, and are scheduled for February 12 and March 12. Details can be found here: <https://saveland.org/news-events/>

Out of respect for both the land as well as our neighbors, we are limiting the size of future work parties to not more than 25 people. If you wish to volunteer, we ask that you please RSVP in advance using the link above. We kindly ask that all volunteers follow Land Trust instructions regarding carpools and parking at the preserve site. If the work party is full, we invite you to consider signing up for the next available date.

Preserve Opening

We are currently on track for a late spring public opening of the preserve. Watch our e-newsletter for announcement of Preserve public opening and celebration! In the meantime, we remind supporters that the preserve is not yet open to the public. We ask that visits be limited to scheduled work parties, or by permission of Land Trust staff.

We are thrilled at the ongoing interest in and support for this project, thank you!

Richard

Richard Tucker
Executive Director
Jefferson Land Trust