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Draft of Turtleback plan advances to Council

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Turtleback Mountain became “ours” when the public contributed to the San Juan Preservation Trust and the county Land Bank joined forces to purchase it in the fall of 2006.

But how “we” will use it has been problematical to the Land Bank, which must present a stewardship and management plan for the County Council to approve by the end of this year.

On Oct. 10, the Land Bank held a public hearing for the revised draft of the Turtleback Mountain Preserve Management Plan, and following a public hearing, voted to approve the plan and send it on to the County Council for adoption.

The SJ Preservation Trust has already approved the revised document, and the Council will take comments and deliberate adoption at a meeting on Nov. 18.

In presenting the plan, Land Bank Board President Nancy Jones said, “Stewardship and participation will be very important going forward.”

While the south side of the property is intended for pedestrian use only, the plan allows for horseback riding and mountain bike use on the northern part of the property. The draft is “a framework in which we work to manage the property. When the plan is finalized, we’ll issue a trail map,” said Eliza Habegger.

Eastsound Planning Review Committee member Bob Connell praised the multi-use component of the plan, and asked if mountain bikes will be allowed before the trail plan is implemented.

Turtleback Mountain property owner Linda Henry noted that the plan is not a finished document, but people are anticipating horseback and mountain bike use of the property – “That may be a liability issue. Communication to the public about its use can’t be overstated,” Henry said.

Dan Christopherson, owner of Wildlife Cycles in Eastsound, also commended the Land Bank for its work and offered to assist with trail work. He noted that the International Mountain Bike Association, of which he is a member, provides resources for trail building. Habegger noted that the mountain bike association offers “great principles for non-bike trails as well.”

Land Bank member Amanda Azous said “the plan is explicit there will be a bikes-only trail.” Ruthie Dougherty, Orcas Island Land Bank Steward, said that “mainstream” mountain bikers were very helpful and agreed that while it was conceivable that the mountain bikes could share

ascent on the existing north side road with hikers, “their descent needs to be on a dedicated [separate] trail.”

She distinguished between the Turtleback Mountain Preserve and state or county parks, saying, “Our resources are less, we’ll be dependent on the community to help us as we bring multi-use aspects on line. We’ll need more volunteers to help us.”

Nancy Greene agreed, saying, “It’s incumbent on the community to reinforce the conditions that are set forth in the plan for any kind of use – it’s everybody’s business. It’s your mountain.”

For more on the Land Bank meeting, go to www.Islandssounder.com, “Communities.”