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The obligations of stewardship

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On Orcas Island, we are fortunate to have recently acquired two outdoor attractions for our pleasure that also bring visitors to the island –Turtleback Mountain Natural Preserve and a world-class skatepark.

The skatepark is built on school property, and has been maintained by the school district. Its very popularity has brought problems of maintenance costs and enforcement of public law. Now the school district is trying to enlist the public in support of the park, because, as School Superintendent Barbara Kline says, it's not fair to maintain the park at the cost of our teachers' salaries.

Turtleback Mountain Preserve became public land when it was bought, in part, by private and public funds, to be administered by the county Land Bank, in 2006.

Its logging road has been open for public use , accessed by entrances off Crow Valley Road and Deer Harbor Road while the Land Bank prepares its stewardship and use plan.

Public comments have included requests for use by mountain bikers and horseback riders as well as by hikers. Members of the public have also requested that minimal impacts be allowed, in order to maximize access and enjoyment by future generations.

The Orcas school district and the county Land Bank are to be commended for the lengths they have gone to in order to hear all requests and to accommodate all interests.

The school district will hold a meeting on Oct. 30 to brainstorm solutions for the continued use and support of the skatepark so that they don't have to close it in the face of illegal behavior and costly maintenance.

The Land Bank has emphasized that it is still in the process of resolving use issues on Turtleback and has sought the input for both implementation and oversight of its planned trails.

Use it or lose it has morphed in our civilized and diversely-populated culture (from laid-back naturalists to extreme mountain bikers and outdoorsmen of every stripe in between) to love it and take care of it.

Both the school district and the Land Bank have emphasized that they don't have the resources to minimize impact and preserve the best of their amenities. They both stress that it falls to the

local community, especially those who make use of and enjoy these attractions, to take an active part in ensuring that public use doesn't become public abuse.

That stewardship includes communication, both implicit and outspoken, to island visitors who come to the island to take part of our treasures.

Surely that is not too high a price to ask for those who both love these two amenities and want to preserve them for use in the near and distant future.