

FAQs by OCVSAG:

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1. What is OCVSAG?

Oak Creek Valley Safety Action Group was formed by a group of residents living within the Oak Creek valley of Benton County. The team formed to find solutions to problems that affect either explicitly, or implicitly all residents and visitors to the valley from 53rd/Walnut westward along Oak Creek Drive and its feeder roads. Many of the recorded concerns are driven by the continuously increasing volume of vehicular traffic reaching the area's trail systems. OCVSAG seeks win-win solutions to purposefully acknowledge desired access while managing to mitigate concerns. Some areas or neighborhoods are less impacted than others.

The use of "valley" in OCVSAG's name is an appropriate geographical term to quickly associate the area's concerns to its unique topology. This is evident in one primary access road that all visitors and residents' vehicles travel as well as the current primary fire evacuation route. Local resident Ann Eissinger living on Oak Creek Drive has been leading an effort for 3+ years, known as the Oak Creek Valley Community (OCVC) specifically seeking additional fire evacuation route(s). The valley also hosts access to five significant recreational/trail destinations, three of which have parking across four lots. They service Bald Hill Park, Mulkey Ridge Trail, Fitton Green, Crestmont Land Trust trails, and McDonald Forest's Oak Creek road entrance.

Action is part of the name as we intend to drive activity to find solutions. Safety is directly pulled from our Vision Statement as it is the driving objective.

2. What is OCVSAG's vision statement?

- Oak Creek Valley Safety Action Group (OCVSAG) will take a positive stance with stakeholders by offering solutions to cited problems, supports trailhead multi-mode access, and works to have implemented managed predictable access protocol for decades to come.
- Safety is paramount. It takes many forms for residents and visiting recreationists including planning for fire evacuation in emergency.

3. OCVSAG is a mouthful. Is there an easier way to talk about it?

Yes, we pronounce it "oak-sag".

4. Is participating in OCVSAG open to anyone living within Oak Creek valley?

Yes, and beyond, please just respond via email to hello@ocvsag.org. Let us know if you would like to participate, receive updates, work on specific issues, or just express your support for OCVSAG's efforts. Our efforts strive for outcomes like a safer Oak Creek valley with less environmental damage while maintaining and enhancing recreational access.

Please Include your home address as it aids OCVSAG in defining the support and helps to include updates on issues that may be most relevant to you.

5. What are the issues OCVSAG has identified so far?

The Oak Creek valley's network of big outdoor spaces and trails have become increasingly desirable destinations, reached by specific neighborhood roads. The trails include Fitton Green Natural Area, Bald Hill Natural Area, Mulkey Ridge Trail, Crestmont Land Trust and McDonald Research Forest.

Examples of issues which risk the safety, the environment, trail users' experience and host neighborhoods:

- Increasing volume of vehicular traffic
- Traffic speed, that can exceed comfortable shared roadway use for vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians, equestrians, and wildlife.
- Limited sightlines risk the shared roadway
- increased fire danger from off-road parking, cigarettes, fireworks, and illicit campfires
- damage to the environment; either flora or fauna from parking outside of designated spots, roadkill, litter, off-leash dogs (and uncollected excrement), and silt in drainage.

- The above is a sampling, OCVSAG's full understanding can be shared via request. Today it is summarized in Venn Diagram formats. (email hello@ocvsag.org for details)

6. The issues raised by OCVSAG are legitimate, but it seems like a lot of the issues are related to roads and traffic; why has this recently become a problem?

As a complex of trail systems whose popularity is spread by word of mouth, on-line trail maps, social media sharing, mapping route software, county promotion, etc. it has been consistently increasing for more than two decades at rates far exceeding the growth in population.

The higher volume of vehicular traffic puts pressure on area multi-use road safety with trailheads that often exceeds parking carrying capacity. It is a challenge for trail users as well, since would-be recreationists drive to trailheads only to find there is no place to park; this leads to frustration, maybe not a successful trip or parking in unplanned-for areas resulting in environmental damage or other issues. At times, excess parking has been reported to limit easily passable road surfaces which could have been emergency vehicle impediments.

7. But isn't the increase in trail use likely due to COVID? After all, people need a break from being at home. Won't natural areas use drop off again after the virus isn't so much of a factor?

Yes, there is an increase in use from Covid because people want and need nature in these stay-at-home and socially distanced times. Additionally, recreationists who would normally carpool to a trailhead to share an experience together are sometimes now wanting to ride in separate cars to limit the virus spread. That said, even before the virus was a factor traffic to trailheads was steadily recorded as increasing. Traffic may drop a bit in the immediate future following Covid, but the long-term trend over twenty years is a steady increase. There is no reason to believe that pressure will abate. Visitors who had not previously known about or appreciated the trails are now familiar with them and more likely to return.

In short: Access at the trailheads have exceeded their natural carrying capacity and will continue to be further pressured into the future.

8. Is OCVSAG promoting the closure of any trails in the trail system?

Absolutely not, nor is OCVSAG seeking to reduce individuated parking where designated parking currently exists. The trails and Natural Areas are an important part of our community. OCVSAG seeks win-win solutions with the stakeholders to manage to the natural carrying capacity of the sites and seeks to increase the opportunities for safe multi-mode public access.

9. Of all the trails, Crestmont Land Trust trails are new to me. As a nearby neighbor affected by the increasing traffic why didn't I hear about the new trails sooner?

Crestmont Land Trust trails was an agreement between Benton County, Greenbelt Land Trust and Crestmont Land Trust.

Background: https://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/making-connections-new-path-links-trail-networks-in-major-expansion/article_5d20f465-138a-57db-b5ef-93a17de69bff.html

<https://www.corvallisadvocate.com/2018/oak-restoration-at-crestmont-land-trust/>

10. I've heard that the different trails in the Oak Creek valley are managed by different entities. It's confusing!

Yes, it can be confusing. Benton County is responsible for managing Fitton Green whose lands were originally obtained by Greenbelt Land Trust. [Fitton Green's management plan page 25 published in 2000](#) named three trailhead parking areas: one on Panorama and one at each end of Cardwell Hill Road. Bald Hill Park, and parking for those trails off Oak Creek Drive, is managed by the City of Corvallis. McDonald Forest and the parking at the end of Oak Creek Road is managed by OSU's College of Forestry. Bald Hill Farm (Green Belt Land Trust managed) which has an access through the Mulkey Ridge Trail connector (which has no parking) and easement managed by Benton County is an example of why it can be confusing. Large tracts of Forest Conservation property and the Crestmont Land Trust are privately held and have no parking relying on other site's parking or nearby neighborhoods. Law enforcement is Benton County Sheriff's Office except for Bald Hill, which is primarily Corvallis Police Department.

11. Why does OCVSAG seek to address the safety issues and environmental issues at multiple primary trails accessible through Oak Creek valley; Bald Hill, McDonald Forest, Fitton Green, Mulkey Ridge, and Crestmont Land Trust?

Safety affects everyone that lives or recreates along Oak Creek Drive and the valley it travels through. Being a valley with access to multiple sites in proximity, many of which are interconnected, allows the opportunity to efficiently deliver solutions to problems that all face. Additionally, recreationists will be better informed if the protocol is similar from site to site. They will benefit by fire and safety protocols as well as with searching for parking with a comprehensive "know before you go" strategy, so it makes sense to seek solutions for the valley as a whole system.

12. During 2020's extremely high fire conditions, the different trails were closed at different times. That does not make sense, what's up with that? And who is responsible for making sure the trails aren't being used when they are closed?

This is an example of why Oak Creek valley needs to be looked at as a continuous system with consistent protocols. Oak Creek valley is managed by different entities so there are multiple decision makers, Benton County, City of Corvallis, OSU College of Forestry, OSU College of Agriculture, Starker Forests, Crestmont Land Trust, Greenbelt Land Trust, Oregon Department of Forestry, Corvallis Rural Fire Protection District, Corvallis Fire Department, City of Corvallis. Volunteer organizations like OCVV (Oak Creek Valley Community, which is engaged in developing fire evacuation routes) and OCVSAG are advocating for an agreement that all decision makers use the same process to determine when trail

closures for fire hazard are appropriate, for example using NOAA weather Red Flag Warnings as a specific closure point. This work is in discussion.

13. I'm interested in getting updates from OCVSAG, but I don't necessarily want to join meetings.

How can I sign up for that?

Great! just respond via email to hello@ocvsag.org

14. I'm curious about firefighting responsibilities in Oak Creek Valley; what entities are responsible in the 10 different neighborhoods vs. Fitton Green, Bald Hill, Crestmont, McDonald Forest, Mulkey Ridge, Starker? Do they have a mechanism to communicate and coordinate?

Structures and homes in Oak Creek valley are under the [Corvallis Rural Fire Protection District](#) which contracts for the valley to the City of Corvallis Fire Department. However, since Oak Creek Valley is an example of [WUI firefighting](#) (Wildland/Urban Interface) there is a unique sequence of events that occurs when someone dials 911 that will automatically involve the West Oregon District of the [Oregon Department of Forestry \(ODF\)](#). The city firefighters' expertise and equipment arsenal are structural fires, and ODF's is in wildland fire that may come with a range of equipment from bulldozers to airplanes with fire retardant and the men and women of specialized wildland fire training.

An example of how it works: At home you have a fire and Call 911 >>> dispatch receives call >>> dispatch directs call appropriately based on GIS information for location >>>> call received by Corvallis FD, and texts go to ODF >>>> Corvallis FD will be enroute first, and a Corvallis FD Battalion chief will be riding along and monitoring the situation and be in communication with ODF. Simultaneously, the dispatch continues to work with ODF dispatch. Corvallis FD, and then ODF will show up at the fire site unless the Battalion Chief has specific knowledge to not have ODF respond.

ODF has feeds from satellites for large hot spots, comparative landscape visual equipment that scans for smoke and has roving fire patrols that are literally traveling routes throughout forested and WUI lands looking for problems. In the area of Oak Creek and immediately around it there are no manned lookout towers. [ODF has shared that most wildland fires are human caused](#). In our extended general area, there have been two lightning strikes in twenty-years. Careful humans following sound protocol will prevent most fires e.g., not parking off road in dry vegetation, not throwing out cigarettes and ensuring any outside fire is cold to a bare-handed touch before ever leaving it alone.

Another example: If a hiker atop Fitton Green sees smoke/fire in what they think is the Crestmont Land Trust trails system and Call 911>>>> dispatch receives call >>> dispatch directs call appropriately based on GIS information for location >>>> Texts go to ODF, and dispatches for both ODF & Corvallis FD informed >>>> ODF would be the lead responder. Being a WUI area, unless the caller is very clear of their location relative to the fire threat it is likely that both Corvallis FD and ODF would need to respond.

Currently, Benton County is sponsoring an update to their [2016 adopted Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#) which has a great deal of information.

(content reviewed & edited by Philomath Unit Forester, ODF – West Oregon District 3/4/21)

15. What added value does the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) provide rural fire organizations?

There are three general areas of service where ODF adds value. The first is wildfire suppression. ODF is the largest fire organization in the State. It provides access to state, regional and national fire resource capacity that includes fire retardant air tankers, helicopters, and professional contracted firefighting crews and equipment. ODF also offers vast experience in large fire organizational strategy and tactics, including the rural-urban interface. This level of protection is not available through other sources. ODF also provides the more routine and typical fire responses.

Additionally, ODF provides fire prevention and law enforcement services. ODF regulates fire activities and laws within the District's fire protection boundary. This includes industrial and non-industrial use of fire and equipment. Examples include open burning, off-road vehicles, fireworks, and chainsaws. Because fire suppression activities are generally very expensive, fire prevention activities tend to be cost effective and have the additional advantage of minimizing resource damage.

(used by permission by the Oregon Department of Forestry – West Oregon District, Philomath from the "Fire Patrol Q&A" circa 2010)

16. Are fireworks legal in neighborhoods? On Fitton Green or other trails?

Not in Fitton Green, Crestmont Land Trust or Greenbelt Land Trust properties. Neighborhoods must follow Oregon Law.

Oregon law forbids the possession, use, or sale of fireworks that fly, explode, or travel more than six feet on the ground or 12 inches in the air. Bottle rockets, Roman candles, and firecrackers are illegal in Oregon. www.co.benton.or.us/sheriff/page/july-4th-tips-safe-holiday

17. What is the difference between a County Park and the County's Natural Areas like Fitton Green? I've seen Fitton Green referred to as a Park but thought a Natural Area was different.

Officially Fitton Green Natural Area is not a park. It is not clear at this point why sometimes Fitton Green gets referred to as a "park", since by its own definition and management plan it is not. Signage recently installed has been asked to be updated to correctly reflect that is a natural area and not a park.

Natural areas do not have park infrastructure like playgrounds, picnic tables, etc., rather they are meant for on-trail use to observe nature while supporting and appreciating the local flora and fauna.

18. Is it "legal" to hike off the designated trail at Fitton Green? I noticed it looks like people are walking off the trail at Throop Loop, right next to the sign indicating habitat restoration.

Visitors should not be off trail- including, dogs, hikers, cyclists, photographers, picknickers' etc. For example, the top of Fitton Green is a very fragile and special ecological area of upland prairie, and there are several sensitive riparian zones crossed by the trail system. County trail maps are available online

and at the kiosks at trail entrances.

https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/natural_areas_and_parks/page/2572/mulkey_trail_complex_2018_final_lr.pdf

19. Does the County have a management plan for Fitton Green?

Yes, the management plan was published in June 2000.

https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/natural_areas_and_parks/page/2391/fittongreenplan.pdf

20. Some of the problems described are occurring at Fitton Green. What's the Chinook Road District's (CRD) involvement with Fitton Green, Mulkey Ridge trail connector or OCVSAG?

CRD has ties and interests due to any traffic on its roads for which it has maintenance responsibility for whether it be its residents, or recreational traffic.

CRD is a special road district and has ownership for the costs and management of maintenance for the roads within the CRD. CRD is funded by residents within its boundaries who tax themselves through special levies to maintain the roads.

21. For the CRD roads that lead to the Fitton Green trail head, what entity is responsible for paving the roads? Maintaining them? In the absence of the Fitton Green trailhead it is obvious that CRD would need to be responsible for maintaining its own roads but a lot of the traffic is comprised of non-resident visitors to an area promoted and managed by the County. How is this worked out?

There are inter-governmental agreements made between the CRD board and county representatives. Please ask the CRD board for details as this is not an OCVSAG activity.

22. Were the CRD roads designed with Fitton Green traffic in mind, there are some scary spots?

No. Nor were they designed to support additional traffic for the newer Crestmont Land Trust trails and the Mulkey Creek Connector trail.

23. People park on Wynoochee at the Mulkey Ridge trail connector trailhead where there is a turn out. Is this trailhead parking?

No, there is not supposed to be any parking on Wynoochee to access any trail. The "turn-out" was a gravel storage location for road work and initial trail building. It is not for parking.

24. Is OCVSAG seeking to close the trailhead access off Wynoochee?

No. OCVSAG supports the Wynoochee trailhead access but seeks to work with the County to ensure that no parking is allowed as per prior agreement's intention.

25. I've noticed a lot more trash along the sides of neighborhood roads over the past few years, not to mention trash on the trails (alarmingly including fireworks debris and cigarette butts not to mention empty beer cans and evidence of camping). What entity is responsible for managing all the litter?

As discussed in FAQ #10, different entities are responsible for managing the different trails. All visitors are expected to behave responsibly and leave nothing behind. Unfortunately, Fitton Green's upland prairie seems to be more susceptible to littering because of its accessible views within a short walk from the parking area. Litter negatively affects the enjoyment of any natural space. Neighborhood street litter does not have a specific responsible entity for prevention and clean-up.

26. Is OCVSAG involved in trail maintenance?

No, but we advocate that private groups can get permission from the land management teams potentially via a permitting process. This has been feedback to the Benton County Natural Areas Forest Stewardship Plan to be released 1st half 2021.

27. Is it legal to use Fitton Green for commercial purposes or group activities/gatherings?

Yes, but with caveats. There is no off-trail access especially at the top of Fitton Green. Permit processes have been discussed with Benton County representatives and given as feedback to the new Forest Stewardship plan. This may require specialized conditional use permits. Groups should carpool or take a van and never park outside of the approved parking spaces.

28. How do I get more info on what the County is up to with regards to parks and Natural Areas such as Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green, etc?

The county passively informs the public in most cases. You would need to scour the [Benton County Parks and Natural Areas and Parks](#) website for updates or occasionally call their representatives as listed in contacts. On rare occasions the county may publish something in the public notices section of the Gazette Times or send USPS mail to "affected" land owners or agencies of an impending change. The latter is curtailed where possible due to cost. This is a recent example from the Forest Stewardship plan for public notice. <https://www.co.benton.or.us/parks/page/forest-resource-stewardship-plan-update-public-outreach>

29. I'm happy to know you're working with many different groups that work with or support recreation on natural and forested lands. Are there any examples of similarities of mind set?

Yes, OSU's College of Forestry published the 2018 Research Forests Trailhead Alternative Transportation Strategy that found the need to "Develop and implement a strategy to encourage alternative methods

of transportation to trailheads to reduce vehicular traffic.” Their stated goals were “Improve non-motorized access for local community members” and “Address issues associated with visitor’s vehicular use on access roads and at trailheads”. This published strategy concluded with the plea ““We need your help in setting a cultural standard for getting visitors to trailheads with minimal vehicular use to protect free and open access to the forest.” The OSU College of Forestry efforts were driven by understanding “An increase in recreation traffic has put a lot of pressure on the access roads and parking areas at OSU [and other site’s] trailheads. We expect recreation use to continue increasing into the future [...]”.

https://cf.forestry.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/Alt_trans_strategy.pdf

30. Has OCVSAG communicated with all of the specific parties mentioned in the FAQs?

Yes

31. I have a question that OCVSAG may be able answer, how can I ask it?

Please email your question to hello@ocvsag.org. Thanks for your interest.