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## Park It Here: The Making of Hare's Canyon Park

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Park it here:

# *The Making of Hare's Canyon Park*

Text and Photographs by Mateusz Perkowski

**L**ike the abandoned railroad trestles and outdated telegraph poles that run through it, Hare's Canyon State Park – Oregon's first in over 30 years – is a monument to the old Tualatin Valley, where you were more likely to spend your days tending to hop fields or cutting timber than sitting in a cubicle. Located on what has traditionally been prime logging country in Washington County, some areas of Hare's Canyon currently resemble tree farms more than forests. The trees that once grew on the land were chopped down and probably used to develop the first small towns west of the Willamette River – places like Beaverton, Hillsboro and Tigard – which have now sprawled and suburbanized to become collectively known as the western Portland Metropolitan area.

Although most of the forest in Hare's Canyon is either second or third growth timber, the relative immaturity of the landscape does little to detract from the new state park's ultimate purpose. It isn't meant to be a truly pristine natural sanctuary, but a place for urban residents to get a taste of Oregon's "great outdoors" without actually having to travel far from home. As the master plan for Hare's Canyon explains, the aim is "offering recreational opportunities close to communities, within 50 miles of a metropolitan area. Today's busy families often do not have the time or inclination to travel to a destination site, and are happy to have a convenient location, good facilities, and a natural setting to spend time in.

## **The Idea**

**T**he concept of a state park that caters to the urban community was largely driven by market research and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The 1994 SCORP report indicated that state parks, which attract about 2 million camp night visits and over 30 million day-use visits per year in Oregon, often run at peak capacity during the summer months. On some weekends, people are even turned away due to lack of space. Given that Hare's Canyon is within 30 miles of Portland and the expanding suburbs surrounding it are expanding, the site is perfect for metropolitan residents who want to sit around a campfire for a few days but are wary of driving for hours and being unable to find a tent site.

The SCORP report certainly supported the idea of a park in one of the state's fastest growing regions, but the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) had already begun looking for a site in Washington County in the 1980's. At that point, however, they were unable to come up with anything feasible.

Around the same time, Tom Brian was serving as a state legislator. While sitting on the Transportation Committee, which often put him into contact with OPRD, Brian realized that his county was one of the few in Oregon that had no state park to call its own. When running for Chair of the Washington County Board of Commissioners in 1999, he decided to include a plan for a state park in his platform. "I put it in as one of my planks that I felt the county board should be advocates for building blocks in the community," he says. "Getting a state park in Washington County was one of the things I felt we should go after."

Within a month after being sworn in, Brian met with members of OPRD and Washington County legislative delegates to pitch the idea for a state park. Measure 66 had passed a year earlier, allotting over 7% of Oregon's lottery revenues to OPRD. This allowed for more than just maintenance of existing parks – there was now a possibility for new projects. Brian's proposal was met with enthusiasm, and his efforts led to the legislature's approval of a plan to find an appropriate area for the park.

Jack Wiles, an administrator at OPRD who has been involved in the Hare's Canyon project, remembers, "Tom was very active in getting the legislature to recognize the need for a feasibility study, and he was also involved in bringing other commissioners out to the site."

Luckily, the search for a state park was successful the second time around. In 1990, ownership of a 21-mile stretch of abandoned railroad was transferred to OPRD, which became Oregon's first "rails-to-trails" park. The railway was built in the 1920's for logging purposes, but after nearly three decades, the lumber mill in Vernonia closed down. By the 1970's, the line fell into disrepair and the rails were salvaged. The fact that the long trail was now in the hands of

OPRD immediately made Hare's Canyon stand out as a potential site. The only problem was that almost all the land surrounding the trail was owned by a logging company: Longview Fibre.

### The Land

What began as an effort by OPRD to obtain about 500 acres for a park turned into an immense land deal involving four state departments, a major logging firm, and private owners in which over 9,000 acres ended up being exchanged.

When approached about the Hare's Canyon property, Longview Fibre was not initially interested in selling the land, but was receptive to the idea of a trade-off. Thousands of acres owned by the company were surrounded by land belonging to the Oregon



Department of Forestry, and vice-versa. In one case, the Forestry Department owned a parcel completely enclosed by Longview Fibre territory, which in turn was totally encircled by Forestry land. Needless to say, such convoluted tracts of forest created administrative problems for both the corporation and the state agency. The State Forestry Department also had another headache – and an opportunity: OPRD owned well over 1,000 acres along stretches of highway that cut through major portions of Forestry land.

So, when OPRD was looking to acquire the Hare's Canyon property, it presented the perfect moment to sort out this checkerboard. "The state park is just a small part of it," says Dave Wright, the OPRD project manager responsible for the land deal. "It really consolidates management and cleans up some access issues."

The trade-off is just now coming to completion after about five years. In the end, the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Military Department and Washington County were also drawn into the deal. "This has been a long, arduous thing," says Wright, looking over the complex, multi-colored map delineating the exchange. Essentially, though, the equation was fairly simple: State Forestry Department traded about 3,500 acres with Longview Fibre. Of the land it acquired, the Forestry Department gave OPRD 1,600 acres of Hare's Canyon property in return for its holdings along state highways.

The actual acreage exchanged between the Forestry Department and Longview Fibre was fairly even, but the logging company wound up with older, bigger trees on their new land – the resources were more valuable. To prevent the state from getting the short end of the stick, an agreement was reached in which State Forestry will retain timber reserves on their former property, allowing them to gradually profit as the trees get harvested.

A similar deal was struck between Washington and Tillamook counties. Because Washington

County was swapping private property for public land, timber that could have generated tax revenue was now part of a state park, rendering it unusable. Up to \$300,000 in yearly tax revenues could have been lost for the county. Board Chairman Tom Brian says that usually such exchanges lead to one county getting a windfall and the other one getting shorted, which led him to come up with a "phasing plan" that will transfer the tax revenues over a 45-year period. In the first year, Tillamook County will receive only 10% of revenues. Each succeeding year, however, it will tack on another 2% until all the tax money ends up in its pocket.

### The Ecology

Due to these arrangements and the funding provided by the lottery, Hare's Canyon won't be a financial burden on any state agency or county government. However, there are certain drawbacks to building a state park in a forest that for over a century has been treated more like a cash crop than an ecosystem. Large portions of the property have been clear-cut in the last decade. In many areas, the terrain is covered in thick monocultures of Douglas fir trees growing so closely together that undergrowth can't develop. In addition to this, much of the newly planted trees at the northern end of the park have developed "root rot" and aren't expected to live more than a few years. As stated in the master plan



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Joseph Coulson Hare's logging camp near Hillsboro. Courtesy of the Washington County Historical Society.

for the park, "Except for the riparian and wetland areas along the creek corridors, most of the site is not in good ecological condition ... Although there are a few, scattered patches of moderately aged trees, up to 80 years old, they do not possess the structure needed for mature coniferous forest habitats."



Dan Lucas, the park manager at Hare's Canyon, says that the environmental features will evolve over time. "You've really got to think more about how all this will look in 20 years," he says, pointing out that other previously developed sites, such as Silver Falls, have grown into ecologically mature and visually appealing state parks. Indeed, environmental assessments of Hare's Canyon have found that past forest management practices were sound.

This means the area was not contaminated with hazardous materials and can be expected to recover environmentally in the coming decades.

OPRD is taking advantage of the areas that have been recently logged by cultivating them into meadows, or by scheduling them to be the most heavily developed portions of the park. Dense stands of trees will be thinned and new plantings will increase the forest's diversity. Hardier trees, which are not specially designed for harvestable timber, will replace those afflicted with "root rot." Though specific plans

are still in the air, the park's bathrooms will most likely be outfitted with water-preserving fixtures, and instead of using culverts, OPRD is building bridges to avoid disturbing the plants and animals that rely on the creek corridors. As Dan Lucas says, "We want this park to be an example of sustainability."

### The Name

The park's long history with logging is appropriate enough, considering that its namesake, Joseph Coulson Hare, was one of the region's foremost lumbermen. One of Hare's many endeavors was operating a mill in Buxton for the Hillsboro Lumbering Company. He left enough of an impression on the area that a local canyon was named after him.

A century later, Tom Brian was hiking along the same canyon and its name stuck with him. "So, when State Parks was looking for a name, I suggested that," he explains, referring to Hare's Canyon. "But I said, 'You'd better check it out first. The guy could've been a local horse thief or something.'" He didn't need to worry. The story of Joseph Hare is illustrative of the enormous change the Tualatin Valley has experienced since the days of the pioneers.

William Davenport Hare, Joseph's father, came to the Oregon Territory in the cowboy era, before it was even a state. He was one of the few educated, upper-class settlers in the region – a descendant of distinguished British families in Virginia – and upon his arrival in Hillsboro, soon established a legal practice and then held public office.



William's wife, Henrietta, gave birth to his second son, Joseph, in the summer of 1862. The Hillsboro young Joseph grew up in was a far cry from the city it is today. In the 1870's, it was known as the local "sin city" – boasting more saloons than general stores and pharmacies combined. Years later, citizens still remembered Hillsboro as a place where "men wore whiskers, chewed tobacco, spit on the sidewalks, and cursed." Early editions of the Hillsboro Independent directed several prominent medical advertisements at "Young Men who may be suffering from the effect of youthful follies or indiscretion." In those simpler days, crowds of onlookers were cheered by a saloon owner's pet goose, who was taught to drink liquor and regularly stumbled drunkenly around on the street. Neighborhood boys, meanwhile, spent many wholesome hours in an alley behind the butcher shop, "fishing for rats," according to a newspaper article of the time.

It is unknown whether Joseph Hare himself partook in such dubious activities as spitting on the sidewalk or fishing for rats, but if he did, it certainly didn't distract him from following his father's footsteps as one of the town's leading citizens. By his late twenties, Joseph was sitting on the city council, and at the age of 31 was elected Mayor of Hillsboro with a solid 56% of the vote. During his tenure, Hare passed several ordinances that without question helped tame the frontier town of his childhood. Persons using "violent,