

ROGER JENSEN/THE OREGONIAN

A basalt cliff known as the Madrone Wall dwarfs Dan Zinzer, Clackamas County's transportation engineering and parks manager, and a Madrone tree near where he is standing.

SCALING A POLITICAL WALL

Fans of a rock-climbing site ask Clackamas County to make the former Hardscrabble Quarry into a park

By CHRIS EHRLICH
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Rock climbers and land preservationists want Clackamas County officials to protect and reopen to the public the Hardscrabble Quarry — or Madrone Wall — a vertical cliff about 100 feet high considered one of the best rock-climbing sites in the Portland area.

They have proposed creation of a county park at the scenic 44-acre site that overlooks the Clackamas River. The land, now zoned for rock and timber harvesting, is estimated to be

worth about \$10 million.

"Once it's gone, we can't get another one. It's irreplaceable — there's only one," said Keith Daellenbach, 37, an avid rock climber and director of the nonprofit Madrone Wall Preservation Committee.

"It's a very rare and unusual civic treasure. These kind of places just don't exist in other places — I know it."

The preservation committee, which, according to its president, Ian Caldwell, represents the whole Portland area's rock-climbing community, has been

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To our readers

You'll now find coverage of community recreation each week inside the Clackamas County Weekly. It replaces coverage of high school sports, which has moved to an expanded Sports section on Thursdays. The new Recreation page is the home for features on ways to keep active in Clackamas County.

"My vision would be for it to be a climbing wall until such time that we need the area for gravel mining, and I don't foresee that to be in the next 10 years or so," Sowa said.

Sowa would like the county to make a final decision on the site's future in the spring or summer.

Popular climbing spot

Members of the regional rock-climbing community said they lost one of the most beloved cliffs in the Portland area when the county placed no-trespassing signs at the site.

"When it was open, it was easily, in the spring and the fall, the most popular climbing area in Portland," said Gary Rall, owner of Portland Rock Gym, an indoor rock-climbing facility people typically visit to train for outdoor climbs.

Based on his own market research, Rall estimates the number of rock climbers in the Portland area has grown from about 3,000 in 1997 to about 10,000 today.

"There's a limited supply of cliffs. We don't have that luxury of having another cliff made. It's a natural resource," he said.

The site includes a basalt cliff formed by ancient lava flows as well as more than 100 plant species, including old-growth Douglas firs and Pacific madrone, and blacktail deer, according to the preservation committee and a Portland State University ecology study that the committee funded.

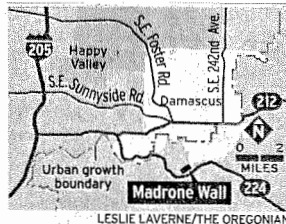
Daellenbach contends that mining the site would cause an "environmental disaster." Quarrying, he said, would result in increases in traffic, noise, dust, wastewater flow into the Clackamas River, and habitat destruction.

"It's all in your perspective, I guess," said Dan Zinzer, the county's transportation engineering and parks manager.

Any commercial project at the site would have to be approved by various local, state and federal environmental agencies, Zinzer said. He said wildlife and habitats at the site would be disrupted if the site were a park.

Site's value considered

Sowa said the county must determine whether it can "forgo" the \$10 million it could possibly earn by selling the land to a mining company. The county's annual parks operating budget, excluding Stone Creek Golf Club, is about \$1.2 million for 17 parks, Zinzer said.



LESLIE LAVERNE/THE OREGONIAN

The county has spent a nominal amount of funds to maintain the abandoned site. If the site were a park, Zinzer said, the county would not have to make a "huge investment" to open and close gates, set up garbage cans and portable toilets, and maintain trails.

Zinzer said county officials should solicit and consider all public input on the site before making a decision on its future.

"This is coming to the forefront today based on what a lot of the rock-climbing groups are asking for," Zinzer said. "I haven't heard a lot of interest from anybody else."

Daellenbach, of Northeast Portland, said the site would be a perfect park for all Portland area residents. It is an excellent place for picnics, bird-watching, wildflowers and hiking, he said.

The site also could be used as a field classroom for students from grade school through college to learn about diverse ecosystems, wetlands and geology, Daellenbach said.

"It's an excellent resource for the community," Daellenbach said. "We need outlets for schools to go to, and if we have none, then we can't do that. We have opportunities to set aside land now for future generations."

Rall said the regional rock-climbing community alone is not a large enough constituency to protect the site or lobby the county.

"We're large enough to be noticed, but too small to stand up for ourselves, so we rely on common sense and commissioners and politicians," Rall said.

County hearings officer Larry Epstein — a lawyer and contract employee appointed by the commissioners — must approve any plans that would make the site a park.

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CONTACT CLACKAMAS COUNTY NOW:

Clackamas County has committed to determining the future of the Madrone Wall soon. Please take a moment to write, email, or call the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners to express your views on the public benefit of preserving the Madrone Wall as a park or open space.

Clackamas County Board of Commissioners
Commissioner Bill Kenemer
Commissioner Martha Schrader
Commissioner Larry Sowa
2051 Kaen Road
Oregon City, Oregon 97045
503/655-8581
www.co.clackamas.or.us/bcc/
bcc@co.clackamas.or.us

MADRONE WALL COMMUNITY MEETING:

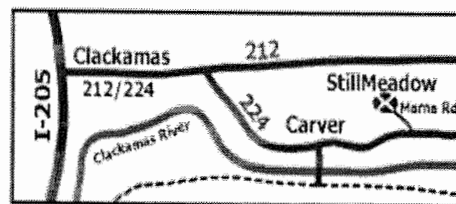
Please attend an upcoming community meeting hosted by Still Meadow Community near the Madrone Wall off Highway 224 on Marna Road. Representatives of the Madrone Wall Preservation Committee will be providing an update on recent developments affecting the future of this civic treasure. County officials have been invited to speak as well.

Where: Still Meadow Community Retreat Center
16561 S.E. Marna Road
Clackamas, Oregon 97015
503/658-8793
www.stillmeadowcommunity.com

When: 7:00 p.m. on Monday 3 January 2005

Directions:

From I-205, take exit 12 to Clackamas/Estacada heading east on Hwy 212/224. Travel 3.1 miles to the "Y" of Hwy 212/224 and at the stop light, bear right onto Hwy 224. In one mile you will pass through Carver where the road curves to the left. Travel about 2 more miles and turn left onto Marna Road. Follow Marna Road about 1/4 mile to the top of the hill. Just past the cedar home on the left, watch for the Still Meadow sign marking the gravel driveway. Follow the drive to parking area.



Climbers: Opponents say mining will hurt environment

Continued from Page 1

in talks with the county since 1998.

The group also has sent mailings to rock climbers throughout the region, initiated letter-writing campaigns to the commissioners and co-funded a study with the county in 2000 that determined it wouldn't be cost-effective for the county to quarry the site

County commissioners and staff are expected to discuss options for the former quarry site that runs along Oregon 224 between Carver and Damascus at a study session early next year.

Portland area rock climbers scaled the site's cliff for years until 1997, when the county closed it to the public to absolve itself of legal liability for the property and to consider quarrying it.

County Commissioner Larry Sowa, who worked on legal liability legislation as a state legislator, said that legal liability may not be an obstacle to making the site a park.

"I think other areas have operated under county auspices and liability is taken care of, so I think that could be done (at Hardscrabble),"