

Fall City Quarry Gets New Life

by Kate Grossman

In 2018, the King County Department of Natural Resources (DNR) proposed a Land Conservation Initiative to obtain 65,000 acres of “critical natural lands and green spaces in King County.” In October, as part of that initiative, DNR completed acquisition of a 51-acre parcel along the Raging River to add to its managed lands.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KING COUNTY DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS.

The Fall City Quarry will now have a new life as a space for recreation and nature conservation.

After multiple years of negotiation and a multi-phase, multi-organization plan, DNR bought the third of three parcels from the Raging River Quarry. The property consists of 41 acres of forestland and the ten-acre quarry, spanning three parcels of riverfront property bounded to the east by the Raging River and Preston-Fall City Road, and adjacent to other King County-owned land and residential properties on Mitchell Hill. Starting in 2020 and finishing with the primary quarry parcel in late 2024, the three parcels cost \$7.43 million.

Other parties, including King County Search and Rescue (SAR) and a private corporation, expressed interest in purchasing the site. However, because of specific needs for SAR and permitting restrictions for the corporation, neither ended up able to purchase the land. In stepped the Trust for Public Lands, a national nonprofit devoted to creating parks and public land. They made the initial purchase from the quarry owners, and when funds became available, King County purchased the land from the Trust using the Conservation Futures tax levy, a long-standing local property tax used to provide grants for preservation of open space within King County. Additional funding came from the County Parks levy, approved by voters in 2019.

The Raging River Quarry was used in various capacities over the past decades, both for blasting new rock as well as crushing and processing for gravel and other stone products. Somewhat ironically, King County Road Services Division was one of the primary customers for the quarry. Now that King County DNR owns the property, there will be no further mineral or rock extraction from that land.

As John Taylor, director of King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks explains, “Because this was acquired with Conservation Futures tax dollars it’s not eligible for intense use. You couldn’t put buildings on it. You can’t do anything here other than passive recreation, trails, things like that. Within the limitations that the funding puts on the property, we want to have conversations with the community [about its future use]. There’s some restoration work to be done. We’re going to maximize the natural resource values of this property as much as we can.”

Though it is still in the early planning phases given the recency of the purchase, in the short-term King County Parks will work on ecological restoration of the quarry site. Because it includes frontage along the Raging River, some of the work on the property is also expected to aid in the protection of endangered Chinook salmon habitat, as well as other wildlife in the area. Longer term, the DNR will engage the Fall City community and Snoqualmie Tribe

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Public meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month
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in planning efforts for use of the property. This planning process is expected to kick off under the next Parks levy, up for a vote in 2025.

“We’ll be talking to everyone with an interest in this property about what uses will be,” says Taylor. “This is a great example of community and the County collaborating together to achieve a public good that meets many, many needs of people and natural resources and strengthens our commitment to community. People may get frustrated with government because it takes so long, but some of these efforts take many years.”

Across all of King County, approximately 12% of all land is owned by the County, including urban green space, trails,

natural lands, rivers, farmland, and forests, according to the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Public Lands Inventory. In Fall City, roughly half of the publicly owned acreage is owned by the County, which has long had an interest in buying land in the area. In 2018, the County worked with local stakeholders in Fall City to socialize the Land Conservation Initiative (developed in 2017) and “collaborate on land acquisition and management in the Fall City area,” per their report.

The Fall City community is looking forward to the next chapter in the life of the quarry property.