Our goal is for parking areas on the OSU Research Forests to be safe and sustainable. We are required through the donation language for the properties, as well as by the land use zoning regulations of Benton County, to retain our primary focus on research and forest management. We also want to respect the interests of our neighbors as well as assure that our visitors have the opportunity to experience the Forests. These goals provide challenges to manage together, yet are each essential to our mission and provide incredibly rich opportunities for learning and growing.

This year represents the height of visitation yet experienced on the McDonald Forest (an estimated 155,000 visits in 2017). During busy times, Oak Creek and Lewisburg Saddle parking lots are full to capacity, and Peavy Arboretum and smaller parking areas are also seeing more use. Many in the community have concerns about how the OSU Research Forests will provide for the access needs of the visiting public with this increase in use and limits on available parking.

With this in mind, here is our philosophy when it comes to addressing parking needs:

- **Make parking areas safer and more user-friendly**: We are currently working on providing clarity regarding where parking is and is not appropriate. This will make it easier for visitors to navigate the sites in their vehicles, and address many of the safety concerns associated with vehicle congestion.

- **Modestly increase capacity where it makes sense**: We will be adding some additional parking spaces at Lewisburg Saddle this summer, and are evaluating several on-site and off-site options at Oak Creek to increase access in the future. Addition of parking on the forest is limited by the topography of the area (very steep), resource concerns (some areas located near waterways), Benton County land use restrictions (location in Forest Conservation Zone), available funding (funded entirely by timber revenue or grants – no tax receipts), and neighbor concerns (regarding traffic, speeds, and congestion). Our plan is to create a little more parking where it best meets goals, and then to cap additional parking development. In other words, once the modest increase has been added, we will not be adding more parking.

- **Focus on getting people to the forest other ways**: However, it remains vitally important that we provide a welcoming and accessible forest for the residents of Corvallis. A recent study of Research Forests use showed that people are feeling crowded at trailheads, but as
Our Parking Philosophy

soon as they branch out into the Forest, they are experiencing very low levels of crowding. There’s lots of room to spread out on the forest, and lots of people to serve!

However, we have to start getting creative with how people get to the Forest. Instead of focusing on adding more parking, which does not suit our purpose or goals as a working forest, we plan to spend our time and effort over the next few years supporting alternative methods of connecting people with the forest (including trails from town, support for carpooling, and a thorough investigation of public transportation possibilities). Check out our Alternative Trailhead Transportation Strategy for more information about these discussions and plans.

As a reminder, changes to Oak Creek and Lewisburg Saddle parking areas were a requirement of the Conditional Use Permit from the Benton County Planning Commission in 2017 to allow development of recreation features on the OSU Research Forests. Read more about that process here.

Bike racks recently installed at Oak Creek for adventurous visitors’ use as an alternative way to get to the trailhead.

Conditional Use Permit hearing in summer of 2017

Before and after bollard installation to address unsafe parking on NW Oak Creek Dr