

DuPont's Legacy Oaks

DuPont, Washington, a quiet former company town near the original site of Fort Nisqually is the fastest growing city in Pierce County. Of the more than 5,000 residents, 90 percent have lived here less than a decade. Most, like me, were attracted to Northwest Landing, an award-winning master-planned community.

The 3,000-acre community is also home to native Garry oaks - *Quercus garryana*. Oak woodlands covered much of the South Puget Sound area two centuries ago while today about 3 percent of these woodlands remain.

The City of DuPont had the foresight to preserve this unique natural heritage by protecting 100-year-old landmark trees within the city code. The largest community of these landmark oaks is in an area where a new park is planned. Current plans would cut down anywhere from 10 to 29 landmark oaks.

That's how I got involved. A couple of friends who are active in the community asked me if I would photograph the oak woodland for a city planning presentation. I spent a couple of hours one winter morning in the company of these trees. Last August, I photographed the oaks again, this time in full dress. One small way I can help raise awareness about this natural legacy is through my writing and photography. Photos are currently on display at Caffe Pegaso in DuPont and online:

www.wordandpicturecommunications.com. Photo sales will benefit The Nature Conservancy. Photos will also be on display at Chloe Clark School for the DuPont Centennial Celebration, Jan. 7, 2006.

Most residents of DuPont are not aware about what is planned. If you ask any resident what they think about the proposed 24-acre park, they would tell you they are thrilled that there will finally be a community park here. If you then tell that same resident that a couple dozen old trees will have to be cut down to create the park, they would ask why.

Northwest Landing's developers have put in "pocket" parks that few people use. These parks contribute about 18 acres toward compliance with a city code requirement of six acres of park for every 1,000 residents. With more than 5,000 residents, building cannot proceed until there are 30 acres for parks. The developer submitted a plan to the city a year ago. Since then the city has asked for revisions that will remove more trees than the original plan.

So what difference would it make if a few trees are cut down? There are several problems, the first of which is that the city code protects landmark trees and requires that 100 percent of landmark trees be retained. Garry oaks are Washington's only native oaks. Oak woodlands are rapidly disappearing and endangered. The city has just begun a master parks plan which will not be ready until after this park is completed. It's possible that the plan may recommend a better location for active recreation.

A map of the proposed park is on the city's Web site <http://www.ci.dupont.wa.us> and decision documents ADM 05-05 and SEPA 04-13 are posted here: <http://www.ci.dupont.wa.us/decisions.htm>. If you would like to get involved, contact me at 253-431-3093 or wordandpicture@msn.com.

- Kate Lynch

