

Anouschka Andresen and Shannon Clery  
Little Gnomes Nature School, LLC  
1050 Oak St., Ashland, OR 97520

March 2, 2018

To whom it may concern,

We are writing to express our strong support for the proposed Nature Play Area at North Mountain Park in Ashland Oregon. We own and teach a fully outdoor preschool and kindergarten, based at North Mountain Park. We have seen first hand how beneficial our students' time outside has been to them and their families. Our students develop a deep connection to nature, which has made them more confident little people and inspired to be outside more with their families. Early childhood is a key time for physical development and outdoor nature play is the best setting for providing the movement and challenges and engaging all their senses. The imaginative play that is stimulated by the natural areas is some of the best we have seen in our many years of teaching young children.

We are strongly in support of this project receiving funding to move forward. Our school group would use the area frequently, and it would not only provide an opportunity for our children to have more freedom in their nature play, but would lessen our impact on other areas in the nature park where that sort of play is not as appropriate due to habitat concerns. We would not only use the area with the children we serve, but would love to see the benefits of nature play extend out into the community. The area would be an excellent bridge to introduce parents that visit with their children to the many benefits of nature play.

In addition, our school would be thrilled to commit to "adopt" the area in the form of regular maintenance and parent work parties. During and after our groups use of the area, we would provide day to day monitoring, clean up, and material resupply, as well as communicate with park staff about additional needs and improvements. Bigger improvements could be part of community building work parties with our parent body.

*Personally from Anouschka:*

I have lived in this town for over 15 years. I have four kids and chose to live and raise them in this area for many reasons. One of them being the incredible display of nature that is surrounding the Rogue Valley. Being a preschool teacher I very much care about children and it seems that in this day and age most children do not have enough time to play in nature. It is such a simple thing that has been forgotten and undervalued. Children are deeply connected to nature around them and they have a need to get dirty and muddy. I am very proud to see that our community is aware of those needs for children and are looking at building a nature playground. I am certain that such a playground will be used on a daily basis by many families and that it would help bridge the connection of human and nature.

*Personally from Shannon:*

I have lived in Ashland for nearly 20 years and have two boys, almost 13 and 10. Our family has used almost every park in Ashland at some point quite regularly. I have a BS in Botany and an MS in Environmental Education, as well as lots of early childhood trainings. I am also a certified Cedarsong Teacher (Cedarsong is the longest running Forest Kindergarten in the US). I am inspired by the growing movement of forest and nature schools in the US as a way to cure the nature deficit that is happening in our society. I am strongly supportive of our parks efforts to make play in nature more inviting to young families as a balm to cure many problems among our communities today.

Sincerely,



Anouschka and Shannon