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Group walks in hope of curbing Foothills development

Hikers also don't want developers to cut off access to popular trails

Bounding dogs and hikers armed with walking sticks and canteens brought even more activity than usual to a prime crescent of Boise Foothills land Saturday morning.

The Hillside to the Hollow Coalition, a grassroots group of citizens and neighborhood organizations, led a public hike from Hillside Junior High on 36th Street to the Harrison Hollow trailhead off Bogus Basin Road, to call attention not only to the area's charms, wildflowers, birds, winding trails - but to its vulnerability.

"We're losing the area incrementally to development," coalition spokesman Steve Steubner said.

At the moment, six different parties own the 350-acre area.

Kastera, a residential development company, owns the biggest chunk, around 270 acres. Steubner said the company, which did not return calls from the Statesman, has been looking for investors in the area.

The coalition wants the city of Boise to become the area's main investor and is lobbying Boise Mayor Dave Bieter and the Boise City Council to use Foothills levy funds, conservation easements and other strategies to buy the land.

Michelle Cooper, coalition president, said the area has been open to walkers and runners and everyone else, but that's only due only to the generosity of landowners. That generosity comes with no guarantee of what might happen in the future.

Arrowhead Ridge, a development off Cartright Road, has already severed one section of a looped trail.

"The city's planning staff had recommended getting a trail easement there, or a reroute, but it slipped through the cracks," Steubner said.

"Ultimately, we citizens were to blame for not going to bat."

More development without trail access agreements or public easements could cut the area off from a connection to the popular Ridge to Rivers trail system as well.

North End resident Donna Hiller walked on Saturday. "A lot of what makes Boise a wonderful place to live are places like the Greenbelt and Military Reserve," she said, adding that many Boiseans seem to share her love of open space. "I couldn't find a place to park at Camel's Back park this morning."

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