

Outdoors plus

GREEN LAKE

The People

No question it's crowded, but often with the nicest folk

by Sherry Stripling
Times staff reporter

Green Lake has been in danger of being loved to death since the path was paved more than a decade ago.

On hot summer days as many as 1,000 persons an hour use the 2.8-mile interior path.

Confusion is added by the fact that 29 percent will be walking, 26 percent will be skating and the remaining 46 percent will be split evenly between bicyclists and runners.

The 10-foot wide path becomes a circus ring when the walkers and joggers push baby strollers or lead dogs and the contraptions go beyond bikes and skates to three-wheeled cycles or skateboards.

In perfect weather, the notion of quietly sifting through thoughts as you circle the lake is jarred loose by the need dodge that potential injury skating or running toward you.

Should something be done to relieve the crowding?

Results of a Seattle Times' informal poll substantiated a 1980 Seattle Park Department survey. Green Lake users said: "Leave it alone."

"If you put in another path, you'll be making a highway with a lake in the middle," said Steve Darland, who, with his son Garrett, 5, was skating around the lake on a beautiful afternoon this week.

"I think it naturally limits itself. If people don't like crowds, they will stay away."

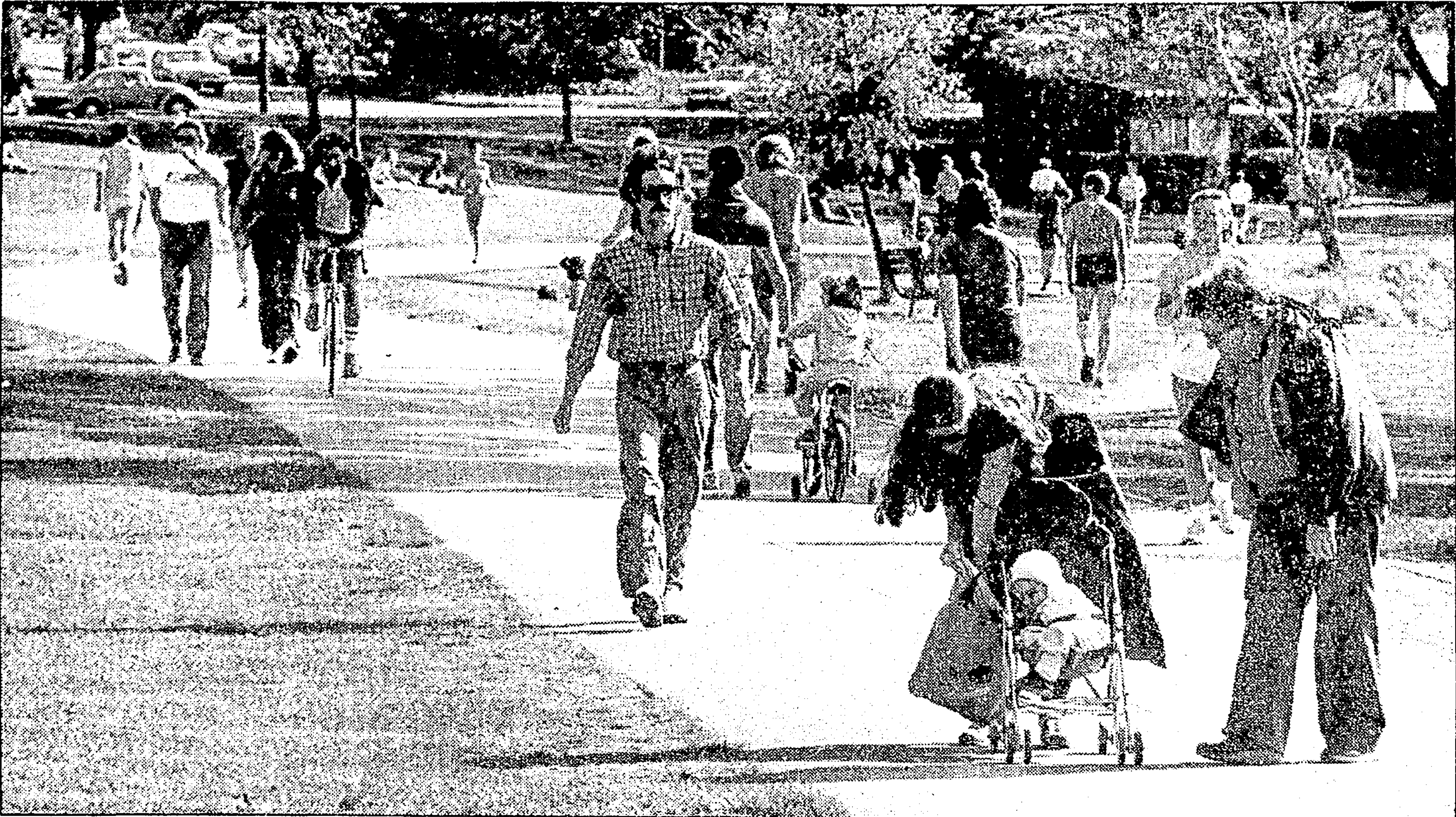
Too many people doing too many activities in different directions are the main complaints. Though it is sometimes stated sheepishly, many people go to Green Lake simply to watch other people.

"People-watching is fun," said Doug Mosich, a cyclist and runner.

Kathy Callahan, a walker, said, "It is almost unsafe to have such crowds, but I like the people. I like to watch them. It's only when it gets to be a juggling act on the road that it's not good."

"It depends on what you're looking for," said Henry Burton, who walks around the lake three or four times a week with his wife Susanne. "If you're looking for seclusion, you're not in the right place. If you enjoy the clean air, the pretty lake and the beautiful, nice faces, then this is the place."

The couple struggled with what seems to be the main object of confusion. "Are we going the right way?" Mrs. Burton asked.



Greg Gilbert / Seattle Times

Walkers and runners are less diligent about going in the correct direction and staying on their side of the path, according to the poll. But cyclists and skaters seem to create more havoc because of speed.

A courtesy code was instituted in the fall of 1979, asking walkers and joggers to use the lane closest to the lake on the interior path or the outside jogging path near the street.

Bikers and skaters using the interior path are asked to use the outside lane, the one farthest from the lake. They should go counterclockwise. Walkers and joggers are asked to go clockwise.

The park department's 12-week study in 1980 said 95 percent of Green Lake users abide by the courtesy code. But users questioned this week laughed at that statement.

"Not even close," said Bob Crutchfield. "In fact, I'm not even sure which is the right way."

"People doing everything on both sides of the path is a big problem," said Ginny Larkins, walker.

Users say more direction signs would be helpful, but most are not in favor of strict enforcement.

"Most people have just left eight hours of rules when they get here," said Callahan. "If they add too many rules, it takes away the reason for being here."

Officer Howard Haines of the Mounted Horse Patrol said he cannot ticket violators. He doesn't have the right to stop and ask people to go in the proper direction. "Nothing in the park code is enforceable," Haines said.

Fritz Hedges, senior planner with the Park Planning and Capital Improvement Program, said the parks department wants the direction request to remain just a courtesy code.

"Our philosophy is that there is as

much danger of being overbearing about the thing as there is in not doing enough," Hedges said. "We're trying to maintain a fairly light touch. We also want to educate people that we hope that if they use it correctly, there will be fewer problems."

It has worked well. Of the accidents reported in Seattle's busiest park last summer, none involved collisions. Two accidents reported in the past four months involved collisions.

"That's important when you consider that 10,000 people may use the park in a day," said Lou Anne Kirby, community-relations coordinator for Seattle Parks and Recreation. "Most people seem to recognize that it is a recreational setting so they make allowances for one another."

"Some of the charm is that they know it's going to be crowded but that the people are going to be in a festive mood. They don't have the same expectations of one another. People who have particular problems will call and bend my ear for a half an hour. But the irate people are the exception and not the rule."

Suggestions have been made that bicycles or skaters be eliminated from the interior path,

particularly on weekends.

"We continue to believe that we don't have to resort to that strong of action," said Hedges, adding that a new bicycle lane on Green Lake Way has lightened the load.

"We don't plan any changes in the basic circulation system. We have pretty much decided against increasing the width or adding another path. It already seems like a freeway out there."

Parking always has been a major problem. The 1980 survey showed 43 percent of those who drove on sunny days either were forced or chose to park on the street. The survey showed that 3 percent of Green Lake's users arrive by public transportation, despite five Metro routes in the area.

Other survey statistics:

✓ Weekday path traffic is characterized by two peak periods from noon to 1 p.m. and from 5 to 7 p.m. Weekend traffic has one large surge in mid afternoon.

✓ Only 75 percent of the number of runners who use Green Lake's interior path on weekdays also use it on weekends. In contrast, the number of skaters, bicyclists and walkers increase by 50 percent on weekends.

✓ The number of weekday users in poor weather is 56 percent less than in fair weather. The number of skaters drops 80 percent in poor weather.

The park department has plans to relieve congestion near the Aqua Theatre and to provide better drainage on several parts of the path.

"We recognize that Green Lake is the heaviest use park and we want people to enjoy themselves," said Hedges. "But we also want them to show a little sensitivity toward other people."

"And just use a little common sense."

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The Lake

Algae is the annual spoil-sport in fight to save lake quality

by Sherry Stripling
Times staff reporter

The impending death of Green Lake is announced every few years, setting the stage for yet another study and the expenditure of many thousands of dollars on temporary restoration.

Someday newspaper readers may learn:

"After a 16,000-year struggle, algae and a dirth of fresh water overcame Green Lake today. At 5:03 this morning, biologists announced that the popular recreation site had succumbed to eutrophication."

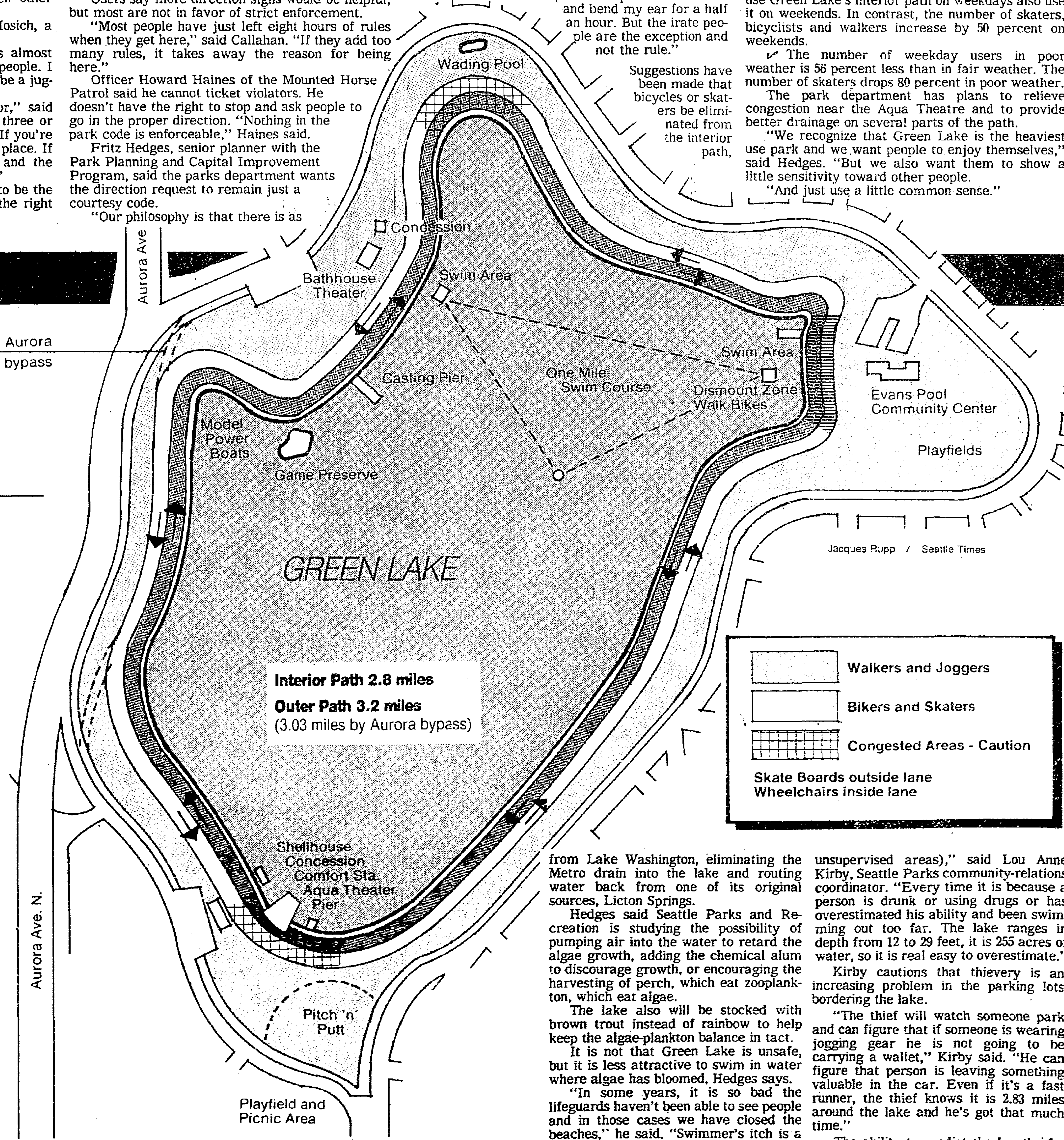
The latest Green Lake crisis falls short of that. But help is needed again to wage war with oxygen deficiency, not to mention algae and other fresh-water aquatic weeds.

"It's not like Green Lake is going to dry up or turn into a green mass of algae overnight," said Fritz Hedges, senior planner for the Park Planning and Capital Development Program. "But the continuing algae problem is a nuisance. It reduces people's enjoyment of the lake. We want to protect the quality of the lake."

A public meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. May 4 in the Green Lake Community Center to discuss the alternatives to restoring Green Lake. A bond issue this fall, if it passes, would allocate \$300,000 to restore the lake.

The lake never has been fed by a major natural source, such as a river, but its level was maintained by water from some 25 natural springs on the land around it.

One by one, the springs were diverted into channels away from the lake and, one by one, plans to add fresh water were tried and either abandoned or found to be not good enough.



To compensate, the city water department was draining one million gallons of water a day into the lake from Maple and Green Lake reservoirs. But the city has been getting less surplus water in recent years, according to Hedges, and 10 million gallons a day would not be too much to keep the lake fresh.

"We are concerned that we have been

getting less and less," said Hedges. "Mainly, we feel before it gets critical we should find a more reliable source. It may still be we'll be able to work something out with the water department, but we're also looking at other options."

The options include drilling wells near the lake, building pipes to borrow water

from Lake Washington, eliminating the Metro drain into the lake and routing water back from one of its original sources, Licton Springs.

Hedges said Seattle Parks and Recreation is studying the possibility of pumping air into the water to retard the algae growth, adding the chemical alum to discourage growth, or encouraging the harvesting of perch, which eat zooplankton, which eat algae.

The lake also will be stocked with brown trout instead of rainbow to help keep the algae-plankton balance in tact.

It is not that Green Lake is unsafe, but it is less attractive to swim in water where algae has bloomed, Hedges says.

"In some years, it is so bad the lifeguards haven't been able to see people and in those cases we have closed the beaches," he said. "Swimmer's itch is a problem. We encourage people to towel off after swimming and to shower as soon as possible."

Park officials are very proud of their lifeguards, who have not lost a swimmer to drowning in Green Lake's two supervised swim areas or at Evans Pool in nearly a decade.

"The lake is very deep and every year it claims one or two people (in

unsupervised areas)," said Lou Anne Kirby, Seattle Parks community-relations coordinator. "Every time it is because a person is drunk or using drugs or has overestimated his ability and been swimming out too far. The lake ranges in depth from 12 to 29 feet, it is 255 acres of water, so it is real easy to overestimate."

Kirby cautions that thievery is an increasing problem in the parking lots bordering the lake.

"The thief will watch someone park and can figure that if someone is wearing jogging gear he is not going to be carrying a wallet," Kirby said. "He can figure that person is leaving something valuable in the car. Even if it's a fast runner, the thief knows it is 2.83 miles around the lake and he's got that much time."

The ability to predict the length of a victim's walk, problems with lake stagnation and certainly the need for lifeguards all could have been prevented if a 1921 plan had been implemented.

City engineers and officials of that era envisioned one easy solution. Drain the lake, fill it with landfill and the last one to tee off on the new 18-hole golf course could pay the green fees.