

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

STRATEGIC PLAN

Achieving a healthy, sustainable park system.



2021-31



Lake Chelan State Park

SEPTEMBER 2020

PARKS.STATE.WA.US



2020 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As we look forward to the next 10 years, we must acknowledge the profound impact the coronavirus pandemic and equity and inclusion movement have on our state, park system and visitors. This plan, and our ability to meet its goals and strategies, is more critical than ever to our ongoing success. These major events have amplified the importance of state parks and their role in supporting everyone's physical and mental well-being, regardless of race, identity, abilities or socioeconomic status. Our parks are truly for everyone, and we must ensure they stay that way.

ABOUT PARKS

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission has a proud 107-year history. Our first two parks, Moran and Larrabee, were donations made to the state, a tradition that continues today.

The Commission currently manages 124 state parks and properties totaling about 138,000 acres. The park system includes marine parks, heritage sites, historic parks, interpretive centers, retreat centers, ocean beaches and hundreds of miles of trails.

State parks offer a variety of recreation opportunities for citizens and provide stewardship protection for an outstanding array of natural, cultural and historic resources.

State Parks also manages statewide programs, including over 400 miles of long-distance trails, Recreational Boating and Winter Recreation.

There is truly something for everyone at our state parks. What do you want to experience?

MISSION

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission cares for Washington's most treasured lands, waters, and historic places. State parks connect all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and provide memorable recreational and educational experiences that enhance their lives.

VISION

Washington's state parks will be cherished destinations with natural, cultural, recreational, artistic, and interpretive experiences that all Washingtonians enjoy, appreciate, and proudly support.



Peshastin Pennacles State Park

MEET OUR COMMISSION

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is appointed by the Governor to staggered six-year terms. The Commission is charged with setting agency direction and policy.



Steve S. Milner, Chair
Chelan



Michael Latimer, Vice-Chair
Yakima



Mark O. Brown, Secretary
Lacey



Ken Bounds
Seattle



Sophia Danenberg
Seattle



Diana Perez
Vancouver



Lucinda S. Whaley
Spokane



Don Hoch, Director



Goldendale Observatory State Park Historic Site

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington state has one of the largest, most beautiful and diverse park systems in the country. Our parks and the opportunities within them are as unique and varied as the people of our state.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is committed to furthering our mission and vision, using this strategic plan as the blueprint for the future.

The 2021-31 strategic plan builds on decades of hard work and outlines our goals and strategies for achieving a healthy, sustainable park system.

Over the past year, we traveled across the state and collected feedback from partners, stakeholders, staff and the public. We used that advice to develop a strategic framework that reflects the interests of all park users.

Our plan includes six principles and goals that set our strategic priorities and direction over the next 10 years. These goals, and the strategies that support them, will ensure we are working toward maintaining and improving our park system for everyone.



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Deception Pass State Park

Provide exceptional recreation, cultural and interpretive opportunities that all visitors enjoy and support

Parks provide the public with opportunities to experience a variety of recreation. They are places for rest, reflection, enjoyment and exploration. Parks enhance our overall health and well-being. Visits to parks offer a wide range of opportunities for visitors to learn about our state’s history and rich natural and cultural heritage. Each park is unique and has its own story to tell.

STRATEGIES

Keep parks vibrant, accessible and well cared for

Keep parks open and accessible with facilities that visitors enjoy and return to support. Ensure day-use, overnight accommodations, grounds, trails and other facilities are operational and well-maintained. Maintain infrastructure such as water, sewer and electrical systems to ensure they work and meet all health and safety standards. Appropriately staff parks in order to meet the needs and expectations of the visiting public.

Provide customers the facilities and experiences they want and expect

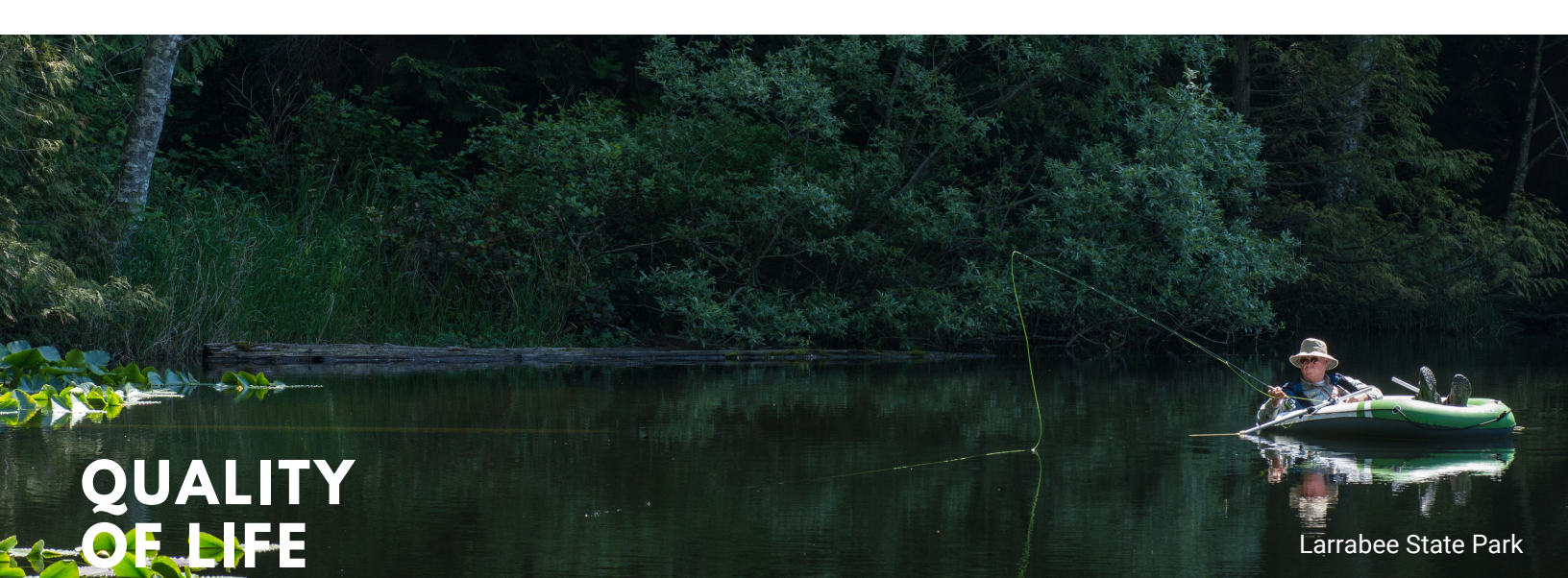
Collect and analyze customer data to improve park services and facilities. Conduct ongoing visitor surveys of both day-use and overnight customers. Use customer feedback to make data-driven business decisions regarding facilities, staffing levels, services and other improvements.

Survey and research non-park users to better understand what facilities, services or other conditions would draw them to the parks.

Continually assess and prioritize park maintenance needs to ensure the public's highest priorities are being addressed.

Form partnerships with agencies, tribes, non-profits and new stakeholders

Collaborate with local governments to plan and develop new and improved park amenities. Expand partnerships with the Washington State Parks Foundation and friends groups to support park improvements and programming. Continue to develop relationships and agreements with tribes to advance career-connected learning opportunities for tribal youth, expand traditional and folk art activities, interpret authentic Indian stories, and protect significant natural and cultural sites and properties throughout the state park system.



QUALITY OF LIFE

Larrabee State Park

Contribute to Washington’s quality of life and support healthy communities

State parks benefit everyone. They contribute to quality of life, the state’s character and identity, and are an anchor to the outdoor recreation and tourism economy.

State parks are places where people can escape from everyday stresses and an increasingly technological world and connect with nature. Studies show that experiencing nature, even just two hours per week, makes a measurable improvement in people’s sense of well-being.

Visits to Washington state parks generate jobs, business income and tax revenues for the state and local governments. Each year, visits to state parks generate more than \$1.4 billion in economic activity. This consumer spending generates over \$64 million to the state General Fund and 14,000 jobs. Visits to state parks help increase economic activity in rural areas as visitors travel to park in all regions of the state.

STRATEGIES

Demonstrate that all Washingtonian’s benefit from their state parks

Provide opportunities for the public to learn how parks contribute to everyone, even those that don’t visit them. Specifically, educate people about the benefits of natural resources like clean air, clean water, native habitat, carbon sequestration, water, filtration, storage and flood protection.

Promote benefits of outdoor recreation and exercise

Develop marketing and outreach campaigns that connect people with parks and healthy recreation pursuits. Promote Washington’s nation-leading Parks Rx Program allowing health care providers to prescribe time outdoors to their patients, reducing illness and promoting healthy lifestyles. Expand the program by partnering with more medical professionals - maintaining Washington’s position as national leader.

Contribute to statewide tourism and local economic development

Partner with the Tourism Marketing Authority, the tourism industry, local governments, other parks departments and community partners to promote parks and events. Demonstrate how visits to state parks generate business for neighboring communities and contribute to the health of the state and local economies.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Saltwater State Park

Expand access and opportunity for everyone to experience the outdoors

Visitors of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds should have the opportunity to visit and enjoy state parks. Parks need to be welcoming to everyone, and the agency is committed to creating a hospitable, safe and inclusive park environment. Every state park should be a safe place for all to gather, recreate and feel like they belong.

STRATEGIES

Maintain a safe and welcoming environment for all visitors of all backgrounds

Engage people of all races, ethnicities, national origins, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, religions, veteran status and ages to better understand their barriers to using state parks. Use feedback to eliminate barriers identified by underrepresented communities.

Develop new parks and amenities, and improve trails and park services that meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse population

Develop new parks and facilities to meet increasing demand from the state's growing and changing population. Support popular outdoor recreation activities that align with the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan's findings and meet customer expectations. Increase outreach to trail users, improve trail conditions, build relationships with trail neighbors and engage partners to improve mobility and connections between communities.

Engage youth and diverse communities

Reach out to youth and underserved communities to better understand their recreation preferences and support their participation in the outdoors. Continue the No Child Left Inside Grant Program and expand other efforts to involve youth and diverse communities in outdoor recreation and education activities, career-connected learning and resource stewardship. Explore ways to increase teenage participation in the park system. Increase cultural opportunities by working with local communities and organizations to coordinate cultural performances and events at parks.



RESOURCE PROTECTION

Joemma Beach State Park

Protect and conserve park system resources for the future

Acre for acre, state parks feature some of the state’s most significant natural environments. From lowland old growth forests, to globally at-risk plant communities, national historic landmarks and sacred cultural sites, state park lands reflect the amazing diversity of Washington’s natural and cultural heritage. To establish priorities and protect the most important natural and cultural resources, we must continue improving our understanding of the resources in our care. These actions will lead to better protection, restoration, and stewardship of park resources for future generations.

STRATEGIES

Protect ecosystems and habitat for long-term sustainability

Understand and improve the condition of ecosystems in our care by improving land assessments and inventories of habitats and species. Work with government agencies, tribes, volunteers and non-profit conservation organizations to enhance the function of of ecosystems within the parks.

Preserve Washington’s cultural heritage

Preserve, treat, protect and interpret historic properties to showcase the state's cultural heritage for the public. Protect and conserve historic architectural and cultural resources as part of the state’s legacy. Work with Washington’s Native American tribes to develop and enhance relationships, protect archaeological and cultural sites, interpret appropriate features, and help tell authentic tribal stories.

Improve facility condition through capital planning

Make strategic decisions to determine priorities for facility repair, replacement or removal. Use capital planning and maintenance staff to improve the facilities in our care and address the statewide maintenance backlog. Actively use climate change science to assess future needs for the protection and development of park properties and facilities.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Seaquest State Park

Attract and retain a dedicated workforce that reflects Washington’s diverse communities

To successfully operate the park system, Parks must recruit, develop and retain a diverse, high-performing workforce. The agency is committed to this effort and will also continue efforts to maintain a work environment that is inclusive and respectful. Diversity is multi-dimensional and covers a broad spectrum – from race and ethnicity, to gender and sexual orientation and from socio-economic status to physical abilities, age and religious beliefs.

By eliminating barriers to growth and opportunity, and investing in our staff, each employee can contribute their full measure of talent. This will allow us to be more successful by building capacity to deliver innovative and effective services to all visitors.

STRATEGIES

Invest in ongoing staff training and recruitment efforts

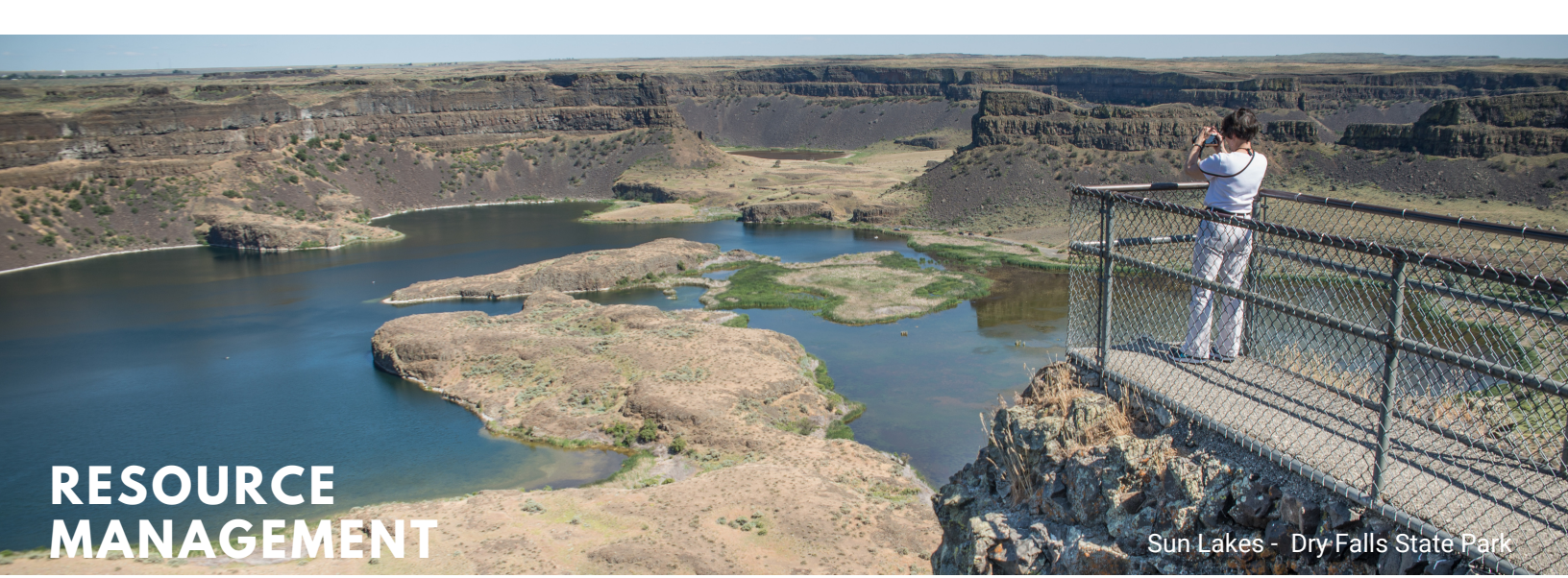
Provide staff training and development that build skills and provide opportunities for advancement. Concentrate recruitment strategies on the most difficult positions to fill, and those that are most important to park visitors.

Build equity and inclusion in the workforce

Build a diverse workforce to ensure that all Washingtonians feel welcome and included in the parks. Focus job recruitments on diversity and target underrepresented communities. Train employees on the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace and how to communicate with staff and visitors in an equal and respectful manner. Offer annual trainings on diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, tribal government to government training, and sexual harassment prevention.

Improve internal employee communication

Develop an internal communication strategy to deliver information to staff in an efficient and effective way. Utilize technology and the agency's intranet to create a one-stop-shop for employee information – including a forum to share best practices and other materials that improves employee engagement and morale.



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Sun Lakes - Dry Falls State Park

Obtain and effectively manage resources needed to create and sustain an exceptional parks system

With nearly 40 million visits per year, the Washington state park system provides recreational opportunities to a diverse array of customers. Sound financial management practices are required to best serve these customers and effectively manage lands, facilities and other business activities.

As one of the state’s major providers, the park system is a primary choice for recreation and hospitality services. To effectively fulfill these roles, the agency must acquire the resources needed to adequately invest in its operations and facilities. This helps increase earned revenue as people pay for various park services.

Operating the park system is primarily paid for by user fees. Therefore, providing expected levels of service in an attractive and safe environment is crucial. As visitation grows, increased demand puts more burden on the park system, so revenue and state financial support must keep pace with these increased costs. The agency will continue to mindfully raise user fees to help pay for increasing costs, but higher levels of tax support are also needed to pay for the full cost of operations.

STRATEGIES

Expand use of partnerships, concessions and other business opportunities

Explore opportunities to expand State Parks’ services through partnerships and concession agreements. Consider business opportunities that will further State Parks as the recreational provider of choice to increase visitation and revenue.

Secure financial resources needed to address agency and visitor priorities

Engage in sound business practices to grow revenue to support agency operations. Set user fees using customer data and feedback, market rates, and affordability. Promote donations to help pay for operating costs. Advertise park services to increase attendance and revenue. Pursue increased levels of tax support. Work with the Governor, legislators and stakeholders to obtain funding to address the increasing demands being placed on park lands, facilities and staff.

Ensure effective, efficient services

Continue efforts to find the most efficient and effective methods to deliver services. Continue use of Lean process improvement efforts and research best practices to create efficiencies, enhance productivity and improve services. Pursue cost reduction strategies to ensure the best value to the state of Washington. Spend dollars wisely to ensure optimum use of state funds.

LOOKING FORWARD

Great things are happening at Washington State Parks, and we have a lot to look forward to. We are beginning work on two new parks, and people are recreating and getting out into nature more than ever.

The success of our park system depends on our ability to meet the demands of the visiting public and create a welcoming and enriching environment that welcomes all park users. Through this plan, we intend to do just that.

Thank you for your commitment to our remarkable park system and to preserving Washington's natural and historic treasures for generations to come.





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