

Cama Beach Public Comments

August 15 – 30, 2024

Dear Commissioners and Director Dupuis:

We are writing as former owners of Cama Beach, and as donors to Washington State Parks through our charitable trusts of approximately \$10 million in property value (in 1990s dollars), and well over \$2 million in cash to fund the Master Plan and what eventually became the Cama Center building.

We would first like to say that we very much appreciate that you, the Commissioners, are generously serving with no compensation, other than knowing that you are offering your experience and judgment in the best interests of the people of Washington State, present and future.

When we turned over ownership of the Cama Beach waterfront to the Commission, we turned over a sacred trust – a trust involving the protection of the sole remaining large historic 1930s waterfront family saltwater fishing resort (and also, of course, the protection of the tribal artifacts and remains below the ground surface).

We now fear that the Commission, although with the best of intentions, might soon make a decision based on incomplete information that sets aside that sacred trust and fails to provide this unique National Register treasure, and living museum, the protection it requires.

We believe that the Commission is legally obligated, as well as having a duty to future generations, to protect the historic cabins and other resort buildings and to reopen them to the public in their current location as soon as feasible.

In the agreement dated April 12, 2004, and ratified June 1, 2004, between us and the Commission for the cash donations for what became the Cama Center Building, the parties agreed in Section 13 that among the most important reasons for our Trusts to make the donation was the buildings' intended use in providing kitchen, dining, meeting, lodging, and restroom facilities for members of the public attending educational programs at Cama Beach State Park. That section also provides that "Educational programs will be a primary and significant purpose of Cama Beach State Park."

Section 14 of that Agreement states that "the parties understand that one of the most important reasons for the Trusts to make the donation of the buildings is that the activities conducted in the buildings are anticipated to enhance and help ensure the preservation of the adjacent historic resort buildings and related structures. The Commission undertakes to make bona fide and continuing significant efforts to preserve, in accordance with its own Cultural Resources Management Policy, and to interpret to the public, the historic structures and artifacts of Cama Beach."

We consider that agreement to still be in effect and binding upon the Commission and the agency.

Both the likelihood of future sea level rise and the condition of the sea wall were well known at the time of the agreement. Indeed in the first edition of my (Gary Worthington's) book on Cama Beach, published in 2008, on page 107 the past flooding issues were mentioned, as well as the fact that in 2007 the cabins were raised an average of one-and-one half feet in new foundation posts and around two hundred truck loads of fill were brought in and spread in the lowest areas.

The text goes on to say on the same page that "sea level rise due to global climate change may make these improvements even more relevant." (That same text is repeated on page 113 of the second edition of the book which you, as Commissioners, should each have.)

Consequently, projected possible sea level rise and the sea wall condition would not be valid legal reasons to abandon the cabins and other historic resort buildings in their waterfront locations.

The last sentence of the Commission's own Critical Areas Policy appears to be applicable here: "It is recognized that when historic structures or other historic facilities are involved, extra care and expense may be involved in the short term to comply with this policy, but that they will be both responsible and cost-effective in the long-term."

Various alternatives, both "hard" and "soft," exist to protect the sea wall and the resort buildings, and there are many people with expertise that can be brought to bear such as coastal geologists, shoreline restoration managers, and civil engineers, and resources such as the Northwest Straits Foundation. It may well be that a combination of solutions will be best (including, possibly, measures such as raising the cabins again and not making the cabins available for rent during certain predicted King Tide events, and maybe a low dike across the north end of the current resort area following the existing rock wall from the sea wall to the base of the hill).

We believe those solutions, and funding sources such as FEMA, have not been adequately explored, given the supremely important implications of the decisions to be made, including the serious, major long term effects on such a large number of interested parties and constituencies, as well on the land and the buildings themselves.

It is likely that whatever course of action appears to be the best alternative will be costly and naturally will require permits, as well as an agreement satisfactory to the interested tribes. An experienced person has pointed out that with regard to obtaining permits, Cama Beach actually has an advantage, since it has over a mile of shoreline, most of which can be left to natural processes, as the portion needing repair is a relatively small percentage of the whole. In fact, much of the northern section of the sea wall is already protected by natural accretions of logs, gravel, and shells that are in some places even higher than the wall. This would all be taken into account in evaluating any required mitigation.

We have long felt that the Native American use of the site should be better presented to the public, and we would be very supportive of the tribes being offered an opportunity such as an interpretive long house or other facility in an appropriate location.

The fact that undertaking that project will be difficult, time consuming for the staff, and expensive, does not justify setting aside the obligation and the sacred trust. In our own experience, most things worth doing are indeed hard and take time.

We therefore urge the Commission to:

1. Fulfill its obligation to do everything necessary to protect this one-of-a kind historic treasure for present and future generations, including obtaining an engineering study to come up with the alternatives, the permits to be needed, and the likely costs.
2. Request an appropriation in the coming Legislative session to fund the project and undertake it as soon as possible, before the historic buildings and sea wall deteriorate further. We will work with the Commission, the Director, and staff, as we did before, to obtain that needed funding.
3. Make the necessary water and sewer arrangements to reopen the highly popular cabins as soon as possible in their current locations, making them again available for the public to experience and enjoy, and bringing in revenue.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

W. Gary Worthington, Attorney at Law, and Trustee, Worthington Foundation

Sandra R. Worthington, Trustee, Worthington Foundation ¹

Please factor into the plan the immense value of the history and beauty of this wonderful park as well as the economic impact this has on the communities of Camano Island. The loss of this unique park and Experience for Washington families is a tragedy which should be averted. I do understand how difficult this vulnerable place is to make usable by the public again and am grateful for your careful work. Cama Beach and the Cama Beach cabins are worth the effort to save. Thank you. ²

Though I've lived in state for 25 years, I visited Cama Beach state park for the first time yesterday. I couldn't believe that I've been missing out on this treasure! Please do whatever you can to re-open the Cama Beach cabins and other amenities as soon as possible. This is an amazing recreational opportunity for folks that can't afford expensive beach rentals. ³

Thank you to the state parks commission for the work on the Cama Beach planning project thus far. While I understand the challenges that led the commission to recommend not re-opening the cabins, I urge the state parks department to reconsider. Cama Beach is a one of a kind place - we have many beautiful state parks in Washington, but in my opinion, Cama Beach stands head and shoulders above the rest. Please estimate the cost to repair responsibly and maintain moving forward, and, at minimum, ask the legislature to fund it. as a taxpayer, I am fully supportive. ⁴

I am interested in the survival of Cama beach as local families have generously donated land for this precious Gem to be enjoyed by present and future generations. Please consider efforts to restore the septic and sea wall. Thank you, ⁵

I have visited Cama Beach Park many times and have enjoyed the simplicity and beauty of the setting. I have stayed in the cabins twice. Both times I brought friends who were thrilled to be so close to the water and nature, all within driving distance of Bellevue where we all resided. It was

so much fun to walk the beach, visit the store and walk through the woods. So calming. The educational programs were great. I remember going to the beach at night to look at the moon snail. Cama may be the last affordable vacation spot with nature related activities for many Washingtonians. The last place to get away from it all.

So many volunteers put their heart and soul into Cama Beach. All their hard work for nothing. Glad I will have my memories and a watercolor picture of the cabins on my wall.

When I return to WA on an annual trip, I look forward to visiting friends and the park. Glad my friend bought me a watercolor of the cabins ⁶

The closure of Cama Beach cabins and related park area appears to be neglect and mismanagement by WASH State park management. Both the septic system and fire suppression systems are fixable. The problems were likely discovered well before the cabins were closed. Although budgets may have restricted work to be done, the State Parks department higher levels of management and higher levels of state government could have found a monetary solution.

Cama Beach is unique and special as a feature on Camano Island as a place to visit for local residents. The cabins and beach area is a large draw for others to visit the Island. We regularly visit the beach area for picnics. Even as we live just a few miles away, we stayed in the cabins for a special experience. The Cama Beach park is like the waterfront cabins our family stayed at when I was a child. I believe these cabins may be last of kind and showcase life around the Sound some decades ago.

There are economic benefits to Camano Island from having visitors come to our Island as well recreational and educational opportunities for outside visitors and locals. The park and cabins etc., were donated to Washington to be retained as they were in past years. Without finger pointing, the Washington State Park Commission and governors office simply need to obtain a cost and schedule to fix the two systems keeping the cabins closed and make the necessary repairs.

It is quite unimaginable that after nearly eight months (or more) a proper plan and estimate of time and cost to make the repairs is not available. This should be a management priority to prepare the plan, obtain approval for the funds and make permanent repairs. The cabins and beach area need to be restored and opened. ⁷

Although I am a resident of Camano Island (for 30+ years) I was unaware until recently, that the Cama Beach cabins have been closed, and that concerns me. I remember the process of WA state's purchase of the land from the family that originally created Cama Beach Resort. I was there when they opened the park to fanfare; I enjoyed the salmon barbeque provided free by the Tribes.

This is an extraordinary park with unique offerings. I was quite disappointed when I heard that the Center for Wooden Boats was no longer on location. The center, the restaurant, the trails, the seawall, and the *cabins have all been places where I commonly brought out-of-state visitors. So now I read that there are problems with the septic; does this mean that the restaurant has septic problems as well, or are the restrooms/cabins on separate systems?

And I also read that sea level rise is posing a problem. I've read that FEMA had money for repairs but that there was not a request to access those monies.

Simply closing the cabins (where friends and family members have stayed in the past) seems an extreme choice. The entire park is only about 15 years old. Where is the cost analysis for repairs ? How does the cost balance against the the revenue that the cabins reflect as an asset to the park? This is not a simple matter of comparing income from the cabins to cost of repairs. There

are jobs associated with this asset; there is peripheral business income associated with the cabins availability. There is community pride.

I passionately urge the State Parks Commission and Management to work toward a renewal of their commitment to keep Cama Beach State Park intact! ⁸

We cannot forget Cama Beach State park. The recreational and educational value of this site should not be taken away from the thousands of people who stay and visit each year. Our legislators must pressure the State Oarks to do the right thing. ⁹

I understand and sympathize with “both sides” of this dilemma. My initial reaction is to remove as much as possible without disturbing anything that may be sacred to the tribes and / or archeological importance. You can’t go back and fix the past. WA state should have been maintaining the sea wall for decades. Taking that, plus the long overdue repairs to septic and cabins, PLUS what financial recompense the legal process would award to the tribes. I think we should walk away and close it off. However, I understand the emotional connection of decades of meaningful family vacations at the beach. It will cost so much money which I personally feel would be better channeled toward transportation infrastructure repairs (including graffiti removal) and better funding in our schools. I think a compromise would be to remove the cabins where they are, build new ones up higher in the park where the septic could be built easily and maintained cheaper, and do whatever is needed so the beach can be enjoyed by visitors without staying there overnight or launching boats. ¹⁰

I was a volunteer at Cama Beach before it was opened to the public. I witnessed the transformation and careful steps taken to create a safe space many families and visitors have enjoyed. Cama is unique in what it can offer based on its setting and location. Yes, there are current problems with the septic and the seawall. The seawall issue is not unique to Cama and it will be studied by many for other locations along the Salish Sea. Sharing information will bring results as time moves on. Cama's cabins do not need to remain on the same beach footprint. Utilizing forest space for cabins and building an interpretive center to honor the indigenous tribes will create a unique park many can enjoy. The space is available. Much effort was put into Cama Beach to become a state park. It now needs the creativity and support to remain the unique park it has become. ¹¹

These cabins are a pillar of Camano Island’s history. In 2023, there were 273,000 visitors to Cama Beach State Park. Those visitors spent \$8,829,000 in the area, according to a State Parks Department study. The cabins bring in \$1.5 million in revenue each year, which could be used for the repairs of the park, if budgeting is an issue.

The management of the park by the State Parks Department could have avoided this entirely. They made temporary fixes, knowing it wouldn’t last. The sea wall has needed work for years, and it wasn’t addressed by the Parks Department at all. Currently, they claim they cannot help due to the rising sea level, but if they hadn’t ignored the maintenance of the park, this would not have happened.

As for the land, \$2 million worth of archaeological work was done in 2008 prior to the resort reopening to help protect any culturally sensitive areas.

The cabins at Cama Beach State Park are an important part of the island. Businesses such as the Cama Beach Cafe and many others rely on the visitors there for revenue. By shutting down the cabins, the local economy will be severely hurt. The cabins are a special place, where you can watch the stars and hear the waves, and experience a preserved slice of history. I personally have

many good memories of the cabins, and the idea that others won't be able to make memories here too, is very sad. Please, do the necessary repairs and reopen the cabins.¹²