

Ross Lake National Recreation Area GMP/EIS or EA

Summary of Public SCOPING Comments

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February 16, 2007

The Ross Lake National Recreation Area General Management Plan (GMP) team launched the planning process in late September 2006. The official public scoping period was initiated on September 29, 2006 and closed on December 30, 2006. A comprehensive scoping outreach effort was planned to elicit early public comment regarding issues and concerns, the nature and extent of potential environmental impacts, and possible alternatives that should be addressed in the preparation of the GMP. Through various scoping outreach activities, the NPS welcomed information and suggestions from the public regarding resource protection, visitor use, and land management.

The NPS formally announced the public scoping period and invited public comment through newsletters, correspondence, press releases, public workshops, informal meetings, the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website, and a *Federal Register* notice. NPS staff produced and mailed Newsletter Number 1 to approximately 350 individuals and entities on the NRA's mailing list. Agencies, organizations, governmental representatives, and tribal governments were sent letters of invitation to attend the public workshops or individual meetings. Press releases were distributed to local and regional news media. The project was launched on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/rola>,

providing access to information about the Ross Lake NRA GMP and a method for taking public comments. A notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement/General Management Plan for Ross Lake National Recreation Area was published in the *Federal Register* on October 30, 2006 (Vol. 71, No. 209, pp. 63351-63352). The public was invited to submit comments by regular mail, e-mail, fax, online, and at public workshops and individual meetings.

News articles featuring the public workshops were written in the local *Courier Times* and *East Skagit Community News* and announced on private and public radio stations.

Public Workshops and Written Comments

The NPS held seven public workshops in western Washington and British Columbia in October 2006 to provide the public with an opportunity to learn about the general management planning project and to offer comments. The meetings began with a presentation of Ross Lake National Recreation Area and the GMP planning process. The meeting then transitioned into a facilitated group discussion format. Meetings were held in Concrete, WA; Marblemount, WA; Sedro-Woolley, WA; Bellingham, WA; Surrey, BC; Chilliwack, BC; and Seattle, WA. 63 people attended the meetings overall. The following table lists the locations, dates, and number of people who attended each meeting:

Public Workshops		
Location	Date	Attendance
Concrete, WA Concrete Senior Center	10/17	8
Marblemount, WA Marblemount Community Club	10/18	4
Sedro-Woolley, WA North Cascades NPS Complex Headquarters	10/19	14
Bellingham, WA Bellingham Senior Center	10/23	12
Surrey, BC Surrey Community Services	10/24	0
Chilliwack, BC Chilliwack Arts Council Lounge	10/25	9
Seattle, WA Seattle Mountaineers	10/26	16
TOTAL		63

- North Cascades Institute
- Ross Lake Resort
- Seattle City Light
- Skagit County
- Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission
- Student Conservation Corps
- Washington Climbers Association
- Washington Native Plant Society
- Wilderness Conservation Corps
- The Wilderness Society

Summary of Public Scoping Comments

The following summary incorporates both the public workshop comments and the written comments received by the NPS through the close of the public comment period. The NPS received correspondence from over 80 individuals and organizations during the public comment period that provided a total of over 750 specific comments. All comments received were reviewed and considered by the NPS staff for the preparation of this GMP.

During the public comment period, the NPS received a total of 19 written responses in the form of letters, e-mails, newsletter response forms, and web comments.

Comments, either through public meetings or written correspondence, were received from the following representatives of entities including:

- The Access Fund
- Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
- Buffalo Run Inn
- Canadian Ministry of the Environment
- Conservation Northwest
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Miller Construction
- National Parks Conservation Association
- North Cascades Conservation Council

The comments received covered a broad range of topics, ideas, and preferences. Many statements or ideas were expressed by several individuals. In this summary, similar comments are stated once along with how often the particular idea was repeated. The summary is organized by topics.

Comments were grouped into 25 topics, and the number in brackets indicates the number of comments that were received concerning the stated topic. The topic that received the most comments was Recreation (269), which included issues, concerns, and ideas about all types of recreation within the NRA. Other topics that received the most comments were:

- Natural Resources (150)
- Visitor Experience/Use (106)
- Education and Interpretation (87)
- Access and Transportation (75)

- Visitor Facilities (60)

Topics that received a moderate number of comments were:

- Carrying Capacity (60)
- Interagency Management (55)
- Wilderness (48)

Topics that received a low number of comments were:

- Staffing (26)
- Zoning (26)
- Concessions (26)
- Seattle City Light (26)
- Safety/Security (19)
- Partnerships (15)
- Cultural Resources (15)
- Funding (10)

Recreation

Most of the comments on recreation state that Ross Lake NRA should provide a diversity of dispersed recreational activities with an emphasis on non-motorized activities. Many commenters also state that recreational activities should not impact the North Cascades natural ecosystem resources and conditions.

Several commenters want more dayhiking opportunities, climbing opportunities, and a variety of camping or overnight experiences. Many people would be willing to pay fees for service and use of Ross Lake NRA facilities. Comments related to the installation of an advanced reservation system were mixed. Some comments state that group size limits should be better enforced to ensure that large groups do not overrun the NRA.

Lake recreation was a popular topic, and the public provided dozens of comments on boating within Ross Lake NRA. The overwhelming majority of comments on boating and lake recreation state that self-propelled boating should be emphasized and there could be limits on motorized use that could benefit natural conditions,

soundscapes, and visitor experiences on the lakes. Limits that were suggested include limiting boat engine size and horsepower, phasing out the use of 2 cycle engines in favor of 4 cycle engines, and limiting jetskis and float planes.

Natural Resources

The overwhelming majority of comments on natural resources maintain that ecological integrity of resources and processes in the NRA should be preserved. These resources include the diversity of wildlife, vegetation, aquatic, air and water resources. Many people are concerned about recreational pressures and hydro-electric demands that could create impacts to natural resources, wilderness values, and the primitive character of Ross Lake NRA.

Commenters want to ensure the protection of migration corridors for wildlife. Several people express support for the reintroduction of grizzly bears and other native wildlife populations. Comments also express concern about the introduction of exotic species and support for the NPS to remove and prevent invasive species. Some people mention concern about climate change and the impacts from global warming on natural resources within Ross Lake NRA.

Visitor Experience/Use

When asked what the kind of visitor experience they would like to have at Ross Lake NRA in 20 years, the vast majority of commenters state that its existing character should be preserved. Comments describe the existing character as a place of beauty, spaciousness, and isolation. Commenters want the wilderness character to be preserved as well, where visitors can experience solitude, peace, and quiet in a natural setting.

Several people say that the NPS should allow for a natural increase in visitation and encourage learning about Ross Lake NRA. Several people also recommend that the NPS should seek to diversify its visitor base through new programs and facilities.

Education and Interpretation

Most comments on education and interpretation suggest that the NPS should diversify and increase educational and interpretative programs. The NPS could explore additional ways to connect with the interested public and park visitors, such as internet-based educational programs. Partnerships for education and interpretation should be expanded, and the partnership with North Cascades Institute can serve as a model. The NPS should consider ways to interact with and engage visitors who are driving through the NRA on Highway 20.

Access and Transportation

Comments include concerns about new and upgraded roads to and within Ross Lake NRA, the soundscape along the Highway 20 corridor, and expanded opportunities for non-vehicular access to the NRA's scenic and hiking areas. Several people say their greatest concern is the possibility of paving the road from Hope, British Columbia to Hozomeen; they fear that paving the road will allow larger boats and more visitors which would detract from the visitor experience in the Hozomeen area. Opening up Highway 20 to yearround traffic is a significant concern, and most comments say that yearround traffic would prevent visitors from wintertime recreational activities along Highway 20 to the east of the Ross Dam parking lot. Several comments state that soundscape intrusions along Highway 20 affect park users, and the NPS should work with the Washington State Department of Transportation to enforce

noise levels. Several comments focus on public transportation to trailheads and scenic areas throughout the park, which could broaden visitor use while reducing vehicular traffic along Highway 20. Some people think the parking lot at Ross Dam trailhead should be expanded, as there is not enough parking during the peak season.

Visitor Facilities

Comments on visitor facilities focus on the preventing overdevelopment, locating new facilities within the Highway 20 corridor, and creating a distinct park entrance that is consistent with the natural setting. Most comments state that the NRA should maintain existing facilities, and growth, if at all, should be modest and located in existing developed areas of the NRA. Several people state the need for a more formalized entrance, which would provide a distinct sense of arrival to the NRA and park complex as well as visitor information. A few people would like to see improved visitor facilities at campgrounds.

Carrying Capacity

Many commenters express concern over the regional increase in population, subsequent increase in visitation and the impacts this additional visitation could have on resources and existing visitor experiences. People want to ensure that resources will not be degraded by increased visitor use. Some commenters think the NPS could consider a permitting or reservation system that could regulate the number of visitors to the NRA.

Interagency Management

Most comments on interagency management state that the NPS will benefit from working with related agencies and partners. These entities include Seattle City Light, the Washington Department of Transportation, U.S. Forest Service, Fish

and Wildlife, British Columbia Parks, Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission, and the North Cascades Institute. Issues that could be mutually addressed through cooperation could be visitor use and facilities management in the Newhalem area, soundscapes along Highway 20, resource protection strategies and visitor services with neighboring land management agencies, and joint educational programs with Seattle City Light and the North Cascades Institute.

Wilderness

The majority of comments on wilderness pertain to preserving wilderness character, values, and experience. These commenters think the NPS should provide recreational opportunities that are compatible with wilderness and protect wilderness from impacts. Comments suggest that wilderness educational and interpretive opportunities should be expanded.

Other Comments

The public commented on several other areas of park management and operations. These general comments are listed below.

- Comments on staffing recommend increasing staffing, particularly rangers in the field for interpretation, resource protection, and visitor safety.
- When zoning the park, visitor facilities and services should be concentrated in already impacted areas along Highway 20.
- Comments on concessions focused on the Ross Lake Resort. They state that some expansion could be manageable; however no new concessions should be added to the lake.
- Seattle City Light operations could be coordinated with the NPS, including the ferry schedule, lake levels, and removal of woody debris.

- Safety and security were concerns, particularly along Highway 20 and at the international border with Canada.
- Partnerships were strongly encouraged to enhance resource protection, visitor recreation, and education and interpretation.
- Cultural resources, particularly archeological resources, were highlighted by a few individuals to preserve and conduct additional research in cooperation with tribal governments.
- Some commenters are concerned about funding for Ross Lake NRA and want to ensure that appropriate funding levels match the NRA's needs.

Public Scoping Comments and the GMP

The public's comments help the NPS to define the future and direction for the NRA's future. Public comments received have been documented, analyzed, and considered in decision-making and will be incorporated into possible visions for the future (called alternatives). Some comments provided specific ideas for preserving what's important and providing better visitor services and programs. Comments with more detailed ideas will be incorporated into plans that will implement the GMP.

Next Steps

Over the next several months, the GMP planning team will use the scoping comments to develop a range of management alternatives. These alternatives will address resource protection, recreation and access, and comply with all applicable laws and policies.

We would like your participation in the development of the alternatives. This summer we will send you a newsletter with some preliminary alternative concepts for your review and input. Please take time to

read the draft alternatives and provide your comments and ideas about these possible visions and actions for the future of Ross Lake NRA. Your ideas and suggestions will help the NPS serve you better now and after the completion of the GMP.