

II-A. INTRODUCTION AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE

In 2013, the Washington State Parks System will enter its 100th year. To celebrate this milestone and guide future development, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission adopted the Centennial 2013 Vision:

"In 2013, Washington's state parks will be premier destinations of uncommon quality, including state and regionally significant natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources that are outstanding for the experience, health, enjoyment and learning of all people."

A stunning section of western Washington's landscape stretches between the Cascade Mountains and the expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Midway between the Nisqually River's delta with Puget Sound – 'whulge' in the native Lushootseed language – and its headwaters high on Mt. Rainier (*Tacobet*), the people of Washington State have chosen to invest in a new state park. The Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site has steep-sided forested river valleys, dynamic floodplains and reforested plateaus. It embraces a remarkable story of people and their relationship to the land over millennia. From the earliest ancestors of the Salish and Sehaplin people who hunted, fished and gathered here, to European explorers, settlers and contemporary culture, people have interacted with and left their mark on this land. The stretch of the Nisqually River adjacent to the park, between the Mashel River and Ohop Creek, provides the highest quality salmon and steelhead spawning habitat along the river's journey to the sea. The new Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site will allow visitors to immerse themselves in this beautiful and productive landscape and to learn more of its stories.



Figure A-1: Park Site Photos

The Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site is wonderfully positioned to provide outdoor recreation and environmental education to meet the demands of visitors from an expanding regional, statewide, national and even international population. Not only is the park located within an hour's drive of Puget Sound urban centers, but it is adjacent to forested mountain trails, waterfalls and viewpoints.

Thirty minutes from the entrance to Mt. Rainier National Park, the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site will provide an opportunity for every visitor to have a memorable experience. The master plan allows for individual and family access to the site's rich natural and cultural resources and amenities. This experience is accessible by people of all ages and abilities given the many facilities, environments and seasons of the park. Whether going for a hike, picnicking for an afternoon, camping for a week, going for a long backcountry horse ride, helping with salmon habitat restoration or engaging in Native American plant use programs, the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site will provide recreational and educational experiences from which memories and learning are born.

The Master Planning Process

The Nisqually River Management Plan, a comprehensive planning document approved by the Washington State Legislature in 1987, recommended development of a major destination park at the confluences of the Mashel River and Ohop Creek with the Nisqually River. Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission took the lead on this project and began acquiring land in the early 1990s. The development and planning for Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site is informed by the Commission's Centennial 2013 Vision and Guiding Principles:

1. Create a park "with" the local community – State Parks hopes to engage local governments, tribes, non-profit organizations, businesses and local community members to jointly plan, construct and operate a park that is oriented toward visitors from throughout the state and beyond.
2. Build on a foundation of public participation – State Parks will seek inspiration and counsel from the public during each step of planning. State Parks will foster a two-way dialogue by establishing a temporary community exploratory committee, holding public workshops, meeting with interested organizations, providing timely information, and soliciting input from individual stakeholders.
3. Develop the park's niche – The Nisqually-Mashel property should be seen as part of a larger network of recreation, education and conservation opportunities in the Nisqually River corridor. It should seek to compliment existing opportunities and otherwise enhance the region's tourist economy.
4. Plan for financial sustainability – The Park has a goal to generate 50% of its operational budget through its revenue stream. Park planning will explore a full range of models to finance and operate the park. This may include developing

partnerships with other government agencies, tribes, non-profit organizations, foundations and private investors, in addition to employing traditional state and federal funding sources.

In 2006, the Washington State Legislature funded a master plan and allocated funds for Phase 1 design and permitting for the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site. State Parks staff initiated work on the park's Classification and Management Plan (CAMP), formed a community exploratory committee, and led two initial public workshops to gather input on the park's development.

Building on CAMP planning work, community outreach, partnership building and many years of land acquisition and study, in 2007 State Parks selected The Portico Group, a firm of landscape architects, architects and interpretive planners, to lead a consultant team and prepare a master plan for the park. Through its completion, the plan will:

- Finalize the Classification and Management Plan
- Establish the park's long term boundary
- Prepare a set of specific park plans and guidelines, including:
 - Land Use and Capital Development Plan
 - Transportation and Circulation Plan
 - Design Guidelines
 - Stewardship Plan
 - Business Plan
- Define park implementation phases and support State Parks' partnering agreements
- Complete design, permitting and construction for Phase 1 park development

Stakeholders

The planning process actively involved key stakeholders, including Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, the Nisqually Tribe, the Nisqually River Council, the Nisqually Land Trust, local government representatives, special interest groups and members of the community. Stakeholder feedback throughout the process expressed a desire to protect the Park's natural and cultural resources while providing or enhancing a variety of recreational opportunities, including hiking, biking and equestrian trails and camping facilities.



Figure A-2: Community Meeting, April 2008

Because of its rich history, the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site is of interest to multiple Native American tribes, and State Parks is committed to working with those tribes with an interest in the park. The Nisqually Tribe, in particular, has expressed a special interest in the park and has worked with State Parks extensively during the master planning process. Members of the tribe have also expressed an interest in partnering with State Parks to develop and manage parts of the park, and have expressed willingness to invest significant financial resources into the park. A significant tribal role in the development and use of the park is expected, including an appropriate relationship between the Nisqually Tribe and other tribes. State Parks will continue to work with all interested tribes to define those roles.

Representatives of the Nisqually Tribe participated as partners in the development of Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site Master Plan. Input from the Tribe was a key foundation for the organizing philosophy and concept. The Tribe may be deeply involved in the park's focal People's Center and a portion of the site may be designated as a Tribal management area. The park's and the Nisqually Tribe's program will be activated through outreach, a Traditional Knowledge Camp, a recreated Leschi's Village, protection of the Shaker Cemetery, Mashel Prairie and Medicine Springs and the stewardship of river and fish resources. The Appendix includes a draft Letter of Intent and documentation of tribal input to the Master Plan.

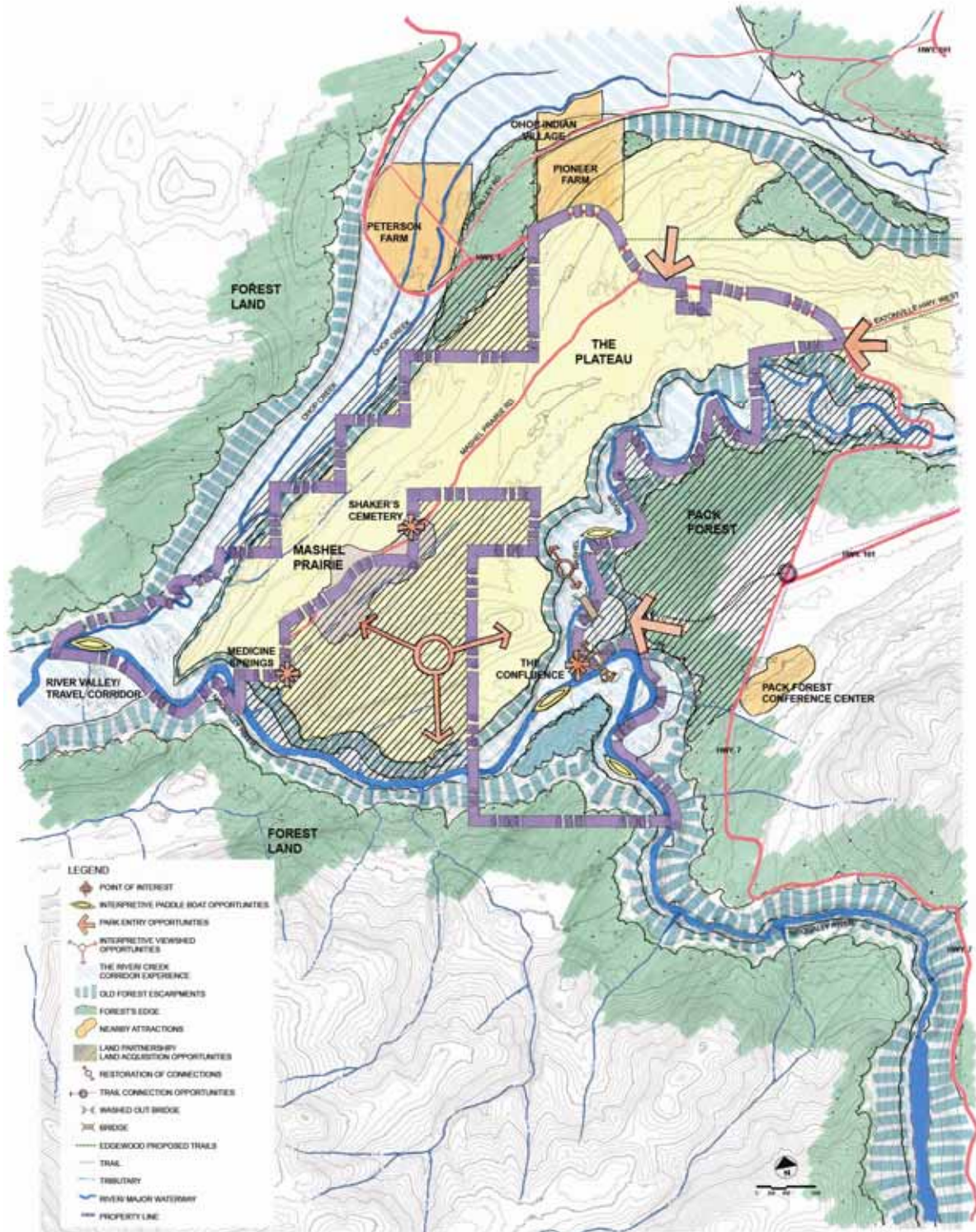


Figure A - 3: Opportunities and Constraints Map

Site Analysis

The park planning team visited the site several times over all seasons, examined existing data sources, interviewed stakeholders, and prepared site assessments and maps. Park planning issues, constraints and opportunities were identified and examined. The proposed park site was mapped and analyzed in terms of a number of factors, including:

- Regional and Local Context
- Cultural Features
- Natural Resources
- Site Character and Experiential Features
- Environmental Constraints

The site analysis made it clear that the precious cultural and ecological resources of the park site are both a significant opportunity and an important constraint to the ongoing planning process. Respect for environmentally critical areas directs primary park development to the upland plateau (Central Plateau) west of the Mashel River, bounded on three sides by rivers and steep ravines. Strategically located (and limited) access to waterways, wetlands and sites of cultural significance will allow visitors to experience the compelling character of the park and its history without compromising the very things that make it precious.

Site Planning Goals

Stakeholder input and the site analysis lead to the goals for the Master Plan, including:

1. Create a compelling and viable destination park - not just a camping backup facility for Mt. Rainier National Park. Seek a rich and exciting camping and recreational experience while establishing the park as a travel hub. Provide access to local and regional attractions and accommodate special/seasonal events and gatherings.
2. Base the park master plan on identified patterns, resources and values such as:
 - a. Native peoples of the Puget Sound (specifically the Nisqually Tribe and Salish tribes of the Pacific Northwest);
 - b. Environmental stewardship, conservation and sustainability; and
 - c. Excellent recreational experiences in contact with the dynamic cultural and natural dimensions of the park, including: camping, interpretive opportunities, river access and links to regional recreation areas.
3. Develop the Park in the geographical and visual context of a Long-Term Park Boundary area.

4. Establish, in all phases of development, interpretive programming and facilities to illuminate the key stories of the park.
5. Locate intensive park use areas near SR 7, away from high value natural and cultural resource areas.
6. Protect and manage creek and river systems to provide for healthy habitat and wildlife enhancement – especially for salmon and steelhead.
7. Establish wildlife corridors within all areas of the park.
8. Identify and protect cultural and heritage resources – allowing for managed access, when considered appropriate, for educational purposes.
9. Maintain access to and from park private in-holdings. Coordinate with Pierce County to manage access and adjustments to Mashel Prairie Road.
10. Incorporate landscape initiatives into overall Park planning and design, including upland/plateau forest enhancement, meadow creation, Mashel Prairie restoration and sustainable vegetation management of utility corridors.

Site Alternatives

In March of 2008, the planning team developed and presented three initial park master plan concepts based on the site planning goals, site analysis and public feedback. Each alternative highlighted a different thematic aspect of the site’s “spirit of place” to direct the form and function of the plan, help select programmatic activities and influence the appearance of physical elements. The three alternatives are presented here:

1. *People’s Center*: This alternative reinforces the park’s goal of becoming a “one of a kind” destination by partnering with Native American tribal people to express their long connection and history with the park site. It concentrates park services and camping at the north edge of the site’s main plateau with tribal-focused activities closer to the confluence of the Nisqually and the Mashel Rivers.
2. *Conservation*: This alternative emphasizes the development of the park as a site for research and study of the forest. In this alternative, development of park services is concentrated on the east side of the Mashel River on land currently owned by the University of Washington as part of their Center for Sustainable Forestry at Pack Forest.
3. *Woodland Experience*: The intent of the third alternative is to amplify the visitor’s sensory experience of the natural world as a means of generating long-lasting

memories and intensifying feelings of connection to the park. Park services and camping facilities are centrally located on the plateau west of the Mashel River.

Partner, stakeholder and community meetings led to the selection of a preferred plan – direction that became the basis for the Master Plan. Although it is based primarily on the People’s Center alternative, the Master Plan incorporates program and physical aspects of all three alternatives.

Master Planning Implementation

The master plan documents an ambitious vision for what the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site might look like fifty to a hundred years from now. With this long-term vision in mind, a phased implementation approach will shape and organize the Park’s development in the near-term through a twenty-year phased implementation plan. The implementation strategy prioritizes the plan elements that most actively support the goal of becoming a destination park with a variety of recreational opportunities. Revenue-generating elements are programmed as early as possible to help make the park financially sustainable.

Business Plan

Finally, the goals for implementation of a new State Park at this site include an economic performance objective at build out of the park to generate sufficient operating revenues, through enterprise recreation and user fees that will offset up to 50% of annual operating expense. Another option that may offset up to 100% of expenses is for a private camping operator to construct and operate the facility within the park resulting in greater revenues to offset the State Park’s expenses. If the Parks and Recreation Commission would like to consider this option, then an additional economic analysis should be completed.

As investments are made in camping, event space, equestrian activities, cultural attractions, trails, education programs and other activities, it will be necessary to test demand and feasibility through market confirmation and testing of project designs and development proposals. The quality of the visitor experience and the recreation amenities offered will have a direct effect on the potential of the park to generate revenue and become self supporting.

Visitor Experience Narrative

This narrative describes one possible experience sequence for a family, traveling to the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site from a nearby urban area. As an introduction to the park's programs, activities and vistas, it highlights what a family might see, and what choices they might have, over the course of their stay.

New Entry from State Route 7

Park visitors arriving by car on their journey from the Puget Sound area find an inviting entry along State Route 7 (SR-7) announcing Washington State's newest State Park site. Turning onto the park entry road, visitors notice the Nisqually place name carved on the cedar entry sign; it provides a clue that this is a unique park and partnership reflecting the site's human use for thousands of years. Along the mile long entry drive, visitors begin to slow down as they pass several large wetlands and forest openings, before arriving at the Welcome Center. At the entry kiosk, a ranger describes the major destinations within the park: the Village Center, the People's Center, the Ohop Equestrian Center, and the East Mashel Plateau. After listening to the description of offerings, the family decides to go first to the park's most distinctive feature, the People's Center.

Passing the main intersection of the park, the family notes the wayfinding signs to the Village Center. They will return later to check into their cabin.

People's Center

Traveling south, the park entry road swings to the east providing a glimpse down a wide opening in the forest toward the Mashel Prairie. From there the road begins a gentle climb toward the summit of the park's central ridge. At the end of the road is the People's Center interpretive facility, parking, day use area and trail head. The center welcomes all visitors and shares the centuries-old history and tribal use of the site and greater watershed as a village, temporary camp and travel way.

An accessible trail leads up to the Observatory at the summit. With clear skies, the view of *Tacobet* (Mt. Rainier) to the east is stunning. Turning clockwise, views are revealed to the Olympic Mountains rising in the distant west and to the far north, the southern end of *Whulge* (Puget Sound). In the foreground below and to the west, is the view of the Mashel Prairie. The observatory circle is laid out and oriented to the cardinal directions, and the lands of the Nisqually River watershed. As the family arrives, an interpretive program is just beginning. A tribal interpreter explains the importance of this site to the Nisqually as the mid way point between *Tacobet* and *Whulge*. The family learns of the past and current use of the Mashel Prairie as a place to gather camas root. They also hear about Indian Henry's home near Medicine Springs and the somber story of the 1856 Mashel Massacre near the confluence of the Mashel and Nisqually Rivers.

After a chance to ask questions, the family continues on the loop trail back down slope, pausing on the boardwalk over a forested wetland, where at a wayside an interpreter is describing how the Nisqually people make use of the western red cedar found growing at this moist location. Continuing out to a dramatic overlook of the Nisqually River gorge, the visiting family gets their first glimpse of one of the park's most prominent features – the silvery Nisqually River far below.

Village Center

While the children run around the event lawn, the adults walk over to the village store to register for their cabin in the woods. As first-time guests, they appreciate the manager's description of the offerings available at the Village, including a day use picnic area, the separate campground loops for tents and recreational vehicles, and the group of cabins where they are staying. They learn that the amphitheater will host a ranger chat describing the forest reconstruction efforts that State Parks, University of Washington's Center for Sustainable Forestry at Pack Forest and the Nisqually Tribe are engaged in at the park. The flashlight walk to the Mashel Overlook, after the presentation, sounds intriguing as well, especially the idea of walking out over the 200 foot escarpment under the light of the full moon. Finishing registration, they take the manager's suggestion to sign up early for a morning trail ride departing from the Ohop Equestrian Center the next day.

Ohop Equestrian Center

In the morning, taking the western fork in the road at the Village entry, the visitors proceed down hill to the Equestrian Center, housed in the historic Milk Barn, overlooking the Ohop Creek valley. They find other children watching as the trail master and her assistants are demonstrating how to saddle a horse.

Like most novice riders heading out on a ride at Nisqually Mashel, the family heads southwest along the bluff edge above Ohop Creek. Dropping down to the creek via the existing road, the loop trail crosses upstream of the confluence with the Nisqually River. As they precede parallel to Kjelstad Road, the guide describes the early 19th and 20th century agricultural history of the Ohop Valley and the recent efforts by the Nisqually Land Trust to remove dikes and return the valley floor to a reconstructed floodplain. Several of the riders ask what the plentitude of blue stakes are for. They learn that these are newly planted willow saplings, the blue wrap meant to protect the tender shoots from grazing deer and foraging beaver. When they meet SR-7 again, they ride back uphill to the Milk Barn.

By completing the four-mile ride, the family has a new found sense of accomplishment. They are already talking about next year and the chance to go on a longer ride to the east, on the network of trails in the Pack Forest or to the new rails-to-trails project linking the park to the Eatonville town center.

Primary Loop Trail

On their third day at Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site, the family sets out on foot to explore the four-mile Plateau Loop Trail. Setting off from their cabin, the first destination is the Mashel Overlook, perched out over the bluff, amidst the towering Douglas fir and swaying cottonwood trees. Luckily they remembered to bring their binoculars to scout for bird life in the high branches.

From the overlook, the bluff trail heads south towards the People's Center, arriving at the juncture with the Canopy Bridge and trail to the East Mashel Plateau. Although not their primary destination, they could not resist walking out and back across this 1,200 foot long span over the Mashel - the longest pedestrian cable stay bridge span in North America. It is a remarkably light structure, more than a bit scary for someone afraid of heights, but exciting and beautiful.

The loop trail continues south a short distance to the People's Center, then returns via a traverse across the plateau. It takes visitors past the camas fields at the north edge of the Mashel Prairie and the adjacent wetlands, and through the regenerating forests back to the Village Center. The family makes a note to return in the future when the children are older to take the south side trail over the Nisqually River.

South Side Nisqually Loop Trail

As another option, the reconstructed bridge over the Nisqually, just upstream of the confluence with the Mashel, provides a glimpse of spawning steelhead and salmon. On a regular basis Nisqually Tribal interpreters describe traditional use of paddle boats for fishing, salmon habitat restoration efforts, and the use of plants including cedar and horsetail. On a somber note, this confluence is also the site of the Mashel Massacre, where many Nisqually were killed by the Washington Militia under the command of Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens.

For those participating in a Nisqually-led tour, the south bank stop at the Traditional Knowledge Camp provides insight into the learning center where tribal elders pass on skills related to fishing, berry collection, carving of cedar canoes, and weaving to younger generations.

The loop trail continues west, following the bluff line, immersed within the mature forest lining the banks of the river. Upstream from the confluence of the Nisqually with Ohop Creek, the trail crosses on a second canopy bridge that springs from the bedrock bluffs on both sides of river. A ridge top trail returns the visitor back to the main loop, which then leads back to the Village Center.

East Mashel Plateau

At the East Mashel Plateau the visitor finds more specialized uses, including the Back Country Horse Camp, Group Camping area and a Back Country Bike Challenge Course.

This acquisition from the University of Washington provides access to the confluence of the Nisqually and Mashel Rivers from SR-7, and a logical connection for visitors to the UW Center for Sustainable Forestry - Pack Forest Conference Center on the east side of SR-7.

On a typical weekend day, trucks and trailers are seen rolling into this side of the park. Back country horsemen saddle up and prepare to head out via the undercrossing at SR-7, a link to the network of trails and logging roads in Pack Forest. The group camping site for RV and tents provides space for large gatherings and family reunions. The back country bike and challenge course provides a separate use area with a diversity of courses testing the full range of rider's expertise. A loop trail around East Mashel Plateau is linked to the west side by the aforementioned canopy bridge near the People's Center, and a second bridge connecting back to the Village and campsites.

Lasting Memories

Upon leaving the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site the family is thrilled to tell friends and neighbors about the many activities available at the park. They also couldn't get over how close the park was to other area amenities, including: Northwest Trek where they saw many birds and animals; Pioneer Farm Museum and Ohop Indian Village's re-creation of historic structures and settlement patterns; the Tacoma Power dams; Alder Lake's swimming and boating activities; and Mount Rainier National Park's spectacular scenery. They felt they made a connection, spanning millennia, with the Nisqually people and the dynamic landscape that exists between the mountains and the Sound – a relationship between people and the land.

