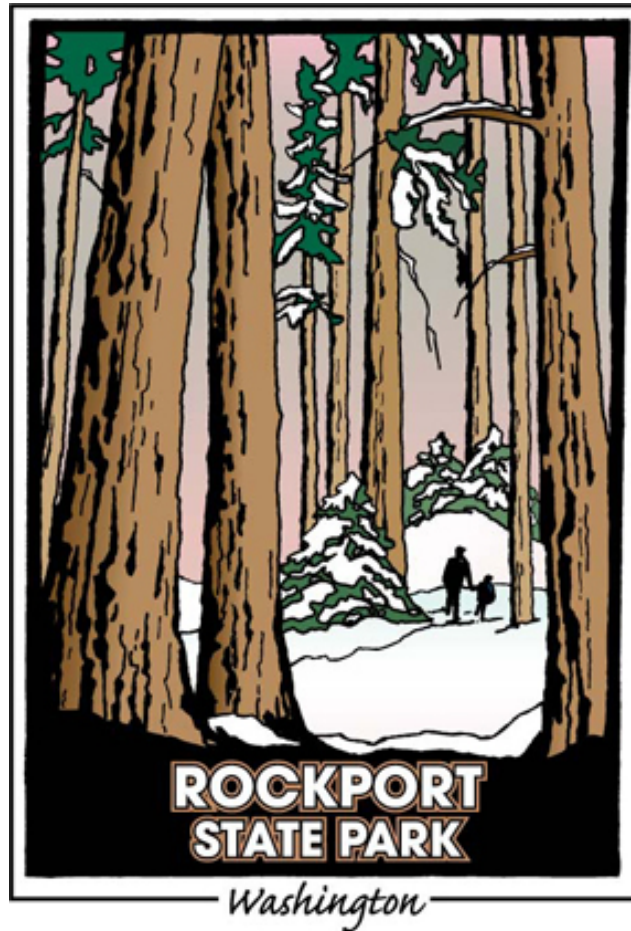


# ROCKPORT STATE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

May 2011



## Washington State Parks Mission

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission acquires, operates, enhances, and protects a diverse system of recreational, cultural, and natural sites. The Commission fosters outdoor recreation and education statewide to provide enjoyment and enrichment for all and a valued legacy to future generations.



WASHINGTON STATE  
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION



**CAMP**

Washington State Parks  
Classification and Management Planning Project

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND CONTACTS**

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission gratefully acknowledges the many stakeholders and the staff of (insert park name) State Park who participated in public meetings, reviewed voluminous materials, and made this a better plan because of it.

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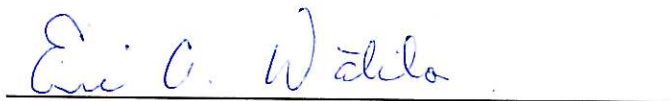
**ROCKPORT STATE PARK LAND CLASSES, RESOURCE ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT APPROACHES**

**CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION**

The signatures below certify the adoption of this document by Washington State Parks for the continued management of Rockport State Park.

  
Park Manager

5/9/11  
Date

  
Region Director

5/9/11  
Date

  
Deputy Director

5/11/11  
Date

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## **PREFACE**

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) manages a diverse array of 120 parks located throughout the state.

The Commission adopted the Centennial 2013 Plan in October, 2003, thereby creating a focus for the agency, state leadership and the public, to work toward a parks system all can celebrate as it turns 100 years old. The Centennial 2013 Plan blends public and private funding, engages more partnerships and creates greater public stake in the system.

As part of the Centennial 2013 Plan, the Commission directed staff to complete land use plans for all 120 parks. Land-use plans follow a process that has been used by the Commission since 1996, called CAMP. CAMP is an acronym for Classification and Management Plan.

One of the most important elements of land use planning is the classification of lands. In 1995, the Commission adopted a land classification system. Application of the system creates zones, or land classifications, within a park (see Section 5, Land Classifications). Six distinct classifications determine what recreational uses and facilities are appropriate in different areas of a park. In general, sensitive areas are classified restrictively and allow only low-intensity uses and development of minor facilities. Less sensitive areas are classified to allow higher-intensity uses and more extensive facilities.

A CAMP brings together park visitors, nearby communities, stakeholders and agency staff in a public process that forges a common vision of what the state park should become. Through a public process staff and public participants identify park management issues, and look at alternative approaches for addressing them. The outcome is a plan that will help focus our efforts to balance resource protection with recreation in the park. For State Parks' staff, this document represents policy approval and a means to create a state park that meets the Commission's Vision for State Parks Centennial:

*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.*

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to: 1) orient readers to the park and the agency's park management planning system, 2) identify park natural, cultural, and recreation/facility management issues, and 3) provide initial direction to park staff (suggested management approaches) to address these issues. The ultimate purpose of this document is to describe how the agency intends to balance recreational use with measures to protect natural and cultural resources.

The document is divided into six sections, with several appendices:

- Section 1: Provides a brief overview of the park including its geography, historical background, major attributes, and public use.
- Section 2: Describes both the agency's system-wide park management planning program and its specific application to this park.
- Section 3: Outlines management objectives established for the park.
- Section 4: Describes the park's land classifications (management zoning) and long-term park boundary.
- Section 5: Lists natural, cultural, and recreational/facility resource issues identified through the public planning and outline general approaches toward addressing them.
- Section 6: Lists other plans pertinent to this park.

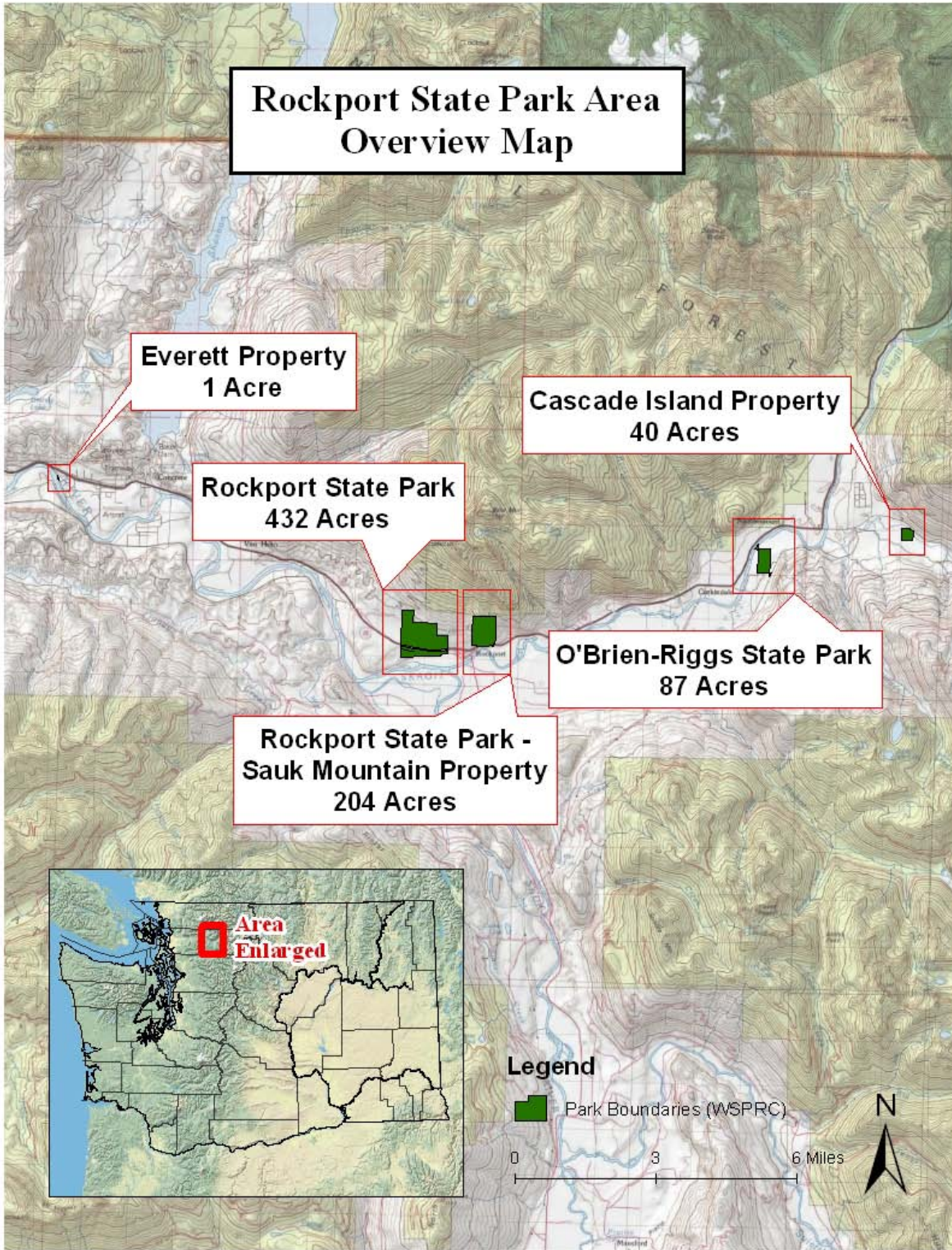
Appendices contain additional supporting documentation pertinent to this plan.

## SECTION 1: PARK DESCRIPTION

### ROCKPORT STATE PARK - RECREATION AREA

- Location:** Rockport State Park is located on State Highway 20, 7 miles east of Concrete, 1 mile west of Rockport in Skagit County. David Douglas Historical Marker in park's day-use area.
- Acreage:** 457 acres.
- Acquired:** Rockport State Park was withdrawn from the Department of Natural Resources in 1961. It was purchased through the Trust Land Agreement for \$134,100.
- Historical Background:** The park is relatively new, yet the old growth Douglas fir for which the park is noted reflects a unique ownership history. The park land belonged to the Sound Timber Company which, for some reason, did not log the timber. Instead, in July 1935, Sound Timber Company sold the land and timber to the State for \$1 and other goods and values considered. It was subsequently designated as school-scientific land. Recognizing the unique recreational and interpretive values of this forest, Washington State Parks acquired the land from the Department of Natural Resources in 1961 for development. The park derives its name from the community which was named because of the many large rocks in the nearby Skagit River at the boat landing.
- Facilities:** 33 picnic sites, 5 miles of hiking trails, kitchen shelter, 74 parking sites, 2 comfort stations, residence, trailer pad, shop/garage/office building, and a drilled well with closed system reservoir.
- Activities:** Picnicking and hiking.
- Of Special Interest:** In 1985, 305 acres of the park were designated a "natural forest".

Figure 1: Rockport State Park Vicinity



**Table 1. Summary of Rockport State Park Issues.**

<b>Rockport State Park</b>	
Natural Resource Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Old-growth forest management</li> <li>Sensitive species protection</li> <li>Non-native species</li> <li>Wildlife corridor</li> <li>Current WSPRC land classification system</li> <li>Geologic hazards</li> <li>Wetlands</li> <li>Surface water management</li> </ul>
Cultural Resource Issues	Cultural Resource Assessment
Recreation Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trail maintenance: wetland and stream crossings</li> <li>Economic impacts of closed camping</li> <li>Long-term park boundary</li> <li>Regional trail connections</li> <li>Old-growth educational opportunities</li> <li>Service Road maintenance</li> <li>Visitor safety</li> <li>Lighting at entrance</li> <li>Area lodging</li> <li>Existing and future infrastructure</li> <li>Skagit PUD agreement</li> <li>ADA accessibility</li> <li>Staffing levels</li> <li>Master planning</li> <li>Old highway corridor</li> </ul>

<b>O'Brien-Riggs Property</b>	
Natural Resource Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wildlife habitat</li> <li>Riparian zone</li> <li>Floodplain management</li> </ul>
Cultural Resource Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inventory and protection of historical properties</li> <li>Cultural Resource Assessment</li> </ul>
Recreation Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore recreational opportunities</li> <li>Boat access</li> <li>Current WSPRC land classification system</li> <li>Public access</li> <li>Group camp</li> <li>Deed restrictions</li> <li>ADA accessibility</li> <li>Visitor safety</li> <li>Staffing levels</li> <li>Long-term park boundary</li> </ul>

**Sauk Mountain Property**

Natural Resource Issues	Sensitive species Geologic hazards
Cultural Resource Issues	
Recreation Issues	Public access Long-term park boundary Explore cooperative management agreement

**Cascade Island Property**

Natural Resource Issues	Wetlands Floodplain management
Cultural Resource Issues	Cultural Resource Assessment
Recreation Issues	Explore recreational opportunities Public access Maintenance Long-term park boundary Explore cooperative management agreement

**Everett Property**

Natural Resource Issues	Wetlands Floodplain management Riparian zones
Cultural Resource Issues	
Recreation Issues	Property management Long-term park boundary Explore cooperative management agreement

## **SECTION 2: PARK PLANNING PROCESS**

In May, 2007 State Parks closed Rockport State Park to camping. This decision was based on an initial forest survey that indicated that the park's old-growth Douglas fir forest showed signs of structural instability that could pose an unacceptable level of risk to campers. This created a need to consider the future of the park comprehensively through CAMP.

The CAMP project for Rockport State Park Area began in January of 2008. Figure 1 is a vicinity map describing the location of Rockport State Park, O'Brien Riggs State Park, and the Sauk Mountain, Cascade Island, and Everett properties. Staff reports, public comments, and other project information have been posted on the planning web page and are available at: <http://www.parks.wa.gov/plans/Rockport/>

Public outreach has been extensive. The planning team sent correspondence to park neighbors, visitors, and other stakeholders. Articles and announcements were published in the Skagit Valley Herald and the Concrete Herald. Staff conducted three public workshops in Concrete to solicit public input. The first workshop was held on April 7, 2008 to identify issues to resolve during the planning process. The second workshop was held on November 18, 2008 to present alternatives to resolve issues identified at the previous workshop and receive public comment. The third workshop was held on November 17, 2009 for staff to present preliminary recommendations and receive public comment.

The Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) adopted the long-term park boundaries for Rockport State Park between the March and May 2010 commission meetings.

### **SECTION 3: PARK LAND CLASSIFICATIONS AND LONG-TERM BOUNDARY**

#### **Land Classifications:**

The CAMP process uses six land classifications: (1) the Recreation classification designates areas suitable for and/or developed for high-intensity outdoor recreational use; (2) the Resource Recreation classification designates areas suitable for and/or developed for natural and/or cultural resource-based medium-intensity and low-intensity outdoor recreational use; (3) the Natural classification designates areas suitable for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of natural processes; (4) the Heritage classification designates areas suitable for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of historic properties; (5) the Natural Forest classification designates areas suitable for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of natural forest processes while providing for low-intensity outdoor recreation activities as subordinate uses; and (6) the Natural Area Preserve classification designates areas suitable for preservation of rare or vanishing flora, fauna, geological, natural historical or similar features.

For each classification there is a list of activities and facilities that are permitted, conditionally permitted, or not permitted with the classification. A conditional activity requires approval of the Commission during CAMP. An activity identified in the matrix as permitted in a classification is not obligated to be included within the park.

Through analysis of future program direction, facility needs, and the existing natural and recreational resource base, staff recommends that the Commission classify Rockport State Park as a combination of Natural Forest, Recreation and Resource Recreation Areas (Figure 2).

#### Recreation Areas

Areas classified as Recreation provide for high-intensity recreational activities such as overnight accommodations, camping and administrative facilities.

Activities *conditionally* permitted under the agency's land classification system may be permitted at specific sites only with the concurrence of the Commission. Activities conditionally permitted in Recreation Areas include:

- Farming/orchards
- Grazing
- Off-Trail Equestrian
- Off-trail Cycling

Of these conditional activities, staff recommends the Commission not permit any of these activities at Rockport State Park.

#### Resource Recreation Areas

Proposed Resource Recreation Areas provide for medium to low-intensity recreational activities that are generally natural and or cultural resource based.

Activities Permitted in Resource Recreation Areas, by land classification include:

- Filming/Special Events
- Harvesting (fruits, mushrooms, algae, fish, and shellfish)
- Haying
- Metal Detecting
- Orienteering
- Off-Trail Hiking
- Paragliding
- Water: Kayaking/Canoeing
- Water: Sailing
- Water: Swimming
- Water: Wind Surfing

Activities conditionally permitted in Resource Recreation Areas include:

- Farming/orchards
- Grazing
- Off-Trail Equestrian
- Off-Trail Cycling
- Water: Jet Skiing
- Water: Power Boating
- Water: Skiing
- Water: Wind Surfing

Of the conditional activities listed above, the Commission does not permit any of these activities at Rockport State Park.

### Natural Forest Areas

Proposed Natural Forest Areas provide for preservation, restoration and interpretation of the natural forest processes while providing for low intensity outdoor recreation activities.

Activities Permitted in Natural Forest Areas, by land classification include:

- Harvesting (fruits, mushrooms, algae, fish, and shellfish)
- Off-Trail Hiking
- Water: Swimming
- Winter: C-C Off Trail
- Winter: Snowshoeing

Activities conditionally permitted in Natural Forest Areas include:

- Filming/ Special Events
- Technical Rock Climbing
- Water: Kayak/ Canoeing
- Water: Power Boating
- Water: Sailing
- Water: White Water Boating

Of the conditional activities, the Commission only permits filming/ special events from this list of activities at Rockport State Park.

## **Long-Term Park Boundary**

The purpose of a long-term boundary is to take a big picture look at what lands, independent of ownership, might advance the vision and goals of the park. This process not only considers whether an adjoining property would make a suitable addition, but also considers whether agency-owned property should be retained or might appropriately be considered surplus to park needs. Including a privately owned property in a long-term boundary does not necessarily mean the agency wants to

purchase it. It simply means that it would be in the park's best interest if the property were managed in a condition that complements development and operation of the park. Any of the following possibilities could apply:

The agency might

- Seek to formalize an agreement with an adjacent property owner to advance a shared property management goal.
- Solicit a conservation easement from an adjacent property owner to protect certain natural or cultural features.
- Readily accept a donation of all or part of a private property.
- Consider exchanging agency-owned property for a private property.
- Consider purchase of a private property in fee.

### **Long-Term Park Boundary**

The purpose of a long-term boundary (Figure 2) is to take a big picture look at what lands, independent of ownership, might advance the vision and goals of the park. This process not only considers whether an adjoining property would make a suitable addition, but also considers whether agency-owned property should be retained or might appropriately be considered surplus to park needs. Including a privately owned property in a long-term boundary does not necessarily mean the agency wants to purchase it. It simply means that it would be in the park's best interest if the property were managed in a condition that complements development and operation of the park. Any of the following possibilities could apply:

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- Readily accept a donation of all or part of a private property.
- Consider exchanging agency-owned property for a private property.
- Consider purchase of a private property in fee.

### **Rockport State Park:**

The commission approved the following properties be included within the park's long-term boundary:

- Properties adjacent to the northwest boundaries of the park could be utilized in the future for trails and other recreational opportunities.
- Properties adjacent to the south boundary of the park could be utilized for trail connections and to provide important protection in the ongoing protection of the Skagit Wild and Scenic River corridor.
- The properties adjacent to the southwest boundary of the park, owned by Skagit County, comprise the Howard Miller Steelhead Park. State Parks may be interested in acquiring or managing this park if the County decides to divest.

Also staff recommends that the Sauk Mountain property of Rockport State Park be classified as Natural Area. This property is determined to be suitable for transfer or partner management with appropriate public agency.

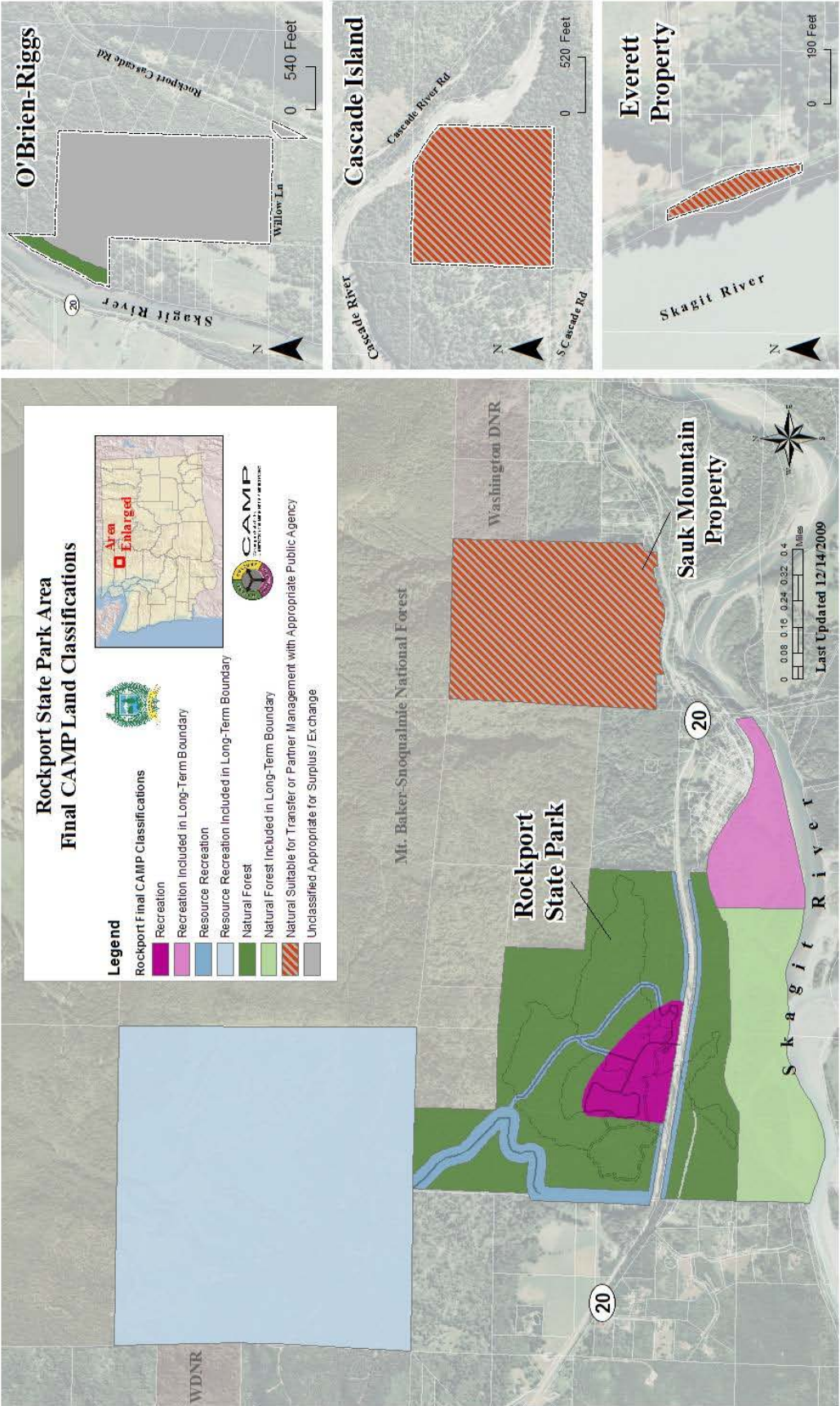
Additionally, the commission approved the following:

**O'Brien-Riggs State Park:** This undeveloped 87 acre property is proposed as a combination of Natural within the riparian zone and the remainder Unclassified for staff to seek a management agreement with a conservation organization that meets the requirements of the original grantor.

**Cascade Island Property:** This 40 acre property is proposed to be classified as Natural Area. This property is determined to be suitable for transfer or partner management with appropriate public agency.

**Everett Property:** This 1 acre property is proposed to be classified as Natural Area. This property is determined to be suitable for transfer or partner management with appropriate public agency.

Figure 2: Rockport State Park Long-Term Boundary and Land Classification Map



## SECTION 4: PARK ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

Numerous natural and recreation / facility resource issues were identified by the public and staff during the CAMP planning process. Suggested management approaches to address the issues are included within the tables below. Some issues do not neatly fit into any one of these three categories, while others may span more than one. Some license has been taken for the sake of consistent presentation. Addressing these issues will in almost all cases involve park staff working with Regional Stewardship, Environmental, and Planning staff. Additional stakeholder involvement is also anticipated, and may include (but not be limited to): Headquarters, service centers, sister natural resources agencies (including the Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Ecology, Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation), local government institutions (weed control boards, permitting), non-profit organizations (Washington Native Plant Society, The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society), tribes, institutions of higher education, and adjacent land-owners and interested citizens. All management actions will be consistent with the laws and policies<sup>1</sup> governing the agency, in addition to all federal, state, and local regulations. As the issues and their management approaches are addressed in the future, associated materials (e.g., inventories, plans, monitoring records) will be added as appendices to this document.

Natural Resource Issues	
Issue	Management Approach
Protection of Natural Plant and Animal Communities	<p>Emphasize management of the park for natural resource conservation and public open space/greenbelt functions with the same or slightly lesser intensity of park development than currently exists. Specific measures may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classify the majority of lands as Natural or Natural Forest Areas within the existing land base and Recreation and Resource Recreation Areas within the long-term boundary.</li> <li>• Restrict construction of new recreational facilities to the existing developed footprint at Rockport State Park and within long-term boundary properties adjacent to the park.</li> <li>• Reaffirm the agency position of closing the existing campground indefinitely.</li> <li>• Remove non-native plant species from undeveloped areas and rehabilitate natural plant communities.</li> <li>• Classify Sauk Mountain property, Everett Property and Cascade Island as Natural Area appropriate for transfer or partner management with appropriate public agency with the condition of public access and ownership.</li> <li>• Prepare a “Restoration Plan” to address long-term future of the closed campground area. The plan will include evaluation of the removal of existing structures and infrastructure.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, for natural resources: Protecting Washington State Parks' Natural Resources – A Comprehensive Natural Resource Management Policy (Commission Agenda Item F-11, December 2004); and for cultural resources: Cultural Resources Management Policy (Commission Agenda Item E-1, October 1998 + three amendments).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include property south of existing park border adjacent to the Skagit River in long-term boundary and classify as Natural Forest Area.</li> </ul>
Collection of Natural Resource Inventories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Skagit County as it updates the critical areas element of its comprehensive plan.</li> <li>• Collect anecdotal information from local flora/fauna enthusiasts, local chapters of Audubon Society, Native Plant Society, and like organizations (on-going).</li> </ul>
Interpretive Approaches for Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop partnership with local natural resource groups and tribes to coordinate on-site park interpretation and links to other related sites in the region.</li> <li>• Prepare an interpretive master plan for the park.</li> </ul>
Management of Wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare a wildlife management plan and Work with Tribes, the Department of Fish and Wildlife and other interested groups to enhance wildlife within the Wild and Scenic river corridor.</li> </ul>
Forest Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a forest management plan for all forested areas with the park.</li> <li>• Consult with Forest Service and other agencies on compatible management approaches on forest lands adjacent to Rockport State Park. Consider long-term boundary agreements if and when said properties alter management objectives.</li> </ul>
County Designated Critical Areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wetlands</li> <li>• Geologic hazards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Skagit County to address all critical area and shoreline related issues within the park and undeveloped properties with the goal of avoidance or minimizing of potential impacts as a result of park improvements.</li> </ul>
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a sustainability plan for the park.</li> </ul>

<b>Cultural Resource Issues</b>	
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Management Approach</b>
Providing cultural/environmental education programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research regional/local educational programs and seek to provide opportunities that are not currently provided.</li> <li>• Incorporate use of education programs to conduct old growth tree monitoring.</li> </ul>
Natural/Cultural resource interpretation/environmental education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a park interpretive master plan using primarily park staff and volunteers to complete.</li> <li>• As part of park interpretive master plan, design and construct a modest interpretive network for the park utilizing at most interpretive kiosks, signs, and non-facilities oriented programming (brochures etc.).</li> <li>• Actively solicit partnerships with outside interest groups to provide environmental education opportunities.</li> <li>• Consider partnership with interested tribes to sponsor cultural events/ programming at the park.</li> </ul>
Cultural Resource Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to consult with Tribes that may have an interest in the archaeological and traditional cultural properties within the park area.</li> </ul>

<b>Recreational Resource Issues</b>	
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Management Approach</b>
Recreational Facilities Development – Visitor Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare park master plan to guide Redevelop of the park. As part of re-development, consider new welcome center to include visitor orientation, interpretive programming, park store, new public restrooms, administrative and other visitor service oriented programming with efficient and accessible parking and access.</li> </ul>
Recreational Facilities Development - Camping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaffirm the agency position of closing the existing campground indefinitely.</li> <li>• Include county owned Howard Miller Steelhead Park (HMSP) in long-term boundary. Acknowledging that HMSP serves as the existing camping support facility with direct connectivity to Rockport. And consider partnership management agreements and/or acquisition of property if appropriate and mutually agreeable.</li> </ul>
Recreational Facilities Development - Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire Trillium Property Northwest of Park boundary and classify land as Resource recreation to serve as multi-use trail system.</li> <li>• Prepare trails plan to guide trail development on Trillium property.</li> </ul>
Trail Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the Increased emphasis of trails as a main feature of the park, establish a trail maintenance plan. Use on-site materials where possible (i.e. downed trees) for trail enhancements including turnpike and foot bridges.</li> <li>• Expand the existing volunteer base to provide trail and park wide maintenance support.</li> </ul>
Recreational Facilities Development – Water Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider water access as part of a trail connection to Howard Miller Steelhead County Park.</li> </ul>
Recreational Facilities Development – Interpretation & Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with agency staff, volunteers and interested groups to develop and implement a park-wide interpretive plan.</li> <li>• Consider expansion of existing interpretive trail into closed campground loop as part of re-development of day-use area.</li> <li>• Actively solicit partnerships to provide educational opportunities.</li> <li>• Consider the development of an in-door interpretive facility as part of day-use redevelopment.</li> </ul>

## **SECTION 5: OTHER DOCUMENTS**

- Agenda Item E-2: Rockport State Park- Classification and Management Plan (CAMP) - Requested Action, March 11, 2010 and commission action.
- Agenda Item E-8: Rockport State Park- Classification and Management Plan (CAMP) - Requested Action, May 6, 2010 and commission action.
- SEPA Checklist and Determination of Non-Significance, February 12, 2010
- Land Classifications