Cape Disappointment State Park
Master Plan Report

Prepared for:
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
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Background

Cape Disappointment State Park is located on an ancient and high basaltic bluff that has recently been supplemented by an enormous accreted dune area. The Cape acts as sentinel and eyewitness to the Columbia River Bar, where the Great River of the West meets the mighty Pacific Ocean. It was here, in 1805, that Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery first reached the ocean’s breakers. It is now one of the most popular recreation destinations in Washington State - truly a jewel of the Pacific Northwest. Located adjacent to the town of Ilwaco at the mouth of the Columbia River, the park is bordered by urbanizing private property on the north, the Pacific Ocean on the west, a United States Coast Guard station on the south, and Baker Bay (Columbia River) to the east. (See Vicinity Map, below).

Its strategic location at the confluence of the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean has made this a treasured landscape for many generations and peoples. The natural resources of the park are rich in importance and diversity. Within the park boundaries, visitors experience ancient Sitka spruce forests, sea cliffs, estuaries and coastal dunes. These varied landscapes hold innumerable species of flora and fauna.

The park’s cultural resources are of international significance. Cape Disappointment State Park has had a rich history since pre-historic indigenous peoples seasonally inhabited the area to harvest its resources from the land and water. A string of explorers in the 18th and 19th century sought the Cape as a destination, from the Spaniard Bruno Heceta, to the British trader Captain John Meares, to American trader Robert Gray, to the American explorers Lewis and Clark. It was at Waikiki Beach where Captain William Clark first set foot in the Pacific Ocean, essentially completing the charge of the Corps of Discovery.

The high coastal bluffs of Cape Disappointment made the area a perfect place to locate navigational aids to guide shipping vessels safely from the Pacific over the Columbia River Bar. The park still contains two lighthouses that are some of the earliest installations on the west coast. In addition to warning shipping vessels, the tall bluffs offered a
management of the park as a major recreational resource in the Pacific Northwest. As a part of the planning effort, several related documents have been published that inform this Master Plan. These documents are as follows:


This Master Plan Report summarizes detailed information and analysis contained in these reports. For additional details beyond the summary incorporated in this Plan, please refer to these individual documents.

Some of the issues which prompted the development of the Master Plan, included:

Coastal Erosion
Following the construction of the North Jetty in 1917, there was widespread accretion of sand north of the jetty, replacing the rugged shoreline with a broad sandy foredune and beach. The accretion vantage point useful in defending U.S. borders from foreign invaders. Later, the area became a strategic military fort named Fort Canby in honor of Major General Edward Canby who died in 1873 during the Modoc Indian War. The legacy of military fortifications is visible today, most notably at Battery Harvey Allen located near the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, the coastal searchlight platform area at North Head, and at McKenzie Head.

The natural and cultural resources thread their way through the landscape and await discovery by the many visitors who come to experience Cape Disappointment State Park. The park was originally established in 1957, transformed from a military base to a public recreation destination. Encompassing over 1900 acres with the 2004 addition of waterfront property to the north, facilities within the park include day use areas, overnight camping sites with and without utility hook-ups, cabins, yurts, vacation housing, hiking trails, a boat ramp, a newly renovated Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, a concession store and assorted maintenance and administrative facilities. The recreational opportunities afforded by the park include camping, boating, hiking, beachcombing, natural and cultural resource interpretation and education, and sightseeing.

The park is open to visitors all year long with peak visitation in the summer months and during mid-November anniversaries of the arrival of Lewis and Clark. The park is managed by the Washington State Parks and Recreation community (State Parks); on land owned by both the state and federal government.

Purpose of the Master Plan
The purpose of the Cape Disappointment Master Plan is to direct future improvements and guide continued...
Transportation and Circulation

The park is served from Ilwaco by State Route 100 Loop; a narrow, winding, shoulder-less road. The road lacks adequate width to safely accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians, and therefore it was important to evaluate existing facilities and determine if there were improvements that needed to be made.

Inventory and Protection of Significant Cultural and Natural Resources

As a site that includes many historic structures and distinctive natural and cultural landscapes, it became important to assess their significance. In order for State Parks to secure new federal leases on the property, it was vital to have a comprehensive natural and cultural inventory of the park. These were accomplished and documented in the Cultural Landscape Report, October 2003; the Class III Archeology Report, 2003; and the Vascular Plant Species and Plant Community Survey, 2004.

Master Plan Objectives

The mission of Cape Disappointment State Park is to foster outdoor recreation and education about the unique and significant contributions of the park to Washington State’s natural and cultural history. It is also the park’s mission to nurture those critical landscapes that form the basis for its attraction as a recreation destination, as well as its importance as a place of outstanding natural and cultural resources. In keeping with this mission, the Master Plan is designed to direct Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission actions that will accomplish the following objectives for Cape Disappointment State Park:

Visitor Contact

The establishment of day use fees and a desire to provide more information to a larger number of park visitors led to a goal of improving the location and function of a visitor contact station.

Long-Term Boundary

With urban growth increasing adjacent to the park, and changing demands for visitor services, it was seen as vital to examine areas surrounding the park and evaluate whether they are suitable for park purposes and should be considered for incorporation into the park, should such lands become available.
1. Serve as a destination park that provides a wide variety of recreational and educational opportunities.
2. Expand its recognition as a nationally significant interpretive site.
3. Provide a variety of high quality coastal overnight camping experiences.
4. Provide public access to the shoreline and Pacific Ocean.
5. Preserve its significant cultural and natural resources, including historic lighthouses and coastal fortification structures, diversity of habitat types and functions, and scenic qualities.
6. Continue to draw visitors to the Long Beach peninsula, thereby contributing to the economic vitality of the area.
7. Accommodate increased visitation over the next 20+ years through improved and expanded visitor facilities and interpretive opportunities.

Planning Process

In July of 2002, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission hired consultants to assist in the development of a Master Plan for the park. The planning process for the Cape Disappointment Master Plan contained four distinct phases:

1. Detailed Project Scoping
2. Planning Inventory and Assessment
3. Park Master Planning
4. Site Planning and Permitting

The phases outlined above also included extensive inter-agency coordination, environmental documentation and public involvement meetings. The diagram shown on page 11 outlines the overall process.

Detailed Project Scoping

Conducted in July and August of 2002, this phase of the project established the overall scope of work for the consultant team, and established the project schedule and budget.

Planning Inventory and Assessment

Conducted in September through December of 2002, this phase of the project included extensive site inventories and analysis including: archeological investigations and research, cultural landscape research, traffic and transportation research, development of an opportunities and constraints map, and consultation with various state and federal permitting and regulatory agencies. On October 10, 2002 the initial public meeting was held in Ilwaco to discuss the purpose of the Master Plan and solicit input from the public on the issues that should be addressed in the Plan.

Inventory maps generated during this phase include Property Boundaries, Existing Built Environment and Existing Natural Resources, and are included on pages 5-9 respectively.

Park Master Planning and Environmental Analysis

Begun in December 2002, the overall Park Master Planning process continued through March 2004. This phase included the development of the Cultural Landscape Report including Treatment Recommendations, initial development of Design Guidelines for the park, development of several design alternatives for the park, a public open house May 6th to solicit input on various alternatives, and development of a Preferred Alternative Master Plan.

From June 2003 until February 2004, the team revised the preferred alternative into a Proposed Action, and developed detailed site plan designs for the Isthmus area and new campgrounds in the Isthmus area. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was published in October 2003, and a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was published in February 2004. In addition, the alignment of a new multi-use trail linking the Isthmus...
Property Boundaries

- North Head Lighthouse
- West Beach
- West Campground
- Sewage Lagoon
- Property Boundaries

BLM

STATE PARKS

ACOE

Columbia River

PACIFIC OCEAN

Cape Disappointment Lighthouse

Waikiki Beach

Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center

O’Neil Lake Boat Ramp

Park “Hub”

COAST GUARD RESERVATION
with Beard’s Hollow and North Head Lighthouse was evaluated and surveyed on site. A proposed phasing plan with cost estimates for implementation of the Master Plan was developed by WSPRC staff and incorporated in the FEIS. On March 11, 2004, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission unanimously adopted the Master Plan as described in the FEIS.

In order to secure new federal leases and other approvals for the Master Plan, additional federal environmental documentation is required. As of the date of this Master Plan, documentation of plan direction is being developed to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and other federal laws. Minor changes to the Master Plan may occur during this process.

**Site Planning and Permitting**

Implementation of development proposals within the Master Plan will require site specific design, permitting and construction. Cost analysis and phasing priorities for implementation can be found on page 31. Development of the Isthmus Area (current park administrative hub) and the Gateway Center are early priority projects currently undergoing design at the time of publication of this Master Plan.

![Planning Process Diagram](image-url)