

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

2014-21 Strategic Plan Executive Summary

March 2019

Introduction

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission completed a “refresh” of its Strategic Plan in 2018. As part of this effort, performance measures were introduced, and additional 2019-21 biennium actions were identified. These build upon efforts to meet the agency’s vision, mission, and topmost goal of achieving a healthy, sustainable park system. Work is under way to update the plan for Commission adoption in 2020. The following information summarizes the current plan.

Core Services – What We Do

- ★ Outdoor recreation
- ★ Statewide Recreation Programs
- ★ Arts and Cultural Events
- ★ Natural resource protection
- ★ Cultural heritage preservation
- ★ Natural and cultural heritage-based education and interpretation

Performance Results for 2018 (unless noted, comparisons are 2017 to 2018)

- ★ Park visits reached 36.7 million – an increase of 3.7 percent
- ★ Earned revenue collections totaled \$56.5 million – an increase of 7 percent
- ★ 83 percent of customers indicate visit worth the money
- ★ Facility condition reached 65 percent – an increase of 1.4 percent
- ★ 83 percent of employees satisfied with employment – a 2 percent increase
- ★ \$1.4 billion annual economic contribution; \$212 million annual federal, state, local taxes (2015)

Vision: Washington’s state parks will be cherished destinations with natural, cultural, recreational, artistic, and interpretive experiences that all Washingtonians enjoy, appreciate and proudly support.

Mission: The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission cares for Washington’s most treasured lands, waters, and historic places. State parks connect all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and provide memorable recreational and educational experiences that enhance their lives.

Goal: Achieving a healthy, sustainable park system

Why is a healthy park system important?

State Parks benefit everyone. They contribute to our quality of life. They provide connection with nature and heritage, and they offer healthy recreation and learning experiences for families and children. State parks visits contribute significantly to state and local economies, particularly in rural communities. An investment in State Parks is an investment in a healthy Washington.

Strategies to achieve a healthy, sustainable park system

Strategies guide the agency’s day-to-day work and are supported through a variety of initiatives. Through these efforts, the Commission will build on recent park system improvements to meet our goal. Below is a selection of strategies and actions to get results.

Strategy: Demonstrate that all Washingtonians benefit from their state parks

Engage youth and diverse communities. Demographic changes continuously alter State Parks' potential customer base and service preferences. The agency is working to better understand changing recreation needs, as we provide equitable opportunities and ensure we are inclusive in providing parks, programs and services to the public. The review under way will guide our future work. Efforts include:

- Increase outreach to youth and ethnic communities to help strengthen engagement and participation and to understand and meet changing recreation needs.
- Continue our commitment to the No Child Left Inside grant program and explore and expand other efforts to engage youth in outdoor education resource stewardship activities.
- Continue our efforts to recruit and develop a diverse workforce that reflects the public we serve.

Understand and protect resources in our care. State Parks knows it needs to improve its knowledge of the the natural and cultural resources in its care to establish priorities and provide better protection. To this end, staff will continue assessments and inventories and will work with volunteers, non-profit conservation organizations and other agencies to convey their significance and value to the public and enlist public participation and support. Expected results:

- Better understanding of stewardship needs for noxious weed and forest health management, wildfire prevention and shellfish protection.
- Enhanced restoration, protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources.
- Improved response to wildfire threat and progress on natural resources deferred maintenance.

We continue compiling field data to aid in development of a systematic stewardship plan to protect and restore natural plant and animal communities. The agency will develop a condition index that identifies the overall condition and integrity of Parks' mapped habitats. To better manage cultural historical assets, the agency will develop a systematic plan for treatment and complete scoring of all historic properties and incorporate those priorities into capital planning.

Strategy: Adopt a business approach to park system administration

Promote state parks. State Parks relies heavily on customers choosing parks and being willing to pay out of pocket for recreation services. To entice new visitors and retain repeat customers, the agency must continue to effectively market and promote its sites and service offerings. Successful promotion means understanding customers' wants, needs and changing desires for services. Gathering and using customer data allows Parks to reach a broad and diverse audience. The agency continues to work on a range of communication and marketing modes that appeal to a broad audience.

Use data to inform decisions. State Parks is making steady advances in data collection to better connect with and understand park visitor expectations, create administrative efficiencies, streamline decision-making and enhance communications. Recent successful efforts include development of a new web portal for convenient online Discover Passes purchasing; a new reservation system; and launching phase 1 of a customer relations management system (CRM). While improving customer surveys, the agency will collect data from the new reservation system and launch phase 2 of the CRM.

Use fees. The agency currently pays for 80 percent of operating costs out of earned revenue (versus 20 percent tax support) making the management of user fees a critical activity. Parks will continue to collect, improve and use customer data to help set market-rate fees. Customer feedback will guide the agency in improving the visitor experience and encourage new and repeat visits to parks.

Modernize park operations. State parks receive more than 36 million visits a year with about 1,000 employees on the ground in the parks during the busy season. The agency must invest in technology to help park personnel handle their business as efficiently as possible and provide the services that visitors

need, want and expect. The agency is working to improve connectivity to parks and expand access to the State's network for secure, more efficient computing.

Strategy: Provide recreation, cultural and interpretive opportunities people will want

Develop and maintain trails. Surveys show that, by a wide margin, the most popular outdoor recreation activities are walking, biking and horseback riding in summer and skiing and snowshoeing in winter, mostly on state park trails. The agency will increase outreach to trail users, improve trail conditions, build relationships with trail neighbors and engage partners to help develop programs and facilities.

Customer focus – providing services they need and expect. In 2017, the agency used one-time cash reserves on a focused statewide effort to respond to stated visitor desires for clean, well-functioning parks and increased contact with park staff. The successful “Clean Green and Be Seen” campaign made visible improvements in parks and boosted staff morale, with priorities that included:

- Making sure restrooms and park areas were clean.
- Ensuring lawns and vegetation were green and maintained.
- Posted staffed “open” hours in welcome stations.

Even though the reserve funds have been spent, the “Clean, Green and Be Seen” focus and ethic remains, as staff continue to improve assessment and delivery of maintenance activities. Meanwhile, the agency is working to improve coordination between operating maintenance and capital program efforts.

Universal access. The agency continues its effort to improve agency services for citizens of varying abilities. Activities will include assessing access routes between parking areas and comfort stations, continuing to seek capital budget dollars to upgrade facilities, and continual updates to the agency's interactive online ADA recreation map.

Interpretation. Efforts continue to restore and enhance interpretive programming as an integral part of the park experience. Work continues to assess and update exhibits in parks.

Strategy: Form strategic partnerships with other agencies, tribes, and non-profits

Develop and maintain beneficial partnerships. Attaining the goal of a healthy, sustainable park system relies, in part, on the ability of State Parks to forge beneficial partnerships that help provide services and maintain or develop facilities. These partnerships can take many forms and address a variety of issues and interests. The agency places a priority on strategic partnerships that help staff effectively manage the park system. The agency has forged strong relationships with tribes and will work to enhance those relationships.

Strategy: Develop amenities and acquire lands that support the agency's strategic direction.

Improve facility condition. During the past few years, the agency made progress to improve facility condition with support from the Governor, Legislature and partners. The Commission is making strategic decisions in determining priorities for facility repair, replacement or elimination. With a maintenance backlog currently estimated at \$463 million, State Parks will use capital and operating funds as well as other defined strategies to continue improving facility condition. The goal is to raise overall facility condition from what is currently a “D” grade to a “B” grade.

Improve capital planning. State Parks is conducting multiple assessments to better understand and improve the condition of park infrastructure and structures. These assessments will continue into next biennium. As assessments are completed, the information is incorporated into capital planning efforts, including the agency's 10-year capital plan and biennial capital budget requests.