2 | Problem Statement

In 1987, the Washington State Legislature approved the Nisqually River Management Plan, which recommended development of a major destination park at the confluence of the Mashel River and Ohop Creek with the Nisqually River. In pursuit of developing such a park, State Parks began acquiring land in the 1990s and initiated several planning efforts culminating in the adoption of the Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site Master Plan and Nisqually State Park Classification and Management Plan in 2010. In 2016, a day-use access area was constructed including parking stalls, horse trailer stalls, an accessible vault restroom and interpretive signage. Volunteers and interest groups have long been building and maintaining the current trail system, which spans miles through the site.

Based on decades of planning and legislative approval, State Parks seeks to further develop the park into a full-service park with a campground and additional recreational opportunities. Nisqually State Park is unique, it will be the first new state park with camping in over two decades. It is envisioned as a part of a larger plan to unify parks and recreational opportunities along the Nisqually River from its origins at Mount Rainier, to its mouth at the Puget Sound. State Parks sees it as a link to Mount Rainier National Park, but it is also an opportunity to educate the public on the environment and cultural history. In addition, the parkland is highly significant to the Nisqually Indian Tribe for its cultural history and environmental resources. State Parks has the opportunity to partner with the Nisqually Tribe, who have been involved in the park planning efforts since 2007.
2A. Problem Statement

Currently, Nisqually State Park is day-use only and includes a parking area, and hiking and equestrian trails. In its present condition, the park does not meet public demand, nor does it fulfill the legislative visioning and planning for a major destination park as recommended in the 1987 Nisqually River Management Plan and 2010 Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site Master Plan.

In the Southwest Region, public demand for outdoor recreational opportunities exceeds supply as evident by the following:

- The yearly occupancy rate for the campgrounds in the Southwest Region of Washington State Parks averages 60%
- Millersylvania State Park, the closest Washington State Park to Nisqually State Park, has an annual campground occupancy rate of 80%
- None of the four public campgrounds near SR7 and Mount Rainier National Park offer campsites specifically for Class A Recreational Vehicles, equestrian campers, tent sites, Group Campsites, and Park Cabins
- 2.2 million visitors per year visited Mount Rainier National Park; the majority of these visitors travel SR7 to access the National Park
- In 2017, 212,200 visitors stayed in the Mount Rainier National Park lodges and campgrounds
- The Recreation and Conservation Office’s 2019 study on “Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance” found that Pierce County has one of the lowest camping ratios in the state, with 0.06 camping facilities per 1,000 people in the county. By comparison, Ferry County has 3.0
camping facilities per 1,000 people

This evidence demonstrates Nisqually State Park has the potential to be a very popular destination for campers, river rafters, equestrians, mountain bikers, and outdoor enthusiasts. The site itself is rich in history and ecological resources and as such, it is a prime opportunity in the Nisqually River Watershed to convey cultural and environmental stories and experiences. The opportunity to provide a new State Park campground with these unique experiences close to Mount Rainier National Park will begin to meet demand.

Aside from the park entry sign and an interpretive kiosk in the parking area, there is not enough programming on site to properly guide the visitor experience. There are no trailhead markers or additional signage, which may be confusing to first time visitors who are unfamiliar with the park. Visitors to the site who are looking for more of an attraction may be disappointed, and over time there may be a decline in visitation.

In addition, State Park ranger and maintenance staff presence on site is limited, which has resulted in undesirable usage of the park such as abandoned cars, target shooting of signs, vandalism of access control improvements, and campfires. State Parks asserts that the proposed development, including an administration facility and staff residence, along with additional staffing will discourage an escalation of this undesirable behavior.

Furthermore, State Parks has been acquiring land for the park since 1991. The majority of the land was acquired using grant funds from the Washington Recreation & Conservation Office (RCO) “to continue creation of a site for a major state park facility, including camping and river access.” If State Parks does not adhere to the terms and conditions of the RCO agreement by creating such a facility, RCO could find these properties not in compliance or declare them as conversions.

Opportunity

Developing Nisqually State Park would address the problems mentioned above by providing the following opportunities: expanded regional recreational opportunities, local economic development, wildlife and environmental stewardship, environmental and cultural interpretation and education, and potential partnership with the Nisqually Tribe.

- Development of the park will expand regional recreational opportunities in the area including camping. As State Parks is continuously at capacity with current campgrounds, the proposed development of 50+/- campsites would be welcome. There would be a variety of campsite types available to serve a large range of user groups, including RV campsites, equestrian campsites, ADA campsites, pull-through sites, and cabins.
- Development of the park will have residual economic enhancement on the neighboring City of Eatonville and Mount Rainier National Park because of an increase in visitation.
- Restoration and management at the Nisqually River will include planting, buffer mitigation, and removal of exotic plant species. These restoration efforts will protect habitat for critically endangered fish and wildlife, such as salmon.
- Recreational and educational access to the environment will be managed by strategic and limited access to waterways, wetlands, and sites of cultural significance to allow visitors to experience the compelling character of the park and its history without compromising its natural resources.
- State Parks has the opportunity to partner with a Native American tribe on the new park;
because of its rich history the park is of interest to multiple Native American tribes, in particular, the Nisqually Tribe. The Nisqually Tribe has collaborated with State Parks on park planning and development since 2007 and has influenced the character and design of the park. State Parks and the Nisqually Tribe have aligned goals in wanting to foster and protect the environment through restoration and stewardship, and to share a cultural and historic narrative with the community. They will continue to work together to define a formal partnership.

2B. Project Requirements
This project must comply with the following Commission and administrative policies which drive the project’s operational and programmatic needs.

Commission Policies

Cultural Resource Management Policy (12-98-1)
The State Parks Cultural Resource Management Policy guides the identification, protection, management, treatment, and use of historic properties and cultural resources on lands owned or operated by State Parks. These resource policies are derived from state and federal laws, Governor executive orders, proclamations, and input from the public. The policies require that resources be evaluated and assessed during the planning process before any decisions are made about the treatment of these resources.

Critical Areas Policy (73-03-1)
The State Parks Critical Areas Policy requires that new park facility developments are not built in critical areas except where the theme, character, quality or other park planning provides overriding justification for development in such areas, and appropriate mitigation can be provided. When a new park facility development is justified in a critical area, environmental permit considerations shall be prerequisite to the planning, design, and scope of the development, and development shall be limited such that its assumed life and costs to abandon is an acceptable risk of loss.

Protecting Washington State Parks Natural Resources Policy (73-04-1)
The State Parks Natural Resources Policy provides an overarching policy for the agency that addresses the long-term protection and management of natural resources on State Parks properties. This policy provides guidelines addressing multiple topics including biodiversity protection, nonbiotic resources, disturbance events, resource use, planning, regulatory compliance, interpretation and education, and research, surveys, and collections.

Centennial 2013 Plan
The Centennial 2013 Plan calls for the agency to work toward opening new parks, including one at Nisqually State Park, in order to ensure a parks and recreation legacy for future generations. Completion of this plan will take us one step closer to achieving an important goal for the Centennial 2013 Plan – that all parks have land-use plans supported by the public and the Commission.

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 complement 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.

Statewide Acquisition and Development Strategy
The 2016 Statewide Acquisition and Development Strategy guides State Parks in its land acquisitions and developments. The overarching goal of the Strategy is for Washington’s state parks to be recognized as the collection of places and experiences that are distinctly Washington. The first phase of Strategy implementation is for State Parks to select a property for new park development from among those being held for future development. The first property selected was Nisqually State Park.

2014-2021 Washington State Parks Strategic Plan
The 2014-21 Strategic Plan highlighted collaborations with Native American Tribes, including new efforts at management collaboration at the Kukutali Preserve and Nisqually State Park. The Plan also confirmed that the Commission seeks to acquire and develop new parks to meet the current and future needs of the people of Washington.

Nisqually State Park CAMP
Adopted in 2010, the Nisqually State Park Classification and Management Plan (CAMP) provides a land classification system and management objectives for the park. Land classifications, like zoning, determine what recreational uses and types of development are appropriate in different areas of the park. The park property is classified as a combination of Recreation, Resource Recreation, Natural Forest, Natural, and Heritage areas. These classifications provide greater protection for the older forests in the river valleys and concentrate most of the higher-intensity development to the northern part of the park, leaving large parts of the park’s plant and wildlife habitat unfragmented except for trails.

The management objectives outline suggested approaches for addressing the principle natural, cultural and recreational/facility resource issues identified in the park. The project will be required to implement recommended actions to address specific issues including protection of natural and scenic resources, protection of cultural resource sites, traffic management, trails and barrier-free access. All management actions taken within the park must be consistent with the laws and policies governing the agency, as well as all federal, state, and local regulations.

Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site Master Plan
The 2010 Nisqually-Mashel State Park Site Master Plan provides a vision and phased implementation plan for long-term development within the park. The Master Plan is composed of specific element plans and guidelines for the park including; Land Use Plan, Business Plan, Capital Development Plan,

**Land Use Plan**

The Land Use Plan evaluates the available resources and their potential for development, as well as examining land use issues from the Master Plan. Uses and developments proposed in the Land Use Plan include camping and day-use facilities, an interpretive People’s Center, Village Center, mixed-use trails, eight bridges, utilities, minimal road infrastructure, and miscellaneous amenities throughout the park to support visitor use (e.g., restrooms and parking lots).

**Business Plan**

The Business Plan is predicated on the formation of a strategic alliance between the State of Washington and the Nisqually Tribe and associated or confederated tribes of the Pacific Northwest. This is key to enhancing market penetration and user demand, facilitating development and administering year-round operations that promote and sustain recreational and cultural values and economic performance. 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. As investments are made in camping, equestrian activities, trails, 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.

**Capital Development Plan**

The Capital Development Plan outlines a 20-year, four-phase implementation plan for development of the park. Initial park development is structured with the goal to:

- Implement land acquisition and infrastructure development in support of park development.
- Establish significant components of the Master Plan that create the unique identity of the park revolving around its purpose of reconciliation and renewal, including the People’s Center and Village.
- Integrate the business plan with park implementation to provide revenue-generating facilities and programs as early as possible.

**Design guidelines**

The design guidelines provide direction to meet the spirit and intent of the Master Plan by establishing standards for quality, aesthetic, environmental accessibility and safety. For all park design elements, the following design guideline principles apply:

- Maintain consistent character and quality throughout each building development zone – resulting in exceptional character, quality and identity for all park elements
- Apply design guidelines coordinated with park development partners
- Apply Low Impact Development (LID) strategies for site, infrastructure and building facilities
- Apply green environmental and energy technologies and strategies (such as those found in Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) from the US Green Building Council or the Sustainable Sites Initiative (ASLA, et al)).
Stewardship Plan
The Stewardship Plan provides strategies for effectively managing the natural and cultural resources of the park. The plan is intended to protect the park’s diverse system of recreational, cultural, historic, and natural sites. It describes the current resource conditions within the park; provides stewardship prescriptions that are specific to important resources within the park; and discusses regulations, park safety, climate change, and stakeholder coordination.

Transportation and Circulation Plan
The Transportation and Circulation Plan describes the recommended options for roads, trails, bridges, overlooks and crossings. This plan will guide implementation of the new park entry, Mashel River overlook and trail, campground loop, and managed access to the Nisqually River.

Nisqually Tribe Partnership Agreement
State Parks and the Nisqually Tribe are working together to develop a co-management agreement for Nisqually State Park. The agreement is envisioned to include a joint mission and vision for the park and parameters for decision making. It may also cover specific issues including utilities, trails, facilities, staffing, cultural resources, and fish habitat and restoration projects. Once finalized, the Partnership Agreement may place additional requirements on the project.

2C. Agency Mission
The mission of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is to care for Washington’s most treasured lands, waters, and historic places. State Parks connects all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and provides memorable recreational and educational experiences that enhance their lives. State Parks’ vision is that Washington's State Parks will be cherished destinations with natural, cultural, recreational, artistic, and interpretive experiences that everyone can enjoy, appreciate, and proudly support. The proposed development at Nisqually State Park fulfills State Parks’ mission in multiple ways including, forging an exciting new partnership with the Nisqually Tribe, addressing stewardship and preservation of the natural environment, and providing the opportunity for additional recreational and educational experiences. One of the many goals of this project is to strike a balance between providing recreational opportunity, yet limiting it, so that people can appreciate the history and beauty of the site.
2D. Project Approach

Figure 2 – Project Approach for the Predesign Phase

To solve the problem, State Parks developed an approach (Figure 2). The approach includes gathering background information and evaluating site information and technical components that impact the project (see Section 4B for a list of studies completed or underway). The project focused on technical evaluations within the proposed project area (Figure 3).

Following background information gathering and technical evaluations, State Parks worked with the Nisqually Tribe and stakeholders including Nisqually River Council, Nisqually Land Trust, local government representatives, special interest groups, and members of the community to develop design alternatives, and ultimately identify a preferred alternative that meets the vision for the park.

The alternatives analysis compared three alternatives:

1) Alternative 1: No Action
2) Alternative 2: Development of 58 campsites
3) Alternative 3: Development of 52 campsites
Figure 3 – Nisqually State Park Design Element Areas
The following provides a detailed breakdown of each design element proposed for this project. Elements within the OFM scope include: a new park entry on SR7; Mashel River overlook and trail, managed access to the Nisqually River; a campground loop, and associated building amenities and facilities. All infrastructure and utilities required for the proposed development are also included.

**Design Element: New Park Entry**

**Alternative 1: No Action**
- No further development will occur

**Alternative 2: Channelized Intersection at 431st St Ct E**
- Moves the existing entry to midway along SR7 along the northern park boundary
- Maximizes sight distance from both directions

**Alternative 3: Roundabout at Existing Location**
- Maintains existing location
- Maintains 60-foot right-of-way including shoulders
- Designed to slow traffic into the roundabout (15 miles per hour)
- A roundabout is the safest traffic calming solution
- Create wider shoulder in roundabout for large trucks and trailers

**Design Element: Mashel River Overlook and Trail**

**Alternative 1: No Action**
- No development will occur

**Alternative 2: Platform Overlook**
- 10-foot-wide paved in-and-out trail to the overlook
- Interpretive signage along trail and at the overlook structure
- Square 24-foot x 24-foot two-tiered platform overlook (576 square feet)
  - Maximum capacity 30 people
  - Platform maintains a distance back from the slope apex
  - (2) theatre steps
  - Steps and handrail to lower tier
  - ADA accessible ramp entry to lower tier
  - Grated mesh surface

**Alternative 3: Cantilevered Overlook**
- 10-foot-wide paved loop trail to the overlook
- Interpretive signage along trail and at the overlook structure
- Trapezoidal two-tiered platform overlook (620 square feet)
  - Maximum capacity 30 people
  - Platform dramatically extends over the slope apex
  - (3) theatre steps
  - Steps and handrail to lower tier
  - ADA accessible ramp entry to lower tier
  - Grated mesh surface
Design Element: Nisqually River Managed Access

Alternative 1: No Action
- No further development will occur

Alternative 2: No Motorized Access, Natural Trail Development
- Secure gate at trailhead to deter all access, except for hikers
- Habitat restoration will close in current access road to be a 6-foot-wide gravel trail
- Habitat restoration at the Nisqually River and Ohop Creek confluence
- Natural paths and interpretive signage provided at Nisqually River area

Alternative 3: Limited Motorized Access, Boardwalk & Trail Development
- Steel electronic gate at the trailhead
- Vehicular access for staff, bus, ADA, and boat trailer
- Access for hikers, bicycles and equestrians
- 12-foot-wide paved road to the Nisqually River area
- Midway parking area for (5) boat trailer/bus stalls and (1) ADA stall
- Nisqually River area
  - Parking area for (6) vehicles plus (2) ADA stalls
  - Interpretive kiosk
  - ADA vault restroom
  - Bicycle racks
  - Horse hitching posts
  - Trail to Nisqually River and kayak launch area
  - ADA 10-foot-wide paved pedestrian trail with 3-foot-tall, two-rail wood fence and interpretive signage along Nisqually River
  - 10-foot-wide pedestrian boardwalk trail with 3-foot-tall fence and interpretive signage along Nisqually River & Ohop Creek
  - (2) overlook platforms along the Nisqually River
  - (1) overlook platform along Ohop Creek
  - Benches every 200 feet

Design Element: Campground Loop

Alternative 1: No Action
- No development will occur

Alternative 2: Development of 58 Campsites
- (5) universal pull-through campsites
- (34) back-in RV campsites
- (2) ADA back-in RV campsites
- (8) universal equestrian campsites
- (4) universal park cabins
- (5) universal primitive tent campsites
- (2) group picnic shelters
- (3) restrooms/showers/dishwashing stations
- (24) parking stalls plus (8) ADA stalls
Design Element: Building Facilities and Amenities

Alternative 3: Development of 52 Campsites

- (4) universal pull-through campsites
- (30) back-in RV campsites
- (2) ADA back-in RV campsites
- (8) universal equestrian campsites
- (2) universal pull-through equestrian campsites
- (6) universal park cabins
- (2) group picnic shelters
- (3) restrooms/showers/dishwashing stations
- (15) parking stalls plus (5) ADA stalls
- (5) dumpsters & enclosures
- (1) equestrian waste dumpster

Alternative 1: No Action

- No further development will occur

Alternative 2 & 3: Facilities are consistent for both alternatives

- Welcome center
- Staff residence
- RV dump station
- Administration and maintenance facility
- Well house and reservoir

2E. Relevant Project History

In 1987, the Washington State Legislature approved the Nisqually River Management Plan, which called for a major destination area park/put-in site at the confluence of the Nisqually and Mashel Rivers. State Parks has worked on assembling a land base suitable for such a destination park.

Timeline

- In 1991 State parks began acquiring land to create “a major state park facility, including camping and river access”. So far, there have been seven phases of acquisition totaling 1,292 acres. All but the first were acquired using RCO grant funding.
- In 2003, State Parks adopted the Centennial 2013 plan that calls for the agency to work toward opening new parks, including the Nisqually State Park, in order to ensure a parks and recreation legacy for future generations.
- In the 2005-2007 biennium, the Washington State Legislature funded a Master Plan for the new park. the Nisqually Indian Tribe formed a State Park Committee to determine the Tribe’s desired level of involvement in the park, and to give input on the park’s planning process. The planning team met regularly with the Exploratory Committee and with the tribal State Park Committee as the
CAMP and the Master Plan were being developed. Public input was also solicited at a series of four public meetings in the Eatonville area, at a meeting of the Eatonville Chamber of Commerce, and at a Nisqually Tribe community meeting. Finally, public input was solicited through a page on the State Parks website, and through email.

- March 2010, State Parks adopted a Master Plan and Classification and Management Plan (CAMP) for Nisqually State Park.
- In 2016, State Parks successfully developed a parking lot and trailhead area with an informational kiosk, ADA vault toilet, horse trailer stalls, and hitching post.
- Currently State Parks is working toward a partnership agreement with the Nisqually Tribe. The agreement is envisioned to include a joint mission and vision for the park and parameters for decision making, as well as specific guidance on issues such as utilities, trails, facilities, staffing, cultural resources, and fish habitat and restoration projects.

“Although it is usually deceptively serene in appearance, the land halfway between the Nisqually River’s headwaters on Mount Rainier and the delta where the river flows into Puget Sound has long been a place of convergence and upheaval. Geologic evidence, recorded history, and the stories of those who have lived here tell of eons of change – often peaceful but sometimes violent – that have dramatically altered both landscape and people. The setting today features the Mashel River and Ohop Creek as well as the Nisqually, punctuated by the confluences of the waterways, high bluffs and an upland plateau. It is a place much altered from the environment historically occupied by early Nisqually people, who were a part of the Southern Coast Salish culture. Beginning in the mid-1800s, non-native settlers and entrepreneurs cleared forests to create farmland, extracted timber and minerals, and diminished the salmon runs. But change continues. Renewal efforts are producing a growing array of individuals and groups committed to working together to restore the environment cherished by all people. It is a new era of reconciliation and renewal.”

– 2010 Nisqually-Mashel Site Master Plan Summary