

Blue Mountain CAMP Alternatives Meeting December 10, 2020, 6-8 pm

State Parks staff hosted a virtual public meeting to discuss Stage 2 of the Blue Mountains Park Classification and Management Planning (CAMP) process. This meeting included review and input about alternative concepts for each of the three parks that are part of this CAMP including: Palouse Falls, Lyons Ferry and Lewis and Clark Trail state parks. About 18 people signed in. Participants were able to see and hear the presentation and were encouraged to type in comments and questions through the Question-and-Answer feature of MS Teams Live Event. General comments and questions were submitted throughout the meeting. In addition, participants were asked to respond to the alternative themes for each park. The following includes the comments and questions for each alternative. Miscellaneous questions are addressed at the end of the document. Staff responses are addressed in italics.

Palouse Falls Comments

1. Any consideration for multi-modal connection (bike / horse / hiking) between proposed camping and camp site area –

All three alternatives for Palouse Falls State Park include hiking trails but do not include facilities for overnight camping, bicycling or equestrian activities. Hiking trails have the least impact on the natural resources and cultural significance of the site. Each alternative varies as to the number and distance of hiking trails depending on the theme and features of each. The Public Access theme includes the most trails. In addition to the designated walkways to three scenic viewpoints that are included in all three alternatives, the Public Access theme includes a north trail to the upper falls. In the Scenic Overlook and Overlook-Heritage themes, parking for non-ADA visitors would be located on the west side of the railroad tracks and a hiking trail would be developed to provide pedestrian access to the overlook and other park features.

The alternatives at Lyons Ferry State Park are not proposing designated bike, horse or hiking trails. Bicycle use would be allowed in the Recreation theme on shared roadways connecting the camping area to day-use facilities.

2. Have you done a cost/benefit analysis of a visitor center facility in this location? Is this related to the Ice Age Floods tourism trail?

We have not done a cost/benefit analysis of a visitor center facility here. The first step is to identify the idea of including a visitor center in the alternatives stage. Then, based on public input and staff consideration, preliminary and final recommendations will be made. If the visitor center concept is included in the final CAMP, State Parks will consider costs, benefits, feasibility, and funding. This could be a project that is

developed 10 or 15 years in the future. The state park is a key point of interest along the Ice Age Floods National Geologic Trail (IAFNGT) managed by the National Park Service. The purpose of a conceptual visitor center facility would be to provide orientation to the state park and to IAFNGT sites in the region, as well as local historical sites. State Parks would consider partnering with interested Native American tribes, other agencies and non-profit organizations in the development and management of the center. In addition, State Parks would consider multiple strategies with partners related to interpretive messaging the visitor center would provide.

3. Re Alt 2: I would like some assurance that the history of indigenous people in the area would be presented. I love the idea of contemplative experience, good stuff: but I think way more on --- AHH! you are doing it on Alt 3! Excellent. Thank you.

All three alternative themes envision cultural interpretive opportunities, including the history and significance of this area to Native American tribes. State Parks has been and will continue to partner with interested Native American tribes throughout the planning process and we welcome them to share their stories at the park.

4. Yay for walk in parks!
5. I like the elements in Alt 3 of protecting the views, the land, and the habitat
6. What parameters or criteria do you use to identify carrying capacity conditions? What level of acceptable change are you considering and how are these quantified over time?

We have not developed a framework for assessing carrying capacity. This is something we will do if carrying capacity is determined to be necessary at Palouse Falls and is included in the Final Recommendation. Carrying capacity could be identifying the number of people that can be reasonably managed by staff on site at any one time to protect against off-trail use. Carrying capacity would also look at available parking, available sanitation services (bathrooms), potable water, sound and visual 'pollution', ecosystem degradation, as well as how the numbers of park users affect the user experience at the site.

7. Why the restrictions on hiking?

The natural conditions of the site – alluring waterfalls, deep canyons, steep cliffs, and loose talus – combined with high visitation, especially after the area was designated the state waterfall in 2014, have led to severely degraded habitat, scarring of the landscape and public safety concerns. Many social trails – informal paths created by people walking over and over an undeveloped area or unidentified trail – exist. All three themes aim to create a defined trail system, with access to several viewpoints where visitors can hike and experience the park safely. The park has also suffered from

vandalism and illegal trespassing on the railroad property along the west side and down to the river beyond the State Park boundary. Designating trails and enforcing rules about use will improve public safety concerns and lessen habitat degradation, as well as protect the culturally significant landscape.

8. Alts 2 and 3 seem very restrictive and limiting. As far as Alt 1 have you considered limiting the lower parking to ADA and designating the upper area for parking.

At this time, there is a three-tiered parking configuration within the park - lower, middle, and upper (overflow) parking – which are cramped and restrict the flow of traffic during heavy use. Moving forward, allowing more ADA capacity as well as a designated drop off (unload/load) opportunity in the lower lot could meet currently underserved needs. To address your specific question, yes, the preliminary recommendation could look like the Public Access theme with the lower parking lot serving only ADA accessible parking and drop-off (unload/load) location, with primary parking being in the upper lot (overflow) and the additional new overflow parking west of the railroad.

9. Was there any consideration to permit access to the canyon trail?

Not being sure of what trail you are referring; we will do our best to address this question. There is a social trail that spans between Palouse Falls and Lyons Ferry State Parks. This is not a developed trail. This social trail is located on Army Corp of Engineer land as it is part of a Habitat Management Unit (HMU) that is open to the public for dispersed recreation area for passive recreation and hunting. In discussion with USACE and Native American tribes, it was determined to be left outside of State Parks long-term boundary because of cultural significance. On lands State Parks does not own or manage, access and use is defined by that landowner.

The other ‘trail’ you may be referring to within the park is another social trail leading to the upper falls. This is identified in Alternative 1: Public Access theme to develop a trail to the upper falls to be accessed by permit or staff/volunteer led tours. For sensitive lands that State Parks does manage, using a permit system for limited access is an operational approach that is being considered. This again relates to promoting public safety and positive stewardship of a rare and fragile landscape.

10. Comparing camping experience at Palouse Falls to Lyons Ferry is not objective. They are very different sites and experiences. Not sure this is a defensible position to prohibit long standing activity in the community.
11. I'm torn between option 1, which gives the public some access to explore the area (which they are clearly craving), and option 3, which preserves the views and habitat and helps interpret the cultural significance of the area. They may seem like opposites, but I like the idea of controlled access to the upper falls, etc.

12. Will you continue with the public education about the fall risks?

Yes, absolutely. Public safety is the priority here, in addition to providing the public opportunities to experience this incredible landscape. The costs and logistics of responding to an emergency here are very challenging. Cell reception is poor, and the steep slopes and remote location make it very difficult for State Parks and the other emergency responders.

The public education currently is comprised of digital (web) based messaging, on site signage, staff contact, interpretive programs, and mobile resources such as reader boards; it also includes use of the news media at significant times of year, such as peak river flow. These, or other methods, will continue.

Lyons Ferry Comments

1. What is a "social" trail?

Social trails are informal paths created by people walking over and over an undeveloped area. Over time, these become depressions and eventually clearly identified pathways or trails on the landscape. You can see these all over Palouse Falls – narrow paths crisscrossing each other around and through the park, and alongside some of the steep fenced areas and cliff edges.

From the air, these social trails look like an ant farm and being able to see their full scope/scale shows the ecological loss. The negative results of this include (a) destruction of a rare and fragile desert ecosystem that takes YEARS to recover and (b) visual pollution – both the trails and the people on them – detracting from the viewshed but also including (c) a public safety element as some of these social trails lead to dangerous areas. People see the trail and believe it to be ‘approved’ and safe; in many instances that is not the case at all.

2. With either theme for Lyons Ferry, what are the plans, if any for the old ferry?

The ferry is in a very dilapidated condition and not easy to restore. We will discuss this issue with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who owns the property. (State Parks manages the park on behalf of the Corps.)

3. Alt 2 especially considering limited access to Palouse Falls.

4. Have you done a cost/benefit analysis of a **campground** at Lyons Ferry? Seems there are notable cultural resource management implications to a project action SEPA determination

A cost/benefit analysis has not been performed on the campground project at Lyons Ferry State Park. This project was legislatively mandated by a State Senator representing this district. Historically, this site has been operated as a campground between 1971-2002 by State Parks. It has since fell into disrepair and State Parks took management of the park back in 2015. Lyons Ferry State Park is owned by the USACE and State Parks is in the process of going through the grantee application process with them on a design/permit project for the campground development. This will include federal regulatory review processes including NEPA and Section 106 (Tribal review).

5. I like Alt 2 with the upgrading of the campground, providing recreation opportunities, and being a companion park to Palouse Falls.
6. Lyons Ferry: prefer the Heritage theme
7. Where is the money coming from to expand the parks?

The planning horizon for CAMP plans is 20 years or more, and the plans can be updated if conditions change significantly. Once a final recommendation is adopted by the Washington Parks and Recreation Commission, recommended facilities and improvements can be implemented. This will depend on the availability of funding, which comes in large part from the state legislature. Grants are a big part of the funding picture and can help leverage additional funds with other partners such as local governments, land trusts and others.

8. I would recommend keeping Lyons Ferry a day use park with control water access.
9. I think the recreation alternative is the best for this park. It is an absolute gem that just needs polishing. The swimming beach is the best in the area, and the campground is in such a beautiful spot. There is already space designated for a drainfield to accommodate sanitary sewer expansion in the camping area. It needs water, shade, and electricity to be attractive for camping with RVs. I think this park would thrive with a little more investment.

Lewis and Clark Trail Comments

1. I like the idea of adding campsites and having everything on the same side of the Hwy. I think day-use fishing access right there would be great too.
2. Make this park as big as you can manage sustainably. There is a scarce resource in this agricultural landscape.

3. What is the flood frequency in this reach of the River and how can you relocate facilities to reduce flooding, this is a floodplain are all.

The flood frequency of the Touchet River adjacent to the campground has been flooding every year for the last 5 years impacting four primitive camp sites. State Parks has a climate change adaptation plan in place that is referenced prior to developing new or improving existing facilities that considers the potential for flooding, etc. No new facilities are being proposed in areas at risk of flooding.

4. More presentations of information, arts, tribal history? Bike tours that circle out and about in the extensive ag areas with great roads?

Yes, we would like to improve our educational and interpretive offerings. The stories we include about tribal history will require participation from multiple tribes. Regarding bicycling, we are coordinating with a local effort to develop a paved trail from Dayton to Waitsburg. These ideas will be considered in developing the Preliminary and Final Recommendation.

5. Lewis and Clark Trail: prefer Alt 2

Miscellaneous Comments

1. How much planning is underway to make the parks more bicycle friendly? Thank you for all that you have already done.

Where feasible, we proactively plan for and develop bicycle friendly facilities. Many park trails are multi-modal, allowing use by bicyclists, hikers, and equestrians. In addition to the cross-state trails that we manage, we work with local governments, bicycle advocates and regional trail planners to identify trail segments and other bicycle amenities that will serve park and trail visitors. We continue to hear requests for more bicycle friendly trails and amenities. Considering these opportunities at each park is part of this process.

2. Are you willing to put in writing to the current landowners a guarantee that you will not do a land grab for the lands that have been family homestead lands?

Yes, State Parks sent letters prior to the virtual public meeting notifying affected landowners that their properties were being considered in the park's long-term boundary. In the letter State Parks stated the following:

- *If ever you find yourself in a position where you would like to give your property away, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission would gratefully accept your tax-deductible donation.*
- *If you decide you would like to sell your property, the agency may be interested in purchasing it.*

- *If you would like to explore the potential tax benefits of placing a “conservation easement” on portions of your property, the agency may be able to assist you in this process.*
- *If you feel you would like to support the conservation mission of the park, but don’t quite know how, the agency may be able to provide you with technical resource management assistance.*
- *If you decide you would rather not become involved in park planning and would not like further contact with the agency, your decision will be respected.*

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