2. Problem Statement

Twin Harbors Beach State Park, located four miles south of Westport on the Pacific Ocean, was established in 1937 when State Parks began acquiring properties in the area. State Parks continued to assemble parcels over the decades but did not fully develop the park until the early 1960s. Today, Twin Harbors is 225 acres in size and includes 6,214 feet of ocean frontage. It offers beach access and activities, trails, picnicking, and camping year-round.

The park, primarily developed in wetland areas, was considered buildable at the time because the land was flat and easily cleared. Wetlands were filled on the east side of SR105 to establish a vehicular circulation system, campground, and administrative and maintenance facilities. Filled wetlands west of SR105 enabled the construction of 88 camping sites and to provide beach access. A total of 262 campsites were constructed park-wide, including 42 full hookup sites, 208 standard, and four primitive sites. Currently, there are 11 comfort stations (restroom buildings), five cabins, and two yurts. The park includes a welcome center, maintenance and operations facility, staff residence, dump station, two picnic areas, beach access, and parking.

In 2006, State Parks began a planning process to improve coastal state parks culminating in the 2007 South Beach Area Classification and Management Plan (CAMP). The CAMP identified the need for park renovations at Twin Harbors due to aging infrastructure, safety issues, frequent flooding, and a less than optimum user experience. The specific recommendations for park improvements include: adding campsites to an undeveloped area on the west side of the highway; eliminating campsites on the east side that regularly flood; restoring native vegetation in the eliminated campsite areas; building a new welcome center on the west side of the highway; and relocating the shop and other administrative buildings outside flood areas. Along with infrastructure improvements, the CAMP also recommends expanding camping capacity regionally to account for anticipated population growth.

This project seeks to update and renovate the park based on the CAMP recommendations. Because of extensive wetlands and flooding within Twin Harbors State Park, suitable development areas are limited. Therefore, as part of the predesign process, State Parks explored the possibility of relocating campsites and other facilities to nearby Grayland Beach State Park. Grayland Beach is a 581-acre, year-round marine camping park located five miles south of Twin Harbors. While much of the park is undeveloped, a limit on further development exists at
Grayland Beach due to protected bird populations and habitat. Critical breeding grounds for Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*) and Streaked Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*) are significantly present along the western part of the park, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has advised against development in or around this area. Interdunal wetlands are also heavily present throughout the park.

These constraints omit Grayland Beach State Park from potential camping relocation with the sole focus being at Twin Harbors State Park. However, the small adjoining property at the north end of Grayland Beach is suitable for the development of a new administration and maintenance facility that would service all parks within the South Beach Area. This site poses no risk and avoids environmentally sensitive areas.

*Figure 1: Vicinity Map of Twin Harbors State Park and Grayland Beach State Park*
2A. Problem Statement and Project Opportunities

Problem

**Aging Infrastructure**

Initially constructed in the 1960s, facilities and infrastructure at Twin Harbors State Park are old and in need of repair or upgrades. Based on a review of condition assessment reports and personal communications with park staff, many of the park buildings are rated fair to poor. Some of the utility infrastructure is in poor condition and needs replacement. During low-use periods, sewage moves slowly between the park and treatment plant creating odor problems. Also, the regional administration and maintenance facility located on the east side of the park are outdated and do not provide adequate office space, shop space, and storage areas to service the entire South Beach Area.

**Flooding**

The park is within the 100-year floodplain, and the entirety of the park is within Grays Harbor County’s flood hazard zone. Flooding has been an ongoing issue within the park for many years. This results in annual closures of campsites in the shoulder and winter seasons, and damaged infrastructure (e.g., sewer and electrical conduit). State Parks operations staff endeavor to keep the park open as much as possible. The closures are weather/flood related entirely. The number of sites and closures change drastically each year. This means that partial closures, complete closures, and sometimes several opening or reopening dates occur within a season or year. A total closure occurs when the east side floods. When this happens, groundwater intrusion into the sewer system results in closure of the city of Westport’s pump system. This action closes the entire park sewer system, including the day-use area.

The maintenance facility, located adjacent to the east campground, also floods in more severe rainfall events. This condition not only reduces recreational opportunities and diminishes the visitor experience, but it also creates a maintenance burden as it necessitates extensive cleanup and repair every spring.

*Figure 2: Flooding Area on the West Side of Twin Harbors State Park (dry condition)*

*Figure 3: Extent of Flooding on the West Side of Twin Harbors State Park (flood condition)*
Tree Health

Tree health has also declined on the east side of the park. Multiple pathogens spread through forested areas, especially in the campground, creating hazard trees that pose a public safety risk when they fall. Evidence suggests that regular flood events have further stressed the trees, which is due to regional development adjacent to the park. Managing tree risk to visitors necessitated the permanent closure of most standard sites on the east side by 2016. Maintaining this risk, along with the perennial flooding, further adds burdens to the maintenance system.
Camping Capacity

Currently, 94 camping sites on the east side are permanently closed, leaving a total of 73 sites available during the summer and shoulder seasons. The east side campground flood events are a moving target. These events happen sporadically and vary in length of time. Upon flooding of the east side, operations staff are forced to close the entire park to camping as water intrusion in the sewer system closes our sewer pumps down. On the west side, 45 camping sites are closed seasonally from November 1 through April 1. Some years, the closures have lasted through June 25. This leaves a maximum total of 123 sites available only during the summer and shoulder seasons.

Visitor Experience

The visitor experience at Twin Harbors also needs improvement. Customers regularly complain about campsites being too close together, a lack of campsites, and utilities. Many have said that the park should be more like Grayland Beach State Park, which has undergone improvements in recent years. Campers on the west side of the park need to cross the highway to register and buy shower tokens. Campers on the east side of the park must cross the highway to access the beach. Despite the existing crosswalk, park visitors have expressed concerns about speeding cars that do not give pedestrians the right-of-way.
Safety & Access

The safety of the public and the staff are at risk due to SR105 that bisects the park. This access route is a hazardous commute for visitors traveling to and from the west and east side of the park (Figure 8). Maintenance of the crossing creates both a hazard and an unnecessary obstacle for staff to upkeep. There is no easy access to do continuous monitoring and maintenance, sustainably caring for the park, and making conditions safe for visitors.

Opportunity

Exploring options for a new and renovated Twin Harbors State Park is a significant opportunity. If the campsites are relocated east of SR105 to the west side of Twin Harbors State Park, and the amenities upgraded, the park issues addressed above will fulfill the recommendations of the Commission-adopted CAMP, capture public comments, and meet the following project needs and goals:

- Develop conceptual plans consistent with the CAMP
- Create a sustainable campground that can be efficiently managed and operated by State Parks
- Create recreation opportunities that embrace and protect the dunes and coastal wetlands
- Develop a design that can be implemented and funded
- Reduce operational costs
- Close campsites with flooding and safety concerns
- Address flooding issues: Develop a design that protects the environment and restores the ecological values to the extent possible
- Enhance tourism opportunities for Westport and Grays Harbor County
- Celebrate what is unique about Twin Harbors State Park
- Create rich and comfortable camping experiences
These proposed project improvements will result in a low maintenance campground with a better park experience. While the alternatives may have a reduced overall number of campsites, a revenue reduction is not expected. The plan will likely see an increase in revenue as occupancy increases throughout the year with the creation of a higher quality camping experience, including the addition of cabins. This has been the case at Grayland Beach State Park, where the campsites are higher quality, more desirable, and occupied at a higher rate. Another example compared Pacific Beach State Park with Twin Harbors in 2019. It revealed that Twin Harbors had only 12,474 occupied nights that year whereas Pacific Beach, with less than half the inventory, had 13,211 occupied nights. Many of the existing sites at Twin Harbors State Park are flooded much of the year and crowded together and are considered a lower quality experience. The preferred plan will provide campsites that are dry and have wider spacing. This conclusion resulted from public requests for improved camping experiences.

New and improve amenities for the new campground can include: a relocated park entrance and welcome center, modern campsites for RV and tents, restrooms, RV hookups, and an expanded cabin camping area. Portions of the campground and vehicular circulation system will be elevated with fill so that they are less prone to flooding. Relocated campsites will be outside of areas with intensive flooding. Boardwalks and trails will create better pedestrian circulation across flooded areas and to the beach. The sites to avoid for campground use are areas with large amounts of diseased trees. Also, this renovation and relocation provides an opportunity to remove infrastructure from sensitive wetland areas on the East side and restore habitat and enhance ecological functionality.

Figure 9: Context Map of Twin Harbors State Park
2B. Project Requirements

This project must comply with the following Commission and administrative policies and adopted CAMP documents, 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 come from state and federal laws, Governor executive orders, proclamations, and input from the public. The policies require resource evaluation and assessment during the planning process, and before making decisions about the treatment of these resources.

Critical Areas Policy (73-03-1)

The State Parks Critical Areas Policy requires no building of new park facility developments in critical areas. Exceptions are where the theme, character, quality, or other park planning provides overriding justification for development in such areas and provides appropriate mitigation. 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. The 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, non-biotic resources, disturbance events, resource use, planning, regulatory compliance, interpretation and education, and research, surveys, and collections.

South Beach Area CAMP

Adopted in 2007, the South Beach Area CAMP provides a land classification system and management objectives for state parks within the South Beach Area, including Twin Harbors State Park. Land classifications, such as zoning, determine what recreational uses and types of development are appropriate in different areas of the park. The park property has a combination of Recreation, Resource Recreation, and Natural areas. These classifications provide greater protection for sensitive wetland areas and concentrate new development outside of flood-prone areas. The management objectives outline suggested approaches for addressing the principle natural and recreational resource issues identified in the park. The project is required to implement recommended actions specific to campground renovations, public safety improvements, increased recreational opportunities, utility evaluations and upgrades, and relocation of the administrative and maintenance facilities.
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 connect all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and provide 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 park renovation fulfills State Parks’ mission in multiple ways, including restoration and enhancement of the natural environment while providing a balanced opportunity for improved recreational experiences.

2D. Project Approach

To solve the problem, State Parks developed a detailed approach, as shown in Figure 10: Project Approach. The process includes gathering background information and evaluating site information and technical components that impact the project. The tasks consist of an initial analysis of coastal erosion and interior flooding, assessment of wetland areas, documentation of wildlife, and characterization of mitigation opportunities within the east side of the park see Section 4B. Site Analysis for a list of studies completed or underway.

**Note:** The preferred alternative from the West side Alternative Analysis and the preferred alternative from the East side Alternative Analysis will be combined into the Preferred Alternative.

![Figure 10: Project Approach](image-url)
Following background information gathering and technical evaluations, State Parks worked with stakeholders, including regulatory agencies, local government representatives from the City of Westport, special interest groups, and members of the community, to develop design alternatives. The goal is to ultimately identify a preferred alternative on how to renovate the park.

Separate design alternatives were developed for the west and east sides of the park because the goals and design elements for those areas are different. Improvements on the west side are focused on the development of additional recreational facilities. In contrast, the focus for the east side is the elimination of facilities and restoration of wetland areas.

Separate evaluations for the west and the east side alternatives use design criteria appropriate to the differing goals and elements to determine the preferred option for each side. These preferred options comprise the projects Preferred Alternative.

The alternatives analysis compared the following alternatives:

**West side:**
- 1W: No Action
- 2W: 152 Campsites
- 3W: 130 Campsites

**East side:**
- 1E: No Action
- 2E: Closure of East side with Modest Habitat Restoration
- 3E: Closure of East side with Intensive Habitat Restoration

The following is a breakdown of the common programming and design elements needed for the west and east sides of the park for the renovation project, regardless of the alternative.

**Design Elements: West side**
- New staff housing – 1,800 SF
- New welcome center – similar to Grayland Beach State Park
- New trash compacter/dump station
- Maintenance shed
- Additional comfort stations
- Improved trail loops
- Enhance interpretive and wayfinding signage
- Boardwalks when needing to cross sensitive wetlands
- Boardwalks onto dune (accessible with pedestrian and bike use)
- View deck associated with dune boardwalk
- Playground area associated with day use
- Additional cabins (not to exceed 22 including the existing 5)
- Back-in and pull-through campsites
- Campsites spaced 70-80 ft apart, with several less than 60 ft apart to provide different price points
- Amphitheater – similar to Grayland Beach State Park
- Mix of campsites with power and water
Design Elements: East side

- Elimination of camping
- Retain access to lift station
- Relocate boneyard to area adjacent to lift station
- Relocate the administration and maintenance building to property adjacent to Grayland Beach State Park
- Potential mitigation opportunities for wetland buffer impacts from development on the west side

2E. Relevant Project History

Previous Use

The name of Twin Harbors came from the two harbors in the region: Willapa Bay to the south, and Grays Harbor to the north. Used for training by the United States Army in the 1930s, the property since has been used for recreational purposes.

Figure 11: Twin Harbors State Park 1974

_Twin Harbors State Park in 1974. Noticeable difference in vegetation and ecosystem regimes, i.e., a large part of the east portion of the West side of the park is mostly sand. Today that area is a Shore Pine (Pinus contorta) dominated forest._
Site History

Twin Harbors State Park was established in 1937 when the Commission began acquiring lands along the Pacific Ocean. The Commission went on to assemble more properties in this vicinity over the coming decade. During this time, the Commission sought a mix of private and public lands. The Commission went as far as to work with the United States Army, who owned the land to allow for recreation activities at the property. By 1942, there was sufficient land to create a park, and as a result, it was named Twin Harbors. By 1944, the Army ceased operations and abandoned their camp; this allowed the state to acquire it and various war surplus items. After World War II, it appears very little development occurred through the 1950s, although the Commission did consider possible closure of a group camp during this early period. According to Commission meeting notes, park development did not happen until it commenced in the 1960s with funding provided by the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC).

Primary development occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s. Anecdotal accounts indicate the park as a trendy destination for those who wanted to visit the ocean during this period. It is unclear, however, if flooding of campsites and park facilities occurred regularly during this period. Historical aerial photography reveals no shore pine trees established in the 1970s. The camping experience would have been significantly different than today. Individual campsites were far more open in appearance and sandy. Shore pine trees were likely established by park staff in the 1980s to prevent the movement of sand and to enhance the camping experience. Today, vegetation characterizes the west side of the park instead of sand and openness. It appears that some shore pines were also established on the east side of SR 105 but did not spread as there was already an established mix of conifer and deciduous trees.

Over the years, Twin Harbors endured flood events that altered its availability for recreational use in winter months. Flooding on the east and west sides of SR 105 contributed to long periods of closure and arduous cleanup by staff to reopen facilities in spring. Also, flooding may have contributed to the poor health of trees, especially on the east side of the park. By 2016, around 70 campsites were permanently closed due to the risk of trees falling on visitors.

In 2007, the Commission adopted the Twin Harbors CAMP. The report documented existing conditions and speculated on future flooding. It recognized that the park needed rehabilitation to preserve recreational activity. It also required improved wetlands conditions to manage stormwater better and improve habitat. The CAMP made recommendations for future land use and for the development of new facilities that would be more in harmony with the natural systems at Twin Harbors. Specific provisions in the CAMP envisioned classification of most lands on the west side as Recreation. Classification of land on the east side of the park, comprised of wetlands, would be classified as Natural. A consensus around moving campsites to higher ground adequately addresses frequent closure of facilities in flooded areas.

Recreational use at Twin Harbors State Park will continue to accommodate those who come to walk and play on the beach in addition to visitors who camp, surf, clam, bird and storm watch.