

Miller Peninsula State Park Property Initial Trail Identification and Designation

December 8, 2014




Approved by

Don Hoch, Director



Date

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Miller Peninsula State Park Property, located in Sequim, consists of nearly 3,000 acres of undeveloped land covered in an informal network of existing trails. In 2005, a planning effort was launched to develop the property into a State Park. It was the first phase of a multi-phased effort, which was to include several public meetings and an exploratory committee, to develop a park vision, goals, and ultimately a master plan. Unfortunately, anticipated funding was not realized in the following biennium and the master planning effort was put on hold. Despite the suspended planning effort, the properties' extensive trail system remains highly popular with intensive use by hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, and wildlife viewing enthusiasts.

During the past several years, the lack of parking has become increasingly problematic. Agency staff have also found it difficult to adequately provide information and orient trail users to the property's vast network of trails. Currently, the only horse trailer parking access in the area is off the property on an adjacent gravel road, Cat Lake Road. The intersection of Cat Lake Road with Diamond Point Road (the main county roadway leading to the property) is on a blind corner, raising safety concerns as vehicles with horse trailers access and leave the property. In 2013, State Parks received a grant to design, permit, and construct a multi-use trailhead with parking, sanitary facilities, and informational kiosk to address these management concerns. The trailhead design includes 10 spots for car parking and an additional six that would accommodate horse trailers.

Clallam County zoning of the Miller Peninsula State Park Property does not permit development of parking areas. To allow construction of the desired trailhead, State Parks was required to obtain a Zoning Conditional Use permit. The County Hearing Examiner is appointed by the county to provide a public hearing process for land use and other critical issues. The Examiner issues formal decision or makes recommendations to the County on matters heard. During the hearing it was identified that existing use of trails by horses and mountain bikes was in violation of State Parks' Washington Administrative Codes (WAC) 352-32-070 and 352-32-075, which address the use of horses and non-motorized vehicles on State Park property. The WACs state that "No horses, [or non-motorized vehicles].... shall be permitted on trails in any state park area, except where designated and posted to specifically or conditionally permit such activity. The director or designee may open or close trails to such use..." The Hearing Examiner approved State Parks' conditional use permit on May 12, 2014, with the condition that the agency comply with the language set forth in WAC.

Pertaining to equestrian use and mountain biking, State Parks WAC states that: "the director or designee may open or close trails to such use. This decision shall include an evaluation of factors including, but not limited to, conflict with other park users, public safety, and damage to park resources and/or facilities. This evaluation shall include a reasonable effort to involve interested trail users of the park in question, including, at a minimum, one public meeting advertised and conducted in the region where the park is located."

Sequim Bay Area and Southwest Region staff evaluated the current trailhead development project and the existing trail system under the context of the WACs. Park staff identified those trails within the system that would be appropriate to formalize for public use. As they had done with the parking lot, staff ensured that the trails that would be included in this Initial Trail Identification and Designation would not impact sensitive environmental or cultural resources. No threatened or endangered species have been identified on the property.

Adoption of this Initial Trail Identification and Designation by the Director was reviewed under SEPA on November 14, 2014 and determined to be not significant. On November 24, 2014 State Parks held a public meeting at the Guy Cole Convention Center in Sequim to receive public comments on formally adopting the existing trail system and designating it appropriate for equestrian and biking use. Comments received were generally in support of the action. Some clarification was needed about future development as some participants were concerned this action would result in further development of the property. This action, as reviewed under SEPA, is solely the adoption and signing of the existing trail system.

During both the SEPA comment period and public meeting, public concerns about this Initial Trail Identification and Designation centered primarily on ongoing management of the park's trail system. There are over 20 miles of single track trails and primitive roadways throughout the property that are used extensively for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Identified trails-related issues included:

- Natural resource impacts caused by trails in inappropriate places
- Safety of trail users
- Trail use conflicts
- Adequacy of visitor information/user education
- Trails crossing onto private lands
- Trail maintenance needs
- New trail development
- Appropriate/effective volunteer participation

Currently there is no available funding for extensive trail use and development planning for the Miller Peninsula State Park Property. State Parks staff believes an appropriate next step is to create a trail advisory group (TAG) made up of trail users who could assist staff in creating standards for the existing trail system. These standards, along with volunteer maintenance efforts, trail system information, and signing will satisfy the immediate need to keep trail users safe and keep trail user conflicts to a minimum. Staff also believes that an *Interim Trail Plan* will be necessary to guide trail management during the period prior to development of a park master plan and a finalized trail plan.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of Initial Trail Identification and Designation (this document) is to map the existing network of trails and designate permitted trail uses for the Miller Peninsula State Park Property necessary to adequately sign trails, provide orientation materials, and otherwise satisfy requirements of the Zoning Conditional Use permit discussed above. This document is also intended to guide trail system management activities until the TAG and agency staff complete development of an Interim Trail Plan. The scope of Initial Trail Identification and Designation is therefore limited to trail-related issues requiring immediate attention, including protecting park natural/cultural resources, ensuring visitor safety, avoiding trail user conflicts, and volunteer involvement. Issues not requiring immediate attention, including new trail development and major trail renovations, will be addressed as part of the future Interim Trail Plan.

ORGANIZATION

This document addresses policy direction and the programmatic activities that, in combination, will address immediate issues related to natural/cultural resource protection, visitor safety, and user conflicts.

Policy direction includes existing state laws and agency-level rules and policies that guide trail management throughout the state park system. Policy direction also includes interim trail use policies and the trail standards established in coordination with TAG for the Miller Peninsula State Park Property.

Programmatic activities outline specific projects or tasks designed to achieve the indicated policy direction. Programmatic activities are separated into five areas and include:

- Interim Trail Plan Development
- Volunteer Participation
- User Information/Education
- Monitoring of Trail Use and Resource Impacts
- Relationship with Adjacent Landowners

POLICY DIRECTION

State Laws and Agency Rules/Policies: State laws generally applicable to Washington State Parks including minor references to trails are contained in Chapter 79A.05 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). Agency rules directly applicable to trail management in state parks are contained in Chapter 352-32 of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC). Applicable sections include WAC 352-32-070: Use of horses, llamas, sled dogs or similar animals for recreation, and WAC 352-32-075: Use of non-motorized vehicles or similar devices. Agency-level policies that guide management of state trails are contained in the Commission's Non-Motorized Trails Policy approved on June 11, 1999.

Trail Standards: State Parks' staff will work with the Trail Advisory Group to establish clear standards for clearing of brush and maintenance of trail surfaces. Standards will be compliant with the above mentioned agency policies as well all applicable state and federal laws including, but not limited to, those established by the American with Disabilities Act and subsequent revisions. Standards will be determined individually for each trail within the property and be managed as such until future trail planning efforts are completed.

Trail Policies: Existing trails and primitive roadways throughout the park will be managed to the above mentioned standards for shared pedestrian, cycling, and equestrian use. Unless otherwise determined by park staff, no new trails will be planned on the property prior to future, comprehensive park planning efforts. Indications of visitor impacts on natural and cultural resources, as well as potential risks to the safety of trail users will be observed and managed. Should indicators of resource condition, visitor safety, or quality of experience fall below established standards outlined, one or more uses may ultimately be excluded as applicable. Conspicuous signing and other barriers clearly indicating permitted trail uses and closures will be installed and regularly maintained by park staff with volunteer assistance and other trail user groups. Motorized use of park trails is prohibited except where required for trail maintenance and under staff supervision/agreement.

Permitted Trail Uses: Until an Interim Trail Plan is developed, trail uses will be permitted as shown in Figure 1: Initial Trail Identification and Use Designations. This maps shows the trail system within the property, as well as closure of existing trails and primitive roadways leading off the property. Trails without any indicated closures will remain open to hiking, cycling, and equestrian use.

PROGRAMMATIC ACTIVITIES

Development of Interim Trail Plan:

Volunteer Participation: It is essential for a trail plan's success that volunteers participate in its development and implementation. It should be acknowledged however that effective use of volunteers requires coordination and supervision by agency staff. There is currently no "Friends Group" for the Miller Peninsula State Park Property operating under an agreement with State Parks. However future development of such a group is anticipated. Several other not-for-profit groups have stepped forward to assist in the maintenance of trails and to help with any planned future trail development. The Use of volunteers must also be consistent with Commission Policy 82-70-1: Volunteers. Below are listed plan items where volunteer participation is anticipated or highly desirable.

- The Trail Advisory Group will consist of volunteers whom have identified their interest and willingness to participate at the public meeting and will be facilitated by State Parks staff. Park staff will work with TAG to develop standards and develop the Interim Trail Plan which will act as the guiding management plan for the trail system until such time as a more comprehensive park planning effort is undertaken. The group will launch its' efforts in January of 2015 with an anticipated goal of completing the plan by January of 2016.
- Park staff are coordinating with the Back County Horsemen of Washington Peninsula Chapter to develop a working Memorandum of Understanding for trail maintenance throughout the property.

- Park staff will coordinate with the Back Country Horsemen of Washington Peninsula Chapter to *initiate* development of a formal trail user education program including development of trails etiquette/leave no trace brochures and signs/kiosks, public presentations, trail hosts, children's programs, etc.

User Information/Education:

- Agency staff will develop a media notice and social media postings informing the public and potential visitors of this Initial Trail Identification and Designation and opening of the new trailhead to public use once completed.
- Park staff will design, purchase and assemble signage (consistent with the trail signing manual) as identified in Figure 1. The BCHMW have agreed to install these signs as indicated.

Trail User Education Activities:

- Park staff will coordinate with TAG and contact trail user groups to inform them of the Interim Trail Plan upon its completion.
- Park staff will coordinate with the regional Planning Program, TAG, and volunteer groups to *initiate* development of a formal trail user education program including development of trails etiquette/leave no trace brochures, public presentations (if applicable), volunteer work parties, etc.
- Agency staff will coordinate with State Parks Public Affairs Office to develop a press release for newspapers, television, and radio stations to inform potential park visitors of this interim trail use plan.

Monitoring of Trail Use and Resource Impacts:

- Park staff will manage the trail system and monitor visitor safety and user conflicts on all trails within the property and apply management actions as necessary.
- Park staff will coordinate with the agency's Stewardship Program and institute temporary seasonal closures of individual trails or trail segments as necessary if concerns are identified for threatened, endangered, and sensitive wildlife species after consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Temporary closures of this type may be instituted at the discretion of the park manager as provided in WAC 352-32-070 and WAC 352-32-075.

Relationship with Friends Groups and Adjacent Landowners:

- As part of future trail planning, park staff should initiate discussions with landowners adjacent to the park and other stakeholders to assess and formalize existing and/or additional cooperative trail management opportunities.

IMPLEMENTATION

With his signature the Director formally adopts the existing trail network at the Miller Peninsula State Park Property in its existing condition as shown in Figure 1: Initial Trail Identification and Use Designations. As required in WAC, the Director also designates the Miller Peninsula State Park Property trail system appropriate for equestrian and mountain biking uses unless otherwise indicated in Figure 1. The Director takes this action with the intent that an Interim Trail Plan will be developed and maintained until such time as a park master plan or other development plan can be completed.

With the signing of this document, the Director commits to carrying out this effort. However, it should be recognized that unforeseen circumstances or reductions in available resources may affect the agency's ability to complete implementation. In this event, the agency will inform stakeholders of significant changes in the pace or direction of implementation.

Figure 1: Miller Peninsula State Park Property Initial Trail Identification and Use Designation

