Executive Summary

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) is developing a strategy to guide its land acquisitions and park developments in the years to come. The agency’s mission is to connect all Washingtonians to the state’s diverse natural and cultural heritage, and this mission provides the inspiration for the strategy.

The overarching strategic goal is for Washington’s state parks to be recognized as the collection of places and experiences that are distinctly Washington. To achieve that goal, the state park system should include:

- **Places to be:** Connecting people with Washington’s iconic landscapes
- **Stories to know:** Engaging people in authentic Washington stories
- **Things to do:** Providing Washington’s recreational mainstays
- **Ways to grow:** Inviting novices to experience Washington’s outdoors
- **Something for everyone:** Improving the quality of life for all Washingtonians

For each of these goals, State Parks will complete a gap analysis to determine:

- What State Parks has
- Whether it has enough of it
- What State Parks does not have
- Whether another government or nonprofit has it
- Whether another government or nonprofit should provide it instead of State Parks

This gap analysis will be used to identify which undeveloped properties should be developed into new state parks first, which existing state parks should be redeveloped, and which areas should be targeted for new park acquisitions.
Background

For the past 20 years, State Parks land acquisitions have fallen into two main categories:

1. Acquisitions within designated long-term park boundaries inside or adjacent to existing state parks or properties
2. Opportunistic acquisitions of lands for new state parks.

About 90 percent of the acreage acquired by State Parks has been within or adjacent to existing park property. State Parks is developing long-range plans for each of its parks, and these plans include what is called a long-term park boundary. Long-term park boundaries identify the lands that should ideally be managed for park purposes.

In many cases, long-term park boundaries are larger than the current State Parks ownership, meaning the agency would consider purchasing the additional land, accepting it as a donation, or developing a management agreement with the owner. In some cases, existing park properties are found to be inconsistent with park purposes, and those properties are declared suitable for surplus. Long-term park boundaries are developed through a public process known as Classification and Management Planning (CAMP) and are approved by the seven-member State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission).

Occasionally, State Parks has an opportunity to receive or purchase land for a new state park. In most cases, the agency has not intentionally sought out properties for new state parks, but has instead reacted to opportunities as they came up. For example, a landowner may contact State Parks seeking to donate or sell their property to the agency or a land trust may alert State Parks about a property being offered for sale.

Since the Great Recession, some legislators and members of the public have questioned why State Parks continues to acquire lands, since the agency’s reduced budgets have made it difficult to properly care for the parks and properties it already has. In this new political climate, State Parks is no longer able to make so many of its land acquisition decisions opportunistically. With shrinking budgets and increased scrutiny, the agency needs to base its acquisition decisions on clearly described goals and strategies.
New land acquisitions are often held for years or decades before they are developed into state parks. Such state park properties are said to be “held for future development.” Some of the properties currently being held for future development include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Name</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burrows Island</td>
<td>Skagit</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dugualla</td>
<td>Island</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elbow Lake</td>
<td>Thurston</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisk</td>
<td>Spokane</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forks of the Sky</td>
<td>Snohomish</td>
<td>1,383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harstine Island (Fudge Point)</td>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harstine Island (Scott)</td>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loomis Lake</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoko River</td>
<td>Clallam</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Isabella</td>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller Peninsula</td>
<td>Clallam</td>
<td>2,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisqually</td>
<td>Pierce/Thurston</td>
<td>1,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shine Tidelands</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skating Lake</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol Duc</td>
<td>Clallam</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washougal River</td>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choosing which of these properties to develop next is not easy. New state parks cost millions to develop, and State Parks needs to divide its limited capital money wisely between new and existing parks. Such decisions should be based on how well a new park will support the State Parks mission and goals.

Similarly, in many existing developed state parks, most of the facilities are nearing the end of their useful lives. These parks need more than a capital improvement project here or there. They need major park redevelopments, and the agency needs a way to determine which park redevelopments should come first, based on clearly defined goals.

This Statewide Acquisition and Development Strategy is intended to guide State Parks in acquiring, developing, and redeveloping lands in a more intentional and directed manner. And it hopes to do so in a way that inspires and enlists local communities and partners to support and participate in park acquisition and development.
Assumptions

State Parks developed this strategy with the following assumptions:

**Long-Term Park Boundaries:** Since the vast majority of State Parks land acquisitions occur within or adjacent to existing parks, long-term park boundaries adopted by the Commission during a CAMP process will remain the primary guidance for agency land acquisition and disposal. The CAMP process involves a tremendous amount of public outreach and input, opening lines of communication between State Parks, local governments, and adjacent landowners. The process and the product have been very successful, and this strategy assumes that will not change.

**Existing State Parks:** In the strategic planning effort leading up to the State Parks centennial in 2013, the agency reviewed its land holdings park-by park to determine whether each park was consistent with the agency vision. In cases where consistency with the vision was in question, State Parks considered transferring those parks to other public agencies. In almost every case, the public spoke out against such a transfer and against the notion that a park might be inconsistent with the State Parks vision. The process proved to be divisive and created ill will and distrust among those living near the affected parks. In the end, very few parks or properties were transferred to other agencies.

This Statewide Acquisition and Development Strategy assumes that the positioning of existing whole, developed state parks is not being questioned. The CAMP process will still consider whether any properties associated with a park might be surplus to the park’s purpose, but the agency is not seeking to divest of whole, developed state parks.

**System Size:** To continue meeting the needs of all Washingtonians, this new strategy assumes that the size and scope of the state park system will continue to grow and evolve to help address the demands of a growing and changing population. The state population is projected to increase by more than 20 percent in 20 years, and those bigger populations will need more parkland.

**Diversity:** This strategy assumes that the facilities and activities offered by state parks will need to adapt to meet the needs of evolving state demographics and values. Data show that different ethnic groups recreate in different ways. To serve all Washingtonians, state parks will need to provide facilities and activities that appeal to the diverse population of the state.
Another expected demographic shift will be toward an older population. The increase in the state’s population is mainly due to migration. Population growth due to “natural increase” (births > deaths) is slowing. As the state’s population ages, state parks will need to provide facilities and activities that appeal to, and are accessible by, older people.

**Goals**

The goals for the Statewide Acquisition and Development Strategy stem from the State Parks mission, which is focused on connecting Washingtonians to their natural and cultural heritage.

The overarching goal is for Washington’s state park system to be recognized as the collection of places and experiences that are distinctly Washington. In other words, if a Washingtonian were to introduce someone else to the state:

- What kinds of places would they visit?
- What kinds of stories would they tell?
- What makes Washington treasured and unique?

State parks should be the ideal places to connect with what makes Washington special.
The strategy for achieving that vision includes five goals. The Washington State Parks system should be made up of:

- **Places to Be**
  - Connecting people with Washington's iconic landscapes

- **Stories to Know**
  - Engaging people in authentic Washington stories

- **Things to Do**
  - Providing Washington's recreation mainstays

- **Ways to Grow**
  - Inviting novices to experience Washington's outdoors

- **Something for Everyone**
  - Improving the quality of life for all Washingtonians

The following pages provide more detail on each of these goals.
Places to Be

Washington State Parks should seek to acquire and develop places that connect people with the state’s iconic landscapes, including:

- The Palouse
- Dry forests
- Rain forests
- Puget trough lowland forests
- Columbia basin coulees and reservoirs
- Columbia River Gorge
- Channeled scablands
- Shrub-steppe
- Salish Sea shorelines
- Ocean beaches
- Glacial lakes
- Wild rivers
Stories to Know

Washington State Parks should seek to acquire and develop places that engage people in authentic Washington stories, including:

- Ice Age floods
- Native American history and culture
- Lewis and Clark exploration
- Pioneer settlement
- Civil War
- Indian Wars
- Ethnic immigration
- Logging
- Coastal defense
- Depression era
- Hydroelectric power
- Aerospace
- Agriculture
- Mining
- Railroads
- Navigation
**Things to Do**

Washington State Parks should provide places for people to enjoy Washington’s recreational mainstays, including:

- Walking and hiking
- Cycling
- Horseback riding
- Picnicking
- Fishing
- Camping
- Geocaching
- Beach exploring
- Boating
- Skiing
- Climbing
Ways to Grow

Washington State Parks should provide opportunities for recreational novices to get outdoors, experience what Washington has to offer, and progress in their skills. Such opportunities include:

- **Urban gateways.** There should be state parks in proximity to the state’s urban populations, and those parks should provide activities accessible to novices.

- **Multi-park recreation opportunities.** State parks should offer systems of recreational facilities that encourage novices to explore multiple parks. Multi-park opportunities include:
  - Marine parks
  - Water trails
  - Cross-state trails
  - Winter recreation areas
  - Cabins and vacation rentals
Something for Everyone

Washington State Parks should improve the quality of life for all Washingtonians. Some of the benefits that state parks should provide include:

- Health
- Conservation
- Economic development
- Transportation
- Environmental and heritage education
- Community identity
- Intergenerational continuity
Analysis

For each of the five acquisition and development goals, State Parks will analyze:

- **What does State Parks already have?**
  For example, Gingko Petrified Forest State Park includes a shrub-steppe landscape, and Cape Disappointment State Park is a good place to tell the story of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

- **Does State Parks have enough properties that meet each goal, or are more needed?**
  For example, the agency manages a number of parks that include Salish Sea shorelines. Should it continue to acquire shoreline properties?

- **What kinds of properties does State Parks not have?**
  For example, the agency is not yet telling the story of ethnic immigration in Washington. Should it seek out a place to tell this story?

- **Does another government agency have the kinds of properties missing from the State Parks portfolio?**
  For example, volcanos are an iconic Washington landscape, but the federal government provides opportunities to see Mount Rainier, Mount Saint Helens, and Mount Baker.

- **When a gap is identified, would another government agency or nonprofit be better positioned to fill it than State Parks?**
  For example, State Parks is not currently telling the story of aerospace in Washington, but perhaps that story is better told by the Museum of Flight or by local government agencies.

Wherever it makes sense, State Parks will use geographic information systems (GIS) to assist with a gap analysis. For example, the map on the following page shows the distance between state parks that offer bicycle trails. Yellow areas are less than 10 miles from a state park with bicycle trails, and blue areas are more than 80 miles from a state park with bicycle trails. Maps like this can help the agency determine where it might be appropriate to develop new bicycle trails or to purchase property suitable for bicycle trail development.
To better analyze the factors making up the Something for Everyone goal, State Parks has been working with the science-based economic firm Earth Economics to develop a tool to analyze current and proposed park properties. With the tool, one can input basic information and land-cover types for a property, and the tool will estimate:

- Park revenue
- Park visitation
- Tax contributions to the state General Fund
- Recreational benefits
- Health and social benefits
- Ecosystem services

More work is needed to refine the tool, but in the end, it will be used to analyze the benefits that a park or a potential acquisition will offer for the state.
**Strategic Direction**

The strategy to complete a gap analysis and work toward the State Parks acquisition and development goals has two main phases: **initial direction** and **long-term direction**.

**Initial Direction (2016-2019)**

The first effort in this strategy will be to identify a property for new park development from among those currently being held for future development. In 2016, State Parks will submit a 2017-2019 capital budget request for a predesign study for the next new state park without specifying which property will be targeted. Then, using the goals in this strategy, State Parks will establish priorities for the properties being held for future development.

When the properties that best help to achieve one or more of this strategy’s goals are identified, State Parks will communicate with the communities near those properties to explain the benefits that state parks provide and to seek support and partnerships from the communities. State Parks will also seek feedback on the properties from the public statewide. The goal is for the Commission to select the next new state park in 2017. The agency will then use the capital funding to complete a predesign report on the selected park and request development funding for the 2019-2021 biennium.

State Parks will initiate a similar effort to decide which existing state park should be targeted for a major park redevelopment. The agency will request capital funding for a predesign report without specifying a park and then will use the Statewide Acquisition and Development Strategy goals and input from communities and the public to select a park in 2017 for redevelopment. State Parks will then complete the predesign report, and request redevelopment funding for the 2019-2021 biennium.

The initial strategic direction will also focus on refining the park benefits tool developed by Earth Economics and completing a first-run gap analysis using this strategy’s goals to determine:

- What State Parks has
- Whether it has enough of it
- What State Parks does not have
- Whether another government or nonprofit has it
- Whether another government or nonprofit should provide it instead of State Parks
In the next three years, State Parks will also continue work designating long-term park boundaries through the public CAMP process. Currently, approximately 75 percent of the state parks have long-term boundaries, and completing this work will help significantly with land acquisition decisions for the rest of the parks.

**Long-Term Direction (2018 - )**

The long-term strategy will be to complete a CAMP process for every park. Commission-adopted long-term park boundaries will continue to be the primary guidance driving land acquisitions within or adjacent to existing state parks.

State Parks will also continue assembling data to refine the initial gap analysis to target areas of interest to guide new park acquisitions. New park acquisitions will focus on properties that either satisfy several of this strategy’s five goals or that satisfy one or two of them very well. For example, a property might be targeted if it were the best place in the state to tell an important Washington story. Although most new park acquisitions should stem from this strategy, State Parks will continue to remain open to acquiring new chance-of-a-lifetime properties if opportunities arise.

Another long-term goal is to continue using this strategy’s goals to cyclically prioritize and select parks for development or redevelopment. This will allow State Parks to meet the needs of Washington’s growing and shifting population.

Finally, State Parks will use the refined gap analysis to measure the agency’s progress toward its goal to be recognized as the collection of places and experiences that are distinctly Washington.