

Email received: May 8, 2012

Subject: Visions for the future of Washington State Parks

Dear Washington State Parks Stakeholder,

Washington State Parks is in the midst of an extraordinary transformation of programs and finance. As we enter our second century of service, we find ourselves mightily challenged by the task of stewarding an amazing legacy of natural, cultural and recreational resources turned over to our care by previous generations.

During the past five years, State Parks has shrunk the system from 121 to 116 parks, has reduced staff by approximately 200 FTE and has reduced its operating budget by 25%. In the same five years, our funding has decreased from a decades-long funding level of about 70 percent general fund support, to 42 percent last biennium and about 12 percent currently. General fund for State Parks is expected to be at zero in the next biennium.

The 2011 budget proviso passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Gregoire, gave clear direction to the agency:

By August 1, 2012, State Parks must submit a report to the Office of Financial Management detailing its progress toward the goal of making the parks system self-supporting and outlining any additional statutory changes needed for successful implementation.

With our “*Centennial 2013 Plan*” set for a strategic update, and our 2013-15 budget submittal needed on the heels of the above proviso report, State Parks is going to reach out to the public to help us chart our course forward. Ten public meetings are scheduled throughout the state in May and June. In addition, we want to talk with you, our stakeholders, to better understand your questions, suggestions and concerns, so we can provide you the best information we have about the choices we face in programs and finance. The information gained will be used to help us develop a larger transformation strategy intended to be the successor to the Centennial 2013 Plan.

To structure the public outreach effort, State Parks has come up with three alternative “thematic visions” for the future of our system. The alternatives are:

Theme 1: Parks as an Enterprise

Theme 2: Parks as a Community Non-Profit

Theme 3: Parks as a Public Conservation Asset

Each thematic alternative will be described in some detail and discussed at the public meetings, where we will ask a number of critical questions for your consideration. Each theme details an approach that could close the gap between program costs and park financing. But these are only “themes.” Outlining our choices in this fashion will allow us to broaden our thinking about what

we most value about our magnificent park system and how best to sustain it over time. The themes also provide a meaningful structure for public comment now and in the future.

The State Parks and Recreation Commission website (<http://www.parks.wa.gov/Beyond2013/>) is your source for understanding how best to participate in this upcoming public outreach effort. I would like to meet with you and your group on the phone or in person if possible to talk about the critical choices facing the park system and to hear your thoughts on directions you think we should take. Please let me know how State Parks can best meet your needs for information in the coming months.

Thank you so much for your attention and interest in your Washington State Park system.

Regards,
Daniel Farber
Strategic.Planning@parks.wa.gov