

Summary

Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve was created by Congress in 1978 as a unit of the National Park System. However, the Reserve is not a typical national park. It is an experiment in its approach to park management and land protection. Ebey's Landing is the first "historical reserve" in the National Park System—its boundaries surround mostly private land (approximately 85 percent) and it is managed through a partnership. Though most national park units are managed by a superintendent, the Reserve is managed by a nine-member Trust Board comprised of representatives from four units of government—town, county, state, and federal. Given this non-traditional approach, the Reserve presents unique opportunities and challenges to planning, management, public use, Reserve operations, and preservation of significant natural and cultural resources.

Since Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve (Reserve) Reserve was established in 1978, many changes have occurred. The Seattle-Tacoma Metropolitan Area has grown considerably, increasing visitation and residency to central Whidbey Island. Over the years, dairy-based and other types of agriculture have declined within the Reserve while conversion of land to residential use is on the rise. Washington State Department of Transportation improvements along State Route 20—a State Scenic Highway and the main highway through the Reserve—are incrementally changing the historic road patterns and increasing speeds in favor of the commuter at the expense of the park visitor. All these factors affect the ability of the National Park Service and the Trust Board to preserve the rural setting which the enabling legislation seeks to protect: "to preserve and protect a rural community which provides an unbroken historical record from ...19th century exploration and settlement...to the present time."

Other changes have been favorable. Nonprofit organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, the Whidbey-Camano Land Trust, and the Au Sable Institute now own and have protected land within the Reserve, preserving agriculture and protecting open space and unique natural resources. Partnerships have been forged that protect historic buildings and new "niche" agriculture is beginning to appear as economic factors change.

In recent years, additional measures have been taken by Island County to address changing conditions. Some changes have occurred since the initiation of the Reserve's GMP planning process

and are noted in the "Background of the Reserve" chapter.

However, as agriculture continues to decline within the Reserve, whether from the declining viability of farming or through increased residential pressures, over time, it is fully expected that there will continue to be pressure to fragment land into smaller parcels resulting in loss of open space and the associated rural character of the Reserve. Maintaining the nationally significant rural character of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is mandated by Congress and is of the utmost importance.

This document is a final general management plan and environmental impact statement (GMP/EIS) for Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. The GMP provides NPS and Trust Board management with the necessary framework to guide the management of the Reserve for the next 15 to 20 years. The GMP is intended to be a useful, long-term decision-making tool, providing managers with a logical and trackable rationale for decisions about the protection and public use of park resources.

As part of the general management planning process, three alternatives have been developed that address these changes and other issues discussed in the "Purpose and Need" chapter of this GMP. The Preferred Alternative is the Proposed Action and the alternative chosen by the Trust Board and the NPS for implementation. No changes were made to the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) or Alternative C.

An environmental impact statement (EIS) has also been prepared, which outlines the impacts or effects that each of the alternatives will have on the Reserve environment. It also assists managers and the public in assessing the relative merits and effects of any one alternative from the others.

As a partnership park, the success of this plan is not solely determined by the National Park Service; instead, the plan's success depends upon the will and perseverance of all those who have the authority and desire to implement actions within this plan. Final GMP/EIS approval is obtained by the Trust Board recommending the signing of the Record of Decision and the approval by the NPS Regional Director, Pacific West Region. In acknowledgement of the partnership arrangement, the Trust Board will be recommending the adoption of the approved final GMP by the elected officials from the town of Coupeville and Island County as a component of their comprehensive plans. The Reserve's Trust Board also will recommend that State Parks recognize this final GMP and incorporate its actions into its planning documents, as appropriate.

In conjunction with the GMP/EIS, a land protection strategy was produced by a consultant for the Trust Board and some of the key elements of this plan are included within this GMP/EIS. A more detailed land protection plan, which seeks to implement these strategies, will be completed by the National Park Service in consultation with the Trust Board in the near future. Once a draft of the land protection plan is produced, it will be made available for public review and comment.

The Proposed Action

The Preferred Alternative is the Proposed Action for Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. The Trust Board and the National Park Service would respond to new operational and land management realities by enhancing programs, resources, and administrative and visitor facilities. This alternative would focus on promoting agriculture, protecting resources, and providing for greater opportunities for public education and enjoyment.

The NPS would seek increased budget appropriations from the National Park Service operating base to enlarge staff presence at the Reserve. The profile of the Reserve staff would expand from four to nine positions comprised of both Trust Board and NPS employees. This staff increase would be phased over time as funding permits. Staff composition would expand the limited maintenance and resource capabilities and allow for education and interpretive positions and programs.

The Trust Board would adopt a new land protection plan subsequent to publication of this GMP that would better articulate the long-range land protection needs by prioritizing highly valued landscapes within the Reserve. Emphasis would continue to be upon the purchase of conservation easements from willing sellers, augmented by land use protection measures by local government and nonprofits.

The Reserve staff would expand its role in natural resource protection within the Reserve by partnering with other organizations and agencies, when appropriate, on such issues as prairie restoration, roadside vegetation, protection of prime and unique agricultural soils, air and water quality, elimination of exotics and protection of night sky and natural quiet.

Facility improvements would include new information kiosks at three gateway areas into the Reserve and locating a visitor center/contact station in an historic building either in the town of Coupeville or in the historic district to inform the public about the Reserve. This building could also serve as the Reserve's administrative headquarters. This alternative would promote partnerships with others to achieve education and visitor goals.

To promote agriculture within the Reserve, the NPS would seek to exchange NPS-owned Farm I and Farm II to private owners for additional protection on other properties within the Reserve. The NPS-owned historic buildings on these properties would be stabilized and preserved (Jacob Ebey House and Blockhouse) and the Ferry House rehabilitated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The NPS would retain

protective easements on the Rockwell House and Reuble Farmstead, as well as on the adjoining farmlands, before they are exchanged.

Once Farm II (the Reuble Farmstead) is exchanged, the Reserve's maintenance facility would need to be relocated. The new owner of Farm II would be required to construct a new maintenance building to NPS specifications adjacent to the Sheep Barn at the West Ridge Property, as part of the exchange. The West Ridge Property would remain in NPS ownership.

Congressional legislation would be sought to provide for a modest boundary expansion of the Reserve to incorporate additional prairie, and wetlands. These additions would include the remainder of the wetland system around Crockett Lake, the Naval Air Station-Whidbey Outlying Landing Field not currently within the Reserve, additional portions of Smith Prairie. Any boundary changes proposed would be fully coordinated with willing property owners and managers.

The Trust Board would work with the public, the Island County Marine Resources Committee, and other agencies to protect the coastal waters adjacent to the Reserve.

Three development concept plans have been included at the end of this alternative showing detailed treatment for the proposed South Gateway, the Ferry House, and a portion of the West Ridge property.

In addition to corrections and editorial changes, several modifications have been made to the GMP based upon public comments and changes by the planning team. The draft GMP recommended that Island County adopt a regulatory overlay zone over the entire unincorporated portion of the Reserve for the purposes of implementing design review and other land use controls to help fulfill the Reserve's mission. Acknowledging county opposition along with some landowner opposition to this recommendation, the planning team decided to strike all language relating to an overlay zone. The GMP has also been updated to include historic preservation and land use measures adopted by Island County since the initiation of the GMP.

A second change in response to public comment involved the establishment of a marine science center. The Reserve recognizes the efforts by others and not the NPS to establish a marine science center within the Reserve and would encourage those on-going efforts in the Preferred Alternative.

Three changes have been made to proposed staffing in the Preferred Alternative. First, a seasonal interpreter position has been eliminated, reducing the total number of proposed staff additions over the next 20 years to five additional staff. For clarity, the GMP has separated out the personnel costs from support costs, such as leased space, supplies, vehicles, and equipment. In addition, the roles and functions of the NPS and Trust Board positions have been better defined and to allow



some flexibility in filling interim positions.

Since release of the draft GMP, Bell Farm has been removed from the proposed boundary change in both Alternatives B and C at the owner's request. Properties still within the proposed boundary addition would include Whidbey Naval Air Station—Outlying Landing Field, a remnant of Smith Prairie at Au Sable Institute and the remaining wetlands adjacent to Crockett Lake.

Finally, the Preferred Alternative in the Draft GMP called for the NPS maintenance facility currently at the Reuble Farmstead at Farm II to move when the farms are exchanged back into the private sector and the NPS would partner with others for a maintenance facility. Since no partnering opportunities have been found, or seem reasonably foreseeable in the future, this concept was changed. The agreement with the NPS and the Reserve's Trust Board is to require the new owner of the farms as part of the exchange to construct a new maintenance building to NPS standards adjacent to the Sheep Barn at the West Ridge property. The Sheep Barn would be rehabilitated using preservation funds for dry storage. The West Ridge property would stay in NPS ownership and

be used as the core interpretation area for the Jacob Ebey House, the Cottage offices, and NPS maintenance.



Coupeville at Dawn, Whidbey Island, ca. 2004. Photo by Randy Emmons. Courtesy of the Coupeville Arts Center.



Penn Cove at Dawn, Whidbey Island, ca. 2004. Photo by Randy Emmons. Courtesy of the Coupeville Arts Center.



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*Mussell Farm, Whidbey Island,
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