



NPS Photo by Kevin Bacher

Nisqually To Paradise Road Corridor Management Plan Summer 2021 Newsletter

Concerned About Congestion? We Want To Hear From You!

Last summer we invited you to join us in envisioning the future of the Nisqually to Paradise Road Corridor at Mount Rainier National Park. Your feedback was instrumental in helping the planning team develop the range of preliminary strategies represented below. This newsletter presents ideas for different ways of providing safe and efficient transportation and a variety of high-quality experiences to visitors within the park while ensuring the protection of park resources and values.

We want to hear your ideas and questions on these preliminary strategies! This newsletter lays out many ways to stay involved and access information, including attending our virtual public meeting on **August 5, 2021**.

Thank you for your continued interest and support in this process!

- Mount Rainier National Park Planning Team.

Purpose of This Comment Period

We are interested in hearing from you and receiving your ideas and questions on the preliminary strategies. **We will be accepting feedback until September 14, 2021.**

Please submit comments electronically by visiting the National Park Service (NPS) Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/NisquallyCorridor>. Once on the website, select "Open for Comment" to provide your thoughts on the preliminary strategies.

Stay Involved!

Want to learn more?

Visit the project website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/nisquallycorridor>) and StoryMap (<https://arcg.is/88v8W>). A virtual public meeting is scheduled for **August 5, 2021**. The NPS planning team will share information about the ideas described in this newsletter and be available to respond to questions. Check the project website for a complete list of public meetings and instructions on how to connect to the meeting.

If you would like the National Park Service to notify you when the next public comment period opens and with related project updates, please provide your email address on this [form](https://bit.ly/3cuMBfh), <https://bit.ly/3cuMBfh>.

Key Issues

This plan is needed to meet the changing needs of park visitors and to sustainably support positive visitor experiences. Mount Rainier grows in popularity each year and experienced a 30% increase in visitation between 2008 and 2018. Astoundingly, 70% of annual visitation occurs between July and September, and most use is concentrated in a small number of destinations including the Paradise area. This management plan is needed to address the following current issues within the Nisqually Corridor:

- Quality of the visitor's experience from arriving to leaving the park.
- Traffic congestion leading up to the park entrances and on the Nisqually and Paradise Roads.
- Congestion in parking lots.
- Quality of the experience at visitor facilities, scenic viewpoints, and along trails.
- Damage to subalpine meadows, streamside vegetation, and other natural resources.
- Protection of culturally significant park features like roads, trails, and bridges.

Goals of The Plan

This plan aims to achieve the following goals:

- Reduce roadway congestion and improve the visitor experience.
- Appropriately disperse visitors throughout the many key destinations in the corridor and the park.
- Provide adequate trip planning and crowding condition information to visitors.
- Align public expectations with availability of resources or infrastructure.
- Enable visitors to easily navigate and find parking in the corridor.
- Restore and maintain trails and meadows in the corridor to desired conditions.
- Preserve and interpret the historic integrity of the cultural landscape and significant transportation features.
- Examine current and potential visitor opportunities and develop long-term strategies for providing safe access, connecting visitors to key visitor experiences, and managing use.
- Incorporate best practices for managing visitor use to protect resources and promote high-quality visitor experiences while meeting legal requirements.

Plan Components

This plan will apply the visitor use management framework to ensure that decisions about transportation and visitor access to the park are consistent with protecting and maintaining desired conditions for resources and experiences. For additional information on the visitor use management framework, please see: <https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/>.

Potential Strategies

The Nisqually to Paradise Corridor project team has been working to develop options for management based on public and stakeholder input and feedback from all levels of the National Park Service. These ideas would be designed to help protect the park's fundamental resources and values and improve visitor access and opportunities.

For each of these strategies, we are currently evaluating:

- **Viability:** How this strategy will help us resolve key issues in the corridor; how this strategy will help us meet the project goals.
- **Feasibility:** How much this strategy will cost and the potential source of funding, including whether user fees would be required and which resources will be needed to implement this strategy.
- **Desirability:** When and where this strategy would be most useful; how much this strategy would improve visitors' experience and/or resource conditions, and whether there are likely to be any trade-offs, for example additional fees, trip planning, or wait times to access the corridor.

No single solution will meet all project goals and resolve all issues. We are seeking your feedback on the management options described below as a part of our evaluation. Please see the following to learn about some potential strategies!

Reservations and Timed Entry

Issue/Opportunity: One of the project goals is to provide safe and clear traffic flow and parking and to address vehicle congestion at the Nisqually Entrance station, along the road to Paradise, and in popular parking lots. Some individuals and stakeholders have encouraged the National Park Service to consider reservations and other timed-entry systems to better manage the distribution and flow of vehicles into the park. Based on other public lands and recreational resources, well-designed reservation systems have been shown to increase the quality of visitor experiences, proactively distribute use across time and space, and serve as a useful trip planning tool for visitors.

Potential Strategies:

- Timed entry for corridors (e.g., between Nisqually and Paradise)
- Parking lot reservations for specific areas (e.g., Paradise) or specific lots (e.g., Paradise Upper Lot)
- Your ideas?

Trip Planning

Issue/Opportunity: Trip planning and travel forecasting tools help improve visitor experiences by giving visitors the information when and where they need it to make informed choices about visiting.

Potential Strategies:

- Improve visitor orientation and information outside the park, such as self-guided information.
- Improve trip planning information to set visitor expectations. Examples of trip planning tools include park website and app; social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; use partnerships to disseminate information; hold a media press campaign, etc.
- Your ideas?

Winter Use

Issue/Opportunity: Winter visitation, though not as busy as summer at Mount Rainier, has increased in recent years, resulting in congestion on icy roads and competition for the reduced parking capacity during peak weekends. Winter offers a different experience, with snow-covered landscapes and winter recreation activities such as snowshoeing, sledding, and skiing.

Potential Strategies:

- Add an additional gate at Cougar Rock to have the option to open the road segment between Longmire and Cougar Rock on days when the road to Paradise does not open.
- Expand camping season at Cougar Rock.
- Your ideas?

Paradise

Issue/Opportunity: At Paradise, we are managing for high-quality access where natural ecological functions, components, and processes are preserved and maintained. As we consider strategies for this area, we want to think about how we can provide an experience where visitors could move along trails relatively freely, experience park resources near developed facilities, and not be impeded by others.

Potential Strategies:

- Improve trails and directional signage throughout the Paradise area. This could be achieved by adding additional signage and information in the lower parking lot to increase the number of places visitors can start Paradise hikes and get information.
- Formally convert portions of Paradise picnic area to day-use parking to expand parking opportunities.
- Designate some parking areas as day-use only or overnight use only. For example, all backpacker, climber, and/or inn guest parking use could be moved to the lower parking lot, or portions of the upper lot could be designated for "day-use only."
- Your ideas?

Cougar Rock Picnic Area

Issue/Opportunity: While there is a net parking shortage in the Nisqually to Paradise Road Corridor during peak hours of typically busy summer days, there are often unoccupied parking spaces in Cougar Rock Picnic Area Lot.

Potential Strategies:

- Use this area as trailhead parking for the Wonderland Trail, and build a trail that goes from Cougar Rock to Carter Falls.
- Redesign picnic area to serve as remote parking for a potential shuttle (see Shuttle Ideas section).
- Redesign a portion of the lot to provide additional campsites in this area of the park to expand camping availability in the park.
- Your ideas?



Westside Road

Issue/Opportunity: Because of several decades of severe flooding damage on Westside Road, private vehicle access has been restricted since 1989 and is now limited to a three-mile section of Westside Road from Nisqually Road to Dry Creek. The National Park Service re-examines the hazards in this area every few years. If more road sections could safely be open to vehicle traffic, what would you like that access to look like?

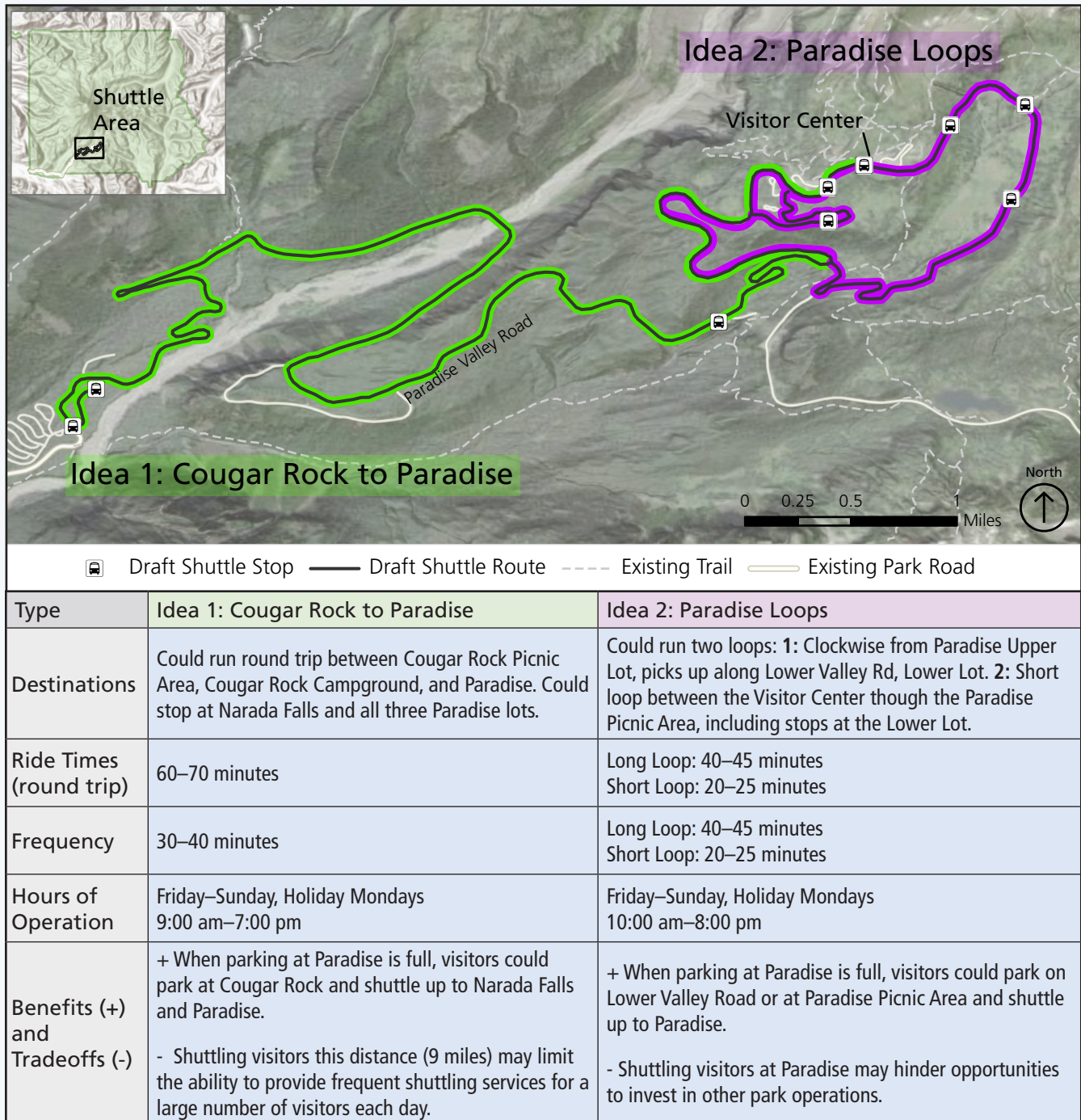
Potential Strategies:

- Road-based tours of this area.
- Your ideas?



Shuttle Ideas

Shuttles are being considered to help visitors move around the Paradise area without relying on personal vehicles. These systems are not common within the national park system because they require a significant investment in operating costs. Shuttles may be considered in situations where they are feasible and help the park achieve resource protection and visitor experience goals. It is important to note that the National Park Service must evaluate many factors to determine the feasibility of a shuttle system, and a system may be determined infeasible even if there is strong public support for one.



Shuttle information is in conceptual (idea) phase only. There are no shuttles in operation at Mount Rainier.

What Do You Think?

Submit Comments

Summer 2021 Public Comment Period: through September 14

Visit the project website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/NisquallyCorridor> to share your ideas and questions. Your input will help refine these preliminary concepts for analysis later this year. We are seeking your responses to the following questions:

1. What questions do you have about these ideas (reservations, trip planning, shuttles, etc.)? Please share them so we can address these questions in the next phase of analysis.
2. How would these ideas (reservations, trip planning, shuttles, etc.) influence your visit to Mount Rainier?
3. What information do you think the planning team should consider when analyzing these ideas?
4. What tools do you use to help plan your trip to Mount Rainier? How could these tools be improved, and where should this information be provided?
5. Based on your desired experiences at Mount Rainier, which combination of the ideas do you think best achieve the purpose of the plan? Which do not, and why?
6. Are there other ideas that should be considered and analyzed that are not already presented? What is missing, and why should it be considered?
7. What other comments or suggestions do you have?



Planning Schedule

The National Park Service is in the second phase of a three-phase planning process (see graphic below). The anticipated schedule for project milestones and opportunities for public input are as follows.

**WE ARE
HERE!**

Phase 1: Summer 2019 – Winter 2020

- Define purpose and need for the project
- Initiate civic engagement

Phase 2: Winter 2020 – Fall 2021

- Explore potential strategies
- Request public input to inform plan development

Phase 3: Fall 2021 – Summer 2022

- Refine strategies, conduct analysis, and draft plan
- Hold public meetings and civic engagement events
- Finalize plan

