



WELCOME

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ross Lake National Recreation Area (NRA) is a unit of the National Park System and is managed by the National Park Service (NPS). It is managed as one unit of the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, which also includes North Cascades National Park (north and south units), and Lake Chelan National Recreation Area. The North Cascades NPS Complex is located deep in the northernmost reaches of the Cascades Range in Washington State, with its northern boundary forming the international border with Canada. Ross Lake National Recreation Area is within Washington's Second Congressional District in Whatcom and Skagit Counties.

DESCRIPTION OF ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Ross Lake National Recreation Area was established by Congress on October 2, 1968 “in order to provide for the public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment of portions of the Skagit River and Ross, Diablo, and Gorge Lakes, together with the surrounding lands, and for the conservation of the scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment of such lands and waters” (82 Stat. 926) (Public Law 90-544). The purpose of Ross Lake National Recreation Area is to complement North Cascades National Park and conserve the scenic, natural, and cultural values of the Upper Skagit River Valley and surrounding wilderness, including the hydroelectric reservoirs and associated developments, for outdoor recreation and education.

Ross Lake National Recreation Area is the most accessible part of the North Cascades NPS Complex. Ross Lake NRA protects 116,798 acres and is the corridor for scenic Washington State Route 20, also known as the North Cascades Highway. It includes three reservoirs: Ross Lake, Diablo Lake, and Gorge Lake. These reservoirs also serve as water gateways to more remote areas. Ringed by mountains and glaciers, 69% percent of Ross Lake NRA is part of the federally designated Stephen Mather Wilderness established in 1988 with another 4% percent as potential wilderness. The Pyramid Lake and Big Beaver Research Natural Areas are located within Ross Lake NRA and were designated for their prime natural resources and processes. Ross Lake NRA offers many outdoor recreation opportunities along the upper reaches of the Skagit River and between the north and south units of North Cascades National Park.

Ross Lake NRA is distinguished by two very different areas set within the North Cascades NPS Complex. The first area is characterized as a scenic byway corridor along the North Cascades Highway from the western entrance into Ross Lake NRA, beside the

free-flowing Skagit River, to the eastern entrance in the mountains beyond Ross Dam. This area stretches 28 miles and traverses lowland riparian zones along the Skagit River, past the Newhalem Townsite and the Seattle City Light hydroelectric facilities, below Ruby Mountain, and up beyond the reservoirs to the east side of the North Cascade Mountains. Many visitor opportunities exist along this corridor including day-hiking, river and lake boating, overnight drive-in camping, visitor information centers, the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center, and several trailheads that lead into the north and south units of North Cascades National Park. The Seattle City Light hydroelectric facilities which supply approximately one fourth of Seattle's current power needs are located within this corridor. These facilities include Gorge Dam, Diablo Dam, Ross Dam, power lines, powerhouses, and several associated penstocks that bore through mountains and hillsides. The hydroelectric facilities and portions of the townsites at Newhalem and Diablo comprise the “Skagit River and Newhalem Creek Hydroelectric Projects” Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996. This popular scenic byway is the northernmost route across the Cascades and was designated a Washington State Scenic Byway and National Forest Byway in 1984.

The second distinct area of Ross Lake NRA is Ross Lake proper and its environs. This area stretches from Ross Dam northward approximately 20 miles to the Canadian border and reservoir headwaters at Hozomeen. Vehicular access to Ross Lake is limited to the Ross Dam parking area from the U.S. side and to the Hozomeen area from Canada. Otherwise, this large swathe of land and water is only accessible only by foot, stock, boat, and air. Significant visitor use features in this area include Ross Lake Resort, comprised of concession-operated floating cabins at the southern end Ross Lake, long distance trails such as the East Bank Trail, boat-in and walk-in back-country campsites, and the developed campground at Hozomeen. This area is characterized by the open serene waters of Ross Lake surrounded by scenic mountain wilderness.

Ross Lake NRA is part of the North Cascades NPS Complex which spans the Cascade Crest from the wet temperate rainforest of the west side to the dry ponderosa pine ecosystem of the east. The Complex encompasses landscapes with over 9,000 feet of vertical relief. This results in a high diversity of plants, over 1,600 species so far identified, and many other organisms adapted to a wide spectrum of habitats. Within Ross Lake NRA, the Big Beaver and Thunder Creek watersheds contain supreme examples of remnant old-growth forests dominated by cedar and Douglas fir trees.

The geologically young mountains, glaciers and streams of the North Cascades NPS Complex lie near a dynamic interface of tectonic plates and provide an opportunity to study geologic processes unfolding through time. Geologists and others come here to seek greater understanding of global climate change, mountain building and erosion, volcanism, glaciation, stream dynamics, and more. Ruby Mountain and Hozomeen Mountain are the two highest peaks in Ross Lake NRA. The Skagit River and its tributary streams comprise the largest watershed draining into Puget Sound. Variation in elevation, soil types, rainfall and exposure combine to form eight distinctive life zones, from the lowland forests and wetlands to the alpine peaks and glaciers. Located within Ross Lake NRA, the Skagit River is the only Puget Sound tributary to support all native species of anadromous salmonids and hosts one of the highest concentrations of wintering bald eagles in the lower 48 states.

Evidence of human settlement and use of the North Cascades NPS Complex spans over 9,500 years of cultural and technological development. Humans have adapted to the changing climates and environments at all elevations of the North Cascades. Pre- and post-contact archeological sites within Ross Lake NRA include the Newhalem rockshelter, campsites, quarries, and resource use areas. Early historic resources beginning in the late 1800s, such as homesteads, mining sites, and the Desolation Fire Lookout illustrate pioneering activities, resource extraction, and early tourism and recreation.

Beginning in the early 1900s, Seattle City Light began developing their hydroelectric facilities, first with Newhalem, then Gorge, Diablo and Ross. In 1972 the North Cascades Highway was completed, connecting the Skagit and Methow Valleys.

Regional Context

Ross Lake NRA, as part of the North Cascades NPS Complex, is the core of over two million acres of federally designated wilderness. It is one of many publically owned and protected properties within the region. Others include the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest to the east and south, and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest to the west, all managed by the United States Forest Service. In Canada, Chilliwack Lake Provincial Park, Skagit Valley Provincial Park, and Manning Provincial Park are directly north of Ross Lake NRA and are managed by the British Columbia Parks.

Designated wilderness adjacent to the North Cascades NPS Complex contributes to the extensive nature of the North Cascades ecosystem, making it part of the largest contiguous designated wilderness in Washington State and one the largest in the lower 48 states. Contiguous designated wildernesses includes: Mount Baker, Pasayten, Noisy-Diobsud, Lake Chelan-Sawtooth, Glacier Peak, Henry M. Jackson, and Wild Sky wildernesses.

The closest communities to Ross Lake NRA are Marblemount to the west and Winthrop to the east. Within Ross Lake NRA, year-round residents live and work in Newhalem and Diablo to provide operational functions for the Seattle City Light and to support NPS and county services.

The context for this plan is affected by adjacent land uses and other planning projects that are occurring outside Ross Lake NRA. Management direction and activities in the two other units of North Cascades NPS Complex (North Cascades National Park and Lake Chelan National Recreation Area), the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests, British Columbia Parks, Seattle City Light areas, as well as other public and privately owned areas in the region will have broad effects on conditions and use in Ross Lake NRA. The decisions made for this general management plan will affect resources throughout the region, just as decisions made by other governmental agencies and land owners will affect management of Ross Lake NRA. For more information about plans and planning projects in the region, an annotated list of plans for adjacent lands is located at the end of Chapter 3.

HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF THE NORTH CASCADES NPS COMPLEX

Long before Ross Lake NRA was created, the “terra incognita” of the North Cascades was actually a well-known region, used and lived in by the native people for at least 9,500 years. The abundant natural resources of the mountains helped to sustain these people on both a seasonal and permanent basis. In more recent times, the past 5,000 years, evidence shows the Upper Skagit, Chilliwack, Lower Thompson, and Chelan people exploited mountain resources as they traveled through the valleys and mountain passes of the North Cascades, creating corridors of commerce and using the collected resources for trading purposes.

Euro-american exploration of the enigmatic territory in and around the North Cascades came much later, beginning with coastal expeditions in the 18th century, followed by inland expeditions first penetrating via the rivers and then into the mountains themselves. By 1820, the first recorded journey into today’s national park complex was accomplished. Fur trappers were the first to spread knowledge of the region to anglo-americans, and miners, loggers and eventually homesteaders followed in their footsteps, all realizing they could extract a living from the resources of the area. Simultaneously, the federal government expressed an interest in the remote region and assigned military personnel to conduct general reconnaissances there, as did private railroad concerns, all in an effort to improve transportation and communication networks in the growing territory and to take advantage of the abundant natural resources.

From the 1880s on, both miners and homesteaders claimed the loamy river bottomlands along the Skagit River. There were 10 known homesteaders along the upper Skagit River, though only three filed homestead claims between 1889 and 1910 to gain full title to their lands. Over time, the squatters abandoned their efforts and claims to the land, as the federal government aggressively asserted its ownership of the acreage after the passage of the Forest Reserve Clause of 1891, wherein President Benjamin Harrison authorized the establishment of forest reserves throughout the country. In 1897, the Washington Forest Reserve was created, one of the largest under a Presidential Proclamation. In 1905, the forest reserves were transferred into the Bureau

of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture, and the newly created United States Forest Service (USFS) was charged with protecting these lands from illegal settlement and other uses not officially sanctioned. The USFS’s credo was “the greatest good for the greatest number” and the agency was led by a trained professional forester named Gifford Pinchot. Over time, the forest reserves became national forests in name, and their vast expanses were divided into management units with different forest supervisors watching over these public lands.

The primary function of the USFS was to ensure the nation had a reliable and sufficient wood supply. To that end, the agency built roads, lookouts, and trails, all in an effort to protect the forests from fire and illegal cutting. The agency also surveyed and mapped the backcountry of the region, further transforming the mostly unknown territory into one that both exploiters and recreationists could enjoy. Ranger stations were built in the front country so forest rangers could have an office, storage and residence from which they oversaw the operations of the forest. Additionally, backcountry ranger and guard stations were built to assist rangers in monitoring activities in the backcountry. Timber sales, land surveys, fire protection, and trail and telephone line construction and maintenance were all aspects of a forest rangers work. The infrastructure created by the USFS left an indelible mark on the lands that were to become a national park complex.

Recreation was not a major concern for the USFS before the 1930s because of competition from special interest groups representing mining, timber, water and grazing. But as the agency watched their forest lands become national parks elsewhere in the country, recreation quickly became a use that the USFS made a priority. With that change of perspective, more trails and backcountry shelters were built to accommodate this new use.

Another new user of lands in the upper Skagit River basin was Seattle City Light (SCL). Beginning in the late 1910s, SCL embarked on an ambitious hydroelectric project to supply the growing city of Seattle with inexpensive and reliable electricity via a hydroelectric project. SCL not only transformed the upper river from a wild, free-flowing watercourse into a tame and predictable series of three lakes, but it also altered the wilderness by introducing foreign elements into a relatively pristine landscape. SCL employees relocated from metropolitan Seattle to a company town called Newhalem, and less than

a decade later, a second company town, Diablo, was built to accommodate the growing number of workers needed for the enormous undertaking of the dam project. Paved streets and sidewalks, electric lights, houses, garages, a store, manicured gardens, and other amenities of civilization were brought in over time, forever altering the appearance of the Skagit River corridor. In 1924, the first of a multi-phased hydroelectric project began with the starting of the Gorge Powerhouse generators. By then, the drilling for Diablo Canyon dam was underway, and when finished in 1930, it was the highest dam in the world.

The establishment of North Cascades National Park Service Complex is a chronicle of the conflict between those who loved the land and extracted its resources and those who loved the land and wanted to preserve its wildness for future generations. From the time the first park proposals appeared in the 1890s until the park was actually created in 1968, the North Cascades have been contested terrain. That contest has centered on how the range should be managed, and the preservationists were pitted against the utilitarian users of the mountains.

The history of the park's establishment evolved through three periods, beginning first with the Progressive Era, 1890s-1920s, where the idea of a national park emerged during the conservation movement but was defeated due to the rift between the economic interests and preservationists. The 2nd phase was during the New Deal Era, where the National Park Service submitted a proposal for a park only to see it defeated by a well-organized opposition still reeling from the establishment of Olympic National Park in 1938. The final stage of the movement to create a park in the North Cascades came in the aftermath of World War II with the rise of the modern environmental movement and the desire to preserve remaining areas of wilderness. After considerable compromise between all the parties, including the USFS, NPS, environmentalists, and economic interests, Congress created this national park complex composed of a national park (two units), and two national recreation areas. Ross Lake NRA was intended to provide for public outdoor recreational use and conservation of scenic, scientific, historic and other values, but it also provided for the development and operation of hydroelectric projects, the use of renewable natural resources, and mineral development, the latter a gesture to the many privately owned mineral claims in place in the North Cascades. The many years

of controversy revolving around how these forest lands, and now park lands, should be managed and maintained continues today, with environmentalists, recreationists, hydroelectric facility managers, miners, and others all advocating for their particular values and needs.

Following over 80 years of contentious debate about the basic philosophy of forest land management and protection, the creation of the park came at a time of dynamic change in the psyche of the American people. This time of change and turmoil led to many of the ongoing management challenges of the new park.

The reasons for recommending the creation of the park, as described by the 1965 North Cascades Study report, highlighted not only the magnificence and grandeur of the environment but also the need to provide access and infrastructure as well as economic development.

The National Park Service unit that resulted from enactment of Public Law 90-544 presented a different and very complex picture, unique in organization (having both national park lands and national recreation areas in a single administrative unit). The park was one of the few units created at this time primarily for its natural resources. This view reflected the new environmental awareness that, born in conflict, was beginning to prevail. This awareness led to park managers recognizing and adopting ecological principle-based resource management. This resource management paradigm led to support for ecological research that, it was believed, could maintain or re-create the "... (environmental) condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by white man", thereby producing a "... reasonable illusion of primitive America"(Leopold Report, 1963).

The first managers of the park were charged with not only creating the administrative direction of the park, but also shaping the transition from the prevailing USFS multiple mandate management to the more restrictive mandates of the NPS. The first managers of the park needed to not only implement the policies of the NPS, but also present them in a manner which would allow the citizens of surrounding communities who had accessed and used the lands for generations to embrace the new, more restrictive environmental preservation ethic. The managers of the park were not always successful in accomplishing this daunting task.

In 1970, the NPS management team completed a draft master plan for the area. It called for the two national recreation areas to be managed as wilderness thresholds and for their great recreational potential. Ross Lake NRA would be a gateway to access the park's wilderness lands. State Route 20, which would help provide this access, was scheduled to be completed in 1972. The master plan called for four aerial tramways to get visitors into areas otherwise not available unless backpacking or climbing. At the time, trams were seen as a means of reducing road building in parks. After public hearings were held, the draft plan eventually dropped all of the tramway proposals except the Ruby Mountain and Arctic Creek tram. Ruby Tram was particularly controversial because it was intended to be the most developed area in Ross Lake NRA, with eating facilities, parking and interpretation occurring where the tram and highway met.

Another controversial development proposed in the draft master plan was for Roland Point on the east shore of Ross Lake. A large-scale waterfront development was considered, including an overnight lodge, marina, and campground, to serve the multitude of automobile tourists traveling to the park. Many, including some members of the Congressional delegation, saw Roland Point as critical to the park's success. Ross Lake NRA would become a model of visitor dispersion and make the park 'people friendly'.

Simultaneous to the draft master plan release, the park superintendent released the wilderness recommendation boundaries in 1970. The controversial nature of these proposed boundaries kept these boundaries, which were changing regularly due to lands being purchased and private enclaves being eliminated, from becoming official until 1988 when Congress designated the North Cascades NPS Complex's wilderness by an official act. The language of the bill helped resolve numerous management concerns, including those surrounding the hydroelectric developments and the use of natural resources in Ross Lake NRA.

The North Cascades have a long history of hydroelectric power production and the centerpiece of it all is Seattle City Light's (SCL) Skagit River Hydroelectric Project, located in Ross Lake NRA. The project has three dams—Gorge, Diablo and Ross—and three reservoirs with the same names. Dealing with SCL and its plans to expand its power production proved to be one of the most contentious episodes in the history of the new park.

The main focus for SCL was to increase the height of Ross Dam, which would have great ramifications for how the NPS managed Ross Lake NRA. Beginning in the late 1960s, SCL moved forward with its plans for High Ross. This project would have flooded additional lands in British Columbia (BC), Canada, flooding most of the Skagit River in BC. Approved by the International Joint Commission in 1942, BC government tried to back out of the agreement in the 1950s, and by the 1960s, with pressure to create the new North Cascades park, further stalling of the project occurred.

The contentious High Ross Dam proposal dragged on into the 1980s, with environmentalists lining up on both sides of the border to stop the project from moving forward. A particular issue revolved around the flooding of Big Beaver Valley, which was considered an irreplaceable laboratory of nature and one of the most ecologically significant sites in western Washington for studying a bottom-land cedar environment.

Legal suits and appeals resulted in an agreement between Seattle and BC in 1984, ending a 20 year struggle. The accompanying treaty between the U.S. and Canada expires in is good through 2066, with Canada still controlling the future of Ross Lake. This treaty bonded the two countries with the establishment of the Skagit Environmental Endowment Fund of \$5 million for the enhancement of recreational opportunities in, and environmental protection of, the area above Ross Dam. The fund is administered by a joint commission known as the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission, and includes members from tribes, the USA, and Canada.



Seattle City Light's hydroelectric facilities have a long history in the upper Skagit River basin.

In 1977, SCL's license to operate the Skagit Hydroelectric Project, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) #553, had expired. The High Ross Dam controversy had delayed SCL's relicensing of the Skagit Project but FERC allowed SCL to operate on an annual license until this could be resolved.

The NPS submitted a mitigation package which proved to be effective during the negotiation forums. Fisheries, recreation and aesthetics, wildlife, erosion, and cultural resources were the five forums created by SCL for negotiation. Meetings required much time of NPS park and regional office staff, as each forum was charged with developing both an agreement and a mitigation plan. SCL agreed to the mitigation package.

Relicensing and settlement agreements were a legal process, and during the final months of negotiations between lawyers and technical representatives of the various federal and state agencies and interveners, participants on both sides were concerned people might break ranks, jeopardizing the entire relicensing effort. In September 1990, all parties signed a preliminary agreement which was non-binding; the signing of the official settlement by all parties occurred on April 26, 1991. The agreement called for SCL to provide \$100 million for mitigation over a 30 year period for a variety of facilities and activities, and it did allow SCL to maintain that High Ross Dam was still viable and included it in the license. This agreement and the new license for the Skagit Project was had to be approved by FERC, which, after many additional meetings, hearings, and negotiations later, occurred on June 26, 1996 May 16, 1995, when FERC issued an order for the Skagit River Project's new license. With the relicensing of the Skagit Project, a new era was launched in the management of Ross Lake NRA. The license expires in 2025, and the relicensing process will begin in approximately 2015.

In 1996, the "Skagit River and Newhalem Creek Hydroelectric Projects" Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The District original listing included more than 30 contributing resources, such as Diablo Dam, Gorge Powerhouse, and historic houses and structures related to the Skagit and Newhalem Hydroelectric Project. The National Register nomination was updated in 2010 and the District now encompasses more than 80 contributing resources, including Ross Dam and Powerhouse.

Legislation

North Cascades National Park, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, and Ross Lake National Recreation Area (collectively referred to as the North Cascades National Park Service Complex) were established by Public Law 90-544, October 2, 1968. According to this legislation, the purpose of North Cascades National Park is:

... to preserve for the benefit, use and inspiration of present and future generations certain majestic mountain scenery, snow fields, glaciers, alpine meadows, and other unique natural features [16 U.S.C. §90]

The legislation further stated that the purpose of the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and the Ross Lake National Recreation Area is:

... to provide for the public outdoor recreation use ... and for the conservation of the scenic, scientific, historic and other values contributing to the public enjoyment [16 U.S.C. §90a & 90a-1]

The legislation (as amended) provided for development and operation of certain hydroelectric projects, the use of renewable natural resources, and mineral development.

Administration of the National Park System has been further clarified as follows:

The authorization of activities shall be construed and the protection, management, and administration of these areas shall be conducted in light of the high public value and integrity of the National Park System and shall not be exercised in derogation of the values and purposes for which these various areas have been established, except as may have been or shall be directly and specifically provided by Congress [16 U.S.C. §1a-1].

The Stephen Mather Wilderness, comprised of 642,332 acres or 94% percent of the park and recreation areas, was established by the Washington Park Wilderness Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-668). The 1964 Wilderness Act defined Wilderness as follows:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area

where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this chapter an area of underdeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticed; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, educational, scenic, or historical value [16 U.S.C. §1131].

- to clearly define resource conditions and visitor uses and experiences to be achieved in Ross Lake NRA
- to provide a framework for NPS managers to use when making decisions about how to best protect Ross Lake NRA's resources, how to provide quality visitor experiences, how to manage visitor use, and what kinds of facilities, if any, to develop in or near Ross Lake NRA
- to ensure that this foundation and plan for decision-making has been developed in consultation with the public, interested stakeholders and adopted by the NPS leadership after an adequate analysis of the benefits, impacts, and economic costs of alternative courses of action

Legislation establishing the National Park Service as an agency (the Organic Act of 1916) and the range of laws governing its management provides the fundamental direction for the administration of Ross Lake NRA and other units and programs of the National Park System. This GMP is intended to build on these laws and the legislation that established and govern Ross Lake NRA to provide a vision for the park's future. (See Appendix A: Ross Lake National Recreation Area Enabling Legislation.)

For more detail on the law and policy directing management actions, see Appendix B: Pertinent

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The new general management plan will set the management philosophy for Ross Lake National Recreation Area for the next 15 to 20 years. The purposes of this GMP are as follows:

- to develop the purpose, significance, and primary interpretive themes of Ross Lake NRA
- to describe any special mandates of Ross Lake NRA



Enjoying the vista at Diablo Lake overlook.

Laws, Policies, and Procedures. The alternatives in this general management plan address desired future conditions that are not already mandated by law and policy and which must be determined through a planning process. Where law, policy, and regulations do not provide clear guidance, management decisions will be based on the GMP, public concerns, and analysis of impacts of alternative courses of action, including long-term operational costs. Successful implementation of the GMP would result in the long-term preservation of natural and cultural resources and an enhanced visitor experience.

This general management plan will not describe how particular programs or projects will be implemented or prioritized. Those decisions will be deferred to more detailed implementation planning, which will follow the broad, comprehensive plan presented in this document.

NEED FOR THE PLAN

The current 1988 North Cascades NPS Complex General Management Plan no longer provides adequate guidance to address the policy and operational issues now facing park management for Ross Lake National Recreation Area. Most of the actions in the 1988 North Cascades GMP have been implemented or are now outdated.

Many conditions in Ross Lake National Recreation Area and throughout the region have changed since the current *North Cascades NPS Complex General Management Plan* was completed in 1988. These changes include the re-license of three hydroelectric facilities, new and diversified recreational uses, and long-term management of natural resources, cultural resources, and wilderness within Ross Lake NRA. Since the 1988 GMP was completed, Congress designated the Stephen Mather Wilderness, which encompasses 69% percent of Ross Lake NRA and an additional 4% percent of potential wilderness. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission re-licensed the Skagit Hydropower Project for Seattle City Light, which resulted in a settlement agreement and funds for resource protection and visitor use projects for the NPS in the North Cascades NPS Complex, predominantly in Ross Lake NRA. Visitor use within Ross Lake NRA has diversified and significantly increased since the 1988 North Cascades GMP, due in part to the enhanced recreational facilities. The park also faces natural and cultural resource protection issues that need to be addressed in the new GMP.

A further discussion of these and other issues can be found in Chapter 3, “Planning Issues and Concerns to be Addressed.”

National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978

The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625), requires the preparation and timely revision of general management plans for each unit of the National Park System. The National Park Service management policies call for each GMP to “. . . set forth a management concept for the park [and] establish a role for the unit within the context of regional trends and plans for conservation, recreation, transportation, economic development and other regional issues. . . .”

Congress has also specifically directed (16 U.S.C. 1a-7[b]) the NPS to consider, as part of the planning process the following elements: “General management plans for each unit shall include, but not be limited to:

- measures for the preservation of the area’s resources;
- indications of types and general intensities of development (including visitor circulation and transportation patterns, systems and modes) associated with public enjoyment and use of the area, including general locations, timing of implementation, and anticipated costs;
- identification of an implementation commitment for visitor carrying capacities for all areas of the unit; and
- indications of potential modifications to the external boundaries of the unit, and the reasons therefore.”

The proposed GMP is accompanied by an environmental impact statement, which identifies and evaluates the effects or impacts of various alternative approaches to the protection and appropriate uses of Ross Lake National Recreation Area.

OVERVIEW OF THE NPS PLANNING PROCESS

Planning provides an opportunity to create a vision and to define a park’s role in relation to its national, natural, historic, and community settings. The planning process is designed to provide decision makers with adequate information about resources,

impacts, and costs. Decisions made within this planning context are more likely to be successful over time and promote a more efficient use of public funds.

A general management plan is the result of a logical decision-making process, in which relevant information is gathered and used to make a series of related decisions. The process of creating a GMP ensures that park managers, stakeholders, and the public share a clearly defined understanding of the resource conditions, opportunities for visitor experiences, and general kinds of management, access, and development that will best achieve a park's purpose and conserve its resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Planning for Ross Lake National Recreation Area

An interdisciplinary planning team was assembled in January 2006. It was comprised of the North Cascades NPS Complex superintendent, staff and specialists, and planners from the NPS Pacific West Regional Office in Seattle. The planning team met frequently between 2006 and 2011⁰⁹ to gather background information, develop the Foundation Statement for the North Cascades NPS Complex, examine resources, identify issues, and develop and refine alternative management concepts and actions. Throughout the planning process, public participation played a large part in helping to focus the plan, identify issues, and formulate alternatives. The NPS held dozens of public and stakeholder meetings throughout northwestern Washington and southern British Columbia to discuss the GMP. A detailed account of the public involvement process and the public comments received by the NPS is provided in the "Public Involvement" chapter of this draft **final** GMP/EIS.

NEXT STEPS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

After distribution of the draft GMP/EIS, there will be a 90-day public review and comment period after which the NPS planning team will evaluate comments from other federal agencies, tribes, organizations, businesses, and individuals regarding the draft plan. The planning team will then incorporate appropriate changes to produce a final general management plan and environmental impact statement.

The final plan will include letters from governmental agencies, any substantive comments on the draft document, and NPS responses to those comments. Following distribution of the final GMP/EIS and a 30-day no-action period, a record of decision approving the final plan will be signed by the NPS regional director. The record of decision documents the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation. With the signing of the record of decision, and its publication in the *Federal Register*, the plan can then be implemented.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GMP

Implementation of the approved GMP will depend on future funding. The approval of a plan does not necessarily guarantee that the funding and staffing needed to implement the plan will be forthcoming. Full implementation of the approved plan may be many years in the future.

Implementation of the approved plan also could be affected by other factors. Once the general management plan has been approved, additional feasibility studies and more detailed site specific documentation, planning, and compliance would be completed, as appropriate, before many proposed actions could be carried out.

The general management plan does not describe how particular programs or projects should be prioritized or implemented. Those decisions will be addressed during the more detailed planning associated with strategic plans, implementation plans, or other plans. All of these future plans will tier from the approved general management plan and will be based on the goals, future conditions, and appropriate types of activities established in the approved general management plan.



Discovering wildlife.