

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 nontraditional approach, the Reserve presents unique opportunities and challenges to planning, management, public use, Reserve operations, and preservation of significant natural and cultural resources.

The current comprehensive plan for the Reserve is now 25 years old. The production of a new general management plan (GMP) is necessary to respond to changing conditions, and to provide a new framework for the future management, protection, and public use of Reserve resources for the next 15-20 years.

Since the Reserve was established, many changes have occurred. The Seattle-Tacoma Metropolitan Area has grown considerably, increasing visitation and residency to central Whidbey Island and changing the character of the rural environment. 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. Partner-

ships have been forged that protect historic buildings and new “niche” agriculture is beginning to appear as economic factors change.

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. Both the action alternatives, Alternatives B and C, are intended to address these issues successfully, if the recommendations are implemented. The Preferred Alternative is the alternative chosen by the Trust Board and the NPS to implement.

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; rather, 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.

This general management plan is a two-volume document that includes the GMP/EIS in Volume I. Volume II includes supporting technical reports prepared by consultants on agriculture, land use change patterns, and the adequacy of county zoning for protecting the Reserve.

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.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative, Alternative A, is required by the National Environmental Policy Act and provides the baseline from which to compare the other alternatives. Under this alternative, current management practices would continue as funding allows. Emphasis would be upon protecting the values of the Reserve largely through partnerships with others without substantially increasing staff, programs, funding support or facilities.

It would be assumed under this alternative that the principal support for the Reserve would continue to come from the leadership of the predominantly volunteer Trust Board. A small staff consisting of the Reserve Manager and part-time administrative assistant would continue to serve the Reserve, along with an NPS part-time natural resource position and the combined NPS Cultural Resource Specialist/Trust Board appointee. From time to time, staff would be augmented by assistance from the Pacific West Region Seattle Office, North Cascades National Park Service Complex and other NPS park units in the Region as time and funding permit.

The Reserve staff would continue to protect historic structures and natural resources on retained NPS owned land in fee. The Reserve staff would also continue to monitor and manage easements, helping to protect the cultural landscape. The Trust Board would continue to encourage private

landowners within the Reserve to be private land stewards of natural resources. State parks would continue to be managed according to state law and policies. The resources on any NPS lands owned in fee would continue to be managed according to federal law and NPS policies.

Land protection efforts would continue to rely upon availability of federal funds secured through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) by NPS staff, largely to acquire conservation easements from willing sellers on the high priority lands within the Reserve. However, the principal reliance of the Trust Board for protecting Reserve values would continue to be upon local land use controls from the town of Coupeville and Island County. No expansion of facilities, staff, programs, or services would be anticipated under this alternative. There would be no adjustment to the Reserve boundary under this alternative.

Alternative B Preferred Alternative

This alternative constitutes the Preferred Alternative 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 ten staff 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.

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. Emphasis would continue to be upon the purchase of conservation easements from will-

ing sellers, augmented by land use protection measures by local government and nonprofits. The establishment of an overlay district in the unincorporated portion of the Reserve (not to be confused with the existing town's historic overlay zone) would be one of several key recommendations for strengthening design, zoning, and permitting authorities by Island County and the town of Coupeville.

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/natural quiet.

Facility improvements would include new information kiosks at three gateway areas into the Reserve and 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 farms to private owners for additional protection on other properties within the Reserve. The NPS-owned

historic buildings would be stabilized and the Jacob Ebey House and 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 move. The Reserve would explore partnering opportunities with units of local government, nonprofits, or others within the Reserve to accommodate this function.

Congressional legislation would also be sought to provide for a modest boundary expansion of the Reserve to incorporate additional prairie, agricultural lands, and wetlands. These would include the remainder of Crockett Lake and the Naval Air Station-Whidbey Outlying Landing Field not currently within the Reserve, additional portions of Smith Prairie, and Bell Farm in the northwest area of the Reserve. 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 of the South Gateway, the Ferry



For Sale Signs near Grasser's Lagoon. ca. 2001. NPS Photo.

House, and a portion of the West Ridge property.

Alternative C

This alternative would capture many of the components of Alternative B, but with a few important distinctions.

First, the overall policy management of the Reserve would be executed by a part-time Commission that would be compensated through a stipend for their service. This Commission would replace the current Trust Board management structure. Reserve Staff would increase from four (No Action) to ten positions that would be exclusively hired and managed by the Commission. In Alternative C, the Commission would seek increased budget appropriations from the National Park Service operating base to enlarge staff.

As in Alternative B, the land protection emphasis would primarily focus on securing conservation easements on important Reserve landscapes from willing sellers, augmented by local land use controls. In addition, Alternative C would recommend that Island County reinstitute a system of transfer of development rights for the protection

of agricultural, and other important lands.

Rather than exchanging all NPS-owned farmland, the NPS would retain a five-acre portion of NPS-owned Farm II, including the historic farm buildings, for use as the Reserve's administrative and maintenance facilities, then exchange the remainder of agricultural land for additional protection on other properties within the Reserve. The historic Reuble Farmstead buildings at Farm II would be stabilized and rehabilitated to the Secretary of Interior's Standards and adaptively reused as NPS administrative offices and workshop facilities. Some non-historic buildings may be removed. Preservation maintenance training could be incorporated into any rehabilitation work done on the historic buildings.

The Ferry House would be stabilized and a barn-like building would be built at the Ferry House using new compatible construction to serve as a visitor information and interpretive center.

The Jacob Ebey House would be treated the same as in Alternative B using the house as a seasonal contact station and the Blockhouse as an exterior exhibit. Before exchanging the farmland to a

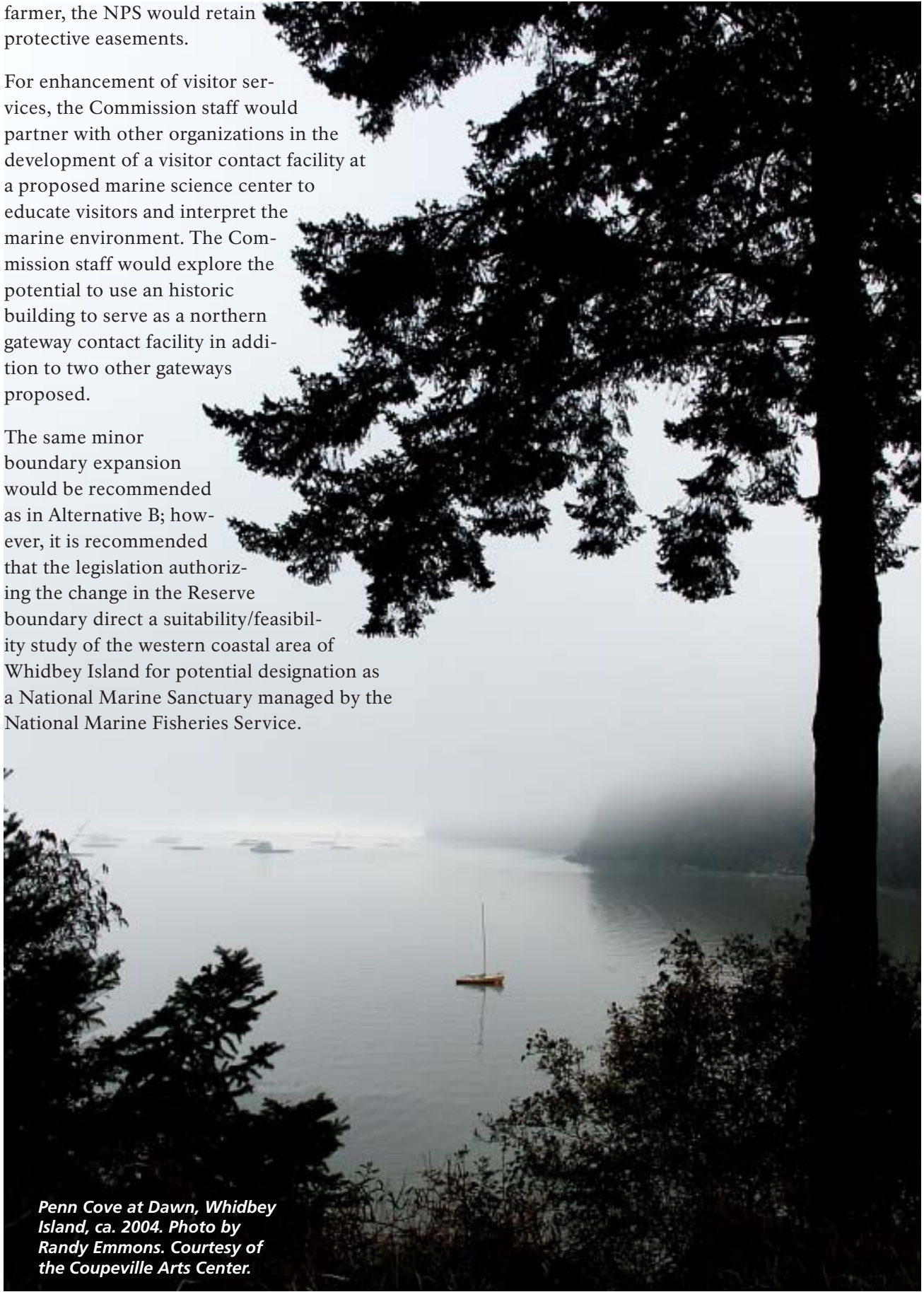


Coupeville at Dawn, Whidbey Island, ca. 2004. Photo by Randy Emmons. Courtesy of the Coupeville Arts Center.

farmer, the NPS would retain protective easements.

For enhancement of visitor services, the Commission staff would partner with other organizations in the development of a visitor contact facility at a proposed marine science center to educate visitors and interpret the marine environment. The Commission staff would explore the potential to use an historic building to serve as a northern gateway contact facility in addition to two other gateways proposed.

The same minor boundary expansion would be recommended as in Alternative B; however, it is recommended that the legislation authorizing the change in the Reserve boundary direct a suitability/feasibility study of the western coastal area of Whidbey Island for potential designation as a National Marine Sanctuary managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service.



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



*Coupeville Wharf at Dawn,
Whidbey Island, ca. 1999.
NPS Photo.*

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