

# Background of the Reserve

*Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve (Reserve) is located in western Washington State on Whidbey Island. Situated in Puget Sound, it is 50 miles south of the Canadian border and 27 miles north of Seattle. By ferry and car, it takes about two hours to drive from Seattle to Coupeville located in the heart of the Reserve. The boundary of the Reserve is situated in central Whidbey, includes Penn Cove, and is surrounded by the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Saratoga Passage, and Admiralty Inlet. The city of Oak Harbor is located to the north of the Reserve and the town of Langley to the southeast. (See Figure 1, Regional Context and Figure 2, Reserve Orientation)*

The Reserve comprises an area of approximately 17,572 acres: 13,617 acres of land, and 3,955 surface acres of water (Penn Cove). Approximately 2,023 acres are protected with NPS-held conservation easements and 684 acres are NPS-owned in fee. Coupeville, the county seat, is an incorporated community and the entire Reserve, including the town, is a National Register historic district called the Central Whidbey Island Historic District. The Reserve is within Washington's 10th legislative district in Island County. (See Figure 3, Land Ownership.)

## Background

### Establishment of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

Section 508 of the Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625 and USC Sec. 461) established Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. (See Appendix A: Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve Legislation.)

It is unique in that it is the first "historical reserve" in the National Park System. It is a "partnership" park that uses a cooperative strategy to bring together private and public resources at the local, state, and federal level.

The Reserve was created "to preserve and protect a rural community which provides an unbroken historic record from...19<sup>th</sup> century exploration and settlement in Puget Sound to the present time" and emphasizes four historic eras. These eras are Vancouver's exploration of the Puget Sound in 1792, the first permanent settlement on Whidbey Island by Isaac Ebey, the Donation Land Claim settlements and subsequent settlements, and the

development of the town of Coupeville. The Reserve's boundaries reflect this history and are the same as those of the Central Whidbey Island Historic District established in 1973, which were based on the settlement patterns resulting from the Public Lands Survey Act of 1850, also known as the Donation Land Claim Act.

Though the Reserve is a unit of the National Park System, the Reserve varies from traditional National Park System units. The legislation points to the fact that this is a community that has evolved from early exploration to the present and consists of descendants of original settlers as well as new residents. As such, the Reserve cannot be interpreted from one specific point in time, as is the case of most traditional, particularly historic, NPS sites. In addition, most of the land (approximately 85 percent) is privately owned, with the rest a combination of local, state, and federal ownership. The NPS has purchased little land within the Reserve (approximately 3.8 percent or 684 acres), but has actively acquired easements (interests in land, not fee title) on farms and important open spaces. The concept of the Reserve was a community effort and participating in land protection is voluntary on the part of private landowners. Sales of easements to the National Park Service to protect the rural landscape are on a willing seller basis. This has been a key to the Reserve's success in the community.

The impetus to protect central Whidbey began from local citizens' initiative to protect Ebey's Prairie from inappropriate development and is well documented in the Reserve's administrative history (McKinley 1993). The concept of a national historical reserve was viewed as a way to preserve open space with a minimum disturbance

to private landowners—to provide initial federal support without threatening local autonomy. As part of the legislation, management of the Reserve was to be through a unit of local government and not solely with the NPS. The reserve concept permitted immediate protection of critical lands threatened by development and allowed for continued federal technical assistance while transferring the management role to a local entity.

The Trust Board was created to fulfill the mandate of the enabling legislation calling for “a unit of local government” to manage the Reserve. According to Public Law 95-625, when local government having jurisdiction over land use within the Reserve had enacted appropriate zoning ordinances to protect its historic and natural features, management would be conveyed to local government. Washington State Parks and other agencies already established in the area would continue to function with little impact from the Reserve. The NPS would provide technical assistance and provide grants of up to 50 percent of the Reserve’s annual cost of operations and maintenance. If the Secretary of the Interior found that local authorities failed to conform to the plan, the Secretary could assume control of the Reserve.

The Act required a comprehensive plan to be developed within 18 months to identify those areas most appropriate for 1) public use and development, 2) historic and natural preservation, and 3) private use subject to appropriate local zoning ordinances designed to protect the historical rural setting. Congress could not appropriate funds without the plan. Once completed, Island County, and the town of Coupeville would use the final plan to establish appropriate zoning ordinances while NPS proceeded to implement the necessary land protection measures. The 1980 *Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve Comprehensive Plan* was the first and only general management plan for the Reserve.

## **Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve Trust Board**

Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve is a partnership between the town of Coupeville, Island County, Washington State, and the National

Park Service. On July 23, 1988, an Interlocal Agreement for the Administration of the Reserve was recorded, which established a joint interagency administrative board for management of the Reserve. (See Appendix B: Interlocal Agreement for the Administration of the Reserve.)

Instead of a traditional park superintendent, policy oversight of the Reserve is managed by a nine-member board of volunteers representing the four governmental partners. There are seven local residents on the Reserve’s Trust Board (three appointed by the town of Coupeville, four appointed by Island County), one representative from Washington State Parks, and one from the National Park Service. The Trust Board members each serve a four-year term. It is the first NPS unit to be managed by a trust board entity. (For a complete list of names and positions, see Appendix C: Trust Board Members.)

The Trust Board employs a Reserve Manager to oversee the day-to-day operation of the Reserve. The Reserve Manager is assisted by staff composed of both NPS employees and Trust Board employees. Currently, the Reserve Manager is the only full-time staff employed by the board.

The Trust Board has primary management responsibility for volunteer programs, and partnership and community planning functions. The Board shares responsibility with the National Park Service in the functional areas of administration, interpretation, maintenance, land protection, and resource management. The role and responsibilities of the National Park Service are discussed in the following section.

## **Role of the Island County**

Island County will use the Reserve’s GMP as an element of the county’s comprehensive plan to assist the Reserve in the protection and stewardship of the cultural landscape and historic properties. This would be achieved through sound land use planning practices for all private properties outside of Coupeville and within the Reserve. In addition, the county will annually provide direct and in-kind financial support up to 50 percent of the operating costs of the Reserve (subject to limitation in annually appropriated budget).

## Role of the Town of Coupeville

Similar to the county, the town will use the Reserve's general management plan as an element of the town's Comprehensive Plan to assist the Reserve in the protection and stewardship of the cultural landscape and historic properties. The town will annually provide in-kind financial support and may provide other direct or indirect financial support. The town of Coupeville will also implement sound planning and development regulations and ordinances that work toward preserving the character of the Reserve.

## Role of Washington State Parks

Washington State Parks will use the Reserve's general management plan as a planning tool for projects and facilities within the Reserve. Washington State Parks' role is stewardship of state park lands: Ebey's Landing, Fort Casey and Fort Ebey state parks. This includes promoting public activities on state lands that are compatible with the overall purposes of the Reserve. In addition, Washington State Parks may provide financial assistance through public grants or other financial support, including in-kind contributions to the Trust Board. State Parks will consult with the Trust Board in exercising its responsibilities and authority within the Reserve.

## Role of the National Park Service

Since Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is a unit of the National Park System, the NPS is

an integral player in the protection and long-term preservation of the historical Reserve, with a role distinctive and separate from the other partners. As one of four partners representing the umbrella entity formed for the purposes of managing the Reserve (the Trust Board), the NPS has five primary responsibilities: operations (including maintenance) and management of federal lands, resources, and programs; developing and periodically updating the general management plan for the Reserve in collaboration with the Trust Board; participating as one of nine members on the Reserve's Trust Board; requesting appropriations for budget; and providing senior policy level oversight of Trust Board management of the Reserve.

Operational responsibilities include general land protection, cultural and natural resource management and protection, interpretation, and facility maintenance within the Reserve. The NPS is a model for stewardship in these areas for both visitors and residents of the Reserve.

The role of the NPS Cultural Resource Specialist/Trust Board member is to serve as the NPS representative on the Trust Board and represent the national perspective and to ensure that the public investment in the Reserve is upheld.

In addition, the NPS is responsible for requesting an appropriation for the Reserve's budget for up to 50 percent of the annual operations of the Reserve. The remaining costs would be provided



*Front Street in Coupeville looking west, Whidbey Island, Washington, ca. 1890. Permission of University of Washington Libraries. Special Collections Division.*



*Same view, Coupeville, Whidbey Island, Washington, ca. 2000. NPS Photo.*

from other sources both direct and in-kind support.

As part of the policy oversight role, the NPS conducts annual performance reviews of the Trust Board by the Deputy Regional Director in Seattle, Washington.

Although the NPS was never intended to become a large landowner within the Reserve, the agency is authorized to protect lands through purchase in fee or less-than-fee interest, in order to carry out the mandate of the enabling legislation. As an owner of important historic properties (buildings and structures), the NPS is required to maintain those properties according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Additionally, as owners of partial interests in land (such as conservation easements) the NPS is required to manage and ensure compliance of conservation easements with local properties owners.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the Secretary of the Interior has the responsibility to withdraw management of the Reserve from the state or unit of local government if the Secretary determines that the Reserve is not being managed in a manner consistent with the enabling legislation. This is viewed as a last resort in order to realign management direction or activities to protect resources.

As a unit of the National Park System, Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve has access to support and services provided by the NPS to all national park units. In addition, the NPS Pacific West Region—Seattle Office and other regional NPS park units contribute services, support, and technical assistance to the Reserve Trust Board and Reserve staff, as available funding and staffing permit.

## **Events Affecting the Reserve after Enabling Legislation**

Twenty-five years after the establishment of the Reserve, a number of developments and actions have occurred that affect, or could potentially affect, the unit.

## **Island County Zoning and Ordinances**

Island County, through the Growth Management Act and Comprehensive Plan process, re-instituted five acre minimum zoning within the Rural Zoning District of the county. Though in 1980, the Reserve's own 1980 comprehensive management plan, adopted by the county, called for five acre zoning in the rural areas of the Reserve, it has become obvious to the Reserve Trust Board and staff that zoning at this development density will not preserve the historic views and scenic rural quality that the legislation for the Reserve sought to protect. This zoning change has, and will continue to have, impacts in maintaining agricultural land and critical open space within the Reserve. In addition, the lack of clustered development provisions hinders protection of open space.

Several National Register-listed contributing properties have been demolished in the Reserve since its creation, beginning with the 1850s Kineth House and Barn overlooking Penn Cove near Snakelum Point. Some of these properties were deemed significant in the 1930s and were recorded as part of the Historic American Building Survey documentation projects during the Great Depression. The lack of an adequate demolition ordinance in the county will result in additional losses of historic properties.

## **Au Sable Institute**

In the mid-1990s, the property owned by the Washington State Fish and Game Department known as the Game Farm in historic Smith Prairie (a portion of this property is within the Reserve) was subdivided into ten-acre tracts intended to be sold at market value for home sites. The Trust Board and NPS, along with other concerned groups, worked with legislators from Washington State to prevent the immediate sale of this significant property until a conservation buyer could be found. Fortunately, the Au Sable Institute, a non-profit environmental education organization, came forward to purchase the property for its Pacific Rim campus and to protect the remnant prairie plant community. Native Puget Lowland grasslands are one of the most endangered types of ecosystems in Washington State. There are only two remaining glacial outwash prairies in the



northern Puget Sound region and one is Smith Prairie. Au Sable land contains a rare, five-acre intact prairie plant community. Easements on this land have not yet been purchased to provide full protection.

### **Robert Y. Pratt Preserve**

When Robert Y. Pratt died in 1999, he left hundreds of acres of significant prairie, woodlands, and cultural resources at risk; however, he also provided that the historic Ferry House, the Bluff Trail, and portions of Peregos Lagoon and bluff would remain in conservation status by being deeded to an appropriate conservation organization. Through an aggressive fundraising and acquisition effort, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) purchased four key Pratt estate holdings: Ferry Forest (approximately 20 acres), the West Woods area (approximately 400 acres) which abuts the Bluff Trail; the Cottage parcel (less than one acre); and the West Ridge parcel which included the Jacob Ebey House and Blockhouse, sheep barn and machine shed, and farmland (approximately 60 acres).

The Nature Conservancy subsequently donated the Ferry House and a surrounding five-acre parcel to the NPS; sold the Ferry Forest, Cottage, and West Ridge property to the NPS; sold a conservation easement on the West Woods to the NPS. The Nature Conservancy sold the Jenne Farm parcel (approximately 140 acres) to a private conservation buyer. This buyer then sold a scenic easement over most of the parcel to the NPS.

The Nature Conservancy established the West Woods, Bluff Trail, and Peregos Lagoon as the Robert Y. Pratt Reserve. This preserve is one of TNC's most visited holdings in Washington State.

### **Seattle Pacific University Conference Facilities**

Seattle Pacific University began plans recently to increase the conference capability of the Casey Conference Center, adjacent to and originally part of the historic Fort Casey Military Reservation (now Fort Casey State Park and within the Reserve). Development plans included selling off open space and agricultural lands to the north of

the main campus in order to raise funds for building a new conference facility. Lands to be affected include a parcel that contains a federally listed plant commonly known as the Golden Paintbrush, and woodlands with a designation by the state of Washington as a Natural Heritage Forest Area. An application for some of the property to become a special review district was filed with the county, only to be rescinded later after public outcry and lawsuit. No easements have yet been purchased to protect these significant lands in the Reserve.

### **Washington State Department of Transportation Improvements**

Improvements to the Keystone-Port Townsend Ferry terminal are being proposed by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Originally considering three alternatives, public feedback resulted in WSDOT scaling back its plans to only consider improvements to the existing ferry terminal. One of the many issues is whether to remove the older, possibly historic, vessels along the Keystone-Port Townsend route and replace them with the newer, larger Issaquah class of vessels in order to make all the ferryboats operating in Puget Sound interchangeable as needed. There are potential effects on the cultural landscape in the area of Admiralty Head and Keystone Spit/ Crockett Lake should these improvements occur.

### **Washington State Growth Management Act**

In March of 2004, the Washington State Legislature passed a bill that amended the state's Growth Management Act (GMA) and allows towns located completely within the boundaries of national historical reserves to be exempt from GMA density requirements. The GMA called for future growth to be diverted into towns and cities where services already existed. Because of this, Coupeville was concerned about potential impacts to the quality of life for its residents, as well as adverse impacts to the resources within the Reserve. Coupeville is the only town in the state that falls within the boundaries of a national historical reserve. This bill allows Coupeville to restrict zoning densities within its town limits as long as it pro-

protects the physical, historic, and cultural integrity of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve.

## Purpose and Significance

### Purpose of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

Purpose statements are the foundation for all subsequent decisions and qualify the language used in the legislation to more clearly state the purpose of the Reserve. They are the specific reasons why this area warrants national reserve status.

The National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 established management criteria for all units of the National Park System. The stated purpose of the National Park Service is "...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Specifically, the purpose of the Reserve is to preserve and protect the cultural landscape and to commemorate the history of a rural community, which provides a continuous record of exploration and American settlement in Puget Sound from the nineteenth century to the present. This includes the first thorough exploration of Puget Sound by Captain Vancouver in 1792; settlement of Whidbey Island by Colonel Ebey; settlement during the years of the Donation Land Law beginning in the 1850s; and the growth of the town of Coupeville. Preservation of natural and cultural resources in the Reserve happens in the context of a living, working, and changing community.

### Significance of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

Significance statements are also drawn from the enabling legislation and other legislative descriptive documents. Significance statements explain what resources and values warrant the area's designation as a national reserve.

Through planning team workshops and public meetings, the local, national, and international sig-

nificance of the Reserve has been determined as:

- Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is the nation's first national historical reserve; a new kind of national park unit cooperatively managed by a trust board representing local, state, and federal interests.
- The Reserve provides the nation a vivid and continuous historical record of Pacific Northwest history, including early exploration and American settlement of the Puget Sound region.
- Early settlement at Ebey's Landing, precipitated by the 1850 Donation Land Claim Act helped establish American claims in the Pacific Northwest, resulting in the 1859 Border Resolution.
- The historical landscape of the Reserve appears much as it did a century ago. Historic homes, pastoral farmsteads, and commercial buildings are still within their original farm, forest, and marine settings.
- Within the fast growing Puget Sound region, the Reserve has quickly become the only remaining area where a broad spectrum of Northwest history is still clearly visible within a large-scale (and partially protected) landscape.

### Secondary Significance

- Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve consists of excellent undisturbed examples of post-glacial geological features such as kettle ponds, steep gravel bluffs, remnant prairies formed by glacial lakes, and sweeping shoreline topography left by the receding glaciers.
- The unique climates, rainshadow, soils, maritime influence and geologic features result in an unusual diversity of plant and animal species, communities, and habitats.
- Within the Reserve, the visitor can experience a variety of diverse physical and visual landscapes within a small geographic area.
- Because the Reserve is a short drive from major Northwest population centers, it is a popular destination for various forms of recreational and educational activities.
- Penn Cove within the Reserve has an internationally significant shellfish (mussels) industry dependent upon high water quality.
- Due to the sheltered harbor, Penn Cove has been a focus of human activities from prehistoric times to the present day.

## Desired Future Conditions

The following are desired future conditions or goals of the Reserve. These goals incorporate mandates required of Reserve management and include input solicited from the public on how they would like to see this area managed. Since these following conditions are general in scope, specific resource conditions, strategic planning goals and management strategies would be developed for the four management zones for the Reserve in later planning efforts. This would include the eventual development of a resource stewardship plan for the Reserve. All the alternatives presented in this GMP should be able to meet these goals to varying degrees:

- At Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, one of the nation's first Pacific Northwest settlements is preserved through a protected, viable, and dynamic landscape for the public to see and experience.
- With the full cooperation and assistance of Island County and the town of Coupeville, the rural historic landscape of the Reserve retains its integrity. New development is designed and sited to respect the cultural landscape and to protect key landscape features and characteristic patterns that are of historic significance.
- The town of Coupeville, Island County, Washington State Parks, and the NPS all understand the benefits that the Reserve provides to each organization and supports the Reserve fully. Fiscal support for the Reserve is evidenced in the budgets of each partner as well as by Congressional action to provide land protection funds when needed.
- The presence of the Reserve enhances the social, physical, and economic health of the central Whidbey community as it continues to grow and evolve. The local community appreciates and protects its historical inheritance and valuable natural resources by assisting in the maintenance of open space and historical structures and providing recreational and educational opportunities to residents and visitors alike.
- The agricultural community operating within the Reserve is vital and is able to respond to changing market conditions to remain economically viable.
- Residents enjoy a high quality of life because the Reserve is adequately protected.
- Recreational opportunities within the Reserve are provided by each of the Reserve partners, each according to its unique abilities. Programs are coordinated so that the highest quality recreational opportunities are provided most efficiently and in a way that complements the rural historic landscape of the Reserve and benefits the local community as well as visitors.
- Visitors safely enjoy and are satisfied with availability, accessibility, diversity, and quality of Reserve facilities, services, and appropriate recreational opportunities.
- Residents and visitors are provided opportunities to learn about the natural and cultural history within the Reserve and have individual opportunities to contribute to the protection of the Reserve.
- Natural resource conditions in the Reserve are maintained for natural processes and healthy ecosystems.
- Natural Landscapes of bluffs and beaches are maintained in natural conditions with minimal structural intrusions.
- Areas and resources important to Native Americans are protected and respected.
- The Reserve is a model for sustainable development that respects a community's need to adapt to new challenges while protecting a nationally significant historical resource. The Reserve partnership is a model of cooperative management of cultural and natural resources. A well-developed sense of stewardship exists within the local community and among the Reserve partners that assures the health of the Reserve into the future.
- The management of the Reserve is well understood within the local community and strengthens a sense of community identity and pride.
- Historical structures are preserved and maintained. Appropriate use is encouraged and archaeological sites are protected
- Historic and scenic views are maintained and enhanced.