



Wilderness Stewardship Plan

Scoping Newsletter • Winter 2015



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

In 1988, Congress designated 97% of Mount Rainier National Park as wilderness in recognition of its outstanding resources and values. The Mount Rainier Wilderness contains ancient forests, subalpine meadows, and the largest single-mountain glacial system in the contiguous 48 states. As a vital remnant of the once widespread primeval Cascade ecosystem, Mount Rainier provides visitors with diverse opportunities to experience the challenge and natural beauty of wilderness.

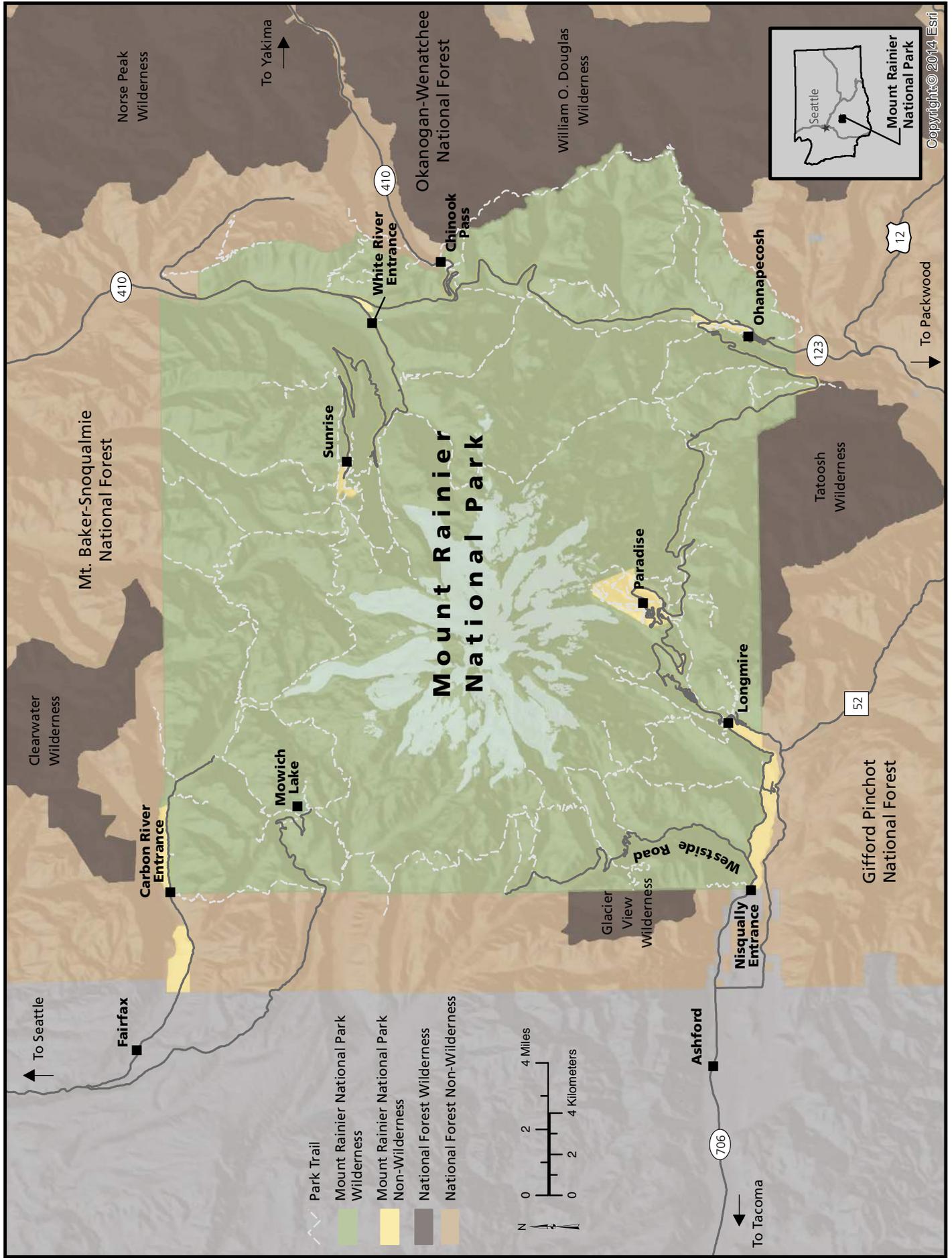
Today, we are asking you to play an important role in preserving this special place. We are initiating a Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) to guide future efforts to preserve the park's wilderness character, and your involvement is crucial to our planning process. The proposed WSP and its effects will be analyzed in an environmental impact statement (EIS). This brochure provides background to the planning process and an opportunity for you to comment about alternative ways that the wilderness could be managed. By sharing your ideas and opinions, you can help us shape its future.

Sincerely,

Randy King, Superintendent
Mount Rainier National Park



For more information, visit the park's wilderness planning website at:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/morawild>



Purpose and Need

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) is to guide the preservation, management, and use of the park's wilderness area as defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964. The goal is to restore, protect, and enhance the overall character of the Mount Rainier Wilderness.

Need for the Plan

National Park Service policy directs wilderness stewardship plans to include "desired future conditions, as well as establish indicators, standards, conditions, and thresholds beyond which management actions will be taken to reduce human impacts to wilderness resources."

Mount Rainier National Park last prepared a wilderness management plan in 1992. Since that time, wilderness use has continued to be in high demand for visitors seeking both day and overnight opportunities. This demand persists and continues to impact wilderness qualities. An updated plan is needed to guide future visitor use and the park's management methods in the Mount Rainier Wilderness.

The development of this WSP is based on the need to:

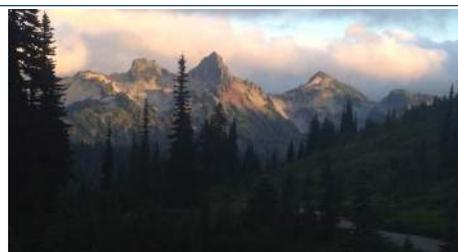
- Develop an approach to managing visitor use such that wilderness character is preserved and public use and enjoyment are provided.
- Re-evaluate management zones that were adopted in the 2002 General Management Plan, and adopt indicators, measures, and standards for wilderness character in those zones.
- Clarify how decisions about wilderness administrative actions are made and documented.
- Evaluate the current plotting of the wilderness boundary and consider adjustment where non-conforming administrative infrastructure is present.
- Further the public understanding of wilderness stewardship through effective communication and education.

Wilderness Act

The Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577, 16 United States Code 1131 et seq.) established a policy for the enduring protection of wilderness resources for public use and enjoyment. The act defines wilderness as,

a tract of undeveloped federal land of primeval character without permanent improvements or human habitation; an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain; where the forces of nature predominate and the imprint of man's work is substantially unnoticeable; which provides outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

This act established the National Wilderness Preservation System and set forth management directives that specify the preservation of wilderness character. Section 4 of the act identifies appropriate uses and prohibited uses in wilderness areas.



Key Components of the Plan

Wilderness Character

There are four “qualities” of wilderness character that are common to all wilderness areas regardless of size, location, or agency administration. A fifth quality includes “other features of value” that are unique to a particular wilderness. These five qualities link wilderness resources and conditions directly to the statutory language of the Wilderness Act.

Untrammeled

Wilderness is defined as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, meaning that it is free from modern human control or manipulation. Hazard tree management in wilderness is an example of an action that affects the untrammeled quality.



Natural

Wilderness should be protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions. Wilderness ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization. This quality is degraded by intended or unintended effects of modern people on the ecological systems inside the wilderness since the area was designated. The introduction of non-native species, vegetation loss, and soil compaction in a campsite are examples of impacts to the natural quality.



Undeveloped

Wilderness is defined as an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation. This quality is affected by the presence of structures or installations. A patrol cabin or seismic monitoring installation in wilderness is an example of a structure that affects the undeveloped quality.



Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Wilderness is defined as an area that has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. Opportunities for solitude are affected by the presence, visibility, or noise of other humans. High visitor densities and administrative use of helicopters are examples of conditions that reduce opportunities for solitude.



Opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation are affected by management restrictions that reduce visitors’ freedom or self-reliance. Designating campsites is an example of a management restriction that reduces opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Other Features of Value

Wilderness areas may also have ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. This fifth quality reflects unique features of a park’s wilderness area that are not adequately reflected in the other four qualities. An example would be the deterioration or loss of cultural resources integral to wilderness character.



Key Components of the Plan

Indicators, Measures, and Standards

A major part of this WSP is the development of a comprehensive monitoring strategy to track trends in wilderness character by developing a set of indicators and measures for each wilderness quality. Indicators and measures track conditions to assess progress toward attaining desired conditions and preserving wilderness character. Standards (or thresholds) are based on the measures and are developed to ensure that conditions are stable or improving over time.

Management Actions

The Wilderness Act of 1964 requires each agency that administers wilderness to “preserve the wilderness character of an area.” Two main types of management actions will be employed to meet this goal: 1) actions that can be implemented immediately following approval of the plan as part of a broad management strategy, and 2) actions that would be triggered by exceeding a standard (based on the results of ongoing monitoring).

Preliminary Alternatives

The National Park Service has developed preliminary alternatives for public comment. Public comment will help to refine the alternatives before they are analyzed in the EIS. Each preliminary alternative is subject to the requirements and prohibitions of the Wilderness Act of 1964, and must meet the purpose and need for the WSP. The preliminary alternatives differ in terms of recreation and conservation goals and in terms of the emphasis that is placed on each wilderness character quality.

- **Alternative 1. No Action:** A no action alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as a baseline for comparing the effects of the action alternatives. For this WSP, the No Action alternative is defined as the continuation of existing management. As the baseline for the alternatives, the No Action alternative (existing management) demonstrates the current condition of wilderness qualities within the Mount Rainier Wilderness.

Examples of these existing conditions are as follows:

- Opportunities for solitude are available in lower-use areas and during lower-use days and seasons.
- Opportunities for unconfined recreation are limited on trail corridors by the requirement to use designated campsites for overnight camping.
- The Mount Rainier Wilderness is in a largely natural condition, although some impacts are occurring along trails and routes that experience heavy day use.
- The presence of historic ranger patrol cabins, historic fire lookouts, utilities, and research installations within the Mount Rainier Wilderness are impacting the undeveloped quality.



Key Components of the Plan

- Fire management, native plant restoration, and fisher reintroduction are examples of National Park Service management activities that may improve the natural condition while impacting the untrammeled quality of the Mount Rainier Wilderness.
- Commercial uses are consistent with existing Commercial Services Plan.
- **Alternative 2. Implemented General Management Plan (GMP):** This alternative focuses on implementing key elements of the General Management Plan (2002) to create a high-quality visitor experience within Mount Rainier Wilderness while also ensuring that the park's natural and cultural resources are preserved.

Specific proposals might include:

- Implementing a Westside Road shuttle.
- Implementing a shuttle system in the Nisqually to Paradise road corridor.
- Implementing a visitor experience and resource protection framework for visitor capacity.
- **Alternative 3. Manage for Opportunities for Solitude:** This alternative focuses on increasing opportunities for solitude by actively managing visitor use levels, particularly day use levels. Less emphasis would be placed on qualities such as visitor self-reliance and freedom from management control.

Specific proposals might include:

- Maintaining requirements to use designated campsites for overnight use.
- Relocating campsites away from each other.
- Reducing parking at some trailheads and/or requiring parking permits in heavily used areas.
- Managing day use through trailhead quotas and/or additional day use fees.
- **Alternative 4. Manage for Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** This alternative emphasizes primitive and unconfined recreation by expanding access and reducing management controls on visitors. Less emphasis would be placed on providing opportunities for solitude by promoting a more unconfined use of park resources.

Specific proposals might include:

- Removing designated camps and allowing self-selected sites in some areas.
- Providing more parking at underutilized trailheads.
- Creating new trails or loops for visitor use.
- Increasing recreational opportunities during winter months and early spring/late fall.



Key Components of the Plan

- **Alternative 5. Manage for Natural and Undeveloped Lands:** This alternative focuses on preserving and restoring the natural quality of wilderness by preserving or restoring ecological systems and allowing the wilderness to be substantially free from the effects of modern civilization. Less emphasis would be placed on qualities such as solitude or freedom from management control.

Specific proposals might include:

- Removing non-native fish from lakes and streams.
- Planning and implementing ecological restoration projects.
- Implementing a requirement for bear canisters and removing bear poles.
- Relocating current campsites that are within 200 feet of streams.
- Removing some existing facilities and structures from the wilderness.
- Limiting use and access to areas of resource degradation or concern.

Share Your Thoughts

The comment period for public scoping will be announced on the planning website at

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/morawild>

This is an ideal time for you to share your thoughts, concerns, and vision for the future of Mount Rainier National Park's wilderness area. Your input will help guide the planning team in developing the WSP, including the consideration of various alternatives for managing the Mount Rainier Wilderness. Additional opportunities for public input will be announced as the planning process progresses.

We look forward to hearing from you.



How to Comment

There are several ways to provide comments:

Attend a public meeting.

Submit comments online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/morawild>.

Mail comments to:

Randy King, Superintendent
Attn: Wilderness Stewardship Plan
Mount Rainier National Park
55210 238th Avenue East
Ashford, Washington 98304-9751

Schedule of Scoping Meetings

Monday, November 16, 2015
5:30 – 7:30 PM

**Seattle Public Library,
Douglass-Truth Branch
2300 E. Yesler Way
Seattle, WA 98122
Phone: 206-684-4704**

Tuesday, November 17, 2015
5:00 – 7:00 PM

**Tacoma Public Library
1102 Tacoma Ave. South
Tacoma, WA 98402
Phone: 253-292-2001**

Wednesday, November 18, 2015
5:30 – 7:30 PM

**Mount Rainier National Park
Education Center
55210 238th Ave. E.
Ashford, WA 98304
Phone: 360-569-2211**

Thursday, November 19, 2015
5:30 – 7:30 PM

**Pierce County Library,
Buckley Branch
123 S. River Ave.
Buckley, WA 98321
Phone: 253-548-3310**

What is scoping?

The purpose of scoping is to determine the scope of an EIS to ensure that issues are identified early and properly studied. The result of scoping is to ensure that the draft EIS produced for public review is thorough and balanced.

Scoping should identify concerns of both the agency and the affected public and should clearly define environmental issues and alternatives to be examined in the EIS. If there are important environmental or social impacts that the public wants considered, the place to raise these issues is at scoping.

Questions to Consider

1. What makes the Mount Rainier Wilderness special to you and why?
2. When you visit the Mount Rainier Wilderness, what types of activities do you engage in?
3. What does the term “wilderness” mean to you, and how does it relate to the Mount Rainier Wilderness?
4. Imagine you are visiting the Mount Rainier Wilderness 20 years from now. What conditions, experiences, visitor services, and facilities would you like to see?
5. What types of activities do you consider important and appropriate in wilderness? And inappropriate?
6. Do the preliminary alternatives address the issues you are concerned with?
7. What are your thoughts on:
 - a. Food storage practices?
 - b. Use of designated camps?
 - c. Day use permits?
8. Please share any additional comments or suggestions.

Planning Phase	Tentative Timeframe	Opportunities for Public Input
Public scoping and comment on preliminary alternatives	Winter 2015	Review information in this newsletter, and attend a public meeting and/or submit your comments online.
Finalize alternatives	Winter 2015/Spring 2016	Stay up to date on the planning process by visiting the website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MORA .
Prepare draft WSP/EIS	Summer/Fall 2016	Stay up to date on the planning process by visiting the website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MORA .
Public comment on draft WSP/EIS	Winter/Spring 2017	Review the draft WSP/EIS, attend a public meeting, and/or submit your comments online.
Public comment on draft WSP/EIS	Winter/Spring 2017	Stay up to date on the planning process by visiting the website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MORA
Prepare final WSP/EIS	Winter 2017	
Record of decision	Winter 2017	
Implementation of WSP	Winter 2017 onward	

