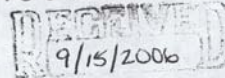


PEPC 190848



September 12, 2006

Carla McConnell  
Olympic National Park – GMP  
National Park Service  
Denver Service Center – Planning  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. McConnell:

My wife and I have been residents of the Port Angeles, WA area since June, 2005; however, we have used the Olympic National Park (henceforth referred to as "the Park") extensively since we moved here from New Jersey. We are United States Citizens.

We are now familiar with the northern, western, and to some degree southern parts of the Park, however we have not been to its eastern portion. The following are our comments on the Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for Olympic National Park (The 15-year Plan).

We were very involved in conservation issues when we lived in New Jersey so our first instinct would be to support Alternative B – Resource Protection Emphasis. We have mostly concentrated on day hikes, so this plan would not impact on our own personal activities. In addition, the emphasis on natural protection coincides with our philosophical point of view. As one commentator here in Clallam County put it, "There are so few wild places left in America today, we need to do everything we can to keep Olympic National Park as wild as possible."

Indeed, I suppose it could have been a hypothetical option to deny any human access to the Park at all or to put a fence around it to ensure that human activity within the Park is not a major component of environmental change. In fact, that might be a good thing for all the other forms of life in the park.

But we asked ourselves if limiting access to the Park too much is actually in the best long-term interests of the Park and its ecology. We are afraid that if too many people are denied the ability to see what a relatively wild place looks like, this Park will lose the constituency needed to protect it in the years ahead.

For the most part, we can still hike where we want, but a lot of Americans simply don't have the level of health or fitness that would allow them to hike on a lot of mountain trails. But that doesn't mean that they aren't capable of enjoying the incredible and unique beauty of the Park. With enjoyment comes support for the existence of the Park as a relatively wild place with a minor amount of human intrusion. Also, getting as many

young people as familiar with the Park as possible is essential so that there are newer generations of Americans who support the existence of not just Olympic National Park, but the concept of land conservation in general.

I personally prefer quiet, steep-climbing trails that are good for both physical health and spiritual contemplation. Aesthetically, some of the wildflower meadows like the Switchback Trail at the peak of bloom in July make the greatest Impressionist masterpiece seem insignificant by comparison.

However, it might not be wise to primarily allow access to the Park to a hard core of elite hikers and back country campers. The average American would lose the opportunity to see, feel, smell and touch nature in the raw. This is already a societal problem as many studies have found that many children are no longer able to make the connection between living processes and daily life – for example, the connection between a farm and the food they eat.

Somehow, the National Parks must balance the preservation of nature/wilderness with the role of educating Americans about their relationship with the natural world. If in addition many unfit Americans at least go on easy walks on easily accessible trails, that seems somehow better than if they never took a walk in the mountains at all. And maybe in some cases a little walk near a nature center might inspire some people to get in a little better shape so they can see more. I personally have been surprised to meet some fairly rotund people up on the High Divide Loop, obviously willing to sweat a bit for the glorious experience.

Are small reminders of human presence – trail signs for example, since they are mentioned in the Plan – really an unbearable intrusion on the wilderness? Sure, the elite hiker doesn't need them, but many visitors like the reassurance that they're going in the right direction and I doubt those signs confuse or otherwise disturb the elk, the cougars, or the bears.

Not having guarantees that the great bulk of the Park will be generally undisturbed defeats the purpose of its preservation. That is clear. A plan that would ultimately degrade the Park so that it no longer qualified as a wilderness is unacceptable. However, the park can also serve a number of other functions and these should not be ignored. It can provide either an active or passive recreational opportunity, it exposes many people to a unique wilderness area and allows them to enjoy a facet of life that many didn't even know existed, and it offers an excellent opportunity to educate visitors about why such preserved areas are so important in the first place.

Therefore, in summary, we support, with some reservations Alternative Plan D, the Management Preferred Alternative, or some hybrid thereof. It is our profound belief that access to the Park makes better people out of most who have been there and visitors who



take away a greater understanding of conservation from the Park will ultimately be the constituency that supports conservation goals and National Parks in the future.

Reservations on this Plan and other suggestions follow:

1. The Boundary adjustments included in Plan D are too limited. Buffer zones should be enlarged wherever possible around the Park. In particular, after personally observing environmentally irresponsible construction on National Forest Service Road 3068 (?) to the northwest of Pyramid Mountain on Lake Crescent, the entire adjustment recommended in Plan B - Resource Protection Emphasis - should be pursued in this area.

Only that boundary adjustment would fully contain the watershed draining from Pyramid Mountain and Boundary Creek, thus protecting the vital spawning grounds of the Beardslee and Crescenti trout in the upper reaches of the Lyre River. Runoff caused by the lessees of the National Forest Lands could easily degrade these spawning grounds. Olympic National Park has a public duty to protect these unique subspecies of fish that exist nowhere else in the world. The Boundary Adjustments in Plan D – the preferred Plan – would not come close to including the Boundary Creek/Pyramid Mountain drainage system. If this aspect of Plan D cannot be corrected to include the entire watershed that could impact the spawning grounds of these endemic subspecies, we would be inclined to support Plan B which does. In the case of the Beardslee trout, the upper Lyre River is the sole spawning habitat for the subspecies. We believe protection of indigenous and particularly endemic species should be a primary goal of the Park's mission.

Other boundary adjustments also seemed too small in Plan D. Any opportunity to increase buffer zones around the Park should be pursued, but in the case of the lands north of Lake Crescent, the Park has an obligation to protect the spawning grounds of the endemic trout there.

2. Motorized boating on Lake Crescent and Ozette Lake should be eliminated or severally restricted. There is no doubt that motorized boating opportunities bring visitors to the Park, but this must be carefully balanced by environmental and safety concerns. Lake Crescent is truly a national gem, a unique ecological habitat of stunning natural beauty. Ozette Lake is a unique wilderness lake very close to the Pacific Ocean. Increased motorized boating over time would almost assuredly degrade the environment of both lakes and should be carefully monitored, if not eliminated outright.
3. A greater percentage of Park funding should go to Natural Resource Education. Olympic National Park has some really great employees who do their best to ensure that visitors enjoy their stay, but part of their job and part of the Park's mission should be to educate people about how to act in the Park. Enjoying the Park must also entail

responsibilities for the visitor; somehow that message must be gotten across to those who use the Park.

This wonderful place is not a Disney Movie set; it's the result of millions of years of biological, geological, and climatic change. Visitors have to be made to understand that their good behavior is the only way that it can remain a wild and beautiful area. Unacceptable behavior – wantonly destroying alpine vegetation, for example - must be vigorously discouraged as part of the Park's mission. Interpretative lectures, guided walks, plant identification classes, etc. are all useful ways to increase knowledge of and interest in the Park. We understand that Law enforcement is an essential component of National Park Management, but Natural Resource Education efforts should not suffer as a result.

4. As part of an enhanced Natural Resource Education Program more full-time rangers should be hired for positions in this area. I personally have met some part-time rangers who were so enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the Park, it was a joy to talk to them. One female Ranger from the Sol Duc Park Ranger Station literally bounded up and down the High Divide Trail pointing out glaciers, peaks, and other natural points of interest to everyone she met. I kept meeting hikers on the High Divide Trail who said "the Ranger told us this, and the Ranger showed us that..." I finally met same ranger on the way down from Heart Lake and she was indeed a great credit to the Park and a great advocate for wilderness protection.

But I can also remember a young Ranger in the Storm King Ranger Station who was reading a book, barely looked up when asked a question, knew nothing about the state of the trails even in the immediate Lake Crescent area, and obviously didn't give one bored hoot if the visitors enjoyed the Park or not.

Rangers are the public face of the National Park Service. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic Rangers, particularly when involved in Natural Resource Education can do a great deal to promote the concept of natural resource conservation and be advocates for the National Park system. Olympic National Park needs more of them on a full-time basis.

5. If those parts of Plan D that include such improvements as mass transit systems to Hurricane Hill and/or the enlargement or enhancement of current facilities are enacted the Park could somehow mandate or at least encourage the use of alternative energy to power these operations.

Washington State is rapidly becoming one of the leading states in the nation for the production of biodiesel. Why not have the mass transit vehicles transporting people in the Park powered by biodiesel? If facilities at Hurricane Ridge, Sol Duc, Kalaloch, or elsewhere are improved, sustainable, alternative energy from wind, solar, etc. could be



used as a source of power. Even small displays of clean, alternative energy in the Park could have a great symbolic value for the visitors who witness it.

The National Park should be a model for the conservation of the natural world. Any way the Park could integrate the concept of man living with nature as opposed to man working against nature should be pursued. Sustainability is by definition essential for the future existence of the Park. The Park should therefore make part of its Natural Resource Education the need for conservation and sustainability of resources in the Park itself. Maybe some of the visitors will take some of those lessons home with them.

6. The National Park System has a long tradition of on-site lodging. In fact, a unique American rustic architectural style was developed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for many of these lodges. Some of them are still in existence today and they offer a special type of atmosphere for a National Park/National Forest/National Monument/National Recreation Area, etc. visit. They may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it could be argued that they provide an aesthetic style and atmosphere that is more in character with their natural surroundings than the generic motels, motor lodges, etc. that surround many wilderness areas. It would be hard to argue that Lake Crescent Lodge and Lake Quinalt Lodge in Olympic National Forest do not offer a special type of accommodation that would be hard to find anywhere - on Federal lands or not.

While there are no plans for net new on-site accommodations in the Draft Management Plan or any of the alternatives, Plans C and D do recommend possible improvements to facilities at Lake Crescent and Sol Duc, and in the case of Kalaloch, the lodge would be relocated. If these improvements are eventually implemented a conscious effort should be made to meld the visitor facilities into their natural surroundings. Again the Park could set an important example by emphasizing alternative, sustainable energy or otherwise ensuring the concessions are run in an environmentally friendly manner.

One final note on the on-site accommodations in the Park. If they are to exist, they must be properly maintained. Lake Crescent Lodge is an absolutely wonderful place, but it will not remain a wonderful place without eventual capital improvement.

Even in the short time we have been in the area, we have noticed that the facilities at Sol Duc and Kalaloch have become increasingly shabby, with an air of neglect. People come from all over the world to take the waters at Sol Duc, but we have been there when the facilities were downright unkempt, even dirty. That is unacceptable.

If the Park is going to have these facilities, the Park must ensure that the concessions are run in a way that does not bring discredit to the Park. If the Park can't ensure well-run operations, they should do away with them entirely as is suggested in Plan B. We

shouldn't be hearing German tourists at Sol Duc Hot Springs Resort complaining about the upkeep of the place.

7. We much disagree with the recent comments of an appointed Port Angeles City Council member that the Park is hostile to the local community. While it is true that some people living in the area surrounding the Park are unhappy that they do not have free, unlimited, and unrestricted access to the Park, the whole *modus operandi* of the Park is to insure that no one, local or not, has unlimited, unrestricted access.

Our observation as relative newcomers is that local residents have special opportunities to use the Park that most visitors do not, simply because trails, visitor centers, and other facilities (The Sol Duc Hot Springs Resort, for example) are close and offer easy access. We consider the year-round Park access fee of \$35.00 to be probably the best bargain in America.

In addition, local communities benefit from employment opportunities, both direct and indirect. Since the Park provides little in the way of accommodations or eating establishments within its boundaries, gateway communities benefit by providing these and other services.

This said, there should be no ill will between area communities and the Park. In fact, the people of Port Angeles came out in force in September, 1937 to encourage President Franklin D. Roosevelt to create the Park. We strongly believe that the Park should have well-funded outreach programs working with local government, schools, and organizations to ensure that "us against them" attitudes do not develop. The Park, if given adequate funding, has the opportunity to educate the local and regional population about the need to conserve wilderness areas. Furthermore, any and all outreach programs can help build the constituency of the future that will recognize the absolute need for Olympic National Park in the first place.

8. It is well known that National Park funding has decreased in recent years. Clearly, Park Management is not going to be able to fully implement any of these plans without the financial means to do so. We hope the Federal Government will increase funding for National Parks so that they are able to fulfill their mission of Natural Resource Conservation.

9. As American citizens, local residents, and interested conservationists we want to thank those responsible for producing the exhaustive Olympic National Park Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (The 15-year Plan).

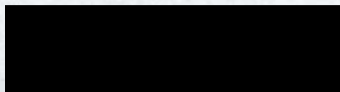


We hope you will consider some of our suggestions, in particular those regarding protection of the entire watershed feeding the Crescenti trout and Beardslee trout spawning areas on the upper Lyre River.

Sincerely,



C.C: Superintendent William G. Laitner, Olympic National Park



Port Angeles, WA 98362

