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Moscow, Idaho 83843

To the Olympic National Park GMP Planning Effort:

I recently reviewed parts of Olympic National Park's draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. I am writing to offer several radical suggestions, as well as comments upon small matters addressed in the draft plan.

Generally, I support most of the elements for each area of the park proposed under Alternative D- the preferred management alternative. For instance, I believe that alternative transportation systems should be implemented in areas like the Hoh and at Hurricane Ridge and given serious consideration, rather than passed off as impractical or financially unviable at this moment in time. I also support modern visitor facilities that incorporate technology and more modern, interactive exhibits, as they are also needed. I support a new visitor center at the Hoh as well as at the coast and new exhibits throughout the park. New signs throughout the park are a management must as well.

I do NOT support the notion under Alternative D that "improvements to the downhill ski support facilities could be allowed" at Hurricane Ridge. Instead, I believe that in this particular case, Alternative B's wording should be adopted in the General Management Plan: "downhill ski support facilities would be closed and removed. Resources would be restored." Here are my reasons for believing the downhill ski slope should be removed:

- 1) the downhill ski area cannot provide significant economic benefit to the park or to a concessionaire to merit keeping it open.
- 2) The park tells people that the park meadows are fragile and need protection in the summer, and then there is a disconnect between this environmental preservation message and what is communicated in the winter—when people can use and slowly destroy parts of the meadow near the ski slope (even if most of this destruction is unintentional). Support of the downhill ski slope demeans the park's communication efforts and also provides people with the false notion that in winter Hurricane Ridge is more resilient than in the summer. It puts out a mixed message.
- 3) There are plenty of other places nearby where people can ski downhill—I don't think this recreational opportunity is fostering any greater connection to the resources of Hurricane Ridge and Olympic National Park.
- 4) Local interests are trumping national interests. Participation and input among local populations I recognize to be important for implementing policies in the park that communities support, but I don't think this ski area draws people who are looking for superb downhill skiing. It only serves a few people at a much higher cost.

Obviously, these are my personal opinions about the ski slope and are probably not shared by all. I think the park should at minimum conduct a study throughout the year that discovers what people think about this important issue in the park.

I would more specifically like to outline some ideas I have that might be somehow incorporated at least in the mind of park personnel or in the Alternative D proposed management choices.

Each year I watch the park staff at Olympic (as well as at other national parks) decrease. The staff of the park do an amazing job to continue treading water each year and provide excellent customer service while also protecting the park. Nonetheless, I am not sure how much longer this can continue before the resources of the park are impaired and people no longer care about the park.

The management options outlined in this draft of the General Management Plan represent the best efforts of our park system to manage parks in the 20th century. These ideas, however, do not allow much room for the drastic changes that will be needed to help protect our parks in the future. With such a drastic dwindling of human resources and funding at Olympic National Park, I believe the park needs to find engaging and innovative new ways to obtain funding and staff.

Volunteers support the park tremendously, but are limited in the scope of what they can do. Conservation is also important work! It is a shame that there is a culture among conservationists where people work for free when the value of the work they do is worth millions.

After serious thought, I think the park needs to begin accepting private funding donations from individuals, businesses, and corporations. Americans have a general dislike for ideas of "commercialization" in national parks, but fail to recognize that our government is not going to fund our national parks in the future any more wholeheartedly than it is now. Budgets will continue to dwindle. Receiving private funds and putting up a few banners for businesses won't distort the experience and authenticity of national parks if done properly.

What I am getting to is that I think the park needs to begin accepting private donations and also charging for some of the services it offers—namely ranger programs. Parks I have recently visited such as Mesa Verde National Park and Carlsbad Caverns National Park have larger ranger staffs because they charge for tours. Selling tickets helps create a feeling of exclusiveness and value while also making sure that people are with a ranger when they explore certain areas of national parks.

My primary idea as a way of initially starting to charge for ranger programs and other services would be to shut down the Obstruction Point Road to private vehicle traffic. Instead, the park should offer regular shuttles on the half hour for a cost of around three to five dollars and have a park ranger talk about what people can see as they ride along.

Ranger programs about marmots could be provided—a key selling point that is not currently available in the programs the park offers. Rangers could lead longer half day hikes in the Obstruction Point area (and other areas), and the park could charge \$15-20 for these programs as well as for other programs it might offer. One disadvantage obviously to having shuttles is that more people would choose to go out to Obstruction Point, and there would be more pressure to develop additional facilities as well as an infrastructure for selling tickets. The benefits, however, I think would far outweigh these potential costs. Alternative transportation would have a stem to grow from, and eventually mandatory shuttles up to Hurricane Ridge could be implemented, with people parking in a satellite park area somewhere in Port Angeles.

While I love Olympic National Park and think that projects like that of the Elwha dam removal and river restoration are inspiring, I also think the park could do better to model the values it represents. For instance, I went to a program about global warming and its potential effects, and yet everyone drives up to Hurricane Ridge in their own cars.

Obviously I recognize that the park's superb staff only have so much time and energy to devote to a myriad of challenges, but I hope that new efforts will take place to help protect the park. Obtaining more staff members than federal budgeting allows through private funding would be a great first step toward that goal. I hope the park will consider my ideas carefully even though I understand they might seem quite radical, challenging, and impractical to conventional thinking.

Thank you for asking for my input and thanks for having the courage to put the draft plan out for criticism.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.