

# **Summer 2021 Civic Engagement Comment Summary Report**

**Nisqually to Paradise Road Corridor Management Plan  
Mount Rainier National Park  
Draft: March 2022**

## **Executive Summary**

The National Park Service (NPS) is developing a Visitor Use Management Plan (plan) for the Nisqually to Paradise Road at Mount Rainier National Park (park) that would address key issues related to transportation and visitor use management at the park. The plan would also identify solutions that protect and improve visitor experience and the park's natural and cultural environment and resources. A long-term approach for managing visitor use at the park would provide NPS managers with the guidance necessary to address current challenges and identify future opportunities.

The park released a newsletter for the plan in July 2021. The newsletter provided the public with background on the project, potential management actions the park may consider, key issues and opportunities, and a timeline for the planning process. The newsletter also solicited comments from the public on seven questions pertaining to visitor use and experience at the park. The newsletter was published on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/nisquallycorridor>.

The public comment period began on July 16, 2021, and ended on September 14, 2021. Any comments entered into PEPC by the public, e-mails sent to park staff, and written comments mailed to park headquarters were considered and included in the overall project record. This *Civic Engagement Comment Summary Report* provides a summary of the concerns expressed during the public comment period.

## **Suggested Strategies**

This section provides recommendations from the public on management strategies and actions to inform the development of the plan. The top three categories of strategies identified by commenters were shuttles, reservation and timed entry, and trip planning. However, commenters also identified additional issues of concern. Recommendations are ordered based on the most common themes or issues that arose, and include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Use shuttle systems to reduce the number of private cars in the park. Shuttles could originate from gateway communities or from farther destinations such as Seattle.
2. Create a reservation or timed entry system to address congestion and improve visitor experience. Ensure that any reservation system is provided online, but also make accommodations for those without easy access to technology.

3. Provide more information via a mobile application or online website regarding park capacity levels and traffic volume before visitors get to the park. Update trail and camping status reports more frequently. Install webcams at popular locations and park entrances to supply real-time, viewable information on congestion and winter conditions.
4. Provide information on accessible trails, programs, and facilities. Make the website, reservation system, park signs, shuttles, and tours available in multiple languages. Ensure shuttles can serve individuals with transportation or mobility aids, and reservations can be made without technology for those without internet, phone, or credit card access. Ensure reservations and parking are free or low-cost to not exclude low-income individuals or families.
5. Address congestion at the park entrances through either built options (i.e., adding a lane) or other management strategies such as a fast pass lane for specific user groups, an online reservation system, self-serve kiosks, or pricing demand management during peak visitation periods.
6. Discourage inappropriate behavior in the park (i.e., stepping off-trail, damaging meadowlands, bringing dogs on trails, and feeding or disturbing wildlife) by increasing the number of park rangers or other enforcement personnel, fining visitors, issuing warnings, or temporarily banning visitors. Place more etiquette signs, include fine amounts on signs, install more rope barriers along paths, and place rangers on trails to better enforce rules.
7. Increase education and outreach, specifically related to the protection of natural resources and leave-no-trace principles. Provide additional interpretive materials/activities such as signs and interactions with rangers, and offer these opportunities in multiple languages.
8. Increase coordination with regional partners for management actions such as providing (1) shuttle stops, (2) updates on park schedules and/or capacity, and (3) additional visitation opportunities in these areas to disperse visitor use.
9. Consider alternative forms of transportation to access the park such as promoting electric vehicles and installing chargers for electric vehicles, and using a train, chairlift, gondola, or tram.
10. Address parking lot capacity and illegal parking along roadsides. Expand parking lots and limit time allowed in parking lots. Consider expanding parking lots at the Carbon entrance, Crystal Mountain trailhead, Mowich Lake, Kautz Creek, Comet Falls, Summerland, Owyhigh Lakes, Bench, Snow Lakes and Grove of the Patriarchs, and behind the Longmire Inn.
11. Add additional visitor centers or other facilities that service as visitor use areas and help disperse visitation.
12. Focus efforts at Cougar Rock on adding/expanding campgrounds and making better use of the Cougar Rock picnic area, including providing overflow or overnight parking and creating better trail connections to and from this area.
13. Provide additional camping opportunities and address the use of large recreational vehicles (RVs) in the park. Allow for areas to have overnight car camping opportunities.

14. Focus efforts at Paradise on addressing congestion and trail improvements. Trail improvements should include providing clearer signage (including wayfinding, level of difficulty, and suggested safety equipment) and addressing the flow of traffic on trails through one-way trails or the creation of pull-offs. Address congestion in this area by increasing parking fees, employing measures to disperse visitor use, limiting large campers/RVs, requiring shuttles/buses to access Paradise, and limiting visitation to this area.
15. Allow access and expand Westside Road to alleviate congestion pressure from other areas of the park. Ensure improvements to the Westside Road area are consistent with the General Management Plan.
16. Expand winter use opportunities for cross-country skiing, cross-country skating, winter camping, and snowshoeing. Expand hours of operation for winter use and increase maintenance during this time. Include entrance at Cougar Rock and expand operation hours at Longmire and Paradise. Provide snow removal on roads to access these opportunities.
17. Provide additional opportunities and incentives for nonmotorized uses such as biking and hiking. Biking/hiking-only entrances and parking lots could incentivize this use. Maintain these opportunities regardless of management actions implemented.

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## Comment Analysis

### Correspondence Received

The following tables were produced by the NPS PEPC database and provide information about the numbers and types of correspondence received, organized by code and by various demographics. Data on the number of correspondences received by correspondence type, organization type, state, and country are presented.

Also included below is a table detailing the number of comments identified by code. A total of 3,164 individual comments were derived from the 705 correspondences received on the newsletter for the plan.

**TABLE 1. CORRESPONDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY CORRESPONDENCE TYPE**

Correspondence Type	Correspondences
Web Form	697
E-Mail	7
Letter	1

**TABLE 2. CORRESPONDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY ORGANIZATION TYPE**

Organization Type	Correspondences
Unaffiliated Individual	684
Conservation/Preservation	9
Recreational Groups	7
Business	2
Federal Government	1
Tribal Government	1
Non-Governmental	1

**TABLE 3. CORRESPONDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY STATE**

State	Correspondences
WA	636
OR	18
CA	9
UN	9
FL	5
IL	3

TX	3
NY	2
OH	2
CO	2
MO	1
IN	1
HI	1
PA	1
AZ	1
DC	1
SC	1
MT	1
GA	1
KS	1
WI	1
VA	1
WY	1
NJ	1
NC	1
MN	1

**TABLE 4. CORRESPONDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTRY**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Correspondences</b>
USA	703
SWZ	1
CAN	1



## Definition of Terms

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**Correspondence:** A correspondence is the entire document received from a commenter and includes letters, e-mails, comments entered directly into the PEPC database, and any other written comments provided either at the public meetings or in person at the park.

**Comment:** A comment is a portion of text within a correspondence that addresses a single subject such as “Natural Resources.” The comment could also question the accuracy of the information provided in the newsletter, question the adequacy of any background information, or present issues other than those presented in the newsletter.

**Comment Summary:** A grouping that is centered on a common subject. Comment summaries combine similar comments.

## Comment Summaries

### Prompting Questions and Comment Summary Structure

Seven questions were posed to commenters to receive targeted feedback on issues and opportunities in the corridor. These questions included:

1. What questions do you have about these ideas (reservations, trip planning, shuttles etc.)? Please share them so we can address these questions in the next phase of analysis!
2. How would these ideas (reservations trip planning, shuttles etc.) influence your visit to Mount Rainier?
3. What information do you think the planning team should consider when analyzing these strategies?
4. What tools do you use to help plan your trip to Mount Rainier? How could these tools be improved, and where should this informing be provided?
5. Based on your desired experiences at Mount Rainier, what combination of these ideas do you think best achieve the purpose of the plan? Which do not, and why?
6. Are there other ideas that should be considered and analyzed that are not already present? What is missing, and why should it be considered?
7. What other comments or suggestions do you have?

Within the comment summary that follows, major concepts and unique perspectives are represented for the comments received during the comment period.

### Trip Planning

#### Suggestions / Requests

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To enhance trip planning, commenters offered the following suggestions:

- Improve the Rec.gov site; it is clunky and does not work well to reserve campsites.
- Promote carpooling to the park through the NPS website and social media.
- Provide real-time updates for traffic loads and parking at the park (entrances, popular locations), wait times, available camping spots, road construction, and visitor volume.
- Create itineraries for different lengths of stay (1-day, 1-week) or different visitor types (casual, backpacker, camper).
- Update trail and camping status reports more frequently, especially during summer; note when trails have been maintained.
- Provide detailed trail information about trail length, elevation gain, services/facilities available, hazards and assumed risks (e.g., when a bridge is out, potential difficulty/risk level of a log crossing), temperature, wind chill, and visibility.
- Provide a park newspaper with detailed site maps of Paradise, Ohanapecosh, and Sunrise to relieve the burden on visitor centers.
- Install webcams at popular locations and park entrances to supply real-time, viewable information on congestion and winter conditions.
- Provide forecasted use data on wait times for any given day based on historical use.

- Provide trip planning information on lesser-known parts of the park.
- Place electronic signs along the roads to the park with the wait time to enter the park.
- Implement a text or email system that visitors sign up for that sends periodic updates on park information (congestion, interesting sights).
- Reinstate the wildflower reports.
- Provide the chalkboard/whiteboard trail conditions updates online (picture or webcam) through social media.
- Provide downloadable maps on the park website.
- Incentivize visitors to submit optional information on when they plan to visit to set expectations for others on when the park may be crowded.
- Supplement campsite reservations with multiple pictures of a site, including satellite image to give a better idea of the site in relation to neighboring campsites.
- Supply more links to valuable websites on the park site, such as a link to the park's Facebook page or to WTA.
- Continue to have rangers available to answer the phone.
- Update social media the day before or early in the morning during the winter for gate closures; keep a steady schedule for updates.
- Provide general park information on the tram or before visitors arrive in park.
- Provide usage patterns on shuttles (if implemented).
- Include a "recent animal sightings" page for hikers and photographers that lists the trail and animals sighted.

## **Mobile Application (App)**

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Commenters suggested the park create a mobile application (app) with the following features:

- self-contained maps so that cell signal is not needed to use them
- a primer that would provide a small introduction to the visitor's upcoming visit and allow the visitor to create a personal map of their trip
- information on flora, fauna, and trails
- ability to book a parking spot or shuttle reservation
- real-time data on various locations, parking spots currently available, congestion, and events
- a QR code that allows automated entry to the park once fee is paid
- a text or video chat feature in the app to talk to a ranger right from the phone
- self-guided tours

One commenter suggested selling the app for a few dollars. Another commenter noted the importance of how and who gets the contracts for an app; the company should be vetted by independent third parties and the public for efficacy, ease of use, and potential conflicts of interest.

Commenters noted the drawbacks of an app, specifically the limited cell service in the park.

## **Smoke and Air Quality Considerations**

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Commenters requested the park provide information on smoke and air quality throughout the park. One commenter suggested installing smoke monitors at varying elevations so visitors can be aware of smoke plumes that affect air quality.

## **What tools do you use to help plan your trip to Mount Rainier?**

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### **Maps/Books/Guides**

- Recreation guidebooks (mountaineers' hiking guidebooks, local area guidebooks, National Geographic guidebooks, AAA Visitors guide)
- Maps (Topo maps, NPS Wilderness maps, AAA road map, Yellow National Geographic map, Mount Rainier / Cascade Mountains books/maps)
- National Geographic National Park edition
- MORA brochure
- Book from Ohanapecosh
- Magazines
- The Falcon Guide - Hiking Mount Rainier National Park

### **Online Resources**

- Trip blogs/reviews; updates from climbing rangers on Mount Rainier climbing blog
- Mount Rainier webpage
- Campground reservation system / campground reports
- WTA.org (trip reports and trip planner)
- Recreation.org
- NWhiker.com
- Airnow.gov
- Google maps
- All Trails trip reports
- Weather sites / online forecasts (e.g., Mount Rainier recreational weather forecast. [https://a.atmos.washington.edu/data/rainier\\_report.html](https://a.atmos.washington.edu/data/rainier_report.html); weather.gov)
- Mount Rainer National Park website travel alerts
- Turns-All-Year trip reports
- Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center forecasts
- WSDOT pass conditions in season / current road conditions and alerts
- Links to outside-the-NPS sites on "planning your visit" page
- CalTopo
- Gaia GPS
- MeetUps
- National Weather Service recreational forecast
- YouTbe

- Facebook pages (Washington hikers and climbers Facebook group)
- Trail reviews online
- Adventure Cycling website
- NOAA Mount Rainer forecast
- Mountain Project
- Northwest Avalanche Center (telemetry weather)
- Reserve America
- Climbing route pdfs
- Wildflower reports
- Webcams (gate/entrances, roads, parking lots)
- NWHikers.net
- Green Trail maps
- Snowpack reports
- Photographic animal sightings
- Conservation NW and the National Parks Conservation Association
- Coalition to Protect National Parks
- The forecast link, which points to the University of Washington Atmospheric Sciences web site
- Trail conditions web page
- Trip Planner
- WTA hike finder

### **Mobile**

- NPS app
- Gaia app
- Alltrails app
- Weather apps
- Plant and bird identification apps
- WTA's Trailblazer smartphone app
- Park social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)
- Trailforks
- Waze

### **In Person**

- Contacted the park by phone (ranger stations, inn)
- Visited the park (ranger stations, road signs)
- Previous visitors of the park (family, friends)
- Visits to local outdoors stores
- Ranger desk at the Seattle REI
- Books from the library

## **Transportation and Parking**

### **General Parking Suggestions**

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Commenters suggested managing parking in various ways, such as building new lots, expanding existing lots, and closing lots once parking capacity is reached. They stated that the parking areas need to be bigger to address unsafe parking that blocks road lanes. Commenters suggested expanding parking areas at the Carbon entrance, Crystal Mountain trailhead, Mowich Lake, Kautz Creek, Comet Falls, Summerland, Owyhigh Lakes, Bench, Snow Lakes and Grove of the Patriarchs, and behind the Longmire Inn. One commenter suggested establishing a parking lot lower on the mountain, potentially near Longmire.

Commenters suggested that parking times either be limited to a short-term (45 minutes) and mid-term (90 minutes) parking, particularly at Paradise, or that parking passes should be used during times of high visitation. Additionally, commenters suggested adding parking facilities outside the park so that public or private shuttles could transport visitors into the park. Other suggestions included reserving parking for annual pass holders, providing valet parking at trail heads, increasing safety signage, fixing roads, and building ranger booths. Some commenters stated opposition to building or expanding parking lots, explaining it would only add more people and take away from the experience of nature.

### **Non-motorized Transportation**

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Commenters requested the park put more emphasis on nonmotorized forms of transportation such as biking and hiking. Specific suggestions included having a bike-only day (similar to what is offered at Crater Lake), designating backpacker-only parking for trailheads, creating trails and bike paths into the park, providing more options for bike access, and offering designated parking for hikers/bikers. One commenter suggested the park focus on creating new corridors for people to travel by bicycle, horse, and foot to encouraging non-automobile transportation.

### **Transportation Improvements**

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Commenters suggested improvements to transportation and parking throughout the park, such as installing solar-powered or electric vehicle charging stations; offering electric bike (e-bike) and motor scooter rentals; and creating a chairlift, gondola, and/or tram system. Commenters expressed concern that the use of motorcycles in the park diminishes visitor experience, citing the impact from loud, unmuffled exhaust.

### **Improved Regional Roadways**

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Commenters suggested changes and improvements in infrastructure, including roadway improvements to lessen traffic, such as widening SR-706, improving the U.S. Forest Service portion of the road to Mowich Lake and Westside Road access, and building a transit lane on SR706 from Kernahan Road to the park. One commenter suggested opening Highway 123 earlier and closing the road farther up the pass.

## **Rail Transportation**

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Commenters requested the park consider rail transportation to the park. Specific suggestions included activating the Tacoma Rail Mountain Division rail lines, partnering with an existing train line, and incorporating a train located along the I-5 corridor.

## **Parking and Road Congestion**

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Commenters stated that some of the solutions presented seem to contradict the goal of relieving traffic congestion. They noted that increasing the amount of parking would increase the number of visitors and cars on the roads. Additionally, commenters suggested that if access to Paradise were restricted, it would create congestion by dispersing cars and visitors to other areas.

Commenters felt the park should consider reducing park access, lessen or stop advertisements for the park on social media and with local chambers of commerce, institute a lottery for some types of visitors, discourage motorhomes and incentivize small vehicles, incentivize off-peak visitation, reduce food services and museums in the park, limit the park to hike-in access only, discourage the use of park as a gathering place and require special reservations for groups of more than eight people, eliminate overflow parking, require payment for parking at the most congested areas, and establish a carrying capacity.

One commenter stated that if use restrictions (i.e., roads, trail, capacity) are implemented at Mount Rainier, visitors could choose to go to other public lands that do not have restrictions. This would alleviate congestion in the park, but only cause impacts to shift elsewhere.

## **Suggestions to Relieve Congestion in the Park**

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Commenters provided suggestions to relieve congestion in the park, including providing information on less visited or new areas in the park and in other gateway communities. To take pressure off more popular areas of the park, commenters suggested upgrading the Cascade Pass for windshield tourism and opening additional park entrances.

They also suggested the park provide additional campgrounds and lodging to lengthen visits, encourage carpooling and/or shuttles, use message boards to provide real-time information and let visitors know a certain area such as Paradise is full, provide drop-off areas and have the cars park farther away, build more pull-outs/overlooks, add visitor centers at locations such as Elbe and Ashford to distribute visitation, provide internet access to allow visitors to see wait times, allow parking farther in Longmire, use a seasonal ranger in the summer to distribute traffic and visitation, and improve signage at lesser known trails to reduce congestion at better known trails. One commenter suggested conducting a traffic study to examine the number of cars that enter the park and where they go to better understand how to address congestion.

## **Regional Connections**

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Commenters noted regional connections should be made, such as connecting a shuttle system to the Tacoma Dome/Federal Way transit center, partnering with organized trailhead buses, and coordinating with local transit agencies such as King or Pierce County Transit.

Commenters suggested operating a shuttle system outside the park that would bring visitors to the park, noting that this would reduce traffic and parking congestion in the park. Further, commenters suggested specific locations where shuttles should originate, including from locations such as Bellevue, Seattle, Tacoma, Enumclaw, Yakima, I-5, 410, Elbe, and Ashford. Commenters suggested shuttles be contracted out, run by lodges for lodge guests, or managed by tour operators. They noted it would be helpful for the shuttle to skip the entrance line and possibly for those on shuttles to receive reduced entrance fees.

Commenters suggested coordinating with communities to provide visitor services and other amenities in gateway communities, such as outpost stations in Seattle or nearby towns. One commenter suggested the park collaborate with cities and non-governmental organizations to provide alternative transportation to the park for disadvantaged individuals. There was also a suggestion to partner with local transit agencies for a “transit to trails” program. One commenter suggested that shuttles coordinate with public and private schools in the area, while another commenter requested the park consider a partnership with the Trailhead Direct partnership in King County. One commenter suggested using Metro ride share vans on the weekends with certified volunteer drivers.

## **Reservations and Timed Entry**

### **Suggestions / Requests**

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Commenters were supportive of a reservation system and stated that it would help with congestion and visitor experience. They suggested that a reservation system could support a carrying capacity within the park to limit the number of visitors. Commenters stated that timed entry could be an effective solution but noted that visitors using the Stevens Canyon entrance would also need to be considered.

Commenters opposed a reservation system and noted that it would be financially restrictive and represent a challenge for those coming from out of town because they would need to secure lodging and a park reservation for the same day. In lieu of a reservation system, commenters suggested implementing a peak-usage fee or closing the gates when there are not enough parking spaces to accommodate additional guests.

Commenters requested that the system be available online, through call-in, at a location outside the park, and via walk-up. Commenters also requested that a system be implemented in phases and that the opportunity for first-come-first-serve reservations remain. Several commenters suggested an additional or separate gate for locals, season pass holders, and those who already have reservations prior to entering the park. Several commenters also requested that the reservation system only be used on peak times/days/seasons.

Additional suggestions for the reservation included:

- Using a QR code and electronic check-in and check-out system.
- Setting a daily carrying capacity visitor limit.
- Giving locals priority with a local pass, separate entrance, free pass, or local-only days.
- Creating a lottery system and allowing a waitlist.



- Varying the reservation based on use (i.e., backcountry, camping, hiking) or location (i.e., certain parking lots or hiking trails).
- Not using private companies because they can charge high fees and are burdensome to navigate online.
- Allowing reservations for 30 to 60 days in advance.
- Staggering when reservations slots are released so they are not all available for purchase at once.
- Limiting how many reservations a single person or company can purchase in one day. Commenters expressed concern that tour/recreation companies or citizens would buy out all the tickets to sell to third parties. Other commenters expressed the desire to purchase for an entire group.
- Not requiring reservations for volunteers, people entering the park before a certain time of day, those on foot, or those on bike. Giving a priority or discount to those who carpool or have an electric vehicle. One commenter suggested charging an additional fee for driving a private vehicle.
- Using one reservation system for summer use and one for winter use.
- Using a reservation system only for parking or only for the shuttle.
- Implementing zoning for parking reservations for a block of hours or all day for an additional fee. Using different time limits for different parking lots.
- Creating a limit on the type of vehicles allowed per day (limiting the daily number of oversized vehicles/motor homes that can enter).
- Offering ranger talks or guided hikes as an incentive to use the reservation system.
- Requiring timed entry at Longmire and allowing visitors to explore the area during their wait.
- Using a one-in-one-out system similar to Hurricane Ridge in Olympic National Park.
- Use a scholarship fund to assist any users who would be financially restricted from visiting the park due to the hold fees.

## **Camping Reservations**

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Commenters supported a camping reservation system but noted that it should have an electronic payment system and requested that parking be included with the reservation. Commenters stated that the existing reservation system is difficult to use because of the lack of available reservations and noted that it is unclear when reservations become available. One commenter indicated that they do not like that they have to pay the park entrance fee to speak with a ranger to see if there are any campgrounds available. One commenter requested a reservation system for the White River campground. Another commenter suggested that those camping, backpacking, or climbing should get preferential reservations.

## **Cancelling Reservations**

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Commenters expressed concern that visitors would make reservations and then not use them or not cancel them. Suggestions to mitigate this included making the reservations flexible for cancellation in case of emergency or bad weather, allowing flexibility for use over a 3-day period,

opening the reservations to others when they are canceled, or charging a large fee to hold the reservation and refunding it when it is used. Commenters also requested that reservations be non-refundable to fund additional trail maintenance.

## **Entrance Station Queues and Fees**

### **Management Activities to Address Long Entrance Lines**

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Commenters stated that the long lines at the entrance station affect visitor experience and block residents and businesses during peak visitation. They suggested various improvements to the entrances, such as moving Nisqually entrance station 2-4 miles, so the line would be inside the park boundary and would not block residences; commenters specifically suggested moving the entrance station to Kautz Creek. Commenters also suggested widening the entrance to a two-lane entry, with specific suggestions to add a “ferry waiting line” type of lane from the Nisqually entrance to Alexanders Inn to help traffic flow, have a “fast pass” lane for hikers or park pass/reservation holders, and reopen the road to Ipsut campground. Other improvements included building kiosks for park entry (either self-service or ranger-operated), allowing people to buy passes online before they arrive to streamline the entrance process, and constructing gates at the entrance to restrict nighttime use. Amenities to address long wait times included a turnaround if someone wants to leave the line and portable toilets along the line while people wait. Specific projects mentioned included partnering with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to widen SR706 from Kernaham Road to the park entrance and upgrading the Back Road into Longmire (via Skate Creek Road) for visitors who pre-purchase a pass. Commenters noted safety concerns with the current traffic, such as the ability for emergency vehicles to access the park. Some commenters expressed concern with adding lanes at the entrances, noting high costs and impacts on natural resources.

Commenters suggested several management activities to address long entrance lines, including raising fees during peak visitation times and offering a discount during lower visitation times, alternative fee structures for visitors, charging higher prices for those that drive in versus those who walk/bike or have multiple people in a car, charging based on where in the park a visitor is going, using digital message boards to communicate wait times, opening the Nisqually gate earlier in the day, promoting use of the Sunrise entrance, and having lower rates or special lanes for motorcycles or other vehicles that take up less space. For carpool discounts, commenters suggested that these apply to cars with four or more people. Commenters also requested that the gates be managed independently from one another.

Commenters raised concerns about the impacts some management activities at the entrance gate may have, including how to manage traffic that may move from Nisqually to Sunrise, and concern that increasing entrance costs would make the park inaccessible to disadvantaged groups.

## Shuttle System

### Suggestions for Shuttle Operations

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Commenters supported the use of shuttles but made several suggestions regarding shuttle operation and ways to encourage people to use the shuttle. These ideas included:

- Prevent crowding on shuttles by adding an additional trailer during busy periods, consider variations on demand during different periods/times, include frequent stops, have a large shuttle for main stops and smaller vans for specific locations, and include a daily carrying capacity between all the shuttles.
- Offer frequent shuttles to prevent crowding.
  - Add an additional trailer to decrease crowding.
  - Consider varying demand.
- Provide frequent stops for recreationists and offer quick access to shuttles in case of change in weather.
- Offer 24/7 shuttles or shuttles that run early/late enough that people can return to their vehicles without worry.
- Have shuttles comply with the ADA.
- Run winter shuttles only on weekends.
- Use electric or clean burning fuel shuttles.
- Make shuttles large enough to carry gear and bike/ski racks.
- Do not allow pets on buses.
- Offer free or low-cost shuttle.
  - Discounts for families
  - Discount/free rides for annual pass holders
  - Consider the use of sponsors (i.e., Amazon) to offset the cost of the shuttles
  - Make the cost of parking significantly higher to encourage use of shuttle
  - Cost of an autonomous bus or a human driven bus
  - Include the cost of the shuttle in the entry fee instead for everyone to encourage use
  - Do not add an additional shuttle fee to encourage use
  - Include shuttle rides in overnight permits
- Run shuttles only during busy periods.
- Consider using school buses/drivers during the summer
  - Allow private enterprises to run shuttles.
  - Do not allow private enterprises to run shuttles.
- Copy the shuttle system at Zion National Park or Denali National Park. Supporters stated that these shuttle systems were efficient and pleasant to use.
- Offer two types of shuttles: One for tours/interpretation and one for quick access to hiking trails. Include stops on the east side.
- Ensure social distancing or smaller busses with low carrying capacity due to COVID-19. Sanitize the shuttles several times a day.
- Continue to allow private vehicles.

- Consider partnerships with local jurisdictions in the development of a shuttle system.
- Partner with local jurisdictions during the development of the shuttle system.
- Offer special discounts on select days during the week for seniors or residents of Washington state; have passenger show their identification card to receive the discount.

### **Suggested Locations for Shuttle Parking and Stopping Points**

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Commenters suggested locations for shuttle parking lots and stopping points, including:

- From Longmire to Paradise
- From Paradise to Nisqually
- Visitor centers
- Each entry gate
- From the West Side
- Along West Side Road
- Sunrise
- Whitaker's region
- Mowich Lake
- Mowich Lake to Longmire and/or White River
- Reflection Lake
- Ohanapecosh
- Between Greenwater / Crystal Mountain and Sunrise
- Trailheads (Narada Falls, Christine Falls, Wonderland trail)
- New trails that are only accessible by shuttle

Suggested parking/staging areas include:

- Cougar Rock
- Box Canyon picnic area
- Outside the park
- At hotels outside the park
- Ricksecker Point
- New shuttle-only parking lots

### **Opposition to Shuttles**

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Commenters opposed a shuttle system and noted that it would be difficult for families, physically disabled visitors, groups of visitors, recreation users with a lot of equipment, and those recreating for long hours. Other reasons for opposing shuttles included the cost of shuttle fares, the cost of shuttles themselves, and rider safety during COVID-19.

Commenters also noted that shuttles would lead to additional crowding because lack of parking currently acts as a carrying capacity for trailheads. One commenter suggested micro-transportation options instead of shuttles, such as e-bikes and e-scooters. Another commenter suggested valet for those who do not want to ride a shuttle.

## Paradise

### Suggestions / Requests – Trail Improvements

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Commenters offered the following suggestions for trail improvements at Paradise:

- Add barriers to keep people on the trail and make trail improvements so hikers do not have to move off the trail to pass.
- Clearly sign the Nisqually Vista, Deadhorse Creek, and Avalanche Lily trail entry in the lower parking lot.
- Clearly sign the routes to Skyline east, Skyline west, and the Nisqually trail from the Jackson Visitor Center route.
- Consider changing the name of the Skyline trail on east side of the loop to avoid visitor confusion in the vicinity of the Jackson Visitor Center.
- Post a large Paradise area trails map in the lower parking lot that is suitable for taking a cellphone photo; provide information about varying trail difficulty, trail type, and average congestion, and install trailhead maps near Paradise.
- Close the Alta Vista center trail or at least remove asphalt paving and close it during melt-out.
- Provide a clearly marked dog walking loop at Paradise picnic area.
- Provide spots to pull over off the trail to let people rest/take pictures while keeping the flow on the trail.
- Display information about how to recreate respectfully.

### Suggestions / Requests – Parking and Congestion

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Commenters offered the following suggestions to improve parking and help alleviate congestion at Paradise:

- Designate certain areas as day-use and long-term parking; these designations could also be made on the lower road.
- Increase parking fees at Paradise to incentivize shuttle use.
- Limit parking during the summer to those staying at the lodge, are backpacking, climbing, or in the park for overnight use. Charge a fee for day-use parking.
- Ban campers/trailers/RVs because they take up too much room on roads and in parking areas.
- Designate parking areas based on purpose in the park; hiker-designated parking far enough from Paradise to deter short-term visitors but suitable for hikers visiting the trails.
- Provide shuttle-only or bus-only access to Paradise.
- Remove car access to Paradise unless visitors are patrons of the inn or possess a disabled parking permit.
- Increase spots to pull over/off the trail to let people rest/take pictures so that flow to improve flow.

- Institute a time limit for Paradise visits.
- Develop a two-level or multi-level parking garage at Paradise.
- Designate space closer to the lodges for cars carrying at least four (or maybe three) people.
- Set aside dedicated areas for motorcycle parking vs. allowing riders to take up a whole parking slot. Slots could also be designated for up to three motorcycles.
- Dispense Paradise parking passes at Elbe and Ashford.
- Assign overnight parking to less congested lots, or require overnight users to park off site and shuttle in.
- Limit the number of vehicles per group; require partial carpooling from an off-site parking area to Paradise.
- Use the Barn Flats area from the Nisqually Road as a turn-a-round place for cars with no Paradise ticket.
- Redesign the back area of Barn Flats so visitors can go through the picnic area into the Paradise parking area to allow visitors without a Paradise ticket access to the restroom and recreation area.
- Provide parking along the exit road from the Paradise picnic ground at Barn Flats.
- Use Paradise picnic area for overnight guests at the Inn and provide valet parking.
- Establish a quota for entry to the Paradise area.
- Institute a lottery system for Paradise visits or trail use.

Furthermore, commenters suggested several ideas to improve visitor experience at Paradise, including keeping the Paradise lodge open year-round to overnight guests, basing gate closure at Longmire on sunrise and sunset instead of fixed times; not locking the gate at night, expanding the visitor center, decreasing the size of existing parking lots at Paradise, returning parking to meadowland for recreation, using Paradise picnic area as a designed selfie-photo spot, and providing an automatic entrance gate into Paradise from Barn Flats on the Nisqually Road.

## Winter Use

### Suggestions / Requests

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Commenters supported expanding winter use activities, including cross-country skiing, cross-country skating, winter camping, training programs and slopes designated for kids or beginners, and snowshoeing; they requested that the hours of operation and the period of winter use be extended. They also suggested additional amenities such as ski huts, snow coach rides, and increased maintenance for winter use areas.

Commenters supported constructing a gate at Cougar Rock and requested that the gates to Longmire and Paradise be opened earlier during winter months and more consistently, noting that current hours are not predictable. Commenters requested better trip-planning tools in the winter to alert of gate closures.

Commenters stated that to support winter recreation, the camping season needs to be extended, Crystal Mountain should remain open longer into the shoulder seasons, and Highway 123 and White River Road should be opened earlier in the spring.

Commenters also requested snowshoe trails be added in Cougar Rock campground. One commenter requested that if weather does not permit access to Paradise, the road be gated farther up than it is now. Another commenter noted that having a real bridge over the Nisqually would provide additional snowshoeing and skiing opportunities.

Concerns about winter use included crowding and safety, with commenters suggesting users take safety training. One commenter suggested a skills and knowledge requirement for people accessing dangerous areas in the winter. A few commenters requested a snowcat, or other type of shuttle, to improve visitor safety and access during winter months.

## **Snowmobile Use**

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One commenter discussed the environmental assessment prepared in 2001 regarding snowmobile use in Mount Rainier National Park. The commenter noted that the park should have prepared a Finding of No Significant Impact and undertaken a rulemaking in the Federal Register. The commenter recommended the park either include snowmobiling in this planning effort or revisit the 2001 environmental assessment on snowmobiling as a separate effort.

## **Westside Road**

### **Suggestions / Requests**

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Commenters noted that allowing access and expanding Westside Road would alleviate congestion pressure from other parts of the park, such as Paradise. Other commenters stated that Westside Road should remain closed and noted that opening Westside Road to traffic or vehicle tours would detract from its current hiking and biking use.

One commenter stated that the addition of vehicles would endanger individuals trying to get to Lake George, while another commenter noted that vehicles would help visitors access the trailhead for Lake George. One commenter suggested Westside Road be a shuttle-only road. Another commenter suggested limiting Westside Road/parking permits to those with verified camp permits. One commenter stated that the road needs to be open to everyone, not to just a small set of people who are able to pay for guided tours.

Commenters also suggested the following ideas for Westside Road:

- Create a paved cycling route if a road is not feasible.
- Have shuttles for hikers on Westside Road; use shuttles for scenic tours.
- Expand parking on Westside Road near the Paradise Road.
- Construct picnic areas and a campground.
- Open a visitor center on the west side of the mountain to ease congestion at Paradise/Sunrise.
- Keep road open year-round.

- Ban electric mopeds.
- Provide guided jeep/van tours at extra cost.
- Ban private vehicles; allow access only through shuttle bus, by bicycle, or on foot.
- Re-mark trailheads that existed along the road, provide parking areas, and add new signage.
- Use temporary, army-type bridges over the Tahoma River during the summer.

Commenters suggested that more background information is needed on the history of current management decisions regarding Westside Road and that the General Management Plan / Record of Decision should be revisited before the park considers opening Westside Road in light of geohazard conditions that have been previously identified.

## **Cultural Significance**

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One commenter noted that allowing visitors on the road would provide access to cultural landscapes in the park.

One commenter suggested that not opening Westside Road would conflict with a goal of the plan to preserve and interpret the historic integrity of the cultural and significant transportation features of the park. The commenter noted that Westside Road has multiple architectural features, buildings, and memorials (e.g., Klapatche Point walls, stone arch bridges, historical patrol cabins, the 1946 Marine Memorial). The commenter further noted that there are inconsistencies in the Westside Road issue statement causing it to be intentionally misleading; specifically, the wording suggests that most of the road is severely damaged by flooding and is unsuitable for private vehicles when only a small portion of the road is washed away, and the closed portion of the road is used by NPS vehicles.

## **Cougar Rock Picnic Area**

### **Suggestions / Requests – Campgrounds**

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Commenters suggested adding the following campgrounds:

- Develop campgrounds off the road at Mowich because it could be developed without removing old-growth forest.
- Add a campground at Westside Road near Paradise Road.
- Rebuild Sunshine Point campground. One commenter opposed opening Sunshine Point campground because it is subject to future flooding and is not environmentally or economically sustainable.
- Rebuild Ipsut campground.
- Add more camping near the north side of the mountain.
- Add a campground close to Longmire.
- Add another campground near White River; repair and reopen campsites in that area.
- Repurpose the Cougar Rock picnic area as a campground.
- Add campgrounds near park entrances with campsites, parking, and a shuttle stop.



- Expand campground access through access points on highway 410 and Buck Creek.
- Develop a new campground up the Westside Road near the St. Andrews Patrol Cabin.

Some commenters suggested adding overnight parking in the Cougar Rock picnic area. One commenter requested smaller, tent-only campgrounds for families. Another commenter requested yurts and small cabins with electricity and centralized showers and toilets. Commenters further discussed the use of RVs in the park; one commenter noted that the current campgrounds are not adequate for modern RVs, while another commenter requested the park move RV camping from Cougar Rock. Additionally, one commenter suggested using Cougar Rock picnic area as a no-campfire facility to accommodate visitors with respiratory issues.

One commenter opposed more campsites at Cougar Rock because of the impact to the area.

### **Suggestions / Requests – Trails**

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Commenters requested more trail connections to and from Cougar Rock picnic area. Commenters specifically suggested starting the Wonderland trail from Cougar Rock to reduce parking demand elsewhere in the park. One commenter requested the park build a trail from Cougar Rock to Carter Falls. Commenters further suggested opening Nisqually Bridge to allow visitors over the Nisqually River to get to the Wonderland trail.

### **Additional Uses**

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Commenters suggested that the Cougar Rock picnic area is underused and could provide other/multiple uses, such as overflow for parking and camping, a hiker-only parking lot, or a redesigned picnic area to serve as remote parking for a shuttle stop.

One commenter opposed the repurposing of Cougar Rock picnic area and suggested the park create new picnic areas if Cougar Rock is used for parking.

### **Other Corridor Locations**

### **Suggestions / Requests - Trails**

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Commenters suggested the following ideas regarding trails for other corridor locations not discussed in the newsletter:

- Develop new trails overall; develop trails outside the central “ring” of the Wonderland trail to disperse visitors (such as at Crystal Lakes, the northwest quadrant of the park, or the north-central portion of the park); make some trails one way or loop trails to avoid trail congestion and visitors going off the trail; expand the size of the park to include subalpine hiking opportunities; and urge visitors to use the Packwood cutoff to reach the east side of the park.
- Provide more trailhead parking for the "less popular" trails, such as trails leading to western parts of Tatoosh.

- Improve hiking access at Carbon River and fix the road there to at least Green Water trailhead.
- Relocate and maintain the Tahoma Creek trail (move it up the hillside) to have alternative travel to the suspension bridge, Indian Henry's viewpoint, Glacier Island viewpoint, and Emerald Ridge.
- Restore access to the Mount Wow trail starting from the Ashford entrance.
- Provide a bicycle entrance to ride from Skate Creek Road into the old campground near Longmire.
- Build a trail from Kautz Creek to Longmire.
- Build a new trail to the Oliver Lakes Basin and connect with the Northern Loop trail; build a trail up Goat Island Mountain from the beginning of the Summerland trail; build a trail between Burroughs Mountain (between the second and third) and just beyond Skyscraper Pass; build a trail between the Skyscraper Pass trail and the Berkeley Park trail.
- Expand opportunities around Narada Falls by providing additional connections from Paradise to the Lakes trail and High Lakes trail.
- Consider new or expanded trail opportunities in areas of the park that are under-visited or that currently have no trail access.
- Consider expanding use of Mowich; there is a lot of potential for several hikes that currently cannot be supported because of limited parking.
- Allow/do not allow dogs on trails.

## **Suggestions / Requests - Roads**

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Commenters suggested the following changes to roads in other park corridors not discussed in the newsletter:

- Repair the roads to Carbon Glacier campground and Puyallup glacier area.
- Repair the road at Carbonado and reopen it to guests.
- Rebuild or replace Westside and Carbon River Roads with access roads outside park lands.
- Repair Steven Canyon Road.
- Improve and pave more of SR165 toward Mowich Lake to make it more accessible; plow it year-round.
- Adopt the Old Hersey Road for activities outside park boundaries.
- Open Carbon River Road to allow vehicle traffic to Ipsut Creek campground; closing the road put pressure on Cougar Rock campground.
- Open the back way into Longmire off Skate Creek Road.
- Replace bridge(s) and roads NFD 74 and 75 for better access along the West Fork White River for hike-in park access from the northside boundary/Clearwater Wilderness.
- Provide road access to the west side of the mountain.

One commenter suggested removing the roads to Paradise, Sunrise, and Mowich Lake to make travel more challenging and reduce congestion.

## Suggestions / Requests – General

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Commenters suggested the following changes to other park corridors not discussed in the newsletter:

- Close the administrative offices at Sunrise and reopen that lodge to visitors or develop a lodge at Sunrise.
- Develop a new location like Paradise to disperse visitors throughout the park.
- Build out facilities in other parts of the park (Mowich and Carbon River).
- Make areas like Kautz Creek and Comet Falls more accommodating to visitors.
- Disperse picnic opportunities across Glacier Bridge, Fourth Crossing, and the switchback on the Valley Road to replace picnic areas that are converted to parking.
- Consider the White River entrance and Sunrise in future discussions with the other examined locations.
- Provide more places on the Panorama Loop hikes where hikers could stop for lunch.
- Redevelop/promote the northwest corner of the park; add more parking at the Carbon River Road entrance.
- Recommission roads north of Carbon River, 7810 and 7840, and Chenuis Creek to the North Park boundary.
- Open Longmire campground and picnic area to volunteers and visitors during summer and open the area fully in fall and winter.
- Consider Reflection Lakes a part of the Nisqually corridor.
- Expand the park south to include the Tatoosh Range, north, and west.
- From Stevens Canyon Road just before Grove of the Patriarchs is a section of the East Side trail going to Silver Falls: Mark this trail clearly to Silver Falls and the Ohanapecosh campground; add picnic tables and trash containers; add signage for the back way into Silver Falls from the Stevens Canyon Road at the Grove; and add a crosswalk to safely access the back way to Silver Falls.
- Reflection Lake: Add more picnic tables down the stairs where there is a sitting bench; appropriate waste containers near table; ecofriendly fencing around some porta potties; and a portable washing station.
- Louise Lake: Make a picnic area by the Lake; improve the trail down; and add a porta potty and washing station.
- Snow Lake/Bench Lake: Expand parking area at Snow Lake trail; and add ecofriendly fencing around some porta potties and a portable washing station.
- Nisqually Road/Steven Canyon Road Junction-Bridge on Stevens Canyon: This junction has a lot of room for parking if renovated; add a crosswalk for safety.
- Nisqually Road Parking Lot to back part of Rampart Ridge trail: Improve parking lot with restroom facilities; paint the crosswalk Nisqually Road for safety; add boards over the wetlands.
- Bridge on Comet Falls trail, Comet Falls, Mildred Point, Christine Falls: Dig into the bank and shore it up to provide more parking; install railings near the edge of the

wooden bridge; add a fenced porta potty at the trailhead; improve Christine Falls and the Rock Wall viewing areas to make them more user friendly and provide better footing.

- Twin Firs: Improve signage and the pullout; advertise the loop trail better.

## Facilities

### New Facilities and Improvements to Existing Facilities

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Commenters requested additional facilities in the park, including concessions, restaurants, bathrooms, showers, seating areas, regular and bear proof garbage containers, recycling containers, storage lockers or a storage system (for check-in bags, strollers, backpacks, and other personal items), water bottle filling stations, AEDs, emergency call boxes, food storage boxes at campsites, an area for local artist's and hand-crafted items, gear rentals (e.g., bikes, mountain bikes with trailers), equipment stores (such as a small REI store at Longmire), and lodging.

Commenters also suggested the following facility improvements: information kiosks at Elbe, small nature loop trails, shelters at shuttle stops, smaller and dispersed visitor centers (i.e., small-scale hut for information, water, restrooms, maps, and emergency assistance near trails), a lower elevation visitor center for year-round service, and rest areas on high-traffic trails with sitting options (benches, rocks, stumps). In general, commenters wanted more facilities/attractions/visitor location at Mowich, West Road, Carbon River, and places other than Paradise.

### Food and Lodging

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Regarding food, commenters specifically requested concessions in the park to include beer, sugar-free snacks, healthy snacks, mocha, and ice cream. Commenters also requested an outdoor bratwurst restaurant at the Jackson Center, better concessions at the visitor center, the addition of concessions at Paradise and Longmire, and more outdoor dining in general.

Regarding lodging, commenters requested additional lodging facilities at Longmire, Sunrise, and Mowich.

### Restrooms

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Commenters requested restrooms at the following locations: the lower Jackson Visitor Center parking lot, the parking at 4th Crossing, any new parking lots, on popular trails, in shuttle waiting areas, at Reflection Lakes, and at the ranger station. Additionally, commenters requested vault toilets that are compatible with the national historic district to conserve water and reduce treatment of potable water and need for wastewater treatment, winterized restrooms at the old Paradise Visitor Center, and composting toilets in the heavily used areas (see facility at Summerland). One commenter requested placing restrooms behind wood blinds to be more aesthetic.

## **Backcountry**

### **Improvements to Backcountry Experience**

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Commenters provided suggestions to improve the backcountry experience such as dedicating more resources to trail maintenance, using the Marsh property as a primitive tent-only camp area, creating backcountry hostel-style cabins, and having a separate parking area for backpackers and climbers. One commenter requested creating a “backpacker zone” that would provide a designated space in the car campgrounds the night before a backpacking trip. Another commenter requested additional winter accommodations for backcountry skiers who require earlier starts, longer hours of operation, and different access points than regular tourists.

## **New Elements to Consider**

### **Cell Signal**

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Commenters requested cell signal/cell towers within the park.

### **Park Maintenance**

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Suggestions for park maintenance included addressing treefall and rebuilding log bridges and encouraging visitors to carry out bags of trash while hiking. One commenter also requested additional funding for park maintenance and opportunities for individuals and families to volunteer to help maintain trails.

### **Photography**

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Commenters suggested encouraging photography without increasing traffic by promoting a tour bus for photographers and promoting golden hour photography by extending visitor center hours and evening concession/picnic dinner promotions. One commenter suggested adding an entrance sign with the NPS logo to allow for visitors to take a photo at one of the entrances, while another commenter suggested a shuttle to a viewing platform with a short trail for photography.

## **Accessibility and Equitable Access Issues**

### **Accessibility Improvement Suggestions**

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Commenters detailed accessibility issues for park visitors and requested equitable access to park resources, such as:

- Making reservations accessible without technology for those without internet skill or internet/cell phone access; face-to-face and voice-to-voice (e.g., phone) interactions need to be available.
- Making reservations accessible to individuals who cannot use a credit card or pre-pay.
- Ensuring shuttles can serve individuals with transportation or mobility aids (e.g., scooters, wheelchairs, and baby strollers).

- Providing trails for different age groups (elderly, children) and those with mobility challenges; improving access to Twin Firs lower section; and creating new trails from both Paradise and Cougar Rock that offer opportunities that meet Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requirements. Commenters noted that Myrtle Falls at Paradise is good, but Sunrise also needs an accessible trail.
- Ensuring reservations and parking are free or low-cost to not exclude low-income individuals or families, and maintaining entrance fees for the same reason.
- Providing ADA-compliant parking based on the percentage of park visitor who need these services and specifically at Paradise Inn.
- Making the website, reservation system, park signs, shuttles, and tours available in multiple languages (e.g., Spanish, American Sign Language).
- Advertising ADA-accessible destinations in the park.
- Ensuring opportunities to explore the park for those without a personal vehicle.
- Providing information on accessible trails, programs, and facilities.
- Adding a new access to Sunrise picnic area solely for people with disabilities; allowing vehicles with handicap permits to use the existing service road to the picnic area.
- Allowing individuals to sleep in their cars in the park if they cannot afford to pay for a campsite.
- Provide the Nisqually Tribes with a certain number of reservation slots to maintain their access to the park.

Commenters wanted to guarantee that the suggested strategies are not unduly affecting the access that minority groups, local tribes, individuals with disabilities, elderly visitors, or children have to the park. For example, trip planning information provided via Twitter may not reach visitors who are unfamiliar with or cannot access it.

## **Equitable Outreach**

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Commenters suggested specific types of outreach efforts to reach different demographics and marginalized groups. One commenter suggested the park implement free park entry for families traveling with children; this action could be advertised by sending notices home from children's schools. Another commenter suggested reaching out to local libraries to promote online tools for individuals who may not have access to them otherwise. Other commenters requested the park initiate programs to mitigate the costs of the park on lower-income people, such as using funds from permits or allowing donations to make entry, shuttle, and parking fees affordable to those who otherwise could not pay for them. One commenter suggested shuttles serve neighborhoods where people of color live, while another commenter suggested the park continue outreach programs to encourage camping in the park for populations from local cities. Additionally, a commenter suggested the park accommodate programs for people of color, led by people of color.

## **Inclusion in the Planning Process**

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Commenters requested that the planning effort include individuals who would be affected by accessibility and diversity issues. One commenter specifically requested planners on the project

include people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, while another commenter requested that people with disabilities and chronically ill individuals be involved with the decisions. One commenter noted that minority groups should be consulted about the suggested strategies, specifically reservations and timed entry, because of equity issues associated with implementing them.

Commenters emphasized the importance of consulting with the native tribes and stated that the indigenous people, including the Nisqually Tribe, should be engaged throughout the planning process, noting requirements that tribes be a part of this process.

Commenters requested the proposed strategies be considered from an equity and accessibility standpoint and evaluated with these issues in mind. One commenter proposed adding equity/justice criteria to the current criteria used to analyze the proposed strategies (viability, feasibility, and desirability). The commenter noted any equity/justice criterion needs to be carefully defined as to not cause more harm than good, and should be created with the help of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) groups/committees within park staff.

## **Elderly Visitors**

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Commenters requested the park exempt the elderly and visitors with disabilities from requirements about shuttle usage and reservations and indicated that these populations should have priority for use of private vehicles over the general population.

Commenters requested the park give priority for campgrounds to the elderly.

## **Inability to Plan Ahead**

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Commenters noted that some visitors are unable to plan ahead because of a disability or illness (e.g., ADHD or depression). Another commenter also discussed the lack of ability to plan ahead as it related to the limitations of families with young children.

## **Visitor Experience Issues**

### **Improving Visitor Experience**

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Commenters stated the level of crowding negatively affects visitor experience. To improve the visitor experience, commenters suggested limiting the number of large tour buses, reducing vehicle speeding throughout the park, opening and expanding the visitor center, and keeping existing facilities and ranger stations open.

Commenters also made suggestions on how to redistribute visitors to reduce crowding, including reopening historic trails that have been closed, expanding park boundaries, better maintaining existing trails and picnic areas, improving wayfinding and safety signage (e.g., providing information on trail difficulty (via a color-system map) and equipment needed), having hikers and climbers park farther away, adding a second bridge at Grove of the Patriarchs for one-way travel, and adding “sick pic” location signs to reduce trailhead congestion. One commenter suggested encouraging visitors at the Jackson Visitor Center to travel up the Alta Vista trail instead of traveling to the visitor center and then up Skyline trail. One commenter

asked about the cost/benefit of widening the current trails, noting that the existing trails can barely support the current number of visitors.

Commenters also stated that increasing visitor capacity would not improve the visitor experience, would negatively affect the recreation areas surrounding the park, and would continue to negatively impact the solitude/wilderness aspect of the park.

## **Partners and Communities**

### **Private Partners**

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Commenters suggested that the park could partner with companies that could provide lodging for visitors or with private concession partners to modernize rooms at the Paradise Inn. Some commenters recommended that larger businesses, such as Amazon, could help distribute the reservation requirement information. One commenter stated that data could be collected through crowdsourcing and a partnership with Outdoor R&D and other local adventure groups.

Commenters supported the use of private concessioners but did not support the use of Aramark because its food quality and services detracted from visitor experience.

Other suggestions for partnerships included: the Shuksan Conservancy, AmericanAlps.org, alltrails.com, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency, BLM, Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, YMCA/YWCA, Cowlitz River Valley Museum, East Lewis County Chamber of Commerce, Washington Trailblazers (WTA), and Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Commenters expressed concerns about these partnerships because local communities could profit from these partnerships, which is not the purpose of the park.

### **Federal and State Partners**

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Several commenters suggested working throughout the region with the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Washington state parks to redistribute visitors to nearby areas. Commenters proposed that the park work with other NPS parks that have successfully implemented some of the proposed strategies.

### **Effect on Local Business**

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Commenters voiced concern about the impact of the management strategy on nearby communities and local businesses and suggested partnering with the businesses as hosts for visitors waiting for shuttle rides, promoting shopping locally, advertising changes in reservation requirements, and providing other information such as shuttle schedules.

Commenters suggested improving coordination throughout the region to improve the quality of accommodations and visitor services, so visitors are incentivized to spend time in other places in the region to lessen congestion issues in the park.



## Natural Resources Issues

### Impacts on Natural Resources

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Commenters expressed concern about impacts on natural resources and suggested an environmental review of impacts associated with the increases in staging areas, carbon emissions, vehicle capacity, vehicle run off, new roads, and visitor capacity. Commenters stated that the planning team should consider impacts on park lands related to greenhouse gas emissions and consider limiting the size and number of motor coaches and/or requiring shuttles to be electric. Several commenters asked how climate change, air quality, and greenhouse gas emissions are being considered during planning efforts and requested that environmental impacts from large RVs, cars tent camping, and bicycles be analyzed. Examples included: how the Cougar River area will remain stable due to increased rain conditions in the winter, how changes in seasonal weather patterns will affect wildlife and vegetation, the impacts to park wildlife and recently reintroduced species, managing infrastructure for climate change, and whether the park would close during extremely hot or smoky days. One commenter suggested reviewing the visitor transportation section from the 2014 Climate Friendly Parks Mount Rainier National Park Action Plan. Commenters also suggested a noise pollution ban and noted that visitors often drive vehicles with mufflers that disturb the soundscape of the park.

### Mitigating Natural Resource Impacts

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Commenters requested additional biological studies and expressed concern about wildlife, vegetation, and habitat within the park and suggested temporarily or permanently closing areas that are sensitive or impacted by visitors for short/long durations. Other suggestions for preventing impacts on natural resources included: closing off sensitive areas frequently or during high-use periods, creating people exclusion zones, instituting regular periods of no visitors to allow the park to heal, constructing electric fences to prevent people from off-roading and stepping off-trail, relocating the trails with GPS technology, erecting snow poles in the fall before the trails are covered in snow, adding speed bumps to prevent wildlife collisions, setting a daily visitor carrying capacity, closing trails when they reach a certain capacity, and preventing evening hiking when rangers are not present to enforce rules. One commenter asked how changes in winter use would affect fauna that relies on the park for winter habitat. Commenters voiced concern about run-off affecting vegetation and habitat and noted that undesignated car pull-off areas negatively affect the surrounding habitat. One commenter suggested constructing short, paved, interpretive trails for visitors who are not interested in a full hike (such as parents with young children).

## Park Enforcement and Park Staffing Issues

### Park Enforcement

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Commenters requested better enforcement throughout the park. They noted several issues that could be improved by better enforcement, including preventing visitors from: leaving the trails, damaging meadowlands, picking flowers, bringing their dogs on trails, feeding or disturbing wildlife, biking off designated paths, flying drones, drinking alcohol, parking outside designated

areas, not wearing a mask (when required), vandalizing, and littering. One commenter specifically complained about visitors abusing the park's offer to pick a bag full of huckleberries for personal use, stating that they have witnessed visitors picking an excessive number of berries.

To counteract inappropriate behavior in the park, commenters suggested increasing the number of park rangers or other enforcement personnel, fining visitors, issuing warnings, or temporarily banning visitors who break the rules from the park. One commenter suggested fines should go directly toward funding the park, while another commenter suggested requiring community service in addition to or in place of a fine. With regard to parking, one commenter suggested more patrols at trailheads and in parking lots to discourage inappropriate behavior or crime (car theft); another commenter suggested automatically ticketing speeding cars via an electronic system that records the start and finish of transit. One commenter noted that there would be less rule-breaking if visitors could report each other.

Commenters suggested placing more etiquette signs, installing more rope barriers along paths, including fine amounts on signs, or placing rangers on trails to better enforce rules. Some commenters stated that visitors should not be allowed in the park until they have been informed or can demonstrate working knowledge of good stewardship (concepts such as leave-no-trace, responsible wildlife viewing, awareness of park hazards, and awareness of fragile ecosystems). One commenter suggested a ban of pets from the park entirely, while another commenter suggested promoting a volunteer-based program in which hikers act as trail rangers and have temporary authority to monitor and guide trail behavior.

One commenter stated the park would need to analyze what levels of enforcement are needed. Another commenter requested a feasibility study on speed enforcement inside the park.

## **Park Staffing**

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Commenters requested more staffing and/or volunteers at the park to answer visitor questions, educate the public on safety and etiquette, assist unprepared visitors (visitors who did not bring water, sunscreen, or other necessary items), assist visitors who need to buy a ticket, and alleviate entry gate waiting times. One commenter specifically noted that interpretive rangers were needed at the park. One commenter suggested stationing rangers at Paradise at the John Muir steps or building a kiosk at Sunrise. Another commenter suggested placing Meadow Rovers at Longmire to greet visitors, give out trail information, and better disperse visitors. Another commenter suggested the park construct a ranger station at the base. One commenter requested the park bring back the revegetation crews and ranger program in the subalpine meadows of Paradise and Sunrise to set up ropes and poles to protect the meadows.

One commenter suggested allowing volunteers to manage deskwork while rangers work the trails; another commenter suggested the park seek volunteers from high school students, college students, and scouting programs. One commenter requested the park have more volunteers and rangers to talk by phone or face to face with visitors.

One commenter questioned how the new initiatives offered at the park would affect current park staffing. The commenter further questioned how the park plans to staff adequately to execute the proposed plan given the current labor market. One commenter questioned how the

limited staff at the gates would impact traffic in the park. One commenter requested the park put more effort into hiring a diverse staff, both culturally and economically.

## **Interpretation and Education**

### **Additional Interpretive Services**

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Commenters suggested additional interpretive services the park should offer, including education on hiker etiquette and general park etiquette (e.g., how to interact with wildlife, the importance of protecting the meadowlands, why visitors should stay on the designated trails), and information on the history of the area (specifically, the continuous human occupation and importance of tribes). Commenters suggested that visitors participate in trail etiquette training or be required to sign a statement agreeing to remain on trails. Commenters also suggested the park invest in more signage to show permissible and restricted locations. Commenters placed a strong emphasis on the park educating visitors on leave-no-trace principles and the potential impacts of visitation in fragile landscapes. Commenters specifically suggested interpretation by ranger, signs, or pre-recorded message about leave no trace and reducing impacts on the park environment. One commenter pointed to the success of the “Don’t be a Meadow Stomper” campaign.

Commenters indicated that the shuttles could be used to provide a variety of interpretive information, such as talks, guided walks, ranger visits, access to programs, and trail etiquette.

### **Educational Tools and Programs**

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Commenters suggested a variety of educational tools or programs for the park to implement, including a display about funding issues at the park, updated information in the newsletter to provide positive stories, presentations from volunteers on the park’s natural resources, the ability for school groups to visit the park, visitor information about lesser used trails or areas outside the park, a reexamination of the branding of Mount Rainier National Park to focus on why it is important to limit visitation, tours (possibly at a discount) to allow people to see the park while protecting resources, ranger talks, additional ranger-led activities outside Sunrise and Paradise to disperse visitation, and evening programs at local inns and campgrounds.

## **Camping Issues**

### **Enhancing Camping Experience**

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To reduce campground congestion and enhance the overall camping experience at Mount Rainier, commenters suggested reducing the maximum stay in campgrounds to 7 days, completing repairs/maintenance more quickly on existing campgrounds, adding provisions for off-trail camping, and using long-term parking lots/picnic areas as dual-use for car camping.

Commenters also requested banning or severely limiting RV camping and use within park boundaries.

One commenter noted that to improve fire safety, the fire pits at the White River campground need to be improved.

## National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Issues

### Public Engagement

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Commenters voiced concern that the engagement process did not reach all interested parties and that the opinion of the local population was taking preference over other input.

Commenters also stated that the platform, including the use of PEPC, the layout of the newsletter, the lack of a presentation and/or maps, and the number of questions posed for commenters to answer was confusing. One commenter stated that feedback from the 2020 engagement period was not reflective in the 2021 newsletter and requested more detailed alternatives for the next round of review. Commenters suggested hiring a private company to perform public engagement, conducting a townhall/zoom presentation on the materials, and using a rating system for the topics presented.

### Questions and Comments Pertaining to NEPA

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Specific questions and comments about the NEPA process included:

- Where would funding come from? What is the existing budget? How would hiring additional drivers affect the budget? Would these strategies take away from an existing budget used elsewhere?
- What is the timeline of the project?
- What form of outreach is NPS using for different user groups, including those who may not have access to technology?
- Will there be updates on the planning process? Will there be another round of public review?
- How would NPS measure success, and how often would the success of the measures be assessed?
- Would the plan address how it would facilitate/inhibit anticipated future needs?
- Is it feasible to acquire funds for additional land outside the Nisqually entrance for increased capacity?
- What existing data are available?
- What is the current visitor use and what is the peak number of visitors that the park can accommodate at any one time? These numbers should be used to evaluate the plan components.
- The term “visitor” was never defined for this project.

### Environmental Impact Statement and Other Studies

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Commenters suggested that the planning team author an environmental impact statement (EIS). One commenter stated that the geographic focus should be expanded to include all entrance stations and the entire park. During the environmental review process, commenters suggested conducting environmental impact studies, wildlife habitat analyses, area use and visitor use surveys, and visitor counts. Commenters also suggested reviewing strategies implemented by other parks and those noted in the existing General Management Plan-Final EIS; they also

suggested reviewing funding opportunities offered from the reduction of fuel use. Commenters stated that management strategies should be based on peak visitation, and that COVID-19 visitation data should be excluded because these data are not an accurate representation of visitor use of the park. Commenters also indicated that they opposed the use of private concessions within the park boundary.