

**Draft Version #7a - Update to 2014-19 Strategic Plan**  
June 27, 2018

## Cover Page

# 2014-21 Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission Strategic Plan

**Achieving a Healthy, Sustainable Park System**

**Washington State Parks and Recreation Commissioners**

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# Introduction

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is committed to engaging in strategic planning efforts to help keep the agency on course to meet our vision and mission.

Over the last few months, agency staff engaged in an effort to refresh the current Strategic Plan for Commission approval. The current plan was last updated in 2016. This update was aimed specifically at simplifying the current plan, updating outdated information, providing summary information and extending the plan two years to encompass the 2019-21 biennium. There are no changes to the major elements of the plan including the vision, mission, goal, strategies and principles.

This updated plan will help set the stage for a new, comprehensive planning effort to produce a whole new strategic plan for the 2021-23 biennium and beyond. In meantime, this updated plan communicates current Commission priorities, provides strategic direction and outlines our specific priorities for the 2019-21 biennium. The plan also provides the framework for operational plans and ongoing work across the agency.

Engaging in strategic planning helps to ensure success in managing the agency to achieve positive outcomes and results as we continue to move forward. This success is evidenced by the national recognition the agency received for how the agency is managed and operated.

The Commission is pleased to introduce this newest update to the Strategic Plan. We hope that it conveys to you the agency priorities and view of the environment in which we work. In the end, this plan provides the framework for achieving our vision and mission and the goal of achieving a healthy, sustainable park system for the citizens of the state.

(Signatures by Ken Bounds as Chair and Don Hoch as Director)

# Summary - 1 Page (format will be a matrix)

## Vision

Washington's state parks will be cherished destinations with natural, cultural, recreational, artistic and interpretive experiences that all Washingtonians enjoy, appreciate and proudly support.

## Mission

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission cares for Washington's most treasured lands, waters and historic places. State parks connect all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and provide memorable recreational and educational experiences that enhance their lives.

## Goal

A healthy, sustainable park system.

## Strategies

- Demonstrate that all Washingtonians benefit from their state parks
- Adopt a business approach to park system administration
- Provide recreation, cultural and interpretive opportunities people will want
- Promote meaningful opportunities for volunteers, friends and donors
- Form strategic partnerships with other agencies, tribes and non-profits
- Expand use of land holdings for compatible revenue generating purposes
- Develop amenities and acquire lands that advance transformation

## Values (optional, may come out)

**Stewardship** that preserves the state's natural and cultural heritage in perpetuity

**Universal access** to recreational, educational, artistic and cultural opportunities in state parks

**Meaningful public engagement** and participation in developing and operating the state park system

**A supportive work environment** that relies on teamwork to achieve the Commission's mission

**Quality and value** in services we provide

## Key Performance Measures

- Grow park attendance
- Increase earned revenue
- Economic contribution
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Improve facilities condition
- Dedicated and engaged employees

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# Vision

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# Culture and core values

## The State Parks work environment

In all interactions, the Commission and staff strive to foster a **collaborative culture** in which people:

- Maintain a working environment to **nurture innovation**
- **Encourage risk-taking** and accept responsibility for outcomes
- **Respectfully challenge** assumptions and work traditions
- **Respect and honor colleagues' diverse cultural heritage**
- **Give and accept** constructive criticism
- **Accept that conflict** between ideas may be a necessary step toward finding solutions
- **Act with civic courage** and the highest ethical standards
- **Invest in training** and professional and personal development
- **Take pride** in the work, mission and resources they steward

**Core values** shared by the Commission and staff include a commitment to:

- **Stewardship** that preserves the state's natural and cultural heritage in perpetuity
- **Universal access** to recreational, educational, artistic and cultural opportunities in state parks
- **Meaningful public engagement** and participation in developing and operating the state park system
- **A supportive work environment** that relies on teamwork to achieve the Commission's mission
- **Quality and value** in all services we provide.

# Who we are and what we do - Overview

## Washington State Parks:

- Operates one of the largest, most diverse and most beautiful park systems in the country
- Is guided by a policy-setting Commission comprised of seven members from around the state
- Provides sites where all people can enjoy an array of healthy outdoor recreation activities
- Manages statewide recreation programs that are not limited to agency-managed lands
- Provides educational and interpretive events and activities designed to connect people with the natural and cultural heritage of our state
- Balances providing services geared to the health, education and enjoyment of people, with the stewardship and care of natural and cultural resources

**We operate one of the largest, most diverse, and most beautiful state park systems in the country.** With more than 120,000 acres, the system includes 125 developed parks, including 19 marine parks, 11 historical parks, 35 heritage sites, 13 interpretive centers and approximately 500 miles of long-distance recreation trails. There are state parks in nearly every county in the state and within an hour's drive from home for almost all Washingtonians. Parks lie along rivers, freshwater lakes and Puget Sound shorelines. State Parks manages lands in mountains and along the Pacific Ocean seashore, in Central Washington's desert shrub-steppes and river gorges, and in Eastern Washington's channeled scablands and river corridors.

According to the most recent estimates, parks receive more than 35 million visits per year. These visits generate an estimated \$1.4 billion in annual economic contribution to the state and \$64 million in state general fund tax receipts. Visits to parks boost local and statewide economies and contribute significantly to delivery of government services.

The Commission owns more than 2,800 buildings – more than one-quarter of all state-owned structures. Most of these buildings are small and isolated but expensive to maintain. The Commission cares for more than 770 identified historic structures. These include Victorian-era officers' residences at former military forts, a historic homestead and ranch buildings, several light houses, and a historic seminary building and grounds. The Commission also manages an array of cultural landscapes and sites listed on the Washington Heritage Register and National Register of Historic Places.

State parks are like small cities, with law enforcement, public works and facility management responsibilities. The agency also manages and maintains 300 miles of roads, 140 watercraft launches, more than 100 wells and water systems and hundreds of sewer and septic systems.

**We are guided by a policy-setting Commission comprised of seven members from around the state.** Commission members are appointed by the Governor to serve six-year terms. This governing body sets policy for the system and hires an agency director, who in turn manages all aspects of agency operations.

**We provide sites where all people can enjoy an array of healthy outdoor recreation activities.** Year-round activities include camping, hiking, mountain and trail biking, boating and horseback riding. Winter recreation activities include downhill and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, skijoring, dog-sledding and snowmobiling. Over the years, Washington's state parks have become known as world-class locations for recreation enthusiasts pursuing such activities as long-distance kayaking, wind surfing and wind sailing, diving, paragliding and rock climbing. As new trends develop, the agency strives to meet the needs of recreation enthusiasts, while ensuring protection of natural and cultural resources.

**We manage statewide recreation programs that are not limited to agency-managed lands.** This responsibility includes management of the federally funded Boating Safety Program and the fee-supported Winter Recreation program. The agency also carries out regular public safety inspections of ski lifts and purveyors to ensure their safe operation.

**We provide educational and interpretive events and activities designed to connect people with the natural and cultural heritage of our state.** Washington State Parks interprets the Ice Age floods that carved Washington's landscapes; We collaborate with tribes to tell the stories of the people who are native to this land. We provide multi-media history exhibits to educate visitors about early explorers such as Lewis and Clark. We offer a glimpse of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century life on military forts constructed during the administrations of Presidents Pierce, Lincoln, McKinley and both Roosevelts. And we preserve the stories and park structures built during the Great Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

**We balance providing services geared to the health, education and enjoyment of people, with stewardship and care of natural and cultural resources.** The Commission stewards natural ecosystems, historic properties and cultural sites of statewide and national significance. The lands managed by the Commission are precious and varied and include nationally significant natural ecosystems, historic properties and cultural sites. Acre for acre, these Commission-managed lands represent the greatest concentration of endangered, threatened, sensitive, imperiled and vulnerable species held by any public or private entity in Washington. More than 10 percent of park lands contain rare plant and/or animal species, and more than 40 percent of park landscapes have plant associations classified as moderate risk or higher, within our state or globally.

Water is essential to all types of habitat. More than half of the uplands in state parks lie within 600 feet of a surface water source. The Commission manages 19,800 acres of wetlands, 2.1 million lineal feet of riparian habitat and 15,800 acres of significant habitat supporting rare plants, animals, or both. The agency manages 4,799 acres of Natural Area Preserves and 13,173 acres of Natural Forest Areas.

## Who we are and what we do - Core public services

As numerous studies have confirmed, parks benefit all people. They contribute in immeasurable ways to personal well-being by enhancing physical and mental health. They strengthen the fabric of society through community, family and spiritual bonds. They provide a place where families can reconnect. Park experiences also offer visitors of all ages the opportunity to learn about the environment and be inspired to care for the health of natural resources. To provide this opportunity for recreation, renewal, and education, the agency conducts several core services:

- Outdoor recreation
- Statewide recreation programs
- Natural resource protection
- Cultural heritage preservation
- Natural and cultural heritage-based education and interpretation
- Arts and cultural events

### **Outdoor recreation**

State parks provides beautiful and inspiring venues that connect Washingtonians and visitors with the great outdoors. The agency focuses on creating opportunities for natural heritage-based outdoor recreation, with interpretive facilities, wildlife-viewing areas and informal picnic and gathering spots for families, friends and community groups. State Parks also provides active recreation opportunities through trails and trail systems for walkers, bicyclists and equestrians. Wheelchair-accessible trails and sites encourage people of all abilities to use park trails. An abundance of water adds a “water-trail” dimension to many parks, attracting boaters, windsurfers, kayakers and swimmers. An array of winter recreation sites supports activities such as skiing, snowshoeing, skijoring and dog-sledding. State Parks also provides a more immersive experience for visitors, with camping and overnight stays. Parks has an outdoor recreation option for every visitor.

### **Statewide recreation programs**

The cross-state trails program coordinates opportunities for hikers, bicyclists and equestrians on trails that spread over hundreds of miles and that will eventually make up a cross-state, east-west traverse. The Winter Recreation program, which is funded through dedicated revenue sources, administers the state’s system of Sno-Parks and trail grooming for non-motorized and motorized winter recreationists. The Commission also oversees the state’s federally funded vessel pump out and boating programs, which includes boating safety and education, in coordination with stakeholder groups and law enforcement agencies around the state.

### **Natural resource protection**

The Commission preserves Washington’s diverse natural resources for the benefit of all Washingtonians, visitors and future generations. Efforts to protect these resources include condition assessments, planning, treatment, restoration and monitoring. These efforts can involve conserving rare plant and animal species and preserving unique habitats and landscapes. The agency uses its expertise in science, along with stewardship staff, arbor crews and park staff to

manage forest health activities, fire fuel reduction and weed-control efforts in parks across the state.

### **Cultural heritage preservation**

The Commission honors the past by providing public access to sites and programs that connect people with their cultural heritage. The Commission preserves the state's most iconic and representative historic structures, sites, districts and intact cultural landscapes. Examples include historic military forts from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; historic markers; heritage agricultural sites such as the Olmstead Homestead; the Jackson House territorial courthouse; Cama Beach State Park, a historic fishing resort; and Civilian Conservation Corps-era parks and park features.

### **Natural and cultural heritage-based education/interpretation**

The Commission offers educational and interpretive programming at the state's most important natural and cultural heritage sites and provides one-of-a-kind opportunities for scientific research, field work and education. For example, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center at Cape Disappointment State Park provides interactive displays that tell the story of the Lewis and Clark expedition; the interpretive centers at Sun Lakes/Dry Falls and Gingko-Wanapum state parks offer intimate perspectives on the iconic Ice Age floods that carved much of Washington's landscape; Sacajawea State Park Interpretive Center brings focus to the confluence of the Snake and Columbia rivers, where people of many tribes gathered for centuries; and the Goldendale Observatory provides astronomy education and interpretation.

### **Arts and cultural events**

State Parks develops, protects and enhances special venues of unsurpassed beauty and cultural significance, where people come together for cultural celebrations, commemorations and other forms of artistic expression. State Parks works with a variety of organizations to present Folk and Traditional Arts in the Parks programming, which promotes understanding of and connection with the state's rich cultural heritage.

# Environmental conditions and trends

Washington State Parks continually assesses the operating environment and strives to understand and address factors that affect business operations. Some of the challenges faced by the agency include changing demographics, social shifts, political dynamics, climate-related concerns, and competition for financial support. Significant factors and challenges that influence or impact State Parks' business include:

- Physical environment
- Economic impact
- Funding for the park system
- Knowing our customers
- Technology
- Partnerships
- Expectations for government efficiency
- Workforce Issues

## Physical environment

**Outside forces affect Parks:** Parks provide public access to the beauty of nature and exposure to the state's cultural heritage. Yet that beauty and heritage are constantly threatened. Noxious exotic plants invade park vegetation communities, urbanization spreads to park boundaries and global-scale climate alteration stresses habitats and threatens sea-based infrastructure. To address these issues, cultural and natural heritage preservation efforts must be active and ongoing.

The park system can be dramatically affected by such events as storms, fires and natural disasters. For example, storms in 2007 destroyed bridges across the Chehalis River and damaged Rainbow Falls and Willapa Hills Trail state parks. In 2015, wildfire closed Alta Lake and several other state parks. Wildfires threaten lands and affect park visits every summer.

**Natural processes cause damage and dynamic change:** Tree diseases such as laminated root-rot have already led to temporary or permanent closures of several state park campgrounds. These and other natural processes create pressures on agency operations and policies. Considerations may include moving recreational facilities out of high-risk areas, modifying the environment to maintain facilities, or otherwise reducing public exposure to risks. Forest diseases can cause unplanned recreation closures, associated downturns in revenue, additional expenses and staffing challenges. The agency is working with the University of Washington to be proactive in understanding how climate change and sea level rise affects protection and care of lands and structures, as well as informing future acquisitions.

Another challenge for parks is to set preservation and restoration priorities. Since financial resources are finite, it is important to preserve the most significant cultural sites first. Likewise, State Parks must protect those natural habitat areas that show the greatest promise for resilience. Park facility design should maximize the impact of park resources on people. At the same time, facility design should minimize the impact of people on park resources.

## Economic Impact

**State parks benefit the economy:** Visits to Washington state parks generate jobs, tourism, business income and tax revenues for the state and local governments. In 2013, the Outdoor Industry Association reported that two-thirds of Washingtonians participate in outdoor recreation each year and that \$22.5 billion is spent annually on outdoor recreation in our state.

A follow-up study commissioned by the Commission in 2015 showed that half of Washingtonians visited a state park in the previous two years. State park visits generate more than \$64 million to the state General Fund each year and contribute more than \$1.4 billion to the state's economy. What's more, the data shows that this economic contribution transfers economic activity from urban portions of the state to rural areas.

## Funding for the park system

**Public funding for parks:** Legislative policy changes for State Parks' financing happened quickly between 2009 and 2013. Those changes were dramatic. Prior to 2009, the agency received 70 percent of its operating revenue from taxes. By 2013 and thereafter, the agency is operating on about 20 percent of its revenue from taxes, while 80 percent is earned or derived from use fees and donations.

During this time, one-third of State Parks' staff members were laid off throughout the system. Parks made tough decisions and acted quickly to keep parks open by moving to a more seasonal structure and spreading staff more thinly. The legislature repeatedly asked Parks, through budget proviso-mandated reports, whether a budgetary policy goal of moving the system toward 100 percent self-sufficiency was possible. The Commission asserted that this goal was not sustainable or desirable and that stable public funding is necessary to provide the kind of park system the public expects and deserves.

Over the last few years, the agency has managed the park system closely and strategically, stabilizing its operations and gradually increasing staffing levels; this includes restoring ranger positions back to full time after an interim seasonal model allowed the agency to get through the toughest of times. Though the budget situation has improved in the past four years, staffing levels have not returned to pre-recession levels. Current funding does not allow the agency to operate at sufficient staffing levels to meet the needs of running the park system.

**Boosting earned revenue:** The Commission responded effectively to legislated mandates to earn revenue through fees and donations. As the Commission continued to make the case that a balance of public funding and fees is needed to have a healthy park system, the agency continued to do what it could to meet its own fiscal needs. Because of these efforts, earned revenue more than doubled from \$20 million to more than \$50 million annually between 2007 and 2016. Between 2011 and 2015, overnight accommodation revenue increased by 24 percent as the agency moved to a more demand-responsive pricing system and Discover Pass revenue increased by more than 30 percent. While the cost of the Discover Pass ranks amongst the lowest tier of state park passes, it generates the fourth-highest revenue of any state park day-use fee in the country. (National Assoc. of State Parks Directors, 2014-15).

Earned revenue has continued to increase. However, the increase has not offset the loss in tax support that started in the 2007-09 budget cycle. Over the years, the amount of earned revenue that supports State Parks operations has changed from about 30 percent to currently about 80 percent. As demands on the park system grow over time, revenue from fees will not be sufficient to adequately maintain the park system. Today, the nationwide trend among state park systems includes a mix of stable public funding and use fees. No other state park system of comparable size and mission relies solely on use fees.

A meaningful and significant element of the Commission's mission – natural and cultural heritage protection – does not generate direct revenue. Yet, these types of core activities are essential for sustaining the state's environmental health, vibrant economy, quality of life and legacy for future generations. Because these activities benefit all Washingtonians, the Commission stands firm in its conviction that broad public financing is appropriate and must be an essential component of park system funding.

**Legislative mandates and business costs:** Legislative budget provisos that proscribe uses for existing resources, as well as unfunded biennial mandates and other unexpected obligations provide additional challenges, limiting Parks' authority and necessitating the re-direction of critical resources. Cost increases for things such as employee compensation and health insurance premiums, regulatory requirements and prices for utility services and equipment must be factored in when assessing the capacity for service fees to meet or cover program costs.

**Capital needs:** In addition to sufficient operating funds, the Commission needs a strong capital budget to protect the state's investment in the park system. Development costs for new facilities and renovation costs to maintain park assets in good condition require substantial and sustained capital funding. In 2013, State Parks developed a comprehensive digital inventory of facility condition, called the Facility Condition Index (FCI) to measure the growing backlog of needed maintenance, which is currently estimated to be \$473 million. The FCI is a percentage measure of a fully healthy physical plant for all structures, roads, and utilities in the park system. Between 2013 and 2017, with support from the Legislature and the Governor, the agency increased its FCI from 60.5 percent to 63.6 percent. The overall goal is to reach an FCI of at least 80 percent in 10 years. State Parks must maintain quality facilities that accommodate and encourage visits, retain revenue from use fees and allow operational efficiencies.

## Knowing our customers

**A changing Washington:** While population growth is static or declining in some states, Washington continues to experience population growth and significant pressures from development and urbanization. The State Office of Financial Management (OFM) reports that the state's population will increase 21 percent over the next 20 years. During that period, Washingtonians are expected to be more ethnically diverse, about 90 percent urban – and older. Increasing lifespans and generational changes are contributing to a doubling of numbers among the 65-plus population. Currently, participation rates in outdoor recreation are lower among the elderly and some ethnic and racial minorities.

**Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:** If the Commission is to meet its mission to connect all Washingtonians with their state’s heritage, we will need to respond in ways that are welcoming and relevant to citizens. The Commission is committed to customer satisfaction, creating an equitable, hospitable, appreciative, safe, and inclusive park environment – one that embraces the full spectrum of community members' contributions. The Commission’s commitment is based on the following principles:

- Celebrating diversity is a way to appreciate and value individual differences.
- A diverse workforce will more effectively serve an increasingly heterogeneous society.
- Diversity in our staffing and programs helps to ensure the relevance of a state park system to all visitors.

The Commission encourages and supports staff efforts to reach out to people of all races, national origins, abilities, religions, sexual orientations, veteran status, ages and genders who use the parks and who live in communities near parks. The Commission is dedicated to offering quality experiences to all visitors through a workforce and volunteer corps that reflects the diversity of Washington.

**People do not want parks commercialized:** The Commission continues to hear a clear message from people around the state: People love their state parks, and they do not want them commercialized or changed substantially. This message was clear as the agency conducted significant outreach when developing strategies to adapt to a new operating paradigm.. This perspective from the public remains consistent as staff conducts various public outreach and planning activities.

**What people do want – rest, renewal and connection:** Surveys show that basic recreation pursuits remain important to people in Washington. They want places to walk, bike and ride horses. They want trails, and they like to be near, in and on the water. Passive recreation – just being out in nature – is far more popular than active or organized recreation. More than 40 percent of Washingtonians go camping. Arts and cultural celebrations remain vital draws, along with programs and experiences that connect people with history and culture or provide learning experiences. Many survey respondents affirmed the personal and social benefits of access to quiet, beautiful natural places. **(Scorp reference)**

**Visitor feedback:** Through its reservation camping system, staff gathers feedback from campers to guide and inform future improvement efforts. For example, visitors have responded positively as Parks has increased numbers of cabins, yurts and vacation house rentals. State Parks considers these accommodations to be solid capital investments that upgrade services and increase revenue. The agency is now engaged in the next stage of surveying, capturing the wants and needs of day-use visitors; day use visits make up 94 percent of total estimated, annual park attendance.

## Technology

**People expect the benefits of technology:** For many years, the trend was for parks to be “technology-free zones,” where the concerns of daily life could be set aside. This attitude has shifted nationwide, and park systems around the country are responding to visitor desires, embracing technologies that enhance services, expand communications and advance core missions. State Parks is making greater use of technologies that provide customer information and services through web sites, apps and new digital platforms. Apps and web-based information can replace the need for costly, on-site interpretive displays that degrade in weather and quickly become outdated. We understand that we must compete for people’s leisure time. This requires a balance – using technologies to entice visitors who want a real experience and enhancing the on-site experience for visitors, versus technologies that replace a site visit with a “virtual” trip. Meanwhile, greater investment in advanced technologies will support agency efforts to meet customer needs.

## Partnerships

**Working with government partners:** The Commission recognizes that the agency must work with partners to meet the demands of a large and diverse park system. Engaged partnerships allow us to deliver public service with greater efficiency. For example, the Discover Pass program is managed collaboratively with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In other examples, the agency collaborates with the Departments of Health and WDFW to provide recreational shell fishing communication and access, and works closely with other state agencies, counties, cities and public utility districts on various projects.

**Collaborating with tribes:** The Commission has a long history and good track record of collaborating with native tribes on cultural and natural resource protection and cultural events. New efforts include collaboration with tribes on basic park management. A unique co-ownership and co-management arrangement was forged with the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community at Kukutali Preserve, where joint development and preservation efforts are proving successful. Parks also has engaged with the Nisqually Tribe to provide trail access at Nisqually State Park. This partnership creates a venue in which the tribe can tell its story to a wider audience. The annual intertribal canoe journey route includes stops and celebrations at state parks, where we are honored and proud to help host.

**Linking State Parks to broader recreation, education and conservation purposes:** The lands and waters of state parks meet multiple public interest objectives. State Parks campgrounds, trails and picnic areas serve as way stations for anglers, hunters, bird watchers and climbers. Its wetlands, escarpments, prairies and old-growth forests serve as habitat for wildlife conservation. Its amphitheaters and historic structures are sites for field research, formal and informal education and lifelong learning. The State Parks’ “No Child Left Inside” grant program, administered in coordination with the Recreation and Conservation Office, fosters connection between our state’s youth and the great outdoors.

**Volunteers:** Washington State Parks has a long tradition of engaging volunteers to help leverage resources and create a welcoming atmosphere. In FY17, volunteers contributed more than 214,000 hours of service as campground hosts and trail maintenance hands. Clearly, the park system cannot run solely on volunteer efforts, but these dedicated park users make significant contributions to the quality and breadth of system services.

**Parks Foundation and friends' groups:** The Washington State Parks Foundation raises public awareness and financial support for park projects and programs. Contributions include development of Cama Beach State Park, opened in 2008; construction projects along the Willapa Hills Trail in 2016; and financial support for or the Folk and Traditional Arts in the Parks program. In coordination with Parks leadership and field staff, the Foundation supports a Parks Improvements Grant program that helps fund small park improvements throughout the system.

In addition, 19 incorporated friends' groups associated with specific parks work closely with staff to improve the parks they support. The Foundation is available to help new friends' groups form. The Foundation can act as a fiscal agent, helping friends' groups implement programs and projects or to foster partnerships.

**Business relationships and partnerships:** State Parks has dozens of concession and lease agreements with commercial businesses. These provide equipment and services (boat rentals, firewood, etc.) that support the agency mission. An example is the lease agreement State Parks signed with a non-profit, quasi-governmental entity (the Fort Worden Public Development Authority (PDA) to co-manage Fort Worden State Park. The PDA is managing the "campus" portion of the park, which encompasses lodging and rental buildings, while State Parks continues to manage the park's natural areas and campground. The arrangement encourages fundraising for capital development by the PDA to improve the large collection of historic buildings onsite and allows parks to focus on core activities typical to the park system

The agency is cautiously and systematically exploring partnership options where mission-aligned investment and development may more feasibly be accomplished by other public or private entities. To that end, the Commission is ready to initiate pilot projects for designated recreation concession areas and enterprise lands. These efforts are directed at mission-aligned recreational facilities and/or programs within the state parks that are developed and managed by the private sector within state parks. In exploring partnerships, the Commission will keep the focus on providing facilities and services that meet immediate needs for public recreational access, while maintaining the long-term public interest of land stewardship and fiscal health.

## Expectations for government efficiency

The public expects their tax dollars and use fees to be spent wisely. To help ensure effective operations, the agency continues to actively engage in Lean management efforts, investing staff time and resources to streamline processes, save time and create greater efficiency. Pursuing continuous improvement in agency business processes frees up staff time and other resources for essential, mission-related work.

## Workforce issues

**Staffing adjustments:** In response to budget reductions between 2009 and 2012, State Parks made a series of deep, system-wide staffing and program reductions. The agency went into survival mode. Since then, some public funding has been restored, and earned revenue has increased. This increase has allowed the agency the ability to re-invest in additional staffing to start the recovery from the survival-only years; reinvestment is focused on improved operations, increased facility maintenance and improved customer service.

During the crisis years of the Recession, workload and retention issues arose from a seasonal staffing structure that was adopted to get through the downturn; as could be expected, the seasonal model contributed to losses in capacity and stability. But between 2013 and 2016, the agency was able to move back toward a year-round workforce structure. More recently, Parks made a shift toward a geographically based area management structure for field operations that is allowing greater efficiency and consistency in operations across the state. The new structure creates greater specialization among staff positions and allows park managers to build relationships with local communities. The Commission is focused on acquiring the resources to continue building staff capacity to meet growing demand, deal with challenges and provide the park system people want and expect.

**Law enforcement:** Park Rangers employed at the 2 and 3 level are fully commissioned law enforcement officers who provide public safety services. Investment in training and equipment is essential to provide this service. The new operating structure focuses on training and assignment of law enforcement staff when and where they are most needed.

**Labor relations:** Most of the workforce is covered by a labor contract, and the Commission places a high value on the ongoing, collaborative working relationship with the union. It is important to note that reductions and downsizing during the 2009 to 2012 period put a strain on this valuable relationship and created new challenges. Even as the agency has begun to reinvest, some employees who had been through years of layoffs remain anxious. In this climate, policies that call for new businesslike approaches and greater use of appropriate partnerships can be sources of stress for employees concerned about job security. Agency leadership is sensitive to these concerns and is working to address these concerns and create a stable work environment.

**Diversity:** State Parks is committed to recruiting, developing and retaining a diverse, high-performing workforce and maintaining a work environment that is inclusive and respectful. Diversity is multi-dimensional and covers a broad spectrum – from race and ethnicity, to gender and sexual orientation and from socio-economic status to physical abilities age and religious beliefs. By eliminating barriers to growth and opportunity, each employee can contribute his or her full measure of talent. By building capacity to deliver innovative and effective services to all Washingtonians, State Parks will be more successful. The overall goal is to have a workforce that reflects the diversity of Washington’s residents.

**Training:** To provide relevant and expected services to the public, State Parks believes it is essential to maintain a well-trained and qualified workforce. Employees are therefore

encouraged to participate in training and development opportunities. Required training is provided in such areas as law enforcement, sexual harassment, ethics and information technology. Parks is once again advancing position-appropriate professional development training and is empowering managers to provide needed and effective training for their employees. Providing more training will increase employee and departmental productivity and boosts morale across the agency.

**Staff turnover:** The agency has a large percentage of core staff who have been with the agency for years. This longevity and depth of experience has served the agency well. But on the downside, many agency employees are already eligible or will be eligible for retirement in the near term. These retirements will result in a loss of significant institutional knowledge. Management is taking steps to minimize the impact of these retirements through efforts to fill positions early so that this aspect of succession planning can be implemented through knowledge transfer.

**Employee engagement:** A key success factor for any business is a motivated and engaged workforce. To measure employee engagement, State Parks participates in the annual Employee Satisfaction Survey conducted by the State. In responding to the question “Overall, I am happy to work at State Parks”, in calendar year 2017, employees responded with a positive 81 percent. This score improved from a 71 percent positive rate in 2013 – a 10 percent improvement in four years.

# Strategic response

This Strategic Plan builds on the August 2012 *State of State Parks* report and the March 2013 *Transformation Strategy*, providing context and background for the agency's strategic direction. Those documents and other support materials, including public involvement efforts, can be found on the agency website at: <http://parks.state.wa.us/152/Strategic-Planning>. The agency's vision, mission, culture and core values and a comprehensive set of strategies emerged from those documents. Strategies are geared toward rapid and meaningful changes and the creation of a successful, sustainable foundation. The vision, mission, and core values will help to ensure that service quality and public trust and confidence are achieved and maintained.

The following principles advance the Commission's vision and mission:

- **Defining a healthy, sustainable state park system:** The description of a healthy, sustainable park system forms the basis for agency strategies. Achieving a healthy, sustainable system is the ultimate goal expressed in this strategic plan.
- **Measuring a healthy, sustainable state park system:** Converting definitions of "park health" into measurable indicators that can inform budgeting is an administrative challenge that will take time to complete.
- **Size and scope of the park system:** Basic assumptions about the size and scope of the park system are stated to provide context for goals and activities.
- **Financing the park system:** Factors related to the financing of a healthy, sustainable park system are identified.

## Defining a healthy, sustainable state park system

Years of restricted budgets have left the system in need. The Commission is committed to advocating for needed resources that will enable the agency to do all within its power to establish and sustain a healthy park system for current users and future generations. Some attributes of a sustainable, healthy park system are described below.

### Parks are in good physical condition

- All state parks are open and accessible, meeting established and publicly acceptable service levels and providing visitors a safe, healthy environment.
- All park facilities are well cared for and functioning for their intended purpose. Restrooms are clean. Grounds are well-maintained. Boat launches, utility campsites and other overnight facilities meet industry standards for quality and effectiveness. Recreation trails, picnic sites and other day-use areas are well-maintained. Infrastructure services such as water, sewer and electrical systems are working and meet all health and safety standards.
- The natural and cultural heritage features of each park are protected from degradation and managed for long-term sustainability.

**Parks provide opportunities for recreation, enjoyment, health and learning**

- The state park system offers a diverse array of active outdoor recreation choices for visitors, including but not limited to hiking, camping, bicycling, picnicking, boating, horseback riding, rock climbing and winter recreation activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, skijoring, dog sledding and snowmobiling.
- Parks provide beautiful natural settings for passive recreation; examples include picnicking, wildlife viewing and personal learning through interpretive features and displays.
- Commission facilities and programs promote individual and community health and wellness.
- State parks and facilities are accessible to visitors of all ages and abilities for day and overnight use.
- State parks provide opportunities, as appropriate to the site, for all people – but particularly for our youth – to connect with, learn about and experience the state’s significant natural and cultural heritage.

**State Parks’ resource care and protection mission is fulfilled**

- Biological communities, including forests, wetlands, plant communities, habitats, seashore conservation and natural areas are healthy and well cared for.
- Historic properties contributing to the state’s cultural heritage are appropriately preserved, treated and interpreted for the public.
- Architectural and cultural resources are protected and conserved in perpetuity as part of the state’s cultural legacy and are managed appropriately for scientific and interpretive use.

**Staffing and customer service meet public expectations**

- State park offices, interpretive and visitor centers are open and welcoming during reasonable hours. At full-service parks, visitors have access to park staff.
- Staff or agency representatives offer customer service in a pleasant, efficient manner, using their knowledge to meet established and publicly acceptable service levels. This includes customer reservations, access to information and purchase of use permits (such as the Discover Pass), whether online, by phone or in person.
- Administrative and support services are adequately resourced, enabling staff to efficiently and effectively fulfill the agency mission, meet legal requirements, operate with the highest ethics and minimize public liabilities and risks.

**Public and community engagement are considered in decision-making**

- Parks and program staff throughout the agency have the skills, time and resources to engage with the public and stakeholders. Park and regional staff have the tools to build effective relationships in their local communities.
- State Parks engages with the tourism industry, local governments, other parks departments and partners to promote parks and tourism offerings, recognizing that visits to state parks generate business for their neighboring communities and add significantly to the economic health of their local economies and the state.

## Measuring a healthy, sustainable state park system

The Commission faces a significant challenge to establish consistent, measurable standards for public parks. Each park is distinctive, with highly varied uses, public expectations, cost-drivers and revenue potential. Nevertheless, when competing for public funds, the Legislature, the Governor and the public want to know what services will be provided with additional resources.

The agency is committed to improving methods for quantitative measurement. An example is the recently developed Facility Condition Index (FCI) which was created in 2014. For the first time, this measurement tool allowed Parks to provide up-to-date, system-wide quantitative analysis of its infrastructure's condition, including the ability to estimate facility deficiency costs.

## Size and scope of the state parks system

The Commission strives to create and maintain a state park system that the public enjoys and proudly supports, now and into the future. To help achieve this part of the vision statement, the Commission identified the following commitments to drive agency decision-making during the period of this Strategic Plan.

The public expects the size of the park system to remain relatively unchanged. From public outreach efforts and Parks' long experience with various budget-driven lease cancellation and park closure discussions, public feedback has been clear: any significant reduction in the size of the system is not acceptable. This sentiment is consistent with known conditions: Washington's population continues to grow and become increasingly more culturally diverse. The park system must keep up with demand for park and recreation opportunities, keep up with the times in offering modern recreation opportunities and be relevant to the broad array of cultures and visitor ages that make up our state. These things are essential if the park system is to meet its mission of connecting all Washingtonians to their state's natural and cultural heritage and providing meaningful recreational and educational experiences.

**Acquisition and development.** The Commission's Acquisition and Development Plan is focused both on local and statewide needs; to appropriately expand the boundaries of existing parks, to acquire lands that fill in gaps in the statewide inventory, and to meet future needs of the entire park system.

At the park level, land acquisition activities are often focused on land parcels located within park boundaries or adjacent properties. Properties that don't contribute to the Park's mission may be transferred, sold, or leased.

At the system level, the Commission seeks to acquire and develop new parks in an intentional and comprehensive manner, involving communities and local partners to achieve its mission. Acquisitions and developments are undertaken in places that meet one or more of the following five themes. (These are fully described in the Land Acquisition and Development Strategy Policy, online at xxxxxxxx):

- **Places to be:** Connecting people with Washington’s iconic landscapes – places that are uniquely Washington. Examples are Salish Sea shorelines, rain forests, ocean beaches, the Columbia River Gorge, shrub-steppe and channeled scablands, wild rivers, the Palouse.
- **Stories to know about the state:** Our stories include Ice Age floods, Native American history and culture, Lewis and Clark Exploration, pioneer settlement, history and culture associated with ethnic immigration, natural resource-based industries, agriculture, railroads, aerospace and more.
- **Things to do:** Providing an array of outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **Ways to grow:** Inviting people who are new to outdoor recreation to experience Washington’s outdoors through use of urban gateway parks, marine parks and water trails, cross-state trails, winter recreation areas and cabins and vacation rentals.
- **Something for everyone:** Improving quality of life with benefits that include personal health, economic development, transportation, environmental and heritage education, community identity and intergenerational continuity.

## Financing a healthy, sustainable state park system

**Operations.** The Commission believes that a park system that provides benefits to all should be supported by a mix of broad public funding and fees paid by users – in other words not 100 percent self-funded. A healthy, sustainable park system that satisfies public expectations also requires collaboration with partners and friends.

A stable funding source for the agency has been the subject of an ongoing discussion among the Commission, stakeholder groups and special panels, most notably, the 2014 Governor’s Blue-Ribbon Parks and Outdoor Recreation Task Force. The task force recommended several public funding options including an annual motor home and travel trailer excise tax, a sales tax on bottled water and/or a watercraft excise tax could be used as a secure funding base by generating a projected additional \$100 million per biennium. None of these options have been legislatively approved.

Washingtonians have been surveyed about how to pay for park services. (See Ruckelshaus survey at [XXXX](#)). They have repeatedly said that they do not want state parks to become overly commercialized or to feel like amusement parks. Many see parks as an escape from the stresses of daily life but may be reluctant to pay taxes to support the parks and services they want and expect to find. Some believe their taxes already fully pay for State Parks operations.

The discussion on how much tax support is needed to operate the state park system will continue. In the meantime, the Commission is currently operating below capacity on a ratio of about 80 percent earned revenue and 20 percent tax support.

While this discussion continues, Commission works hard to balance the necessary generation of revenue with the principles of its mission by:

- Constantly pursuing efficiencies in operations.
- Striving to providing high-quality recreation opportunities and customer service; maintaining health/safety, infrastructure and recreational and interpretive features and programs; and protecting natural, cultural and historic resources.
- Setting fees at a level that retains broad public access, keeps fees affordable and uses market rates for special services.
- Actively supporting the Discover Pass and camping and other activities, make customer-focused improvements and continue working with stakeholders, legislators and Governor on financing solutions focused on ensuring expanded park use and enjoyment by the public.

**Facility renovation and development.** State Parks manages significant resources on behalf of the state. These resources include buildings and structures, campgrounds, trails, and other facilities and infrastructure that are needed to provide recreational opportunities to visitors. The agency will continue to pursue adequate funding through the capital budget and state grant programs to improve and maintain existing facilities and develop new ones, to meet customer expectations.

# Goal

A primary goal of the Commission is to achieve a healthy, sustainable park system. Attaining this goal is central to meeting State Parks' mission and vision.

# Strategies

To achieve the goal of a healthy, sustainable park system, the Commission identified the following seven strategies: to make further progress toward achieving the goal of a healthy, sustainable park system. They are:

1. Demonstrate that all Washingtonians benefit from their state parks
2. Adopt a business approach to park system administration
3. Provide recreation, cultural and interpretive opportunities people will want
4. Promote meaningful opportunities for volunteers, friends and donors
5. Form strategic partnerships with other agencies, tribes and non-profits
6. Expand use of land holdings for compatible revenue generating purposes
7. Develop amenities and acquire lands that advance transformation

Attaining these strategies will be through ongoing work, a variety of initiatives and efforts related to the 2019-21 biennium priorities described in the next section.

## Financial Considerations

As the agency makes needed investments and builds capacity, agency leadership knows there are immediate significant financial uncertainties, risks and challenges that lie ahead. These include:

- The anticipated loss of \$9 million in Litter Tax revenue and \$1 million in General Fund tax support in the base budget for the 2019-21 biennium. State Parks received \$10 million in each of the last three biennia, as “one-time” funding. To help maintain operations at current levels, Parks needs these dollars allocated on an ongoing basis.
- The 2015-17 and 2017-19 budgets relied on one-time use of cash reserves; these are no longer available to mitigate cost increases in future biennia.
- Addressing a \$473 million building deficiency deferred maintenance backlog
- A lack of agreement on how to best finance the state parks system, including questions about the level of public funding; the flexibility, purpose and fiscal goals of agency fees; and the creation of one or more dedicated public fund sources.

Despite the financial challenges, the Commission will continue to pursue the overall direction outlined in this plan by:

- Focusing on providing relevant recreation opportunities and quality customer service
- Improving the condition and function of park facilities
- Embracing opportunities to improve the system through thoughtful acquisition and development
- Earning revenue from park users, lessees and partners
- Continued efforts to meet the Commission's stewardship mission and resource protection obligations

# 2019-21 priorities

The Commission is building on recent progress on improving the park system, with plans to focus on the following areas during the 2019-21 biennium:

## **Customer focus: Providing expected and needed services**

The state park system provides services to people visiting parks over 35 million times per year. To provide these direct services, more than 70 percent of the current agency budget is devoted to direct, on-the-ground service to park visitors. Park staff respond to visitor questions, address visitor concerns, provide event and interpretive programming, conduct administrative activities such as selling Discover Passes and registering campers, and provide a safe environment in which the public can enjoy the parks. We also work to keep public facilities such as restrooms, campgrounds and picnic shelters safe, clean and welcoming.

During the last biennium (2015-17), using cash reserves the agency embarked on a major, successful statewide initiative to improve the park experience for visitors by focusing efforts on visible activities. This effort was labeled “Clean, green and be seen”. The agency continues to pursue this initiative even though resources have been curtailed.

Since the agency operating model relies on a majority of funding to come from user fees, satisfying customer expectations in the parks is critical to the financial stability of the park system.

State Parks will continue to focus efforts on basic custodial care as a core element of customer service and will continue work to standardize service efforts throughout the state. The agency will also continue its work to survey and respond to visitors.

## **Improving facility condition**

The condition of facilities in state parks varies. Some parks have been recently refurbished and have buildings, roads, trails and utilities that are in good condition. Other parks have serious deficiencies in facility condition and have buildings and infrastructure in need of renovation or replacement. During the past few years, the agency has made some progress on improving the condition of its facilities, because of support from the Legislature, the Governor and partners. The agency is making strategic decisions in determining priorities for facility repair, replacement or elimination. With a maintenance backlog currently estimated at \$473 million statewide, State Parks will use capital and operating funds to continue improving facility condition.

## **Making smarter decisions with better data**

State Parks will continue investing in efforts to obtain and use better data that yield the following results:

- Better understanding of state parks visitors and their expectations
- Administrative efficiencies
- Expansion of internal and external communications

- Streamlined decision-making
- Improved connection with current and potential customers

Obtaining better data about our operation and our visitors also will result in clearer and more meaningful information for policy makers. Customer service and customer expectations data will drive service and facility investments.

### **Understanding and protecting resources in our care**

To prioritize and protect the most important natural and cultural resources, State Parks must continue improving its knowledge of the resources in its care. Staff will improve assessments and inventories and will work with volunteers, non-profit conservation organizations and other agencies to deepen its understanding of stewardship needs around such activities as noxious weed and forest health management, wildfire prevention and shellfish protection. This will lead to better restoration, protection and preservation of natural resource assets for future generations. We will place additional focus on these areas, to respond to increased wildfire threat and deferred maintenance of natural resources.

### **Engaging youth and diverse communities**

Demographic changes continuously alter State Parks' potential customer base and the resulting service preferences of those prospective customers. The same changes affect the probable work force. The agency is working to better understand these changes and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. In particular, State Parks will make concerted efforts to reach out to youth and ethnic minorities to help increase engagement and participation. The agency also seeks to better understand and meet the recreation needs of various ethnic communities. Parks intends to continue its commitment to the No Child Left Inside grant program and expand other efforts to engage youth in outdoor education activities and resource stewardship. The agency is focused on recruiting and developing a high-performing, diverse workforce.

### **Developing and maintaining trails**

Surveys show that, by a wide margin, the most popular outdoor recreational activities are walking, biking and horseback riding in the summer and skiing and snowshoeing in the winter. These are the activities that take place on State Parks trails. The agency intends to increase its outreach to trail users, improve trail conditions, build relationships with trail neighbors and engage partners to help develop programs and facilities.

### **Developing and maintaining beneficial partnerships**

Attaining the goal of a healthy, sustainable park system is in part reliant on the ability of State Parks to forge beneficial partnerships that help us provide services and maintain or develop facilities. These partnerships can take many forms and address a variety of issues and interests. The agency places a priority on strategic partnerships that help us effectively manage the park system.

### **Modernizing park operations**

State parks receive more than 35 million visits a year with about 950 employees on the ground in the parks during the busy season. The agency must invest in technology, not only to help park personnel handle their business as efficiently as possible, but to provide the services that visitors need, want and expect.

### **Investing in core capacity**

Top priorities include providing positive front-line service to the public and maintaining park facilities. To support these and other important mission-driven efforts, a variety of support functions are needed to ensure the agency is successful. These core functions help ensure that the agency has the internal capacity to operate at optimal levels, meeting state guidelines, regulatory and business requirements and ensuring staff have the resources and support to do their jobs and keep focused on priorities.

### **Promoting State Parks**

State Parks is heavily reliant on customers choosing and paying for agency recreation services. To maintain and grow customer visits, the agency must continually promote its sites and service offerings. Successful promotion is built upon an understanding of customers' wants, needs and changing desires for services. State Parks continues to place emphasis on gathering and using customer data to reach a broad and diverse audience and provide the information people need.

### **Capital planning**

State Parks is conducting multiple assessments to better understand the condition of park infrastructure and structures. As the results of these assessments are finalized, the information is incorporated into capital planning efforts, including the agency's 10-year capital plan and biennial capital budgets requests. It is an agency priority to complete necessary assessments and continually improve the capital planning process.

# Key performance measures

The following key performance measures are used to help ensure successful operations.

## **Grow park attendance**

- ✓ 34.0 million visits in FY14
- ✓ 33.0 million visits in FY15
- ✓ 35.1 million visits in FY16
- ✓ 35.4 million visits in FY17

## **Increase Earned Revenue**

- ✓ \$45.8 M collected in FY14
- ✓ \$49.5 M collected in FY15
- ✓ \$51.8 M collected in FY16
- ✓ \$52.8 M collected in FY17

## **Economic Contribution (2015 Earth Economics Study)**

- ✓ \$1.4 billion in annual consumer spending
- ✓ \$212 million in annual federal, state and local tax collections
- ✓ \$64 million in annual general fund revenue to state
- ✓ 14,000 full and part-time jobs

## **Improve Customer Satisfaction**

(Pending review)

## **Improve Facilities Condition**

- ✓ 60.4% in FY14
- ✓ 62.0% in FY15
- ✓ 62.8% in FY16
- ✓ 63.6% in FY17

## **Dedicated and Engaged Employees**

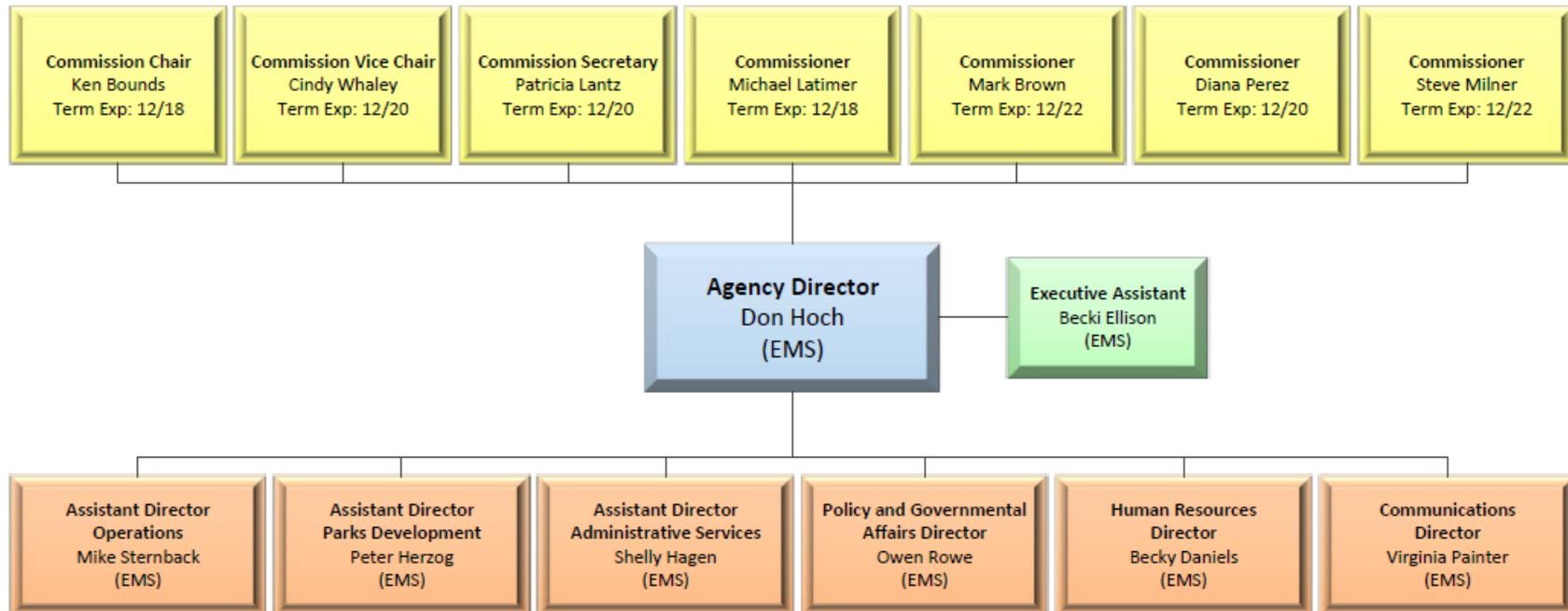
- ✓ 73% satisfied with State Parks employment in 2014
- ✓ 74% satisfied with State Parks employment in 2015
- ✓ 75% satisfied with State Parks employment in 2016
- ✓ 81% satisfied with State Parks employment in 2017

# Appendices: Organization Chart



## Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

Updated May 2018



# Appendices: State Parks System Statistics

## General

- 124 developed parks; includes 19 marine parks, 11 historical parks, and 35 heritage sites
- 123,000 leased and owned upland acres
- A state park or trail in nearly every county
- About 35 million visits per year
- 94 percent of visits are for day-use

## Buildings and Structures

- 2,800 buildings – State Parks owns more than one-fourth of all buildings owned by the State
- 770 officially listed historic structures – including military forts, homesteads, ranch buildings, lighthouses and a seminary complex, more than any other state agency

## Roads and Infrastructure

- More than 300 miles of roads
- 140 watercraft launches
- More than 40 miles of buried water and irrigation pipeline
- 80 reservoirs
- More than 150 wells
- Hundreds of sewer and septic systems ranging from simple vault toilets to state-of-the-art sewage treatment facilities including membrane bio-reactors and vibratory emulsion systems
- Hundreds of water control systems – including 178 culvert crossings, seven dams, one fish way, and five water diversions of fish bearing streams
- Miles of overhead and underground electrical utilities

## Natural Resources

- 19,800 acres of wetlands
- 2.1 million lineal feet of riparian habitat
- 15,800 acres of significant habitat supporting rare plants, animals or both
- 4,800 acres of natural area preserves
- More than 13,000 acres of natural forest areas
- More than 10% of parklands contain rare plant and/or animal species
- More than 80,000 acres of forested lands
- More than 60 miles of ocean beaches in the seashore conservation areas
- More than 40 percent of park landscapes contain plants and vegetative communities classified at moderate or greater risk of extirpation within our state or globally

## Recreation and Services

- 77 parks with campgrounds
- 13 interpretive centers
- 40 concessionaires
- 29 designated swimming areas
- 158 mooring buoys in 24 state parks
- Over 40 parks with boat launch facilities
- 500 miles of long-distance trails

