

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

MISSION STATEMENT

OF

SKAGIT COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

It is the mission of the Skagit County Parks and Recreation Department to provide high quality recreational services, facilities and parks to our customers and the citizens of Skagit County. This is exemplified through professional staff, cost effectiveness, community leadership and customer service.

A strong park and recreation system is essential for a thriving community. Outdoor recreation benefits the individual, as well as society as a whole—both mentally and physically. Studies show that communities that are rich in park and recreational opportunities, have less crime, decreased health care and insurance costs, less heart disease, stronger economies, and a richer environment.

In 2002, the Surgeon General identified the problems of excess weight in humans as a community problem and specified the need to address the problem on a community, as well as individual level. Solutions to this community problem include an improved public infrastructure which encourages people to walk, jog, or ride a bike. The Surgeon General encourages hiking, biking, and walking opportunities and encourages various providers of Parks and Recreation to play an integral role in supporting Americans in their exercise routines.

Skagit County is blessed with a wide variety of outdoor recreation settings, from marine islands, to rushing rivers, to alpine meadows. In addition to natural settings, a variety of agencies provide recreation facilities and programs to the residents and visitors of Skagit County. Skagit County Parks and Recreation (SCPR) with over 1,700 acres of park land and over 300,000 annual participation hours in its programs, is a key provider in helping to ensure the availability of passive and active recreational opportunities to people of all ages.

This Park and Recreation Plan update is the primary document for addressing the need for public access to natural areas, providing services to newly established sub areas, and meeting the park and recreational needs of County residents. The park and recreation plan is Skagit County's foundation for the park system of the future. It reflects the changes in both supply and demand for parks since the previous 1998 plan.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This plan will redefine policies and establish a sense of direction for the County to follow in serving the recreational needs of its residents. The update is a Growth Management Act (GMA) requirement and fulfills grant funding eligibility criteria required by the State of Washington Interagency for Outdoor Recreation (IAC). This document sets the goals and objectives which will provide the department with policy direction and implementation of strategies. It helps to provide direction for SCPR in regards to property acquisition, park development, capital improvement planning, and programs for the next six years.

The elements contained in this plan include:

- An analysis of the community's population and setting
- An analysis of existing parks, open space areas and trail facilities
- An analysis of existing department operations
- An assessment of recreation and facility needs
- Recommendations for the acquisition and development of parks, open space and trail systems
- Recommendations related to management, administration, and other aspects of providing park and recreation services
- Recommendations for funding and implementing the plan

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process consisted of four basic steps. The first step was the administration of a county-wide survey. Conducted by Applied Research Northwest (ARN), the survey asked Skagit County residents a number of specific questions in order to obtain estimates of residents' preferences for parks and recreation facilities development and priorities for future planning. Questions related to recent activities, desired expansion of existing facilities (including athletic fields, campgrounds, trails, etc.) and the addition of a new public indoor facility including classrooms and a multi-purpose gym. Development of the Northern State Recreation Area was also included in the study.

The second step was to hold public meetings throughout the three County districts. The meetings served as a forum for listening to the concerns and desires of County residents.

The third step of the process was to reassess the parks and recreational services and verify as to what modifications to the current levels of service (LOS) standards are presently warranted. This

determination was made through public meetings, the county-wide survey, input from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), consultation with user groups, as well as input from Skagit County Parks and Recreation (SCPR) staff.

The fourth step was to refine the previously established vision and set goals to support the implementation of the modified plan. The modified plan included adjustments to previous recommendations for improving park and recreation services. These services consist of improvements to existing parks, acquisition and development of new parks, and changes to the administrative and operation functions of the Department.

The fifth and final step includes a series of implementation strategies for funding and managing the actions of SCPR for the next six years.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public participation in this type of study is critical because local needs vary, depending upon the values local residents place on their region. Since every region is different, national standards or analogous recommendations may not meet Skagit County's specific recreation needs. As a result, public involvement in the planning process was essential and came in several ways.

The level of public involvement included:

- A Random Countywide Telephone Survey
- Public Meetings
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Input
- SCPR Staff Input
- Contributions from Local User Groups

KEY MECHANISMS

Skagit County Parks receives input from the general public. The flow of input comes in many forms including, but not limited to:

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board:

Skagit County Parks and Recreation has a 9-member advisory board which meets monthly. The Park Board reviews acquisition offers, policy recommendations, works in concert with park staff to develop master plans, and provides input into development projects. Over the next six years, the

Park Board will continue to seek to provide a forum for the public to provide input about a variety of park issues.

Site Master Plan Processes:

Park sites with significant development opportunities are typically subjected to a master plan process. This process incorporates input from a variety of park users, neighbors, and the general public in developing the future vision for a given park. As such, it is a good vehicle for folks to express their opinions on their park needs. For sites which do not go through a formal master plan process, neighborhood meetings are a good way for concerned citizens to develop an understanding of planning and development efforts.

Public Comments:

Skagit County Parks and Recreation staff has contact with their clientele on a daily basis. This contact provides a forum for staff to receive recurring advice, criticism, comments, assessment, analysis, and/or praise from park users. Letters, electronic mail, phone calls, and other types of correspondence come in regularly. This information is often presented and discussed at SCPR staff meetings. This informal type of feedback from the public is taken in earnest and is another piece of the formula which contributes to everyday decisions and long range planning made by the department.