NSRA Master Plan

Vision and Goals

Northern State Recreation Area is a premier year-round regional facility that offers a wide range of recreational experiences in a manner that respects the natural environment, celebrates the region's past, and meets the needs of current and future generations.

This vision is achieved by accomplishing the following goals:

- Provide facilities and activities that are compatible with the environment
- Showcase the natural, historical and cultural character of the region
- Design for accessibility and sustainability
- Promote a healthy, active community
- Offer a diverse range of opportunities and experiences (i.e., active, passive, team, individual, competitive, recreational, etc.).

Design Elements:

Open Space

Over 500 acres of the site will not be developed. This land will be left as it is or enhanced to provide for fish, wildlife, water quality, and other environmental purposes.

Ball Fields

The goal of the ball field component is to provide a destination youth and adult ball field complex that creates an exciting baseball environment by providing state-of-the-art play fields, integrated parking, concessions, restrooms, maintenance facilities, and picnic areas. An additional goal is to incorporate aesthetic values as well as conservation and restoration of sensitive natural resources into the planning of the ball field area.

Layout of Ball field elements at center of site No Scale

Elements

The ball field component includes the following elements:

- 5 youth/adult softball fields
- 4 youth baseball fields
- 1 youth/adult baseball field
- Adequate parking for the fields
- Sufficient space for maintenance and operations
- Adequate concessions
- Play areas

Location

The ball fields and related infrastructure were designed to be constructed in the southern (lower) center region of the site. The charette participants felt that it was important to locate the fields close to one another so that they could share much of the infrastructure (maintenance area, concessions, play grounds, parking, etc.) that is needed to support the fields and related tournaments. The charette participants also felt that one of the alluvial fan alternatives, as recommended by the proposed Hansen Creek Management Plan, should be integrated into their designs if at all possible. The large contiguous block of buildable land in the lower center portion of the site quickly emerged as the only place large enough to accommodate the ball field facilities.

Design Considerations

Orientation & Architecture of Fields

All ball fields and supporting facilities were aligned along a number of tree lined pedestrian walkways. These walkways radiate out from the central plaza and create organization around which the facilities are located. Ball fields were oriented with consideration to the sun. The majority of the fields have been designed in the optimal position. Due to the circular design of the softball five-plex, not all of the fields could be arranged in the ideal position. Trees and vegetation will be used as buffers for stray balls as well as view screening and blocking the low afternoon sun. The maintenance and concession/restroom buildings will be constructed to reflect the historic architectural character of the original Northern State Hospital buildings.

Artist's rendering of concessions stand

Softball Fields

The softball five-plex was configured in a circular layout to minimize space and to allow for proximity and ease when the site is host to tournaments. The ball field's largest concession building complete with restrooms will be located inside the five-plex to serve a more adult oriented crowd. The entire five-plex will be equipped with night lighting.

Baseball Fields

The baseball fields were aligned along the main pedestrian walkway as well as to optimize the sun angle and the environmental constraints of the site. The adult field was put farthest from the parking lots to reduce the chance of foul balls hitting the parked vehicles. Rows of columnar trees were added to help create spaces for the fields and provide separation. A satellite concession building with restrooms was located at the end of the pedestrian walkway to serve the baseball fields. Consideration should be given to not lighting the two youth baseball fields closest to the wetlands in the southern portion of the recreation area to reduce disturbance to adjacent neighbors, traffic on the highway, and wildlife.

Play & Picnic Areas

Play areas were designed to be as centrally located as possible so that adults playing and watching the ballgames could keep an eye on their children. Two picnic areas were located on the fringes of the fields to allow for some open space and respite from the crowds and noise of the ball fields.

Maintenance Area

A maintenance area was designed to be inconspicuous through the use of vegetative screening and location. The location of the maintenance area will also allow access to the softball fields without having heavy machinery using the foot traffic corridors to the fields. Some maintenance and operation equipment and gear will also be stored in the two-concession/rest room buildings to allow for easy access to the fields.

Parking

The parking lots are situated to provide easy access to the ball fields while minimizing impact to the rest of the recreation area's traffic flow. Over 400 vehicles are accommodated in the four parking lots, which should be more than sufficient for normal uses. Larger tournaments may require additional parking, which has been designed in the overflow parking area across Helmick Road to the east. The overflow parking will not be paved; however, other hardening techniques will be used to

support overflow parking for automobiles. Trees and other vegetation will act as view screens for the parking lots as well as the overflow parking area. A vehicular drop-off and turn-around allows for better handicapped access as well as expedite the dropping off and picking-up of visitors. An entry plaza will greet and guide ballpark visitors and provides for an integrated aesthetic experience by serving as the central location from which all walkways radiate to the surrounding facilities.

Entranceway

The visual experience of the visitor as he or she arrives into the park played an integral role in the design of the entranceway. The design of the entranceway and entire ball fields complex was planned so that the visual experience of the visitor seeking a more natural experience at Northern State Recreation Area was not impaired from the more developed feel of ball fields and their related infrastructure. As a result, the view towards the park from the main entrance on Helmick Road was designed to visually screen most of the ball fields as well as the parking. This will be achieved by planting four rows of large trees (two on either side of Helmick Road). In addition to the visual screening, at the access to the recreation area from Highway 20, an information kiosk and sign with vehicular pullout on the east side of Helmick Road has been planned to welcome and orient visitors.

Alluvial Fan

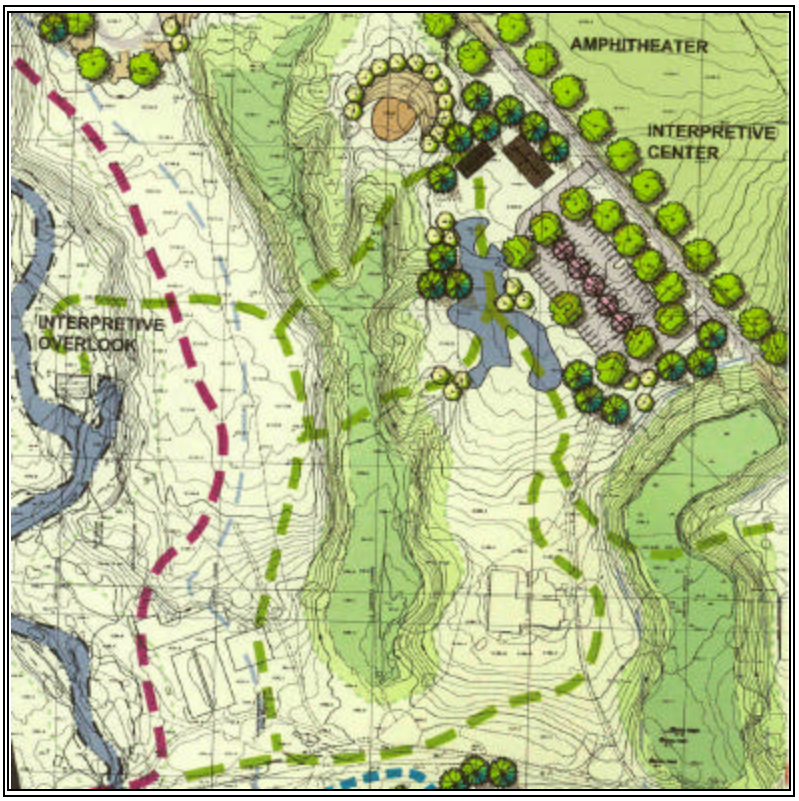
The ball field design team integrated their design with elements of the proposed Hansen Creek Management Plan. Every attempt possible was made by the design group to maximize the acreage available for the restoration of Hansen Creek's alluvial fan. A slightly reduced version of the medium-sized alluvial fan was the largest feasible alternative that could be integrated into the design of the ball fields and parking.

Ditch Realignment

The ditch or Dairy Fork that currently runs alongside Helmick Road will be realigned to closer mimic its historical path feeding into Red Creek. This will allow for more usable space for parking as well as provide for hydrological restoration.

Trails

The goal of the trails component is to develop an integrated non-motorized trail network throughout the Northern State Recreation Area property that provides for a minimum of at least five miles of trail. It should be emphasized that trails were identified as the highest priority type of facility to include at NSRA in the countywide survey administered prior to the charette.



Layout of trails near interpretive center No Scale

Trail Types

The design team members quickly agreed to several types of trails to include in planning a trail system. These are:

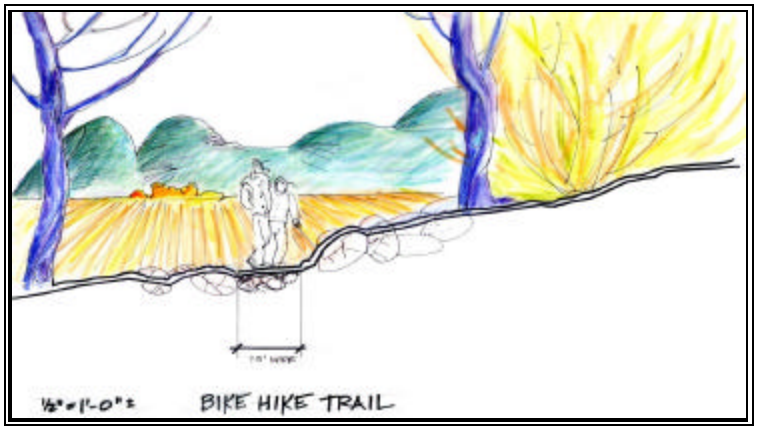
Artist rendering of a multiple use trail

Multiple Use Trails

The main type of trails the design team felt should be developed at NSRA are the multiple use trails suitable for walking, hiking, bicycling and horseback riding. This type of trail should be ten feet wide with a cleared area of twenty feet horizontal and ten feet vertical all around. It should be a hardened, compact surface, possibly using some type of binder for increased compaction. These trails should be made ADA accessible where feasible and include frequent widened 'pull-out' type areas with benches and interpretive signs (where appropriate). The

team designed a primary north/south route through NSRA that would be a multiple use trail and would provide outside connections to the Cascade Trail on the south and to DNR lands to the north that could eventually be extended to create a link to the Pacific Northwest Trail.

Mountain Biking/Hiking Trails



This type of trail has a narrower tread width of three to five feet in width and is designed for hikers and mountain bikers (similar to hiking in a National Park or Forest). The surface would primarily utilize native materials, with some sections consisting of crushed rock, turnpike or boardwalk as needed. This type of trail would be more rugged and may not be ADA accessible in all areas. In the northwest corner of NSRA, the team designed a loop mountain bike/hiking trail that would lead off of the multiple-use trail loop and would parallel Hansen Creek for a short section. This would provide trail users appropriate and managed access to views of wildlife along the creek and around wetland areas. Short spurs leading to wildlife viewing areas could also be developed.

Another trail of this type was planned in the south central part of NSRA where it will skirt the bottom edge of the restored alluvial fan. This area will likely experience frequent flooding and washouts which will make it difficult and costly to maintain a trail surface. The concept is to leave this section 'open' with two trail endpoints. Trail users should be able to make their way through this short section with little difficulty and the location could serve as a useful interpretive site about Hansen Creek restoration.

Interpretive Trails

An important component of the trail system includes several interpretive loop trails starting and ending at the Interpretive Center. Each loop would be developed around a theme (i.e., cultural, geology, wildlife, restoration, etc.). These trails would be for walkers only and would be ADA accessible.

Limited Use Trails
A limited use area is provided for in the upper northeast corner of NSRA for hikers and horseback riders. This area would accommodate the desire from equestrian users for a space where they could occasionally set-up a cross-country course for timed events. The area would be closed to hikers during such events, but open to both hikers and horseback riders all other times. Horseback riders could access this area via the multiple use trails.

Exercise Trail
A one-mile exercise trail is included around the athletic fields complex. This trail would include frequent 'pull-out' type areas with exercise stations for stretching, sit-ups, pull-ups, etc.

Bike Lanes
Bike lanes are provided on roads in areas where separate pathways cannot be constructed.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

The goal of the environmental education and interpretation component is to develop ways in which these concepts could be incorporated into all aspects of the Northern State Recreation Area.

Interpretation & Educational Themes

The overarching theme for the recreation area will be "the natural resources and people's relationship to them over time." Of the many possible stories that could be interpreted at Northern State Recreation Area, the team chose the following as the most significant to accomplishing the educational and interpretive goals of the site. Each is stated as a theme:

1. Salmon Habitat Restoration

Hansen Creek restoration is an example of the steps being taken to restore salmon habitat in Skagit County.

2. The Northern State Hospital Farm

The Northern State Farm produced enough food to make the hospital self-sufficient and also supported other state institutions. Many county residents were involved with the operation of the farm and the hospital.

3. Natural Habitats & Biodiversity

The Northern State Recreation Area includes a great variety of habitats that support a significant diversity of plants and animals.

4. Native American Continuity

Indian people, some of who live adjacent to the site today, have for a very long time been inhabitants of this region and continue to preserve their culture here today.

In relation to number 4, the story of Native American cultural and historical continuity should be integrated into the interpretive stories rather than being treated separately. For example, wayside exhibits about salmon should include the tribes' perspective and mention their involvement in restoration work, habitat preservation, etc. It will be especially important in referring to Indian people to emphasize their presence and activities today, avoiding the implication that their story is all one of the past. In order to better accomplish this, the local tribes should be consulted during the planning or development of this the particular theme.

Guidelines for Interpretation

The following guidelines were recommended by the team:

- Include education as an element of the recreational experience
- Promote public understanding and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- Present topics of countywide significance.
- All designs, especially those of related to the educational facilities and devices, be sensitive to natural and cultural values of the site.

Environmental Education Center

An environmental education center will serve as the focal point for educational and interpretive opportunities on the site. It will also act a gateway to the more natural or northern portion of the Northern State Recreation Area. It will be located in the center of the site just north of the ball fields and west of the multi use events center.

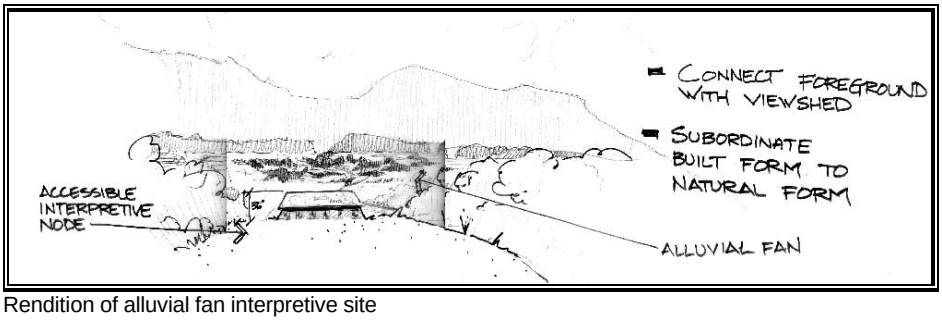
The following elements will be incorporated into the environmental education center:

- The structure will be designed to reflect the historic character of the site
- The structure will contain classrooms and/or theater(s)
- An outdoor amphitheater will be designed in close proximity to the environmental education center
- Exhibits will reflect the above mentioned themes

Interpretive Trails

Interpretive trails should start from the environmental education center and return visitors via a loop route. Trails should be of varying lengths and allow for ADA accessibility where possible. Themes of potential interpretive trails include:

- Dairy barn and related farm structures
- Hanson Creek and restoration efforts
- Habitat diversity

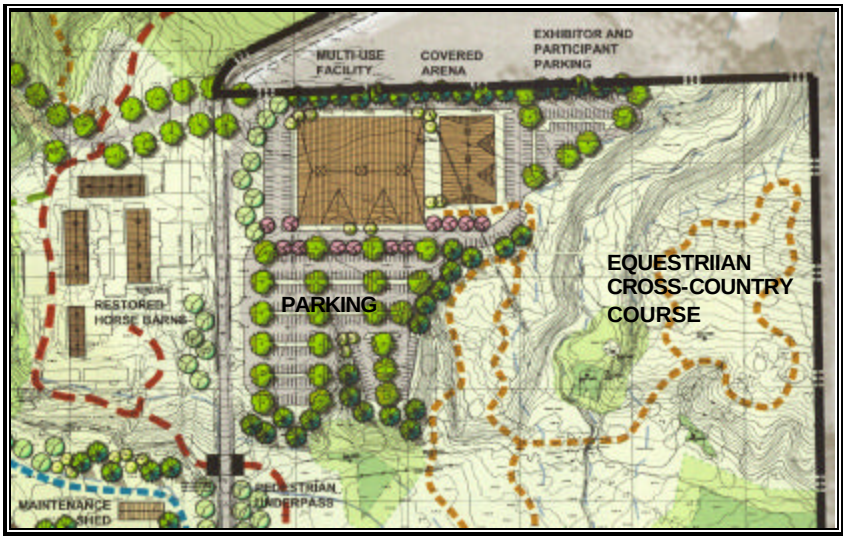


Rendition of alluvial fan interpretive site

Equestrian and Multi-Use Events Center

The goal of the equestrian and multi-use events center component is to develop a facility that can accommodate a variety of equestrian and community functions. These functions include (but are not limited to):

- rodeo and equestrian events
- school and educational programs
- trade shows
- craft fairs
- community and business meetings
- recreation classes
- family programs
- weddings and dances



Layout of Equestrian & Multiple Use Events Center Facilities No Scale

Multi-Use Events Center

The Multi-Use Event Center building footprint is approximately 260 feet by 300 feet. The size of the structure is largely dictated by the need to fit an equestrian arena and spectator seating/grandstands inside. The open arena floor would be 240 feet by 140 feet. Grandstands/ bleachers would be installed on each side of the length of the arena, and will be capable of seating up to 2500 people. It is estimated that eight rows/banks of seating would be required on each side of the open floor to satisfy the seating capacity. The grandstands/bleachers may be designed as either permanent structures or as retractable seating, similar to that seen in high school gymnasiums. The arena floor will be designed so that the footing can be removed to expose a concrete floor for alternate uses.

In addition to the open floor and spectator seating area, the Multi-Use Event Center will house offices and meeting rooms, a concessions/kitchen area, an upstairs event announcer's and lighting booth, and restroom facilities. The building will be heated and lighted. Doors will be large enough to allow vehicle access for exhibitors, and for emergency and maintenance purposes. The building design will feature cupolas on the roof structure, as well as exterior design accents similar to the historic dairy barns across the street.

Covered Arena

An outdoor, covered arena will be located to the east of the Multi-Use Event Center. The overall footprint provides for a 200 foot by 100-foot equestrian arena and protection for onlookers or equestrians tacking up

their horses. The covered arena will be lighted, and is intended for use as a warm-up area during large equestrian events in the Multi-Use Event Center, as well as for general use by casual equestrians.

A driveway off Helmick Road provides vehicle access to the site, with a service road around the perimeter of the building. Handicap and general parking for approximately 300 cars will be located adjacent to the multi-use events center. Additional overflow parking is located in the lower field to the south of the center (see Ball Fields write-up). Pedestrian trails will offer a path for spectators to access the center or the ball fields from the lower parking area. Parking for horse trailers is located across the street inside the Equestrian Center, with a Pedestrian/Equestrian underpass designed to allow for the safe crossing of Helmick Road. An Exhibitor parking area for larger trucks and service vehicles is located to the east of the outdoors arena structure.

Users of the Multi-Use Event Center will be charged appropriate fees for specific uses. It is intended that use of this facility will produce sufficient revenues to offset the operating costs and maintenance of the facility and grounds.

Equestrian Center

A premier Equestrian Center will be located near the entrance of the park, in the historic Dairy Complex. It is a goal in the design of this center to preserve as many historical buildings as possible. Two or three of the old Diary Barns will be saved and renovated to provide temporary stabling for 75 to 100 horses during equestrian events. The barns will be finished to include cupolas on the roofs and barn doors to match the original Dairy Barn designs. Barns will have interior lighting and a restroom facility. If feasible, a fourth barn building will be renovated as an open indoor area for a variety of meetings and group functions. Historic photographs and summaries describing site history and culture will be displayed throughout the Equestrian Center buildings. If possible, the old Diary Barn mural on the old maintenance shed will be restored and moved to a new location within the Equestrian Center.

An equestrian Cross Country event course will be developed to the north of the Equestrian Center, extending up into the northeast corner of the park. The course will utilize the natural terrain of the park's open and a forested area to site jumps for the horses/riders. In addition to the cross-country course, equestrian trails will be developed throughout the park, with a concentration of trails to the east and south of the outdoor Covered Arena (adjacent to the Multi-Use Event Center) near Red Creek. A trail will extend south and will connect to the existing Cascade Trail. When not in use for events, the Cross Country course can be enjoyed by pedestrians and equestrians for casual use.

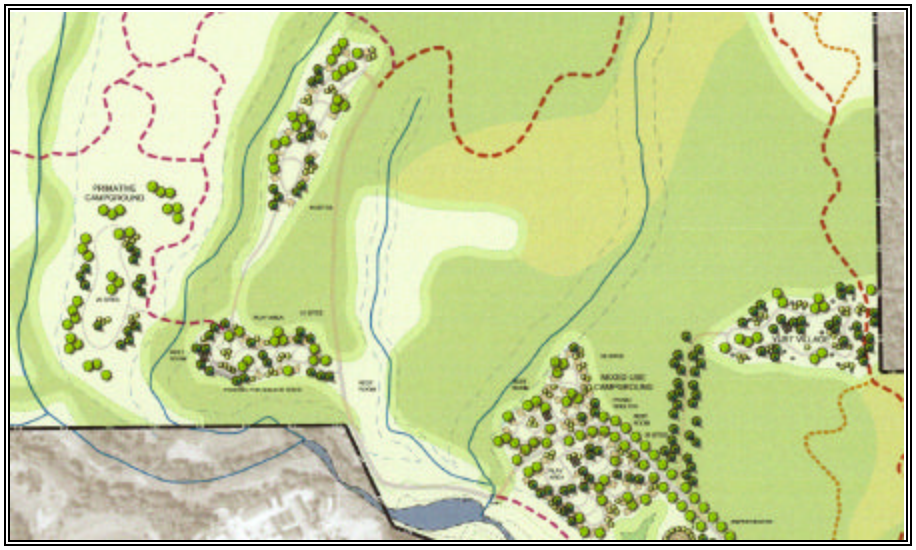
Access & Parking

Vehicle access to the south end of the Equestrian Center will be from a driveway off Helmick Road, which leads directly into the center. Additionally, the center can be accessed from the north via the main entrance to the park. Parking for horse trailers and tow vehicles is available on the east side of the center, along the Helmick Road fence. Additional parking will be available directly to the west of the barns, with a road going around the perimeter of the center. Parking areas will be maintained as reinforced grassy fields to the extent possible. If necessary, the overflow parking area in the lower field south of the Multi-Use Event Center can be used for larger equestrian center events. The Pedestrian/Equestrian underpass will offer uninterrupted and safe crossing of Helmick Road by users.

Maintenance Building

If possible, a maintenance building will be located inside a restored building in the Equestrian Center. The building will be large enough to house a tractor and other equipment and tools needed for operations for the Equestrian Center and Multi-Use Event Center. Shavings bunkers will also be located on the site for the delivery and pick-up of shavings during equestrian events.

Campgrounds



Layout of Campground Elements No Scale

The goal of the campgrounds component is to design a variety of camping experiences that address the regional deficiency in camping and picnic areas for a diverse set of potential users. The design team made every attempt to incorporate aesthetic values as well as environmental education, conservation and restoration of the area's sensitive natural resources into the planning of the camping and picnic facilities.

Elements

The campgrounds component includes the following elements:

- 100 camping sites
- Year round availability
- Diversity in design.
- Multiple locations throughout the site
- Play areas and picnic facilities dispersed throughout the site.

Location

Camping facilities are located throughout the site near activity areas as well as in more remote locations. The sites of the various campgrounds, picnic areas and play areas were strategically located on small parcels of developable land left over after siting other facility needs and in relation to the sensitive areas to be retained as open space.

Design Considerations

Campers at the Northern State Recreational Area represent a broad cross section of needs whether participating in sports tournaments, environmental education or escaping from the pressures of modern life. Driven by diverse demand, facility needs vary from larger heavily developed open public group campgrounds to more rustic isolated, individual or group areas as the user moves deeper into the park. Availability of

utilities also follows this pattern. Trees and vegetation as well as elevation changes and physical separation will be used as buffers for noise as well as to enhance the sense of separation.

Quality of Experience

Each park visitor should come away from the experience remembering the uniqueness of the Northern State Recreational Area in terms of the events in which they participated. Campground facilities are to be designed and sited so as to be transparent. Tree and shrub buffered locations promote the sense of separation from the other sites with views preserved at every opportunity and access to trails and other facilities.

Maintenance

Maintenance ease and cost help drive the planning of the various campgrounds. Limited utilities reduce not only initial construction costs but also maintenance costs.

Period of Usability

Remoteness of the hike-in areas limits their use in the winter, reducing the costs of maintenance. Yurts are designed as an all weather shelter for year-round use. Portable by design, the yurt village can be expanded as demand increases up to and beyond cost recovery.

Infrastructure

Access to areas by vehicle is in proportion to the type and number of likely users. A main campground loop is entered from the main entry drive with parking at the individual campsites. The yurt village accessed by an all-weather road, has a modest parking facility at the foot of the village. Parking for the more remote day use, camp and hike-in trailhead areas is reached by an all-weather but unpaved drive. Hike-in areas are approached by developed trails. Restroom and shower facilities are centrally located in more organized camping areas below the urban growth boundary. Each major campground and day use area is equipped with an appropriately sized open area for picnics, family sports and an equally proportional sized playground for younger visitors.

Accessibility

Access to the various camping, picnic areas and play areas follows the same pattern as the facilities themselves. Easy immediate handicapped accessible facilities are universal in the larger more developed areas. Some trails to the more remote hike-in camping areas may present barriers to some visitors.

Ecological Relationship

Balance is sought in siting the campgrounds between the need to protect environmentally sensitive areas and the camping needs of the general public. There is value in allowing park users to experience environmentally sensitive areas, but in a controlled manner so as to not jeopardize their integrity. For example, the yurt village and the upper camping areas provide for such access, while being separated by fences, screening or elevation changes from the more sensitive nature to be experienced that surrounds it.