



# Mount Rainier

## National Park

Update from the Superintendent

Summer 1998

Dear Friends of Mount Rainier National Park:

I'd like to update you on the progress we are making towards developing our General Management Plan. Last fall in a round of public meetings, we presented our initial ideas to protect the park and provide quality experiences within the park. Many of you have since expressed your thoughts to us on these ideas. Because protecting the mountain is as important to you as to me, we have taken your comments to heart and have been reconsidering the ideas we will propose in the plan. I'd like to tell you about some of the changes we are considering and let you know what comes next in the planning process.

### Progress to Date

While we have made several changes, I will describe three of the most significant to you. One of the most contentious issues the plan has dealt with is deciding what the National Park Service should do--or not do--in response to the mountain's geological hazards. We are specifically concerned about two campgrounds and the historic Longmire Village area which our research shows to be in the path of potentially large mud flows that can happen with little or no warning. Some of you told us that it should be your choice--not the government's--as to whether you would continue to use facilities in these locations. Some of you said our research exaggerates any risk. And, others of you said if the area is that dangerous, then relocate the campgrounds to another suitable place within the park, even if the only suitable place is in wilderness. Based on your comments, I am taking the following actions:

- including information in the park's Official Map and Guide about the potential geologic hazards in the park
- presenting information on geologic hazards in the Safety column of the current as well as future editions of the Tahoma News -- Visitor Guide to Mount Rainier
- posting warning signs about possible geologic hazards along roadways leading to the White River and Cougar Rock Campgrounds
- developing informational literature with United States Geological Survey (USGS) to be handed out or posted on bulletin boards and restrooms throughout each campground notifying visitors of possible risks and the best actions to take in case of an geologic event
- making more detailed geologic hazard information available on the USGS Cascade Volcano Observatory's website at <http://vulcan.wr.usgs.gov> as well as on the park's website at [www.nps.gov/mora](http://www.nps.gov/mora)

In addition, we are having other scientists and statisticians review current research, specifically the formulas used to predict potential risks. We are also collecting information from other national parks and recreation areas that have volcanoes or similar hazards to understand how they manage use and deal with public liability. As we learn more from these efforts, other avenues of opportunity may come into play. Therefore, I will wait until we have these findings in hand to make a decision about the future use of either of these campgrounds as well as the Longmire area. Most likely, I will not be able to make this decision in this General Management Plan since it will take awhile to complete the work on the geohazards risk assessment. If need be, I will conduct a separate planning

process to determine the future of these areas when I have the findings in hand and you will be invited to participate. The General Management Plan needs to continue since there are many other pressing issues to be resolved.

Another significant change is what we are doing about the flood damage along the Carbon River road. We released an environmental assessment on May 11th., for a 30-day public comment period, that proposes to repair the historic road so visitors can once again drive to Ipsut Creek campground. Of all the comments I received, most were in support of repairing the road. The General Management Plan will still look at future possibilities for this area. However, these possibilities will no longer include closing the road during the summer season.

The third change we are making is in response to Congress rather than from public comments. Almost all of the park's historic roads, developed areas, backcountry structures and the Wonderland trail were recently designated by Congress as a single National Historic Landmark District. This is because, within the entire National Park System, Mount Rainier National Park contains the best example of master planned facilities. For example, the roads you drive along, pullouts you may stop at, and developed areas you visit were specifically planned, designed and built in primarily the 1920's and 30's so that visitors could enjoy the best of what Mount Rainier National Park has to offer. I am charged with preserving, protecting and helping visitors learn about these important historic resources. Consequently, the plan will reflect more emphasis on this important aspect of the park's mission.

### What's Next

It is important that we take time with this plan and that we have your continued participation, so I ask for your patience. It will be awhile until we wrap up this effort. While I would like to have my staff working only on this plan for the future, they must also manage the park and protect its treasures on a daily basis. We also have the centennial coming up and are working to plan events and improve our facilities to be able to commemorate this milestone in the park's history.

When I think about the impact this plan will have into the future, I realize we will make changes--some highly contentious--to how the park is protected and enjoyed. It is important that we take the time we need and not act in haste so that we can collect the best, most innovative ideas from park service professionals and from all of you.

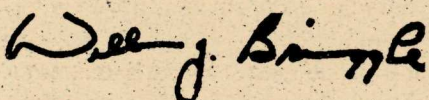
We are working to get the draft of the General Management Plan out to you sometime next spring. This one document will also serve as the environmental impact statement and will contain:

- the goals, or desired conditions, for the park
- alternative ways to achieve those goals
- an assessment of what impacts the alternatives will have on park resources, visitors, the surrounding communities and others

Many of you have told me you want to have plenty of time to closely study the alternatives. You also said you needed more information on what the impacts and costs of the alternatives would be. All this information will be in the environmental impact statement and you will have at least 60 days to review this document and provide your comments. During this time, I will hold the next round of public meetings. What you have to say is important to me and can shape the future of the park. Your comments and our responses to those comments will be printed in a final document that we will send to you.

I look forward to continue working with all of you to develop a plan that's best for Mount Rainier National Park.

Sincerely,



William J. Briggie  
Superintendent