

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

North Cascades National Park Complex
Washington



Foundation Document

North Cascades National Park Complex

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Park Description

North Cascades National Park Complex is located in Washington State along the Canadian border, approximately 100 miles northeast of Seattle, in Whatcom, Skagit, and Chelan counties in the 2nd and 4th congressional districts.

North Cascades National Park Complex is comprised of North Cascades National Park, Ross Lake National Recreation Area (Ross Lake NRA), and Lake Chelan National Recreation Area (Lake Chelan NRA), a complementary suite of protected lands, united by a

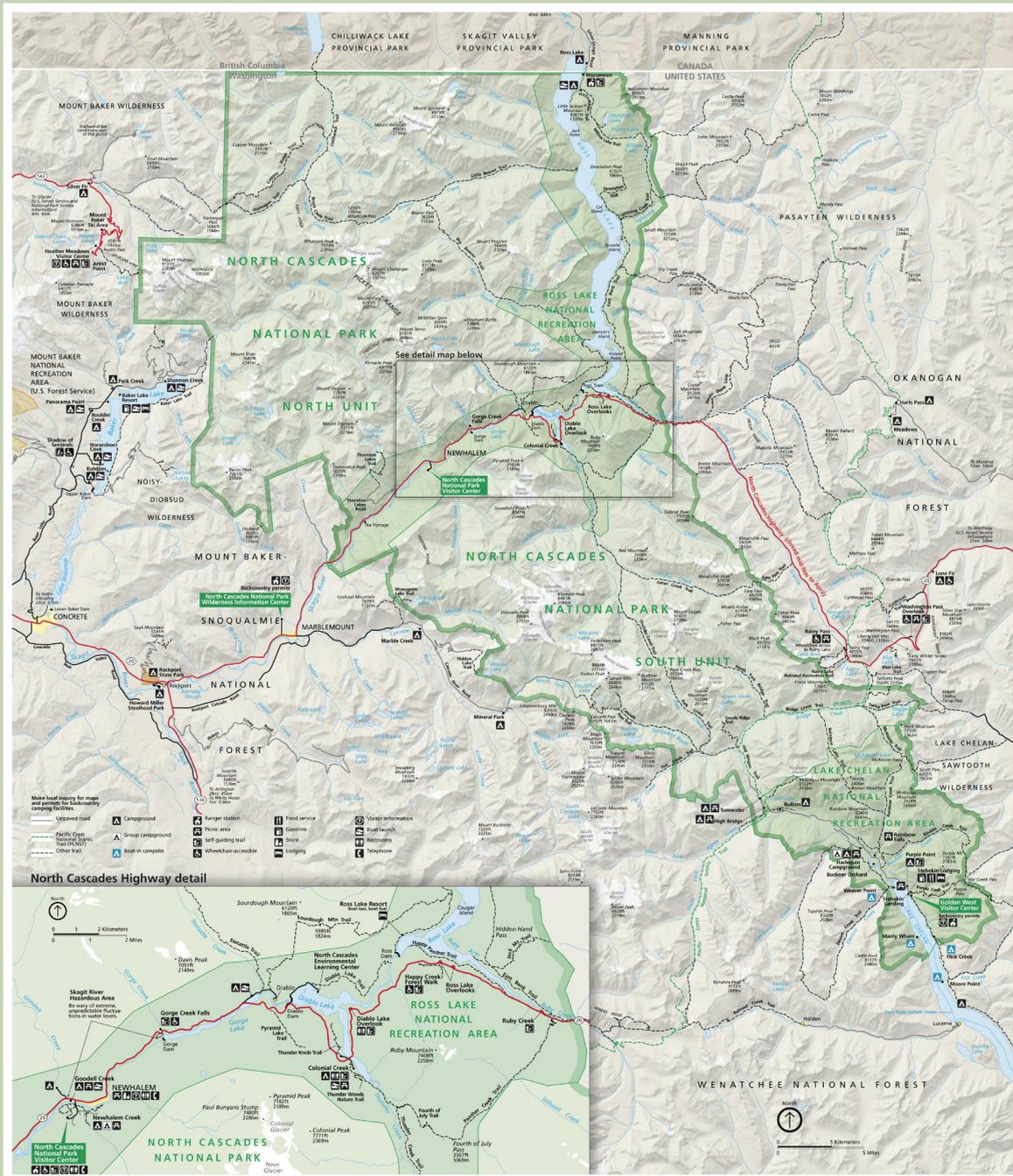
contiguous wilderness overlay. Combining these three distinct units under a single unique administration recognizes their shared purpose of preserving the core of the greater North Cascades ecosystem and wilderness while advancing their individual purposes.

North Cascades National Park Complex units include:

North Cascades National Park –501,458 acres

Ross Lake National Recreation Area–116,798 acres

Lake Chelan National Recreation Area–62,902 acres



Purpose

The purpose of North Cascades National Park is to preserve a dynamic wilderness landscape of dramatic alpine scenery including a vast expanse of glaciated peaks, countless cascading creeks and deep forested valleys for the benefit and inspiration of all.

The purpose of Lake Chelan National Recreation Area is to complement North Cascades National Park and conserve the scenic, natural and cultural values of the Lower Stehekin Valley, Lake Chelan and surrounding wilderness, while respecting the remote Stehekin community, for outdoor recreation and education.

The purpose of Ross Lake National Recreation Area is to complement North Cascades National Park and conserve the scenic, natural, and cultural values of the Upper Skagit River Valley and surrounding wilderness, including the hydroelectric reservoirs and associated developments, for outdoor recreation and education.



Significance

NORTH CASCADES LANDSCAPES

The North Cascades range reaches its finest expression in the North Cascades National Park Complex, where a dense concentration of jagged glaciated peaks towers above alpine meadows and deep valleys and results in supremely majestic scenery.



GLACIERS

The North Cascades National Park Complex contains more glaciers than any other protected area outside Alaska, representing one-quarter of all glaciers in the lower 48 states, and supporting ecosystems, communities, and industries in the Puget Sound and lower Columbia River basins.

ECOSYSTEM AND BIODIVERSITY

From deep forested valleys to alpine peaks, the North Cascades National Park Complex encompasses extreme gradients of climate and topography that contribute to an impressive diversity of habitats and species. This area is the core of a vast mountainous ecosystem of protected public lands spanning the border of the United States and Canada. The ecological integrity of the North Cascades National Park Complex and the greater North Cascades ecosystem depend on one another.

Significance



WILDERNESS

Envisioned as a wilderness park from its inception, the North Cascades National Park Complex is part of more than 2 million acres of federally designated wilderness, which is one of the largest such areas in the lower 48 states. The Stephen Mather Wilderness, along with adjacent wilderness areas, is maintained to preserve and enhance the qualities of wilderness character.

WILDERNESS RECREATION

North Cascades National Park Complex provides the wilderness traveler with great challenges of physical endurance, route-finding, and navigation through on- and off-trail hiking. The park contains climbing routes of high quality and aesthetic appeal guarded by remote, rugged terrain and volatile weather, resulting in mountaineering experiences of solitude, mental and physical challenge, and fulfillment.

CULTURE AND HISTORY

Preserved within North Cascades National Park Complex is abundant evidence of nearly 10,000 years of cultural and technological development. This long history reveals a range of human adaptations to changing climates and environments at all elevations of the North Cascades.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

North Cascades National Park Complex provides educational and scientific opportunities that support the understanding and preservation of park resources and values while contributing to public enjoyment and understanding.

SKAGIT RIVER

The Skagit is the largest river draining into Puget Sound. Stable flows help make it the only Puget Sound tributary to host all native species of anadromous salmonids and one of the highest concentrations of wintering bald eagles in the lower 48 states.

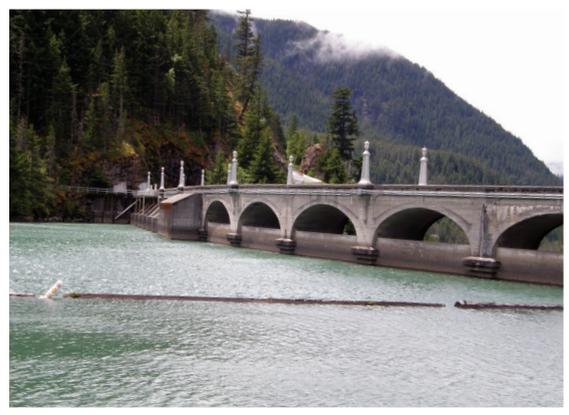
RECREATION IN ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Ross Lake NRA provides a variety of high quality outdoor recreation opportunities, accommodating people with a wide range of interests and abilities.



WATER-BASED RECREATION

Ross Lake provides diverse water-based opportunities where visitors can experience the scenic reservoir amidst a mountain wilderness where small or nonmotorized watercraft characterize recreation in this serene setting.



HYDROPOWER LANDSCAPE

Ross Lake NRA offers a relatively seamless transition between a utilitarian landscape and a remote wilderness.

LAKE CHELAN

Set in a glacier-carved trough nestled between steep valley walls, Lake Chelan is the nation's third-deepest lake. Fed by glacial melt and the Stehekin River, it is known for its exceptionally cold and clear water.

RECREATION IN LAKE CHELAN NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Lake Chelan NRA provides a spectrum of recreational opportunities that transition from highly mechanized to primitive as one moves from the lake, up the Stehekin Valley, and into the wilderness.

STEHEKIN

Within Lake Chelan NRA, Stehekin is a private community that provides visitors with an opportunity to see and experience life in a remote setting that is not accessible by roads and is surrounded by wilderness.

NORTH CASCADES LANDSCAPES

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Scenery. Majestic mountain scenery includes alpine meadows, countless cascades, towering mountains, and forested valleys.

Viewpoints. Majestic mountain scenery is observed from trails, overlooks, and viewpoints.

Night Sky. The general absence of artificial light ensures preservation of majestic nighttime views.

Ecology and Geology. Dynamic ecological and geologic systems and processes that created this scenery are active in Ross Lake NRA today.

Natural Soundscapes. Natural sounds predominate, supporting natural ecosystem function and providing an unrivaled wilderness experience.

GLACIERS

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Glaciers. The Complex contains 312 active glaciers, including ice fields, cirque glaciers, and hanging glaciers, which create unique microclimates and habitats and are dramatic indicators of climate change.

Glacial and Hydrologic Processes. Glacial and hydrologic processes that shaped the mountains in the past are still active today.



Fundamental Resources and Values



ECOSYSTEM AND BIODIVERSITY

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Climate Variability. Dramatic range in weather and climate contribute to a diversity of habitats and biological communities.

Diverse and Extensive Tracts of Intact Habitat. These areas provide for a diversity of life forms and are essential for native species, especially those with extensive home ranges such as wolves, wolverines, and grizzly bears.

Ecosystem Processes. Dynamic influences such as fire, flooding, mass wasting, and avalanches generally occur unimpeded.

Diversity of Old-growth Forest Types. The low-elevation forests associated with all major drainages in the Complex provide distinctive habitats.

Water Resources. Abundant glaciers, snowfields, lakes, ponds, tarns, wetlands, rivers, and streams of exceptional quality support ecological integrity.

High Elevation Meadows. Extensive alpine meadows exist and are maintained by heavy snowfall.

Plant Communities. The Complex contains one of the most diverse arrays of plants, including rare and listed species.

Fish Communities. The Complex's ecosystems support viable populations of resident and anadromous fish species that are found in their native habitats and the Complex's lakes, streams and reservoirs.

Wildlife Communities. The Complex contains a diversity of wildlife communities that are found in their native habitats, including rare and listed species.

Air Quality. The Complex's generally excellent air quality contributes to ecological integrity and beneficial air quality-related values such as outstanding visibility.

WILDERNESS

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Natural Quality. North Cascades and its community of life exists as a functioning natural ecosystem on a large geographic scale with connectivity to other wild places.

Solitude. Opportunities exist for visitors to experience solitude and have relatively few encounters with others.

Undeveloped Quality. Largely devoid of modern human structures, minimal development creates the primeval nature of the North Cascades and contributes to a relatively intact wilderness landscape.

Untrammeled Quality. The North Cascades wilderness is essentially unhindered and free from modern human control or manipulation.

WILDERNESS RECREATION

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Trails. A variety of trails with a range of challenges provide access to peaks and a diversity of wildland recreation opportunities, including the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail and the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail.

Trailless Areas. Much of the Complex is trailless, providing opportunities for wilderness exploration, solitude, and unconfined recreation.

Variable Terrain. The mixed terrain of the complex, from flat valley floors and subalpine meadows to glaciers, snowfields, couloirs, and rock routes of solid gneiss and granite, enriches mountaineering experiences.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Access to Authentic Resources for Education. The Complex provides a diverse array of access to authentic resources, including the Environmental Learning Center, staffed interpretive and educational facilities, publications, wayside exhibits and signs, museum collections, interpretive programs, and physical access.

Access to Authentic Resources for Science. The Complex provides a diverse array of access to authentic resources. These include five research natural areas, the research station, museum collections, and the Environmental Learning Center.

Partnerships. The Complex maintains partnerships with public, private, and other nonprofit groups for education and scientific research.

CULTURE AND HISTORY

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Pre- and Post-Contact Archeological Resources. These resources preserve evidence of the utilization and exploitation of the landscape in the form of pre-contact tool stone quarries, campsites, resource use areas, rock art, and historic period sites at areas such as Cascade Pass, Horseshoe Basin mines, and the Newhalem Rockshelter.

Cultural Landscapes. Cultural landscapes embody evidence of post-contact exploration, resource extraction and utilization, transportation, federal and tribal land management, and tourism and recreation at sites such as High Bridge Ranger Station, Buckner Homestead, and Golden West Lodge.

Historic Resources. Historic resources chronicle early utilization and exploration of the landscape by homesteaders, miners, trappers, tourism, and industry, and the protection and management of forest lands by the federal government.

Ethno-historic Resources. Human connections to, and experiences in, the North Cascades have been expressed through a variety of means, which have created the history, legends, and cultural traditions associated with the North Cascades.

Collections. The Complex's collections include cultural objects, photographs, oral histories, historic resource maps, archives, and biological specimens.

SKAGIT RIVER

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Water Quality and Quantity. Fresh, cold water is fed by glaciers, snowfields, groundwater, and seasonally abundant rainfall in the Complex.

In-Stream and Riparian Habitat. In-stream and riparian habitats support an assemblage of terrestrial and aquatic species.



Fundamental Resources and Values

RECREATION IN ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Visitor Resources and Opportunities. The reservoirs, highway, wilderness, recreational infrastructure, cultural resources, and educational services provide diverse experiences for visitors of different interests and abilities.

Accessible Opportunities. High quality opportunities for visitors with a range of abilities and diverse needs are provided that complement the natural setting, including trails, overlooks, campsites, and fishing platforms.

WATER-BASED RECREATION

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Undeveloped Setting. Above Green Point, visitors experience a lake setting characterized by an undeveloped shoreline and surrounded by majestic mountain scenery that is almost entirely designated wilderness.

Limited Motorized Access. A primitive road minimizes vehicular access to the reservoir.

Lake Recreation. Ross Lake has high water quality and is a clear lake that has attracted generations of visitors for primitive, dispersed lakeshore camping, boating, and fishing.

HYDROPOWER LANDSCAPES

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Scale and Style of Development. The architectural style and scale of infrastructure that began with Seattle City Light projects allowed for engineering accomplishments,

also left a relatively undeveloped footprint beyond the hydroelectric infrastructure, enabling future development that would provide a national park experience in the North Cascades.

LAKE CHELAN

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Water Quality and Quantity. Clear, cold, and exceptionally deep waters characterize Lake Chelan.

Stehekin River. The free-flowing Stehekin River is eligible for inclusion as a wild and scenic river.

RECREATION IN LAKE CHELAN NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Visitor Opportunities. Limited road access, recreation infrastructure, education opportunities, and associated services provide diverse experiences for visitors of different interests and abilities.

STEHEKIN

Fundamental Resources and Values:

Remote Setting. The surrounding wilderness and lack of access by roads preserves the remote setting.

Private Community. The private community helps define the character of Stehekin and the diversity of public experiences.

