



Foundation Document Overview

Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

Washington



EBEY'S LANDING
NATIONAL HISTORICAL RESERVE

Contact Information

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Description



Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is in western Washington State on Whidbey Island. Situated at the entrance of Puget Sound, 50 miles south of the Canadian border and 27 miles north of Seattle, it includes Penn Cove and is surrounded by the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Saratoga Passage, and Admiralty Inlet.

The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625, Section 508(a), 92 Stat. 3507) established Ebey's Landing as the first national historical reserve in order to protect, preserve, and interpret nationally significant historical resources that comprise a continuous record of exploration and American settlement in Puget Sound from the 19th century to the present day.

The boundaries of the 17,572-acre reserve include 13,617 acres of land and 3,955 surface acres of water (Penn Cove), coinciding with the boundaries of the 1973 (amended 1997) Central Whidbey Island Historic District. This area retains many characteristics of mid-to-late 19th century development and maritime commerce, including Territorial-era architecture and the land claims filed by westward-migrating settlers under the Oregon Territory's Donation Land Claim Act (1850–1855). The reserve bears the name of Isaac Ebey, the first of these settlers to permanently settle on Whidbey Island.

Most of the land (approximately 85%) within the reserve is privately owned, with the rest in a combination of local, state, and federal ownership. Approximately 2,023 acres are currently protected with NPS-held scenic easements, and 413 acres are owned in fee and managed by the National Park Service.



In addition to lands and structures protected by NPS easements, local design review, and zoning, the National Park Service has acquired, in fee, certain resources that are critical to preservation and interpretation in the reserve. These include:

- Scenic areas suited to interpretation and public access: the Prairie Overlook and Prairie Wayside, and other scenic areas in the vicinity of Ebey's Landing;
- Territorial-era historic structures that illustrate mid-19th-century European American settlement in the reserve: the 1860 Ferry House and the 1856 Jacob and Sarah Ebey House and Blockhouse;
- Historic agricultural buildings that tell the story of the Pratt family's era of stewardship in the reserve: a rehabilitated 1930s shingled caretaker's cottage that serves as the Trust Board offices, and a 1930s sheep barn currently being rehabilitated for use as a rustic classroom;
- Active farm lands acquired to protect the landscape from development, including two historic farmsteads: the Crockett-Engle Farm, also called Farm I, and the Reuble Farm, also called Farm II, intended to one day be sold or transferred into private ownership. Farm I (115 acres) includes a large and extensive complex of non-historic agricultural facilities and two historic structures, the Rockwell House and the old milking parlor. Farm II (113 acres) includes a cluster of historic agricultural buildings that serve as a base of NPS operations in the reserve.

Description



Other NPS-owned historic structures have undergone more basic treatment efforts, generally preservation and stabilization.

Natural forces and human activities have shaped the distinctive landscape of the reserve today. Its open, rural character reflects historical land use patterns and ecological change that have forged a strong relationship between the built and natural environments, blurring the lines between where one ends and the other begins. The landforms, soils, and shorelines of this island are the result of glaciation over thousands of years. Receding ice left lakes and wetlands, which influenced soil formation and helped establish the rich and fertile prairies found in the reserve.

Native American settlement and land use closely followed the retreat of glaciers, as shown by an unusually rich and early archeological record. Many scenic views recorded by Captain George Vancouver in his 1792 journal are still evident. Coast Salish people inhabited the island at the time of Vancouver's expedition, and the landscape encountered by the explorers and later by settlers had already been shaped by thousands of years of human occupation. Patterns of settlement, historic homes, pastoral farmsteads, and commercial buildings are still within their original farm, forest, and marine settings.

The impetus to protect central Whidbey Island arose from a local citizens' initiative to safeguard Ebey's Prairie from development incompatible with its rural character. The concept of the reserve was first envisioned by the community, with voluntary participation in land protection on the part of private landowners. The community's effort to preserve the reserve's rural character is both supported by and sustains a vibrant place-based economy.

Active agriculture in addition to outdoor recreation and heritage tourism are valued and help foster protection of the reserve's sense of place.

The reserve's enabling legislation commemorates a community that has evolved from early exploration to the present and consists of descendants of original settlers as well as new residents. Therefore the reserve cannot be interpreted from one specific point in time: the community it comprises is a healthy, vital one that allows for growth while respecting and preserving its heritage, including the heritage of native peoples who lived in the area for thousands of years before European American settlement.

In addition to the enabling legislation, management of the reserve is guided by the 1980 *Comprehensive Plan for Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve*, and the 1988 *Interlocal Agreement for the Administration of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve*.

Day-to-day management and administration of NPS programs and NPS-owned properties and assets, and transfer of federal funding to the Trust Board, is guided by a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the Trust Board. The cooperative agreement outlines specific management functions delegated to the Trust Board, functions that will be jointly performed by the NPS and the Trust Board, and programs and functions retained by the National Park Service.

The 2006 *Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve General Management Plan* is used to guide NPS management within the reserve.

Description

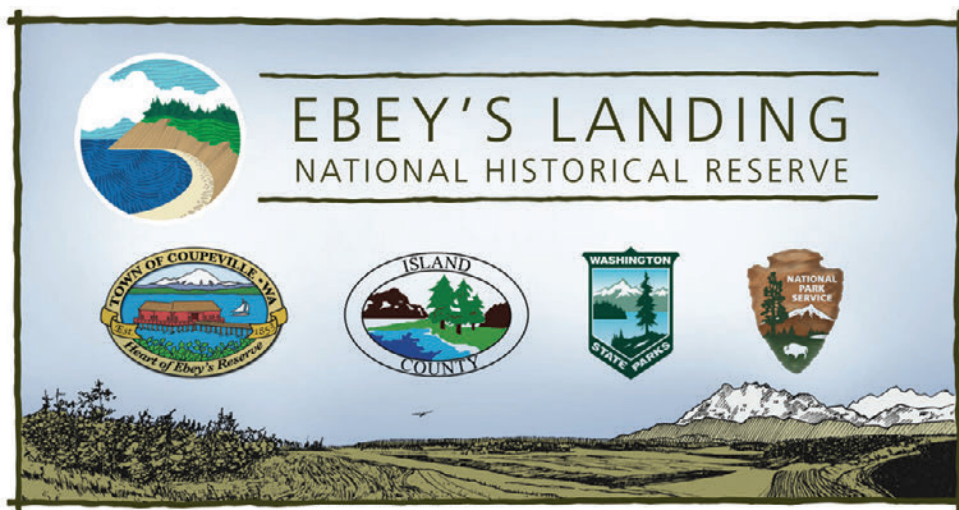
Management and Administrative Summary, in the words of The Trust Board of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

National reserves are areas of land and water containing nationally significant resources in which federal, state, and/or local governments, along with private individuals, groups and/or organizations, combine efforts to manage, protect, and interpret the valued resources. The hallmark characteristic of these areas is collaboration between a federal entity and one or more non-federal entities, for the purpose of protecting nationally significant resources.

At Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve this collaboration occurs through a Trust Board, a joint administrative board representing four government partners bound by a formal Interlocal Agreement: the National Park Service, Island County, Town of Coupeville, and Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

While each of these partners maintains its own jurisdiction according to the land they administer, the Trust Board was established to coordinate the partnership, and assume certain responsibilities for day-to-day management. Currently these responsibilities include administration of the Department of the Interior's scenic easements; advising the partners on matters relating to the reserve; participating in local government planning and preservation; and accomplishing specific administration, land protection, maintenance, interpretation, and visitor services responsibilities, as outlined in an NPS Cooperative Agreement.

The inclusion of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve in the 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act is significant, partly because it proved successful, but also because it represents a distinct approach to national stewardship that did not previously exist. Its foundation was a desire to demonstrate that broad federal ownership is not the only approach to preservation, and various levels of government and private citizens can work together to protect outstanding natural and cultural areas. These concepts are evident in the enabling legislation and initial planning for Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. They also align with the growing emphasis on collaborative partnerships expressed under "Goal #3: Embrace New Conservation Roles" in the 2017 *National Park Service System Plan*.



Purpose



The purpose of EBEBY'S LANDING NATIONAL HISTORICAL RESERVE is to preserve and protect a rural community, which provides an unbroken historical record from 19th century exploration and settlement in Puget Sound to the present time, and to commemorate the first thorough exploration of the Puget Sound area by Captain George Vancouver in 1792; settlement by Colonel Isaac Neff Ebey, who led the first permanent settlers to Whidbey Island; early active settlement during the years of the Donation Land Law (1850–1855) and thereafter; and the growth since 1883 of the historic town of Coupeville.



Significance

Significance statements express why Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Spurred by a grassroots movement to preserve a multigenerational rural community, Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve was the nation's first national historical reserve, a preservation partnership cooperatively managed by a trust board representing local, state, and federal interests.
- Strategically located near the entrance to Puget Sound, the reserve's geographic setting and its rich soils and marine resources have attracted and shaped human habitation across millennia. Thousands of years of Coast Salish land cultivation sustained the distinctive pattern of prairies and forest that facilitated early agricultural development of the reserve. This vivid, unbroken record of Pacific Northwest history is reflected in cultural landscape features, from prairies to Coupeville and Penn Cove, and from farms to military forts.
- European American settlement at Ebey's Landing represents a distinctive chapter in the story of westward migration as pioneer settlers, drawn to the Northwest by the 1850 Donation Land Claim Act, formed a rural community that endures today. Their land claims, which are still visible, helped secure U.S. claims in the Pacific Northwest and define an international border.
- The living, changing landscape of the reserve and its organization around historic structures and traditional land use practices inspired the development of a new and nationally influential approach to cultural landscape analysis and preservation.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Cultural Landscape.** Within the reserve, the visitor can experience diverse landscape conditions within a small geographic area. Post-glacial geological features and continuous human use have shaped a distinctive cultural landscape defined by a contrast of open prairie and forest, kettle holes, steep gravel bluffs, and sweeping shoreline topography. Visual connections to Puget Sound, the Olympic and Cascade mountain ranges, and iconic peaks such as Mount Baker and Mount Rainier are largely unchanged since Donation Land Law settlement of the area. Views across the landscape illustrate how land use has changed over time, from sweeping panoramas of agricultural fields to discreet clusters of rural historic buildings to historic military forts and a classic northwest small town edged by modern development.



- **Central Whidbey Island Historic District and Donation Land Claim Properties.** The reserve and historic district boundary follow the shape of the original Donation Land Law parcels established by settlers on Whidbey Island. This organization is still apparent in the alignment of reserve roads and individual parcel boundaries that have changed very little since the landscape was first settled. Contributing resources such as the town of Coupeville, farm clusters, roads, block houses, and other historic structures also provide a physical reminder of how people have lived and worked in this place over time. In this way, the spatial configuration of the reserve itself is a remnant of history that conveys the story of human relationships to the land.
- **Town of Coupeville.** Settled by sea captains and farmers in the 1850s, Coupeville is one of the oldest towns in Washington and contains one of the greatest concentrations of historic structures in the state. Structures vary widely in age, form, and use, including residences, outbuildings, commercial structures from the Territorial era (1850–1870), Victorian era (1880–1910), and period of community development (1910–1940). The scale and spatial organization of the town demonstrates Coupeville’s historic importance as the commercial hub of central Whidbey Island and its key role in supporting industries such as ship building, fishing, farming, lumber mills, and timber harvesting in the larger Puget Sound region.
- **Farming Community.** Throughout history, farming has been a fundamental part of the livelihood and growth of the central Whidbey Island community and the establishment of the reserve. Multigenerational farming continues within the reserve, supplying local and regional food markets. Diverse agricultural systems—including produce, shellfish, livestock, forage, seed, and grain—and evolving farming approaches reflect a living and sustainable agricultural community.



Fundamental Resources and Values



- **Penn Cove.** Influenced by tidal influx and by the glacial sediments and fresh waters of the Skagit and other coastal rivers, Penn Cove's biologically rich and sheltered deep water harbor has served as a much-desired center of sustenance and commerce for thousands of years. The cove sustains a diverse shell and finfish population, including mussels, clams, salmon, and other fish and shellfish. First harvested by Coast Salish people, some of these species are still cultivated today. The protected harbor, with its favorable wind conditions, reliable anchorages, and easy portage to the Strait of Juan de Fuca has supported maritime trade and commerce for millennia.
- **Diverse and Abundant Natural Resources.** The climate, rain shadow, soils, maritime influence, aquatic resources, and geologic features of the reserve result in an unusual diversity of plant and animal species, communities, and habitats. The productivity of the landscape and its abundant natural resources have attracted people to Whidbey Island for more than 10,000 years and continue to draw residents and visitors today. The soundscape, scenic views, and dark night skies of the reserve provide the context for this rich natural environment and evoke the historic settlement periods, when the community would not have experienced modern noise, development, and light intrusions.



- **Community Relationship.** The rural community is a core part of the reserve. The community worked to establish the reserve in order to protect and preserve its own history and way of life. The importance of this relationship is reflected in the reserve's enabling legislation, which emphasizes preserving the rural community and sets forth a management structure based on local participation. Collaboration and partnerships are essential to the reserve's success and identity.
- **Reserve Partnership.** A unique partnership—currently represented by a Trust Board comprising Island County, the Town of Coupeville, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, and the National Park Service—preserves and protects the rural community and the historic, natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources that are vital to Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. This Trust Board fosters appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of the reserve through programs and partnerships between governmental agencies and public and private organizations and individuals.

Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Recreational Destination.** The reserve provides recreational opportunities that appeal to visitors of all ages and abilities, including fishing, bird watching, hiking or walking on trails, viewing historic structures, bicycling, picnicking, and visiting beaches. In addition to the more rugged, secluded coastal areas, many parts of the reserve can be enjoyed through scenic drives on rural roads, including a section of the Cascade Loop Scenic Byway. These recreational experiences promote public health and are highly valued by urban dwellers in nearby cities, who seek day trips and brief weekend getaways imbued with the quiet, rural character of the reserve.



Reserve Map

