

Ross Lake National Recreation Area

General Management Plan
Newsletter #3: Draft GMP/EIS Executive Summary
July 2010

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Dear Friends of Ross Lake National Recreation Area,

The North Cascades are calling!

They are calling for you. Calling for you to visit. Calling for you to learn about our heritage. Calling for you to have fun. Calling for you to create lasting memories. Calling for you to be a steward. Calling for your help.

We are pleased to provide the *Ross Lake National Recreation Area Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* for your review. We are asking for you to give us your thoughts about the draft plan so we can make the best long-term decisions for Ross Lake NRA. We hope you will answer this call.

During this the planning process, we’ve heard from many of you through public meetings, email, our website, and in letters. You’ve expressed your hopes and desires for the future of Ross Lake NRA.

For many people, Ross Lake NRA is a front door to the rugged and spectacular wilderness of the North Cascades. It is a place where you can canoe and kayak, use trailheads for demanding mountaineering adventures, and backpack to untrammelled wilderness. For many people, Ross Lake NRA is a place where their school classes come, and learning is fun. For many people, Ross Lake NRA is a place where friends and families are introduced to the North Cascades and your national parks.

The challenge for the National Park Service is to maintain and enhance these experiences while ensuring that the National Recreation Area is preserved for our children’s children. The Ross Lake NRA general management plan will guide us toward this goal. We’ve been listening and taking what we have heard from you into consideration as we have created the alternatives presented in this draft plan. By reviewing this draft plan and providing us with your thoughts and specific recommendations, we can reach this goal.

Over the next three months, we will be hosting several open houses to provide a forum for conversations about the future of Ross Lake NRA. The National Park Service planning team and I will be attending these meetings to discuss the draft plan, answer your questions, and listen to your ideas. We’ve scheduled this review period during the peak summer season with the goal of engaging those of you that care about Ross Lake NRA and the North Cascades while you are here for a visit. We also hope this will be a chance for us to introduce new people to the North Cascades and invite them to be stewards for its future.

The North Cascades are calling, and we hope you will heed the call.

Palmer “Chip” Jenkins
Superintendent
North Cascades National Park Service Complex

You’re Invited to an Open House

- Learn about the NPS’s alternatives and preferred alternative for Ross Lake NRA
- Discuss your ideas, concerns, and thoughts about the preferred alternative
- Talk with the planning team

We sincerely request your attendance at these open houses. Your ideas are important for developing a successful plan. Please take some time to fill out the comment form enclosed in this newsletter or provide your comments on-line by **September 30, 2010**.

Wednesday, July 21, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Sedro-Woolley, WA
North Cascades NPS Complex Headquarters
810 State Route 20

Thursday, July 22, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Marblemount, WA
Marblemount Community Center
60055 State Route 20

Saturday, July 24, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Newhalem, WA
North Cascades Visitor Center

Tuesday, July 27, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Seattle, WA
REI Seattle Flagship Store, North Room
222 Yale Avenue North

Wednesday, July 28, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Bellingham, WA
Bellingham Senior Center
315 Halleck Street

Thursday, July 29, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Winthrop, WA
Winthrop Barn
51 N Highway 20



National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

General Management Plan

Ross Lake National Recreation Area

Contact Information

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Draft General Management Plan is Available for Public Review

The National Park Service (NPS) has just published the *Ross Lake National Recreation Area Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (Ross Lake NRA Draft GMP/EIS).

The purpose of the plan is to articulate a vision and overall management philosophy for Ross Lake National Recreation Area (NRA) that will guide decision-making by current and future management teams during the next 15 to 20 years. The draft plan presents management strategies for resource protection and preservation, education and interpretation, visitor use and facilities, land protection and boundaries, and long-term operations and management of Ross Lake NRA.

This newsletter provides an executive summary of the draft GMP/EIS and the four management approaches that were considered during the planning process. These alternatives were initially presented to the public as draft alternatives in February 2008 and have been further developed and refined in this draft GMP/EIS. All of the alternatives are reasonable, viable, and conform to NPS guiding laws, regulations, and policies. Additionally, the NPS has selected a preferred alternative, which the NPS considers as the best package of actions and approaches that fulfill the purpose and long-term goals for Ross Lake NRA.

The *Ross Lake NRA Draft GMP/EIS* document is now available for review. The document contains information about the background and history of Ross Lake NRA; the purpose, significance, interpretive themes, and special mandates for the unit; the purpose and need for the plan; a conditions assessment of Ross Lake NRA and its affected environment; the alternative management strategies, preferred alternative, and management zones; impacts that could result from implementing any of these alternatives; a summary of public involvement and public comments; and the draft Skagit Wild and Scenic River Studies.

The two volume document is available for review on the internet at: www.nps.gov/noca/parkmgmt/rlna-gmp.htm. Copies and compact discs (CDs) of the document can also be obtained by calling the NPS at (360)854-7205, e-mailing the NPS at noca_superintendent@nps.gov, or by requesting a copy on the enclosed business reply comment form. The public comment period closes on **September 30, 2010**.

How Can I Be Involved in Planning for Ross Lake NRA’s Future?

Your continued involvement in the planning process is critical for the successful completion of the GMP. This is the final time period for providing formal comments to the National Park Service on the Ross Lake NRA GMP/EIS, and you are encouraged to write or call us to voice your concerns or insights and to check in on the planning process.

- Here are several ways for you to participate in this planning effort:
- Carefully review this newsletter and other GMP materials
 - Attend public open houses
 - Access information about the GMP and provide electronic comments at www.nps.gov/noca/parkmgmt/rlna-gmp.htm
 - Sign up on the mailing list to receive publications about the GMP and the North Cascades NPS Complex projects. You can choose whether you’d like to receive paper newsletters sent to your mailing address or e-newsletters sent to your e-mail address.
 - Send a letter to the Superintendent

Next Steps

The next step in the planning process is analyzing the public comments on the draft GMP/EIS. The NPS will revise the draft GMP/EIS after consideration of public comments and publish a final GMP/EIS. Substantive public comments will be formally responded to and published in the final GMP/EIS. Following the distribution of the final GMP/EIS, a record of decision will be issued in the *Federal Register* to substantiate a decision based on the EIS and complete the planning process. The NPS may begin implementation of the GMP following the issuance of the record of decision.



Kayaks at Diablo Lake. Photo by David Snyder.

Ross Lake NRA GMP Schedule		
Planning Steps	Date	Public Involvement Opportunities
1 Identify the Planning Context Reaffirm the purpose and significance of Ross Lake NRA. Determine issues and concerns, and gather and analyze information.	2005 to 2006	- Attend a public workshop and provide comments - Read the newsletter and send us your comments
2 Develop and Evaluate Preliminary Alternatives Identify a reasonable range of alternative future conditions and management actions, assess their potential effects, analyze public reactions, and select a preferred alternative.	Winter 2007 to Spring 2008	Read the newsletter and send us your comments
3 Prepare and Publish a Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement <i>*We are currently in this step</i> Prepare a draft plan describing the planning context, management alternatives, preferred alternative, and impacts. Distribute to the public.	Summer 2008 to Summer 2010	- Attend a public open house to learn more about the draft plan and provide comments - Read the newsletter or draft plan and send us your comments
4 Revise and Publish the Final GMP/EIS Analyze comments, revise draft document, and distribute to the public.	Fall 2010 to Summer 2011	Read the final plan
5 Implement the Approved Plan	Summer 2011 and beyond	- Stay involved throughout the implementation of the approved plan - Check park website for updates

Description of Ross Lake NRA and Planning for Its Future

DESCRIPTION OF ROSS LAKE NRA

Ross Lake National Recreation Area was designated as a unit of the National Park System on October 2, 1968. It is managed as one unit of the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, which also includes North Cascades National Park (north and south units), and Lake Chelan National Recreation Area. Although comprised of three separate units of the National Park System, the complex is managed under the leadership of a single superintendent. The North Cascades NPS Complex is located deep in the northernmost reaches of the Cascades Range in Washington State and borders British Columbia, Canada.

The Complex encompasses a vast “sea of peaks” replete with over 300 glaciers, sawtoothed granite pinnacles, myriad creek and riverine systems, and vast expanses of wilderness. Its rugged topography is home to a multitude of plant, animal, and fish species. Rare lichens, ancient cedars, Chinook salmon, bald eagles, marmots, mountain goats, the elusive fisher and some 1,600 identified species share this diverse and expansive landscape. Human evidence spans over 9,000 years of habitation, use and technological development. Within Ross Lake NRA lie three placid reservoirs and their impressive mega-engineered facilities that harness nature’s hydropower and convert it to electricity for the people of Seattle.

Ross Lake National Recreation Area is the most accessible part of the North Cascades NPS Complex and is reached via scenic Washington State Route 20, the North Cascades Highway. Ross Lake National Recreation Area protects 116,798 acres of the Complex and includes three reservoirs: Ross Lake, Diablo Lake, and Gorge Lake -- water gateways to more remote areas. Ringed by mountains and glaciers, most of Ross Lake NRA is designated wilderness and offers many outdoor recreation opportunities along the upper reaches of the Skagit River and between the north and south units of North Cascades National Park.

The purpose of this Ross Lake National Recreation Area General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS) is to articulate a vision and overall management philosophy for Ross Lake NRA that will guide decision-making by current and future management teams during the next 15 to 20 years. This new document presents management strategies for resource protection and preservation, education and interpretation, visitor use and facilities, land protection and boundaries, and long-term operations and management of Ross Lake NRA. It will replace portions of the North Cascades NPS Complex General

Management Plan completed in 1988 that provided guidance for the management of Ross Lake NRA.

PLANNING FOR ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

An interdisciplinary planning team was assembled in January 2006. It was comprised of the North Cascades NPS Complex superintendent, staff and specialists, and planners from the NPS Pacific West Regional Office in Seattle. The planning team met between 2006 and 2010 to gather background information, examine resources, identify issues, and develop and refine alternative management concepts and actions.

Throughout the planning process, public participation played a large part in helping to focus the plan, identify issues, and formulate alternatives. Public involvement sessions included seven scoping workshops, four draft alternatives workshops, and two workshops on the Skagit Wild and Scenic River Studies held in local and regional communities. Public comments also included responses to the publication of three newsletters, and briefings and meetings with government agencies, tribes, and stakeholder groups.

After distribution of the draft GMP/EIS, there will be a 90-day public review and comment period after which the NPS planning team will evaluate comments from other federal agencies, tribes, organizations, businesses, and individuals regarding the draft GMP/EIS. The planning team will then incorporate appropriate changes to produce a final general management plan and environmental impact statement.

The final GMP/EIS will include letters from governmental agencies, any substantive comments on the draft document, and NPS responses to those comments. Following distribution of the final GMP/EIS and a 30-day no-action period, a record of decision approving the final plan will be signed by the NPS regional director. The record of decision documents the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation. With the signing of the record of decision, and its publication in the *Federal Register*, the plan can then be implemented.

Implementation of the approved GMP will depend on future funding. The approval of a plan does not necessarily guarantee that the funding and staffing needed to implement the plan will be forthcoming. Full implementation of the approved plan may be many years in the future.

Implementation of the approved plan also could be affected by other factors. Once the general management plan has been approved, additional feasibility studies and more detailed site specific documentation, planning, and compliance would be completed, as appropriate, before many proposed actions could be carried out.

The general management plan does not describe how particular programs or projects should be prioritized or implemented. Those decisions will be addressed during the more detailed planning associated with strategic plans, implementation plans, or other plans. All of these future actions will tier from the approved general management plan and will be based on the goals, future conditions, and appropriate types of activities established in the approved general management plan.

Foundation for Planning

The foundation for planning begins with identifying a National Park unit’s purpose, significance, and special mandates. These statements frame the general management planning process and provide basic guidance for decision-making and management of Ross Lake NRA.

PURPOSE OF ROSS LAKE NRA

“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.”

PURPOSE OF NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK

“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.”

SIGNIFICANCE OF ROSS LAKE NRA

Park significance statements express why the park’s resources and values are important enough to warrant national park designation. Statements of the park’s significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, or system-wide context and are directly linked to the purpose of the park. A park’s significance statements are substantiated by data or consensus and reflect the most current scientific or scholarly inquiry and cultural perceptions, which may have changed since the unit’s establishment.

The National Park Service has identified 11 significance statements for Ross Lake NRA (they are not listed in order of importance).

1. North Cascades Landscapes

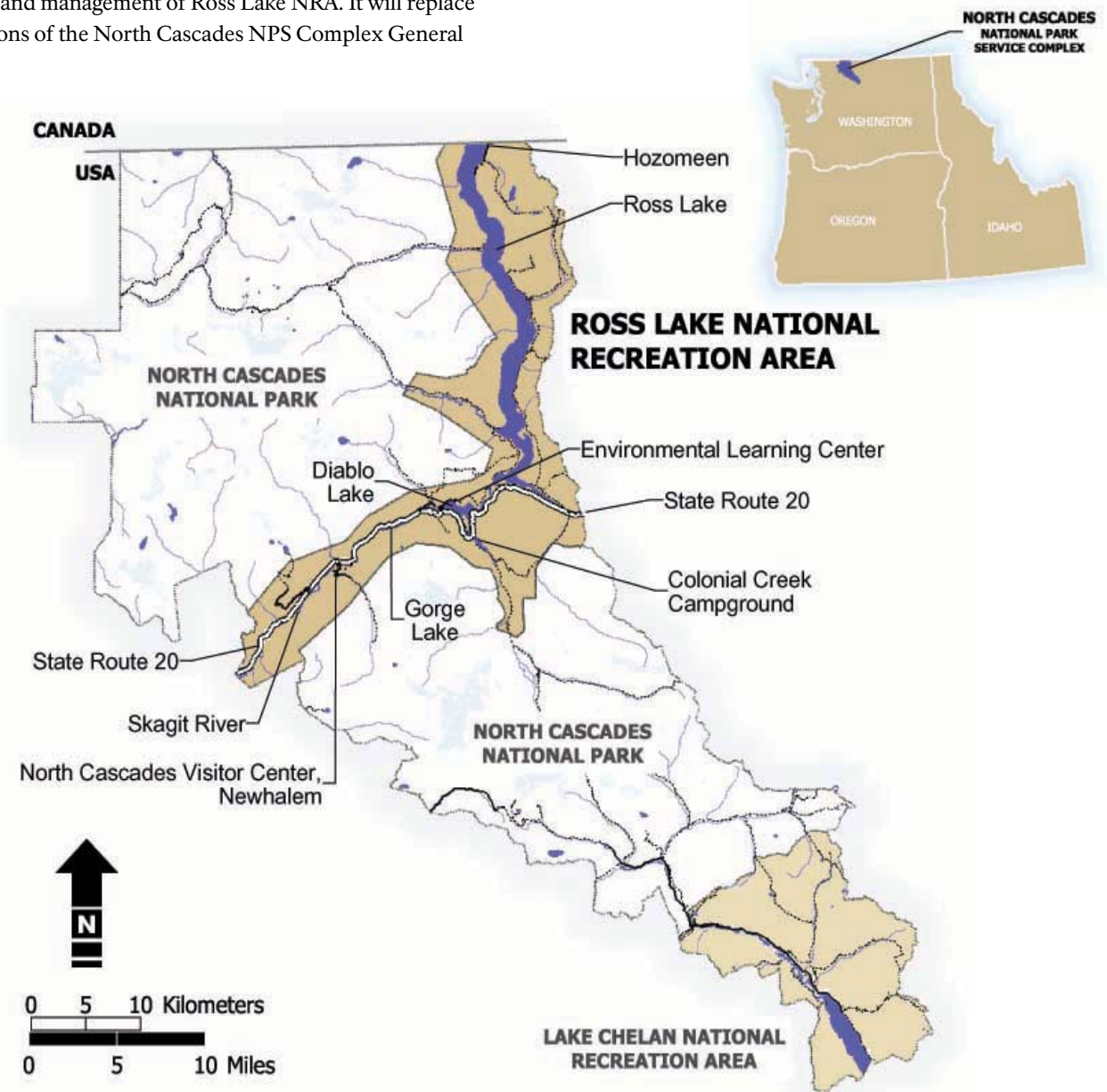
The North Cascades range reaches its finest expression in North Cascades NPS Complex, where a dense concentration of jagged glaciated peaks towers above alpine meadows and deep valleys and results in supremely majestic scenery.

2. Glaciers

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

3. Ecosystem & Biodiversity

From deep forested valleys to alpine peaks, the North Cascades NPS 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 NPS Complex and the greater North Cascades ecosystem depend on one another.



4. Wilderness

Envisioned as a wilderness park from its inception, the North Cascades NPS 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.

5. Culture & History

Preserved within the North Cascades NPS Complex is abundant evidence of over 9,000 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.

6. Research & Education

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

7. Wilderness Recreation

The North Cascades NPS Complex provides the wilderness traveler 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.

8. 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.

9. Water-based Recreation

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

10. Recreation

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

11. Hydropower Landscape

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

SPECIAL CONGRESSIONAL DESIGNATIONS, AUTHORIZATIONS, AND MANDATES FOR ROSS LAKE NRA

Special congressional designations, authorizations, and mandates are legal requirements and administrative commitments that apply to a specific unit of the National Park System. They are mandated by Congress or by signed agreements with other entities that add another dimension to the park’s purpose and significance. Mandates include the designation of an area in the park as wilderness or as an area that is managed by another entity. Mandates may also commit park managers to specific actions and limit their ability to modify land use in the park, such as long-term coopera-

tive agreements or easements. Special congressional designations, authorizations, and mandates for Ross Lake NRA are listed on page 21 of the draft GMP/EIS.

Alternatives

Management guidance is described in the alternatives for Ross Lake NRA in the draft GMP/EIS and is based on ideas from the public, partners, the NPS, and other agencies presented in the scoping and preliminary alternatives phases of this planning effort. The alternatives, which are consistent with Ross Lake NRA’s purpose, significance, special mandates, and laws and policies, present different ways to manage resources, visitor use, and facilities in Ross Lake NRA.

The *Ross Lake NRA Draft GMP/EIS* presents four alternatives for management guidance including the National Park Service’s preferred alternative for future management of Ross Lake NRA. The four alternatives include Alternative A (the “No Action Alternative” that proposes the continuation of current management), and three “action alternatives,” B, C, and D. Alternative B is the NPS Preferred Alternative.

Each alternative is structured around a concept or vision for the future. For each alternative, there are desired conditions for resources and visitor use as a whole and for specific areas within Ross Lake NRA. Each alternative is also supported by management zones with boundaries that vary by alternative. It is important to note that the management zones provide desired conditions for areas within Ross Lake NRA, and the alternatives provide additional guidance both at a NRA-wide scale as well as site specific prescriptions.

The reader must rely on the text, maps, and figures taken together to fully understand the range of alternatives described in this draft GMP/EIS.

The alternatives are described in more detail over the next several pages of this newsletter. The complete list of NRA-wide desired conditions and specific actions that would be taken under each alternative is presented in the alternatives comparison table at the end of the Alternatives Chapter in the draft GMP/EIS.

Actions Common to All Alternatives

The following management guidance, desired conditions, and actions would apply to all alternatives.

INTERNATIONAL AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION

Existing partnerships and international and interagency cooperation would be maintained for resource protection, recreational opportunities, and operational efficiencies. The NPS would continue to work collaboratively with Seattle City Light (SCL), the U.S. Forest Service, British Columbia Parks, and non-governmental entities including the North Cascades Institute and the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission, among others.

MANAGEMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS WITHIN ROSS LAKE NRA

New facilities on the **North Cascades Environmental Learning Center (ELC)** campus would be constructed as

outlined in the original plan and environmental assessment. Facilities that have not yet been built would be constructed, including a dormitory, staff housing, and boathouse. Funding for the construction of these facilities would be provided by the North Cascades Institute. The ELC would host year-round educational and interpretive services through curriculum-based educational programs and continued learning opportunities about the North Cascades ecosystem.

The upper one mile of the **Thornton Lakes Road** would be closed to vehicular access at the wilderness boundary to comply with wilderness regulations. The Wilderness Act of 1964, Section 4 (3) (c) states, “Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act...” The closed portion of the road would be rehabilitated. A parking lot and trailhead would be formalized at the wilderness boundary in an existing disturbed area. A trail would be maintained to Thornton Lakes and trail access would be upgraded. Future planning would determine whether trail access to Thornton Lakes is a direct trail up and back along the same alignment, a loop trail, or a new alignment. The rationale for a loop trail, which could be of various lengths, would be to gain opportunities for subalpine views.

The **boat launch at Colonial Creek Campground** has experienced siltation and shoaling since its construction. The boat ramp periodically becomes unusable during periods of low water. In some instances, boaters who entered the lake during high water cannot retrieve their boats and have been stranded. These problems are caused primarily by periodic debris flows from Rhode Creek, and secondarily by continued expansion of the Thunder Creek Delta. As part of the relicensing of the Skagit River Hydroelectric Project, the NPS requested Seattle City Light to identify remedial measures to address this problem, and incorporate those measures into the City’s recreation plan for the Skagit Project. In the future the boat ramp could no longer be useable given the expansion of the Thunder Creek Delta and more importantly, accumulation of sediment and debris from Rhode Creek (Ebasco Environmental, 1990). Should this happen, the NPS would relocate the boat launch to the north side of the highway in the vicinity of Diablo Lake boathouse, as recommended via previous assessments (Ebasco Environmental, 1990). This action may also require dredging to maintain this new boat launch. Parking would still remain on the south side. Ancillary facilities in the vicinity of the ramp such as a vault toilet and picnic area could be included.

TRIBAL ISSUES

The NPS would continue to work closely with Skagit Tribes to preserve archeological sites and continue their traditional activities within Ross Lake NRA.

WILDERNESS AND BACKCOUNTRY

The Thunder Creek Potential Wilderness Area, totaling 3,559 acres, would be converted through administrative designation to wilderness and included in the Stephen Mather Wilderness as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. This action would ensure that the Thunder Creek area’s wilderness character and wilderness resources would be preserved in an unimpaired condition, in accordance with the Wilderness Act. These lands would be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical uses.



The accessible Sterling Munro boardwalk offers views of the park from the North Cascades Visitor Center in Newhalem.



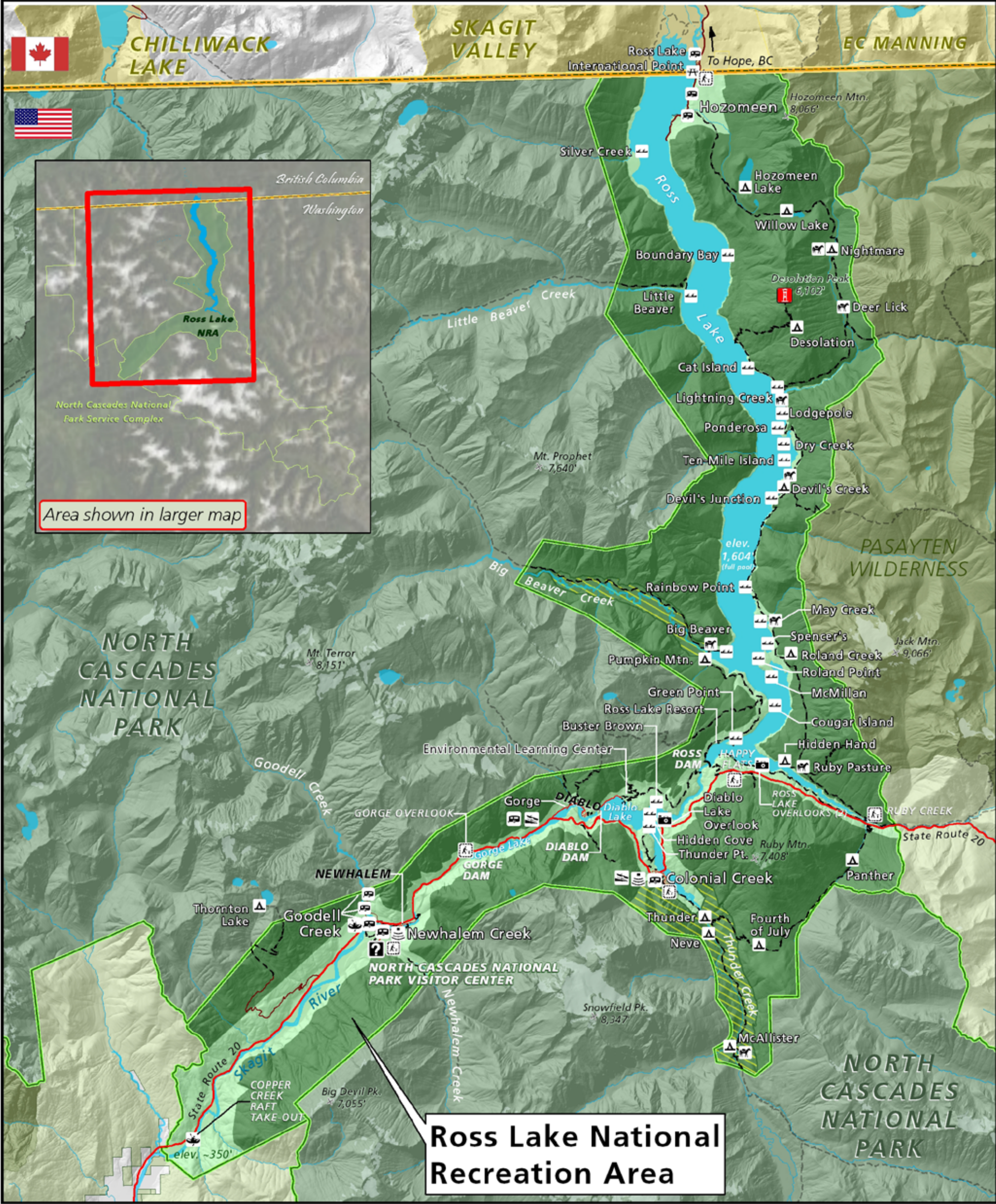
Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot on a busy summer day. Passenger vehicles mix with horse trailers and administrative uses.



The Skagit General Store provides goods and services for visitors.

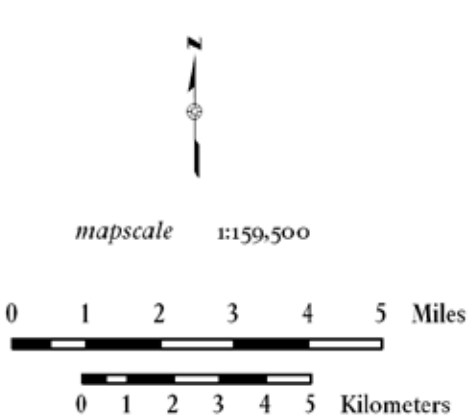
Ross Lake National Recreation Area

Ross Lake National Recreation Area GMP/EIS



- ROSS LAKE NRA within S. Mather Wilderness
- ROSS LAKE NRA, non-wilderness
- North Cascades National Park (S. Mather Wilderness)
- Potential Wilderness
- Pasayten Wilderness (US Forest Service)
- Provincial parks
- Visitor Center
- Amphitheater
- Hiker camps
- Boat-in camps
- Stock camps
- Auto-accessible campgrounds
- Picnic area
- Interpretive trail
- Motor boat launch
- Raft launch/ take-out
- Desolation Fire Lookout

- Roads
- Unpaved roads
- Trails



Produced by:
National Park Service,
North Cascades NPS Complex
17 February 2010
doi/10.1016/j.gis.2010.01.001

Seattle City Light has determined that a hydroelectric project on Thunder Creek is not economically or environmentally feasible. SCL has abandoned hydroelectric development plans for Thunder Creek, and, thereby has removed the possibility of a nonconforming use or incompatible condition. Conversion of this area to designated wilderness would be completed in accordance with the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988, Title IV(a)(2) which states “any lands designated as potential wilderness additions, upon publication in the *Federal Register* of a notice by the Secretary of the Interior that all uses thereon that are inconsistent with the Wilderness Act have ceased or that non-Federal interests in land have been acquired, shall thereby be designated as wilderness and managed accordingly.” Conversion to designated wilderness would also comply with NPS Management Policies 2006 (§ 6.2.2.1) which states, “. . .these potential wilderness areas will become designated wilderness upon the Secretary’s determination, published in the *Federal Register*, that they have finally met the qualifications for designation by the cessation or termination of the nonconforming use.”

GRIZZLY BEAR “CORE AREA” MANAGEMENT

Ross Lake NRA, as part of the North Cascades ecosystem grizzly bear recovery zone, includes portions of six Bear Management Units (BMUs) within the recovery zone. BMUs represent an approximation of home range of a female grizzly accompanied by young, and are generally drawn following natural features to include drainages that encompass a complete array of elevations and seasonal habitat needs of a grizzly bear family’s annual requirements for feeding, cover, and denning.

The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Taskforce Report on Grizzly Bear Motorized Access Management (IGBC, 1998) contains recommendations for a consistent approach to access management within and between grizzly bear ecosystems. The taskforce identified “Core Areas” for grizzly bears as being free of motorized traffic and high levels of human use. Core Area within this ecosystem is defined as any area more than 0.3 miles (500 meters) from a road or high use trail. “High use trail” is further defined as any trail or section of trail receiving greater than or equal to 20 parties per week during the early season (from den emergence to July 15) or the late season (July 16 to denning).

The North Cascades Ecosystem Interagency Grizzly Bear Management Subcommittee adopted interim guidelines for management of Core Area of these BMUs. These guidelines called for a “no net loss of Core Area” within the U.S. National Forests and National Park Service lands within the North Cascades ecosystem, with the expectation that when each federal agency undertook their next major public planning process more formal management direction would be determined for each agency. In British Columbia, management of Core Area in the North Cascades seeks to minimize or avoid the net loss of Core Area from 1999 levels (Ministry of Environment 2004).

Successful recovery is occurring in two other recovery zones in the United States (the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystems) where Core Area is maintained at approximately 70% (Wayne Kasworm, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Office, personal communication; John Waller, Wildlife Biologist, Glacier Na-

tional Park, personal communication; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2007).

Within Ross Lake NRA, current Core Area for the six BMUs ranges from 82-92%. This means that 82-92% of each BMU is free of motorized traffic and high levels of human use. For Ross Lake NRA, the NPS would maintain a minimum Core Area of 70% within each BMU. This would be done by limiting development, such as new trails, roads, and campsites, in BMUs.

No additional roads are proposed for Ross Lake NRA in this draft GMP/EIS. Trail developments proposed in this draft GMP/EIS, which are largely focused along the North Cascades Highway, would not lower the Core Area for any BMU below 70%.

SKAGIT WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ELIGIBILITY AND SUITABILITY STUDIES SUMMARY

Rivers and streams within Ross Lake NRA would be preserved in their free-flowing condition, and they and their immediate environments would be protected.

Based on the findings of the draft Skagit Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Suitability Studies, the NPS would recommend Congressional legislation for wild and scenic river designation of the Skagit River from Gorge Powerhouse downstream to the boundary of Ross Lake NRA, Goodell Creek, and Newhalem Creek. This river segment and creeks were found eligible based upon their free-flowing conditions and outstandingly remarkable values and based upon analysis, public comments, and consultation with partners and tribes. A wild and scenic designation would complete the Skagit Wild and Scenic River System from Sedro-Woolley up to the start of the Skagit Hydroelectric Project at the Gorge Powerhouse, providing an opportunity for holistic watershed management.

The 11-mile Skagit River segment, from Gorge Powerhouse to the Ross Lake NRA boundary, contains the following outstandingly remarkable values: fish, wildlife, geology, pre-history, history, scenery, and recreation. The Skagit River would be classified as “Recreational,” due to the hydropower dams upstream and presence of the North Cascades Highway paralleling the river for this entire stretch.

Goodell Creek, 12.7 miles from its headwaters to its confluence with the Skagit River, possesses the following outstandingly remarkable values: fish, wildlife, geology, and scenery. Goodell Creek would be classified as “Wild” from its headwaters to river mile 0.5 and “Recreational” from river mile 0.5 to its confluence with the Skagit River.

Newhalem Creek, 9 miles from its headwaters to its confluence with the Skagit River, possesses the following outstandingly remarkable values: wildlife, geology, history, pre-history, and scenery. Newhalem Creek would be classified as “Wild” from its headwaters to upstream of the diversion dam at river mile one and “Recreational” from river mile one to its confluence with the Skagit River.”

The Skagit River below Gorge Dam and above the Gorge Powerhouse was found ineligible because the limited water in this reach does not meet the free-flow requirement for wild and scenic river eligibility.

The complete Skagit Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Suitability Studies are included in Appendix D of this draft GMP/EIS.

Additional Eligibility and Suitability Analysis

Three other tributaries of the Skagit River above Gorge Dam (Thunder Creek/Fisher Creek, Ruby Creek, and Big Beaver Creek) were also found eligible in previous study efforts.

The NPS would evaluate and/or update eligibility for rivers or river segments in the Skagit River Watershed within the North Cascades NPS Complex. This evaluation would include, but is not limited to: Bacon Creek, Thunder Creek/Fisher Creek, Ruby Creek, Big Beaver Creek, Little Beaver Creek, and Lightning Creek. If eligible, the NPS would also conduct a suitability analysis for these creeks. Evaluations of Bacon Creek, Lightning Creek, and Ruby Creek would be conducted in cooperation with the Okanogan-Wenatchee and Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests.



A black bear forages in a berry patch on the shoulder of Desolation Peak.

COST ESTIMATES FOR ALL ALTERNATIVES

Cost estimates for the various alternatives throughout this plan are intended only to provide an estimate of the relative costs of alternatives. NPS and industry cost estimating guidelines were used to develop the costs (in 2010 dollars) to the extent possible, but the estimates should not be used for budgeting purposes. Specific costs would be determined in subsequent, more detailed planning and design exercises, and considering the design of facilities, identification of detailed resource protection needs, and changing visitor expectations. Actual costs to the NPS would vary depending on if and when the actions are implemented, and on contributions by partners and volunteers. Note that these costs do not include the costs for any additional plans or studies.

For all alternatives, costs are based upon general “class C” estimates for site development and construction. Prior to submitting funding requests for the design and construction phases, “class B” estimates are required, based upon detailed site and facility designs.

Management Zones

Each action alternative (Alternatives B, C, and D) would assign new management zones to areas of Ross Lake NRA. Management zoning is the method used by the National Park Service to identify and describe the appropriate variety of resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved and maintained in the different areas of a park. Zoning is generally a two-step process: (1) identify a set of potentially appropriate management zones, and (2) allocate those zones to geographic locations throughout the park. The management zones define and spatially apply management goals and objectives for resource management, levels of development, and different types of potential visitors’ experiences as follows:

- 1) **Frontcountry Zone:** A wide variety of high quality recreational and educational visitor opportunities and facilities would be provided. Natural and cultural resource conditions would be maintained with some modification to accommodate visitor or management needs. The scenic east-west route through the North Cascades along the North Cascades Highway and adjacent developed areas would be primarily located in this zone.
- 2) **Backcountry Zone:** Limited visitor facilities would provide a sense of remoteness and immersion in nature within a mountainous wilderness setting. Natural and cultural resource conditions would be preserved and some resources could be enhanced through restoration. This zone would include areas that are dominated by natural conditions with structured opportunities for visitor recreation.
- 3) **Wilderness Zone:** A wilderness experience, limited primitive visitor facilities, and very few encounters with other visitors would be the emphasis for visitor use in the Wilderness Zone. Natural and cultural resource conditions would be preserved and the NPS would focus on resource stewardship and restoration. Designated wilderness and potential wilderness would be located in this zone.
- 4) **Skagit River Zone:** Natural and cultural resource preservation of the Skagit River corridor and visitor facilities associated with river recreation would be the focus of this zone. The Skagit River and adjacent riparian corridor below Gorge Powerhouse in Newhalem and up Goodell Creek to the wilderness boundary would be located in this zone. This zone would be approximately ¼ mile on either side of the Skagit River through most areas.
- 5) **Hydroelectric Zone:** Seattle City Light operations would be paramount to resource conditions and visitor experience in this zone. Seattle City Light facilities and primary management areas, including the hydroelectric projects at Ross, Diablo, and Gorge Dams would be located in this zone. Most visitor experiences would be linked to learning about hydroelectricity and frontcountry recreational activities.

The emphasis of the No Action Alternative would be to protect the values of Ross Lake NRA without substantially increasing staff, programs, funding support, or facilities.

Alternative A:
No Action

Alternative A is the No Action Alternative and assumes that existing management, programming, facilities, staffing, and funding would generally continue at their current levels. The No Action Alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act and also serves as a baseline for comparison in evaluating the changes and impacts of the other three alternatives. Resource preservation and protection would continue to be a high priority for the management of Ross Lake NRA. Staff would continue to work with neighboring agencies for collaborative ecosystem management.

Management of visitor use and facilities would generally continue through existing levels and types of service and regulation. Additional visitor facilities, such as new buildings, structures, roads, parking areas, camping areas, and trails, would not be constructed, except for those associated with the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center. The NPS would react to catastrophic events and the destruction of visitor facilities on a case-by-case basis, which could result in a net loss of visitor facilities.

MANAGEMENT ZONES

The No Action Alternative uses the management zones from the 1988 North Cascades NPS Complex General Management Plan. Ross Lake NRA is overlayed with three zones: Natural Zone, Park Development Zone, and Special Use Zone. These zones are defined as:

Natural Zone: Lands and waters managed to ensure that natural resources and processes remain largely unaltered by human activity. Developments here are generally absent or limited to dispersed recreational and management facilities. Research natural areas are a special subzone within this zone and are strictly protected for their scientific values. Within the national recreation area hunting is allowed within the natural zone, and the National Park Service cooperates with the Washington Department of Wildlife to provide for the management of game species for hunting while ensuring the long-term health of wildlife populations.

Park Development Zone: Lands managed to provide the development needed to support the desired visitor experience and operation of the unit. Development that is non-historic or that significantly alters the natural environment is included in this zone, rather than in the Natural Zone.

Special Use Zone: Lands and waters used by other agencies or interest for the purposes not permitted in the natural or park development zones.

MANAGEMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS WITHIN ROSS LAKE NRA

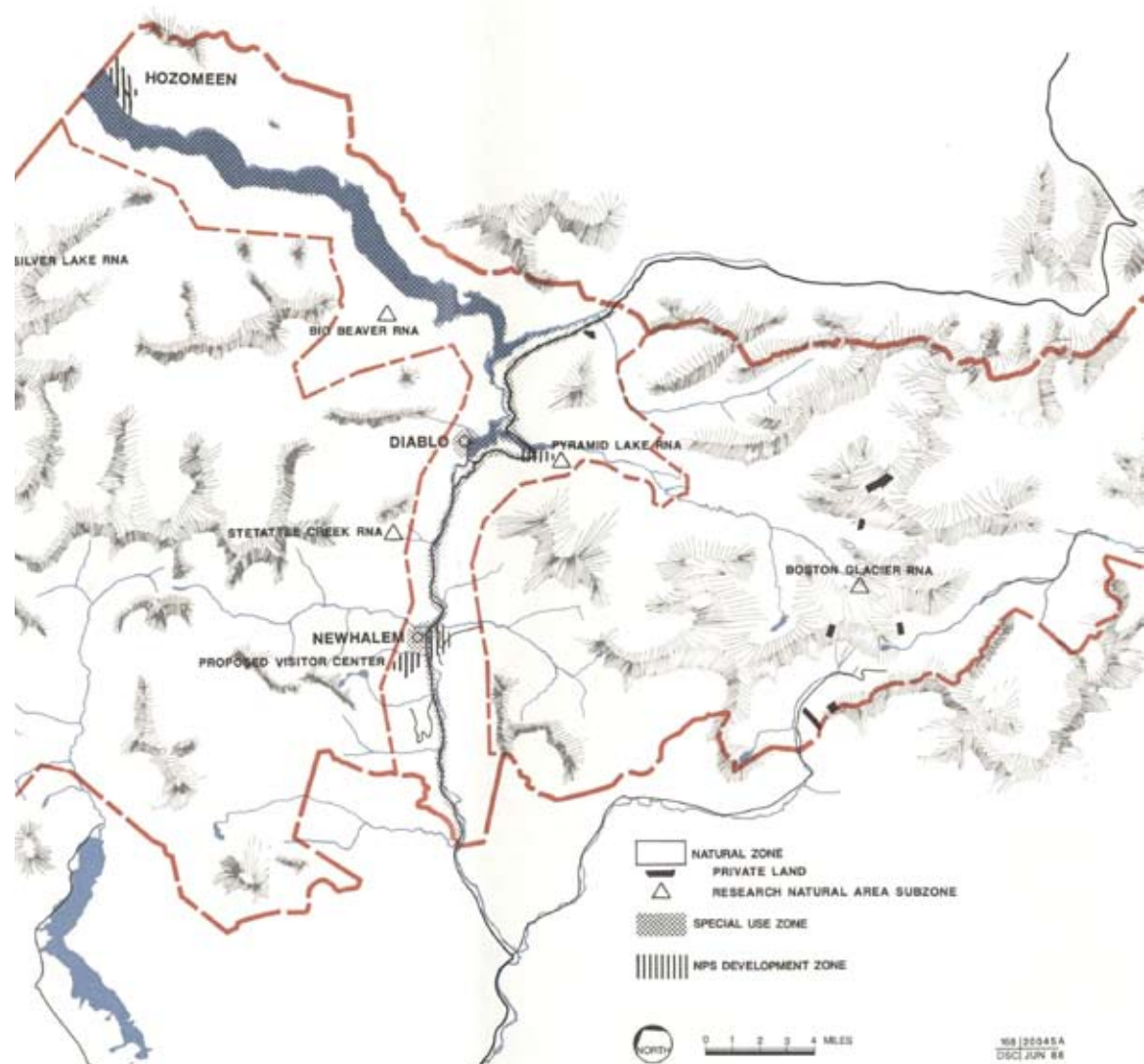
North Cascades Highway Corridor

Under Alternative A, the North Cascades Highway corridor would continue to be managed as the primary access point for visitors. Dramatic viewsheds of the Skagit River, jagged mountain peaks, waterfalls, and reservoirs would introduce visitors to the North Cascades along the highway corridor. Visitors could then venture further into the North Cascades on back roads and trails that lead into the wilderness areas of the complex. The NPS would maintain existing day-use opportunities along the North Cascades Highway, such as day hiking, backpacking, water recreation, and interpretive and educational activities.

Most of the facilities and infrastructure that are threatened by severe weather events, such as flooding, are located within the North Cascades Highway corridor. Under Alternative A, the NPS would continue to respond to facilities destroyed or damaged by severe weather events, such as flooding, in a reactive manner and on a case-by-case basis. Response strategies would be evaluated and determined based on an individual analysis of the situation at the time it occurs. A net loss of facilities or sites, such as camp sites, could occur.

Hozomeen

Hozomeen would continue to offer a unique camping experience as the only campground on Ross Lake that can be accessed by road. Primary access to Hozomeen would continue to be via the gravel road from Hope, British Columbia or by boat, foot, or stock from the U.S.



Management Zoning Map: Alternative A (No Action Alternative)



Hozomeen Mountain as seen from Desolation Peak.

The campground at Hozomeen would be rehabilitated to provide a more organized and traditional camping experience.

Marblemount Ranger Station

The Marblemount Ranger Station would continue to provide buildings and space for visitor services, NPS maintenance, resource management, administration, emergency response, and staff housing functions. In addition, the Wilderness Information Center located at the Marblemount Ranger Station would continue to house a visitor contact station, wilderness ranger offices, communications center, and public restrooms. The facility was renovated and expanded in 2009 to allow for adequate space for all existing functions.

All Marblemount Ranger Station activities would be compatible with the significance of the National Register listed Marblemount Ranger Station Historic District and its associated structures, landscapes, and features.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Under Alternative A, resource preservation and protection would continue to be a high priority for management of Ross Lake NRA.

Natural resources, including wildlife, vegetation, geology, glaciology, fisheries, lightscapes, soundscapes, water resources, and air resources would be ensured long-term stewardship and preservation. Ecosystem processes, such as a natural fire regime, would be managed for the benefit of resources to the greatest extent possible. Current inventory and monitoring programs would continue in their existing capacity and would be the focus of the natural resource management program. In rare cases, impacted resources and extirpated species could be restored for ecosystem health and diversity.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resources, including archeology, historic structures, cultural landscapes, tribal issues, ethnohistory and museum collections, would be ensured long-term stewardship and preservation. The NPS would continue documentation and

research programs geared toward protecting significant cultural sites, objects, and stories and learning more about human history in the North Cascades. The NPS would continue to work closely with Skagit Tribes to preserve archeological sites and continue traditional activities within Ross Lake NRA.

WILDERNESS AND BACKCOUNTRY

In designated wilderness, potential wilderness, and backcountry areas, the NPS would continue to emphasize the preservation of wilderness character. Non-wilderness portions of Ross Lake NRA would also continue to be managed for some wilderness values. Visitors would be provided with opportunities for solitude and connections with the natural world. The backcountry permit system would continue to monitor and control numbers of visitors in these remote areas in order to minimize visitor impacts to resources and other visitors.

RECREATION

Under Alternative A, recreational opportunities would continue to offer visitors a variety of ways to experience, learn about, and enjoy resources in Ross Lake NRA. A wilderness experience would continue to be available to those who prefer solitude and tranquility in more remote areas of Ross Lake NRA.

Boating on Ross, Diablo, and Gorge lakes and the Skagit River would continue to be managed primarily by maintaining the limits set by existing infrastructure, such as boat launches and existing access points. The NPS would not actively implement additional rules or regulations to manage or restrict motor boat use in the near future, such as establishing limits on motorboat speed, horsepower, boat size, and types of motorboat engines. Activities that involve towing people behind boats, such as water skiing, would continue unregulated within Ross Lake NRA.

Hunting and fishing would continue in existing permitted areas within Ross Lake NRA. Hunting and fishing regulations would continue to be coordinated with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Sport climbing within the North Cascades Highway corridor would continue in four documented areas within Ross Lake NRA. Routes and access would be maintained and monitored through an Adopt-A-Crag program. Some routes or areas could be closed for resource protection. New routes that require placement of fixed anchors, and replacements, would be allowed within the four areas.



A creek along the East Bank Trail.

Seaplanes would continue to be allowed on Diablo and Ross lakes except within 1,000 feet of Diablo Dam and Ross Dam, according to 36 CFR 7.69 and 36 CFR 2.17. Pilots involved in commercial scenic air touring must comply with FAA Bulletin AC91-36D to maintain a 2,000 foot above ground level limit when flying over NPS lands.

The **backcountry permit system** would continue to require that visitors obtain permits for backcountry campsites in person at designated locations within 24 hours of the start of the trip. The **campsite reservation system** would also continue to allow visitors to make reservations for some frontcountry campsites by phone and via the web; most frontcountry campgrounds and sites would continue to be held for walk-ins. The backcountry reservation system for commercial users would be maintained.

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

The NPS would continue to organize the interpretation and education programs into outreach, curriculum-based programs, and traditional interpretation. On-site non-personal services, such as waysides and nature trails, would continue to provide opportunities for resource immersion within Ross Lake NRA. Personal services and formal interpretive programs, including interpretive walks, talks, and roving interpreters, would provide opportunities for visitors to engage with NPS staff and rangers. Educational programs would continue to be offered at existing facilities, within Ross Lake NRA, and in the local communities. NPS staff would participate in outreach to provide programming for organized groups and events outside Ross Lake NRA boundaries. Other non-personal services, such as websites and publications, would continue to provide information and educational messages that can be accessed remotely and inside Ross Lake NRA.

Partnerships would continue to help the interpretive messages reach a broader audience through programs, additional interpretive displays, and distribution of interpretive material and media, including retail. Partnerships would also help expand stewardship by engaging volunteers in projects and programs. Existing partnerships with the North Cascades Institute, British Columbia Parks, SCL, and concessioners would continue to engage a diversity of audiences focused on the North Cascades ecosystem.

NPS staff would participate in outreach to provide programming for organized groups and events outside Ross Lake NRA boundaries. Outreach programs that focus on building relevancy between the park and Latino and Hispanic members of surrounding communities would continue. The NPS would also continue to collaborate with its partners to develop pathways for youth from education and stewardship programs to employment opportunities.

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

Under Alternative A, mechanized and non-mechanized access and transportation to and within Ross Lake NRA would largely be maintained. Roads, parking, pullouts, and waysides would continue to provide visitors with vehicular and bicycle access to the frontcountry and some backcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA. Boat launches on the lakes and Skagit River would continue to allow access by both motorboats and paddle boats to Ross Lake NRA’s waterways.

Management of the North Cascades Highway

The NPS would coordinate with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Operations, use, and existing facilities would continue to be maintained in their existing conditions. Some continued operations, including the use of explosives for avalanche control, could result in resource impacts. Additionally, existing vehicular uses would continue to produce intermittent excessive noise. Some facilities would continue to impact natural processes and systems and could be destroyed by severe weather events, such as the narrow bridge over Goodell Creek and other North Cascades Highway crossings at Rhode, Thornton, and Damnation Creeks. Existing parking areas (including the Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot), pullouts, and waysides would continue to be maintained in their current condition along the North Cascades Highway.

During winter, the North Cascades Highway would continue to be closed to throughway vehicular access from the Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot to milepost 170, 14 miles west of Mazama, due to safety threats posed by avalanches and the high cost of plowing and wintertime road maintenance.

Recreational activities, such as skiing and snowmobiling, would continue on this closed portion of the road. Overlooks and trailheads on the open portion of the highway within Ross Lake NRA would remain unplowed during the winter months.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The NPS would continue to interpret and monitor the effects of human-forced climate change in the North Cascades and work toward increasing fuel and energy efficiency. Impacts on facilities would be addressed on a case-by-case basis as needed. Monitoring of natural resources would continue to detect and document impacts associated with climate change. Purchasing “green power,” using photovoltaic systems at select facilities, increasing use of biodiesel fuel, maintaining hybrid vehicles, and prioritizing green facility design would all be actions pursued to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

OPERATIONS

Staffing

Alternative A assumes current staffing levels would be maintained at 133 full time positions with the addition of two permanent resource staff (one full time equivalent (FTE) is one person working 40 hours per week for one year, or the equivalent).

For all alternatives, it is important to note that these staffing figures are for the North Cascades NPS Complex as a whole, as staff work on all three units of the complex. The total number of FTEs is the number of staff required to maintain the assets of Ross Lake NRA at a good level, provide acceptable visitor services, protect resources, and generally support Ross Lake NRA’s operations. The FTE number indicates base-funded staff only, not volunteer positions or positions funded by partners. FTE salaries and benefits are included in the annual operating costs.

Alternative A: Staffing	
Management /Administration	18
Maintenance	44
Interpretation/Education	13
Resource Management	43 + 2 new
Visitor Protection	15
Total Staff	135

Estimated Costs

The cost figures shown here and throughout the plan are intended only to provide an estimate of the relative costs of alternatives. See the “Cost Estimates,” section earlier in this chapter for more detail. Cost estimates for Alternative A are identified below.

Alternative A: Estimated Costs	
Annual Operating Costs	\$7,091,000
Staffing (FTE)	135
Total One-Time Costs	\$6,626,000
Facility Costs	\$60,000
Non-Facility Costs	

BOUNDARY MODIFICATION

There would be no boundary modifications under Alternative A and the NPS would continue management and operations under existing agreements with the Forest Service, Seattle City Light, and the Washington State Department of Transportation.



The accessible boardwalk of the Rock Shelter Trail near Newhalem.

Alternative B: Preferred Alternative

Alternative B is the NPS Preferred Alternative. The North Cascades Highway corridor would be managed to provide a variety of day-use and overnight recreational opportunities for visitors with a range of abilities and interests. Management of wilderness and backcountry areas would focus on ecosystem preservation and compatible recreational activities. Interpretation and education would be a key component of this alternative, emphasizing hands-on experiential learning and stewardship programs delivered by both the NPS and its partners.

Recreation in Ross Lake NRA would be enhanced along the North Cascades Highway corridor through the addition of limited new facilities, including dayhiking trails, reconfigured parking areas, an upgraded Wilderness Information Center, and the modest expansion of overnight facilities and concessions. Recreation in the wilderness and backcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA, including Ross Lake, would focus

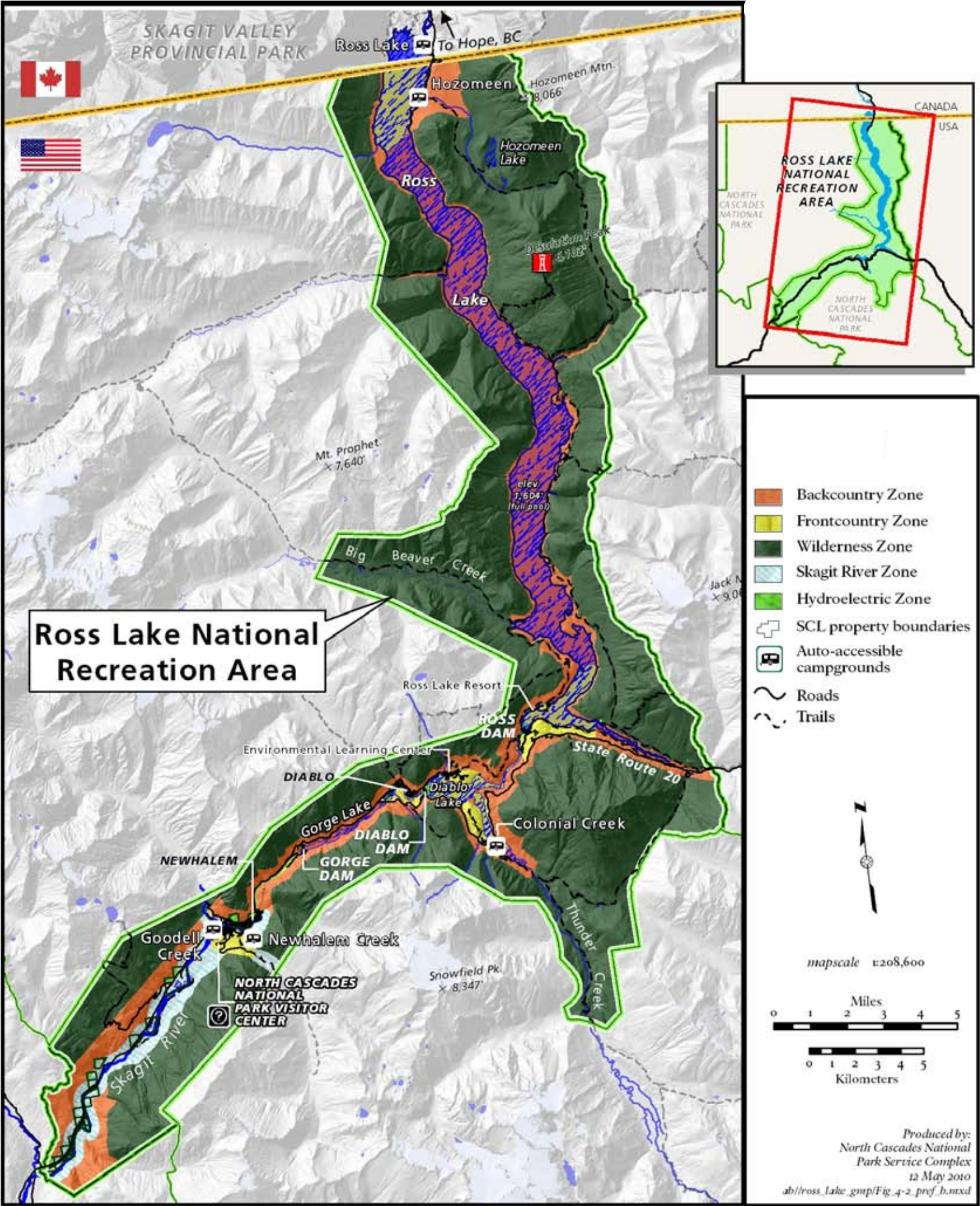
Alternative B would focus on managing Ross Lake NRA as a gateway to millions of acres of wilderness, providing enhanced visitor opportunities along the North Cascades Highway, and making better use of facilities along that corridor while ensuring the long-term stewardship of the surrounding North Cascades ecosystem and wilderness.

on providing visitors with opportunities for solitude, tranquility, and connections with the natural world. Self-propelled and non-mechanized recreation would be encouraged throughout Ross Lake NRA. Regulations for motorized water recreation would work to maintain the ambient character and experience on the lakes and the Skagit River, while also moving towards cleaner technologies. An online reservation system for permits would allow visitors the opportunity for advance trip planning. In the event of a catastrophic event and the destruction of visitor facilities, the NPS would strive to offer similar visitor facilities in the vicinity while limiting net loss of visitor opportunities.

MANAGEMENT ZONES

The management zones for the Preferred Alternative are applied to the landscape to identify an area’s predominant use and desired future conditions.

Frontcountry Zone: The Frontcountry Zone would extend along the entire length of the North Cascades Highway and encompass developed recreational sites and nearby areas. The Frontcountry Zone would encompass the North Cascades Visitor Center, Newhalem Creek Campground, Goodell Creek Campground, Diablo Lake, the Environmental Learning Center, Colonial Creek Campground, Thunder Knob, the southern portion of the Ross Lake area to Cougar Island and Hidden Hand on Ruby Arm, Hozomeen area,



Management Zoning Map: Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)



Walk-in sites at Colonial Creek Campground offer a secluded camping experience for visitors. Photo by David Snyder.

and the northern portion of Ross Lake from the international border to Silver Creek. Along the North Cascades Highway, the Frontcountry Zone would include 100 feet on either side of the highway center line. Lands within this 200 foot corridor that are owned or managed through easements by either the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) or Seattle City Light (SCL) would be zoned Frontcountry. This 200 foot corridor would allow for limited and necessary modifications to the North Cascades Highway, while ensuring that areas outside of this corridor are protected from more intensive development and use.

Backcountry Zone: The Backcountry Zone would include areas that are dominated by natural conditions where recreational opportunities would focus on providing a sense of remoteness and immersion in nature within a mountainous wilderness setting. The Backcountry Zone would also conceptually function as a transition area between the Frontcountry and Wilderness Zones. In the Skagit River area, the Backcountry Zone would be located between the Skagit River Zone and the Wilderness Zone, including the Thornton Lakes access area and upper Newhalem Creek. The Backcountry Zone would include most of Gorge Lake, upper Thunder Arm, and large expanses of land surrounding Diablo Lake and lower Ross Lake. The Backcountry Zone would also cover the entire surface of Ross Lake and its shoreline from Cougar Island to Silver Creek on Ross Lake.

Wilderness Zone: The Wilderness Zone would include all designated and potential wilderness areas in Ross Lake NRA.

Skagit River Zone: The Skagit River Zone would include the Skagit River and adjacent riparian corridor below Gorge Powerhouse in Newhalem and up Goodell Creek to the wilderness boundary. This zone would be approximately ¼ mile on either side of the Skagit River through most areas.

Hydroelectric Zone: The Hydroelectric Zone would include SCL facilities and primary management areas, including the hydroelectric projects at Ross, Diablo, and Gorge Dams.

The greatest proportion of Ross Lake NRA (about 73 %) would be managed in the Wilderness Zone. The Frontcountry Zone would cover about 5 % and the Backcountry Zone would cover 18.5 %. The Skagit River Zone would cover about 3 % and about 0.5 % of Ross Lake NRA would be managed in the Hydroelectric Zone.

MANAGEMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS

North Cascades Highway Corridor

In the Preferred Alternative, the North Cascades Highway corridor would function as a “window on wilderness” where visitors would be provided with meaningful opportunities to see, experience, and learn about the North Cascades. The NPS would create a distinct sense of arrival to help visitors understand they have entered a unit of the National Park System. The NPS would work with the WSDOT and SCL to improve signage with the goal of informing people about services and recreational opportunities in the North Cascades NPS Complex. Redesigned and constructed entrances would serve as portals into the North Cascades. Dramatic viewsheds of the Skagit River, jagged mountain peaks, waterfalls, and reservoirs would introduce visitors to the North Cascades along the highway corridor.

The NPS would work to provide activities to entice people out of their vehicles via enhanced overlooks, the existing visitor center, and visitor facilities in partnership with SCL and the North Cascades Institute (NCI). Once out of their vehicles, the NPS and partners would provide opportunities for enjoyment and learning, such as ranger-led tours, Diablo Lake tour, and numerous hiking trails. Visitors would be encouraged to venture further into the North Cascades on day hikes, ranging from short accessible trails to more strenuous hikes that leave the highway corridor and venture into the wilderness. Gorge and Diablo lakes within the North Cascades Highway corridor would continue to provide boating, fishing, camping, and sightseeing opportunities.

The NPS would provide improved day-use opportunities along the North Cascades Highway, such as day hiking, water recreation, and increased interpretation, educational, and hands-on stewardship experiences for visitors with a range of abilities and interests who desire a variety of recreational activities.

Existing **campgrounds and campsites** within the corridor would be maintained for visitor enjoyment of the frontcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA. New camping facilities could be considered and constructed at Newhalem Creek Campground, Upper and Lower Goodell group sites, and in consultation and cooperation with SCL at the aggregate ponds near the lower portions of the Skagit River. These sites would also be considered as replacement locations in the event of a loss of sites from storm impacts or other hazards at other campgrounds, such as Colonial Creek Campground. Additional services could also be provided at campgrounds, such as showers and electrical hookups, pending the results of a feasibility study.

Trails within the North Cascades Highway corridor would provide excellent dayhiking opportunities from accessible trails to launching points for more extensive hikes into remote areas of the North Cascades NPS Complex. New trails could include the Goodell Landslide Trail, Newhalem Boardwalk Trail, Newhalem Falls Loop Trail, Skagit River Portage Trail at the S curves, Happy Creek Falls Trail, and Newhalem Spawning Channel Trail.

Along the highway, parking and pullouts would be enhanced to improve visitor access and safety. The Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot would be redesigned and constructed for visitor safety. The footprint would be enlarged to accommodate a turn lane, single point of ingress and egress, pull-through spaces for 6 oversized vehicles, and capacity for approximately 43 passenger vehicles. New pullouts and waysides would be considered for several specific areas along the North Cascades Highway at Newhalem, Devil’s Elbow, Gorge Lake, and Ross Lake.

The NPS would continue to respond to **facilities damaged or destroyed by severe weather events**. Many of the facilities along the North Cascades Highway corridor are located in areas prone to flooding and disturbance by natural events such as landslides. The destruction of facilities from catastrophic and natural events appears to be occurring with greater frequency in the North Cascades due to severe storms and unpredictable climactic conditions. In 2003, severe weather and torrential rains resulted in landslides and creek channel migrations, impacting Colonial Creek Campground, the North Cascades Highway at Pyramid Creek, and other visitor facilities in Ross Lake NRA. The NPS would respond adaptively to facilities damaged or destroyed by severe weather events.

Under the Preferred Alternative, if a severe or catastrophic weather event destroys visitor facilities, the NPS would strive to offer similar visitor facilities in the same vicinity as those lost in order to preserve the experiences and facilities that visitors value, while limiting net loss of visitor opportunities or facilities in Ross Lake NRA.

Goodell Creek Campground is located at the confluence of Goodell Creek and the Skagit River along the North Cascades Highway. The Campground is a popular location for its easy access, campsites adjacent to the creek and river, and raft launch area. The access road to Lower Goodell Group camp is threatened by flooding from Goodell Creek. An alternative access road would be provided to the west of the existing road, partially along a section of an old roadbed. Future channel changes could cause further flooding in portions of the main Goodell Creek Campground and campsites could be closed and rehabilitated to natural conditions. Alternative campsites would be provided to the west of the existing Lower Goodell Group Camp.

Newhalem

Newhalem contains the North Cascades Visitor Center, one of the primary drive-in campgrounds, and an extensive trail network. In addition to NPS facilities, Newhalem also contains the visitor facilities operated by SCL, including the SCL



Diablo Dam. Photo by David Snyder.



A wayside exhibit at Diablo Lake Overlook along the North Cascades Highway. Photo by David Snyder.

visitor contact station, which serves as the starting point for tours of the Skagit power facilities, trails, and the Skagit General Store. There is ample parking, areas to picnic, and utility systems that could support additional use. In addition, several sites and structures in Newhalem are listed on the National Register and owned and managed by SCL.

The long term vision for Newhalem is to make it a primary destination and starting point for visitors who are travelling into the North Cascades wilderness. The NPS would seek to use the existing facilities and infrastructure in Newhalem more effectively to provide a more comprehensive experience for visitors. During the summer season, Newhalem would primarily serve general visitors. During the spring and fall seasons, Newhalem could serve as an outdoor classroom that is used by educators in concert with the NPS and partner educational programs. During the winter season, visitor facilities would be minimally maintained in response to seasonally low visitation.

The NPS would operate visitor facilities in **partnership with SCL** and others to provide visitors with a complete picture of recreation and learning opportunities in the Newhalem area and the North Cascades. The NPS and SCL partnership would be enhanced through new collaborative efforts, such as having NPS rangers working side-by-side at the SCL visitor contact station and providing interpretation on the SCL operated Diablo Lake tours. The NPS would encourage SCL to enhance services at the Skagit General Store to better align with the needs and expectations of visitors to the North Cascades.

The **North Cascades Visitor Center** would continue to be the primary information and interpretive center for the complex. The exhibits, multi-media programs, and activities would be updated to provide visitors with more active and interactive opportunities that effectively use technology to provide engaging, fun, and educational activities that communicate the full spectrum of interpretive and educational messages and cultivate stewards of the North Cascades ecosystem. The visitor center would serve as a hub of activity and provide the starting point to a network of ranger-led and self-directed resource immersion activities. Partners would also be encouraged to use the visitor center as a point of origin for their programs and activities.

The single lane **access bridge** across the Skagit River to the North Cascades Visitor Center and campground would be replaced and expanded to accommodate two-way vehicular traffic and bicycle and pedestrian access. The new bridge would remove the traffic light at each end of the bridge and improve traffic safety.

Day hiking and accessible trails would be constructed in Newhalem in partnership with SCL to provide access to additional features in the Newhalem area. These trails include the Newhalem Boardwalk Trail, Newhalem Falls Loop Trail, and Newhalem Spawning Channel Trail.

Diablo Lake

Diablo Lake is a reservoir created by Diablo Dam on the Skagit River. It is known for its beautiful turquoise/green color that is the result of suspended rock particles which have been ground by glaciers which can be seen from the popular Diablo Lake Overlook along the North Cascades Highway. Along the shores of Diablo Lake, visitor facilities include the Environmental Learning Center, Colonial Creek Campground offering drive-in campsites, one of the only public boat launches from the North Cascades Highway, and several dayhiking trails. SCL provides Diablo Lake tours and the shuttle boat to Ross Lake Resort. Diablo Lake is the most accessible lake and would continue to provide a variety of recreational and learning opportunities for visitors with a range of interests and abilities.

New facilities on the **North Cascades Environmental Learning Center** campus would be constructed as outlined in the original plan and environmental assessment. The ELC would continue to function as a center for outdoor learning and a campus for curriculum-based environmental education for youth and families. Facilities that were part of the original plan, but have not yet been built would be constructed, including a dormitory, staff housing, boathouse, and additional outdoor learning shelters. A new camping area at Buster Brown would be considered for seasonal use for education programs and the public. Funding for the construction of these facilities would be provided by the North Cascades Institute. The North Cascades Institute would continue to work in cooperation with the NPS on plans for the ELC and management of the area.

Colonial Creek Campground is located on a narrow unstable debris cone area where Thunder, Rhode, and Colonial creeks drain into Diablo Lake. During the summer season, Colonial Creek Campground is occasionally at capacity due to its easy access to the North Cascades Highway, many wooded lakefront campsites, proximity to dayhikes, and primary boat launch area along the highway corridor. Rhode Creek regularly floods, spewing rock and debris across the North Cascades Highway and occasionally flowing through the south side of the campground. In 2003, the Colonial Creek stream channel migrated over campsites and trails on the north side of the campground, and significantly altered the landscape. To maintain camping opportunities at Colonial Creek Campground, the NPS would take proactive management actions at Rhode Creek to prevent campsites from being impacted by flooding, debris flow, and erosion. If campsites are affected in the future, the NPS would attempt reconstruction in the same area. If reconstruction at the campground is not feasible, the sites lost would be replaced elsewhere in Ross Lake NRA, preferably at another previously developed location such as Newhalem Creek Campground to limit net loss of campsites in Ross Lake NRA.

Diablo Townsite

Diablo Townsite is located near the upper reaches of Gorge Lake near Stetattle Creek and close to the base of Diablo Dam. A significant feature about Diablo Townsite area is that it is one of the few relatively flat, geologically stable, previously disturbed and developed, and buildable locations in the North Cascades NPS Complex. It is composed of two distinct areas: “Hollywood,” an approximately 44 acre parcel owned by Seattle City Light, and “Reflector Bar,” a 25 acre area owned by the National Park Service.

Hollywood contains over 25 houses and was once the primary residential area for Seattle City Light staff working at Diablo Powerhouse and vicinity. The Reflector Bar area includes Diablo Powerhouse itself, a school building (now used as a cookhouse, museum, and administrative office), maintenance facilities, sewer treatment plant, an incline lift and associated waiting station (previously used for tours of the hydroelectric project), and several houses.

At one time, Diablo Townsite was a thriving community of Seattle City Light employees and their families who worked and lived in this isolated setting. As technology advanced, control of the day-to-day operations of the facilities was moved to Seattle and fewer staff were needed on-site to operate the dams and powerhouses. Today, several houses in Diablo Townsite are empty or used as temporary lodging for staff or contractors from out of the area. The opportunity exists to develop new visions and future uses of Diablo Townsite.

The operational and administrative uses of Reflector Bar by Seattle City Light require management of the area exclusively for the purposes of power production. This is a longstanding and customary use that dates back to the inception of the Skagit River Hydroelectric Project. Seattle City Light, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the Depart-



A young visitor watches geese along the shores of Diablo Lake. Photo by David Snyder.

ment of Homeland Security are presently concerned about protection of the facilities that support power production. To reduce security concerns, these agencies are moving to reduce public access to Reflector Bar. The National Park Service is also concerned about ensuring protection of these facilities, as well as ensuring basic public safety by keeping visitors away from the hydroelectric industrial zone.

In 1989, six buildings and structures in Diablo Townsite were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Five of these structures are on Reflector Bar and are part of the Skagit River and Newhalem Creek Hydroelectric Project Historic District that was designated in 1996. To comply with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license agreement, Seattle City Light is evaluating the remaining buildings, structures, sites, and landscape elements associated with the Skagit River Hydroelectric Project to determine their historical significance and eligibility for nomination to the National Register. This analysis will help inform future use of the facilities.

Under Alternative B, the NPS would recommend Congressional legislation to authorize the NPS to relinquish, sell, or exchange Reflector Bar or grant an interest or give greater control therein to Seattle City Light, and acquire Hollywood through an exchange (including making an equalization payment) or a direct purchase. Generally, the NPS cannot divest itself of land or an interest therein, except in limited, narrow circumstances. The enabling legislation allows the NPS to acquire land only by donation from the State of Washington or any political subdivision. Seattle City Light is a municipal corporation of the State of Washington, so the NPS presently only has authority to acquire land from Seattle City Light by donation. Under the Washington State Accountancy Act, Seattle City Light cannot donate land, so legislation authorizing a land exchange, equalization payment, or other purchase payment would be needed for the NPS to acquire Hollywood.

In concept, a land exchange or acquisition would reflect the missions of the two entities: Seattle City Light to operate the hydroelectric facilities and the NPS to support visitors and preserve resources. The end result would be that Seattle City Light would own, have an easement in, or otherwise have greater control of land east of Diablo Powerhouse, where Seattle City Light maintenance and administrative facilities are still in use. NPS would acquire land to the west of Diablo Powerhouse that includes the Stetattle Creek and Sourdough Mountain Trailheads and the houses in Hollywood. The NPS would manage or cooperatively manage Hollywood for visitor use, and would collaborate with Seattle City Light to continue the maintenance and operation of utilities in Hollywood. A site plan would be completed as part of an implementation plan in order to successfully execute a land acquisition or exchange of Hollywood with Seattle City Light.

The National Register eligibility determination would guide the future vision for Hollywood. In the event Hollywood is determined eligible for the National Register, the NPS would evaluate preservation of contributing elements for a variety of future uses depending on the needs of the NPS and its partners. If Hollywood district is found to be ineligible, some buildings and structures could be replaced with new construction, or removed. Future uses of the Hollywood area could include research and educational functions and public overnight opportunities, such as camping and concession operated facilities. Additional planning and analysis

would be needed to determine these future uses, management structure, financial feasibility, and site development.

At present, the NPS is concerned with life cycle costs associated with the houses and utility system serving Hollywood. Ownership, management, and operations of Hollywood would need to be addressed through additional collaborative planning with Seattle City Light.

The Sourdough Mountain and Stetattle Creek trailheads, which are part of the Hollywood area, are presently confusing to find and lack support facilities. They would also be obtained through this land exchange and improved with a parking area, a kiosk, and possibly restrooms and a picnic area. The shoreline of the Skagit River and Diablo Lake adjacent to Hollywood could also be rehabilitated to improve the aesthetic qualities and ecology of the riparian zone.

Diablo Townsite is located in the Hydroelectric Zone. If the Hollywood area were to be managed or owned by the NPS, the Hollywood area of Diablo Townsite would be included in the Frontcountry Zone.



The River Loop Trail, one of many inviting trails near the North Cascades Visitor Center. Photo by Linda Seifried.

Ross Lake

Ross Lake stretches from Ross Dam along the historic alignment of the Skagit River approximately 22 miles northward to the Canadian border at Hozomeen and serves as a portal to the Stephen Mather Wilderness and Pasayten Wilderness. Ross Lake is a reservoir created to serve as a primary power supply for SCL and the city of Seattle. Along the shores of Ross Lake are numerous walk-in and boat-in campsites, trails leading into the backcountry and wilderness, and the East Bank Trail which runs from the North Cascades Highway to Hozomeen. Water recreation on Ross Lake focuses on fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and limited motorboating. Ross Lake is characterized by open waters surrounded by a scenic mountain wilderness in an undeveloped setting.

Visitor experience on and near Ross Lake would be maintained largely as it is today. During this planning process, public comments have expressed the strong desire to preserve the unique character of Ross Lake by controlling access and use and limiting development. Water recreation, camping, and hiking would continue to be the primary forms of recreation on and near Ross Lake. Motorboat and seaplane regulations would work to improve natural soundscapes, water quality, and the visual character of Ross Lake. The number of lakefront campsites on Ross Lake would be maintained at current levels. Should crowding become an issue on Ross Lake, the management goal would be to disperse people over the existing campsites, or manage use through reservations, as opposed to or before expanding the capacity or number of sites on the lakefront.

Ross Lake Resort would be minimally expanded within the capacity of the existing sewage system. The water storage system would need to be increased. New and replacement facilities would follow design guidelines provided by the NPS. Expansion of lodging facilities would not exceed 10 % of existing total number of guest and staff bed spaces. Additional visitor services could be incorporated into the concession contract and operating plan including providing a second water taxi service to provide access to campsites and trailheads on Ross Lake.

Hozomeen

Hozomeen would continue to offer a unique camping experience as the only campground on Ross Lake that can be accessed by road. Primary access to Hozomeen would continue to be via the road from Hope, British Columbia or by boat, foot, or stock from the U.S.

The campground at Hozomeen would be rehabilitated to provide a more organized and traditional campground experience.

The existing ranger station would be replaced with a small new ranger station/orientation center that would provide visitor services, including backcountry permits and interpretive information, and a small office for law enforcement and interpretive rangers. The current facility is in poor condition. The new facility would allow for improved visitor services, adequate space, and improved operational efficiencies. The facility would be jointly used in partnership with B.C. Parks.

The NPS would work cooperatively with Canadian agencies to explore the feasibility of constructing a connection trail between Centennial/Skyline II Trail Junction near Whitworth Meadow horse camp to the East Bank Trailhead at Hozomeen. This trail would provide improved pedestrian access to Hozomeen and a link to other existing trails in the area.

The NPS would encourage Canadian officials to maintain the existing gravel road rather

than paving the road from Hope to Hozomeen. Paving this road could fundamentally alter the character of Hozomeen as a remote outpost for recreationists.

Marblemount Ranger Station

In the Preferred Alternative, the Marblemount Ranger Station would continue to serve as a primary base of operations and support center by providing buildings and space for NPS maintenance, resource management, administration, emergency response, and staff housing functions as well as some limited visitor services, including the Wilderness Information Center. The existing wilderness center was upgraded and expanded in 2009 to accommodate its existing functions as a visitor contact station with restrooms, wilderness ranger offices, and the communications center; however, additional upgrades are needed to improve visitor services and operational efficiencies. This alternative would not preclude moving public functions of the wilderness center to another location if found suitable and feasible in the future.

Employee housing at Marblemount would be improved through the addition of temporary seasonal housing for employees or volunteers which could be in the form of tent cabins or equivalent types of facilities with supporting infrastructure. This addition would fulfill a critical summer season need for employee housing in the area of Ross Lake NRA where it is operationally needed. Tent cabins or an equivalent type of facility would meet the seasonal housing need without creating infrastructure that requires year-round maintenance. Seasonal need in Ross Lake NRA is for

a very short duration, approximately three months, making it difficult for staff to find private housing in the community, where leases tend to run for a six-month or one-year minimum.

All Marblemount Ranger Station activities would be compatible with the significance of the National Register listed Marblemount Ranger Station Historic District and its associated structures, landscapes, and features.

Facility Design Standards

The NPS would develop design standards to create a visual and architectural identity for the North Cascades NPS Complex. The design standards would be based upon existing examples of design in the complex, including such facilities as the North Cascades Visitor Center and Newhalem and Colonial Creek Campground entrance stations. New construction, renovation, and upgrading of facilities in Ross Lake NRA would conform to these new design standards.

NATURAL RESOURCES

In the Preferred Alternative, natural resources, including ecosystem functions and processes, air quality, soundscapes, water resources, vegetation and wildlife, would be ensured long-term stewardship and preservation in the context of a functioning ecosystem. In cases where resources have been impacted, the NPS would seek appropriate restoration to maintain the integrity of the North Cascades ecosystem. The NPS would continue the long-term ecological monitoring and would prioritize existing programs before initiating new programs. The NPS would work to develop collaborative inventory and monitoring programs with neighboring national forests, B.C. parks, and the Canadian Ministry of the Environment to better understand and manage the entire North Cascades ecosystem. The NPS would seek to enhance this work based on clear priorities, such as responses to climate change, and using scientifically valid methods. Priority would also be given to performing this work through long-term sustainable partnerships.

Specific guidance for natural resource management includes new programs, plans, and approaches to management.

Ecosystem Functions and Processes

Ecosystem functions and processes include fire, floods, and mass wasting in the forms of avalanches and landslides, among others. The NPS would work toward allowing natural ecosystem functions and processes to occur where pos-

sible and through collaborative efforts with neighboring and partner agencies to improve management and maintenance practices. The NPS would strive to minimize conflicts between ecosystem functions and processes and developments by siting and/or relocating new facilities out of potential geohazard areas. Ecosystem processes, such as fire, would be managed for the benefit of resources to the greatest extent possible. Where possible, these functions and processes would be interpreted for the public as an important component of ecosystem health and conditions in the North Cascades.

Air Quality

The NPS would continue to monitor air quality for visibility and acid deposition. NPS would also pursue research and monitoring to determine levels of atmospheric contaminants (such as mercury, persistent organic pollutants, etc.) in Ross Lake NRA.

The NPS would pursue redesignation of the Class II Airshed within Ross Lake NRA to a Class I Airshed, which would provide consistency with the surrounding park lands and the national forest lands east of the NRA. Areas redesignated as Class I Airsheds receive more stringent protection from some forms of pollution sources. The process to redesignate to a Class I Airshed would involve the State of Washington and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Soundscapes

The NPS would expand the natural sounds program to create a complete inventory of natural sounds and implement an ongoing monitoring program to assess changes in the soundscape. The NPS would identify unacceptable sources of human-caused noise and sound levels and look for ways (such as enforcement of existing noise standards and increased education along the North Cascades Highway) to protect natural soundscapes when feasible.

Lightscares

The NPS would complete an inventory of night sky conditions and would work with partners and adjacent land managers to protect night sky by reducing light pollution within Ross Lake NRA and on adjacent lands.

Water Resources

A new water quality monitoring program would be established.

Glaciology

The NPS would continue to operate a monitoring program on glaciers and associated processes to assess impacts of climate change, and educate the public about these resources and their implications.

Soils/Erosion Control

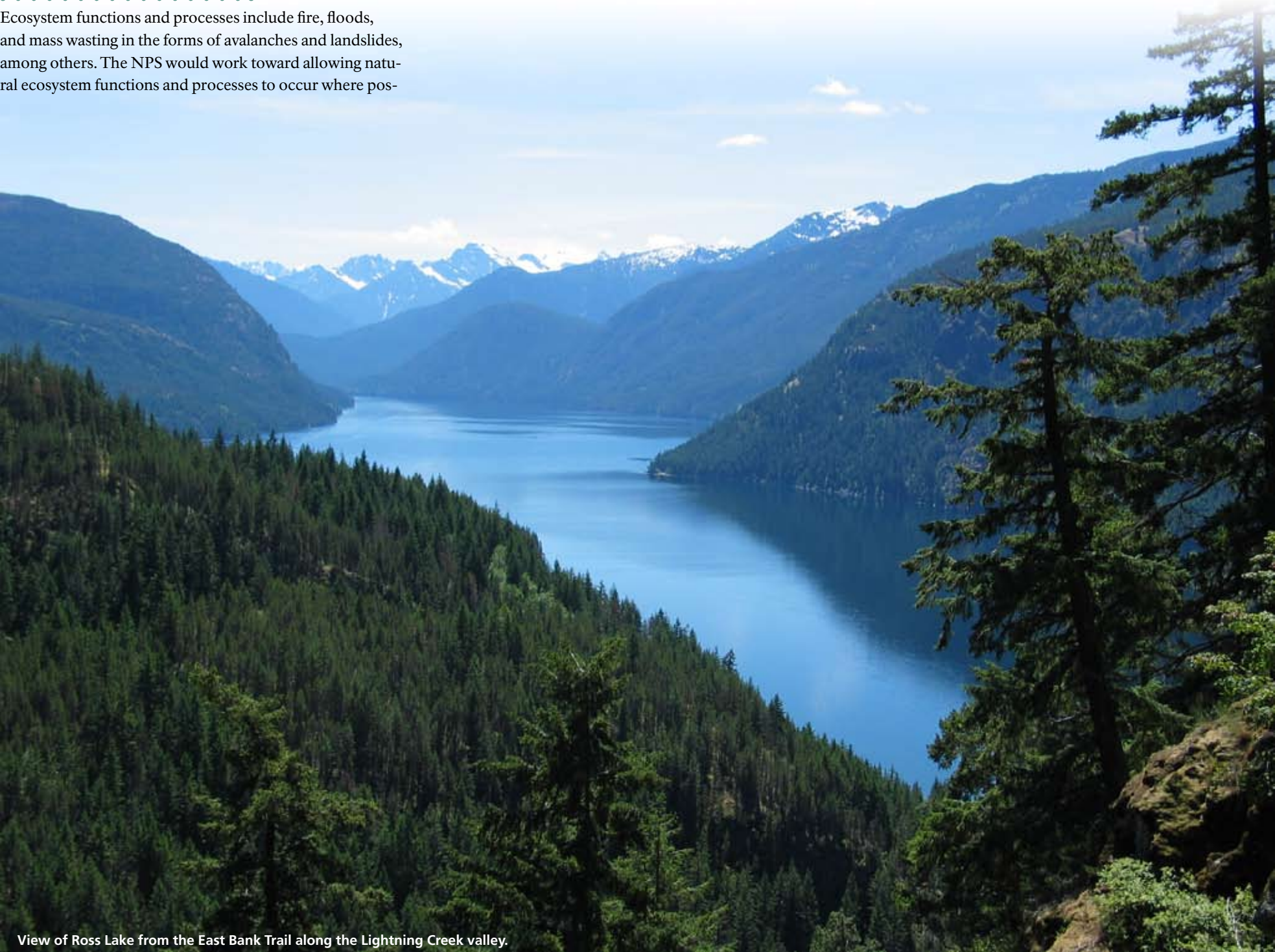
Erosion and soil impacts would be inventoried and monitored in backcountry areas and reservoirs, and a resource restoration plan would be developed for impacted areas. Erosion control would continue in priority areas.

Vegetation

A vegetation management plan would be developed to guide the vegetation management program. The NPS would implement an integrated pest management program that includes the following practices: prevention and early detection, inventory and monitoring, prioritization and control, restoration, and outreach and education.

Wildlife

The wildlife monitoring programs would be expanded to provide additional data on wildlife and take additional actions to protect wildlife from disease or human disturbance. The NPS would continue to participate in restoring extirpated species where feasible, monitor habitat conditions, and work to reduce the risk of bear-human conflicts. As part of the interagency grizzly bear recovery effort the NPS would minimize the possibility of wildlife obtaining human food by providing and maintaining food storage facilities, such as bear boxes or portable bear resistant containers, for overnight camping. The NPS would also work collaboratively on other interagency recovery efforts. The NPS would actively manage to reduce habitat fragmentation, such as consolidating development, and limiting construction of new facilities in undeveloped areas.



View of Ross Lake from the East Bank Trail along the Lightning Creek valley.

Fisheries

The NPS would develop a fisheries management plan which would include a monitoring component. Priorities for the fisheries program would be to work with partners to maintain native fish stocks in the reservoirs and tributaries and to protect spawning habitat on the Skagit and its tributaries.

Science Communication and Volunteer Programs

The NPS would develop a formalized program and process to communicate the results of research and monitoring efforts to a variety of audiences. The NPS would actively work to engage volunteers in scientific research and monitoring projects and programs.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

In the Preferred Alternative, cultural resources, including archeology, historic structures, cultural landscapes, ethnohistory, and museum collections, would be ensured long-term stewardship and preservation through a variety of measures. The NPS would continue identification, documentation and research programs to learn more about human history in the North Cascades in all program areas, including archeology, collections, historic structures, cultural landscapes, and ethnohistory. The NPS would seek to expand opportunities for sharing information about cultural resources through interpretive and educational media and programs.

Archeology

The NPS would develop a program for paleoecological research in partnership with others to expand understanding of past ecological processes and climate conditions. Qualified researchers and volunteers would be encouraged to participate in archeological projects, and the NPS would develop interpretive materials based on research results.

Historic Structures

The NPS would investigate the potential for adaptive re-use of historic structures, where feasible.

Cultural Landscapes

The NPS would prioritize preservation treatments for cultural landscapes that provide for the interpretation of human uses in the North Cascades.

Ethnohistory

The NPS would continue to encourage conducting oral histories and research investigations documenting human use of the North Cascades. The NPS would develop interpretive opportunities communicating human use of the North Cascades.

Museum Collections

Storage capacity for museum collections and archives would be increased to protect paleo-ecological items and emerging collections and archives. The NPS would provide appropriate public access to collections items both on-line and on-site.

WILDERNESS AND BACKCOUNTRY

Management of designated wilderness, potential wilderness, and some backcountry areas would focus on wilderness character, ecosystem preservation, and compatible recreational activities. The NPS would prioritize the protection of resources, natural ecosystem functions and processes, and significant cultural resources. Visitors would be provided with opportunities for solitude, tranquility, and connections with the natural world. The backcountry permit system would continue to monitor and control numbers of visitors in these remote areas in order to minimize visitor impacts to resources.

In designated and potential wilderness, changes in campsite locations or trail re-routes would be permitted, provided there is no net increase in miles of trail.

RECREATION

Recreational activities at Ross Lake NRA would continue much as they do today. Visitor experiences would include a mix of recreational activities and resource-focused activities while minimizing impacts through education and the use of defined high use areas. A wilderness experience would continue to be available to those who prefer solitude and tranquility in more remote areas of Ross Lake NRA. Interactions with uniformed staff would be widely available, particularly in frontcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA. The NPS would communicate the variety of recreational opportunities available in Ross Lake NRA and the park complex through improved information sharing and cooperative efforts with Seattle City Light, the Washington State Department of Transportation, North Cascades Institute, and others.

Boating

Boating on Ross, Diablo, and Gorge lakes and the Skagit River would continue to be primary forms of water recre-

This second water taxi would provide increased access to remote campsites and trailheads for visitors who do not have their own boats.

On the Skagit River, regulations for river rafting would be established for resource protection and improving visitor experience. Regulations could include group size limits and limits on the number of concession operated boats. Motor boats would be excluded on the Skagit River, except for emergency, law enforcement, NPS and SCL operational needs. Boating on the Skagit River is characterized predominantly by independent paddle boaters and concession operated river rafts trips. As of this writing, very few recreational motor boats travel the Skagit River within Ross Lake NRA. Thus, restricting motor boats within this reach of the river would not significantly change visitor use on the Skagit River overall, rather it would serve to enhance the visitor experience for the majority of NRA visitors who experience the river by self-propelled boat.

Many of these boat management strategies and regulations were proposed by members of the public during scoping for this GMP and then supported by the public during the draft alternatives public review process. These actions respond

to public concerns about preserving and improving water recreation while ensuring that these activities are safe and minimize impacts to resources.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting would continue in Ross Lake NRA, and there would be a focus on maximizing visitor safety during hunting season. In response to public concerns about hunting safety and recent hunting accidents in the region, the NPS would seek to expand safety zones in the vicinity of trails and developed areas and improve visitor awareness about hunting activities in Ross Lake NRA. Hunting regulations would continue to be coordinated with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife to reduce conflicts between general recreationists and hunters during hunting seasons. Lead-based ammunition would be prohibited, and some limits to types of firearms could be established.

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife would continue to regulate fishing in Ross Lake NRA.

Sport Climbing

Sport climbing within the North Cascades Highway corridor would be allowed in formalized and clearly defined “Climbing Management Areas.” These “Climbing Management Areas” would be located in areas that do not contain sensitive resources or other concerns to minimize impacts to resources.

The process involved for establishing “Climbing Management Areas” would include dialogue with stakeholders and the general public for a shared understanding of appropriate areas for sport climbing. The NPS would survey potential climbing areas to determine if the areas contain sensitive resources or could be appropriate for sport climbing activities. The NPS would ensure that access and routes are maintained and monitored over time. New routes that require placement of fixed anchors and replacements would be allowed within the “Climbing Management Areas.” The NPS would post this information and make it readily available to climbers and the public.

Seaplanes

Seaplanes would be allowed to land and take off on Diablo and Ross lakes in the Frontcountry Zone. On Diablo Lake, seaplanes would be allowed in areas where landing and



A bicyclist stops at an overlook above Ross Lake along the North Cascades Highway.

ation and experiencing Ross Lake NRA’s water resources. Self-propelled and non-mechanized recreation would be encouraged throughout Ross Lake NRA. Motor boating would be managed to maintain or improve current visitor safety, soundscapes, water quality, and visitor experience on all water bodies in Ross Lake NRA. The NPS would manage the number of boats on the lakes by maintaining the existing capacity of boating infrastructure, such as boat launches and moorage sites.

The NPS would establish horsepower, boat size, and/or speed limits on all lakes in Ross Lake NRA for concessions, commercial, and private boats. Provisions for emergency, law enforcement, NPS and SCL operations, and the water taxi would be made. Exclusive use of four-stroke engines or new direct injection two-stroke engines (or equivalent) would be required for all motorized vessels, including NPS, SCL, and concessions vessels, on all lakes within Ross Lake NRA by 2015. No wake zones would be established to maintain or enhance visitor experience, safety, and soundscapes, and prevent shoreline erosion on the reservoirs. The intent of no wake zones would be to preserve and enhance the experience for non-motorized and small motorized boaters, and could be established near developed sites, docks, dams, and log booms. Wake limits would also be established for proximity to other boaters. Boating recreation that involves towing people behind boats, such as water skiing, would be prohibited on all reservoirs. On Ross Lake, the NPS would allow a second concession operated water taxi that would ferry visitors to boat-in campsites and locations on the lake.

taking off is aeronautically feasible and would be prohibited within 1,000 feet of Diablo Dam or on those areas posted as closed for fish spawning, per 36 CFR 7.69. On Ross Lake, seaplanes would be allowed from the international border with Canada at Hozomeen to Silver Creek and from Cougar Island and Hidden Hand on Ruby Arm to within 1,000 feet of Ross Dam or the log boom closest to the dam. A permit system would also be developed to establish use levels in order to protect desired soundscape and visitor experience. These actions require an update and modification to 36 CFR 7.69 in order to clarify these changes.

Seaplane use is most compatible where higher levels of use already exist. Seaplanes are visually and audibly noticeable and attract attention away from the backcountry character of Ross Lake. Seaplane noise is most intense during a plane’s take-off, impacting the natural ambient soundscape. For these reasons, seaplane use would be allowed at the northern and southern ends of the lake which serve as the primary access points to the lake where vehicular, boat, and overnight activity is the greatest. Seaplane users could overnight at several backcountry boat-in campsites in these areas. Alternately, the middle section of Ross Lake provides one of the few expansive water bodies in the Cascades that serves as a getaway for those seeking a remote backcountry experience. While it is recognized that seaplane users could fly over these areas, landing and take-off would be prohibited in order to maintain the ambient character.

Updated management guidance for seaplane use on Ross Lake is in response to public comments about maintaining the backcountry and wilderness character of the Ross Lake area and emphasizing non-motorized recreation and natural soundscapes. The NPS considered the totality of public comments on the character of Ross Lake, soundscapes, and seaplane use as well as the relatively small numbers of seaplane users compared to non-seaplane users. This guidance reflects the intent of this alternative to maintain natural resource conditions while continuing limited recreational use.

Commercial Scenic Air Tours

Commercial scenic air touring would be managed to protect soundscapes and the recreational experiences of visitors on the ground. The NPS would coordinate with the Federal Aviation Administration to develop an air tour management plan that could establish use levels for commercial scenic air tours and designate appropriate air tour locations. Concern about overflights, and specifically air tours, was expressed by the public during the planning process. Commenters wanted to ensure that the remote and wilderness character of Ross Lake NRA is not diminished by the presence of air tours.

Backcountry Permit System

The backcountry permit system would be changed. Currently, backcountry permits are obtained in-person at the Wilderness Information Center and at other NPS and partner locations. NPS rangers assist with wilderness trip planning and ensure that visitors understand the requirements and risks of backcountry travel. Public comments have expressed frustration at having to obtain a permit in-person and with no guarantee that permits for specific campsites would be available. The permit system would be changed and could provide an option for advance trip planning as a fee for service, as well as monitoring campsite use throughout Ross Lake NRA. The backcountry permit system would continue to prioritize visitor safety, wilderness experience, and protection of resources through preventing overcrowding and ensuring appropriate visitor use in wilderness.

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

Ross Lake NRA would be a platform and classroom for education about the North Cascades ecosystem. There would be opportunities for both structured and unstructured activities, including self-guided exploration, discovery, and fun. Activities would be focused in the Frontcountry Zone but could expand into the Backcountry Zone. Activities in the Wilderness Zone would be limited. The NPS would develop, conduct and evaluate interpretive and educational programs and work with partners to conduct and deliver these programs. The focus of NPS and partner programs would be to develop stewards of the greater North Cascades ecosystem.

Educational and interpretive programs would respond to seasonal changes in visitation and visitor needs. During the spring and fall seasons, programs and associated facilities would be geared to curriculum-based education and school

programs. These programs would focus on immersion, hands-on experiential learning, and environmental stewardship. During the summer season, programs would be geared to general visitors and families through on-site and outreach programs.

Interpretation

Interpretive programs and materials offer visitors opportunities to learn about and find meaning in Ross Lake NRA. Information would be provided through both formal and informal ranger-led programs and activities, exhibits, and diverse media (such as video, publications, website, social media, etc.).

Interpretive programs and materials would use current and dynamic methods to generate curiosity, passion, enthusiasm, and respect for park resources to build a sense of stewardship. The NPS would provide a balance of traditional facility-based interpretive programs and opportunities for people to talk with rangers and be immersed in the park. The NPS would improve traditional interpretive programming within existing facilities, possible new facilities, and select areas of Ross Lake NRA. The NPS would work with partners, including North Cascades Institute (NCI) and SCL, to develop, deliver, and evaluate the programs so that they convey a broad range of interpretive themes.

Visitor Orientation and Informal Education

A visit to Ross Lake NRA would be much as it is today, and Ross Lake NRA would continue to serve as a portal to the North Cascades wilderness. Efforts would go to creating a sense of arrival at destinations within Ross Lake NRA, such as Newhalem, Diablo Lake, and the Environmental Learning Center, by using existing developed areas more effectively. Visitor orientation and informal education would be enhanced through improved signage, multi-media, and exhibits at existing waysides, contact stations, and along interpretive trails. Improved signage would provide visitors a sense of approach and arrival as well as better orientation to the services and resources within Ross Lake NRA. Visitors would experience consistent messages from all contact sta-



Historic water wheel building in Diablo.

tions and partners as well as from pre-trip planning through the completion of their visit. The NPS would make efforts to provide additional training and materials to all NPS staff and volunteers so that the quality of information and informal education being provided is consistent throughout all visitor contact points.

Curriculum-based Programs

Curriculum-based programs help students, teachers, and parents use the park as a classroom in part to educate themselves about the North Cascades ecosystem and history of the area. Similar to interpretation, programs are intended to generate curiosity, passion, and respect for the park among students and build a sense of stewardship. Curriculum-based programs would emphasize low-impact recreation, hands-on activities, and increase relevance to students’ lives, using a broad range of educational and interpretive methods.

Outreach

The NPS would expand participation in outreach programs as one of many mechanisms to build local and regional stewardship of the North Cascades ecosystem. Outreach programs designed to build relevancy between the park and Latino and Hispanic members of surrounding communities would be expanded. The park would also expand collaboration with its partners to develop an increased number of pathways for youth from education and stewardship programs to employment opportunities.

Partnerships for Interpretation and Education

Partnerships help the interpretive messages reach a broader audience through programs, additional interpretive displays, and distribution of interpretive material and media, including retail. Partnerships also help expand stewardship by engaging volunteers in NPS projects and programs.

The NPS would enhance partnerships with Seattle City Light (SCL), British Columbia Parks, the Forest Service, North Cascades Institute, concessioners, and others to attract a broader more diverse audience of visitors and connect people to the outdoors and the North Cascades. The NPS would work with partners to develop and evaluate the interpretive and educational programs and messages and set a standard of excellence. The NPS would emphasize training and collaboration with partners to enhance NPS and partner capacity to develop, distribute and deliver relevant interpretive and educational services. The NPS would also seek to provide interpretive rangers co-located at partner visitor contact stations and at eastside entry points.

The partnership with SCL would be enhanced through working side-by-side in introducing the North Cascades to visitors and the variety of available activities in the area. This could include such partner activities as having NPS rangers provide interpretation on SCL’s Diablo Lake boat tours and assist SCL employees at the SCL visitor contact station in Newhalem. SCL could also enhance the Skagit General Store operations to not only meet the needs of SCL employees and residents, but also provide food and merchandise to visitors to the North Cascades NPS Complex. Other partnership endeavors could include adaptively reusing facilities in Newhalem for visitor services and NPS and partner organizations, such as food service, staff housing, and visitor lodging.

To continue and enhance the distinctive partnership with North Cascades Institute (NCI) in the areas of education and interpretation, the NPS would devote staffing, funding, and NPS resources to Environmental Learning Center (ELC) programs and operations. The NPS would develop and evaluate the interpretive and educational messages with NCI, setting a standard of excellence, and increasingly collaborate with NCI staff based from the ELC to distribute and deliver relevant interpretive and educational messages.

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

Mechanized and non-mechanized access and transportation would largely be maintained to and within Ross Lake NRA with some additions. Improved parking, pullouts, and waysides would provide visitors with vehicular and bicycle access to the frontcountry and some backcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA. Boat launches on the lakes and Skagit River would continue to allow access by both motorboats and paddle boats to Ross Lake NRA’s waterways.

Management of the North Cascades Highway

The North Cascades Highway is a designated National Forest Byway and Washington State Scenic Byway. The NPS would recommend nomination and designation of the North Cascades Highway as a National Scenic Byway to be reflective of its nationally significant resources.

The NPS would coordinate with WSDOT for management and maintenance of the North Cascades Highway. The NPS would coordinate with WSDOT, SCL, and NCI to determine appropriate conditions for when avalanche control would be necessary on the North Cascades Highway within the boundaries of Ross Lake NRA, as well as techniques for avalanche control, in order to prevent the use of explosives to minimize disturbance to wildlife and wilderness values. The NPS would consider solutions proactively in cooperation with WSDOT to avoid catastrophic channel avulsion, road

closure, and to minimize impacts to fish populations and other resources. The NPS would identify and agree upon appropriate mitigation sites for potential future actions. The NPS would work with its partners to reduce excessive noise resulting from motor vehicle use on the North Cascades Highway through education and enforcement.

During winter, the North Cascades Highway would continue to be closed to throughway vehicular access from the Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot to milepost 170, 14 miles west of Mazama, due to safety threats posed by avalanches and the high cost of plowing and wintertime road maintenance. Recreational activities, such as skiing and snowmobiling, would continue on this closed portion of the road. Overlooks and trailheads on the open portion of the highway within Ross Lake NRA would be plowed during the winter months to provide access for winter recreational activities.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change impacts and Ross Lake NRA’s carbon footprint would be addressed through a variety of strategies and actions including the reduction of emissions, use of green energy, adaptive management, and support for scientific research and educational programs. The NPS would be a leader in interpreting climate change and its effects on glaciers, watersheds, resources, and people.

The NPS would implement specific actions for reducing emissions and improving sustainability and efficiency. The NPS would phase out two-stroke motorboat engines throughout Ross Lake NRA. Existing vehicles, machinery, and equipment would be upgraded with appropriate technologies such as hybrid transmissions and the use of green energy, such as photovoltaic systems, biodegradable fuels and oils, or other emerging products and technologies. Non-motorized recreational activities, such as hiking, bicycling, and paddle boating, would also be encouraged in Ross Lake NRA.

The NPS would work with other agency, non-governmental organizations, and the public to develop ecosystem adaptation strategies to address anticipated changes to natural and cultural resources and the park infrastructure. Such adaptation planning is in a very early stage of development within the global community, but in general the body of knowledge

is currently coalescing around several key aspects of adaptation planning. These steps would include: 1) establish a measurable natural and cultural resource baseline, 2) develop key partnerships among land management agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals which would be affected by any actions taken, 3) identify and develop adaptation strategies, including identifying opportunities and projects that would increase ecosystem resiliency, 4) implement adaptation strategies, and 5) revisit and revise these strategies based on experience and updated science.

The NPS would support, encourage, and conduct scientific programs and research related to climate change. Programs and research would include understanding the effects of climate change on resources, natural processes, recreation,

Alternative B: Staffing	
Management and Administration	18 + 3 new
Maintenance	44 + 5 new
Interpretation/Education	13 + 3 new
Resource Management	43 + 8 new
Visitor Protection	15 + 3 new
Total Staff	155

operations, facilities, and hydropower.

The NPS would prioritize green facility design for any new construction, retrofitting, and upgrading of facilities to the greatest extent possible. The NPS would also prioritize contractors and concessioners that use sustainable practices and

Alternative B: Estimated Costs	
Annual Operating Costs	\$8,542,000
Staffing (FTE)	155
Total One-Time Costs	\$19,716,000
Facility Costs	\$17,306,000
Non-Facility Costs	\$2,410,000

local products when selecting contractors for construction, operations, and concessions activities.

OPERATIONS

Staffing

Alternative B would be implemented with the current staffing level (133) plus 22 full-time equivalent staff (FTEs). (One FTE is one person working 40 hours per week for one year, or the equivalent.) New positions would include maintenance workers, education and outreach specialists, ecologists, natural and cultural resource specialists, rangers, and administrative technicians to implement the preferred alternative.

Estimated Costs

The cost figures shown here and throughout the plan are intended only to provide an estimate of the relative costs of alternatives. Cost estimates for Alternative B are identified below.

Development Costs

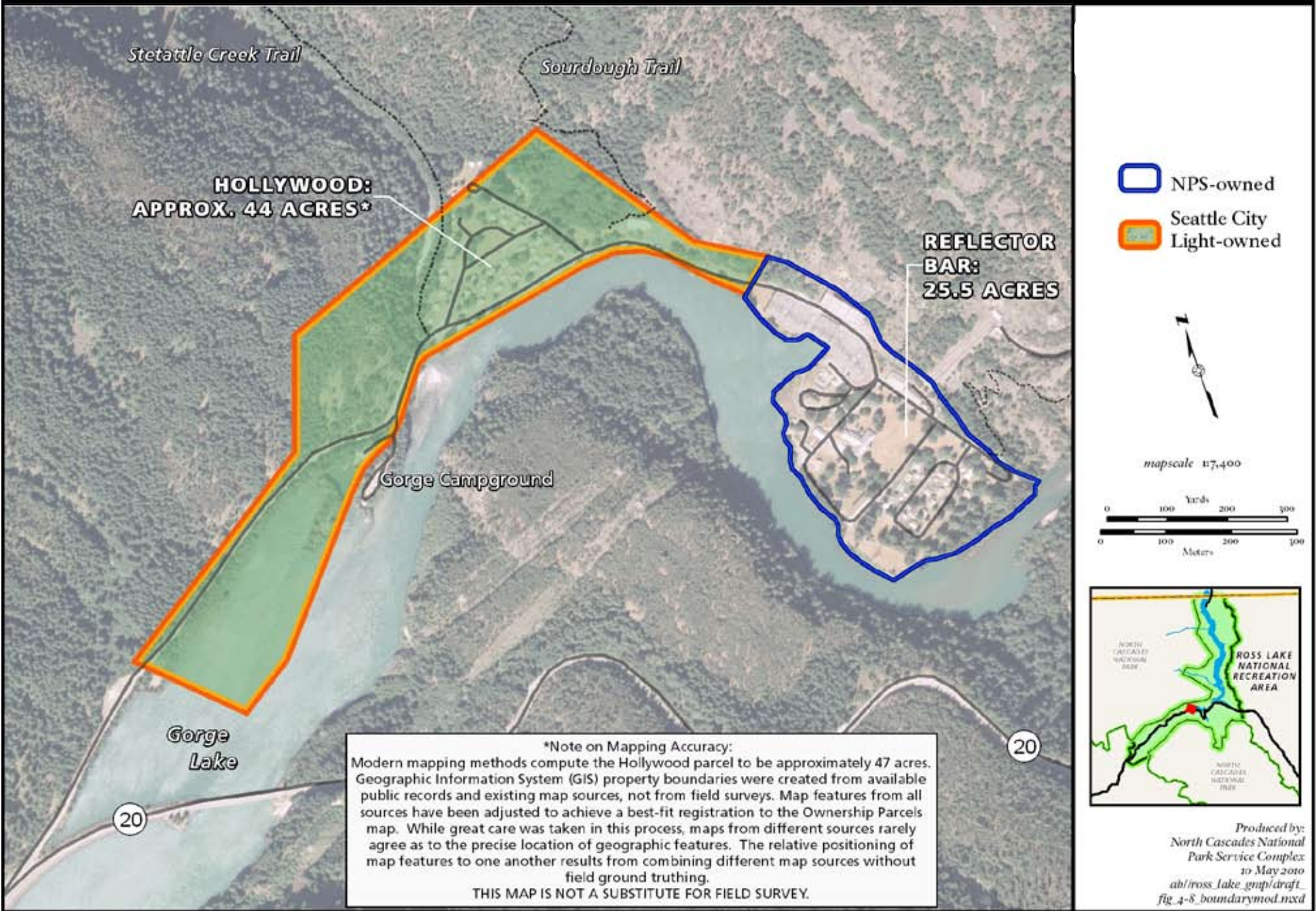
One time facility costs to implement the Preferred Alternative would be \$17,306,000 over the next 15-20 years. One-time facility costs include those for the design, construction, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of facilities, such as visitor facilities, roads, parking, and park operations and maintenance facilities. The one-time costs for Alternative B include such items as \$6,100,000 for a replacement bridge over the Skagit River to the North Cascades Visitor Center in Newhalem, \$1,745,000 for the Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot and improvements along the North Cascades Highway, \$860,000 for the Thornton Lakes Road removal and trail, and \$1,080,000 for new trails.

These costs do not reflect the cost of acquiring Hollywood, any facility changes at Hollywood, or increased operating cost of maintaining facilities at Hollywood.

BOUNDARY MODIFICATION

Hollywood and Reflector Bar

Under Alternative B, the NPS would relinquish, sell, or exchange Reflector Bar (approximately 25 acres) or grant an



Boundary Modifications for Alternative B, C, and D

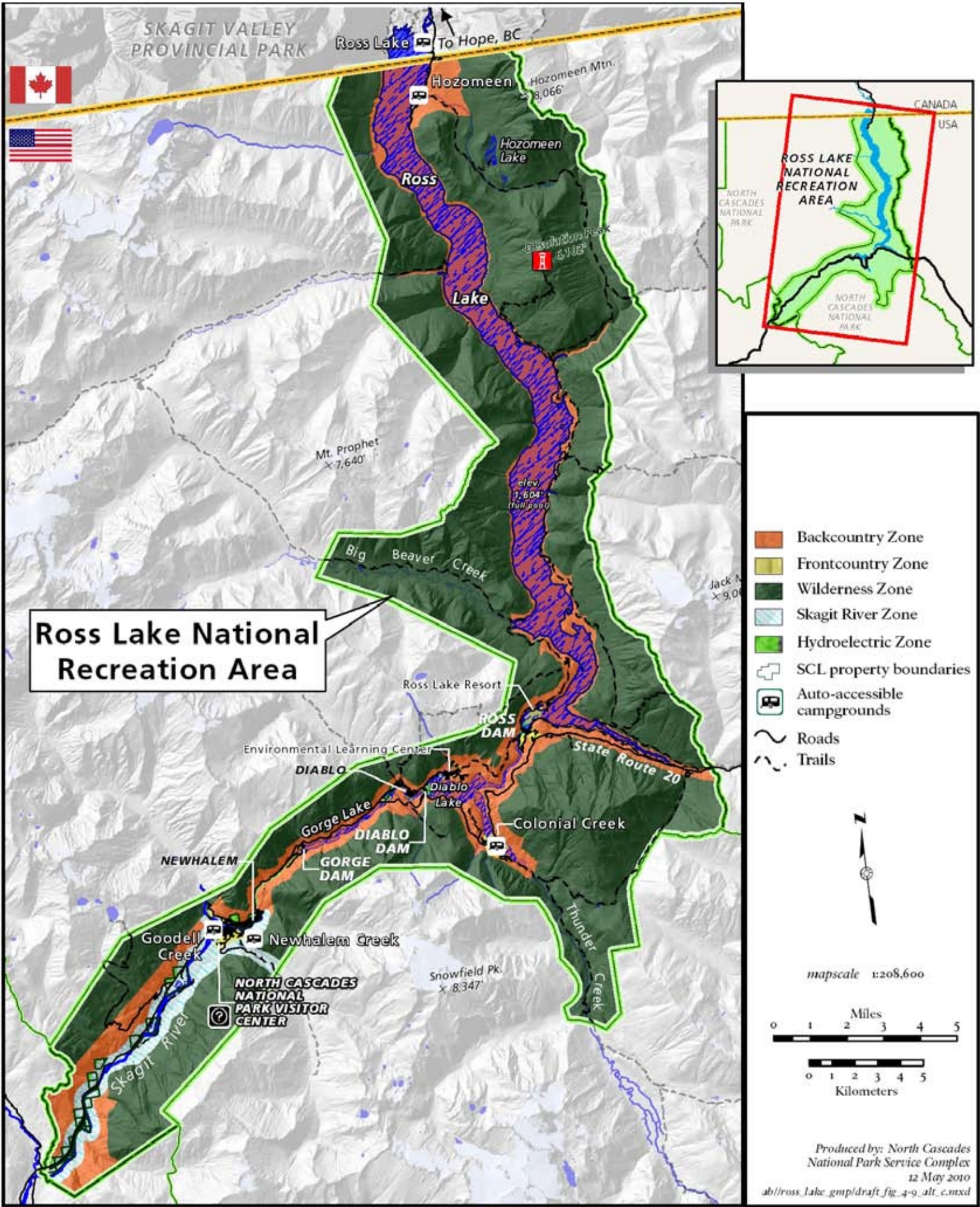
interest or give greater control therein to Seattle City Light, and would seek to acquire Hollywood (approximately 44 acres) through exchange or purchase. This land exchange or purchase would be reflective of the missions of the two entities: Seattle City Light to operate the hydroelectric facilities and the NPS to support visitors and preserve resources. The NPS would manage or cooperatively manage Hollywood to for visitor use.

In Alternative C, park management and education efforts would focus on broader ecosystem preservation and enhancement through coordinated regional and international environmental stewardship.

Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes the role of Ross Lake NRA in preserving the greater North Cascades ecosystem, which includes two additional National Park System units, two national forests, as well as provincial parks and protected areas across the Canadian border. The focus of visitor experiences would be linked to solitude, tranquility, natural soundscapes, and scenery through traditional outdoor activities. The NPS would actively manage to reduce habitat fragmentation throughout Ross Lake NRA by consolidating development, eliminating certain trails, and limiting construction of new facilities in undeveloped areas. Educational and interpretive opportunities would be primarily structured, and the NPS would increasingly rely on partners to deliver educational and interpretive programs both on-site and off-site.

Alternative C would provide visitors with recreational opportunities along the North Cascades Highway. However, there would be no net increase in miles of trail in Ross Lake NRA. In the backcountry and wilderness, Alternative C would focus on resource preservation and enhancement while limiting and/or restricting some recreational uses. Seaplanes would not be allowed to land on the reservoirs, and the NPS would recommend restricting commercial scenic air tours within Ross Lake NRA in order to protect and enhance soundscapes and wilderness character, experience, and values. In the event of a catastrophic weather event and the destruction of visitor facilities, natural geomorphological processes would be allowed to occur unimpeded wherever possible and affected facilities, including Colonial Creek and Goodell Creek Campgrounds, would be closed and restored to natural conditions.



Management Zoning Map: Alternative C

Management Zones

This alternative contains the most Backcountry zoned areas, including Diablo Lake. Only high use areas are zoned Frontcountry.

The configuration of the **Wilderness, Hydroelectric, and Skagit River** zones would be the same as Alternative B and D.

Frontcountry Zone: The Frontcountry Zone would extend along the entire length of the North Cascades Highway and encompass developed recreational sites and nearby areas. The Frontcountry Zone would encompass the North Cascades Visitor Center, Newhalem Creek Campground, Goodell Creek Campground, the Environmental Learning Center area, Colonial Creek Campground area, the Ferry Road corridor around Ross Dam, the southern portion of the Ross Lake to the log boom north of Ross Lake Resort, and the Hozomeen area. Along the North Cascades Highway, the Frontcountry Zone would include 100 feet on either side of the highway center line. Lands within this 200 foot corridor that are owned or managed through easements by either the WSDOT or SCL would also be zoned Frontcountry. This 200 foot corridor would allow for limited and necessary modifications to the North Cascades Highway, while ensuring that areas outside of this corridor are protected from more intensive development and use.

The Backcountry Zone: The Backcountry Zone would include areas that are dominated by natural conditions where recreational opportunities would focus on providing a sense of remoteness and immersion in nature within a mountainous wilderness setting. The Backcountry Zone would also conceptually function as a transition area between the Frontcountry and Wilderness Zones. In the Skagit River area, the Backcountry Zone would be located between the Skagit River Zone and the Wilderness Zone, including the Thornton Lakes access area, the Newhalem Creek roadway, Gorge Lake, most of Diablo Lake, upper Thunder Arm, and the entirety of Ross Lake from the second log boom near Ross Dam to the Hozomeen area.

The greatest proportion of Ross Lake NRA (about 73%) would be managed in the Wilderness Zone. The Frontcountry Zone would cover about 1.5%, and the Backcountry Zone would cover 22%. The Skagit River Zone would cover about 3%, and about .05% of Ross Lake NRA would be managed in the Hydroelectric Zone.

MANAGEMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS

North Cascades Highway Corridor

Under Alternative C, the North Cascades Highway corridor would continue to be managed as the primary access point for visitors. Redesigned and constructed entrance signs would afford a distinct sense of arrival and portals into the North Cascades. Dramatic viewsheds of the Skagit River, jagged mountain peaks, waterfalls, and reservoirs would introduce visitors to the North Cascades along the highway corridor. Visitors could then venture further into the North Cascades on back roads and trails that lead into the wilderness areas of the complex. The NPS would maintain existing day-use opportunities along the North Cascades Highway, such as day hiking, backpacking, water recreation, and interpretive and educational activities. Gorge and Diablo lakes within the North Cascades Highway corridor would continue to provide boating, fishing, camping, and sightseeing opportunities.

Existing campgrounds and campsites within the corridor would be maintained for visitor enjoyment of the frontcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA, but new camping areas would not be considered for construction.

Trails within the North Cascades Highway corridor would be maintained to provide dayhiking opportunities as well as launching points for more extensive hikes into remote areas of the North Cascades NPS Complex. There would be no net increase in miles of trails. Removal of trails within Ross Lake NRA could occur based on future needs and condition of natural resources, particularly wildlife. In the event that trails, such as the Newhalem Creek Trail, are removed from the trails inventory as part of subsequent planning efforts for the park units, such as an updated North Cascades NPS Complex wilderness management plan, the remaining portion of trails within Ross Lake NRA would also be removed and the areas would be rehabilitated and restored where appropriate.

Along the highway, parking and pullouts would be maintained in their current condition. The Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot would be redesigned and constructed for visitor safety but would not be enlarged. Within the existing footprint, a turn lane and single point of ingress and egress would be constructed. Capacity of the parking lot would decrease to approximately 39 passenger vehicles. Stock vehicles and RVs would not be allowed.



Desolation Lookout. Jack Kerouac spent time here as a fire lookout, and drew inspiration for two of his novels from his time in the North Cascades.

Under Alternative C, if there are facilities destroyed or damaged by severe weather events, those facilities would be closed and abandoned and the landscape would be rehabilitated. Visitors would be directed to other existing facilities. Some net loss of facilities and visitor opportunities could occur. In the event that Goodell Creek Campground is impacted by flooding, debris flow, and/or erosion, affected portions of the campgrounds would be closed as necessary. Visitors would be directed to other existing camping locations.

Newhalem

Facilities and visitor opportunities in Newhalem would be similar to Alternative A. The only difference would be the replacement and expansion of the access bridge to accommodate two way vehicular traffic and bicycle and pedestrian access. The new bridge would enable removal of the red light stop at each end of the bridge and improve safety for vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic.

Diablo Lake

Facilities and visitor opportunities in Diablo Lake area would be similar to Alternative A.

New facilities on the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center campus would be constructed as outlined in the original plan and environmental assessment. Facilities that have not yet been built would be constructed, including a dormitory, staff housing, and boathouse. Funding for the construction of these facilities would be provided by the North Cascades Institute.

In the event that Colonial Creek Campground is impacted by flooding, debris flow, and/or erosion, affected portions of the campgrounds would be closed as necessary. Visitors would be directed to other existing camping locations.

Diablo Townsite

Similar to Alternative B, the NPS would recommend Congressional legislation to authorize the NPS to relinquish, sell or exchange Reflector Bar to SCL, and the NPS would seek to acquire Hollywood through exchange or purchase. This land exchange would be reflective of the missions of the two entities: SCL to operate the hydroelectric facilities and the NPS to support visitors and preserve resources. The NPS would manage or cooperatively manage Hollywood for visitor use. Diablo Townsite is located in the Hydroelectric Zone. If the Hollywood area were to be managed or owned by the NPS, the Hollywood area of Diablo Townsite would be included in the Frontcountry Zone.

Following the resource preservation focus of this Alternative C, Hollywood would be preserved. Buildings, structures, and landscape would be stabilized, rehabilitated and adaptively used to preserve the historic character of the area. Hollywood district would be geared to providing a mix of NPS staff and partner housing and/or partner or concession operated rental houses for a variety of NPS, partner, and public opportunities. Public access for overnight accom-

modations would be within the context of being part of an existing program operated by partners, concessions or the NPS. Additional planning and analysis would be needed to determine these future uses, management structure, and site treatments. A site plan would be completed as an implementation plan as part of the successful execution of a land exchange of Hollywood with SCL.

Ross Lake

Visitor experience on and near Ross Lake would be maintained largely as it is today with limited vehicular access. During this planning process,

public comments have expressed the desire to preserve the unique character of Ross Lake by controlling access and use and limiting development.

Water recreation, camping, and hiking would continue to be the primary forms of recreation on and near Ross Lake. Motorboat and seaplane regulations would improve natural soundscapes, water quality, and the visual character of Ross Lake. Seaplane use and towing of people would be regulated. New lakefront campsites would not be constructed which would result in maintaining the existing capacity of campsites on Ross Lake.



Hikers admire ancient cedars along the Big Beaver Trail.

Ross Lake Resort would be maintained at its existing capacity. Any replacement facilities would follow design guidelines provided by the NPS and appropriate for the concession.

Hozomeen
.....

Hozomeen would be managed similar to Alternative B with the following differences. The new Hozomeen Ranger/Orientation Station would be constructed at a smaller scale and would not offer interpretive services. The NPS would not pursue the construction of a Centennial/Skyline II Trail in collaboration with B.C. Parks; existing trails would be maintained.

Marblemount Ranger Station
.....

The Marblemount Ranger Station would continue to provide buildings and space for NPS maintenance, resource management, administration, emergency response, and staff housing functions, as well as limited visitor services including the Wilderness Information Center. The Wilderness Information Center located at the Marblemount Ranger Station would continue to house the wilderness visitor contact station, wilderness ranger offices, communications center, and public restrooms. The facility was renovated and expanded in 2009 to allow for adequate space for all existing functions.

All Marblemount Ranger Station activities would be compatible with the significance of the National Register listed Marblemount Ranger Station Historic District and its associated structures, landscapes, and features.

Facility Design Standards
.....
(Same as Alternative B and D)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resource management would largely be the same as Alternative B. The primary difference from Alternative B would be that in Alternative C, the NPS would play a greater leadership role in the region for resource preservation and enhancement, allocating more of Ross Lake NRA’s resources to engage in resource protection efforts that expand beyond Ross Lake NRA boundaries.

Specific guidance for natural resource management includes new programs, plans, and approaches to management.

Ecosystem Functions and Processes
.....

Same as Alternative B except that channelization of rivers and streams would be avoided wherever possible. The NPS would also encourage WSDOT to construct a longer bridge across Goodell Creek on the North Cascades Highway to minimize the potential for channel avulsion.

Air Quality
.....
(Same as Alternative B and D)

Soundscapes
.....
(Same as Alternative B and D)

Lightscapes
.....
(Same as Alternative B)

Water Resources
.....
(Same as Alternative B and D)

Glaciology
.....
The NPS would expand research and monitoring on glaciers and glacial process that affect Ross Lake NRA and seek additional partners in that effort.

Soils/Erosion Control
.....
(Same as Alternative B and D)

Vegetation
.....
Same as Alternative B plus the NPS would lead efforts with adjacent landowners and jurisdictions on cooperative weed management, such as working with WSDOT to replace invasive non-native species with native species.

Wildlife
.....
The wildlife monitoring programs would be expanded to provide additional data on wildlife and take additional actions to protect wildlife from disease or human disturbance. The NPS would actively pursue restoring extirpated species in collaboration with partner agencies where feasible and monitor habitat conditions. The NPS would provide food storage facilities, such as bear boxes or portable bear resistant containers, for overnight camping to minimize the possibility of wildlife obtaining human food. The NPS would actively manage to reduce habitat fragmentation, such as consolidating development, eliminating certain trails, and limiting construction of new facilities in undeveloped areas.

Fisheries
.....
The NPS would develop a park-wide fisheries management plan which would include a monitoring component. The NPS would lead efforts with its partners to maintain native fish stocks in the reservoirs and tributaries and to protect spawning habitat on the Skagit River and its tributaries.

Science Communication and Volunteer Programs
.....
The NPS would develop a formalized program and process to communicate the results of research and monitoring efforts to a variety of audiences.

CULTURAL RESOURCES
Cultural resources, including archeology, historic structures, cultural landscapes, ethnohistory, and museum collections, would be managed through long-term stewardship and preservation. The NPS would expand identification, documentation, and research programs to learn more about human history in the North Cascades in all program areas, including archeology, museum collections, historic structures, cultural landscapes, and ethnohistory.

Specific guidance for cultural resource management includes new programs and approaches to management.

Archeology
.....
Management of the archeology program would be largely the same as in Alternative B, except that there would be less emphasis on interpreting the results and involving visitors in archeological projects.

Historic Structures
.....
The NPS would continue to identify, document, and treat historic structures according to preservation policies.

Cultural Landscapes
.....
The NPS would continue to identify, document, and treat cultural landscapes according to preservation policies.

Ethnohistory
.....
The NPS would continue to conduct oral histories and research investigations documenting human use of the North Cascades.

Museum Collections
.....
Capacity for collections and archives would be increased to protect paleoecological items and increasing collections and archives. Exhibits would be developed to interpret paleoecological findings and emerging collections.

WILDERNESS AND BACKCOUNTRY
Management of designated wilderness, potential wilderness, and all backcountry areas would focus on wilderness character, ecosystem preservation, and compatible recreational activities. The NPS would prioritize the protection of resources, natural ecosystem functions and processes, and significant cultural

resources. Visitors would be provided with opportunities for solitude, tranquility, and connections with the natural world. The backcountry permit system would continue to monitor and control numbers of visitors in these remote areas in order to minimize visitor impacts to resources.

In designated and potential wilderness, changes in campsite locations or trail re-routes would be permitted, provided there is no net increase in miles of trail.

RECREATION
Visitor experiences would include a mix of recreational activities and resource-focused activities while minimizing impacts to natural and cultural resources through increased education efforts and concentrating activities in defined high use areas. A wilderness experience would continue to be available to those who prefer solitude and tranquility in more remote areas of Ross Lake NRA. Interactions with uniformed staff would be widely available, particularly in frontcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA.

Boating
.....
The NPS would manage boats within Ross Lake NRA the same as under Alternative B with the following differences: the NPS would not consider allowing a second water taxi to operate on Ross Lake, and there would be improved information and outreach for self-propelled boaters to encourage their use throughout Ross Lake NRA.

Hunting and Fishing
.....
Hunting would continue in Ross Lake NRA. Hunting regulations would continue to be coordinated with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. Lead-based ammunition would be prohibited. The NPS would improve visitor education about hunting awareness and visitor safety. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife would continue to regulate fishing in Ross Lake NRA.

Sport Climbing
.....
(Same as Alternative A)



Candystick, or sugarstick (*allotropa virgata*) growing along a trail.



A day hiker on an early season hike in Ross Lake NRA.

Seaplanes

Seaplanes would be prohibited from landing and taking off on all lakes in Ross Lake NRA. 36 CFR 7.69 would be updated and modified to clarify these changes.

Seaplanes are visually and audibly noticeable and attract attention away from the backcountry character of Ross Lake. Seaplane noise is most intense during a plane’s take-off, impacting the natural ambient soundscape. For these reasons, seaplane use would not be allowed in Ross Lake NRA under Alternative C. While it is recognized that seaplane users could fly over these areas, landing and take-off would be prohibited in order to maintain the ambient character. Updated management guidance for seaplane use on Ross Lake is in response to public comments about maintaining the backcountry and wilderness character of the Ross Lake area and emphasizing non-motorized recreation and natural soundscapes. The NPS considered the totality of public comments on the character of Ross Lake, soundscapes, and seaplane use as well as the relatively small numbers of seaplane users compared to non-seaplane users. This guidance for Alternative C reflects the intent of this alternative to prioritize protecting natural resource conditions.

Commercial Scenic Air Tours

Commercial scenic air touring would be managed to protect soundscapes and the recreational experiences of visitors on the ground. The NPS would coordinate with the Federal Aviation Administration to develop an air tour management pan. The NPS would request that the Federal Aviation Administration prohibit all commercial scenic air tours over Ross Lake NRA. Concern about overflights, and specifically air tours, was expressed by the public during the planning process. Commenters wanted to make sure that the remote and wilderness character of Ross Lake NRA is not diminished by the presence of air tours.

Backcountry Permit System

Backcountry permits would continue to be obtained in person at additional designated locations, and in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. A portion of permits would be held for walk-ins.

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

Ross Lake NRA would be a platform and classroom for education about the North Cascades ecosystem. Opportunities in the NRA would be primarily structured, but some opportunities for self-guided exploration and discovery could occur in the Frontcountry Zone, primarily around existing centers of visitation. Enhanced off-site interpretation and education programs would be provided through partners. NPS would develop and evaluate interpretive and educational messages and programs with partners and increasingly rely on partners to deliver this programming.

Interpretation

Interpretive messages would focus on topics that convey the importance of preserving the North Cascades ecosystem.

Interpretive programs and materials would use the most current and dynamic methods to generate curiosity, passion, enthusiasm, and respect for resources to build a sense of stewardship. The NPS would improve traditional interpretive programming within existing facilities by developing, delivering and evaluating targeted messages about ecosystem preservation. The NPS would increasingly rely on effective use of technology as a tool to reach a broader audience as opposed to direct contact with NPS staff.

Visitor Orientation and Informal Education

Visitor orientation and informal education would be enhanced through improved signage, multi-media, and exhibits at existing waysides, contact stations and along interpretive trails. Improved signage would provide visitors with a sense of approach and arrival as well as better orientation to the services and resources within Ross Lake NRA.

Visitors would experience consistent messages from all contact stations and partners as well as from pre-trip planning to the completion of their visit; however, fewer resources would be dedicated to training partners and staffing locations outside Ross Lake NRA.

Curriculum-based Programs

Curriculum-based programs would focus on messages that convey the importance of preserving the North Cascades ecosystem. These programs would emphasize low impact practices for recreating in sensitive ecosystems and include hands-on activities that make learning relevant to students’ lives.

Outreach

(Same as Alternative B)

Partnerships for Interpretation and Education

The NPS would enhance partnerships with SCL, British Columbia Parks, the Forest Service, North Cascades Institute, concessioners, and others to enable visitors to have a lasting connection with the North Cascades and their park experi-



The fishing pier on Diablo Lake at Colonial Creek Campground is popular with visitors.

ence. The NPS would develop and evaluate the interpretive and educational programs and messages and set a standard of excellence, but rely increasingly on partners to distribute and deliver the messages.

The NPS would devote staffing, funding and NPS resources to Environmental Learning Center (ELC) programs and operations. The NPS would develop and evaluate the interpretive and educational messages with NCI, setting a standard of excellence, but rely increasingly on NCI to distribute and deliver interpretive and educational messages focused on conveying the importance of preserving the North Cascades ecosystem.

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

Mechanized and non-mechanized access and transportation would largely be maintained to and within Ross Lake NRA with some changes.

Management of the North Cascades Highway

Management of the North Cascades Highway would largely be the same as Alternative B with the following differences: overlooks and trailheads would continue to go unplowed during the winter months, and the NPS would work with WSDOT to regulate snowmobile use on the closed portion of the road.

CLIMATE CHANGE

(Same as Alternative B and D)

OPERATIONS

Staffing

Alternative C would be implemented with the current staffing level (133) plus 18 full-time equivalent staff (FTEs). (One FTE is one person working 40 hours per week for one year, or the equivalent.) New positions would include maintenance workers, education and outreach specialists, ecologists, natural and cultural resource specialists, rangers, and administrative technicians to implement Alternative C.

Alternative C: Staffing	
Management and Administration	18 + 3 new
Maintenance	44 + 3 new
Interpretation/Education	13 + 2 new
Resource Management	43 + 8 new
Visitor Protection	15 + 2 new
Total Staff	151

Estimated Costs

The cost figures shown here and throughout this plan are intended only to provide an estimate of the relative costs of alternatives.

Alternative C: Estimated Costs	
Annual Operating Costs	\$8,540,000
Staffing (FTE)	151
Total One-Time Costs	\$10,302,000
Facility Costs	\$8,435,000
Non-Facility Costs	\$ 1,867,000

Development Costs

One time facility costs to implement Alternative C would be \$8,435,000 over the next 15-20 years. One-time facility costs include those for the design, construction, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of facilities, such as visitor facilities, roads, parking, and park operations and maintenance facilities. The one-time costs for Alternative C include such items as \$6,100,000 for a replacement bridge over the Skagit River to the North Cascades Visitor Center in Newhalem and \$860,000 for the Thornton Lakes Road removal and trail.

These costs do not reflect the cost of acquiring Hollywood, any facility changes at Hollywood, or increased operating cost of maintaining facilities at Hollywood.

BOUNDARY MODIFICATION

(Same as Alternative B and D)

Alternative D

The emphasis of NPS management would be to diversify Ross Lake NRA’s visitor base and build stewardship through more hands-on/experiential recreation and educational opportunities. Interpretive and educational programs would be offered by both the NPS and partners with expanded offerings in the backcountry and limited areas of the wilderness zones. NPS management would continue to protect resources and minimize impacts from visitor use.

Overnight accommodations, several new trails, and additional visitor amenities would expand visitor opportunities in Ross Lake NRA primarily along the North Cascades Highway corridor. The Wilderness Information Center would be moved to an easily accessible location on Highway 20. A wide variety of recreational activities would be allowed throughout Ross Lake NRA, and there would be fewer restrictions on recreational activities than the other action alternatives. An online reservation system for permits would allow visitors the opportunity for advance trip planning. In the event of a catastrophic event and the destruction of visitor facilities, the NPS would close affected facilities and build new facilities at other locations to limit net loss of visitor opportunities.

Alternative D focuses on improving connections between visitors and the outdoors through a variety of enhanced recreation and learning opportunities.

MANAGEMENT ZONES

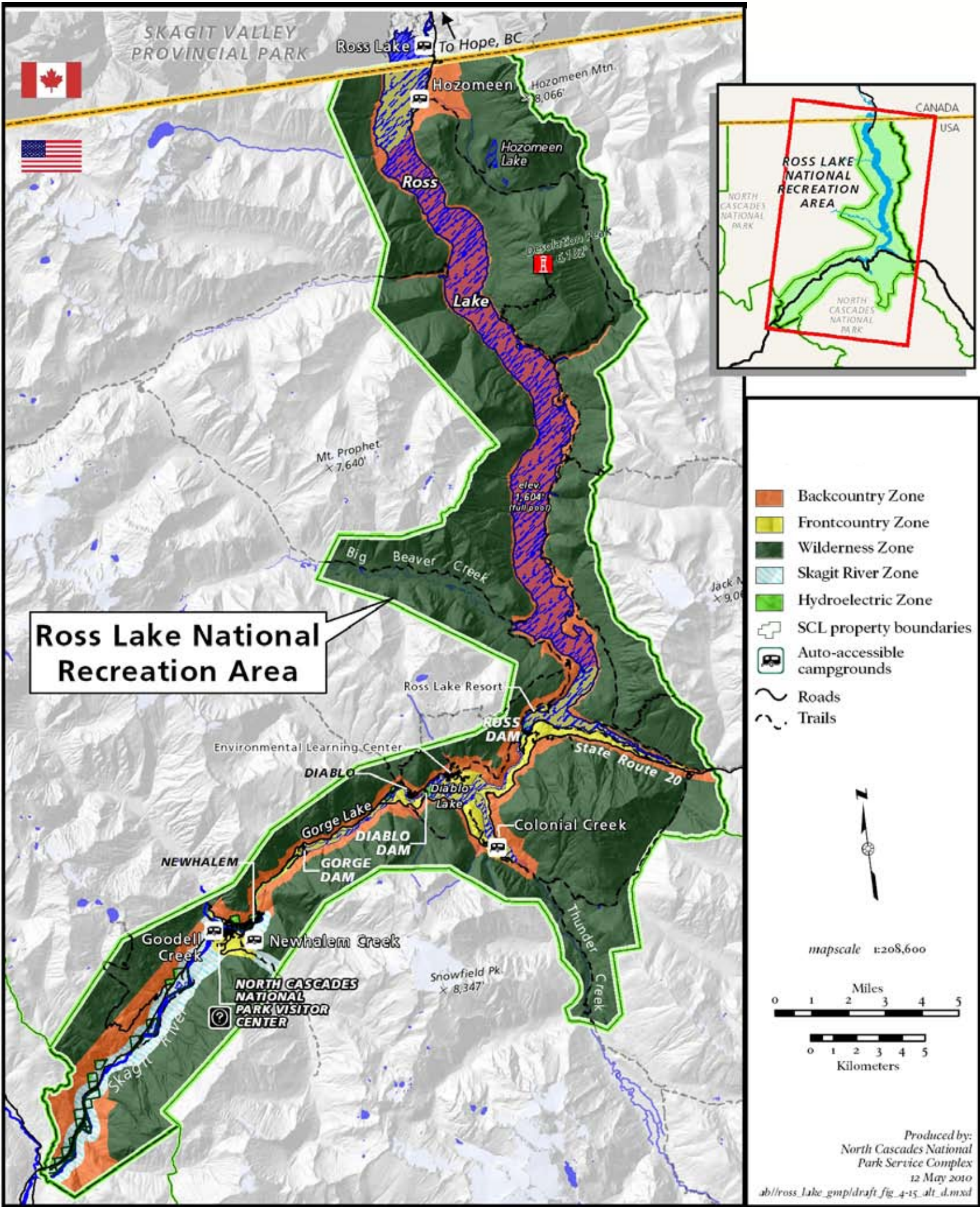
This alternative contains the most Frontcountry zoned areas, including the entire North Cascades Highway corridor, Diablo Lake, Hozomeen, and near Ross Dam.

The configuration of the **Wilderness, Hydroelectric, and Skagit River** zones would be the same as Alternative B and C.

Frontcountry Zone: The Frontcountry Zone would extend along the entire length of the North Cascades Highway and encompass developed recreational sites and nearby areas. The Frontcountry Zone would encompass the North Cascades Visitor Center, Newhalem Creek Campground, Goodell campgrounds, Gorge Lake, Diablo Lake, the Environmental Learning Center area, Colonial Creek Campground area, Thunder Knob, Thunder Point, the swathe of land between Diablo Canyon and the North Cascades Highway, the southern portion of the Ross Lake area to Cougar Island and Ruby Arm, the Hozomeen area, and the

northern portion of Ross Lake from the international border to Silver Creek. Along the North Cascades Highway, the Frontcountry Zone would include 100 feet on either side of the highway center line. Lands within this 200 foot corridor that are owned or managed through easements by either the WSDOT or SCL would be zoned Frontcountry. This 200 foot corridor would allow for limited and necessary modifications to the North Cascades Highway, while ensuring that areas outside of this corridor are protected from more intensive development and use.

Backcountry Zone: The Backcountry Zone would include areas that are dominated by natural conditions where recreational opportunities would focus on providing a sense of remoteness and immersion in nature within a mountainous wilderness setting. The Backcountry Zone would also conceptually function as a transition area between the Frontcountry and Wilderness Zones. In the Skagit River area, the Backcountry Zone would be located between the Skagit River Zone and the Wilderness Zone, including the Thorn-



Management Zoning Map: Alternative D

ton Lakes access area, upper Thunder Arm, and expanses of land surrounding Diablo Lake and lower Ross Lake. The Backcountry Zone would also cover the entire surface of the lake and shoreline from Cougar Island to Silver Creek on Ross Lake.

The greatest proportion of Ross Lake NRA (about 73%) would be managed in the Wilderness Zone. The Frontcountry Zone would cover about 6%, and the Backcountry Zone would cover 17.5%. The Skagit River Zone would cover about 3%, and about .05% of Ross Lake NRA would be managed in the Hydroelectric Zone.

MANAGEMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS

North Cascades Highway Corridor

The North Cascades Highway corridor would be managed similar to Alternative B with the following differences.

Trails within the North Cascades Highway corridor would provide dayhiking opportunities as well as launching points for more extensive hikes into remote areas of the North Cascades NPS Complex. In addition to trails in Alternative B, new trails could include the Goodell Landslide Trail, Skagit River Portage Trail at the S curves, Happy Creek Falls Trail, Skagit Talc Mine Trail, and a spur trail to a waterfall from Stetattle Creek Trail.

Along the highway, parking and pullouts would be enhanced to improve visitor access and safety. The Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot would be redesigned and constructed for visitor safety. The footprint would be enlarged to accommodate a turn lane, single point of ingress and egress, 12 pull-through spaces for oversized vehicles, and capacity for approximately 43 passenger vehicles. New pullouts and waysides would be considered for several specific areas along the North Cascades Highway at Newhalem, Devil’s Elbow, Gorge Lake, and Ross Lake.

Under Alternative D, in the event that there are facilities destroyed or damaged by severe weather events, those facilities could be closed, abandoned, and the landscape would be rehabilitated. New facilities would be constructed at other locations to limit net loss of facilities and visitor opportunities.

In the event that Goodell Creek Campground is impacted by flooding, debris flow, and/or erosion, affected portions of the campground would be abandoned and rehabilitated. To limit net loss of camping opportunities, new or expanded camping facilities would be considered at other identified locations.

Newhalem

Diablo Lake

In the event that Colonial Creek Campground is impacted by severe weather events, affected portions of the campground could be closed as necessary. Proactive management actions could be taken to prevent Colonial Creek Campground from being impacted by flooding, debris flow, and erosion. The NPS would strive to preserve camping opportunities at Colonial Creek. If reconstruction at Colonial Creek is not feasible, the sites lost would be replaced, preferably at another already disturbed location. To limit net loss of camp sites, new or expanded camping facilities would be considered at other identified locations that are not prone to severe hazards.

Diablo Townsite

Similar to Alternative B, the NPS would recommend Congressional legislation to authorize the NPS to relinquish, sell or exchange Reflector Bar to SCL, and the NPS would seek to acquire Hollywood through exchange or purchase. This land exchange would be reflective of the missions of the two entities: SCL to operate the hydroelectric facilities and the NPS to support visitors and preserve resources. The NPS would manage or cooperatively manage Hollywood for visitor use. Diablo Townsite is located in the Hydroelectric Zone. If the Hollywood area were to be managed or owned by the NPS, the Hollywood area of Diablo Townsite would be included in the Frontcountry Zone.

Hollywood would be geared to overnight opportunities for the public. Hollywood district buildings, structures, and landscape would be demolished and new camping and overnight facilities would be constructed, such as tent cabins and RV camping. National Register listed resources and properties would be preserved and adaptively used and/or interpreted for the public. A site plan would be completed as an implementation plan as part of the successful execution of a land exchange of Hollywood with SCL.

Ross Lake

Ross Lake would be managed similar to Alternative B, however regulations for seaplane use and towing of people would be different under this alternative (See the Recreation



Canoeing on a calm day on Ross Lake.

section of Alternative D). Additionally, the Roland Point Loop Trail would be constructed in the lower Ross Lake area.

Hozomeen

Marblemount Ranger Station

The Marblemount Ranger Station would continue to provide buildings and space for maintenance, resource management, administration, emergency response, and staff housing functions.

The public functions of the wilderness center would be moved to a location in the town of Marblemount on the North Cascades Highway; these functions would include visitor contact and wilderness office space. The communication center and search and rescue cache would stay within the Marblemount Ranger Station.

Employee housing at Marblemount would be improved through the construction of a permanent group housing structure to provide approximately 20-30 additional bed spaces; this could be a dormitory or small apartments and a site plan would be needed. This addition would fulfill a critical seasonal need for employee housing where it is operationally needed.

All Marblemount Ranger Station activities would be compatible with the significance of the National Register listed Marblemount Ranger Station Historic District and its associated structures, landscapes, and features.



Backpackers look down at Panther Creek from the bridge along the Panther Creek Trail.



Visitors look out at the water from one of 19 campsites on Ross Lake.

Facility Design Standards

(Same as Alternative B and C)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resource management would largely be the same as Alternative B with the differences listed below.

Ecosystem Functions and Processes

Same as Alternative B except that bank hardening and channelization in limited areas could be used to protect key facilities and recreation access points (such as Rhode Creek). Preferred techniques however, would include rock barbs, engineered log jams, and bioengineering. Emergency repairs that are necessary would be mitigated at the earliest opportunity.

Air Quality

(Same as Alternative B and C)

Soundscapes

(Same as Alternative B and C)

Lightscapes

The NPS would work with SCL to reduce light pollution in Diablo and Newhalem. The NPS would complete an inventory of night sky conditions. The NPS would factor in night sky for lighting new construction and would replace existing lighting as needed.

Water Resources

(Same as Alternative B and C)

Glaciology

The NPS would expand research and monitoring on glaciers and glacial process that affect Ross Lake NRA and seek additional partners in that effort. The NPS would be a leader in interpreting glaciology and the connections between glaciers and Ross Lake NRA to the public and seek additional partners in that effort.

Soils/Erosion Control

(Same as Alternative B and C)

Vegetation

The NPS would contain existing invasive non-native species and focus eradication efforts on new populations, as feasible.

Wildlife

The wildlife monitoring programs would be expanded to provide additional data on wildlife and take additional actions to protect wildlife from disease or human disturbance. The NPS would continue to participate in restoring extirpated species where feasible and monitor habitat conditions. The NPS would provide food storage facilities, such as bear boxes or portable bear resistant containers, for overnight camping to minimize the possibility of wildlife obtaining human food. However, the NPS would consider actions that could lead to increased habitat fragmentation, such as new trails and expanded camping opportunities.

Fisheries

(Same as Alternative B)

Science Communication and Volunteer Programs

(Same as Alternative B)

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resource management would be similar to Alternative A and B. Differences are listed below.

Archeology

The archeology program would continue to focus on identification, investigation, documentation, and protection of archeological sites. The program would also expand opportunities for visitors to participate in archeological projects and would develop interpretive materials based on research results of human use in the North Cascades.

Historic Structures

(Same as Alternative B)

Cultural Landscapes

(Same as Alternative B)

Ethnohistory

(Same as Alternative B)

Museum Collections

Same as Alternative A plus the NPS would provide additional public access to collections items both online and on-site. The scope of exhibits, exhibit areas, and travelling exhibits would be increased to provide open display of collection objects and archives.

WILDERNESS AND BACKCOUNTRY

Management of designated wilderness and potential wilderness would focus on wilderness character, ecosystem preservation, and compatible recreational activities. The NPS would prioritize the protection of resources, natural ecosystem functions and processes, and significant cultural resources. Visitors would be provided with opportunities for solitude, tranquility, and connections with the natural world. The backcountry permit system would continue to monitor and control numbers of visitors in these remote areas in order to minimize visitor impacts to resources.

In designated and potential wilderness, changes in campsite locations or trail re-routes would be permitted, provided there is no net increase in miles of trail.

RECREATION

It would be a high priority for the NPS to provide a wide range of accessible recreation activities throughout Ross Lake NRA. More and different opportunities to easily access and learn about the North Cascades would be offered, such as guided and group activities. A remote wilderness experience would also be available to those who prefer solitude and tranquility. Interactions with uniformed staff would be widely available, particularly in frontcountry areas of Ross Lake NRA.



Canoeing on the Skagit River.

While recreation would be managed similar to Alternative B, there are some key differences. Of the four alternatives, Alternative D would offer the widest range of recreational opportunities.

Boating

Boat management would largely be the same as Alternative B with the following differences:

The NPS would establish horsepower, boat size, and/or speed limits only on Ross Lake and in Diablo Canyon for concessions and private boats.

Towing of people, such as water skiing, would be allowed in the Frontcountry Zone, including Gorge Lake, Diablo Lake, and from the international border with Canada at Hozomeen to Silver Creek and from Cougar Island and Ruby Arm to within 1,000 feet of Ross Dam or the log boom closest to the dam.

On the Skagit River, motorboats would continue to be allowed.

Hunting and Fishing

(Same as Alternative B)

Sport Climbing

(Same as Alternative B)

Seaplanes

Same as Alternative B, except that the primary difference between Alternative B and Alternative D is that Alternative D provides slightly more Frontcountry zoned areas on Ross Lake for seaplane use.

Commercial Scenic Air Tours

Commercial scenic air touring would be managed to protect soundscapes and the recreational experiences of visitors on the ground. The NPS would coordinate with the Federal Aviation Administration to develop an air tour management plan that could establish use levels for commercial scenic air tours.

Backcountry Permit System

(Same as Alternative B)

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

Ross Lake NRA would be used as a platform and classroom for education about the North Cascades, its history and resources, as well as civic engagement, stewardship, and public leadership. There would be opportunities for both structured and unstructured activities, including self-exploration and discovery. Activities would focus in the Frontcountry Zone and some would expand into parts of the Backcountry Zone. Some activities could also be appropriate in limited areas of the Wilderness Zone. The NPS would lead efforts to develop, conduct and evaluate interpretive and educational programs. The NPS would consult and collaborate with partners when appropriate, and partners would assist the NPS in delivering educational messages and programs.

Educational and interpretive programs would fluctuate and cater to different audiences during the year. During the spring and fall seasons, programs and associated facilities would be geared to curriculum-based education and school programs. These programs would focus on immersion, hands-on experiential learning, and environmental stewardship. During the summer season, programs would be geared to families through on-site and outreach programs.

Interpretation

Interpretive programs and materials would use the most current and dynamic methods to generate curiosity, passion, enthusiasm and respect for park resources to build a sense of stewardship. The NPS would provide extensive opportunities for immersion and contact with park staff and resources. The NPS would improve traditional interpretive programming within existing facilities, possible new facilities, and throughout Ross Lake NRA. The NPS would develop, deliver, and evaluate the programs so that they convey a broad range of interpretive and educational themes.



Camping at May Creek.

Visitor Orientation and Informal Education

(Same as Alternative B)

Curriculum- based Programs

(Same as Alternative B)

Outreach

(Same as Alternative B)

Partnerships for Interpretation and Education

Same as Alternative B plus the NPS would devote additional interpretive staffing to Environmental Learning Center (ELC) programs and operations. The NPS would develop and evaluate the interpretive and educational messages with

North Cascades Institute (NCI), setting a standard of excellence, and increasingly collaborate with NCI at the ELC to distribute and deliver relevant interpretive and educational messages.

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

(Same as Alternative B)

CLIMATE CHANGE

(Same as Alternative B and C)

OPERATIONS

Staffing

Alternative D would be implemented with the current staffing level (133) plus 22 full-time equivalent staff (FTEs). (One FTE is one person working 40 hours per week for one year, or the equivalent.) New positions would include maintenance workers, education and outreach specialists, ecologists, natural and cultural resource specialists, rangers, and administrative technicians to implement Alternative D.

Alternative D: Staffing	
Management and Administration	18 + 3 new
Maintenance	44 + 4 new
Interpretation/Education	13 + 3 new
Resource Management	43 + 7 new
Visitor Protection	15 + 5 new
Total Staff	155

Estimated Costs

The cost figures shown here and throughout the plan are intended only to provide an estimate of the relative costs of alternatives.

Alternative D: Estimated Costs	
Annual Operating Cost	\$8,461,000
Staffing (FTE)	155
Total One-Time Costs	\$20,807,000
Facility Costs	\$18,296,000
Non-Facility Costs	\$ 2,511,000

Development Costs

One time facility costs to implement Alternative D would be \$18,296,000 over the next 15-20 years. One-time facility costs include those for the design, construction, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of facilities, such as visitor facilities, roads, parking, and park operations and maintenance facilities. The one-time costs for Alternative D include such items as \$6,100,000 for a replacement bridge over the Skagit River to the North Cascades Visitor Center in Newhalem, \$1,775,000 for the Ross Dam Trailhead parking lot and improvements along the North Cascades Highway, \$860,000 for the Thornton Lakes Road removal and trail, and \$1,280,000 for new trails.

These costs do not reflect the cost of acquiring Hollywood, any facility changes at Hollywood, or increased operating cost of maintaining facilities at Hollywood.

BOUNDARY MODIFICATION

(Same as Alternative B and C)



View of Panther Potholes from Fourth of July Pass.

Identification of the Environmentally Preferred Alternative

In accordance with NPS Director’s Order-12, Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making, the NPS is required to identify the “environmentally preferred alternative” in environmental documents. The environmentally preferred alternative is generally described as “the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources (46 FR 18026 – 46 FR 18038).”

Alternative B, the Preferred Alternative, would also be the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. In this alternative, park management would enhance efforts to protect and preserve natural and cultural resources, with an

emphasis on wilderness protection, through leadership in integrated resource protection fulfilling resource preservation goals while also providing a range of quality recreation, interpretation, and education opportunities for visitors that are consistent and appropriate in a national park setting. Leadership and enhanced partnerships with other agencies and organizations such as the North Cascades Institute (NCI) and Seattle City Light (SCL) would enhance resource preservation efforts and opportunities for visitors. Operational and facility management strategies that include making better use of facilities along the North Cascades Highway as opposed to new construction as much as possible also provide a more sustainable future for Ross Lake NRA, fulfilling sustainability goals.

resource in the parks that “would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values” (NPS Management Policies 2001, §1.4.5).

The determination of impairment is closely tied to the outcome of the natural and cultural resource impact analysis. This determination is also made with a parallel consideration of a unit’s legislative mandates (its purpose and significance), and resource management objectives as defined in relevant unit plans. Impairment would be a major adverse impact from actions taken inside Ross Lake NRA.

The impact analysis for this document shows that no values or resources within Ross Lake NRA would be impaired by actions considered under any alternative.

Mitigation Measures Common to All Alternatives

Mitigation measures are the practicable and appropriate methods that would be used under any alternative to avoid and/or minimize harm to natural and cultural resources, wilderness, visitors and the visitor experience, and socioeconomic resources when no other management alternative exists (such as avoidance). The mitigation measures have been developed using existing laws and regulations, best management practices, conservation measures, and other known techniques from past and present work in and around Ross Lake NRA. Mitigation measures are described in the draft GMP/EIS.

Alternatives and Actions Dismissed from Further Consideration

The Council on Environmental Quality guidelines for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to analyze all “reasonable” alternatives that substantially meet the purpose and need for the proposed action. Under NEPA, an alternative may be elimi-

User Capacity

General management plans are required to identify and implement visitor carrying capacities for all areas of a park. The National Park Service defines visitor carrying capacity as the type and level of visitor use that can be accommodated while sustaining desired park resource conditions and achieving desired visitor experiences consistent with the purpose the park. The overall strategy of implementing a carrying capacity process is a tiered approach to monitoring indicators and managing to standards and conditions. At the general management plan level of decision-making, desired resource conditions are maintained and desired visitor experiences are achieved through the use of management zone prescriptions. Visitor capacity includes managing all components of visitor use (levels, types, behavior, timing, and distribution). User capacity prescriptions in the form of indicators, standards, appropriate types of monitoring, and potential management actions are described for each management zone in the draft GMP/EIS.

Environmental Consequences

The potential effects of the four alternatives have been analyzed for natural resources, wild and scenic rivers, backcountry (including wilderness), cultural resources, transportation, visitor experiences, land uses from Seattle City Light operations, NPS operations, and the socioeconomic environment. The analysis is the basis for comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives. Impacts are described in terms of whether they are negligible, minor, moderate, or major, and how long they would last. The complete analysis of environmental consequences and cumulative impacts that could result from implementation of the four alternatives is described in the draft GMP/EIS.

Impairment of Park Resources or Values

The Organic Act prohibits the National Park Service from impairing resources and values within the National Park System. An impairment is an impact to a natural or cultural



Hikers measure the old-growth cedar trees up the Big Beaver Trail. Photo by Bonnie Seifried.

nated from detailed study for the following reasons [40 CFR 1504.14 (a)]:

- “technical or economic infeasibility;” the inability to meet project objectives or resolve need for the project
- duplication of other less environmentally damaging alternatives
- conflicts with an up-to-date valid plan, statement of purpose and significance, or other policy; therefore would require a major change in that plan or policy to implement
- environmental impacts too great

The following alternatives or actions were considered during the alternatives development phase of the project, but were rejected because they met one or more of the above criteria.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL BOUNDARY MODIFICATIONS

The GMP planning team evaluated lands adjacent to Ross Lake NRA, and within the boundaries of the NRA but presently owned and managed by Seattle City Light in accordance with 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act (16 USC 1a-7(b)) and NPS Management Policies 2006 that mandate consideration of potential modifications to the external boundaries of national park units when developing or updating general management plans. The planning team also considered appropriate designations for Ross Lake NRA.

Except for the Hollywood area of Diablo Townsite which is proposed for a land exchange with SCL under alternatives B, C and D, no other boundary modifications to Ross Lake NRA would be proposed in the alternatives.

OTHER AREAS CONSIDERED FOR BOUNDARY MODIFICATION BUT DISMISSED FROM CONSIDERATION

North Cascades National Park

The NPS dismissed from consideration changing the designation of Ross Lake NRA to North Cascades National Park. Ross Lake NRA was created as a separate unit primarily to accommodate Seattle City Light’s existing and proposed hydroelectric developments. These hydroelectric facilities (three large dams and reservoirs) have dramatically altered the natural landscape and hydrologic systems of the Skagit River and its tributaries. Congress also created Ross Lake NRA to enable enjoyment of a wider variety of recreational activities, including hunting and hiking with pets that are prohibited in North Cascades National Park. Neither activity is creating a notable resource management or public safety concern.

The “National Park” name is generally associated with large areas with a variety of resources where natural resources are largely unaltered or in their natural state. “National Parks” that do have large-scale hydroelectric facilities were established in the early years of the national park system, such as Yosemite and Grand Teton, and before the “National Recreation Area” designation came into common naming practice. When North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake NRA were designated in 1968, areas with reservoirs were generally named “National Recreation Areas,” such as Bighorn Canyon NRA (1966) and Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity NRA (1972). Congress chose to designate the area a “National Recreation Area” based on its significant resources, existing hydroelectric facilities, and range of superlative recreational opportunities.

The NPS dismissed from consideration expanding the boundary of Ross Lake NRA into either the north or south units of North Cascades National Park. Such an expansion would reduce the area of the national park proper, detract from the purposes and significance of the national park, and afford no additional benefits to the resources and values of Ross Lake NRA.

Northeastern Skagit River Watershed

The planning team evaluated lands east of Ross Lake NRA that are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, including the North Cascades Highway corridor up to and including Washington Pass, the Pasayten Wilderness, and Forest Service lands that comprise the watershed for the Skagit River (approximately 208,390 acres).

Rationale for evaluation included (a) responding to public comments that requested consideration of such an expansion of Ross Lake NRA; (b) consideration of U.S. Forest Service-administered lands along the highway corridor

for access as an eastern gateway to the NRA; (c) consideration of the Skagit River watershed as a logical geographic boundary for ecological purposes, recognizing that drawing boundaries along ecological lines such as watersheds helps to protect and conserve various ecological functions and values; and (d) the administrative history of the establishment of the North Cascades NPS Complex.

A preliminary conclusion has been made that a boundary modification is not warranted given that the predominant U.S. Forest Service management activities are compatible with the purposes of Ross Lake NRA. U.S. Forest Service management is geared toward ongoing support of recreational activities, though there are limited potential threats from mining on these Forest Service lands; the designation of the Pasayten Wilderness affords resource protection; and since the creation of the NRA and Park the U.S. Forest Service has a track record for administering the area primarily for conservation purposes. The alternatives address any remaining concerns about management of this area by calling for increased collaboration and cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service.

Lower Bacon Creek Watershed

The planning team evaluated lands southwest of Ross Lake NRA which primarily include U.S. Forest Service lands within the lower Bacon Creek watershed, an ecologically significant area and important habitat for anadromous species of fish such as salmon. While the upper portion of the watershed is protected within the confines of North Cascades National Park, substantial portions of the lower Bacon Creek watershed are presently under U.S. Forest Service jurisdiction.



Calypso orchids (*calypso bulbosa*) blooming in spring along the trail to Fourth of July Pass.

Rationale for evaluation included (a) responding to public comments that requested consideration of expansion of Ross Lake NRA; (b) consideration of U.S. Forest Service-administered lands adjacent to Ross Lake NRA; and (c) consideration of the watersheds as boundaries to protect and conserve various ecological functions and values.

A preliminary conclusion has been made that a boundary modification is not warranted because other alternatives for management and resource protection presently exist. The U.S. Forest Service will be revising in 2012 the forest plan for the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, including the lands within the lower Bacon Creek watershed. This pending planning effort will provide an opportunity for the U.S. Forest Service to address present concerns in accordance with the spirit and intent of ecosystem management.

INTERNATIONAL PARK DESIGNATION

It is widely recognized that transboundary management is beneficial, useful, and often essential for the management of ecosystem processes and functions that do not recognize

human imposed boundaries on the landscape. For example, the headwaters of the Skagit River originate in Canada; and wildlife, invasive, non-native species, and fire cross the international boundary at will. Visitors also cross the international border between the U.S. and Canada on long-distance recreational trails. The primary access to Hozomeen is through Canada along the Hope to Hozomeen road. As a result of these realities, the National Park Service, British Columbia Parks, and the Canadian Ministry of the Environment have worked together for decades to cooperatively manage resources and visitor use.

During the planning process, the idea of an international park designation surfaced in planning team discussions. The designation could further solidify cooperation and transboundary management through tandem federal legislation in the United States and Canada. Procedurally, this GMP does not have the authority to designate the international park, rather the GMP would have provided a recommendation for Congressional legislation to designate the international park.

This action was dismissed from further consideration because a working relationship between Canadian and U.S. land managers already exists, and cooperative management continues through joint planning, programs, and projects. The designation is not necessary for a long-term collaborative relationship. This GMP, however, does not preclude other local and/or interested individuals or entities from developing proposals or working toward such a designation.

MOVING THE WILDERNESS INFORMATION PUBLIC FUNCTION TO NEWHALEM

The Wilderness Information Center is currently located on the Marblemount Ranger Station, approximately one mile from the main North Cascades Highway. This office is one of the designated locations where visitors can obtain their backcountry permits prior to the start of an overnight backcountry trip. The location of the Wilderness Information Center, and process by which visitors obtain permits for backcountry travel, are issues that are evaluated in this plan.

During the planning process, the idea of moving the public function of the Wilderness Information Center to the current North Cascades Visitor Center in Newhalem was considered in team discussions. The intent of the idea was to concentrate more visitor information functions in fewer locations for operational efficiency and reduce the confusion for visitors who have to obtain permits in what may be perceived as an obscure location. If the public function of the wilderness program was moved to Newhalem, the Marblemount Ranger Station could be converted to administrative use only.

This action was dismissed from further consideration and analysis in the action alternatives for several reasons. One concern related to the operational efficiency that would be lost by separating the public wilderness information function from other program functions, such as search and rescue. Staff expressed concern that separating these functions could delay response times for emergencies as many staff work in both program areas. There was also concern expressed about the effect on visitors who use the Cascade River Road as an access point for backcountry travel. Obtaining backcountry permits in Marblemount is more convenient than Newhalem for travelers who are coming from the west side of Ross Lake NRA.

While this idea is not evaluated in greater detail in this draft GMP/EIS, should the permit and reservation system for backcountry travel make it feasible to obtain permits remotely or other circumstances change that make this idea viable, this GMP should not preclude consideration of this idea in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. Please provide any comments you may have about the Ross Lake NRA GMP/EIS to the NPS by September 30, 2010.



EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Mossy creek along East Bank Trail.



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Ross Lake NRA General Management Plan Newsletter #3: Draft GMP/EIS Executive Summary

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View of Diablo Lake from Sourdough.