

Introduction & Background Information

History

In 1991, Skagit County purchased a 726-acre portion of the former Northern State Hospital from the State of Washington for the purpose of developing a major regional recreation facility for the citizens of Skagit County and beyond. The site, now called the Northern State Recreation Area (NSRA), is located on the eastern edge of the urban growth area of Sedro-Woolley in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains.

NSRA has a diverse range of natural, cultural and topographical features. There are significant wetlands on site as well as large areas of dry meadow and forested uplands. Hansen Creek, a significant salmon stream slated for restoration, flows through the site. Prior to closing in the 1970's, NSRA was the working farm associated with the Northern State Hospital. Perched on a plateau overlooking the southern meadows are the abandoned dairy barns from the farm operations, built in 1921.

Some preliminary planning for NSRA occurred in 1993-94 that included a resource classification study and a conceptual master plan for development. However, between 1994 and 1998, the site received little attention due to county staff being fully committed to other projects and minimal public involvement in the site. That changed in 1998 when a group of citizens formed the Northern State Task Force (NSTF) to work on implementing some of the development plans on the property. In support of the NSTF efforts, the County Board of Commissioners earmarked three million dollars in December 1999, as seed money to get development started.

Rationale for Revised Plan

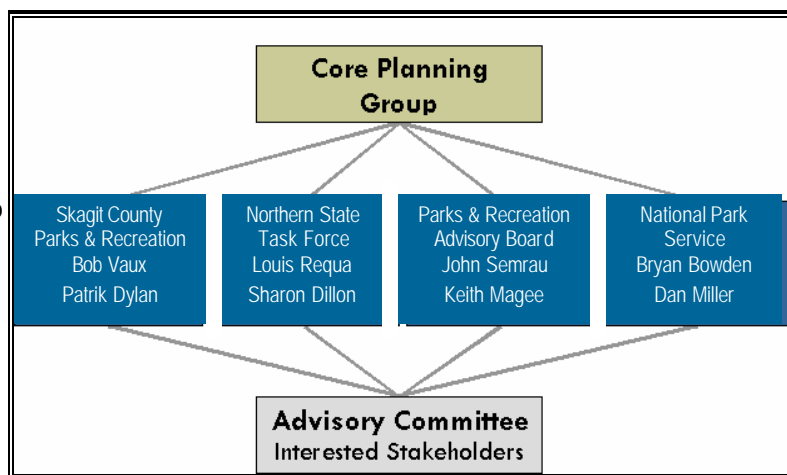
It was evident that a revised plan was required to update the 1994 conceptual master plan because a number of significant changes had occurred since 1994. These included:

- Wetland delineation and mapping (completed in 2000 on the southern half of the site) revealed significantly less land available for development than originally thought.
- A new high school, originally included in the 1994 plan, was no longer slated for location on the site.
- Considerable planning had occurred for the restoration of Hansen Creek that needed to be factored into the new master plan.
- Critical area ordinances requiring buffers around streams and wetlands had changed a great deal over six years.

Request for National Park Service Assistance

In August of 2000, Skagit County Parks and Recreation submitted a request to the National Park Service for planning assistance from the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program for technical help in organizing and conducting a public planning project to prepare a revised master plan for NSRA. The project was accepted and planning began in January 2001, when two groups were formed. The ‘Planning Team’ was organized to assume lead responsibility for organizing the planning process, informing and providing opportunities for public comment and involvement, conducting research, and writing the plan. This planning team was represented by several existing community action groups in Skagit County, specifically the Northern State Task Force and Skagit County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. Equal representation from the Skagit County Parks Department and National Park service completed membership of the Planning Team.

The ‘Advisory Committee’ was organized to represent key stakeholder groups throughout Skagit County and was asked to meet with the Planning Team as required to provide advice and consultation on the various stages of the planning process. Many different community action groups found representation on this committee.



Planning Organizational Diagram

The Planning Process

A project timeline was developed that organized the project into the following four stages: 1) Information Gathering; 2) Analysis; 3) Design Charette; and 4) Writing/Plan Production.

Information Gathering

The first objective was to acquire, develop, and organize background information relative to the project. This included researching natural and cultural resource information, conducting a countywide mail survey, preparing a recreation needs assessment, and developing project vision and goal statements with the advisory committee. The information gathering stage concluded in June of 2001 with a public open house held on site at NSRA.

Analysis and Development of Design Elements

In the analysis phase, the planning team reviewed and discussed all of the background information collected. Then, through a consensus driven process, a draft list of design elements was developed for the types of facilities to include at NSRA that reflected the desires and needs of the general public and key stakeholders. This list was presented to the citizen advisory committee and was enthusiastically supported and adopted by this group in July of 2001. (See Appendix C - Design Elements)



Design team hard at work during the October Charette

Design Charette

The cornerstone event in the planning process occurred over a three-day weekend in October 2001, when a design charette was conducted. Approximately 50 participants (see Appendix B – Charette Participants) from the local community representing user groups, regulatory agencies, natural and cultural resource interests, and other interested citizens were teamed with volunteer design professionals from throughout

the state. Five different teams were organized and tasked with developing graphic ideas for the following design elements:

- Trails
- Ball Fields and Play Areas
- Campgrounds
- Equestrian & Multi-Use Events Center
- Environmental Education and Interpretation

Writing/Plan Production

The final phase of the project was the writing and production of the new master plan for NSRA. This document is a summary of that plan. This updated master plan is consistent with the current Parks Comprehensive Plan as well as the Skagit County Comp Plan as the list of elements on the current plan is a reduced version of the list elements on the Comp Plan referenced 1994 master plan. In addition this new plan includes a repositioning of the remaining elements on the site in a manner that maximizes protection and enhancement of the natural features and processes present on and intrinsic to the site.

Public Participation

A public involvement component was included to complement and parallel the planning process. It was designed to accomplish two functions: 1) inform people about the project at key stages, and 2) provide opportunities for comment, reaction, and participation in the process. Public participation was accomplished in the following ways:

- A citizen advisory committee was formed at the beginning of the planning process to guide in the development of this plan
- Newsletters were mailed out at key points in the planning process.
- A survey was mailed to every household in Skagit County
- An open house was held on-site at NSRA that included site tours and information booths
- Citizens and community professionals were recruited to participate in the design charette
- A public meeting was held at the conclusion of the charette to report on the results

Following is a summary table of the actual public review process and opportunities implemented for this master plan update.

Next Steps

The next step in this project will be to prepare an addendum to the existing SEPA Determination of Non Significance (DNS) with a new SEPA checklist for this project. This decision was supported by the Skagit County Board of Commissioners who unanimously voted to move forward with the planning and permitting process for the entire project on December 11, 2001.

Table 1 – Summary of Public Participation, Review Process, and Comments

<i>Public Review/Comment Opportunity</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>How Advertised</i>	<i>Participation</i>	<i>Supportive Comments</i>	<i>Opposition Comments</i>
Advisory Committee Meeting #1	January 30 th , 2001	County courthouse Hearing Room B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailing sent to 200 people • Press Release published in Skagit Valley Herald • See County Web site • Syndicated Press Release on National Public Radio 	Approx 60 People	“Glad to see something started”	“Concerned that the County is not interested in public input”
Advisory Committee Meeting #2	March 6 th , 2001	Burlington Fire Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailing sent to 60 people who showed up to first meeting and approx 20 new names • Press Release published in Skagit Valley Herald • Listed on County Web-Site 	Approx. 45 people		
Newsletter # 1	Winter 2001		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Mailing 	Mailed to 200 people		
Community Wide Survey	Mailed: May 1st, 2001 Returned: May 18 th , 2001		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertised in newsletter • Referenced in press release 			
Advisory Committee Meeting #3	March 24 th , 2001	Anacortes Senior Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailing sent to 60 people who showed up to first meeting and approx 20 new names • Press Release published in Skagit Valley Herald • Listed on County Web-Site 	Approx 25 people		
Advisory Committee Meeting #4	June 5 th , 2001	Sedro-Woolley Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailing sent to 60 people who showed up to first meeting and approx 20 new names • Press Release published in Skagit Valley Herald Listed on County Web-Site 	Approx. 11 people		
Newsletter #2	Summer 2001		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct mailing 	Mailed to 350 people		
On Site Open House	June 16th		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertised in newsletter • Referenced in press release • Advertised on Radio • 200 posters throughout the county 	Approx 100 people	“Great ideas, please restore as much of the barns as possible”	

<i>Public Review/Comment Opportunity</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>How Advertised</i>	<i>Participation</i>	<i>Supportive Comments</i>	<i>Opposition Comments</i>
Advisory Committee Meeting #5	July 24th, 2001	Burlington Fire Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailing sent to 60 people who showed up to first meeting and approx 20 new names • Press Release published in Skagit Valley Herald • Listed on County Web-Site 	Approx. 35 people	"List of Program Elements seems like a good mix"	"Disappointed that farming will not be a part of final plan"
Design Charette Results Open House	October 21 st , 2001	Sedro-Woolley Senior Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertised in newsletter • Referenced in press release • Advertised on Radio • 200 posters throughout the county • Provided door prizes as incentive to attend 	Approx 75 People	"Great Ideas, thanks for doing all this work"	
Newsletter # 3	Winter 2001		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct mailing 	Mailed to 500 people		
Advisory Committee Meeting #3/Public Information Meeting	February 1 st , 2002	County courthouse Hearing Room C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertised in newsletter • Referenced in press release • Advertised on Radio • 200 posters throughout the county 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Concerned that the park will be built without proper law enforcement present" • "Opposed to idea that trails on the site would connect to trails off the property; specifically the Cascade Trail as individual believes this trail to be an illegal government 'take'." • "Believes that soccer fields need to be present even if needs assessment says not."
Service Clubs Presentation	January, February, March, 2002	Burlington, Sedro-Woolley, Anacortes		Between 25-50 people per event		