



Dry Falls Visitor Center

Area Design

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

November 2009



Acknowledgements

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Project Overview



The Dry Falls Visitor Center (DFVC) welcomes visitors from around the world to a spectacular panorama of massive geologic events that occurred thousands of years ago. Improvements to the site began in the 1930s during the Depression-era recovery efforts by the federal government. During that time, carefully crafted structures including a gazebo, stone bollards and chain guardrails were constructed. In the early 1960s, a formal visitor center was built by Washington State Parks. In 2009, Congress authorized the establishment of the Ice Age Floods National Geologic Trail, thus becoming the newest park facility managed by the National Park Service. The DFVC is intended to become a hub for the new Geologic Trail network drawing thousands more visitors each year. The design of a new Visitor Center couldn't be timelier.

The Dry Falls Visitor Center is located in a National Natural Landmark area that surrounds visitors by a landscape which is an expansive living exhibit. DFVC offers opportunities to learn about and understand the awesome geologic events known as the Ice Age Floods. The visitor experience at the site and in the Visitor Center provides a framework and a starting point for conveying a broad interpretive story. By careful integration of site design elements, interpretive exhibits, and the landscape, interpretation of the geologic, cultural and natural components of the region can provide a compelling experience. Thematic story lines can take the visitor back in time, with dynamic aerial views, simulations of the processes caused by the Ice Age floods and illustrations of where the visitor is in relationship to the overall landscape. The Dry Falls Visitor Center can inspire visitors to explore the greater regional network of Ice Age Floods sites.

The quality of experience will improve with redevelopment. Attention to wayfinding, site circulation systems, large vehicle access, integration of interpretive features, overlooks, picnic area, universal accessibility and developing a strong connection between the building and the natural environment contribute to a positive visitor experience. Improving the organization of these elements is

fundamental in supporting the intended experience. Site options with sensitive planning and design, will create a model for environmental stewardship and recreation. Proposing a building that seamlessly blends with the landscape, the native plant palette, and other features, supports the geologic legacy of the landscape while also respecting the long history of the existing facility.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (WSPRC) public participation process for the Dry Falls Visitor Center Area Design worked closely with stakeholders who represent the interests of the surrounding community. Workshops and presentations gathered useful feedback during the design process by engaging the participants in a focused and constructive dialog. Additionally, given the dispersed character of the surrounding community, outreach to others was conducted through postings on the WSPRC website. Gathering input from a broad range of perspectives ensured the evolution of good ideas and strong goals which have been distilled into a successful site plan and a memorable visitor experience.

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Section 1: Project & Process

The Story

During the last Ice Age, the Cordilleran Ice Sheet crept down into the Pacific Northwest, blocking the outlet of the Clark Fork River in the panhandle of Idaho with an ice dam thousands of feet thick. The river backed up, creating Lake Missoula, a huge body of water covering much of western Montana. Between approximately 18,000 and 12,000 years ago, the ice dam periodically broke, unleashing a series of cataclysmic floods. During the largest floods, the lake emptied in a matter of days, sending water ten times the volume of all of the rivers of the world sweeping across eastern, central and southern Washington, sculpting and altering the landscape within the blink of a geologic eye. The flood waters scoured new channels, created immense cataract waterfalls, left huge gravel deposits, stripped topsoil and dramatically altered the landscape. Flooding reoccurred again and again, carving new landforms and reshaping the land until the floods finally ceased when the ice sheet retreated.

The Ice Age Floods affected and continue to affect human activities in four states. We mine the gravel deposits, pump water from the aquifers created by the flood waters, grow crops in the displaced topsoil, construct roads along the coulees, hunt waterfowl in the lakes and ponds created by the floods, and build towns and cities in the flat areas shaped by floodwaters. Yet, for all this impact, the Ice Age Floods remain relatively unknown to the general public.

Much of the impact of the Ice Age Floods is concentrated in central and eastern Washington, which bore the brunt of the initial force of the floods. Of the features left behind by the flood waters, Dry Falls is arguably the most impressive and iconic in the region. Today, Dry Falls stands as a reminder of the power of nature, and of the historic flood events. To provide access to the falls allows a unique opportunity to “show” people the story, and to give voice to the region’s amazing geologic, natural, and cultural history. Washington State Parks is uniquely positioned to interpret the features resulting from this major geomorphologic event, consistent with their mission and long standing commitment toward stewardship of public lands.



Purpose

The mission of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is:

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission acquires, operates, enhances and protects a diverse system of recreational, cultural, historic and natural sites. The Commission fosters outdoor recreation and education statewide to provide enjoyment and enrichment for all, and a valued legacy to future generations.

“Enrichment”, in the 21st Century context of park management can be interpreted to include facilitating economic benefits to surrounding communities, especially rural communities, specifically through fostering sustainable tourism opportunities.

In October 2003, in anticipation of its centennial as a state park system, the WSPRC developed its Centennial 2013 Vision:

“In 2013, Washington’s state parks will be premier destinations of uncommon quality, including state and regionally significant natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources that are attractive for public experience, health, enjoyment and learning.”

Within the plan, one of the “legacy” projects is to “unveil the mystery of the Ice Age Floods.” Interpreting the Ice Age Floods (IAF) in the Washington State Parks not only fits within the broad purview of the Commission’s mission statement, but is a specific goal identified by the agency.

To begin the process, WSPRC contracted for the development of the Interpretive Master Plan for Ice Age Floods in Washington State Parks (IMPIAF) to address all of the State Park facilities that are associated with IAF story. Utilizing the IMPIAF, thirty-three interpretive panels were created and installed at six different State parks. To further tell the IAF story, the Dry Falls Visitor Center area design was tasked with creating a specific plan for the development of Dry Falls as the hub of the interpretive network.

Objectives

The basic objectives for the Dry Falls Visitor Center Area Plan, as interpreted through the WSPRC Centennial 2013 Goals and the 2006 IMPIAF are as follows:

- Tell the story of the IAF by creating a safe and inviting public amenity.
- Foster stewardship of the Center and Sun Lakes-Dry Falls State Park to ensure their important role as destination visitor and recreation sites in the Grand Coulee landscape and Coulee Corridor National Scenic Byway.
- Generate educational opportunities allowing the public to enjoy and learn about natural and cultural heritage in an exciting and interactive manner.
- Provide public services of a high value by becoming a major amenity of the Central Washington region, and by providing an amenity that attracts local, State, national and international visitors.
- Retain the Depression-era heritage of the facilities at the DFVC.
- Foster partnerships with the National Park Service, Ice Age Floods Institute, the Coulee Corridor Consortium, State and regional tourism organizations, local communities, Tribes and others to support and energize the Center and carry it into the future.
- Retain financial accountability through on-site retail sales and other strategies to continue to allow the DFVC to operate in a self sustaining manner.
- Enhance Washington’s legacy by telling the story of the IAF and being part of the larger regional interpretive network.
- Develop park improvements that use environmentally sensitive design practices

Scope

The primary components outlined for the project were the exploration and development of schematic plans for an improved Visitor Center to address visitor arrival, wayfinding, recreational opportunities and interpretive improvements.

With a regional overview, the planning and design effort needed to address the challenges and opportunities of the Dry Falls site and the Visitor Center. Given the importance of local tourism generated by Scenic Byway travelers, specific understanding of their needs and issues required consideration while planning for future site and Visitor Center improvements.

The Dry Falls Visitor Center Area Design project as outlined in this document, represents the initial phase of a three phase effort which includes:

Phase 1 Schematic Design of the Dry Falls Visitor Center site

Phase 2 Architectural and interpretive exhibit design, with construction plans, specifications and cost estimates

Phase 3 Construction funds for site work, Visitor Center improvements and interpretive exhibits.

The basic project scope for Phase 1 was to produce: 1) schematic site plans addressing vehicular and pedestrian circulation, scenic overlooks, and outdoor interpretive exhibits; 2) schematic floor plans with use areas of the Visitor Center, including accessible restrooms and visitor activity areas; 3) conceptual design of thematic story lines and interpretive exhibits, addressing programs for international visitors; 4) preliminary cost estimates, with a logical construction phasing strategy for total project implementation.



The process was enriched by a public participation program that allowed citizens to provide input and have an opportunity to be a part of the planning process. Additionally, there was a desire to continue to maintain compatibility with Byway goals and programs.

Interpretive Overview

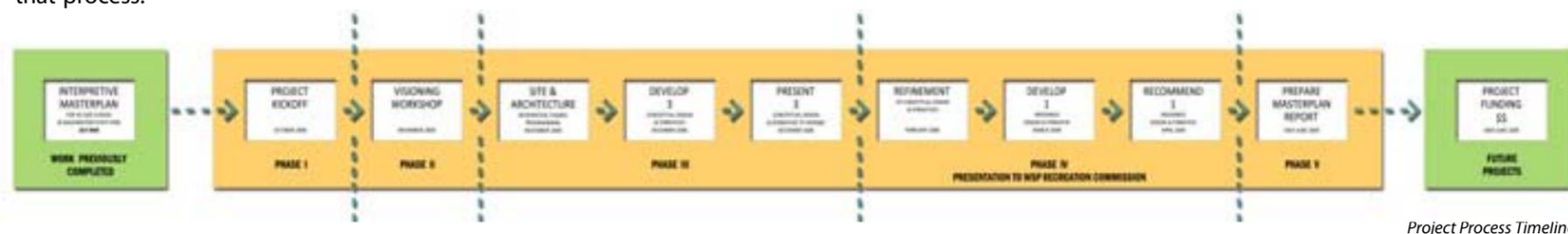
The planning process focused on conceptual design of thematic story lines and interpretive exhibits. The goal was to develop the Dry Falls site to serve as the hub of the IAF interpretive network. Proposed solutions considered both site and building interpretive strategies and exhibits.

Cost Assessment

Charged with presenting fiscal overview, the preliminary cost estimates were generated with an understanding of construction phasing for total project implementation. These estimates represent the desired improvements and have not been adapted to a specific project budget.

Process

Development of the vision for the new Dry Falls Visitor Center involved a collaborative process by engaging numerous public and private organizations and entities. The following is a summary of that process.



Project Process Timeline

In August of 2008, WSPRC issued a formal Architect/Engineer Request for Proposal (RFP) to seek qualified consultants to facilitate a visioning process and provide conceptual design plans for the Dry Falls Visitor Center area design. After reviewing responses submitted by 27 firms, a consultant team was selected. The team included:

- Walker Macy, Landscape Architecture & Planning
- THA Architects, Architectural Design
- Bucy Associates, Interpretive Planning Consultant
- AldrichPears Associates, Interpretive Exhibit Planning and Design
- Hammond Collier Wade Livingstone, Civil Engineering
- Davis Langdon, Cost Consultant

A Stakeholder Advisory Committee was formed to represent the interests of the surrounding community. Public and non-profit organizations guided the development of programmatic and interpretive goals for the Visitor Center and provided a structure for review and approval of these goals. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee included the following individuals as representatives of their respective agencies:

- Eliot Scull, Chair, Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission
- Jim Harris, Washington State Parks, Eastern Region Director
- Christine Parsons, Washington State Parks, Eastern Region Development Manager
- Steve Wang, Washington State Parks, Interpretive Programs Director
- Ryan Karlson, Washington State Parks, Interpretive Program Manager
- Alex McMurry, Washington State Parks, Historic Properties Representative
- Tom Ernsberger, Washington State Parks, Regional Stewardship Specialist

- Denis Felton, Sun Lakes-Dry Falls State Park Manager
- John Ashley, Sun Lakes-Dry Falls State Park Visitor Center Manager
- Amy McDougall, Sun Lakes-Dry Falls Visitor Center, Parks Staff Interpreter
- Bill Fraser, Washington State Parks, Eastern Region Park Planner
- Mark Schulz, Washington State Parks, Regional Environmental Program Specialist
- Tim Alling, Coulee Corridor National Scenic Byways, Chairman
- Ken Caylor, Coulee Corridor National Scenic Byways, Representative
- Corinne Isaak, Coulee Corridor National Scenic Byways, Coordinator
- Carrie Sunstrom, WSDOT, Head of State Scenic Byways Program
- Michelle Campbell, Washington State Tourism Office
- Paul Mahre, WSDOT Regional Local Program Engineer
- David Kieninger, WSDOT Regional Planning Representative
- Keith Dunbar, National Park Service, Chief of Park Planning & Environmental Compliance, Pacific West Region
- Reed Jarvis, National Park Service Volunteer
- Brent Cunderla, Ice Age Floods Institute Representative
- John Moody, Ice Age Floods Institute
- Susan Lacy, Ice Age Floods Institute
- Kristen Gregg, Representative of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville



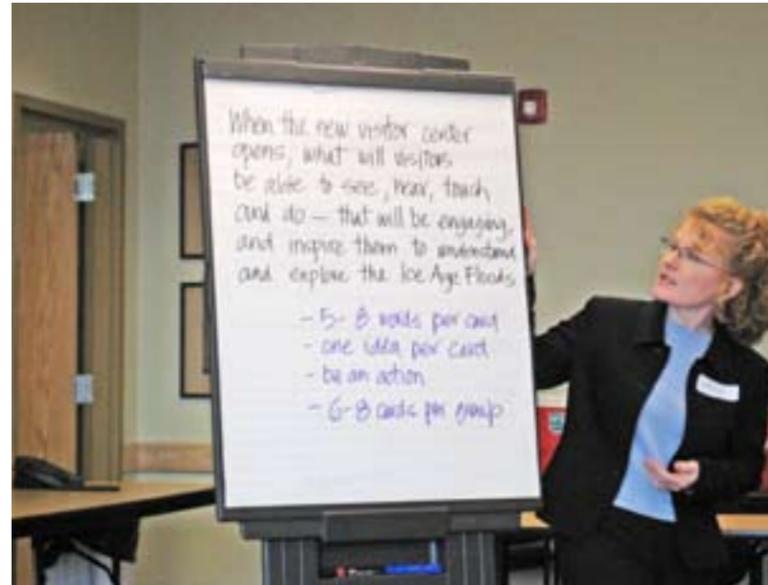
Project Roles Diagram

Project Start-up

The project began with a site visit and project start-up meeting held in October 2008. The consultant team and representatives from Washington State Parks, Coulee Corridor National Scenic Byway Consortium and Eastern Washington University's Archaeological and Historic Services toured the site, assessed the existing Visitor Center and met with the interpretive staff. The group also assessed surrounding areas, including Sun Lakes-Dry Falls State Park, Coulee City and the approach to the site on Highway 17, from both the north and the south.

Following the site visit, the consultant group met at the regional office of Washington State Parks (WSP) in East Wenatchee to debrief, discuss the project scope and to confirm the process and schedule.

Visioning Workshop



Visioning Workshop

A visioning workshop was held on November 18, 2008 at WSP in East Wenatchee. The workshop was attended by more than 30 participants from a range of organizations. In addition to the consultant team, attendees included representatives from WSP, the Coulee Corridor National Scenic Byway Consortium, Washington State and Grant County Tourism agencies, the National Park Service, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville and the Ice Age Floods Institute.

The purpose of the visioning workshop was to build on the strong foundations created by the 2006 Interpretive Master Plan for the Ice Age Floods in Washington State Parks (IMPIAF), and to begin developing the visitor experience. To move the design forward, a visual overview of the basic principles of interpretive design was presented as they applied to the Dry Falls visitor experience. The goal of this presentation was to inspire participants to think in terms of the visitor experience in addition to interpretive goals and content.

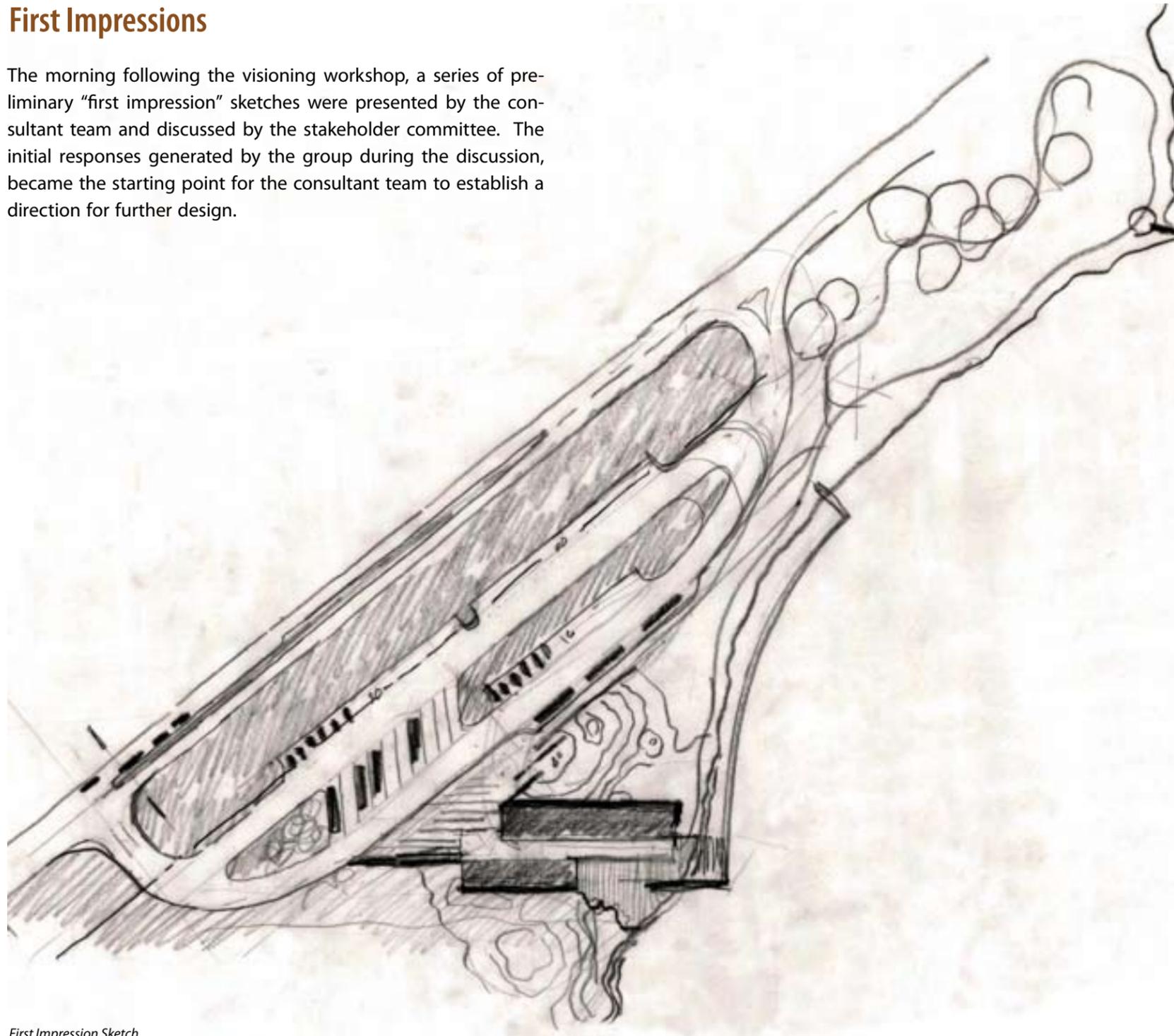


Carding Exercise at the Visioning Workshop

A carding exercise helped the stakeholder group communicate their ideas on establishing the visitor experience. The information gathered from this exercise was added to the existing body of interpretive planning and research work that had been done in 2006 with the IMPIAF, and became the foundation for generating a vision of the future Visitor Center. Eliciting participation of all meeting attendees, the carding exercise provided the consultant team with excellent direction for further development of the visitor experience.

First Impressions

The morning following the visioning workshop, a series of preliminary “first impression” sketches were presented by the consultant team and discussed by the stakeholder committee. The initial responses generated by the group during the discussion, became the starting point for the consultant team to establish a direction for further design.



First Impression Sketch

A Collective Vision

The result of collaborative decisions by the stakeholder group, public response, and guidance of the consultant team led to a proposal for the Dry Falls Visitor Center. A collective vision was established for the evolution of the Dry Falls Visitor Center site to become a world class facility, acting as a major hub of the IAF story within Washington Parks and within the total IAF floodway zone. The facility and landscape will collectively guide various types of visitors seeking to explore the untold IAF story and the greater natural resource.



Stakeholder Workshop

Public Outreach

Given the dispersed character of the surrounding community, and the desire to gather feedback of others, a public participation program was established by way of an interactive website. Additionally, all registered campers at regional State Parks in 2007 were contacted and encouraged to participate in the process.

The results of the November 2008 visioning workshop and the preliminary site and interpretive concepts of the January 2009 work session were assembled into a web page for public input. Over fifty citizens responded favorably and continued participation through the planning and review process.



Dry Falls Website: <http://www.parks.wa.gov/plans/dryfalls>

Briefing & Recommendation to the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

On June 11, 2009, Walker Macy presented a project overview to the Commission (WSPRC). The presentation summarized the nine month process that the consultant team, stakeholders, Parks' staff and the public undertook to determine the best solution for the Dry Falls site. The presentation included a summary of the design alternatives being considered. A preferred alternative was presented to Commission which represented the approach recommended by the consultant and stakeholder group. The WSPRC did not make the final choice on the design, but offered their individual perspectives during the briefing. The commissioners expressed support for the design alternative that was recommended.

Following the workshop, State Parks staff prepared a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) analysis of the preferred option. After compliance with SEPA was determined, the Parks Development Assistant Director made a final decision on behalf of the Parks director and the Commission by selecting the preferred alternative (as conditioned) for future project implementation.

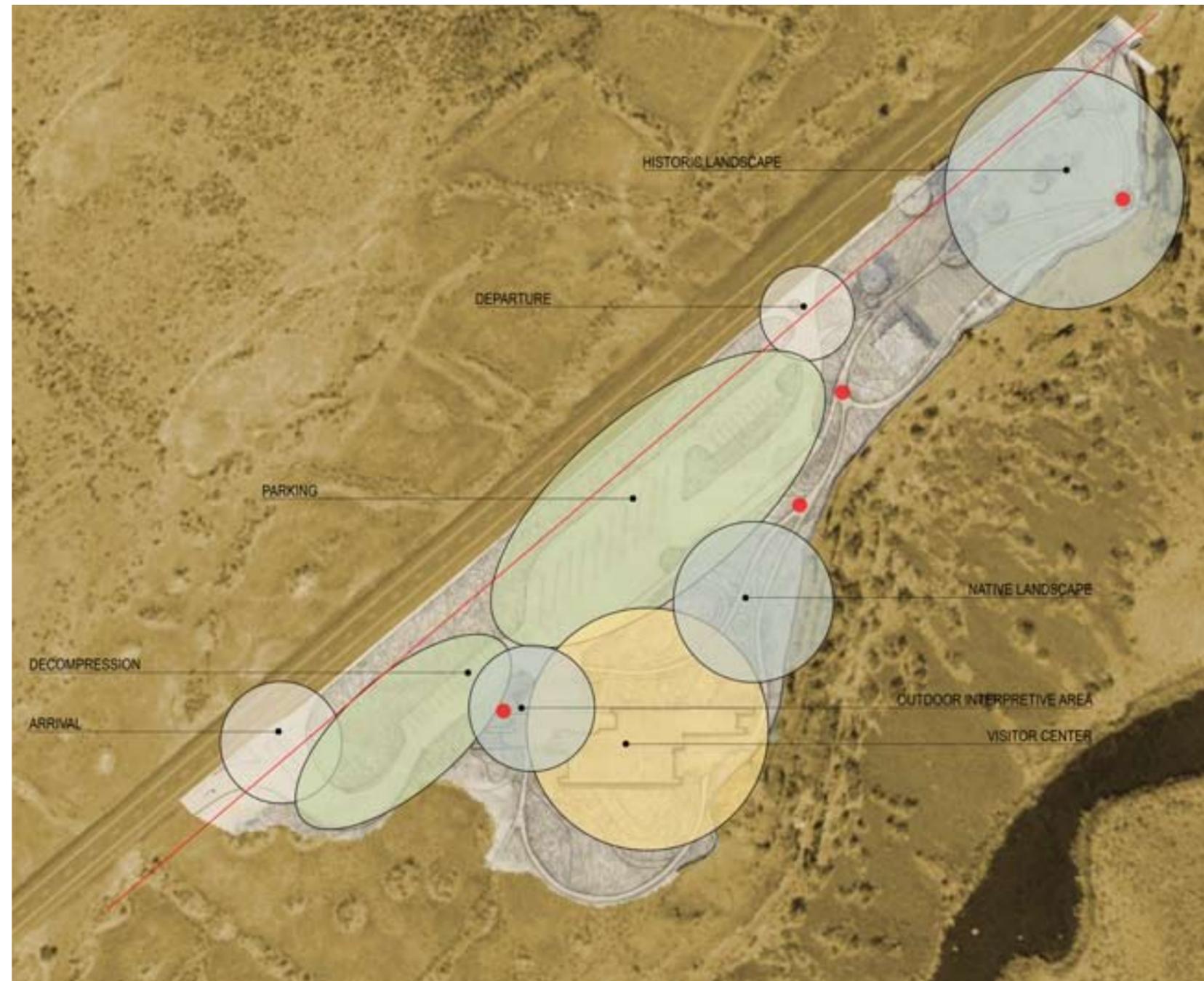
Meeting Summary

- Site visit and Project Start-Up Meeting - October 2008
- Visioning Workshop with Stakeholders - November 2008
- Preliminary Concepts Work Session with Stakeholders - January 2009
- Public Comment Period (Website) December 2008 - April 2009
- Briefing with WSPRC - June 2009

Preliminary Concepts

Based upon the results from the visioning workshop, the site visit and review of relevant literature and documents, the design team developed six unique options to present to the stakeholder committee.

The six options explored using different building sites for a new facility, preserving or eliminating the existing facility, and locating parking in different areas on the site. These options were presented to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee with an assessment and summary of how each scheme accomplished the desired objectives of the visitor experience. Following open discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of each option, the committee selected a preferred option for further refinement and development.



Preferred Option - Site Diagram

