

Washington State Parks and
Recreation Commission
KOPACHUCK STATE PARK

Master Plan Report

June 27, 2014



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30 Master Plan Elements

- Access Roads and Parking Lots
- Upper Day Use Area
- Beach Area
- Trail System
- Interpretation
- Materials
- Utilities
- Sustainable Design
- Waste Management
- Security and Control Systems

50 Design Standards

- Structures
- Site Furnishings

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- Permits, Check Lists, and Compliance Requirements
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Acknowledgements





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kopachuck State Park, located on the east side of Colvos Passage south of Gig Harbor, is a 114 acre park that includes Cutts Island just offshore. Since its establishment in 1955, the park has offered Washington residents both day use and overnight camping facilities for both individuals and groups. Recently, however, laminated root rot - a disease which causes loss of root support, resulting in the sudden and often unexpected toppling of infected trees - has been identified in many of the park's Douglas Fir trees. Because of the risk to human safety, the individual and group camp sites have been closed and trees surrounding the ranger residence and shop were removed. In order to address this situation, the Washington State Parks Commission authorized a master planning process to convert the park to day use only and to address other needed improvements. The goal of the Kopachuck State Park Master Plan process was to develop a plan that would protect park resources, enhance park visitation, comply with applicable state park and land use policies, and create a park that is sustainable in terms of operation costs and revenues.

Bruce Dees & Associates, a landscape architecture firm, was retained and a citizen ad hoc committee was established to develop the plan in collaboration with parks staff. The committee met a total of seven times between February and May 2014. Working together, they established design criteria, finalized a list of program elements, and developed the master plan itself.

In addition to the ad hoc meetings, two public meetings were also held. At the first public meeting, the project was introduced to the public and they were encouraged to offer their input, both orally and via write-in comment cards, before the design process began. The second public meeting was held to present the preliminary master plan and to receive public feedback on it.



Primary Elements of the Plan

Upper Day-Use Area

- Kitchen/Shelter/Restroom
- Picnic Area
- Children's Play Area
- Outdoor Amphitheatre
- View Point
- Horseshoe Pits

Beach Area

- Restrooms
- Viewing Decks
- Improved Beach Access
- Additional Mooring Buoys
- Cascadia Marine Trail Campsite
- Disabled Parking and Boat Drop Off Parking
- Emergency Vehicle Turnaround

Loop/Interpretive Trail System Improvements

- Six Connected and Improved Loop Trails with Interpretive Story Points
- Trail Connection to Kopachuck Middle School

Road and Parking Lot Improvements

- Revised Park Entry/Exit
- Upper Day Use Parking Lot Improvements
- Welcome Center/Park Office
- Paved Access to the Beach Use Area
- Six Car Parking Lot at the Interpretive Trail
- Disabled Parking at Both Lots

Forest Management Plan

Since camping was such a vital function of the park in the past, the ad hoc committee noted that implementation of the master plan should include a long-term forest management plan that could include future development of individual and group camping.

The presence of laminated root rot has dramatically altered the activities at Kopachuck State Park. This master plan will serve as a guide for the conversion of the park to day use and the restriction of gathering areas to those areas not currently affected by the disease. As time goes on, the forest will change and the forest management plan will address these changes. It will also address the application of appropriate technical forestry principles and practices for forest management in order to achieve stated objectives, one of which may be the restoration of individual and group camping.



CUTTS ISLAND

INTRODUCTION

Kopachuck State Park is located in Pierce County, Washington, five miles west of Gig Harbor. Washington State Parks owns and manages the 114 acres that comprise the park, including the 5,600 feet of saltwater shoreline. This includes Kopachuck State Park and Cutts Island, which sits one half mile offshore from the park proper. The park was acquired in seven parcels, the first acquisition having taken place in 1955 and the most recent in 1991.

The name “Kopachuck” has its origins in Chinook, the trade language of the Pacific Coastal Indians. The name is actually the merging of two words: kopa, meaning “at,” and chuck, meaning “water.” This scenic park was once a seasonal fishing and clamming site for the Puyallup and Nisqually tribes. Currently, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) stocks the beach with oysters and clams for recreational harvest, a popular activity for many visitors to Kopachuck State Park.

While the origin of the name “Cutts Island” - the current name for the little island to the north of the park - is unclear, many of its former names have clear roots in the history of the area. For example, the name “Dead Man’s Island” was derived from the belief that the island was once used by saltwater tribes to bury their dead in canoes placed in the forks of trees. The island has been called many other names, from “Crow Island” – so named because of the large number of crows that explorer Peter Puget discovered there in 1792 – to “Scotts Island,” named in honor of Thomas Scott, the quartermaster of the 1841 Wilkes Expedition.



KOPACHUCK PARK SHORELINE AND CUTTS ISLAND



ENTRY TO MARINE TRAIL CAMPSITE



VIEW FROM NORTH LOOP TRAIL



SCENIC & RECREATION RESOURCES

The most popular scenic attractions at Kopachuck State Park are the beach and the views from the beach. In almost all locations except for the beach, trees screen all but peekaboo views to Puget Sound. Improved visual access to the water is needed to increase scenic values of the park and to attract more visitors to the park.

Mature upland forest contributes to the park's scenic values. The removal of trees with laminated root rot has impacted scenic quality; however, this area has been replanted so it will soon recover aesthetic values.

Despite its beautiful location, Kopachuck is severely underutilized due to several factors: lack of public knowledge about the park, limited and low quality facilities, and a limited number of walking trails. Updating and improving the facilities will not only enable the park to better serve the public but in doing so, will also increase revenue.

Two pressing concerns at the site are slope instability – damaging and threatening to trails, restrooms, and beach access – and ground movement which has resulted in cracks and slumps in several areas, including the marine campsite and beach restroom. In order to ensure public safety, several facilities will need to be relocated. Moreover, due to dangers posed by laminated root rot, the campground has been eliminated and the development of overnight and sitting areas

within the fall zone of affected trees has been prohibited. Other unsatisfactory conditions at present include: uneven and inconsistent trail treads which have made walking challenging in affected areas, no ADA-compliant trails, and no ADA-accessible routes to restrooms or park features.

Recreation at Kopachuck State Park centers mainly around the beach and trails with peak use occurring during clamming season. The park and its trails are popular with picnickers and visitors looking for a natural environment in which to exercise and walk their dogs. With its scenic views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains, it is an ideal park for clamming, kayaking, picnicking, and forest trails exploration. WDFW stocks the beach with oysters and clams for recreational shellfish harvesting.

The neighboring elementary and middle schools use the park periodically to enhance classroom studies; however, that relationship could be expanded to more areas of the curriculum. Of particular interest are fitness and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects, all of which are currently receiving more attention around the nation. Kopachuck Middle School also has a small grant for students to develop a field guide for Kopachuck State Park. Harbor Wildlife Watch, a non-profit, conducts environmental education programs on the beach with assistance from park staff.



Geology and Topography

The park's geology and topography pose challenges to siting, constructing, and maintaining safe and stable park trails and facilities. A site reconnaissance level survey of the geological hazards and conditions at Kopachuck State Park was conducted by Associated Earth Sciences, Incorporated (AES). According to their report, Kopachuck State Park is roughly divided into two major areas, the upland portion and the lower portion, clearly defined by an abrupt edge or head scarp.

The upland portion of the property is generally flat-lying with gently undulating terrain in places, vegetated primarily with native understory, deciduous trees, and evergreen trees. The upland portion of the park is made up primarily of evergreen trees standing upright, including trees up to 6' in diameter. Vertically oriented evergreen trees, some up to 3' in diameter, growing along the head scarp suggest relative stability along the scarp face. Trees just over the edge, however, have a pistol-butted growth pattern, suggesting ongoing localized soil creep.

The land below the head scarp consists of hummocky terrain – sloping relatively gently with native vegetation and a few trees (primarily alders) indicative of former landslide deposits below the head scarp. Many trees in this area, some as large as 3' in diameter, grow in a bending or twisting fashion. Coupled with the size of the trees, this growth pattern suggests

ongoing soil creep but no recent, large-scale movement within the area below the head scarp. A roughly 2' to 6' high bank leads down to the beach itself. Ongoing sloughing is affecting trees along the top of the bank. These trees are now leaning out toward the beach. There is dense glacial sediment extending through the beach gravel in places, suggestive of a “toe bulge,” possibly related to a former landslide.

The geologic map describes the sediment underlying the upper portion of the site to be Vashon till (Qgt) and Vashon advance sand (Qgas) with landslide deposits (Qls) mapped below the steep scarp. The Coastal Zone Atlas of Washington, Volume 7 (Pierce County Coastal Zone Atlas), indicated that the lower slope area consists chiefly of esperance sand with sediment – consisting of Vashon lodgement till and Vashon recessional outwash – underlying the upper portion. The geologic units shown on these maps indicate that the sediments underlying the site are generally dense, granular, and glacially overridden sediments. The atlas also indicated that while the upland areas are stable, the area from the bluff or scarp is an unstable older slide.

Coastal drift maps indicate littoral drift in a northeasterly direction along the beach during both summer and winter months. The same maps described the beach process as “feeding” from the erosion material