

Historic Properties in Washington State Parks Cultural Heritage Initiative Prioritization Criteria



October, 2014

Introduction

Washington State Parks is currently undertaking an effort to critically examine the historic properties in the agency's collection. Historic properties represent a significant portion of the total buildings owned or managed by State Parks, and account for over half of the estimated cost to correct the agency's building and infrastructure deficiencies. Historic properties compete for funding with other projects ranging from utility or infrastructure upgrades to new facilities or health and safety projects. These historic properties are all significant and provide a tangible connection to the history of the state. Due to the magnitude of the need it is imperative that the agency establish priorities to better direct resources to help fulfill the agency mission and provide a safe and memorable experience for park visitors. State Parks is seeking assistance from those who value historic properties to help shape the direction of these efforts.

To put the agency's collection of historic properties in perspective, Washington State Parks has responsibility for over 2800 buildings and structures, ranging from small pump houses to the 80,000 square foot St. Edward Seminary, encompassing 3.28 million square feet in total. As a whole, the State of Washington has 10,192 owned or leased buildings, meaning that State Parks manages 27.7% of state owned buildings. Currently, State Parks has identified 788 historic resources within the agency's holdings (not including archaeological sites).

The sheer number of historic properties in State Parks, the competition for funding, and the maintenance backlog within the agency has resulted in the need to establish strong priorities for preservation treatment. To achieve this, a statewide Historic Property Treatment Plan will be produced to guide agency decisions on how historic properties are treated.

To inform the Treatment Plan, Washington State Parks is asking for your assistance in the development of criteria that can be used to prioritize the diverse collection of historic properties across the agency. Prioritization criteria have been drafted by the agency, and your input on these criteria is requested.



Battery Ord, Fort Columbia State Park

Background Information

This effort began under the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission's Transformation Strategy, adopted by the Commission in March of 2013. The intent of the Transformation Strategy is to guide efforts to align the agency philosophy and the approach to funding and operations, and to provide a conceptual framework for transforming the agency to a new business model over the next decade that diversifies its base of financial and public support while remaining true to the mission of the agency. This document updated the agency mission and vision statements, both of which demonstrate the importance of historic properties within the State Parks system. These statements are worth repeating here:

State Parks Mission

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission cares for Washington's most treasured lands, waters, and historic places. State parks connect all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and provide memorable recreational and educational experiences that enhance their lives.

State Parks Vision

Washington's state parks will be cherished destinations with natural, cultural, recreational, artistic and interpretive experiences that all Washingtonians enjoy, appreciate and proudly support.

The Transformation Strategy identified seven distinct strategies for management of the State Park system that provide the foundation for various initiatives across the agency that will position it to be a more successful public enterprise. Historic properties are most closely related to the first of these seven strategies: Demonstrate that all Washingtonians benefit from their state parks. These historic properties are tangentially related to other core strategies as well. This strategy is intended to reinforce that State Parks stewards a large assembly of historic properties across the state, and that the resources under State Parks' care are a vital part of connecting Washingtonians to their cultural heritage.

The agency recently adopted a Strategic Plan, based on the Transformation Strategy, to solidify agency direction over the next five years. This plan reaffirms the agency commitment to stewardship of our significant historic properties, and identifies this as a core public service. The Strategic Plan recognizes that resource stewardship of all types often does not directly generate revenue, yet contributes



Commanding Officer's House, Fort Simcoe

substantially to the agency's capital, deferred maintenance, and operating budgets. The Strategic Plan also identifies the care and protection of historic properties as fundamental to the agency mission as part of a healthy and sustainable state park system. Many historic properties within the system contribute to the financial health of the agency, but the revenue generated by these properties is not sufficient to care for the broad range of resources stewarded by the agency.

The Transformation Strategy identified a series of initiatives designed to reinforce the seven general strategies during the transition to a new

business model. The Cultural Heritage Initiative is one of these. State Parks' staff has begun work to demonstrate the value of the agency's historic properties through this initiative. The ultimate purpose of this initiative is to develop a systematic plan for the treatment and preservation of significant historic properties in State Parks, to convey their significance and value to the public, and to enlist the public's participation and support in preserving those resources. Key elements of this initiative include:

- Assessing the significance and integrity of identified historic properties
- Identifying information gaps and research needs
- Development of criteria to prioritize historic preservation needs across the system
- Field assessment of prioritized resources to determine actual conditions and/or preservation needs
- Development of a plan to interpret historic properties and convey their significance to the public
- Development of a statewide treatment plan for historic properties

The statewide treatment plan will provide direction to the agency's budgetary efforts, both capital and operating. The proposed plan represents a prioritized and ranked approach to historic preservation needs across the state, with the goal of enlisting the broader preservation community's participation and support in conserving them.

Historic Properties in State Parks

State Parks is the largest single owner of historic properties in Washington. The diverse collection represents a variety of resource types, styles, and eras, from simple homestead dwellings to graceful lighthouses. The system currently encompasses 28 National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listings, including 24 parks. These listings and the parks associated with them are included in Appendix A. These listings vary from individual resources to broad historic districts. Currently, 788 individual historic resources have been identified within the system in 56 separate parks. This includes 113 resources designated as contributing to National Historic Landmarks, 396 resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places either individually or as part of a historic district, 68 resources listed on the Washington Heritage Register, two barns on the Washington State Heritage Barn Register, 62 resources determined eligible for listing on the National Register, and 147 resources identified as potentially significant that have not had formal evaluations of National Register eligibility. These numbers continue to be refined as potential historic properties are identified, as determinations of eligibility are made, or as properties are listed on the NRHP. A simple spreadsheet listing identified historic properties in State Parks is available in Appendix C.



[Kitchen Shelter, Millersylvania](#)

Widespread condition assessments for historic properties were conducted in three phases between 1997 and 2000. These assessment phases included one for coast defense properties (fortifications and supporting structures, but not post buildings), one for Depression-era resources, and one for all other resource types. The agency has traditionally approached historic properties by resource type or theme, grouping similar resource types together. The anticipated statewide treatment plan will prioritize resources based not on type but on significance, need, importance to the park operation, the extent to which they meaningfully connect the public with the state's cultural heritage, and their ability to generate business revenues and other philanthropic, volunteer, and community support. This represents a departure from past practices by essentially comparing apples to oranges. Given the declining budget of the agency over the past few biennia, the former approach to preserving the historic properties in State Parks must change to treat those resources that are most important first.

Broadly speaking, State Parks' historic properties are spread within seven general historic themes. These include properties developed under and associated with significant themes relating to coast defense, military history, the Depression-era, rail transportation, marine transportation, agriculture, and architecture.

Prioritization Criteria

Staff is currently working to score and rank the historic properties within the system. Criteria are being developed to be applied "across the board" to each individual historic resource within the state park system. These criteria are presented below, and are designed to capture the historic significance of each individual property. This will provide insight into which resources are of the highest priority for preservation. This ranking will be used in the next steps to focus first on the most important resources in the agency's collection.

The prioritization criteria are weighted, and fall into three general categories. “High Importance” factors include: 1) relative level of historic significance; 2) unique or rare resource type; 3) individual architectural significance; and 4) resources that are part of an intact complex, or series of complexes. “Medium Importance” factors include: 1) resources where significant state history and agency history intersect; 2) resources that provide public access to a resource type not widely accessible; 3) resources that are key features in the identity of a park; and 4) the rank of the park within a common theme. “Low Importance” factors include: 1) the level of endangerment; 2) resources originally designed in support of recreational activities; 3) existing condition and previous public investment in the property; 4) maintenance requirements of the resource type; 5) the potential for the individual resource to generate revenue; and 6) the potential of the resource to be supported by outside entities. These criteria, with explanatory statements and their potential scoring, are attached in Appendix B. The criteria are intended to be as objective as possible and can be applied to each resource relatively quickly. This is a necessity due to the number of properties that need to be evaluated under the criteria.



Dairy Barn, Olmstead Place

Key external stakeholders, including the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, provided initial input on prioritization criteria. The weighted categories as developed by staff have also been sent to these and other stakeholders for comment. The criteria have been drafted to provide meaningful distinctions when comparing dissimilar resource types. Building consensus among internal and external stakeholders is critical to enlisting their assistance in developing the statewide treatment plan and gaining their support and advocacy as the agency implements the treatment plan.

Next Steps

When the prioritization criteria are fully developed, after input from stakeholders, the final criteria will be taken to the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission for adoption. This is currently scheduled for the March 2015 meeting of the Commission. Once the criteria are finalized and adopted, each individual property will be ranked using the criteria. These rankings will be filtered and refined based on multiple factors currently under development by other programs within the agency, including the condition data gathered under the Facility Inventory Condition Assessment Program (FICAP), the operational significance as indicated by the Asset Priority Index (API) and the Operation Critical Systems (OCS) identified under FICAP. This refinement will re-prioritize individual resources, starting with those historic properties that rank highest. These factors may raise the priority of certain resources based on the API and OCS scoring. This ranking will result in groupings that represent priority levels across the agency for capital and operation funding.

Once priority levels are established, the statewide Historic Property Treatment Plan will be developed. Key elements of this plan include:

- Condition assessments to determine preservation or other treatment needs, in priority order. This assessment will be linked with the further refinement of existing condition assessments moving forward under FICAP.
- Programmatic treatment approaches for specific resource types, or within specific parks.

- Identification of opportunities for partnerships (friends' groups, volunteers, business activities, etc.)
- Identification of suitable mechanisms to complete necessary work (capital, operating, partnerships)
- Relationship with or relevance to a Washington Story.
- Identification of research gaps or information needs for properties across the system.
- Identification of resources that may be good candidates for surplus or transfer to another entity.

The Historic Property Treatment Plan will be vetted with stakeholders in the draft phase. After comments are addressed, the final plan (or key portions thereof) will be adopted by the Commission to provide direction for historic properties across the agency. This will provide priorities for the ten year capital plan, deferred maintenance, and operations budgets.

Washington State Parks is asking for your input on the proposed prioritization criteria found in Appendix B. Establishing these criteria is a key step in continuing to move forward with the effort to draft a statewide treatment plan for our historic properties.



Substation, South Cle Elum Railyard

If you have any questions, comments, or need further information please contact Alex McMurry, Historic Preservation Planner, at (360)902-0930 or historic.preservation@parks.wa.gov.