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Director



STATE OF WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

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May 29, 2024

Item E-1: Bridle Trails State Park Land Classification Update – Requested Action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This item asks the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission to approve an update to the land classifications at Bridle Trails State Park. This item advances the Commission’s strategic goal: “Customer Experience: Provide exceptional recreation, cultural, and interpretive opportunities that all visitors enjoy and support.”

SIGNIFICANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Bridle Trails State Park

Bridle Trails State Park is an approximately 489-acre forested upland park located in King County, between the cities of Bellevue and Kirkland (Appendix 1). The park was originally acquired in the 1930s from the Department of Natural Resources. The park includes approximately 28 miles of trails that are open to equestrians and hikers. Additionally, the park has a picnic area and an equestrian event ground that includes arenas and viewing stands. The park currently does not have a staff office or welcome center.

Bridle Trails Park Foundation

In 2003, Washington State Parks (Parks) entered into a 40-year agreement with the Bridle Trails Park Foundation (Foundation) in which the Foundation agreed to fund half of the annual net operating cost of Bridle Trails State Park to protect it from potential closure during a budget downturn. The Foundation’s fundraising efforts have been successful, allowing them to fund equipment purchases, events, park enhancement projects, and for the last five years, they have contributed funding toward a year-round Senior Park Aide.

Classification and Management Plan

In 2004, Parks completed a Classification and Management Planning process (CAMP) for Bridle Trails after an expansive public process. The CAMP included Commission-adopted land classifications and a long-term park boundary, as well as a Director-approved management plan. The majority of the park was classified as a Resource Recreation Area (Appendix 2) to allow for low to medium intensity recreation while providing a moderate to high degree of resource protection. The more highly developed areas of the park near the parking lot, arenas, and picnic area were classified as Recreation Areas. Appendix 3 provides additional information on the State Parks land classification system.

Environmental Education

The Foundation hosts a variety of environmental education programming in the park and the Lake Washington Saddle Club (LWSC) hosts clinics and events related to equestrian education. At least as early as 2008, there was a desire to have a classroom or indoor meeting space in the park to allow some of this programming to happen out of the weather. A variety of locations for such a facility have been considered.

The Foundation has agreed to fund the design and construction of an environmental education classroom, as well as a park welcome center for staff to interact with park visitors. Additionally, they have agreed to provide future funding for facility maintenance and educational programming. The Foundation met with Parks, LWSC, and representatives from the equestrian community to identify a location in the park near the current developed area that would serve Parks and Foundation needs, but limit impacts to equestrians. The Foundation hired consultants to minimize environmental impacts while providing access for people with disabilities and maximizing sight lines to ensure equestrian safety. The selected location is classified Resource Recreation, and is less than 100 feet outside the current Recreation Area land classification. Classrooms and welcome centers are not permitted in Resource Recreation areas, so a land classification update is needed to allow development in the selected location.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Commission updates the land classifications for Bridle Trails State Park to increase the size of the Recreation Area to allow construction of the environmental education classroom and welcome center in the location identified by the Foundation's consultants, as shown in Appendix 2. Additionally, staff recommends that the Commission decrease the size of the Recreation Area around the arena in the north central part of the park to offer additional protection to environmentally sensitive areas and more closely retain the relative percentages of Recreation Areas versus Resource Recreation Areas.

LEGAL AUTHORITY:

RCW 79A.05.030 Powers and duties--Mandatory
WAC 352-16-020 Land classification system
WAC 352-16-030 Management within land classifications

SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Appendix 1: Location and Vicinity Map
Appendix 2: Current and Proposed Land Classifications
Appendix 3: Washington State Parks Land Classification System

REQUESTED ACTION FROM COMMISSION:

That the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission:

1. Adopt revised land classifications for Bridle Trails State Park, as recommended by staff in Appendix 2.

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Reviewer(s):

Kira Swanson, SEPA REVIEW: Following review, staff issued a “Determination of Non-Significance” on May 10, 2024 regarding the proposal to update the land classifications at Bridle Trails State Park and to construct an environmental education classroom and welcome station. The DNS was issued under WAC 197-11-340(2); State Parks will not act on this proposal for 14 days from the date of issuance. Comments must be received by May 24, 2024 to be considered.

Laura Holmes, Fiscal Impact Statement: Action requested has nominal fiscal impact associated with the land classification decision. Future fiscal impacts are expected to be minimal impact based on funding source through an agreement but potentially may involve grant, operating, and capital funding sources.

Andy Woo, Assistant Attorney General: March 20, 2024

Heather Saunders, Parks Development Director

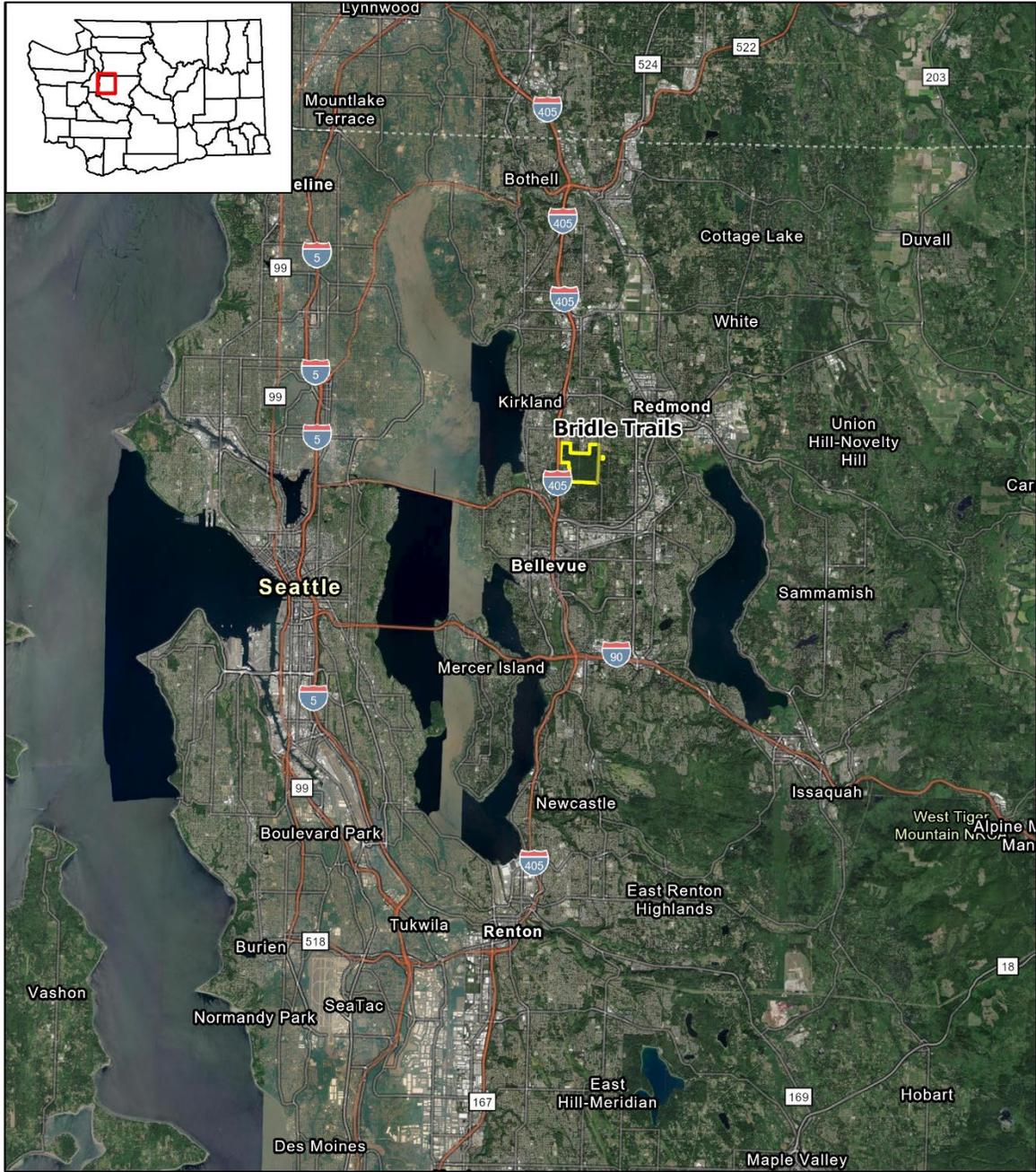
Approved for Transmittal to Commission



Diana Dupuis, Director

APPENDIX 1

Location and Vicinity Map



Bridle Trails Vicinity Map

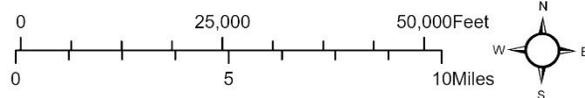


Figure 1

APPENDIX 2

Current and Proposed Land Classifications

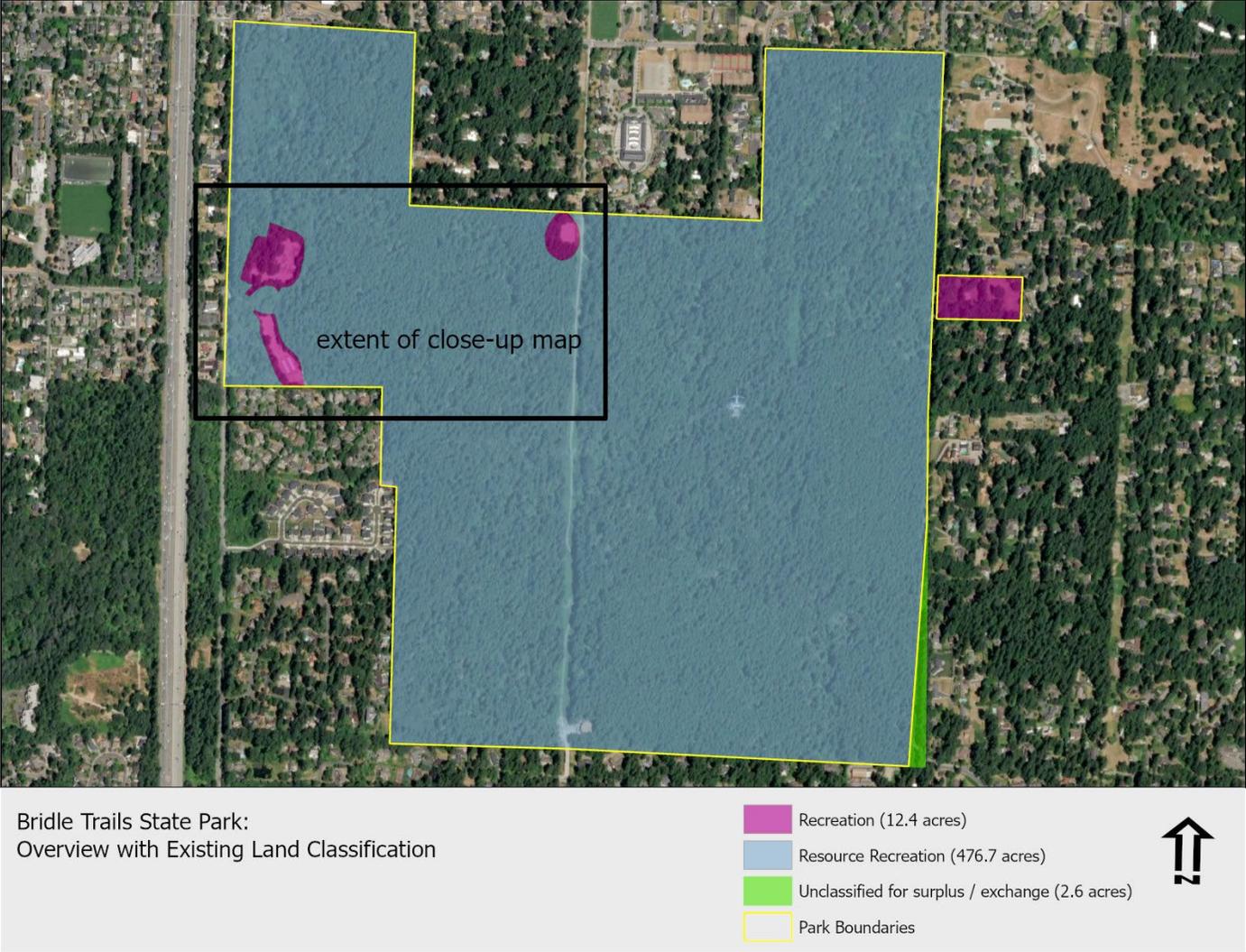


Figure 2

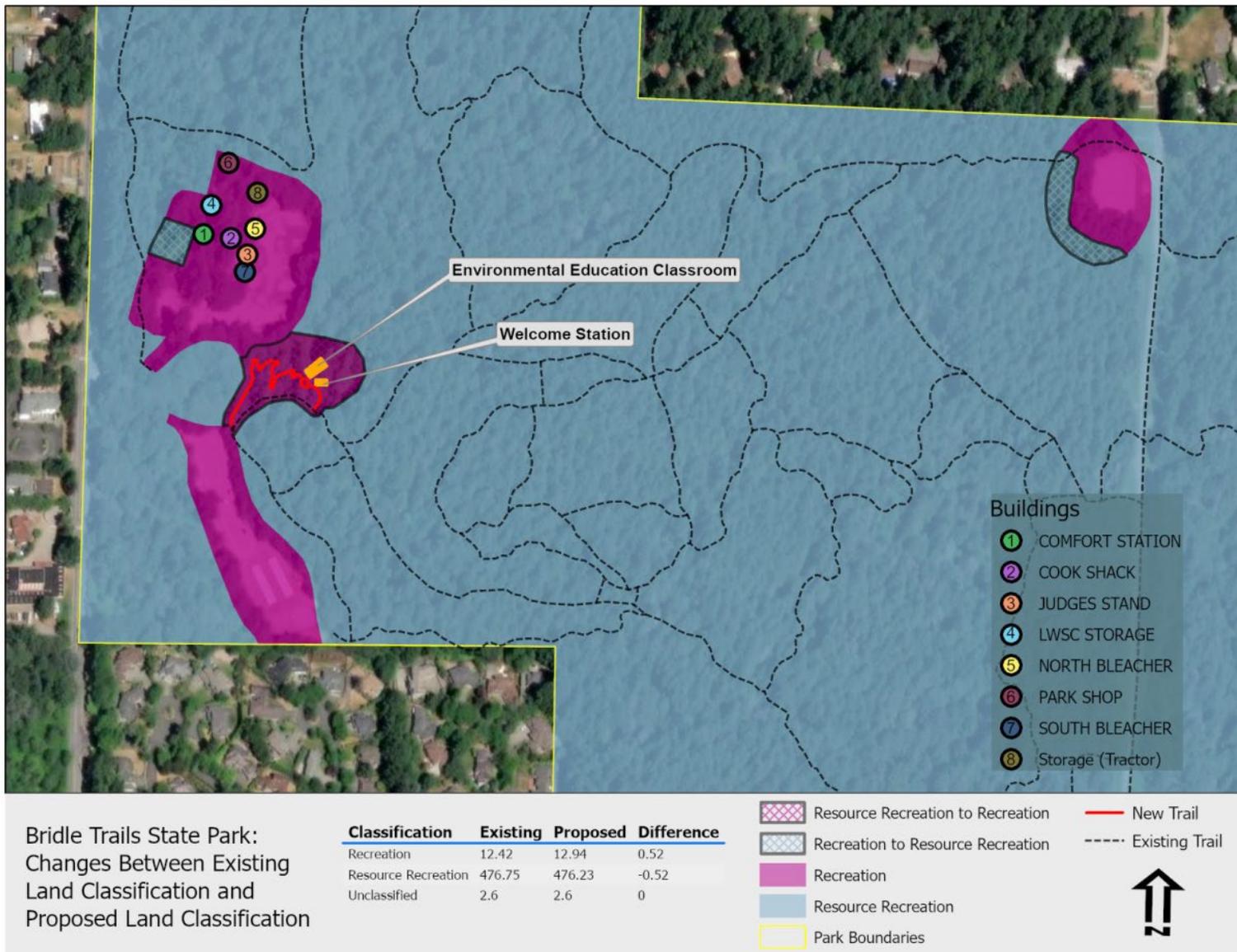


Figure 3

APPENDIX 3

Washington State Parks Land Classification System

Washington Administrative Code Establishing Land Classification System

WAC 352-16-020 Land classification system. State park areas are of statewide natural, cultural, and/or recreational significance and/or outstanding scenic beauty. They provide varied facilities serving low-intensity, medium intensity, and high intensity outdoor recreation activities, areas reserved for preservation, scientific research, education, public assembly, and/or environmental interpretation, and support facilities. They may be classified in whole or part as follows:

- (1) **Recreational areas** are suited and/or developed for high-intensity outdoor recreational use, conference, cultural and/or educational centers, or other uses serving large numbers of people.
- (2) **Resource recreation** areas are suited and/or developed for natural and/or cultural resource-based medium-intensity and low-intensity outdoor recreational use.
- (3) **Natural areas** are designated for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of natural processes and/or features of significant ecological, geological or paleontological value while providing for low-intensity outdoor recreation activities as subordinate uses.
- (4) **Heritage areas** are designated for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of unique or unusual archaeological, historical, scientific, and/or cultural features, and traditional cultural properties, which are of statewide or national significance.
- (5) **Natural forest areas** are designated for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of natural forest processes while providing for low-intensity outdoor recreation activities as subordinate uses, and which contain:
 - (a) Old-growth forest communities that have developed for one hundred fifty years or longer and have the following structural characteristics: Large old-growth trees, large snags, large logs on land, and large logs in streams; or
 - (b) Mature forest communities that have developed for ninety years or longer; or
 - (c) Unusual forest communities and/or interrelated vegetative communities of significant ecological value.
- (6) **Natural area preserves** are designated for preservation of rare or vanishing flora, fauna, geological, natural historical or similar features of scientific or educational value and which are registered and committed as a natural area preserve through a cooperative agreement with an appropriate natural resource agency pursuant to chapter 79.70 RCW and chapter 332-60 WAC.

WAC 352-16-030 Management within land classifications. (1) The director shall develop management guidelines for each land classification listed in WAC 352-16-020. The guidelines shall provide specific direction for each classification, outlining the philosophy of each classification, its appropriate physical features, location, allowed and prohibited activities, and allowed and prohibited developments. (2) Nothing in this section shall be construed to allow uses that are otherwise prohibited, nor prohibit uses that are otherwise expressly allowed, by the commission, this code, or by statute