PEAR Team Meeting 17 – Meeting Notes – November 13, 2024, 12-2 pm

Welcome & Icebreaker – Yelley 12:05 pm

Icebreaker asking the group to respond to the prompts below.

- Name
- Pronouns
  - (she/ her, they/them, he/him, etc.)
- Visual Description (highlights)
  - Race and/ or skin color
  - Hair (cut or style)
  - What you are wearing (glasses, jewelry, color of your shirt)
- Role(s) if you like
- Check in:

  - What energy are you bringing today?

Facilitators' Present:

Yelley Taylor, they/them, Parks DEI Consultant
Janette Chien, she/her, Parks DEI Director
Heather Frye, she/her

PEAR Team Present:

Lynn Makowsky, she/her, Community member
Alyssa Smith, she/her, Boating Education
Stacey Coltrain, she/her, Ranger Sequim Bay State Park
Mary Brown, she/her, Guide Manager at Alpine Events International
Curt Fackler, Camp Host Volunteer WA and AZ
Nick Miron, he/him, Community Member
Suzanne Kagen, she/her, Program Specialist 2 at Lake Sammamish State Park
Angela Smith, she/her, Recreation Professional and Community Builder
Valeria Veasley, Policy & Governmental Affairs Management Analyst
Denice Rochelle, she/her, Founder of The Bronze Chapter
Reco Bembry, he/him, President Big Tent Coalition
Megan Grisso, she/her, community member
MJ Sampang, she/her, Washington Trails Association
Natasha House, she/her, Deputy Director of Administrative Services

Observers Present

Chris Carlson – Parks staff
Philip Nontell – Parks staff
Edmon Lee, Community Member

Agenda

Yelley welcomed the group at 12:05 pm. Janette reminded the team of our community norms that we came up with as a group. We can work to support one another to be accountable for these norms. Please reach out if you would like to make any adjustments to these community norms.

Janette shared the agenda.

- Check in
- EIR Topic: Using Technology to Increase Access
- General updates
- Closing.

Yelley started the meeting with a check-in.

Equity Impact Review (EIR) Using Technology to Increase Access

Welcome Heather! A Los Angeles native who wandered her way to Washington, fell in love with it, stayed and raised her kids here. Heather started working at Parks way back in 2010, which is probably because she was spending so much time in them already, they figured they should give her a job talking about them. She's worn a few different hats since then, but her current position overseeing Park's public-facing websites as part of our Marketing, Creative & Website (MACAW) team by far her favorite role.

RECORDING STARTED

Heather shared that to best understand where we are now it's very helpful to look back at where we started. Back in 2022 we had four websites. We had bigfoot for a digital footprint. Our digital footprint was very expensive and much too wide. On top of being hard to read, difficult to navigate and severely lacking in accessibility features, our four sites, not including the reservation site, were ripe with redundancies and outdated information. It was difficult for our visitors to find anything, let alone know what was accurate and up to date.

Our page structure was very convoluted overall and poorly structured. It was text heavy and not accessible on so many levels. We were also not mobile friendly. People would have to do a lot of scrolling to find any information that they were looking for. What wasn't working on our desktop version of the site was infinitely worse on mobile.

Our studies told us that our website is the first point of contact for at least 88% of our visitors and many of those are via mobile devices. In short, our website is our front door and we needed to improve it so more people can get it. It was time for a change. We partnered with anthrotech which is a human centered User Interface User Experience (UIUX) website development consulting firm in Olympia.

We began our journey with a mission statement. Our mission statement served as our guiding light through our 18-month iterative and data-driven redesign process, and the same holds true as we move into the future. It's the standard we hold ourselves to in everything we do on our website. Our website mission is that: Washington State Parks will build an inclusive and accessible website where everyone from the first-time visitor to the expert adventurer can find, understand, and discover information that they need from any device. Agency team members will work together to create and maintain content based on user tasks and data.

Heather asked the group what words stand out for you in this mission statement?

- Any devices stood out to me. I use different devices.
- Inclusive
- Discovering information
- Everyone
- All devices
- New visitors
- Expert adventures
- First time visitor to the expert

Let's talk a little about our approach. The redesign was not just a complete overhaul of our site, which it was an overhaul of our site as well. We rolled three websites into one and kept our Discover Pass website. We cut down a tremendous amount of our redundancies. We cut down a tremendous amount of the extra pages and old content that was no longer in use. I think we had at one point somewhere around in the neighborhood of 27,000 PDFs hanging out on the back end. We cut that number way, way back and, and got rid of just a whole lot of stuff that had been literally on the site probably since the very beginning of the website. It wasn't bad information, just old and outdated. So, we got rid of it. It was also a complete transformation of the way that we approached our public facing website and its structure and the way that we manage it, which is also known as website governance. In short, it was designed from the outside looking in and with an eye toward long term sustainability and accessibility.

Our choices were data-driven and user centered, meaning they came from real users, both internal and external, in every walk of life. They were also driven by what's known as VOCAG or web content and accessibility guidelines, the 2.1 AA standards. We restructured our governance to be multilayered and educated so that it assures accurate quality product. The bonus is that our web staff are innovative and thoughtful and tuned into our customers' needs, and they provide feedback that helps us develop even more improvements for our visitors.

Let's talk a little bit about what we mean when we say user centered approach. We shifted from thinking like an agency communicating out basically kind of lecturing at people to looking from the outside in. We gathered data from real users to find out what they wanted to know most of all, and then structured our site accordingly. You'll see that represented throughout the site we call that top task navigation. The things that people want to know are #1 and right up front there. It's like, oh, the park is closed, and they know the park is closed right away.

What we ended up with this year since we launched is a website that meets and exceeds in some places modern accessibility standards and is maintained by a structured, educated team of subject matter experts, editors and publishers agency wide. We've won more than a dozen national awards for design and accessibility. We are truly setting the standard gold standard for government websites. We're very,

very proud of that for many reasons, which is a great segue into talking about accessibility features we've built in.

I want you all to bear in mind that for everything that I will be able to show you, there are a host of other deeper and much more technical aspects that are integrated into the site. We're just going to be touching on the things that are more above ground, so to speak. First, it's hard to talk about website accessibility without talking about the guiding principles behind it all. The first set of these is known as POUR and pour stands for perceivable, operable, understandable and robust. There are a set of four guidelines that help us create accessible content. All users can attain awareness of the content, whatever device they're using in whatever way they're accessing it, they can perceive it, it is operable. It's navigable and operable with any device by anyone, no matter who they are with what they're using to operate it. It's understandable whether you have cognitive differences, you're using English as a second language in a variety of other words. You can understand it's comprehensible by everyone and it's robust. The content can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents. Whatever you're accessing it on, you can access it on, including assistive technologies now and into the future.

And finally, just a few words on why the real biggest reason behind why we do this work of building in accessibility. It's ultimately because accessibility has another name and that name is kindness. Every time we take a moment to be thoughtful and build in ways that anyone can do things, that's kindness. Every time we remove a barrier or create greater clarity or ease of use, that's kindness. And that's why we do this in this quote from Brené Brown clear as kind, unclear as UN kind, which is, you know, that's our guiding principle.

Let's take just a very quick moment before we go into a live demonstration and have a look at the old site versus the new site, everyone. Heather shared she would love to hear some of the thoughts y'all have about what you noticed about the changes we've made and what stands out for you.

- New categorization
- Higher contrast
- Less text more pictures
- Hours in full box
- Old site very busy

Live Demonstration

Heather started a live demonstration of the new site, isn't it pretty? One of you pointed out clear contrast and that's 100% correct. We tested every single color to make sure it lays over each other correctly and doesn't create visual confusion, that it's visible, that it's very clear that there's high contrast, that people would be able to see everything and that the colors don't cause confusion together. We chose a very clear large legible font. We chose clear organization. That's the top task bar. We did lots of testing to find the

things that people wanted to know first.

And overall, what we found was that people wanted to know where to go and what to do and then a little bit of both kind of mixed together. On the top task bar is everything you find a park, find an activity, find a Sno-Park. Further down the page we have our calendar and support information/inspiration from our blogs.

On the park pages alerts are first. There are photographs and all the pages are like one another. All the snow park pages, they all have information in consistent places. There's a lot of site continuity throughout. We've simplified our navigation. At one point on the old site, we counted at least 18 different types of navigation. That was extremely confusing. We were spreading our information through four websites, and we've paired that down. We rolled three into one and now have the information on two sites.

What is a header class? These may look just like large or just variations in font. But they are not. Header classes move in sequential order through the page. A person who does not have vision impairments is able to see an ordering of information. A person using a keyboard navigation can move through the page with the information sets based on the header classes so that they don't have to go through the entire page to find the information that they're looking for. For example, this up here, the title of the park is in header class one and the subsequent information activities is in header class two. Under header class two "Things to do at this park" you'll find header class three. Header class four is shown as the winter schedule. People using keyboard navigation can move through different sets of information more quickly and it works for people without vision limitations as well.

Our pages open in the same window, that creates reliable navigation back and forth. We have breadcrumbs. What are breadcrumbs? It's the reliable navigation at the top of each page showing how you get there and the way you find the page. We have what's known as filtering and tagging. We've integrated this the icons or things you want to do in a park are also part of finding things that you like in a par. Let's say you wanted to find a park that has accessible campsites, allows dogs, and has beach exploration. Then you hit apply and the options of the parks offering those three categories. This helps visitors find parks in ways that are useful to them.

Heather shared that she is very proud of a new feature finished this year is deep linking to our reservation site. For every park that has campsites that are reservable or every park property that is reservable, we've created a one-to-one link with the corresponding page on our reservation system so that people don't have to go back to the top of the system. This allows them to navigate using the back-and-forth buttons. They don't have to go through all the trouble of going back to the top and finding what they were looking for.

Heather shared the park pages content. First the name of the park, address and a little slug line, not two miles of content to move through. Everything that you need to access the park is in what we call the call out card. This includes our hours and fees. We also

have iconography, it's not perfect. We are working on finding a font class with more universal symbols, but for the most part we do have this which helps to pair down content. It let's people find stuff quickly and is also helpful for folks who have English as a second language or non-English speaking.

We've also incorporated what we call once source of truth. Once source of truth means that the information on one thing, one area, one aspect, one set of rules, or one anything on our website is in one place. We can link to it from another page, but we do not repeat the information in multiple places. Redundancy was a problem on our old sites, and this helps to solve that. We have an educated group of editors working on our site. They've been educated in plain talk. We've pared down our language choice and in general just the amount, which are also very helpful to anyone reading it, let alone those using a translation service. With translation services the cleaner the language, the better the translation.

We've also incorporated alt text. For those of you who are not familiar with alt text, we've incorporated alt text on our photographs. We chose galleries instead of slideshows. We used to have slideshows, but they move too quickly, and they don't allow people to access alt text. Instead of see the Scenic Beach shoreline. We have alt text that reads, "The Shoreline of Scenic Beach with they rocky shore and green leafy threes in the foreground and brilliant blue water in the background. In the distance, the Olympia Mountain range rises into a clear blue sky." That's what alt text looks like. It brings the picture to life, like describing it to someone. For those using a screen reader they can get a feeling for the park.

We also added our website accessibility page. It's a technical page that talks about our statement of commitment and what we've done. It also talks about what we need to do. We know we have some things that do not meet standards and what we're going to be doing about it, how we're supporting our accessibility and what sorts of assistive technology are supported on our site. We also have a feedback form and many other ways to provide feedback on any accessibility barriers for the public so they can let us know what they're facing, and we can find solutions.

No website stays accessible without continuously working hard to make it so. Here's a few things on our radar that we're working on to ensure we keep meeting and hopefully exceeding our high accessibility standards. We are going to be opening our first content audit. We're going to be creating a rolling audit of every single page on our website. We're going to keep doing it repeatedly. We're going to go through every piece of content starting with our park pages to make sure all the alt text is there, and all the header classes are there, and everything is in plain speak, and that it's up to date and accurate. We have a budget request submitted for the 2025-2027 biennium to fund our partnership with accessibility experts on an accessible map project. The parks need maps and visitors need accessible maps. We are also looking into ways that we can improve our website for non-English speakers. We're looking into translation services and what that will look like. We're also beginning to address video accessibility

compliance. We don't have very many videos on our site at this time and we provided closed captions on those, but we're going to obviously need to work harder on that and it will be a growing need.

Heather thanked the group for having her to talk about for website journey and prompted the groups for questions and comments.

Q: [Washington State Park Virtual Tours | Park Photo Guide - Washington State Parks Foundation](#) - is there a reason that this is not on our website?

Heather: Unfortunately, it is inherently inaccessible. Virtual tours are inaccessible. As agents of the public, we have a greater responsibility to ensure website access. Anything we provide on our website needs to meet accessibility standards. State Parks foundation is a private organization and can offer the virtual tours. We want to offer an accessible map, not a non-accessible map. We won't put it on the website until we know that it's something that is accessible to the public.

(Later from the chat) So just as a clarification, there ARE in fact accessible versions of virtual tours now. My bad, in past days that was not the case and I have not revisited the information lately. We would have to look into whether or not those are a piece of technology we would be able to use.

Q: re: translation services, what groups are you or do you anticipate partnering with?

Heather: Because we are a land-based organization, the information on our website changes constantly. For govt sites that have more stagnant or more slowly changing information, it's more affordable to have a translation service. With the amount of changes, we make on a daily basis with our alerts, events and all things we do – we are much more reliant on online translation services (like google translate). This can be a bit volatile – at least the free version. If we want to promise translation to our visitors, we need it to be reliable. We are looking into the paid version through google. This process needs to go through IT's approval.

Q: A few years ago, I used to review similar webpages. One of the constant Q's around google translate was that it wasn't that accurate. Has google translate improved over time? Or the medium level paid option – has that improved?

Heather: Office of cyber security – chief information officer – their thoughts were that it is slightly better. But I can't answer that 100% because I don't know. The free version is improving but it's not 100%. That's one of the reasons we are making our pages plain-speak and keeping it clean, paring it down. It helps regardless of whatever service you use.

Q: Translation creates a higher-level sense of welcoming – even if the translation isn't perfect. Adds to the welcoming mission of every website.

Q: Do you use some sort of criteria for ADA visual accessibility?

Heather: Yes – the criteria is built into web content accessibility guidelines. I can drop an information page for people to peruse – that we use.

Q: Could a "google" street view be incorporated?

Heather: Probably not for a variety of reasons. But if you do access the page and go to the google maps prompt on the parks page - it takes you to regular google maps, and you can use the street view. I don't think we have the ability to display on our website in that way, but we can link and take users to the google map.

Reco: There are some companion tools - https://waparks.org/virtual-tours/

Is there any connectivity from the state to these tools? Also, all trails app/website.

Heather: Not at this time, but we will take that feedback and look into it.

Heather pasted in chat: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Break
From 1:01 –1:11pm

Breakout Rooms
DEI team divided the team into breakout rooms to discuss the prompts for 15 minutes. Each group was then asked to share out.

Prompts for Discussion:

- What digital accessibility challenges do you face? Were they addressed by the features showcased today?
- What feedback do you have regarding the digital accessibility features on the Parks website? What would you like to see and/or experience that would be helpful to you in the future?

Room 1 highlights:

- We brought back the discussion of trusted partnerships - There's lots of content on the WTA website, the foundations website, hiker biker websites. Some of these orgs we have partnerships with and MOAs, some we don't.
- Linking to trusted partnerships has been brought up in the past
- There is a grey area – as a public agency linking to outside entities – we are responsible for the content on our site
    - We have to let people know when we are linking away
    - We have a responsibility to make sure information is consistently reliable and that partners are meeting their obligation as partners
- Adding icons about cash, card, information about WACs

- **What digital accessibility challenges do you face? Were they addressed by the features showcased today?**
- **What feedback do you have regarding the digital accessibility features on the Parks website?**
- **What would you like to see and/or experience that would be helpful to you in the future?**

Discussion about the benefit of virtual tours, maybe link to friends sites. There are some technology and rule barriers to consider. The Washington State Parks Foundation may have some technology we could learn from.

Site should be easily accessible on mobile devices

Site is much better than previous, finding it meets a lot of self-learning needs

Helpful things to include on the site:

- Advertising if cell service is available
- Post on the website rules that help park users know what rules may apply - for example, finding camping for bikers entering the parks. Letting bikers know that they will always find 1 night of camping for those entering a state park by foot / bike.
- Add icons that show whether a park is card or cash only.

Other thoughts? Ideas? Reflections?
I am pretty good w/technology access, I am challenged sometimes by all the different platforms, however, I live in a rural area w/limited Wi-Fi access and many of the more senior folks have difficulty manipulating computers, menus, dropdowns, hyperlinks etc.

Room 2 highlights:

- Lingering conversation about virtual tours
- Accessibility standards and guidelines – kudos to Heather
- If WA state parks had a map with all the overlays – what could that look like?
- Retreat centers is not the same reservation process – you have to reach out and work with a staff member. what does customer service look like for that for a customer who does not speak English?
- Definitely appreciate this website!

- **What digital accessibility challenges do you face? Were they addressed by the features showcased today?**
- **What feedback do you have regarding the digital accessibility features on the Parks website?**
- **What would you like to see and/or experience that would be helpful to you in the future?**

Feedback

1. Language translations
2. More events on calendar maybe? Seasonal outdoors
3. Maps: length of time to create one, add the layers, and what information to add on the maps

Lingering conversation/question

- Virtual tour
  - What can that look like to those who need that before visiting?
  - Accessibility standards - what does this look like? (guidelines)

Format

- Side by side was great visually
- Less text to read
- (YT) has no exp with the previous website so seeing this side by side was interesting
  - Headers were really helpful
  - Less words, better information to absorb
- Website shows information for users

Other experiences

- Blogs regarding community at state parks
- Articles: example LOTR (Lord of the Rings) parks [9 parks that bring Middle Earth to Washington](#)
-
  - Personality of the agency
  - Catered to visitors with different interests
- Photos of the park highlighted the park experience to what the visitor can experience
  - Who chooses the photos in the parks?
- Website shares that anyone can enjoy the outdoors at state parks, the language is not catered to just one specific community

- Ton of information to use on all ends with a variety of visitors.
  - Example - ADA Accessible Park Features

Bigger group reservations

- Retreat center reservations

Room 3 highlights:

- Pictures for the website – have noticed them changing and better representation of people of color
- Some photos of the parks are poor quality
- Connectivity issues – some people have unreliable internet service, can the website still be accessed if you have slower internet speeds?
- Focus groups should include seniors and those with low tech literacy
- Talked about Friends group and their roles
- Website is "activity focused" but if you're a group that wants to volunteer or engage in a partnership, it's not as easy to navigate
- Would be nice if there were better pictures - some of them are pretty poor in terms of quality (fuzzy, unclear, out of focus, poor colors, backlit)
- Not sure how the website does on a slower connection? For some people who travel a lot into zones with slower service. It might be good to check. You think they would have thought of that since we have so many parks in slower areas.
- I remember getting phone calls from the public who were lower technology literate and struggled to navigate website.
- Make sure to add seniors as part of the focus group. It is hard to learn something fresh without a previous reference. Would be more inclined to use the phone.
- Overall the website is really good
- Thinking about the function of the website - really good for individual visitors searching for recreational experiences and a place to have them. Experienced based
- But no link for a community group who wants to partner with Parks, or a school group
- I've always lived close to a park and so I would just go down to the park and talk to the ranger (but I'm old-fashioned)
- It can be a challenge when trying to arrange things from afar, but even at times when I can go to the park to talk to a staff member about partnering, there are no staff available. Definitely gotten more challenging
- As a program specialist - would get lots of phone calls with requests from volunteer groups, community groups, etc. (Phone is #1 when they couldn't find

info on the website). Or request would go to HQ and then a week later be routed to the park area.

- Even if you do find someone at the park, they might not even have the right information to get to you.
- If I did not work for Parks, I would not approach an armed ranger for casual conversation, how to partner, local hikes in the area
- I have comfort going up to a ranger because I know what the role is - but if I didn't, I don't think I would
- Like the idea of having on the website - the communication that you can partner with parks
- A partner portal? A volunteer portal? - But hard to maintain
- Talked about Friends groups as an old partnership

Room 4 highlights:

- Access for seniors
- Having some alternatives other than digital?
- Folks in rural areas who have connectivity issues
- Are we going to get caught up in changes a year from now? AI?
- Virtual park rangers?
- Translation services on website even if it's not as sophisticated
- RB - I presume or remember the site being haptic usable on multiple devices, phones, iPad, tablets etc., YES! I would love to see Ai integration sooner rather than later, it's changing so rapidly, for young people more specifically, i.e. search bots, background information on each park, historical context updates.
- Adding an Ai. Virtual parks ranger, to speak, direct and navigate through the site reflective of multiple cultures, ages and abilities, relatively easy to set up!
- The Virtual option is an absolutely great feature for new users
- https://waparks.org/virtual-tours/ is a great link to use for those who have ability
- AS - Having some type of translation tool available would be helpful. It doesn't have to be perfect right away. The information that is attain can help folks progress to what they want to learn or receive.

General Updates
- Sign up for a 1:1 PEAR Team end of year check in – scheduling link in the chat
- Updates to community compensation rates
- January PEAR Team meeting will be a work planning meeting
- No Child Left Inside Grant Program
- Everyone Outdoors Program
- Next month – Visitor Services: Discount Pass Programs

Closing

Yelley asked the group to type or verbally respond: One thing you are leaving with? One action you are going to take? The meeting closed at 2:00 p.m.

PEAR Team Meeting 17

November 13, 2024

Using Technology to Increase Access

Community Norms	Practices
GOAL ORIENTED & STRUCTURED MEETINGS	• Facilitators provide agenda, meeting notes, and organization • Time checks – limit tangents to keep us on track • PEAR Team meetings recorded during presentation portions
THOUGHTFUL PARTICIPATION	• Center PEAR goals to empower discussions • Raise your virtual hand • Balance speaking and active listening • Open-minded observations and feedback, lean into curiosity, ask questions before assuming, seek to understand • Use accessible language (explain acronyms, terms, etc.) • Practice compassion, patience, and understanding • Trust the process; be open to feedback • Trust that we are stronger together than alone
RECOGNIZE EACH PERSON HAS UNIQUE EXPERIENCES	• Speak your truth • Appreciate everyone's differences and commonalities • Awareness of diversity within BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community • Awareness of privilege (white, able-bodied, education, etc.) • Notice and re-consider blanket statements
SUPPORT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY	• Judgment-free zone • Recognize this is an intergenerational space • Consider the role(s) of silence and its impact in our space • Take care of yourself • Acknowledge intent, assess impact • Honor confidentiality for the group's contributions

Agenda

- Check in

- **EIR Topic:** Using Technology to Increase Access

- General updates

- Closing

Let's check in!

- **Name**
- **Pronouns**
  - (she/ her, they/them, he/him, etc.)
- **Visual Description** (highlights)
  - Race and/ or skin color
  - Hair (cut or style)
  - What you are wearing (glasses, jewelry, color of your shirt)
- **Role(s)** if you like
- **Check in:**
  - Describe today's energy using a weather event.

Welcome Heather!

A Los Angles native who wandered her way to Washington, fell in love with it, stayed and raised her kids here. Heather started working at Parks way back in 2010, which is probably because she was spending so much time in them already, they figured they should give her a job talking about them.

She's worn a few different hats since then, but her current position overseeing Park's public-facing websites as part of our Marketing, Creative & Website (MACAW) by far her favorite role.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE ACCESS

Heather Frye
Marketing, Creative and Website

WASHINGTON STATE PARKS

Greeting y'all, I'm Heather Frye, Washington State Park's web manager.

I am so pleased to be here with you today to talk about our website, and how we are working hard to eliminate barriers and help everyone to find our parks and their outdoor passions and memories through technology.

I am passionate about accessibility and spend a lot of time perusing outdoor-enthusiast social media, reading blogs and listening to our staff and visitors. I love reading, hearing, thinking about and creating innovative ways we can help connect everyone with our beautiful Washington State Parks through technology.

I am pleased to share with you all today and excited to hear your thoughts and ideas on how we can better serve you!
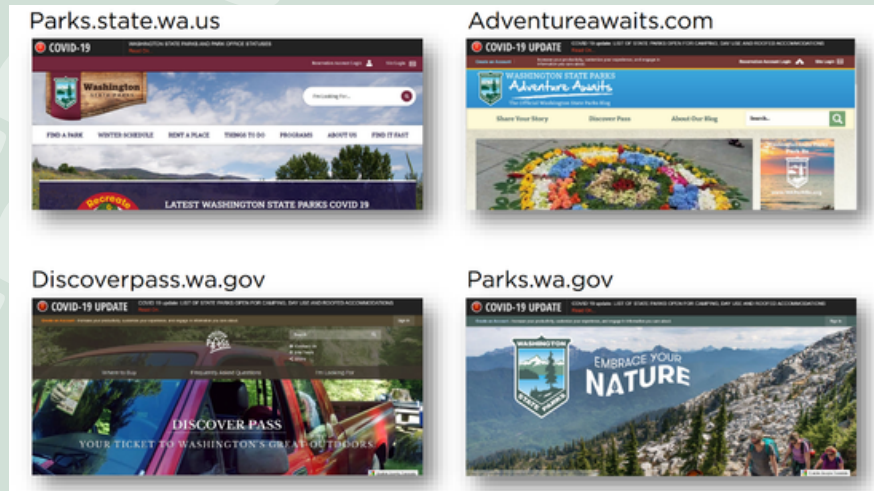
Once upon a time...

There were four websites

WASHINGTON STATE PARKS

To best understand where we are now, it helps to look back at where we started. So....

Our digital footprint was expansive

Our digital footprint was far too wide

On top of being hard to read, difficult to navigate and severely lacking in accessibility features, our four sites (not including our reservation site) were rife with redundancies and outdated information. It was difficult for customers to find anything, let alone know if it was accurate and up to date.
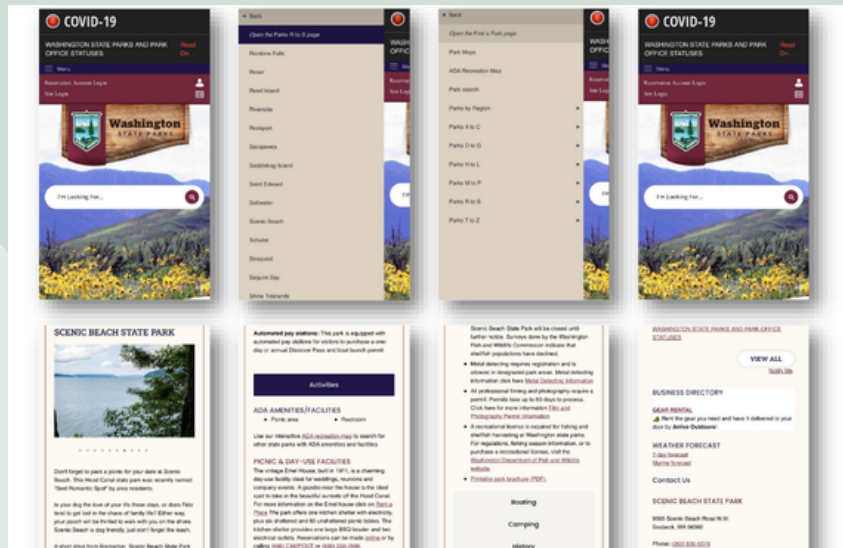
Our page structure and content were convoluted

The old pages were, overall, poorly-structured, text-heavy and not accessible on many levels. Note the tan background.

We were not mobile friendly

What wasn't working on the desktop version of our site was infinitely worse on mobile.

Our studies told us that our website is the first point of contact with our parks for at least 88% of our visitors, and a great many of those are via mobile devices. In short the website is our front door, and we needed to improve it so more people could get in. It was time for a change.
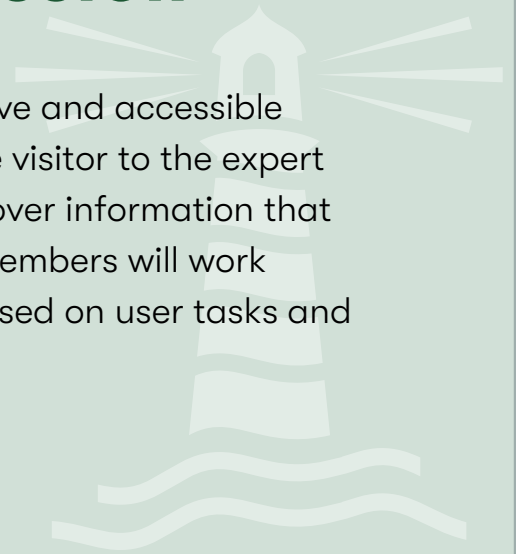
Redesign

▼

WASHINGTON STATE PARKS
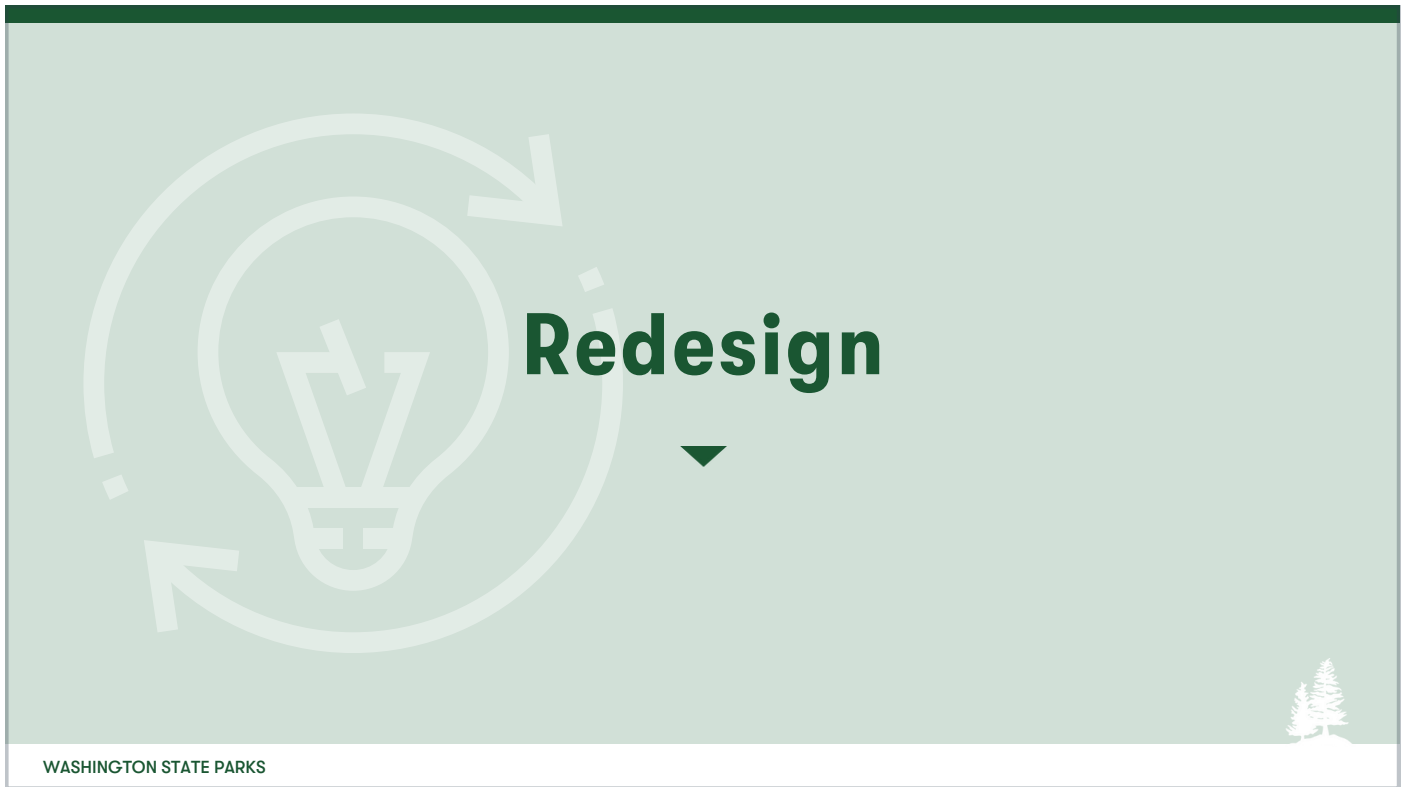
So we partnered with AnthroTech, a human-centered UI/UX website development consulting firm in Olympia and began our journey with….

Our Website Mission

Washington State Parks will build an inclusive and accessible website where everyone—from the first-time visitor to the expert adventurer—can find, understand and discover information that they need from any device. Agency team members will work together to create and maintain content based on user tasks and data.

... our mission statement. It served as our guiding light through the 18-month, iterative, data-driven redesign process. And the same holds true as we move into the future ... it's the standard we hold ourselves to in everything we do on our website.

Question: What words stand out for you in this mission statement?

Our Approach

Data Driven and User-Centered

Building the website was an iterative process built on user data

High Accessibility Standards

We built in WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards

Governance Restructure

We rebuilt our governance to be structured, robust and educated

The redesign was not just an overhaul of our site -- it was a complete transformation of the way we approached our public-facing website, it's structure, and the way we manage it (also known as website governance). In short, we designed from the outside looking in and with an eye toward long-term sustainability.

Our choices were driven by data   -- from real users, both internal and external and every walk of life -- and Web Content and Accessiblity 2.1 AA standards.

We created a governance structure that is multi layered, educated and assures an accurate, quality product. Bonus, our web staff is innovative, thoughtful and tuned in to customer needs -- they provide feedback that helps us develop improvements for our visitors!

USER-CENTERED APPROACH

Where can I camp with my dog?

What are the park rules?

What parks have accessible restrooms?

Where can I launch my boat?

What kind of equipment do I need?

Which Sno Parks allow sledding?

What is a user-centered approach to building a website?

In short, we shifted from thinking like an agency communicating out, to approaching our site build from the outside looking in. We gathered data from real users to find out what they wanted to know most of all and structured our site accordingly.

The Results

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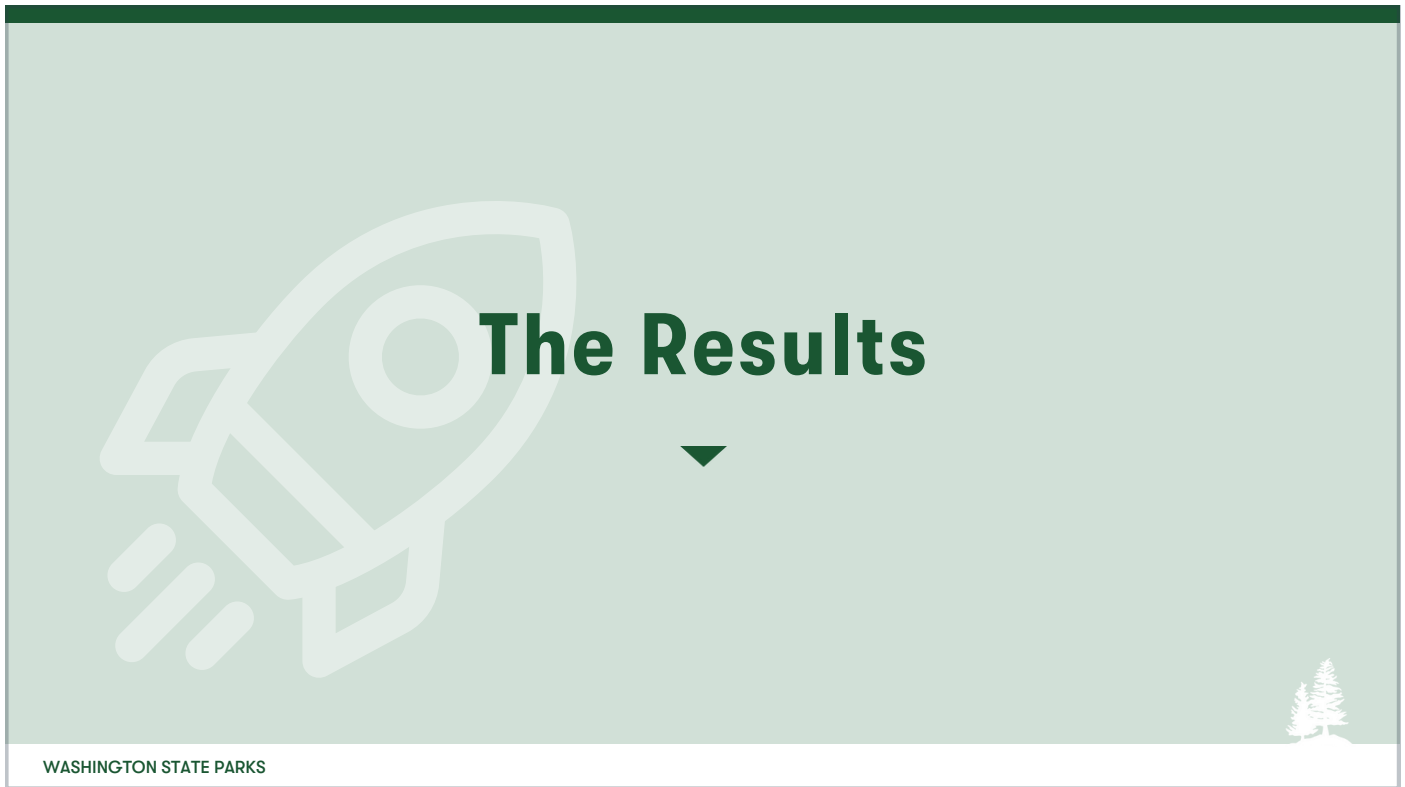
Needless to say, it was a long process and a ton of work. There were ups. There were downs. There were sacrifices, compromises and a whole lot of quesadillas. Like, actual quesadillas.

But, what we ended up with, in this year since we launched, is a website that meets modern accessibility standards and is maintained by a structured, educated team of subject matter experts, editors and publishers agency wide. Oh, yah, and we've won like, more than a dozen national awards for design and accessibility. We are setting the gold standard for government websites.

Which is a great segue for talking about the accessibility features we've built in. Bear in mind, for everything I will show you, there are a host of other, deeper and more technical specs that are integrated into the site. So we will just be touching on the one's that are more above ground, so to speak.

Pour Principles

Perceivable

Information and interface are presented in ways users can perceive.

- Easy for all users to access content
- Text alternatives such as icons, and alt text for images

Operable

User interface and navigation are operable with any device

- All functionality available from a keyboard and other devices.
- Help users navigate, find content, and where they are on site.

Understandable

Information and user interface are understandable.

- Content can be comprehended by everyone, even when translated.
- Web pages appear and operate in predictable ways.

Robust

Content can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies

- Compatible with user agents and assistive technologies now and into the future

But first....

It's hard to talk about Website Accessibility without talking about the guiding principles behind it all. These are known as POUR. It stands for Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust. POUR is a set of four guidelines that help us create accessible web content: They are:

But building in accessibility has another name: Kindness. Every time we take a moment to be thoughtful and build in ways that make it easier for others to do things, that's kindness.

Next I want share some of our features with you via a live demonstration. These are listed on the following slides as well
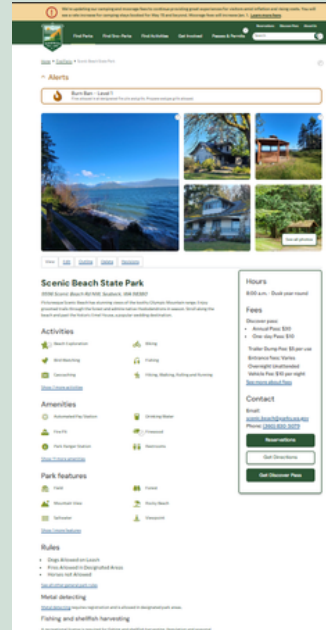
But building in accessibility has another name: Kindness. Every time we take a moment to be thoughtful and build in ways that make it easier for others to do things, that's kindness. Every barrier we remove and create greater clarity is a kindness.

Next I want share some of our features with you via a live demonstration. These are listed on the following slides as well
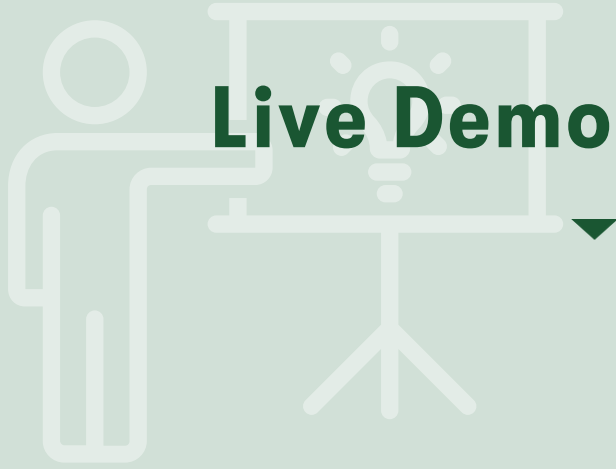
Here is a side by side comparison of the old site and new site. What things do you notice about the changes we made?

Live Demonstration

Now I'd like to take you for a cruise through some of our website's accessibility features. You may also find these listed on the following slides

Layout and Design

- User top-task oriented
- Clear color contrast
- Legible font
- Clear organization

First let's look at our overall layout.

-- User top-task oriented organization (driven by our user studies)
-- Colors were all chosen to pass WCAG contrast standards (color blindness, low vision, regular people just trying to read the page
--Same goes for font type and size choices.
--Same for image sizes and layout (we went from slide shows to galleries)
-- All pages are cleanly organized and each area of every pages has a clear purpose

Navigation

- Simplified navigation throughout
- Site continuity
- Header classes
- Filtering and tagging
- Breadcrumbs
- Pages open in same window
- Deep linking to reservations site

-- Top-task oriented navigation driven by user research
--Users will find the same types of information sets in predictable places on similar page types and, to the best of our ability, on pages throughout the site.
--We added header classes to aid screen reader users. And everyone else too -- in navigating content.
--Filtering helps end users find exactly what they want quickly
--Pages may be reliably navigated using breadcrumbs and the browser's back, forward buttons
--We have added deep links from our parks and rentable properties pages to the affiliated page on the reservations site to aid in ease of use for the end user and prevent confusion

Content

- Top-task oriented organization
- Pared down and plain talk
- Icons
- One source of truth
- ALT text on all images
- Compliance page and feedback form

Cleaning up our content was a major part of our redesign. With the help of our statewide team, we started by removing hundreds of unnecessary pages, some of which had been on the site for decades. We reorganized the content we still needed based on user needs.

--Our content takes users to what they want and need to know most.
--We educated our editors and publishers on plain talk principles and scrubbed our content.
--We implemented the principle of one source of truth to prevent redundancies
--We are teaching our editors to add robust ALT text to every image.
-- We have a page dedicated to defining our WCAG compliance level, identifying known pain points and what we are doing to address them. In addition, we have a form for taking feedback on accessibility barriers. It is available in a number of different ways.

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Of course, no website stays accessible without continuously working to make it so. So here's a few things on our radar to ensure we keep meeting and, hopefully, exceeding, our high accessibility standards.

Content Audit

We are building our auditing process to assure our content is accurate and compliant

Accessible Maps

We have a budget request in to begin partnering with accessibility experts on maps.

Translation

We are looking into ways to improve our website experience for non-English speakers.

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This fall we are working on how we will create a continuous annual audit of our entire site and it's governance.

We have a budget request in for the 2025-2027 biennium for funding our accessible map project.

We are looking at ways and tools for improving our site experience for non English speaking visitors.

And we are also beginning to address video accessibility compliance. We do not have very many videos on our site at this time, but it will be a growing need.

Questions? Comments?

Tell me what you want, really really want to know -- or see!

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I would like to thank you all so much for having me today to talk about our ongoing website journey. It is such an important part of the way we connect with visitors and they way visitors are connected, we want it to be the best tool it can be. We appreciate your thoughts and feedback. So, with that, I welcome your questions and comments.

Prompts for Discussion

What digital accessibility challenges do you face? Were they addressed by the features showcased today?

What feedback do you have regarding the digital accessibility features on the Parks website? What would you like to see and/or experience that would be helpful to you in the future?

Discuss in Breakout Rooms!

Updates

- Sign up for a 1:1 PEAR Team end of year check in – scheduling link in the chat
- Updates to community compensation rates
- January PEAR Team meeting will be a work planning meeting
- No Child Left Inside Grant Program
- Everyone Outdoors Program

2024 PEAR Workplan / EIR (Equity Impact Review)

Date	EIR Topic	EIR Priority Category
Jan 17	Volunteer program	Visitor Experience / Community Engagement
Feb 7	HR Staff recruitment	Workforce Development
March 27	Interpretation	Visitor Experience / Community Engagement
April 24	Interpretation continued & DEI Roadshow Data	Workforce Development
May 15	Parks Planning public input process	Community Engagement
June 5	Partnerships program	Community Engagement
July	NO MEETING	
Aug 14	Emerging Leaders Program	Workforce Development – Career Pathways
Sept 18	The commission & conversation with Commissioner Danenberg	Community Engagement
Oct 16	Reservations program	Visitor Experience
Nov 13	Using Technology to Increase Access – Creative Services	Visitor Experience
Dec 18	Discount pass programs	Visitor Experience

Ongoing: DEI Learning, PEAR team feedback, reflection on PEAR team "roles in social change ecosystem"
Future Possibilities: PEAR team community building, participating in Parks events