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Director

STATE OF WASHINGTON

## WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

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### **STATE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE AND REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Date of Issuance:** February 20, 2025

**Lead agency:** Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

**Agency Contact:**

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**Description of Proposal:**

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission proposes to create a Classification and Management Plan (CAMP) for the Recreation Drive Trail corridor in Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park. This will determine the appropriate classification of land within the trail corridor and determine what uses should be permitted within it.

The Recreation Drive Trail is four miles long and runs approximately north-south in the northern portion of Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park. It runs from Recreation Drive to the northern State Park boundary and follows the top of Jackknife Ridge. Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park is the location of nationally significant "in-place" petrified trees, and provides recreational opportunities for camping, picnicking, guided hikes, an interpretation center, and recreational boating access to the Columbia River. It also includes historical resources that are recognized on the National Register of Historic Places and locations of Native American cultural resources.

Three main areas of impact to Park resources have been identified:

1. The Park needs to reduce or prevent further damage to the tread of Recreation Drive Trail in order to preserve emergency and administrative access to the northern portion of the park.
2. Local recreationists are advocating to allow public motorized use of Recreation Drive Trail to access adjacent lands owned by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).
3. Significant damage to geological and natural resources, including theft of irreplaceable petrified wood, cultural and historical artifacts, vandalism, and destructive off-trail use by vehicles.

**Summary of Alternatives**

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission has proposed three potential land classifications for this trail corridor. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will also consider “No Action”, under which the trail corridor would continue to be unclassified.

Classification	Allowable Activities	Non-Allowable Activities
<b>Alternative 1: No Action</b>		
<b>Not Classified</b>	Vehicle Access Restrictions Trail limited to administrative access, scientific activities, agency issued access permit for properties owners and OPDMD (other power-driven mobility device), hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, and no vehicle weight limit.	Public motorized access
<b>Alternative 2: Limited Access</b>		
<b>Natural Area</b>	Low intensity; administrative or emergency response vehicle access only; scientific activities; hiking; snowshoeing; mountain biking.	Public motorized access; equestrian use.
<b>Alternative 3: Permitted Conditional Access</b>		
<b>Resource Recreation</b>	Low-medium intensity; vehicle access with a permit, equestrian, hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, interpretive; vehicle weight limit.	Vehicle access without permit.
<b>Alternative 4. Seasonal Access</b>		
<b>Resource Recreation</b>	Medium-high intensity; limited OHV and vehicle access; through-access to WDFW land for hunting; scientific, administrative, permitted property owners, OPDMD, equestrian, hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, interpretive; vehicle weight limit.	Vehicle access outside of open season.

**Figure 1. Summary of CAMP alternatives**

**Location of proposal:**

The Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park (GSP) is located outside of Vantage, Washington, and extends both north and south of Interstate 90 on the west bank of the Columbia River. GSP is located within Kittitas County and the project area is located within Sections 19,24,18,13,07, and 12/ Township 17N/ Range 22E.

This proposal will apply to “Recreation Drive Trail” and areas within 150 feet of either side of its approximate centerline.

**Scoping:**

The lead agency has identified the following three (3) areas for discussion in the EIS:

**1. Probable significant impacts**

Any use of the Recreation Drive Trail incurs some small impacts to cultural and natural resources located on its surface. The rate or amount of impact may be increased or lessened depending on the final alternative selected.

Providing a range of recreational access is an important part of the mission of State Parks. Increasing the protection levels for natural and cultural resources would restrict the types of recreational use available in this section of the park.

Deliberate theft or vandalism of the natural and cultural resources on and near the trail has been an ongoing problem; as has off-trail cross-country travel by motor bikes and OHV drivers. These impacts cannot be entirely prevented or mitigated by administrative land classifications.

Addressing these issues effectively will depend upon increased staffing, structural improvements at each end of the trail, and increased signage and awareness of the regulations covering trail use. Specific strategies to mitigate these problems will be left to be addressed at the project level.

***Alternative 1: No Action*** includes:

- cultural, natural, and recreation resources monitoring;
- traffic counter consistency;
- south gate and fencing replacement;
- placement of Carsonite posts to deter trail widening and off trail use;
- call-in phone number for gate access.

Under Alternative 1, incremental degradation of cultural and paleontological resources would likely continue at the current rate. Ongoing damage to the track would degrade access to emergency and administrative purposes. Recreational access for visitors unable to walk, cycle, or ride horses would not be possible.

***Alternative 2: Limited Access*** includes:

- additional staff hours;
- cultural and natural resources monitoring to support timely adaptive management;
- adaptive management;
- traffic counter at each end of trail;
- south gate and fencing replacement;
- trail signage improvements;
- robust permitting system

Under Alternative 2, incremental degradation of cultural and paleontological resources would improve over current rates. Lower levels of damage to the trail would preserve vehicular use of the trail for emergency and administrative purposes. Recreational access for visitors unable to walk, or cycle would not be possible. Additional expenses beyond the current budget would be incurred to support more robust permitting, staff time for monitoring, and the cost of physical improvements such as new signs, traffic counters, fencing, and gates.

Management needs include additional staff, cultural and natural resources monitoring to support timely adaptive management, adaptive management, fencing replacement,

south gate replacement, trail improvements including signage, and a robust permitting system.

**Alternative 3: Permitted Conditional Access** includes:

- additional staff hours;
- cultural and natural resources monitoring to support timely adaptive management;
- adaptive management;
- conditional access;
- traffic counter at each end of trail;
- south gate and fencing replacement;
- trail bed improvements and signage;
- robust permitting system;
- permit fees to fund trail bed maintenance

Under Alternative 3, degradation of cultural and paleontological resources would increase over current rates from trail bed maintenance activities. Maintenance activities would include the need to grade the trail to ensure its passable. Trail maintenance would improve the accessibility of the trail to emergency responders and for administrative purposes. A wider variety of recreationists would be able to use the trail. Overall use of the corridor could increase, which could lead to damage of adjoining natural areas and potential conflict between types of users. However, the introduction of use fees to support trail maintenance could deter potential users. Trail maintenance would improve the accessibility of the trail to emergency responders and for administrative purposes. Additional operating expenses would be incurred by State Parks to support more robust permitting, staff time for monitoring, and the cost of physical improvements such as new signs, traffic counters, fencing and gates. Additionally, costs would increase for those acquiring permits to utilize access to the trail.

Management needs are similar to Alternative 2.

**Alternative 4: Seasonal Access** includes

- additional staff hours;
- cultural and natural resources monitoring to support timely adaptive management;
- adaptive management;
- traffic counter at each end of trail;
- south gate and fencing replacement;
- trail bed improvements and signage;
- robust permitting system;
- new Washington Administrative Code for enforcement;
- dynamic annual planning based on needs.

Under Alternative 4, incremental degradation of cultural and paleontological resources would likely increase over current rates. Increased motorized use of the trail would

further impact trail accessibility to emergency vehicles and for administrative purposes. Recreational access for visitors unable to walk, or cycle would be possible during hunting seasons (hunting within the park would remain prohibited). Additional operating expenses would be incurred by State Parks to support more robust permitting, staff time for monitoring, and the cost of physical improvements such as new signs, traffic counters, fencing and gates. Additionally, costs would increase for those acquiring permits to utilize access to the trail.

Management needs include additional staff, cultural and natural resources surveys and monitoring to support timely adaptive management, adaptive management, fencing replacement, south gate replacement, trail improvements, robust permitting system, new rules for enforcement of seasonal access, and dynamic annual planning based on needs.

## **2. Potential Mitigation Measures**

The adverse impacts that were identified center on damage to the non-renewable cultural and fossil resources that are located in the Recreation Drive Trail, and the potential to degrade the trail to the point that emergency or administrative vehicles can no longer access this portion of the State Park. Damage to cultural artifacts and fossils cannot be mitigated once it occurs; these resources are non-renewable. Trail bed improvements or maintenance such as re-grading can mitigate the impacts of increased motor vehicle use to the accessibility of the trail to emergency vehicles. However, grading or paving has the potential to increase impacts to the non-renewable cultural and natural resources located on and adjacent to the trail.

## **3. Areas of Study**

The EIS will address in detail areas where the impacts of the alternatives differ from each other. Some areas of study that fall under SEPA (for example surface water quality or public utilities) would not be affected differently by any of the land classifications proposed. The EIS will briefly discuss these areas but will primarily consider the following areas of study, in alphabetical order:

- Biological resources (impacts to plants and animals),
- Cultural resources (impacts to artifacts or locations of cultural importance),
- Conformance to Washington State laws and policy,
- Cost of each alternative and economic impacts,
- Emergency response infrastructure,
- Paleontological Resources (impacts to fossils),
- Public and Agency concerns regarding the impacts from the alternatives, and
- Recreational opportunities in the park.

**Comments on Scoping:** Agencies, affected Tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on the scope of the EIS. You may comment on alternatives, mitigation measures, probable significant adverse impacts, and licenses or other approvals that may be required. Comments regarding the Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park Recreation Drive Trail CAMP project can be submitted in writing or by email to the SEPA Responsible Official at the address below. The Scoping comment period is from February 20, 2025 – March 13, 2025.

Determination of Significance/Scoping Notice: Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park Recreation Drive Trail  
CAMP

February 20, 2025

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**EIS Scoping Meeting:** A public open house Scoping meeting will be held on February 27, 2025, from 5:00 to 7:00 PM at the Kittitas County Historical Museum, 114 E 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave, Ellensburg, WA 98926. Additional information about the project and the EIS process will be provided at the meeting. Participant comments during the meeting will also be noted.

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