



# "Free Days and Free Ways"

April 16, 2025

Reaching State Parks  
through Public Transit



# How this project started:

- State Parks connected with SNAP-Ed
- Presented to SNAP-Ed providers across WA about Free Days and Free Ways:
  - Discover Pass Free Days (12 per year)
  - Discount Passes (Disabled Vet, Foster Family, Senior Limited Income)
  - Everyone Outdoors Program
- **Walk, bike or use public transit to reach state parks**



# Free Days & Free Ways

- Which state parks are reachable by public transit?
- Let's create a public-facing resource that shows state parks reachable by public transit: "Free Days and Free Ways"
- This resource can be distributed to SNAP-Ed providers across the state



# Clair Werch



Clair (she/her) is a second-year Master of Public Health (MPH) student at the University of Washington-Seattle. She is passionate about food systems and health equity, especially within rural and LGBTQIA+ populations. Her work in rural Alaska and rural Wisconsin has deepened these passions, along with her degree in Nutrition and Food Systems from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Currently, Clair is working on her thesis about consumer and producer trust in animal agriculture.

**Intern at Washington State Parks  
Masters of Public Health student at the  
University of Washington-Seattle**



# AGENDA

- Why Free Days and Free Ways?
- What did we do?
- Challenges & Recommendations
- Potential Benefits



# WHY FREE DAYS AND FREE WAYS?

## Health

- Outdoor access is vital for the health and well being of all members of the community
  - Mental health impacts 1.
  - Physical Health impacts 1.
    - Physical activity mitigates CVD, T2D, all cause mortality 2.,3.
    - Green space makes it possible for those with asthma to recreate 4.
  - Recommendations are 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity 5.
- Outdoor spaces provide community building and strengthen ties 6.

# WHY FREE DAYS AND FREE WAYS?

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## Equity

- There are disparities in greenspace access by a variety of socio demographic factors
  - Race, ethnicity, income, disability, etc 7.
  - Public transit use
- Environmental exposure to hazards 8.
- Equity: who uses public transit 9.
  - People who do not have private vehicles
    - Racial and sociodemographic factors

**Limitations:** not talking about city parks or green areas

# WHY FREE DAYS AND FREE WAYS?

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## State Parks Mission

- State parks has commitments to serve all people in the state of Washington
  - Unique resource
  - The Parks have stated that DEI is a priority for the Commission
  - Growing efforts to support accessibility and inclusion in the Parks System
    - new ADA coordinator
    - DEI team
    - Tribal relations team
    - PEAR team
- State Parks have made commitments to reducing the carbon footprint of the Commission
  - Electric vehicles
  - Building modifications
  - Efforts to assess impacts of recreation on the environment
  - Climate team

# How many times a month do you take public transit?



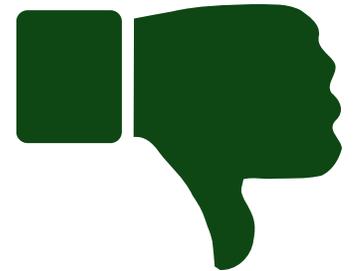
20 times or  
more



5-10 times



less than 5  
times



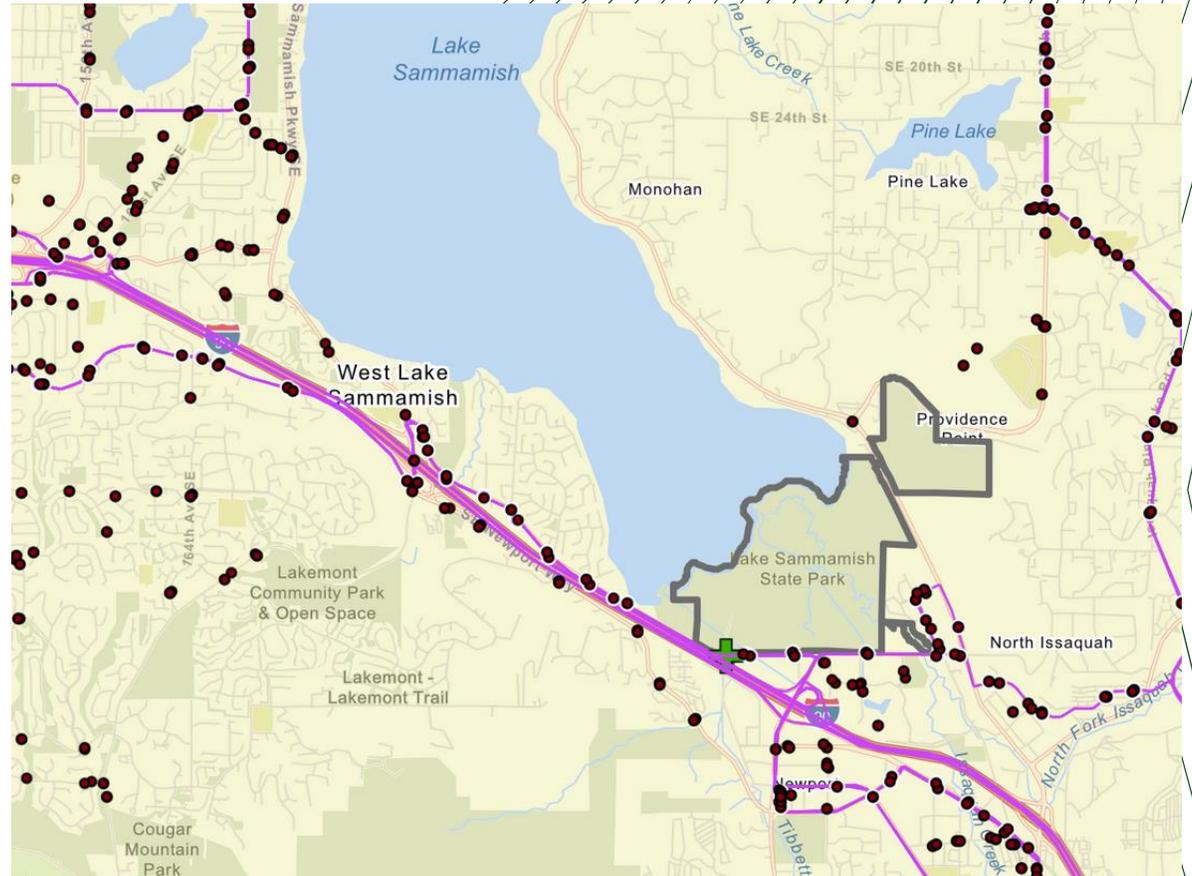
Never



**Personal experience:** State Parks lover and full time public transit user

# WHAT DID WE DO?

Audit of all state parks location in relation to bus stops



# WHAT DID WE DO?

Personal trip/blog



# WHAT DID WE DO?

Meetings/informational interviews  
with DOT, Parks, SNAP-ed



**Washington State  
Department of Transportation**



**SNAP-Ed** PROVIDERS

# WHAT DID WE DO?

Create a resource for customers and participants

Webpage coming soon!

**Why Visit State Parks?**

Not sure where to start? At Washington State parks you can:

- hike
- bird watch
- bike
- visit historical sites
- fish
- attend cultural events
- picnic

Washington State Parks believes that the outdoors is for everyone. We believe that State parks connect all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and that everyone should have access to memorable recreational and educational experiences that enhance their lives.

**Questions?**

Call the State Parks Information Center for help on navigating to the park, what to do when you get there, and more!

 (360) 902-8844

 <https://parks.wa.gov>

**Free Days and Free Ways**

to reach Washington State Parks

State Parks are for everyone! Visit Parks by bus or by car to enjoy all the parks have to offer



**By Public Transit**

Walk or bike from a bus stop

Washington State Parks are free for day use if you arrive by foot or bike.

Find parks reachable by public transit at the QR code below.



**Discover**

Library may have a program to check out free passes to visit your local park!

**Discounted Programs**

Foster family, a foster parent, a foster parent, or are a foster parent on a limited basis may be eligible for a discounted or free pass.

QR code below to get more information



Day

- Oct. 10 — World Mental Health Day
- Nov. 11 — Veteran's Day

Reachable by public transit:



# King County



Heading to a State Park by bus? No entry fee and no parking hassle!

## Dash Point State Park

### Miles of forested hiking trails

Route 187: Stop 61422, Hoyt Road SW & SW 323rd Street



Access miles of trail system on route 187 of King County Metro transit

Connect to route 187 from Federal Way Transit Center.

Bust Stop 61422: Hoyt Road SW & SW 323rd Street. Enter via Hoyt Road trail.



## Lake Sammamish State Park

### Wetland wildlife and recreation for everyone

Route 269: Stop , NW Sammamish Rd & 11th Ave NW  
Route 271: Stop 64583, NW Sammamish Rd & 15th Pl NW



Play volleyball, softball, or soccer, swim, or walk around beautiful paved trails

Served by King County Metro transit

- Route 269
- Route 271



# CHALLENGES

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## *Funding*

- Approx. 65% of Parks funding comes from sales revenue, including Discover passes sales, which incentivizes the Parks Commission to focus on promoting car visitation

## *Infrastructure*

- Current parks are often not developed with bus access in mind
- Often, intentionally, locations of parks are far from population centers
- Long term camping concerns

## *Community Input*

- The community members who are able/willing to attend planning meetings are often not the community members who we are trying to reach
- Concern about recreation impacts to wildlife and plant species
- Some community members don't want the parks to be any busier

## *Monitoring*

- No current way to monitor current or future park use by public transit
- No data on how many people currently access the park this way, or how many would

# RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>Relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Form stronger relationships with DOT<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Advocate for diverting bus routes closer to parks, several bus routes come within a quarter mile or a half mile of a park</li><li>◦ Requires bringing in local transportation authorities in planning processes</li></ul></li></ul>
<p>Monitoring and evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In-park survey (2019) showed 0.39% of park visitors used public transit (bus) to visit state parks. 93.2% used a private vehicle.</li><li>• We can view anonymized cell phone ping data within state park boundaries to see visitor movement.</li><li>• Need to better understand how people are currently using transit to access parks</li></ul>

# RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>Funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analyze how funding streams interact with state parks' priorities<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ State Parks relies on 65% revenue (primarily Discover Pass and camping) and 35% General Fund.</li><li>◦ Reliance on Discover Pass sales can encourage a focus on private vehicle users - which is not always in support of DEI and sustainability goals</li><li>◦ Changing focuses allows an expansion of public transit options<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ i.e. merch/stores in parks with transit access, food vendors in parks with transit access</li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
<p>Future Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prioritize public transit access in future planning of parks</li><li>• When infrastructure is being created or modified, the ability for buses/mass transit options to access the infrastructure allows for future growth in this area</li><li>• For new development, making bus access a contingency for building codifies access for all</li></ul>

# POTENTIAL BENEFITS

## Improved health outcomes

- Improved ability to access recreation

## Improved equity

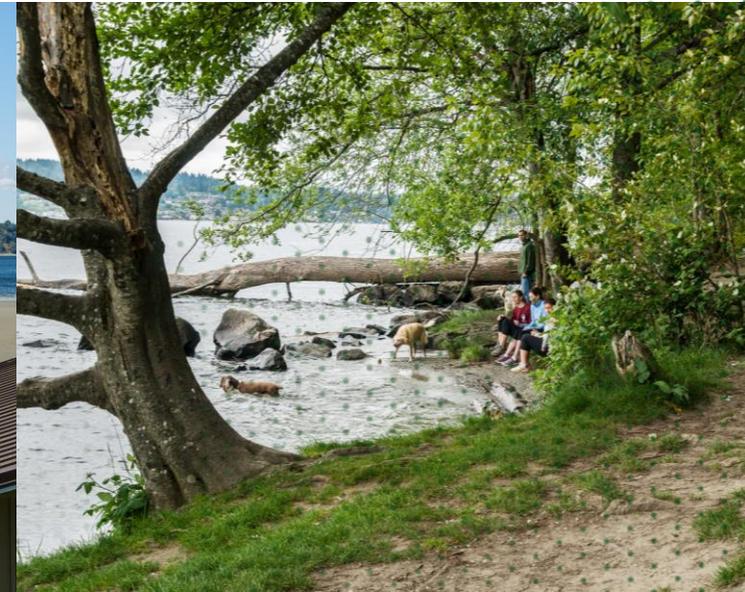
- More equal access to all Washington residents

## Decreased carbon emissions from visitors

- More people riding buses and bikes = fewer cars emitting carbon

## Increased profit and customer satisfaction

- Easing parking issues
- Increased accessing of vendors and park sales
  - Increased traffic and website traffic



*“...the outdoors is for everyone. We believe that State parks connect all Washingtonians to their diverse natural and cultural heritage and that everyone should have access to memorable recreational and educational experiences that enhance their lives.”*

*-WA State Parks Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement*

*Thank you.*



# References

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