

PEAR Team Meeting 21 – Meeting Notes –May 14, 2025, 12-2 pm

Facilitators Present:

Janette Chien, she/her, Parks DEI Director
Emily Masseth, she/her, Communications Consultant
Yelley Taylor, they/them, Parks DEI Consultant

PEAR Team Present:

Mary Brown, she/her, Seattle Guide Manager
Lynn Makowsky, she/her Community Member
Reco Bembry, he/him, President Big Tent Coalition
Suzanne Kagen, she/her, Program Specialist 2
Jeff Vassallo, he/him, Tahoma Gateway Area Manager, NW Region
Claire DeLong Tuminez, she/her, Parks Communications Director
Natasha House, she/her, Business Support Services Deputy Director
Anisa Proda, she/her, ADA Coordinator
Angela Smith, she/her, Recreation Professional and Community Builder
Curt Fackler, Camp Host Volunteer WA and AZ
MJ Mahan, Washington Trails Association
Valeria Veasley she/her, Management Analyst
Chris Carlson he/they, Parks Construction Project Coordinator
Alyssa Smith, she/her, Boating Education

Observers Present

Melinda Wolfman, she/her, Parks Planning
Phillip Nontell, IT Business Analyst
Michael Mataya, he/him, Administrative Assistant
Heather Carrington, she/her, Central Lakes Area Administrative Assistant
Maddy Laoprasert, Community Member

Agenda

Janette welcomed the team at 12:04, and she reviewed our community norms and the agenda.

Agenda:

- Check in
- Engaging Diverse Communities through Digital Communication
 - Newsletter review and discuss
 - Breakout rooms
 - Regroup and recap
- General Updates

- Closing

Updates

- Tonna is out at a conference, Yelley will be taking notes.
- Michael Mataya is the new AA for (new department). He will be joining the PEAR Team as a note-taker starting in June.

Check Ins until 12:15

Janette is going to record the presentation portion and stop the recording for the discussion.

Let's meet the Team, which sits under the larger Communications Team.

(Introduces Team – reference PowerPoint)

Question: What newsletters do you subscribe to and why?

From chat:

Suzanne: Friends groups newsletters, partner groups (Issaquah Alps Trails Club), etc.

Val: Senators Murray and Catwell

Janette: I subscribe to a few social justice educator newsletters

Natasha: Book releases, library, etc.

Mary Brown: I am subscribed to WAY too many newsletters, but I get daily updates from NYT to stay informed (and forever depressed) and Cascade Endurance for training tips.

MJ: mainly newsletters related to work, Tacoma Weekly Newspaper

Janette: I get the NYT daily but i'm too cheap to subscribe to the newspaper

Angela: Event announcements

Melinda: methow cycle and sport- because they have information about bike riding activities; DEI monthly !; Nicole Cardoza at reimagined, library and more

Reco: Newsletters, WSP, WDFW, DNR, Emerald, AllTrails, WTA, Black WallStreet, Port of Seattle etc...

Chris: Good afternoon, I (being an architect) are several Architecture and design newsletters, I'm also a City Councilperson, so numerous government newsletter, also

several general news/technical newsletters (I'm a science nerd), Tangle, 1,000 life hacks, Yakread, Consumer Reports, word trivia, Shortform...

Reviewing Newsletter as a group

First word or phrase that comes to mind?

Suzanne: Complete

Val: Informative

Natasha: Organized

Janette: Covers lots of topics

MJ: simple, organized, photos

Curt: Easy to read and laid out nice.

Angela: Lots of info

Reco: Simplistic

Claire: Informative

Questions at 12:35

MJ: To subscribe to the WA State Parks newsletter, is this the pathway on the website to subscribe: parks.wa.gov > scroll down to bottom of website and click on "subscribe to our email list" > then enter email address > submit

Phillip: How is the content for the newsletter chosen?

Reco: I find myself gravitating towards things that aren't in the newsletter ... Has there been an intentional request to scale back BIPOC representation in that newsletter which was more prominently represented on the March 2024 newsletter?

MJ: Can the public submit pieces to write for the newsletter? Or make suggestions? (They have done guest blogs)

MJ: For your high school internships (John's program if its still running) through state parks, it would be cool to read a piece from high schooler's perspective.

MJ: I love the new website and newsletter, and appreciate youth voices so excited to see the newsletter grow

Janette: I was wondering if you had... do you have goals about the readers you're trying to reach?

12:43: Janette reads through questions to see if folks want to power through or take a break.

The group decided to power through. Participants are split into two breakout rooms for 18 minutes each.

Breakout Rooms

Prompts:

- *How did the content make you feel?*
- *What topics would you like to see in future newsletter issues?*
- *How would you describe the tone of the newsletter?*
- *Are there terms, phrases, formats or photos that might be confusing or feel exclusive?*
- *What might help more people feel invited to subscribe and stay engaged?*
- *What stories and topics build trust and connection with readers?*
- *If you could change one thing about the newsletter, what would it be?*
- *What did we do well?*

Group discussion, we've got three rooms to share out.

Room 1:

How did the content make you feel?

- Not very inclusive; didn't encourage to send it to others to participate
- Through an accessibility lens: easy to understand from a content perspective; easy to navigate
- "Charming, cute", "home made". Content not very inclusive, but it was very topical
- Didn't really grab me with something I'd sign up for, nothing that stood out that would get folks to plan ahead. Something to do right away.
- An assumption that you already have the knowledge and context to understand the topics
- Not geared towards beginners....need to assume they know nothing
- Needs a small section or articles tailored to new people in order to balance newbies and more experienced users
- Layout is random, needs more structure

- (e.g. family friendly, underserved communities, etc.) People would know what to expect, remind us to include something for everyone
- Needs a “call to action”; ask people to do something on each topic
 - In order to measure engagement, even if it’s just “read more” or “sign up here”, share it with others?
- Is inclusion being stripped out due to federal influence?

What topics would you like to see in future newsletter issues?

- Challenge folks to engage (e.g. take a picture, etc.)

Suzanne: I was taking notes and we didn’t get much further than how the content made you feel. There wasn’t a feeling of inclusivity, doesn’t encourage sending it to others and engage. There was a lot of talk about how to get people to sign up for something so we can measure engagement and also encouragement, try to get people to plan ahead, or a call to action. The last thing that was really interesting, asking people to go to this park and take a picture and encourage people to engage with the Park. It looks like inclusion in the last few months has been taken out. Potential censoring. A way of tailoring articles so that it balances the need for newbies vs. More experienced to provide information for both of them. It could be things like read more, sign up here, share with others, go out to the park.

Reco: Call to Action.

Janette: There were a lot of commonalities with the group. I’ll report out for our group.

We talked about how the content didn’t necessarily inspire one of us to get out into the park. Lynn talked about how she tends to look for info that’s not readily available like an event happening in a park. I know they do special editions so I asked a question about editions for first time users. We have a partnership with Fridie Outdoors ... creates videos by a BIPOC creator for the BIPOC community. That’s really cool.

Emily: Those are coming out for memorial day weekend.

Janette: We also talked about having it broken down by region. There are so many reasons people visit parks... having a personal touch. Here are the staff picks. We talked about the bookstore approach and that could be really appealing to readers. We asked if we’ve ever asked for feedback (we do not), we asked about polls and unfortunately there’s no way to do this on this platform. We talked about the call to action and how the newsletter doesn’t necessarily have one outside of general stewardship. It’s not evoking a small emotional reaction, maybe there’s a way to send in favorite photos, hikes, recipes.

Room 2 (Main Room):

- Could we do a special edition for first-time campers
 - Partnership with Friddle Outdoors
- Don't necessarily inspire me to get out - tend to look for information that is not readily available (e.g. on the website or google). Looking for events in my community.
- Maybe having more specific information about cool things happening in our parks that isn't as easy to find out about?
- Could we break it down by region? And then people can scroll down directly to it
- There are so many reasons that people visit parks
- Even something like "top 5 staff recommendations" - a personal touch'
- This newsletter feels a lot more informative and general than Inside Parks
- Do you have any geographic information for readers? (Not at this time)
- Have you ever asked for feedback from subscribers? (We haven't)
- Do you ever do silly polls? Would you rather have your birthday party in the desert vs. xyz. (The gov agency platform has only a few options - text, photo)
- Thinking about tone - have you all ever done a newsletter that has a call to action? (The biggest one we do is the July 5th clean up. There's a lot of messaging for Leave No Trace, getting people out to clean up. For selling, there's a holiday newsletter edition where people can buy gear - tshirts, calendars, etc.)
- It's the emotional piece - it's not pulling my emotions.
- Are we reaching a broader audience? (Analytics are limited, only open rate and click rate. In conversation about adding demographic questions during the subscription process. No info on previous or current subscribers).
- Is there an opportunity for readers to engage: favorite photo or favorite hike as a way to directly engage with the audience. Or people to share their favorite camping recipes ahead of camping season.
- I like that there are activities "near X, X and X.." then I can find something for me vs. just one featured area

Curt: What explains the 33% open rate? Is it good, bad, or normal?

The problem now is that so many people get so much information from so many different places. Especially the

Janette: Something I get from this edition is the investment in stewardship. I was thinking about Reco's question and I don't get a strong feeling of wanting to bring new users into the park. I wonder if you could do a special edition on the experiences of first-time users.

Emily: We will have special editions before the upcoming holidays for first time campers with blurbs and videos this time. The partnership with the foundation and Fridie Outdoors will also be included in upcoming newsletters. We are coming up with creative ways to reach those new people.

Lynn: For me, reading through the newsletters I didn't feel particularly inspired to go out into the parks. In newsletters I look for things that aren't as easy to access otherwise. It's helpful with the seasonal stuff to link to past blog posts, but especially if it's older information that I can find myself, I'm not going to be as interested. I think maybe having more specific... there are so many cool things happening at Parks that aren't on our website. Maybe more specific information.

Emily: Yeah, so maybe breaking down by region.

Curt: I think that's a good idea.

Emily: People aren't reading the entire newsletter anyway so if they could scroll to central Washington that would be helpful.

Lynn: There are many different reasons why people use parks so making sure there are things like, what's a good reading spot, peaceful place to sit ... making sure to reach all the ways that people engage in Parks.

Emily: We do have the "find activities" part in the website. Would you want a link to the website?

Janette: It's kind of like going to the bookstore and being overwhelmed and seeing the staff picks.

Group 3:

How did the content make you feel?

- Information dump
- Information was useful to know, good information
- I enjoy seeing the snow plover. Good to share animals that are in the park and how to protect them
- Lots of info but word heavy so hard to digest

Tone of newsletter

- Instill sense of wanting to travel
- Section of park alerts to inform travelers/visitors

Topics to see in future newsletters

- Youth voices that highlight other state parks programs
- ADA access in state parks

What might help more people feel invited to subscribe and stay engaged?

- Public input on planning projects
- Commission meetings - when they are, they can provide public input
- Highlighting places that are relatively easy to get access to
 - Mitigates barriers to getting to these parks and also local parks to highlight (urban, walking distance, access to public transportations)
- Personal stories and storytelling
 - Public or parks staff stories?
 - *stories that feel relevant, personable. even cultural stories staff members may have about e.g. why flowers bloom, etc that is important to them*
- Meet the staff spotlight? Community partner highlight?

What stories and topics build trust and connection with readers?

- Happy, joyful stories
- Restoration projects
- Family friendly hikes
 - "Toddler friendly"
 - "How to explore tidepools with kids"

If you could change one thing about the newsletter, what would it be?

- Easier way to subscribe to the newsletter
- Conversational versus announcement tone
- Interactive maps
 - Can have a printable version?
 - Kids having coloring book maps to print out from newsletter
- Fun facts!

What did we do well?

- Cities from all around the state and not focusing on one specific region/place
- Photos tying into the information (again - snowy plovers)
- Trip resources that are digestible and can answer the questions they may immediately think of or have about state parks
- Article with a lot of space in order to read
 - Especially online

MJ: We kind of went down the line. OF the content, some of us said it didn't make us feel anything however that was a lot of useful information. I enjoy seeing the snow clover. A little word heavy, some parts of it were hard to digest. Some of us said it instilled a sense of wanting to travel. There's park alerts other information could be useful. Youth Voices, ADA access in state parks would be really great. Public input might help people subscribe and stay engage. Planning project, commission meetings. Highlighting local or urban parks maybe walking distance. Public transportation as well. Personal stories or storytelling from public or parks staff. Meet the staff spotlight or community partner highlight. Staff picks remind me of Trader Joe's items. It would be really cool to hear happy and joyful stories. Toddler friendly hikes, how to explore tide pools with kids. Easier way to subscribe to newsletter, more conversational tone, interactive maps because some people like to print, coloring books, like a snowy clover thing for kids to color. Seeing things from all around the state is a highlight. Having more space between the sections makes it easier to read.

Suzanne: It's hard to get rangers to do an article on themselves, but it might work to send them prompts to answer OR ask one person to interview someone in their office. Potential prompts:

What's your favorite area of your park

Funny/memorable story about the park

- What's your earliest memory of working at the park?
- How has the park changed? What do you miss (or NOT miss?!)
- What's your favorite task at the park?
- Do you have a favorite animal story?

If a ranger doesn't want to do it, they could be interviewed around a water cooler.

Janette: I think the personal stories are what draw people in. For Emily, do you feel like you get a lot of content from people proposing content and you have to curate and filter?

Emily: No – we put a call out on Inside Parks every month and we don't get anything. We get a few events but we already look at the events calendar on the website.

MJ: I've met a park aide that has an original wooden pin and she is very kind. I also ran into her twice in one year. I really enjoy park aides/campground hosts. They are so friendly.

Reco: Personal Stories to draw people into the newsletter!

MJ: Starts with us maybe... PEAR team members 🍌 to share our stories in the newsletter

Melinda: Starting with feedback is a good step. Because it's digital it may not be a costly thing to do. Every edition is a little bit different, you scan and you're looking for something that would pique your interest. Today things near you really stuck out to me. I'm interested in what the subscribers are thinking and doing with the newsletter and how we might improve based on what others would like to see.

Emily: That's definitely something that we can put in there.

Angela: I wanted to ask has there been talk about a photo contest or creating a calendar where we have different pictures – taking the top 12 and people vote on the picture throughout the year and have people vote on it? Maybe it's by season, categories for beginners, kids, etc. Maybe that would be an incentive to engage more people.

Emily: That's a great idea! We do have a calendar – I'm not sure about the legality of using other people's photos but I'll look into that?

Angela: Perhaps hiring a third party.

Emily: Not sure we can give things away.

Angela: Yeah, get someone else to sponsor it.

Alyssa: I have a picture to submit from the photo contest. Last week we were kayaking with 30 kids and saw rattlesnakes on the water. We name him Mr. Slithers. There are internal processes that can slow down things like photo submissions. Something about reducing waste from the move.

Reco: Emily - Try soliciting feedback through listening sessions from multiple, diverse user groups, create intentional guest features, "Outdoor for All." "Share your experience." Feedback!

Suzanne: Doing articles that highlight partner groups like for example a group called Diversify Water. They teach water skills for BIPOC community members. Maybe we should be highlighting it in some way. There's things like Afro Outdoors. Having a partner of the month thing.

Janette: That was a question I had too. Can the newsletter share community events that are in the park but not necessarily organized by the park.

Emily: I believe we can as long as they are a non-profit.

Janette: Denice who is not here today is organizing a series of events, and I'll add them to the chat if you'd like to learn more. It would be great to highlight some of the awesome events that are happening?

Reco: How do we get stories like that to the team? If we have ideas for stories and articles?

Emily: You can send them to me.

Suzanne: We also have highlighted Makaela Kroin's work in the newsletter as well. Perhaps advertise it ahead of time instead of report on it after the fact.

Janette: Any other last minute questions, thoughts, ideas? A huge thank you to Emily for joining us and sharing all of this information. We are here to colaborate with you and share ideas so thank you for being here and to be continued!

Emily: thank you all for the feedback. I really appreciate it. Thank you all!

Updates:

Janette:

- Michael will be joining us from June onwards.
- NCLI will be funded at \$1.126 million, down from \$7million last biennium. Just wanted to share that is funded. It just shows that we are in a very challenging climate right now with our budget and there's going to be a great demand to support these projects.
- Family Camping program pilot – families can sign up to camp for free for the weekend. The rangers will meet the families and orient them to the campsite, the gear, and offer an interpretive hike. All families will need to bring is food and bedding or a sleeping bag, though we do have some extra.

Reco: That's a huge newsletter item!

Janette: WE are trying to do more targeted outreach especially with folks in Whatcom County.

Next month we'll be diving into customer data. We are going to look at our overnight customer service and we have a ton of data on that. That'll be a really great session.

Our closing prompt is what is something you are going to do for yourself today to stay grounded:

What is something you will do today to stay grounded?

Go for a walk during lunch!

Yoga!

Eat Thai food!

Change diapers.

Thanks all - really great to see you PEAR Team!....smell scented azaleas!

Read!

Sitting in nature!

My son's baseball game!

What is something I'll do today to stay grounded: Yardwork & Gardening...

Have a treat

Meeting ends at 1:41



PEAR Team Meeting 23

May 14, 2025

Engaging Diverse
Communities through
Digital Communication



Community Norms	Practices
GOAL ORIENTED & STRUCTURED MEETINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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:** Engaging Diverse Communities
through Digital Communication
- 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:** Who or what ancha





Engaging diverse communities through digital communication

EMILY MASSETH

COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT & SOCIAL MEDIA LEAD



WASHINGTON STATE PARKS

Meet the Communications Team



Sarah Fronk

Communications
Manager



Meryl Lassen

Communications
Consultant



Emily Masseth

Communications Consultant
& Social media lead



Lindy Henry

Internal
Communications Lead



What we do

- Internal communications: We develop, customize and implement effective communication tools to keep all levels of Parks staff equipped with the information they need to successfully do their jobs, stay connected and support the overall goals of the agency.
- External communications: We lead collaborative communications planning, provide media strategy and response, manage cross-platform community engagement efforts and develop educational outreach campaigns. We reach more than one million people across several platforms.
- Strategic communication: We look at the big picture. We evaluate scenarios to determine the short-and long-range impacts and think through pre-, during- and post-action communication stakeholders and strategies.



Let's discuss

What newsletters do you subscribe to and why?



Let's take a look at our newsletter



After reading the newsletter...

What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind?



01

Let's dive deeper



Our goals

- Keep communities informed, engaged and connected to the outdoors
- Make content relevant, representative and inclusive
- Use language and visuals that resonate with broad audiences
- Support our visitors pre-, during- and post-visit
- Broaden our subscriber list to include diverse communities and future generations



About our newsletter

- Sent monthly around the 15th to an external audience of over 800,000 people
- Average open rate in 2024: 33.5%; in 2025 (so far): 35%
- Average click rate in 2024: 3.42%; in 2025 (so far): 2.75%
- Public sector's standard open rate is about 28%; the click rate is 4.58%
- Covers a wide range of topics: upcoming events, alerts, current and upcoming projects, blog posts and camping content (like booking tips and featured parks)



Updates we have made

- Redesigned the template to be fully mobile and desktop friendly
- Cleaned up and reorganized our subscriber list for better targeting
- Switched to more engaging, timely subject lines (e.g., no more "Washington State Park E-News Month 2025")
 - 33% of email recipients decide whether or not to open an email based on subject line alone
- Focused on including timely content and evergreen education



Things to keep in mind

- The platform we use has limited customization and design flexibility
- Our analytics are basic — we get open and click rates, but little audience detail
- We have limited data on the demographics of our readers, but we do know who is using the parks
- There are some technical glitches we've encountered, including a clunky unsubscribe process that can “suppress” users from receiving other newsletters



Provide us with feedback

- How did the content make you feel?
- What topics would you like to see in future newsletter issues?
- How would you describe the tone of the newsletter?
- Are there terms, phrases, formats or photos that might be confusing or feel exclusive?
- What might help more people feel invited to subscribe and stay engaged?
- What stories and topics build trust and connection with readers?
- If you could change one thing about the newsletter, what would it be?
- What did we do well?



Discuss in Breakout Rooms!



Updates

- Michael Mataya – Administrative Assistant for Workforce, Technology and Equity Division
- \$1.126 million funding for NCLI in the 2025-2027 Operating Budget – assuming Governor Ferguson signs the budget as is
- Family Camping Program Pilot at Larabee and Birch Bay State Park



2025 Meeting Topics

Date	EIR Topic	EIR Priority Category
Jan	2024 reflections, 2025 planning	
Feb	Folk and Traditional Arts program	Community Engagement
March	FTA continued, Free Days and Free Ways	Community Engagement
April	Rescheduled	Workforce Development
May	Engaging Diverse Communities through Digital Communication	Community Engagement
June	Using Data to increase Equity	Community Engagement
July	OFF	
Aug	Public input for SEPA determinations	Community Engagement
Sept		
Oct		
Nov		
Dec		



Closing

