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“The storm continued & hard rain during the last night, and this morning rainy disagreeable weather. Our buffalo robes are getting rotten, and the most of our baggage were wet. We have a very disagreeable time of it, the most oart of our Men having slept in the rain, ever since this storm began, & are continually wet”

- Sgt. Joseph Whitehouse,
Nov. 13, 1805

1.0 SITE/ EXISTING CONDITIONS

1.1 SITE HISTORY

The site history incorporates the histories of the Native Peoples in the area, the European and US explorers, the Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery, the original Euroamerican settlements, fisheries and canning, the “clamshell railroad”, the Megler Ferry Landing, the modern development of the Safety Rest Area, and the new development of the Lewis & Clark National Historical Park.

Much of this history has been effectively written in the Cultural Resource Survey dated November 17, 2005, prepared as part of this project by AINW and included on a CD available upon request. We summarize this history in the text below. It is recognized that the Lewis & Clark Voyage of Discovery history at the Dismal Nitch is the primary interpretive theme for the site, and this history is the reason the site is a Unit of the Lewis & Clark National Historical Park.

Native Peoples

The Dismal Nitch site in its original natural state was never an ideal place for human habitation. The steep topography of the cliffs, which once dropped directly into salt water, combined with dark, narrow and steep creek valleys, made it inappropriate and insufficient compared with village sites several miles downriver or upriver.

There is no evidence in the survey work that villages or clusters of native peoples lived at this site in their historic era, and the nearest Chinook village was 0.75 miles west at present day Point Ellice. Because the site for this Master Plan is nearly all landfill, placed in 1968 or before, the presence of historic artifacts or indicators of

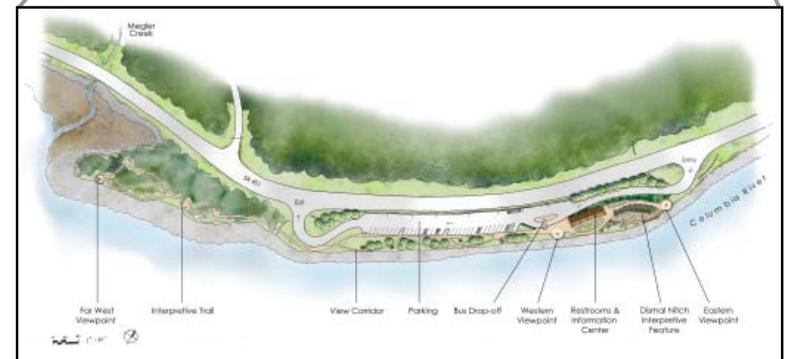
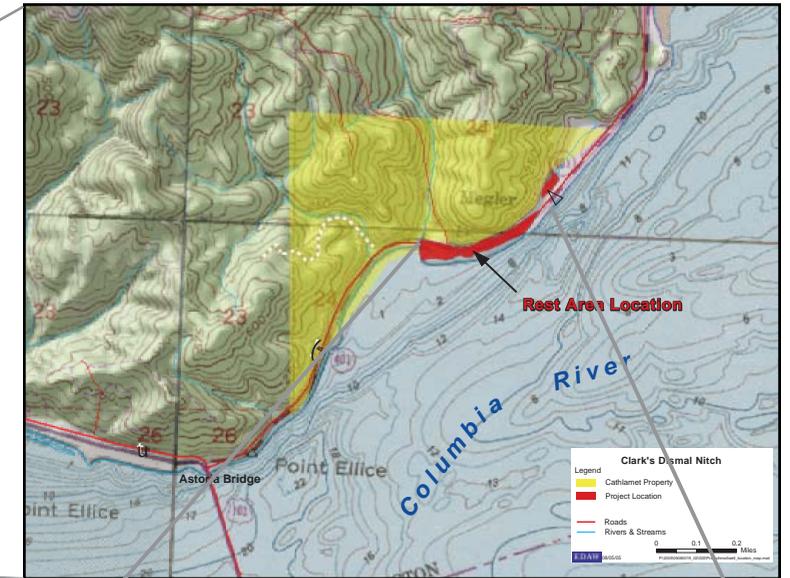
historic habitation is very unlikely. The landfill was obtained by demolition of adjacent cliffs and by importation. The destructive process of obtaining and placing landfill further ensures the low potential for discovery of historic artifacts in this place.

The Cultural Resource Survey confirms the absence of evidence of prior human habitation. This report includes a more complete history of the Native Peoples that lived on the north side of the Columbia River in this area.

Euroamerican Exploration

There is an interesting history of Euroamerican exploration and trading at the mouth of the Columbia River, as the Great River of the West was gradually discovered by explorers in the 18th and 19th centuries who arrived from the Pacific Ocean. Maritime explorers came from Spain, England, America and Russia, and those who were able to cross the bar and navigate the often foggy coast would moor in the area of Baker’s Bay to trade with Native Peoples. Those who may have passed the Dismal Nitch when sailing upriver probably stayed well offshore due to shallow waters.





SITE MAPS LOCATION

The Lewis and Clark Voyage of Discovery

The first of the explorers to see the full extent of the lower Columbia River and reach this part of the Pacific Ocean by land were Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery. The expedition arrived in the region of the mouth of the Columbia River, distantly within sight of the Pacific Ocean, their destination, on November 8, 1805. "Oh the Joy!" was Clark's notation in his journal, and expectations were high that they would be at the ocean in a day or two.

Instead they encountered the might of the river, the tides and the weather in a powerful winter storm, and were marooned at the place they generally called the Dismal Nitch for six days and five nights starting November 10, 1805. In front of them, barring their passage to the ocean was a large headland they named Point Distress in honor of the difficulties and obstacles it placed before them. Weather pinned them in rain, winds, high tides and hail, and there was no shelter or level camp on the river bank.

A vivid and detailed picture of the Lewis & Clark Dismal Nitch experience can be obtained from Rex Ziak's 2002 book "In Full View..." The author has lived within 15 miles of the Dismal Nitch site for most of his life. It is the author's view that nowhere else on the 863 day journey was the Corps of Discovery so severely tested or dangerously exposed.

As the Corps of Discovery retreated for the first time from the maelstrom at Point Distress on November 10, 1805, the first place of partial shelter they found was at a small cove about 600

feet north / northeast of our Dismal Nitch site. Here they tried to make camp on top of driftwood under a steep bank and a cliff, with no real shelter from the storm or the waves.

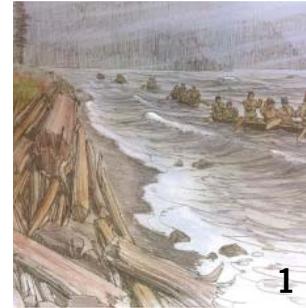
The Corps managed to camp here for two nights only, and then moved on foot crawling over rocks to a more protected "nitch" at the mouth of Megler Creek 1,800 feet to the west. This described site at the far west edge of the current project area is considered by some to be the actual "Dismal Nitch," where the expedition waited out the storm for another three nights and four days.

Due to 20th century construction of roads, a railroad and a ferry landing, neither historical Dismal Nitch site exists today in the physical form it had at the time of Lewis & Clark. The name Dismal Nitch comes from Captain William Clark's Journal for November 15th, as "...this dismal nitich where we have been confined for 6 days passed, without the possibility of proceeding on, returning to a better Situation, or get out to hunt, Scerce of Provisions, and torents of rain poreing on us all the time..."

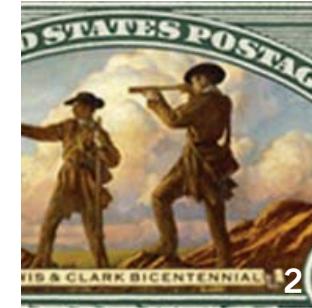
The miserable image that Clark paints indicates that the Dismal Nitch encompassed both sites, on either side of the current project area today.

Pioneering Euroamerican Settlement

Directly across the Columbia River from the Dismal Nitch site is Astoria, Oregon, considered to be the first American settlement west of the Rocky Mountains.



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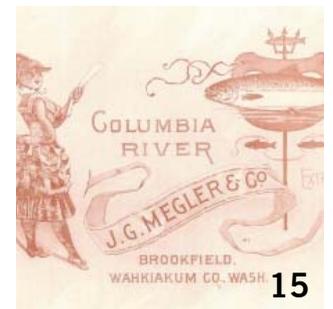
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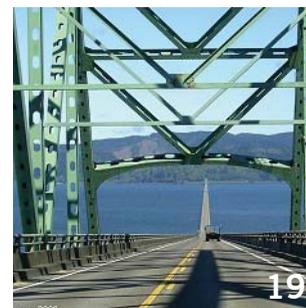
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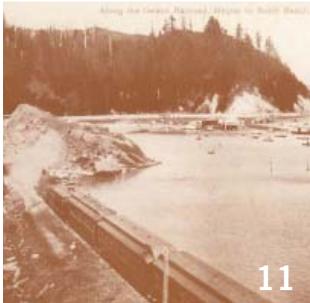
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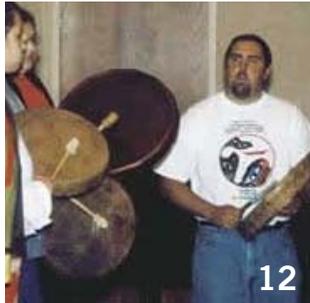
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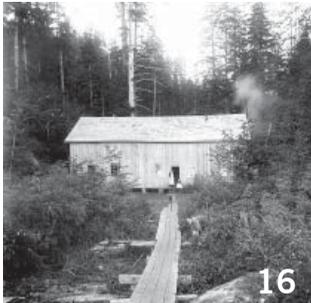
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CULTURAL HISTORY
PEOPLE
LEGEND

- 1. Artistic depiction, Lewis & Clark expedition Dismal Nitch, WA
- 2. Lewis & Clark Bicentennial postage stamp
- 3. Canoe carving *
- 4. Gillnetters at Point Ellice
- 5. Artistic depiction, hauling canoes ashore
- 6. Artistic depiction, Lewis & Clark landing at Dismal Nitch *
- 7. From steamer to railroad
- 8. Artistic depiction, trade
- 9. Salmon totem, Chinook tribe
- 10. Cliff Schneider, Chinook tribe
- 11. Along Ilwaco railroad
- 12. Drum class, Chinook tribe
- 13. 1960 Megler Ferry landing
- 14. Historic photo, salmon catch
- 15. J.G. Megler & Co. Cannery label graphic
- 16. Fisherman's mess house, Point Ellice, c.1897
- 17. Historic photo, northwest logging
- 18. Columbia River cannery
- 19. Astoria-Megler Bridge, looking towards Washington
- 20. Lewis & Clark Trail, interpretive signage and RV
- 21. Maritime shipping and trade
- 22. Recreational fisherman, Columbia River
- 23. Astoria-Megler Ferry
- 24. Columbia River, salmon catch

* Taken from "In Full View" by Rex Ziak

The "Astorians" fur trading party organized by John Jacob Astor arrived by sea at the site of today's Astoria in 1811, just five years after the Lewis & Clark Expedition departed the river to move upstream and return to St. Louis. Although this settlement lasted only five years, it started a wave of British and American fur trading activity focused on Fort Vancouver 100 plus miles upriver. Nearly all of the traders arrived by sea, passing the Dismal Nitch on their way to the Fort. Trading activity with the Native Peoples continued to increase up and down the river.

The next wave of American settlement came by land in the middle of the 19th Century. Coming mostly by the Oregon Trail from Missouri, these settlers were headed for the fertile lands of the Willamette Valley. From there some scattered throughout the territories of Oregon and Washington. Sparse settlement came back to the mouth of the Columbia River, attracted by the resources of the forests, rivers and ocean.

Fisheries and Canning

In the 19th Century at the mouth of the Columbia River the fishing and canning industry boomed. The resource seemed endless and canneries were built on every stable shore. The canneries were mostly on pilings where the water was shallow enough, and access was mostly by water, particularly on the north side of the river. Even today, legions of these original pilings are visible, making it possible to visualize the many canneries that once were there and have today virtually disappeared.

The canneries were a temporary form of settlement, built over the river and accessed by water. They generated very little land-side infrastructure, almost no roads, and only intermittent settlement.

At the Dismal Nitch site there are pilings that remain as evidence of the fish receiving station built by Marshall Kenney in 1880. Joseph Megler used the site for fish receiving in 1883. Megler, who gave his name to the area, was a leading citizen and state representative for 22 years. His main cannery was at Brookfield, Washington nearly 20 miles upriver, and he operated another fish receiving station in Astoria.

The Clamshell Railroad

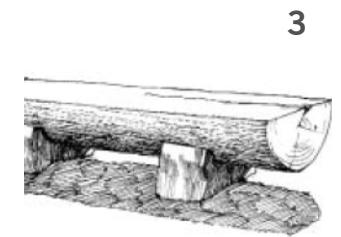
The development of the Long Beach Peninsula and Ilwaco was boosted first by the harvesting of seafood (salmon, crab and oysters) and reinforced by the timber business. Communities like Chinook and Ilwaco flourished, yet remained unconnected to each other except by water. By the late 19th Century tourism was flourishing due to the popular nearby beaches. Improved access was needed to cater to tourism and to move goods to markets. The port of Ilwaco was insufficient for deep water steamers, and a deeper water port was needed. This was later developed at Megler to make a better boat connection to Astoria.

A small narrow-gauge railroad had been developed between Ilwaco and the northern villages of the Long Beach Peninsula with service that began in 1889. Owned by the Ilwaco Railroad and Navigation Company, this casual and unique little train was known as the “Clamshell Railroad” or the “Papa Train” or the

“Irregular” or the “Rambling” or the “Never-get-there Railroad”. Later in 1906 under the ownership of the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company the line was extended from Ilwaco to Megler, with a new deep water port developed at Megler at the same time. Its terminus was at the east end of the present day Dismal Nitch site, and there ferries would dock, moving tourists, residents and goods across the Columbia to and from Astoria. Construction of this rail extension to Megler changed that part of the shoreline forever, and obscured the wooded shore and cliffs known to native peoples, fishermen and Lewis & Clark. Immense boulders were carved from the cliffs and poured into the river to create an embankment, to protect the rail construction from erosion. The construction of the rail terminal and ferry landing put the name “Megler” on the map, and when the four-mile long bridge was built across the Columbia in 1963-66, it was named the Astoria-Megler Bridge.

Passenger and Auto Ferries

The ferryboat era for Megler began in 1906 with the completion of the rail connection and boat landing, serving passenger boats initially. Roads on the north side of the river were slowly improved, and by 1921 it was practical to create a car ferry service from Astoria. Under the leadership of Fritz Elfving car ferry service began with service to McGowan, three miles east of Megler. Megler was a much more protected harbor, but access was controlled by a rival company, and more importantly, Megler was not served by any automobile roads. Both of these deficiencies were corrected by 1927 when the road was extended from Point Ellice to Megler.





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SALT WORKS



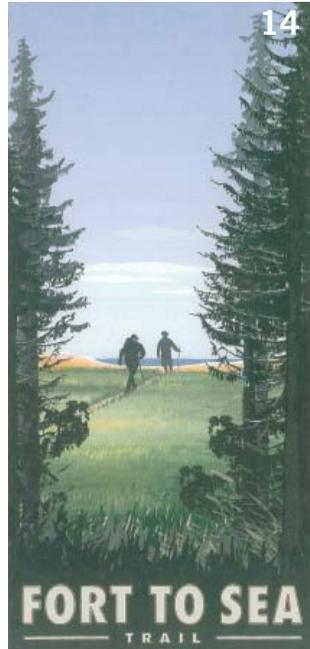
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NETUL LANDING



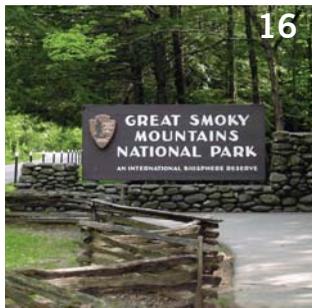
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CAPE DISAPPOINTMENT
STATE PARK

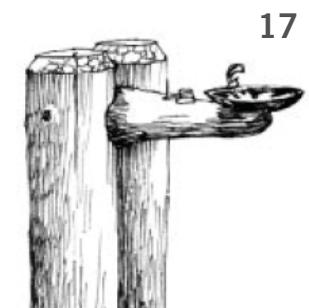


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FORT TO SEA
TRAIL



16



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NATIONAL PARKS

CONTEXT
LEGEND

- 1. Fort Clatsop entrance signage
- 2. National Park graphic Dismal Nitch
- 3. Log bench sketch
- 4. Boardwalk and signage
- 5. Ranger and school group
- 6. National Park graphic, Salt Works
- 7. Interpretive shelter sketch
- 8. National Park Service arrowhead logo
- 9. National Park graphic, Netul Landing
- 10. National Park graphic, Cape Disappointment
- 11. National Park graphic, Fort Clatsop
- 12. Fort Columbia
- 13. National Park graphic, Venturing into the West
- 14. National Park graphic, Fort to Sea Trail
- 15. Interpretive signage
- 16. Great Smoky Mountain National Park entrance signage
- 17. Drinking fountain sketch

In spite of the “Ferry Wars” between Fritz Elfving and several rival companies, and operating costs which began to exceed revenue (leading to the sale of the service to the Oregon Highway Department), service was generally continuous in the period. Boats included the North Beach, the Chessman, the Tourist, Tourist II and Tourist III. Ferryboat service from Astoria to Megler continued until 1966, when the completion of the Astoria-Megler bridge rendered the ferries redundant.

The Modern Highway Era

Before 1927 there were no automobile roads to Megler, and from 1927 to 1956 the only road to this site came along the shore from Point Ellice where it ended at the ferry terminal. The modern highway completed in 1956 was designated State Route 12B, now State Route 401. The completion of the Astoria Megler Bridge in 1966 made this part of Pacific County fully accessible from the south.

The Safety Rest Area, now designated the Dismal Nitch Safety Rest Area, was built in 1968-69 over the filled land that served the ferryboat landing. Ferry terminal structures were dismantled and pilings at the boat landing area at the east end of the site were removed. A larger area of rock fill topped by one foot of topsoil was built to accommodate the Safety Rest Area (SRA). At the west end of the current site additional rock and topsoil fill had been placed at the site from 1956 to 61 to create this unpaved and undeveloped portion of the site today.

1.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS/ TOPOGRAPHY

The project site is a 3.5-acre strip of land between SR 401 and the Columbia River. The site is approximately 1500 feet long and has an average width of 100 feet. The maximum width is 230 feet at the west end, and the minimum width is 85 feet in the center. The eastern portion of the site has been developed as a Safety Rest Area (SRA). The west 350 feet of the site is an undeveloped wooded area. The undeveloped wooded area has an abandoned dirt road with concrete barriers blocking access from the SRA west driveway.

There is access to a small cove at the mouth of Megler Creek from this area. The site is level and the grade varies from 18 to 21 feet above sea level. The high water is approximately 8.6 feet. The entire south edge of the site has a rip-rap bank that extends into the Columbia River. With the site being 6 to 18 feet above water level (depending on the tide) and the entire south side of the SRA having a chain link fence at the top of the rip-rap bank, the water is inaccessible, except at the small cove.

Paving

Approximately 30 percent of the total site is paved. The SRA has two driveways and a parking lot for 34 vehicles. There are 25 angled parking spaces for standard sized vehicles on the south side of the site facing the Columbia River which includes four ADA accessible spaces. There are nine parking spaces for large vehicles such as trucks and recreational vehicles parallel to the highway on the north side of the site.

Building

There is a 600 square foot Restroom/Information Center (picture 13 on page 8) in the center of the south side of the site.

Vegetation

The vegetation on site consists primarily of maintained turf, which occupies the areas between paving surfaces and the rip-rap shoreline (11,16). Thirty to forty mature ornamental trees, likely planted when the SRA was constructed in the 1960's, are located along the linear stretch of land between the parking lot and shoreline. These trees consist primarily of pine and oak and are in relatively good health. There is a smaller strip of lawn between the parking area and the highway. Six additional trees are between the SRA and the highway.

The vegetation on the western point consists of native species such as alder and Douglas Fir and invasive species such as blackberry (3).

The vegetation of the surrounding hills and cliffs consists of the typical second and third growth conifer forest habitat that is common to southwest Washington. Big leaf maple trees dominate the cliff immediately adjacent to the SRA (4). (See Natural History, pg. 10)

Soil

Soil within the SRA consists of Hoquiam silt loam imported as fill in the early 20th century. When the SRA was constructed on the site of the old ferry landing in 1968-1969, the existing

embankment was extended to the south with additional imported fill.

Two thousand tons of heavy loose rip-rap was laid along the bank to protect it from erosion topped by one foot of topsoil for landscaping. The site had contained many pilings and most were removed within the SRA work area.

Site Furnishings

There are four 1960's-era covered picnic tables on concrete pads (one of which is ADA accessible), all of which are located between the parking lot and rip-rap shoreline (15). Standard trash cans and dumpsters (2) are located throughout the site. Site signage, including rules and regulations, could be condensed to minimize clutter.

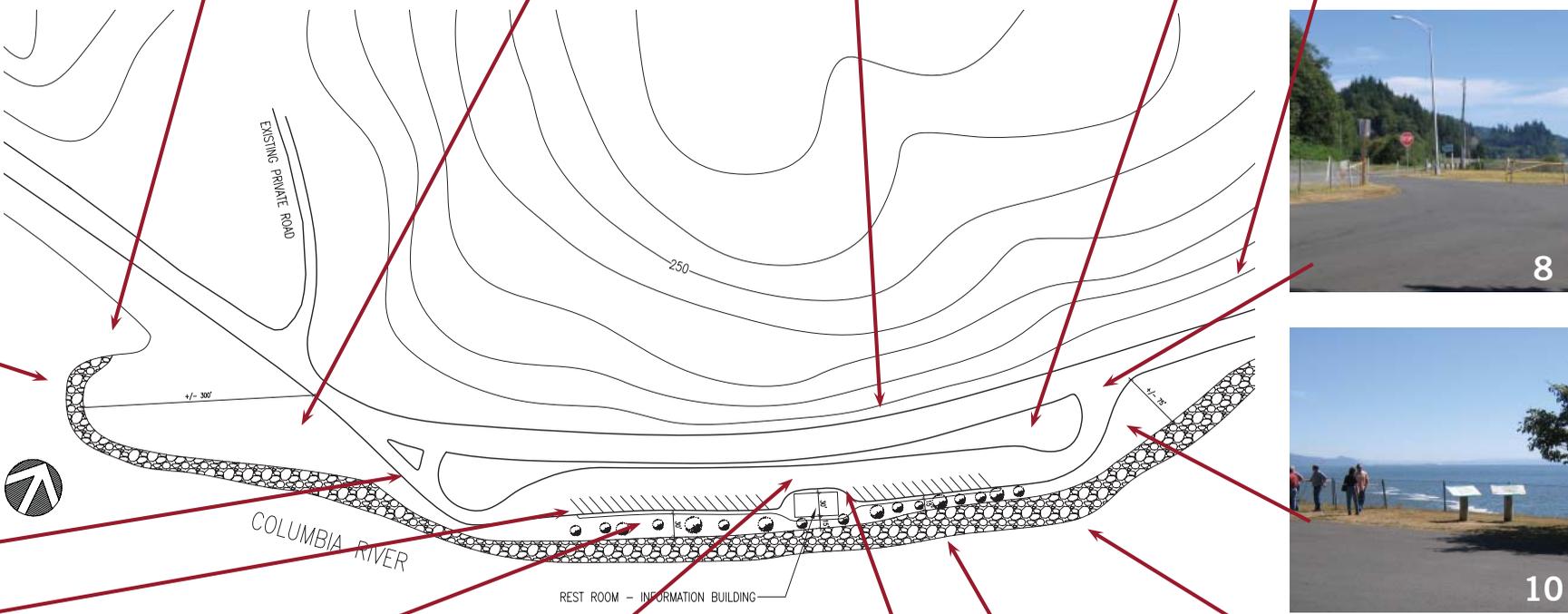
Lighting

Two streetlights, one on either side of the current Restroom/Information Center, currently provide illumination for the parking lot. An additional two streetlights currently provide illumination at the entry/exit drives.

Fencing

The parking lot is currently enclosed with chain link (3 foot height) fencing (16) and metal pole gates at both the entry/exit drives (8). The fence is used to keep people off the steep rip-rap shoreline of the river and runs continuously for over 1300 feet along the length of the park. Chain link fencing is also used as a barrier between Highway 401 and the SRA parking lot.





Walkways

There is currently a concrete sidewalk adjacent to the parking lot on the south (shoreline) side which conveys users of the site to the centrally located Restroom/Information Center (11). There are no other formal trails, only user-defined trails at the western point. Pedestrians also use the turf area between the existing sidewalk and the rip-rap bank to view the river and access the picnic tables.

Interpretation

A relatively new log frame kiosk containing two graphic interpretive panels is located west of the existing Restroom/Information Center between the parking lot and shoreline (12). Two flat panel signs on log posts are located at the east end of the site.

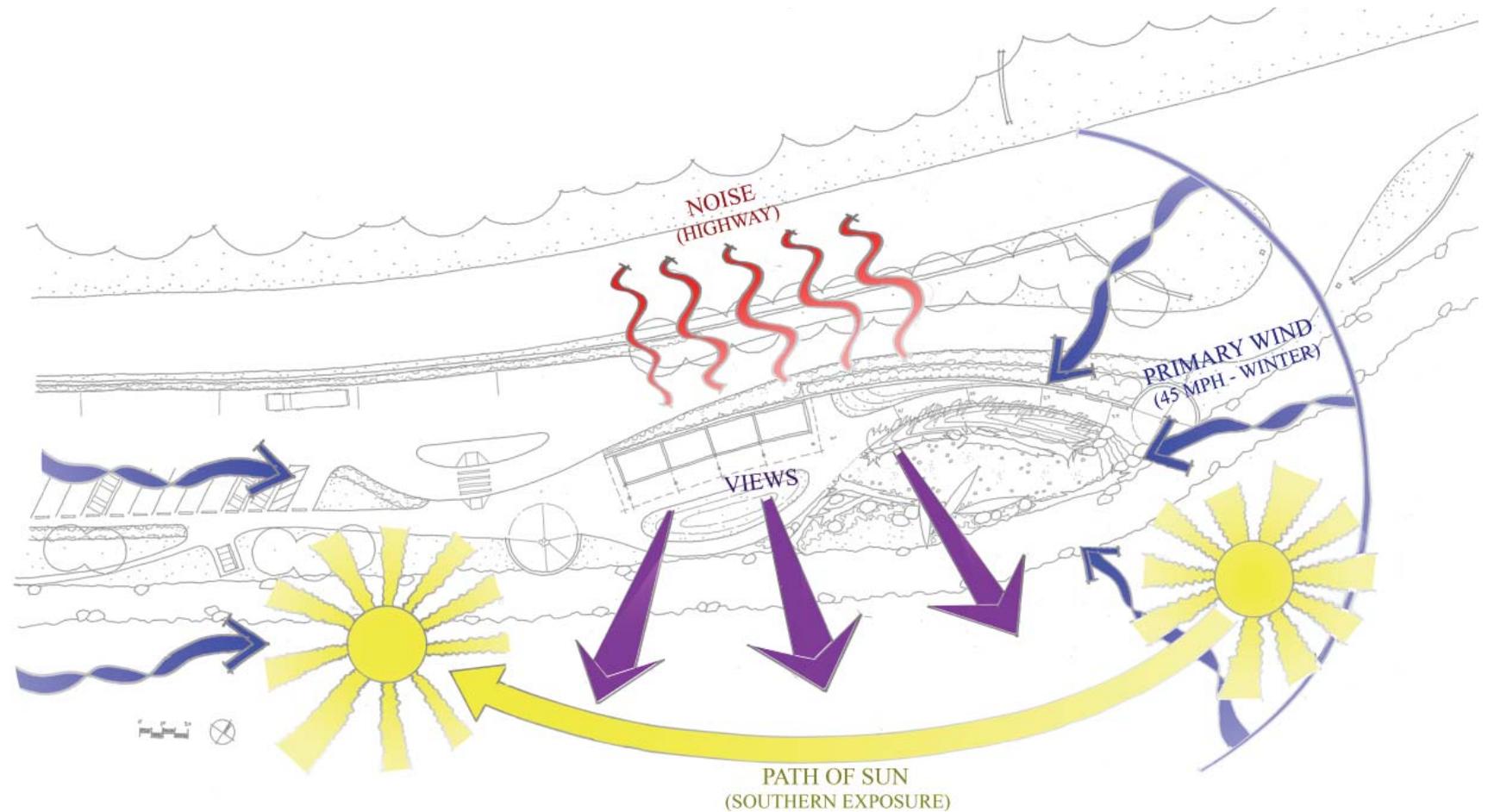
EXISTING CONDITIONS
SITE
LEGEND

1. View of Astoria-Megler Bridge
2. View of cove at beach
3. Undeveloped area overlooking far west viewpoint
4. Steep bluff above Hwy. 401, north of SRA
5. Drainage field & pet area
6. New septic field site option
7. View of Astoria-Megler Bridge to west
8. Eastern site entrance/exit
9. Western site entrance/exit
10. Interpretive signage and view of Columbia River and Mt. St. Helens to east
11. Pedestrian path and restroom structure from west
12. Interpretive signage along pedestrian path
13. Tourist Information and drinking fountains
14. SRA signage and large vehicle parking
15. Picnic structures
16. Fencing and rip-rap along river

Building Site Analysis

The building site has a south to southeast exposure. Prevailing winds come from upriver and from downriver, depending on the time of day and on the season. The downriver winds from the east can reach 45mph in the winter, bringing colder inland air in that season. The site is somewhat sheltered compared to Point Ellice and other headlands in the area, making nearby coves like Hungry Harbor favorite layover spots for fishermen and boaters.

Highway noise is a site issue, and the noise is exacerbated by the cliffs and topography. Noise is generated by logging trucks, motorcycles, and other vehicles, new site features designed for safety and interpretive improvements will also provide noise mitigation benefits along state route 401.



SITE ANALYSIS
DIAGRAM



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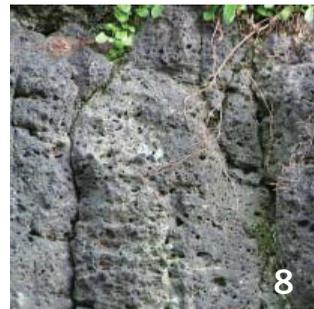
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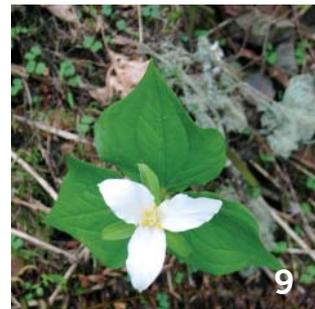
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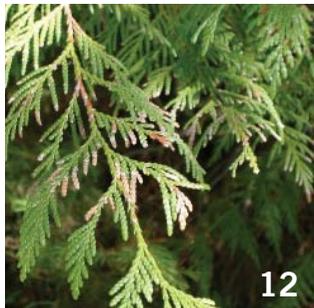
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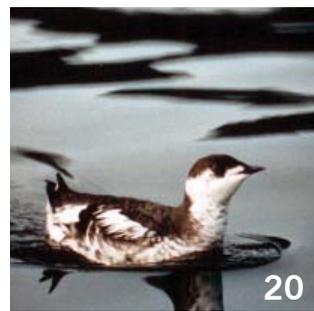
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NATURAL HISTORY ENVIRONMENT LEGEND

- 1. Forested ecosystem
- 2. Wetlands along Hwy. 401, east of site
- 3. Sagebrush buttercup
- 4. Chinook salmon run
- 5. Mule deer
- 6. Devil's club
- 7. View of Saddle Mountain
- 8. Basalt rock formation
- 9. Trillium
- 10. Rocky shoreline
- 11. Fern
- 12. Western red cedar
- 13. Ookow
- 14. Bald eagle
- 15. Great blue heron
- 16. Cove and pilings at southwest corner of the site
- 17. Douglas fir trees and moss
- 18. Blackberry
- 19. Salmon
- 20. Marbled murrelet
- 21. Wild rose
- 22. Columbia River basalt

