

Ross Lake National Recreation Area

Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement
Planning Update, December 2011



The National Park Service is pleased to release the
**Ross Lake National Recreation Area Final General
Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement**

Ross Lake NRA

Ross Lake National Recreation Area (NRA) is one of three national park service units in the North Cascades National Park Service Complex.

Protecting 118,000 acres, Ross Lake NRA stretches along the Upper Skagit River and the North Cascades Highway through the North Cascades and includes three

hydroelectric dams and their reservoirs: Gorge, Diablo, and Ross Lake.

Ringed by mountains, most of the area is designated wilderness and offers numerous outdoor recreational and educational opportunities.

Context of the Plan

The purpose of the *Ross Lake National Recreation Area Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (GMP/EIS) is to articulate a vision and management strategy for Ross Lake NRA over the next 15 to 20 years.

In creating this plan, North Cascades National Park Service Complex articulates a future vision for Ross Lake National Recreation Area – one that has been defined largely by you: the owners and users of this public land. Over the course of this planning effort, you have shared with us a clear vision for Ross Lake NRA: one that recognizes the North Cascades as a national treasure; one that preserves and protects the natural

and cultural histories of this land as they are; and one that connects visitors with this place, its mountains and waters, its history, diversity, and wildness.

We believe this plan heeds your suggestions, concerns, and call to maintain and enhance what we have. This final GMP/EIS sets forth actions to manage Ross Lake NRA as a gateway to millions of acres of wilderness by providing enhanced visitor opportunities along the North Cascades Highway, preserving a remote backcountry experience on Ross Lake, and ensuring the long-term stewardship of the surrounding North Cascades ecosystem and wilderness.

Major Actions of the Plan

North Cascades National Recreation Area

- Change the name of Ross Lake National Recreation Area to North Cascades National Recreation Area in order to respond to widespread public requests to connect to North Cascades National Park and its greater ecosystem through the NRA. This action would require Congressional legislation. Existing uses, such as hydropower generation, hunting, and hiking with dogs on trails would continue.

Skagit Wild and Scenic River

- Recommend wild and scenic river designation of Goodell Creek, Newhalem Creek, and the Skagit River from the Gorge Powerhouse in Newhalem to the western boundary of Ross Lake NRA, totaling 33 river miles.

Wilderness

- Convert 3,559 acres of Thunder Creek Potential Wilderness Area to designated wilderness, implementing the authority granted to the Secretary of Interior by Congress in the Washington Park Wilderness Act of 1988.

Resource Management

- Airshed: Pursue redesignation of the Class II Airshed within Ross Lake NRA to a Class I Airshed.
- Grizzly Bear Management: Retain grizzly bear habitat in large, contiguous, isolated blocks, and assess any new development to ensure high quality grizzly bear habitat would not be compromised. Maintain a minimum core area of $\geq 70\%$ within each Bear Management Unit.
- Soundscapes: Use the natural sounds program to create a complete inventory of natural sounds and implement an ongoing monitoring program to assess changes in the soundscape.
- Cultural Resources: Develop a program for paleoecological research. Increase storage capacity for museum collections and archives. Expand opportunities for sharing information about cultural resources through interpretive and educational media and programs.

Climate Change and Sustainability

- Reduce carbon emissions and increase energy and fuel efficiency in infrastructure through the continual and increased use of “green technology”. Lead regional efforts on climate change research and planning. Pursue stewardship projects that promote ecosystem resiliency.

Visitor Experience

- Boating: To maintain and improve the current visitor experience, visitor safety, soundscapes, and water quality, the NPS would require the exclusive use of four-stroke engines, direct-injection two-stroke engines, or equivalent technology for all boats in the NRA by 2015.
- Seaplanes: To improve soundscapes while maintaining seaplane use, the NPS would institute noise abatement procedures for seaplanes and establish a long-term acoustic monitoring program.
- Backcountry Permit System: Develop an advanced trip planning option for the backcountry permit system.

Facilities

- Trails: Improve existing trails and construct new day hiking and accessible trails primarily along the highway corridor.
- Campgrounds: Consider new camping facilities at the Newhalem Creek Campground and at Upper and Lower Goodell group sites.
- North Cascades Visitor Center: Update the exhibits, multi-media programs, and activities at the North Cascades Visitor Center.
- Wilderness Information Center: Continue upgrades to the facility to improve visitor services and operational efficiencies.
- Thornton Lakes Road: In order to comply with the current wilderness boundary, close the upper one mile segment of the Thornton Lakes Road, convert old road to a new trail, and improve the trailhead with parking. Maintain and upgrade the trail to Thornton Lakes.
- Ross Dam Trailhead: Enlarge the footprint of the parking lot to accommodate a turn lane, pull-through spaces for six oversized vehicles, and capacity for 40 passenger vehicles.
- North Cascades Highway: Recommend nomination and designation of the North Cascades Highway as a National Scenic Byway.

Concessions

- Ross Lake Resort: Permit Ross Lake Resort to run two water taxis on Ross Lake, and allow the Resort to expand by ten percent.

Check Out the Plan

The *Ross Lake National Recreation Area Final GMP/EIS* is available at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/RossLakeNRA> (QR code to right links to page for smart phones).

To request a CD-ROM or paper version of the final plan, please contact (360)854-7205 or noca_superintendent@nps.gov.

