



Notice of Land Conversion Wenatchee River County Park, 2924 U.S. Route 2, Monitor, WA 98836 Request for Public Comment

February 15, 2023



Purpose

Chelan County is inviting public comment on its proposal to mitigate loss of public recreational opportunities associated with ongoing use of a portion of the Wenatchee River County Park property for temporary farmworker housing by purchasing adjacent state-owned parcels to expand the park footprint.

Comment Period

Comments will be accepted from February 20 through March 22, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. Comments must be made in writing, and can be submitted to Scott Bailey, Natural Resources Specialist via email at scott.bailey@co.chelan.wa.us or at the following physical address:

Chelan County Natural Resource Department
Attn: Scott Bailey
411 Washington Street, Suite 201
Wenatchee, WA 98801

Background

The Wenatchee River County Park (the park) is an approximately 31-acre property owned by Chelan County (the County) located adjacent to US Highway 2 near the community of Monitor (see map above). It includes an RV camping area with 49 campsites; laundry, shower, and restroom facilities; and other amenities; and a day use area with a picnic shelter, uncovered picnic tables, restrooms, vehicle parking area and river access.

In establishing the park, the County received four grants during the late 1960's and early 1970's. These included funds from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF, administered by the National Park Service [NPS]) and state bond programs administered by the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). The federal and state funding was intended to develop facilities on the County-owned property to support overnight camping and day use and provide public access to the Wenatchee River.

In 1998, recognizing the critical need to increase the supply of safe, decent and affordable housing for migrant and seasonal farmworkers, Governor Gary Locke declared farmworker housing to be the state's top housing priority. Locke's 10-year capital plan included funding for the development of farmworker housing and, in 1999, the state legislature funded a Farmworker Housing Program through the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (now the Washington State Department of Commerce). In 2001, the County received funding through this program to develop seasonal farmworker housing at the Park. The Park was chosen because it had all the infrastructure needed to develop seasonal housing quickly and cost effectively - it could be made functional at a fraction of the cost of purchasing bare land and developing such infrastructure. The effort to establish the farmworker housing area included significant and needed upgrades to the park's water and on-site septic systems, which also improved conditions for RV camping and day use.

As a result of the 2001 funding, an approximately 8.6-acre portion of the park was fenced off from the remainder of the park and transformed to provide temporary farmworker housing. The housing area includes approximately 30 modular structures that serve as temporary residences for families, restrooms and kitchens; a brick-and-mortar restroom/shower structure; a covered, open-air space for cooking and dining; a grassy area with concrete pads where 31 wall tents are set up to provide temporary housing for single men; playground equipment and turf grass for recreational use; storage/maintenance structures; and an overflow parking lot.

The use of a portion of the park for farmworker housing is ongoing, and the remaining approximately 23.4-acres continues to provide for and support public recreational uses.

Use Limitations and the Land Conversion Process

The State and Federal funding programs used to support park development have restrictions that prohibit certain activities or uses of properties supported by those funding sources that are non-compliant with the terms of funding.¹ Non-compliance includes "conversion," which is defined as actions that change the intended use of a site, whether those actions affect an entire site or any portion of a site. Use of an approximately 8.6-acre portion of the park for other than its original intended purpose, as described above, is a conversion and that portion of the park being used in this manner is referred to as the "Conversion Property" (see attached map).

The state and federal funding programs referenced above also provide a mechanism to approve and mitigate conversions. A primary component of this process is acquisition of other land with equal or greater fair market

¹ For more information see:

USDA, National Park Service. 2021. Land and Water Conservation Fund, State Assistance Program: Federal Financial Manual, Volume 71.
Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office. 2018. Manual 3: Acquisition Projects.
Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office. 2022. Manual 7: Long-term Obligations.
Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office. 2022. Manual 15: Land and Water Conservation Fund.

value and equivalent qualities, characteristics and location as a substitute for the converted property. This acquisition must be from a willing seller. Property purchased for this purpose is referred to as “Replacement Property.”

Proposed Action

The County is working with RCO and NPS to approve the above described conversion and mitigate for the associated loss of public recreational opportunities. Several alternatives were considered in developing the preferred alternative for resolving the described conversion.

Alternative 1 – Do Nothing. Under this alternative the park property would continue to be used for both public recreation and temporary farmworker housing, and no replacement property would be acquired. This is not considered a viable alternative because it would not resolve the conversion.

Alternative 2 – Fee simple acquisition of adjacent state-owned parcels. Under this alternative, the County would purchase adjacent state-owned parcels and this property would be added to the park footprint (the Replacement Property). The proposed Replacement Property adjoins the park’s eastern boundary (see attached map), and is comprised of two parcels currently owned by the State of Washington and administered by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT; Parcel #'s 231913625077 [~14.2 acres] and 231913625085 [~6.3 acres]).² These parcels are undeveloped, but an electric power transmission line runs north-south across the eastern portion of the property. The proposed Replacement Property includes approximately 1,430 ft of riverfront and supports a cottonwood-dominated riparian forest and wetland habitats. This is the County’s preferred alternative.

As noted above, one of the requirements for the Replacement Property is a stipulation that its market value must be equal to or greater than that of the Conversion Property. To verify market values, both federal and state laws require an appraisal and an independent appraisal review for each property. The County completed this appraisal process in June 2022, and verified that the proposed transaction complies with this requirement. While the proposed Replacement Property does not currently include amenities to facilitate day use or overnight camping, it would enable river access with little or no modifications, and post-acquisition work could be completed to enhance recreational use and conservation value of the property. The property is on WSDOT’s list of surplus properties and, therefore, WSDOT is a willing seller.

Alternative 3 – Relocate farmworker housing to another County-owned property. Under this alternative, the temporary farmworker housing facility would be relocated to another County-owned property and the portion of the park currently used for farmworker housing would be re-developed to support public recreation. The county does not currently own property that would be suitable for such a facility, so property would have to be acquired and improvements would have to be made to the property. As a result, relocating and reconstructing the farmworker housing facilities at an alternate location would require significant effort and would be considerably more expensive than the preferred alternative. For these reasons, it is not feasible to relocate the farmworker housing facility to another location and return the park property entirely to public recreational uses.

² Area estimates for these parcels is based on measurement of parcel boundaries using the measurement tool provided on the Chelan County Assessor’s Parcel Search mapping website (<https://maps.co.chelan.wa.us/GIS/>).