



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Interior Regions 8, 9, 10, and 12
333 Bush St, Suite 500
San Francisco, CA 94104

(PWR-LWCF)

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Wards Lake Park Phase 1 Improvements Environmental Assessment Lakewood, Washington

April 2023

BACKGROUND

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the decision of the National Park Service (NPS) to approve a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant application for the development of enhanced public outdoor recreation at the existing Wards Lake Park within the city of Lakewood, Washington. The NPS is providing up to 50% of the funding for this public outdoor recreation development project and as needed for this federal action to approve the grant application and subsequent development of the park, is adopting the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Environmental Assessment (EA) dated February 13, 2023, that evaluates the impacts of developing Wards Lake Park. Federal LWCF funding will be used to develop and construct an underutilized portion of Wards Lake Park. Specifically, the proposed project at Wards Lake Park includes the construction of a dog park, a pump track, a new pedestrian bridge over Wards Lake, improvements to the existing trail network, minor improvement to parking, and will include habitat restoration and enhancement.

The statements and conclusion reached in this FONSI are based on the documentation and analysis provided in the EA and associated decision file. To the extent necessary, relevant sections of the EA and Appendices are incorporated by reference below. Except where noted, references can be found in the EA.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE AND RATIONALE FOR DECISION

Two alternatives were analyzed: 1) The No-Action Alternative which is that NPS LWCF Program does not approve the grant application for funding and therefore, no federal funds would be utilized for improvements to the park, and 2) the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative (NPS Selected Alternative), the NPS LWCF Program approves the grant application to allow park design development including construction of a dog park, a pump track, a new pedestrian bridge over Wards Lake, improvements to the existing trail network, minor improvements to parking, and habitat restoration and enhancement.

The preferred alternative will enhance the overall visitor experience. A detailed description of the grant elements subject to NPS LWCF approval are described in section 3 of the EA.

After careful analysis of resource impacts, consultation with agencies, and review of stakeholder and public comments, the proposed action alternative was selected by the NPS. NPS will approve the LWCF grant application submitted by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) in order to assist with the development of Wards Lake Park for public outdoor recreation. WA RCO will implement the selected action.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA REVIEW

Potentially Affected Environment

The potentially affected environment covers approximately 16 acres of underutilized park land located southwest of the South 84th Street and I-5 intersection in Pierce County, in the northeast quadrant of Lakewood, Washington. The park is bordered by residential and commercial development, and Interstate 5. The existing park includes a natural area with a fishing pier, playground, picnic shelter, restrooms, and trail system.

Degree of Effects of the Action

NPS considered the following actual or potential project impacts in evaluating the degree of the effects (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1501.3(b)(2)) for the selected action.

a. Beneficial and adverse, and short- and long-term effects of the proposed action.

Threatened and Endangered Species

The project is anticipated to have no effect on listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat regulated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). There is a lack of suitable habitat at the site or within the broader action area for the project and there is no designated critical habitat for any identified species at the site.

Cultural Resources

No historic properties, archaeological sites, isolates, or potential cultural indicators have been identified in the cultural resources survey within the APE at the Wards Lake Park site. In addition, no landforms with higher probability of containing cultural resources, and no high probability deposits, such as buried surfaces, were identified at the site.

Socioeconomic Environment

Construction of the Proposed Action would have beneficial effects for the surrounding community by expanding recreation and park facilities. Wards Lake Park represents a unique community resource as there are no other publicly accessible natural areas of this size or scale in the immediate vicinity. Wards Lake is a unique resource for the local community and provides benefits to residential areas of moderate- and lower-income populations. The Proposed Action would benefit historically disadvantaged groups of people by providing enhanced low- or no-cost recreation opportunities for their use. Improved park amenities will continue to be free for all park users, and thus will provide limited economic benefit, but significant social benefit. Adjacent businesses may benefit from the potential increase in park visitors.

Unique Ecosystems

Unique ecosystems within Wards Lake Park potentially include wetland habitat, mature coniferous forest, and an Oregon white oak stand. Mature forest is present at the site, but the understory is highly degraded because of human use, including development of social trails, and encroachment by invasive species. The proposed project will formalize and improve trails and add a dog park in the forested area. These actions will not require removal of mature trees. Trail improvements will help focus visitor use and reduce development and use of social trails, which contribute to degradation of understory vegetation. The dog park will require removal of understory vegetation, much of which is invasive; this impact will be limited in extent and much of the forested understory outside of the dog park will remain unaffected by the project.

Oregon white oaks occurring within the park have not been designated as a priority stand. The Oregon white oak stand will be protected, and no Oregon white oak trees will be removed. Therefore, the Oregon white oak stand will remain unaffected by the project.

Aquatic Resources

The proposed project includes a new overwater crossing structure (bridge) that will have a minor impact on wetland habitat at the site, as well as some work within the wetland buffer that may have indirect impacts to the wetland. Due to its elevation over the wetland, the new bridge will not affect water quality or hydrologic functions of the wetland and impacts to habitat functions are anticipated to be minor and fully offset through compensatory mitigation. Trail and other improvements within the wetland buffer are generally limited to areas where existing trail infrastructure or other improvements, including prior landscape alteration, are already present. Therefore, proposed improvements within the wetland buffer will also have limited impacts and are expected to be fully offset through compensatory mitigation.

The proposed increase in surface area of impervious surfaces for park trails and the bicycle pump track is anticipated to generate additional stormwater runoff. However, these impervious surfaces will be non-pollution-generating and are generally anticipated to be accommodated via groundwater infiltration in adjacent uplands. Some runoff, particularly from pathways closer to the wetland edge, may sheet flow into the wetland but this would be non-pollution-generating runoff.

b. Degree to which the proposed action affects minority and low-income populations.

Pursuant to Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations, the proposed project has been assessed to determine if it would have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. This project will not result in the relocation or closure of any parks that would decrease the accessibility of these facilities. The project will have a beneficial affect by increasing accessibility of the existing facilities and planned facilities within the park. Due to these factors, there is no evidence that there would be any adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. Furthermore, improved park amenities may lead to an increase in surrounding property values, increasing the economic value of the neighborhood. Overall, the project is in compliance with Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations.

c. Effects that would violate federal, state, tribal, or local law protecting the environment.

The selected alternative does not threaten or violate applicable federal, state, or local environmental laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. A detailed description of consultation and coordination efforts for the project can be found in section 5 of the EA, pages 13 and 14. A brief summary of these efforts is below.

The City of Lakewood actively engaged with community members through open houses and stakeholder meetings to gather feedback on the project. Feedback from the general public, site neighbors and adjoining jurisdictions helped define the project, develop alternatives and identify a preferred master plan. The City of Lakewood also held a number of targeted outreach events throughout the community, including focus groups and pop-up events.

A wetland report was prepared for the project site and project design drawings were submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), who issued a letter stating that neither a Section 10 Rivers and Harbors Act nor a Section 404 Clean Water Act permit would be required for the selected alternative/proposed action.

Consultation for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act has been carried out with multiple stakeholders including the Washington State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Federally Recognized tribal governments and the public. The NPS is responsible for carrying out government-to-government consultation with all federally recognized Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 800.2(c)(2)(ii)(C). A cultural resources assessment was completed, and a report was produced and provided to consulting parties. As part of this process, letters were sent to the Nisqually Tribe and Squaxin Island Tribe; no response was received from the Squaxin Island Tribe and a letter of "No Comment" was received from the Nisqually Tribe on January 31, 2022. Based on the results of the assessment and our consultation, a determination of "No Historic Properties Affected," with stipulation for an Unanticipated Discovery Plan, was made. The SHPO provided concurrence with the recommended determination of effect on February 25, 2022.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

- Based on the information contained in the EA, I have determined that the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be required.
- This finding is based on consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality criteria for significance (40 CFR 1501.3 [b] [2020]), regarding the potentially affected environment and degrees of effects of the impacts described in the EA (which is hereby incorporated by reference).

Recommended by:

Brandon Pace Date
Acting Regional Compliance Team Lead
State and Local Assistance Programs
Land and Water Conservation Fund
Interior Region 3, 4, 5
National Park Service

Reviewed by:

Stephanie Stephens Date
Associate Regional Director
Cultural Resources, Land and Water Conservation Fund, and
Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance
Interior Region 3, 4, 5
National Park Service

Approved by:

Frank W Lands Date
Regional Director
Interior Region 8,9,10, and 12
National Park Service