



November 15th, 2019

WA State Parks Director Don Hoch
Commissioner Lucina S Whaley
Commissioner Sophia Danenberg
Commissioner Michael Latimer
Commissioner Mark O. Brown
Commissioner Steve S. Miller
Commissioner Diana Perez
Commissioner Ken Bounds

Dear Commissioners and Director Hoch,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed public-private partnership for the Westport Light State Park. Please include these comments on behalf of the five Surfrider Foundation Washington Chapters in the Commissioners packet for the upcoming work session. The Surfrider Foundation is a grassroots, coastal conservation organization dedication to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves and beaches. In Washington, we are represented by our Northwest Straits, Seattle, South Sound, Olympia, and Olympic Peninsula Chapters, as well as over 500+ members statewide who are surfers, beachgoers, paddlers and coastal recreation enthusiasts.

This proposed project seems to be moving rather quickly as is challenging to give the attention that it deserves, we first learned about the proposed project in a meeting with State Parks staff in late September. A week later we participated remotely in a preliminary stakeholder meeting with the project proponents, and a week after that several of our members attended the public meeting in Westport. In light of this rapid pace, **we feel that before any future decisions are made, a state funded comprehensive master planning process should be conducted and interested stakeholders, and the public should be invited to participate. It is important that any funding for this process not be provided by the project proponents so that the perception of a biased, pre-determined outcome for the park is avoided.**

In 2014 as part of the Washington Marine Spatial Planning process, the Surfrider Foundation conducted an ocean and coastal recreational use survey of the Washington Coast. This "Rec Use Study" collected data on numerous non-consumptive uses by the public including beach-going, kayaking, surfing, wildlife viewing, and camping. The full report can be found here:

<http://publicfiles.surfrider.org/P97SurfriderWACoastalRecreationReport.pdf>

Geospatial data from this study were integrated into the Washington Marine Planning

Mapping Application, which can be accessed here: <http://www.msp.wa.gov>

As you are well aware, coastal recreation provides significant economic and social benefits to coastal communities and the state—these include direct expenditures, as well as social benefits such as citizen enjoyment. In 2014, Washington residents took an estimated 4.1 million trips to the Washington coast, with nearly 60 percent indicating their primary purpose was recreation.

The top five activities respondents participated in on their last trip were beach going (60.5 percent), sightseeing or scenic enjoyment (57.1 percent), wildlife viewing (35.1 percent), photography (34.3 percent), and hiking or biking (28 percent). Of all the recreational uses listed, golf did not make the list for main activities, and was only listed by a portion of respondents as part of an “other” category, which was approximately 3% of respondents. A potential explanation of this could be that there aren’t many golf courses on the Washington coast, however another could be the fact that participation in the sport of golf has been declining in recent years around the country as younger generations haven’t had the same level of interest as previous generations. Additionally, the closure of golf courses around the country has been happening at an increased rate in recent years. In light of this data on the most popular recreational uses and trends for the sport of golf, it seems like it might be putting the cart before the horse in moving forward with the development of a golf course for this public space without initiation of a planning process first.

We would hope that any plans would make sure that we are enhancing and improving the access and enjoyment of the existing most popular coastal recreational uses of this special place first and foremost. A key question for this proposed public/private partnership to develop a golf course would be how would this proposed new use allow for, and potentially enhance the coastal access for the above existing uses? Any disruption to the existing uses could result in effort to shift elsewhere, or potential reductions, which could have negative economic consequences.

The study found that when visiting at the coast, the average respondent spent \$117.14 per trip, translating to an estimated \$481 million dollars in total direct expenditures for coastal communities and the state, through hotel visits, shopping, dining and other trip-related expenditures. Grays Harbor County was the second most visited coastal county according to the study, and the maps indicate that the Westport Light area as a major hotspot for many recreational uses in comparison with other areas of the coast. Most respondents (34 percent) stayed one night on their last trip to the coast, and 26.4% stayed for two. 13.4% of respondents went to the coast for a day without staying overnight. While not listed above in the top 5 most popular uses, camping is definitely in the top 10 uses, and the number of available campgrounds and campsites is a known limiting factor currently. One only needs to look at availability or visitation rates at the various coastal campgrounds to know that it

is a challenge to find a campground, especially during the busy summer season. As part of the planning process, strong consideration should be given to enhancement of camping and overnight accommodation for this park.

In light of a national trend towards the privatization of our public lands, we need to remember that this property was purchased with 1.9 million publicly funded dollars via the Recreation and Conservation Office less than 5 years ago. The proponents of golf development could've previously purchased it with their own money. Any partnership, or potential new use for this newly acquired public land needs to ensure that there is equitable and affordable access to all park visitors, and not creating barriers for those who are less privileged or restrictions on access and potential user conflicts. As stewards of these coastal lands, you must ensure that whatever decisions you make are in line with the public interest and the greatest benefit for a diverse set of recreational uses and users, not catering to special interests of a select few.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that it is important to first conduct an independent, comprehensive master planning process for the newly acquired public park to ensure that any decisions made are in line with State Parks mission and ensure the greatest benefit for the greatest number of users. We would be happy to help support a budget request to the State Legislature in the upcoming session.

Sincerely,

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