

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

December 15, 1994

STAFF DIRECTIVE 94-16

TO: All Division Staff

FROM: Philip K. McKnelly, Director

SUBJECT: Designating Mount Jefferson as a State Natural Area

Mount Jefferson State Park's General Management Plan recommends that the area's designation be changed to "state natural area" because of its natural significance and its extremely limited potential for facility development (operations evaluation attached). In accordance with that recommendation, this directive makes that designation official.

Effective immediately, the new name for Mount Jefferson is "Mount Jefferson Natural Area" and the classification is "conservation area," which will allow such activities as picnicking to continue at the site.

PKM/cjt

Attachment

CHAPTER VIII

PARK OPERATIONS

Operations Evaluation

The major concerns addressed in the general management plan process are identified by Division of Parks and Recreation staff as the plan is initiated. These issues are classified into three operations. This section deals with the park operations issues and recommendations. Four major management and operations issues have been identified as being of significant concern at Mount Jefferson State Park. These are:

1. Should Mount Jefferson be classified as a state park given its size, limited potential for development, and natural significance.
2. Are the current operating hours appropriate? Mount Jefferson opens one hour later and closes one hour earlier than most other state parks.
3. What visitor safety measures are appropriate at the overlooks on the road to the summit?
4. Is the trail system adequate given the park's size and natural resources?

SHOULD MOUNT JEFFERSON BE RECLASSIFIED AS A STATE NATURAL AREA?

Issue Statement: Mount Jefferson's classification as a state park should be reconsidered because of its small size, limited potential for development, and natural significance.

Background: Mount Jefferson has limited potential developing visitor facilities because of the steep slopes that dominate the park. Current visitor facilities are limited to a park office, a picnic area, exhibits, and trails. Prior to the general management plan, only a visitor center and picnic shelter were needed to complete the planned development.

A 470-acre Registered Natural Heritage Area is contained within the boundaries of this 489-acre park. The rock outcrops at the summit and the mature forest communities on the northern-facing slopes are particularly significant.

Recommendation: Mount Jefferson State Park should be reclassified as a State Natural Area because of its natural significance and limited potential for development. The reclassification will occur upon approval of this general plan. According to the Administrative Code for the state natural areas, Mount Jefferson should be classified as a conservation area, which allows the picnicking facilities and trails that currently exist.

OPERATING HOURS

Issue Statement: Is it appropriate to open Mount Jefferson State Park one hour later and close one hour earlier than other state parks in the system?

Background: Mount Jefferson State Park is operated as a satellite of New River State Park. The

operating hours at Mount Jefferson have been reduced in the past so that one staff member can open and close both parks.

Recommendation: Mount Jefferson State Park should continue to open one hour later and close one hour earlier than other state park units.

SAFETY MEASURES AT OVERLOOKS

Issue Statement: A steep cliff is located near the parking lot at the second overlook on the park road to the summit. What are the appropriate visitor safety measures needed at this location?

Background: An automobile guardrail exists at the second overlook, but no pedestrian railing is there. No accidents have been reported at the site.

Recommendation: A warning sign is needed at this location. The warning should be consistent with the Attorney General's opinion by stating clearly the danger that exists and the injuries that could occur if the warning is not heeded.

TRAILS SYSTEM

Issue Statement: The trail system, totaling about 1.2 miles, is not sufficient to provide public access to the 489-acre park.

Background: The trail system consists of approximately 1.2 miles of designated hiking trails. Both trails, the Luther Rock Trail and the Rhododendron Trail, originate in the summit parking lot. A trails evaluation resulted in the recommendation to build new hiking trail.

Recommendation: A new loop trail should be explored from the first overlook to the caves on the western side of the mountain. A second trail should extend the Luther Rock Trail to the southeast and the return by connecting into the Rhododendron Trail. These trails should be two-foot wide dirt trails. The routing and trail impact need to be determined with the assistance of the Natural Resources Section.