



April 23, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Secretary of Health John Wiesman, DrPH, MPH
Washington State Department of Health
101 Israel Road SE
Tumwater, WA 98501

State Parks Director Don Hoch
Washington State Parks
1111 Israel Road SW
Tumwater, WA 98501-6512

EMD Director Robert Ezelle
Washington Military Department
Building 1
1 Militia Drive
Camp Murray, WA 98430-5000

Re: Proposed COVID-19 Recovery Plan Framework for Public Parks and Recreation

Dear Governor Inslee, Secretary Wiesman, Director Hoch and Director Ezelle:

On behalf of the Washington Recreation and Park Association (WRPA) and public park and recreation providers from across the State of Washington, we respectfully submit to you a proposed framework providing guidance to how public parks and recreation service providers can serve a vital role in assisting you to safely return Washingtonians to public life.

We seek to answer your call for collaboration across multiple sectors of government, community, business and industry. We wish to join you in taking measured steps, guided by science and informed by public health needs to mitigate impacts and help restore our communities.

Together with public park and recreation professional associations from Oregon, Idaho and California, we have collaboratively fashioned a framework that can be used to quickly activate this important government sector. It focuses on facilitating a safe start and transition to get

people back to what they do best, in a way that protects themselves and their communities' health.

We welcome the opportunity to explore this with you and look forward to helping the State of Washington develop a safe, healthy and gradual path to recovery.

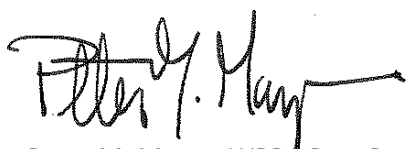
Respectfully,



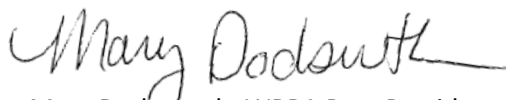
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Attachment: Proposed COVID-19 Recovery Plan Framework for Public Parks and Recreation Service Providers in Washington State

Cc: Mr. Jon Snyder, Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development, Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Jay Inslee
Ms. Tiffany Hanzo, WRPA Executive Director
Mr. Doug Levy, WRPA Lobbyist



Proposed COVID-19 Recovery Plan Framework for Public Parks & Recreation Service Providers in Washington State*

**Developed in consultation with Oregon Recreation and Park Association, California Park and Recreation Society, California Association of Recreation and Park Districts and Idaho Recreation and Park Association*

On behalf of public park and recreation service providers across Washington State, we ask Governor Inslee to entrust park professionals with re-activating park spaces and recreation facilities to the benefit of the public and to build confidence that we can do so in a consistent, progressive and responsible manner.

We acknowledge:

that we have entered a unique time in our nation's history and that social distancing and protections from communicable diseases will be a factor for our industry to bear in mind moving forward. Further, we acknowledge that sacrifices must be made, and we accept our responsibility to make substantive and meaningful changes to the way we deliver services.

We share:

a common goal to have a safe and healthy community for all residents, with special consideration for youth and vulnerable populations.

We believe:

Public Parks and Recreation spaces and services are crucial in the recovery process, as social isolation and lack of physical and outdoor experiences negatively impact the mental, emotional and physical health of citizens. **Washingtonians spend an average of 56 days a year recreating outdoors. Of all the places where they go, local parks are the most visited¹.** Local parks support social equity and access to nature and healthy spaces in proximity to one's home. In fact, local parks are an equal-access destination and experience for all segments of society regardless of their income, their racial makeup, their religion, or their sexual orientation. **Parks and outdoor recreation environments provide some of the lowest cost, most effective public health interventions available in our communities.**

Allowing the greatest number of safe options as possible, given diverse needs and interests, is essential to the overall health and well-being of our citizens in the near term as well as to help residents become more resistive and resilient against all forms of disease. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has prepared guidance to support safe use of parks and open spaces during the COVID-19 outbreak. As of March 27, 2020, more than 1,000* organizations have signed on to voice support for the power of parks and open spaces as essential resources for health and wellness. We recognize that physical

distancing may take a toll on our mental health, especially during high-stress and anxiety-producing global public health emergencies. We also know that parks provide a connection to the outdoors and green space as well as opportunities for physical activity which studies demonstrate reduces stress and improves mental health. (Source: <https://www.nrpa.org/about-national-recreation-and-park-association/press-room/NRPA-statement-on-using-parks-and-open-space-while-maintaining-social-distancing/>)

The necessary Stay Home-Stay Healthy restrictions have re-invigorated an even greater appreciation for the multi-faceted benefits of community parks and recreation services and restrictions on travel will create a significant “stay-cation” demand on local park and recreation systems, as seen in previous economic downturns.

Parks and recreation plays an equally important role in community economic revival, as it is a core part of an outdoor recreation sector that provides more jobs in Washington (201,000) than the aerospace industry does (136,000)² . Restoring activities that can be done in small groups and in a socially responsible manner, such as golf, fishing, boating, and hiking, can produce immediate employment and economic gains.

We request that:

1. Representatives from public parks and recreation are consulted as Governor Inslee assembles community, business, public health, education and industry leaders to advise him on recovery considerations and priorities;
2. Community settings where children are cared for, including K-12 schools, day-cares, and locally attended summer camps be an early priority to allow the workforce to return to work. Consistent with FEMA’s [preliminary strategies for recovery](#), supporting the continuity of learning over the summer months- such as small group day camps- are critical as an option for child care and for social-emotional development;
3. Hiking, fishing, boating, kayaking, and golf should be more immediately provided due to the inherent distancing and small group nature of the activities, with added precautions;
4. Restoration of recreation programming be instituted, to re-engage the community and enable access to the physical and social benefits while complying with public health distancing requirements. Programming is often planned at least three months before the experience, allowing adequate time to address health and safety, staffing, marketing and other resource needs. Developing a scalable framework will preserve our staff capacity and provide the best results for our community;
5. Support be provided to acquire and distribute necessary health tests and safety supplies and equipment, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for park and recreation service providers- including: face coverings, gloves, and hand sanitizer;
6. Relief funding be allocated for local agencies to hire and retain staff to support operations. Helping jurisdictions with significant budget reductions and revenue shortfalls is also critical in order to enable the hiring of additional staff to maintain lower participant-to-leader ratios.

We commit:

- To align our services with local, state and federal guidance, with an early focus on distanced outdoor, open space activation and restrictions on large gatherings. We are planning in a way that is consistent with the progressive phases outlined in the recent [Opening America](#) release and [Governor Inslee's Recovery Plan Policy Brief](#). We have been actively working with health agencies and our national association to promote social distancing and safety protocols.
- To empower and facilitate responsible use and enjoyment of our park and recreation system within our local communities.
- To structure programmatic offerings that can be delivered in small groups where contact is limited between participants and social distancing can be reinforced.
- To utilize technology, registration processes and physical barriers to prevent unauthorized or over-sized gatherings from occurring.
- To train our staff and equip them to safely operate programs, services and public facilities.

As a state-wide association, **we are prepared to:**

- 1) Collaborate with the Governor's Office, State Department of Health and local public health jurisdictions and other governmental and private sector interests to further develop a recovery framework with the above principles in mind;
- 2) Provide park and recreation professionals with venues for best practice discussions and distribution of consistent and replicable program models and materials. For example, we have sample plans for social distancing that have already been created for many of our standard activities;
- 3) Help foster consistency across the state while respecting differences in jurisdictional authorities; and
- 4) Work in tandem with local health jurisdictions with special emphasis on preventing re-emergence of the virus in areas with high populations and higher risk based on health disparities and past rates of contagion by operating in a manner consistent with the locally determined phase of recovery.
- 5) Adapt programs and operations to meet changing public health restrictions and social distancing requirements, including adjusting service delivery should a region experience a second wave of outbreak.