

CITY MANAGER WEEKLY UPDATE REPORT ~ KENT MYERS

March 19, 2010

Due to the length of the City Council meeting last night, I was not able to provide a more detailed report on our trip to Washington D.C. earlier this week. I would like to add several important items to the reports that were provided by the Councilmembers who participated in this trip.

First of all, I believe that we made a lot of progress in our efforts to get Hurricane Ridge Road open throughout the winter months. Olympic National Park Superintendent Karen Gustin had provided the attached report on the road closure and information was very useful for our discussions. Congressman Dicks' staff was able to get us a meeting with a key appropriations staff member for the Department of Interior and he was receptive to the idea of keeping the road open on an extended schedule for a two or three year trial basis. This will provide an opportunity to see if there is sufficient public demand to keep this road opened. If this is approved, we discussed the possibility of the City embarking on a major promotional campaign in Victoria and along the I-5 corridor to market the extended opening of the road.

Another highlight of the trip was the workshops and discussions about improving local economic development efforts. There were several very informative and dynamic speakers who had recent experience with changing their local economies and this information was very timely with our upcoming economic development summit. In addition, our meetings with Port Commissioner Jim McEntire and Executive Director Jeff Robb were encouraging as we realized we have a number of similar goals and aspirations for improving our local economy.

Finally, we were able to establish that the waterfront improvements included in our appropriations request are our highest local priority and will have a dramatic visual impact on our community. The brochure and virtual presentation that Nathan West and his Community & Economic Development staff created were a key part in enabling our Congressional delegation and their key staff understand the vision of what will take place the next several years with these improvements.

I wanted to make you aware that I will be out of the office most of the day on Monday attending an update and discussion with the Department of Ecology on our CSO project. We are making a lot of progress on engineering these improvements and we plan on providing the Council with a progress report at your April 20 meeting.

We hope to see you tomorrow for the Governor's visit and the ribbon cutting for PenPly.

- Kent Myers

BUREAU: National Park Service
MEMBER: Congressman Norm Dicks, Sixth District, Washington
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell
ISSUE: Winter Access to Hurricane Ridge, Olympic National Park

Key Points:

- The Hurricane Ridge Road leads 17 miles from sea-level Port Angeles to Hurricane Ridge at 5,242 feet. It provides the only paved access to Olympic's subalpine zone and is one of the park's most popular visitor destinations.
- The road is open daily throughout the spring, summer and fall. During the winter season (mid-November through the end of March), the road is open Friday through Sunday, weather permitting. The winter schedule also includes Monday holidays and a full week of daily operation during the holiday season.
- Over the past five years, annual visitation to Hurricane Ridge has averaged approximately 240,000, with about 30,000 (approx. 13 percent) of that occurring during the winter months. Monthly visitation ranges from the high of about 54,000 during July and August to an average of approximately 6,100 per month for November through March.
- Prior to 2000, the scheduled Hurricane Ridge Road winter open days were Friday through Sunday; the road was open additional days if no plowing or road maintenance was needed. This led to an unpredictable schedule and frequently left the road open with little or no emergency service or plowing capability. Beginning in 2000, park staff experimented with a variety of schedules in an effort to develop a more consistent and efficient schedule, while responding to public use levels and desires.
- In 2006, the current schedule of Friday through Sunday was adopted and represents the most efficient schedule the park is able to offer at this time. Winter visitation to Hurricane Ridge has fluctuated according to weather and snow conditions since then, with 34,000 visits in 2005, 36,000 in 2008 and averaging about 33,000 overall.
- Members of the local community are interested in expanding the visitor use season at Hurricane Ridge to include daily access throughout the winter.

Background:

- During the winter season, Hurricane Ridge is open 3 days/week, weather permitting. The road is also open for a week between the Christmas and New Year holidays, and on Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Presidents Day.
- Weather-caused closures occur during extreme winter conditions, which include heavy and drifting snow, hurricane force winds (>75 mph), white-outs and avalanches that cross the road. Average winter snowfall is 30-35 feet (360-420 inches.) Despite these factors, the road has been open 80% of its scheduled days over the past five years. For example, during the 2008-09 season, the road was open 56 of 67 possible days, or 84%.

- Annual cost to provide 3 days/week access (total of 66 visitor days) is approximately \$467,130 and includes the services shown in the following table:

Function	Cost	Em- ployees	Comments
Maintenance (road crew, building maintainance)	\$344,100	4	3 employees plow & sand road; 1 cleans and maintains Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center. They work four 10-hour days (total of 111 plowing days) from mid-Nov. through April.
Visitor & Resource Protection	\$82,830	2-4	Provide emergency services (emergency medical, search & rescue, law enforcement)
Interpretation	\$27,000	2	Provide visitor information at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center and lead popular ranger-guided snowshoe walks on weekends
Entrance Station	\$13,200	2	greet and welcome park visitors at the Heart O'the Hills entrance station and collect entrance fees (this service provided Saturdays and Sundays only)
Total	\$467,130	10-12	

- Winter visitation varies considerably by month, day of week and in response to changing weather and snow conditions. Over the past five years, Friday visitation has averaged about 100 visitors per day, while average Saturday/Sunday is about 300 daily. Staff estimates that 75% of visitation is local (Port Townsend – Forks.)
- The Hurricane Ridge downhill ski area is open Saturdays and Sundays during the winter season and over the past five years, has received an average of about 150 visits per day, most of which are local.
- The Hurricane Ridge Snack Bar and Ski Shop is open on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the winter and closed on Fridays.
- Expanding the Hurricane Ridge winter season to a seven day/week schedule (total of 126 visitor days) would require a permanent \$489,400 annual increase to the park budget, primarily to cover increased staffing costs, but also including additional fuel and equipment use.

Function	Added Cost	Em- ployees	Comments
Maintenance	\$361,400	4	Second crew needed to cover additional days, clean and maintain Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center from mid-November through April.
Visitor & Resource Protection	\$80,000	3	Provide emergency services (emergency medical, search & rescue, law enforcement)
Interpretation	\$48,000	2	Provide visitor information and interpretive services at Hurricane Ridge
Total	\$489,400	9	