

MT. WINHOOTCHY NATIONAL PARK

General Information

Background

Mt. Winhootchy National Park is located in the Northwest region of the United States. On the flanks of beautiful Mt. Winhootchy, the Park includes the upper reaches of the Winhootchy River – from its source in several alpine lakes down through the impressive and gorge-like Winhootchy River valley. In the Park, the river itself sports a robust native trout population and consistent (if minimal) salmon runs in the spring and summer. After leaving the Park the Winhootchy River flows down through the reservation lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Winhootchy Nation and down further through the scenic town of Winhootchy Falls. The town thrives during the summer months on the tourist business generated by park visitors. Main Street is lined with hotels, restaurants, fishing, camping and sporting goods stores, and outfitters. Several of the outfitters are licensed to run whitewater trips down through the upper reaches of the Winhootchy River valley. The Tribes have also built on the Winhootchy Park tourist trade and there are a number of highly regarded tribal craftsmen and artists with shops on the reservation. The Tribes have reserved salmon fishing rights at several sites outside the Park, both on and off the reservation. The Tribes also consider the alpine lakes area as sacred, and there reported to be several historical/cultural sites secluded in the vicinity.

The Park itself has a full time staff of about 70 (management, visitor services, maintenance, fire control, park rangers and law enforcement) as well as up to 30 seasonal employees.

The Issue

A dirt road winds through the Winhootchy River valley and ends at the popular Alpine Lakes trailhead (the Valley Road). From the trailhead, the trail winds up the valley 3.5 miles to the first designated camping areas. Wilderness area begins approximately 5 miles from the trailhead. The road also provides the outfitters with access to the upper part of the river for running raft trips.

Because the road is located in a flood plain, every year parts of the road wash out from flooding during the heavy rain season, especially in the upper part of the valley. And every year the Park rebuilds and repairs the road. The rebuilding costs the Park anywhere from \$50,000 to \$200,000 each year (depending on the extent of the flood damage). The funds are taken from the Park's operating budget and emergency funds.

After several years of concerns and dissatisfaction with the situation being expressed by National Park staff, the management of the National Park formed a study team composed of a range of staff persons from within the Park. The team studied the situation and alternatives and concluded that the best solution was to close the last 15 miles of the Valley Road which led up to the Alpine Lakes trail. Hiking would be allowed on the old road, which would link up to the original Alpine Lakes trailhead. It would be far less costly to keep the old road in repair as a hiking trail than to rebuild the road for vehicle use.

A notice informing the public of this impending change was posted in the Park headquarters at the Alpine Lakes Trailhead and in the local newspaper.

The Chinook Explorers, a local/regional hiking and backpacking association with a large membership and political clout, were incensed when they read the notice. They circulated a petition and began a

campaign for legislative action. While there was significant support for the petition in the surrounding community, there are also some community members who do not support the Explorers' petition.

At the urging of Senator Jane Hellstrom from this state, the National Park Service has agreed to initiate a collaborative public engagement process to address the road closing decision.

You are the Park Service Manager who headed the study team, and you have been assigned to develop a public process that would satisfy the Senator. Since you have been told to engage the public in revisiting this decision (which you originally concluded in your initial screening did not need to have the public involved), you are now faced with the "Junction of Public Processes." You meet with your staff team to consider what process might be most appropriate at this point.