



**University
of Idaho**

Point Sublime Amenity Development and Prairie Preservation

**A Report Prepared for McCroskey State Park and
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation**



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Point Sublime Off-Road Use, Credit: Usha Magar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the outcomes of a research effort conducted with park-identified stakeholders and tribal partners of McCroskey State Park to inform amenity development and Palouse Prairie preservation at Point Sublime. The objective of this research was to understand perceptions from different organizations, Tribal nations, and individuals with a vested interest in McCroskey State Park. This executive summary highlights a portion of findings presented in forthcoming pages, detailing the results of research designed to assist in planning and management of the park by Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.

- A total of 13 interviews were conducted with representatives from the Coeur d'Alene Audubon Society, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Friends of McCroskey State Park, Idaho Army National Guard, Palouse Prairie Foundation, Panhandle Trail Riders Association, University of Idaho, and White Pine Chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society, as well as with current park volunteers, former park staff, McCroskey family members, and adjacent private landowners.
- The most frequent recreational activity witnessed by participants was motorized use along Skyline drive and elsewhere in the park ($n = 13$). Hiking, camping, off-roading, and picnicking were recreational activities mentioned by a majority of participants.
- Over half of interviewees ($n = 8$) were familiar with Point Sublime as a placename and six were familiar with the proposed amenity development.
- The Point Sublime amenity development elicited a range of conflicting perspectives with just under half of the interviewees ($n = 6$) generally supporting the current plan ($n = 4$ generally opposing it).
- There was no consensus amongst interviewees regarding the addition of fencing at Point Sublime to protect Palouse Prairie. However, most of interviewees ($n = 10$) emphasized the importance of signage/education at Point Sublime.
- Over half the participants ($n = 8$) expressed concerns for protecting the native Palouse Prairie at Point Sublime.
- Participants recognized amenity development is complex, as it can help accommodate recreation at McCroskey State Park while also increasing use.
- Many interviewees suggested that updated interpretive signage throughout the park could bring additional awareness to users and improve the visitor experience.
- Interviewees mentioned zoning for prairie protection and/or active (i.e., off-roading) and passive recreation (i.e., hiking) may reduce conflict and resource impacts.
- Interviewees suggested regular ranger presence during the park's operational hours and weekends could reduce resource impacts and illegal activity.
- Collaboration between state agencies, private landowners, conservation organizations, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, and community stakeholders is essential for advancing sustainable stewardship of the park's resources.

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the work and outcomes of a research effort conducted with park-identified stakeholders and tribal partners of McCroskey State Park to inform amenity development and Palouse Prairie preservation. The project gathered participants' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs related to McCroskey State Park to help evaluate amenity development proposals and Palouse Prairie stewardship opportunities. Project objectives focused on two elements of visitor use planning and management that can benefit the most from empirical social science data: 1) collecting baseline data on visitor use, attitudes, and perceptions of impacts and 2) assessing management alternatives.

Project Rationale and Background

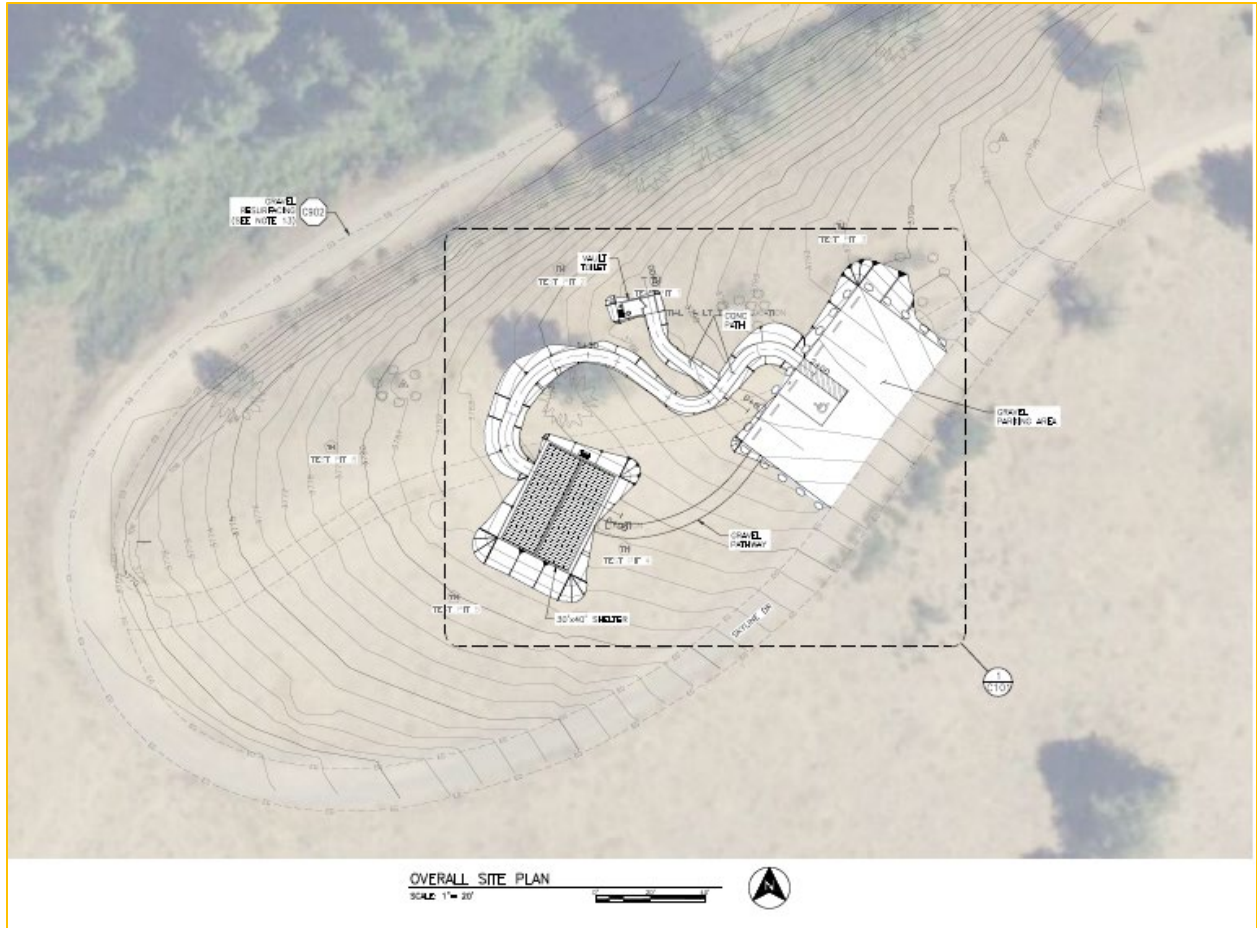
McCroskey State Park is located in the Palouse region of Idaho and flanked by private farmland and USDA Forest Service parcels, as well as the Coeur d'Alene Reservation. The park's namesake is Mary Minerva McCroskey, the mother of Virgil McCroskey. Virgil deeded the land to the State of Idaho in 1955. As part of Virgil's deal with the State, he took on sole maintenance of the park for 15 years, improving the park road, adding parcels, and stewarding lands. Today, the eighteen-mile Skyline Drive Virgil helped to create serves as the spine of park, providing visitors access to multi-use trail systems, semi-primitive camping, ponderosa pine and cedar forests, and some of the last remaining native Palouse Prairie. For more park history, see Reed & Peterson (1983).



Point Sublime Up Close, Credit: JJ Good

In 2022, the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation proposed adding a picnic shelter, small parking area (4 vehicle spaces), vault toilet, and interpretive trail to the Point Sublime location of the park. The proposed area is compacted by user travel and dispersed camping, relatively level, and contains sweeping views of Palouse, including farmland to the west and immediately adjacent prairie remnants. A sample site plan and images are presented on the following page.

In Spring 2023, upon learning of the proposed development, the White Pine Chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society contacted the park manager voicing their opposition to the proposed development due to potential direct and indirect impacts on Palouse prairie remnants.



Point Sublime Overall Site Plan, Provided by Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR)

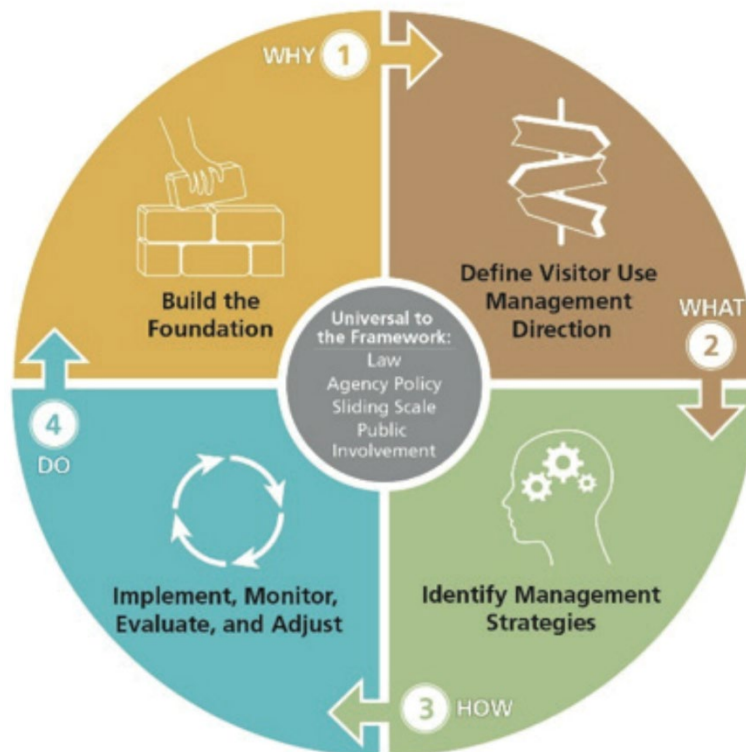


Point Sublime on September 15, 2023, Credit: Chris Zajchowski

Following opposition to amenity development from the White Pine Chapter, IDPR put the slated Fall 2023 development on hold to gather additional information and consultation from the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and park stakeholders. The Parks and Recreation Lab at the University of Idaho – jointly supported by the University and IDPR – was recruited to assist in a gathering perspectives of key individuals and entities regarding amenity development and prairie preservation at Point Sublime. This report is a summary and synthesis of perspectives of those participating interviewees with the goal of assisting IDPR in decision-making considering visitor use planning and management needs.

Visitor Use Planning and Management

The UI Parks and Recreation Lab’s visitor use planning and management research is guided by the Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework (IVUMF). In 2015, Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (IVUMC) developed this framework to address planning for and management of recreational use of public lands. While the IVUMF is currently used predominantly by federal land management agencies, many of its components use practices adopted in state park planning and management. This planning framework is aimed at maintaining the quality of the visitor experience and protecting natural and cultural resources in the face of increasing visitor use (IVUMC, 2016).



Overview of the Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework, Credit. IVUMC

The social science research used by the UI Parks and Recreation Lab supports several critical steps within the VUM framework (IVUMC, 2016). The first is social science's ability to assist with understanding visitor behaviors and attitudes and associated resource/social impacts. For instance, what types of visitor uses are occurring where? What motivates visitors to come? And what do visitors think of their experience, natural resource protection, and how both are managed? Social science additionally supports the identification of indicators for desirable visitor experiences. Indicators are measurable, manageable variables that help define the quality of desired natural/cultural resource conditions and the visitor experience. Attitudes towards current and potential future conditions are an important contribution to park management in informing potential areas for resource allocation or management allocation (Borrie et al., 2002). Social science research and expertise can also help with the third step of selecting and implementing management actions (McLaughlin & Paradice, 1980). Management of visitor use can take many forms, but management actions should be effective, as acceptable as possible to visitors and stakeholders, and consistent with the agency's mission. Research can critically help park staff understand how visitors view current and potential future management actions.

Data collection focused on the opinions and experiences of key stakeholders and tribal neighbors of McCroskey State Park was selected to help inform planning and management at Point Sublime. The findings shared here, when evaluated in conjunction with ecological and historical conditions, as well as park and agency mandates, can assist in directing planning and management.

METHODS

The UI Parks and Recreation Lab, with assistance from 27 undergraduate students, engaged in a qualitative research effort to learn interviewees' perceptions of recreation use and management at McCroskey State Park, as well as acceptable amenity development and prairie preservation practices at Point Sublime. While not generalizable at a population level, qualitative research can assist managers in gathering rich personal histories and knowledge of invested community members surrounding environmental issues (e.g., Hendrick, Zajchowski, Rose, & Scruggs, 2023).

In Fall 2023, an interview protocol and supporting documents were submitted for review and approved by the University of Idaho Institution Review Board (see Appendix A). A Coeur d'Alene Tribe research permit was also submitted and approved (Appendix B). Following human subjects and tribal approval, outreach to park-identified stakeholders, agencies, organizations, and tribal representatives commenced. Identities of specific interviewees are kept confidential, but contacted stakeholders, agencies, organizations, or tribal entity included: adjacent private landowners, Coeur d'Alene Audubon Society, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, former Idaho State Park staff and volunteers, Friends of McCroskey State Park, McCroskey family members, Palouse Prairie Foundation, Panhandle Trail Riders Association, White Pine

Chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society, Idaho Army National Guard, and University of Idaho faculty. Apart from two contacts sourced through other interviewees (i.e., snowball sampling), each contact was provided by IDPR staff.

Following standard sampling practices (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014), participants were contacted a minimum of three times by Parks and Recreation Lab members to solicit interviews. Only one contact ultimately declined to participate through non-response.

After receiving required human subjects training, undergraduate students in *NRS 125*, an introductory College of Natural Resources course taught at the University of Idaho, participated with UI Parks and Recreation Lab researchers as co-interviewers. Prior to interviews, students visited Point Sublime and met with park staff to gain context surrounding planned amenity development and potential Palouse prairie impacts. Students then cleaned interview transcripts ($n = 14$) and provided interview audio files to researchers for further analysis.



NRS 125 Students at Point Sublime, Credit: Will Meyers

An iterative analysis was then conducted by all five authors of this technical report. First, it was determined that one interviewees' data, an individual who had not visited McCroskey State Park and was unfamiliar with Point Sublime, would be removed from analysis. Second, the five researchers reviewed Three transcripts each and subsequently met to create an initial code book, comprised of 79 codes. Third, each transcript was coded by two

researchers and Cohen's Kappa statistic was calculated by interview to represent the level of agreement above chance (see Zajchowski, Riley, & Meerts-Brandsma, 2020 for a similar use). Cohen's Kappa values across all interviews ranged from 0.404 to 0.925 with an average of $K = 0.630$, indicating a moderate intercoder agreement above that possible by chance. Discrepancies between coders were then addressed through subsequent intercoder meetings, resulting in an average Kappa of 0.858, indicating almost perfect agreement. Fourth, researchers engaged in iterative meetings to discuss the nesting of codes within specific themes to understand perspectives related to amenity development and Palouse Prairie preservation. 11 potential themes were developed. Fifth, researchers returned to transcripts to assess the salience and prevalence of themes with each transcript coded by two researchers. Cohen's Kappa was again used to assess intercoder reliability for themes specific to Point Sublime ($K = 0.690$). Finally, descriptive statistics were used to assess and represent the distribution of specific content across interviews (i.e., number of mentions of specific recreation types). Ultimately, the results of these analyses are presented below, followed by discussion and interpretation from our team to inform decision-making.



The Fireplace Pavilion at McCroskey State Park, Credit: Zephryn Andrews

Note. The planned pavilion at Point Sublime is modeled after the Fireplace Pavilion.

RESULTS

Past Use Experience with McCroskey State Park

Park-identified stakeholders, agencies, organizations, and tribal representatives held diverse experiences and relationship with McCroskey State Park. Six of the interviewees were specifically affiliated with organizations with interests in the park: four organizations were conservation oriented (i.e., Palouse Prairie Foundation), one an off-highway vehicle advocacy organization (i.e., Panhandle Trail Riders Association), and one defense oriented (i.e., Idaho National Guard). Tribal representation consisted of one employee from the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. One adjacent landowner/farmer was interviewed, one former staff member of Idaho State Parks, and one current volunteer were interviewed. Finally, three family members or descendants of the McCroskey family participated in interviews.

In their own use of McCroskey State Park, interview participants shared a variety of different uses and a range of lived experience, as exemplified by representative quotes:

“As far as visiting the park, I mean, my grandpa took us through there. My dad took us through there. That's, you know, that's my involvement. We've, you know, we've recreated there through the years.”

“I kind of drive up that Skyline drive and then do different stops along the way, but it seems like I always stop at that Point Sublime.”

“I usually start at highway 95 and follow [...] the road through the park and I stop and wander off into [...] the forest there [...] I always stop at Point Sublime because I always find it such a beautiful place to just sit and reflect and enjoy the view.”

These past experiences provided interviewees with a deep appreciation of the history of conservation exemplified by Virgil McCroskey's legacy, as well as a vested interest in the current and future management of the Park:

“Virgil, he was very persistent and, back in the beginnings of the state park system in Idaho he had to be really stubborn about having his gift received. So that just inspires me.”

“[Point Sublime] is an ecological preserve, where [elsewhere] most Palouse Prairie particularly now is being farmed. And even though [it] doesn't have deep soil [...] it's Palouse Prairie out there. Most Palouse Prairie that still exists is in private hands and [this] is [in] the State Park. So, I hope for some protection up there. And I think that's one of the things that concerns us. And when I go up there, I see some off-roading and things like that, or I see the effects of it, which is kind of worrisome.”

“I think [this is important] just because of the reality that most of us can't be landowners. And so, I really appreciate and value public lands. I would guess having them be public lands is just feeling that we also have to have our voices heard for stewardship and taking care of them and we I don't feel like I can just be a silent user. You know, cause the plants, the animals, they don't speak English or get to show up to meetings like humans can.”

Recreational Activities at McCroskey State Park

Interviewees were asked what kind of ways they engaged with McCroskey State Park, as well as the recreational activities of other users. Each interview transcript was coded for all types of recreational activities mentioned by participants. The word cloud below represents the frequency of mentions of specific activities: if an activity was mentioned at any point in an interview it was coded as a “1,” if it was absent a “0.” The size of the word corresponds with the number of mentions between interviews.



Word Cloud Representing Frequency of Mention of Recreation Activities Across Interviews, Credit. Free Word Cloud Generator

For example, motorized-use – whether scenic driving on Skyline drive or elsewhere in more densely forested sections of park – was mentioned in each interview ($n = 13$), while off-roading (i.e., the use of dirt-bikes, side-by-sides, etc.) was mentioned by nine of the interviewees. Hiking was mentioned in 12 interviews, and camping in designated or user-created campsites was mentioned in 11. Less common were running, dog walking, and national guard training activities (each $n = 1$). While this is a prudent first step in generating a comprehensive list of activities at the park, it should be mentioned that this distribution cannot be generalized to all park visitors. Activity participation rates or segmentation in activity participation by visitor types (i.e., Idaho residents vs. out-of-state visitors) using this

list sourced from interviews could be surveyed in subsequent quantitative efforts (i.e., visitor questionnaires).

Knowledge of Planned Point Sublime and Amenity Development

Interviewees were asked about their knowledge of Point Sublime and their knowledge of the planned amenity development (i.e., picnic shelter, vault toilet, limited parking, etc.). While rich lived experience with the park was present for all interviewees, as exemplified by this interviewee, five interviewees were not familiar with the Point Sublime placename:

“I’ve been trying to find that [Point Sublime] this morning [...] I’ve lived here my entire life and people come out and ask me [to take them to the Park]. I’ve probably been there a million times. I’m just not aware of it. [...] I’m more visual than I remember the name.”

The remaining eight interviewees were aware of the Point Sublime placename, while only six of them were aware of the proposed development.

Perspectives on Point Sublime Amenity Development

Interviewees were asked for their perspectives on the proposed development at Point Sublime, inclusive of perspectives on proposed fencing, picnic shelter, vault toilet, and parking area. This question sought to understand the overall sentiment of interview participants. We deductively sorted responses into an overall sentiment score using the five categories: 1) *Don’t Build It*, 2) *Slightly Pessimistic*, 3) *Mixed Opinion*, 4) *Cautiously Optimistic*, and 5) *Build It*. The Table on the next page provides the number of participants and a representative quote for each category.

Table 1. Sentiment Score Associated with Each Interview Participant

Sentiment Score	Term	# of Participants	Representative Quotes
1	Don't Build it	2	<i>"[...] the soil is not deep enough to put a vault toilet in and adding a picnic area, picnic shelter, doesn't seem appropriate to there. It doesn't seem to fit with the idea of Point Sublime or the park."</i>
2	Slightly Pessimistic	2	<i>"So, I guess that my opinion is it should be moved to somewhere more, you know, where people are going to some place to illegally camp, where it's not on Palouse prairie, which is an endangered ecosystem."</i>
3	Mixed Opinion	3	<i>"I don't have a problem with it, but [I know park staff] wanted to make sure that nobody disturbed the soil and stuff, but it's so disturbed now. If you're going to have an area where people are going to gather, I think you're going to have more degradation than if you just left it alone."</i>
4	Cautiously Optimistic	4	<i>"Without knowing a whole lot of the details, I would say that in general, that's fine with me. I think that's an acceptable use as long as it's not too invasive over the prairie area."</i>
5	Build it	2	<i>"The Skyline drive along there where you can look out [...] basically out to the west [...] I don't see any problems with any further development with that, personally."</i>

Note. This table presents subjective beliefs of interviewees and does not assess factual merit.

Using this question, subsequent questions, and the assigned participant sentiment scores, we then developed six themes from the interviewees' responses when considering Point Sublime and potential amenity development: 1) *conflicting perspectives on the development plan as a whole*, 2) *mixed perception of fencing*, 3) *general concern for protecting Palouse Prairie*, 4) *a general agreement that signage and education is needed at Point Sublime*, 5) *development supports recreational growth while also contributing to it*, and finally, 6) *acknowledgment of the complexities of managing parks and protected areas*.

1) Conflicting perspectives on the development plan as a whole

The first theme captures the multiple sentiments related to the overall development at Point Sublime. When we coded for sentiment, close to half of the interviewees ($n = 6$) supported the development at some level (see table above), while four participants were actively against the proposal at some level. However, important suggestions and comments should be highlighted when deciding if the development occurs and in what form. One of the main suggestions provided by interviewees was physically moving the footprint:

“So, there has been a suggestion to build some structures. I think up on top of that area that is the prairie remnant. I would probably try to move that to not be right on there [...] they could just be moved back a little bit.”

Despite the placement of the development, some participants mentioned that development helps concentrate recreational use around the amenities. For example, one interviewee’s sentiment was positive towards the development due to concentrated recreation use as seen in the quote below:

“Now that sounds like a good idea. I mean, the nice thing about a picnic shelter is it encourages people to stay there and not kind of drift all over the place.”

However, not everyone shared this positive sentiment towards the proposal. Most of the negative attitudes towards the amenity development were rooted in the concern to protect the fragile remnants of Palouse Prairie within McCroskey State Park. Some participants were not in favor due to what they saw as the exploitation of natural resources for human interest (e.g. recreational usage, agricultural use, etc.).

“I think it's really unfortunate that we always keep seeing these prairies as places that are easy to convert to agriculture. For example, we kind of live in place where we're surrounded by prairies that have been converted to things that make sense to humans. And, often to make money or for production or, you know, for our food systems. And so, it's unfortunate that I feel like we're looking at that prairie again - there's an eye on it.”

2) Mixed perception of fencing

There were also mixed perceptions about the proposed fencing. Broadly speaking, out of the 13 participants interviewed, there was no consensus about fencing. Those who supported fencing at Point Sublime acknowledged its efficacy on guiding visitors to stay away from protected areas. For instance, one participant said:

“You put a fence around them in certain spots. It probably would deter people. To some degree.”

However, other participants had concerns about park users' attitudes towards the fencing and expressed concerns such as:

"If you put up a fence, it just invites vandalism [...] I wouldn't, I wouldn't really fence anything. I just want to educate people and hope for the best."

In addition, the other larger concern for the inclusion of fencing was its perceived impacts on the aesthetics of Point Sublime. This perspective was summarized by one participant in the following quote:

"No, I would prefer not to use fences. To me, fences take away from that scenic beauty, you know, just the feel of it is not ideal from my perspective, especially when you start talking about motorcycles and ATVs. Fences become pretty ineffective because they're easier... you can find a way around them whether it's there or further down the road."

3) General concern for protecting Palouse Prairie

Despite the conflicting points-of-view about adding fencing, there was a consensus for protecting Palouse Prairie at Point Sublime during any potential development. Most of the interviewees ($n = 8$) expressed the importance of protecting the remnants present at Point Sublime, and named how McCroskey State Park is one of the few public lands left that has native prairie present. One of the interviewees captures the prairie's importance within McCroskey by saying:

"I think it's a really, it's just a beautiful place. And to have those places around [...] that's why people move to places like Moscow, I think [...] to have those unique, beautiful places that are [...] intact ecosystems, which there are fewer and fewer. To cherish those."

Even those most passionate about protecting the Palouse Prairie did not immediately reject the idea of amenity development but expressed their hesitation with the prairie as the main factor. One participant's response highlights this perspective:

"We're really excited to try to keep that Palouse Prairie intact as well too, because we also recognize it as one of the very last habitats like that. So, I would say do it, but do it in a way that, protects that environment, and doesn't invite a nuisance behavior to everybody."



Point Sublime on September 15, 2023, Credit: Chris Zajchowski

4) General agreement that signage and education is needed at Point Sublime

Related to the consensus that protecting the Palouse Prairie is crucial, many participants ($n = 10$) also expressed that signage and education at Point Sublime is a needed addition to the development plan. To protect the Palouse Prairie in an area that is being developed for recreational use, participants expressed the need to educate park visitors. For instance, one participant highlighted that signage:

“would at least, for most people, create an awareness that ‘Oh, we need to stay back’ and maybe some interpretive signage along the fence to explain why this is there and what why it's important. That sounds promising. I would be okay with that.”

Most of the participants we interviewed expressed that signage and education at Point Sublime is crucial for educating the visitors who would utilize the new development. Educational efforts can explain why McCroskey State Park is unique and important by preserving the little intact Palouse Prairie that is left. Also, interviewees felt the interpretive signage would not only educate visitors about preservation efforts, but also benefit their park experience. For instance, one interviewee stated:

“I mean, there needs to be an informational sign up there for that. I'm not aware of that. So yeah, that is something that needs to be done. That would be of great interest to a lot of people.”

5) Development supports recreational growth while also contributing to it

With the addition of the development at Point Sublime, interviewees recognized that this proposal would help meet the needs of a growing recreation user base, while also further a potential feedback loop. In essence, participants identified the benefits amenity development for meeting the needs of existing recreation usage, however, they also

understand that amenities can potentially further increase visitation and contribute to overuse. A place for visitors to picnic and gather may increase use at McCroskey State Park and interviewees suggested what risks that might pose as stated below:

"If you're going to have an area where people are going to gather, I think you're going to have more degradation. Then, if you just left it alone, people camp up there now."

In addition to simply yielding more use, new developments have risks associated such as increased illegal and ill-advised park behavior. That said, certain attributes like vault-toilets were highly regarded by certain park stakeholders for comfort. This was suggested by a participant who shared:

"I think they do need a vault-toilet somewhere at that end of the park, but I don't think [Point Sublime] is the place for that. Because I think a picnic table and vault-toilet will just bring people who want to illegally camp."

6) Acknowledgment of the complexities of managing parks and protected areas

Most interviewees understood that managing a park is complex and this development plan contained tradeoffs. For example, one park stakeholder stated:

"There's some sensitive plant communities in there that you're looking at, you know, figuring out how to better manage... that's challenging."

These sensitive communities are at the forefront of local conservation efforts around eastern Washington and western Idaho. The Palouse Prairie is an endangered ecosystem altered by an agriculturally dominant landscape since the 1800s (Looney, 2012). With habitat for native plants decreasing, many participants encouraged conservation practices so future generations can enjoy what's left of Palouse Prairie. Some interviewees saw this development as potentially yielding educational results, one saying:

"I certainly think it's a good idea to put a picnic shelter there and a vault toilet, if only to point out to visitors how important that place is and how beautiful the view there is. So that's a complicated answer to a complicated question."

With an abundance of native grasses, forbs, and trees, since its creation, McCroskey State Park has been visited regularly as a place to hike, ride, forage, and revel in Idaho's rolling hills (Reed, 1983). Interviewees understand that stewarding Palouse Prairie while providing recreation access was complicated, but not necessarily in conflict with purpose of Virgil McCroskey's gift: sharing the park's beauty with visitors.

In sum, there was a split consensus about the current development plan at McCroskey State Park. Interviewees held a variety of perspectives on fencing, as it provides a safeguard for plant communities but could encourage inappropriate behavior like fence cutting. Many of the interviewees showed a general concern for the protection of Palouse Prairie, while also

acknowledging the complexities that come with this proposed development. The need for signage and education surrounding the Palouse Prairie at Point Sublime was highly favored by almost all park stakeholders, with the understanding that increased awareness about its delicate ecosystem likely fosters greater care and respect for it. Some interviewees noted the development will encourage recreational growth at the park and might unintentionally increase unpermitted camping and increased off-road use. So while interviewees did not necessarily agree on the path forward it was clear they all deeply valued the park, inclusive of its multiple resources and the outdoor recreation opportunities it affords.



Two bikers at Point Sublime during the class visit. Credit Tristan Currall

Suggested Management Strategies for Overall Park Management

In addition to the six themes specific to proposed amenity development at Point Sublime, five additional park-wide themes, with implications for Point Sublime, were developed: 1) *ranger presence*, 2) *off-roading*, 3) *zoning*, 4) *signage and education*, and 5) *collaboration*.

1) Ranger presence

Ensuring the effective management and maintenance of public parks is key to both environmental conservation and visitor satisfaction. Often central to this endeavor is the presence of park staff during the park's operational hours. These personnel play a vital role in providing visitors with necessary information, offering interpretation services, and ensuring visitors' compliance with park regulations. Interviewees expressed concerns over their perception of the absence of park staff, suggesting increased ranger presence to oversee the park's growing visitor use and facilitate a deeper understanding of its features:

“At this point, they don't have a well, I wouldn't even call it a full-time, designated person that takes care of the park. They're looking at just having different people going up there and when you do that nobody's ever going to really get to know the park. You can't help people find the trails.”

As weekends often witness increased park visitation, more than half of the interviewees ($n = 8$) suggested that park rangers should be present during these peak periods. Additionally, interviewees suggested routine or intermittent patrolling to deter and address illegal activities such as hunting and off-roading, which can jeopardize the safety of visitors and compromise the ecological balance of the park:

“I think if they had a presence there on the weekends, more of a presence. And one that wasn't like ‘Every Saturday morning at 10 o'clock, the ranger would be over there. But then, once he's gone, people show up.’ One that's more intermittent. And I know probably the weekend is not when most people want to work, but I think that's when it gets the most off-road use and maybe in the evenings and long summer evening.”

“[I] say this not knowing whether or not they already do this or not, but I would say doing a lot of conservation patrols in the area, just making sure that people are abiding by the rules.”

Though most of IDPR's funding is self-generated, interviewees expressed increased funding from Idaho's legislature, in part, was necessary to achieve these goals:

“So, there's that, you know, there's the lack of funding in general. And the reluctance of the legislature, who's ultimately responsible for funding the park, to [accomplish] the needs of the park.”



Soil impacts from two bikers off-roading at Point Sublime during class visit,

Credit: Miles Brenner

2) Off-roading

Off-road use by motorized vehicles, such as side-by-sides, dirt bikes, and four-wheelers, was mentioned by interviewees ($n = 9$) as a significant concern. These activities often result in detrimental impacts, including soil erosion, the destruction of vegetation, and trail degradation. This was witnessed by *NRS 125* students, graduate students, and park staff at Point Sublime during our class visit, as two dirt bikers created fresh tracks (see photo above) near the proposed amenity development site 30 yards from our group. Interviewees regularly mentioned these types of impacts:

“The biggest thing that's unacceptable to me is the motorbikes – when they just decide they want to go up a hill. They won't stay on the trail. And part of the problem I found was that one or two people would do it and all of a sudden everybody else thought that was a new trail. And especially when you get out there on the Palouse Prairie that those soils, it doesn't take much to disturb it and then it looks like a trail, but it really wasn't supposed to be a trail. And I think that's one of the biggest problems as far as misuse.”

Interviewees shared off-roading has consequences beyond its direct impacts on soil and vegetation. There were concerns expressed over the dispersion of undesired invasive weed seeds, potentially compromising the preservation efforts directed at sensitive ecosystems like the Palouse Prairie. Interviewees also identified the off-road motorized use as the primary source of conflict among park users, exacerbating tensions within the recreational community. Some interviewees shared off-roading vehicles are responsible for compromising the tranquility of the park, which they deemed one of its most important resources, by generating noise pollution. They sought intervention to mitigate this impact and preserve the park's recreational and aesthetic values:

“I think vehicles that really could be destructive to either noise levels in the area or just for the experience of others in the park because you go there for a quiet time, you don't go there for a lot of off-road vehicles and that kind of thing. I mean, I personally am not a fan of that sort of off-road vehicles and motorized, you know, activities in the park. I think that should be very much restricted”.

Even interviewees who participated in off-road motorized use at McCroskey State Park mentioned interest in addressing these impacts:

“I believe that they're gonna need to enact a travel management plan and actually go through the steps of making it. And, you know, probably better signage. Stuff like that. I think that that's probably what they're gonna need to do long term period.”

3) Zoning

Zoning is an act of partitioning land into segments to regulate use (e.g., Hammitt, Cole, & Monz, 2015). When zoning public space in parks and protected areas, users are provided access to certain areas to enjoy their respective recreational activities and simultaneously prevented from access in others to reduce impact on other users or natural resources (i.e., Palouse Prairie). These types of zoning activities were mentioned by participants:

“There could also be a place that is set aside for motorized use [...] there should be a place for everybody.”

“And so, if motorcycles and four wheelers had their own place to be and then people who love, you know, plants and trees and old growth cater you know [to] the quiet that the forest affords [...] then they could have their space [too].”

McCroskey State Park is 4,400 acres of primarily forested land, providing an excellent opportunity to create active and passive recreation zones within the park boundaries, and/or Palouse Prairie zones with no recreational use is permitted. For example, by creating these zones, active recreators (i.e., off-road vehicle users and mountain bikers) could enjoy and explore, while passive recreators (hikers, birders, foragers, etc.) would have access to other areas where they would not be experiencing potential conflict with the active

recreators. And, specific to Point Sublime, zoning Palouse Prairie remnants would protect ecologically sensitive areas and further communicate the park's interest preserving these specific parcels. While zoning Palouse Prairie areas was never mentioned verbatim by participants, many discussed barriers and educational resources to prevent use and encourage stewardship:

"Yeah, signage... and if there are obvious areas where you can see that people have gone, you could try to block and put rocks. Or something in front of that so it's clear that yeah 'Don't go here' and then provide an alternative, so that there is somewhere else to go."

4) Signage and Education

Signage was a common theme mentioned throughout the interviews as a possible solution to user issues occurring across the park. Many interviewees suggested that improving the maps and interpretive signage throughout the park could potentially bring awareness to users, specifically as an education tool for those who are not familiar with the park and what it has to offer in terms of outdoor recreation and natural resources. Regarding Point Sublime in particular, it was mentioned that adding signage to inform users about the delicate ecosystem that exists in that area may reduce further damage to the Palouse Prairie.

"[It would be great to have] some more educational material up there. To educate people about the Palouse Prairie and what it is, what it was, and maybe it's extent, for example, have some maps up there of how big it was."

"Yeah, I think that's [signage] is the best you can do. You know, it is just asking people to be respectful."

With minimal staff to monitor activity throughout the park, improving the overall wayfinding and educational signage may provide a potential indirect management strategy (e.g., Manning et al., 2022) to an issue occurring at the park. That said, as one interviewee mentioned, signs, alone, are not a panacea – other direct management efforts are likely needed to address visitor use management concerns mentioned at Point Sublime and elsewhere:

"Well, I have said it basically comes down to education. But one of the things I find [is] you can put up signs, but people don't read them. New people will read the signs to find out what's going on, but people that have been using and abusing in the past, don't look at the signs [...] It's difficult and there's just stupid people out there. I'm sorry, but [...] they don't care. And I don't know how you address that. Unless you had somebody up there who could actually write citations."

5) Collaboration

Interviewees shared collaborative efforts between state agencies, Tribal nations, private landowners, conservation organizations, and community stakeholders are crucial for advancing effective strategies for Palouse Prairie conservation and ensuring sustainable stewardship of the park's resources. Given its proximity to the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, interviewees shared engaging with tribal interests is paramount. Furthermore, revitalizing and strengthening partnerships with community organizations like the Friends of McCroskey State Park, park neighbors and McCroskey family members who have historically supported park management initiatives, can offer critical support in several areas related to park maintenance and improvement. Interest in collaborative efforts was evident:

"I would really love if in the future, there was more collaboration between the landowners. Whether it's the tribe or the lumber company or the forest service or the state park. You know, just to have a better handle on it. Protecting the park and sharing the responsibility for maintenance and preservation."

Interviewees shared conflicts resulting from recreational activities can be reduced by open dialogues and collaborative problem-solving approaches, encouraging park use while maintaining the park's integrity. Positive interactions with user groups, such as mountain bikers and off-roading enthusiasts, hold promise in addressing concerns related to off-road usage of park roads and trails. Moreover, maintaining relationships with neighboring private lumber companies is crucial to combat illegal logging activities, necessitating cooperative endeavors to safeguard the park's natural resources:

"I think there needs to be a lot of regular dialogue with stakeholders along the margins of the park, the private lumber companies, and any federal lands where there may be timber sales. There needs to be a real eye toward protecting, a buffer around the margin because there are always going to be those pressures."

Informed decision-making regarding restoration and preservation techniques tailored to the park's unique ecosystem and native Palouse Prairie require the proactive involvement of ecosystem protection and restoration organizations operating within the broader region. Interviewees shared through the collaboration with a range of partners, McCroskey State Park can leverage collective expertise and resources to advance its conservation goals and ensure the long-term sustainability of its natural heritage:

"That's just an ongoing need to keep bringing new generations up to speed on what's happened there, how valuable this resource is to them, and how they can get involved. So, again, I think just kind of broadening that scope of who is interested and who has a stake there and finding out what stakeholders we don't know about. There are probably some that would say, "Hey, I'd be interested," and maybe not just the immediate area. Even getting the students in more of an urban setting, like in

Spokane, to come down and have exposure to the park and have those kinds of engagements. I just think there's a whole lot of things to do. Again, it's not a criticism, it's just there are a whole lot of things that we all could pursue. The manager obviously can't do all that stuff, but they can encourage it and coordinate all those groups and have outreach and meetings to make sure people can talk about what's possible."

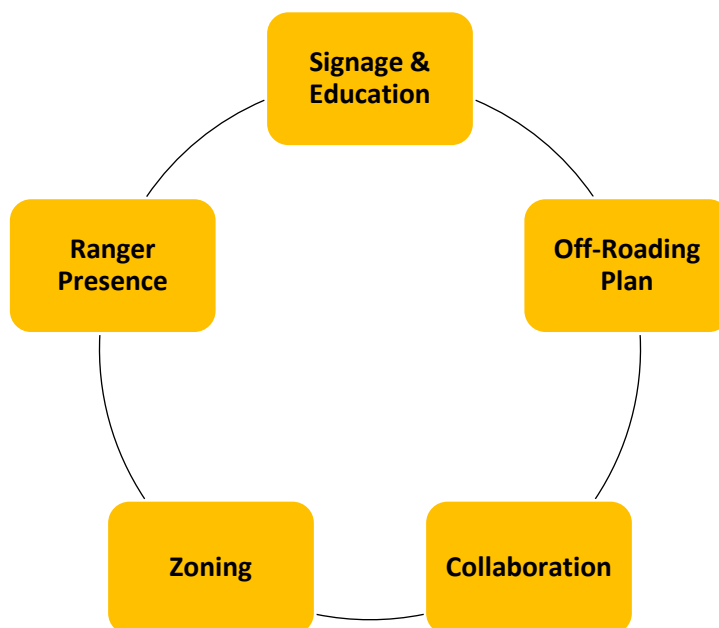


Looking up at the canopy in McCroskey State Park. Credit: Savannah Black

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

These findings describe the work and outcomes of a research effort conducted with park-identified stakeholders and tribal partners of McCroskey State Park to inform amenity development and Palouse Prairie preservation. The project gathered interviewees' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs related to McCroskey State Park to help evaluate planning and management opportunities. While there was little consensus about the current development plan at Point Sublime, there was broad agreement on potential planning and management directions across McCroskey State Park. Increasing collaboration, signage, education, and ranger presence were mentioned by most interviewees and seen as positive. Similarly, exploring zoning to maintain high experiential quality for both active (i.e., off-roading, mountain biking) and passive (i.e., hiking, birdwatching) recreationists was mentioned and supported by interviewees.

While mentioned at the park level, specific to Point Sublime, the strategy of zoning is especially promising. If Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation decides to proceed with the proposed amenity development, creating "Palouse Prairie zones" that limit both active and passive recreation could help to balance recreation access with ecological preservation. One participant mentioned "there are other places in the park that I think are more representative of Palouse Prairie that haven't been so degraded [as Point Sublime]"; thus, establishing these zones at Point Sublime and elsewhere would help to codify protections while simultaneously communicating the park's long-term stewardship focus. That said, without the additional park-wide management practices mentioned by participants (i.e., increased ranger presence), zoning may be ineffective in reducing visitor impacts.



Park-wide planning and management themes mentioned by interviewees.

Both at Point Sublime and across McCroskey State Park interviewees desired increased and updated interpretation and educational resources. In some cases, interpretation was desired to communicate the history and fragility of Palouse Prairie; in other cases, to communicate rules, expectations, and acceptable visitor behavior. In park and protected area research, interpretation is often referred to an ‘indirect’ management strategy, one that puts the onus on the visitor to read and process informational material and then comply with suggested behavior(s) (e.g., Kane et al. 2021). Visitors generally prefer indirect management over ‘direct’ management (i.e., citations, regulations, closures, etc.) because they are free to choose whether to comply (Manning et al., 2022). That said, research is mixed on the role of information and education alone to achieve desired conservation outcomes in park and protected area contexts. Greer, Day, and McCutcheon (2017) highlighted that mountain bikers in an urban natural reserve near San Diego required both indirect and direct management actions to comply with trail closures. Only after direct management (i.e., citations) were issued did illegal mountain bike use on closed trails decrease. The upshot is any zoning efforts at McCroskey State Park, and specifically at Point Sublime, would require multiple management strategies to engender success.

For example, while fencing to protect Palouse Prairie received mixed reviews due to potential aesthetics and perceived efficacy, exploring fencing designs that align with the rangeland, farming, and ranching heritage (i.e. buck-and-rail) in the region may be worth considering. Fencing, along with signage, can communicate the value of the resource, while simultaneously serving the deter use. These types of “structural fixes” (see Heberlein, 2021) for a review) tend to be more efficacious – though perhaps more costly up front – than attempts at “cognitive” fixes, like education and interpretation. And, though the porous nature of this types of fencing allows both wildlife and human passage, the concern for Palouse Prairie that featured in the interviews and current lack of any management strategy to deter impact make this one potential tool in McCroskey staff’s toolbox.

As mentioned by interviewees, increased ranger presence at Point Sublime and elsewhere in the park may aid in reaching desired conservation and visitor experience goals. Park visitors regularly rank speaking to park staff, over stationary waysides, audio tours, visitor centers, etc., as the top way they prefer to learn about specific education themes present in parks and protected areas (e.g., Manning et al., 2022). Furthermore, the mere presence of park staff increases compliance with policies and recommendations (e.g., Shaprio et al., 2022), particularly if the potential for enforcement exists (e.g., Greer, Day, and McCutcheon, 2017). So, while interviewees acknowledged that additional staff presence comes with associated costs, this strategy is certainly worth exploring.

Specific to proposed amenity development at Point Sublime, if development proceeds at the planned location, the opportunity to collaborate with local conservation groups (i.e., White Pine Chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society, Palouse Prairie Foundation, etc.) and



Sample buck-and-rail fence. Credit. Creative Commons, USFWS National Elk Refuge

University partners (i.e., University of Idaho, Washington State University, etc.) may aid in reducing impacts and expanding human resources. For example, local conservation groups and University faculty could be consulted on best practices to avoid invasive weed spread from construction equipment and potentially reduce the expansion of the construction footprint. Similarly, if a Palouse Prairie zoning strategy is selected by park staff, other collaborators can be consulted; following the University of Idaho *NRS 125* Fall 2023 student project, another faculty member from University of Idaho began a Spring 2024 class project with *NRS 476* to identify potential Palouse Prairie zones at McCroskey State Park with her class. These types of efforts have the potential to add capacity and explore new management directions and opportunities. Long-term partnerships with local Universities could also empower students in informal volunteer opportunities as park stewards. The University of Utah’s Wasatch Front Urban Ranger program is one such partnership that supports recreation resources in Utah’s Salt Lake Valley (Furman et al., 2020). Working with State and Federal partners, this funded program empowers cohorts of students to serve as the “eyes and ears” of local trails, interacting with visitors in a non-compliance capacity, documenting management needs, and gaining experience that may translate into future internships, as well as seasonal and full-time park positions.

In sum, multiple management strategies and practices sourced by interviewees may assist in the short-term at Point Sublime or in the long-term across the park. Observations and recommendations within this technical report, when considered with park mandates, funding, and managerial, ecological, and social considerations, may help direct collaborative visitor use management in productive ways.

CONCLUSION

It's prudent to reiterate that interviewees, who represented many key organizations, stakeholders, and park proximate neighbors, including the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, understood that managing a park is challenging, yet they simultaneously wanted their voices to be heard in the ongoing stewardship and care for this treasured resource. Amenity development at Point Sublime elicited numerous perspectives. In line with the Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework, additional outreach, education, and/or data collection following the ultimate decision for Point Sublime amenity may be warranted to monitor and assess resource conditions. For now, what is clear is that there is a strong cohort of partners willing to assist in those near-term and long-term efforts.



NRS 125 Student Entering the Park. Credit, Kolby Clyde

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August 31, 2023

To: Chris Zajchowski, PhD

From: University of Idaho Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: August 31, 2023

Title: Stakeholder Perceptions of Recreation and Palouse Prairie Management at McCroskey State Park

Protocol: 23-198, Reference: 024184

Exempt under Category 2 at 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2).

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for this research project has been certified as exempt under the category listed above.

This certification is valid only for the study protocol as it was submitted. Studies certified as Exempt are not subject to continuing review and this certification does not expire. However, if changes are made to the study protocol, you must submit the changes through [VERAS](#) for review before implementing the changes. Amendments may include but are not limited to, changes in study population, study personnel, study instruments, consent documents, recruitment materials, sites of research, etc.

As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable FERPA regulations, University of Idaho policies, state and federal regulations. Every effort should be made to ensure that the project is conducted in a manner consistent with the three fundamental principles identified in the Belmont Report: respect for persons; beneficence; and justice. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all study personnel have completed the online human subjects training requirement. Please complete the *Continuing Review and Closure Form* in VERAS when the project is completed.

You are required to notify the IRB in a timely manner if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study, if you experience an increased risk to the participants, or if you have participants withdraw or register complaints about the study.

IRB Exempt Category (Categories) for this submission:

Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: i. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the

subjects; ii. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by .111(a)(7).



November 2, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

Based on the information submitted, October 20, 2023, Chris A.B. Zajchowski, PhD, representing University of Idaho Department of Natural Resources and Society, has received approval from the Coeur d'Alene Tribe's Research Review Committee to collect interviews with community members to inform Idaho State Parks in their decision making related to Point Sublime. We believe this study is an important contribution to ensuring the preservation of endangered Palouse Prairie habitat within the reservation and for these reasons we look forward to the results.

As a reminder, as part of their permit requirements Dr. Zajchowski is committed to sharing a written report to the Tribe at least 30 days before any public report or presentation of the data from these files. Additionally, any changes or modifications to the sampling plan must be filed with the Tribe. A copy of any written public reports should also be made available to the Tribe for our files.

As a reminder, any violation of the terms of the research permit may result in penalties, including civil penalties and/or exclusion or removal from the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, as per the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Code 61-12.01.

Concerns or questions about this process can be made in writing to me electronically at cmeyer@cdatribe-nsn.gov, or via mail at Director of Education, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, P.O. Box 408, 150 A Street, Plummer, ID 83851. Good luck in your research endeavors!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Meyer".

Dr. Christine Meyer
Director, Coeur d'Alene Tribe Department of Education
Chair, Interdisciplinary Research Review Committee