St. Edward State Park Env Education and Research Center Public Engagement Meeting

Wednesday, January 23, 2019
Husky Hall, University of Bothell

INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting began with introductions of members from the project’s Managing Team (Susan Carlson, David Stokes, Elizabeth Lunney, and Keegan O’Neill) and the Advisory Committee (Warren Gold, Scott Morris, Siri Nelson, David Bain, and Steve Brand).

This is the first of three meetings to gather public input with regards to a proposed Environmental Education and Research Center at St Edward State Park. The planning process is a joint project between Washington State Parks and UW-Bothell (UWB) to draw up a program and business plan to be presented to the State Parks Commission in May. The process is overseen by an Advisory Committee, which contains a mix of representatives from UW-Bothell and State Parks, as well as private citizens and experts in the field of environmental education.

EERC BACKGROUND AND CURRENT PLANNING PROCESS

Members of the Managing Team presented a brief background and history of the St Edwards EERC project. The EERC came out of discussions that began several years ago as State Parks was considering alternatives for the use of the St Edward Seminary building. The lease signed with Daniels Real Estate contains a provision for 1,200 to 2,000 square feet of space for public use, ideally for an EERC. The space currently being considered is in the Gym Annex, separate from the main Seminary building.

Dr. David Stokes spoke to current research being done within the park, looking at ecological benefits, human uses (trail systems), biodiversity of both wildlife and plants, invasive species (English Holly) study, surveying, and aging. Findings from this research have produced information that can be shared with State Parks and used in peer-reviewed literature and scientific reports. The research is an important part of UWB’s emphasis on community-based learning.

Dr. Warren Gold described a Restoration Ecology Network (REN) project conducted nearby.
Students were sent out in interdisciplinary teams and, over the course of eight months, engaged with partners to conduct habitat restoration, using natural sciences to restore damaged landscapes, building community and engaging in stewardship.

Susan Carlson presented on fundamental concepts and current best practices in the field of preK-12 environmental education. A strong program at St Edward State Park would cover a continuum of experiences across different age bands through a variety of opportunities, including youth and family hikes, school field trips, summer camps, mentored high school internships, community science, faculty lectures, and volunteer docent programs.

The Managing Team fielded questions from the attendees about the project.

Who is the ultimate decision maker? Washington State Parks has asked UWB to head up a working group to develop a set of recommendations that will be sent to the Director of State Parks, who then may make a recommendation to the State Parks Commission. The State Parks Commission has final authority.

What money is involved? Some up front costs will be involved in rehabilitating the Gym Annex to house an EERC. Specifically, funds are needed to develop the classroom and finish out the interior. The EERC would not pay to renovate the remainder of the seminary or gym.

Longterm, State Parks is looking for partners to take on a self-sustaining model. The Managing Team will likely develop a business plan that will include a combination of earned revenue, program fees, and private contributions. The planning process has been looking at how different models of university-led EERCs are structured. Some are a stand-alone nonprofits; some involve a mix of public and private funding. It depends on the programs offered and the partners involved.

How is the Annex set up right now? Is there a vision of having a couple of classroom spaces? One space? Is there a way for like-minded groups to to use the space? What about parking? The Annex is currently highly partitioned. The ideal would be a multipurpose room that could serve toddlers to adults, equipped with modular furniture, lab counters, daylighting, and significant storage. There could be the potential to rent space or storage to partners. There is no parking reserved specifically for the EERC.

St Edward is one of the most used parks in the Seattle area. Is there going to be an environmental impact assessment to examine the overall impact of infusing potentially a lot of people into the park? How can we establish baselines and conduct the monitoring necessary to ensure that impacts as a result of future use are carefully tracked? There have been discussions within State Parks to revise the 2008
management plan. There is going to be more analysis through an EIS to specifically address the City of Kenmore’s ballfield proposal. State Parks is the lead agency on that process.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Managing Team tested a draft mission statement:

To provide inclusive, experiential, and integrated environmental education and research opportunities to all, including pre-K-12, university, and the wider, diverse community, with the purpose of advancing scientific knowledge, public understanding, and stewardship of Pacific Northwest ecosystems and biodiversity for a sustainable future.

Participants were asked what word or phrase jumped out at them as being most important or most impactful. They were then asked to record their second and third impressions. Participants also had the option of identifying elements they felt were missing from the current draft.

Among the words or phrases cited as being most impactful, “stewardship/sustainable” ranked highest. “Experiential” ranked second, and “environmental education” came in close behind. Missing elements included aspects related lifelong learning, environmental preservation, and personal connection to nature.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants were invited to rotate among four different breakout topics.

TOPIC #1: PreK-12 Environmental Education

Participants discussed activities that engage families as family units, that appeal to kids and adults working, playing, exploring, investigating together. Participants also identified the opportunity to develop highly local, yet also regional and statewide, pathways to environmental college degree programs and green economy careers. There is also the potential to run a cohort of Pacific Science Center’s Lake Washington Watershed Internship Program at St Edward in partnership with the EERC, particularly in light of the variety of potential college and university partnerships available.
Several participants expressed concern that the coordination of indoor space among various, potentially vastly different groups and interests will be challenging (i.e., swapping the space between a college class followed by an elementary or Preschool class). How will this be handled? This challenge also underscores the importance of optimizing and coordinating outdoor spaces. One solution might be to designate certain areas of the park landscape as EERC outdoor classrooms in order to mitigate against potential conflicts among educational groups and with general park users.

In terms of the physical classroom space, participants expressed hope that the Annex be renovated as "greenly" as possible both for sustainability values and as an inspiring instructional tool. Infrastructure needs of indoor space, i.e. high speed wireless access, are also very important.

**TOPIC #2: Research**

Potential research topics include root rot in forest trees; wildlife; pollinators; invasive species; forest successional processes/changes; forest condition; restoration potential; water pollution in streams and water courses coming into park from surrounding areas; hydrologic studies of: water flows in park (quantities, patterns of stormwater runoff and flashiness of flow); study of watersheds in park; habitat value of ball field; salmonids and salmonid habitat (kokanee, sockeye, chinook). There was considerable interest in community science for many of these topics, particularly invasives, root rot, pollinators, wildlife, and surface water. Participants also were interested in the human-nature connection and in the idea of incorporating social research. The group also discussed integrated management of St Edward and Big Finn Hill parks.

**TOPIC #3: Volunteering and Community Engagement**

Participants identified multiple opportunities for community engagement in park programs, including student-led docents tours for both the general public and K-12 programs; volunteer trail maintenance; designing materials for natural history interpretation for trails and park in general (signage, brochures), as well for indoor features as appropriate; participation in long-term research and monitoring; organizing and participating in bioblitz-like inventories; restoration projects (planning, implementation, maintenance, monitoring); invasive plant control; assist with running or staffing learning center (equipment cleaning, organizing, inventory); public interface; education of and working with park user groups regarding environmental impacts (e.g., presenting at mountain bike club meetings); mapping park resources; web presence development and maintenance; and participating in K-12 environmental education.

**TOPIC #4: Lifelong Learning**
Participants identified several topics that would be of interest to adult community members looking to learn more about the park and looking to better connect to the nature environment. The group discussed the importance of developing curriculum geared specifically to adults. This could be done through events, mentoring programs, hands-on activities, and activities such as nature journaling. Lifelong learning was seen as a means of building community, connecting like-minded people, expanding the diversity of park users and promoting a future of stewardship. Topics proposed included animal/camera tracking of seasonal migration patterns (who is here now?); biodiversity population and how this fits into a regional ecosystem; native vs invasive species; ecosystem services; astronomy; navigational orienteering; geology; bat recovery; ethnobotany and plant identification (edible, medicinal, toxic, etc.); owl and eagle studies; rabbit population; Leave No Trace; the history of the Park (including pre-Diocese); and the decline in madrona species.

From each of these small group discussions, participants identified several needs a physical EERC space could serve if appropriately designed and equipped. Adequate storage was cited as extremely important. With appropriate technology support, participants noted that students could develop localized apps to further support learning and engage the local community. Other desired features included lab equipment, benches, computers, books (including resource identification guides), projection space, storage, windows, water access (including kayaks and canoes), LEED certified structure or living building design.

WRAP UP AND NEXT STEPS

All participants were encouraged to attend the EERC’s next public meeting on February 21st at Kenmore City Hall. People are also welcome to submit comments to StEdward@uw.edu.