

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 - 2025

OUR MISSION

We teach the health benefits of nature, promote outdoor recreation, and steward the places where we play.

OUR VISION

Community connected to nature.

OUR VALUES

- * **Fun:** Our work provides people the opportunity to explore, be adventurous, and have fun.
- * **Respect:** We aim to create welcoming spaces for people to connect with one another and nature.
- * **Positivity:** We approach our work with optimism and contagious enthusiasm.
- * **Leadership:** We lead by giving guidance, providing inspiration and creating connections for the advancement of outdoor recreation.

OUR STRATEGIC POSITION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recreation Northwest, known for producing fun community events over the years, plans to leverage our Fairhaven Park Stewardship and Parkscriptions programs to expand and evolve into new programming and efforts to benefit our community. We are evolving to add Outdoor Recreation & Nature Education programs for the public as the path forward to meet the needs of our community.

This evolution is also our response to the impact we felt due to COVID-19. As the wave of the pandemic swept our events and related activities away, we went back to the drawing board. With funding secured in 2021 to explore opportunities for new programs, we focused on moving forward as a nimble organization and have added capacity to fulfill these goals.

Our Strategic Position is built on people. Our primary partners are Bellingham Parks, Bellingham Tourism, and the WWU Recreation & Management Leadership Department. We have a solid foundation of trust and respect through our work and the relationships we've nurtured over the years.

- A. OUR PROGRAMS**
- B. COMMUNITY NEEDS**
- C. OUR PLANS**
- D. OUR PEOPLE**

A. OUR PROGRAMS

Historically, Recreation Northwest has served a variety of communities. Beginning with multi-sport races, adding park stewardship, then expanding into outdoor recreation economic development advocacy, and simultaneously creating a pilot program, Parkscriptions, to promote time in nature-- our geographic and demographic scopes have evolved along with the people we've worked with and served. Through our pandemic pivot, we chose to focus on evolving and merging our Fairhaven Park Stewardship and Parkscriptions programs to create opportunities for the public to get outside.

Fairhaven Park Stewardship

Recreation Northwest became Park Stewards for Fairhaven Park in 2014. We chose this particular park due to the impacts of the Bellingham Traverse Trail Run leg - our signature event at the time. The project was tackled in 2 phases. In Phase One, we worked to relocate unsanctioned trails through fragile wetlands in this special urban forest by building the “Fairhaven Park - 18th Street Trail” connector in 2015. For Phase Two, we tackled the larger challenge of crossing the wetland with a trail & boardwalk connecting the popular park and forest trails. 300+ native trees and shrubs were planted in the old trail areas to help restore the wetland as mitigation measures. The trail, boardwalk, and plantings were completed in 2017.

In the proceeding years, in accordance with our official mitigation requirements, we continue to host volunteer work parties to maintain the planting areas and remove invasive species. We worked to create inviting spaces by installing artistic elements and a standard park bench for public benefit. In 2021, we removed wildlife barriers and with our partners from Wild Whatcom and Phillips 66 Refinery, we expanded our stewardship efforts to remove additional invasive species- clearing the space for restoration and public enjoyment of nature. We also began working with the Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education to collaboratively develop “Outdoor Classroom” spaces for the active and passive public education and use.

Parkscriptions

In 2016, We expanded our organizations’ efforts with the addition of our Parkscriptions Pilot Program. Parkscriptions was developed by Recreation Northwest to reflect the models of Parks RX & ParksRx America. In 2017, *WhatcomParkFinder.org* was developed to serve as a resource for doctors to prescribe a park, with the best location and amenities, for their patients. Promotional materials were produced and distributed to participating local healthcare providers. Throughout 2018 we continued to make strides into expanding the program by adding healthcare providers in a variety of specialties- including mental health, naturopathy, physical therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic and family medicine.

In 2019, we hosted Whatcom Parkscriptions Day and a Public Health Campaign. We hosted free events, offering a variety of experiences at popular public parks throughout Whatcom County, providing the opportunity for our community to reap the many proven health benefits of time spent in nature. We leveraged our substantial Murdock Trust funding to create a Public Health campaign to bring the message to encourage engagement with the public and health care providers.

In 2020, As the pandemic ravaged the rest of Recreation Northwest’s business, we were shown the answer is outdoors. We worked virtually with WWU Recreation Management and Leadership faculty and student interns to set a solid framework. We were proud to bring some value to an otherwise depressing year. In 2021, with the generous support of an anonymous benefactor, we were excited to transition into a new set of Outdoor Recreation and Nature programming. We worked with Bellingham Parks to find ways to

- Parkscriptions continued -

get small groups of people together outdoors. We would combine our Parkscriptions philosophy with new programming in our Fairhaven Park Stewardship site.

B. COMMUNITY NEEDS

We are a mission-driven organization that is willing and able to identify and respond to needs in our community. Our current goals are tied to our commitments and identified opportunities.

Fairhaven Park Stewardship. We are required to monitor our native plant mitigation sites and see a need to improve public access and natural habitat, per our MOU with the City of Bellingham. We have an opportunity to use our adopted section of the park to demonstrate how the expressed needs of the community can be implemented in public spaces. These public wishes are being gathered by Bellingham Parks for the Master Planning process for the 100 Acre Wood's future development.

Experiences & Education. Over the course of the past two years we have witnessed resounding recognition for the value that the outdoors holds and the healing powers nature provides. We also recognized a need to educate people as stewards of our public lands and demonstrate how to recreate responsibly, leave no trace, and show respect for others. We are committed to fill that gap for our guests, our community, and the industry. Our programs will also reflect our Parkscriptions philosophy highlighting the mental, emotional and community health benefits of nature.

Woodstock Farm. Working with Bellingham Parks and Woodstock Farm Conservancy, we have also identified a need for more public engagement and activation of the public park. Parks Director, Nicole Oliver, said in a press release Bellingham Parks is proud to be working with Recreation Northwest and community partners to activate Woodstock Farm. "The property is one of the best kept secrets of our local parks," she said. "Creating the opportunities to provide public access to the park, and educate people about the benefits of nature, essential outdoors skills and trail etiquette fills a great gap in our community. More people in the park leads to deeper engagement and care for the property and of the historic buildings at the site."

C. OUR PLANS

Recreation Northwest is proud to be working with Bellingham Parks and community partners for the stewardship of Fairhaven Park; educating people about the benefits of nature, essential outdoors skills, and trail etiquette; and bringing attention to Woodstock Farm. These fill gaps in our community. We also have gaps to fill in diversity, equity and inclusion in the outdoors.

Fairhaven Park Stewardship. We will host regularly scheduled work parties to maintain our native plant gardens. Our complimentary work to enhance our adopted section and other parts of Fairhaven Park include advocating for way-finding signs, improving trail conditions, and decommissioning trails to enhance habitat. We will also be working to transform a former blackberry patch into a safe public space for people to enjoy the outdoors and be in nature.

Experiences & Education. We have been developing programming for Outdoor Recreation and Nature Education offering a variety of beginning and intermediate level experiences of curated educational activities outside with small groups of people in Bellingham's Parks.

We are actively exploring possibilities with organizations that care for underserved populations in Whatcom County to create a new program to connect people with nature. Custom experiences are available by request. Scholarships are available for those who are interested in participating.

Woodstock Farm. Working with Bellingham Parks, Woodstock Farm Conservancy, and other community partners we are working towards activation and stewardship of this special public property. The Recreation Northwest Adventure Shuttle will provide transportation from its Downtown Bellingham HQ to the premier destination at Woodstock Farm on Chuckanut Drive.

D. OUR PEOPLE

The strength in our Strategic Position is grounded in the people that we have chosen to work with and the relationships we have built to create the trust and solid foundations for us to build upon.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

As we explore new relationships within our community, we are seeking partnerships that will allow us to help get people outside who traditionally have had barriers of access to the outdoors; the appreciation of nature; and learning outdoor recreation skills.

OUR CREW

We currently have a capable and enthusiastic staff. The contagious enthusiasm of our Executive Director is the wind in our sails. The Program Director's role has helped build capacity, human resources support, and fiscal responsibility. Our Nature Immersion Specialist has enabled us to implement our Parkscriptions philosophies into our programs. Our Program Coordinator has deftly filled our outdoor recreation and nature curriculum calendar and helped relieve the Executive Director of the tasks associated with our stewardship work parties and volunteer management. Morale is high on the ship!

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our volunteer Board of Directors are representatives of our local outdoor recreation community. They offer their time, expertise, and resources to ensure that Recreation Northwest fulfills its mission and duties for the benefit of our community. President – Andrew Olive, Coastal Insurance; Vice-President – Kristi Kucera, Moondance Sea Kayak Adventures; Treasurer – Jack Pflueger, Entrepreneur; Secretary – Al Ragan, Retired; Past President – Brian Roche, Gear Aid. We have recently added Dr. Greg Anderson, Family Care Network and Dr. Jasmine Goodnow, WWU Recreation Management and Leadership.

OUR PARTNERS

Our **key community partners** are Bellingham Parks, Bellingham Tourism, WWU Recreation and Management Leadership faculty & students, Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education, and Woodstock Farm Conservancy. We have additional partners and supporters that we will continue to work with to reach our new goals and objectives.

Our working relationship with WWU's Recreation Management and Leadership is also set on the foundation that we will have a steady stream of interns annually and an educated labor force that we are partnering with Western's faculty to create.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

We have a tradition of having strong support from our community through volunteerism. From our Board of Directors to people who get their hands dirty at our Fairhaven Park work parties- we have a bank of people to pull from for support for our programs and development. Most recently, a professional Landscape Architect has donated services to help with our "Outdoor Classroom" project for example.

OUR GUESTS

As we explore helping underserved populations, we will continue to discover the opportunities to expand our programs to help those who need it most. Our hope is that we can serve a diverse population, provide equitable access, and enable people to feel included in the outdoors.

We expect our paying guests to be active, interested in continuing education, outdoorsy, mindful, and adventurous. We hope to serve intergenerational groups of families learning and playing together. We anticipate serving a local Puget Sound and lower BC population to begin with and expanding regionally and evolving to be a draw for international travellers.

OUR SUPPORTERS

The bottom line. As a non-profit business, we have a variety of revenue sources available to support our work. We are in a solid position currently due to our generous benefactor. We also have grants, donations, sponsorships, and transactional revenue to round out our balanced budget.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL #1 Create and implement a Business Plan that ensures the financial viability of Recreation Northwest.

OBJECTIVES

1A. Develop a financial plan that identifies strategic opportunities to leverage our Angel Donor's gift.

1B. Determine the financial viability of, community interest in, and business model for new program areas into the future so that our revenue sources are secure and our organization is protected from market shifts.

1C. Pilot fee-for-service experiences to determine viability.

1D. Explore new sponsorship models to support fee-for-service experiences in order to make it more affordable for participants.

1E. Determining next steps for the Parkscriptions brand into the Recreation Northwest brand

1F. Provide guidance for "Parks RX" development to the Washington State Health Department to fund new outdoor programming in order to create revenue sources for nature based experience providers.

1G. Respond to inquiry requests and support other communities interested in "Parks RX"

GOAL #2 Partner with a robust set of Whatcom County organizations who serve a specific, measurable population in order to connect individuals to the outdoors.

OBJECTIVES

2A. Explore DEI opportunities using our Parkscriptions DEI Plan, CHIP and Parks Needs Assessment as resources to determine which populations need outdoor programming.

- GOAL 2 OBJECTIVES CONTINUED -

2B. Work with at least one new organization annually that serves underserved populations in Whatcom County to explore creating a new program to connect them with nature.

2C. Provide WWU RML students, per our MOA, to offer internship opportunities.

2D. Partner with WWU RML faculty, per our MOA, in integrate into curriculum.

2E. Explore the possibilities and opportunities at Woodstock Farm with Bellingham Parks.

2F. Connect with the local HealthCare Industry to offer scholarships to our fee for service experiences

GOAL #3 Engage in at least one new project per year to create or enhance public spaces in Whatcom County so that our people can enjoy the outdoors, close to where they live.

OBJECTIVES

3A. Meet annual mitigation requirements for Fairhaven Park boardwalk and trail project

3B. Create safe spaces for passive enjoyment and educational experiences outdoors.

3C. Seek additional stewardship opportunities that will enhance public access to selected local parks.

GOAL #4 Engage in opportunities to support local Outdoor Recreation economic and community development efforts in order to increase the impacts of the Outdoor Recreation sector.

OBJECTIVES

4A. Articulate and promote the economic impact that the sector has on the local economy

4B. Maintain a seat at key decision-making tables in order to protect public access and promote the outdoor recreation industry and tourism.

4C. Advocate for community development and access to our public lands, open space and waterways.

GOAL #5 Develop and maintain the status as an employer-of-choice in the recreation industry so that we are able to attract and retain talent to ensure that our staff is well-trained and supported.

OBJECTIVES

5A. Create a work culture that aligns the organization's values.

5B. Pay a living wage and offer a competitive benefit package.

5C. Conduct annual reviews for all staff.

5D. Provide opportunities for ongoing training for staff for professional development and to be able to respond to the needs of our audiences.

GOAL #6 Ensure that the board of directors has the skills, knowledge, and construct to effectively lead the organization.

OBJECTIVES

6A. Maintain a robust board whose individuals are connected to each other and the work we do.

6B. Understand board roles and responsibilities to establish and maintain expectations for board involvement and individual commitment.

6C. Annually approve a strategic plan and budget at the beginning of the calendar year each January.

OUR HISTORY

Historically, Recreation Northwest has served a variety of communities. Beginning with multi-sport races, adding park stewardship, then expanding into outdoor recreation economic development advocacy, and simultaneously creating a pilot program to promote time in nature-- our geographic and demographic scopes have evolved along with the people we've worked with and served.

Through our pandemic pivot, we chose to focus on evolving and merging our Fairhaven Park Stewardship and Parkscriptions programs to create new outdoor opportunities for the public. This is an overview of how our current programs evolved and our past events and activities.

A. OUR CURRENT PROGRAMS

B. PAST EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

A. OUR CURRENT PROGRAMS

Fairhaven Park Stewardship (2014 - present)

We are rooted in Fairhaven Park. Incorporated in 2013, Recreation Northwest's primary tenets were stewardship, education and fun. In the first year, we had staff, volunteers, board members, and interns engaging with recreation professionals in our community-asking what gaps were to be filled in Stewardship, Education, and Fun.

Recreation Northwest became Park Stewards for Fairhaven Park in 2014. We chose this particular park due to the impacts of the Bellingham Traverse Trail Run leg - our signature event at the time.* Our relationship with Bellingham Parks would expand with this new agreement and our investment of time and energy as we adopted the space.

The project was tackled in 2 phases. In Phase One, we worked to relocate unsanctioned trails through fragile wetlands in this special urban forest by building the "Fairhaven Park - 18th Street Trail" connector. We hosted the first Ribbon Cutting event on October 8th, 2015. For Phase Two, we tackled the larger challenge of crossing the wetland with a trail & boardwalk connecting the popular park and forest trails. 300+ native trees and shrubs were planted in the old trail areas to help restore the wetland as mitigation measures. The celebratory second Ribbon Cutting was held on November 30th, 2017. The trail now allows increased, easy access for people and protects this important habitat for wildlife and the ecology of the forest.

Fairhaven Park Project Annual Milestones

2018 Wayfinding project started with support from Mount Baker Sierra Club Chapter

2019 October 24th - Ribbon Cutting for Recognition Rock bench

2020 Ribbon Cutting - Upper Meadow Native Garden bench

2021 Ribbon Cutting - Garden Gate & Upper Meadow Native Garden development

2022 -2027 In accordance with our official mitigation requirements, we are committed to continue to host work parties to maintain the planting areas and remove invasive species.

Dig In: A Timeline of Fairhaven Park Stewardship (2014-2020) ([link](#))

*Note: **The Bellingham Traverse** was founded independently by Todd Elsworth in 2001, who leased it to Recreation Northwest to create a solid foundation and expand into the Northwest Traverse Multi-sport Series throughout Western Washington. In 2018, Pacific Multisports secured ownership of the Bellingham Traverse.

Parkscriptions (2016 - Present)

2016 Pilot Program

We expanded our organizations' efforts with the addition of our Parkscriptions pilot program. Parkscriptions was developed by Recreation Northwest to reflect the models of Parks RX & ParksRx America.

2017 Whatcom Park Finder & Promotional Materials

WhatcomParkFinder.org was developed to serve as a resource for doctors to prescribe a park, with the best location and amenities, for their patients. Over 150 parks were visited and assessed for available amenities, trail condition, bus routes and more — and then were added to the database. Print promotional materials including posters and rack cards in English and Spanish were produced and distributed to participating local healthcare providers.

2018 Community Partners & Walk With a Doc

Community Partners. Throughout 2018 we continued to make strides into expanding the program, and adding healthcare providers in a variety of specialties, including mental health, naturopathy, physical therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic and family medicine. Ultimately we grew from 5 providers to 50 within the last 6 months of 2018, thanks to the support of community partners.

Walk with a Doc October 2018 Sponsored by Humana, this event included an aerobic warm up, health care representatives, a walking group activity with two local doctors from Family Care Network, and bike buggy rides with the YMCA.

2019 Whatcom Parkscriptions Day & Public Health Campaign

Whatcom Parkscriptions Day April 2019. FREE hosted events, offering a variety of experiences, at popular public parks throughout Whatcom County, provided the opportunity for our community to reap the many proven health benefits of time spent in nature.

Public Health Campaign. We leveraged our substantial Murdock Trust funding to create a Public Health campaign to bring the message to the public, encouraging people to “Ask Your Doctor which Park is right for you!” and other related messaging to encourage public and health care provider engagement.

We looked to find ways to get small groups of people together outdoors. We would combine our Parkscriptions philosophy with new programming within local Bellingham Parks. Our new offerings would combine Outdoor Recreation and Nature Education for the public in our stewardship site and Native Plant garden in Fairhaven Park.

2020 Pandemic Pivot

As the pandemic ravaged the rest of Recreation Northwest’s business, we were shown the answer is outdoors. We worked virtually with Western faculty and student interns to set a solid groundwork for creating a peer-to-peer program, leading people outdoors into local parks as “Nature Navigators”. We were proud to bring some value to an otherwise depressing year.

2021 Outdoor Recreation Classes & Tours

With the generous support of an anonymous benefactor, we were excited to transition into a new set of Outdoor Recreation and Nature programming connecting Fairhaven Park and Woodstock Farm. We worked with our primary partners at Bellingham Parks to create a fresh set of experiences for the public that launched in July 2021.

We formalized our relationship with WWU Recreation Management and Leadership faculty with a MOU. We began working with the Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education to help develop outdoor nature education spaces for the public.

Dig In: Check out our latest publication that gives a broad summary and outlines our Reflections and Next Steps on an annual basis: Parkscriptions Program Review 2016-2021. ([link](#))

B. PAST EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

Past Events

Northwest Traverse Multi-sport Series

Bellingham* (2002-2018); Olympia (2010-2014); Winthrop (2014); North Bend (2014)

Bellingham KIDS Traverse (2014-2016)

Race Director Roundtable (2013-2015)

Quest Adventure Races (2013-2017)

Bellingham Swim Run (2017)

Alliance Gatherings - Bellingham & Seattle (2016-2019) formerly known as Basecamp

Recreation Northwest EXPO (2014-2019)

Washington Outdoor Recreation Summit (2016-2018)

Breakfast of Champions (2017-2018)

Whatcom Parkscriptions Day (2019)

Great Outdoors Awards (2019)

*Bellingham Traverse (2002) and Olympia Traverse (2010) were founded by Todd Elsworth and Fourth Corner Productions, LLC. As a founder of the organization, Elsworth leased the rights to Recreation Northwest to host and grow it into the Northwest Traverse Series in its first year, 2013. Yes, the same guy that is the founder and current Executive Director of this great organization. Bellingham Traverse was sold to Pacific Multisports in 2018. The race lives on.

Activities

In 2015, Recreation Northwest released: *The Economic Contribution of Outdoor Recreation to Whatcom County*. (PDF) (link)

This was the first study of it's kind for Whatcom County and we were excited to highlight the impact of outdoor recreation. The study was done by Earth Economics, in Tacoma and funded by Whatcom County, City of Bellingham, Port of Bellingham and Bellingham Whatcom Tourism. Outdoor recreation is an important part of why people choose to live in Whatcom County, it is a foundation of our local economy.

In 2019, Recreation Northwest launched the *Washington Outdoor Business Alliance* (PDF) (link)

The *Washington Outdoor Business Alliance* is an association of individuals, businesses, organizations and land managers that work from the shared values and varied interests of advancing the position of our recreation economy, increasing outdoor participation and protecting our public lands.

We represented recreationists: hikers, bikers, runners, paddlers, boaters, equestrians, anglers and other outdoorists. We are the business owners and employees who support those passions; We are the staff, board members and volunteers who protect our natural places and who introduce people to the love of participating outdoors. We are students studying the multi-disciplinary elements of the outdoor recreation industry.

Alliance Reach Our core work and direct representation was in our hometown of Bellingham and Whatcom County. Our objective was to share our success with others across Washington State. We have Alliance Chapters in the North Sound (Whatcom/Skagit/San Juan), Seattle/King County and potential in Port Angeles/Peninsula. Our relationships were growing in: Everett/Snohomish; Olympia/Thurston; Wenatchee/Chelan/Douglas; and the Methow Valley/Okanogan.