

Astoria-Megler Bridge

2

Study Area and Boundary

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a conceptual boundary for the proposed Columbia-Pacific National Heritage Area. A national heritage area boundary serves two purposes. First, it defines the area that Congress has recognized for the distinct role it has played and continues to play in the nation's history and heritage. For many residents and visitors, this designation is a declaration of the region's importance and distinction. Second, a boundary defines the area where congressionally appropriated national heritage area funds can be spent.

A national heritage area boundary does not restrict land use or change any existing right or authority held by private property owners or public entities. As was noted in Chapter 1, Congress has not granted regulatory authority, land use management authority, or land acquisition authority to national heritage areas. In fact, the designating legislation prohibits these activities.



McGowan town site, east of Chinook

DETERMINING AN APPROPRIATE BOUNDARY

The legislation authorizing this study requires the NPS to examine a study area that includes the “coastal areas of Clatsop and Pacific Counties” and “areas relating to Native American history, local history, Euro-American settlement culture, and related economic activities of the Columbia River within a corridor along the Columbia River eastward in Clatsop, Pacific, Columbia, and Wahkiakum Counties” (from Public Law 110-229). The NPS must determine whether the whole study area or portions of the study area constitute a distinct and cohesive region.

To make this determination, the NPS asked citizens at seventeen scoping meetings and at more than two dozen stakeholder meetings to share their thoughts and ideas about a suitable boundary for the Columbia-Pacific National Heritage Area. The NPS also conducted independent research and sought the advice of experts in the natural and social sciences.

Citizens and research suggested that the NPS should consider the following criteria to determine an appropriate boundary:

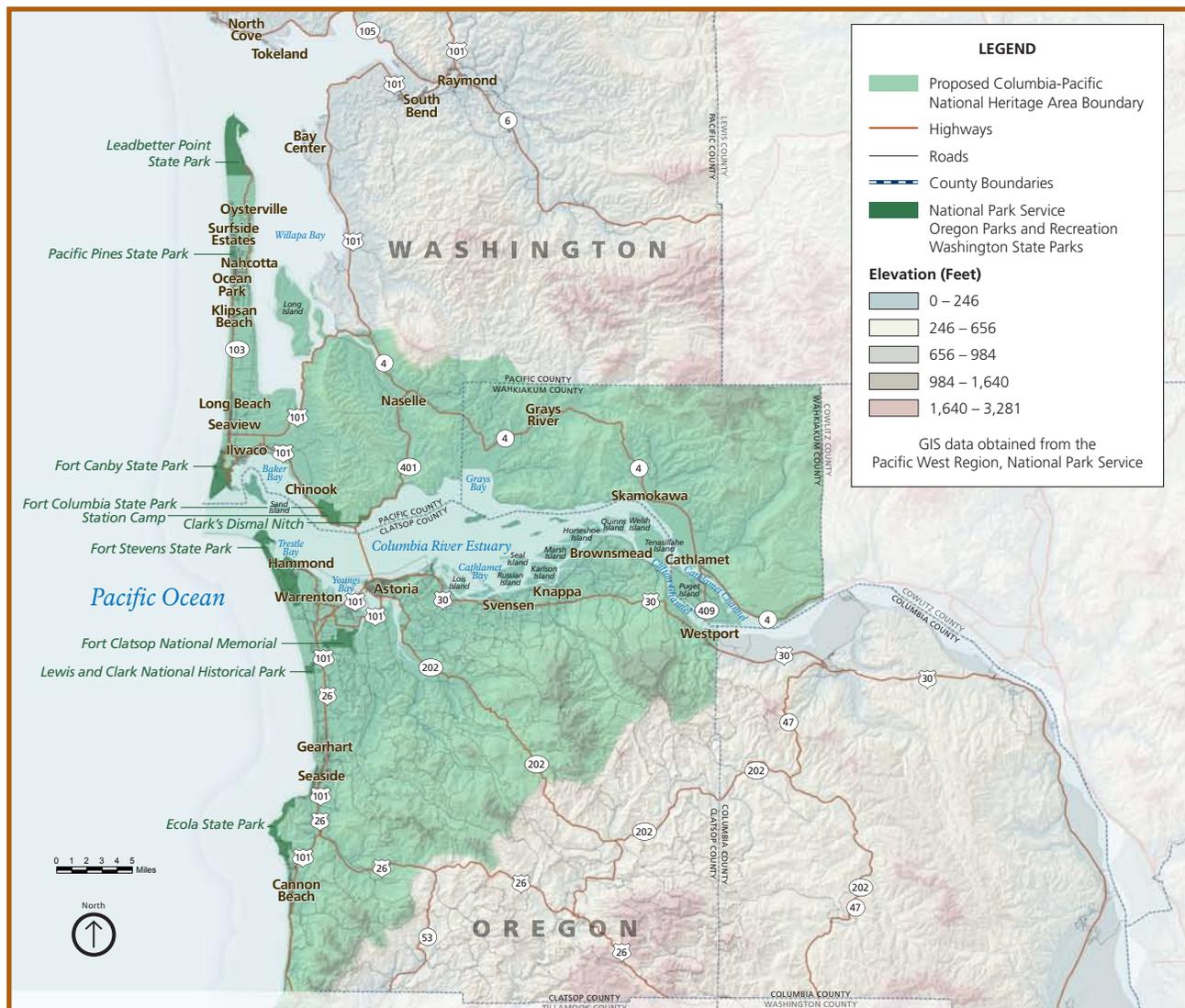
1. Physical barriers, such as watershed divides, mountains, and others
2. The boundaries of the Columbia River estuary
3. Ecological boundaries of maritime influence
4. Pre-contact cultural divides between the tribal groups that occupied the area
5. Historical social and market connections
6. Modern political boundaries
7. Modern social and market connections

PROPOSED COLUMBIA-PACIFIC NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA BOUNDARY

Using the criteria cited, NPS proposes the boundary shown in figure 2.1 for the Columbia-Pacific National Heritage Area. On the Oregon side of the Columbia River, the southern boundary is the divide between the Columbia and Nehalem River watersheds. This divide was created by Columbia River lava flows during the Miocene Epoch. The remains of these lava flows form a series of basalt peaks, including Nicolai Mountain, Saddle Mountain, Onion Peak, and Angora Peak, among others. These peaks make an almost straight line from just west of Westport to the Clatsop–Tillamook County line.

Historically, the Columbia-Nehalem divide formed a loose cultural boundary between tribes of the region. To the northwest, Chinookan-speaking Clatsop People were dominant. South of the divide, Salish-speaking Tillamooks were dominant. Southeast of the divide lived the Athabascan-speaking Clatskanie. While tribal boundaries were fluid and there was often exchange and intermarriage between neighboring tribes, the watershed formed rough boundaries between major language groups.

FIGURE 2.1: PROPOSED BOUNDARY MAP



Today this same watershed boundary constitutes a political, social, and market divide. The proposed national heritage area is entirely within Clatsop County and ends in the northeast at the Clatsop-Columbia County line and in the southwest at the Clatsop-Tillamook County line. During public meetings the NPS found that residents in Knappa, Svenson, Brownsmead, and Westport are more likely to work and socialize within the project area, while those people living in Clatskanie and points farther east are much more likely to go to Kelso or Longview for livelihood, entertainment, and cultural events. Similarly, residents north of the Tillamook County line are likely to work, shop, and interact with people in Astoria, Warrenton, Seaside, Cannon Beach, and the rest of Clatsop County. People south of Neahkanie Mountain are much more likely to feel an affinity to Tillamook and Tillamook Bay.

In Washington, it is proposed that the boundary include Pacific County from the north tip of the Long Beach Peninsula to the Naselle River watershed and from there to the Wahkiakum County line. There is a clear cultural and social divide between north Pacific County and south Pacific County. While not as simple as in Oregon, this divide has historic and pre-historic roots and also follows watersheds and other physical boundaries. In Washington, the primary physical barrier is formed by the Willapa Hills, a geologically young range of mountains that runs from the west and north of Willapa Bay to Aberdeen and the Olympics. Before United States conquest and settlement, Chinookan peoples lived west and south of the Willapa Hills. They occupied the main stem of the Columbia, the Long Beach Peninsula, Willapa Bay, and the river valleys that drain into the Columbia in Wahkiakum County. North of Willapa Bay lived the Salish-speaking Quinault. To the northeast and east lived the Salish-speaking Chehalis.

This divide continues to function in the present day. Today people in north Pacific County feel a closer affinity to Grays Harbor and the town of Aberdeen. They are likely to work and shop in Aberdeen or Olympia. In contrast, people in south Pacific County



Historic North Head lighthouse located at Cape Disappointment

work, collaborate, and go to market in Astoria and Warrenton, Oregon.

Fixing a boundary in Wahkiakum County is more difficult. It is clear that Chinookan peoples occupied the river valleys and lowlands of Grays River, Deep River, the Elochoman River and others. It is also clear that the early American communities on these rivers conducted business and trade at the mouth of the river much more frequently than they did upstream in Longview or Portland. After lengthy discussions with elected officials and residents, the inclusion of the entire county within the boundary is proposed.



Coast line along Clatsop County

OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROPOSED BOUNDARY

In addition to the factors described above, the Columbia River estuary and the ecological extent of maritime influence also influenced the proposed boundary. The estuary and climate are two of the most characteristic features of the area. However, as with most ecological phenomena, the estuary and maritime climate have boundaries that are too fluid and imprecise to serve as lines on a map, so the more specific influences described above had to be taken into consideration.

The Influence of the Columbia River Estuary

The Columbia River estuary is perhaps the principal defining feature of the region. However, the geographic boundaries of the estuary are open to interpretation. If we use the maximum intrusion of saltwater from the Pacific, the boundary would be just upstream of the mouth of Grays River. If we were to use the maximum extent of daily reversals in flow, the boundary would be just upstream of Puget Island. Prior to the damming of the Columbia, it is likely that flows were significantly greater in winter

and significantly lower in late summer. During these times, both saltwater and tidal reversals would have likely traveled even further upstream. Thus, while the proposed boundary definitely includes most of the Columbia River estuary, the shifting and vague boundary of the estuary was not used to set the boundary.

Maritime Climate Influence

As with the boundary of the estuary, the maritime influence on climate, life zones, and plant communities is hard to define. It is clear that in eastern Wahkiakum County and eastern Clatsop County plant communities begin to change. Sitka spruce and western hemlock, the two dominant species of the North American coastal temperate rainforest, become less common while Douglas-fir becomes more common. Poison oak begins to show up more frequently in the eastern portions of both counties. But there is no sharp line defining the end of maritime influence on climate. Thus, while the climate within the proposed national heritage area is maritime, the area boundary is not determined by the extent of this climate.



Gearhart Wagon, Dodd Bridge, 1892