



“The waves became so high we were compelled to return about two miles to a place we could unload our canoes, which we did in a small nitch.”

- Capt. William Clark,
Nov. 10, 1805



Executive Summary

DISMAL NITCH SAFETY REST AREA MASTER PLAN



November 17, 2006

Dear Friend of Lewis and Clark:

On behalf of the Washington State Department of Transportation and the National Park Service, we are pleased to provide you with the *Dismal Nitch Safety Rest Area Master Plan*. It is our hope that you will be excited, as we are, about the future opportunities for commemorating this important site. We have tried to strike a balance at the site, providing an attractive safety rest area for the public while also creating a chance for park visitors to learn more about the rich history of this area.

In 2004, Congress established the Dismal Nitch unit of the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. This important site related to the Corps of Discovery and its experience in the Lower Columbia region will also remain an important component of the State of Washington's Safety Rest Area program.

In 2005, three Washington State Agencies; the Washington State Department of Transportation, State Historical Society and the Department of General Administration, joined with the National Park Service to develop a Master Plan for this historical area. Meanwhile, the Conservation Fund, with cooperation of area landowners, acquired lands to the north of the highway that will ensure the permanent protection of the forested setting adjacent to this magnificent site. These lands to the north were transferred to the National Park Service for management in the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park on September 22, 2006, as part of Phase One implementation of this master plan.

We would like to extend our appreciation to everyone in the Lower Columbia region and elsewhere who attended the public meetings, and shared perspectives on the draft. Your contributions helped to shape this document.

We look forward to the implementation of the *Dismal Nitch Safety Rest Area Master Plan* and the completion of improvements planned for the site. These changes will leave a legacy for visitors today and for future generations who visit the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug MacDonald'.

Douglas B. MacDonald
Secretary of Transportation

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chip Jenkins'.

Chip Jenkins
Superintendent
Lewis and Clark National Historical Park

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document is a Master Plan for the redevelopment of the Dismal Nitch Safety Rest Area in Pacific County Washington. On October 19, 2005 the Washington State Transportation Commission recognized this site as significant by changing its name from the Megler Safety Rest Area to Dismal Nitch Safety Rest Area. This site is also a Unit of the Lewis & Clark National Historical Park, the newest National Park in the United States, as designated by Congress.

Several state agencies in Washington and the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service have a stake in the planning and operation of the Dismal Nitch Safety Rest Area.

Dismal Nitch partnership agencies:

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

WSDOT owns the land and will continue to operate and maintain the Safety Rest Area (SRA). The Federal Highway Administration is responsible for project compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and WSDOT administers federal funding and federal compliance. WSDOT will lead implementation of this Master Plan.

National Park Service (NPS) U.S. Department of the Interior

The Dismal Nitch site is a Unit of the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. The NPS and the State of Washington will work together to develop the interpretive and display materials and other elements to implement this Master Plan. The national park service owns and protects approximately 154 acres of land at the Dismal Nitch Site.

Washington State Historical Society (WSHS)

WSHS is the lead agency for developing the Master Plan and vision for this facility. Upon completion of the Master Plan, WSHS will continue to participate as one of the key state partnership agencies.

Washington State Department of General Administration (GA)

GA provides the Project Management of this Master Planning project for the State of Washington on behalf of WSHS.



LOOKING WEST FROM DISMAL NITCH DOWN THE COLUMBIA RIVER TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Master Plan for the Dismal Nitch Safety Rest Area is designed to establish a structured guide for the expansion and improvements of the existing site, in recognition of its new role as a Unit of the Lewis & Clark National Historical Park. The pivotal events that were endured by the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery shaped national history for decades to come. The Dismal Nitch SRA will recall this story, while serving the local public and travelers visiting in a memorable setting on the shore of the Columbia River.

1. BACKGROUND

What is the importance of this site?

Located near the mouth of the Columbia River and a mile east of the Astoria-Megler Bridge in Washington State, Dismal Nitch was an important and unique site for the Lewis & Clark Voyage of Discovery of 1804 to 1806. It was a major camp site for five nights and six days for the Corps of Discovery in November 1805, where they were pinned down by bad weather virtually in sight of the Pacific Ocean, their destination. The story of the ordeals of the Lewis & Clark Corps at the Dismal Nitch has become legendary as one of their most dangerous moments on the voyage, as they survived the perilous weather and the river trapped against cliffs, drifting trees and impenetrable forest.

What is the opportunity today?

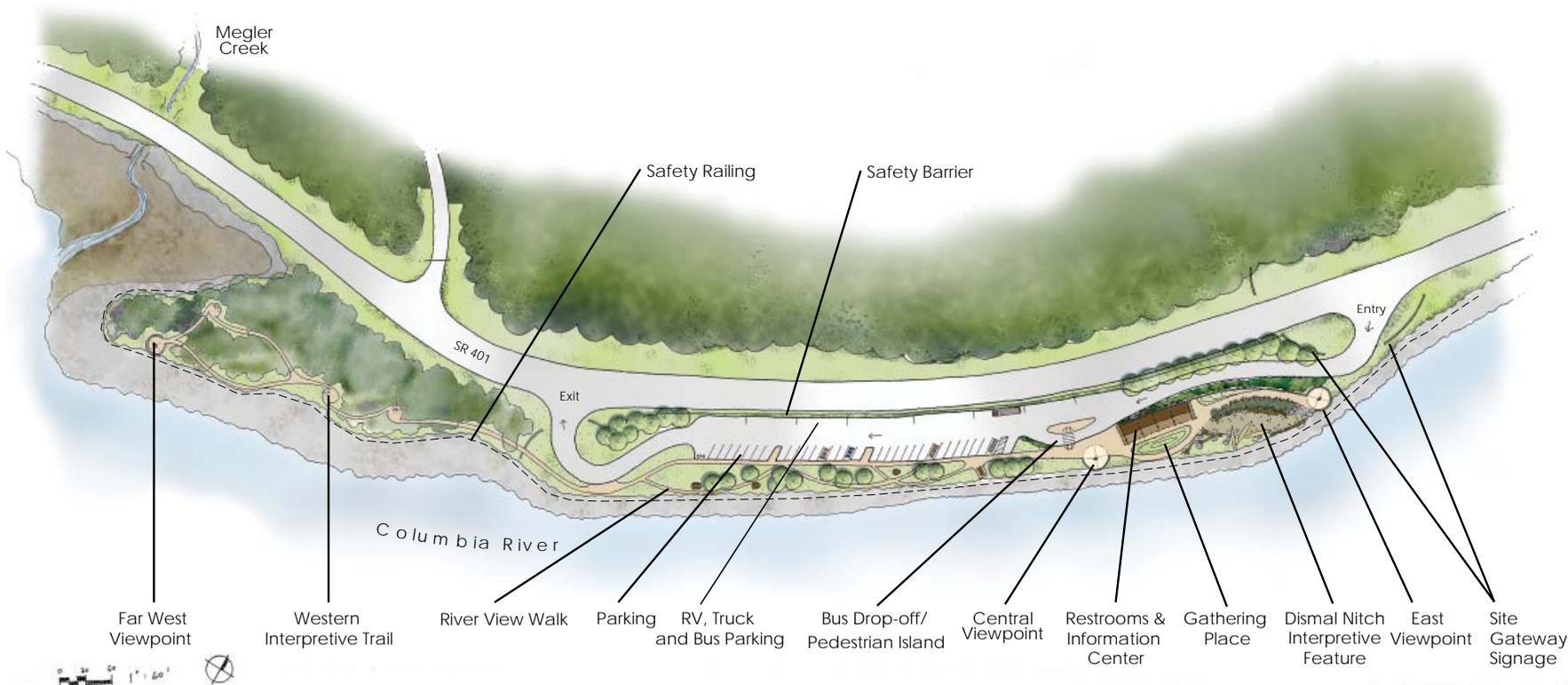
Today's Dismal Nitch site serves as a SRA on State Route 401, and in 2005 was designated by Congress as the Dismal Nitch Unit of the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. The site has panoramic views of the Columbia River and key Lewis & Clark landmarks. The scenic value, and geographic location creates an opportunity for the site to become a gateway to the new national park as the arrival point for visitors, providing maps, information and valuable orientation toward the park's many features. At the same time the site will continue to serve as a SRA, upgraded and enhanced for travelers in Pacific County.

Why are these improvements needed?

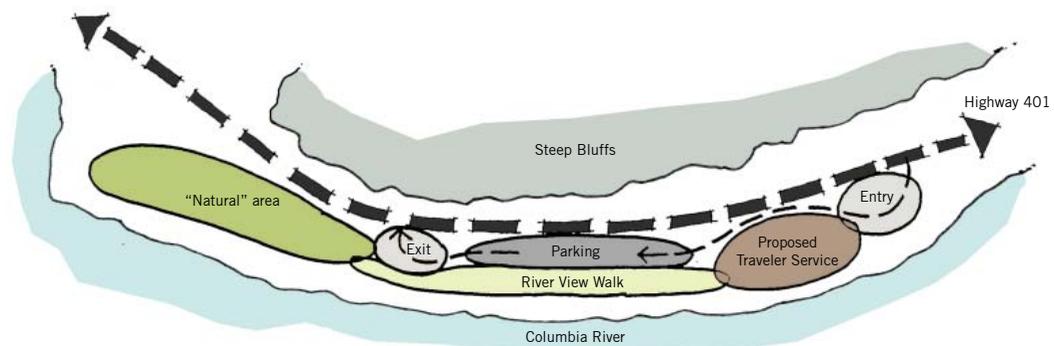
For the benefit of local residents, tourists, and national park visitors, the proposed improvements in this Master Plan will revive the unique history of the Dismal Nitch site, so named by Captain William Clark. Memories of the Corps of Discovery and their ordeal here in November 1805 will be re-created. The SRA will accommodate increased levels of visitation, and will operate at a greater level of safety. Its service life will be extended, with improvements focused on a safer highway entry and exit, a protective and decorative barrier at the highway, and pedestrian safety improvements throughout. Landscaping will be provided to create a greener, more visitor-friendly, sustainable environment.



VICINITY MAP



OVERALL SITE PLAN



SITE DIAGRAM

Who is leading this project and what is their role?

Multiple partners are involved in the management and direction of the project, and it is being developed through a partnership of the State of Washington and the National Park Service. The design team has worked closely with all stakeholders during the development of the Master Plan document. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) will continue to own, operate and maintain the SRA. WSDOT will develop the necessary agreements with the National Park Service to fully create the Dismal Nitch Gateway to the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park.

How is the public involved?

In addition to frequent contact with the partnership agencies, the design team worked with local residents in Pacific County, Washington and Astoria, Oregon. Two public workshops were held near the site in Ilwaco, WA and at Fort Columbia, WA. Chinook tribal leaders, members of the Pacific County Friends of Lewis & Clark, Long Beach Peninsula Visitors Bureau members, the Ilwaco Heritage Museum, and many others attended and contributed to the design process through input collected at these workshops.

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS

- Improve Site and Highway Safety
- Improve Pedestrian Circulation and Site Accessibility
- Create a Gateway to the new National Park
- Improve the Natural Setting of the Site and the Safety Rest Area
- Provide enhanced traveler information, to benefit the local economy
- Reduce Driver Fatigue
- Extend the Service Life of this Facility



MEGLER CREEK

3. FEATURES OF THE NEW PLAN

The Master Plan expands the area of the Dismal Nitch SRA and adds visitor features serving the needs of the SRA and the National Park. New features include:

Three Elevated Panoramic Viewpoints

The broad sweep of the Columbia River is viewed from the slightly elevated East, Central and Far West Viewpoints.

New Trails

Three new trails along the river and linking the site features are planned: Trail to the East Viewpoint, the River View Walk, and the Western Interpretive Trail.

Dismal Nitch Interpretive Feature

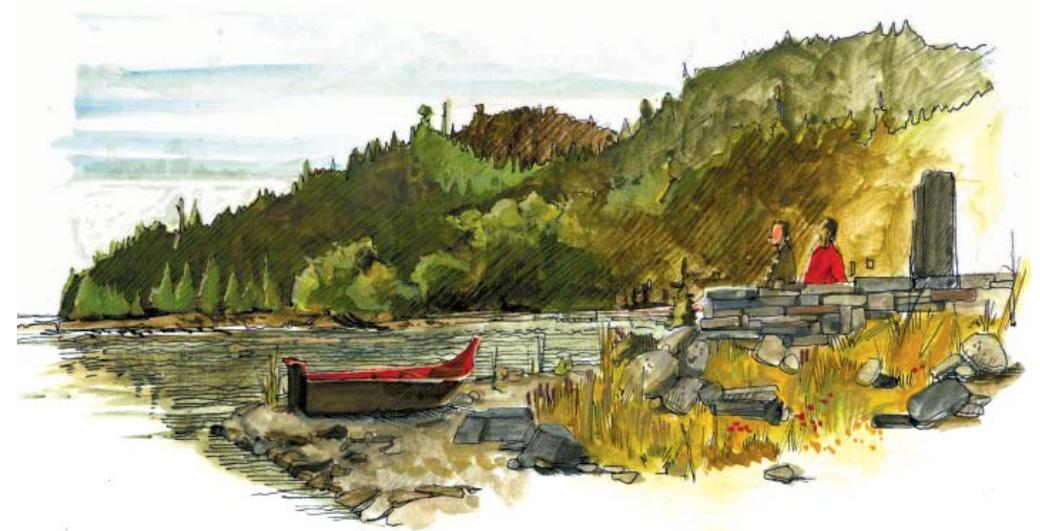
Presenting the Lewis & Clark experience at the Dismal Nitch site, accurately in scale with historic conditions, the re-creation will feature replicas of the members of the Corps of Discovery and their canoes.

New Restroom and Information Center Building

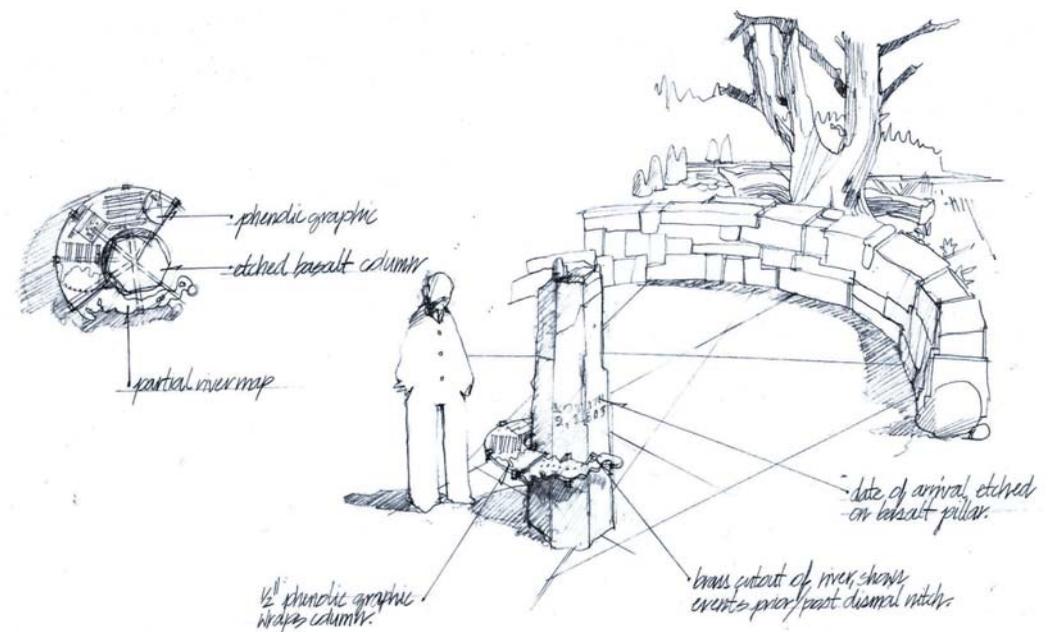
Located conveniently by the entrance and the bus drop-off, the new building will welcome travelers and provide regional and national park information.

Improved Parking, Signage, Safety Features and Landscaping

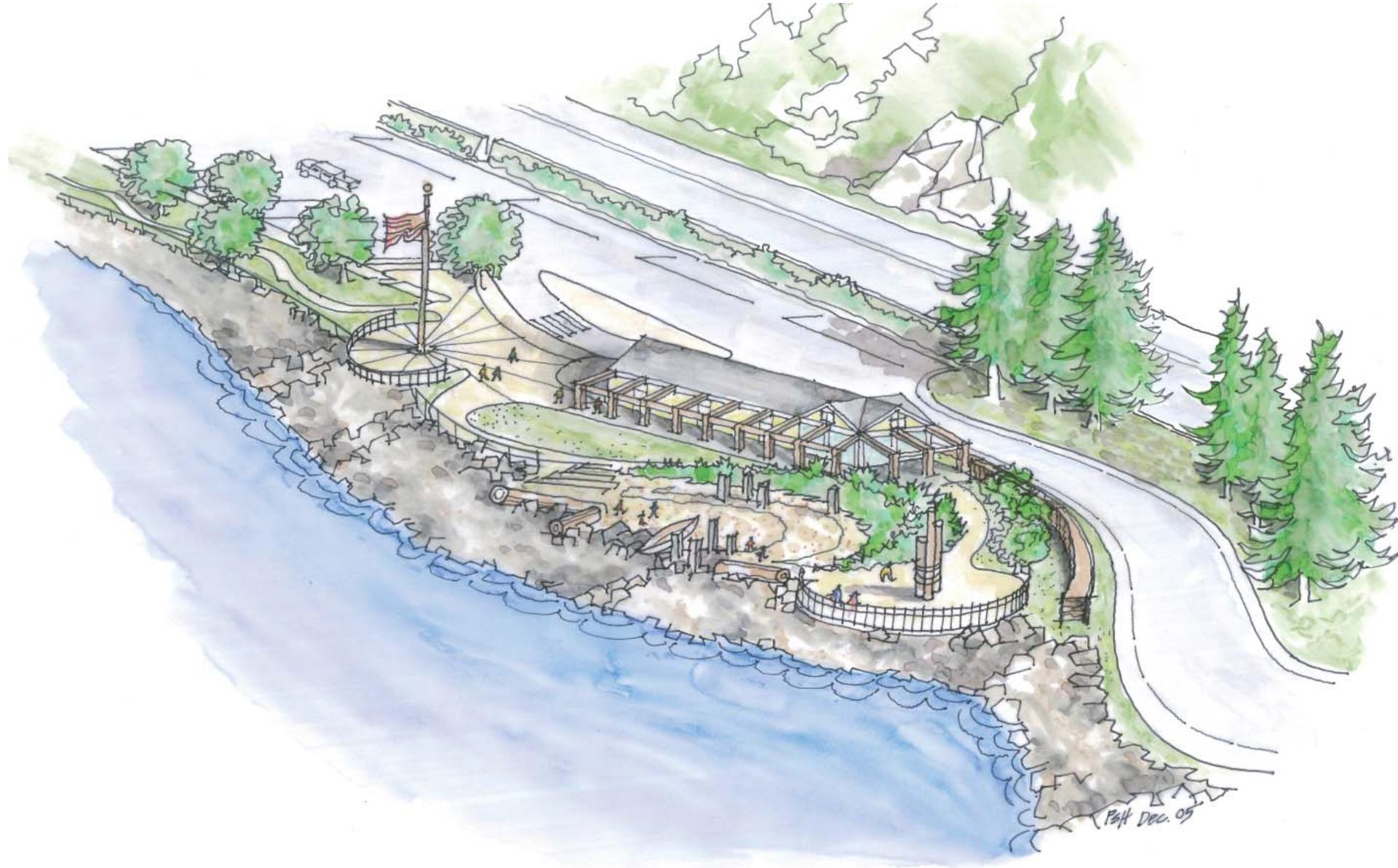
Provided parking for cars, trucks, RV's and buses will meet current standards and ADA needs. A new entry sign is provided, along with interpretive and directional signage throughout. Safety fencing is incorporated into the design, and new landscaping will enhance the site with native plant materials.



FAR WEST ANCHOR AND VIEWPOINT



ANCHOR FEATURE



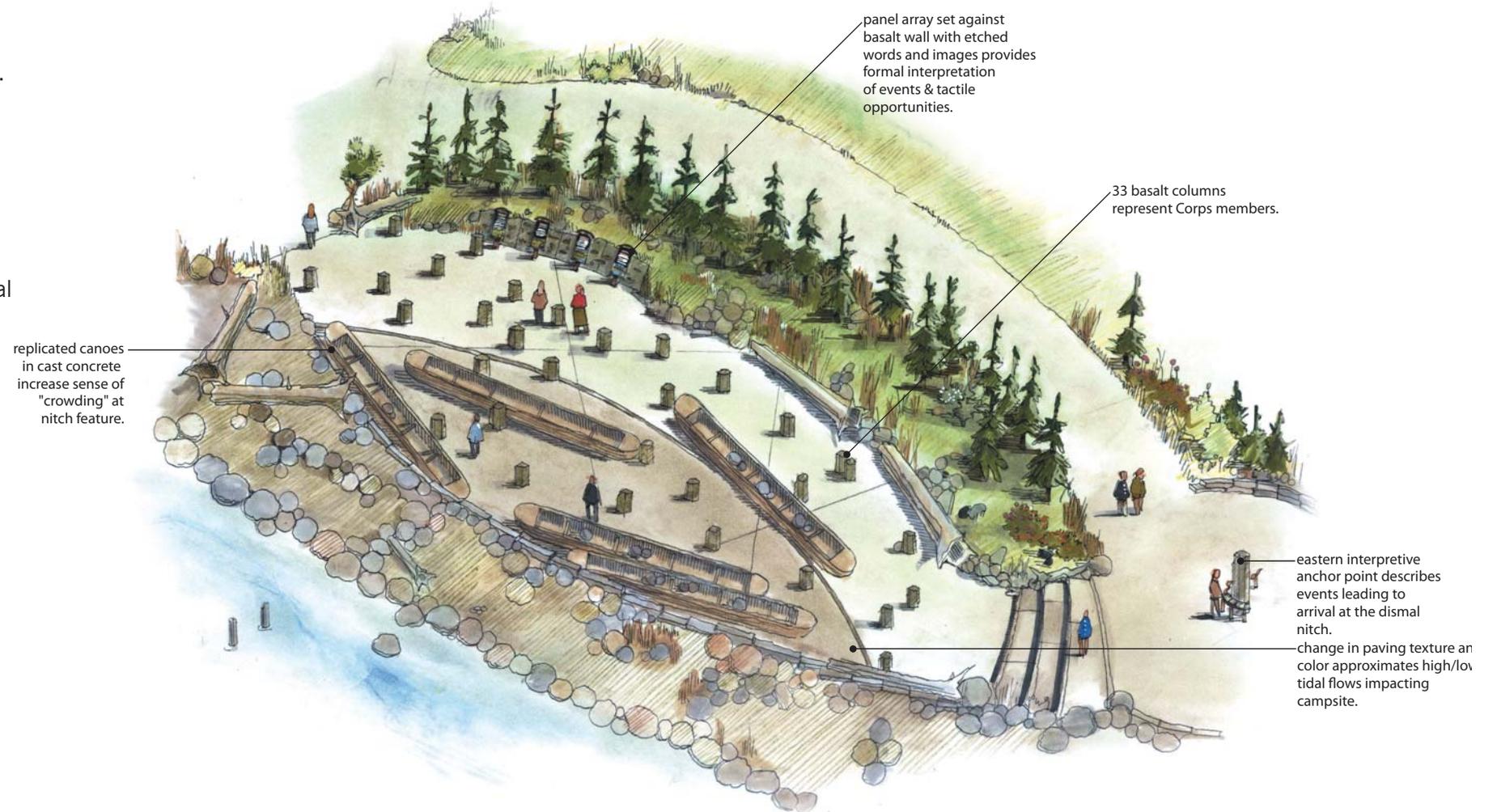
AERIAL VIEW OF BUILDING SITE



4. IMPLEMENTATION

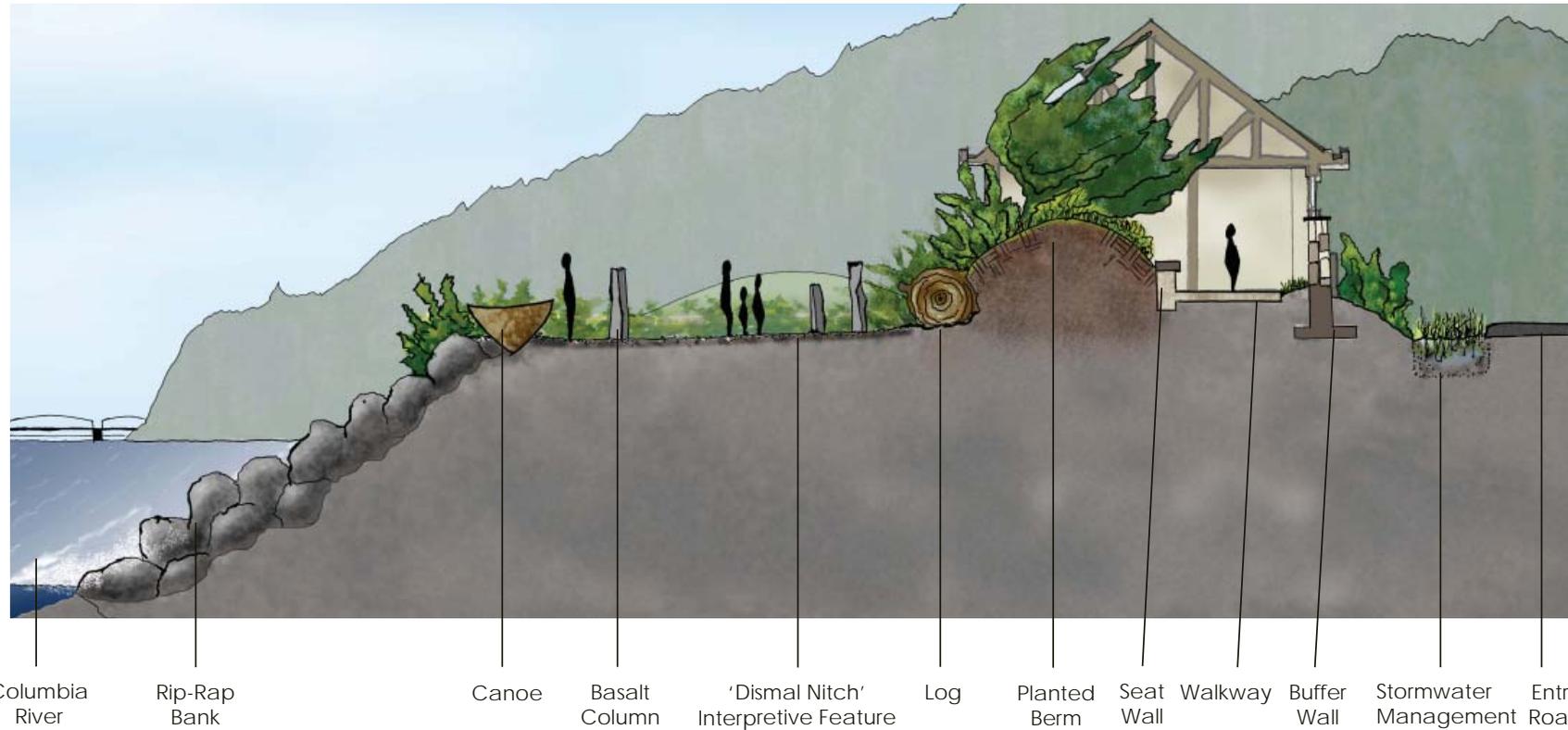
This Master Plan creates a vision for the entire project that can be funded and built in phases, to meet immediate and long term needs. As developed in this report, four phases include:

- Phase I: Water System Replacement, Master Plan Design, Land Protection Acquisition (funded).
- Phase II: Western Interpretive Trail and Fencing, Entry Sign (funded)
- Phase III: Roads, Parking, Landscaping, Fencing, Sewer (unfunded)
- Phase IV: Restroom / Info Building, Dismal



DISMAL NITCH INTERPRETIVE FEATURE





Columbia River Rip-Rap Bank Canoe Basalt Column 'Dismal Nitch' Interpretive Feature Log Planted Berm Seat Wall Walkway Buffer Wall Stormwater Management Entry Road

SECTION THROUGH DISMAL NITCH INTERPRETIVE FEATURE

5. BUDGET

The following budget estimate is prepared using 2006 dollars. The total project cost is \$4.3 million. A budget is developed for each of the major project phases in 2006 dollars. Project phases will be built as funds become available. \$1.6 million has been secured and a remaining \$2.7 million is needed from additional sources to complete this project.

Project Budget	
Phase I: Water System Replacement, Master Plan Design, NPS Land Protection and Acquisition (funded)	\$1,435,000 (\$590,000) (\$845,000)
Phase II: Western Interpretive Trail and Fencing, Entry Sign (funded)	\$175,000
Phase III: Roads, Parking, Landscaping, Fencing, Sewer (unfunded)	\$992,000
Phase IV: Restroom / Info Building, Dismal Nitch Feature (unfunded)	\$1,739,000
Total Project Cost	\$4,341,000



"the natives...made their canoes remarkably neat, light, and well adapted for riding high waves. Some are...waxed, painted and ornamented with curious images. ...they are neater made than any I have ever seen and calculated to ride the waves and carry emence burthens"

- Capt. William Clark, Nov. 11, 1805