



CHAPTER 7

Brace and Take on the Task:

Parks for the Past, Parks for the Future (1999 - 2014)

The 1990s left Oregon Parks and Recreation worn down. Those staff left standing were exhausted by funding battles, political problems, new programs, and constant calls to do more with less. Bob Meinen, a savvy if unpopular leader, was left with too many bruises to adequately recover, and no one what sure what the next decade would bring. Compared to the declaration of park independence in 1989, the passage of Measure 66 brought only a small amount of fanfare, and no giant cake. Parks were falling apart, and even a temporary end to budget shortfalls didn't shake feelings of fatigue. In this new century, parks would continue to fight for their place in Oregon's government and live up to the mandate of Measure 66—to make parks thrive. But the legislature, and the economy, wasn't going to make it easy. Still, OPRD grew in unexpected ways in the new millennium. Embracing new programs, new technologies, and new policies, the department worked to be more “for the people” than ever before. Despite obstacles and obstinance, Oregon State Parks struggled toward a better future.

Meinen Knew How to Manage Parks but Not Politicians: Fights in the Legislature

Parks boosters had hoped that the passage of Measure 66 in 1998 would solve the struggle for funding. Adding lottery money to the other funding sources for parks would be enough to put them on firm financial footing. However, threatened shutdowns, demands for relief, and grim state budgets took their toll. Although the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department gained a critical source of funding, they lost much of their financial support from the General Fund and political support in state government. The department emerged from the budget battle better funded but bruised—and Meinen bore the brunt of it.

In what some parks boosters believed was bipartisan betrayal, Governor Kitzhaber and the Republican-dominated legislature both supported “backfilling”

the lottery dollars earmarked for parks by Oregon voters. Much of what had been intended to add to park coffers would instead replace the General Fund contributions of previous years. There was some back-and-forth over how much to take from Parks. Eventually, the state legislature decided to take it all. The General Fund contribution for Oregon Parks and Recreation in the 1999 – 2000 budget was \$0 dollars, when it had at one point provided nearly a third of the park budget.³³⁹

Meanwhile, the perception that parks would now be flush with lottery cash led many legislators to try and shove programs new and old into the parks budget, and reassert control over lottery funds. Much of the Measure 66 money mandated for park use was stripped from OPRD’s general budget and put into a “reserve fund,” with any spending from the fund subject to the “greater oversight” of the legislature. A legislative demand requiring OPRD to build a series of “scuba dive parks” was not successful, but administration of “pioneer cemeteries” (broadened to “historic cemeteries” in 2004) was shifted to parks without an attendant shift of money to pay for them. Parks were also given the All-Terrain Vehicle program (which at least came with its own source of funds). The department had hoped to focus on land acquisition and deferred maintenance—difficult enough, as many of the experts needed for maintenance and repairs had been let go amidst the layoffs. But now OPRD also had to scramble to fund and staff new non-park programs on a budget smaller than projected. And, as Meinen juggled these new responsibilities, the eyes of a hostile legislature were on him.³⁴⁰

The state legislature responded to outrage over their cuts to OPRD in the face of popular will by blaming parks leadership. Questioned about whether these cuts reflected the desires of voters, Senator Lenn Hannon of the Ways and Means committee deflected: “I’ve been disappointed, quite frankly, with Mr. Meinen’s leadership.” Weary of the threat of park closures and stung by popular outrage over (the lack of) park funding, legislators redoubled the critiques of park management that had been a mainstay of the 1990s—and launched a new audit of OPRD aimed at financials.³⁴¹

Unlike the earlier audits of lobbying efforts (see Chapter 6), the 1999 audit of park management was grounded in differences of philosophy rather than violations of the law. The recommendations made in many cases matched with those that had previously been considered and rejected by OPRD. The report suggested broader implementation and enforcement of day use fees, but did not include consideration of whether those fees would reduce visitation. Nor

339 Steve Suo, “Governor’s Critics Say State Parks Are Being Shortchanged,” *Oregonian* Feb 1, 1999, p. E08; Steve Suo, “Measure 66 Supporters Attack \$30 Million Parks Budget,” *Oregonian* Apr 15, 1999, p. D07.

340 *FYI* 286 (Apr 16, 1999); *FYI* 297 (July 2, 1999); “Draft OPRD History Questionnaire, 1990 – Present [2013],” p. 19, Folder: Kate Schutt Records – More Kate Schutt Records, Oregon Parks and Recreation Digital Archive; “An Act Relating to Cemeteries...,” Chapter 731 Oregon Laws 1999; “Relating to the Oregon Pioneer Cemetery Commission,” Chapter 173 Oregon Laws 2003.

341 Suo, “Measure 66 Supporters Attack \$30 Million Parks Budget.”

did this recommendation consider political feasibility—a growing concern, as the same legislature that ordered and endorsed the report had moved strongly against new day-use fees at beachfront recreation areas. The report assumed fees from state park campgrounds could be brought into rough parity with private campgrounds, and rejected long-held studies and concerns by the OPRD and Parks Commission that the comparative lack of amenities in state parks would make raising fees to that extent infeasible. The last major revenue idea in the audit suggested replacing seasonal workers with temporary ones, operating under the assumption that seasonal work positions needed little to no experience or training.³⁴²

But though the critiques in the audits were mild, the attacks from legislators were devastating. Reporting transformed the decorous “opportunit[ies] for improvement” in the audit into a more attention-grabbing “mismanagement.” Senator Eugene Timms, joint chair of Ways and Means in the legislature, responded to the audit with exasperation. “Why do we keep having a problem with the parks division? We’ve got to get someone managing that department better. It makes me sick.” Meinen responded coolly: “When I hear there are management problems, I don’t hear specifics.”³⁴³ The Parks Commission urged Meinen to work on his relationships with the legislature. Commissioner Betsy McCool suggested the immediate implementation of opening ceremonies for parks receiving maintenance to showcase the work parks were now able to do with new lottery funding. This sort of public performance was in line with the culture of public relations Meinen had been trying to instill since his arrival. But he was exasperated with demands and insults from the legislature:

[It is] important to keep in perspective [that] the agency has come from almost closing parks, laying off staff and almost starving to death in the last 20 years and then as soon as there is money they expect the plans to be all finalized and ready to roll out.

The Commission offered to help smooth things over with the legislature, but soon found that they, too, were viewed skeptically. In 2000, they came in for legislative critique—both because it was unclear if they were active enough in policy decisions and because the Commission was not “as inventive as they should be” in fundraising efforts. Demands to “do more with less,” it seemed, would continue.³⁴⁴

342 Oregon Audits Division, “State of Oregon Parks and Recreation Department: Management of State Park Resources,” John N. Lattimer, Director, No. 1999-28 (Aug 5, 1999).

343 Lisa Grace Lednicer, “Audit Finds Mismanagement in State Parks,” *Oregonian* Aug 6, 1999, p. A01.

344 Odie Vogel, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, April 29, 1999, p. 6, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Odie Vogel, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, January 13, 2000, p. 5, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection.

The Recent Events Have Tested our Resolve and Broken our Hearts:

Attack at Oswald West State Park

As Director Meinen fought the legislature in Salem on issues of funding, the Parks system suffered an immeasurable tragedy in the field. On April 27, 1999, two rangers on duty at Oswald West State Park were shot while checking the restrooms. Danny Blumenthal died instantly, Jack Kerwin survived and was able to assist police in locating the assailant, who was arrested later that day. Danny Blumenthal, described as quick to smile and a lover of the outdoors, was 51 years old. He was a “big kid at heart,” trying to instill in visitors of all kinds a respect for the trees and amazing Pacific coast views that brought people to Oswald West State Park. He and Jack Kerwin worked together for two years before the shooting, doing the work all rangers knew well, trail maintenance, handling visitors, cleaning, and education. Jack Kerwin recovered from his injuries and returned to the work that he loved. Bob Meinen wrote at the time, “the recent events have tested our resolve and broken our hearts.” Rangers gathered at Oswald West State Park for a memorial, and, in uniform, stood with the family of Blumenthal as they mourned. Soon after, two of the major creeks at Oswald West State Park were named after Kerwin and Blumenthal. Blumenthal Creek empties over a cliffside beach view, one of the many oceanside vistas Blumenthal had urged visitors to savor.³⁴⁵


The attack sent shockwaves through the organization as park rangers grappled with the loss of a colleague and questioned their own safety in the field. Perversely, the state legislature had slashed the proposed budget for parks safety almost to nothing just two weeks before the shooting. Governor John Kitzhaber said in a prepared statement, “We take for granted the safety of our roads, streets, parks and public places. We should not.” Washington State had just begun arming some park personnel after a ranger was grievously wounded in a vehicular assault. Rangers in California state parks had been permitted to carry firearms since 1986. Oregon had resisted this measure. In the aftermath of the shooting, this decision was hotly debated. Director Bob Meinen wrote in a staff newsletter directly after the attack,

I... believe, that as we move ahead in the weeks and months to come, that our reaction to how and why this tragedy occurred needs to be responsive, but not one of overreaction. Our approach needs to be thoughtful and measured. The work of our task force looking into equipment and safety for our employees needs to continue with objectivity and intensity. If we need to make changes, we will make changes.

345 “Director’s Corner,” FYI 289 (May 3 – 7, 1999), p. 1; Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, “Oswald West trail guide” [Online Brochure], n.d., <https://stateparks.oregon.gov/index.cfm?do=v.publications>, accessed July 20, 2020; “Blumenthal Falls, Tillamook County, Oregon,” Northwest Waterfall Survey [online], updated March 19, 2017, <https://www.waterfallnorthwest.com/waterfall/Blumenthal-Falls-3884>.

In an editorial days after the attack, the *Oregonian* urged state parks not to arm their officers, despite this act of violence. The difference between Oregon and Washington, the editorial noted, was that Oregon rangers were not law enforcement officers, nor should they become them. Oregon State Parks historically relied on assistance from Oregon police to handle any serious infractions, and, the editorial noted, this arrangement was largely successful. By requiring rangers to wear firearms, the job would move away from its role as interpreter and visitor support, and towards a role of enforcement. With this change, the tenor of parks would change as well, shattering the innocence of recreation in Oregon's scenic spaces.³⁴⁶

Reporting to the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission, Meinen stressed that this tragedy was not directed at the rangers specifically, but was rather a random act of violence that did not signify a danger unique to park employees. He urged the committee to consider the issue of arming rangers, but to keep the issue in perspective. Stub Stewart agreed with the *Oregonian* editorialist that rangers should not be armed, but he noted that many people had voiced support for arming rangers during his recent trip to Salem. Other Commission members agreed a patient and cautious approach to the issue should be taken—and pointed out the sharp reduction in the safety budget that the legislature had just imposed.³⁴⁷

A friend of Kerwin's noted that Jack, a Vietnam veteran and US Marine Corps Colonel, was not in favor of rangers carrying guns. The taskforce convened under Meinen agreed: rangers would not be permitted to carry weapons of any sort while on duty. Government risk management staffers pointed to data that suggested arming park personnel would make serious injury and accidents more likely. Instead, the slow-growing pilot program training parks staff in how to deescalate dangerous situations would now be made a part of ranger training. Park Officer Safety Training was created to prevent further violence without the use of force. The safety of parks would not be maintained through the arming of parks personnel.³⁴⁸ 

346 *FYI* 286 (Apr 16, 1999); Bryan Denson, Hal Bernton, and Jonathan Nelson, "Attack on Park Rangers Leaves 1 Dead, 1 Injured," *Oregonian* Apr 28, 1999, p. A01; Seabury Blair, "Olympia: Parks Panel Takes Aim at Issue of Rangers and Guns," *Kitsap Sun* Dec 18, 1998; Pieter M. O'Leary, "A Walk in the Park: A Legal Overview of California's State and Federal Parks and the Laws Governing Their Use and Enjoyment," *Natural Resources Journal* 52:1 (Spring 2012), p. 257; "Director's Corner," *FYI* 288 (Apr. 26 – 30, 1999), p. 1; "Friendly, Unarmed: The Brutal Random Attack on Two Park Rangers Is Frightening, but Oregon Should Not Arm Its Park Employees with Handguns," *Oregonian* Apr. 29, 1999, p. D12.

347 Odie Vogel, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, April 29, 1999, p. 1, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection

348 Denson, Bernton, and Nelson, "Attack on Park Rangers Leaves 1 Dead, 1 Injured.," *FYI* 299 (July 16, 1999); *FYI* 119 (Nov 9, 1995); *FYI* 283 (March 26, 1999); Tim Wood, "Looking Back from 2013: Synopsis and Commentary by Director Tim Wood," 13, Folder: Kate Schutt Records, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Archive Collection.

Assuming Nothing Goes South on Us: **OPRD Tackles Technology**

One key new line item for parks safety in the 1990s was the purchase of cellphones. An expensive and exotic technology that worked even less often at the time, it took several years for mobile phones to become a standard item for park rangers to carry. Among the many changes of the 1990s, career rangers often mentioned the sudden dependence on technology for a job that was once entirely removed from computer systems. The first mention of technology of any sort was in a 1971 staff newsletter, in which the office marveled over the new equipment in the Engineering department, a Monroe 990—essentially a glorified calculator. Perhaps a touch tongue in cheek, the newsletter boasted,

The Engineering staff is proudly sporting an electric computer, a Monroe 990, which literally produces answers in the twinkling of an eye. It has a square-root key, a memory bank, and even a floating decimal point! Truly a magical aid. The Recreation staff is experimenting with a printing electric calculator. Stop by for your own amazement.

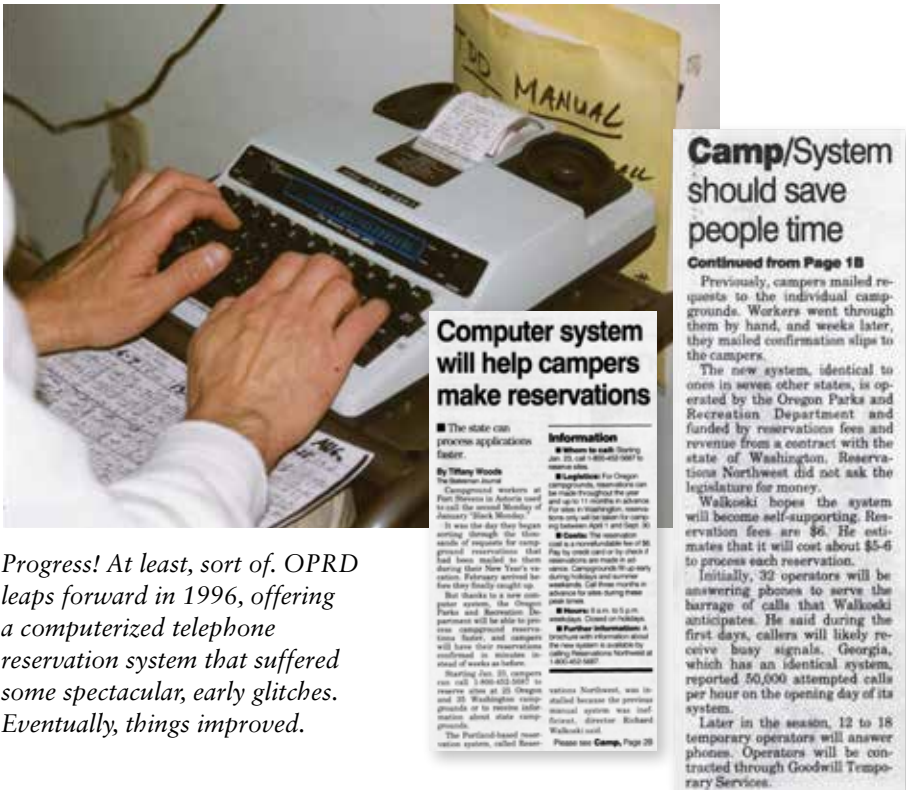
Computer systems wouldn't be mentioned again until the mid-1990s, and rangers were hesitant to engage with them even then. The job of a ranger was not based at a desk, and any suggestion that it should be was met with jeers.³⁴⁹

Park reservations, started under Dave Talbot early in his tenure, were one example of the analog procedures that dominated the park system prior to 2000. Before a telephone reservation system, people mailed in their reservation requests, which were collected in a 50-gallon drum, and opened on “Black Monday,” the second Monday in January. It would take until March to process them. The pile of requests was sorted, one by one, and campsites were assigned.



Field staff began to see more indoor work, courtesy of the PC revolution that ramped up in the 1990s.

349 FYI 176, (Jan 17, 1997); “The Office” *Oregon State Park Times* 9:2[?] (Aug 1971), p. 24.



Progress! At least, sort of. OPRD leaps forward in 1996, offering a computerized telephone reservation system that suffered some spectacular, early glitches. Eventually, things improved.

Although a call center existed, they usually could do no more than inform customers of which campsites might be available. But “that all changed on Tuesday, January 23, 1996 when OPRD stepped into the modern world of centralized reservation systems.” Helping to build a single system to handle reservations for both Oregon and Washington, Oregon State Parks spent almost \$3 million dollars to step into the modern era. They went through 300 reservations employees in the first year. The system was plagued by busy signals, double bookings, and the slow crawl of early computer systems. One unlucky soul answering phones, Kristi Granberg, remembered of one customer, “She stopped just short of threatening bodily harm. And at the end of the call, I raised my head up above the cubicle wall for some air, much like a periscope on a submarine. It was hard to go back for more of that punishment.” Field employees suffered as well, with double bookings causing a flood of angry campers that would end up in hotels, on the park’s dime, instead of at camps.³⁵⁰

The new phone reservation system was a shock to a department that relied on pen and paper. By the late 1990s, park staff were faced with more

350 “OPRD History Panel Discussion,” Interviewer - Kathy Schutt, Dec 2012, p. 7 Folder: Kate Schutt Records, Oregon Parks and Recreation Digital Collection. Hereafter “OPRD History Panel Discussion [2012].”; *Oregon State Park Times* 8:1[?] (April, 1970), p. 26; Richard Walkoski, “Happy Anniversary: Twenty Years of Central Reservations” *FYI 2.0* January 22, 2016, p. 1; “OPRD History Panel Discussion [2012].”

technological challenges. The rough implementation of phone reservations made it clear to park administrators that OPRD was behind the curve on technology upgrades, especially in parks. This problem became all the more urgent as the decade progressed. The Y2K frenzy, centered on the fact that many computers did not have the capacity to recognize the year 2000, required Oregon Parks to reluctantly thrust themselves into the 21st century. A 1999 *Oregonian* article noted at the time that the United States spent over \$100 billion dollars on preparing computer systems to recognize the year 2000. Staff worked frantically not only to upgrade computers, but to force a reluctant staff to train on new systems.³⁵¹

Staff newsletters in 1999 tried to ease the fears of staff, not only of the potential upheaval from Y2K, but also on the changing roles of technology in parks. Rangers with 20 years of experience in the field were now spending more time on computers, whether they liked it or not. Even a small software change seemed insurmountable. A 1999 FYI article noted that OPRD was going to standardize software to Microsoft suite products, and the IT pros in charge were readying themselves for the panic that this would cause among the staff. That year, OPRD owned 486 computers, which were recently upgraded to 64 MB of memory and a whopping 3 GB hard disk. A decade later cell phones would have roughly the same processing power. Money earmarked to prepare for Y2K allowed Meinen's staff to complete necessary system upgrades, get everyone using the same software, and start the long process of training staff. This diligence led to an uneventful switch to the year 2000.³⁵²

Equipping staff with computers was only the beginning. Park websites, online reservation systems, and even a MySpace* page were implemented in the late 1990s and 2000s. OPRD got its first mention on a website in 1995. According to a staff newsletter, "Internet users can now find OPRD information through accessing Oregon Online, an internet information service." This early website only had phone numbers of parks and camp descriptions but promised that it would grow over time. A standalone website for OPRD was introduced in 1998. Chris Havel, the project coordinator, was cautiously optimistic about the launch, saying "We'll be placing the files online this weekend. Assuming nothing goes south on us, you should be able to reach the site with web browsing software by Sunday." Five years later, the first *FYI* internal newsletter with embedded pictures was sent out to staff, using the magic of html.³⁵³

351 "Happy New Year: Here Comes the New Millennium—Ready or Not," *Oregonian* Dec 31, 1999, p. C06.

352 "Conversion to Microsoft Office Coming New Year," *FYI* 311 (Oct 11 – 15, 1999), p. 1. 1; "Y2K Update," *ibid.*, 2; There was one incident reported: A rock climber that bought a day pass at Smith rock did receive a ticket with the wrong date. This was resolved when staff arrived on site and updated the day use ticket machine. Odie Vogel, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, January 13, 2000, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; see also Francine Uenama, "20 Years Later, the Y2K Bug Seems Like a Joke—Because Those Behind the Scenes Took It Seriously," *Time* Dec 30, 2019.

353 "OPRD's on Oregon Live," *FYI* 85 (March 6 – 10, 1995); "Editor's Note," *FYI* 500 (Aug 17 – 23, 2003), p. 1. MySpace was an early social networking platform that rose meteorically around 2005 then fell a few years later. Nicholas Jackson and Alexis C. Madrigal, "The Rise and Fall of MySpace," *Atlantic* Jan 12, 2011.

Online reservations also quickly grew. In 1999, 12 people reserved a campsite online. The next year, 7,200 did. In 2008, online reservations outnumbered reservations by phone for the first time, signaling a shift in how Oregonians chose to interact with park personnel. These accommodations continued when wireless internet hotspots were set up along some coastal parks in partnership with the Oregon Travel Information Council in 2006. State parks also took to social media, creating MySpace, Facebook, and, later, Instagram pages to connect more directly with visitors. These technological upgrades, though slow to implement, allowed parks to function more cohesively, using networks and direct marketing to better meet the needs of the department. For the first time field staff and Salem staff were easily connecting online and sharing information across networks. This signified an improvement in efficiencies, but it also drastically changed the role of rangers. Computers, once a strange anomaly, were now necessary to the job duties of all staff. Technology also permeated the ways visitors engaged with parks, from online reviews to social media posts. Just as camping changed the physical layout of Oregon parks, technology changed how, and why, visitors came to see the landscape.³⁵⁴

I Carried my Load: **Meinen's Legacy**

The Y2K success was one of the last acts of the Meinen administration. He announced in January, 2000, that he was stepping down from his position, hopeful that a new Director, without the baggage of the fight for Measure 66, may have more luck in securing sustained funding. After his retirement, the *Oregonian* noted that “Meinen knew how to manage parks but not politicians. Ultimately, it led to his departure.” Democrats in Salem saw Meinen in a different light, arguing that he had dealt with the mess he was handed admirably. Representative Randell Edwards praised Meinen as “cautious and prudent.” Oregon Parks staff would remember these years as unsteady and dizzying, a mix of hope for the future of parks and fear that OPRD, and their own jobs, were precariously bound up in political maneuvering. Meinen would end up finishing his parks career in Idaho, where he had begun. There, he was “well-known... for getting the lottery money for State Parks in Oregon” and “[f]amous for getting kicked out of the state for having that success.”³⁵⁵

Meinen headed the park system through funding disasters, staff layoffs, immense tragedy, and rapid technological advancement. But for all his success,

354 “Internet Camping Reservations Escalate,” *FYI* 322 (Jan 10 – 14, 2000), p. 2; “Online Bookings Lead to Changes for Reservations Northwest,” *FYI* 726 (Apr 20 – 26, 2008), p. 1; “Wireless Internet Access Installed at Central Coast Parks,” *FYI* 646 (Sept 10 – 16, 2006), p. 3. Facebook and Instagram, like MySpace before them, are social networking programs.

355 Robert L. Meinen, “Interview Transcription,” Interview with Elisabeth Walton Potter, Apr 28, 2000, p. 8, Folder: Kate Schutt Records, Oregon Parks and Recreation Digital Archive; Steve Mayes, “State Parks Hunts for New Director,” *Oregonian* March 13, 2000, p. E01; Rick Just, “Robert Meinen and Idaho State Parks,” Interview with Marc James Carpenter [phone], July 15, 2020, unfiled, Oregon Parks and Recreation Digital Collection.

most state legislators couldn't wait to see him leave. Staff were still scarred and distrustful from years of layoffs, and Nancy Rockwell had already departed a few years before. After Meinen's retirement, he continued to work with OPRD on a temporary basis, under Acting Director Laurie Warner, to ease the transition and wrap up a few acquisition projects. Although multiple heads of the state park system, including Sam Boardman and Dave Talbot, had done similar part time work after their resignation to transition projects, this arrangement enraged the legislature. Watchdog groups claimed that Meinen was being given the state equivalent of a golden parachute. Meinen commented on the backlash from the legislature, now a very familiar occurrence, by saying simply, "I carried my load." A leader of state parks during its most tumultuous eight years, Meinen wished his successors luck, knowing full well that they would need it. He believed that the lottery funds would help stabilize the budget, but he also knew that revenue outside of the unstable flow of lottery funding would be necessary. In an interview, he said, "You can put sugar coating on it, and you probably can have some freedom over the next biennium from severe cuts and things like that, but the reality is that our system needs a certain level of operational money to be a success."³⁵⁶

More than the need for money, Meinen also came to understand that "Oregonians are not going to tolerate compromise." There was an expectation of high caliber recreational facilities, and any compromise or cuts to those services would be met with anger on the part of the visitor. The way to avoid these cuts to services, Meinen believed, was for the voting public to maintain a watchful eye on park funding, and, just as they had with Measure 66, continue to advocate for parks. To create advocates OPRD needed to educate the public on the importance of these parks. Meinen said, "if we don't make them familiar with the outdoor resources that they have, they won't treasure them." Despite the conflict with staff and legislators that would be the defining legacy of this era, Meinen believed that he made a tough situation better, sometimes at a great cost. He said, "I came into the organization when it needed a change in vision and set a positive course... I've accomplished a lot of what I set out to do." Meinen also offered something his successor should keep in mind. No matter what a Director does, or how tightly the parks are managed, "you are going to run into issues that are going to make legislators unhappy."³⁵⁷

And this was certainly the case for Laurie Warner, who took over as Deputy Director when Rockwell stepped down in 1999, and Acting Director when Meinen resigned in 2000. Most of her brief time in charge was spent trying to keep all of the plates in the air. "The major challenge... was the political side," she remembered. Being Meinen's successor left her under a cloud. But she also had to balance the needs of the environment with the desires of ATV users, freshly put under OPRD purview and a "very focused and vocal group advocating

356 Harry Esteve, "Workers Leave with Golden Handshakes," *Oregonian* Feb 12, 2001, p. E01; Meinen, "Interview Transcription," 11.

357 Meinen, "Interview Transcription," 11-13; Mayes, "State Parks Panel Hunts for New Director."

for their interests.” And she had to deal with the “backlog on every front,” from preservation to planning to purchasing to the growing beast that was maintenance. The department was “still for the most part a work in progress.” Warner spent most of her time making sure the wheels didn’t fall off the bus before the department could be handed off to a permanent successor.³⁵⁸

The Box is Big Enough: **Carrier Calms the Storm**

Michael Carrier was approached by Bob Meinen at the National Association of State Parks Directors board meeting in Portland, where Meinen asked Carrier if he would be interested in his job. Despite the tenuous position of Oregon parks, Carrier chose to throw his hat in the ring. Previously the Division Administrator for Iowa State Parks and Recreation, Carrier remarked that he was ready for a new professional challenge. In his conversations with Meinen, he was no doubt informed of just the sort of challenge he was likely to face. A disgruntled legislature, new budget constraints, and a staff still reeling from the restructuring shake ups five years prior, Carrier would either be a breath of fresh air or a lightning rod. Legislators were pleased that the Commission chose someone from out of state and removed from the recent events at OPRD. They hoped that this would give everyone a fresh start, separating the growing pains of the 1990s from the (hopefully) smooth sailing into a new century. “I think it’s good that they went outside the state and brought in someone fresh,” Senator Lenn Hammond, a long-time critic of Meinen, said. “We can move on from here and forget the past.”³⁵⁹

During his tenure, Carrier focused on a “positive and transparent” relationship with both legislators and staff. He hoped to mend fences that had necessarily been broken during the 1990s. To do this, like many directors before him, Carrier logged a lot of “car time” meeting with local Friends groups, volunteers, and park staff. Carrier also worked to rebrand the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department as a natural and cultural resource agency, not just one focused on recreation, which had been the emphasis in the 1960s through the 1990s. The newly created Stewardship Division handled these programs, ranging from habitat protections to historic preservation. Carrier’s education and professional experience focused on the importance of these initiatives. He ushered in a new era of natural resources professionalization, but he was aware that these projects wouldn’t gain any traction without the support of staff, the

358 Laurie Warner, “Written Interview with Laurie Warner, Deputy Director & Director,” [Kate Schutt], 3 – 4, Folder: Kate Schutt Files— Guided Interview Questions with Directors, Dept. Directors, and Commission Chairs, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection .

359 Michael Carrier, “Written Interview with Michael Carrier, Director,” [Kate Schutt], Folder: Kate Schutt Files— Guided Interview Questions with Directors, Dept. Directors, and Commission Chairs, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Steve Mayes, “State Commissioners Tap Iowa Man to Run Oregon’s Park Department,” *Oregonian* May 20, 2000, p. B01.

public, and the still-fuming state legislature. One staff member remembered that Carrier urged staff to “find ways to say yes” to both legislators and the public as an effort to combat the negativity of the previous decade.³⁶⁰

Carrier attempted to create an atmosphere of openness, but OPRD was far more rigid and “by the book” than it had been under Meinen. Claude Crocker remembered, “Carrier was about stewardship. He was not interested in camping or being entrepreneurial. He was tired of hearing about thinking outside of the box. He would say, ‘The box is big enough. Stay inside it.’ ” This outlook extended to the slush funds, campaigning, and other rogue activities that had kept the park system afloat during the leaner years. Carrier was a rules follower and he expected the same from his staff. Dave Wright echoed this sentiment, remembering a shift away from “commercializing the system.” “To me,” Wright said, “I felt like the darkness of the growing years was lifting.”

As the darkness lifted and long-term planning became an option again, it became apparent that years of backlogged maintenance would need immediate action. At the same time, the public and legislators that fought for parks wanted to return to an era of land acquisition after a long period of the status quo. Laurie Warner remembered, “the Parks Commission wanted to [do] as much as quickly as possible.” Carrier had to balance the need for infrastructure updates and more public-facing park development. He had modest successes in historic preservation, and modest failures in yet another attempt to jumpstart the perennially stalled Willamette Greenway. Although Carrier laid the foundation for broader changes, it would be his successor that would be called on to see them to completion.³⁶¹

Michael Carrier’s tenure was one of quiet redirection, out of the fire of funding debates and into the business of glad-handing the political forces that had brought the organization to task for mismanagement real and perceived. Carrier believed his success was in his transparency. He was open with staff, the public, and the men and women in Salem that held the purse strings. This cordial relationship with the government led to Carrier’s appointment as the Natural Resources Advisor under Governor Kulongoski. His tenure at OPRD was short, only four years. Like Harold Schick, who saw the department through the tumultuous beginnings of professionalization, Carrier’s tenure can be viewed as a moment of transition. But where Schick had been disruptive, Carrier was restorative. The mission remained the same, but the pressure dropped several notches.³⁶²

360 “OPRD History Panel Discussion [2012],” p. 8.

361 Warner, “Written Interview with Laurie Warner, Deputy Director & Director,” p. 3; “OPRD History Panel Discussion [2012],” p. 8; Dave Wright, “Written Interview with Dave Wright, Deputy Director” [Kate Schutt], Folder: Kate Schutt Files— Guided Interview Questions with Directors, Dept. Directors, and Commission Chairs; Gerry Frank, “Silverton Offers Great Burgers, Scenery,” *Oregonian* Oct 25, 2002, p. A18; Stuart Tomlinson, “Vista House Project Allowed to Resume,” *Oregonian* Jan 23, 2004, p. B02; Jonathan Nicholas, “An Idea Whose Time Just Came,” *Oregonian* Aug 13, 2004, p. E01; “OPRD Given Action Plan to Revitalize Greenway,” *FYI* 602 (Oct. 2 – 8, 2005), p. 1.

362 “Commission Bids Mike Carrier Farewell; Taps Tim Wood as Acting Director,” *FYI* 546 (Aug 1 – 7, 2004), p. 1.

After a nationwide search for Carrier’s replacement, the Parks Commission decided to go with a known entity to lead the parks system, Tim Wood. Wood had been with the agency since 1998, and under Carrier, held the role of Field Operations Manager. Previously, Wood worked with the US Army and the Army Corps of Engineers, including a posting as chief operating officer for the greater part of Oregon and Washington, where he gained local and national recognition for his response to the floods of 1996. A man known to the department as steadfast in his dedication to the mission and able to take on large and complex projects, Wood seemed like a steady hand for a department that had experienced its share of shakeups over the previous decade. Wood’s tenure would see the highs of new park openings and a push to inclusivity in both staff and visitors, and the lows of an economic downturn that again threatened park funding.³⁶³

All of These Demands Added Up: **Tim Wood and the Cost of Saying Yes**

In 2007, OPRD’s annual revenue from the Lottery Fund peaked at \$65 million. The same year, the recession took hold in Oregon and throughout the nation. Until 2013, the Lottery Fund suffered losses each year, proving that this funding source lacked the stability the department desperately required. In addition to economic downturns, OPRD inherited multiple money-draining programs that strained their financial and administrative capacities. Legislators



Taking on the responsibility—and debt—of the State Fair and Expo Center was an unpleasant surprise to Parks leadership, and strained staff capacity for years.

363 “Acting No Longer... Tim Wood Appointed Director,” *FYI* 558 (Oct 24 – 30, 2004), p. 1.; *FYI* 220 (Dec 5, 1997).

offered fee waivers for certain groups using the park system, which cut into a budget already stretched thin. New programs included the State Capitol grounds and the financially disastrous State Fair and Expo Center—dubbed by parks advocates a “30-mile-high stack of manure.”³⁶⁴

In July 2005, Governor Kulongoski let House Bill 3502 pass into law “without the benefit of his signature.” This piece of legislation abolished the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center as a separate entity and transferred its management to OPRD. The governor felt that this move challenged the intent of Measure 66 by unloading another struggling program onto the state parks system and that there was not an appropriate amount of public debate, but he wouldn’t stop its passage. During an August Commission meeting, Commission Chair John Blackwell began discussion on this issue with, “The day isn’t long enough to vent all of our emotions about the Oregon State Fair.” Both poorly managed and not financially viable, the State Fair was, to the Commission, just another responsibility that would siphon off money that should go to the real business of operating parks. Commissioner David Kottkamp tried to look on the bright side: “I think we have to note that in a backhanded way this is a compliment to the staff—and maybe in a small measure the commission, that we’ve done a good job running our business.” But, he continued, diverting resources and time to this project, “distresses me to no end.” Disgusted by the new law, Kottkamp very publicly quit just a few weeks after sounding his distress. The Commission hoped that the State Fair would be a temporary addition to the park’s portfolio, but, while it was under the parks umbrella, staff would be asked to “brace and take on the task.”³⁶⁵

Carrier’s mandate to “find a way to say yes” increased the expectations placed on parks, and as Bob Meinen had warned, working to please politicians was a zero-sum game. The more that the State Parks system seemed to be economically responsible and well-managed, the more programs OPRD was “asked” to take on. The public also clamored for a more involved and diverse park system, requiring OPRD to take on scenic bikeways and cultural heritage projects, in addition to more traditional parks focused on camping and boating. Wood wrote “All of these demands added up to millions and millions of dollars of new commitments OPRD was expected to make, on a shrinking revenue stream, and with mounting maintenance and staffing costs for the existing sprawling State Park System.”³⁶⁶

Perhaps the flashiest of these new park programs was Governor Kulongoski’s Park-A-Year mandate, announced in 2004 while Mike Carrier was still Director, in which one new park would be purchased, built, and opened each year of Kulongoski’s term. This focus on acquisition, rather than the less glamorous work of maintenance and staffing, has long captured the imaginations

364 Wood, “Looking Back from 2013,” p. 3; “Oregon’s Newest Park: The Fair,” *Oregonian* Aug 26, 2005, p. D10.

365 Jo Bell, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, August 4, 2005, pp. 12-13, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection.

366 Wood, “Looking Back from 2013,” p. 4.

of visitors, advisory boards, and legislators. One of the key complaints levied against Chet Armstrong in the 1950s, as he had struggled to introduce camping amenities to former waysides, was the dearth of new acquisition. One of the key arguments made by Talbot and Meinen in their quest for funding had been the lack of new acquisitions. Looking back on his tenure, Tim Wood saw the Park-A-Year mandate, however successful it was from a public relations perspective, as a shortsighted policy that ignored the still-sizable maintenance backlog that threatened existing parks.

Governor Kulongoski, however, remembered a different financial situation. When a representative from his office was asked about the program, they responded,

Thanks to ballot Measure 66... OPRD has been given a wonderful opportunity for adequate funding and expansion at a time when parks in other states are closing... [the Governor's] love for parks and the value they add to the lives of citizens was a powerful motivator to ensure that the significant investment that citizens made in 1998 and 2010 was represented by several new parks to serve future generations.

With the Park-A-Year program, Measure 66 had taken on new political meaning. Rather than an effort to protect the parks from closure, this wellspring of money was now meant to grow a system already frayed at the edges.³⁶⁷



“Stub” Stewart State Park was perhaps the shiniest example of Governor Kulongoski’s “park a year” program that celebrated the largesse of Lottery funding.

³⁶⁷ Office of Ted Kulongoski, “Written Interview with Ted Kulongoski, Governor” [Kate Schutt], Folder: Kate Schutt Files— Guided Interview Questions with Directors, Dept. Directors, and Commission Chairs. “New” parks were sometime developed from existing acquisitions—Chris Havel, personal communication, Oct 1 2020.

The most symbolic opening was L.L. “Stub” Stewart State Park in 2007. This was billed as the first new “full service” park—a park that included a campground—since 1972. Located in Washington County, the park, originally named Hares Canyon, was aptly renamed for the man known as “Mr. Oregon State Parks,” “an unwavering, untiring advocate and promoter of Oregon’s state park system.” Stewart had served on the State Parks Advisory Board as well as the Commission before stepping down in 2000, the longest-serving advisory member, remembered for his push to bring more women on as voting members and his relentless respect for the bottom line. He had died in early 2005, still setting up new endowments for the good of Oregon practically with his last breath. Wood noted that “Stub” had been key in “forging the Department into a system of state parks and outdoor recreation programs that has gained national recognition.” This park, it was hoped, could signify the end of dark times within the Oregon State Parks system, the important role of volunteers (especially volunteers with money) in the history of parks, and a new era of growth and prosperity. The park was dedicated in 2007, mere months before the Great Recession hit.³⁶⁸

To accomplish this mandate, Wood had to pull resources from other parks, delay maintenance projects, and compound resentments among park employees. Manager Kevin Price remembered,

[The] Park a Year program... fostered the “them and us” feeling. When Stub Stewart was being built managers had to ask for help from each region and they were told “guess what, you are paying for your staff to work at Stub Stewart.” That caused more resentment.

The new parks opened during this period became valued additions to the parks system, but the mandate also highlighted the strings attached to the lottery funding. Saying no to one’s bosses in government, as Meinen had learned, could bring swift and terrible budgetary retaliation. But saying yes came with its own costs.³⁶⁹

We Need to Move Forward: **Steps Toward Inclusion**

The 1990s required park staff to look inward, handling the immediate needs of money and staffing that threatened the organization. As the dust cleared, more staff started to see that Oregon State Parks and Recreation was walking out of step with the rest of the state. Since the beginnings of park surveys in the 1950s, there was an assumed “ideal” park visitor: Young families

368 Alice Tallmadge, “‘Stub’ Stewart, Timber Baron, Lawmaker, Dies at 93,” *Oregonian* Jan 4, 2005; Jo Bell, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, January 27, 2005, p. 2, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection.

369 “OPRD History Panel Discussion [2012],” p. 3.

or retirees, middle or upper middle class, and avid recreationist, whether it be boating, swimming, or the ever popular “loafing” of the 1960s. It went unsaid in these early surveys, but these ideal guests were also largely White and able-bodied, in addition to appropriately well-off. By the 1980s, Parks took a look at those people that were being knowingly or unknowingly excluded from their parks. But finding remedies would be a long and faltering process.

New attempts at inclusion sometimes came from below. In 1973, long before accessibility became a matter of national law in 1990, the volunteer program at Tryon Creek State Park created interpretive programs tailored to people with disabilities. Parks leadership quickly saw the utility and morality of such programs. By the early 1980s, the Oregon State Parks Guide listed accessible parks and waysides, and there were moves to consider accessibility when building and remodeling. Accessibility goals were integrated into park plans and guidelines formally in 1988. In 2004, the issue of accessibility came face to face with the issue of historic preservation. Vista House, a historic structure and landmark of the Columbia River Gorge, was in the midst of a years-long restoration when the issue of accessibility features was brought to Carrier’s attention.

Many groups—ODOT, the Historic Columbia River Highway Advisory Committee, some among the park staff—grew concerned that plans for wheelchair access to and within all levels of the building would significantly detract from the exterior and interior features of the building. Mike Carrier, meeting with the concerned parties, held firm that access to the building would be a mandatory feature of any restoration work, and that only the specifics of the design could be negotiated. Remembering this altercation years later, park staff recalled that it was “an unpopular but principled decision.” Tim Wood continued the fight over ramps at Vista House, acknowledging that it was important to strike a balance between the architectural beauty of the building and the needs of visitors. He would strive to strike a balance “between all interested persons and competing interests,” But he also stressed that “we need to move forward.” Eventually, OPRD found a pragmatic third way. A semi-concealed lift with period-appropriate accents was installed in 2006, making the whole structure accessible to those with mobility issues without mortally offending preservationists.³⁷⁰

Moves toward accessible buildings, larger campsites for handicap vehicles, and other amenities geared towards visitors with disabilities began in the 1970s, but programs geared toward more culturally diverse Oregonians would not follow until the 2000s. In 2006, the Oregon Statewide Comprehensive

370 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, April 1, 1977, p. 2, Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; John Elliott, “Questions and Answers Regarding State Parks” (Aug 26, 1982), p. 3, OPRD Digital Archive [unfiled]; 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan” (Salem: Oregon Parks and Recreation Division, Department of Transportation, 1988), p. 7, Box: Strategic Plans 1956 – 2012, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; “OPRD History Panel Discussion [2012],” p. 8; Jo Bell, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, December 16, 2004, Meeting Brief # 17, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Jo Bell, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, December 16, 2004, p. 10, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; <https://vistahouse.com/accessibility/>.

Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) looked specifically at two growing Oregon populations, retirees and minorities, and speculated about activities that might drive these groups to more regularly visit parks. In the resulting report it was noted that “the results of a statewide SCORP mail survey of Hispanic and Asian-American households show that members of the two minorities engage in fewer outdoor recreation activities, and in fewer numbers, than the general population.”

The “Let’s Go Camping” program taught families camping know-how and was designed to make parks more freely accessible to those less familiar with the outdoors. In 2006, the Oregon State Parks guide was printed in Spanish for the first time. Still, these efforts fell short in making parks more representative of the state as a whole. By 2017, it was clear that a more seismic shift would be necessary, after that year’s “Let’s Go Camping” event when “visitors from another group directed racial epithets toward program participants who were using the restroom facilities.” The same year, park staff debates over the appropriateness of a confederate flag during Civil War reenactments at Fort Stevens State Park began to confront racism more directly (see below).³⁷¹

These small advances ignored larger issues of stereotyping and a lack of representation that made parks unwelcoming spaces for minority populations. Focus groups conducted on the heels of the 2006 SCORP noted that it was stereotyping rather than a lack of interest that kept Black communities from using Oregon parks. Kevin Price, the first and at times only African American park manager in the first 100 years of Oregon State Parks, added that there was no education or marketing of parks to people of color. “People come from all over the world to see the scenery in the Columbia River Gorge, yet we’ve found that kids living only 20 miles away don’t know it exists.” Price worked with Black communities to open the door for more diverse visitors. One of his more famous programs brought students from Martin Luther King Jr. School in Portland to state parks along the Columbia Gorge. Price believed that experiencing the outdoors on guided tours with Black rangers eased the fears of some school children who were taught or internalized a certain discomfort with wild spaces. This program drew new visitors to Gorge parks, and OPRD made a glossy video praising Price and his program. But this was not followed by any systematic statewide equivalent that might directly engage with minority populations to encourage visitation.³⁷²

371 “SCORP to Target Social Issues,” *FYI* 616 (Jan 29 – Feb 4, 2006), p. 3; “Potential Camping Interest Emerges in Latest Minority Recreation Survey,” *FYI* 695 (Sept 2 – 8, 2007), p. 1; “State Parks Guide Now in Español,” *FYI* 716 (Feb 10 – 16, 2008), p. 1; “Director’s Office: Recent Incidents Shed Light on What It Means to Be Inclusive” *FYI* 2.0 Sept 22, 2017, p. 1; Jean Thompson, Personal Communication, July 24 2020.

372 “Black History Observance, SCORP Research Target Barriers,” *FYI* 665 (Feb 4 – 10, 2007), p. 1; Jennifer Anderson, “Boosting Diversity at Oregon State Parks,” *Sustainable Life* Aug 1, 2017; “Park Manager Kevin Price reflects on his 35-year career with the Oregon State Parks” [video], –Aug 2018, <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/emp/Pages/EMP-overview.aspx>; Jean Thompson, Personal Communication, Aug 26 2020.

It Is Natural as Anything: **Continued Fights for Affirmative Action**

As staff took a long look at the lack of representation in park visitors, the SCORP also recommended that Oregon State Parks needed to diversify their staff which would, it was hoped, create an environment of inclusion on all levels. The lack of representation among rangers and Headquarters staff was something that Dave Talbot noted in the 1990s. Kevin Price, when reflecting in 2007 on more than 20 years of service with OPRD, said “I still attend too many meetings where I’m the only Black person there... Some days, the only person of African American descent I see in our parks, let alone meetings, is Lavern Watson, our office manager. I’d like to see that change.” Price suggested that staffing should to reflect Oregon’s population: in 2007, he was one of only four Black OPRD employees statewide. OPRD had kept a passive eye on these racial disparities among staff since the era of Dave Talbot, but it became clear in the 2000s that OPRD needed to take an active role in education, training, and advocacy for more diverse staff and visitors in park spaces. In 2014, executive leadership identified inclusion, both among employees and park visitors, as a key strategic initiative of the coming years. Director Van Laanen (see below) acknowledged that parks were failing in “our ability to reach the full spectrum of Oregon citizens, regardless of race, ability, economic background, geography, or affinity for what we see as traditional recreational pursuits.” So a committee was formed.³⁷³

Inequalities in representation were brought to the forefront in the era of Affirmative Action, but discrimination in the workplace was an issue of Oregon State Parks from its inception (see Chapter 4). In 1983, Maureen Kurtz, the Affirmative Action Coordinator reported to the Advisory Committee that “women and minorities are underutilized in certain jobs within State Parks.” Four years later, Kurtz reported some improvement in the hiring of women and that “minority representation in Office/Clerical and Service/Maintenance categories remains above parity.” It is unclear from the source whether the fact that minoritized people held a high number of clerical and maintenance positions was meant to applaud the efforts of the Affirmative Action program or to highlight the fact that minoritized people were being hired for blue and pink collar positions rather than more elevated roles. By 1989, only 16 percent of the 140 Oregon State Park rangers were women. The racial background of employees was not noted.³⁷⁴

373 “Black History Observance, SCORP Research Target Barriers,” p. 1; “Director’s Column” FYI 2.0 (Dec. 12, 2014), p. 1.

374 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 9, 1983, p. 8, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 4, 1987, p. 9, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; There were multiple park employees with Spanish names and surnames employed by Oregon Parks and Recreation by the 1980s; it is unclear how many of them were Hispanic or Latinx. “Changes Transform ODOT Workforce,” *Via News: Oregon Department of Transportation* 9:10 (Oct 1984).

A 1989 article in *Via*, published through the Oregon Department of Transportation, noted that sexual harassment claims were on the rise in Oregon, though they blamed the uptick on “more men and women working side by side” rather than on the toxic norms of abusive masculinity many employees still embraced. In ODOT, 12 allegations of sexual harassment were investigated in 1989, though the Parks and Recreation Department had no formal sexual harassment investigations in 1988 or 1989. Operations analyst Deb Schallert was quick to note that the lack of formal complaints did not mean that Parks were without issues, “It’s not that sexual harassment isn’t a problem at Parks. It’s just that things aren’t escalating.” The two complaints made in 1989 were “resolved at the local level.”³⁷⁵

Unlike workers in earlier eras—the “girls with pretty eyes” regularly ogled and demeaned by coworkers—those facing sexual discrimination and harassment during this period had recourse. In 1987 a “seasonal employee at Wallowa Lake State Park was charged with sexual misconduct by the division, based on allegations by fellow employees. Concerns for employee and park visitor safety resulted in his removal from employment and investigation of charges.” Despite the complaints of multiple employees, the removal could not be “justified,” and the man who was fired sued on the grounds of emotional distress. This case, brought to the attention of the Advisory Committee, showcased a new effort on the part of the Parks system to investigate claims and act swiftly to protect employees. But it also demonstrates how difficult such changes can be in a hostile cultural climate. The man had been accused by multiple employees, and those accusations had purportedly been taken seriously. But apparently multiple witnesses and allegations were not enough to “justify” the complaint, and the man was able to bring a lawsuit credible enough that the Advisory Committee needed to know about it.³⁷⁶

Changes among staff were stilted and largely tactical. The 1960s culture of parks, the old jokes and the boys’ club mentality, stayed largely intact into the next decades. Affirmative action and sexual harassment policies were brought into the organization through federal and state mandates. Unlike the old *Oregon Park Times*, the new internal newsletter *FYI* did not feature regular stories making light of sexual harassment by perpetually ogle-some male employees. But below the surface of officialdom, the fraternity of workers went unchallenged. “I’m afraid our organization is guilty of some ‘good ol’ boy’ mentality,” Dave Talbot said in 1990. “It is natural as anything.” And that societal presumption about what was “natural” haunted all attempts at inclusion or representation in parks.³⁷⁷

375 “Sexual Harassment on the Rise,” *Via News: Oregon Department of Transportation* 15:1 (Jan. 1990), p. 1.

376 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 4, 1987, pp. 13 - 14, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 - 1989, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

377 David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” May 16, 1990, Interview with Lawrence C. Merriam and Elisabeth Walton Potter, p. 118, Folder: Administrative History - Oral History - David G. Talbot, Director, 1964 - 1992, Box: Staff Biographies and Oral Histories, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.



For decades, women were almost never considered for field management jobs. By the 2000s, that picture was beginning to change.

Lisa Van Laanen (later Sumption) was interviewed by the *Statesman Journal* in 2015, after a year as the Director of State Parks. An employee of the parks department since 2007, Van Laanen was already familiar with the Parks system before she had been tapped to lead it. When asked if she faced any hardships as the first woman serving permanently in the role, she replied:

This is honestly the first time I've thought about it ... I've never felt like I have to show up different because I'm in a male-dominated organization. I work with people who love what they do, who know that I love what I do, and that's the most important thing. So, thank goodness no, it hasn't been a hurdle at all.

Others working within OPRD saw the positive changes from earlier eras but still urged the organization to strive for more. As one employee said in 2013:

Initially, in the '90s, OPRD was a male dominated, hierarchical agency. New, strong, qualified women brought a sense and reality of equality... However, the culture was still fairly closed as far as acceptance went.... The "good 'ol boys" network was slow to change and open.

Women were able to rise through the ranks of the parks system, and staff training on sexual harassment gave marginalized workers opportunities for advancement and legal recourse for any claims of harassment. But disparities still existed and exclusion would still partially define working within parks.³⁷⁸

378 Zach Urness, "Parks Leader Charts New Direction for Oregon," *Statesman Journal*, March 5, 2015; "Draft OPRD History Questionnaire, 1990 – Present [2013]," pp. 29 – 30, Folder: Kate Schutt Records – More Kate Schutt Records, Oregon Parks and Recreation Digital Archive. As is often the case with more subtle forms of discrimination, it can be difficult to parse potential sexism in records from the 2000s and 2010s. Many of the mostly male participants in a 2012 group oral history of the turbulent 1990s described Nancy Rockwell as an especially divisive and aggressive member of the executive team. But it is unclear the extent to which those descriptions reflected her role and attitude as Meinen's enforcer, and to what extent they reflected sexist biases (unconscious or otherwise) among participants. "OPRD History Panel Discussion [2012]"; Deborah A. Prentice and Erica Caranza, "What Women and Men Should Be, Shouldn't Be, Are Allowed to Be, and Don't Have to Be: The Contents of Proscriptive Gender Stereotypes," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 26:4 (2002): pp. 269 – 281.

You're in Our Country: **Indigenous Nations Working with Parks**

Although progress in the realm of inclusivity came slowly, efforts to include and honor Indigenous nations within the park system leapt forward in the 2000s. In 1990, the federal government enacted the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Although specifically relevant to gravesites and only mandated for organizations that received federal funding, this legislation encouraged states to examine their treatment of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and objects. Prior to NAGPRA, the treatment of Indigenous remains and objects was left largely unregulated and no clear-cut legal recourse existed for Indian nations in the event that burial sites were found, looted, or destroyed. A 1969 Oregon State Parks newsletter highlights the confusion over handling of remains:

Elisabeth Walton has three boxes of bones in her room

On October 9 Joe Davis of Champoeg brought the three boxes of skeletal remains (presumed to be Indian) unearthed during construction on private land, about 12 miles north of Champoeg. The bones were offered to the park after having been offered to OMSI and the Oregon Historical Society. She is transferring them to the University of Oregon Museum of Natural History for study.

Walton had reason to believe that the remains in her office were Chinook, but it didn't occur to any of the people who handled these boxes to contact anyone of Chinook descent to weigh in. NAGPRA was designed to avoid instances like this.³⁷⁹

In 2019, Nancy J. Nelson, Oregon State Parks archaeologist, determined that most state park properties had at least one precontact archaeological site. To respectfully handle these sites and train staff on appropriate management, OPRD held its first archaeological training in 2005 and the first archaeologist for OPRD was hired in 2006. This signified a shift in the relationship between Indian nations and Oregon State Parks. OPRD for the first time acknowledged their role as stewards for lands that were violently taken (see Chapter 1).³⁸⁰

The purpose of the trainings was to bring Indigenous people into discussions of appropriate use of lands, help staff understand the importance of certain natural resources to cultural identity, and create reciprocal relationships between park employees and tribal nations. Most importantly, staff were

379 "MEANWHILE BACK AT THE OFFICE," *Oregon State Park Times* 7:3[?] (Nov. 1969), p. 18, Folder: Staff Newsletter – Park Times – 1969, Box: Publications – Staff Newsletters, 1963 – 1994, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

380 Nancy J. Nelson, "Tribes and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department—Partnerships in Training, Repatriation, and Traditional Plant Gathering," in Dennis G. Griffin *et al.*, "The State of Oregon and Nine Federally-Recognized Tribes Forge a Path Forward," *Journal of Northwest Anthropology* 55:1 (2021), pp. 173 – 184, esp. p. 2.

given clear guidelines on when and how to involve tribal leadership in the decision-making process on state park land. In 2003, a policy was drafted that “permit[ed] Native Americans to conduct traditional plant collecting and ceremonial activities on OPRD owned or managed property.” Programs extended to include appropriate training for law enforcement when looting is discovered, a problem that was once common among park visitors and park staff alike (see chapter 4). In 2008, OPRD began the process of repatriation more than 5,000 artifacts looted from lands belonging to the Klamath and housed at Collier Memorial State Park. The slow process of cataloguing and returning these objects took nearly a decade to complete. Going beyond the requirements of NAGPRA to attempt the spirit, not just the letter, of the law, this repatriation effort signaled the changes that could be made when ongoing relationships are developed between OPRD and Indigenous communities.³⁸¹

The return of physical objects and open communications between OPRD and Indian nations was one step. Another was acknowledging Oregon State Parks’ own history of erasing Indigenous nations from the narrative of the Oregon. At Champoege State Heritage Site, a traveling exhibit titled “Oregon is Indian Country” designed by the Oregon Historical Society and the nine recognized Indigenous nations of Oregon was brought in. Together with new interpretation linking Champoege to its Kalapuya origins, the exhibit helped to dispel some of the White pageantry usually associated with Champoege as the seat of a new territorial government. During the restoration of Vista House, the Parks Commission requested that Indigenous history be featured in any new interpretive displays and, more importantly, that local Indigenous nations be consulted in the creation of that exhibit. These small acts in re-framing Oregon history showcase the very tentative steps State Parks took in the 2000s, and highlight that there is still much more to be done.³⁸²

In 2009, Oregon State Parks and Recreation opened the first park that explicitly acknowledged the location’s ties to Indigenous history. Named Iwetemlaykin, Nez Perce for “at the edge of the lake,” this was the first park created with input from multiple Indigenous councils at the onset. The Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, and Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation all partnered with Oregon State Parks in the acquisition and development of this park. Located in the Wallowa Lake Basin, this site is adjacent to the Nez Perce National Historical Park.³⁸³

381 Angie Springer, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, January 23, 2003, p. 7, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Nelson, “Tribes and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department—Partnerships in Training, Repatriation, and Traditional Plant Gathering”; “Site Stewards Sought to Keep an Eye on Park Archaeological Treasures,” *FYI* 802 (Dec 6 – 12, 2009), pp. 3 – 4.

382 “Traveling Historical Exhibit at Champoege Focuses on Native American Heritage,” *FYI* 802 (Dec 6 – 12, 2009), pp. 4 – 5; Angie Springer, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, June 19, 2003, p.2, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; David G. Lewis, “The Spirit of Colonization of Indian Country: Vista House and American Nationalism,” *Quartux Journal* Sept 4, 2017.

383 “Iwetemlaykin Timeline on Pace for September Opening,” *FYI* 765 (March 1 – 7, 2009), p. 1.

The Parks Commission met with representatives of the tribal nations of the Willowa Lake Basin in 2005 to discuss the potential of a park in the area. Joseph McCormack, speaking on behalf of the Nez Perce General Tribal Council, appealed to the Commission for the protection of certain key lands in the area:

We feel that we need help in this and we approach this Board to help collaborate in the securing of this area for the future of the tribal people and also for the citizens of Oregon. It's very imperative that our people continue to be able to come here and celebrate this area knowing that our ancestors had always done so. . . . We are not a people that has vanished. We continue to revere this lake.

Bobbie Conner, speaking on behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and a retiring member of the State Parks Commission, urged not just the protection of sacred spaces, but also a rethinking of how state parks handled notions of “ownership” and “cultural significance.”

I find it ironic that you're in our country, from which we were dispossessed—for anyone else to possess it now required dispossession from us—and you're asking us to prove what we know to be true. . . . It is strange that a people whose history is no-impact and low-impact camping are now being required to dig holes to prove that we know that there is something there. Again, we're not talking about the rules that exist, because you only have the responsibility for making sure that they're carried out. But I would like to challenge one of the rules. . . . modify the regulation so that it does not use the word 'site,' but instead 'landscape or 'area.'

Requiring a “site,” Conner argued, meant that Native people had to comply with a potentially violating act of archaeology just to prove, in the eyes of American law, what they already knew—that their homelands were their homelands. Iwetemlaykin was eventually made into a cultural area as requested, with the financial assistance and collaboration of the three Indigenous nations most closely tied to the lake, and despite contentious meetings characterized by racial tensions. It was, as Nez Perce Vice Chair Brooklyn Baptiste said at the dedication, a way to “bring a little peace,” and perhaps to serve as an “example. . . of what can be done to heal those wounds, what can be done to make amends in some way. . . . to work together toward a common goal.” But the issue Bobbie Conner raised remained. OPRD had taken significant steps towards inclusion, particularly when it came to Indigenous issues. But what about when inclusion isn't enough? ³⁸⁴

384 Jo Bell, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, September 22, 2005, pp. 1-5, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Terry Richard, “Memorize Iwetemlaykin: It Will Be Famous,” *Oregonian* March 9, 2009; “Iwetemlaykin: At the Edge of the Lake, a State Park Is Born,” *La Grande Observer*, Oct 15, 2009; Brooklyn Baptiste, “Iwetemlaykin Grand Opening - Part 5” [video], Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, uploaded Dec. 16, 2009.

Exterminate Every One: **Reckoning with a Problematic Past**

Oregon Parks and Recreation has long approached the creation of history collaboratively. From Champoeg onward, most historical sites in the state parks system came from dedicated individuals on the ground excited about a particular site or aspect of history. Interpretation, so often on the budgetary chopping block, has frequently been the purview of enthusiastic amateurs, invested volunteers, or rangers with a particular passion. This has spurred expansions and changes in interpretation. In 1994, for example, Ranger Kelly Brady and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla put on a tribal living history event at Emigrant Springs State Park—the very spot where President Harding had celebrated the violent conquest of Native America some 70 years before (see Chapter 1). But although individual passions could lead to positive changes, they could also mean that popular historical narratives would become ingrained in the state parks system, even when scholarship has moved past or challenged them.³⁸⁵

In the 2000s and 2010s, efforts were made to bring forward previously excluded narratives. Kam Wah Chung, a vital site for the history of people of Chinese descent in 19th century Oregon, went from afterthought to a prized jewel of the historic park system. During the restoration of Vista House, the Parks Commission asked that Indigenous history be featured in any new interpretive displays and, more importantly, that local Indigenous nations be consulted in the creation of that exhibit. In 2004, the Parks Commission approved an updated policy that “allows for Tribal consultation in the naming process if there is a tribal cultural affiliation with the property.”³⁸⁶

This new naming policy was a tangible move toward avoiding repetition of the mistakes of the past. But it did nothing to redress them. Naming practices for parks in the past have celebrated colonialism and violence. In 1979, Dexter State Park was rededicated as Elijah Bristow State Park, meant to honor Bristow as the “first white settler in Lane County.” Following the recommendations of the Lane County Historical Society and the subsequent approval of the Advisory Committee, Parks and Recreation overlooked the fact that they were naming a park after a settler who was known to have shot a Klamath man in the back, threatened to “exterminate every one” of that Klamath man’s friends and companions, and a little later beat a visiting Klickitat person half to death for no clear reason other than “to show courage.” These anecdotes were indisputably known to the Lane County Historical Society, which had published them as part of a celebratory history of Bristow in 1968. Whether Oregon Parks and Recreation was aware of this history at any level is unknown—they were, after all, just

385 FYI 51 (1994). This was far from the only such partnership—see for example the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs involvement in Lake Billy Chinook Days, FYI 208 (Sept 5, 1997).

386 Angie Springer, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, February 26, 2004, p. 7, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Angie Springer, State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, June 19, 2003, p.2, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection

listening to the experts. But the racist renaming showcases the ease with which “pioneer” history continues unchallenged.³⁸⁷

By design, inclusion adds to, rather than replaces, existing narratives. While it was at Champoege, the “Oregon Is Indian Country” exhibit may have been a counterpoint of sorts. And there have been other moves to bring the Indigenous history of Champoege to the forefront. In 2018, for example, OPRD co-hosted a “Champoege Celebration” with the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. Harkening back to the Indigenous and etymological roots of the site—Champoege’s name is derived from a Chinook word for the edible roots cultivated and gathered there—the event was yet another result of the carefully built partnerships between OPRD and Oregon’s Indigenous communities.³⁸⁸

But “history” at the site in the 2010s was still dominated by the historical narratives that were popular at the time of its foundation in the 1900s. “Living history” reenactments, which can do so much to engage visitors, also run the risk of repeating harmful historical narratives. Volunteers dressed up as “pioneers” or “mountain men” in multiple parks have typically ignored the racism, theft, rape, murder, and genocide that typified the conquest of Oregon in the 1840s and 50s, focusing instead on demonstrations of trapping, farming, and “pioneering” unencumbered by the historical reality of violence (see Chapter 1). Native people continued to be largely absent from the events and the narrative—except for the redface portrayals of largely Euro-American women pretending to be the Metis/Native wives of fur trappers in re-enactments. The racism of the pageantry billed as “what life was like in the 1800s” most likely sprang from ignorance more than malice. And formally ending it at Champoege might even require legal action, as OPRD has arguably been mandated by law to “encourage the further development of the pageant and promote increased attendance at its performances.” But whatever their ultimate fate, “pioneer” reenactments illustrate the thornier issues of history in state parks. Adding new stories is generally popular. Removing racist narratives can be harder.³⁸⁹

This issue came to a head over the Confederate flag. At least as early as 1990, Civil War reenactors were performing in Oregon State Parks, especially

387 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, March 22, 1979, pp. 2 – 3, Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; Fannie Leggett, “A Short Historical Sketch of a Part of the Bristow Family,” *Lane County Historian* 13:3 (Fall 1968): 63 – 68; Marc James Carpenter, “Pioneer Problems: ‘Wanton Murder,’ Indian War Veterans, and Oregon’s Violent History,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 121:2 (Summer 2020): pp. 156 – 185. These stories of violence were the ones Bristow bragged of publicly; there is no reason to believe that he did not commit other acts of violence deemed less suitable for public consumption. The “Dexter” in what was Dexter State Park purportedly came from the name of a cookstove.

388 Danielle Frost, “Champoege Celebration Attracts 100 Attendees Interested in Native Plants,” *Smoke Signals* Oct 18, 2018.

389 Oregon State Parks and Recreation, “Champoege State Heritage Area Trappers Camp, 2017” (video), uploaded July 26, 2017; Collin Ellis, “Founders Day Celebrates History of Champoege,” *Newberg Graphic* May 2, 2019; ORS 186.30, “Champoege Historical Pageant as Official Statehood Pageant,” *CHAPTER 186—State Emblems; State Boundary* (Legislative Counsel Committee, 2019); Ann Virtù Snyder, “Location, Location, Location: Reflections of an Itinerant Practitioner,” *NWSA Journal* 17:2 (2005), pp. 142 – 149; Patrick McCarthy, “‘Living History’ as the ‘Real Thing’: A Comparative Analysis of the Modern Mountain Man Rendezvous, Renaissance Fairs, and Civil War Re-Enactments,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 71:2 (2014): pp. 106 – 123. C

Milo McIver and Fort Stevens. The mock battles, which took place over multiple days, drew thousands to Oregon state parks in the 1990s. The Northwest History Association was in charge of most of these events. They dabbled in other wars, once putting on a WWII demonstration at Fort Stevens that included pitting those dressed as US servicemen against those dressed as Nazi soldiers. But the Civil War was their focus. Like other “living history” re-enactors they focused on the attention to material conditions that could be brought to life. Like other “living history” reenactors they glossed over the violent racism (though not the other violence) that was so central to the history they were playing with. And like other Civil War re-enactors, those roleplaying as Confederates flew the Confederate battleflag, which retains its visceral power as a symbol of violent racism for many people of color *and* White supremacists in the Pacific Northwest. The Northwest History Association has always asserted that the use of Confederate iconography has been meant to reflect history rather than celebrate it—whether in flying the flag of slavery during their re-enactments on the grounds of state parks, or when wearing replicas of the uniforms of those who fought against the United States when they march in Veteran’s Day parades.³⁹⁰

In the September 2017 issue of *FYI*, unnamed “people of color in the agency” raised concerns with OPRD leadership about the effect that flying of the Confederate flag on parks property had on themselves and potentially on visitors. Leadership responded with a commitment to examine the issue. There was no official announcement about what followed. But special treatment of reenactors ended. Previously, they had gotten fee waivers for visiting and camping—no more. The non-profit Friends of Fort Stevens were asked by people within OPRD to stop advertising or assisting with the events. “[S]tate parks no longer want us here,” Northwest History Association Chairman Earl Bishop complained. And so the reenactors did not return to state parks in 2018, or after.³⁹¹

A call to re-examine a problematic practice may have led the leadership to forego at least some profit in the pursuit of racial justice. Civil war reenactments had first been encouraged during the “Wild West” of the 1990s, when park profits were paramount. They were reconsidered at a time when priorities had changed, but money was once again tight. Budget difficulties, briefly warded off in the early 2000s, came roaring back. Budget problems *always* came back.

390 Northwest Civil War Council, “Who We Are,” <https://www.nwcwc.net/who-we-are.html>; *FYI* 190 (Apr 25, 1997); *FYI* 237 (Apr 10, 1998); *FYI* 305 (Aug 27, 1999); *FYI* 825 (Sept. 10, 2010); Lizzy Acker, “White Nationalist Grad Student Responsible for Confederate Flag Hanging Across from Black Cultural Center in Corvallis, Police Say,” *Oregonian* Jan 26, 2018; Bennett Hall, “Reenactors Rise Again at Parade,” *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, Nov 11, 2019; James O. Farmer, “Playing Rebels: Reenactment as Nostalgia and Defense of the Confederacy in the Battle of Aiken,” *Southern Cultures* 11:1 (2005): pp. 46 – 73; Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1998).

391 “Director’s Office: Recent Incidents Shed Light On What It Means to Be Inclusive” *FYI* 2.0 Sept, 22, 2017, p. 1; Jack Heffernan, “Ordering a Retreat,” *Daily Astorian* Feb 20 2018 AND Dec 4 2018; Northwest Civil War Council, “To Avoid Further Confusion” Facebook post, March 31 2018; Bryn Stole, “The Decline of the Civil War Re-Enactor,” *New York Times* July 28, 2018.

Everything They Asked For, and More: **Tim Wood Weathers Another Storm**

Tim Wood began his directorship in 2004 focused on the growth of programs. By the time he stepped down in 2014, however, it was clear that his era would be defined by how OPRD handled the Great Recession. The recession hit at the end of a rare moment of optimism. Referring to the 2005 – 2007 budget, Tim Wood noted that parks received “everything they asked for, and more”. Though the “and more” hinted at the tendency for the legislature to unload struggling programs onto the park system, the overall tenor of budget planning that year was one of cautious hope. The approved budget hinted that the financial storms that had wracked the department under Bob Meinen and washed in with each new troubled program under Carrier might be coming to an end. The calm, such as it was, lasted two years.³⁹²

In 2007, a cascade of disasters from subprime lending and the collapse of the real estate market had a swift and far-reaching impact on the finances of the United States and the world. These impacts rippled quickly through the financial sector, closing banks and putting mortgages underwater. As foreboding and fear swept Oregon, fewer people took a gamble on lottery games. In the summer of 2007, as the crisis was just unfolding, Director Tim Wood recruited Lisa Van Laanen for the role of Assistant Director. Van Laanen’s background was largely in business management and customer service, and Wood knew that the money pits OPRD had been inheriting would require business savvy to weather. When she was recruited from among a pool of candidates to replace Tim Wood at his retirement in 2014, the *Statesman Journal* wrote, “In some ways, Van Laanen was an unusual choice. Although she’d worked at OPRD for seven years, her background was in internal auditing and business administration, not natural resources.” Van Laanen’s role, her involvement overseeing the team dealing with the State Fair mess, and her eventual promotion to lead OPRD signaled that those in charge were returning the “business” of managing parks to center stage.³⁹³

As the financial crisis deepened in 2008, Tim Wood tried to avoid the mass layoffs that had traumatized the department in the 1990s. The budget plan in May required hiring freezes, travel restrictions, and programmatic cuts, but not the mass destruction of jobs that had accompanied budget reductions in previous decades. In February of 2009, Wood warned that, depending on the economy projections, more cuts might be necessary. That summer, high gas prices challenged another revenue source—campsite rentals—and strained an already slim budget. Although people with planned trips still went camping, drop-in sites were often vacant. In November of 2009, Van Laanen presented the

392 “OPRD’s 2005-2007 Budget” “Everything asked for, and more” FYI 595 August 14-20 2005 p. 1.

393 “New Assistant Director Assumes OPRD’s Administration Lead,” FYI 693 (Aug 19 – 25, 2007), p. 2; Zach Urness “Parks Leader Charts New Direction for Oregon,” *Statesman Journal*, March 5, 2015.

financial situation to the Commission. The state of Oregon instituted 10 closure days in which staff would be furloughed, and an additional one to four furlough days would be instituted for management only. Parks would remain open, and the overall budget projections for parks seemed, if not promising, sustainable. Compared to the downturns of previous eras, this probably felt like a miracle. Lottery funding was not as resistant to economic downturns as gas or bottles would have been, but compared to those agencies solely reliant on the General Fund, Oregon Parks and Recreation weathered the Great Recession well.³⁹⁴

Wood urged optimism and a staff-wide focus on the mission of the organization, which was more important now during these times of uncertainty. He saw visitors still coming to parks, just choosing parks closer to home, as an example of parks' importance to the community. When livelihoods are threatened, he argued, the "respite and solace" found in state parks "improve[s] the daily lives of Oregonians." This was a lesson Sam Boardman had taught his own staff during the Great Depression: that people need parks more, not less, when times are tough. But despite the optimism of management and the dedication of the staff, the impacts of the Great Recession were keenly felt in parks. Hiring freezes and furloughs meant fewer hands on the ground to clean, lead programs, and maintain the landscape. Staff kept their jobs, but the work became harder. The 2009-2011 budget was nine percent less than requested, but, Wood said, most programs would thankfully remain intact.³⁹⁵

In 2010, Oregon Parks and Recreation sailed through another important milestone. With the economy still recovering from the Great Recession, Oregon voters were asked if they still wanted to fund Oregon state parks through the lottery. They answered with a resounding "yes!" The State Parks portion of lottery funds was made permanent, with a majority of Oregonians in every county, urban or rural, voting in favor.³⁹⁶

The larger financial crisis had largely passed by 2013, but lottery revenue for state parks was still in a decline—placing a spotlight on the dangers of relying on those funds for operational security. Wood saw this as an opportunity to take a hard look at the park system's viability. The 2012 Systems Plan, created in this era, was meant to guide OPRD's financial solvency through strategic downsizing of the park system. It also encouraged staff to consider revenue sources that would not sacrifice the integrity of the mission. In writing a history of the period, one staff member noted, "this [began] to sound quite a lot like the crisis

394 "Budget Proposals for 2009-2011 Receive Commission Approval," *FYI* 728 (May 4 – 10, 2008); "From the Director: Savings Plan Keeps Us in Control," *FYI* 761 (Feb. 1 – 7, 2009), p. 1; "From the Director: 2009 Brings Opportunities," *FYI* 757 (Jan 4 – 10, 2009), p. 1; State Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes, November 18-19, 2009, p. 7, Folder: Commission Meeting Notes [1990 – 2013], unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection.

395 "From the Director: 2009 Brings Opportunities," *FYI* 757 (Jan 4 – 10, 2009), p. 1; OPRD's Savings Plan: Communicating its Effects," *FYI* 763 (Feb 15 – 21, 2009), p. 1; "From the Director: OPRD Programs Intact as New Budget Period Begins," *FYI* 782 (July 5 – 11, 2009), p. 1.

396 Measure 76, which made the parks portion of the lottery permanent, got 69% of the vote overall—the most popular measure on the ballot in 2010. Craig Dirksen and John Isaacs, "Environmental Protection: A Resounding Call for Investing in Our Natural Assets," *Oregonian* Nov 19, 2010.

OPRD faced with proposing to close parks in the early 1990s.” Closing parks in the 1990s prompted ire among visitors which created support for parks, but now this was more than a political ploy: it was the key, Wood believed, to remaining afloat. The report likened Oregon parks to other fundamental utilities, necessary for Oregonians and therefore, requiring of public support. “In many ways, recreational opportunity is like a public utility in Oregon. Similar to public education, water supply, and public safety, good outdoor recreation is an essential need of a healthy community.” Public support, “right-sizing” the park system, and using business strategies to optimize resources would allow the park system to continue providing for Oregonians. If these strategies were ignored, the report warned, “people will be disappointed with worse service, sketchy parks, and nasty restrooms.” Tim Wood announced his retirement in 2013 and would not be in the role of director as this latest scheme for solvency played out. Despite the hardship of his tenure, he looked back on the time with fondness for the staff and its mission, and a hope that the organization would continue to find new ways to adapt to the changing needs of Oregonians.³⁹⁷

In the year 2000, Mike Carrier wrote to his staff, “having stood on its own now for a decade – withstanding the hardest of times, strident criticism and shattered expectations – OPRD has matured into a fully-fledged, independent agency... Just imagine what we can accomplish in a string of years like 2000.” He likely wasn’t aware that he echoed Chet Armstrong’s message nearly 50 years prior. Armstrong looked at the beginning of the park system as he would a baby learning to take their first steps. Both men saw growth and change and both men dreamed that these growing pains would soon pass, and that Oregon State Parks and Recreation would be fully realized. Though, as the new millennium saw the end to some uncertainties, it also saw change in ways that neither Carrier nor Wood anticipated. It was the organization’s ability to adapt, rather than its ability to “mature,” that let it survive. It was the dedication of those who loved parks, inside and outside of the department, that would allow it to thrive. Through the next crisis, and the next crisis, and the next.³⁹⁸

397 Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, “State Park Systems Plan,” (Dec. 2012), p. 21, unfiled, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, “State Park Systems Plan,” p. 22; Wood, “Looking Back from 2013.”

398 Carrier, Mike. “Director’s Corner” FYI 369. December 18-22, 2000. Folder: Staff Newsletter – FYI – 2000, Box: Publications – Staff Newsletters, 1963 – 1994, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.