

July 1, 2025

Governor Bob Ferguson
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Ferguson,

In January, 2024, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, (WSPRC) at Cama Beach State Park and in October of 2024 the State Parks Commission made the decision to permanently close the cabins. As a result, many people who live on Camano Island and many Park visitors have been working hard to get these unique cabins reopened. Through the hard work of Rep. Shavers and Rep. Paul along with Rep. Tharinger, we were successful in getting funding for a study of the sea wall and septic system at Cama Beach State Park. After all of the time and effort we spent in getting a funding proviso into the Capital Budget for Cama Beach State Park, you disappointed a huge number of citizen supporters and our Legislators by vetoing our proviso after it had survived all the way through the Legislature, thereby dismissing all of our hard work with the stroke of a pen without more thoroughly looking into our side of the issue. The vetoed proviso required consultation with the tribes, Dept. of Archaeology and Historical Preservation, and the local groups.

Unfortunately there is no mechanism for the citizens in this State who disagree with a State Park Commission decision to file an appeal and get a hearing by an impartial party. Our group, Save Cama Beach Cabins, decided it was in the best interest of Cama Beach State Park to work with our current Legislators to find a way to get the cabins reopened. In the early 1990s the Worthington and Hamalainen Families, owners of the property along with the Legislature began working to make Cama Beach State Park a reality. After 18 years of hard work by many people and the contribution of millions of dollars by the owner families, it took one decision by the State Park Commission, elected by no one, to permanently close the cabins after a 5 month process undoing all of the hard work of so many people. The public has not been well represented by WSPRC in this process.

During the limited public process, WSPRC made many claims about why they could not reopen the cabins, but made no attempt to look at options to reopen the cabins, did nothing to address the issues raised by the local community and ignored their own SEPA analysis. The Commission provided no cost benefit information to the public showing the cost of any of the needed repairs, the loss of the revenue generated by the cabins at the Park, the loss of reasonably priced lodging, the loss of the shuttle transportation providing safe access to the beach for visitors especially those who have mobility issues, and the loss of the many free activities for Park visitors and the local community provided by the volunteer groups. The Commission closed the cabins completely ignoring the contract between the State Parks Commission and the two families whose generosity made this Park possible. Center for Wood Boats (CWB) who were partners with the WSPRC long before it opened also had a contract in which many

of the obligations were not met. After a major water leak in the Boat House and no commitment by WSPRC to repair the damage in a reasonable time, CWB decided to pull out of the agreement and leave Cama Beach State Park permanently.

Protection of cultural artifacts and conflicts with current state codes was mentioned during the presentation made by WSPRC to the public, but there was no opportunity to discuss with WSPRC or the tribes, ways to resolve the issues. At a meeting in March of 2024 on Camano Island, the Director of State Parks made an unsubstantiated claim that Cama Beach is the site of a permanent tribal village and burial ground. Archaeological work completed by the State with tribal participation found no evidence of a permanent village or burial ground. As a result of the studies and much work with tribes, WSPRC was able to renovate the resort and open it to the public.

Many residents of Camano Island along with thousands of visitors want to see these cabins reopened and Cama Beach State Park restored to its former operation. The resort at Cama Beach is unique. It is the only remaining large, intact, 1930s saltwater fishing resort left on Puget Sound. It is on the National Historic Register and the resort is a time capsule from the past where people can not only see, but can actually experience the past while staying in the cabins. It is a living museum where people can stay a few feet from the beach and have the wonderful experience listening to the waves at night, seeing the stars and maybe hearing passing whales. This Resort is the heart of Cama Beach State Park and it is an important part of the history on Camano Island.

Since the opening of Cama Beach State Park in 2008, it has been very popular both with people visiting and staying in the 36 cabins, which were filled every summer, but also with the many businesses who benefited from the visitors who came to Cama Beach State Park because of the cabins. Cama Beach State Park had 272,888 visitors in 2023 and a revenue of \$979,000. In 2024 the revenue at Cama Beach State Park had dropped to \$48,615. In 2021 Park visitors spent around \$8,829,000 in the local community and created about 71 jobs. (Data from Economic Analysis of Washington State Parks 2021). The State, the Camano Island community, and State Parks all benefited from the many visitors who came and stayed in these cabins.

The Park also became a popular place for the residents of Camano Island. It has a wonderful public beach and there was easy access for the local visitors. In addition a thriving infrastructure of volunteers developed at Cama Beach State Park. The Cama Beach Foundation volunteers ran the historic store and all of the profits made were used for educational programs at the two Camano Island Parks. Since 2008 the Cama Beach Quilters had made 800 quilts. These quilts were on the beds in all of the cabins making the cabins feel like 1935. Friends of Camano Island Parks, the oldest of the volunteer groups, helped create and maintain trails in the parks and completed approved projects in both parks. WSPRC has benefited greatly from having these volunteers. In 2023 there were 13,654 volunteer hours at the two Camano Island Parks, amounting to 6.5 full time employees that provided free labor to the Camano Island State Parks. WSPRC should have been looking at how to take this model to the other state parks, instead they closed the cabins eliminating the many benefits, like

easy access to the beach, and the need for the Cama Beach Quilters and the Cama Beach Foundation.

Our Legislators saw the need to address this problem but we need your help, too, Governor Ferguson. We had hoped that getting the funding to do the studies during the last session would be a good first step to getting the cabins reopened. We will try again working with our Legislators to fix the infrastructure problems and get these cabins reopened. These cabins are special and the thousands of visitors who were lucky enough to stay in the them during the last 15 years will tell you so. The State made a \$30 million investment in opening Cama Beach State Park with the wonderful water front cabins, let's not waste that investment by closing these cabins forever. Please help us correct this faulty decision by the State Parks Commission and get the cabins reopened.

Thank you for your time. We want to work with you to return Cama Beach State Park to the thriving place it once was instead of the "Ghost Resort" it has become. ALL OF THE HISTORY AT THE CAMA BEACH STATE PARK IS WORTH PRESERVING!

Sincerely,

On Behalf of the Save Cama Beach Cabins Board and Steering Committee

Cindy J. Custer, President

Board

Elaine Chan,
Board Member
Malynda Shipley
Board Member

Steering Committee

Gary Worthington,
Worthington Foundation
Former Senator Mary Margaret Haugen
Tom Eisenberg,
Friends of Camano Island Parks
Pam Fredericksen,
Cama Beach Quilters
John Custer
Volunteer, Cama Beach State Park
Russ Holmes
Volunteer Cama Beach State Park
Kathleen Stariha
Friends of Camano Island State Parks Volunteer
Jeff Wheeler
Edie and Ross Henderson
Jim King

Attachments:

Diary from Cabin 19

Signed Petitions

cc:

Attorney General Nick Brown

Lieutenant Governor Denny Heck

Secretary of State Steve Hobbs

Director of Dept. of Archaeology and Historical Preservation Allyson Brooks

House Capital Budget Committee Chair Representative Steve Tharinger

Washington State Representative Clyde Shavers

Washington State Representative Dave Paul

Washington State Senator Ron Muzzall

Janet St. Clair, Island County Commissioner

Jill Johnson, Island County Commissioner

Melanie Bacon, Island County Commissioner

Stanwood Camano - News

Everett Herald

Whidbey News - Times

Cascadia

Seattle Times