

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Creating and Sustaining a Long Term Partnership with an Independent Non-Profit Organization A case study of the relationship between North Cascades National Park and North Cascades Institute

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for North Cascades Institute and North Cascades National Park
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“I’m a deep believer that the National Park Services roles and responsibilities, and challenges of the future, are not going to be met without partners like North Cascades Institute. We need these kinds of organizations. We need them to be successful. We need them to have their independence. We need them joined with us on this noble mission. When we’ve got a great Park and a great Park staff and a great Institute and a great Institute staff, amazing things happen.”

– **Jon Jarvis, Director, National Park Service**

(former Chief of Natural Resources, North Cascades National Park)

“I’ve said to many people and I think it’s absolutely true that there is no Institute whose quality is any better--- there might be some that are equal, but there is none that has so successfully put together such a wide array of programming. Nobody else does all that and they do every piece of it well. It’s an incredible organization.”

– **John Reynolds, former Deputy Director, National Park Service**

(former Superintendent, North Cascades National Park)

“I think as my philosophy matured over the course of my career I finally came to understand that the National Park Service is not just about me. It’s even bigger than the parks themselves. The National Park Service is about helping society keep the things that are healthy and make the things that are frail stronger.”

– **Bill Paleck, former Superintendent, North Cascades National Park**

“We give a lot to the Park and the Park gives a lot to us. But I would hope that all the superintendents we’ve worked with and all the Park people we’ve worked with would say that we have given more than we have taken. Because that’s the goal. It’s not about us, it’s about these kids, these people, this place.”

– **Saul Weisberg, founder and Executive Director, North Cascades Institute**

“Part of what I’ve come to believe is that the parks, whether it’s spectacular scenery or a functioning ecosystem or a powerful and compelling story, are at the center of people’s attention. And we who work in the Park Service are very close to that center of attention, but we are not that center of attention. And at times there are other people, or other organizations, that are equally as close to that center of attention as we are. Recognize that. Become very comfortable with it. Promote that others can be close to parks, embrace parks, be stewards of parks. You can get a collection of people that are working together around that center of connection that can create synergy that lets a lot get done.”

– **Chip Jenkins, Superintendent, North Cascades National Park**

I. Introduction

In 1986, North Cascades National Park had the opportunity to participate in the creation of an independent non-profit education organization – North Cascades Institute. The Institute’s mission – to conserve and restore northwest environments through education – has significant mission overlap with North Cascades National Park. The Park entered the partnership with the goal of creating and sustaining relationships with local communities in order to connect people to their National Parks. This is the story of a successful partnership that has continued to evolve and meet changing needs for 23 years and that continues to leverage Park, public and private resources to provide high quality education programs for all ages.

The information in this case study is based on transcripts from interviews that took place in Fall 2009. The individuals interviewed were **John Reynolds**, Superintendent at North Cascades National Park from 1984-1988; **Bill Paleck**, Superintendent at North Cascades National Park from 1992-2006; **Jon Jarvis**, the current Director of the National Park Service who served as the first Chief of Natural Resources at North Cascades National Park from 1986-1991 and represented the Park Service in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) negotiations that resulted in construction of the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center; **Chip Jenkins**, current superintendent at North Cascades National Park since 2007; **Saul Weisberg**, founder and current Executive Director of North Cascades Institute; and **John Miles**, a current and founding board member at North Cascades Institute and professor at Western Washington University’s Huxley College of the Environment. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and excerpted to create a collection of perspectives representative of the 23-year growth and evolution of a successful partnership. Particular focus was given to the distillation of the elements of the strategies applied, and the lessons learned, in the voices of the leaders involved in the creation and stewardship of the partnership.

National Park Service leaders all agreed from the beginning that the inclusion of an outside of the National Park Service perspective was central to the vision for this case study. Perspectives from the independent partner are included alongside those of Park leaders. Indeed, a common theme heard from the NPS leaders interviewed was the importance of understanding not only the strengths and limitations of the agency and how it operates but also the strengths and opportunities of an independent partner, working within an entirely different organizational framework, as critical in order to leverage impacts and outcomes. Excerpts from interviews follow each section, providing the opportunity to hear the perspectives of the leaders in their own words.

II. The Leadership Challenge and Opportunity

What is core or constant to all parks?

Many of the challenges faced by North Cascades National Park are common to parks young and old. These challenges center around creating and sustaining relationships with local communities to better connect people to their National Parks. In addition, all parks are influenced and impacted by activities that take place outside of park boundaries and park leaders generally recognize the value of an educated and informed citizenry as essential to the support of sound management practices both inside and outside of the parks themselves. In parks created to preserve natural landscapes, the desire

to take the public deeper into an understanding of complex ecosystems is of particular strategic importance for park managers.

While most parks have interpretive programs, and many have Visitor's Centers, many lack the resources and expertise to offer self-sustaining, longer duration (e.g. multi-day), in-depth programming designed to meet the needs of the regional community. In addition, changes in leadership, pressure to reduce budgets or focus on new or higher priority initiatives results in engagement in education programming waxing and waning over time. This is a shared limitation for parks that impacts their ability to sustain long term relationships with public schools, universities and local business in their surrounding communities.

What is unique to North Cascades National Park?

North Cascades National Park was created in 1968. When the Institute started in 1986 the Park was relatively new with little interpretive or natural resource management infrastructure. When John Reynolds arrived as Superintendent in 1985 it was with an imperative to lay the groundwork for the creation of a new management plan that would prepare the Park to meet the management challenges of the future. North Cascades was a wilderness Park without a front country focal point and without a broad public constituency. In addition, the Park is surrounded by land managed by the US Forest Service, an agency that was deeply embroiled in the timber wars of the 1980's and early 1990's. These factors underlay the receptivity of Park leadership to partner with and fledge an independent, community based educational partner. The idea of North Cascades Institute was proposed and developed by two seasonal backcountry rangers. Superintendent Reynolds and Park staff supported the new organization by giving them permission to operate within Park headquarters, yet they perceived the value of the organization's independence as essential to the Institute's ability to leverage outside resources over time.

In addition, Jon Jarvis, then a Natural Resources Specialist in the Park, saw an opportunity to take a failing concession (Diablo Lake Resort) and use its location as a site for a new Environmental Learning Center operated by the young North Cascades Institute. In doing so, Jarvis hoped to place the new independent partner on a strong footing by providing them a base from which to operate programs within the Park itself. Jarvis felt that the Institute, as an independent non-profit organization, could better operate and sustain the programming at the new facility because of its ability to put down roots in the community and its ability to provide stability in programming that was not as vulnerable to changes in agency priorities and agency budgets. The idea of the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center was born and North Cascades Institute was invited to participate alongside the Park in the FERC negotiations.

Perspectives: the leadership challenge/opportunity and goals for the partnership

“One of the things that was obvious pretty early on at North Cascades was that it didn't have a broad constituency. It was limited to a wilderness and hiking constituency. So without trying to change the rationale for why the Park exists and the internal feeling of what this Park was all about, which is wilderness, how do you then start exposing more and more people so they will love the place and support it?”

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

“The Institute felt right to me from the very beginning as an opportunity for a really practical, altruistic approach to connecting people and their National Park and the rest of the ecosystem in which the Park operates. We were trying create a National Park that could respond more effectively to the kinds of opportunities and problems that would manifest themselves in the future.”

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

“I saw what North Cascades Institute was doing – which was taking the public on a deeper dive into understanding issues – and I thought this was a good idea because it was a level of interpretation and education that the National Park Service couldn’t provide. We didn’t have the time or the resources to take it to that next level. I felt that the Institute had the opportunity to deepen the public’s understanding and appreciation for the resources we were trying to manage in the Cascades.”

– Jon Jarvis, former Chief of Natural Resources

“I’d been working as a climbing ranger in the North Cascades for eight years with friends, and we were in love with the place and knew it really well, and we were passionate about the National Park – about the ecosystem, about getting people outside. We worked on the idea of North Cascades Institute as a group for three years and it kind of went up and down until John Reynolds arrived and then it stuck.

– Saul Weisberg, Director, North Cascades Institute

Perspectives: the setting and the stakeholders

“The timber wars were going on and for the Forest Service the forest planning was going on and in those days that was just horrendous. The Institute’s idea was that if you dealt with an entire ecosystem, people could understand how agencies’ actions might affect that ecosystem, whether it be the Fish and Wildlife Service or the Forest Service or the National Park Service. I recall thinking about how if you could reach kids and teachers that would be really good because you’d have increasing numbers of people with a connection to this place, this ecosystem and this Park.”

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

“At the time we had a failing concession at the Diablo Lake Resort. I had the responsibilities of formulating our mitigation package. I went to Saul and said “what about an education campus at Diablo Lake? What would make that work for you that would really establish you on the ground with something?” Saul and I sat down and basically framed the ask in terms of the purchase of the resort, the building of the facilities, the endowment, the operational costs, the vehicles and all those sorts of things. It was at that point that I became more involved in the future of North Cascades Institute and then ultimately saw it through to the signing of the settlement agreement. The key there in my mind was to put the Institute on sound financial footing, at least in terms of a physical place, so that their primary fundraising could focus on program and content.”

– Jon Jarvis, former Chief of Natural Resources

“I saw this as an opportunity to get to know the Park Service and the Forest Service in hopes that as the Dean of Huxley I could build some bridges that might yield some consequences and that’s what I tried to do. I personally loved the landscape and thought it would be great to have a program that brought more attention to it. One of the things that amazed me when I came here was how little a lot of the people around here knew

about the North Cascades. Many people just thought of it as a barrier that was in the way, you had to drive over the pass to get anywhere, so that was a big part of my wanting to be involved with this.”

– John Miles, Institute founding board member

“The idea was that the natural world is a place where people can learn and make connections between things in living systems and see themselves as part of nature. We’d all been involved in activist organizations in different ways but education and taking people outside seemed like a better fit for us. Giving people education, giving people these experiences, that seemed like how we were really going to change things.”

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

III. The Strategy and its Outcomes

To meet the challenge of creating increased opportunities for public education, engagement and stewardship for North Cascades National Park, John Reynolds looked toward a strategy of pursuing the opportunity to partner with an independent, private non-profit education organization, North Cascades Institute. The partnership began in 1986 when Superintendent Reynolds gave his support to the creation of the Institute. This strategy has been applied over the past 23 years by successive superintendents and continues to be applied through the present superintendent. Each superintendent has had unique challenges and opportunities related to sustaining and growing the partnership; however, each applied three core strategic elements during their tenure at North Cascades.

Elements of the strategy applied:

- 1) Provide ongoing support of an independent, non-profit partner over a long-term time frame
- 2) Support the partner's independence as integral to its ability to leverage NPS support to garner other public and private resources to support partnership programs
- 3) Identify and pursue opportunities to deepen and grow the partnership

Strategy #1: Provide ongoing support of an independent, non-profit partner over a long-term time frame

The first element of the strategy sets the stage by supporting the partner over a long-term time frame as opposed to support for a single project or initiative. From 1986 on, all superintendents at North Cascades National Park shared an outward-looking focus that went beyond the boundaries of the Park and sought to create larger impacts that extended throughout the ecosystem, including into surrounding communities. Superintendents appointed to North Cascades after the creation of the Institute all had prior experiences working with community partnerships in other parks and were positively influenced by these experiences. These successive superintendents saw the strength of the partnership with North Cascades Institute stemming from a substantial mission overlap and all expressed a core belief in education as a valuable and long-term resource management tool for the Park.

As the Institute demonstrated its ability and potential to leverage resources and engage public schools, universities, business and community leaders, planning for the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center began in earnest. Support for the partnership was increasingly shared by the regional office and new superintendents understood part of their role at North Cascades was to steward the partnership, because it increased the effectiveness and operational capacity of the Park.

Superintendents all shared the challenges and opportunities of translating the benefits of the partnership to Park staff who were in some cases not supportive of the partnership strategy. Institute leaders note that without the support of the Park, the Institute and the partnership would not have grown to be what it is today. The present status of the Institute and the benefits that are seen today are the result of a Park commitment that has lasted and evolved for 23 years and has been shared by four superintendents as well as a generation of Institute leaders.

Perspectives: Support of an independent, non-profit partner over a 23-year time frame

“I felt that North Cascades Institute could do a better job than the Park Service could. Park Service people in general move around in the organization and move around geographically. I felt that the Institute would put down roots, really deepen the local knowledge of the Cascades and its very complex system, and provide for long-term continuity through transitions that go on in the Park so that successive superintendents and successive chiefs of interpretation might come and go and have different emphasis but the Institute would be there and maintain and grow in terms of its quality programming. In addition, the Institute would build connections both philanthropically and educationally with the other institutions in the northwest, which is harder to do for Park staff.”

– Jon Jarvis, former Chief of Natural Resources

“I’d seen the way environmental education/interpretation ebbed and flowed in the Service and I saw in the Institute the potential to create some stability in that, both stability in terms of capacity as well as stability in terms of focus and message. The capacity could grow, the message could expand, but it was better buffered as a non-profit than the Park Service was, or had been in my experience. To me, that was a tremendous asset and when I spoke with staff it was that message I tried to get across to them. You know, when I arrived there were some staff here that really didn’t think that the Institute should exist at all, that they should not be doing educational programs in the Park at all, and helping them see the potential and understand the potential was one of the things I worked very hard to do.”

– Bill Paleck, former Superintendent

“One of the things I never did, I never wanted to know what the cost of our partnership is, the dollar cost. If you wanted to know you could calculate it, but from my perspective the dollars didn’t matter. It was always going to be a priority to maintain that relationship and to help it not only survive and then grow, but to help it mature.”

– Bill Paleck, former Superintendent

“It became clear to me early on that the Park Service saw us as a vehicle to do what they wanted to do, too. They wanted to broaden their educational approach beyond the kind of interpretation that they could do in a campground amphitheater but they didn’t have the resources and the expertise to do it. I think John Reynolds saw this as a potential way to expand the education mission of the Park Service in this Park in a relatively inexpensive way. He saw these guys who knew what they were doing, he respected them and knew they were the right kind of people to do it and he supported them 100%. So the superintendents of the Park have been absolutely essential because they saw the value of this for what they were trying to accomplish.”

– John Miles, Institute founding board member

“What parks have is land, these amazing places, and they also have these amazing people who know those places. What we have is experience and expertise in talking to people, reaching people, raising money and

running a business and we can work pretty fast and fluid and strategic and political in a way that the agencies can't. And so the partnership works best when we remember to focus on what we can each do really well."

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

"Our focus has always been public lands. We wanted to use public land as a classroom. Our mission is conservation and that gives us a huge mission overlap with the Park Service. We want to effect change, we want to promote what's best for this ecosystem, we want people to care deeply, we want to give people the same experiences that we had – those intimate, powerful, deep experiences that help people care – and that feeds right into the Park Service mission. How do you get people to care about these special places? That's what we are about. That makes us a good partner."

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

Strategy #2: Support the partner's independence as integral to its ability to leverage NPS support to garner other public and private resources to support partnership programs

The second element of the strategy has been to support the independence of the Institute as a critical feature of its ability to leverage Park resources to the benefit of the Park and the National Park Service. The Institute began with an ecosystem focus, as opposed to a Park focus, with the Institute's founders envisioning programming taking place throughout the entire region and placing the Park within the context of the larger landscape. As part of his support for getting the Institute off the ground, Superintendent Reynolds joined Institute founders in inviting the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest to support the organization in partnership alongside North Cascades National Park, seeing a multi-agency partnership as a strength for the new organization. In early forays into both adult and school programs the Forest Service was an integral partner, and as both agencies ebbed and flowed in their ability to provide support over time it was advantageous to the Institute to have strong partnerships with both agencies. These expanded over time to include State Parks, municipalities including the City of Seattle, universities and a number of school districts.

The Institute's independence required belonging to the communities it served and being responsive to their needs. An independent board of directors composed of community leaders coupled with a strong funding base provided by private foundations, corporations and individuals have been hallmarks of the Institute's business plan and lie at the core of its ability to bring additional resources to the Park. The Institute's identity as a regional organization with an ecosystem focus has played an important role in the development of its ability to generate community support through grants and donations. The ecosystem focus is also reflected in Institute educational materials and programs which seek to provide interdisciplinary outdoor experiences which help people to explore the connections between people and place, economies and ecosystems, nature and community. Along with organizational independence, this larger-than-park educational focus is perceived as a strength by Park, Institute and community leaders.

Perspectives: Support for partner's independence as integral to its ability to leverage resources

"Part of Saul and Tom's idea that I did not have initially was that this should be ecosystem based and not Park based. Which was brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. And you know today it's still ecosystem based and not Park based and you see evidence of that all over the place. Natural resources don't only exist within the

boundaries of a park and one can't understand all of the pressures and opportunities in an ecosystem if you don't include the whole ecosystem."

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

"One of the challenges that North Cascades National Park has is that we are the minority land owner in a large landscape and we have a relatively low radar signature in the public – that's not good, it's not bad, it just is – but it poses a challenge for us in developing long-term stewards, people who care about the place, people who are willing to pay attention so that they can be engaged in protecting the place. It is a challenge in terms of raising additional support. Because the Institute is engaged over a broader landscape, it's actually an advantage for the Park to have that affiliation."

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

"I think that the larger ecosystem focus was governed by geography and not by bureaucracy. I think if you are aligned exclusively with one government agency then you are more likely to be vulnerable to the whims of that agency, but there was a certain autonomy that was granted us by the geography that enabled us to do various things, so I think that was a very fortunate asset in the early days."

– John Miles, Institute founding board member

"I can't think of any time when I thought we were in danger of losing our integrity, or our independence, because we've always had a board that was on top of that. They always saw us as a strong partner of the agencies and that our independence was what made us a good partner and that if we were owned, or bought, it wouldn't work. And I think the leads at the agencies have understood that too, that we serve them best by being independent."

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

"We were and are clearly advocates for education. We are advocates for conservation. We are advocates for public lands. So there has always been an advocacy element in there but it seemed very clear, I think, to all of us that the Institute would not be as effective at reaching people if we got involved in advocating in controversial issues."

– Saul Weisberg

Strategy #3: Identify and pursue opportunities to deepen and grow the partnership

The third and final element of the strategy has been the continued pursuit on the part of each successive superintendent to strengthen the partnership by seeking out opportunities to leverage and grow its potential. Superintendent Reynolds played a key role in getting the Institute started and used his influence and available resources to reach out to community and other agency leaders in efforts to build support for the new organization.

Jon Jarvis, in his role as the Park's lead negotiator for the FERC relicensing, identified an opportunity to turn a failed concession into an Environmental Learning Center which he envisioned as a home base for the fledgling Institute's operations, thereby enhancing its ability to conduct education programs in the Park. By formally identifying an independent partner as the program provider and specifically rejecting the idea that the Park Service would operate programs at the proposed Learning Center, he brought the Institute to the table as a representative of the public's interest in National Parks as places for education. His goal was sustaining both the Institute and education programs in

the Park. He believed that an independent Institute, based in the Park at the new Learning Center, would have the highest chance of success by being responsive to both Park and community needs and therefore best be able to attract the community support needed to sustain programming.

Superintendent John Earnst supported the partnership through its early stages of program growth while the FERC license was awaiting approval, a process that took five years. When the license was granted, Superintendent Paleck oversaw its implementation and provided much needed support for the Institute during some challenging, and at times contentious, phases of Learning Center construction by Seattle City Light. Currently, Superintendent Jenkins has undertaken an initiative to transition the Institute into the role of the Park's Cooperative Association, operating the bookstores in the Park, in order to use this operation to leverage more connection with Park visitors and communities to education and stewardship in the Park.

All of these Park leaders have helped the partnership grow and succeed by actively identifying opportunities to deepen the relationship, resulting in continually accomplishing more than either could alone. Institute leaders have pursued their own opportunities for growth as well as being responsive to those that come from the Park. The close relationship and high level of trust that exist between the Park and the Institute has resulted in an ability to grow strategically while sustaining successful programs both inside and outside of the Park over time.

Perspectives: Identifying and pursuing opportunities to deepen and grow the partnership

"You had this group of really tightly screwed together engineering types, extremely precise, almost anally retentive, not bad people but that was their culture (Seattle City Light). Then you had these wonderfully creative, enthusiastic, passionate, but sometimes vague people (North Cascades Institute) – you know, they knew what they wanted but they couldn't be as precise about it and frequently I felt like I was being not the educational interpreter but the literal interpreter to help both sides perceive where things were coming from."

– Bill Paleck, former Superintendent, on the FERC negotiations

"Currently we have a very specific initiative which is asking North Cascades Institute to take over as the cooperating association. In my mind there are all sorts of strategic opportunities associated with that. I think that walks the talk of the North Cascades Institute being involved throughout the ecosystem, not just at the Learning Center. I think that by having the Institute and the Park working in the bookstores it's an opportunity for us to connect people more effectively in a variety of other interpretive and educational ways. So the Cooperative Association is not about generating more money, it's about generating more connectivity."

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

Outcomes derived from the strategy applied

Outcomes from the strategy included personal reward and in some cases career advancement of the Park leaders who worked with the partnership. In addition, programs maintained a steady growth trajectory and brought many thousands of people of all ages each year from around the region to participate in award-winning education and stewardship activities in the Park. Mountain School for school-age children and their teachers, adult seminars, summer youth programs and teaching internships all took root in the Park. The Park became a venue for teacher training and a body of curriculum materials were developed and distributed. Events in major population centers highlighted the park and its resources, reaching thousands more people each year outside of the Park itself.

The North Cascades Environmental Learning Center was approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as an element of mitigation in the relicensing of the three Skagit dams and a planning team consisting of representatives from the Park, the Institute and Seattle City Light collaborated on the design of this state-of-the-art facility, which opened in 2005. With the opening of the Learning Center several new programs were initiated, including a new graduate program implemented in partnership with Western Washington University. The program, which grants a Master of Education in Environmental Education, includes a year-long Professional Residency at the Learning Center and draws young leaders from around the country to live and work in the Park. Graduates from the program have been employed in leadership positions in parks and educational non-profits throughout the country.

In 2009, with support from the National Park Foundation, the Park and the Institute hosted the inaugural pilot of the Parks Climate Challenge, which brought 19 diverse, urban high school youth to the Park to learn about climate change, leadership and service. The ability of North Cascades National Park to act as the venue for the program was due in large part to the presence of the partnership and the ability to use the Learning Center as a base for program activities. The Park provided the expertise of its staff to work with the students in an intensive scientific study of climate change and its impacts on National Parks. The Institute provided the trained instructors who acted as adult mentors and guided the students through a variety of wilderness experiences and intensive leadership skill development. Students took these experiences and used them in a variety of settings including public presentations in Seattle and Washington DC, and the implementation of service learning projects in their home communities and local National Parks.

The partnership has proven successful in terms of connecting the Park to new audiences, leveraging Park resources through philanthropy and making the Park competitive for internal funds. The partnership has been driven by outcomes since the beginning, and the commitment to working together over time has resulted in both the sustainability of successful programs and the continued development of new programs reaching new audiences, particularly non-traditional Park visitors and users such as the local Hispanic community, diverse urban youth and their families, and community leaders. By maintaining a focus on working to understand and meet the evolving needs of the community, the partnership has demonstrated success, resulting in a Park that is known for its innovative approach to providing opportunities for education tailored to reach priority audiences.

Perspectives: Outcomes derived as a result of the partnership strategy

“From my perspective, the future of places like North Cascades hinges on having healthy communities, and without healthy communities North Cascades would never continue to survive. I believe that shared experience plays a large part in building healthy communities. So it’s not just youth, it’s Mountain School, it’s the programs that bring people together.”

– Bill Paleck, former Superintendent

“One of the things that would bring me great joy, and I did this frequently at the Park, was to wander around out of uniform and listen and watch people. It was not all that uncommon to see a grade school or junior high school kid taking a parent through the campground talking about how “this is where I slept, this is where I did

this” and talking about their North Cascades Institute Mountain School experience and that would bring me such joy.”

– Bill Paleck, former Superintendent

“If your goals in the Park Service are trying to get the Park Service to do better more broadly all the time then that becomes your motivation. I didn’t think about that a lot at the time but I sure knew it and that outweighed any risks. And now, to walk into that Learning Center and see it and experience what these wonderful people have created and just think ‘gee, you know, I was a part of the beginning of all this.’ I don’t know how you describe that.”

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

“I once heard John Reynolds say that being involved with this Institute was one of the most significant things he’d been involved with in his whole professional career and I’d have to say the same. We come at it from totally different angles but it’s the same for me. It’s rewarded me in a multitude of ways, not the least of which is that I’ve had the opportunity through the graduate program to get to know a whole bunch of fabulous young people and my contact with these students in particular feeds my optimism. These people are going to help make things go, make things happen in the future.”

– John Miles, Institute founding board member

“The North Cascades Institute leverages the resources that the National Park Service provides. I’ve never added it up, I don’t really know what the dollar amount is, but I am guessing that we put somewhere between \$200,000 and \$300,000 of effort into sustaining and growing our relationship. That’s everything from maintaining the water system at the Learning Center, to Park Rangers teaching at Mountain School, to the Maintenance Foreman’s time leading youth service projects, to gas in the boats, to my time participating in our strategic planning. The Institute has a \$2.5 million budget. Say, we put in \$250,000. We get out \$2.5 million worth of programming. That’s a 10 to 1 leverage. And, more important, we get thousands of kids and hundreds of adults who spend three days to three weeks in the North Cascades learning about the ecosystem, learning about the cultural history, having fun and making memories. And we have teachers and parents who see that value has been added to their classroom, to their school, to their kids’ lives. Through a relatively modest investment from the Park, we amplify the impact through the partnership with the Institute and the result is we touch people’s lives in this place, in this Park.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

“One advantage is that we are very successful in competing internally within the Park Service for project funds that allow us to do volunteer and youth groups and because we have that relationship with the Institute it makes us very competitive for this other funding. An example is at this time last year I got a call from the National Park Foundation and they said ‘we want to bring a group of emerging high school leaders to a park where they are going to spend time learning about climate change, would you do this?’ And what was interesting is that they had actually talked to another park first and that park said ‘no, we can’t do it.’ Because they were thinking ‘how are we going to get all the rangers, how are we going to house these people, how are we going to supervise these kids, how are we going to teach these kids?’ My reaction was ‘yeah, sure, because we’ve got this partner that could help us do it.’ So I trotted downstairs and talked to Saul and we ended up taking it on. It was because that partnership was in place that we were able to say yes to a wonderful opportunity and in addition leverage other resources in order to take advantage of that.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

“So the questions we continually ask are how do we teach people, how do we get them outside, how do we help them care and get them engaged in their community? And then we trust them, and trust that their engagement is going to be a good thing because that’s how democracy works. And some get involved and some don’t, but most people, when they get involved, they become involved on behalf of the Park. They become National Park advocates.”

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

IV. What Was Learned

Key Factors that Influenced the Outcomes

Three factors were identified as being key to the beneficial outcomes of the partnership. The **long-term commitment to the partnership** from the Park that took place over time and through changes in Park leadership was one primary factor. This provided stability to the partnership and allowed sustainable growth to occur while key relationships among staff matured. Second, Park leaders consistently saw their role as **exercising influence without exercising control** in their work with the Institute. This encouraged the Institute to operate independently to form productive relationships with community partners that resulted in dynamic programming responsive to the needs of the Park and target audiences. This was necessary to sustain funding based on community values. Lastly, all leaders emphasized that **trust and respect were built over time**, allowing the partnership to take on consistently larger projects and overcome larger challenges and risks because of a solid foundation of experience and expertise.

Perspectives on Key Factors that Influenced Outcomes

Long-term continuity of commitment to partnership

“I’m here today and I have this flexibility and creativity because Bill and Jon and John built on it and nurtured it. I wouldn’t have this tool if it wasn’t for their work. So I am obligated to hand this partnership on in at least as good a shape if not better.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

Exercising influence without exercising control

“So I say to a lot of people, if you are worried about power and control, quit worrying about it! Back off of the control issues and head for opportunity and build on opportunities with full knowledge of your shared risks. Go for the opportunity and step back and watch it unfold.”

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

Importance of trust, respect built over time

“Number one, we started out with this great trust in Saul and Tom. They were such sensible thinkers. And then as the model went on year by year they proved that they were sensible thinkers and good business people and there was no fear that they were going to try to take over from the Park Service.”

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

“Take things one step at a time. One of the reasons that North Cascades Institute has been so successful is that every time it’s decided to add a new program it’s made sure that the existing ones operate really well and that there is a good basis for thinking they will continue to. Even when they took on the Learning Center, they kept

their eye on the ball of all the things that were already going on and they are known around the country for taking one step at a time, doing it well and getting it solidified before you start on the next thing. That's really important."

– **John Reynolds, former Superintendent**

"North Cascades Institute is our alpha partner, and that's not measured in terms of dollars, it's measured in terms of daily impact. Part of it is they are here, we work together every day. When I say we work together it's not just Saul and I talking, it's the front line staff who are talking day to day. It's a very large overlap in mission, in shared outlook and I think there is a lot of respect."

– **Chip Jenkins, Superintendent**

Leadership Best Practices

Best practices in leadership can be synthesized into four recommendations from the leaders interviewed. The first suggests that leaders **look for opportunities and don't get stuck on risks**. Both Park and Institute leaders shared risks throughout the 23-year time period of partnership growth and development. While care was taken to understand the risks, they were weighed alongside strategic outcomes and were not the sole focus in decision-making. Consistent preference for a focus on opportunities played a key role in achieving the desired results.

Both Institute and Park leaders shared a belief in the importance of **strategizing for the long term**, beyond the tenure of any individual or program, by keeping strategy focused on the larger opportunities that transcend the tenure of any individual and lie in the future. Leaders described elements of their decision-making which had in common a belief that the most significant outcomes would come to fruition only over a long-term time frame. An orientation to devise strategies and measures based on long-term impacts created the incentive for the partnership to work on multiple initiatives, such as simultaneously sustaining support for and measuring short term impacts from successful existing programs, while continually generating new ideas and relationships for the future. This resulted in building, step-by-step and over time, strong and growing constituencies that value public lands as venues for education. Understanding that education itself is a long-term investment and that larger impacts can only be adequately measured over time was an underlying factor in this orientation.

The belief that this partnership is not an isolated success story but rather has the potential to be a model for other National Parks seeking to expand their value to communities by being seen as places for education was shared in the sentiment that **this approach could be done and should be done elsewhere**. Leaders express a desire to share their experience of working in successful partnership with other parks and park partners, and express a great deal of enthusiasm toward what parks stand to gain from strengthening their relationship to the public they serve through supporting productive partnerships built on a shared mission with the Park Service.

Lastly, the Park leaders communicated a belief that the true nature of success lies in a **focus not on agency needs, but rather on the needs of the parks themselves and the people the agency exists to serve**. In practice, this encompasses an orientation to actively give those outside of the agency credit for successes in which they played a part, to reward staff members who actively support and work with partners, to look outward for opportunities to interface with the public to understand their needs, and

finally to see the relevance of the agency in the future in terms of its ability to help people to meet those needs.

Perspectives on Leadership Best Practices

Look for opportunity, don't get stuck on risks

“My advice to others would be to look for opportunity. Don't get stuck on the risks. Don't be stupid about the risks, I mean, know what they are and so on, but head for opportunity, head for what's good for the American people. That's who this is all about.”

– John Reynolds, former Superintendent

“I think folks, particularly new superintendents, need to answer the question for themselves: who is the National Park Service? If the National Park Service should have healthy partnerships and engage people to do things, the superintendents should be making that happen. So if a superintendent thinks that something ought to be different, look in the mirror and see if you embody it. Look in the mirror and ask yourself if you are willing to do the things that it takes to make that happen.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

“When people ask me for advice I tell them to be courageous. Don't be fearful. Think things through but then try things, take risks, trust people. If it's not going to work it's not going to work, but better to give it your all and have it not work than to just be cautious and have it not be the vision that you have. And it's relationship first, relationship second and relationship at the end in terms of making things work. But it's not just our program either. If it's going to work this way it's got to be shared. When I think of the big things we've accomplished, we wouldn't have done it without the Park, without the Forest, without the University, without the City. Those have all had their challenges, the Park probably the least in some ways, but it seems to be worth it. It's like why people have relationships – because it's fun and we get things done that we wouldn't even try doing on our own. The bottom line is we can accomplish more together than any of us can alone.”

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

Strategize for the long term

“There needs to be trust. There's got to be some patience. The idea of the Institute that Saul and Tom and John Reynolds created took 10 years to really come to any real fruition and now 20 years later to the sophisticated organization that it is today and I think that managers in the organization need to realize that they probably won't see it if they start it. They've got to be willing to invest the time and energy to get it going and then hand it off to the next set of managers with the hope and the push that they support it as equally or help take it to the next level.”

– Jon Jarvis, former Chief of Natural Resources

“Perhaps the most impactful work of the partnerships are things that will transcend you being there. The most impactful are the things where the next generation will see the results. You helped plant the seed or weed the bed but they will be there to harvest the fruit and somehow you have to learn to take satisfaction in that.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

This could be done, should be done elsewhere

“My experience with North Cascades Institute left a positive impression on me that this can be done, should be done elsewhere. These kinds of partnerships enhance our capability and capacity in parks to do great things and so whatever I can do to develop it, facilitate it, cut through the bureaucracy I will do.”

– Jon Jarvis, former Chief of Natural Resources

Focus on audience needs, not agency needs

“By turning the spotlight onto your partner, or onto the other people who are doing good work, you actually amplify your own influence.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

North Cascades Institute and North Cascades National Park have had a long and productive partnership with impressive results. Several characteristics were identified that could provide guidelines to similar partnership endeavors. The first characteristic which has the potential to be replicated is that **the partnership is based first and foremost on a shared mission**. All of the activities that the partners undertake together are grounded in the mission of conservation and restoration of northwest landscapes, including but not limited to the resources of North Cascades National Park.

This mission overlap helps individuals working within the partnering organizations to understand the rationale for partnership, but it is important to note that **internal challenges are inherent** when organizations with strikingly different organizational structures attempt to work together sharing resources and risks. Therefore the leader’s role must include a continued commitment not only to the partnership, but also to translating the benefits of the partnership to their staff members, **preferably through direct experience working together to provide positive reinforcement**.

Articulating the benefits of a partnership to staff or to community members is made easier when the partnership is **outcome based**. Identifying, demonstrating and sharing tangible successes form the basis for valuing the partnership internally and externally. If the partnership exists only on paper, for instance as an endorsement without measurable outcomes, then the benefits are invisible. One key characteristic of this partnership has been continued demonstration of measurable outcomes with an orientation to always be looking ahead to what’s next.

Growing directly from this orientation to being outcome based is the practice of **the actual work of the partnership being carried out at all levels of the organization**. The partnership cannot reach its full potential if only the leaders are working together. The partnership is stronger and the staff’s ability to understand its benefits are enhanced when **individuals from all levels of the agency are actively involved in working with individuals from all levels of the partner organization**.

Lastly, if these traits are implemented, then a culture of **learning from different organizational frameworks** can thrive, allowing each to understand the strengths and limitations of their own and their partner’s organizational structure. This is especially important in this type of public/private partnership. Leaders consistently expressed their belief that **the true benefits of the partnership lie in understanding each other’s areas of influence, areas of opportunity and areas of overlap**. By working to understand what makes them different, the partners can play to their strengths while helping each other overcome their external and internal limitations.

Perspectives on the Characteristics of a Successful Partnership

Built on shared mission

“You are going to have to start with a shared mission but then you are going to have to trust each other, you’re going to have to believe in each other, you’re going to have to weather hard times and misunderstandings, you are going to have opportunities to celebrate great joy. Words are such awkward things sometimes. I mean partnership connotes some kind of a business relationship and there is that component to it. But it’s as much a marriage as it is a business relationship. It may succeed or fail in spite of you, but it’s only going to flourish if you are passionate about it.”

– Bill Paleck, former superintendent

Internal Challenges

“What was in common with other partnerships I’d seen was that there were people on the Park staff who understand the value of the relationship with the Institute and then there are people who don’t understand it. They either feel threatened by it or they feel that somehow it devalues Park Service folks having another entity in the Park doing really good work, or somehow think that it competes for resources. That is something that I’ve seen in every park, that kind of split. It’s unfortunate and takes energy away from doing our best work.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

Outcome based

“So I think part of it is what are the benefits, especially in a partnership that they don’t control but they influence, and what do they get out of that? Outcomes, and things that are not about an isolated project but about sustaining the project over time or about what is the next project. You don’t partner just to do one thing. You partner to accomplish many things over time and there is something about that that changes the nature of the relationship. If you are looking at just a one shot deal then that’s more like a contract.”

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

Depth is derived from cutting across organizational structure

“One measure of success would be if there was literally a person in every division who came up and said “you know, I wonder if we could work with North Cascades Institute to do this.” That would be a measure of success because that would indicate first of all that people throughout the Park recognize the value of the Institute as an organization, and it would demonstrate a recognition that that partnership can make something happen that wouldn’t otherwise happen.”

– Chip Jenkins, Superintendent

“We made the conscious decision, at a fair expense to us, to keep staying co-located so that we could have those informal conversations and those discussions. I don’t think we’d have the same relationship if I got together with the superintendent four times a year for a two hour meeting and we had an agenda. I mean you could do it but it wouldn’t be the same. It’s that informal relationship over a long period of time that has been really important. A lot of problems have been solved and a lot of ideas generated from that continual contact.”

– Saul Weisberg, Executive Director

Value, understand and learn from different organizational frameworks

“A highlight for me is the really engaged board. It’s been a pleasure to interact with the board, and seeing them at work is really a positive thing. They are active and engaged. They are smart people and they have great

discussions. They come from a cross section of people in the Pacific Northwest and it is a wonderful thing to see. The Institute exists in a completely different organizational framework and I am constantly learning.”
– **Chip Jenkins, Superintendent**

The Future of the Partnership

“The opportunity for the Institute is to lead the Park Service in being comfortable in dealing with all of America.”

– **John Reynolds, former Superintendent**

The work of the partnership is ongoing and the leaders continue to focus on the challenges yet to be accomplished. Leaders identify four major areas of contribution for which they see an important role for the partnership. First, the changing demographics of the country are reflected in the Pacific Northwest and the Institute/Park partnership seeks to **help the Park be accessible and welcoming to an increasingly diverse population** who will value their National Parks because of their experiences in North Cascades.

Second, climate change is an area where the Institute and the Park, with the support of new partners like the National Park Foundation, have been working together to **help the public explore and understand how climate change is affecting the ecosystem, communities and economies of the North Cascades**. Third, as public lands change as a result of the changing climate, increasing pressure is being put on these lands from a growing population. The Institute’s close working relationship with resource managers in the Park will **continue to bring scientific information to a growing public** through learning opportunities in the North Cascades. Both partners believe this will help the public understand and be involved in management challenges.

Finally, leaders are particularly excited about the growing ability of the partnership to **reach and train the next generation of emerging leaders** through high school programs like the Parks Climate Challenge, North Cascades Wild and Mountain School. Reaching future leaders underlies one potential challenge for the partnership that leaders identify: the challenge of changing leadership and the desire to translate the lessons learned from the current generation to a new generation of leaders. These aspects of the current long-term strategic vision are characteristic of the forward-looking nature of the partnership.