



# **Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center**

Interpretive Plan

Fall, 2016

Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center Interpretive Plan

# Interpretive Plan for the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center

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Fall, 2016

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# Acknowledgements

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For Information about the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center, go to <http://www.ycic.org>

Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Initiative

Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center Interpretive Plan

# YCIC Interpretive Plan

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# Introduction

After the passage of Senate Bill 424, the Yakima River Canyon along State Route 821 became Washington's first scenic corridor. A corridor management plan was developed in the late 1960s to maximize the Canyon's aesthetic beauty and recreational potential, but progress was stalled until 2010 and the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Initiative (YRCSBI). Since 2010, there has been an awakening of the original 1968 corridor management plan through reprioritization of plan goals by Forterra, the largest land conservation, stewardship and community building organization in Washington State, and the Kittitas Environmental Education Network (KEEN). An open conversation with the local public in both Yakima and Kittitas Counties and area stakeholders to identify the vision for the canyon helped to shape the YRCSBI. Initiative goals include improvements to visitor experience, improvements to tourism, protection of resources, and sustainable facilities for visitors of the byway. At the end of October, 2010, twenty-six federal, state, and local agencies, conservation groups, clubs, local business partners and private landowners signed a Memorandum of Understanding, establishing a collective dedicated to designing, implementing and promoting the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway. The Memorandum of Understanding was updated and re-signed in the spring of 2016 with additional partners coming on board, and with a focus on plan implementation.

In 2008, KEEN began planning for the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Natural History Center (now renamed as the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center) bringing together community members and supporters to outline goals, purpose and timelines for the Center. The project has gone through several iterations and is now seeing renewed focus on zero energy and zero carbon design with a new architectural team and a strong fundraising plan. The purpose of the Center has always been to welcome visitors to the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway, provide interpretation of the surrounding habitat and ecosystems of the Canyon, and to provide a sense of place for our community within the broader regional context of the Pacific Northwest.

The interpretive plan described here includes the goals and desired outcomes for a visitor experience in and around the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center (YCIC) and the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway. It also includes themes and a prescription of interpretive strategies for communicating these themes to achieve the desired outcomes. The prescription is meant to guide future exhibits and programming—to provide direction—while accommodations are made to allow for creativity of the designer and budget.

The prescription is presented here to reflect the desired visitor experience at the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center and scenic byway. Because the Interpretive Center is still in the planning phase, many of the design elements and exhibits are presented as strategies to guide and assist in future planning and programming. While the look and size of many elements have not been prescribed, and trails have not been marked, the themes and goals will be central to the design process.

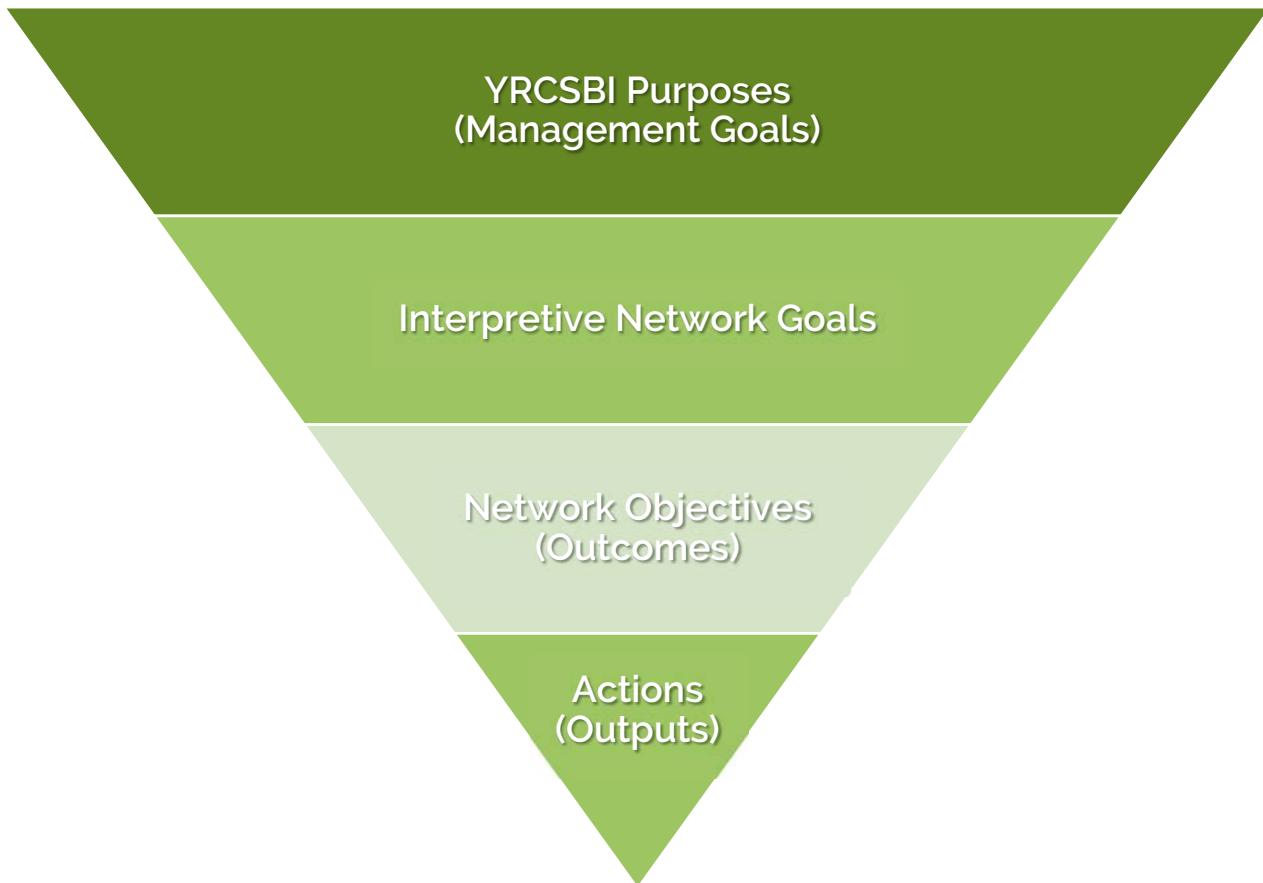
The sections included in this plan provide an overview for the visitor experience both on site and along the canyon corridor, and describe roughly the interpretive and informational strategies recommended for each part of the visitor experience.



# Goals and Objectives

## Introduction

The goals and objectives described herein were derived from management goals developed in the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Initiative, and follow a hierarchical structure as depicted in the following graphic.



## YRCSBI Purposes (Management Goals)

The Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Initiative set the following objectives for education in and around the scenic byway:

1. Provide natural and cultural educational opportunities.
2. Involve the public.
3. Build lasting partnerships with community, local government, and agency stakeholders.

As many of the visitors to the center will be families with children, the Washington State Environmental and Sustainability Education Standards (set by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) must also be considered in development of programming. Every program and exhibit put forth by YCIC should in some way help fulfill one or more of these purposes. The specific interpretive network goals presented in this document were created with these purposes in mind.

## Interpretive Program Goals and Outcomes

**Note:** The term ‘visitor’ refers to anyone who visits the park or canyon whether he or she is a resident of Kittitas County or not.

### Introduction

An interpretive program can help achieve the KEEN’s educational goals and the intent of the YRCSB by increasing a visitor’s understanding and awareness of concepts associated with the macro- and microcosms of the Yakima River Canyon corridor, and how these are intricately intertwined and related to one another—and to our own cultural heritage. Through that increased understanding and awareness, visitor behaviors will change as feelings of ownership and stewardship of the natural environment become the norm. To increase the level of stewardship, KEEN will offer opportunities that lead to:

- Better understanding of personal impact on the environment.
- Better understanding of the interconnectedness of life along the canyon corridor and thus the importance of management of our rare and vanishing ecosystem.
- Better understanding of the fragility of the shrub-steppe ecosystem and the urgent need to protect it.
- Greater appreciation for the recreational and scenic opportunities presented in the Yakima River Canyon, and
- Better understanding of the key threats faced by the shrub-steppe ecosystem and how those threats are being addressed.



Visitors with understanding of these key points will also comprehend ecosystem function and the importance of appropriate management actions and philosophies.

## Goals and Outcomes

The following Interpretive Program Goals and Outcomes were derived from surveys of local visitors, recreation and tourism data for the county, and the overall conservation and sustainability efforts of local environmental groups—the purpose being to modify current visitor behavior to better meet or achieve the goals, and to increase interest of existing tourist groups. The goals are interrelated, being specific and measureable. They help provide focus for future programming, interpretation, and evaluation.



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### *Interpretive Goal 1:*

Welcome and orient visitors to the park, services and recreational/interpretive opportunities in the area of Helen McCabe Park and the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway.

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This is accomplished by outreach through social media, web-based platforms, highway signage, interpretive and way-finding signage within the Canyon, Center signage, educational campaigns and other outlets to increase visitor comfort on-site and throughout the canyon corridor.

#### **Outcomes**

Achieving the following outcomes will reflect progress toward this goal:

- 1.1 There will be an 80% increase in the number of vehicles which stop and/or drive in to the facility from pre-improvement numbers by the second season of center operation.
- 1.2 All visitors (100%) will encounter a map or sign that orients visitors to park and/or canyon within 15 feet of parking at the Interpretive Center.
- 1.3 KEEN social media sites will have a 200% increase in the number of 'likes', 'followers' or other such measures.
- 1.4 KEEN's email list for members and 'interested' persons will grow to 5,000 people by the second year of operations.
- 1.5 KEEN electronic newsletters will have a 50% open rate and a 30% click-through rate by the second year of operations.
- 1.6 WSDOT, Kittitas County and other partners will assist in design, fabrication, installation and funding of signage for the Yakima River Canyon and the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center prior to center opening.

## *Interpretive Goal 2:*

Promote visitor appreciation and understanding of the natural, recreational and cultural resources of the area.

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This goal is accomplished by enhancing the quality of experience for visitors who visit the canyon corridor for recreational experience and providing interpretive signage or programming at point of visit.

### **Outcomes**

Achieving the following outcomes will reflect progress toward this goal:

- 2.1 A 50% increase in approval rating by visitors to the site or canyon corridor specifically due to interpretation.
- 2.2 A 25% increase in the percentage of people engaging in “no trace” recreation by packing out garbage and pet waste.
- 2.3 Fifteen interpretive signs will be installed along the canyon corridor by 2020 and safe pull-offs to access them will also be constructed.
- 2.4 Interpretive trails at YCIC will be completed by year 1 of center operations.
- 2.5 Interpretive materials will be designed, funded and in circulation prior to center opening.
- 2.6 Electronic and printed surveys will be designed to measure visitor appreciation and will be sent to visitors subsequent to their visit to collect data on understanding/appreciation, showing continued visitor knowledge growth over first two years of center operation.

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## *Interpretive Goal 3:*

Educate and inform visitors about appropriate resource use and encourage appropriate use.

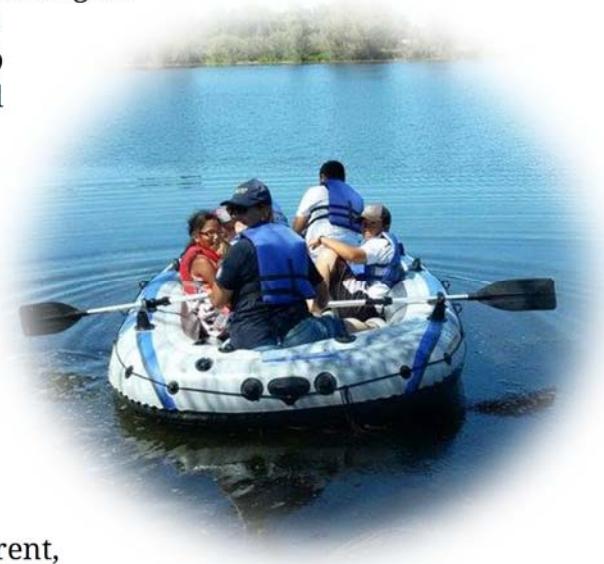
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This goal directs KEEN to choose and locate interpretive strategies to achieve a high probability of being used, which means tailoring them to the specific audiences they are trying to reach, and locating opportunities in the areas frequented by these visitors.

### **Outcomes**

Achieving the following outcomes will reflect progress toward this goal:

- 3.1 A 25% increase in the percentage of visitors participating in at least one interpretive opportunity.
- 3.2 A 10% increase in the percentage of bicyclists, birders, or anglers participating in at least one interpretive opportunity.
- 3.3 An increase in the number of visitors who get current, seasonally appropriate information on key corridor message.



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### *Interpretive Goal 4:*

Educate and inform visitors about the interconnections and interdependency of ecological, social, and economic systems.

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KEEN offers several interpretive programs that support this goal, such as guided nature walks, events, and other environmental education opportunities; these help weave the story of the canyon corridor. The addition of the interpretive center programming and exhibits will achieve the following outcomes.

#### **Outcomes**

Achieving the following outcomes will reflect progress toward this goal:

- 4.1 A 25% increase in the percentage of visitors participating in at least one interpretive opportunity.
  - 4.2 A 10% increase in the percentage of visitors participating in more than one interpretive opportunity per year.
  - 4.3 A 10% increase in the number/frequency of collaborative programs involving local organizations within the first five years of center operation.
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### *Interpretive Goal 5:*

Increase conservation efforts by residents and non-residents, including support for management philosophy and actions.

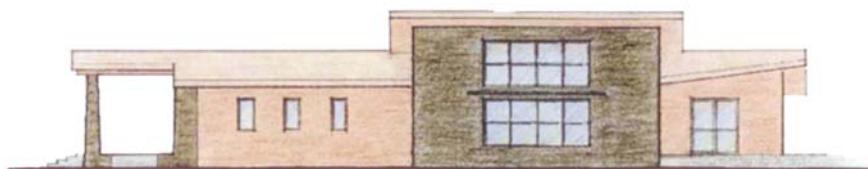
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A well-functioning interpretive network inspires visitors to take action. This goal is accomplished by exemplar programming, consistent messaging, and corridor-long interpretation that invites all visitors to learn and grow.

#### **Outcomes**

Achieving the following outcomes will reflect progress toward this goal:

- 5.1 A 15% increase in the percentage of visiting households making financial contributions to YCIC's conservation efforts within one month of their visit.
- 5.2 A 10% increase in the percentage of visiting households participating in KEEN-sponsored volunteer events within six months of their visit.
- 5.3 Social networking posts from YCIC are retweeted, reposted, and shared by 60% of visitors to the park or corridor.
- 5.4 Geotags at YCIC will increase by 10% every year for the first five years of center operation.
- 5.5 Interpretive postcards provided at the center will be sent by 30% of visitors.





# Themes (Messages)

## Introduction

One of the fastest shrinking ecosystems, the delicate shrub-steppe flourishes atop flood basalts cut by millions of years of water flow through the Yakima River, intensified by slow, steady uplift of the land. Salmon travel upriver to spawn; minerals and nutrients flow from mountains to basins and help feed the fertile valleys below. People and goods travel through the canyon connecting cultures, histories, and facilitating trade for thousands of years.

The Yakima River Canyon offers visitors an easily accessible window into the shrub-steppe ecosystem and more than 200 bird species and 30 kinds of mammals. As large areas of shrub-steppe in the United States have been tilled for agriculture or invaded by non-native plant species, native wildlife have been severely impacted, and the ecology changed.

Helen McCabe Memorial State Park, though no longer an exemplar image of the shrub-steppe ecosystem, continues to be part of the Yakima River watershed and part of the history of SR-821, Washington's first scenic byway.

The elements in the theme hierarchy include:

### **Themes**

The key ideas or concepts that are to be communicated.

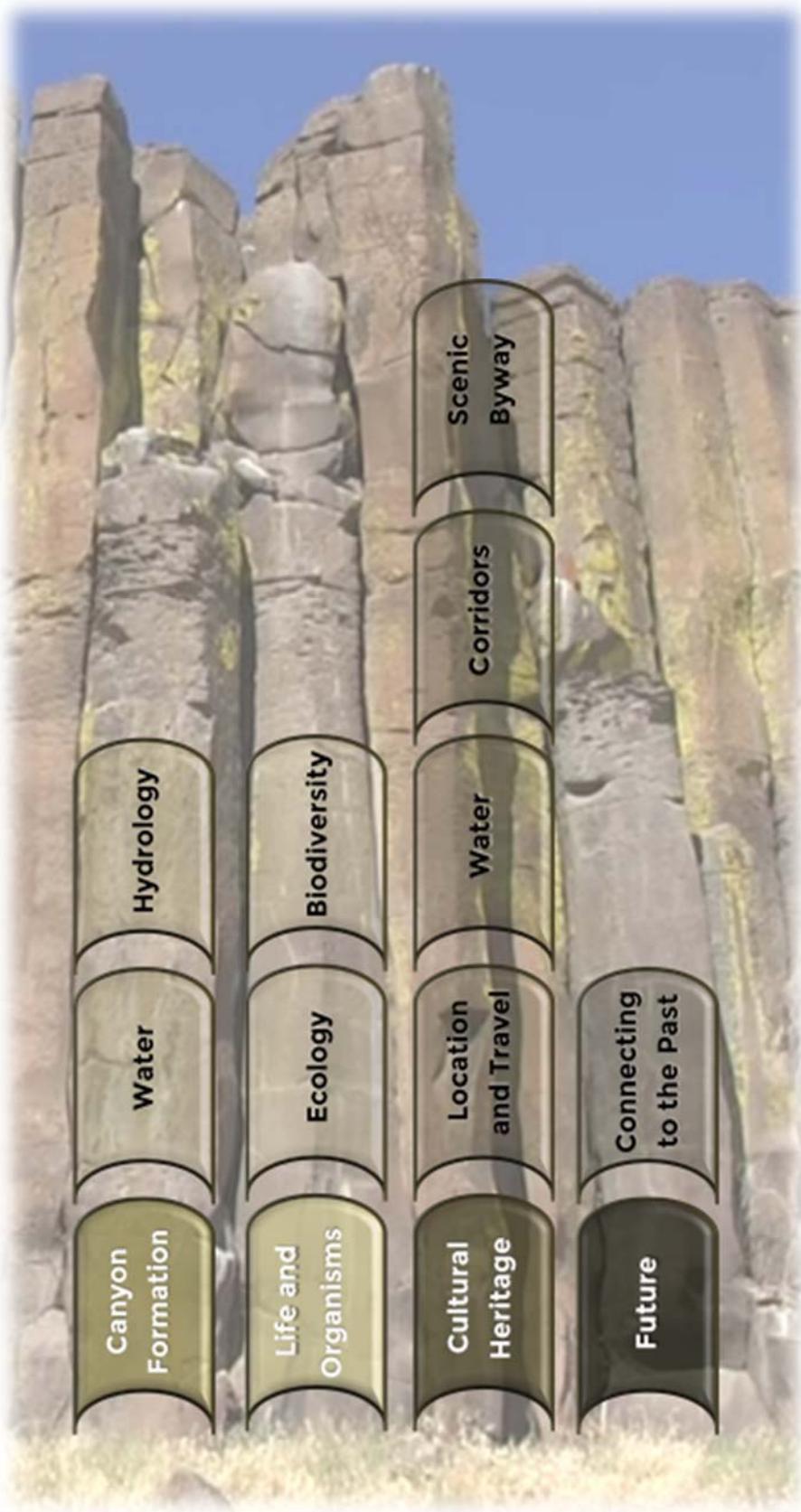
### **Sub-themes**

The concepts that support the theme.

### **Supporting Stories**

Examples of stories that communicate the sub-theme or theme.

Goals and objectives help form the theme hierarchy and determine the concepts a visitor needs to understand to respond in a way that reflects stewardship of the canyon corridor and shrub-steppe ecosystem.



## Theme Hierarchy

### Theme 1: Canyon Formation

More than 17 million years of geologic and natural histories have shaped the Yakima River Canyon into a unique geologic story, witnessed today.

#### Sub-theme 1-1: Water

Unlike other river canyons, the meandering path of the Yakima River indicates the river preceded the ridges around it and as such the river today is trapped in its current path.

##### **Examples of supporting stories**

- Uplift of the surrounding rock intensified the erosion of the canyon
- The carving of the canyon has locked the river in its current path

#### Sub-theme 1-2: Hydrology

Today, the Yakima River is managed to meet the irrigation needs of agricultural producers along its length. Management for irrigation has dramatically altered the hydrology of the river. The river's hydrology is also expected to change as the weather patterns in our region change.

##### **Examples of supporting stories**

- History of irrigation in the Yakima Basin
- Detailed information about Roza Dam
- Explanation of watershed patterns: rain-dominant, snow-dominant, transitional



## Theme 2: Life and Organisms

The diversity of the Yakima River Canyon and its unique ecosystem is a complex and interrelated network that depends on conservation efforts to prevent it from vanishing completely.

### Sub-theme 2-1: Ecology

The Yakima River Canyon offers visitors an easily accessible window into the shrub-steppe ecosystem, one of the fastest shrinking ecosystems in the world.

#### Examples of supporting stories

- Understand the natural systems to preserve and restore intact ecosystems

### Sub-theme 2-2: Biodiversity

The shrub-steppe ecosystem offers an endemic assortment of plants and animals, with both intrinsic and scientific value that increase their importance to society.

#### Examples of supporting stories

- Salmon and steelhead life cycles and value to humans and other components of the ecosystem
- The negative impacts of invasives
- Issues with stream bank erosion caused by anglers
- Importance of trail designation and use to minimize human impact on the delicate landscape



## Theme 3: Cultural Heritage

The Yakima River Canyon has served as a travel corridor for millennia. The resources of the Yakima River (especially fish and wildlife) have always been, and will continue to be, integral to the lifestyles of those who live here and, increasingly, to people from out of the area.

### Sub-theme 3-1: Location and Travel

Helen McCabe Memorial State Park is a gateway to the Yakima River Canyon, located at the mouth of a basalt-walled travel corridor used by both humans and wildlife.

#### Examples of supporting stories

- Artifacts and stories from indigenous cultures indicate that the natural canyon served as a through-way and important trade route long before Euro-American settlement.
- People and goods travel through the canyon connecting cultures, histories, and facilitating trade for thousands of years

### Sub-theme 3-2: Water

The water of the Yakima River has been used as both a resource and for transportation and recreation throughout time.

#### **Examples of supporting stories**

- The importance of fish as a food resource
- Use of the water in agriculture
- Transportation of goods

### Sub-theme 3-3: Corridors

While the corridor is a natural path for wildlife, nutrients and water, it is also a connection between our past and present, and is essential to providing our future. The corridor health is connected to the health of other systems.

#### **Examples of supporting stories**

- The link between natural and human systems
- Use of canyon resources in agriculture
- Wildlife migration and connection to ecological systems

### Sub-theme 3-4: Scenic Byway

Washington was one of the first states to establish a system of scenic highways, the first of which is the Yakima Canyon Scenic Byway.

#### **Examples of supporting stories**

- The establishment of the scenic byways program
- Role of Dr. Helen McCabe in Canyon protection



## Theme 4: Future

The abundant natural resources of the Yakima Canyon have attracted humans for millennia, and protecting the region's special values in the face of climate change and urban sprawl is imperative.

### Sub-theme 4-1: Connecting to the Past

Connecting to our past through visitation of the Yakima River Canyon, visitors learn how to travel and interact with the land while reducing impact.

#### **Examples of supporting stories**

- The role of conservation
- Actions by local residents to conserve energy



# Information/Interpretive Network

## Overview

The flow of information in and through the interpretive network reflects the typical sequence of information desired by visitors. Once on-site, first-time visitors will need site-specific orientation and wayfinding information to locate restrooms and plan their visit. Many may also be seeking orientation and wayfinding information for exploring the Yakima River Canyon and will want to obtain a map of the area and get answers to basic questions for trip planning, such as “What is there to do here?” and “Where can I see wildlife?”

Since orientation and wayfinding information is a primary need, it has priority over interpretive opportunities which – for other travelers – are options for spending time. To facilitate a good interpretive experience, the orientation and wayfinding information is available at the beginning of the visitor experience, in the lobby, in the form of a docent or volunteer guide, maps and a topographic model, all with answers to basic questions. Because safety is also important, guidelines for recreating safely in the Yakima River Canyon are offered in the same location to increase the probability of visitors encountering that information. Basic orientation and wayfinding information is also available at the parking lot in two or more locations to serve visitors who come when the facility is not open or who do not wish to visit the interpretive center at the time.



There are different interpretive opportunities which have varied durations to meet the many and diverse needs of the visitors. Each of these experiences is designed to stand alone, but also to inspire visitors to return and participate in other interpretive opportunities. Visitors with only a few minutes can read the kiosk and answer the basic question, “What is this place?” Visitors to the information desk in the lobby of the interpretive center would be able to answer the secondary question, “Why is this place special?” (at a rudimentary level). Each experience would then add a layer of understanding, further answering the questions above, and telling the story of the interconnected natural and human histories of the canyon corridor.

The exhibit elements in the Exhibit Hall visible from the lobby are designed to attract visitors with more time to travel into the virtual canyon to learn the stories the corridor has to tell. The Exhibit Hall also opens out on to the terrace where visitors can start their outdoor learning experience (or further it) on the interpretive loop trails. As a whole, the interpretive network inspires people to explore and discover the Yakima River Canyon while associated information provides the maps and other information to facilitate that experience.

The information is organized into the following sections:

**Arrival/Departure:** This encompasses the visitor experience from the parking lot to the front door, and then from the front door back to their vehicle.

**Building:** This encompasses the lobby, the education room and the exhibit hall.

**Outdoor:** This encompasses the back terrace and interpretive trail associated with this facility.

Each of the following sections contains an overview of the experience and a summary of the interpretive strategies recommended for that area followed by a description of and design concepts for those strategies where applicable.

*Note: This plan was developed during the building design process so exact conditions, sizes and other factors relating to the infrastructure are not finalized. Consequently, the recommendations for this network and the strategies may have to be modified based on the final building configuration and dimensions and on the landscape surrounding the building.*

The themes developed for this document and described in the previous section are meant to be a guide for future decision-making about infrastructure at the site and along the canyon corridor. As such, the experiences described in the following pages are to be developed in support of these themes; the following chart provides an analysis of where each interpretive strategy can support the YCIC themes.

Themes	Directional Signage	Site Orientation Kiosk	Area Orientation Kiosk	Interpretive Panels	Safety Panels	Information Desk	Self-Serve Orientation Area	Topographic Model	Educational Programming	Presentations	Audiovisual Program	Mini-diorama(s)	Plant/Animal Identification Panels	Touchable Specimens	Large Animal Taxidermy	Smells of the Shrub-Steppe	Xeriscaping	Interpretive Trails
1-1		●	●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●					●	
1-2			●		●			●	●	●	●						●	
2-1		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2-2			●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●					●	
3-1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					●	
3-2		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●	
3-3			●		●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●				●	
3-4	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●						●	
4-1			●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●					●	●	

## Arrival/Departure Experience

### Overview

Visitors are introduced to the idea of spending time on YCIC's site through social media, advertisements in local newspaper inserts ("Kittitas County Living", etc.), the Chamber of Commerce weekly newsletter, the local sports shop, and websites (such as Washington Trails Association, Geocaching.com, TripAdvisor, ModernMom.com, MyEllensburg, HotelPlanner, YCIC.org, etc.). Advertisements, announcements, and outreach through community centers such as RSVP, the Senior Center, churches, and the local library add a special touch, making visitors feel personally invited. Easy to locate (and print) maps are accessible from websites, including directions to the site, sitemaps, and activity calendars.

Clear signs along major highway/routes of travel guide travelers to Helen McCabe Park. Wayfinding signs direct families to the Interpretive Center and parking or the pond/natural play area parking. Visitors arrive at the park to clear welcome signs. Visitors are greeted by nonpersonal signage at restrooms and parking lots, including a large orientation map. Smaller site maps are available for visitors to take with them while they explore the park (downloadable or available via mobile apps), marking interpretive points along the trails, recycling and trash bins, restroom facilities, natural play space, shaded picnic shelters and other points of interest.

When arriving at the Interpretive Center parking area, clear signage orients the visitor to this part of the park. When entering the Interpretive Center during open hours, a park interpreter (or docent) greets the visitor, providing direction to exhibits, highlights the ecological importance of the area, and offers the available "Adventure Pack" to check out during their visit. The interpreter encourages families of older children to participate in scavenger hunt activities and explains the prizes.



### Summary of Strategies

In summary, the following strategies comprise the basic interpretive network to facilitate the Arrival/Departure experience:

- Directional Signage
- Site Orientation Kiosk
- Area Orientation Kiosk
- Shrub-steppe Interpretive Panels (at multiple entry points)
- Safety Panels

Multiple entry points and a large parking lot necessitate multiple points of communication to visitors.

## Descriptions/Concepts

### Directional Signage

#### Locations

At potentially confusing intersections encountered by on-site visitors and along the canyon corridor.

#### Objectives

After encountering directional signage, visitors will be able to:

- Confidently and easily make a route choice.

### Design Concept

All signage is unified under color schemes and styles used along the corridor and in other elements of the information network.



## Site Orientation Kiosk and Area Orientation Kiosks

### Locations

A large kiosk present at the start of the path toward the interpretive center contains all site information (safety, orientation to site and surrounding area, recreational opportunities, interpretive panels, special events schedule, etc.), while a smaller kiosk at the north entrance of the parking lot contains an abbreviated version of the information.

#### Objectives

After viewing the kiosk, visitors will be able to:

- Find the best route to the Interpretive Center,
- Navigate from their location in relation to other areas of interest on-site and along the canyon corridor,
- Find the next space in which they may continue their experience,
- Identify key interpretive/recreational opportunities on-site and along the canyon corridor (including trails), and
- Identify accessible opportunities (if needed).

## Design Concept

The effectiveness of the signage depends on design and placement. The following important aspects will increase effectiveness:

1. Limit information to help with function; avoid putting symbols and information that does not help (especially on the map). Adding unnecessary information clutters the sign and increases the difficulty in getting the desired information, which usually focuses on answering questions such as “Where am I?,” “What is there to do here?,” and, “How do I get where I want to go?” At a minimum, the site orientation kiosks should contain the following:
  - Simplified map of the site including roads, parking areas, trails, structures and key features
  - Mileages and times for walking the trails
  - A “You Are Here” symbol
  - Visuals of key interpretive and recreational opportunities tied to the park and canyon corridor
  - List of services available in the Interpretive Center and major services along the canyon corridor
  - North arrow
  - Legend scale (i.e., 1 inch = 100 yards)
2. People expect information at the top of a map to be in front of them (rather than the map be oriented north), thus the kiosk must be oriented such that the map has this orientation when the visitor is facing the sign. This requires determining the location and orientation for the kiosks prior to fabrication.
3. The same map used on the kiosk must also be printed in all other forms (i.e. brochures, websites, etc.). This aids visitors who move back and forth between media.
4. For maps of the canyon, use a 3-dimensional look to the map to help visitors recognize features.

Use of a stylized oblique aerial perspective graphic of the canyon corridor as a major orientation element and as a backdrop for all basic orientation information would assist in visitor navigation. Images of recreational opportunities (hiking trails, boat launches, vineyards, etc.) will be organized around the perimeter of the map with graphic elements (such as a line) connecting the image to the appropriate location on the map.

## Shrub-Steppe Interpretive Panels

### Locations

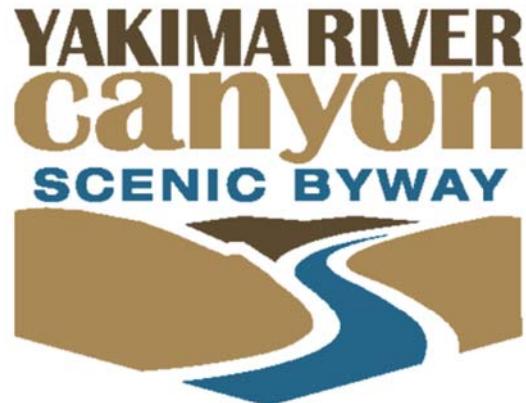
Edge of the parking lot and along the canyon corridor at existing pull-outs and camping areas and along pre-existing trail systems.

### Objectives

After visitors interact with interpretive panels, they will be able to

- Explain one natural feature of the canyon corridor, and
- Find more information about the shrub-steppe.

**Note:** Other objectives depend on the themes selected to guide the design of these panels, which in turn depends on the elements in line-of-sight from the final location of the panel.



## Design Concept

The panels are low-angled to facilitate focus on the environment/features being interpreted rather than preventing visual access to those features. The basic concept is to use elements of the landscape as focal points for connections between corridor health and the health of other systems, or on the importance of a particular species of vegetation in the health of the shrub-steppe environ. As this plan is meant as a guide, specific locations of these signs are not indicated and therefore the landscape visible from these panels is not yet known and will need careful planning prior to fabrication and placement.

## Safety Panels

### Locations

At major visitor points (i.e. on YCIC grounds, parking lots, pull-outs along the canyon corridor, campgrounds, etc.).

### Objectives

After interacting with these panels, visitors will:

1. Be more comfortable engaging in recreational opportunities on site and along the canyon corridor, and therefore more likely to engage in outdoor recreational activities,
2. Be aware of rattlesnake and tick hazards associated with recreating in this area,
3. State how to recognize warning signs of rattlesnake activity and act accordingly, and
4. State how to minimize the potential for encounters.

## Design Concept

The kiosks are designed to encourage visitors to engage in outdoor recreational activities, and signs educating visitors about these activities safely must not make visitors afraid to recreate. The very real danger of a rattlesnake encounter should not be minimized, but visitors should also not be frightened about recreating.

One possible design concept is to use images of people recreating in the area amidst wildlife accompanied by the question “Is This Safe?” For example, a hiker going off trail; a visitor turning over rocks; an angler fishing from a rocky shore; a child reaching down to touch a snake; etc. The point is to communicate that recreationists and wildlife can co-exist. The other images should focus on guidelines for avoiding encounters, recognizing warning behaviors and what to do when they occur. These would be accompanied by the answer, “Yes. With a Few Precautions.”

## Building Experience: Lobby Overview

The purposes of YCIC and KEEN in this part of the experience are to satisfy the basic needs of visitors, motivate visitors to engage in interpretive opportunities inside the Interpretive Center and on site, and facilitate exciting experiences along the canyon corridor. A visitor entering the facility will be greeted by a docent or volunteer sitting at the Information Desk, the Topographic Model, and the Self-Serve Orientation area, visitor restrooms or signage which clearly marks the location of the restrooms, and the exit to the Exhibit Hall, Education and Meeting Rooms.

### Information Desk

The Information Desk provides visitors with information and the opportunity to ask questions of the docent or volunteer. This is a more critical part of the experience on site, as it may be one of the only personal interactions a visitor has and it sends a message that KEEN and YCIC hold service to the public in very high esteem.



### Self-Serve Orientation Area

The area allows visitors to get all the orientation and wayfinding information they need without having to go to the Information Desk. Availability of the information eases pressure on the Information Desk when the facility is crowded and serves visitors who prefer to gather information impersonally. Key information needs to include answers to basic questions, such as "Where can I see wildlife?" and "What is there to do here?", and orientation and wayfinding information facilitating a visit to sites along the canyon corridor. Visitors who choose to find information at this part of the facility should be able to select an activity, such as hiking, canoeing, birdwatching, etc., and easily find information to facilitate their desired experience, such as maps and other publications.

### Topographic Model

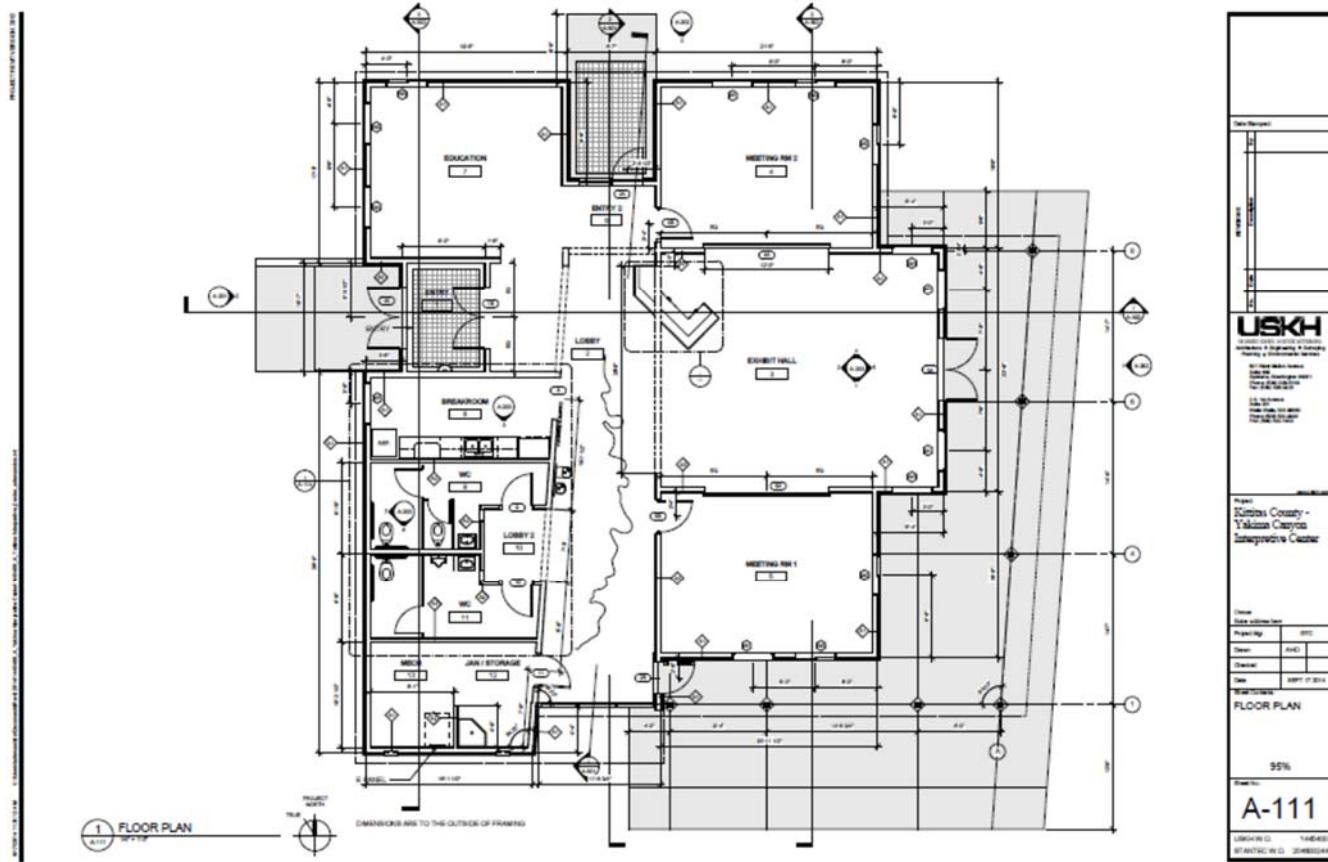
The function of this element is primarily as an orientation, wayfinding and trip planning strategy rather than an interpretive strategy, but should be designed so it can be used for talks. Visitors will use it to orient themselves to the area in terms of where they are, where they have been and where they can go. They will also use it to determine physical location/relative location of opportunities, such as good places to see wildlife, places to hike, picnic sites, places to camp and to engage in other activities on the canyon corridor.

# Summary of Strategies

The lobby will contain the information desk and the following information/interpretive strategies:

- Self-Serve Orientation Area
  - Topographic Model

As of creation of this document, a floorplan for the center has not been finalized. The image that follows is the second rendering of the Interpretive Center:



# Descriptions/Concepts

## Self-Serve Orientation Area

## Location

The location of this area is dependent on final floor plan of the lobby area, but should be easily accessed with room for navigation of multiple visitors.

## Objectives

After interacting with the Self-Serve Orientation Area, visitors will:

- Have had most (if not all) their orientation and wayfinding questions answered, especially “What is there to do here?” and “Where can I see wildlife?”,
  - Be excited about exploring the site and the Yakima River Canyon, and
  - Have all the information they need for their desired experience.

## Design Concept

To function effectively, visitors entering the facility must be able to quickly identify the type of information offered at this station. One possibility for a basic panel or literature display would be to

use a large title and visual element, such as “What is there to do here?”, accompanied by a stylized three-dimensional representation of the site and/or canyon corridor from an oblique aerial perspective as an organizer for large images of people engaging in a variety of recreational activities. The intent is not to show all locations for all activities, but rather to convey the idea that the Yakima River Canyon offers a large array of opportunities and that visitors can find information about all of those activities at this station. A map of the Yakima River Canyon and publications relating to each activity will be available at the station. An interactive element, such as an electronic touch-screen kiosk, could include an interactive version of the recreational map, interpretive questions answered (such as, “What species is this?”), and videos which display explanations and/or visual overviews of specific sites along the corridor. There also could be a downloadable app that visitors could use to guide their experience through the byway without the need for cellphone or internet access.

### Topographic Model

#### Location

The location of the model is dependent on the final floor plan of the lobby area, but should be easily accessed with room for navigation of multiple visitors.

#### Objectives

After interacting with the model, visitors will:

- Be able to name at least one of the multiple hiking trails and campgrounds on site and along the canyon corridor,
- Identify two of the different land-use types along the canyon corridor (Designated Wilderness, private land, etc.),
- Be inspired to visit other parts of the canyon and park, and
- Be confident in their location and the locations of sites they wish to visit, and the general layout of the canyon corridor.

#### Design Concept

The topographic model should represent the entire Yakima River Canyon and should be large enough to function effectively for locating key recreational opportunities and attractions. Specific land-use areas will be obviously designated. Circular or oblong shapes work better for topographic models of this kind than square or rectangular models because they are better at facilitating social interaction – a prime activity for visitors engaging in such an experience – and they do not have sharp corners as hazards. Touchable and durable models are also preferable.

The model can be simple, where the information is communicated only via written and graphical means, or it can be more complex, such as including a systems where visitors can push buttons to obtain more information.

As this is an orientation, wayfinding and trip planning strategy, the map/brochure for the Yakima River Canyon and YCIC should be available nearby. Ideally, the map in the brochure would be similar to the topographic model so users can easily move intellectually between the two.

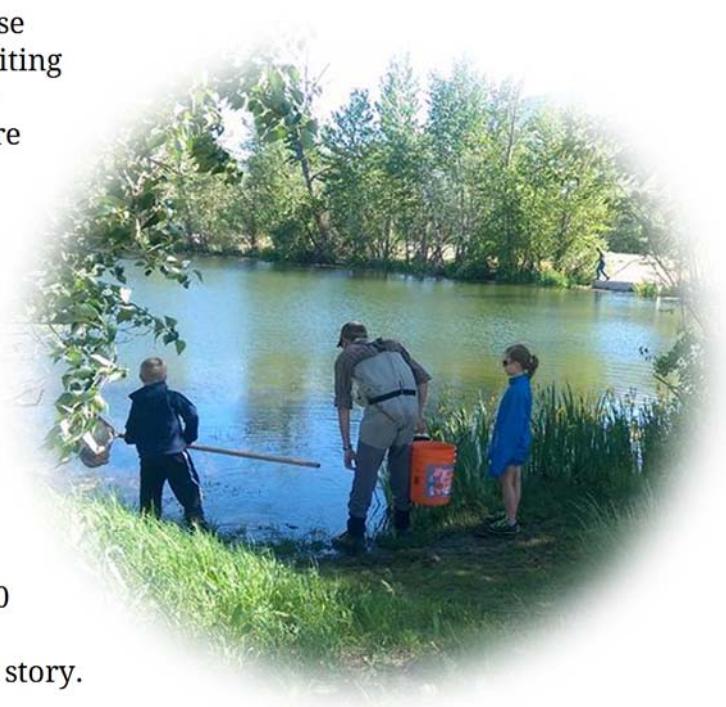


## Building Experience: Education Room

### Overview

This area of the Interpretive Center is a multipurpose classroom for use by K-12 students and teachers visiting the site, on-site camps and field-work, and summer programming. The intent is to provide a space where communication pre- and post-visit can be accomplished with a larger sized group of students. Additionally, the space will be used for interpretive presentations and special events, which will be an important strategy for serving not only the K-12 student but also other local residents by offering new opportunities.

The area could also function during open visitor hours as an audio-visual presentation room, where a video program describing the natural and cultural history of the area could play on repeat. The video program could be divided into shorter (10 minute or so) segments that could be viewed independently, offering chapters of one continuous story.



### Summary of Strategies

The Education Room will be a large open space with seating and will conform to the following information/interpretive strategies:

- Educational programming
- Presentations
- Audiovisual program (such as a video)

### Descriptions/Concepts

#### Audiovisual Program

#### Location

#### Education Room

#### Objectives

After viewing the program, visitors will:

- State three of the major themes that guide the interpretive network,
- Feel inspired to view the exhibits and experience the outdoor exhibits and interpretive trail,
- Feel inspired to explore the canyon corridor and nature center site,
- Understand the need for intact ecosystems and wilderness,
- Understand issues with invasive species,
- Understand the threats of global climate change,
- Understand the importance of natural process and systems,
- Know that humans have long been and will continue to be part of the system,
- Know that everything in the system is linked, and
- Know about the geomorphologic forces at work to form what is here now.

### Design Concept

A variety of treatments can be used to present the desired picture of the canyon corridor and its importance. One possibility is to start with the era when the land was being shaped by great floods of lava and carry it forward through different eras of geologic and human history and use before focusing on the canyon corridor today. The core of the program would explore different microcosms within the shrub-steppe ecosystem. It is important to focus on wilderness and intact ecosystems even under threat from human activities in a positive way while building awareness of the issues, what is being done, and ways they can help. The video program should convey that what is going to happen in the future rests in the hands of the visitor.

## Building Experience: Exhibit Hall

### Overview

This space contains the core of the interpretive experience at the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center. Its purpose is to communicate and reinforce the themes identified for the interpretive network to as many visitors as possible. To that end, it will provide a variety of different access paths to the key messages in the form of different topics and media with the intent of providing a large enough array of opportunities so that everyone will find something that captures their attention and imagination. The intent is also to provide the opportunity to dig deeper into the stories that are presented in other programs offered at the site.

Key aspects of approach to developing the concept for the exhibits include the following emphasis:

- Connections and interrelationships among systems (human and natural),
- ‘Discovery’ of an awe inspiring and rare place, the Yakima River Canyon,
- Exciting and inspiring visitors to explore the landscape and experiencing it as experts in finding connections, signs of wildlife and other aspects of the land and its inhabitants, and
- Providing an interactive, multi-sensory experience.

As the exhibit area floor plan is not yet finalized, the precise layout cannot be presented here—in its place, a general flow is considered.

Visitors can enter the exhibit area from the lobby. The floorplan should be open, with plenty of space to move around the exhibit area and ease of navigation for multiple visitors. The exhibit area will be divided into several focused zones, including one special area for a rotating exhibit.

Exhibit elements within each zone include drawers, doors, flip plates and other means of ‘discovering’ different aspects of the canyon using all senses. All aspects of the canyon corridor – plants, mammals, reptiles, fish, birds, humans, and the natural forces that have and continue to shape the land – can be found in the array of strategies to emphasize that all occur in the same place at the same time, and they are all connected, and to emphasize that humans are integrally connected to the canyon corridor. The issues facing the shrub-steppe environment and potential impacts can also be found in the array of strategies.

The integration of a variety of elements into a single exhibit reflects the holistic quality of nature and avoids compartmentalization of information, which tends to be an obstacle in communicating interactions and connections. To avoid giving the impression of a vast quantity of information to digest, while at the same time motivating visitors to engage, much of the information will be hidden in drawers, recesses, flip plates and other reveals waiting to be discovered as visitors discover the Yakima River Canyon.

### Summary of Strategies

The exhibits in the Exhibit Hall will be developed to include the following:

- Mini-diorama(s),
- Cultural history and use of the canyon,
- Plant/animal identification panels,
- Touchable “cookies”, bark, and/or fallen limbs from tree and shrub species,
- Touchable skull collection,

- Large animal taxidermy, and
- Smells of the shrub-steppe.

## Descriptions/Concepts

Although specific exhibits are not yet planned, a general flow and pattern to the exhibit area can be outlined. The decision for exhibit designs will follow the themes and sub-themes outlined in this plan, and have a unified look and feel that ties these exhibits to the interpretive panels and other parts of the interpretive network.

### Main (Permanent) Exhibits

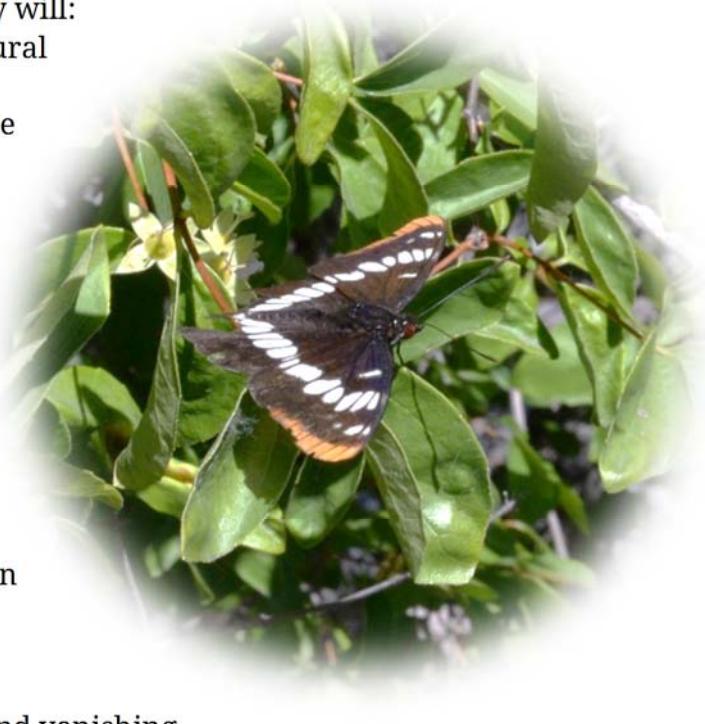
#### Location

The Exhibit Hall

#### Objectives

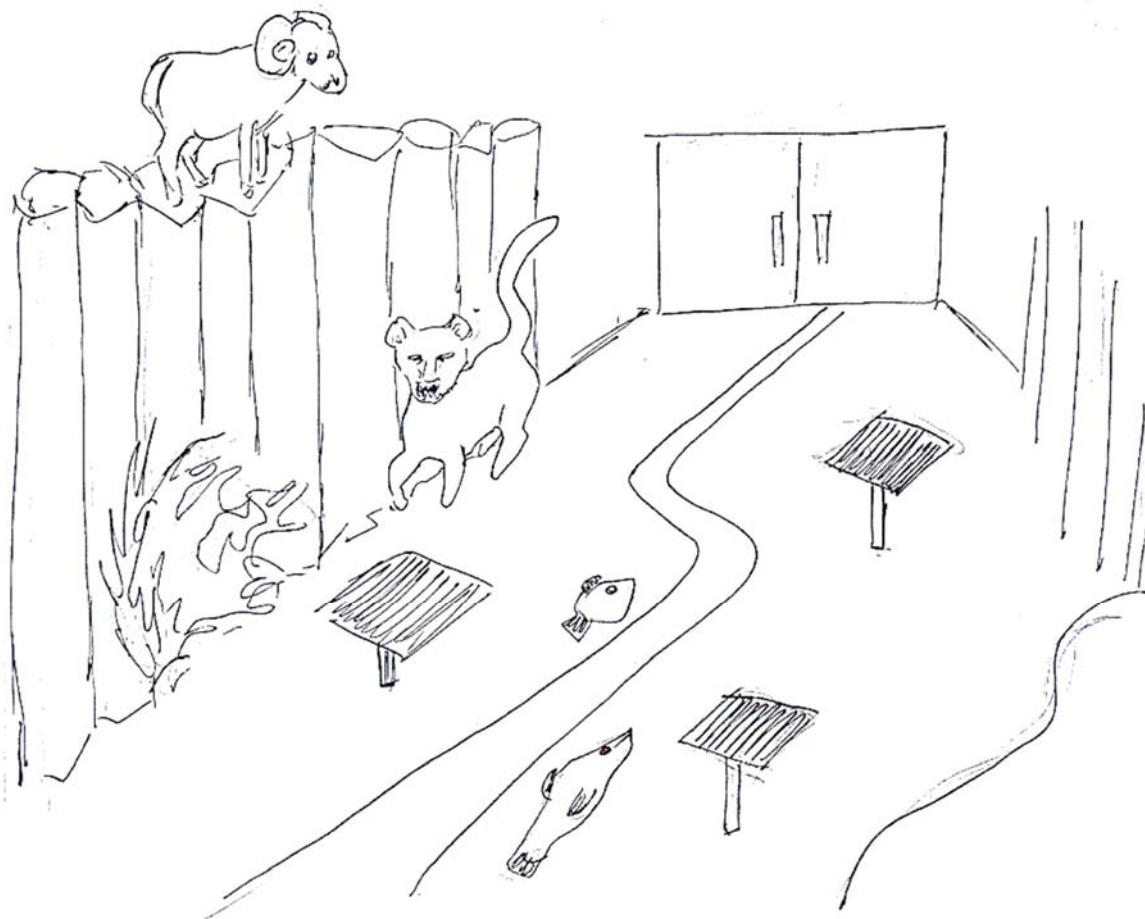
When visitors finish interacting with this exhibit, they will:

- Understand the interconnectedness of our natural spaces and humans,
- Understand the importance of the species in the canyon corridor today,
- Be able to define and explain the importance of intact ecosystems, especially in the face of global climate change,
- Know that humans are part of the system, and are welcomed and encouraged to visit and enjoy the ecosystems in ways that do not impair them,
- Understand that all the pieces of the system are necessary for it to function,
- Be inspired to explore the Yakima River Canyon, beginning with the interpretive trail on site,
- Know all the themes communicated by the interpretive network, and
- Be inspired to take action to protect this rare and vanishing ecosystem.



#### Design Concept

The main exhibit area builds a virtual canyon, complete with flora and fauna and large basalt columns to make the visitor feel as if they are traveling through the canyon corridor. Through their travels in the exhibit area, panels, drawers, and specimen samples create the illusion of a walk through a field study guidebook. Each element included helps tell the story of the canyon corridor and the shrub-steppe environment and engages all senses. Taken as a whole, when a visitor enters the exhibit area they will have been transported into a mini canyon corridor. A rough sketch has been provided here to help shape the vision of the exhibit area. The Exhibit Hall opens to the terrace and the views of the mouth of the canyon.



### Special Rotating (Non-Permanent) Exhibits

#### Location

The Exhibit Hall

#### Objectives

When visitors finish interacting with this exhibit, they will:

- Have a greater depth of understanding of a particular theme or sub-theme,
- Be inspired to return to learn more when the next special exhibit is scheduled, and
- Be able to better appreciate/understand a local partner and their connection to the YCIC.

#### Design Concept

Specific sub-topics may require additional space in the exhibit either seasonally or as available. These exhibits would be in greater depth than those of the main exhibit space, or may be of a particular topic not adequately covered in the main exhibit space. These exhibits could also be a space to showcase local collections, as in the cultural museums in the area, artwork of local artists, or expertly designed exhibits from neighboring interpretive centers. As this space is meant to be in transition, a specific design cannot be designated. Exhibits chosen for this space must be aligned with the goals and objectives of the interpretive center, and have at least a loose tie to the themes of the interpretive network.



# Terrace/Interpretive Trail Experience

## Overview

When a visitor exits through the terrace door, they will find themselves on a terrace area that connects with the beginning of the interpretive trail and trail system. An exhibit in xeriscaping will be located somewhere in this area, but in such a way as not to interfere with the view from the interior of the building. The interpretive trail will include both a short and a long option to allow accessibility to visitors of varying mobility.

## Summary of Strategies

- Xeriscaping Exhibit, and
- Interpretive Trails.

## Descriptions/Concepts

### Xeriscaping Exhibit

#### Location

TBD – Depending on the final design and layout of the terrace.

#### Objectives

After interacting with this exhibit, visitors will:

- Be able to identify native species of plants, and
- Be inspired to cultivate native species on site or at home.

### Design Concept

This opportunity is based on native plant species that use very little water to grow in this area. The actual strategies to be depicted will be identified during the design development process as the actual location of the building and the associated modifications to the surrounding landscape become finalized.

An interpretive panel will provide overview of the xeriscape and native species. An associated publication will contain specific information necessary to help visitors learn more and take action to preserve these valuable species.

### Interpretive Trails

#### Location

New and existing trails around the pond (on site), and new and existing trails at sites along the canyon corridor.

#### Objectives

After interacting with the interpretive opportunities on the trail, visitors will:

- Be inspired to hike other trails on the site and along the canyon corridor,
- Be motivated to continue to apply information learned in the Interpretive Center and on the trail to reading the landscape and environment,
- Want to return at other times of the year to see what has changed, and
- Be inspired to visit the interpretive center for more information and to dig deeper into the experience.

### Design Concept

Specific interpretive opportunities along trails will depend on the features available for use as focal points, but the focus will be on reading the landscape to discern connections. Ideally the trail will pass by evidence of wildlife, such as beaver sign, woodpecker holes, osprey nests and other such features that could be used to emphasize that the area is filled with wildlife even if it can't always be seen. The interpretation will be offered by an introductory overview panel located at the trailhead and visible from the terrace. The panel will highlight the trail route and what could be discovered along the way. Additional interpretation will be provided by an associated trail brochure.



# Appendix A: Background Information

## Target Audiences

### Introduction

Information is a commodity; people have to buy it with their time, a highly valued personal resource. Since different people have interest in different communication experiences, it is important to identify user groups and profile the specific target audience(s) to be reached.

Based on the goals, data collected during recreational use surveys, and inputs from work sessions, the following appear to be key audiences for the interpretive network. Although overlap exists, such as a resident who is also an angler, each audience has distinct characteristics that help guide development of an effective network.

### Key Target Audiences

#### The Byway Traveler

These visitors may not have a knowledge of the area, and may be using the scenic byway as a throughway to get from one point to another in their travels. These visitors may or may not be residents, and may have plans other than visiting the interpretive center.

#### Anglers

The draw of the abundant resources of the Yakima River bring many visitors from out of the area to fish. These visitors may or may not have plans to learn more about the environs that surround them.

#### Birders

The draw of the abundant and varied species of birds bring visitors from outside the county to spot and view them. Recreational birders may be looking for more information about the species they seek and how to locate them.

#### Cyclists

The beauty of the Yakima River Canyon brings many visitors who desire a cycling trip along the scenic byway. Being so close to the environs and traveling at a slower speed than a vehicle, cyclists are at a distinct advantage for accessing interpretive panels along the corridor. These visitors also present a very specific need for safety as they travel the canyon.

#### Families

Either with children or without, families may be traveling to the interpretive center site for specific programs and information.

## Desired Visitor Experiences

### Introduction

Needs and interests of target audiences direct the flow of information at the center and the delivery methods of that information. The following experiences follow two distinct user groups (families and retired persons), and how the programming at the Interpretive Center and along the canyon will meet their needs and draw them in to learn more. Though other audiences and experiences are desired at the YCIC, these two examples serve to inspire future interpretation

**Parameters:** Due to the location and budget of the site, the Interpretive Center is only open on the weekends.

**Physical Infrastructure:** Current infrastructure on site includes parking area, vaulted toilet, and several fishing platforms. There are also some scattered interpretive signs and one “welcome” sign.

**Location and Access:** Park interpretive assets are placed across the park landscape. This requires an effective wayfinding system to ensure all participants can locate and access interpretive features. Maps will be made available at the kiosk to help orient visitors.

**Theme:** The abundant natural resources of the Yakima Canyon have attracted humans for millennia, and protecting the region’s special values in the face of climate change and urban sprawl is imperative.

### Desired Visitor Experience: Families (with Children)

**Implications:** Easy to access information, enticing graphics and interpretive “adventures” will be accessible to all ages and learning styles.

#### Pre-arrival:

Families are introduced to the idea of spending time at the Helen McCabe Park through social media, advertisements in local newspaper inserts (“Kittitas County Living”, etc.), the Chamber of Commerce weekly newsletter, the local sports shop, and websites (such as Washington Trails Association, Geocaching.com, TripAdvisor, ModernMom.com, MyEllensburg, HotelPlanner, YCIC.org, etc.). Easy to locate (and print) maps are accessible from websites, including directions to the site, sitemaps, and activity calendars.

#### Trip to byway:

Clear signs along major highway/routes of travel guide travelers to Helen McCabe. Wayfinding signs direct families to the Interpretive Center and parking or pond/natural play area parking. The visitor arrives at the park to clear welcome signs. Visitors are greeted by nonpersonal signage at restrooms and parking lots, including a large orientation map. Smaller site maps are available for families to take with them while they explore the park (downloadable or available via mobile apps), marking interpretive points along the trails, recycling and trash bins, restroom facilities, natural play space, shaded picnic shelters and other points of interest during their visit.

When arriving at the Interpretive Center parking area, clear signage orients the family to this part of the park. When entering the Interpretive Center during open hours, a park interpreter (or docent) greets the family and directs them to exhibits highlighting the ecological importance of the area and offers the available “Adventure Pack” to check out during their visit. An interpreter encourages families of older children to participate in scavenger hunt activities and explains the prizes.

#### Visitor Experience on Site:

Parking lots and restroom facilities are ADA accessible, marked and signed well. The layout of the park and facilities is inviting, well-marked, and obvious. A well-maintained trail connects the various points of interest in the park (such as the restrooms, natural play space, the fishing area, sheltered picnic area, air pump station, dock, and Interpretive Center). Welcome signage at each parking lot offers a large map, ideas for what to do on site, dog leash regulations, information about where to find the updated calendar of events, and advertisement for the KEEN and YCIC Interpretive Trail App.

Families find a variety of exhibits around the central theme at the Interpretive Center, many of which are permanent exhibits while some change seasonally. An Adventure Pack loaded with species identification cards, magnifying lenses and more is available for checkout at the visitor center's information desk. When open, a docent will orient visiting families to the Adventure Pack, the Story Trail, and the Scavenger Hunt.

Scheduled guided walks and events (such as wine and food tasting) offer guests interpretive experiences outside of the exhibits at the interpretive center.

Outdoor School experiences offer elementary aged children outdoor learning experiences and environmental education opportunities.

Equipment (such as inflatable boats, snowshoes, etc.) is available for checkout at the visitor center. Retail items are also available.

Information about drives through the canyon is available on site. Audio tours, family Yakima Canyon Bingo, and Yakima Canyon Eye Spy games are available for download at the YCIC website and in print at the Interpretive Center.

#### **Exit/Post Trip Experience:**

A guest book offers opportunity for visitors to share their favorite experiences and date of their experience. If visitors downloaded the YCIC Interpretive Trail App (and provided their email address), an email survey would be sent to follow up on the visitor experience. Invites to events and guided walks are also emailed (if requested). Visitors are also encouraged to share pictures of their adventures on social media, with a special YCIC/KEEN hashtag. Retail items such as recreation passes, memberships, binoculars, magnifying glasses, reusable water bottles and grocery or sandwich bags, and specific, relevant items for expanding knowledge about the Yakima River Canyon and the shrub-steppe environ are available for purchase at the interpretive center when open. If visitors participated in the scavenger hunt, they have opportunity to win a prize (i.e. an e-prize such as a coupon for the retail space or a special item not available in store). Visitors can send a postcard to themselves or others to describe their experience. Native seeds are available for planting to encourage taking action to protect the vanishing ecosystem.

#### **Desired Visitor Experience: Retired Persons**

**Implications:** Visitors in this target are looking for a variety of experiences, including social outings, opportunities for life-long learning, guided walks, and opportunities to get involved in the community.

##### **Pre-arrival:**

Retired persons are introduced to the idea of spending time on site through community centers such as RSVP, the Senior Center, churches, library, Kittitas Valley Memorial Pool and the community center, advertisements in local newspaper inserts ("Kittitas County Living", etc.), the Chamber of Commerce weekly newsletter, the local sports shop, and websites (such as Washington Trails Association, Geocaching.com, TripAdvisor, ModernMom.com, MyEllensburg, HotelPlanner, YCIC.org, etc.). Easy to locate (and print) maps are accessible from websites, including directions to the site, sitemaps, and activity calendars.

#### Trip to byway:

Clear signs along major highway/routes of travel guide travelers to Helen McCabe. Wayfinding signs direct families to the Interpretive Center and parking or pond/natural play area parking. The visitor arrives at the park to clear welcome signs. Visitors are greeted by nonpersonal signage at restrooms and parking lots, including a large orientation map. Smaller site maps are available for families to take with them while they explore the park (downloadable or available via mobile apps), marking interpretive points along the trails, recycling and trash bins, restroom facilities, natural play space, shaded picnic shelters and other points of interest during their visit.

When arriving at the Interpretive Center parking area, clear signage orients visitors to this part of the park. When entering the Interpretive Center during open hours, a park interpreter (or docent) greets the visitor and directs them to exhibits highlighting the ecological importance of the area. The interpreter (or docent) encourages visitors to explore the scenic byway.

#### Visitor Experience on Site:

Parking lots and restroom facilities are ADA accessible, marked, and signed well (signs are ADA compliant). The layout of the park and facilities is inviting, well-marked, and obvious. A well-maintained trail connects the various points of interest in the park (such as the restrooms, the fishing areas, sheltered picnic area, rest benches, docks, and Interpretive Center). Welcome signage at each parking lot offers a large map, ideas for what to do on site, dog leash regulations, information about where to find the updated calendar of events, and advertisement for the KEEN and YCIC Interpretive Trail App.

Visitors find a variety of exhibits around the central theme at the Interpretive Center, many of which are permanent exhibits while some change seasonally. When open, a docent will orient visitors the interpretive trail and other activities on site. A “cafe” or similar social spot offers opportunity for retired persons to sit and enjoy the beauty of the park while protected from the elements.

Two looped trails (one shorter and one longer) are well-marked, have interpretive signage (ADA compliant), and frequent scenic spots to stop and rest. Scheduled guided walks and events (such as wine and food tasting, bird watching events, fundraising, etc.) offer guests interpretive experiences outside of the exhibits at the interpretive center. A TEDx-style speaker series and a nature-art series of lectures and exhibits offer more opportunities for lifelong learners.

Equipment (such as inflatable boats, snowshoes, etc.) is available for checkout at the visitor center. Retail items are also available.

Information about drives through the canyon is available on site. Audio/guided tours are available for download at the YCIC website and in print at the interpretive center.

#### Exit/Post Trip Experience:

A guest book offers opportunity for visitors to share their favorite experiences and date of their experience. Retail items such as recreation passes, memberships, binoculars, magnifying glasses, reusable water bottles and grocery or sandwich bags, and specific, relevant items for expanding knowledge about the Yakima River Canyon and the shrub-steppe environ are available for purchase at the interpretive center when open. A survey at the interpretive center asks visitors to reflect on their visit, and provide feedback about what opportunities they would like to see offered. Visitors can send a postcard to themselves or others to describe their experience. Native seeds are available for planting to encourage taking action to protect the vanishing ecosystem.

## Appendix B: Information Sources

Many websites and other sources were used during the development of this plan, but the following are the primary sources of information:

Kittitas Environmental Education Network  
Education Committee

### Documents

Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Comprehensive Master Plan  
Yakima River Canyon Recreational Use Survey  
Interpretive Plan for the Kenai NWR Visitor Center

### Websites

YCIC.org



**Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center**  
**Interpretive Plan**

Prepared Fall, 2016