

## Plans for river gorge park put into action

Our View: Thanks to help from National Park Service, Spokane at last may be able to showcase, more fully, its gorgeous river.  
[John Kafentzis](#) - For the editorial board

Spokane \_ Spokane without its river gorge would be like Seattle without Puget Sound or San Francisco without the bay.

The Spokane River is our city's single most important piece of geography. It's the reason James Glover founded the city here. And it was an important gathering spot long before there was a city. American Indians fished at the falls for centuries.

The river has been used and sometimes abused over the years.

For Expo '74, the community cleared away decades of industrial neglect and reclaimed a substantial portion of the river in the downtown area.

Now, with help from the National Park Service, Spokane has an opportunity to preserve and protect a section of the river from the falls to Latah Creek.

Acting on a request from Friends of the Falls, one of many groups interested in protecting the area, the Park Service will devote 400 hours to help plan a park in the river gorge.

The idea is almost as old as the city. As early as 1913, landscape architects John Olmstead and his brother Frederick urged the Spokane Park Board to turn the wild riverbank into "Gorge Park."

The idea surface several times over the years, but really gained momentum during discussions of the proposal for a Lincoln Street Bridge.

Interest in a park has continued to grow.

Friends of Centennial Trail member Jon Rascoff said that group for years has wanted to close the gap in the Centennial Trail between Riverside State Park and Riverfront Park. The Cheney Cowles Museum has expressed an interest in sharing ideas with park proponents.

Likewise, the Spokane Park Board has kept the gorge in its sights for years, buying up parcels along the riverbank as they became available. The city owns about 75 percent of the south riverbank and a large portion of the north bank.

But for all the good efforts over time to preserve the area, the vision of what the park would be remains nebulous.

At least two dozen groups have expressed a specific interest in how the gorge plan turns out. And the city park department is one of those stakeholders.

That's where the National Park Service comes in. The park service is an outside entity with no stake in the project, but with loads of expertise. Its planners are uniquely situated to work with the various groups to develop a plan that can be widely accepted.

This isn't the first time the park service has helped with natural area development in the area. It also helped citizens plan a system of trails in the Liberty Lake area that is now being implemented.

This doesn't mean the area would become a national park or a national monument. The park service is only here as a consultant.

Back in 1913, the Olmsteads had high hopes for the gorge. "It is a tremendous feature of the landscape and one which is rarer in a large city than river, bay or mountain. Any city should prize and preserve its great landscape features ..."

The potential for the gorge was evident even then.

Now, with a little help from the National Park Service, Spokane has the opportunity to display this natural jewel in a way that it can be fully appreciated.

John Kafentzis/For the editorial board

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