



# **Conceptual Plan** *for the* **Spokane River** **Gorge**

*Text version prepared through the collaborative efforts of:*

**Friends of the Falls**  
**&**  
**The Great Gorge Group**

March, 2002



## Welcome

In April of 2000, the citizen's group **Friends of the Falls** helped to convene the first meeting of nearly two dozen groups and organizations with cultural, political, economic, or geographic ties to the Lower Spokane Falls and Gorge area. These initial meetings quickly led to the realization that broad-based support existed to develop a **common vision** for the Gorge, and that many felt the time was ripe to promote the value and place of the river as the centerpiece of the community of Spokane.

As stated in the first invitation letter to what would become the **Great Gorge Group**: "What comes of these meetings is contingent on what we discover as a group - on the common ground we may find."

The text, drawings and ideas contained in this document are the product of those many meetings, of scores of community presentations, and of hundreds of comments received from the public at-large. In sum, they represent the conceptual "common ground" that we believe **honors the Falls and Gorge**. This document will guide future steps to restore, conserve and make accessible Spokane's natural jewel, providing untold others the opportunity to cherish the Gorge.

The late **Peter Campbell**, a Colville Tribal leader widely credited with the formation of the Center for Plateau Cultural Studies at the Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, was interviewed about the region's character shortly before he died. After speaking about his habit of returning to the river for "his mental health days," when he'd stop along the shoreline just to listen, he added: "When you talk to non-tribal people, there is something they're looking for - security and a place where they can belong." What they seek exists here, he said.

**"There is a history and a culture and a law and a way of life that has always existed in this place," he said. "And they can link into that. All they need to do is listen."**<sup>1</sup>

This document represents the joining of many along the path of listening to the river.

Sincerely,



Rick Hastings  
President, Friends of the Falls

---

<sup>1</sup> "Native Truths," Rob McDonald, *Spokesman-Review*, March 28, 1999



## Vision Statement

*"Spokane's many cultures, as collaborative caretakers, honor and protect the Great Spokane River Gorge as our gateway to understanding the unique cultural, historical, geological, and spiritual significance of our region. This is accomplished through education, access, and enlightened interaction of people and the natural environment."*

The Conceptual Plan Phase of the "Great Spokane River Gorge" (Gorge Park) work is to develop the general goals and objectives for future planning, design, and implementation work associated with the Spokane River Gorge.

To date, numerous participating groups and organizations have provided input in developing these Conceptual guidelines. These include:

- **The West Central, West Hills, Peaceful Valley and Latah Valley neighborhoods**
- **The Spokane Tribe**
- **The Spokane Parks & Recreation Department**
- **Avista Corporation**
- **Metropolitan Mortgage (Summit Properties)**
- **The Downtown Spokane Partnership**
- **The Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture**
- **The City/County Office of Historic Preservation**
- **Friends of the Centennial Trail**
- **The Washington State Parks Department**
- **The Washington State Department of Ecology**
- **Friends of the Falls**
- **Spokane Preservation Advocates**
- **Washington State University, Spokane**
- **Neighbors of the Spokane Falls & Rapids**
- **The Spokane Convention & Visitor's Bureau**

In addition, hundreds of area residents provided input through surveys, written comments, map notations, and tape recorded interviews. Three large public events were held – one to gather initial input, the second to gather response to draft concepts, and the third to present the completed Concept Plan. The process received an assistance grant from the National Parks Service's Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program.

The Conceptual Plan features **four main guideline categories**:

- **History & Culture**
- **Access and Linkage Development**
- **Protection & Conservation**
- **Recreation**

## **History & Culture**

One unique and key aspect of the falls and river area is its compelling geological, cultural and contemporary history. Developing and/or conserving features within the Gorge area that describe its geologic history, that aid in relating stories of traditional and recent cultures, or provide experiences unique to the historic backdrop of the Gorge will be a crucial element in future plans. Research to develop and promote the full historic backdrop of the Gorge is highly desirable. Historic designation may also prove useful and appropriate, commensurate with the true significance of the area. Features developed to support *History and Culture* objectives may include: designated view points, destination points within the Gorge that display facts, stories, pictures, drawings or other items of interest, rail and/or hydropower interpretive elements, and stronger links to existing allied features such as the Museum of Arts and Culture. In addition, ties to future allied projects such as the proposed “North Bank” development, Riverfront Park entry plaza, Ice Age/Missoula Flood history, and potential Expo ’74 history, should be encouraged. One specific proposal serving *History & Culture* goals calls for a Cultural Center for Tribal interpretation, possibly based at the existing Salty’s restaurant site, and programmed to compliment the existing Museum of Arts & Culture.

## **Access and Linkage Development**

It is recognized that fostering a long-term public appreciation for the Gorge needs to include greater access, where appropriate and beneficial to overall objectives. By definition, Gorge “access” may also include views into the gorge, as well as physical links to surrounding areas. Features developed to support *Access and Linkage Development* objectives may include: hard surface and natural-surface trails - perhaps facilitating a “loop,” or circuit trail of the Gorge; limited, though improved parking areas, improved shoreline access where appropriate, overlooks, designated “view corridors,” and developed access points from adjoining neighborhoods. Two specific proposals serving these goals are the proposed “Westlink” extension of the Centennial Trail along the north rim of the Gorge and across the river near the confluence of Hangman

(Latah) Creek; another is the proposed Lower Falls Access Path, connecting Riverfront Park with the Lower Falls (Huntington Park) area.

## **Protection & Conservation**

Restoration and conservation of the natural elements native to the Gorge (both plant and animal) is recognized as key to the long-term sustainability of the Gorge area. An inventory of existing conditions leading to a working master plan for the restoration of Gorge area habitat is strongly encouraged; this should be developed in close coordination with the City of Spokane, the Spokane tribe, the State Department of Ecology, State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Avista Corporation, and others. With an attendant and well-crafted education program, the Gorge should raise awareness and understanding of conservation issues, as well as ensuring the recovery and protection of native plant and animal species within the area. Plans for protection and conservation should at once promote the health and sustainability of the Gorge ecosystem, and enhance the opportunities for unique experiences by visitors. Due to the fact that the Spokane River Gorge borders and contains existing homes and neighborhoods, and that these areas are integral to the historic character and future of the community of Spokane, it is imperative that all future planning and work pertaining to the Spokane River Gorge be developed in harmony with these areas, to provide mutual benefit between natural resource and adjoining populace.

## **Recreation**

The Great Spokane River Gorge is seen primarily as a “light use,” or “conservancy” area. However, general and community support exists for areas of focused intensity incorporating recreational opportunities. These may be realized with features developed furthering other goals, such as a looped bike/pedestrian trail, view points, access points, paths, etc., but may also include activities such as fishing, un-powered boating or rafting, improved picnic areas, and children’s play areas.

## **Additional Topics:**

### **Boundaries**

The Conceptual Plan does not set formal boundaries for the Great Spokane River Gorge project. Instead, obvious geographic, environmental and cultural conditions have suggested a general “study area” to guide future planning efforts. This may be described as: beginning at, and including the Lower

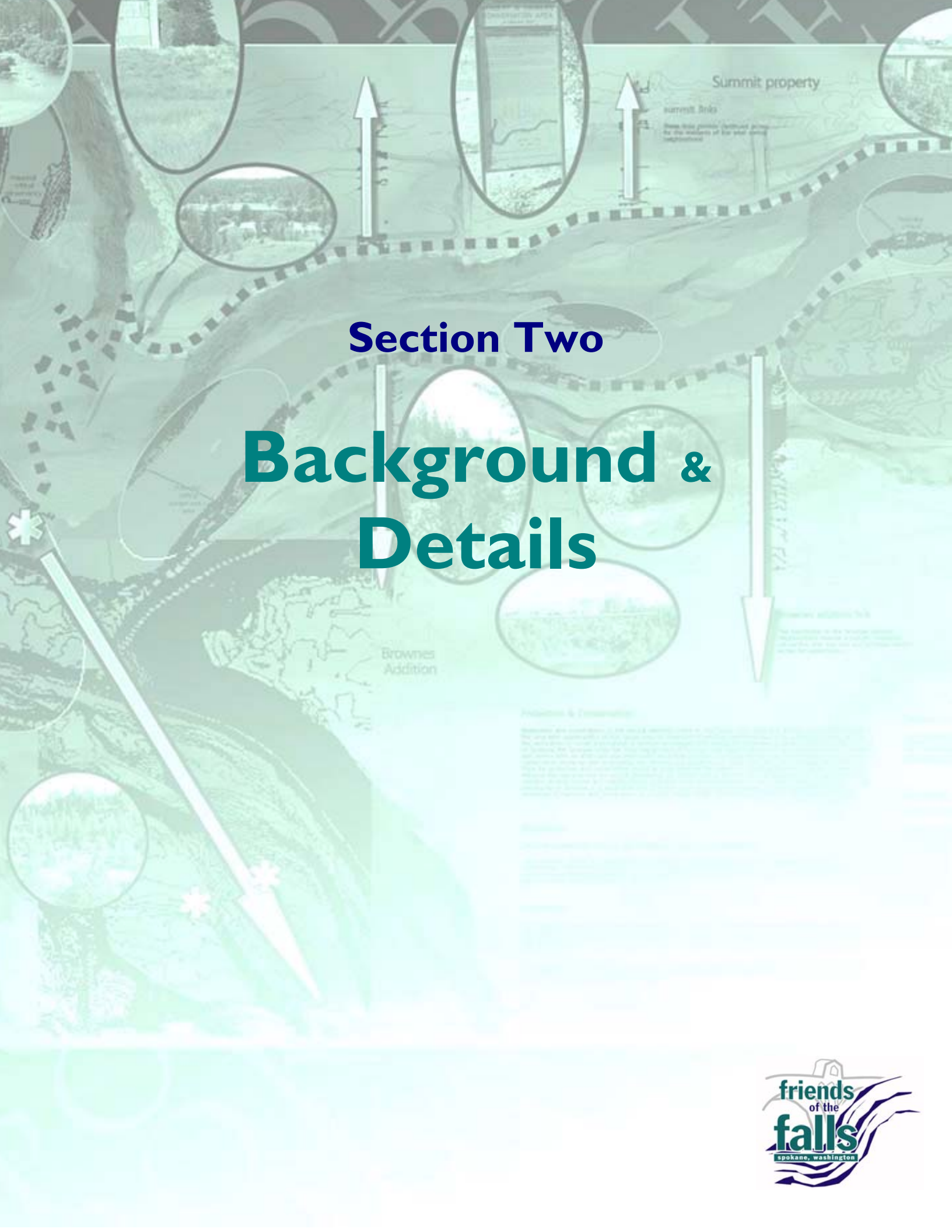
Spokane Falls, abutting Riverfront Park, then, from east to west along the north rim of the gorge, abutting the Summit Properties site. From there, including the existing “People’s Park,” moving south, and including High Bridge Park to the Sunset Highway bridge. The southern limits of the study area are not defined. Many indicators suggest the Peaceful Valley neighborhood be included in future plans, to provide mutual benefit between the river and that historic district.

### **Security & Stewardship**

It is recognized that a successful project will by necessity address security and long-term maintenance issues for the Great Spokane River Gorge. First and foremost, the progression of work for the Gorge is to enhance Spokane’s relationship to its river and heritage; the value of such a relationship cannot be fully realized without community backing, care and consideration. Secondary planning efforts should address long-term questions regarding security, cleanliness, and maintenance of the Gorge area.

### **Ownership**

Since the 1913 Olmsted Report proposing the “Great Gorge Park,” the Spokane Parks Department has been purchasing land as available within the Gorge. Today, approximately 80% of the land identified by the Olmsteds for the park is in public hands. Like the original Gorge Park proposal, the Concept Plan for the River Gorge is intended to coexist with existing private ownership of lands. Future work should help identify key areas for acquisition, if and when such areas become available.



## Section Two

# Background & Details

# Introduction

## Conceptual Plan

**Recognizing** that planning documents are often forgotten because they aren't visually compelling, and once "placed out of sight, fade out of mind," the Great Gorge Group decided to let this Concept Plan be expressed primarily in a graphic poster format. This segment of the plan, therefore, is intended only to provide general context and background for the map on reverse (*poster version -ed*). The group has arranged all this under the "resource" topics of:



The Monroe Street Bridge, constructed in 1910, was the largest concrete-arch bridge in the world when built. It is currently scheduled to be reconstructed from the main arches up, and will allow the passage of the Centennial Trail beneath its northern landing. (*Friends of the Falls*)

- **Historic/Cultural Summary**
- **Environmental Summary**
- **Economic Summary**

The Group also wanted to lay the groundwork for the next steps in the process – to answer the question “where do we go from here?” Towards this end, we’ve included the “**Next Steps**” section at the end of the resources section.

Of course, the poster can't include everything we've collected. Much of the remaining background – the hundreds of surveys, notes, pictures, comments, the audio and videotaped interviews, the press coverage, the meeting minutes, historic research, and other correspondence – will be compiled in report format and/or made available on CD-ROM and via an internet website. For this, contact Friends of the Falls at 509-979-2874, or visit [www.friendsofthefalls.org](http://www.friendsofthefalls.org) for more information.

Thanks to Sally Reynolds, Teresa Brum and the rest of the G3 Historic/Cultural Committee, to Mike Stone, Kerry Brooks and Steve Franks, and to Gavin Cooley and Rick Hastings for preparing much of this background information.

## Resource Overview

*“The City of Spokane recognizes that the Spokane River is the City’s most treasured environmental resource. The City of Spokane should undertake actions which establish reverence for this resource, emphasize its history and value, and encourage the use and development of public pathways along the river from downtown Spokane to Idaho to the East and West to points beyond Riverside State Park. In addition, the City should pursue the Spokane River Gorge Park Project as vigorously as funding and energy allow.”*

*- Amended to the City of Spokane Comprehensive Plan, passed on June 18, 2001*

**The Spokane Falls and River Gorge** has supported and defined human culture for as long as people have lived near its shores. From native tribes, sustained by salmon harvested near the falls, to the first white settlers, sustained by the power of the river’s flow, the people of this region – whether directly or indirectly – are **“people of the river.”**

In 1908, the **Olmsted Brothers**, renowned Landscape Architects who had seen much of the beauty of America, were nonetheless captivated by the Gorge, and recommended that the young city preserve it as its defining landscape. Although not yet realized, that dream has inspired successive generations to restore and preserve the river - if only piece-by-piece. Today, much of the landscape which inspired the Olmsteds - and which fostered a rich and varied Native culture - **is in public hands.**

Nearly 30 years ago, our city reclaimed the downtown portion of the river for the 1974 World’s Fair, and by all accounts, Spokane is today a much richer, more beautiful place for having done so. Yet the Lower Falls and Gorge – the point of inspiration for Expo, the landscape that inspired the Olmsteds, the place where regional tribes gathered, the very origin of the City itself – has yet to be fully valued as a scenic, economic, cultural, or recreational resource. By fostering value in these ways, our generation can not only add the Gorge to Spokane’s riverfront legacy, but also contribute the type of awareness and pride that can **help build a brighter civic future** for our community.

## Historic/Cultural Summary

### The Setting

**An inland city** surrounded by mountain ranges, Spokane sits at the eastern edge of Washington State. Its downtown is located in a valley, at the center of a dramatic landscape. The city straddles the Spokane River at a point where the River drops in two main falls, an upper falls sixty feet high, and the lower falls, seventy feet high. Before settlement, the surrounding banks offered a range of environments from steep slopes, great rock outcroppings and pine-covered bluffs to quiet grasslands.



This 1925 view of Glover Field shows the first-ever encampment of the National Congress of American Indians. Note the grandstands overlooking the area, and the Union Pacific “High Bridge” in the distance. (*Eastern Washington State Historic Society*)

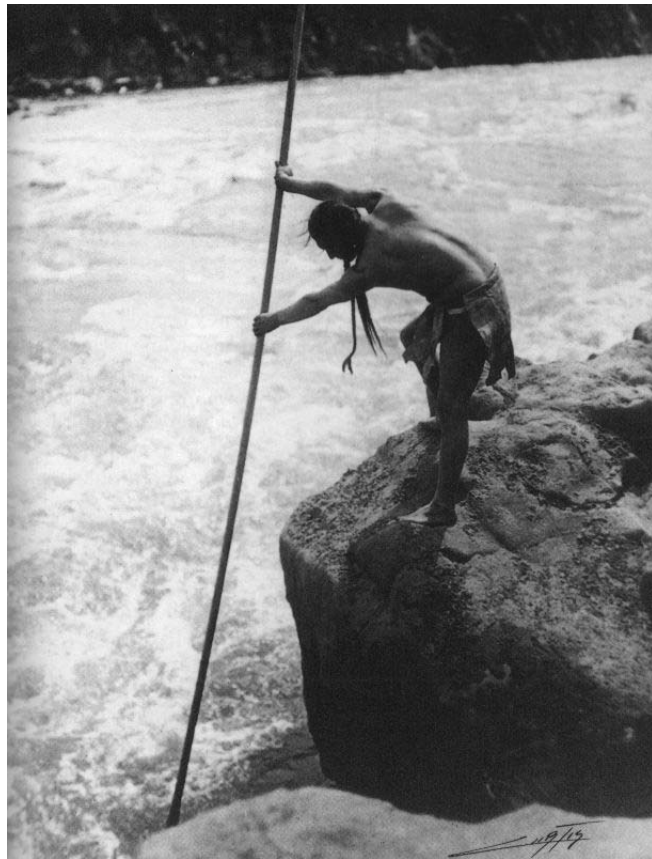
### Geology

Shaped by a series of cataclysmic events, the Inland Northwest's landscape is duplicated nowhere else. Great floods of basalt, some dozens of feet thick flowed over Eastern Washington, in the late Miocene Epoch, covering the wind-blown loess that accumulated between flows. Beneath this impervious layer and occasionally protruding from it are the much older landforms of Mount Spokane, Mica Peak and Tower Mountain, granite rock formations from 50 to 100 million years ago, when the ocean met the edge of what is today's Eastern Washington. In more recent geologic time, toward the end of the last ice age, gigantic floods from Glacial Lake Missoula repeatedly washed across the landscape, carving existing channels deeper, sweeping away layers of soil, exposing basalt, and re-depositing rock debris.

## Native History

**Above and below** the thundering falls, quiet banks were the sites of frequent Native American encampments, since the Spokane Tribes depended heavily on the River both as a main artery for migration and a principal source of fish.

The Spokane River was one of the most productive salmon streams in the entire Columbia River system. The total number of salmon likely approached a million annually, of which about 300,000 were harvested by native peoples. Unlike Celilo & Kettle Falls, the **Spokane Falls were too high** for the fish to traverse, and the migrating salmon could travel no further. This made the lower falls a prime fishing site, **shared** by the Spokane, Couer d' Alene, Colville, Kalispel, Nez Perce, and other regional tribes.



Salmon were so plentiful that the Spokane Indians welcomed neighboring tribes to their annual fishing celebration. Up to 5,000 Indians gathered every year along the shores of the river that now runs through the heart of Spokane, Washington. (*Eastern Washington State Historic Society*)

Debbie Finley, historian and member of the Colville Tribe, wrote in a 1995 *Spokesman-Review* article that between 200 and 5,000 Indians gathered near the falls every year for the salmon harvest.

The lower falls and gorge are **still considered sacred** to the Spokane Tribe. To this day, regional tribes gather every year near the falls (the Spokane Pow-Wow) to celebrate their traditional and contemporary culture.

## White Settlement

Spokane's identity and history are tied to the River and its falls. A barrier to travel for much of the year, the Spokane River was a deterrent to settlement of the Inland Northwest, except for early trading posts, until 1873. In May of that

year, 36-year old **James Glover** journeyed from Portland with a companion, and recognized the potential of the River and falls. He recalled in later years, "I was enchanted - overwhelmed - with the beauty and grandeur of everything I saw. It lay just as nature had made it, with nothing to mar its virgin glory" (*Glover Reminiscences*). Glover purchased the preemptive rights of two settlers who had arrived one-year earlier and opened Spokane's first store. The town of "Spokane Falls" was platted in 1878 and incorporated in 1881. (*the term "Falls" was dropped after incorporation*).

## The Railroads

During his first six years in Spokane, James Glover struggled to encourage settlers to remain. When the northern route of the transcontinental railroad arrived, Spokane's future brightened. The first rail lines were laid through the town in 1881. Connection to the Midwest and East was completed with the laying of the golden spike in Montana in 1883. Over the next three decades, rail lines and depots gradually filled riverbank locations.



Spanning the bridge that spanned the falls. By 1912, the Union Pacific Railway bridge was constructed over the hydro station, the Monroe Street Bridge, and the falls, barely visible in the lower right corner. Note the extensive backfill placed to accommodate the rail grade. (*Eastern Washington State Historic Society*)

## Power Generation

The River became a resource for economic development when Glover's predecessors constructed the first "muley sawmill" in 1872. Many more elaborate mills followed. The first waterworks facility became operational in October of 1884, and consisted of two water-wheel driven pumps. The system pumped river water to business and residential customers with a combined capacity of 1400 gallons per minute. The **Washington Water Power Company** was established in March of 1889, and in 1894, the original system was replaced with the upstream dam and plant.

Spokane became the first city west of the Mississippi to light its downtown with electricity when, in 1885, George A. Fitch, using technology recently developed by Thomas Edison, installed a dynamo capable of operating twelve arc lamps.

In 1899, D. C. Corbin began to set up the irrigation system that brought development to the Spokane Valley.

### **Bridging the River**

The river was a barrier to travel and to development. Early crossings, by Indian canoe or ferryboat, were both difficult and dangerous. In 1881, residents raised funds and hired a Portland contractor to complete three wooden truss bridges to span the river from Howard Street to Havermale Island and then to the north bank. Three more wooden bridges were added. The first steel bridge was constructed over Washington Street in 1889, followed by steel bridges at Monroe, Post, Howard, Stevens and Division Streets. Unable to withstand flooding and increasing traffic, the steel bridges were gradually replaced, beginning in 1907, with concrete bridges. In the next decade, under the supervision of City Engineer J. C. Ralston, eight concrete arch spans were erected over the Spokane River, and a ninth over Hangman (Latah) Creek.

### **The River - Cornerstone of a Park Plan**

In concert with the City Beautiful movement, and westward migration and resource development that led to explosive growth for the Inland Northwest, Spokane business leaders campaigned to establish a system of parks and civic improvements for their city. In 1907, after a charter change that established an independent Board of Park Commissioners, the world-renowned Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architecture firm was hired to design a parks system for the city. Predictably, **the plan emphasized the river and its vistas**. Under the leadership of Park Board President **Aubrey L. White** and his friends, along with Park Superintendent John Duncan, the plan was largely implemented over the next several years, despite the continued growth of rail lines in the River's vicinity. John C. Olmsted's recommendation to set aside as much of the riverbanks as possible for public open space was pursued with vigor by White, Duncan and their followers.

## Reclaiming the River

The Inland Northwest's **economy became flat after 1912** and didn't begin to grow again until World War II and the increase of electrical power availability with Grand Coulee Dam. The downtown riverbanks, long-neglected, once again became of interest as Spokane business leaders fought to improve their city's image and economy. In 1969, after a team of recognized



Spokane's first master plan, the 1961 *Ebasco Report*, revived the Olmsted vision of a city celebrating its river. This model – modified and still on-view at City Hall – was the first to show what would become Riverfront Park, and envisioned pedestrian trails on both sides of the river. (Courtesy Don Murray)

experts was hired to study the project, detailed plans for developing the riverbanks were released in 1969. The possibility of railroad relocation became a reality when the City found the means to stage Expo '74, a Worlds' Fair themed to the environment and reclamation of the Spokane River. In the aftermath of the exposition, Riverfront Park was established, and much later, the Centennial Trail.

## Environmental Resources Summary

The Great Gorge area is one of Spokane's greatest environmental resources. When the famous Olmsted Brothers' Landscape Architecture firm created the City's first park plan almost 100 years ago, they identified the Gorge area as one of only four areas in the city that "especially commend themselves to our judgment as being most desirable sites for large parks." The Olmsted's description of the hoped-for "Gorge Park" began with the following:

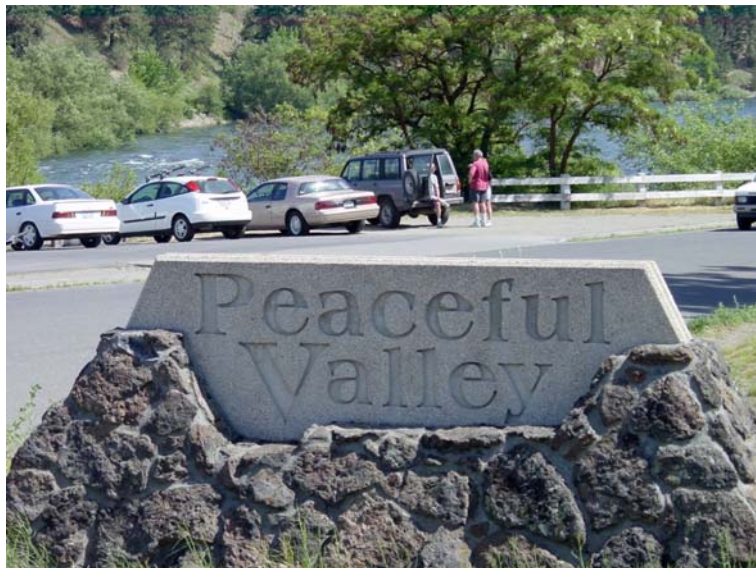
*"Nothing is so firmly impressed on the mind of the visitor to Spokane, as regards its appearance, as the great gorge into which the river falls near the center of the city. It is a tremendous feature of the landscape and one which is rarer in a large city than river, lake, bay or mountain. Any city should prize and preserve its great landscape features, inasmuch as they give it individuality."*

*- Report to the Board of Park Commissioners, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects, 1913*

The major environmental resources of the "Great Gorge" area today include the following:

### Peaceful Valley/Bennett's Addition

Peaceful Valley is a National Register historic district that has recently been experiencing a renaissance of sorts. Within the last few years, new houses have been constructed in Peaceful Valley - and Bennett's Addition, which lies just to the west of Peaceful Valley - the first new housing built there in decades. Environmental resources in this area include 11 acres of City Park Department "Conservation Area" land



The Peaceful Valley Neighborhood is a National Register historic district, located within the Gorge area. The 1913 Olmsted Report suggested for this area: "narrow roadways, so as to leave ample space in the sidewalks," and ample shade and fruit trees. (*Friends of the Falls*)

along the south bank of the river; Peaceful Valley's **Glover Field**, a two-acre Neighborhood Park, has the distinction of being one of Spokane's most historic  
*2002 Conceptual Plan, Great Spokane River Gorge*

park sites (its early uses include being the location of Spokane’s first high school athletic field), and located next to Glover Field is the Peaceful Valley Community Center.

### **Herbert M. Hamblen Conservation Area**

The Herbert M. Hamblen Conservation Area consists of **63 acres** of City parks “**conservation land**” on the north bank of the river. This conservation land lies east and west of the Maple Street Bridge and extends along the river west of and below Summit Blvd, just across the river from High Bridge Park. North of the Hamblen Conservation Area is the nine-acre “Summit Blvd Parkway.” North of the parkway is **Downriver Park** (95 acres of park conservation land) and Downriver Golf Course (169 acres).

### **The West Central Neighborhood**

The Hamblen Conservation Area is within the **West Central Neighborhood** (the Spokane River serves as West Central’s south and western boundaries). West Central is one Spokane’s oldest inner-city neighborhoods. It includes the **County Courthouse** and government complex and several small commercial areas. The commercial area at Broadway and Maple has been identified as one of the City’s four initial **neighborhood planning pilot projects**. Current visioning for this neighborhood center includes that it will provide neighborhood residents with centrally located goods and services, more business and job opportunities, and diverse new higher density housing choices while preserving the neighborhood’s historic character. Within the West Central neighborhood is what is known as the “**Summit Property**,” a vacant, 80-acre site overlooking the Gorge.



This image, taken along the north rim of the Gorge near the Summit site in West Central Neighborhood, shows the Maple Street Bridge in the background. The Centennial Trail, it is hoped, will one day pass very near this site. (*Friends of the Falls*)

## High Bridge Park

High Bridge Park is one of three City parks designated as “Major Parks” (the other two being Riverfront Park and Manito Park). This 200-acre park lies on both sides of Hangman (Latah) Creek, extending south of the junction of the creek and the Spokane River (north of Riverside Drive, it is informally known as “Peoples’ Park”). Of the City’s three Major Parks, High Bridge is undoubtedly the least known and least-used, while still serving as an important regional asset as well as to the **Latah Creek Neighborhood**, in which it is located.

## Centennial Trail

In 1979, Spokane County Parks proposed a bicycle/pedestrian pathway along the river, a pathway that would run from Argonne Road to the Idaho state line. The Parks and Recreation Committee of the **Spokane Valley Chamber of Commerce** nurtured this idea in 1984, as they explored recreational opportunities along the river. In 1986, they proposed a 10-1/2 mile trail to be built in conjunction with the



This artist’s conception of the proposed Westlink pedestrian bridge would connect a new northern stretch of the Centennial Trail across the river using the existing “High Bridge” abutments. The trail could then tie to its existing section towards Riverside State Park, and to the Fish Lake Trail network currently under development. (*Friends of the Centennial Trail*)

Washington Centennial in 1989. Creative thinking helped expand this idea into a coordinated effort with representatives from Coeur d’Alene, Idaho to build a trail from the “Spokane House” at the confluence of the Spokane and Little Spokane Rivers to the far side of Coeur d’Alene Lake, **some 69 miles in length**. Many pieces fell into place to make the Centennial Trail a reality. The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission had recently declared a significant part of its Spokane County land holdings as surplus for park purposes. This land was used to trade for that owned by **Inland Empire Paper Company**. Expo '74 had already set the stage for restoration and access of the river, removing bridges and buildings in the center of the city. **A \$7.5 million federal matching grant** was appropriated in time to take advantage of such local contributions as

AT&T's laying of fiber-optic cable along portions of the trail's desired path, providing much-needed land preparation.

From the original steering committee emanated the **Friends of the Centennial Trail**, a non-profit Washington corporation dedicated to the needed private sector ongoing support for the development, operation, maintenance and enhancement of the Spokane River Centennial Trail. The trail is administered by the **Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission** and is maintained through the provisions of a cooperative agreement among the commission and the city and county parks departments. **A coordinating council** comprising members of state, city, and county parks representatives, as well as a member of the Friends of the Centennial Trail, is responsible for implementation of the cooperative agreement.

One key "missing link" along the Centennial Trail's path is that portion to pass on the north rim of the Gorge, and cross the river on the old "High Bridge" abutments near the confluence with Hangman (Latah) Creek. Known as the **"Westlink" project**, this section of the trail would link the trail from **Riverfront Park** to its remaining length downstream along the Spokane River, through **Riverside State Park**, to the Little Spokane River confluence. In addition, this key component of the trail would also provide connection to a larger "Rail to Trail" network proposed and/or under construction **leading to the Tri-Cities**, and to points west through much of Eastern Washington. At this time, **only \$200,000 remains** to be raised towards the total project cost of \$1.75 million, and the realization of this exciting component of Spokane's infrastructure.

## Monroe Street Bridge

The Monroe Street Bridge, one of Spokane's most prominent historic landmarks, provides a **dramatic boundary** to the east side of the envisioned Great Gorge area. The bridge will be undergoing renovation in the next few years. The renovation plans include opportunities for **pedestrian linkages** underneath the north side of the renovated bridge to provide an important link on the north bank of the river between the uses on either side of the bridge.

## Links to the East

Just east of the Monroe Street Bridge on the steeply graded south bank of the river is **Huntington Park**, a five-acre parcel of land located between the bridge and City Hall. This Avista-owned park is maintained for hydroelectric operational purposes as well as for its scenic, recreational, and environmental values. Further east beyond City Hall is **Riverfront Park**, the City's wondrous legacy from Expo '74 - a 100-acre park in the heart of Spokane. Yet another City-owned and operated asset in this vicinity is the main branch of the **Spokane Library**, which includes a panoramic view of the river as a major feature of the building.

On the north bank of the river east of the Monroe Street Bridge lays **Veterans Court Park**. Due to voter-approval of a major park bond in 2001, a major expansion of Riverfront Park is planned on the north bank of the river, to potentially include a relocated IMAX Theatre, ice-skating rink, and Science Center.

## Conclusion

These environmental resources within and adjacent to the Great Gorge area are outstanding assets for the city and entire region. The Olmsteds recognized this almost 100 years ago, and it continues to hold true today. Enhancing these assets by creating the Great Gorge area supports the environmental values of the community, as expressed in the City's recently adopted new **Comprehensive Plan**. Environmental values that were identified in the plan as important to Spokane's future include the following:

### From the Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces chapter –

*“Maintaining open spaces, golf courses, and trails.”*

*“Being close to the outdoors, recreation, and nature.”*

*“Maintaining linkages between parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces.”*

**From the *Natural Environment* chapter –**

*“Maintaining a close connection to the outdoors, recreation, and nature areas.”*

*“Being responsible stewards of the environment.”*

*“Keeping areas where wildlife live.”*

*“Maintaining the availability of open space, golf courses, and trails.”*

*“Preserving the Spokane River and Hangman (Latah) Creek.”*

# Economic Resources Summary

## Introduction

A community's "**quality of life**" is increasingly seen as the cornerstone for attracting residents, businesses and economic activity. As communities around the country turn their attention to quality of life issues, they are learning that parks and natural areas have become the essential infrastructure for a community's quality of life. The result is that spending for "green" infrastructure is no longer seen as an expense, but **an investment** that produces important economic benefits. The River Gorge project provides a remarkable opportunity for Spokane to improve both the quality of life for its residents, and to help improve its economic outlook.

The Gorge proposal builds on a **national trend** in developing urban waterfront areas. Unlike revitalization efforts such as San Antonio, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Chattanooga, where the traditional urban environment is brought to the water's edge, the Gorge proposal seeks a more integrated approach - a "**soft edge**" weaving of the natural setting into the urban setting that is at once environmentally sensitive and economically compelling.

Some of the most forceful economic arguments for parks and natural areas seem a **natural fit for Spokane**, which is already perceived by many as rich in outdoor and other quality of life resources (it may, for instance, be recalled that the tremendous success of Expo 74 was built on an environmental theme). The River Gorge, with its centerpiece Lower Falls, could provide the ideal mechanism for building on that image - and branding Spokane as a **regional center for outdoor activities**.

The following are a few broad categories of benefits Spokane might anticipate from investing in the Gorge project as a centerpiece of our community's system of parks and natural areas:

## Attracting and Keeping Business

Attracting and retaining business is important to our area's economy. Quality of life is increasingly cited as a factor in where businesses locate. Thus, localities with access to natural areas and outdoor recreational opportunities have advantages over those that do not.

A 1997 study titled "An Empirical Study of the Role of Recreation, Parks and

Open Space in Companies' (Re:) Location Decisions," showed that owners of small companies ranked recreation/parks/open space as the highest priority in choosing a new location for their business. These are the same types of businesses that our local Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council and other organizations work so hard to attract to the Spokane area. Among many similar studies is a report by the Arthur Andersen consulting company, which found that mid- and high-level executives increasingly choose to work in locations that offer a high quality of life outside the workplace. The report highlighted **proximity to open space** as a key benefit.

## **Tourism/Leisure**

**Tourism makes an important contribution** to the economy. Across the nation, parks, protected rivers, scenic lands, wildlife habitat, and recreational open space help support a \$502-billion - and growing - tourism industry. At present rates of growth, the tourism/leisure industry will soon become the leading U.S. industry of any kind.

Outdoor recreation, in particular, is playing an increasingly important role in the tourism/leisure industry, and represents one of the most vigorous growth areas in the U.S. economy. Much of this recreation is supported by public and private parks and open land which in turn support popular outdoor recreational activities. **Spokane seems perfectly positioned** to capitalize on this economic hot-spot with its many outdoor resources coupled with a potentially vast market reaching from the Cascades on the west to Minneapolis in the East.

## **Reducing Public Spending**

**Conservation of greenways**, rivers and trails may indirectly reduce costs to local governments and other public agencies. Encouraging commercial and residential development in urban areas with greenspace, instead of encouraging development to sprawl outward, can reduce community costs that are associated with water and sewer systems, roads and schools.

These are issues that Spokane faces right now. A thoughtful assessment of why Spokane struggles to maintain its roads and other infrastructure should include the effects of sprawl on the city's tax base. Of course, Spokane is not alone. A study of New Jersey communities titled "Impact Assessment of the Interim State Development and Redevelopment Plan" indicated that area would save \$1.3 billion in infrastructure costs over 20 years by avoiding unplanned sprawl development. Another report predicted that even a modest implementation of higher-density development would save the state of South Carolina \$2.7 billion

in infrastructure costs over 20 years. And a third study found that increasing housing density from 1.8 units per acre to 5 units per acre in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area would slash \$3 billion in capital infrastructure costs over 20 years.

### **Commercial Activity**

The popularity of outdoor activity extends to commercial enterprises. Outdoor concessions serve people enjoying nature; special events are staged in park settings. All of these uses generate spending, which in turn creates employment and channels money back to municipal and federal governments in the form of taxes.

## Next Steps: How to Achieve the Vision

Developing a common vision for the Gorge, and ultimately, the features and activities springing from that vision, is expected to grow from a three-phase process:

**Phase One: Conceptual Design** (current phase). This phase outlines general concepts, ideas and guidelines – in essence, the blueprint “requirements” for the project. Key groups and interests, informed by public input, develop the goals and objectives for more specific planning addressed in future phases.

**Phase Two: Master Planning.** (next step) Guided by Conceptual Design requirements, participants should evaluate the scope of work needed to expand a Conceptual Design document into one that can address specifics of design,



Great Gorge Group members and volunteers at the September 2001 Plan Charette. (*Friends of the Falls*)

funding, research, and other goals. Expert consultants may be employed to develop those specifics, and to gather further input from stakeholder groups and the general public. In short, a Gorge Master Plan will integrate conceptual input with researched inventory, identify funding strategies, propose key projects, aid in gathering legislative backing, and suggest long-range goals and objectives.

**Phase Three: Implementation.** This phase simply follows on the guidelines and opportunities provided by the Master Plan to developing specific projects and activities, including funding and physical development identified River Gorge improvements.