

Recreation and Conservation Office



FACT SHEET

The Office Supports:

- Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
- Salmon Recovery Funding Board
- Invasive Species Council
- Governor's Salmon Recovery Office
- Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

Eligible Grant Recipients

- Local governments
- Federal agencies
- Nonprofits
- Private landowners
- Salmon recovery lead entities
- Some businesses
- Special taxing districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

Funding Sources

State

- General obligation bonds
- Gas taxes
- Off-road vehicle permits
- Concealed weapon permits
- Revenue from use of the state's aquatic lands
- General taxes

Federal

- Gas taxes
- User fees
- Oil and gas royalties
- Congressional appropriations

Recreation and Conservation Office

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Ensuring Washington Stays a Great Place to Live, Work, and Play

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) is a small state agency that manages five boards and offices tasked with creating outdoor recreation opportunities, protecting the best of the state's wildlife habitat, conserving working farms and forests, recovering salmon from near extinction, and coordinating the state's response to invasive species.

This collection of boards and offices provides leadership, funding, and technical assistance to local communities, state and federal governments, and others.



Making Washington a Better Place to Live

The benefits of parks and wildlife lands are many.

- Parks boost local economies by attracting businesses, residents, and tourists.
- A 2014 economic analysis¹ of outdoor recreation in Washington showed:
 - \$21.6 billion annually is spent in Washington on outdoor recreation trips and equipment.
 - 199,000 jobs across the state are supported by outdoor recreation.
 - \$2 billion in state and local taxes is generated by outdoor recreation.
 - \$4.6 billion is spent by out-of-state visitors recreating in this state.
- Parks can help people stay healthy, reducing health care costs.
- Recovering salmon can improve the economy. A 2008 study estimated that commercial and recreational fishing supports more than 16,000 jobs and more than \$500 million annually in personal income statewide.²
- Conservation of land can help reduce the costs of flooding, fires, and other natural disasters. It also contributes to clean water and air, climate regulation, and crop pollination.
- The value of ecosystem services provided by trees, water, and animals on public recreation lands has been estimated at between \$134 billion and \$248 billion a year.³

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Ensuring the Best Projects are Funded

All of RCO's grant processes are open and competitive. Generally, grant applications first are reviewed by panels of volunteers, experts, and staff. The panels weigh the merits of the proposals against criteria, strategic plans, and in some cases, national priorities. They rank the lists of projects and submit them to RCO boards for funding consideration, helping to ensure that only the best projects receive funding.

Parks

Several grant programs provide funding for parks.

- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- RCO Recreation Grants
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
- Youth Athletic Facilities

These programs provide funding to acquire land and to renovate, build, and

equip outdoor facilities, including parks, ball fields, skateboard parks, tennis and ball courts, spray parks, and pools. Grants also provide funding to create access to the waterfront through parks or shoreline boardwalks.

These programs are the largest funding sources for local parks, outside of local levies.

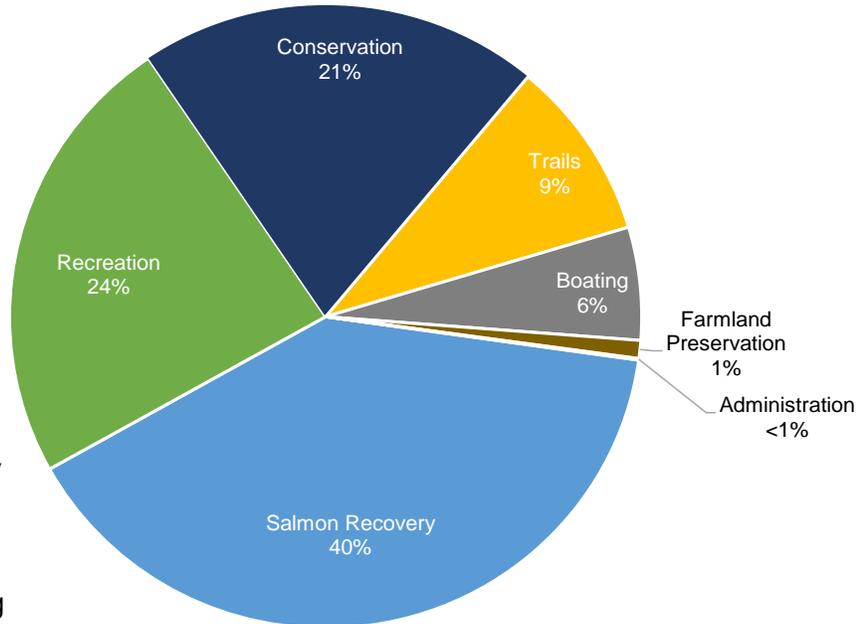
Trails

Trails come in a variety of styles from connecting urban areas for bicycle commuters to providing backcountry experiences. They receive funding primarily through three grant programs.

- Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities
- RCO Recreation Grants
- Recreational Trails Program
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

These programs provide grants to buy land, develop trails and trail-related facilities, and support other trail activities, such as planning, maintenance, education, and law enforcement.

Grant Awards
Percent of \$2.2 Billion
1964-2015



Shooting Ranges

One grant program provides funding to support archery and firearm ranges.

- Firearms and Archery Range Recreation

This program provides grants to acquire, develop, and renovate public and private nonprofit firearm ranges and archery training and practice facilities. It also funds equipment purchases, safety and environmental improvements, noise abatement, and liability protection.

Environmental Education

One grant program provides funding for programs aimed at getting at-risk children outside.

- No Child Left Inside

This new program provides grants to groups that offer outdoor environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based education and recreation programs serving youth. The State Parks and Recreation Commission offers the grants and RCO administers them.

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Boating

There are two grant programs specifically designed to help Washington meet the needs of boaters.

- Boating Facilities Program
- Boating Infrastructure Grant

These programs provide grants to acquire, develop, and renovate boating facilities on both freshwater and saltwater, and for both motorized boats and non-motorized craft, such as kayaks and canoes.

Four other grant programs provide funding to create access to the waterfront and boating facilities.

- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- RCO Recreation Grants
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

These programs provide funding to acquire land and to renovate, build, and equip outdoor facilities, including shoreline boardwalks.

Conserving Habitat

There are four grant programs primarily aimed at protecting habitat for wildlife.

- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Marine Shoreline Protection
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

These grants allow for land purchases and restoration to help conserve Washington's unique plants, fish, and other wildlife.

Farm and Forest Preservation

There is one grant program that provides funding to protect the state's most valuable working farms and forests.

- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

Farmland grants may be used to buy development rights using voluntary land preservation agreements, called conservation easements. Portions of grants also may be used to enhance the agricultural production

of preserved farmland or its ecological functions.

The forestland grants may be used to protect forests for the growth and harvest of commercial timber. Funding also may be used to restore wildlife habitat in those protected forests.

Salmon Recovery

There are several grants programs that help restore salmon populations.

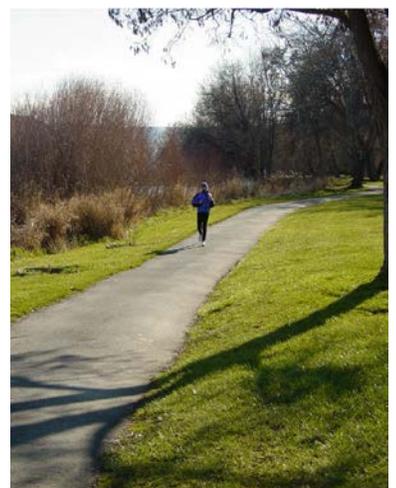
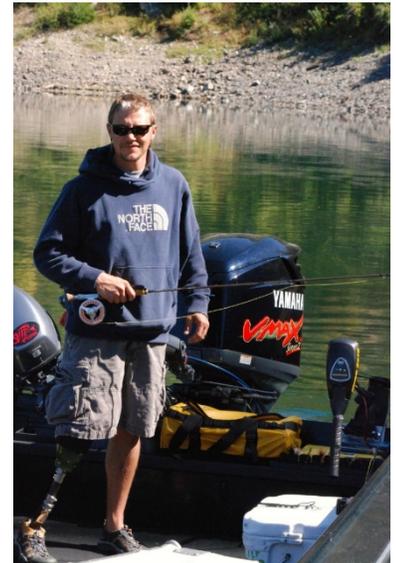
- Salmon recovery
- Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program
- Family Forest Fish Passage Program
- Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration
- Puget Sound Critical Stock
- Coastal Restoration Grants

These programs provide grants to protect and restore salmon habitat and fix fish-blocking culverts.

Flood Control

RCO manages one grant program aimed at reducing the impact of floods in the Chehalis River Basin.

- Catastrophic Flood Relief program



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Financial Information

A small state agency in terms of employees (53), the RCO has the fourth largest capital budget of any state agency.

Since 1964, RCO's boards:

- Awarded more than \$2 billion in grants.
- Funded more than 9,000 projects.
- Grant recipients contributed more than \$1 billion

Total = More than \$3 billion investment in Washington's great outdoors.

Managing Performance

RCO offers a range of grants. Some projects, such as building trails that cross multiple counties, may take many years to accomplish. To ensure the state's investment is being spent wisely, efficiently, and timely, RCO has initiated multiple actions to improve its grant process.

- RCO has created multiple reports that track the progress of grants. These reports help staff identify projects that are falling behind so grant recipients can get additional help.
 - Information on all RCO-funded projects is available online. Visitors to RCO's Web site can find details of any project, such as the location, grant recipient, grant amount, status, pictures, and more with the Project Search feature (<https://secure.rco.wa.gov/prism/search/projectsearch.aspx>). Information on salmon recovery grants also is available on the Habitat Works Schedule at <http://hws.ekosystem.us/>.
- RCO has refocused its efforts to close older projects.
- RCO has increased communication with grant applicants who have large numbers of uncompleted projects to help them track and finish projects.
- RCO has instituted policies to terminate grants for poor performing grant recipients.
- RCO has adjusted internal procedures to speed up the delivery of grant funding.

These efforts have paid off. Since 2005, the agency has successfully dropped its re-appropriations rate from more than 57 percent to 52 percent.

¹Tania Briceno and Greg Schundler, "Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State," Earth Economics, Tacoma, WA, January 2015, pp.IX-XI, 14.

²Economic Analysis of the Non-Treaty Commercial and Recreational Fisheries in Washington State," TCW Economics, Sacramento, CA. December 2008, p.23.

³Tania Briceno and Greg Schundler, "Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State," Earth Economics, Tacoma, WA, January 2015, p.39.

