
Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

2015 Progress Report



Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group
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Background

In 2007, the Washington State Legislature created the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group¹ to improve the visibility and coordination of habitat and recreation land purchases and disposals by state agencies. The Legislature wanted to ensure that state agencies acquiring lands were coordinating their efforts with one another and making their efforts more visible to the public.

WHAT STATE LAWMAKERS ASKED STATE AGENCIES TO PROVIDE

Are state agencies acquiring habitat and recreation lands strategically, and not just as opportunities arise? Are state agencies talking to each other? Are agencies duplicating roles, or do the programs within different agencies have distinct purposes that complement one another?

WHAT CITIZENS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ASKED STATE AGENCIES TO PROVIDE

A combination of state, federal, and nonprofit land buyers using different planning processes has made it difficult for citizens to know what recreation and conservation land purchases are being planned and occurring in their communities. Citizens and local governments want to know which purchasers are planning to buy recreation and conservation land in their communities. What land is planned for purchase? Why is the land being purchased? What are the longer-term priorities and how are they set? How can citizens get involved in the planning process?

Since 2007, the lands group has been a key vehicle for improving the visibility, coordination, and transparency of land purchases by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission. The lands group makes state land acquisitions more visible and coordinated at key points before, during, and after the acquisitions are completed.

The lands group process occurs on the biennial funding cycle and includes the following components:

- **Annual Coordinating Forum:** The Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum brings together state agencies, local governments, non-government organizations, landowners, tribes, and citizens to learn about and share ideas on proposals for state habitat and recreation land purchases and disposals.
- **Biennial Forecast Report:** The *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* gives information about state land purchases and disposals planned for the next biennium.
- **Biennial Performance Monitoring Report:** The *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* shows whether state agencies achieved their initial acquisition project objectives.

¹Substitute Senate Bill 5236

The lands group membership includes representatives from the following state agencies:

- Department of Ecology
- Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Department of Natural Resources
- Department of Transportation
- Puget Sound Partnership
- Recreation and Conservation Office
- State Conservation Commission
- State Parks and Recreation Commission

The lands group also includes representatives of local governments, the Legislature, and others including the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Washington Forest Protection Association, Pacific Coast Joint Venture, Washington Association of Land Trusts, and the American Farmland Trust (See Attachment A for a list of members). The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides staff support and hosts the lands group Web site.

The lands group is assigned 11 legislative directives aimed at improving state land acquisition and disposal coordination and visibility. If resources are scarce, five of these tasks are to be prioritized. The lands group meets quarterly and makes a difference in the following ways:

Improving coordination – The annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum and the quarterly meetings enable interagency coordination of land acquisition projects to improve strategic planning; help agencies identify partnering opportunities and reduce duplicative efforts; and help produce best management practices for land purchases. Another benefit is improving coordination of information between local governments and citizens in counties where acquisitions are proposed.

Addressing key policy issues – The annual forums encourage open discussion of key policy issues, such as funding for land maintenance, with citizens and state lawmakers. With an increased interest in public land conservation, the forum gives an opportunity for agencies to hear about the issues that are important to lawmakers and the public, and for legislators and citizens to learn about projects in their areas and about state land purchasing practices.

Improving transparency – The lands group reports give timely information to citizens about land purchase plans in their areas. The annual progress report (this document) is submitted on behalf of the group to satisfy the reporting requirement in the Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.260². The *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* shows maps and detailed information about proposed projects, such as project boundaries, intended uses, purchasing agency, cost, and number of acres. It

² Attachment B: Enabling Legislation

rolls up the data by county and statewide to show the big picture of what the state is planning. Local and state planners say the report helps them make more informed decisions about land purchases.

2015 Progress on Statutory Tasks

The lands group is responsible for accomplishing 11 statutory tasks. In 2012, the Legislature amended the statute to prioritize five. The progress achieved for each of the five priority tasks is outlined below.

TASK 1 | *Review agency land acquisition and disposal plans and policies to help ensure statewide coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisitions and disposals.*

The lands group accomplished this through publication of the third biennial *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* in 2014 and the annual coordinating forum in 2015.

TASK 2 | *Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal plans.*

The lands group published the third [*Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report*](#) on its Web site in January 2016. The goal of the monitoring report is to monitor the success of state habitat and recreation land acquisitions by examining whether state agencies achieved their acquisition objectives. Data from the report can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in state acquisition processes and inform decisions made by the Legislature, state agencies, local governments, and others.

The report was modified this year to provide data in a more useable and searchable format. Moving from a text-based format to a spreadsheet streamlines the most relevant information and provides a means of sorting and summarizing acquisition data that didn't previously exist. The intention is to provide a long-term look and comparison of planned versus implemented acquisitions. The report is available on the [lands group Web site](#).

TASK 3 | *Establish procedures for publishing the biennial forecast of acquisition and disposal plans on Web sites or other centralized, easily accessible formats.*

The *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* provides early notification about plans for land purchases by the state natural resource agencies. The report also gives a comprehensive look at what's being planned around the state, through county-wide, statewide, and project specific maps and data. In preparing the 2014 report, RCO partnered with Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and State Parks and Recreation Commission to compile and refine state land acquisition data. RCO packaged and submitted the third biennial *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* to the Legislature in December 2014. The forecast also was distributed to legislators and other interested parties.

TASK 4 | *Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans.*

The lands group hosted the sixth State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum on July 9, 2015. The forum is an opportunity for citizens, legislators, state and local planners, tribes, and others to learn about

habitat and recreation lands that state agencies propose for state and federal funding in 2015-2017 and that were funded in past biennia. This past year, participating agencies presented maps and information about funded projects and explained why the projects were or were not priorities for the state. A roundtable discussion offered the opportunity to identify efforts, opportunities, and issues for improving transparency and coordination of state land acquisitions. Attendees were encouraged to discuss the projects openly at the forum. The forum is intended to generate questions and discussion about policy and coordination with other state agencies.

TASK 5 | *Develop an approach for monitoring the success of acquisitions.*

The third *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* was released in January 2016. Its goal is to monitor the success of state habitat and recreation land acquisitions by examining whether state agencies achieved their acquisition objectives. Data from the report can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in state acquisition processes and inform decisions made by the Legislature, state agencies, local governments, and others.

Other Activities that Support the Lands Group

PUBLIC LANDS INVENTORY

The state Legislature³ asked RCO to provide an inventory of lands in Washington owned by federal, state, and local governments, and by Native American tribes by July 1, 2014. The *Washington Public Lands Inventory* Web application is available at <http://publiclands.smartmine.com>.

The inventory is accessible to everyone and offers the first Web-based interactive mapping application for Washington State public lands. The inventory includes ownership, ownership type, location, acreage information for each parcel, and data from the *2014 State Land Acquisition Forecast Report*. The land is categorized according to its principal use, including, but not limited to, developed recreation land, habitat and passive recreation land, and revenue generation. The inventory also includes the intended use at the time of acquisition, the current use, acquisition cost, and funding sources for lands acquired by state agencies within the past 10 years.

The Public Lands Inventory is intended as a tool for Washingtonians to better understand the location, use, and purchase price of recreation and natural resource lands owned and managed by federal, state, and local governments. The inventory also helps state agencies better collaborate and manage these lands by revealing current and future opportunities for partnerships.

Although the proviso asks RCO to include tribal lands in the Public Lands Inventory, these lands are not included for several reasons. The Bureau of Land Management collects ownership records of tribal lands from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and contributes these data to the parcel database. Some of the data includes federal reservation boundaries; sometimes the data merges many different categories of tribal

³2013-2015 Capital Budget proviso (Section 3174 of Engrossed Substitute Bill 5035)

land (tribal land held in trust by the federal government, tribal lands owned by individuals, tribal lands acquired by the tribe but not held in trust); sometimes the data held by the Bureau of Land Management is out-of-date.

RCO distributed Bureau of Land Management maps to all of Washington's federally recognized tribes and requested feedback on the accuracy of the land and boundary information. RCO received many responses indicating that the maps and data were inaccurate. RCO contacted the Bureau to better understand the data and learned that due to long-standing litigation over tribal trust lands, the Bureau is undertaking a major update to its tribal databases. Because of the inconsistencies, lack of consensus, ongoing efforts to update the tribal data, and the short time frame for this project, it was decided not to include tribal lands in the inventory. Further, the responses from tribes clarified that tribal lands are not public lands and should not be included in an inventory of public lands.

Executive guidance for the 2014 inventory was provided by a steering committee, which was chaired by RCO and included executive managers from the state agency partners. Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee staff provided input to the steering committee about how the inventory could support its separate study of public habitat and recreation lands. A technical advisory committee, also chaired by RCO, brought together information technology and data management staff from the state agency partners. In keeping with past public land inventories completed by RCO, the 2014 inventory is focused on publicly-owned, natural resource and recreation lands.

Inventory Findings: The estimated total land area of Washington State is 45,663,000 acres. All public natural resource and recreation lands total about 19.8 million acres. State-owned natural resource and recreation lands represent roughly 6.5 million acres, or 33 percent of public lands in Washington State. Of the 19.8 million acres in public ownership, 12.7 million, or 64 percent, are owned by the federal government. The available federal data did not distinguish between land use types, so the federal acreage total includes lands presumably not used for recreation.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION RELATED TO THE LANDS GROUP

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee Final Report: State Recreation and Habitat Lands (July 2015). In this study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee concluded that the Legislature would benefit from additional information about detailed outcomes and future costs of recreation and habitat lands when considering funding requests. The recommendations from the report include the following:

- The State Parks and Recreation Commission, Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, RCO, and the Office of Financial Management should develop a single, easily-accessible source for information about acquisitions, detailed outcomes, and costs. In undertaking this effort, the agencies can build on work they already are doing. This work includes lands group reports, budget documents, land management plans, and grant program applications. These agencies also should establish guidelines and reporting protocols so that they are providing consistent information to the Legislature.

- The Office of Financial Management should develop guidelines that standardize the cost estimates. Guidelines should address, at minimum, the number of biennia that estimates must cover and the types of expenses to be included. The Office of Financial Management also should develop a process to reconcile estimated costs with actual expenditures. The Office of Financial Management and the agencies should use that reconciliation to inform future cost estimates and budget requests.
- The State Parks and Recreation Commission, Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, RCO, and the Office of Financial Management should report to the Legislature by January 1, 2016 with a proposal that outlines how the recommendation will be implemented and estimates of any associated costs.

To take a step towards providing more easily-accessible information, as well as more information on detailed outcomes and future costs, the lands group is making modifications to both the monitoring and forecast reports. In the monitoring report, the format has been changed to one that more easily searchable and accessible. In the upcoming 2016 forecast report, new fields of information will be added:

Project Name and Year		5
Agency	Department of Natural Resources	Proposed Acres
Proposed Project Description and Purpose	Describe the project and what the significance is to the bigger picture.	Proposed Funding Source
		Type of Acquisition
		Proposed Acquisition Cost
Current Use	Describe how the property is currently being used.	Anticipated Future Costs
Location	Description of location	Include the following estimates per OFM guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future capital costs for the property. • Future operating costs for the property. • Future maintenance costs for the property. • Additional costs incurred to the management unit from the addition of the property.
Legislative District	#	Revenue Generation
Planning Link	How does the acquisition relate to the agency's current ownership and its plans for an entire management unit? What are the outcomes for the entire management unit and how will the acquisition contribute to achieve those outcomes? Explain how the project is a strategic investment for the agency.	Partnerships
Project Outcomes	Describe the anticipated outcomes of the acquisition in detail, including specific development plans, service improvements, staffing levels, habitat restoration needs, and projected accomplishments (e.g., recreational opportunities for XX community, population enhancement of XX sensitive species)	List Partners and what partnerships will contribute to the long-term success of the project.
Current Progress on Outcomes	Describe the agency's current progress towards achieving the detailed outcomes as explained above.	

NAME OF COUNTY PROPOSED ACQUISITION

Figure 1. Revised template for the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group forecast report. New information as requested by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee is shown in red.

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee Final Report: Economic Impact of Public Natural Resource Lands (July 2015). The results of this study showed that, in general, the percentage of public natural resource lands in Washington counties did not negatively affect job, income, or population growth between 1990 and 2010. It further showed that the overall percent of public natural resource land is not a major driver of county job, income, and population growth. What this means is that a change in the percentage of publicly owned land in a county is not expected to strongly affect county economic vitality in a positive or negative manner.

The study also examined a subset of lands managed for conservation, habitat, or passive recreation and found a slightly different result. For these lands, the economists found a small positive relationship between the percent of conservation and recreation lands in a county and income and job growth. The results indicated that a 1 percent increase in the percent of conservation, habitat, or passive recreation lands in a county may be related to a 0.28 percent increase in income growth and a 0.15 percent increase in job growth. These lands frequently attract visitors for hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other recreational activities. Visitors may generate business for local restaurants, hotels, gas stations, and recreational industry stores. These lands also might attract new businesses or residents to the local area, which can lead to county-level job and income growth.

HB 2493 and SB 6296. In the 2016 Legislative Session, the Recreation and Conservation is requesting that the Legislature extend the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group's expiration date from 2017 to 2027.

2016 Action Plan

- Host 8th Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum
- Publish 4th *Biennial State Land Acquisition Forecast Report*

Attachment A | Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

As of December 2014

Affiliation / Organization	Member / Alternate
Washington State Legislature	Senator Linda Evans Parlette Alternate: Grace Edwards
American Farmland Trust	Heidi Eisenhour
City Government Park Planners / Washington Recreation and Park Association	Leslie Betlach Alternate: Shelley Marelli
County Governments / Okanogan County	Commissioner Sheilah Kennedy
County Governments / Douglas County	Commissioner Steve Jenkins
Forest Products Industry / Washington Forest Protection Association Member	Eric Beach
Pacific Coast Joint Venture	Lora Leschner
Puget Sound Partnership	Jeff Parsons
The Nature Conservancy	Tom Bugert
Trust for Public Land	Bill Clarke
Washington Association of Land Trusts	Hannah Clark Alternates: Gary Schalla, Joe Kane
Washington Department of Ecology	Heather Kapust
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	Cynthia Wilkerson Alternates: Clay Sprague, Eric Gardner
Washington Department of Natural Resources	Jed Herman
Washington Department of Transportation	Paul Wagner
Washington Recreation and Conservation Office	Kaleen Cottingham Alternate: Wendy Brown
Washington State Conservation Commission	Ron Shultz Alternate: Josh Giuntoli
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission	Steve Hahn Alternate: Shannon Stevens

Attachment B | Enabling Legislation

REVISED CODE OF WASHINGTON 79A.25.260

Habitat and recreation lands coordinating group — Members — Progress reports — Duties.

(Expires July 31, 2017)

- (1) The habitat and recreation lands coordinating group is established. The group must include representatives from the office, the state parks and recreation commission, the department of natural resources, and the department of fish and wildlife. The members of the group must have subject matter expertise with the issues presented in this section. Representatives from appropriate stakeholder organizations and local government must also be considered for participation on the group, but may only be appointed or invited by the director.
- (2) To ensure timely completion of the duties assigned to the group, the director shall submit yearly progress reports to the office of financial management.
- (3) The group must:
 - a. Review agency land acquisition and disposal plans and policies to help ensure statewide coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisitions and disposals;
 - b. Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal plans;
 - c. Establish procedures for publishing the biennial forecast of acquisition and disposal plans on web sites or other centralized, easily accessible formats;
 - d. Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans;
 - e. Develop a recommended method for interagency geographic information system-based documentation of habitat and recreation lands in cooperation with other state agencies using geographic information systems;
 - f. Develop recommendations for standardization of acquisition and disposal recordkeeping, including identifying a preferred process for centralizing acquisition data;
 - g. Develop an approach for monitoring the success of acquisitions;
 - h. Identify and commence a dialogue with key state and federal partners to develop an inventory of potential public lands for transfer into habitat and recreation land management status; and
 - i. Review existing and proposed habitat conservation plans on a regular basis to foster statewide coordination and save costs.
- (4) If prioritization among the various requirements of subsection (3) of this section is necessary due to the availability of resources, the group shall prioritize implementation of subsection (3)(a) through (d) and (g) of this section.
- (5) The group shall revisit the planning requirements of relevant grant programs administered by the office to determine whether coordination of state agency habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal could be improved by modifying those requirements.

- (6) The group must develop options for centralizing coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisition made with funds from federal grants. The advantages and drawbacks of the following options, at a minimum, must be developed:
 - a. Requiring that agencies provide early communication on the status of federal grant applications to the office, the office of financial management, or directly to the legislature;
 - b. Establishing a centralized pass-through agency for federal funds, where individual agencies would be the primary applicants.
- (7) This section expires July 31, 2017. Prior to January 1, 2017, the group shall make a formal recommendation to the board and the appropriate committees of the legislature as to whether the existence of the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group should be continued beyond July 31, 2017, and if so, whether any modifications to its enabling statute should be pursued.

[2012 c 128 § 1; 2007 c 247 § 1.]

Notes

Finding – 2012 c 128: "The legislature finds that participation by the state's habitat and recreation land management agencies in the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group is an inherent part of transparent, efficient, and effective state habitat and recreation land management, and must be conducted within existing resources." [2012 c 128 § 2.]