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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

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## Topic #12: Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account – Policy Issues

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**Proposed Action:** Discussion

### Summary

On August 29, Recreation and Conservation Office staff requested comment from interested parties on possible changes to the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) Grant Program. This memorandum summarizes the proposed options and comments, and outlines staff's recommendation for modifications to existing program policies.

### Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends modifying grant program evaluation criteria to provide equal weight to the public access and environmental enhancement portions of a project. However, staff is recommending that the decision regarding modification of the criteria and corresponding policy language be delayed until the first Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) meeting in 2008.

### Background

Public comments were solicited regarding the relative emphasis between the two goals of the ALEA grant program: (1) providing public access to aquatic lands and (2) providing environmental benefits through restoration and preservation of these lands. The relative importance of the ALEA grant program's two purposes is not clear in either the ALEA policy manual or the evaluation criteria that assess a project's need and benefits. Additional program information and project evaluation criteria can be found in Manual 21, *ALEA Grant Program: Policies and Project Selection*.

### Analysis

To address any perceived conflict between the two program goals, three options were presented to the public for consideration:



- ➔ **Option 1.** Make it more clear in the ALEA manual, instructions to applicants, and instructions to the evaluation team that the public access and environmental enhancement portions of a grant are equally important, and ensure that the evaluation team includes people with interest and expertise in aquatic land access, recreation, and environmental education as well as members with expertise in ecological restoration and environmental protection.
- ➔ **Option 2.** Modify the evaluation criteria so that the public access and environmental enhancement needs and benefits of a proposed project are scored separately, but giving equal weight to both sets of questions. In addition, give extra points to projects where the access and environmental portions of a project complement each other and negative points where they are in conflict.
- ➔ **Option 3.** Retain current policies.

The majority of comments received encouraged maintaining the dual program goals, with clarification on how the two project components—public access and environmental enhancement—are evaluated. To this end, most respondents preferred Option 2 as described above. A handful of comments discussed combining Options 1 and 2, thereby reinforcing the program goals, providing more clarity to the evaluation process and revising the evaluation criteria to provide separate but equal scoring mechanisms. A minority of comments preferred Option 1 only.

Other comments, beyond the three options, included encouraging projects that involve both public access and habitat protection measures. However, there was no clear consensus on how encouraging both elements in a project should be done. Comments also reflected an interest in funding projects with additional environmental benefits such as low impact development techniques, use of environmentally preferred products, and environmental education (which is already encouraged in the program).

### **Next Steps**

Public comments on the proposed options referenced above were distributed to the Board at the September 14 RCFB meeting. Comments received by October 25 on staff's recommendation as presented in this memorandum will be distributed to the Board electronically in advance of the November meeting.

If the Board approves this recommendation, staff will draft changes to the evaluation criteria and related policies within Manual #21, *ALEA Grant Program: Policies and Project Selection* and send them out for stakeholder comment. Recommendations will be presented at the Board's first meeting in 2008.