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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

October 12, 2007

Topic #7: WWRP Riparian Protection Account – Policy Issues

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Approved by the Director: 

Proposed Action: Discussion

Summary:

On August 27, Recreation and Conservation Office staff requested comment from interested parties on whether or not to increase the maximum grant request limit in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Riparian Protection Account. This memorandum summarizes the proposed options and comments, and outlines staff's recommendation for modifications to existing program policies.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends retaining the current limit of \$1,000,000 on grant awards in the Riparian Protection Account. If the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) chooses to increase the cap, staff recommends that it not be increased beyond \$1,500,000.

Background

The Washington State Legislature established the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program¹ (WWRP) in 1990 and added the Riparian Protection Account in 2005. The RCFB establishes program policies, including the limit on the grant amount that can be requested by a project applicant.

Currently the minimum riparian protection grant request is \$25,000 per project; the maximum is \$1,000,000. By statute, there is a 50% match requirement for local agency² sponsored projects. There is no match requirement for state agency sponsored projects.

¹ WWRP is codified in RCW 79A.15 and WAC 286-27.

² Local agencies include cities, counties, federally recognized Native American tribes, special purpose districts, port districts, and other political subdivisions of the state providing services to less than the entire state if legally authorized to acquire and develop public open space, habitat, farmland, riparian habitat, or recreation facilities. RCW 79A.15.010(5)



Analysis

Stakeholders commented on the following options regarding limits to grant awards.

➔ **Option 1: Increase the limit to \$2,000,000**

Pros	Cons
An increase in the limit acknowledges that land prices and restoration costs continue to increase.	Fewer projects would be funded, depending on the size of grants requested.
Large acquisition and restoration projects are in some cases more beneficial than several smaller projects.	Local agencies may not be able to take advantage of the larger limit due to the difficulty of raising the 50% match.

➔ **Option 2: Remove the limit; allow grants of any amount**

Pros	Cons
Allows an applicant to target high priced properties.	Local agencies may not be able to take advantage of the larger limit due to the difficulty of raising the 50% match.
Encourages larger projects (multiple parcels within one project area), which are in some cases more beneficial than several smaller projects.	Fewer projects might be funded, depending on both the total appropriation and on the size of grants requested.
	Potential for reduced leveraging of local funds.

➔ **Option 3: No change; retain the limit of \$1,000,000**

Pros	Cons
This is a new program, retaining the current limit allows more time to measure outcomes as more potential applicants learn about the Riparian Protection Account.	Does not achieve the advantages listed for Options 1 and 2 above.
Ensures funds are distributed among a larger pool of grantees.	May leave funds on the table depending on the number of projects submitted and amounts requested.
Is perceived as allowing local jurisdictions a more even playing field with state agencies.	
Increases the likelihood that funds are distributed statewide.	

Comments generally favored retaining a maximum cap on riparian protection grant awards, with recommendations ranging from the current amount of \$1 million to the "no limits option" described in Option 2.

Retaining the current limit of \$1 million as potential applicants learn about this new funding category, will allow more time to assess the implications of a funding cap on potential projects. Staff believes that the reason this category was initially undersubscribed in its first grant cycle was due to the uncertainty that significant Riparian Protection Account funding would be available if the WWRP appropriation was maintained at the historic level of \$50 million. In addition, staff believes that retaining the cap at the current level is fair to local agencies competing in this category and will ensure a broader geographic distribution of projects.

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 staff's recommendation, no manual update is required. If the Board adopts a change, staff will update Manual #10b, *WWRP: Habitat Conservation Account and Riparian Protection Account: Policies and Project Selection* and send out notices to potential applicants and other interested parties. Any adopted changes will affect grant requests beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.