

December 19, 2007

Topic #15: State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) and State Recreation Policy

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Approved by the Director:

Proposed Action: Discussion and direction

Summary

In order to be eligible to receive Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants, the state must submit a State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) document to the National Park Service. The current SCORP expires in June 2008.

Staff Recommendation

At a minimum, staff recommends submitting a tightly focused new SCORP document to the National Park Service to continue the state's eligibility for Land and Water funding.

Additionally, staff seeks advice on whether to begin taking steps to develop a state strategic plan for the acquisition, renovation, and development of recreational resources and the preservation and conservation of open space envisioned by RCW 79A.25.020 and the extent the Board wishes to be involved in either approach.

Background

The Recreation Conservation Office has, since its creation as the Interagency Committee in 1964, been responsible for development of a "state comprehensive outdoor recreation planning" document. SCORP is a federal requirement for state participation in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) federal pass-through grant program. The National Park Service, the federal entity responsible for administering the LWCF, provides funding and guidance for plan development. There is ample flexibility, however, for tailoring the document to meet state needs. The most recent version of SCORP, published in 2002, can be found on RCO's website

http://www.rco.wa.gov/documents/rcfb/Recreation_Trends/SCORP_Oct_2002.pdf

Analysis

SCORP has been problematic since the beginning. The more significant problems associated with SCORP are:

- **Decentralized planning in Washington.** This state's populist tradition, scattering roles and responsibilities across many jurisdictions with an emphasis on the power of local agencies, makes central planning of any kind all but impossible.
- **Doesn't direct state funding.** SCORP only affects federal LWCF appropriations, which are minimal, and has no affect on state or local funding. The results in little incentive for agencies or organizations to either participate meaningfully in the planning process or to agree to any resulting recommendations.
- **Cumbersome process.** The prescriptive public process required tends to become so ponderous as to minimize its timeliness and "strategic" value.
- **Literal interpretation of "comprehensive."** Past SCORP documents done here and in other states have been attempts to be all inclusive, resulting in little more than counts or inventories of agencies, programs, issues, and facilities from picnic tables to swimming pools. This approach tends to be unhelpful to those seeking meaningful guidance.
- **Outdated planning model.** The federal guidelines call for a "supply-demand" planning approach, which many recreation planners view as obsolete. In fact, most recreation planning models in current use are ineffective and need to be reconsidered.

Meanwhile, as the amount of money available from LWCF has diminished (from \$6 million in 1979 to \$500,000 in 2005), the value of SCORP has diminished. RCO staff believes that SCORP has for some time been not been worth the investment of time and money if it is done for LWCF purposes alone.

In the late 1980's RCO was subject to a Legislative "sunset review." At the same time, SCORP was in transition from old "supply-demand" models to new directions. Unfortunately, there was no consensus on the new direction at the time of the sunset review. Legislation adopted following the sunset review provided some direction in the agency's "permanent" statutes. The result is RCW 79A.25.020, assigning RCO's director with the responsibility to "...prepare and update a strategic plan for the acquisition, renovation, and development of recreational resources and the preservation and conservation of open space."¹ This statutory direction is much broader than the federal planning requirements of SCORP, and has its own built-in contradictions (for

¹ [The Director is empowered] (3) To prepare and update a strategic plan for the acquisition, renovation, and development of recreational resources and the preservation and conservation of open space. The plan shall be prepared in coordination with the office of the governor and the office of financial management, with participation of federal, state, and local agencies having recreational responsibilities, user groups, private sector interests, and the general public. The plan shall be submitted to the recreation and conservation funding board for review, and the board shall submit its recommendations on the plan to the governor. The plan shall include, but is not limited to: (a) an inventory of current resources; (b) a forecast of recreational resource demand; (c) identification and analysis of actual and potential funding sources; (d) a process for broad scale information gathering; (e) an assessment of the capabilities and constraints, both internal and external to state government, that affect the ability of the state to achieve the goals of the plan; (f) an analysis of strategic options and decisions available to the state; (g) an implementation strategy that is coordinated with executive policy and budget priorities; and (h) elements necessary to qualify for participation in or the receipt of aid from any federal program for outdoor recreation

example, calling for universal participation yet limiting goals and actions to state government, and mixing obsolete supply-demand and more modern strategic planning approaches) and overlaps (such as the duplication such a plan would have with plans adopted under the Growth Management Act).

The 1995 and 2002 SCORP documents were done with the requirements of RCW 79A.25.020 in mind. The 2002 SCORP effort focused on how the document might contribute to the success of other agencies required to plan, whether under the Growth Management Act or the new state habitat and recreation land coordination effort required of RCO. This was done through the presentation of high level state government policy (see attached summary), sound data and an analysis of the data and its implications, and general recommendations to agencies and organizations providing recreation opportunities.

Some measure of the success of the approach can be found in the following examples.

- SCORP's recreation participation data is in high demand by GMA and recreation planners statewide and is essential to an understanding of outdoor recreation.
- Operators of non-federal hydropower dams seeking a license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) must demonstrate how plans for recreation and public access are consistent with SCORP. On numerous occasions, RCO staff has been invited to assist in the application and interpretation of SCORP in hydro license proceedings.
- Department of Natural Resources must determine consistency with the statewide recreation plan when re-conveying trust land to counties for park purposes. SCORP recommendations give DNR flexibility in making its determinations.

However, neither the 1995 nor 2002 SCORP documents were completely successful in the eyes of those seeking a true strategic plan. Because of the problems mentioned earlier, SCORP could not give agencies detailed guidance (short of directive) they sometimes seek, and it could not give recreation groups an activity-specific advocacy tool.

Next Steps

Given the above background, staff sees two approaches that can be taken. One would be to focus on LWCF requirements while still offering value to recreation generally. The second would be to broaden the planning process in order to develop a truly strategic plan as called for by 79A RCW.

The first approach could be to complete one document designed to meet the federal requirements for SCORP by June 30. Staff has already developed a plan outline that emphasizes the roles and responsibilities of Washington State government in outdoor recreation. In particular, the outline proposes to: 1) address the need for meaningful, measureable elements for state government's Priorities of Government (POG)

budgeting process, and 2) propose meaningful, measurable elements for the Governor's Government Management, Accountability and Performance (GMAP) system. The outline incorporates the "level of service" (LOS) model as a proposal for meaningful, measurable elements.²

To meet the June 2008 deadline for filing SCORP with the National Park Service, the following actions, at minimum, are required:

1. Collection and analysis of relevant data, especially participation data (this task is already completed).
2. Development of a draft SCORP document for RCFB discussion at its March 2008 meeting.
3. Public review and comment in April and May.
4. Development of a proposed final SCORP document for RCFB action at its June 2008 meeting.
5. Transmittal of a recommended document to the Governor.
6. Submittal to the National Park Service.

The second approach could be to broaden the planning processes and work toward completing two separate documents. The first document would be a June 2008 SCORP, and the second would be a strategic plan consistent with RCW 79A.25.020 which uses the June 2008 SCORP as a point of departure.

A broader process could address a number of elements found in the RCO strategic plan: coordinating recreation information and priorities (Objective 1.4), using information about participation and satisfaction (Objective 5.3), and contributing to an outdoor recreation strategy (Objective 16.1 and 16.2). It is also consistent with the RCFB's strategic plan (Strategy 1.A.2 "Develop an outdoor recreation strategy that balances investments across a range of recreational activities"), and recommendations concerning the integration of low impact recreation and natural settings consistent with the recently-released *Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy*.

Developing a more strategic approach to planning would not be time constrained and could be planned around more active involvement of the Board members and stakeholders. In staff's opinion, getting to a draft version of such a plan could take from one to three years to complete.

Staff Recommendation

Members of RCFB have expressed interest in participating in the development of state recreation policy. The staff believes that the SCORP process is limited in its ability to

² The RCO was directed by legislative proviso in 2006 to "develop recommendations for a statewide approach to a recreation level of service for local and regional active recreation facilities, including indicators with which to measure progress in achieving level of service objectives." Staff believes this LOS model should be further reviewed and incorporated into any new SCORP document as a possible new planning model. Public work on a new direction for recreation planning is long overdue.

set state recreation policy and thus might not be the best use of valuable board member time.

At a minimum, staff recommends submitting a tightly focused new SCORP document to the National Park Service to continue the state's eligibility for Land and Water funding.

Additionally, staff seeks advice on whether to begin taking steps to develop a state strategic plan for the acquisition, renovation, and development of recreational resources and the preservation and conservation of open space envisioned by RCW 79A.25.020 and the extent the Board wishes to be involved in either approach.

Attachments

Summary of state government policies found in the most recent SCORP.

Summary of State Government Policies Found in
*An Assessment of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State: A State Comprehensive
Outdoor Recreation Planning [SCORP] Document 2002-2007.*

It is a policy of the State of Washington:

To recognize outdoor recreation sites and facilities as vital elements of the public infrastructure, essential to the health and well being of Washington citizens, and important to visitors.

To assist local and state agencies in providing recreation sites and facilities that benefit our citizens' health and well being.

To provide adequate and continuing funding for operation and maintenance needs of state-owned fish and wildlife habitat, natural areas, parks, and other recreation lands to protect the state's investment in such lands.

To work in partnership with federal agencies to ensure the availability of a variety of opportunities and settings for outdoor recreation.

To encourage the private sector to contribute needed public recreation opportunities.

To encourage all agencies to establish a variety of financial resources which can be used to significantly reduce the backlog of needed outdoor recreation, habitat, and open space projects.