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# Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

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2010 PROGRESS REPORT

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## BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Washington State Legislature created the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group<sup>1</sup> to improve communication between natural resources agencies about land acquisitions and disposals, and to make that information accessible to the public.

The lands group is comprised of representatives from the following state natural resource agencies:

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

In addition, the lands group includes representatives of non-profit organizations, local governments, legislators, private interests, and others (See Attachment A). The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides staff support and hosts the lands group's Web site.

The lands group was formed primarily because the Legislature wanted a statewide strategy for transparency and coordination of land acquisitions by state agencies. That directive was driven in part by citizens and local government officials who wanted to know what land the state was planning to acquire. A 2005 report<sup>2</sup> examined acquisition and disposal practices of the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission, and concluded that acquisition coordination would be improved with better communication and transparency between agencies themselves, as well as between agencies and citizens.

The lands group is assigned 11 legislative directives aimed at improving state land acquisition and disposal coordination and visibility. The lands group meets quarterly and six subgroups are focused on implementing an action plan to accomplish all of the legislative directives by the lands group's sunset date of July 2012.

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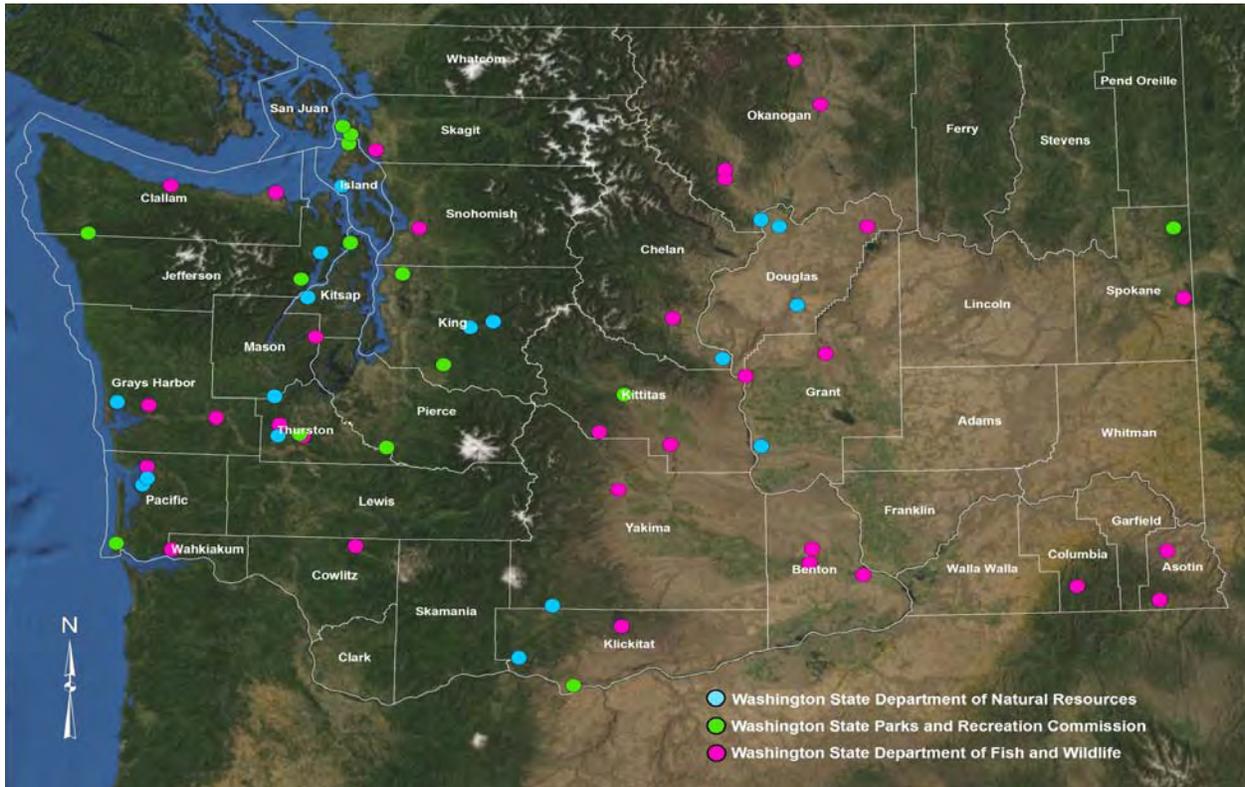
<sup>1</sup> Substitute Senate Bill 5236.

<sup>2</sup> "Toward a Coordination Strategy for Habitat and Recreation Land Acquisitions in Washington State" <http://www.rco.wa.gov/documents/hrlcg/LandsFinal.pdf>

This memorandum is submitted on behalf of the lands group to satisfy the reporting requirement in subsection (2) of the Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.260<sup>3</sup>.

## 2010 HIGHLIGHTS

### Proposed 2011-2013 State Agency Acquisition Projects



### ANNUAL STATE LAND ACQUISITION COORDINATING FORUM

The lands group hosted the second State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum on February 3-4, 2010. The forum was designed to help the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission coordinate acquisition grant requests and to present information about proposed 2011-2013 acquisition and disposal projects. In addition, the Department of Transportation presented information about where it needed to find wetland mitigation sites at that time, and the Department of Natural Resources described the Trust Land Transfer program and presented the legislatively approved trust land properties for transfer in the 2009-2011 biennium. Stakeholders were invited, including agency planners, local government representatives, non-profit organizations, and tribal members. Attendees learned about and discussed acquisitions proposed in their areas.

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<sup>3</sup> Attachment B: Enabling Legislation

## BIENNIAL STATE LAND ACQUISITION FORECAST

The lands group published the first biennial state land acquisition forecast report on its Web site in June 2010. The goal of the forecast is to provide helpful and complete regional information about acquisition and disposal projects proposed by state agencies. Providing project information early in the acquisition planning process will help citizens, legislators, and state agencies make informed decisions about state land acquisitions and encourage better coordination and communication among state agencies.

The report included statewide maps and information about 60 habitat and recreation land acquisition projects proposed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission for the 2011-2013 biennium. The projects in the report were unfunded at the time the report was published, and the information provided was based on best estimates at the time. The report includes proposed project maps, estimated costs, estimated number of acres, proposed funding sources, and project descriptions. Tables provide quick access to regional information about proposed acquisition and disposal projects.

The report also included the approved properties planned for transfer through the Department of Natural Resources' Trust Land Transfer Program in the 2009-2011 biennium, the Department of Transportation's wetland mitigation project needs for the 2009-2011 biennium, and the State Conservation Commission's farmland preservation projects proposed for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program in the 2011-2013 biennium. The report and companion statewide map of proposed projects is available on the lands group Web site at <http://www.rco.wa.gov/boards/hrlcg.shtml>.

## PROGRESS UPDATE

### ACQUISITION COORDINATION AND TRANSPARENCY PROCESS

The lands group is responsible for accomplishing 11 statutory tasks. The lands group's work will culminate in formal recommendations to the Legislature as to whether the lands group should continue beyond July 2012.

To meet its statutory goals, the lands group established a process to improve the visibility and coordination of acquisitions and disposals by sharing information about proposed state acquisition projects:

July 2009: The lands group hosted the first State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum to help agencies coordinate funded acquisition projects and projects planned for the 2011-2013 biennium.

February 2010: The lands group hosted the second Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum to help agencies coordinate acquisition grant requests and to give updated information about proposed 2011-2013 acquisition projects. The Department of Transportation gave information on where it needed to find wetland mitigation sites at that time, and the Department of Natural Resources presented the legislatively approved properties for transfer in 2009-2011 through the Trust Land Transfer program and sought stakeholder input in developing the list of properties for transfer in the 2011-2013 biennium.

June 2010: After state agencies submitted acquisition grant applications for state funds, the lands group published the biennial state land acquisition forecast report and companion map to provide an overview of state land acquisitions in Washington and updated information about proposed 2011-2013 acquisition projects.

September 2010 – June 2011: On its Web site, the lands group is tracking the progress of the proposed 2011-2013 acquisition projects through the funding process.

August 2011: The first state land acquisition monitoring report will be published to track the success of proposed 2009-2011 acquisition projects.

July 2011 and February 2012: The lands group will host the Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum to coordinate and share information about potential acquisition projects proposed for the 2013-2015 biennium.

June 2012: The lands group will publish a biennial state land acquisition forecast report and companion map about projects proposed for the 2013-2015 biennium.

July 2012: The lands group sunsets.

## TASK UPDATES AND ACTION PLAN

The lands group’s enabling legislation directs the lands group to accomplish the tasks below. Following is a progress report of work to date.

<b>Task 1</b>	<b>Review agency land acquisition and disposal plans and policies to help ensure statewide coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisitions and disposals.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Hosted Acquisition Planning Work Session. Invited state, federal, non-profit, and local government partners to brief the lands group about their acquisition planning approaches. Identified overlaps and gaps in agency goals, processes, and challenges.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Draft report to the Legislature for improving coordination of state agency acquisition plans and processes in advance of the 2012 session.
<b>Task 2</b>	<b>Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal plans.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Developed report format and identified which data were important to include. Collected proposed project information from state agencies. Posted the report on the lands group Web site.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Collect feedback from stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of the report and map in achieving coordination and transparency goals in advance of the next forecast.

<b>Task 3</b>	<b>Establish procedures for publishing the biennial forecast of acquisition and disposal plans on Web sites or other centralized, easily accessible formats.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Used a searchable PDF format to allow easy navigation through the report. Uploaded the report and statewide map of proposed projects on the lands group Web site; sent announcement to stakeholders.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Track the progress of the proposed 2011-2013 acquisition projects through the funding process. Update progress on the lands group Web site. Publish next biennial state land acquisition forecast report and companion map in June 2012.

<b>Task 4</b>	<b>Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Established annual coordinating forum cycle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even-year (January/February) – Agencies present projects they plan to request funding to acquire.</li> <li>• Odd year (July) – Agencies present projects that have been approved for funding and projects that previously were purchased.</li> </ul> Hosted the first and second Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forums.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Host next Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forums in 2011 and 2012.

<b>Task 5</b>	<b>Develop a recommended method for interagency geographic information system (GIS)-based documentation of habitat and recreation lands in cooperation with other state agencies using geographic information systems.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Identified overlaps and gaps in agency GIS processes.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Draft recommendations to the Legislature for improving coordination and transparency of state agency GIS documentation of habitat and recreation lands in advance of the 2012 session.

<b>Task 6</b>	<b>Develop recommendations for standardization of acquisition and disposal recordkeeping, including identifying a preferred process for centralizing acquisition data.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Compared and evaluated state agency recordkeeping processes, data standards and tools.

<b>Next Steps</b>	Draft report to the Legislature on standardizing recordkeeping and centralizing data via the lands group coordination and transparency process in advance of the 2012 session.
<b>Task 7</b>	<b>Develop an approach for monitoring the success of acquisitions.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Established a process to monitor the success of proposed state agency acquisition projects. Goal is to compare proposed acquisition projects with completed projects.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Publish first state land acquisition monitoring report on lands group Web site in September 2011.

<b>Task 8</b>	<b>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.</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Established method to include the development of the Department of Natural Resources' Trust Land Transfer list in the lands group process and to make Trust Land Transfer projects that have been approved by Legislature more visible. Included Trust Land Transfer projects in the Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum and the biennial state land acquisition forecast report. Provided lands group members with an opportunity to review the draft list of proposed trust lands for transfer in the 2011-2013 biennium.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Include Trust Land Transfer projects in the next Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum in July 2011, state land acquisition monitoring report in September 2011, and biennial state land acquisition forecast report in June 2012.

<b>Task 9</b>	<b>Review existing and proposed habitat conservation plans on a regular basis to foster statewide coordination and save costs</b>
<b>Progress</b>	Identified the key question: How can the Endangered Species Act Habitat Conservation Plans be better used as a planning tool for conservation land acquisition?
<b>Next Steps</b>	Compare how state agencies are using Endangered Species Act Habitat Conservation Plans in their conservation strategies. Draft report to the Legislature in advance of the 2012 session.

<b>Task 10</b>	The group shall revisit the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's and Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program's planning requirements to determine whether coordination of state agency habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal could be improved by modifying those requirements.
<b>Progress</b>	Identified key questions: Can the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) do more through its planning processes to encourage state agency coordination? Can WWRP do more to coordinate local and state acquisition planning? Determined that a statutory change isn't necessary and that administrative code and policy changes could better encourage agencies applying for WWRP funds to coordinate.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Draft report to the Legislature in advance of the 2012 session; include case study.

<b>Task 11</b>	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requiring that agencies provide early communication on the status of federal grant applications to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, the Office of Financial Management, or directly to the Legislature</li> <li>• Establishing a centralized, pass-through agency for federal funds, where individual agencies would be the primary applicants</li> </ul>
<b>Progress</b>	Determined that a tracking system to increase visibility of federally funded acquisitions is preferred over a centralized, pass-through agency for federal funds. Included federally funded projects in the State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forums and the biennial state land acquisition forecast report.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Continue including federally funded projects in the State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forums and the biennial state land acquisition forecast report. Include federally funded projects in the state land acquisition monitoring report. Draft report to the Legislature in advance of the 2012 session.

## NEXT STEPS

The lands group will complete all legislative assignments no later than July 31, 2012. The lands group's work will culminate in a final report and recommendations delivered to the Legislature no later than December 31, 2011.

The final recommendations will be submitted by the Recreation and Conservation Office to the Office of Financial Management as a fourth annual progress report. In the meantime, the lands group progress, meeting and event information, and documents can be found at its Web site at [www.rco.wa.gov/rco/h&rlcg/default.htm](http://www.rco.wa.gov/rco/h&rlcg/default.htm).

# ATTACHMENT A: HABITAT AND RECREATION LANDS COORDINATING GROUP MEMBERS

December 2010

Affiliation / Organization	Members/Alternates
Washington State Legislature	Senator Linda Evans Parlette Alternates: Sean Graham, Shiloh Schauer
Washington Recreation and Conservation Office	Kaleen Cottingham Steve McLellan Dominga Soliz Alternate: Kammie Bunes
Washington Department of Natural Resources	Pene Speaks Alternate: Clay Sprague
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission	Steve Hahn Alternate: Shannon Stevens
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	Elizabeth Rodrick
Washington Biodiversity Council	Sarah Gage
Washington State Conservation Commission	Ron Shultz Alternate: Josh Giuntoli
Washington Department of Ecology	Jeanne Koenings Alternate: Kathy Taylor
Washington Department of Transportation	Ken Risenhoover
County Governments/ Okanogan County	Commissioner Andrew Lampe
City Government Park Planners/ Washington Recreation and Parks Association	Leslie Betlach Alternate: Shelley Marelli
Pacific Coast Joint Venture	Lora Leschner
The Nature Conservancy	Bill Robinson
Green Diamond Resources	Eric Beach
Puget Sound Partnership	Roma Call
Trust for Public Land	open

## ATTACHMENT B: LEGISLATION

### RCW 79A.25.260

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

(Expires July 31, 2012.)

- (1) The habitat and recreation lands coordinating group is established. The habitat and recreation lands coordinating group must include representatives from the \*committee, the state parks and recreation commission, the department of natural resources, and the Washington state department of fish and wildlife. The members of the habitat and recreation lands coordinating 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 habitat and recreation lands coordinating group, but may only be appointed or invited by the director.
- (2) To ensure timely completion of the duties assigned to the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group, the director shall submit yearly progress reports to the office of financial management.
- (3) The habitat and recreation lands coordinating 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 acquisitions [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;
  - i. Review existing and proposed habitat conservation plans on a regular basis to foster statewide coordination and save costs.
- (4) The group shall revisit the \*committee's and Washington wildlife and recreation program's planning requirements to determine whether coordination of state agency habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal could be improved by modifying those requirements.

- (5) 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 \*committee, 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.
- (6) This section expires July 31, 2012. Prior to January 1, 2012, the \*committee shall make a formal recommendation to 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, 2012, and if so, whether any modifications to its enabling statute should be pursued. The \*committee shall involve all participants in the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group when developing the recommendations.

[2007 c 247 § 1.]

Notes: **\*Reviser's note:** Chapter 241, Laws of 2007 amended RCW [79A.25.010](#), changing the definition of "committee" to "board."