
Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

2013 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 group is designed to provide information to key questions.

State lawmakers and others want to know:

- Are state agencies acquiring habitat and recreation lands for a strategic reason and not just as opportunities arise?
- Are state agencies coordinating with each other when they are planning land purchases?
- Are agencies duplicating one another's roles, or do the habitat and recreation land programs within different agencies have distinct purposes that complement one another?

At the same time, the number of state, federal, and nonprofit land buyers—often using different planning processes—may make it difficult for members of the public to know about the transactions going on in their regions.

Residents and local governments want to know:

- Which purchasers are planning to buy land in a region?
- What land is planned for purchase?
- Why is the land being purchased?
- How can people get involved in the planning process?

Since its formation, the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group (lands group) has become a key means for improving the visibility and coordination of land purchases by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

The lands group makes state acquisition projects more visible and coordinated at key points before, during, and after they are completed. The lands group process occurs on the biennial funding cycle and has 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 members of the public to learn about and share ideas on proposals for state habitat and recreation land purchases and disposals. The focus of the forum depends on when it takes place. In odd-numbered years, the forum includes a review and plan for acquisitions funded in the current biennial budget. In even-numbered years, the forum provides an opportunity for agencies to coordinate their future plans.

¹ RCW 79A.25.260 (Attachment B)

- BIENNIAL FORECAST REPORT: The *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* provides information about the state land purchases and disposals that are planned for budget requests in an upcoming biennium.
- BIENNIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT: The *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* shows whether state agencies achieved their acquisition objectives.

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

The lands group is comprised of representatives from the following Washington State natural resource 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 from the legislature, local government, nonprofit organizations, and others (See Attachment A). These include:

- Washington State Legislature
- County Government
- American Farmland Trust
- The Nature Conservancy
- Pacific Coast Joint Venture
- The Trust for Public Land
- Washington Association of Land Trusts
- Washington Forest Protection Association
- Washington Recreation and Park Association

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides staff support and hosts the lands group's Web site.

This report is submitted to satisfy the reporting requirement in the Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.260 (2)².

² RCW 79A.25.260 (Attachment B)

2013 HIGHLIGHTS

UPDATED CHARTER

In 2012, the Legislature extended the lands group to July 31, 2017. The reauthorization directed the lands group to prioritize its requirements and implementation plan. In light of its extended timeline, the group adopted an updated charter in 2013.

MEMBER SURVEY

After the Legislature extended the lands group's tenure, RCO staff surveyed the members to determine how they felt the group was functioning. Eight of seventeen lands group members, or 47 percent, responded to the survey. Two lands group members were new at the time, and some state agency members rarely participate. No state land managing agencies reported responding to the survey.

Most respondents indicated they were satisfied with the size and composition of the lands group, the quarterly meetings as organized, the Forecast Report (suggestions for improvement focused on better identifying the audience and better outreach), the Annual Progress Report, the Annual Forum (suggestions for improvement focused on pursuing more involvement in the forum through communication and outreach), and the lands group Web page.

Respondents gave mixed responses to questions about the Performance Monitoring Report and whether it serves its purpose well; hosting coordination workshops for the state land managing agencies; addressing policy issues (there was no agreement about which policy issues should be addressed or where they should be addressed); and whether the lands group should provide legislative testimony.

ANNUAL STATE LAND ACQUISITION COORDINATING FORUM

The lands group hosted the fifth annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum on October 30, 2013, with about 50 people attending. The forum is an opportunity for members of the public, legislators, state and local planners, tribes, and others to learn about habitat and recreation lands that state agencies propose for state and federal funding received in 2013–2015.

The goal of the forum is to share information; create an opportunity for discussion and questions; identify opportunities for coordination and transparency; and inform legislators and staff, county commissioners, and the public.

Participating agencies presented maps and other information about planned projects and explained why the projects are priorities for the state. Attendees were encouraged to discuss the projects openly at the forum. The forum is intended to generate discussion and help identify opportunities for coordination. In addition to discussing proposed projects, the forum provides an opportunity to talk over policy considerations with other state agencies.

Forum presentations include: agency and program mission, information about a land purchase (amount, acreage, general purposes), process for choosing lands for acquisition, public outreach efforts, maps of the planned acquisitions, current and planned use of the lands, cost information, (including the capital appropriation, known future capital costs, expected operating costs, payment-in-lieu-of-taxes requests), whether farmland is removed from production, and maintenance plans. The lands discussed at the forum include all state recreation and habitat acquisitions that received a 2013-15 state appropriation (including federal funds appropriated in the state budget) and land disposals.

In addition, the Department of Natural Resources discussed its projects in the Teanaway watershed of Kittitas County and gave a presentation on the goals and procedures for Trust Land Transfers. The Department of Ecology presented information on its Wetlands Stewardship Projects and other acquisitions. Recreation and Conservation Office staff provided information on its Farmland Preservation Program grants that supply funds to purchase conservation easements and about acquisitions funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

BIENNIAL STATE LAND ACQUISITION MONITORING REPORT

The lands group prepared the second biennial *State Land Monitoring Forecast Report* at the end of 2013. The goal of the monitoring report is to describe the success of state habitat and recreation land acquisitions by examining whether state agency land purchases achieved their 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 is not meant to offer policy recommendations for improving state habitat and recreation land acquisitions. By comparing project outcomes with their initial objectives, the report provides a snapshot of information about what happened during a specific period of time to give decision-makers a more detailed picture of state habitat and recreation land acquisitions.

The focus is on land acquired by the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission because these are the primary state agencies that acquire habitat and recreation lands. The report does not focus on lands purchased primarily for non-habitat or non-recreation purposes, such as infrastructure or state-owned trust lands.

The report includes:

- **State Agency Profiles.** This section describes the missions, plans, and processes of the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and State Parks and Recreation Commission to acquire habitat and recreation land.
- **State Habitat and Recreation Land Acquisition Practices.** This section describes state agency land acquisition practices.
- **Funding for State Habitat and Recreation Land.** This section gives an overview of the primary state and federal grant programs for state habitat and recreation lands, including a description of the grant process.

- **Projects Monitored for Performance: 2009 State Land Acquisitions.** This section presents information about state habitat and recreation acquisition projects funded in during the 2009–2011 biennium by state grants managed by RCO.

The monitoring report looks back at projects funded in 2009. This ensures that the projects were completed or near completion when they were examined to determine whether they achieved their acquisition objectives (state land acquisitions typically take 2 to 4 years).

The report also includes information on projects that received funding in the 2009–2011 biennium from the Farmland Preservation Program of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.

The report and its companion statewide map of projects are available on the lands group Web site at www.rco.wa.gov/boards/hrlcg.shtml.

2013 PROGRESS

The lands group is responsible for accomplishing 11 statutory tasks. In 2012, the Legislature amended the lands group statute to prioritize five of these tasks when funding is scarce. The five prioritized tasks are:

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

Task 2 – Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal plans.

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

Task 4 – Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans.

Task 5 – Develop an approach for monitoring the success of acquisitions.

To meet its statutory goals, the lands group created a process to improve the visibility and coordination of state land acquisitions and disposals. The process works over the biennial funding cycle and has three primary components.

State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum	State Land Acquisition Forecast Report	State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report
Brings stakeholders together to review state land acquisition proposals and discuss land acquisition policy	Gives information about the state land purchases and disposals that are being planned around the state	Shows whether state agencies achieved their initial acquisition project objectives
Hosted annually	Published biennially, at least six months before funding is approved by the Legislature in a regular session.	Published biennially, at the close of each biennium
Tasks 1 and 4	Tasks 2 and 3	Task 5

In 2013, the lands group completed tasks 1, 4, and 5.

It accomplished these tasks by hosting the State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum and by completing the [*Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report*](#) (published January 2014). Tasks 2 and 3 were not completed in 2013 because the *Biennial State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* is published in even years.

IS THE LANDS GROUP MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

State agencies purchase habitat and recreation lands to protect important state resources such as habitat for threatened and endangered species, to maintain examples of native ecosystems, and to provide outdoor recreation opportunities. As population increases, there is greater need to preserve these resources for current and future generations. At the same time, the pressures of a growing population have led to an increased desire to find innovative ways to meet multiple state objectives on the same land, such as protecting habitat while encouraging agricultural productivity.

State agencies have had to become more strategic in planning for habitat and recreation land acquisitions during difficult economic times. With agency staff cuts and reductions in grant funding for land purchases, agencies must make careful decisions about which projects to pursue to meet their public mandates and how to better coordinate with other agencies on land transactions.

Similarly, with an increasing demand for accountability, it is more important than ever to ensure that each project is a good investment of public resources. Open, visible state land acquisition processes help make strong public investments. As agencies work to protect natural resources under increased scrutiny, transparent land transactions help inform local and state decision makers.

Improving coordination – The annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum and the quarterly meetings make a difference by providing regular opportunities for interagency coordination of land acquisition projects to improve strategic planning. Learning about one another’s purchase plans helps

agencies identify partnering opportunities and reduce duplicative efforts. Learning about one another's acquisition processes helps produce best management practices for land purchases.

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

Policy issues addressed during 2013 included showing measurable objectives of land acquisitions and improving the visibility of current and future costs.

The lands group discussed how best to show that properties are meeting statutory and agency objectives. As a result of these discussions, the 2013 [*Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report*](#) includes more of this information than it has in the past. The lands group plans to include even more of this type of data in the next report.

In addition, the lands group improved the visibility of current and future costs associated with public lands. Both the annual forum and the 2013 [*Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report*](#) included more of this information than they have previously. Among the topics addressed are payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILT) and future maintenance and capital expenses associated with acquisitions.

Improving transparency – The annual forum and the lands group reports make a difference by providing timely information to citizens about land purchase plans in their areas. 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 rolls up the data across the state and by county 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.

2014 ACTION PLAN

In 2014, the lands group will complete Tasks 1–4 of its five prioritized statutory tasks:

- Task 1 – Review agency land acquisition and disposal plans and policies to help ensure statewide coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisitions and disposals.
- Task 2 – Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans for projects included in the 2015-2017 biennial budget requests.
- Task 3 – Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal plans.
- Task 4 – Establish procedures for publishing the biennial forecast of acquisition and disposal plans on Web sites or other centralized, easily accessible formats.

- Task 5 – Continue to discuss how to demonstrate past projects success in meeting land acquisition objectives and all costs associated with current and past projects.

Tasks 1–4 will be accomplished in 2014. The lands group will host the State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum and publish the *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report*. The group will also meet quarterly to continue discussions on improving coordination and visibility.

Task 5 will not be undertaken in 2014 because that report is published biennially in odd years, at the close of each biennium. The lands group will next produce the *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* in 2015.

PUBLIC LANDS INVENTORY UPDATE

The 2013–2015 Capital Budget requires the RCO to provide a centralized inventory of lands in Washington owned by federal, state and local governments, and by Native American tribes. The proviso stipulates that the inventory must be Web-accessible and include a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based interactive map. The inventory will allow users to find information about specific aspects of land ownership and to access summary information.

The inventory must include ownership, ownership type, location, and acreage. Lands will be categorized according to their principal use, including, but not limited to, developed recreation land, habitat and passive recreation land, and revenue-generation uses. This will cover both intended use at the time of acquisition and current use. Acquisition costs and funding sources for lands acquired by state agencies will be included if acquired within the last ten years.

In addition, RCO will develop recommendations for standardizing biennial acquisition and disposal recordkeeping and identify a preferred process for centralizing acquisition data.

Although not the responsibility of the lands group, participants in the lands group are involved in the development of the inventory. The inventory will help agencies coordinate and will provide relevant information on topics the lands group covers.

Completion of the inventory will meet two of the lands group’s statutory requirements³, which read:

- 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.
- Develop recommendations for standardization of acquisition and disposal recordkeeping, including identifying a preferred process for centralizing acquisition data.

The inventory will help improve the visibility of acquisitions and their purpose, and it will assist in measuring whether acquisitions are meeting their statutory and policy objectives. The inventory also will

³ RCW 79A.25.260 (3) (e) and (f) (Attachment B)

show acquisition costs, and it has the potential of showing associated costs, such as maintenance and operations.

The public lands inventory will be a tool that provides a statewide picture of what habitat and recreation land the state owns and how much money has gone towards acquisitions in the last ten years. It will be useful for helping the Legislature and the public decide where investments in land should be directed, and it also will help state land managing agencies prioritize future land purchases.

ATTACHMENT A: MEMBERS OF THE HABITAT AND RECREATION LANDS COORDINATING GROUP

DECEMBER 2013

Affiliation / Organization	Members/Alternates
Washington State Legislature	Senator Linda Evans Parlette
Washington Recreation and Conservation Office	Kaleen Cottingham Alternate: Nona Snell Sarah Gage
Washington Department of Natural Resources	Pene Speaks
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission	Steve Hahn Alternate: Shannon Stevens
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	Clay Sprague
Washington State Conservation Commission	Ron Shultz Alternate: Josh Giuntoli
Washington Department of Ecology	Heather Kapust
Washington Department of Transportation	Paul Wagner
County Governments/Okanogan County	Sheilah Kennedy
City Government Park Planners/Washington Recreation and Park Association	Leslie Betlach Alternate: Shelley Marelli
Pacific Coast Joint Venture	Lora Leschner
The Nature Conservancy	Bill Robinson
Forest Products Industry, represented by a Washington Forest Protection Association member	Eric Beach
Puget Sound Partnership	Michael Grayum
Trust for Public Land	Bill Clarke
Washington Association of Land Trusts	Leda Chahim Alternates: Gary Schalla and Joe Kane

ATTACHMENT B: 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.]