
Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

2014 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 Legislature wanted to ensure that state agencies acquiring lands were coordinating their efforts with one another and making their efforts more visible to the public.

WHAT STATE LAWMAKERS ASKED STATE AGENCIES TO PROVIDE

Are state agencies acquiring habitat and recreation lands strategically, and not just as opportunities arise? Are state agencies talking to each other? Are agencies duplicating one another's roles, or do the programs within different agencies have distinct purposes that complement one another?

WHAT CITIZENS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ASKED STATE AGENCIES TO PROVIDE

A combination of state, federal, and nonprofit land buyers using different planning processes has made it difficult for citizens to know what is going on in their communities. Citizens and local governments want to know which purchasers are planning to buy land in their communities. What land is planned for purchase? Why is the land being purchased? What are the longer-term priorities and how are they set? How can citizens get involved in the planning process?

Since 2007, the lands group has been a key vehicle for improving the visibility, coordination and transparency of land purchases by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission. The lands group makes state acquisitions 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 includes 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 citizens to learn about and share ideas on proposals for state habitat and recreation land purchases and disposals.
- **Biennial Forecast Report:** The *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* gives information about state land purchases and disposals planned for the next biennium.
- **Biennial Performance Monitoring Report:** The *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* shows whether state agencies achieved their initial acquisition project objectives.

¹ Substitute Senate Bill 5236

The lands group membership includes representatives from the following state 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 of local governments, the Legislature, and others including the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Washington Forest Protection Association, Pacific Coast Joint Venture, Washington Association of Land Trusts, and the American Farmland Trust (See Attachment A for a list of members). The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides staff support and hosts the lands group Web site.

The lands group is assigned 11 legislative directives aimed at improving state land acquisition and disposal coordination and visibility. If resources are scarce, five of these tasks are to be prioritized. The lands group meets quarterly and hosts the Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum for state agencies, local governments, non-government organizations, landowners, tribes, and citizens to share ideas on proposals for state habitat and recreation land purchases and disposals.

The lands group makes a difference in the following ways:

Improving coordination – The annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum and the quarterly meetings enable interagency coordination of land acquisition projects to improve strategic planning; help agencies identify partnering opportunities and reduce duplicative efforts; and help produce best management practices for land purchases. Another benefit is improving coordination of information between local governments and citizens in counties where acquisitions are proposed.

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

Improving transparency – The lands group reports give timely information to citizens about land purchase plans in their areas. The annual progress report (this document) is submitted on behalf of the group to satisfy the reporting requirement in the Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.260².

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 by county and statewide 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 Progress on Statutory Tasks

The lands group is responsible for accomplishing 11 statutory tasks. In 2012, the Legislature amended the statute to prioritize five. The progress achieved for each of the five priority tasks is outlined below.

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

The lands group accomplished this through publication of the third biennial [State Land Acquisition Forecast Report](#) and the annual coordinating forum as noted in Tasks 2 and 4 below.

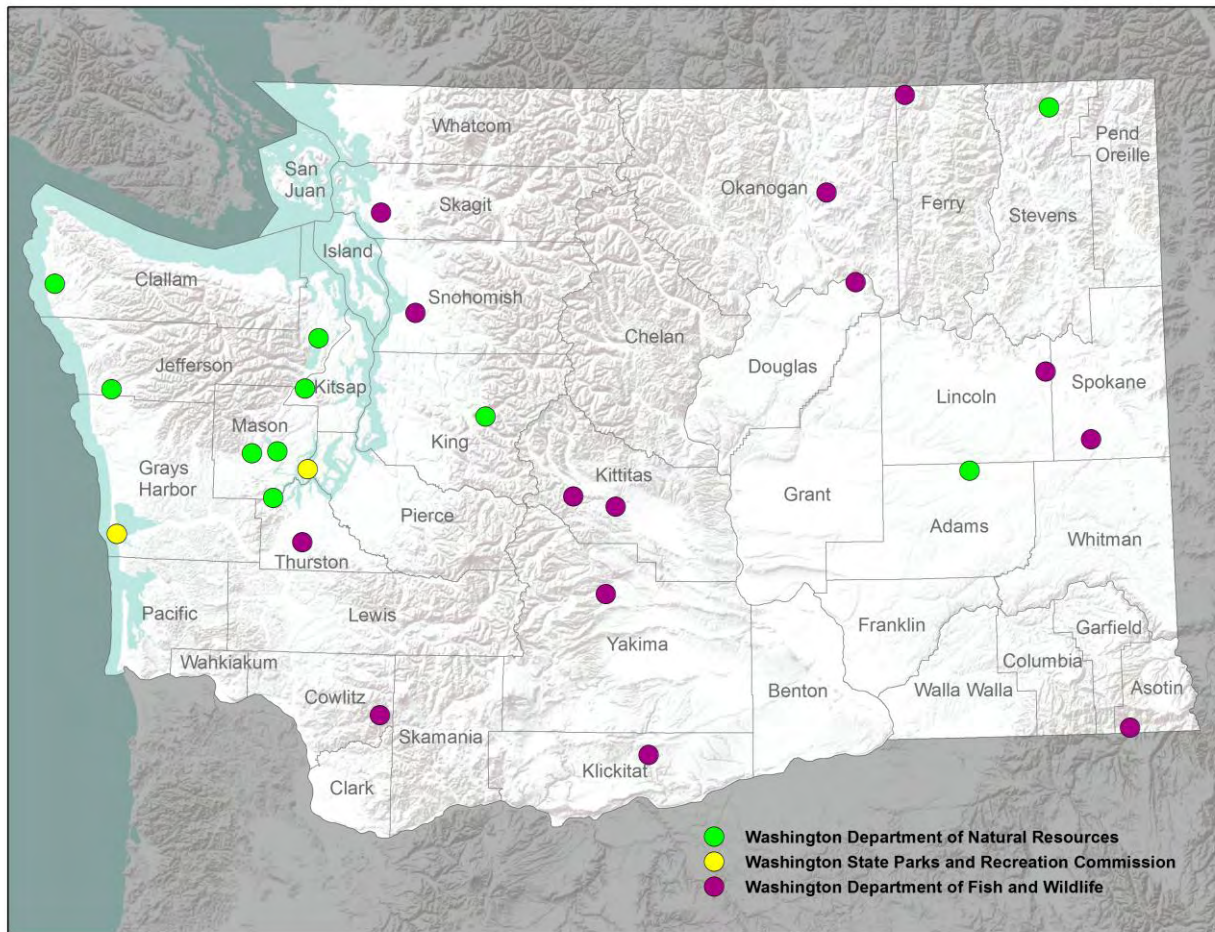
TASK 2 | *Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal plans.*

The lands group published the third biennial [State Land Acquisition Forecast Report](#) on its Web site in December 2014. The goal of the forecast is to provide information about the state land purchases and disposals that are being planned around the state for the coming biennium. 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 includes maps and information for about 40 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 2015-2017 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, proposed costs and number of acres, proposed funding sources, project descriptions, and intended uses. Tables provide quick access to regional information about proposed acquisition projects. The report also includes properties planned for transfer through the Department of Natural Resources' Trust Land Transfer Program in the 2015-2017 Biennium. The report and companion statewide map of proposed projects is available on the [lands group Web site](#).

² Attachment B: Enabling Legislation

Proposed 2015-2017 State Agency Acquisition Projects



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

The *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* provides early notification about plans for land purchases by the state natural resource agencies. The report also gives a comprehensive look at what's being planned around the state, through county-wide, statewide and project specific maps and data. In preparing the 2014 report, RCO partnered with Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and State Parks and Recreation Commission to compile and refine state land acquisition data. RCO packaged and submitted the third biennial *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* to the legislature in December 2014. The forecast was also distributed to legislators and other interested parties.

TASK 4 | *Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans.*

The lands group hosted the sixth State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum on March 14, 2014. The forum is an opportunity for citizens, legislators, state and local planners, tribes, and others to learn about habitat and recreation lands that state agencies propose for state and federal funding in 2015-2017. Participating agencies presented maps and information about planned projects and explained why the projects are priorities for the state. A roundtable discussion offered the opportunity to identify efforts, opportunities, and issues for improving transparency and coordination of state land acquisitions. Attendees were encouraged to discuss the projects openly at the forum. The forum is intended to generate questions and discussion about policy and coordination with other state agencies.

TASK 5 | *Develop an approach for monitoring the success of acquisitions.*

The second biennial *State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* was released in January 2014. Its goal is to monitor the success of state habitat and recreation land acquisitions by examining whether state agencies achieved their acquisition 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 third *State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* is due in December 2015. Much of the scoping and preparation for the next report will take place at the annual coordinating forum in summer 2015.

Other Activities that Support the Lands Group

PUBLIC LANDS INVENTORY

The state Legislature³ asked RCO to provide an inventory of lands in Washington owned by federal, state, and local governments, and by Native American tribes by July 1, 2014. The *Washington Public Lands Inventory* Web application is available at <http://publiclands.smartmine.com>.

The inventory is accessible to everyone and offers the first Web-based interactive mapping application for Washington State public lands. The inventory includes ownership, ownership type, location, acreage information for each parcel, and data from the *2014 State Land Acquisition Forecast Report*. The land is categorized according to its principal use, including, but not limited to, developed recreation land, habitat and passive recreation land, and revenue generation. The inventory also includes the intended use at the time of acquisition, the current use, acquisition cost, and funding sources for lands acquired by state agencies within the past 10 years.

The Public Lands Inventory is intended as a tool for Washingtonians to better understand the location, use, and purchase price of recreation and natural resource lands owned and managed by federal, state,

³ 2013-2015 Capital Budget proviso (Section 3174 of Engrossed Substitute Bill 5035)

and local governments. The inventory also helps state agencies better collaborate and manage these lands by revealing current and future opportunities for partnerships.

Although the proviso asks RCO to include tribal lands in the Public Lands Inventory, these lands are not included for several reasons. The Bureau of Land Management collects ownership records of tribal lands from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and contributes these data to the parcel database. Some of the data includes federal reservation boundaries; sometimes the data merges many different categories of tribal land (tribal land held in trust by the federal government, tribal lands owned by individuals, tribal lands acquired by the tribe but not held in trust); sometimes the data held by the Bureau of Land Management is out-of-date.

RCO distributed Bureau of Land Management maps to all of Washington's federally recognized tribes and requested feedback on the accuracy of the land and boundary information. RCO received many responses indicating that the maps and data were inaccurate. RCO contacted the Bureau to better understand the data and learned that due to long-standing litigation over tribal trust lands, the Bureau is undertaking a major update to its tribal databases. Because of the inconsistencies, lack of consensus, ongoing efforts to update the tribal data, and the short time frame for this project, it was decided not to include tribal lands in the inventory. Further, the responses from tribes clarified that tribal lands are not public lands and should not be included in an inventory of public lands.

Executive guidance for the 2014 inventory was provided by a steering committee, which was chaired by RCO and included executive managers from the state agency partners. Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee staff provided input to the steering committee about how the inventory could support its separate study of public habitat and recreation lands. A technical advisory committee, also chaired by RCO, brought together information technology and data management staff from the state agency partners. In keeping with past public land inventories completed by RCO, the 2014 inventory is focused on publicly-owned natural resource and recreation lands.

Inventory Findings: The estimated total land area of Washington State is 45,663,000 acres. All public natural resource and recreation lands total about 19.8 million acres. State-owned natural resource and recreation lands represent roughly 6.5 million acres, or 33 percent of public lands in Washington State. Of the 19.8 million acres in public ownership, 12.7 million, or 64 percent, are owned by the federal government. The available federal data did not distinguish between land use types, so the federal acreage total includes lands presumably not used for recreation.

LEGISLATION RELATED TO THE LANDS GROUP

Senate Bill 5035 – Costs and Economic Impacts of Public Recreation and Habitat Lands: The 2013-2015 Capital Budget directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to prepare a three-part study of public recreation and habitat lands. Part 1 covers operating budget impacts of recreation and habitat land acquisitions by the Departments of Fish and Wildlife and Natural Resources, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission over the past 10 years. Part 2 covers estimated economic benefits and costs

from acquisitions of recreation and habitat lands. Part 3 analyzes differences in public land ownership among Washington's 39 counties.

Researchers are evaluating the net change and impact on other industry sectors, and a cost-benefit analysis of non-market values, for example, ecosystem services. In part, this economic study looks at the impact to economy vitality from changes in public land ownership and use, specifically habitat and recreation lands. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee will release a preliminary report covering Parts 1 and 2 in January 2015, a preliminary report covering Part 3 in April 2015, and the final report in May 2015.

Senate Bill 6002 – Economic Contribution from State Public Lands and Outdoor Recreation: The 2013-2015 Capital Budget directed RCO to contract with a consultant to provide a study that quantifies the economic contribution to the state economy from the state's public lands and statewide outdoor recreation. RCO selected Earth Economics, based out of Tacoma, to conduct the study, which is due to the Legislature by January 1, 2015.

Senate Bill 6052 – Collection of Land Acquisition Information: This bill did not pass in 2014, though if it did, it would have directed the lands group to collect the following information about acquisitions:

- Anticipated operations and maintenance costs and funding sources
- Purpose and intended use of acquisitions
- Detailed and measurable goals for each acquisition
- Plan to track meeting measurable goals

While the bill did not pass, the lands group decided to include this information in the next monitoring report due to the legislature in December 2015.

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE STUDY

Economic Analysis of Conservation Efforts in Okanogan County (May 2014): In recent years, questions have been raised in Okanogan County about the costs and benefits of the sale of land and conservation easements by local property owners to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. In response, the department contracted with Resource Dimensions of Gig Harbor to study the economic impacts of habitat restoration and agricultural uses on all 77,000 acres of department-owned and -managed lands in Okanogan County. The study also estimated the economic value of ecosystem services provided by the 156 study parcels, such as flood control, clean water, recreation, and other benefits. A copy of the report may be obtained on the [WDFW Web site](#).

2015 Action Plan

- Host 7th Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum
- Publish 3rd *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report*

Attachment A | Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

As of December 2014

Affiliation / Organization	Member / Alternate
American Farmland Trust	Dennis Canty
City Government Park Planners / Washington Recreation and Park Association	Leslie Betlach Alternate: Shelley Marelli
County Governments / Okanogan County	Commissioner Sheilah Kennedy
Forest Products Industry / Washington Forest Protection Association member	Eric Beach
Pacific Coast Joint Venture	Lora Leschner
Puget Sound Partnership	Jeff Parsons
The Nature Conservancy	Tom Bugert
Trust for Public Land	Mike Deller Alternate: Bill Clarke
Washington Association of Land Trusts	Hannah Clark Alternates: Gary Schalla, Joe Kane
Washington Department of Ecology	Heather Kapust
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	Cynthia Wilkerson Alternates: Clay Sprague, Eric Gardner
Washington Department of Natural Resources	Pene Speaks
Washington Department of Transportation	Paul Wagner
Washington Recreation and Conservation Office	Kaleen Cottingham Alternate: Wendy Brown
Washington State Conservation Commission	Ron Shultz Alternate: Josh Giuntoli
Washington State Legislature	Senator Linda Evans Parlette Alternate: Grace Edwards
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission	Steve Hahn Alternate: Shannon Stevens

Attachment B | Enabling 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.]