

Habitat & Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

Date: September 19, 2017

Time: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Location: Room 172, Natural Resource Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA 98501

Attendees:

Cynthia Wilkerson	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Heather Kapust	Washington Department of Ecology
Jeff Parsons	Puget Sound Partnership
John Gamon	Washington Department of Natural Resources
Tom Bugert	The Nature Conservancy
Nikki Fields (On behalf of Steve Hahn)	Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

Guests and Presenters:

Andrea McNamara Doyle	Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition
Eric Thomas	Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
Melinda Posner	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Cyndi Comfort	Washington Department of Natural Resources

RCO Staff:

Wendy Brown	Washington Recreation and Conservation Office
Kaleen Cottingham	Washington Recreation and Conservation Office
Justine Strange	Washington Recreation and Conservation Office

Item 1: Welcome, Introductions, and Review of Agenda

Wendy Brown welcomed the members of the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group (Lands Group) and reviewed the agenda. The members and attendees introduced themselves.

Item 2: Member Updates

Round Table Updates: 2017 Legislative Session – Bills and Budget

Puget Sound Partnership

Jeff Parsons thanked RCO Director, Kaleen Cottingham, for efforts towards sustaining the Puget Sound Partnership salmon recovery staff until December. There are twelve employees affected by the lack of capital budget – a significant number to the small agency, primarily in the salmon recovery area. In the interim, they are working with local partners on outreach, touring projects in the Puget Sound basin which keeps legislators informed about what they are doing.

The Partnership's 2018 budget plan includes another full-time employee but no statutory changes.

The Nature Conservancy

Tom Bugert shared that The Nature Conservancy is actively exploring a ballot initiative around carbon tax. They are also exploring an investment/planning strategy for 2019 where carbon legislation is a possibility.

The 2018 agenda includes budget as the top priority, potential bills around various natural resource land statutes, Ecology's Floodplains by Design program, and DNR's Community Forest Trust Program, as well as WDFW and reducing wildfire risk.

The Recreation Coalition will meet next month to plan a legislative Outdoor Recreation Caucus to promote information sharing with an added focus on funding, with the Governor's office and stakeholder support.

Washington Department of Ecology

Heather Kapust reported that the Washington Department of Ecology is waiting for a capital budget. Nearly fifty full time employees are affected and are shifting their responsibilities to other projects such as wildfire work and assisting with Hurricane Harvey relief in Florida. They are not hiring any new staff, and some crews are at a standstill until further notice.

Ecology submitted eight grant proposals to the National Coastal Wetlands program; the outcome will be available in January.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Cynthia Wilkerson updated the group on budget deficit impacts to WDFW. The capital budget supports about 100 agency staff, mostly in the engineering areas. Re-appropriation has been helpful for branching into other projects with the remaining funds and redistributing staff roles and locations.

The 2017-19 operating budget that passed the Legislature left the agency with a 15-million-dollar deficit. As directed, they are working with a contractor on a management assessment of the wildlife state funding sources to determine a future path.

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

Nikki Fields attended on behalf of Steve Hahn. Sixteen employees were laid off due to the lack of capital budget. More layoffs will occur every month after September until a capital budget is finalized.

Washington Department of Natural Resources

John Gamon reported that nearly sixty positions, mostly in the conservation area of the agency, are affected by the lack of a capital budget. Revenue generated by the Trust Property Replacement account contributes to the project transitions but requires re-appropriation from the capital budget. They have the authority but lack the funds now unless the trade equals exactly zero. John thanked RCO for making a difference at the meeting last week on the debate to protect staff (in the short and long-term) and assigning positions to other funded projects because it makes a difference for impacts on staff. They are not filling any vacancies and are at a hiring freeze at this time.

In other news, they are working on a Natural Heritage Land grant and updating the agency's strategic plan.

Washington Recreation and Conservation Office

Kaleen Cottingham touched on updates related to the lack of a capital budget and RCO's calculations in moving forward. There are no near-term plans to lay off employees, but the agency may need to shift some staff in the salmon area to other programs that do have money if there is still no budget by the

spring 2018. Vacancies will be kept unfilled except for the Volunteer and Grants Process Coordinator position. Lorinda Anderson is retiring in December after thirty-nine years at RCO.

Next month's Recreation and Conservation Funding Board meeting will bring discussion around future grant rounds in the event that there is not budget. An actual decision will be made by the board in January. The agency will also provide a report on the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) document which included a conservation area into the plan in addition to recreation. The report has been out for public comment since August.

The agency was recently successful in applying for two new federal grant programs.

Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition (WWRC)

Andrea with the WWRC reported that the Coalition was not as impacted by the lack of the capital budget as state agencies, but they are anxiously awaiting it to be passed. There is no report until that time, as they are in a holding pattern. They are engaging with social media about the lack of budget and the effects that it is having to keep the public informed. She expressed appreciation of RCO's decision to get creative in making more options available financially.

Item 3: Ruckleshaus Study on Recreation Fees Update

Melinda Posner from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Cyndi Comfort of Washington Department of Natural Resources spoke on behalf of their agencies on a study on recreational fees currently being conducted by the Ruckleshaus Center. After talking to sixty different parties including state agencies and relevant stakeholders, four scenarios for funding recreation emerged and include the following:

1. "Opt-in Tweak" - Keeping access and fee systems in place and work toward improving the process.
2. "Opt-In Plus" – streamlining access in the form of a base pass that can hold additional endorsements depending on the actives.
3. "Opt-Out" idea which encourages people to buy a pass during vehicle registration for a reduced fee to sell more annually across the state ultimately reducing the cost.
4. "All-in" in which the Discover Pass would be eliminated by adding a tax during vehicle registration that goes towards recreation which causes a flat fee to everyone in the state making it truly 'public land'. Most of the input received around the scenarios came from a state level but there have been some federal attention, just no determination.

A public survey was conducted about the above scenarios and the research team is currently analyzing the results (of nearly 18,000 respondents). They will present finalized findings to Legislation at the end of the year.

Break 10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Item 4: Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC): Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) and State Land Acquisition Study Update

Eric Thomas will provide the JLARC report in about a month. Eric will attend the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board meeting in October to provide background information to the group.

Item 5: WDFW/DNR/Parks Land Acquisition Plan

The draft plan was dispersed and revised since the group last met in June 2017. Wendy Brown asked for the group's feedback by December 31, 2017. One group member emphasized the importance of running any contributions through their agency's communications staff to ensure quality, accuracy and any added visuals that may be available. The goal is to have an organized layout that gives information at a glance. The group had a productive brain-storming session around the subject, and Wendy thanked the members for their ideas.

Meeting adjourned at 11:08 am.