

# Habitat & Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

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**Date:** June 1, 2017

**Time:** 9:00 AM – 12:30 PM

**Location:** Natural Resources Building, Room 175A&B, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia

**Attendees:**

Cynthia Wilkerson	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
John Gamon	Washington Department of Natural Resources
Josh Giuntoli	Washington State Conservation Commission
Steve Hahn	Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
Heather Kapust	Washington State Department of Ecology
Commissioner Steve Jenkins	Douglas County
Lora Leschner	Pacific Coast Joint Venture
Jeff Parsons	Puget Sound Partnership
Tom Bugert	The Nature Conservancy
Bill Clarke	Trust for Public Land

**Guests and Presenters:**

Representative Steve Tharinger	Washington State Legislature
Leslie Connelly	Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office
Eric Thomas	Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
Rachel Murata	Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
Suzanna Pratt	Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
Rhianna Hruska	Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee

**RCO Staff:**

Wendy Brown	Washington Recreation and Conservation Office
Kaleen Cottingham	Washington Recreation and Conservation Office
Wendy Loosle	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.

**Item 2: Monitoring Forum – Agency Updates on Proposed Land Acquisitions and Disposals, 2013-2015**

Ms. Brown introduced the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Coordinating Forum, with a focus on monitoring. This forum represents a four-year retrospective look at state agency land acquisitions. Participating agencies present maps and other information about planned projects, the purpose of the acquisitions, if they happened as planned, and their coordination efforts. Attendees are encouraged to discuss the projects openly at the forum.

Following the Monitoring Forum, agency presentations will be posted on the Recreation and Conservation [website](#), and the 2017 Monitoring Report will be developed and published to the web. The Monitoring Report will most likely be completed by August 2017.

### **Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) Projects**

Steve Hahn reviewed land acquisition projects on behalf of State Parks, providing details about the acquired parcels such as local geography, history of a parcel, collaboration with sellers and landowners, and the purpose(s) for selecting a specific parcel. He highlighted properties in several counties including Clark, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, Mason, and Pacific as examples of successful acquisitions. Alternatively, Mr. Hahn shared examples of challenging, and sometimes unsuccessful, acquisitions from Pierce, Thurston, and Whitman counties. State Parks manages a list of inholding properties (parcels that complete larger projects, join trails, etc.) that also

### **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Projects**

Cynthia Wilkerson, Lands Conservation and Restoration Section Manager, presented projects on behalf of WDFW. She began with an overview of the agency's mission, strategic plan, and their land acquisition process. The latter included a description of their acquisition principles, internal policies, and the Lands 20/20 internal application process.

Ms. Wilkerson provided an overview of eleven acquisition projects from the 2013-15 and 2015-17 biennia. Organized alphabetically by county, each project summary included a description, relevance to the agency's mission, a map of the proposed project area, the amount of funding requested, the amount of funding granted, and a discussion. Projects from various counties were highlighted, including Asotin, Chelan, Clallam, Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, Okanogan, Pacific, and Yakima.

### **Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Projects**

John Gamon presented land acquisition projects on behalf of DNR. He began with an overview of the [Natural Areas Program](#) and mission. The program manages natural resource conservation areas and natural area preserves, guided by The Natural Area Preserves Act 79.70 and the Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act 79.71. Mr. Gamon described DNR's acquisition process, largely driven by the priorities outlined in the agency's Natural Areas Plan.

Mr. Gamon provided an overview of acquisition projects from the 2013-15 and 2015-17 biennia. Organized by county, each project summary included a description, relevance to the agency's mission, a map of the proposed project area, the amount of funding requested, the amount of funding granted, and a discussion. Projects from various counties were highlighted, including Chelan, Clark, Grant, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Stevens, and Thurston.

### **Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) Projects**

Josh Giuntoli, Project Coordinator, presented a project on behalf of WSCC, the Cowiche Basin Working Rangelands in Yakima County. The project summary included a description, planning links to WSCC's long-term goals and priorities, a map of the proposed project area, the amount of funding requested, and the amount of funding granted.

Lands group members discussed challenges and common scenarios that come up during the land acquisition process. Sellers may decline to continue with a property sale due to personal values, not reaching an agreed sale price, unanticipated fees or external costs. Members discussed other factors that affect acquisitions and property values, such as public access components, recreation opportunities, and appraisal outcomes.

Representative Steve Tharinger asked about the process for removing structures or managing roads on acquired properties. State Parks and other agencies often rely on the Washington Department of Transportation for relocation assistance, aligning costs and policies with the federal process.

***BREAK 10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.***

### **Item 3: Member Updates**

#### **Round Table Updates: 2017 Legislative Session**

Representative Steve Tharinger, Chair of the House Capital Budget Committee, provided an update on the legislative progress in finalizing a state budget. While the Senate and House are coming to agreement in some areas, state agencies were still directed to continue with the contingency planning efforts should a budget agreement not be reached. Regarding a lands acquisition focus, he spoke to budget proposals made by the Senate and House, noting that the former provides a better outlook for programs such as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP). He encouraged agencies and organizations to continue coordinating their work for the benefits of open communication, transparency, and gaining support from legislative representatives. He commented on funding and budget strategies, specifically as they might apply various program project lists, explaining that it's beneficial to maintain multiple, smaller funding sources rather than consolidating funding into one, larger source.

Commissioner Jenkins described a WWRP acquisition project, critical to the county's larger phased plan, which was removed from the project lists approved by the Legislature. Representative Tharinger stressed the importance of a commissioner approaching legislative representatives either in person or via writing letters, as demonstrating their support is powerful.

Ms. Brown provided information in the House and Senate budget proposals as they relate to the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) this legislative session. Ms. Brown shared that the Senate proposal is more favorable, although the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) program may see significant cuts and RCO would like to see the WWRP project lists restored after some projects were removed. RCO continues to monitor the budget development process at the Legislature and policy issues nationwide.

Lora Leschner provided information on behalf of the Pacific Birds Joint Coast Venture. She discussed projects that are on state agency budgets whose funding may be cut, which would also impact the larger organization budget.

Heather Kapust provided a brief update on information in the House and Senate budget proposals as they relate to the Washington Department of Ecology.

Cynthia Wilkerson provided an update on successful WDFW bills, including one focused on license fee bill increases and immunity for private land owners who allow public access. The agency may see lay-offs should budget cuts be approved in the final budget. Ms. Wilkerson also provided updates on the agency's requests for their prescribed fire program.

Jeff Parsons provided an update regarding the Puget Sound Partnership's (PSP) outlook considering the current House, Senate, and Governor's budget proposals. He discussed PSP's Large Capital project list, funded at wide-ranging levels across the three budgets this session, commenting on a new strategy to engage local partners and emphasize RCO processes to build support for acquisition projects under the Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) Program.

Josh Giuntoli provided an update regarding the Washington State Conservation Commission's (WSCC) agency operating and capital budgets as proposed this session. He shared information about land acquisitions of interest to the WSCC, including some with broad local and tribal support, as well as those that have encountered some obstacles due to landowner issues. WSCC will be completing some long-term projects this year as funding comes together.

Tom Bugert provided information on behalf of The Nature Conservancy regarding forestry interests, specifically the potential for opening a mill near the Central Cascades and opportunities for prescribed fire. Additionally, TNC continues to explore carbon pricing and associated investments; should related bills not pass this session, the organization intends to embark upon an independent initiative in the coming years. Mr. Bugert shared that TNC will conclude a study of community forests this year, as well as continue ongoing efforts to improve the Floodplains by Design program.

Steve Hahn shared that the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) did not submit any agency request legislation this year; the agency is satisfied with the current budget proposals. Mr. Hahn provided an updated regarding budget provisos in the capital budget. He shared information about a new program concerning tech investments to support data-driven marketing and customer support strategies.

Commissioner Steve Jenkins, also Chair of the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board, shared information about a recent trip to Washington, D.C., to advocate for funding related to salmon habitat restoration, prescribed burning, and forest health.

John Gamon shared that the Washington Department of Natural Resources' did not have any agency request legislation related to natural areas. The agency continues to monitor bills that address conservation issues and recreational trust land, particularly trust land transfers. Additionally, DNR is seeking ways to partner with land trusts to explore acquisitions for natural areas that better align with local interests. Pacific Education Institute is also supporting the agency in exploring relationships between natural areas and school districts.

Director Cottingham focused on federal funding updates for salmon recovery, the Habitat Work Schedule, and Puget Sound. She shared that RCO is hopeful for the Legislature to pass continuing resolutions to maintain funding. Should funding be secured, the Public Lands Inventory will be updated.

#### **Item 4: Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee Study Update**

Eric Thomas, Rachel Murata, Suzanna Pratt, and Rhianna Hruska, Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC), presented an update regarding the JLARC study currently underway focused on measuring the outcomes of habitat and recreation acquisitions and regulations, a comparison of six east and west counties, and assessment of agencies' land stewardship programs. The study questions evaluate six counties: Asotin, Clark, Jefferson, King, Kittitas, and Okanogan.

The team shared the study questions with Lands Group members, which focus on measuring acquisition outcomes. To facilitate a discussion focused on answering these questions, Ms. Murata asked members to talk about current work and successes.

Members shared examples of monitoring efforts and programs, noting that their processes are similar in terms of monitoring whether the outcomes proposed when acquiring land were achieved later on down the road, i.e., money was spent as intended, investments were transparent and fruitful, etc. Mr. Hahn explained that acquisitions that may be deemed as having unsuccessful outcomes often have a second component – development – which provides additional barriers to project completion. Ms. Wilkerson commented on the challenges of measuring public use as an outcome. Other constraints include lack of sufficient funding to carry out comprehensive, long-term monitoring efforts.

The JLARC team will use members' feedback to examine agency programs and continue their research. The team is set to present their findings to the committee in December 2017.

## **Item 5: State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) Update**

Leslie Connelly, RCO Policy Specialist, shared progress made to update the SCORP, beginning with a summary of the background, purpose, and the process for updating the plan. SCORP guides other grant and recreation plans related to youth activities, boating, trails, athletic fields, and nonhighway and off-road vehicle activities. The plan is also used to inform the federal Recreational Trails and the Land and Water Conservation Fund plans, as well as overlaps with other state agency plans.

Ms. Connelly summarized the SCORP survey development and implementation, conducted by professors at Eastern Washington University. The fully online survey was a change from past years and also included the option for Spanish translation services. She shared the preliminary results and findings of the major outdoor categories surveyed with participation rates, frequency of activities, and where people are recreating. Over 6,000 respondents have provided data so far, statistically well-representing every region within the state and a covering a wide demographic range.

Ms. Connelly previewed the top ten recreation activities, primarily distinguished between those with children or without children (however, data will be rolled up for the final results). She focused on the top five activities in order to demonstrate the level of detail achieved within the survey questions: walking, leisure activities, nature activities, day-hiking, and freshwater-based activities. Other activities included running, swimming, camping, and bicycling.

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board takes part in the process, already having held discussions regarding the SCORP plan and strategy in May 2017. The board will review the draft plan in July 2017 and making a decision for adoption in October 2017. RCO will submit the plan to the National Park Service in December 2017.

## **Item 6: State Agency Unified Plan – Current Status and Feedback**

Ms. Brown summarized the goals of the unified plan that was commissioned in response to the WWRP studied completed in late 2015. The contributing agencies identified four existing plans that will provide the basis for the combined effort to develop a strategy for acquisitions, identify overlap, and determine opportunities to coordinate.

Ms. Brown circulated a draft plan in May 2017 for the group to provide feedback. Ms. Cottingham encouraged members to focus on a legislative audience when revising the unified plan. Ms. Brown would like to include the unified strategy as part of SCORP, therefore a draft plan would need to be completed by mid-July. Ms. Brown will circulate a revised draft that incorporates feedback to Lands group members prior to its inclusion in SCORP in the next few weeks. Suggestions for the report included adding information about monitoring.

## **Closing**

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.