



WASHINGTON STATE

Recreation and
Conservation Office

**2013–2018 WASHINGTON STATE NONHIGHWAY AND
OFF-ROAD VEHICLES ACTIVITIES (NOVA) PLAN**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primary Authors/Editors

Gregory L. Hughes, P.E., Research Associate, Responsive Management
Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director, Responsive Management
Michael Fraidenburg, Owner, The Cooperation Company

Contributors

Amanda Ritchie, Research Associate, Responsive Management
Tom Beppler, Research Associate, Responsive Management
Kaleen Cottingham, Director, Recreation and Conservation Office
Sarah Gage, Senior Project Associate, Recreation and Conservation Office

Recreation and Conservation Office Staff

Lorinda Anderson	Rebecca Connolly	Dominga Soliz
Marguerite Austin	Karl Jacobs	Sarah Thirtyacre
Rory Calhoun	Darrell Jennings	Greg Tudor
Scott Chapman	Steve McLellan	Susan Zemek
Leslie Connelly	Nona Snell	

Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Members

Bill Chapman, Chair, Mercer Island Resident
Elizabeth Bloomfield, Yakima County Resident
Ted Willhite, Twisp Resident
Pete Mayer, Everett Resident
Harriet Spanel, Bellingham County Resident
Dave Brittell, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Don Hoch, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
Jed Herman, Washington Department of Natural Resources

NOVA Advisory Committee

Citizen Members

Mike Blankenship, Off-Road and All-Terrain Vehicles
Jeremy Blasdel, Nonhighway Road Community
Arlene Brooks, Off-Road and Four-Wheel Drive
Rick Burk, Off-Road and Motorcycles
Louise Caywood, Equestrian Community
Mary O'Neil, Nonhighway Road Community
Mike Harum, Local Agencies
Jeff Lambert, Hiking Community
Mark Levensky, Hiking Community
John Spring, Nonhighway Road Community
Art Tuftee, Mountain Bicycling Community

State and Federal Agency Members

Paul Dahmer, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Susan Kavanaugh, Washington State Parks and Recreation
Mark Mauren, Washington Department of Natural Resources
Brenda Yankoviak, Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests

We would also like to thank all the residents and recreationists of Washington for their contributions to this planning effort, including their involvement in Town Halls and the NOVA Advisory Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan updates the 2005-2011 NOVA Plan as required by law (RCW 46.09.370) and sets forth policies to guide expenditures under the Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities Program account (RCW 46.09.510), thereby providing funding to local, state, and federal agencies for acquiring land; planning, building, and maintaining facilities; and managing opportunities for nonhighway road (NHR), nonmotorized (NM), and off-road vehicle (ORV) recreational users. This plan is presented and administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), formerly the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC).

The NOVA program provides funding to develop and manage nonhighway road, nonmotorized, and ORV recreational activities, with a portion of the funding available for education and enforcement programs that encourage environmentally responsible use of the outdoors and minimize user group conflicts through positive management techniques. Except for ORV facilities, activities supported by NOVA must be accessed by a nonhighway road, meaning a public road that was not built or maintained with state gasoline tax funding.

NOVA funding comes from ORV permits and a portion of the state gasoline tax paid by users of ORVs and nonhighway roads (roads not supported by state fuel taxes), which include Forest and National Park Service roads. About 1% of all state fuel tax revenues go into the NOVA account.

Funding is divided among categories by formulas established in statute at a ratio of 70% earmarked for recreational facilities and 30% earmarked for education and enforcement. Among the recreational uses, of the annual sum: 30% goes to non-trail opportunities, such as campgrounds, toilets, and scenic turnouts; 30% goes to nonmotorized recreation, such as hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding; 30% goes to motorized recreation, such as dirt bike, ATV, and 4x4 use; and 10% is allocated as competitive across all three categories, with the greatest benefit going to projects that serve the largest number of users.

The grant process is open and competitive, and grant applications are accepted in even-numbered years. Organizations that are eligible for NOVA grants include local governments; special purpose districts, such as park districts and port districts; Native American tribes; state agencies; and federal agencies. NOVA-eligible projects can receive grants for all aspects of a project cycle, including planning, land acquisition, development/construction, maintenance and operation, and education and enforcement.

The methodology used to develop the 2013-2018 Washington State NOVA Plan was designed to ensure public participation in the planning process, to assess policy issues identified in the 2005 NOVA Plan and identify emerging issues, to evaluate NOVA demand, and to develop priorities and recommendations for implementing the program.

The data and research collected for the NOVA Plan update include:

- an outreach blog Web site, "Trails Town Hall," to collect comments from the general public;

- a NOVA Advisory Committee discussion Web site;
- a survey of the NOVA Advisory Committee; and
- portions of the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) related to NOVA recreation (39 activities from 13 activity categories).

The Town Hall and Advisory Committee blogs were active from mid-May to mid-August. The survey was conducted with the NOVA Advisory Committee in July and August 2013. SCORP data were collected during a large-scale 2012 general population telephone survey of Washington residents. The SCORP data were further analyzed to parse out quantitative data specifically related to NOVA recreation.

There is a great deal of demand for NOVA opportunities in the State of Washington. An astounding 94% of Washington residents participate in some form of nonhighway road recreation, 86% participate in nonmotorized recreation, and 16% participate in ORV recreation.

As a whole, NOVA recreation consists of 39 activities within 13 of the 16 activity categories as defined by the SCORP. While the SCORP did not specifically ask how respondents accessed a recreation opportunity (i.e., if they accessed it via a Nonhighway road), the following table indicates which NOVA activities that the SCORP data showed having the highest participation rates.

Table 1: NOVA Activities with the Highest Participation Rates

SCORP Activity Category	NOVA Activities within this category	Percent of Residents Participating
Walking, hiking, climbing, or mountaineering	Hiking mountain or forest trails	36%
	Hiking rural trails	19%
Nature activities	Wildlife viewing /photographing	59%
	Fishing or shellfishing	34%
	Gathering/collecting things in a nature setting	27%
Water-related activities	Canoeing, kayaking, rowing, or using other manual craft	11%
Sightseeing	Sightseeing at a scenic area	59%
Bicycle riding	Biking in rural trails	11%
	Biking in mountain or forest trails	8%
Snow and ice activities	Snowshoeing	7%
	Cross country skiing	5%
Off-roading for recreation		15%
Horseback riding	Horseback riding on rural trails	2%
	Horseback riding on mountain or forest trails	3%

The 2005-2011 NOVA Plan had set forth major policies related to three topical areas:

- NOVA Program (Policies A-1 to A-4)
- NOVA education, information, and law enforcement (Policies B-1 to B-5)
- NOVA recreational facility acquisition, development, operation and maintenance, and planning (Policies C-1 to C-15)

As part of this update to the Plan, the NOVA Advisory Committee responded to a survey, which in part asked them to rate the importance of each existing policy. The committee expressed overall satisfaction with most existing policies, ranking them as important to extremely important.

Analysis of the NOVA Advisory Committee survey results, the Advisory Committee discussion Web site, and the Trails Town Hall public forum indicate that stakeholders have the following priorities.

Stakeholder Priorities

1. Protect the NOVA fund

Stakeholders consider it essential to protect the NOVA fund, especially in light of its reallocation by the state legislature in the recent past. They also noted that the NOVA fund originally consisted of 1% of the state fuel tax, but that recent gasoline tax increases have not included a corresponding NOVA fund increase. A recurring suggestion from stakeholders was to create an entity that could advocate on behalf of NOVA interests.

2. Make maintenance a funding priority for NOVA

An overwhelming majority of the NOVA Advisory Committee and public comments expressed that the top priority of NOVA funding should be maintenance of existing trails and facilities, instead of facilities acquisition, planning, development, education/information, or law enforcement. NOVA recreationists and professionals are concerned that trails and recreation facilities can become dangerous and could be closed due to deferred maintenance.

3. Address road closures that limit access

NOVA participants indicate that road closures by private landowners (timber companies in particular) have greatly reduced access to existing trails. Several ORV users suggested that, if they were provided access, they could effectively clear and maintain trails with volunteers. They suggest that NOVA funds to purchase public access through private lands could be an efficient expenditure for enhancing recreational opportunities.

4. Minimize user conflicts

While NOVA recreationists recognize that some amount of conflict may be inevitable, they felt that problems could be minimized through communication and cooperation between user groups. Recommendations included developing a leadership council or other organization that

convenes different user groups or, in a similar vein, group collaborations such as maintenance work parties by groups using the same trail system. People also suggested that clear and concise information about the source and intent of NOVA funding would help alleviate frustration among user groups who feel they are not getting their fair share of NOVA funds.

5. Encourage designs that minimize future maintenance

NOVA stakeholders would like to see the program encourage projects with designs that minimize the need for ongoing maintenance (e.g., choosing the best trail tread material). Similarly, they suggested that applicants for maintenance and operation projects state how their project's goals and objectives meet future maintenance needs and sustainability issues.

6. Ensure that NOVA funds augment, but do not replace, other funding

Respondents noted that NOVA allows grant recipients to achieve results that would not be possible without state funding, but that the program is not designed to replace other funding sources. They felt that the NOVA program should encourage sponsors to provide matching funds, although no consensus emerged about whether this should be a requirement. Respondents further observed that organizing and supporting user-group volunteers has proven to be an effective way to stretch limited NOVA funds; recreationists are often glad to provide time and labor to support their favorite activities.

7. Do not use NOVA funds to subsidize private ORV sports parks

NOVA stakeholders held differing opinions, generally drawn along user group lines, as to how much NOVA funding should contribute to the development of ORV sports parks. Proponents claim that ORV recreationists contribute to the NOVA fund and should have ORV sports parks to go to; they noted that ORV sports parks also help alleviate user conflict on overcrowded trails and facilities. Consensus emerged that NOVA should not subsidize the profits of private ORV sports park operators.

8. Encourage trail reconstruction that corrects environmental problems

Respondents observed that trail reconstruction can be less expensive than new construction, and that it often presents opportunities to rebuild trails to current standards and correct environmental problems. They felt that project sponsors should try to retain trail difficulty and user experiences and minimize user displacement, but that reconstruction should be emphasized as a sustainable and desirable option.

9. Ensure that the NOVA Advisory Committee represents all user groups

The NOVA Advisory Committee should consist of nonmotorized and ORV recreationists, as well as local, state, and federal agency representatives, to represent the views and needs of users, organizations, and agencies that are affected by NOVA funding. To date it is generally believed that the committee is functioning as intended.

Recommendations for RCO Actions

RCO staff studied the findings and conclusions that Responsive Management produced from its research, and made the following recommendations to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board for action items that could be implemented by RCO.

1. Review the goals for the NOVA Program and the Recreational Trails Program to determine whether the programs are complementing each other.

The board should review the program's grant award results to determine whether changes need to be made to the allocation of funds based on the NOVA plan key findings and stakeholder feedback. For example, NOVA and RTP funds are increasingly awarded for maintenance and operation projects, so less funding is awarded for development and acquisition projects. The board should review whether this pattern of funding is consistent with the goals of the program.

2. Review NOVA program priorities (Policy A-1 and C-10) for acquisition, development, and maintenance and operation type projects.

The board should review the policies that state that NOVA funds shall not augment or replace other funds, and that operating and capital projects will compete directly for funding. In conjunction with recommendation #1, the board should review whether the increased funding of maintenance projects would be consistent with the policies that restrict NOVA funds from being used to replace other funds.

3. Review NOVA program policy (Policy C-2) that encourages projects near population centers.

RCW 79A.25.250 requires the board to place a high priority on parks that are near urban populations. Stakeholder feedback, however, placed less of a priority on funding NOVA projects near population centers. The board should review whether the current criterion for meeting the law can be modified to address stakeholder feedback or whether the board should seek a modification to the population proximity statute. The current criterion has a maximum score of two points.

4. Prioritize NOVA Program funding for projects that are designated as statewide trails per RCW 79A.35.

The recommendations in the Washington State Trails Plan call for the board to develop a method for designating a system of state recreation trails. If a system of state recreation trails is established, the NOVA program could place a priority on funding those state recreation trails that are eligible for funding in the NOVA program.

5. Prioritize program funding for projects that incorporate sustainable design practices to protect and improve the environment and reduce trail maintenance needs.

The board should incorporate its sustainability policy recommendations into the NOVA program priorities and adjust the evaluation criteria. This action is already proposed (see Item 11).

6. Retain all other policies in the NOVA Program as currently written.

RCO staff finds all other NOVA program policies to be consistent with the research findings and stakeholder input for the NOVA 2013-2018 plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	9
The NOVA Program	9
Definitions	9
Assessment of the NOVA Program	10
NOVA Funding and Eligibility.....	14
Chapter 2: Methodology.....	17
NOVA Advisory Committee.....	17
Public Outreach.....	17
2013 Washington SCORP	17
Chapter 3: Assessment of Demand for NOVA in Washington.....	20
Nonhighway Road Recreational Use	21
Nonmotorized Recreational Use	23
Off-Road Recreational Use	25
Chapter 4: Assessment of NOVA Program Policies	27
Top Funding Priority.....	30
NOVA Program General Policies.....	31
NOVA Education/Information and Law Enforcement (E & E) Policies	36
NOVA Recreation Facility Acquisition, Development, Maintenance and Operation, and Planning ..	39
Chapter 5: Other Key Issues Affecting NOVA	48
Access.....	48
User Conflicts.....	49
ORV Sports Parks.....	51
Chapter 6: Priorities and Recommendations	52
Appendix A: Regional and Demographic Characteristics of NOVA Users	55
Appendix B: NOVA Advisory Committee Survey	92
Appendix C: Chapter 46.09 RCW	116
Appendix D: 2005-2011 NOVA Plan Appendix.....	136

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THE NOVA PROGRAM

Since 1971, the state of Washington has administered a program designed to serve off-road vehicle (ORV) recreational users. The program was broadened in 1978 to fund educational and enforcement programs, in 1986 to serve nonmotorized recreational users, and in 2004 to serve nonhighway road recreational users.

Originally titled the All-Terrain Vehicle Program and later the ORV Program, this expanded operation is now known as the **Nonhighway Road and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program**. Hereinafter the term NOVA is used to refer to the program established by Chapter 46.09, Revised Code of Washington (RCW), Off-Road and Nonhighway Vehicles (see Appendix C).

This plan updates the 2005-2011 NOVA Plan and sets forth policies to guide expenditures under the NOVA Act, thereby providing funding to local, state, and federal agencies for acquiring land; planning, building, and maintaining facilities; and managing opportunities for nonhighway road (NHR), nonmotorized (NM), and ORV recreational users. This plan is presented and administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), formerly called the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC).

The NOVA Plan **vision** is to:

Maintain a framework that allows various user groups and agencies to provide quality opportunities for Off-Road Vehicle, nonhighway road, and nonmotorized recreationists—opportunities that satisfy user needs, are environmentally responsible, and minimize conflicts among user groups.

The NOVA Plan **goals** are to:

- Assess issues related to the NOVA Program,
- Provide policy guidance on the use of NOVA funds, and
- Make recommendations about future program direction.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are important in understanding the policies and usage classifications in this plan. The complete list of definitions (RCW 46.09.310) can be viewed in Appendix C.

- **“Nonhighway road”** means any road owned or managed by a public agency or any private road for which the owner has granted an easement for public use for which appropriations from the motor vehicle fund were not used for (a) original construction or reconstruction in the last twenty-five years, or (b) maintenance in the last four years.

- **“Nonhighway road recreation facilities”** means recreational facilities that are adjacent to, or are accessed by, a nonhighway road and intended primarily for nonhighway road recreational users.
- **“Nonhighway road recreational user”** means a person whose purpose for consuming fuel on a nonhighway road or off-road is primarily for nonhighway road recreational purposes including, but not limited to, hunting, fishing, camping, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, picnicking, driving for pleasure, kayaking/canoeing, and gathering berries, firewood, mushrooms, and other natural products.
- **“Nonmotorized recreational facilities”** means recreational trails and facilities that are adjacent to, or accessed by, a nonhighway road and intended primarily for nonmotorized recreational users.
- **“Nonmotorized recreational user”** means a person whose purpose for consuming fuel on a nonhighway road or off-road is primarily for nonmotorized recreational purposes including, but not limited to, walking, hiking, backpacking, climbing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, horseback riding, and pack animal activities.
- **“Off-road vehicle recreation facilities”** include, but are not limited to, ORV trails, trailheads, campgrounds, ORV sports parks, and ORV use areas, designated for ORV use by the managing authority, that are intended primarily for ORV recreational users.
- **“Off-road vehicle recreational user”** means a person whose purpose for consuming fuel on a nonhighway road or off-road is primarily for ORV recreational purposes including, but not limited to, riding all all-terrain vehicle, motorcycling, or driving a four-wheel drive vehicle or dune buggy.

ASSESSMENT OF THE NOVA PROGRAM

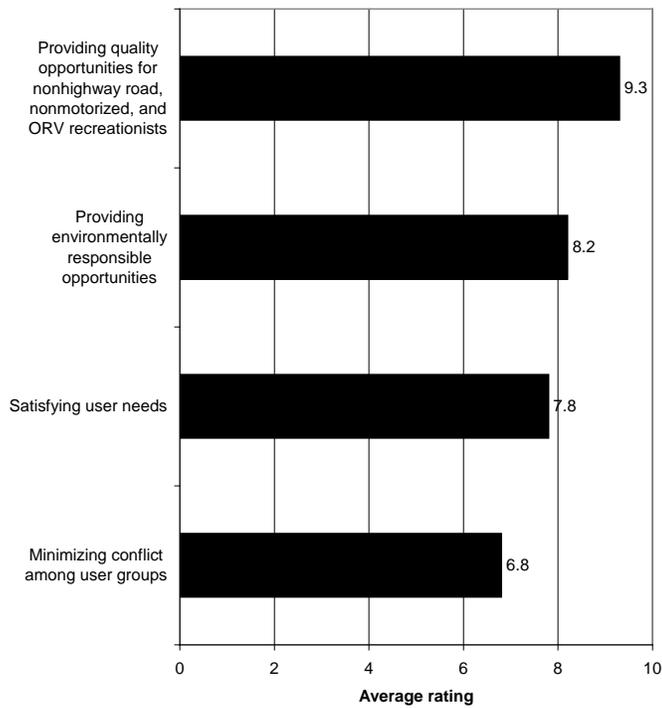
RCO’s contractor, Responsive Management, provided the NOVA Advisory Committee (discussed further in Chapter 2) with a survey that asked members to assess the NOVA Program, rate the individual NOVA policies (see Chapter 4), and provide open-ended comments on key or emerging issues. Nine of the sixteen committee members completed the survey.

The first part of the survey focused on the overall effectiveness of the NOVA Plan. The survey asked: Has the 2005-2011 NOVA Plan has met its overall vision?

- One respondent selected *strongly agree*
- Six respondents selected *moderately agree*
- One respondent selected *neither agree nor disagree*
- One respondent selected *moderately disagree*. (The survey typically requested a comment from those who disagreed with a given statement or policy. In this case, the respondent claimed that the NOVA Plan did not provide strategic direction for the type, location, and quantity of recreation opportunities needed in the state.)

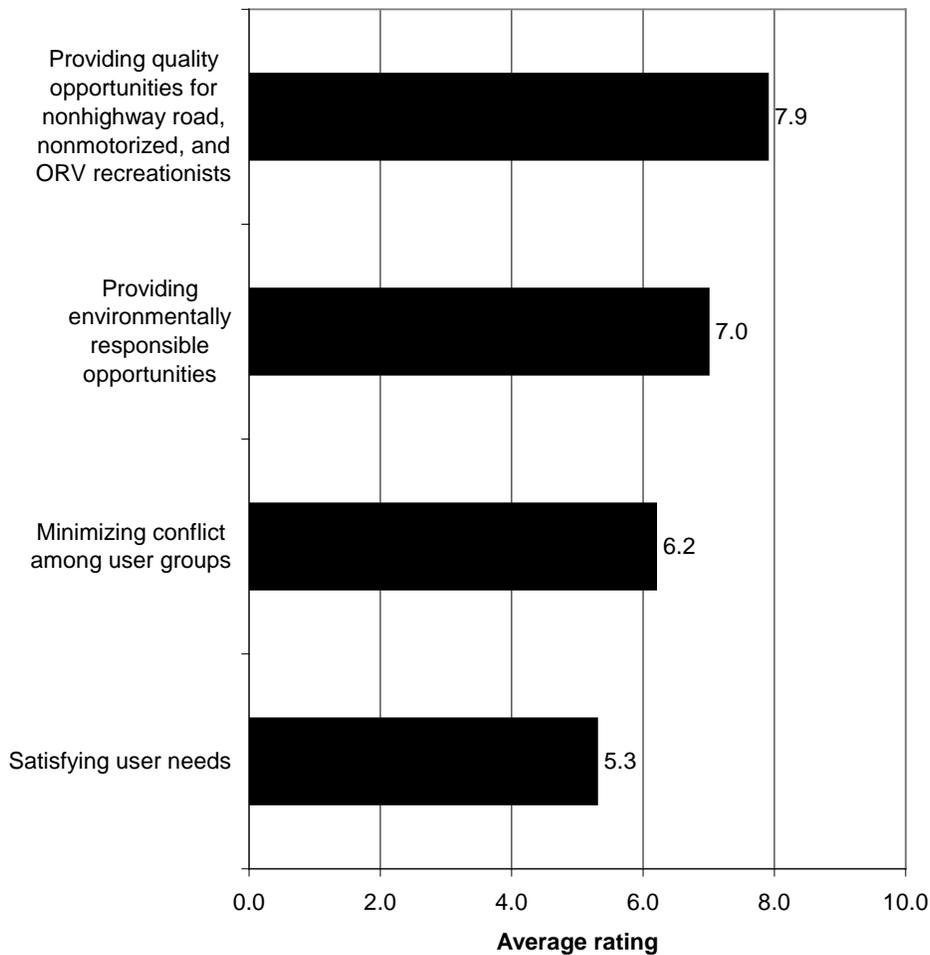
Next, the survey asked the Advisory Committee to rate the importance of each element of the NOVA Plan vision. As the following graph shows, “providing quality opportunities for nonhighway, nonmotorized, and ORV recreationists” is considered the most important element, with an average rating of 9.3 out of 10, while “minimizing user conflict” is considered the least important element, with an average rating of 6.8.

How important is each element of the 2005-2011 NOVA Plan vision? (On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important.")



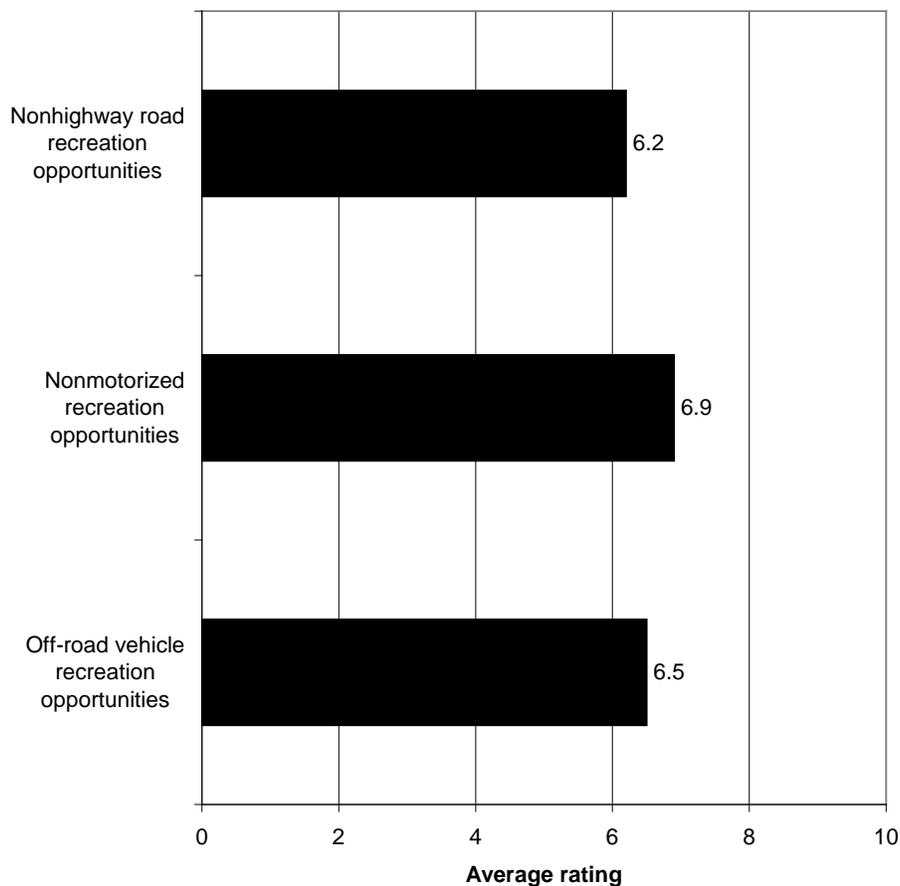
The survey asked the committee to rate the performance of Washington's NOVA recreation providers in fulfilling each of the specific elements of the NOVA Plan's vision. The respondents indicated that providers were most effective at "providing quality opportunities for nonhighway, nonmotorized, and ORV recreationists," with an average rating of 7.9 out of 10, and were least effective at "satisfying user needs," with an average rating of 5.3.

Please rate the performance of Washington's NOVA recreation providers in fulfilling each of the specific elements of the plan's overall vision. (On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent.")



Finally, the survey asked committee members to rate how effective the implementation of the NOVA Plan has been at improving recreation opportunities within each of the major NOVA funding categories (nonhighway road, nonmotorized, and off-road vehicle). The average rating for each category was 6.2 out of 10 for nonhighway road recreation, 6.9 for nonmotorized recreation, and 6.5 for off-road vehicle recreation.

Overall, how effective do you think the implementation of the NOVA Plan has been at improving the following recreation opportunities in Washington since 2005? (On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all effective" and 10 is "very effective.")



The rest of the survey results are considered in later chapters. Chapter 4 discusses the Advisory Committee's assessment of the NOVA Program policies, and Chapter 5 discusses other key issues noted in the survey as well as from the Advisory Committee discussion blog and the Trails Town Hall public forum.

NOVA FUNDING AND ELIGIBILITY

The NOVA program provides funding to develop and manage nonhighway road, nonmotorized, and off-road vehicle recreational activities, with a portion of the funding available for education and enforcement programs. Education and enforcement programs encourage environmentally responsible use of the outdoors and minimize user group conflicts through positive management techniques.

Except for off-road vehicle facilities, activities supported by NOVA must be accessed by a nonhighway road, meaning a public road that was not built or maintained with state gasoline tax funding.

NOVA funding comes from off-road vehicle permits and a portion of the state gasoline tax paid by users of off-road vehicles and nonhighway roads (roads not supported by state fuel taxes). Nonhighway road include U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service roads.

About 1% of all state fuel tax revenues go into the NOVA account. Funding is divided among categories by formulas established in statute at a ratio of 70% earmarked for recreational facilities and 30% earmarked for education and enforcement.

Within the recreation sum:

- 30% goes to non-trail opportunities, such as campgrounds, toilets, and scenic turnouts;
- 30% goes to nonmotorized recreation, such as hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding;
- 30% goes to motorized recreation, such as dirt bike, all-terrain vehicle, and 4x4 vehicle use;
- 10% is allocated as competitive across all three categories, with the greatest benefit going to projects that serve the largest number of users.

The NOVA Fuel Use Study, funded by the legislature in 2002, randomly sampled recreational fuel use by more than 7,000 vehicles statewide. Of funds that go into the NOVA program, about 50% comes from people driving on U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service Roads to camp, fish, hunt, pick berries, watch birds, or participate in other nonmotorized activities; 30% comes from people who hike, mountain bike, ride horses or use pack animals; and 20% comes from people who ride dirt bikes, all-terrain vehicles, 4x4 vehicles, or other motorized vehicles.

The grant process is open and competitive, and grant applications are accepted biennially. Organizations that are eligible for NOVA grants include local governments; special purpose districts, such as park districts and port districts; Native American tribes; state agencies; and federal agencies. On average, \$7 million is available for each biennial application period (that is, about \$3.5 million per year).

The funding ceiling per project is shown in the following table.

NOVA Program Grant Assistance Limits		
Category	Maintenance and Operation	Land Acquisition, Development, Planning
<i>Nonhighway Road</i>	\$100,000 for each project	\$100,000 for each project
<i>Nonmotorized</i>	\$100,000 for each project	\$100,000 for each project
<i>Off-Road Vehicle</i>	\$200,000 for each project	No limit
<i>Education and Enforcement</i>	\$200,000 for each project	

NOVA-eligible projects can receive grants for all aspects of a project cycle, including planning, land acquisition, development and construction, maintenance and operation, and education and enforcement. Details and restrictions regarding NOVA funding of these project aspects are discussed below.

Planning

Planning funds can be used for the development of comprehensive plans, construction drawings, environmental assessments, feasibility and preconstruction studies, traffic route surveys and reconnaissance, and site master plans.

Land Acquisition

Land acquisition can include a purchase in fee title or lesser interests such as leases and easements. In most cases, any land purchased must be kept for recreational purposes indefinitely. Leases must be purchased for at least 25 years. NOVA grants may not be used for land acquisition by federal agencies.

Development and Construction

Development and construction grant funds may be used for the following:

- Access roads, parking areas, trails, and trail heads
- Utilities, including water, electric, and telephone service
- Sanitary facilities, including sewer systems and other related utilities
- Route and interpretive signs and informational bulletin boards
- Picnic and camping areas
- Wildlife viewing facilities

- Nonmotorized boating access facilities
- Off-road vehicle sports park facilities including, but not limited to, motocross tracks, sand drag strips, 4-wheel drive competitive and play facilities, spectator facilities, concession buildings, and park administration and maintenance facilities
- Employee residences, typically related to an off-road vehicle sports park facility; the construction of residences must be for employees directly involved in the operation and maintenance of a NOVA-assisted project
- Extensive renovation or redevelopment of existing improvements when they have deteriorated to the point where their usefulness or safety is impaired (although not because of inadequate maintenance) or when the facility has become outmoded

Maintenance and Operation

NOVA grants are available for the maintenance and operation of off-road vehicle riding areas, trails, trail heads, day-use areas, campgrounds, off-road vehicle sports parks and intensive use areas, support structures and facilities, snow removal and trail grooming for non-snowmobile recreation, water access sites that serve nonmotorized activities, or other facilities with the primary objective of nonhighway road, nonmotorized, or off-road vehicle recreation.

Education and Enforcement

Education and enforcement activities may include making in-field contacts with NOVA recreational users and groups to encourage responsible behavior, providing information and education materials for public distribution, and protecting resources and facilities from theft and vandalism. Eligible projects include the employment of personnel, including law enforcement staff, and capital equipment purchases, provided that they are 100% dedicated to NOVA education and enforcement activities.

Source: <http://www.rco.wa.gov/grants/nova.shtml>

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

RCO contracted with the consulting firm Responsive Management to undertake this plan. They designed the methodology to develop the *2013-2018 Washington NOVA Plan* to ensure public participation in the planning process, to assess policy issues identified in the 2005 NOVA Plan and identify emerging issues, to evaluate NOVA demand, and to characterize stakeholder priorities and recommendations for implementing the program.

NOVA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

To ensure adequate public participation in the NOVA planning process, the consultants consulted the standing 16-member NOVA Advisory Committee. The committee consists of local, state, and federal governmental representatives and citizen stakeholders. Members have NOVA recreational experience, provide topical and geographical diversity, and possess first-hand knowledge of key recreational issues.

The committee provided qualitative input to the plan through an Internet discussion board. The consultants posed three rounds of questions to the NOVA Advisory Committee, and the group was given time to provide feedback and response.

The NOVA Advisory Committee also participated in a web-based survey. The survey was designed in part to evaluate the effectiveness of the 2005 plan by exploring its recommendations and assessing the progress toward meeting its goals. The survey also assessed committee members' opinions on and attitudes toward NOVA recreation opportunities currently provided by the state, explored public priorities for NOVA use, and identified new and emerging issues for consideration in updating the NOVA plan.

The survey took place in July and August 2013. Nine of the 16 committee members completed the survey.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Responsive Management collected input from the general public by using a blog Web site known as the "Trails Town Hall." This gathered comments for use in both the *2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan* and the *2013-2018 Washington State NOVA Plan*.

The public had an opportunity to comment on and discuss six questions. All told, 160 people provided 300 comments on the Trails Town Hall Web site.

2013 WASHINGTON SCORP

Another major source of data used to update the 2005-2011 NOVA Plan was the research conducted in support of the Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The data were collected during a large-scale scientific survey conducted by Responsive Management in 2012 for the RCO.

The SCORP research was designed to determine residents' participation in outdoor recreation in Washington, as well as their opinions on recreational facilities and opportunities. Although the SCORP did not specifically ask how respondents accessed a recreation opportunity (i.e., if they

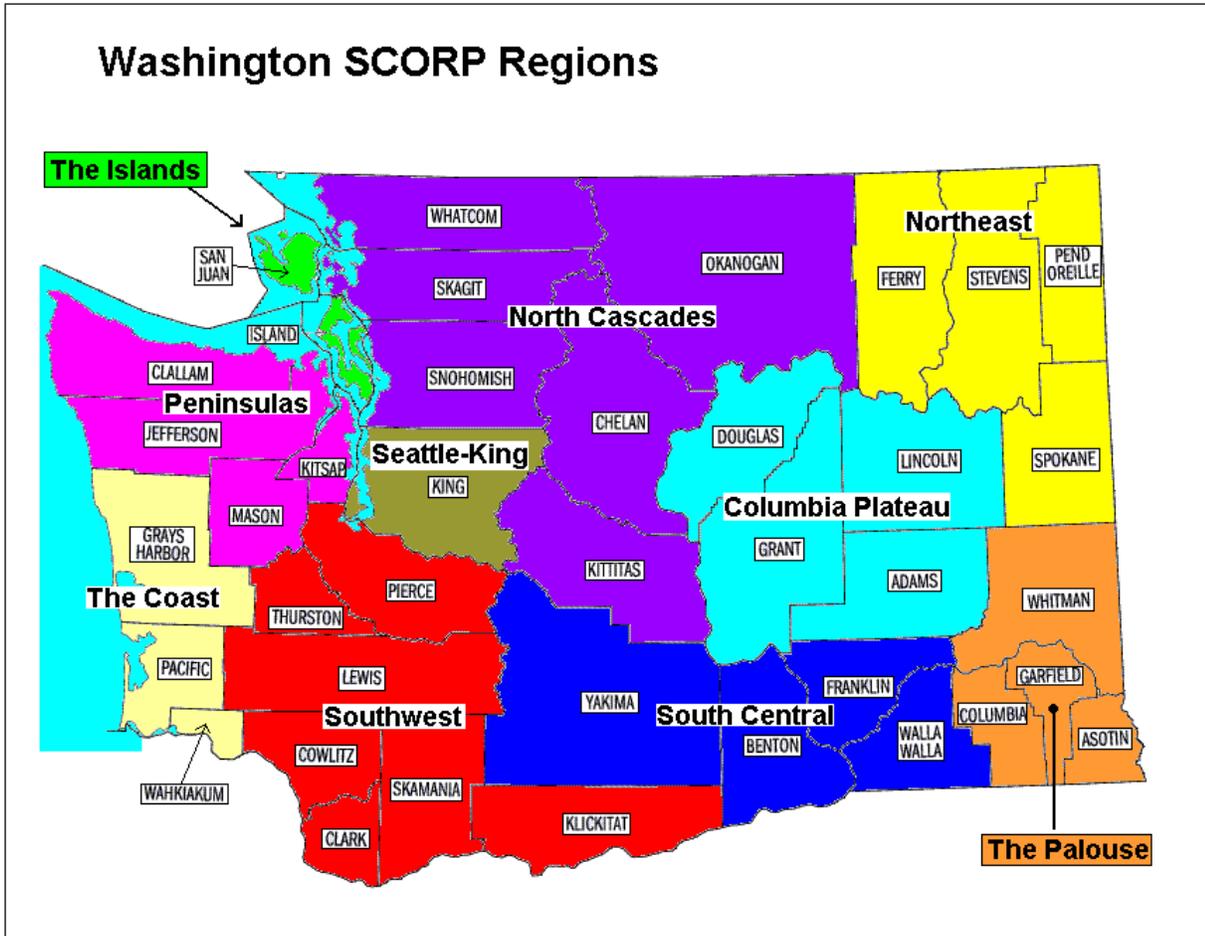
accessed it via a nonhighway road), NOVA-related activities discussed in the SCORP represent the major activities that take place in a nonhighway, nonmotorized, or off-road vehicle location or setting.

Responsive Management and the RCO developed the telephone survey questionnaire cooperatively. Responsive Management pre-tested the questionnaire to ensure proper wording, flow, and logic. A central polling site at the Responsive Management office allowed for rigorous quality control over the interviews and data collection.

Responsive Management conducted the telephone survey Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Saturday from noon to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., local time, from August to October 2012. Responsive Management used the Questionnaire Programming Language for data collection and obtained a total of 3,114 completed interviews statewide.

The consultants analyzed the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program, as well as proprietary software developed by Responsive Management. Findings of the telephone survey are reported at a 95% confidence interval for the statewide results. For the entire sample of Washington residents statewide, the sampling error is at most plus or minus 1.76 percentage points, with a sample size of 3,114 and a population size of 5,143,186 Washington residents 18 years old and older.

Throughout this report, NOVA-related outdoor recreation participation is discussed both in terms of overall statewide participation as well as regional participation, with the regional results based on the breakdown shown in this map:



Note: Map was produced in color; may not be legible in black and white.

The Islands: Island and San Juan Counties

Peninsulas: Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, and Mason Counties

The Coast: Grays Harbor, Pacific, and Wahkiakum Counties

North Cascades: Chelan, Kittitas, Okanogan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom Counties

Seattle-King: King County (including the City of Seattle)

Southwest: Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Lewis, Pierce, Skamania, and Thurston Counties

Northeast: Ferry, Pend Oreille, Spokane, and Stevens Counties

Columbia Plateau: Adams, Douglas, Grant, and Lincoln Counties

South Central: Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, and Yakima Counties

The Palouse: Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Whitman Counties

CHAPTER 3: ASSESSMENT OF DEMAND FOR NOVA OPPORTUNITIES IN WASHINGTON

There is a great deal of demand for NOVA opportunities in the State of Washington. An astounding 94% of Washington residents participate in some form of nonhighway road recreation, 86% participate in nonmotorized recreation, and 16% participate in ORV recreation.

As a whole, NOVA recreation consists of 39 activities within 13 of the 16 activity categories as defined by the SCORP. While the SCORP did not specifically ask how respondents accessed a recreation opportunity (i.e., if they accessed it via a nonhighway road), the following table indicates which NOVA activities that the SCORP data showed having the highest participation rates.

Table 1: NOVA Activities with the Highest Participation Rates

SCORP Activity Category	NOVA Activities within this category	Percent of Residents Participating
Walking, hiking, climbing, or mountaineering	Hiking mountain or forest trails	36%
	Hiking rural trails	19%
Nature activities	Wildlife viewing /photographing	59%
	Fishing or shellfishing	34%
	Gathering/collecting things in a nature setting	27%
Water-related activities	Canoeing, kayaking, rowing, or using other manual craft	11%
Sightseeing	Sightseeing at a scenic area	59%
Bicycle riding	Biking in rural trails	11%
	Biking in mountain or forest trails	8%
Snow and ice activities	Snowshoeing	7%
	Cross country skiing	5%
Off-roading for recreation		15%
Horseback riding	Horseback riding on rural trails	2%
	Horseback riding on mountain or forest trails	3%

There are three major NOVA recreational funding categories: nonhighway road recreation, nonmotorized recreation, and off-road vehicle recreation. A fourth major funding category, education and enforcement, applies to all aspects of NOVA recreation.

NONHIGHWAY ROAD RECREATIONAL USE

The first of these funding categories to be discussed, nonhighway road recreation, includes the most popular of outdoor recreational activities. In fact, an overwhelming 94% of Washington residents engage in at least one of these recreational pastimes, which include but are not limited to:

- Sightseeing
- Wildlife viewing and photographing
- Picnicking
- Camping
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Canoeing or kayaking
- Driving for pleasure
- Gathering berries, mushrooms, firewood, or other natural items

The following graph shows a demographic breakdown of nonhighway road recreational users: 94% of Washington residents participated in at least one recreational activity that fits within this category (meaning only 6% of Washington residents did not).

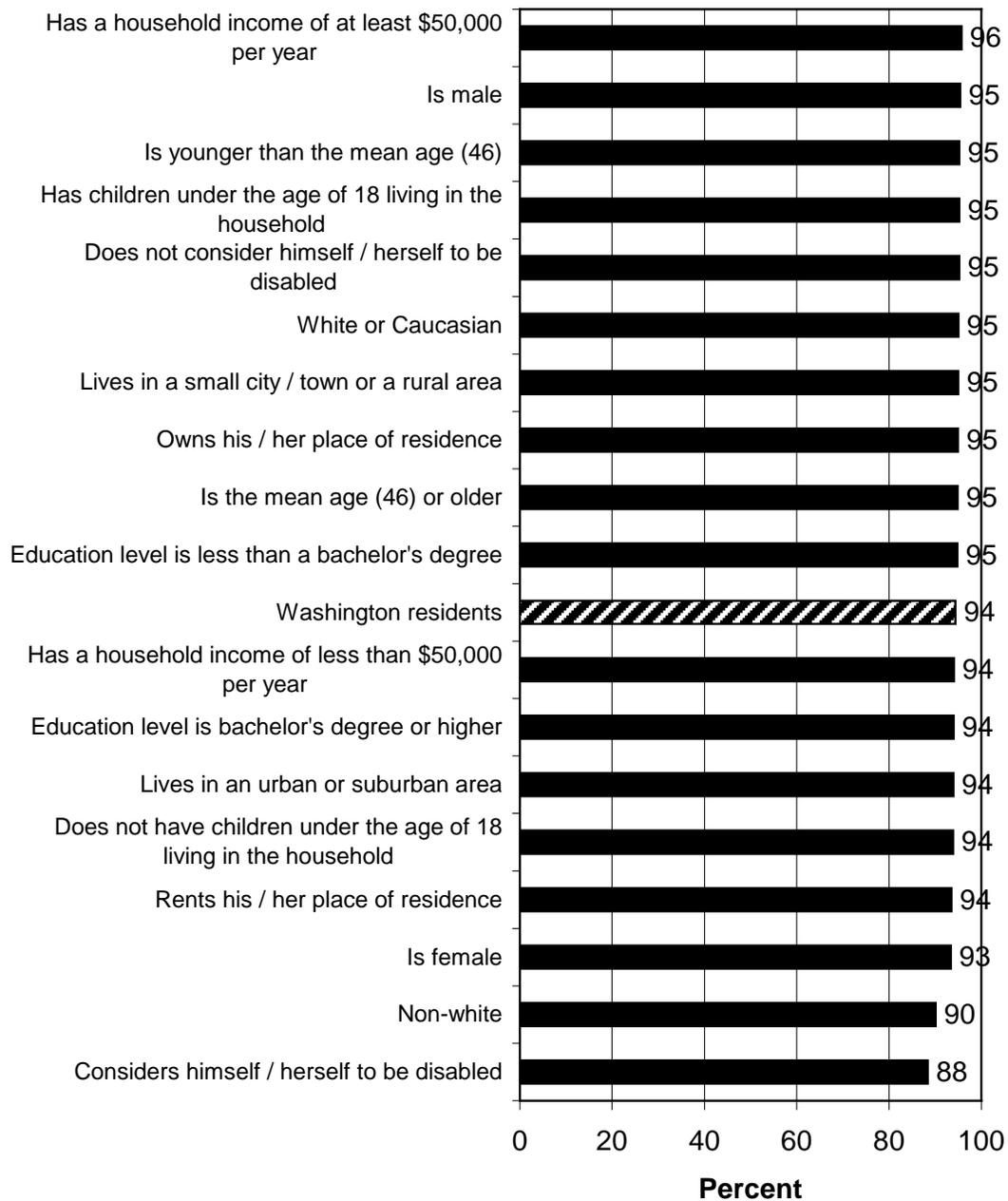
This 94% value is thus the baseline for demographic comparisons and is shown as a patterned bar on the graph. All the demographic groups shown above this baseline are positively correlated with participation in nonhighway road recreational use, and all the groups below are negatively correlated.

The graph shows that the demographic groups *most likely* to participate in nonhighway road recreational activities include those with an annual household income of at least \$50,000 (96% of this group participates) and male residents (95%), whereas the demographic groups *least likely* to engage in these activities are residents with disabilities (88%) and non-white/non-Caucasian residents (90%).

Note that these are not strong correlations. The most positive correlation is only 2% above the baseline value, and the most negative correlation is only 6% below. Nonhighway road recreation is a broad category that includes many popular recreational activities; all of the demographic groups exhibit high participation rates.

Appendix A presents a more focused analysis of the regional and demographic characteristics of specific recreational activities.

Percent of each of the following groups who are nonhighway road recreational users



NONMOTORIZED RECREATIONAL USE

Nonmotorized recreation follows closely behind nonhighway road recreation in popularity among Washington State residents. As the name implies, nonmotorized recreation includes human-powered or animal-powered activities. These include but are not limited to:

- Walking
- Hiking
- Backpacking
- Climbing
- Cross country skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Mountain biking
- Horseback riding
- Pack animal activities

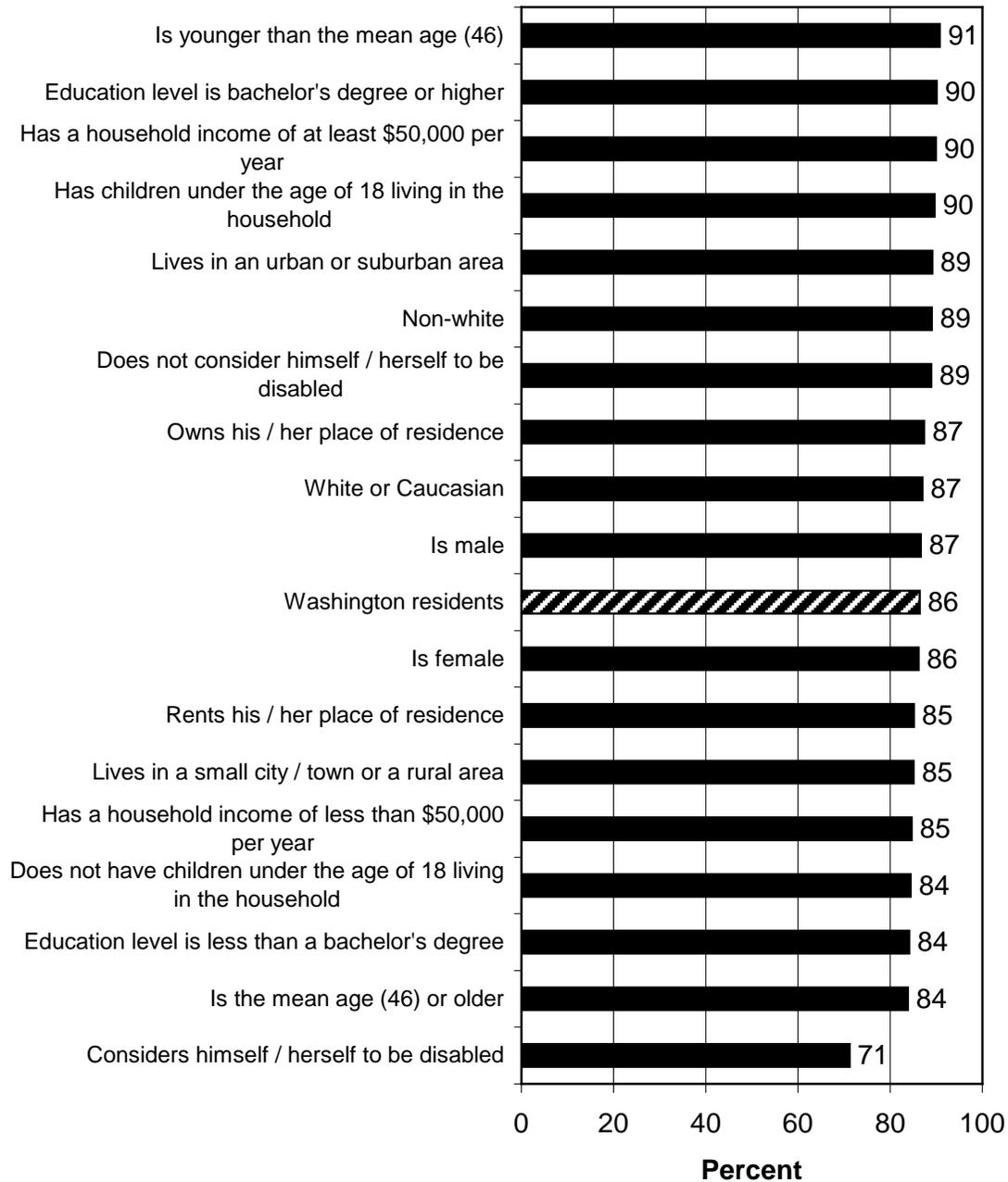
In all, 86% of Washington residents engage in at least one of these recreational activities, so this is the baseline value for demographic comparisons. The following graph shows that the demographic group *most likely* to engage in nonmotorized recreational activities consists of those younger than the mean age of 46 (91% of this group participates), and the demographic group *least likely* to engage in these activities consists of residents with disabilities (71%).

The graph shows that only one demographic group, residents with disabilities, has a strong negative correlation to participation in nonmotorized recreation (meaning this is the only percentage that is substantially different from the baseline value). By definition nonmotorized recreation includes human-powered and animal-powered activities, which can present obstacles to individuals with disabilities. Despite this, 71% is a high participation rate.

As with nonhighway road recreation, nonmotorized recreation is a wide-reaching category that includes many popular recreational pastimes, and consequently large participation rates are observed in each demographic group.

Refer to Appendix A for analysis of the regional and demographic characteristics of specific recreational activities.

Percent of each of the following groups who are nonmotorized recreational users:



OFF-ROAD VEHICLE RECREATIONAL USE

Off-road vehicle recreation has a significantly lower participation rate among Washington residents compared to nonhighway road or nonmotorized recreation. This may be due to its specialized nature and the cost of owning or resting an ORV.

NOVA-related off-road vehicle recreation can occur at off-road facilities, rural trails, or mountain or forest trails and typically involves the following vehicles:

- Motorcycles
- Dune buggies
- All-terrain vehicles (ATVs)
- 4-wheel drive vehicles

In total, 16% of Washington residents engage in some form of off-road vehicle recreation, so this is the baseline value for making demographic comparisons.

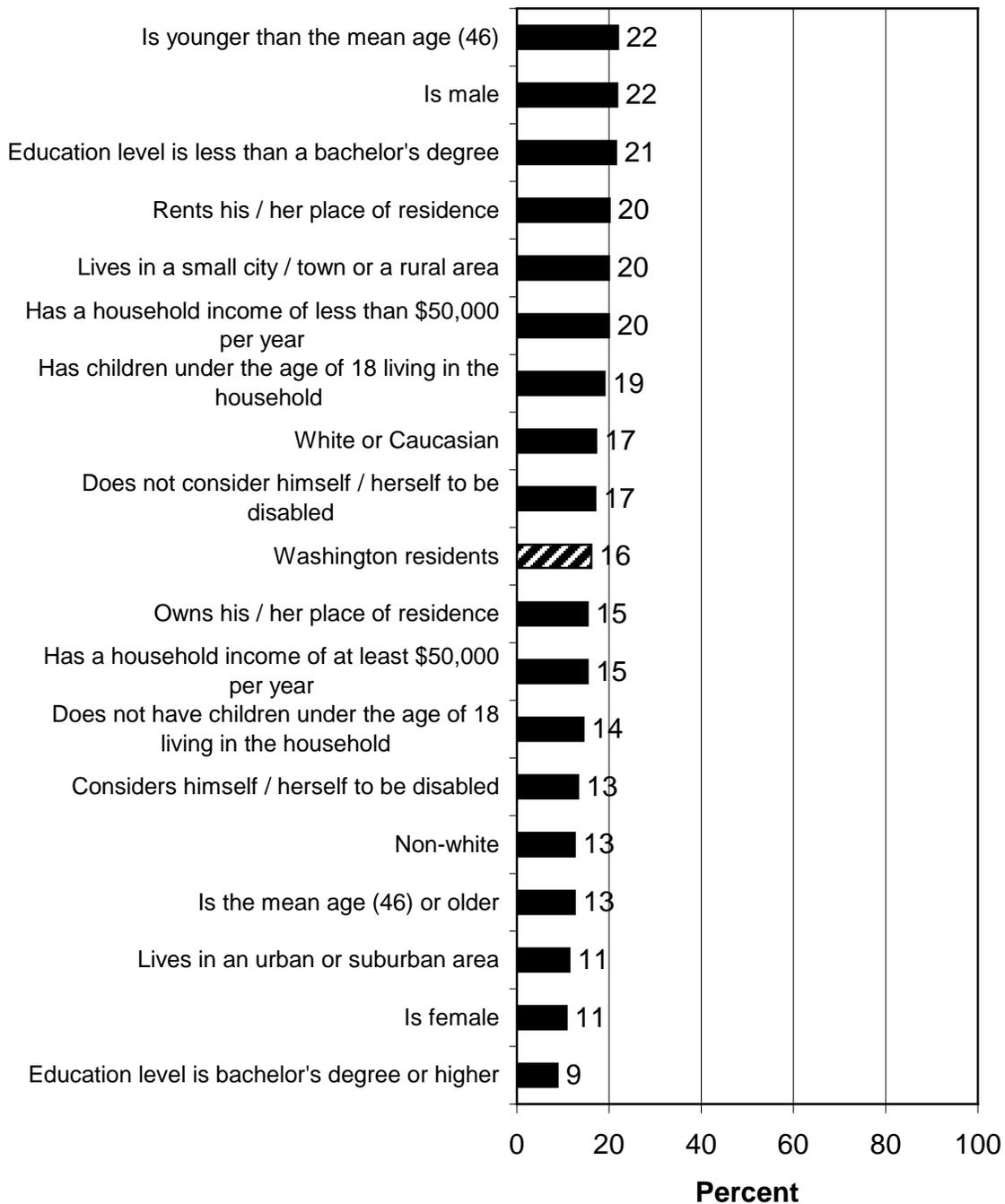
The following graph shows that the demographic groups *most likely* to participate in off-road vehicle recreation include those younger than the mean age of 46 (22% of this group participates), male residents (22%), and those with an education level less than a bachelor's degree (21%).

Conversely, the demographic groups *least likely* to engage in these activities include those who live in an urban or suburban area (11%), female residents (11%), and those with an education level of a bachelor's degree or higher (9%).

Compared to the other major NOVA categories, slightly more variation exists in the demographic groups' correlation to participation in off-road vehicle recreation. However, the positive and negative correlations are not very strong, most likely due to the grouping of activities.

Refer to Appendix A for analysis of the regional and demographic characteristics of specific recreational activities.

**Percent of each of the following groups who are
ORV recreation users:**



CHAPTER 4: ASSESSMENT OF NOVA PROGRAM POLICIES

The 2005-2011 NOVA Plan had set forth major policies related to three topical areas:

- NOVA Program (Policies A-1 to A-4)
- NOVA education, information, and law enforcement (Policies B-1 to B-5)
- NOVA recreational facility acquisition, development, operation and maintenance, and planning (Policies C-1 to C-15)

Responsive Management provided the NOVA Advisory Committee with a survey, which in part asked them to rate the importance of each policy* on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is “not at all important” and 10 is “extremely important.” Nine of the sixteen members of the Advisory Committee completed the survey.

In general, the NOVA policies are considered to be important, but in light of funding limitations it is helpful to see a comparative, quantitative ranking to help establish priorities moving forward.

The graph on the next two pages shows how the NOVA Advisory Committee ranked the existing policies. Note that policy descriptions have been shortened on the graph due to space limitations, but a complete description of each policy, a discussion of its ranking in the survey, and a summary of the open-ended (qualitative) comments provided in the survey are included in this section.

As the graph demonstrates, the policies ranked as the *most important* in the survey are:

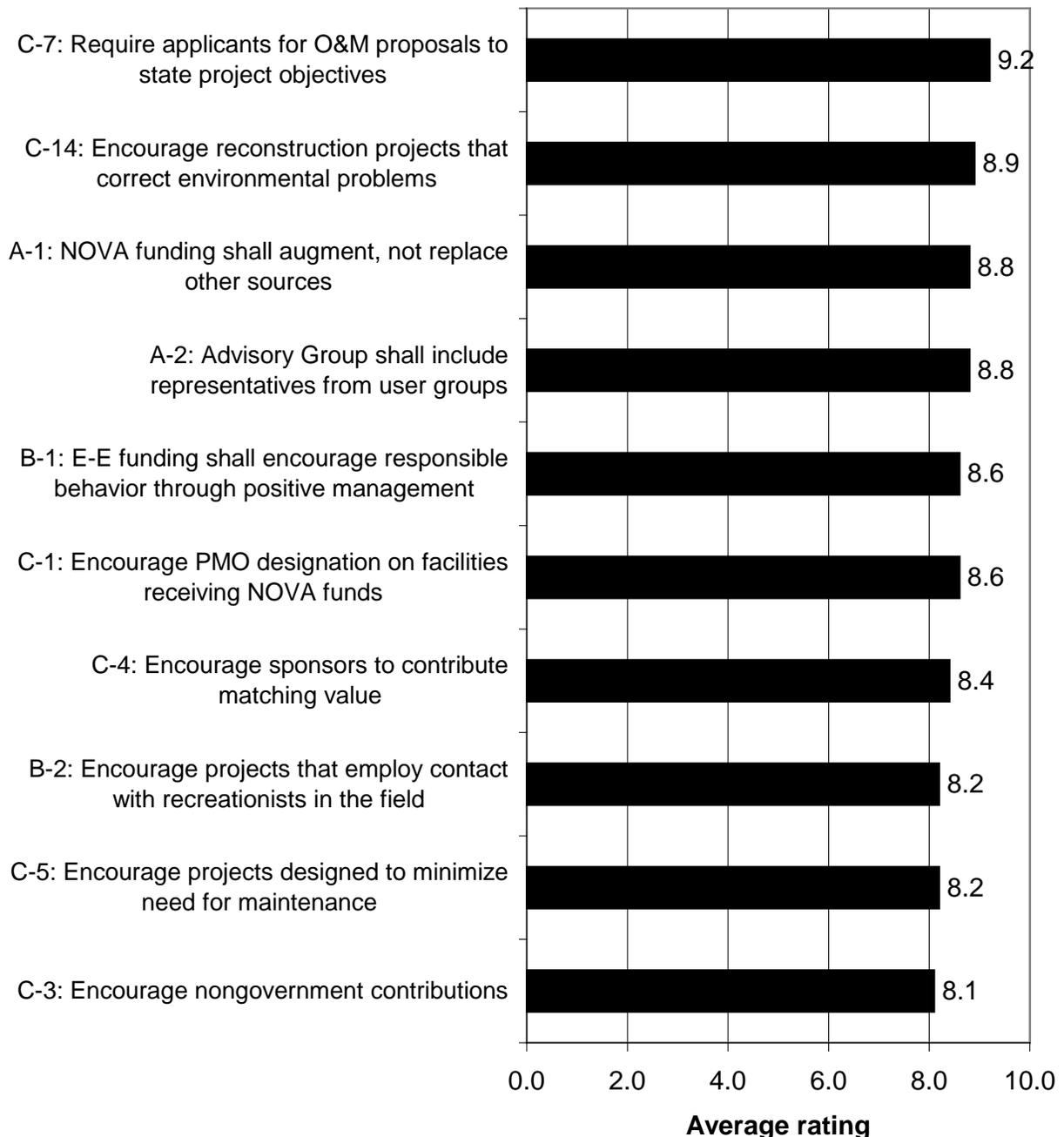
- C-7: Require applicants for operation and maintenance projects to state their project’s goals and objectives in the application (the average score was 9.2 out of 10);
- C-14: When reconstructing trails, encourage projects that correct environmental problems, retain trail difficulty and user experiences, and minimize user displacement (8.9);
- A-1: NOVA funding shall augment, not replace, other sources of funding (8.8); and
- A-2: The NOVA Advisory Committee shall include representatives from user groups and agencies affected by NOVA funding (8.8).

In contrast, the policies ranked as the *least important* are:

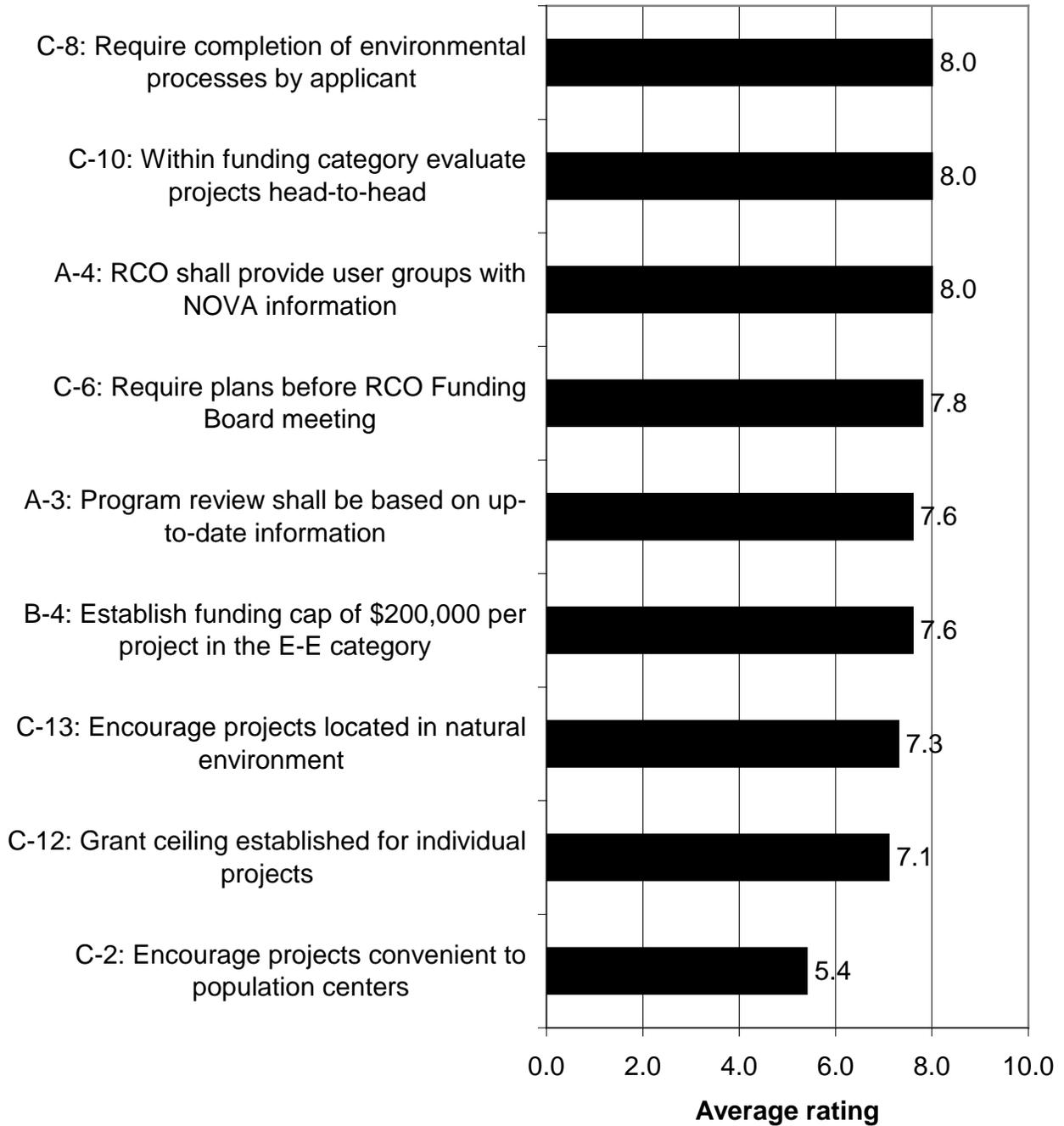
- C-2: Encourage projects convenient to population centers (average score of 5.4 out of 10);
- C-12: Grant ceiling established for individual projects (7.1); and
- C-13: Encourage projects in areas that are predominantly natural, such as are typically found in a “backcountry” environment (this policy does not apply to the off-road vehicle funding category) (7.3).

* Policies B-3, B-5, C-9, C-11, and C-15 are not subject to change and Responsive Management did not include them in the survey at the direction of the RCO. However, the descriptions of these policies have been included in this section.

Please indicate how important the following policies SHOULD BE for the 2013-2018 NOVA Plan on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important." (1 of 2)



Please indicate how important the following policies SHOULD BE for the 2013-2018 NOVA Plan on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important." (2 of 2)



TOP FUNDING PRIORITY

A key question in the survey provided the Advisory Committee with six choices for general categories of NOVA funding and asked them to select the top priority.

“What do you think SHOULD be the top priority for NOVA funding for the 2013-2018 NOVA Plan?”

- Education/information
- Law enforcement
- Planning
- Facilities acquisition
- Development
- Maintenance and operation

An overwhelming eight of the nine respondents selected “Maintenance and operation” as the top priority; one respondent selected “Facilities acquisition.”

When asked why they selected this as the top priority, respondents’ comments were generally consistent with the idea that development or new construction of recreation opportunities did not make sense given the backlog of maintenance needs.

They noted that existing trails and facilities are in danger of closing if they become unsafe or inaccessible through neglect. One respondent indicated that money for education and enforcement is important, but user behavior is less of a concern than trail conditions. The committee’s response to this question is consistent with the high ratings of importance given to policies that relate to operation and maintenance.

A review of comments received through the Trails Town Hall forum shows that much of the general public agrees that maintenance of existing NOVA-related recreational opportunities should take precedence over new development.

A major concern noted in comments on this NOVA Advisory Committee survey as well as in the Trails Town Hall and Advisory Committee forums, is the diversion of NOVA funds by the legislature toward projects and entities for which the funds were not originally intended.

In addition, respondents stated that the NOVA fund was originally comprised of 1% of the state gasoline tax, but that the most recent fuel tax increases did not include a corresponding increasing in the NOVA fund.

The remainder of this chapter discusses the ratings and comments provided for the individual policies, grouped into the three major topical areas. The discussion of each policy includes the policy text as originally published in the 2005 plan, followed by a summary of the survey results, and relevant comments provided by the NOVA Advisory Committee.

NOVA PROGRAM GENERAL POLICIES

The NOVA Program shall allow agencies to provide quality opportunities for nonhighway road, nonmotorized, and off-road vehicle recreationists—opportunities that satisfy user needs, are environmentally responsible, and minimize conflict among user groups. Sponsors will demonstrate accountability and help attain this goal, in part, by reporting on project related activities.

Policy A-1: NOVA funding shall augment, not replace, other sources of funding.

The NOVA Program allows user groups and public agencies to work cooperatively to provide nonhighway road, nonmotorized, and off-road vehicle recreation opportunities. Because of the program's revenue source and the effects of its funding, the program brings together many interests that sometimes conflict. NOVA funds shall be used to provide quality recreation opportunities in a manner that strives to minimize conflict and environmental damage.

NOVA funding is intended to enhance the capabilities of recreation providers and managers. Similar to other RCO funding programs, NOVA funding shall achieve results that would not be possible without state funding. It shall not replace other funding. When NOVA funding is available for maintenance and operation, for example, it shall not be used to replace or divert monies that would otherwise be available for that purpose.

The Advisory Committee gave this policy an average rating of 8.8 out of 10, one of the highest scores, emphasizing the important of incorporating other revenue sources into NOVA-related recreation.

Such sources may include matching funds provided by project sponsors (discussed further under Policy C-4) or the organization of user group volunteers for maintenance, operation, or education/information activities.

Policy A-2: The NOVA Advisory Committee shall include representatives from user groups and agencies affected by NOVA funding.

The Advisory Committee shall include the following representatives:

- 3 state agencies (Department of Natural Resources, State Parks, Department of Fish and Wildlife)
- 1 federal agency (Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, National Park Service)
- 1 local government (police, sheriff, or other administrator of NOVA projects)
- 3 off-road vehicle (intent to include off-road motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, and four-wheel drive)
- 4 nonmotorized recreation
 - 2 hiking (hiker, backpacker, climber, etc.)

- 1 mountain bicycling
- 1 equestrian
- 3 nonhighway road with one or more of the following recreational interests associated with fuel used on nonhighway roads:
 - Hunting and/or fishing (required)
 - Driving for pleasure or sightseeing
 - Wildlife viewing
 - Camping
 - Picnicking
 - Gathering (firewood, berries, mushrooms, etc.)

In selecting members the RCO will strive to ensure:

- They represent federal, state, and local government and primary NOVA-related recreation (all-terrain vehicle riding, horse/stock users, four-wheel driving, mountain bicycling, hiking, motorcycling).
- They demonstrate the support of those represented.
- Together they comprise a broad range of human diversity (gender, geography, ethnicity, physical ability, age).
- They have the time and resources to participate.
- They have basic experience in and an understanding of NOVA issues.
- They are committed to helping implement the policies reflected in this plan and the project evaluation system.

Likewise, after selection, committee members will:

- Represent those groups/agencies for which they have been selected.
- Demonstrate the support of those represented.
- Commit the time and resources needed for participation.
- Remain committed to the policies in this plan and project evaluation system by providing recommendations that reflect program policies and ensure the integrity of the project evaluation process.

In accordance with RCW 46.09.340, only representatives of the NOVA Advisory Committee's off-road vehicle and mountain biking recreationists, government representatives, and land managers will make recommendations regarding the expenditure of off-road vehicle permit funds received under RCW 46.68.045.

The Advisory Committee rated this policy as highly important, giving it an average rating of 8.8 out of 10.

In a self-evaluation of its performance in serving NOVA user groups and agencies since 2005, the committee gave itself an average score of 8.0.

In related questioning, all the respondents either *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that the NOVA Advisory Committee is qualified to make decisions regarding NOVA projects, and all but one of the

respondents either *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that the committee fairly represents user groups (one respondent gave a neutral response).

When asked about term limits, five of the respondents stated there should be no term limit, with two respondents suggesting a 4-year term and one each suggesting terms of 6 years or 8 years.

The respondents were generally consistent in stating that the role of the NOVA Advisory Committee is to assist the RCO in evaluating and selecting projects for NOVA funding without bias. Members should have experience with NOVA-related recreation and represent their user group while remaining impartial and respectful of other user groups. Respondents to the survey indicated that the NOVA Advisory Committee is properly executing its intended function.

Policy A-3: NOVA Program review and administration shall be based on valid, up-to-date information.

At least once every 12 years the RCO will seek funding to complete a new NOVA fuel-use study. (The 12-year cycle coordinates with the NOVA Plan, which by statute, must be updated every six years.) In completing the survey, the RCO will:

“...study the source and make recommendations on the distribution and use of funds provided to NOVA recreational activities under RCW 46.09.170. The study shall determine the relative portion of the motor vehicle fuel tax revenues that are attributable to vehicles operating on nonhighway roads or off-road trails for recreational purposes... [and] shall include the types of vehicles and location of their use, the types of recreational activities, the types of recreational facilities used, and the recreational use of forest roads.”

The 2005–2011 NOVA planning process was informed by the 2003 *Washington State Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities Fuel Use Survey* and a U.S. Forest Service trailhead user survey.

The Advisory Committee gave this policy an average rating of 7.6 out of 10, making this one of the lower-ranked policies in terms of relative importance.

When asked if NOVA review and administration is based on valid, up-to-date information, most respondents *moderately agree* with the statement, with one selecting *strongly agree* and one selecting *moderately disagree* (this respondent contends that the 2003 fuel use study is too outdated).

Survey respondents indicated that the RCO is doing an excellent job, given the difficulty and expense of gathering data on NOVA-related recreational needs. One respondent indicated that NOVA funds should not be so heavily based on usage, which tends to underserve less populated areas. Another suggestion was to include local area planning and infrastructure data, while another was to gather information on how the other western states administer their outdoor recreation programs.

Multiple respondents expressed concern that there was a lack of follow-up on funded projects to ensure that the dedicated funds were efficiently applied to the stated goals and objectives.

In a separate question, eight respondents were *somewhat satisfied* and one was *very satisfied* with the use of funds provided to NOVA recreation opportunities.

Policy A-4: The RCO shall endeavor to provide user groups with current NOVA-related information through a variety of communication methods.

Efficient and effective communication is critical for increasing awareness, building trust, and ensuring that accurate information is available to recreationists. The planning process for the 2005-2011 NOVA Plan suggested that recreationists are generally unaware of the NOVA Program, funding sources, funding allocations, and the role of the NOVA Advisory Committee. To this end, the plan discussed methods for increasing information and outreach.

Policy A-4 seeks to expand communication methods and increase public awareness regarding the NOVA Program and NOVA funding decisions.

The NOVA Advisory Committee was asked to rank the five means of communication that the RCO currently uses to provide user groups with information on the NOVA Program. The scores were weighted in which a respondent's top selection received 5 points, the second choice received 4 points, etc. The table below shows that updated web pages and e-mails are considered the most effective methods of communication.

Ranking	Form of Communication	Weighted Score
1	Updated Web pages	34
2	E-mails	27
3	News releases	24
4	Informational materials distributed at retail outlets	17
5	Informational materials attached to Department of Licensing notifications	16

The Advisory Committee gave this policy an average rating of 8.0 out of 10 in terms of its relative importance to the NOVA Program.

When the survey asked the committee to assess the RCO's performance in providing user groups with current information through varied communications since 2005, the average score was 6.5.

Multiple respondents acknowledged that rapid changes in information technology present challenges in delivering focused messaging, particularly to older recreationists. Challenges also exist in reaching users who are not part of organized groups.

Finally, for the section on Policy A-4, the Advisory Committee was asked the following question:

“In your opinion, what are the best ways to provide user groups with information on the NOVA Program? [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]”

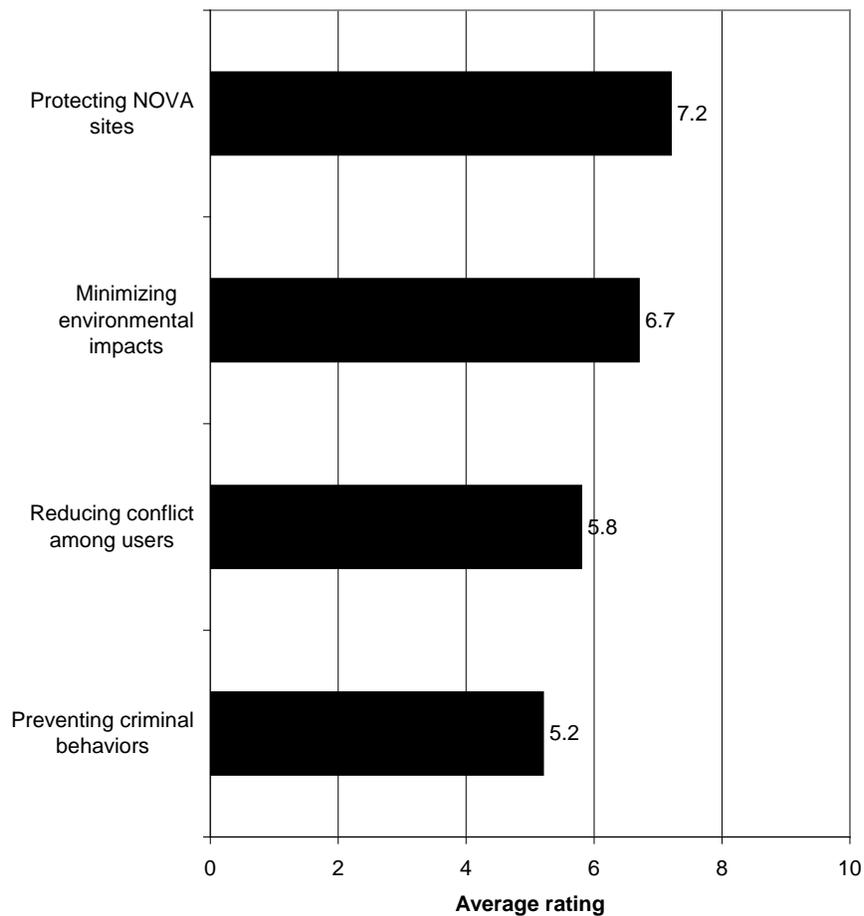
Number of Selections	Form of Communication
5	E-mails
5	News release
6	Updated Web pages
2	Informational materials distributed at retail outlets
2	Informational materials attached to Department of Licensing notifications
0	Direct mail
2	RCO News You Can Use (electronic newsletter)
4	Newspapers
2	Radio
1	Television
3	Public meetings/open houses
4	RCO Web site
4	Facebook
0	Google+
0	Pinterest
0	Twitter
0	YouTube
1	Blogs
2	Internet search engines (e.g. Google, Yahoo!, Bing)
0	RSS feeds
1	Other: Use partner organizations in recreation
1	Other: Articles in user group magazines
1	Other: Direct notifications to recreation groups

NOVA EDUCATION AND ENFORCEMENT (E & E) POLICIES

In the NOVA program, the primary focus of education/information and law enforcement policies is on recreational behaviors.

First, the survey asked the NOVA Advisory Committee to assess the performance of the RCO in focusing education and enforcement efforts on recreational behavior since the 2005 plan. The graph below shows average ratings that range from 7.2 (out of 10) for protecting NOVA sites to 5.2 for preventing criminal behaviors.

Please assess the PERFORMANCE of the RCO in focusing E-E efforts on the following recreational behaviors since 2005 (on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent"):



The survey also asked the committee to rank the above-referenced recreational behaviors regarding which one should be the most important focus for education and enforcement efforts in this updated plan. The scores were weighted so that a respondent's top selection received 4 points, the second choice received 3 points, etc.

In keeping with the previous assessment, the table below shows that crime prevention was considered to be the most important focus for ongoing education and enforcement efforts.

Ranking	Recreational Behavior	Weighted Score
1	Preventing criminal behaviors (e.g. trash dumping, firearm use, trailhead thefts, trespassing, and vandalism)	30
2	Protecting NOVA sites	21
3	Minimizing environmental impacts	20
4	Reducing conflict among users	17

Policy B-1: E&E programs shall help preserve NOVA opportunities. E&E funding shall encourage responsible recreational behaviors through positive management techniques.

Because law enforcement can reduce recreationists' inappropriate behavior, it helps protect the availability of sanctioned NOVA opportunities. Education and enforcement measures should include positive management to improve recreational behaviors. NOVA funding shall not, however, be used to replace local law enforcement funding. It shall instead augment local capabilities and result in improved NOVA recreation management. In general, projects that focus solely on enforcement of area closures, or within areas with few or no legal opportunities, shall be discouraged.

This policy is considered very important by the Advisory Committee, who gave an average rating of 8.6 out of 10.

Policy B-2: Encourage projects that primarily employ contact with current NOVA recreationists in the field during high use seasons.

During the 2005 planning process, there were concerns about focusing education and enforcement efforts in schools, which many believe encourages otherwise uninterested children and youth to desire the speed and power of an off-road vehicle. The suggestion was to focus education and enforcement efforts on those already using NOVA trails by engaging interest clubs or organizations.

Policy B-2 was developed to focus scarce education and enforcement resources on existing users at the place and time of NOVA activity, while discouraging activities that have fewer benefits, such as “mall shows” and many in-school (K-12) programs. This maximizes the benefit to users.

Policy B-2 helps concentrate funding on expenditures most directly related to education and enforcement activities, such as education and enforcement personnel salaries and benefits, and related materials and equipment.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of this policy an average rating of 8.2 out of 10, and a majority of respondents either strongly agree or moderately agree that education and enforcement efforts should target existing users. A couple of members disagreed, though, stating that the program should not preclude efforts to reach school age children or non-users.

Regarding law enforcement, three respondents would like to see a greater presence at NOVA trails and sites while the remaining six would like it to remain about the same.

In a related question, seven of the respondents believe criminal behavior is best prevented through an equal focus of education and enforcement, while one respondent each would like to see more education or more law enforcement.

The NOVA Advisory committee expressed only minor concerns about safety on trails as a result of criminal or other behaviors. They noted, however, that any further reductions in education and enforcement funding create a worry that crime will increase and people will stop going to NOVA-related trails and sites.

Policy B-3: Require E&E project applicants to provide project goal and objective information as part of the application process. Encourage applicants to provide demand and need information as a part of the evaluation process.

It is important that key planning elements, (program goals and objectives, description of demand and need) be retained as part of the application process. Additionally, the requirement for regular progress reports on activities and expenditures will be continued.

Policy B-3 is not subject to change, and in the interest of providing the NOVA Advisory Committee with a streamlined survey, Responsive Management did not include it in the survey at the direction of the RCO. The policy wording is included here to provide readers with the complete set of policies.

Policy B-4: Establish a funding cap of \$200,000 per project.

Before adoption of this policy, the limit on education and enforcement project support was based on Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees. However, caps based on FTEs were cumbersome to calculate, especially when applicants sought funding for multiple FTEs, each of which planned to work a different number of hours annually, and at various hourly rates.

As a result, in 2007 the cap method was changed from one based on FTEs and equipment to one based solely on individual projects – the same method used in other RCO grant programs with caps.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy B-4 an average rating of 7.6 out of 10.

In follow-up questioning, none of the respondents oppose a cap of \$200,000 per education and enforcement project, nor do they oppose funding education and enforcement projects for up to two consecutive years.

One respondent suggested reaching users not targeted by education and enforcement efforts in the past, such as those who participate in cycling, mountain biking, climbing, water sports, and snow sports. Another cautioned that, as overall recreation increases, monitoring of activities will need to increase to prevent criminal activity.

Policy B-5: Fund E&E projects for up to two consecutive years.

Allowing education and enforcement funding to be used for two years increases budget certainty for sponsors and may result in higher quality programs. At the same time, it reduces the work associated with annual project evaluation for sponsors, the NOVA Advisory Committee, and the RCO.

Policy B-3 is not subject to change, and in the interest of providing the NOVA Advisory Committee with a streamlined survey, Responsive Management did not include it in the survey at the direction of the RCO. The policy wording is included here to provide readers with the complete set of policies.

A question in the previous section showed that all respondents support funding education and enforcement projects for up to two consecutive years.

NOVA RECREATION FACILITY ACQUISITION, DEVELOPMENT, MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION, AND PLANNING

Policy C-1: Encourage a primary management objective designation on facilities receiving NOVA funding.

Primary management objective designations (equestrian, off-road vehicle, hiking, mountain bicycling, etc.) help identify the primary purpose and function of a NOVA site and also guide management decisions regarding the site. Designating trails and other facilities with a primary management objective not only helps clarify the experience users can expect, but also provides clear and consistent direction to managers.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-1 an average rating of 8.6 out of 10, making it one of the highest ranked policies.

Eight of the respondents *strongly support* having a primary management objective. One respondent selected *moderately oppose*, stating that such designations are not followed consistently by land managers and can be viewed by some as user segregation.

In general, the committee views primary management objectives as a useful tool in avoiding user conflicts. It was noted that the NOVA Program needs to strike a balance between providing multi-use trails and facilities and recognizing that certain recreation types have specific needs.

Policy C-2: Encourage projects convenient to population centers.

One of the issues raised during the previous NOVA planning process was how to provide NOVA opportunities in urban areas or for underserved populations. Because of the nonhighway road threshold criteria (access via a non-gasoline tax supported road, etc.) and emphasis on natural settings, most NOVA recreation opportunities are provided in relatively remote settings. While it is often difficult or impossible to locate such opportunities in urbanized areas, priority shall be given to projects convenient to such areas.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-2 an average rating of 5.4 out of 10, making it the lowest ranked of all the policies.

A follow-up question asked the committee if there is an adequate supply of NOVA sites convenient to urban areas; five of the respondents *moderately agree*, two *moderately disagree*, and two are neutral.

On the topic of NOVA recreation locations, the respondents provided a wide range of comments, some of which are shown below.

- Urban demand is growing faster than other types and development limits opportunities.
- By focusing funds on urban areas we cannot spread the use out. Small towns are more dependent on recreation for their economy; in our mobile culture users will drive to remote recreation areas.
- There is an increased need for short trails for cycling, mountain biking, etc. without trailering long distances.
- As rural areas become more urbanized, there is increased demand for access to nonmotorized and motorized trails.
- As fuel costs increase and roads become more crowded, there is an increased importance of recreation convenient to population centers. People are less likely to go to remote trailheads.
- Communities should designate and fund open space, without relying so much on NOVA funding.

Policy C-3: Encourage non-government contributions.

Contributions of money, materials, and/or services by volunteers, the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and others are important in the NOVA Program. Donations stretch scarce public funding, improve the overall cost-benefit ratio, extend “ownership” to those involved in the project, and help demonstrate broad public support.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-3 an average rating of 8.1 out of 10.

Six of the respondents *strongly agree* and three *moderately agree* that the NOVA Program should encourage non-government contributions.

In the interest of providing the NOVA Advisory Committee with a streamlined survey, Responsive Management did not include a space for open-ended comments on this policy.

Policy C-4: Encourage sponsors to contribute matching value to their project.

Project sponsors who contribute part of a project’s cost (via dollars, materials, or labor/service) make NOVA Program dollars reach more projects while demonstrating a local commitment in the project’s success.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-4 an average rating of 8.4 out of 10.

All respondents either *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that the NOVA Program should encourage sponsors to contribute matching value to their projects. When asked about an appropriate match, a few respondents indicated the ratio should be 50/50, while others suggested a lower amount, ranging from 10% to 30% of the project’s value.

Another question asked if a matching contribution should be *required* for project funding: two respondents *strongly agree*, two *moderately agree*, one *moderately disagrees*, and one was neutral. Those who agree with a matching requirement were asked to suggest a percentage; the responses ranged from 10% to 30%, lower than the amounts suggested for recommended contributions in the earlier question.

Next, the survey asked if funding from other programs administered by the RCO Funding Board should be considered as matching funds for NOVA projects. This question evenly divided the Advisory Committee, as two respondents each selected *strongly agree*, *moderately agree*, *moderately disagree*, and *strongly disagree* (one selected *don’t know*).

In addition, the Advisory Committee was asked if the NOVA Program should encourage volunteer opportunities that are approved by the land manager. On this the respondents were united, with seven selecting *strongly agree* and two selecting *moderately agree*.

Multiple respondents indicated that the NOVA Program could encourage volunteerism through recognition programs, such as feature stories of volunteers in action on local newscasts or in newspapers. The NOVA Program project sponsors could also provide support and information to the volunteer base, educate users on how the NOVA Program benefits them, and show those in charge of non-government contributions how NOVA projects benefit everyone.

Policy C-5: Encourage projects that have design considerations that minimize the need for ongoing maintenance.

Projects can often incorporate design elements that reduce maintenance needs. Decisions about placement and materials (e.g. tread surfaces) often affect maintenance needs. Adequate consideration of maintenance during the design phase can result in long-term savings that far outweigh most short-term construction cost increases.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-5 an average rating of 8.2 out of 10. Note, however, that six respondents scored this policy as a 10. Several respondents indicated that they support Policy C-5 due to concerns over diminishing maintenance funding.

One respondent, who strongly dissented, gave the policy a 0, thereby driving down the average. This respondent emphasized that projects should be evaluated for their overall cost-benefit ratio.

Policy C-6: Require general plans and completion of applicant-required processes before the RCO Funding Board meeting.

Policies C-6 through C-8 are project planning requirements collectively designed to ensure that projects support community goals, address a defined problem, and comply with environmental laws and regulations. All are “base requirements” before the RCO authorizes a project.

Policy C-6 states that project sponsors shall provide evidence of planning that supports the proposed project. Unlike project-specific engineering plans, these general plans shall clearly define goals, objectives, and needs, and be developed in a process that includes opportunities for public participation. They may include local agency comprehensive park plans, growth management plans, national forest plans, national park management plans, etc.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-6 an average rating of 7.8 out of 10. One respondent indicated that this policy is not feasible.

Policy C-7: Require applicants for maintenance and operation proposals to state their project's goals and objectives in the application. Encourage these applicants to provide "need" information during project evaluations.

If a project (the "solution") is to be successful, it must be clearly linked to a defined problem. Stating a project's goals and objectives accomplishes this. A *goal* is a broad statement of intent that describes a desired outcome, for example, "stop resource damage" or "improve trail safety." *Objectives* are connected to the goal and are both more specific and measurable. Objectives help us know when the goal has been accomplished. Typical objectives include "stop trail sediment from entering streams" and "apply federal trail safety standards."

"Need" is not so easily defined and so is rated in the more subjective project evaluations. In the NOVA program, need relates to a project's support as expressed in a publicly reviewed and adopted state, regional, or other plan. It can be described in terms of physical condition of existing facilities, safety and environmental issues, or the threat of the loss of an opportunity. Need can vary with the availability of similar opportunities, travel times, accessibility, and use levels.

The NOVA Advisory Committee rated the importance of Policy C-7 as 9.2 out of 10. This is the most highly ranked of all the policies, which supports the committee's earlier selection of maintenance and operation as the top NOVA funding priority.

Policy C-8: Require completion of applicant required environmental processes before issuing a Project Agreement.

Consistent with local, state, and federal laws and regulations, applicants must comply with environmental planning and review requirements. This means demonstrating compliance with either the State or National Environmental Policy Act (SEPA or NEPA). In most cases, this means providing to the RCO within 90 days after RCO funding approval such documentation as a Determination of Non-Significance (for SEPA) or a Record of Decision, Decision Notice, or Decision Memo (for NEPA).

Applicants must also comply with any permitting requirements, including shoreline, hydraulics, building, health, etc. The RCO does not require proof of compliance with these other permit obligations.

The Advisory Committee rated the importance of Policy C-8 as 8.0 out of 10.

Committee members generally support environmental protection measures; in a follow-up question, four respondents indicated they were *very concerned* about the environmental impacts of NOVA recreation, four were *somewhat concerned*, and one was *not at all concerned*.

Additional comments stated the caution that overregulation could place a financial strain on worthwhile projects. One respondent asked how Policy C-8 would apply to specific planning

projects, while another stated there was a patchwork of different environmental requirements at the county level.

Policy C-9: Require a lease period of at least 25 years for projects acquiring leases.

This policy primarily concerns the Washington Department of Natural Resources. Before adoption of this policy, the RCO required that, at minimum and short of a fee simple purchase, any land acquisition project needed to guarantee a lease lifespan of 50 years. However, since it is nearly impossible to obtain a 50-year lease today—because facility life expectancy is usually only 20-25 years—this requirement is reduced to 25 years.

Policy C-9 is not subject to change, and in the interest of providing the NOVA Advisory Committee with a streamlined survey, Responsive Management did not include it in the survey at the direction of the RCO. The policy wording is included here to provide readers with the complete set of policies.

Policy C-10: Within their respective nonhighway road, nonmotorized, or off-road vehicle funding categories, evaluate acquisition, development, maintenance and operation, and planning projects on a head-to-head basis.

By statute, NOVA facility funding is divided into three categories: *nonhighway road*, *nonmotorized*, and *off-road vehicle*. Requiring that all projects within these categories compete in direct competition with one another is one way we can help ensure that only the most desirable projects are funded.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-10 an average rating of 8.0 out of 10.

Respondents indicated that applications need more detailed cost estimates for a fair evaluation. Project evaluations need to address maintenance and operation in addition to growing recreation opportunities to meet demand. One respondent felt that a project's proximity to urban centers should not influence scoring. Another respondent stated that "RCO does a great job of fair and transparent evaluation."

Policy C-11: Fund maintenance and operation projects for up to two consecutive years.

Allowing maintenance and operation funding to be used for two years increases budget certainty for sponsors and may result in higher quality programs. At the same time, it reduces the work associated with an annual project submission for sponsors, the NOVA Advisory Committee, and the RCO.

Policy C-9 is not subject to change, and in the interest of providing the NOVA Advisory Committee with a streamlined survey, Responsive Management did not include it in the survey at the direction of the RCO. The policy wording is included here to provide readers with the complete set of policies.

Policy C-12: The grant ceiling for individual projects is limited as shown in the following table.

NOVA Program Grant Assistance Limits		
Category	Maintenance and Operation	Land Acquisition, Development, Planning
<i>Nonhighway Road</i>	\$100,000 for each project	\$100,000 for each project
<i>Nonmotorized</i>	\$100,000 for each project	\$100,000 for each project
<i>Off-Road Vehicle</i>	\$200,000 for each project	No limit
<i>Education and Enforcement</i>	\$200,000 for each project	

The above limits are imposed due to the shortage of funds available for projects.

Plan research strongly suggests broad support for increasing the availability and quantity of NOVA funding. One of the most intensely discussed issues during plan preparation was trail maintenance.

Program administrators suggested that historically, too much funding has been directed to capital projects without the necessary maintenance infrastructure and funding to support the efforts. Public comments received through the Trails Town Hall forum indicate that recreationists also find maintenance of trails to be their most important issue.

With the exception of off-road vehicle sport parks, the RCO has rarely seen a maintenance and operations project that approaches the \$200,000 limit. The RCO limits the number of competition off-road vehicle sport parks it will support because of their relatively high cost.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-12 an average rating of 7.1 out of 10, making it one of the lowest ranked policies in the survey.

When asked if they support or oppose the NOVA grant ceiling for individual projects, two respondents *strongly support*, three *moderately support*, three *neither support nor oppose*, and one *moderately opposes* the policy.

Another question asked the committee members if they support or oppose funding NOVA maintenance and operation projects for up to two consecutive years; six respondents *strongly support* and three *moderately support* the policy.

Some respondents stated that increasing costs and inflation made the grant ceiling problematic and suggested corresponding adjustments to the grant ceiling. In one example, the capital cost of a trail designed to minimize future maintenance costs (durable tread design) is greater than the cost of a traditional trail, so such a project may have a reduced chance at funding. Again the concern was

expressed that NOVA funding might not even be available from year to year. Also, one respondent noted that off-road vehicle land acquisition should have limits and be equal to the other categories.

Policy C-13: Encourage emphasis on projects in areas that are predominantly natural, such as are typically (but not necessarily) found in a “backcountry” environment. This policy does not apply to the ORV funding category.

To be eligible for nonhighway road and nonmotorized funding, projects must be adjacent to or accessed by a nonhighway road. Consideration of a "backcountry experience" in project selection is based on the notion that additional emphasis should be placed on allocating funds back to the type of setting where funds were generated.

A portion of the NOVA fund is generated by motorists traveling on nonhighway roads, such as those that occur in national parks or forests. As such, travelers who pay the fuel tax will benefit from projects on or next to these roads. This policy, however, does not apply to the off-road vehicle funding category.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-13 an average rating of 7.3 out of 10, making it one of the lowest ranked policies in the survey.

Multiple respondents cautioned that “natural” seems subjective, and any project served by a nonhighway road should be eligible. One comment noted that access to trails and remote sites is decreasing due to more forest road closures. Maintenance of remote locations is another concern noted in the comments. One respondent claimed that natural and urban needs are of equal importance, so this policy should not bias project selection.

Policy C-14: When reconstructing trails, encourage projects that correct environmental problems, retain trail difficulty and user experiences, and minimize user displacement.

Reconstruction can be less expensive than new construction and often presents opportunities to employ current standards and correct environmental problems. Project sponsors shall be sensitive to current trail uses and experiences, and seek to minimize "over building" the trail and significantly changing the opportunity for either motorized or nonmotorized users.

The Advisory Committee gave the importance of Policy C-14 an average rating of 8.9 out of 10, making it one of the highest ranked policies in the survey.

Respondents indicated that trails should be accessible to people with disabilities as well as those willing to make an effort. It was noted that trails in an environmentally problematic area should be abandoned rather than reconstructed. Also, additional environmental requirements may not allow trails to be built to the same difficulty factors.

Committee members noted that there is a backlog of trail repair needs in remote areas, and the use of non-natural construction material is expected to increase, for both reconstruction and new construction, in an effort to minimize future maintenance efforts.

Policy C-15: Find appropriate sites through the initiative of land managers.

The RCO will not assume a proactive role in site identification. Consistent with its other programs, the RCO will continue to rely on public land managers to identify appropriate NOVA project sites through their land use planning and public involvement processes. Recreationist groups are encouraged to continue to work with land managers to identify sites. RCO staff will continue to publicize the availability of NOVA funding opportunities through its grant workshops, web page, and publications.

Policy C-15 is not subject to change, and in the interest of providing the NOVA Advisory Committee with a streamlined survey, Responsive Management did not include it in the survey at the direction of the RCO. The policy wording is included here to provide readers with the complete set of policies.

CHAPTER 5: OTHER KEY ISSUES AFFECTING NOVA

In evaluating the NOVA Advisory Committee survey scoring and comments, the Advisory Committee online discussion blog, and the public Trails Town Hall online discussion forum, certain key issues begin to emerge. Top concerns and suggestions provided by the general public were generally consistent with those provided by NOVA administrators and providers. Also noteworthy was that comments from the public often demonstrated a substantial knowledge of the NOVA Program, suggesting that education and information efforts have gained traction since the program's implementation.

Access, user conflict, and off-road vehicle sports parks are the top concerns.

ACCESS

Access issues are an important area of concern among Washington recreationists and recreation providers.

The NOVA Advisory Committee survey asked members to rate access to **overall NOVA opportunities** in Washington State. One respondent selected *excellent*, six selected *good*, and two selected *fair*; no one indicated that access was poor.

Next the survey asked if they were satisfied with access to **nonhighway road** recreation. Four respondents were *very satisfied* and five were *somewhat satisfied*.

The survey then asked if they were satisfied with access to **nonmotorized** recreation. Six respondents were *very satisfied*, two were *somewhat satisfied*, and one was *somewhat dissatisfied*. The *somewhat dissatisfied* respondent commented that backlogs of maintenance prevented trail use in back country areas.

Finally, the survey asked if they were satisfied with access to **off-road vehicle** recreation. Three respondents were *very satisfied*, one was *somewhat satisfied*, two were *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*, one was *somewhat dissatisfied*, and one selected *don't know*). The respondent who was *somewhat dissatisfied* commented that huge areas of National Forest with thousands of miles were being systematically removed, resulting in a large shortfall of off-road vehicle access.

A number of NOVA Advisory Committee members stated that road closures by private landowners, particularly timber companies, were shutting off access to existing trails. One respondent recommended using that agencies use NOVA funds to purchase public access across private lands.

Respondents noted the need for more access for people with disabilities (likely to be motorized users) and for more urban trails. They also expressed concerns that changing environmental regulations and increased traffic are having a detrimental effect on NOVA access.

Recreationists also pointed out the increased closing of access roads by private landowners. One person suggested that, if off-road vehicle users can gain access through the large network of logging

roads, existing trails could be cleared by volunteers in no time. Respondents suggested incentives to private landowners that could include user fees, tax incentives, or reductions/removals of liability.

USER CONFLICTS

User conflicts are an important area of concern among recreationists and recreation planners. The survey of the NOVA Advisory Committee asked them to assess the extent of the user conflict issue. One respondent stated it was a *major problem*, seven stated it was a *minor problem*, and one said it was *not at all a problem*.

The NOVA Advisory Committee survey respondents were evenly divided when asked if problems with user conflicts have increased or decreased since 2005. Four each selected *increased* and *decreased*.

Those who said user conflicts have *increased* commented that more off-road vehicle participation and lower social tolerance have exacerbated the issue, with too many people sharing too few recreation areas. This corresponds to the access issues previously discussed; many recreationists commented on access issues and user conflicts within the same Trails Town Hall discussion.

In contrast, those who stated that problems with user conflicts have *decreased* since 2005 cited more communication and cooperation between user groups. Recreation organizations have found common ground, thereby decreasing both real and perceived conflicts through better planning and outreach efforts.

Although the term “user conflicts” typically refers to recreationist behavior at trails and other recreation sites, it is important to note that conflicts also exist with regard to NOVA Program funding allocations.

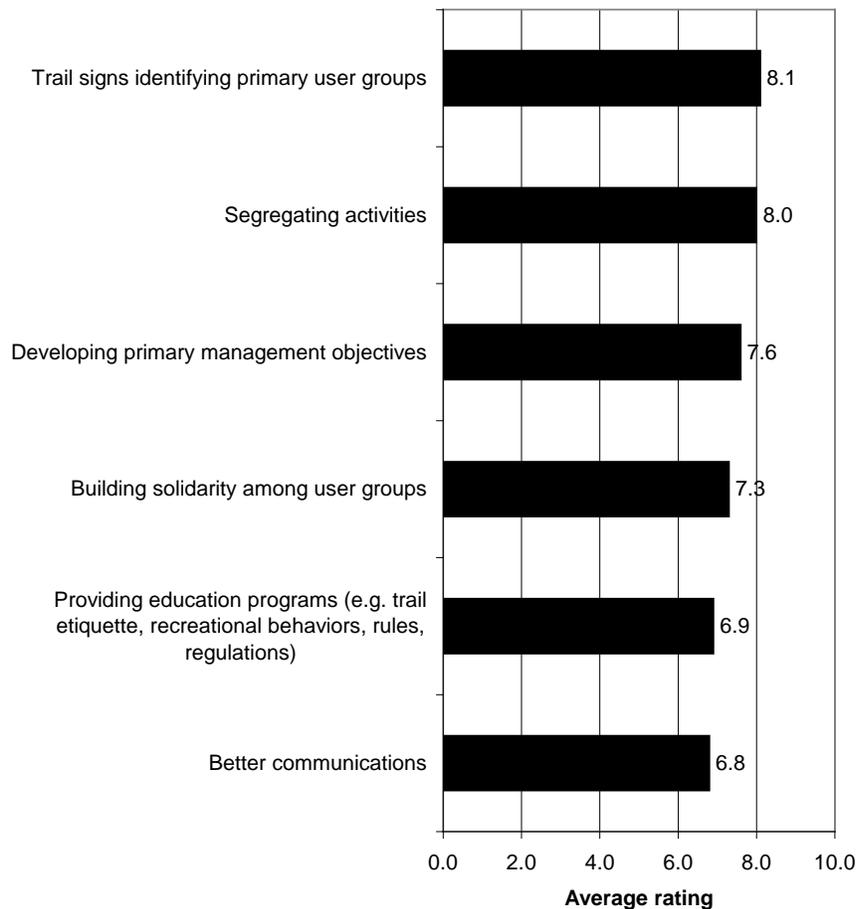
Numerous comments in the public Trails Town Hall forum are from motorized recreationists who feel that fees from off-road vehicle fuel purchases and tabs are being spent on nonmotorized trails. This concern was exacerbated when the state legislature redirected NOVA funds to Washington State Parks in fiscal year 2010-2011.

Some Trails Town Hall participants suggested that users of biking, horseback, or hiking trails should have to purchase licenses similar to off-road vehicle permits. In contrast, nonmotorized recreationists claim that motorized users receive a disproportionate amount of NOVA funding, because a majority of NOVA funds come from fuel taxes paid by nonmotorized users to get to trails or other facilities. It is apparent that clarifying the source and intent of NOVA funding would help alleviate this manifestation of user conflict.

Recommendations to improve user conflict issues include a user group forum (“a leadership council” as proposed by one commenter), user group collaborations (e.g. a maintenance work party by user groups on the same trail system), and data-driven conflict analysis with planning for resolutions.

The NOVA Advisory Committee survey asked members to rate the effectiveness of different management efforts in addressing user conflicts. As the following graph shows, “trail signs identifying primary user groups” was considered the most effective, with an average score of 8.1 out of 10, and “better communications” was considered the least effective, with an average score of 6.8.

**In your opinion, how effective are the following management efforts in addressing user conflicts?
(On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all effective" and 10 is "extremely effective.")**



ORV SPORTS PARKS

"ORV sports park" means a facility designed to accommodate competitive off-road vehicle recreational uses including, but not limited to, motocross racing, four-wheel drive competitions, and flat track racing. Use of off-road vehicle sports parks can be competitive or noncompetitive.

Many respondents questioned the level of NOVA Program support for events at the ORV sports parks assisted with RCO funds versus maintenance of backcountry trail-related facilities. The general sentiment among this group was that the fees and charges of the parks should cover more of the cost of user events and be more comparable to other publicly managed opportunities.

On the other hand, supporters of NOVA funding for management of ORV sports parks felt that, because the areas provide unique regional opportunities, they should receive more funding from state sources. Others pointed out that the RCO's support of acquisition and development of sports parks has created increased demand for limited off-road vehicle dollars for maintenance and operations, and has reduced the ability to create new, dispersed off-road vehicle trail opportunities. It was specifically mentioned that King County does not have an ORV sports park, a concern noted for urban areas in general.

The NOVA Advisory Committee survey asked members if they believe off-road vehicle sports parks should become more self-sufficient. The group mostly agreed with this idea, with six respondents who *strongly agree*, two who *moderately agree*, and one who *neither agrees nor disagrees*. ORV sports parks are usually contracted to private managers, and the consensus was that NOVA funds should not go to increase the profits of private entities who charge user fees.

The next question on the NOVA Advisory Committee survey received a more divided response: Do you support or oppose NOVA funding going toward ORV sports parks? Three respondents chose *moderately support*, two chose *neither support nor oppose*, one chose *moderately oppose*, and three chose *strongly oppose*.

Those in support claim that development of motorized recreational facilities is a legitimate use of NOVA funds, and that off-road vehicle users need somewhere to go so they will not impact trail systems. However, both supporters and opponents of ORV sports parks indicated that NOVA funds should not enhance operational profits.

CHAPTER 6: PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This updated NOVA Plan is based in part upon further analysis of the raw data collected for the 2013 Washington SCORP. The SCORP data show that an astonishing 94% of Washington residents participate in some form of nonhighway road recreation, 86% participate in nonmotorized recreation, and 16% participate in off-road vehicle recreation.

Although the SCORP did not specifically ask how respondents accessed a recreation opportunity (i.e., if they accessed it via a nonhighway road), NOVA-related activities represent the major activities from the SCORP survey that take place in a nonhighway, nonmotorized, or off-road vehicle location or setting. In all, NOVA recreation consists of 39 activities listed within 13 of the 16 activity categories as identified in the SCORP. Clearly, the amount and allocation of NOVA funding is of great importance to Washington residents.

Analysis of the NOVA Advisory Committee survey results, the Advisory Committee discussion Web site, and the Trails Town Hall public forum indicate that stakeholders have the following priorities.

Stakeholder Priorities

1. Protect the NOVA fund

Stakeholders consider it essential to protect the NOVA fund, especially in light of its reallocation by the state legislature in the recent past. They also noted that the NOVA fund originally consisted of 1% of the state fuel tax, but that recent gasoline tax increases have not included a corresponding NOVA fund increase. A recurring suggestion from stakeholders was to create an entity that could advocate on behalf of NOVA interests.

2. Make maintenance a funding priority for NOVA

An overwhelming majority of the NOVA Advisory Committee and public comments expressed that the top priority of NOVA funding should be maintenance of existing trails and facilities, instead of facilities acquisition, planning, development, education/information, or law enforcement. NOVA recreationists and professionals are concerned that trails and recreation facilities can become dangerous and could be closed due to deferred maintenance.

3. Address road closures that limit access

NOVA participants indicate that road closures by private landowners (timber companies in particular) have greatly reduced access to existing trails. Several ORV users suggested that, if they were provided access, they could effectively clear and maintain trails with volunteers. They suggest that NOVA funds to purchase public access through private lands could be an efficient expenditure for enhancing recreational opportunities.

4. Minimize user conflicts

While NOVA recreationists recognize that some amount of conflict may be inevitable, they felt that problems could be minimized through communication and cooperation between user groups. Recommendations included developing a leadership council or other organization that convenes

different user groups or, in a similar vein, group collaborations such as maintenance work parties by groups using the same trail system. People also suggested that clear and concise information about the source and intent of NOVA funding would help alleviate frustration among user groups who feel they are not getting their fair share of NOVA funds.

5. Encourage designs that minimize future maintenance

NOVA stakeholders would like to see the program encourage projects with designs that minimize the need for ongoing maintenance (e.g., choosing the best trail tread material). Similarly, they suggested that applicants for maintenance and operation projects state how their project's goals and objectives meet future maintenance needs and sustainability issues.

6. Ensure that NOVA funds augment, but do not replace, other funding

Respondents noted that NOVA allows grant recipients to achieve results that would not be possible without state funding, but that the program is not designed to replace other funding sources. They felt that the NOVA program should encourage sponsors to provide matching funds, although no consensus emerged about whether this should be a requirement. Respondents further observed that organizing and supporting user-group volunteers has proven to be an effective way to stretch limited NOVA funds; recreationists are often glad to provide time and labor to support their favorite activities.

7. Do not use NOVA funds to subsidize private ORV sports parks

NOVA stakeholders held differing opinions, generally drawn along user group lines, as to how much NOVA funding should contribute to the development of ORV sports parks. Proponents claim that ORV recreationists contribute to the NOVA fund and should have ORV sports parks to go to; they noted that ORV sports parks also help alleviate user conflict on overcrowded trails and facilities. Consensus emerged that NOVA should not subsidize the profits of private ORV sports park operators.

8. Encourage trail reconstruction that corrects environmental problems

Respondents observed that trail reconstruction can be less expensive than new construction, and that it often presents opportunities to employ current standards and correct environmental problems. They felt that project sponsors should try to retain trail difficulty and user experiences and minimize user displacement, but that reconstruction should be emphasized as a sustainable and desirable option.

9. Ensure that the NOVA Advisory Committee represents all user groups

The NOVA Advisory Committee should consist of nonmotorized and ORV recreationists, as well as local, state, and federal agency representatives, to represent the views and needs of users, organizations, and agencies that are affected by NOVA funding. To date it is generally believed that the committee is functioning as intended.

Recommendations for RCO Actions:

RCO staff studied the findings and conclusions that Responsive Management produced from its research, and made the following recommendations to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board for action items that could be implemented by RCO.

1. Review the goals for the NOVA Program and the Recreational Trails Program to determine whether the programs are complementing each other.

The board should review the program's grant award results to determine whether changes need to be made to the allocation of funds based on the NOVA plan key findings and stakeholder feedback. For example, NOVA and RTP funds are increasingly awarded for maintenance and operation projects, so less funding is awarded for development and acquisition projects. The board should review whether this pattern of funding is consistent with the goals of the program.

2. Review NOVA program priorities (Policy A-1 and C-10) for acquisition, development, and maintenance and operation type projects.

The board should review the policies that state that NOVA funds shall not augment or replace other funds, and that operating and capital projects will compete directly for funding. In conjunction with recommendation #1, the board should review whether the increased funding of maintenance projects would be consistent with the policies that restrict NOVA funds from being used to replace other funds.

3. Review NOVA program policy (Policy C-2) that encourages projects near population centers.

RCW 79A.25.250 requires the board to place a high priority on parks that are near urban populations. Stakeholder feedback, however, placed less of a priority on funding NOVA projects near population centers. The board should review whether the current criterion for meeting the law can be modified to address stakeholder feedback or whether the board should seek a modification to the population proximity statute. The current criterion has a maximum score of two points.

4. Prioritize NOVA Program funding for projects that are designated as statewide trails per RCW 79A.35.

The recommendations in the Washington State Trails Plan call for the board to develop a method for designating a system of state recreation trails. If a system of state recreation trails is established, the NOVA program could place a priority on funding those state recreation trails that are eligible for funding in the NOVA program.

5. Prioritize program funding for projects that incorporate sustainable design practices to protect and improve the environment and reduce trail maintenance needs.

The board should incorporate its sustainability policy recommendations into the NOVA program priorities and adjust the evaluation criteria. This action is already proposed (see Item 11).

6. Retain all other policies in the NOVA Program as currently written.

RCO staff finds all other NOVA program policies to be consistent with the research findings and stakeholder input for the NOVA 2013-2018 plan.