



GOVERNOR'S BLUE RIBBON PARKS & OUTDOOR RECREATION TASK FORCE | **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

October 2014

***"We want our children to
experience, enjoy, learn about,
and become lifetime stewards
of Washington's magnificent
natural resources."***

- Governor Jay Inslee

Acknowledgements

The following is an executive summary of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation final report submitted to Governor Inslee on September 19, 2014. The final report and appendix are available on the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Web site:
www.rco.wa.gov/boards/TaskForce.shtml

Prepared on behalf of Task Force members by:

Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office
1111 Washington Street SE
Olympia, WA 98501
(360) 902-3000
www.rco.wa.gov

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Steven Seiller.

Task Force Voting Members

Barb Chamberlain	Task Force co-chair and Executive Director, Washington Bikes
Doug Walker	Task Force co-chair and Chair, The Wilderness Society
Marc Berejka	Director Government and Community Affairs, REI
Joshua Brandon	Military Organizer, Sierra Club Outdoors
Russ Cahill	Retired WA and CA State Parks Manager
Dale Denney	Owner, Bearpaw Outfitters
Patty Graf-Hoke	CEO, Visit Kitsap Peninsula
George Harris	Executive Director, Northwest Marine Trade Association
Connor Inslee	COO and Program Director, Outdoors for All
John Keates	Director, Mason County Facilities, Parks and Trails Department
Ben Klasky	CEO, IslandWood
Noah McCord	Leader, WDFW Youth Council
Dan Nordstrom	CEO, Outdoor Research
Spencer Olson	Communications Hub Director, Fuse Washington
Tom Reeve	National Leadership Council Chair, The Trust for Public Land
Shiloh Schauer	Executive Director, Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce
Louise Stanton-Masten	Executive Director, Washington Tourism Alliance

Task Force Non-Voting Members

Allyson Brooks	Director, Archaeology and Historic Preservation
Honorable Vincent Buys	State Representative
Jim Cahill	Senior Budget Analyst, Office of Financial Management
Kaleen Cottingham	Director, Recreation and Conservation Office
Nick Demerice	External Affairs Director, Department of Commerce
Brock Milliern	Recreation Manager, Department of Natural Resources
Honorable Linda Parlette	State Senator
Honorable Kevin Ranker	State Senator
Rodger Schmitt	Commissioner, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
Joe Stohr	Deputy Director, Department of Fish and Wildlife
Honorable Steve Tharinger	State Representative
Rebecca Wallace	Program Supervisor, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

Task Force Subcommittee Leads

Marc Berejka	Economic Development
Jim Cahill	Meet Future Recreation Needs
Ben Klasky	Get More People Outdoors
Doug Levy	State Role in Providing Outdoor Recreation

Staff and Consultant Partners

JT Austin	Policy advisor to the Governor
Kathleen Barkis	Project support, Recreation and Conservation Office
Leslie Connelly	Project support, Recreation and Conservation Office
Kaleen Cottingham	Director, Recreation and Conservation Office
Jim Fox	Task force lead, Recreation and Conservation Office
Leslie Frank	Project support, Recreation and Conservation Office
Paul Horton	Outreach consultant, The Athena Group
Chuck Lennox	Facilitator, Cascade Interpretive Consulting
Steve Miller	Outreach consultant, MindMixer
Meg O'Leary	Policy administrator, Recreation and Conservation Office
Galen Radtke	Project support, The Athena Group
Justine Sharp	Project support, Recreation and Conservation Office
Nona Snell	Policy director, Recreation and Conservation Office
Susan Zemek	Communications manager, Recreation and Conservation Office



Photo courtesy of Donna Souter

Why focus on outdoor recreation?

We stand poised at a critical moment in time. We can, and must act now to ensure the stewardship of our parks and public lands, to inspire our children to live a life grounded in recreation in the great outdoors, and to nurture a vital and growing business sector. This was the premise when Governor Jay Inslee signed the visionary executive order in February 2014 creating the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation. Over the course of 6 months, the 17 task force members journeyed around the state, listened to hundreds of people who took time out of their busy lives to show up and speak, and read thousands of comments submitted via e-mail and through an online town hall.

What we heard universally confirmed the importance of acting now before the very qualities that make Washington the great state we love are lost. Everything we stand to gain from bold, transformational initiatives is also everything we stand to lose if we do not demonstrate leadership and a commitment to:

Healthier people – Experiencing and recreating in the outdoors contributes to both mental and physical health for everyone from our children to returning veterans and aging Baby Boomers.

Stronger communities – Communities that invest in parks, trails, and other outdoor spaces offer the quality of life that helps every resident thrive, and gives them a competitive edge in the quest for business creation, recruitment, and retention.

A thriving economy – An entire business spectrum rests on the quality of our parks, public lands, and recreational opportunities. Outdoor recreation creates jobs, and is a star attraction for recruitment of new businesses and a talented workforce. The economic contribution to Washington from outdoor recreation is significant, estimated at \$22.5 billion annually by the Outdoor Industry Association. Travel for recreation boosts the economy of gateway communities through the purchase of gas, food, accommodations, outfitting, and other services. Washington residents essentially receive a “second paycheck” in the form of our unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities.



Photo courtesy of Russ Carmack

Priority Action Areas

To increase the participation in outdoor recreation and the resulting social and economic benefits, the task force identified five priority action areas: (1) grow the outdoor recreation economy; (2) lead the way to outdoor recreation; (3) inspire an outdoor recreation culture; (4) open more outdoor recreation opportunities; and (5) sustain our outdoor recreation assets. Within those action areas, members proposed 12 high priority, near-term actions: the first 6 outline what we need to accomplish and the final 6 recommend how to fund it. Task force members stand ready to assist Governor Inslee with implementation of the recommendations in their final report. The time is now to move forward and build on the work already accomplished through the executive order.

Priority Near-Term Actions: What We Need to Accomplish

1. Designate outdoor recreation as a specific industry and create a sector lead
2. Establish an outdoor recreation coordinating council
3. Reinvest in No Child Left Inside Program
4. Incorporate outdoor recreation into elementary through high school core curriculum
5. Diversify appointees to outdoor recreation state boards and commissions
6. Enact the marine tourism legislation

Priority Near-Term Actions: How We Fund It

7. Retain the Discover Pass until a long-term, dedicated funding source can replace Discover Pass revenues
8. Establish annual motor home and travel trailer excise tax, bottled water sales tax, and watercraft excise tax
9. Fund the Youth Athletic Facilities grant program
10. Allow continued use of the real estate excise tax for local park operations by repealing sunset clause (December 31, 2016)
11. Fund and protect current outdoor recreation grant programs
12. Remove 23-cent cap on gas tax attributed to off-road recreation



Photo courtesy of YMCA

Proposed Recommendations for the Future

Grow the Outdoor Recreation Economy

The task force's subcommittee on economic development conducted extensive outreach among business interests and user groups across the state. Those conversations yielded a range of more detailed and sometimes longer-term objectives. For instance, an intensified focus on growing the outdoor recreation economy would include:

- Provide assistance to smaller towns in planning, designing, building, and marketing outdoor recreation opportunities in their area, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations when appropriate.
- Continue to educate public officials that recreation can be a key contributor to the economic well-being of Washington and generates important benefits for public, community, and environmental health.
- Increase and better coordinate the promotion of Washington's many, diverse recreation opportunities to attract more travelers from overseas, across the nation, and within Washington, and to show that our amazing quality of life is a great reason to build businesses and families here. Utah offers a good example.

Lead the Way to Outdoor Recreation

The task force finds a huge need for communication and coordination across local, state, federal, tribal, and nongovernmental providers of outdoor recreation lands, facilities, and programs. In addition, there is a need to collaborate with public health and healthcare providers to promote outdoor recreation as a way to improve health and reduce medical costs, and with educators involved in physical and outdoor education.



Photo courtesy of Steven Seiller

Inspire and Outdoor Recreation Culture

- Ensure integration of outdoor recreation into physical education programs in Washington schools, providing teachers with resources to connect an outdoor curriculum to the state-mandated Common Core learning standards. Evaluate and address the extent to which school districts are waiving the state-mandated health curriculum.
- Establish, market, and promote events for youth—with a particular focus on diverse audiences, minority populations, and ethnic groups—in partnership with State Parks, schools, local parks agencies, and nongovernmental program providers.
- Increase promotion of programs such as Fish Washington, which help retain and enhance fishing and hunting opportunities.
- Offer start-up matching or challenge grants for establishing youth outdoor recreation programs or events statewide, with the goal of getting more kids outside and getting more kids exposed, perhaps for the first time, to the joys of recreating outside.

Open More Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

The task force noted a number of barriers to accessing outdoor recreation opportunities, on both public and private land that should be addressed in the future:

- Lack of easily accessible information
- Fees, passes, and tax policy
- Permit requirements
- Closures of private land and some public land
- Government planning

Sustain Our Outdoor Recreation Assets

- The Legislature should provide stable, long-term funding for Washington's state parks and other state recreation lands, facilities and programs, recognizing that they provide essential public services and should be supported primarily by General Fund revenues, with user fees supporting services that are primarily of benefit to the user.
- Promote expanded use of metropolitan parks districts to provide an additional funding source for local, regional, and state park systems.
- Enhance concession and lease revenues on State Parks.
- Expand recognition of donor and sponsorship programs for operation and maintenance at State Parks to other state lands consistent with Chapter 86, Laws 2014.