

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION FUNDING BOARD SUMMARY MINUTES

Date: January 28, 2025

Place: Retreat – Conference Room, 415 Capitol Way North, Olympia, Washington, 98501

Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Members:

| | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------------------------|--|
| Michael Shiosaki, Chair | Seattle | Bob Bugert | Leavenworth |
| Shiloh Burgess | Wenatchee | Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn | Designee, Department of Natural Resources |
| Trang Lam | Camas | Amy Windrope | Designee, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife |
| Kitty Craig | Seattle | Peter Herzog | Designee, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission |

This summary is to be used with the materials provided in advance of the meeting. The Recreation and Conservation Office retains a recording as the formal record of the meeting.

Call to Order:

Chair Michael Shiosaki called the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. **Julia McNamara**, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) board liaison, performed roll call, determining quorum.

Members Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn and Shiloh Burgess were absent at the time of the roll call but joined later.

Motion: Move to Approve **January 28 and 29, 2025**, Agenda

Moved By: Member **Kitty Craig**

Seconded by: Member **Peter Herzog**

Decision: **Approved**

Items 1 – 4: Equity Training

Dr. Christine Moses and **Liberty Gonzalez** from Buffalo Cloud Consulting presented the board with the objectives of the equity training which included building an understanding of historic and present-day injustices in outdoor equity and greenspace access; exploring examples of emerging funding and design models that promote equitable community engagement and resource allocation; analyzing case studies and

discussing equitable decision making processes; and identifying potential strategies to further advance equity within the board's role and organizational mission.

Director Megan Duffy summarized the internal and external guidance that informs RCO's equity efforts as provided in executive orders; Revised Codes of Washington; the State Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Plan; the board's strategic plan; state human resource directives; the operating budget; board resolutions; and the Prevention Institute Report's key findings and high-level recommendations.

Brock Milliern, policy and legislative director, shared equity driven efforts and actions that are underway at RCO, including updating relevant internal policies; contracting efforts and training; Department of Enterprise Services training; hiring a tribal liaison; hiring an equity coordinator; RCO's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee; and Office of Equity work including Pro-Equity Anti-Racism efforts and use of their equity report. Externally, RCO has focused on equitable grant making through evaluation criteria changes, providing training and technical support, changes to administrative processes, providing better outreach and communication, addressing conflict of interest with advisory committees, and the Planning for Recreation Access grant program.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn joined at 10:21 a.m.

Members of the board suggested sharing this equity work externally and noted that progress monitoring should be considered long-term and generationally.

BREAK: 10:28 A.M. – 10:40 A.M.

Members were led by Buffalo Cloud in a discussion about what equity means to the board and explored the differences in how equity is represented between National Recreation and Park Association and the Prevention Institute's frameworks.

Member Windrope left the meeting at 11:53 a.m. Member Burgess joined the meeting at 12:01 p.m.

LUNCH: 12:09 P.M. – 1:02 P.M.

Members participated in a breakout group exercise, analyzing case studies focused on addressing heat inequities through small-scale investments by providing shade sheds in low-income neighborhoods, creating spaces that accommodate children of all abilities with inclusive playgrounds, and models for engaging marginalized communities in project planning through equitable community engagement. Members worked in small groups to answer questions about one of the case studies and presented their conclusions to the full group for discussion.

Members shared what resonated for them from the training. This included appreciating the functionality of the board and staff; the case study exercise; sentiments of equity work being a long-term, incremental process and the importance of celebrating small victories; seeing how far the agency has come and continues work toward progress; and the importance of staff and the board maintaining a growth mindset.

Member Windrope returned to the meeting at 1:51 p.m.

The board would like to review an ongoing table of progress and spend half a day on equity work each year and suggested visiting projects focused on equity during the board tour, looking at projects that showcase climate resilience, and highlighting how projects make a difference in communities.

BREAK: 2:08 P.M. – 2:22 P.M.

Item 5: Assessment of Recent Changes

Member Herzog was absent after the break and returned at 2:56 p.m.

Policy specialists **Leah Dobey** and **Ben Donatelle** discussed recent changes to further equitable grant making related to evaluation criteria, advisory committees, administrative processes, outreach and communications, Planning for Recreation Access grants, and training and technical support with a focus on the evaluation criteria and planning grants.

Criteria changes were made to six programs/subgrants: [Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account](#), [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#), [Youth Athletic Facilities](#), and [Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program – Local Parks, Trails, and Water Access](#) categories. The changes were made to project introduction, need, scope, design, and project engagement, and helped reduce overlap and duplicity, making it easier for applicants to follow the criteria. The board approved these changes at the December 2023 meeting, allowing the changes to be applied in the 2024 grant round.

Since adopting these changes, staff provided outreach and education using support materials, webinars, and public presentations. Once applications were submitted, staff looked at the location of all projects to ensure the data projects were evaluated against was correct, checked in with applicants, and verified correct scores.

Member Windrope left the meeting at 2:37 p.m.

Ms. Dobey explained the criteria change impacts after one grant cycle. Staff sent surveys to applicants and evaluators. The applicant survey had a 36 percent response rate, up

from 25 percent in 2022, while the evaluator survey had a response rate of 46 percent, down from 63 percent in 2022.

In the Project Need criterion, some applicants provided feedback that indicated the method of using greenspace, social vulnerability, and health outcomes does not account for regional importance or proximity to vulnerable census tracts, nor do these measures always reflect the community; however, 30 percent of applicants felt that RCO used the right data for those data scored-criteria and 31 percent felt that the criteria were weighted appropriately. Additional feedback suggests the evaluation questions are asking for the right information; evaluators know how to fairly and effectively score responses; new evaluators liked the split criteria, although experienced evaluators were less keen; more guidance would be helpful for some applicants and evaluators, especially for high-point value criteria; some overlap remains between Scope and Design; for some projects in earlier stages, responding to and using certain criteria was somewhat difficult; and there are too many criteria.

Staff are early in this process and looking at where more guidance can be provided to applicants and evaluators.

Mr. Donatelle gave an overview of the [Planning for Recreation Access](#) grants, which provided funding for planning and technical assistance to communities that lacked access to the outdoors and provided assistance to less experienced applicants.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn left the meeting at 3:18 p.m.

The grant program funded seventeen comprehensive plans and thirty-seven master, feasibility or site plans for a total of fifty-four projects. To date, eighteen projects have been completed. Seven of the funded Planning for Recreation Access projects resulted in eleven applications in the spring grant round. One Planning for Recreation Access project ranked number one in both the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Local Parks category and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Seven Planning for Recreation Access projects ranked in the bottom 50 percent of the programs they applied to.

Staff will look at new applicants and compare rate-of-success to other applicants, continue to listen to feedback from evaluators and applicants to adapt approach, and continue looking at these criteria over the next year as part of the Policy Work Plan. Staff plan to look at technical assistance and what can be done with the existing capacity and will reflect on Planning for Recreation Access and implementing the Community Engagement Plan, which should be completed in June. There was a recommendation in

the equity review to look at Americans with Disabilities Act projects and making a standalone grant program for upgrades.

Item 6: 2025-2027 Policy Work Plan

This item was presented on day two of the meeting following Item 15: Annual Compliance Report.

Brock Milliern provided an update on the policy work plan that has been underway since December 2023.

The policy team has been working on:

- Developing a Community Outreach Plan
- Addressing urban clusters as presented in Item 11: Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Urban Wildlife Category
- Updating [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#) as presented in Item 14: Acquisition
- A farmland review as presented in Item 9: Farm and Forest Account Policy Changes
- Lower Snake River Dam Recreation Study – RCO’s participation should end in June and the United States Army Corps of Engineers should complete the study by the end of 2025
- An Economic Study update as presented in Item 8: Director’s Report – Economic Update
- Objective criteria assessment as part of the equity review as presented in Item 5: Assessment of Recent Changes
- Updating the trails database – with the first policy intern, Nick Reinhart
- Modernizing the board minutes
- Electric vehicle charging stations – assessing whether sponsors can install charging stations on project sites or use funds to do so

Member Windrope noted the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife uses a time stamped recording of the meeting paired with the written minutes, so the written minutes are shorter. Mr. Milliern noted this is part of RCO’s modernized minutes concept.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn asked if the road usage charge is included in the work plan. Mr. Milliern answered it will be a large part of the work done over the next year but was not included in the work plan.

Member Bugert noted the use of artificial intelligence for note taking has evolved to a point it could be useful. Mr. Milliern noted that RCO may use artificial intelligence to catalogue policy topics.

Although staff are wrapping up 2023-2025 biennium projects, a non-comprehensive plan has been created for the 2025-2027 biennium. Projects can be added through conversations with the board, staff, Legislative direction, and conversations with sponsors. Additionally, the projects Mr. Milliern presented could be bumped if a higher priority arises. The 2027-2027 workplan includes:

- Review [Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program – Habitat Account](#) and [Aquatic Land Enhancement Account](#) for program compliance with the [Evergreen Communities Act](#)
- Updates to [Planning for Recreation Access](#)
- Look into increasing the limit on multi-site eligibility
- Review criteria in natural areas and critical habitat programs that were not included in the 2023 criteria changes
- Reviewing appraisal requirements
- Accessibility projects with the possibility of a standalone accessibility program
- Updates to the [Boating Facilities Program](#)
- The next phase of Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities program updates
- Review manuals
- Implement providing technical assistance as part of the equity review

Member Ohlson-Kiehn asked how the changes to the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities program worked out and how they are evaluated. Mr. Milliern noted there has only been one grant round done since the changes, so the impact may not be clear yet. This topic will be brought back to the board.

Ongoing efforts for the policy team include continued participation in the State-Tribal Recreation Impacts Initiative, reviewing entity's comprehensive plan eligibility, participating in the Outdoor Recreation Caucus, developing the budget, and continued Legislative engagement.

RECESS: 3:44 P.M.

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION FUNDING BOARD SUMMARY MINUTES

Date: January 29, 2025

Place: Hybrid – Room 172, Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA and online via Zoom

Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Members:

| | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------------------------|--|
| Michael Shiosaki, Chair | Seattle | Bob Bugert | Leavenworth |
| Shiloh Burgess | Wenatchee | Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn | Designee, Department of Natural Resources |
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| Kitty Craig | Seattle | Peter Herzog | Designee, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission |

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Call to Order:

Chair Michael Shiosaki called the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. **Julia McNamara**, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) board liaison, performed roll call, determining quorum. Members Shiloh Burgess and Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn were absent.

Chair Shiosaki recognized Myra Barker who will retire on January 31, after twenty-five years of service at RCO.

Member Burgess joined the meeting at 9:07 a.m.

Item 7: Consent Agenda

Chair Shiosaki noted the consent agenda includes the October 29-30 meeting minutes, three time-extensions, one waiver request, and recognizes four advisory committee members.

Motion: Move to Approve Resolution 2025-01

Moved By: Member **Peter Herzog**

Seconded by: Member **Bob Bugert**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 8: Director's Report

Director Megan Duffy emphasized Myra Barker's retirement and noted RCO is hiring a salmon grants section manager. Director Duffy and Brock Milliern met with the new recreation special assistant for Governor Ferguson, Joe Impeccoven. Mr. Milliern and Adam Cole will present to the Washington State Transportation Committee on February 19 regarding the gas tax and the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities program and how the gas tax impacts RCO.

RCO received direction from the Office of Financial Management to reduce the agency's operating budget by 6 percent. Additionally, federal direction from the Office of Management and Budget temporarily pauses some grants, loans, and other financial assistance programs. At this time there are not impacts to the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Recreational Trails Program, but there may be in the future.

Policy Update

Brock Milliern, policy and legislative director, noted that while Governor Inslee's budget and Governor Ferguson's priorities are both available, budget changes could happen until April when the House and Senate budgets are released. An updated revenue forecast is expected in mid to late March, with budget proposals from the House and Senate shortly after.

Mr. Milliern and Director Duffy meet regularly with legislators to discuss RCO programs and priorities and their impact on legislators' districts and state priorities.

The Outdoor Recreation Caucus, chaired by Senator Ron Muzzall and Representative Andrew Barkis, brings together state agencies, nonprofits, and legislators to discuss outdoor recreation related legislative issues during the legislative session. The caucus meets weekly throughout the session and looks at a variety of topics, for example the No Child Left Inside and Outdoor Learning Grants programs and the impact these programs have on the communities that received funding from them.

The Outdoor Recreation Caucus and RCO staff are following several bills through the legislative session. [House Bill 1148](#) exempts sales tax on goods and services purchased at youth athletic facilities run by nonprofits; [House Bill 1537](#) provides funding for the [Green Dot Road](#) system from the [Multi-use Roadway Safety Account](#); [Senate Bill 5234](#) increases the snowmobile registration fee from fifty dollars to seventy-five dollars; and [Senate Bill 5390](#) increases the cost of a Discover pass from thirty dollars to forty-five dollars. Mr. Milliern will provide the board with email updates every other week throughout the legislative session.

Member Burgess asked if RCO had any request legislation related to the board. Mr. Milliern answered no.

Economic Update

Leah Dobey, policy specialist, provided a brief update on the Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State. RCO received 2024 budget funds to update the report. Earth Economics, which did the other two iterations of the report, was hired. Earth Economics is using a new methodology, incorporating models that use mobile device data to estimate recreation visitation.

The 2025 update will include the total economic impact, economic impact of public and private land recreation use, out of state visitors, and ecosystem services.

Work began in the fall of 2024 and is scheduled to be completed in June.

Member Bugert asked if a COVID-19 pandemic analysis will be included in this update. Ms. Dobey noted the 2020 update provided brief commentary on the pandemic and this update will focus on 2024 data and compare it to 2020.

Member Lam asked how the cell phone data works with out-of-state numbers who are new residents to Washington State. Ms. Dobey explained the data works off pings to towers, not individual phone numbers. **Member Craig** asked if there was a dramatic increase in cell phone data compared to what was previously recorded. Ms. Dobey answered that Earth Economics has not shared information on cell phone data to date, but it is important to compare like-data when using a new methodology.

Recreation and Conservation Report

Marguerite Austin, Recreation and Conservation grants section manager, noted the addition of two new RCO staff, Hailee Taylor, grant services administrative assistant, and Mollie Lavelle, salmon grants section administrative assistant.

Ms. Austin highlighted the fall grant cycle which accepted applications from the [Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities](#), [Recreational Trails Program](#), [Firearms and Archery Range Recreation](#) program, and the [Boating Facilities Program](#). RCO finalized 169 applications, requesting a total of \$41.6 million, and anticipates \$30 million to fund these projects. Ranked lists will be presented to the board at the April meeting, and grants will be awarded in June. Applications for the [Boating Infrastructure Grant](#) program will be accepted beginning February 14.

Staff are soliciting proposals for the [Land and Water Conservation Fund – Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership](#) program and anticipate offering grants over the next four

or five years. This program focuses on underserved communities, primarily in urban areas. The program modified eligibility criteria to include Native American Tribes, which were included in the past; however, in this instance they do not have a population threshold. Applications for this program are due to RCO in March and the federal government in June and are evaluated by a national panel. An update on this program will be provided in June.

Member Bugert asked how much funding is available for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Ms. Austin noted that \$220 million was available nationwide last year; however, the National Park Service has not provided an amount for this year. Staff are moving forward, hoping for a sizeable amount as applicants can request up to \$15 million in this program.

Item 9: Farm and Forest Account Policy Changes

Nick Norton, policy specialist, provided an overview of the temporary local non-state, non-federal match waiver and temporary cost increase in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) – Farm and Forest Account, which includes both the [Farmland Preservation](#) and [Forestland Preservation](#) categories. These temporary policy changes applied only to the 2022 and 2024 grant rounds and can be found detailed in the [meeting materials](#).

Member Ohlson-Kiehn joined the meeting at 9:41 a.m.

Local Non-State, Non-Federal Match Waiver

Mr. Norton noted the 2022 rationale for the temporary non-state, non-federal match waiver partly resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic and a lack of grant round competition. Another rationale is that local public funding for farmland preservation is limited. In addition, nonprofits are the most frequent applicants and often don't have dedicated internal funds available for easement acquisition.

In 2022 and 2024, almost half of applicants took advantage of the temporary non-state, non-federal waiver, and the board recently waived this match requirement on two older projects. There was no obvious difference in the number of applications in either the farmland or forest categories, but the average funding request for farmland nearly doubled. While a permanent waiver of the non-state, non-federal match would still require applicants to bring 50 percent match in total, the waiver would reduce the burden to nonprofit organizations by allowing for state and federal funding to complete the match requirement. The waiver also supports project feasibility where non-state, non-federal match is limited. If the non-state, non-federal match waiver was made

permanent in the WWRP Farm and Forest Account, it would be the only category of WWRP where non-state, non-federal match is not required for nonprofits and local agencies.

Member Bugert asked if counties with a Conservation Futures Program have specifically earmarked funds for farm and forestland protection. Mr. Norton answered that Whatcom and Skagit Counties have specifically earmarked funding and in King County some Conservation Futures funding goes to farm and forestland.

Member Windrope left the meeting at 9:53 a.m.

Member Burgess asked if waiving the non-state, non-federal match could disincentivize communities from creating a Conservation Futures Program. Mr. Norton could not speak to that, noting there are a lot of other considerations that go into Conservation Futures. Member Burgess indicated that she was not comfortable with making the match waiver permanent.

Chair Shiosaki recognized making the match waiver permanent would change the consistency with other accounts, but what exists is not working.

Members Craig and Burgess asked for clarification on what match would be with the waiver. Mr. Norton explained if the 10 percent non-state, non-federal match requirement was eliminated, 50 percent match would still be required, but the source of the match would not matter.

Member Bugert agreed with there being benefits to maintaining the policy and waiving match when necessary and suggested developing policy language that clarified when a waiver would be necessary. Chair Shiosaki asked if there was a way to delegate authority to the director to apply the waiver. Mr. Norton noted that it is an option to consider.

Member Herzog supported delegating the waiver to the director.

Member Burgess suggested reducing the non-state, non-federal match requirement to 5 percent. She later suggested extending the current waiver for one more cycle to allow staff more time to provide a pathway forward.

Member Bugert expressed concern over creating a disincentive to apply, noting this is an undersubscribed account and there is great demand for farmland preservation, but it is challenging for applicants to use. Mr. Norton noted the feedback from applicants is to make the waiver permanent.

Members Lam and Craig commented on this being a different account than the other WWRP accounts, and the board may need to approach it through an equity lens, noting each program may need its own tools to be equitable.

Overall, members expressed a general willingness to look at alternate options rather than having the non-state, non-federal match waiver end.

Cost Increases

Mr. Norton explained the background of cost increases in the WWRP – Farm and Forest Account, which can be found in the [meeting materials](#). The temporary cost increase policy allows the director to approve a 10 percent cost increase, while requests above 10 percent must be approved by the board. This policy was modeled after other RCO acquisition programs and is limited to parcel-by-parcel appraised and reviewed value.

The rationale behind this temporary cost increase is that conservation easement values are difficult to estimate, and there is a history of remaining or unspent funds. The board approved three cost increases in 2020 and in the last two years the director has approved four cost increase requests. To date, there have been no cost increase requests in 2022 with this temporary policy in place.

Making the cost increase policy permanent aligns with other RCO programs and only approves cost increases if sufficient funds are available. Additionally, match is still required for cost increases, and this may reduce scope changes or projects that are withdrawn. Conversely, this could possibly result in fewer projects receiving funding overall. In addition, it would be different than cost increase policies for other WWRP accounts, where cost increases would only be available during exceptional economic times by declaration of the board.

Mr. Norton has received universal positive feedback from land trusts and counties to make the temporary cost increase policy permanent.

Members agreed this change is practical and easily accomplished.

General Public Comment

None.

BREAK: 10:22 A.M. – 10:38 A.M.

Item 10: Featured Projects

Allison Dellwo, senior outdoor grants manager, provided an overview of two featured projects from the City of Snoqualmie and the Port of Anacortes.

The Cap Sante Marina Recreational Vehicle Park ([RCO #20-1671](#)) was funded by the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account and Land and Water Conservation Fund. The project aimed to improve the existing recreational vehicle park by providing Americans with Disabilities Act accessible stalls, accessible paths, utility hookups, landscaping for privacy, and stormwater treatment. The Port of Anacortes applied for \$500,000 from the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account, \$600,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and brought \$1,221,971 in sponsor match for a project totaling \$22,311,971.

Public Comment

Brett Greenwood, executive director for Port of Anacortes, emphasized that the Cap Sante Marina Recreational Vehicle Park project created access to local parks, marine terminals, waterfront, and trail system and highlighted how the Americans with Disabilities Act compliant sidewalk allows access down to the esplanade.

Ms. Dellwo provided an overview of the Centennial Fields All-Inclusive Playground ([RCO #20-1739](#)), which was funded by the WWRP – Local Parks category. This community-led project resulted in an inclusive playground facility to serve the Snoqualmie Valley and eastern King County. The City of Snoqualmie applied for \$475,000 in funding and brought \$495,400 in match for a project totaling \$970,400.

Item 11: Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Urban Wildlife Category

This item was presented after Item 16: State Agency Partner Reports.

Julia McNamara, board liaison, acting in a policy developmental capacity, provided an overview of urban clusters as used in project eligibility in the WWRP – Urban Wildlife Habitat category, outlined in the [meeting materials](#).

In 2018, the board directed staff, through the [Unifying Strategy](#), to assess whether the Urban Wildlife Habitat category was meeting statutory intent and was interested in how to serve communities interested in nature-based activities, improving equitable funds, and getting youth outside. A policy work group was created and recommended broader eligibility requirements to more effectively preserve habitat in rapidly urbanizing areas. Location eligibility criteria were expanded to include the United States Census Bureau's definition of "urban clusters" or a location that has a population of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000. The board recognized the value of the location eligibility criteria and in 2019 added "within five miles of a designated urban cluster with a population of 5,000 or more" to [Manual 10b: WWRP Habitat Conservation Account](#). The board chose a minimum population of 5,000 to align with other board programs that address urban habitat based on [Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.250](#).

In 2020, the Census Bureau simplified “urban areas” under a single category and now defines them by a minimum population threshold of 5,000 or 2,000 housing units, eliminating the term “urban clusters.” The board can update the language in the category and criterion while continuing to include communities that became eligible through the 2019 update. While the Urban Wildlife Habitat category already uses a population threshold of 5,000, the program does not use housing units as a criterion for location eligibility.

Ms. McNamara proposed two solutions:

- Option 1: Update “urban cluster” to “urban areas”, excluding housing units – keeps current parameters the same. (Uses only part of the Census Bureau’s updated language)
- Option 2: Update “urban cluster” to “urban areas,” including housing units – housing units have not been used by the board in the past. By using it, there will be less variability within program eligibility as the number of units does not change as frequently as population levels, such as in areas that are popular for seasonal stays. (Uses Census Bureau’s full updated Urban Area definition)

By expanding the criterion, eligibility will expand to include at least four additional communities: Cle Elum, Long Beach, Union/Tahuya/Belfair, and Friday Harbor.

Ben Donatelle, policy specialist, explained the anomaly of the community of White Salmon, Washington, which qualifies as an urban area according to the US Census Bureau because of its proximity to the Hood River, Oregon metropolitan area. Functionally, these two cities act as a cohesive community, but White Salmon itself would not qualify under the population or housing unit thresholds. This is currently the only anomaly in the state with cross border interaction.

Mr. Donatelle shared an [interactive map](#) that illustrates how the current criteria compare to the updated Census Bureau criteria.

Chair Shiosaki asked who has access to the housing unit information and how difficult is it to access? Ms. McNamara explained the interactive map is available to applicants and includes housing unit buffers.

Member Bugert asked if this was a popular category within WWRP. **Marguerite Austin** answered that it is not more popular than other categories. Mr. Donatelle noted that the 2019 program review noticed a decline in local jurisdictions applying. Implementing this policy expanded eligibility to urbanizing communities that were previously not able to apply.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn shared the Department of Natural Resources is protecting natural areas and urbanization is a real threat and management activities become more complex in areas with urbanization. Adopting a definition that broadens eligibility would help the department protect areas that are at risk of development and natural areas with protected and rare species. Mr. Donatelle added the 2019 policy change encouraged human-nature interaction, and these projects provide a place close to population centers where people can be with nature and interact with heritage sites.

The board agreed that broadening the eligibility would cast a wider net of applicants and get ahead of urbanizing areas. Additionally, the board supported including housing units in the criteria if applicants have tools available to determine eligibility.

Based on board feedback, Ms. McNamara will draft recommended policy language, solicit public comment, and return to the board in April for approval.

LUNCH: 11:45 A.M. – 12:47 P.M.

Item 12: Policy Waiver Request: Pre-agreement Cost for California Creek Estuary Park, 18-1045

Member Windrope rejoined the meeting during the lunch break. Member Craig was absent after lunch.

Rachelle Lim, outdoor grants manager, presented a policy waiver request for a pre-agreement cost for the California Creek Estuary Park ([RCO #18-1945](#)) located in northwest Whatcom County. In 2019, the Blaine-Birch Bay Park and Recreation District was awarded \$458,000 from the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account and \$366,400 from the WWRP – Water Access category to acquire two properties and develop a parking lot. Since then, the parking lot element was moved to phase two, a separate acquisition and development project that has also been funded with Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account and WWRP – Water Access funding. The policy waiver request applies to the property at 4677 Drayton Harbor Road and the details of the request are in the [meeting materials](#).

Member Craig rejoined at 12:52 p.m.

To keep the property from being privately developed, the Whatcom Land Trust secured the property for \$350,000 in December 2018, but did not have funds to keep the property long term. In March 2019, prior to receiving the grant, the district and land trust signed a letter of intent, partnering on the acquisition and the district paid the Land Trust \$50,000 towards the purchase of the land. This was a refundable, earnest payment should the district not be awarded a grant or otherwise raise funding to buy

the entire property. The grant was subsequently awarded, and the district has since purchased the property. The district has been reimbursed all but the \$50,000 initial contribution to the land trust due to a conflict with the existing policy. [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#) states that pre-agreement costs are limited to administration costs and limited incidental costs. Land costs are not eligible as pre-agreement costs unless under a Waiver of Retroactivity; however, the property was purchased without this waiver.

The district is requesting a policy waiver to allow the district's \$50,000 contribution to be considered an eligible pre-agreement cost so that the district may be fully reimbursed for the cost of the land. Staff recommend approving the waiver request.

Motion: Move to Approve **Resolution 2025-02**

Moved By: Member **Shiloh Burgess**

Seconded by: Member **Trang Lam**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 13: Eligibility for Acquisition: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Sol Duc River Access, 22-1734

Marguerite Austin, Recreation and Conservation grants section manager, provided an overview of the Sol Duc River Access on behalf of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, who requested the policy prohibiting acquisition of land already managed for public outdoor recreation to be waived for this project. In 1966, the board awarded the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife a Boating Facilities Program grant, bond funds, and Land and Water Conservation Funds to purchase an access site on the Sol Duc River. The one-acre Whitcomb-Diimmel Road water access site was purchased for recreationists to launch and retrieve vessels; however, in 2021 and 2022, winter flood and storm damage destroyed access to the boat launch.

Following the storm damage, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife learned the property owners across the river were preparing to sell and the department negotiated a lease to ensure safe water access for the public while they worked to secure funds to buy the property for permanent public water access. In the 2023-2025 biennium, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife was awarded a WWRP - Water Access category grant to purchase the Sol Duc River Access ([RCO #22-1734](#)) just across the river from the Whitcomb-Diimmel Road water access site. The proposed acquisition has more than a half mile of waterfront, a natural boat launch providing water access to the Sol Duc River, and a partially cleared area previously used for camping.

The existing Manual 3: Acquisition Projects states that property already under public ownership or management is not eligible for RCO grant funding unless the following conditions are satisfied:

- 1) State law requires that the agency selling the land must receive compensation, and
- 2) The land was not originally acquired by the selling agency for... recreation use (for outdoor recreation proposals), and
- 3) The land has never been publicly managed for... recreation.

The proposed site does not meet condition three because the property was previously managed for public outdoor recreation.

Staff recommend waiving item three of the policy and approving the purchase of the Sol Duc River Access site as eligible for grant funding.

Travis Weller, grants manager at Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, noted that the department worked in the public's best interest to secure safe water access.

Noting that the historic funding for the Witcomb-Diimmel Road Access was provided through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, **Member Craig** asked if there were any compliance issues. Ms. Austin answered plans for continued use of the site meet eligibility and compliance requirements for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Motion: Move to Approve **Resolution 2025-03**

Moved By: Member **Amy Windrope**

Seconded by: Member **Bob Bugert**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 14: Acquisition

Nick Norton gave an overview of three potential policy changes to [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#).

Existing Public Property

Current policy prohibits acquiring established outdoor recreation areas developed under ownership or management of a public agency unless: state law requires compensation, the property was not originally acquired for recreation or conservation, and the property has never been managed for recreation or conservation.

The board has waived this policy three times within the last year, most recently during this meeting in Item 13. Mr. Norton presented options for changing this policy:

- Option 1: No change.
- Option 2: Delegate authority to the director.
- Option 3: Remove the management consideration.

Option 3 accommodates projects where there is no immediate threat but establishes site control and allows the managing agency to develop or protect the property more than if they were leasing. This option also allows securing a property during a land transfer for perpetual protection. This change, however, could allow sponsors to propose acquisition of property that is not new at the time of the request and would transition from thinking about quantity to quality.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn noted situations where the Department of Natural Resources is the underlying landowner, and the lessee is a smaller jurisdiction. Member Ohlson-Kiehn asked if there is an equity issue when a larger jurisdiction owns the land and the smaller jurisdiction cannot afford to purchase the land so leases it and then later, when the land becomes available for sale, the smaller jurisdiction is unable to purchase. Mr. Norton noted this is a great example and type of project that Option 3 would make possible.

Members Burgess, Bugert, and Herzog supported Option 3.

Combination Projects

Since 2000, the policy regarding combination projects requires the acquisition component to be closed or executed within ninety days of the board funding meeting. The Salmon Recovery Funding Board allows eighteen months for the acquisition component of a combination project to be closed or executed.

Sponsors tend to struggle to meet the ninety-day requirement and due diligence steps like appraisals are taking longer than previously, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared with salmon-related acquisitions, many recreation projects do not meet the ninety-day window, use waivers more frequently, and close acquisitions quicker. Interestingly, combination projects last similar lengths of time in both salmon and recreation programs. Mr. Norton noted this indicates there is a low risk in extending the timeline for closing or executing projects.

The options for changing this policy include extending the timeline for closing to:

- Option 1: Nine months.
- Option 2: Twelve months.
- Option 3: Twelve months with director-approved extension.
- Option 4: Eighteen months.

Responding to **Member Burgess** on timing, **Marguerite Austin** explained that once the funding has been awarded, sponsors have ninety days to either purchase the property with a waiver of retroactivity or have an option agreement in place that they can execute within ninety days.

Member Lam asked if extending the timeline would reduce jurisdictions' need to request a waiver, and if this helps staff too. Ms. Austin answered yes to both. The original policy intent was to keep applicants from spending two or three years purchasing a property for development. This would only apply to combination projects and could reduce the number of scope changes (sponsors asking to remove the development because the acquisition took too long).

Most board members supported Option 4: eighteen months, Member Burgess supported Option 3: twelve months with director-approved extension.

Earnest Money

Earnest money and option payments are currently listed as ineligible acquisition costs. However, these payments provide surety, help meet RCO requirements and can be applied to the purchase price of the property at closing.

Staff recommend that earnest money and option payments be defined as an eligible pre-agreement incidental cost that only become eligible for reimbursement if they are applied to the reviewed, appraised value of the property at closing during the grant performance period. This recommendation would lower risks for sponsors and support best practices for project development. It also avoids conflicts with existing pre-agreement limitations on land costs and presents no additional risks to RCO, regardless of payment size.

Members of the board supported this staff recommendation.

Item 15: Annual Compliance Report

Myra Barker, compliance unit manager, summarized the annual compliance report. The goal of the compliance program is to ensure funded sites are managed for the intended purpose, use, and function; sites remain open for public access to outdoor recreation; and habitat properties are protected and restored for wildlife consistent with the program policy. The compliance team provides guidance and work with sponsors and staff on changes that impact the project area and identify how compliance issues can be resolved.

The compliance portfolio consists of 6,400 sites across the state, and acquisition, development or renovation, and restoration project types have a long-term obligation beginning when the project is completed. An overview of the report is provided in the [meeting materials](#). Most projects in the portfolio (73 percent) are funded by this board.

In 2024, staff used a grant from the National Park Service to work with the RCO data team and a contractor to design, develop, and implement automated compliance notifications. This is an ongoing effort to inform sponsors of the long-term obligations associated with their grants and will be used to notify sponsors of unresolved compliance issues and unapproved conversions.

Ms. Barker provided an overview and examples of approved 2024 requests of the allowable use policy, corrective action policy, and exception to conversion policy. Requests are reviewed by an internal compliance team who make recommendations to the director. The director approves or denies the request.

Compliance staff started 2024 with 303 compliance issues and eighty-seven were added throughout the year. Staff exceeded their goal and resolved fifty-seven issues, or 15 percent, in 2024. There are 390 compliance issues as of January 2025. Most unresolved issues are for conversions, followed by ineligible structures and no public access. Staff have an established inspection protocol that includes a full file review of all documents, aerial imagery, property records, and PRISM data before onsite inspections. In 2024, staff completed 373 inspections, meeting 93 percent of the goal. Eighty-four percent of inspections were found to be in compliance.

Member Burgess asked what drives lack of public access. Ms. Barker's opinion is that there is a lack of resources or change in the priorities of sponsors. Additionally, there has been a misunderstanding that there is no requirement to move toward development after acquisition.

Chris Popek, compliance specialist, and **Ashly Arambul**, Land and Water Conservation Fund compliance grants manager, highlighted compliance inspections with long-term obligations. These sites included Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Statewide Water Access originally funded in 1966 ([RCO #66-604](#)); Clark County's Salmon Creek Park and Greenway originally funded in 1976 ([RCO #79-023](#)); Washington Department of Natural Resources' Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve originally funded in 1976 ([RCO #76-704](#)); Washington State Parks' Ebey's Landing originally funded in 1978 ([RCO #78-509](#)); Town of Northport's Boat Launch and Park originally funded in 2008 ([RCO #08-1672](#)); City of Lacey's Rainier Vista Community Park originally

funded in 1991 ([RCO #91-115](#)); Clallam County's Quillayute River Park originally funded in 1999 ([RCO #99-1767](#)); and City of Milton's Triangle Park originally funded in 1967 ([RCO #67-048](#)).

Goals in 2025 include conducting 400 compliance inspections prioritizing acquisitions and Land and Water Conservation Fund projects, resolving 10 percent of compliance issues, completing two conversions, and compliance notifications to long-term obligations, unresolved conversions, and unresolved compliance issues.

Chair Shiosaki presented a resolution of recognition for Myra Barker's service to the citizens of Washington State.

BREAK: 2:15 PM – 2:25 PM

Item 16: State Agency Partner Reports

Members Ohlson-Kiehn and Herzog presented partner reports after Item 10: Featured Projects.

Department of Natural Resources

Member Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn provided an update on agency funding requests and agency programs. The Washington Department of Natural Resources is requesting \$637,000 to continue participating in the State-Tribal Recreation Impacts Initiative. This request was not funded in Governor Inslee's budget. The department requested \$8 million for the conservation corps to work on the department's recreational and natural lands; Governor Inslee's budget funds this at \$3 million. The department received lands maintenance backlog funding in Fiscal Year 2022, which carried forward into the 2023-2025 biennium at \$10 million and was reduced by 25 percent, which will reduce the level of service the department can provide for recreation maintenance.

Capital budget requests include \$7.7 million for Safe and Sustainable Recreation, which would fund forty-three projects statewide. Governor Islee's budget provides \$3 million. This reduction would result in fewer projects being funded. There is also a natural areas and facilities preservation and access request for \$5.7 million. This would fund thirty-nine projects. It was funded at \$2.9 million in Governor Inslee's budget.

The Natural Heritage Program is nearing completion of the 2025 State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan, which includes updated lists of state endangered, threatened, and sensitive species and ecosystems and a list of natural area representation priorities for rare species and ecosystems. The Natural Areas Program is in the final stages of completing management plans for five areas and includes work at Cattle Point, Camas

Meadows, Mima Mounds, Bald Hill, and Klickitat Canyon. The Conservation Acquisitions group has completed several acquisitions thanks to WWRP funding, including Lacamas Prairie, which has been in the works for over twenty years and completed the purchase of 622 acres. The Conservation Acquisition team has been in a staffing transition.

The department has completed several developmental WWRP and Recreational Trails Program projects including Middle Fork Snoqualmie River Access Development Phase One ([RCO #18-1456](#)), Tiger Mountain State Forest View Shelter and Trail Connections ([RCO #18-1733](#)), and Eagles Nest Vista ([RCO #20-2185](#)). Additionally, the department completed the [Statewide Outdoor Access and Recreation Process](#), a strategic plan providing a clear idea of what is possible on state land in the next ten years.

The department is in the process of implementing 2024 supplemental funding to develop a target shooting program on Department of Natural Resource lands and address lead contamination from shooting.

The Youth Education and Outreach Program connected more than 5,600 students through field trips, guest speaking, community events, and career fairs, supporting equitable access to department managed lands and exploration and preparation for natural resource sector jobs.

Member Craig asked about the strategic priorities in the Statewide Outdoor Access and Recreation Process. Member Ohlson-Kiehn shared the strategic plan following the meeting (linked above) and noted the priorities emphasize the need for responsible recreation on Department of Natural Resources managed lands.

Regarding the funding reductions, **Member Burgess** asked about the authority the department was given by Legislature to charge fees. Member Ohlson-Kiehn noted the statutory change gives the department the ability to recover costs for permits and not generate revenue, making it difficult to anticipate how that will provide funding relief.

Member Burgess asked how raising the cost of the Discover Pass could affect sales.

Member Herzog noted the request is to increase the Discover Pass fee from thirty to forty-five dollars for an annual pass and from ten to fifteen dollars for a day pass. There is a threshold above which the proportion changes between how money is distributed between state agencies, and this amount of increase will hasten reaching that threshold, keeping the distribution equal among agencies.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

Member Peter Herzog shared that in the operating budget State Parks requested \$24.7 million in new funding; Governor Inslee's budget included \$7.8 million. Most inflationary

costs increase and carry forward budget were funded in Governor Inslee's budget. Most priorities for new funding were at least partially funded in Governor Inslee's budget. This included funding for Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, Fort Worden campus management, the State-Tribal Recreation Impacts Initiative, resource adaptation and climate change funding through the Climate Commitment Act, infrastructure safety compliance, bridge and dam safety, and Cama Beach planning.

Funds earned through camping fees, Discover Pass, and Department of Licensing donations account for over 60 percent of State Parks' budget. Spending these funds requires spending authority from Legislature. Out of concern that earned revenue would not keep pace with spending authority, State Parks requested \$10 million in general funds to cover the potential shortfall. This request was not funded in Governor Inslee's budget.

In the capital budget, State Parks requested \$127 million and received \$74 million in Governor Inslee's budget. This funding is mostly for the preservation of existing facilities. State Parks received some funding for new development including ongoing development of Nisqually State Park and renovations and staff housing at Moran State Park.

[House Bill 1024](#) provides the State Parks and Recreation Commission authority to extend its lease of structures at Saint Edward State Park from 62 to 80 years. [Senate Bill 5234](#) will increase snowmobile registration fees from \$50 to \$75 and has received positive support from the snowmobile community.

State Parks was involved in a complaint to the federal Department of Justice concerning accessibility of facilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The complaint arose from an accident at Paradise Point State Park. State Parks entered into a settlement agreement with the Department of Justice which requires the agency to assess facilities constructed after the 1992 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, develop policy guidance for constructing and maintaining facilities in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act, train staff in Americans with Disabilities Act, and develop procedures for handling any Americans with Disabilities Act -related grievances by the public. State Parks has developed the policy guidance, and the facilities assessment is due in August 2025.

Member Craig noted several snow parks were closed this season and asked if the increase in snowmobile registration fees will fix the need to close parks. Member Herzog noted the 25 percent budget reduction led to the State Parks closing duplicative motorized snow parks to save money in snow removal. The intention was to keep

groomed trails open, but where there was redundant access to the same network, the motorized access was closed.

Chair Shiosaki asked about the funding for work at Cama Beach. Member Herzog did not have a timeline on planning but noted there will be a significant planning process for the shoreline and upland areas going forward.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Member Windrope provided an update after Item 6: 2025-2027 Policy Work Plan.

Member Amy Windrope highlighted the recently completed purchase on an estuary project funded at Twin Rivers Estuary in the North Olympic Wildlife Area that acquired 2,800 linear feet of Strait of Juan de Fuca shoreline. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife completed the list of [Lands 2020 projects](#), which were approved by their director to move to acquisitions.

Member Windrope highlighted two pieces of request legislation: to increase the fees by ten dollars to fifty-two dollars on personalized license plates, which is the primary source of funding for management of non-game wildlife; and modify fish and wildlife violations to address low-level violations.

The department was reviewed by the Ruckelshaus Center to address the effectiveness of the department and commission and compliance with State Environmental Policy Act laws. The [Organization Review Final Report](#) is available online.

Governor's Office

There was no representative available from the Governor's Office.

ADJOURN: 2:58 P.M.

The next regular meeting will be April 22-23, 2025, in Room 172, Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street, Olympia, Washington, 98501.

Approved by:



Michael Shiosaki, Chair