

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION FUNDING BOARD SUMMARY MINUTES

Date: April 22, 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
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 9:00 a.m. **Julia McNamara**, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) board liaison, performed roll call, determining quorum. **Member Peter Herzog** was excused for the first hour.

Motion: Move to Approve April 22, 2025, Agenda

Moved By: Member **Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn**

Seconded by: Member **Shiloh Burgess**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 1: Consent Agenda

Chair Shiosaki noted the consent agenda includes the January 28-29 meeting minutes and thirty-seven time extensions.

Marguerite Austin, Recreation and Conservation Grants Section manager, explained that the high number of time extensions is primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic causing a delay in supplies and permitting. The board can anticipate a similar list in June.

Motion: Move to Approve Resolution 2025-04

Moved By: Member **Bob Bugert**
Seconded by: Member **Trang Lam**
Decision: **Approved**

Item 2: Director's Report

Director Megan Duffy announced the retirement of administrative services manager, Leslie Frank at the end of May. RCO is recruiting for this position, an administrative assistant, and cultural resources unit manager.

RCO entered into nearly \$12 million in grant agreements for the Community Outdoor Athletic Facilities program to support youth and local athletics in underserved communities across the state. The compliance and PRISM teams have completed a PRISM-generated sponsor notification for long-term obligations for grant-funded properties and are referring to it as the Ted Willhite Module in honor of the past board chair.

Director Duffy noted the uncertainty within the United States Forest Service, which receives Nonhighway Off-road Vehicle Activities and Recreational Trails Program funds, on whether resources will be in place to implement projects. RCO staff have spoken with the Forest Service about options if resources are unavailable. Additionally, funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund – Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program is paused and under review at the National Park Service.

The Washington State Legislative Session should finish on April 27; however, there is uncertainty about whether session will end on time.

Legislative and Policy Update

Brock Milliern, Legislative and Policy director, noted the session's difficulty due to budgetary constraints, and discussed the possibility of a special session while noting that there is a technical incentive to end session before the next revenue forecast in mid-June. Mr. Milliern will provide an update on the operating budget once it is released.

Bills of interest to the board and RCO, include:

- [House Bill 2003](#) – A new endorsement for recreational salmon and steelhead fishing on the Columbia River. This bill did not meet cutoff dates but may be deemed necessary to implement the budget.
- [Senate Bill 5281](#) – Non-resident vessels entering Washington waters over 200 feet in length will have to pay a certain fee per foot. The bill directs RCO to develop a

grant program to support youth swim lessons in overburdened communities using the revenue of the fees. Known as the "World Cup Bill," the program will sunset in 2029.

- [Senate Bill 5300](#) and [House Bill 1024](#) – Concerning the leasing authority of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission at Saint Edwards State Park.
- [Senate Bill 5390](#) – Raises the annual Discover Pass fee from thirty dollars to forty-five dollars. This bill has broadened the conversation on how funding is divided among the three land-managing agencies. An active amendment will direct RCO to facilitate a conversation on funding recreation on state lands.
- [Senate Bill 5583](#) – Increasing recreational fishing and hunting license fees. This bill did not make the cutoff, but it could be necessary to implement the budget.

Member Windrope asked about the swimming lesson grant, noting some board funded projects have removed pools to install splash pads due to concerns that community members do not know how to swim. Mr. Milliern noted RCO will develop the grant program for underserved communities and emphasized how communities around the state lack access to aquatic centers and lessons in part because pools are expensive to install and maintain overtime.

Mr. Milliern shared that the Outdoor Recreation Caucus met for the final time on April 10. The caucus is a group made up of nonprofits, state agencies, and chaired by two legislators. They agreed to meet after the legislative session, later this year.

Chair Shiosaki asked what revenue was anticipated to come from the vessel permits and the increase in Discover Pass. Mr. Milliern was unsure of an estimate on the vessel permits but expected it to be substantial because of the fee amount. Regarding the discover pass increase, **Member Windrope** noted that her understanding is that there will be increased revenue, but it will be swapped for general state funds, so while the fees will be higher, services will not increase. Mr. Milliern noted this will be a challenge for the agencies and state land users because increased fees come with increased expectations.

Mr. Milliern noted there are several places in the budgets where dedicated accounts are being put into the general fund and highlighted a \$750,000 decrease in funding for the Nonhighway Off-road Vehicle Activity program in one of the budgets. There is a \$30 million reduction in salmon recovery account funding being proposed, which would impact the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, State Conservation Commission, and RCO. Lastly, cuts to the No Child Left Inside and Outdoor Learning Grant programs are proposed in the budgets. Mr. Milliern expects a couple of losses this legislative session, and RCO is working to minimize the impact.

Grant Management Update

Marguerite Austin, Recreation and Conservation Section manager, highlighted that Director Duffy approved two projects in the Community Forest Program that did not receive funding, but were back filled with Climate Commitment Act funding. Kim Sellers and Andrea Hood, outdoor grants managers, worked hard to issue these agreements and get the projects underway.

Staff have worked hard to raise awareness of the [Boating Infrastructure Grant program](#) with social media posts, information workshops at boating conferences, and answering questions from interested applicants. RCO expects to receive \$300,000 this year from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the program.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund team is working to submit applications for over \$25 million in grant funds from the federal Outdoor Legacy Partnership Program, which will be covered in Item 10.

Staff completed review of 168 applications submitted last fall and will present the ranked lists for the Boating Facilities Program, Firearms and Archery Range Recreation program, Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities program, and Recreational Trails Program in Items 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Grant Services Report

Marguerite Austin The cultural resource team consults on roughly 800 projects each biennium. In March, Sarah Johnson-Humphries, cultural resource unit manager, took a position at Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). RCO has hired Stephanie Jolivette to fill this position; she most recently worked at the Washington State Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation. Cultural resource staff are working on about 430 active consultations and reviewing and preparing 300 projects.

The compliance unit continues to work on fulfilling their inspection strategy for the year, while also working with sponsors and staff to resolve compliance issues. Staff have been working on exceptions to conversions, allowable uses, and obsolescence issues to address corrective actions.

Review and evaluation for the 2024-2025 grant cycle is nearing completion by the eighteen advisory committees with over 200 members. The advisory committees have provided more than 5,000 hours of support. All No Child Left Inside applications submitted this year have been reviewed and evaluated and are awaiting funding.

BREAK: 9:45 A.M. – 10:00 A.M.

Item 3: Farm and Forest Account Match

Nick Norton, Policy and Planning Specialist, provided a brief background on the match policy for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) – Farm and Forest Account. This account requires a 50 percent match by statute and the board requires 10 percent of the total project cost come from a local, non-state, non-federal source (local match). In the 2022 and 2024 grant rounds for the Farm and Forest Account, the board waived the local match requirement partly due to a historic lack of applications and difficulties resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the WWRP – Recreation and Habitat categories require local match. More background and details can be found in the [meeting materials](#).

Mr. Norton presented three local match options for board consideration:

- Waive – Permanently waive the 10 percent local match requirement in the Farm and Forest Account.
- Revert – Revert to 10 percent local match requirement in the Farm and Forest Account.
- Reduce – Reduce local match requirement to 5 percent in the Farm and Forest Account and give the director authority to waive additional local match required when a cost increase is requested.

Staff would like to put these options out for public comment. Mr. Norton explained the “reduce” option. is consistent with trends in previous grant rounds. For example, fifteen sponsors took advantage of the local match waiver and nine of those applicants still brought some amount of local match, just not the required ten percent.

Member Herzog returned at 10:09 a.m.

Member Bugert asked where those local funds came from for the nine applicants that still brought some local match. Mr. Norton recalls it was a combination of land value donation, local public funding like Conservation Futures, and staff time.

Members agreed these are good options to send out for public comment.

General Public Comment

None.

Item 4: Farmland Policy Changes

Nick Norton provided an overview of proposed changes to evaluation criteria and policies in the [WWRP – Farmland Preservation](#) category. Details on the proposed changes can be found in the [meeting materials](#).

Criteria

Mr. Norton highlighted the robust process staff completed to update criteria for board direction. Staff identified issues, developed an internal draft of changes, and received two rounds of feedback from eligible entities, staff, and partners. Specific proposed language changes are included in the [meeting materials](#).

Three criteria are proposed for removal from the evaluation: building envelope, stewardship practices, and points to entities who bring more than the required 50 percent match.

The proposed changes also include a combining and re-bucketing of criteria related to viability, threat, and benefits. The support criterion was reframed to develop a more holistic understanding of who is providing support. Easement duration criterion does not have any changes proposed. Additionally, staff added clarity about how combination projects would be scored. Although combination projects are not currently proposed for funding in the farmland program, staff wanted to ensure that people understood how they would be evaluated. Finally, staff assigned points to each criterion.

Mr. Norton noted the statute is somewhat prescriptive and the proposed changes are an attempt to be more thoughtful in how RCO can provide more consistent guidance between applicants and the advisory committee.

Other

Mr. Norton said there are other potential changes that staff would like to include in the public comment period including policies related to scope changes and impervious surfaces.

Other potential changes may be added as this process continues.

Chair Shiosaki asked how staff know who has not wanted to apply for this program and if there is a way to reach them. Mr. Norton noted the program has inherent limits on who is interested in applying from the start, and not many local agencies apply. The ones that do apply have dedicated Conservation Future Funding. In gathering feedback, staff tried to capture everyone who may be interested.

Member Bugert felt comfortable with the process behind these proposed changes and asked if there were opportunities to link these projects with Salmon Recovery Funding Board projects, to work with growers for farmland protection and restoration. **Director Duffy** noted that both salmon recovery and farmland protection funding have very specific objectives in statute. RCO has a third-party interest in the easements that come into play. There is potential for a conflict of interest between the two funding sources that may force the agency to prioritize one objective over the other. The Salmon Recovery Funding Board received funding in the previous biennium specific to protecting riparian environments and Mr. Norton is looking to see if concepts from developing the riparian program can be viable in agriculture, but it is complex based on the funding source.

Member Craig asked if the topics going for public comment would be bundled. Mr. Norton answered that to respect the public's time and efforts, the proposed changes will be bundled for a one-time public comment period with proposed changes in other agenda items.

Chair Shiosaki encouraged Mr. Norton to put these proposed changes out for public comment.

Item 5: Acquisition Policy Changes

Nick Norton provided an overview of potential policy changes in [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#) for board decision.

Existing Public Property

Currently, acquisition of established outdoor recreation areas developed under ownership or management of a public agency is prohibited 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 or salmon recovery. During the January meeting, Mr. Norton offered three options for this policy:

- Option One: No change.
- Option Two: Delegate authority to the RCO director to waive acquisition eligibility restrictions based on current or past management if the proposed acquisition would secure recreation or conservation or salmon recovery benefits at a credible threat of loss.
- Option Three: Remove the management consideration so the new language reads "Acquisition of established outdoor recreation areas developed under ownership ~~or management~~ of a public agency."

The board had a clear preference for Option Three and directed staff to solicit public comment on that option. During the public comment period, there were sixteen comments related to this policy item, with fifteen in favor of Option Three and one opposed.

Member Windrope asked what the opposition was. Mr. Norton noted it was a blanket statement opposing changes that do not aid in natural conservation.

Member Herzog would like to hear an update on how this impacts applicants and how they are evaluated. Mr. Norton is interested in seeing if entities with stable lease agreements start to apply and will provide an update on the impact of this policy change after future grants rounds.

Combination Timeline

The current combination timeline policy requires the acquisition component of a combination project to be closed or executed within ninety days of the board funding meeting. Notably, salmon recovery projects at RCO have eighteen months. Mr. Norton offered two options to the public for extending this timeline:

- Option One: Twelve months with the potential for the director to approve an additional six-month extension.
- Option Two: Eighteen months.

There were seventeen public comments on this policy change, two in favor of Option One and fifteen in favor of Option Two.

Member Bugert asked how many projects these potential changes effect. **Marguerite Austin** noted there are not many projects since combination projects are discouraged. The ninety-day timeframe was originally put in place to avoid tying up funds to buy and develop the same site. Nowadays, trail projects present the biggest challenge and are asking for the longest time extensions.

Earnest Payment Eligibility

Currently, "earnest money" and "option payments" are listed as an ineligible acquisition cost. These payments provide surety and help meet RCO requirements. While these costs are an ineligible acquisition cost, they can be applied to the purchase price of the property at closing.

The proposed change for this policy would define earnest or option payments as an eligible pre-agreement incidental cost. These costs would only become eligible for

reimbursement if they are applied to the reviewed, appraised value of the property at closing during the grant performance period.

All nineteen public comments on this policy change were in favor of the proposed change.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve Resolution 2025-05

Moved By: Member **Shiloh Burgess**

Seconded by: Member **Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn**

Decision: **Approved**

LUNCH 11:28 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.

Item 6: Boating Facilities Program: Approval of Preliminary Ranked List

This item was presented after Item 11: Washington State Trails Database.

Karen Edwards, Recreation and Conservation Grants Assistant Section manager, provided an overview of the Boating Facilities Program, noting that the ranked lists for both the local and state agency categories can be found in the [meeting materials](#).

Member Ohlson-Kiehn returned from lunch at 12:32 p.m.

Local Agency Category

There were eleven applications (two planning and nine development projects) requesting \$6,061,027 in Boating Facilities Program – Local Agency category funds, bringing \$4,796,190 in match, for a total of \$10,857,217. The top ranked local agency project is the Tenth Street Boat Launch Renovation ([RCO #24-2272](#)), sponsored by the Port of Everett.

State Agency Category

There were eight applications (one planning and seven development projects) requesting a total of \$13,105,000 in Boating Facilities Program – State Agency category funds. The top ranked state agency project is the Ohop Lake Water Access Area Redevelopment ([RCO #24-2288](#)), sponsored by the WDFW.

Staff recommend approving the 2025-2027 preliminary ranked lists for the Boating Facilities Program Local and State Agency categories.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve Resolution 2025-06

Moved By: Member **Amy Windrope**

Seconded by: Member **Trang Lam**

Decision: **Approved**

Member Windrope noted this weekend is the tenth anniversary of WDFW's [trout derby](#). Projects like the Ohop Lake Water Access Area Redevelopment allow for recreational fishing access.

Item 7: Firearms and Archery Range Recreation: Approval of Preliminary Ranked List

Dan Haws, outdoor grants manager, provided an overview and history of the [Firearms and Archery Range Recreation](#) program. The ranked list for the program is available in the [meeting materials](#).

There were seven applications (six from nonprofit organizations and one from a state agency) requesting \$400,083 in program funds, and \$400,201 in match, for a total of \$800,284. The top ranked project is the North Potholes Target Shooting Range ([RCO #24-2699](#)), sponsored by the WDFW.

Staff recommend approving the 2025-2027 preliminary ranked list of projects for the Firearms and Archery Range Recreation Program.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve Resolution 2025-07

Moved By: Member **Amy Windrope**

Seconded by: Member **Bob Bugert**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 8: Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities Program: Approval of Preliminary Ranked List

Brian Carpenter, outdoor grants manager, provided an overview of the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities program. The ranked lists for the program and a review

of the evaluation process and criteria are available in the [meeting materials](#). This program received ninety applications requesting a total of \$16.4 million.

Education and Enforcement Category

There are twenty-six projects on the [Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities – Education and Enforcement](#) category ranked list, requesting nearly \$4.7 million. The top ranked project in this category is the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Backcountry Patrol 2026-27 ([RCO #24-2517](#)), sponsored by the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Snoqualmie Ranger District, United States Forest Service.

Nonhighway Road Category

There are eighteen projects on the [Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities – Nonhighway Road](#) category ranked list, requesting just over \$3 million. The top ranked project in this category is the Mountain Loop Scenic Byway ([RCO #24-2393](#)), sponsored by the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Darrington Ranger District, United States Forest Service.

Nonmotorized Category

There are twenty-three projects on the [Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities – Nonmotorized](#) category ranked list, requesting \$4 million. The top ranked project in this category is the Snoqualmie Ranger District Trail Maintenance ([RCO #24-2722](#)), sponsored by the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Snoqualmie Ranger District, United States Forest Service.

Off-road Vehicle Category

There are twenty-three projects on the [Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities – Off-road Vehicle](#) category ranked list, requesting nearly \$4.7 million. The top ranked project in this category is the Cascade District Maintenance and Operations ([RCO #24-2505](#)), sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources.

Staff recommend approving the preliminary ranked lists of projects for the 2025-2027 biennium as shown in tables in the [meeting materials](#).

Members discussed the obstacles federal agencies are facing this year, and **Member Craig** pointed out the United States Forest Service was the top sponsor in all categories in this program. Noting instability within the Forest Service, **Director Duffy** shared that RCO staff are working under the assumption the Forest Service will have staff available to implement the projects on the list; however, staff are developing alternative solutions

in the event the Forest Service is unable. One possibility is the Forest Service can ask if a contract can be assigned to another eligible applicant.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn asked about the additional changes Adam Cole is working on in this program. **Karen Edwards** answered Mr. Cole is talking with the advisory committee on a second round of changes and will provide an update at a future meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve **Resolution 2025-08**

Moved By: Member **Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn**

Seconded by: Member **Kitty Craig**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 9: Recreational Trails Program: Approval of Preliminary Ranked List

Jesse Sims, outdoor grants manager, provided an overview of the [Recreational Trails Program](#), which provides funds to rehabilitate and maintain recreational trails and facilities that provide backcountry experience for motorized and nonmotorized uses. The ranked list for the program is available in the [meeting materials](#).

Education Category

There are ten applications on the Recreational Trails Program – Education category ranked list requesting a total of \$177,430. The top ranked project in the education category is the Volunteer Trail School Program ([RCO #24-2368](#)), sponsored by the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance.

General Category

There are forty-two applications on the Recreational Trails Program – General category ranked list requesting a total of \$5,412,874. The top ranked project in the general category is the Cub Creek Trailhead Development ([RCO #24-2253](#)), sponsored by the Methow Valley Sport Trail Association.

Staff recommend approving the preliminary ranked lists as shown in the tables in the [meeting materials](#).

Member Herzog was directly involved in the preparation of a grant in this category and abstained from voting in this category.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve **Resolution 2025-09**

Moved By: Member **Trang Lam**

Seconded by: Member **Bob Bugert**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 10: Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program

Hayley Dalgetty, outdoor grants manager, provided an overview of the [Land and Water Conservation Fund – Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program](#). Additional information and background on the program is available in the [meeting materials](#).

These projects compete nationally for funds awarded by the National Park Service. Applications opened in January and were due in March. RCO cannot submit applications to the National Park Service until after the Notice of Funding Opportunity is updated to remove the underserved community eligibility requirement and incorporate low-income status into the evaluation criteria. The National Park Service has not yet provided a timeframe for when this will occur. Once submitted, however, the National Park Service plans to decide which projects are selected for the award within three months. RCO will then have one year to work with applicants to prepare materials, meet federal readiness requirements, and get projects under agreement.

There were four applications (three development and one acquisition/development project) requesting \$25,291,297 in program funds, and providing \$27,098,525 in match, for a total of \$52,389,822. All four projects are located in King County and include the Evans Pool Redevelopment ([RCO #25-1044](#)); South Lake Union Canoe Center ([RCO #25-1098](#)); and Judkins Play Area, Spray Park, and Restroom Renovation ([RCO #25-1046](#)), all sponsored by the City of Seattle; and White Center Ponds Park Renovation ([RCO #25-1109](#)) sponsored by King County.

Member Bugert asked where the match dollars come from. Hayley noted the three City of Seattle projects had local appropriations and other grant sources. King County's project has local appropriations and a matching grant from Conservation Futures.

Item 11: Washington State Trails Database

This item was presented after Item 5: Acquisition Policy Changes.

Nick Reinhart, policy intern, summarized the work he completed on the [Washington State Trails Database](#), a comprehensive tool that can be used for planning by state and local agencies. Background information and summary can be found in the [meeting materials](#). In April 2024, Mr. Reinhart was hired as a policy intern to update, streamline, and clean up the existing trails data.

If funding allows, RCO would like to update the database biennially to make it more of a useful commodity for Washington State stakeholders and citizens. The database is downloadable and available to the public. Additionally, in the future, RCO would like to create Survey123, which would be a fillable form that could be completed in the field to capture accurate trail attributes.

Member Windrope asked what the plan was to keep the database updated. **Director Duffy** explained that unless there is a specific allocation for this, RCO will likely consider internships to keep it updated.

Chair Shiosaki asked who is ultimately responsible for the accuracy of the trail data. **Ben Donatelle**, policy specialist, replied that it is managed by the agencies who are responsible for trails and RCO compiles the data in a single, convenient location.

Member Craig asked how applicants can use this database to identify needs and gaps. Mr. Donatelle added that building the database and ensuring accuracy were the primary goals for Mr. Reinhart, and now RCO can determine how it can be used by applicants and in evaluations.

Item 12: Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program: Urban Wildlife Habitat Location Criteria Update

Julia McNamara, board liaison, provided a brief overview of the location eligibility criteria in the [WWRP – Urban Wildlife Habitat](#) category. As discussed at the January meeting, the United States Census Bureau redefined urban areas and removed distinct classifications, including “urban clusters” which is a term used in the location eligibility criteria in the WWRP – Urban Wildlife Habitat category. Prior to this change, an “urban cluster” represented a location with a population of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people. The 2020 update by the Census Bureau now defines “urban area” as 5,000 people or 2,000 housing units.

The current location eligibility reads “Within five miles of a designated urban cluster with a population of five thousand or more.” Staff recommend updating the language to include “urban areas” instead of “urban clusters” as “urban areas” includes housing units

and population. Including housing units in the criteria will expand eligibility as there are some populations that do not meet the 5,000-person population minimum but do meet the 2,000-housing unit minimum.

Staff considered aligning with the Census Bureau's new definition of urban areas, ensuring eligibility is maintained for communities that met the 2019 board-adopted definition, and addressing the goals and priorities of the board including maintaining focus on protecting functioning native habitat in urbanizing areas by increasing project eligibility and increasing the number of applications and funded projects from local organizations.

Staff also held a public comment period on these proposed changes and heard concern that there may be impacts to off-highway vehicle trails; however, this change is unlikely to impact off-highway vehicle and multi-use trails.

Following approval, staff will update Manual 10B, communicate the change to outdoor grants managers, and implement the changes in the 2026 grant round.

Chair Shiosaki asked which three communities are now eligible with these changes. Ms. McNamara answered Cle Elum, Long Beach, and Friday Harbor.

Member Bugert asked how competitive this category is. **Marguerite Austin** answered there is not much competition because it is about urban habitat, and it is a challenge to find natural areas in highly developed areas. Member Bugert then asked if this change will improve the likelihood of more applicants. Ms. Austin answered that staff will reach out to the three new eligible entities to let them know they can compete. **Ben Donatelle** added that one of the changes the board made in 2019 encouraged low impact recreation.

Chair Shiosaki noted the language in the motion was written to continue using "urban clusters." Ms. McNamara will revise the language to the "U.S. Census Bureau's definition of "urban areas."

Member Burgess noted the Pacific Northwest Four Wheel Drive Association's concern with this change and asked how sure staff are that this will not impact them. Mr. Donatelle answered this program works to acquire land from willing landowners for public ownership. There is a low likelihood that the lands being acquired would have an impact on motorized trail opportunities. Member Burgess noted this is a good education opportunity.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve Resolution 2025-10

Moved By: Member **Bob Bugert**

Seconded by: Member **Shiloh Burgess**

Decision: **Approved as revised.**

BREAK: 2:03 P.M. – 2:20 P.M.

Item 13: Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program: Review of Natural Areas and Critical Habitat Categories

Leah Dobey, policy specialist, shared that staff are conducting a review of the [WWRP – Habitat Conservation Account](#). WWRP is divided into three accounts with 10 percent of the overall funds going to the Farm and Forest Account, 45 percent to the Outdoor Recreation Account, and 45 percent to the Habitat Conservation Account. The Habitat Conservation Account has five categories: Urban Wildlife, Riparian Protection, State Lands Restoration, Critical Habitat, and Natural Areas. Urban Wildlife and Riparian Protection categories were reviewed and updated in 2019. This review will focus on the Critical Habitat and Natural Areas Categories and will ask similar questions as the 2019 review. A summary of the categories and review method is outlined in the [meeting materials](#).

In Critical Habitat, grants acquire land that is important for the protection, management, and public enjoyment of wildlife. Natural Areas grants acquire land with high quality, native characteristics of areas where natural ecosystems remain pristine and include rare plant or animal communities and serve as habitat for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species. While both categories are focused on acquisition, development can occur through a combination project; however, this is typically for limited development related only to passive outdoor recreation, for example: a parking area, kiosk, or walking paths.

In the Natural Areas category, Ms. Dobey highlighted the Hunter Mountain North project ([RCO #22-1235](#)) sponsored by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife; the Klickitat Oaks Phase One project ([RCO #22-1630](#)) sponsored by Columbia Land Trust in the Critical Habitat category; The Lacamas Prairie Natural Areas 2022 project ([RCO #22-1291](#)) and Kennedy Creek Natural Resources Conservation Area

Natural Areas 2022 project ([RCO #22-1290](#)), both sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources.

Member Windrope returned from break at 2:26 p.m.

Critical Habitat includes a wider range of eligible applicants including state agencies, local governments, special purpose districts, Tribes, and non-profit nature conservancies, whereas only state agencies and nonprofit nature conservancies are eligible in Natural Areas. During outreach, staff heard from applicants and advisory committee members that there is an unspoken agreement as to which state agencies apply to which categories. RCO primarily sees applications from Department of Natural Resources in the Natural Areas category and applications from WDFW in the Critical Habitat category; however, there is nothing in the program policies that limit the categories to these agencies.

Following the 2024 grant round, Nick Norton attended debrief meetings and gathered input and feedback directly from advisory committee members. Staff are continuing outreach with state agencies, non-profits, advisory committees, and working with RCO's tribal liaison, Dawn Pullin, about the best way to engage with Tribes. Although Tribes are eligible in the Critical Habitat category, RCO typically does not see many apply.

Staff are in the listening stage of the review process and will continue working with stakeholders. If changes are identified, direction will be requested from the board at the June meeting. Following public comment, staff will present recommendations to the board at the October meeting to be implemented in the spring 2026 grant round. If there are more in-depth changes needed, staff will consider a phased approach. So far, staff have heard input on evaluation criteria, evaluation process, and general policies related to the value of the ecological description, grazing eligibility, and value of degraded properties and will be taking a deeper look into these topics in the coming months.

Nick Norton noted there is a perception that exists of who and what these programs are for, and it plays a role in decision making around when to apply.

Member Craig asked if eligibility is in statute, and how nonprofits were added in 2016. Ms. Dobey answered yes, eligible applicants are listed in statute for both categories.

Marguerite Austin added that a 2016 study of WWRP resulted in multiple changes, including adding nonprofits as eligible applicants. Mr. Norton added that since this

change, three or four nonprofits have consistently applied in the Critical Habitat Category.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn noted that the Department of Natural Resources manages a natural areas and natural heritage program that has a statutory definition and was curious if there was potential for synchronizing between the department's program and these categories. Ms. Dobey will be discussing this with Department of Natural Resource staff who are on the advisory committee in the coming weeks.

Member Bugert noted grazing eligibility being under review and asked if staff have explored whether a property that has an approved Natural Resource Conservation Service management plan can be compatible. Ms. Dobey answered that applicants have shared that the management plans are an important tool for them and can be done well to benefit the land and habitat. Mr. Norton added that beyond being an important and strategic tool, a management plan is needed to demonstrate that grazing is integrated into how the land is managed for projects to move forward in some counties. **Member Craig** noted grazing is included in the Teanaway Community Forest management plan.

Item 14: Emphasizing Accessibility

Leah Dobey provided an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities and guarantees people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to enjoy employment opportunities, purchase goods and services, and participate in state and local government programs. One in four Washingtonians have a disability and most will experience one at some point in their life.

RCO's 2023 State Recreation and Conservation Plan places priority on providing meaningful access to outdoor recreation for all to feel welcome and safe, reducing barriers, and providing diverse opportunities for diverse users with a high level of satisfaction. In a recreation provider survey, 85 percent of respondents said improving access for people with a disability is one of their top priorities. The 2022 RCO Equity Review recommended funding projects that address intersecting social and economic challenges in communities and consider where accessibility gaps may still impact connectivity to greenspace.

Ms. Dobey provided a brief history of accessibility in RCO grant programs, beginning in the 1970s, noting that some historical language is outdated and can be modernized to be supportive of the disability community. The current development manual includes laws and codes that provide designs or guidance through Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, Outdoor Developed Areas Accessibility Guidelines, Washington State building code, local building codes, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design of 2010. Current requirements include providing access to basic services, removal of barriers, considerations for the primary experience of users, and having exceptions for environmental considerations and wilderness locations. Current project design criteria, updated in 2023, asks whether the design provides access for users of all abilities. In other programs, like the Boating Facilities Program and some categories of WWRP that were not previously updated, the Site Suitability and Project Design criteria asks whether the site is user friendly and universally accessible.

Until 2020, RCO employed an accessibility specialist, who retired at that time. Without that support, grants managers are still able to provide a level of technical assistance that helps direct applicants to appropriate resources and provide examples and information to the level of their knowledge.

Staff are looking at potential opportunities to improve accessibility through policy changes and will seek board direction at the June meeting. While reviewing the 2024 round of WWRP local parks projects, eight of the sixty-four are primarily for accessible features, largely inclusive playgrounds. Another fourteen projects include Americans with Disabilities Act improvements. Overall, 38 percent of the projects in that one category had elements related to accessibility. While accessibility is a priority, staff heard there is a lot of need in communities to make upgrades but unless they are tied to a bigger project, funding is difficult.

Members discussed the opportunity of funding multiple projects in multiple locations for programmatic improvements, engaging senior citizens in outreach, and the nuance of accessibility on trails and parting out accessibility projects. **Member Craig** would like information on what other states are doing and if there are existing programs and models to learn from.

Item 15: State Agency Partner Updates

Department of Natural Resources

Member Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn explained how outdoor recreation is complex in Washington State with federal, state, and local entities owning and managing land. Washington State has a unique, decentralized power structure with multiple state agencies led by separate, independently elected officials. While this structure is intentional, it can be a challenging model to implement. Each land-owning state agency

is governed differently, which makes for challenging experiences for recreational users and makes for a complex funding model. To adjust to this structure, agencies are collaborative and understand each other's missions and rules to help the public navigate the experiences they are looking for and set realistic expectations for what responsible recreation looks like. During times of uncertainty, this complex structure requires a lot of patience and grace with sister agencies when funding for one agency may impact another.

In addition to the budget shortfall, there is a new administration, legislators, and agency leaders to educate. Commissioner Upthegrove has been meeting with staff and partners, visiting with the department's Natural Heritage Advisory Council, and will visit recreation sites as part of the Board of Natural Resources' tour. Staff hope to have Commissioner Upthegrove out to see the Washington Conservation Corps and Northwest Youth Corps at work.

Member Ohlson-Kiehn expressed appreciation for the support received from partners and organizations who care about recreation and who have shown up throughout the legislative session with letters of support and to testify in support of a variety of department related bills.

The House and Senate both released a budget. Governor Ferguson provided feedback and requested changes. State agencies are awaiting the updated budgets. In the original budget release, the department's Conservation Corps funding program was not funded in either budget. The Youth Education and Outreach Program was funded in the House but not the Senate budget. The department is concerned with backlog maintenance. It could see a 25 percent reduction, resulting in a \$2.5 million loss. The increase in Discover Pass fees would only increase the department's revenue by \$1.2 million, costing users more and providing fewer services. There is also an ongoing discussion on the reductions in gas tax, which impacts the Nonhighway Off-road Vehicle Activities program's appropriation and department abilities.

The Department of Natural Resources recently completed the Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation planning process, which enthusiastically supports wanting to provide users with the experience they are looking for on department managed lands; however, available funding may require deeper changes to the statewide recreation funding model.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

Member Peter Herzog shared that the State Parks and Recreation Commission was requested by the governor to build 6 percent reduction plans, which State Parks did. Both the House and Senate budgets include further reductions, well beyond that 6 percent. State Parks is concerned about the implications of these budgets, which surpass the revenue increase from the increase in the Discover Pass. Both budgets have around a \$10 million shortfall in funding State Parks operations. While the Senate budget has funding for Americans with Disabilities Act assessments, it has no funding for No Child Left Inside and relies more on earned revenue from State Parks camping fees, Discover Pass, and other fees. Additionally, there is some funding for individual priorities like the State-Tribal Recreation Impacts Initiative. The House budget provides very little funding for new initiatives but does retain 75 percent funding for No Child Left Inside.

Because State Parks is heavily staff oriented and dependent on staff for operations, if the House and Senate budgets stay the same, State Parks will need to consider layoffs, among other cuts to equipment and travel. Member Herzog recognized the federal reductions, noting reductions are happening at the state level and will impact campuses around the state.

In the capital budget, the Senate gives \$55 million and uses some Climate Commitment Act funding for fish barrier removal. The Senate budget is larger and maintains a funding pool for maintenance preservation projects. The House budget does not provide funding for the continued development of the new Nisqually State Park.

The Discovery Pass legislation ([Senate Bill 5390](#)) is moving forward, and the current version maintains the day use permit fee at \$10 but increases the annual fee from \$30 to \$45 and does not require trailered vehicles to have a Discover Pass if the vehicle towing it has one. Currently, there is a threshold for revenue from the Discover Pass set at \$70 million, above which revenues go from the current distribution of 84 percent for State Parks, and 8 percent to Department of Natural Resources and 8 percent to WDFW. The proposed change would increase the threshold to \$85 million.

Governor Ferguson signed a bill allowing State Parks to extend their lease authority for Saint Edwards State Parks to an eighty-year lease. [Senate Bill 5234](#) would increase snowmobile fees and was supported by snowmobilers, but unfortunately ran out of time but will likely return during the supplemental session.

Lastly, Member Herzog shared that State Parks is moving into the Washington State Department of Ecology building in Lacey, which will save the agency money by sharing the space.

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Member Amy Windrope noted that WDFW is looking at a reduction in force and services important to the agency.

Substitute House Bill 1325 passed, allowing WDFW enforcement officers to give civil infractions rather than going through the prosecutor. [Senate Bill 5444](#) which would increase personalized license plate fees by 38 percent and [House Bill 2003](#) for a Columbia River salmon and steelhead endorsement are anticipated to move forward.

Member Windrope noted impacts from federal reductions. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's, a large partner in fisheries and southern resident killer whales, workforce was reduced. The Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund may not be funded, which would have an enormous impact on salmon recovery in Washington State. Changes are proposed to the Endangered Species Act, which would change how agencies are able to protect the species in the state. Additionally, there are possible changes to the National Marine Fisheries Service, which is how WDFW certifies fisheries in marine waters.

Finally, Member Windrope shared a video "[Exploring WDFW Wildlife Areas](#)."

Governor's Office

Joe Impecoven introduced himself noting that he is new to state government. Prior to starting at the Governor's Office, Mr. Impecoven was at the Snoqualmie Tribe as their recreation policy program manager, and before that, at REI for twelve years in their experiences division.

Mr. Impecoven's priorities in this role center around sustainability, equity, collaboration, and innovation by continuing to champion projects that ensure long-term health and resilience of Washington's natural resources. Sustainability includes investments in habitat conservation and recreation, promoting responsible recreation practices through education and infrastructure, and considering the impacts of climate change on outdoor spaces. This also includes ensuring that grants and projects overseen by RCO benefit generations to come. Equity is a crucial aspect in ensuring the benefits of outdoor recreation by actively seeking and prioritizing projects that increase access to underserved communities. Collaboration is fundamental to RCO's success and

partnerships are key to success moving forward. This means fostering stronger ties with state agencies, local communities, nonprofits, Tribes, and even private organizations to leverage diverse expertise and resources. RCO should continue to encourage innovation and support projects that explore new and creative solutions for managing outdoor spaces and enhancing recreational opportunities.

Keeping these priorities in mind will ensure that Washington's incredible natural legacy remains vibrant, accessible, and a source of pride for all.

Member Bugert asked if Mr. Impehoven will have time to tour the state and meet constituents following the Legislative Session. Mr. Impehoven has already taken local meetings and plans to visit projects and communities as time allows.

Member Herzog asked what Mr. Impehoven's portfolio consists of. Mr. Impehoven answered RCO, State Parks, and Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. Owen Rowe's portfolio includes the Department of Natural Resources and other entities. The policy shop at the Governor's Office was created to enhance collaboration and crossover.

Member Craig asked if Mr. Impehoven was involved with the [Confluence of States](#). Mr. Impehoven answered that he is involved with the Confluence of States which is having discussions about what is going on within the states and about how they can work together, nationally, and what ideas can be shared. Mr. Impehoven is optimistic about the growing national interest in enhancing outdoor recreation and will share the conversations from the Confluence of States.

ADJOURN: 3:57 P.M.



Approved by Chair Michael Shiosaki