

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION FUNDING BOARD SUMMARY MINUTES

Date: October 28, 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	Heather Saunders	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 and determined quorum. Member Amy Windrope was absent during roll call.

Chair Shiosaki welcomed the new board member and delegate from the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, Heather Saunders. Member Saunders is the director of Park Development for Washington State Parks.

Motion: Move to Approve **October 28, 2025**, Agenda

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

Seconded by: Member **Bob Bugert**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 1: Consent Agenda

Chair Shiosaki noted the consent agenda includes the June 24-25, 2025, meeting minutes, three time extensions, one cost increase request, and an advisor recognition.

Motion: Move to Approve **Resolution 2025-22**

Moved By: Member **Kitty Craig**
Seconded by: Member **Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn**
Decision: **Approved**

Item 2: Director's Report

Director Megan Duffy provided an overview of federal activity and action. The nearly month-long federal government shutdown has not yet directly impacted RCO. The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund was awarded \$9 million, although there are broader concerns for federal acquisitions dollars being shifted to deferred maintenance backlogs and the impact to federal public lands during the shutdown.

The United States Army Corps of Engineers invoked the thirty-day termination clause in the memorandum of understanding for the Snake River Dam Recreation Impact Study. RCO completed a survey, public outreach, and identified places where new facilities may be needed and older facilities may be obsolete. The Army Corps was responsible for examining the economic impact and the fisheries components of the study. There are conversations on how and if the study can move forward.

RCO is anticipating a challenging supplemental session. The September budget forecast identified a little over \$900 million in additional deficit. RCO requested \$20 million in Climate Commitment Act funding in the event federal 2026 Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund funding is not released.

Governor Bob Ferguson's first Centennial Accord occurred last week where he signed [Executive Order 25-10](#) with provisions to strengthen relationships between state and Tribal governments. The impacts of recreation on the land and to Tribal, cultural, and treaty rights continue to be discussed.

RCO is finishing an Economic Study, which the board can expect to be briefed on in January.

On the salmon team, Ameer Bahr was promoted to senior grant manager, and Alice Rubin was promoted to assistant section manager. Katie Knight Pruitt, from the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office, took a job at the Office of Financial Management.

Legislative and Policy Update

Brock Milliern, Legislative and Policy director, noted agency budgets were submitted in mid-September and the Governor's budget is expected mid-December. The next revenue forecast is anticipated on November 20, which assists the Governor's budget finalization.

As Director Duffy mentioned, RCO submitted one capital budget request for salmon funds in the event the 2026 Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Funds are not awarded. If Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Funds are released, any funds allocated to the board from legislature will be used for targeted investment recovery projects.

During session, Mr. Milliern will send bi-weekly updates to the board.

Jan Fore joins RCO as the Washington Invasive Species Council executive coordinator on Thursday, October 30.

Grant Management Update

Marguerite Austin, Recreation and Conservation section manager, highlighted the 175 closed projects in the last quarter and three hiring changes, including Hayley Dalgetty's promotion to senior outdoor grants manager and the hiring of Aaron Johnson and Hannah Pauly as outdoor grants managers.

In June, the board approved \$148.7 million in funds for 243 applications. Based on staff recommendations, Director Duffy approved additional funds for partially funded projects and alternates on the board-approved ranked list. The director awarded an additional \$70.3 million for seventy-nine unfunded alternate projects and twenty-seven partially funded projects. In total, \$219 million was allocated over 300 projects this biennium.

Staff worked with applicants to get projects underway and under agreement within 180 days of funding. Ms. Austin noted the reason PRISM reflects that no agreements were mailed on time and no projects are under agreement is because the report was generated before the 180-day deadline. Staff will provide a more accurate report in January.

Karen Edwards, Recreation and Conservation assistant section manager, shared that staff are maintaining communication with the United States Forest Service (Forest Service) to keep trails open, despite the federal shutdown. The Forest Service met requirements for \$7.5 million in new grants, with \$1.5 million under new agreements and \$6 million to extend existing education and maintenance agreements for two years. The Forest Service remains committed to the projects and is conversing with other state agencies and nonprofit organizations to facilitate executing the work. RCO will continue supporting these efforts.

Karl Jacobs, Recreation and Conservation assistant section manager, shared that previous challenges have led staff to modify the timeline for offering grants to the National Parks Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund. The solution is to skip the

2026 application cycle and start again in 2028. This pause allows RCO to secure funds in advance of the grant round, decreasing the burden to applicants who currently spend time applying without knowing what funds are available. This change affects only the stateside program, not the nationally competitive Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership.

Some applicants expressed concern about missing the opportunity to apply, using the fund as a source of match for other programs, or impacts to waiver of retroactivity. Mr. Jacobs noted the National Park Service no longer issues waivers of retroactivity, and the impact is limited to a one-year delay for potential top-ranked projects and is balanced by funding certainty.

Member Bob Bugert asked about the waiver of retroactivity. Mr. Jacobs explained the National Park Service used to offer a waiver of retroactivity for land acquisitions but lost pre-approval authority.

During his presentation, Mr. Jacobs noted Heather Ramsay, a former NPS program officer and public commenter on the changes to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, pointed out that the modified timeline aligns with the timeline used in the past.

Chair Shiosaki asked why the timeline changed. **Marguerite Austin** explained the federal appropriations kept coming later and later, the board approved moving to a biennial grant cycle, and staff wanted to review applications for this program, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, and Youth Athletic Facilities simultaneously since these programs are often used as match.

Grant Services Update

Kyle Guzlas, Grant Services section manager, shared the Grant Services team hired Anne Parfitt as the new archaeologist on the Cultural Resources team.

Mr. Guzlas provided updates on the agency's advisory committee recruitment, noting there are vacancies on almost all the committees. Interested applicants can apply to more than one at a time and should visit RCO's [Get Involved](#) webpage to learn more. Stipends are available for qualifying individuals. Mr. Guzlas highlighted recruitment to fill vacancies on the Local Parks, Backcountry Trails, and Off-Road Activities advisory committees.

Member Bob Bugert recommended staff reach out to forest collaboratives as there is a broad assortment of members that participate in them.

Mr. Guzlas gave an overview of Youth Outdoor Programs, noting the unfortunate and substantial reduction in the state's operating budget. Youth Programs are the next step

towards providing access for the next generation of users. In the 2025-2027 biennium, [No Child Left Inside](#) requested over \$20 million; however, the Legislature allocated only \$1.126 million. Comparatively, the request in the 2023-2025 biennium was \$12.4 million and the Legislature allocated \$7 million, which funded 109 programs, served 57,730 youth, and provided over two-million program hours. Due to the dramatic decrease in available funds, the 2025-2027 biennium allocation will fund fifteen programs, serve 2,741 youth, and provide 158,328 program hours.

Mr. Guzlas reported that the grant sponsors who are doing this work are energized to lift it back up. They care about kids, natural areas, and the future and recognize the need for a unified approach to identify common goals and develop strategies for a path forward and what future state asks will be. Staff will continue to support the effort.

Member Kitty Craig confirmed that funding for youth programs comes from the operating budget and asked if there was a strategy for more certainty and consistency in future funding. **Director Duffy** answered that a coalition of organizations and outdoor educators are working on a strategy that includes potential revenue sources. Mr. Guzlas added the state cannot do it alone, and groups are looking at pathways for diversifying funding.

Member Bugert asked if RCO has looked at how other states fund these types of programs. Mr. Guzlas has spoken with recreational staff in Oregon and Colorado, who both have significant outdoor youth programs supported by their state's lottery funds.

General Public Comment

None.

BREAK: 10:00 A.M. – 10:15 A.M.

Member Amy Windrope joined the meeting during the break.

Item 3: Habitat Programs

Request for Direction

Nick Norton, Policy and Planning specialist, provided brief background information of the current review of the Critical Habitat and Natural Areas categories of the [Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program \(WWRP\) – Habitat Conservation Account](#) and outlined the process that led to proposed changes. High-level proposed changes to the evaluation criteria and draft intent language for the categories are included in the meeting materials.

A first draft of proposed changes was shared with key stakeholders and received generally positive feedback and support. Input from that process was incorporated into the draft presented to the board.

For both categories, changes are proposed to the intent language based on the statutory definitions of “Critical Habitat” and “Natural Areas”. These changes better highlight differences between the categories and can help guide applicants in determining which category is the best fit for a project and include project examples.

Critical Habitat

Staff described key aspects of the Critical Habitat definition including that projects are for a wide diversity of wildlife species. This diversity includes, but is not specific to, species with special status. Within the Critical Habitat criteria, staff propose asking applicants to clarify targeted species in the project introduction to help orient evaluators. Additional changes work to provide a clearer line between the habitat impact to target species and the overall significance of the species on the property, including, but not limited to, special status.

Natural Areas

Staff described key aspects of the Natural Areas, including that there are rare or vanishing features located on the property, and that they are of scientific or educational value. Currently, the Natural Areas evaluation criteria include a focus on rare species; however, other features of a site are equally valued in the Natural Areas definition, such as landscape features and scientific and educational opportunities. During outreach, staff provided two options for addressing this, and feedback showed preference for a “fit for program” question that includes special status alongside other features.

Members agreed with the approach and supported intent examples to steer applicants to the appropriate program.

Member Amy Windrope asked how science and education fit into the natural areas purpose. **Mr. Norton** explained that in the current version, science and education are under the umbrella of public benefit and community support. The proposed change, based on statute, brings science and education to the top of the application as part of what makes the project a program priority. This change would not apply to Critical Habitat as science and education is not explicitly stated as a core aspect in statute.

Member Windrope suggested considering climate change in potential changes.

Member Shiloh Burgess asked about what scale rare and vanishing species apply to and expressed an interest in ensuring that local priorities were taken into consideration

regarding species prioritization. **Mr. Norton** acknowledged the ambiguity of scale in statute and noted staff are hoping to create specific language that addresses species vulnerability at the population level.

Member Heather Saunders noted that in the proposed changes to Critical Habitat, the language around rare and vanishing species had been softened. **Mr. Norton** noted that staff are de-emphasizing special status and moving it from its own criteria to an aspect of the criteria.

Item 4: Boating Facilities Policy Changes

[Request for Direction](#)

Nick Norton gave an overview of the [Boating Facilities Program](#) and shared potential policy changes staff are considering. The program has not been meaningfully reviewed in decades.

There have been fewer applications over the past five biennium, and the program tends to fund about 80 percent of the proposed projects. Additionally, the program has experienced decreased funding while the costs of projects have increased. Mr. Norton noted a potential funding increase in 2031 when artificial caps on the state gas tax account expires.

Mr. Norton explained the potential policy changes including funding limits for local acquisition, development, or combination projects; local planning; and multisite projects that are outlined in the [meeting materials](#). Mr. Norton noted the 20 percent match is set by policy, not statute, and will be evaluated.

Most members were supportive of the changes staff are considering. **Member Shiloh Burgess** wanted to hear from the public before further considering any changes.

Member Trang Lam noted project and material costs are increasing while funding sources are decreasing and supported discussions about how to allow projects to be phased in ways that meet current realities. **Karen Edwards** noted planning, mitigation requirements, and permitting have also become lengthy and expensive processes.

At the next board meeting, Mr. Norton will discuss topics such as planning project types, general alignments and clarifications, as well as evaluation criteria.

Item 5: Evergreen Communities Recognition – Impacts to Recreation and Conservation Office Grant Programs

Request for Direction

Julia McNamara, board liaison, provided an overview of the Department of Natural Resources' [Evergreen Communities Recognition Program](#). The program was established in 2024 in accordance with the Evergreen Communities Act and is explained in further detail in the [meeting materials](#). The program rewards communities for their dedication to urban and community forests and requires RCO to give funding preference to Evergreen Communities in the [Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program's Critical Habitat Account](#) and the [Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account](#).

Cities and towns, counties, and Tribes are eligible entities in the Evergreen Communities Recognition Program; however, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program's Habitat Account also allows state agencies, special districts and nonprofits, while the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account also allows state agencies and special districts. To ensure an equitable approach for applicants to RCO's programs that are not eligible in the Evergreen Communities Recognition Program, staff recommended using enrollment in the Evergreen Communities Recognition Program as a tiebreaker, which is used in other RCO programs.

The tiebreaker would only apply to entities tied in ranking if both entities are eligible to be enrolled in the Evergreen Communities Recognition Program where funding preference would go to the entity that is eligible and enrolled in the program. Staff looked at the past three grant rounds and found no instances where a tiebreaker would be needed.

Member Amy Windrope left the meeting at 11:42 a.m.

Staff notified the public of this potential change and intend to seek public comment following board feedback.

Members agreed this is a practical solution. **Member Kitty Craig** would like to hear from the Department of Natural Resources in the future on their program development and what proactive enrollment looks like. She noted the program may put some communities at a disadvantage.

LUNCH 11:48 A.M. – 12:50 P.M.

Item 6: Farm and Forest Account Policy Changes

Decision

This item was presented after Item 10: Featured Projects.

Member Amy Windrope returned to the meeting at 1:03 p.m.

Non-State, Non-Federal Match

Nick Norton provided an overview of the current local match policy, which was temporarily waived in the 2022 and 2024 grant rounds. The policy has been under review since Spring 2024 in anticipation of the 2026 grant round. The review and recommendation process is detailed in the [meeting materials](#).

Staff recommend permanently removing the non-state, non-federal match requirement based on funding availability, applicant types, the competitive environment, and the nature of the resource concern.

Cost Increases

Nick Norton provided an overview of the temporary cost increase policy and potential changes to it in the Farm and Forest account outlined in the [meeting materials](#).

Staff recommend the permanent retention of a dedicated cost increase policy in the Farm and Forest Account based on easement value and funding availability.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve Resolution 2025-23

Moved By: Member **Trang Lam**

Seconded by: Member **Shiloh Burgess**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 7: Farmland Policy Changes

Decision

Nick Norton gave an overview of the proposed changes to evaluation criteria, scope changes, and impervious surfaces in the Farmland Preservation Program in response to public comments. The proposed changes are detailed in the [meeting materials](#).

Public comments overwhelmingly supported the proposed changes.

Staff will continue exploring changes to other policies, considering updates to the easement template, and discussing how this program can support affordability and land access.

Public Comment

None.

Motion: Move to Approve **Resolution 2025-24**

Moved By: Member **Shiloh Burgess**

Seconded by: Member **Bob Bugert**

Decision: **Approved**

Item 8: Emphasizing Accessibility in Recreation Grants

Request for Direction

Leah Dobey provided an overview of the challenges and opportunities concerning accessibility requirements in recreation grants at RCO. In June, the board discussed several policy options for creating inclusive outdoor spaces and providing recreation opportunities for all, including a new grant program, reducing match, increasing grant limits, adding evaluation questions or points specific to accessibility, or allowing accessibility-related projects to be bundled into one project.

Ms. Dobey highlighted three high ranking projects: American Lake Park Waterfront Access ([RCO #20-1349](#)), East Lake Sammamish Trail ([RCO #20-1465](#)), and Gig Harbor Sports Complex Pickle-Bo Spot ([RCO #20-1746](#)). These projects have many elements that when bundled together, improve overall accessibility.

Ms. Dobey explained the previously considered policy options and challenges that each pose to improving accessibility in RCO programs. Details are outlined in the [meeting materials](#). Because of these challenges, staff focused on exploring a new capital grant program to address accessibility needs by funding accessibility renovations at existing facilities and allowing the positive parts from the other options to be incorporated. Additionally, a new program could incorporate themes from community feedback, including preference or prioritization, representation, and information and education.

There are many ways to help communities achieve their accessibility goals. In these challenging budget times, having a ranked list helps demonstrate needs. Staff are considering other ways to demonstrate need to the Legislature. Ms. Dobey noted that a stand-alone grant is a demonstration and statement of our state's values.

Members supported a program dedicated to accessibility. **Member Bob Bugert** asked if this would be a director-approved program. **Director Duffy** answered yes. Members were interested in learning more about the need across the state and within communities and what the specific need trends are; whether there are similar models in other states; and if incremental steps can be taken to other grant programs while this one is being developed.

Member Amy Windrope offered to connect Ms. Dobby with the Fish and Wildlife Commission's Americans with Disabilities Act committee.

Member Windrope left the meeting at 2:10 p.m.

BREAK: 2:10 P.M. – 2:20 P.M.

Item 9: Nonhighway Offroad Vehicle Activities Policy Changes

Briefing

Adam Cole, Policy specialist, briefed the board on potential policy changes to the [Nonhighway Off-Road Vehicle Activities](#) (NOVA) program and shared ideas on how to improve the program ahead of the 2026 grant round.

Mr. Cole briefly explained that NOVA funding comes from 1 percent of the state motor vehicle fuel tax revenues. Currently, the overall fuel tax revenue is limited to 34.9 cents per gallon by subsection one of the [Revised Code of Washington 46.09.520](#). This subsection will expire on June 30, 2031, when the full fuel tax rate will become available, increasing the amount of funding to the NOVA program. Background information and details on how funding is broken down across categories in the program are included in the [meeting materials](#).

In 2024, the board approved increasing grant limits and improved the evaluation process to make the NOVA program more efficient. Nearly all applicants in the 2024 grant round requested more money and around half requested the new maximum grant amount. Mr. Cole highlighted that most projects in the 2024 grant round were for maintenance projects, and from one biennium to the next, applications tend to be for the same maintenance projects. User feedback was positive, and staff plan to make further improvements to strengthen the impact on the program and reduce administrative burden.

Mr. Cole outlined further changes staff are considering to the funding allocation and criteria. The allocation concepts are detailed in the [meeting materials](#) and include no change, raising the grant limits again, allowing longer-term grant awards, and creating "combination" grant proposals.

Member Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn emphasized the importance of NOVA funding to the Department of Natural Resources and the challenges faced in securing grants, particularly in rural areas. The department supports block grants as a way of distributing grant funding more equitably. **Mr. Cole** explained that in early discussions, staff and the advisory committee discussed block grants, which was how funds were allocated early in the NOVA program; however, the Washington Administrative Code requires board programs, such as NOVA, to be competitive.

Members raised concerns about the complexities of finalizing agreements in longer-term grant awards, measures of accountability for multi-biennia grants, and how to budget and plan for longer-term grants. **Mr. Cole** suggested longer-term grants could have a limit on number of “legacy” projects in each category. He added that grant agreements can be customized with terms and conditions as checkpoints for project success. If there are performance concerns in one biennium, an administrative check would be performed before the sponsor receives additional funding.

Mr. Cole explained that staff will be looking at making changes to the following criteria: need, need fulfillment, predominantly natural, project support, matching shares, county population density, and proximity to people, which is statutorily required. Staff will seek stakeholder feedback on the potential allocation and criteria changes to better understand stakeholder needs, challenges, and program priorities.

Member Trang Lam noted the criteria may not reflect asset management principles as much as project related principles.

BREAK: 2:26 P.M. – 2:47 P.M.

Item 10: Featured Projects

Briefing

This item was presented after lunch and ahead of Item 6: Farm and Forest Account Policy Changes.

Aaron Johnson, outdoor grants manager, highlighted the Zillah Splash Park ([RCO #20-1305](#)), sponsored by the City of Zillah. The city received \$306,204 from the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#) to develop a splash park with paths, site furnishings, signs, landscaping, and utilities. In April 2023, the board approved a scope and location change from Loges Park to Stewart Park.

Hannah Pauly, outdoor grants manager, highlighted the Cirque Park Renovation ([RCO #20-1618](#)), sponsored by the City of University Place. The city received \$436,354 from the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#) to expand the playground, renovate the skate

park, pave the walking path, and add nine fitness stations. The playground is a designated [PlayCore National Demonstration Site](#).

Item 11: State Agency Partner Reports

Department of Natural Resources

Member Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn shared that the Department of Natural Resources is requesting \$4.3 million to reinstate the Conservation Corps Program and increase capacity; \$3 million in capital funds for the Natural Areas Facilities, Preservation, and Access program to support maintenance; \$1.2 million to restore law enforcement capacity; and \$16.7 million for the Trust Land Transfers program.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

Member Heather Saunders noted that the State Parks and Recreation Commission will now have representation on the NOVA advisory committee. Member Saunders highlighted that since 1964, State Parks has received over \$264 million in funding from RCO for projects like the Willapa Hills Trail, which will have nearly fifty-six miles of trail open this fall.

On October 1, the Discover Pass fees increased from thirty to forty-five dollars. State Parks continues to have around 71 percent revenue funded mostly by camping and the Discover Pass with visitation at around 40 million visitors per year. Revenue was about 3 percent higher at the end of the biennium.

State Parks is requesting \$7 million in supplemental operating dollars and \$33 million in capital funds to focus on Americans with Disabilities Act improvements and deferred maintenance for code compliance, utility upgrades, and marine facilities.

The inaugural [Scenic Bikeways program](#) launched in October and is open for public nominations through November 30.

Member Saunders explained that State Parks entered an Americans with Disabilities Act settlement agreement with the United States Department of Justice because of a visitor tripping and falling in a state park. The settlement includes policy updates, training updates, and a remediation plan. The remediation plan was completed this summer and found 8,000 barriers at over 1,800 facilities, many of which are historic, at a cost of \$110 million. State Parks has six years to meet the requirements of the settlement, and the Department of Justice is not open to providing an extension. State Parks is focusing on non-ground disturbing activities to begin with and hopes to receive funding from State Legislature to complete.

Governor's Office

Joe Impehoven requested **Brock Milliern** to share updates on his behalf. Mr. Milliern explained this will likely be a difficult legislative session. A previous proviso directed RCO to facilitate a conversation with the three land management agencies to look at how recreation is funded; however, the proviso was vetoed. Despite the veto, Mr. Impehoven has gathered the legislative directors at Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission to look at how the agencies are investing recreation funding. RCO is participating as a helping agency to provide data and context. The group recently met for the second time and are now gathering data for future conversations.

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Member Amy Windrope was absent and did not provide an update.

ADJOURN: 3:29 P.M.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 27-28, 2026. Natural Resources Building, Room 172, 1111 Washington Street, Olympia, Washington, 98501.

Approved by:  _____

Chair Michael Shiosaki