

Meeting Summary

Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group Olympia, Washington, December 5, 2007

Attendance: Ginna Correa (WDFW), Dan Budd (WDFW), Elizabeth Roderick (WDFW), Lynn Helbrecht (Biodiversity Council), Clay Sprague (DNR), Janice Miller (DNR), Erika Keech (Sen. Parlette's office), Mike Rundlett (Western Washington Ag Association), Steve Hahn (State Parks), Gary Cooper (author of *Toward a Coordinated Strategy* report), Kaleen Cottingham (RCO Director), and RCO staff Kammie Bunes.

Gary Cooper provided a historical perspective of Substitute Senate Bill 6242 and the resulting report: *Toward a Coordinated Strategy for Habitat and Recreation Land Acquisitions in Washington State*. Gary summarized his work with DNR, WDFW and State Parks to meet the objectives of SSB 6242. The report provided an inventory of state agency habitat and recreation land acquisitions since 1980; addressed the tax implications associated with state agency land acquisitions; and attempted to address concerns about a perceived lack of internal acquisition strategy within agencies and the confirmed lack of a coordinated strategy among the three agencies.

The report concluded with several recommendations on the next steps toward achieving a coordinated state agency land acquisition strategy, which drove SSB 5236, creating the HRLCG.

The HRLCG will identify ways to improve communication and transparency between agencies and their constituents and recommend a standardized approach to record keeping and information sharing. SSB 5236 calls out several action items for the group to accomplish by July 31, 2012. A formal recommendation on whether or not to continue the group is due to the Legislature by January 1, 2012.

The group reviewed maps of eastern Okanogan County developed by DNR and SP that showed current state ownership and generated discussion about potential exchanges and other opportunities in the area. WDFW shared maps developed through assessments of ecological significance compared to risk of habitat conversion within an ecoregion. WDFW showed their current ownership and talked about their strategy of building cross-valley and riparian corridors. The group discussed the variety of scales to these maps and which would be most useful for discussion purposes.

A draft work plan based on the direction provided in SSB 5236 was distributed. The group agreed a good first step is to compare current state agency procedures and policies around acquisition and disposal of habitat and recreation lands. A matrix will be developed that each agency can complete prior to the next group meeting to be scheduled for some time in February.

The group also agreed that a subgroup of technical specialists could review existing databases and formulate some recommendations on how to achieve the objectives of

standardized recordkeeping and developing GIS-based maps to aid in coordination. Janice Miller will lead that effort and expects to be able to present something to the group in April.

Some of the questions for the group to consider regarding recordkeeping are:

- What is the correct information to track?
- What should be the centralized repository for the data, and where should it reside?
- What other current data systems are in use, and which of those is it most important to be compatible with?

The group discussed what the appropriate scope of review is concerning state agency acquisitions and disposals. There is strong agreement that funded acquisitions and those in the process of seeking funding should be included and that good data should be available for those lands. This includes lands to be acquired via state and federal grant programs, Trust Land Transfer, other fund sources such as the State Parks land acquisition account, potential exchanges, and any near-term disposal plans. Since DNR trust lands follow very different acquisition procedures than do DNR natural areas, there is a desire to keep trust lands separate from this coordination effort. Due to the proprietary nature of trust land acquisitions cross agency coordination will focus on the Trust Land Transfer program and potential exchanges.

The need to engage local communities in the conversation about state agency acquisition and disposal plans was discussed. Often habitat acquisitions can have the unintended consequence of altering the social character of an area – conversion of Ag lands to wetlands for example. Conversations with the local community might lead to more creative ways of accomplishing habitat and recreation objectives. The group will keep this concern in mind when developing their transaction strategies and procedures for information sharing.

The group discussed the potential for this groups work to compliment ecoregion assessments, biodiversity strategies and conservation opportunities. Perhaps the work accomplished by the HRLCG could lay the foundation leading to a statewide assessment of habitat and recreation lands needs, followed by a coordinated strategy to meet those needs.

The draft work plan will be revisited at the next meeting.