

## Meeting Summary

### Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group Olympia, Washington, April 9, 2008

Attendance: Andrew Lampe (Okanogan County Commissioner), Erika Keech (Sen. Parlette's office), Mike Rundlett (Western Washington Ag Association), Elizabeth Rodrick (Department of Fish and Wildlife), Clay Sprague (Department of Natural Resources), Pene Speaks (Department of Natural Resources), Shannon Stevens (State Parks), Jeanne Koenings (Department of Ecology), Sarah Gage (Biodiversity Council), Jim Fox (RCO), and Kammie Bunes (RCO).

RCO staff gave a brief summary of the legislation creating the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group. Substitute Senate Bill 5236 implements the recommendations in *Coordinated Strategy for Habitat and Recreation Land Acquisition* (the SB6242 report) adopted by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board and submitted to the Legislature in 2005. The group's charge is to coordinate planning for habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal by Washington State Parks and the Departments of Natural Resources (DNR) and Fish and Wildlife (DFW).

SSB5236 lists nine specific tasks for the group to implement the SSB6242 report, with emphasis on transparency and communication. The group must also convene an annual forum to promote coordination of land acquisitions and disposals, produce a biennial forecast of planned transactions and review planning requirements of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. Annual progress reports are due to the Office of Financial Management, and prior to January 1, 2012, the group must make a formal recommendation to the appropriate legislative committees regarding continuation of the group beyond July 31, 2012.

Jim Fox shared a short presentation on the variety of RCO grant programs funding habitat and recreation land acquisitions. He tied the spectrum of conservation tools available (including landowner incentives and other non-grant approaches) to the need for long-term strategies to ensure biodiversity and sustainable communities. The group discussed how this ties in to their mandate to coordinate state agency habitat and recreation land transactions.

The remainder of the meeting was spent on presentations by DNR, DFW and State Parks staff. Several of the tasks within SSB5236 relate to identifying and coordinating habitat and recreation land transactions. One of those is to review agency transaction plans and policies to help ensure statewide coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposals. Each agency brought a completed matrix to the meeting listing the variety of programs they administer, their purpose, and pertinent laws, codes, and plans for each program. The matrix also includes the following questions:

- What are the defining criteria for acquiring land in this program?
- What are the fund sources?

- Can property be acquired via Eminent Domain?
- What is the internal approval process for establishing a site? Is the public involved in that process; how?
- Is external approval needed, and by whom?
- What is the process for developing site-specific acquisition strategies?
- How do management concerns factor into the strategy?
- How much coordination occurs with other agencies?
- Are any partners involved?
- What is the process for land sales and/or exchanges?

The completed matrices provide a vehicle to begin to compare and contrast agency processes, and differences within a single agency when multiple programs (and hence statutes, codes, policies, etc.) are involved.

DNR has a variety of programs for acquisition or disposal/transfer of habitat or recreation lands:

- Natural Area Preserves, which protect representative examples of the highest quality native ecosystems and rare plant and animal populations, typically having high scientific or educational value.
- Natural Resources Conservation Areas conserve and manage areas with scenic, ecological and low-impact public use values.
- The Trust Land Transfer Program is a tool by which the DNR can dispose of or transfer School Construction Trust land that is difficult to manage for income to other agencies for management as recreation or habitat lands. The trust is compensated for the timber value and the land value is reinvested for future trust income. This program is often used to transfer lands to NAP or NRCA status, as well as to local governments for county parks.
- Section 6 is a federal grant program to acquire important habitat lands in support of endangered species and habitat conservation plans.

DFW acquires property to secure habitats that are necessary to recover, maintain, or enhance the integrity or habitat diversity of Washington ecosystems. The Department also acquires property to provide wildlife-related recreational opportunities (i.e. wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing) and for administrative support (housing for wildlife area managers, shops, etc). DFW also acquires land for Natural Area Preserves, though to a lesser degree than DNR. Property that does not serve an appropriate habitat, recreational, or administrative support function is considered surplus and may be disposed of.

State Parks acquires land for outdoor recreational opportunities for the public, to protect viewsheds, and for stewardship of natural and cultural resources. Nine criteria are used to evaluate land value: significance, popularity, experiences, uniqueness, flora and fauna, scenery, size, condition, and revenue. Property that is no longer needed for state park purposes may be sold and the proceeds used to acquire other land better suited for park purposes.

The group asked clarifying questions and agreed this was a good first step in reviewing the variety of programs under the umbrella of habitat and recreation lands for these three agencies. The group suggested adding a question on public uses allowed in each program, and also one addressing what happens if the land is converted to a use other than intended.

The group discussed the possibility of adding additional members, such as a federal agency and a nonprofit representative. This topic will be revisited in terms of legislative direction, meeting frequency, maximum number of members that will allow for efficiency and focus.

The group set the next meeting date for July 16, and agreed that meeting should focus on developing an action plan for the group. This will then help the group determine the frequency for future meetings and allow the formation of subgroups that could be working on specific tasks outside the regular meetings. RCO staff were asked to flesh out the draft action plan that was distributed at the April meeting and send this to the group in advance of the July meeting. Clay Sprague volunteered to work with RCO on this.