

## Meeting Summary

### Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group Olympia, Washington, September 25, 2007

Attendance: Steve Hahn (State Parks), Ginna Correa (WDFW), Lynn Helbrecht (Biodiversity Council), Clay Sprague (DNR), Shelley Marelli (WRPA), Andrew Lampe (Okanogan County), Erika Keech (Sen. Parlette's office), Bill Robinson (Nature Conservancy), and RCO staff Jim Fox and Kammie Bunes.

Jim Fox opened the meeting with introductions and a brief history of events leading up to SSB5236. Copies of *Toward a Coordination Strategy for Habitat and Recreation Land Acquisitions in Washington State* were distributed. SSB5236 implements the recommendations of this report.

State agency representatives presented an overview of their land acquisition programs, including the purpose, how lands are selected for acquisition, transfer and disposal, sources of funding, and how information is made available.

#### State Parks:

- Primary purpose is outdoor recreation but the agency is increasing the focus on natural resources and resources of historic and cultural significance.
- Most park land is owned in fee, with some parks leased from the federal government.
- Parks recently inventoried all holdings for consistency with the agencies mission and purpose. Lands that did not fit were identified for transfer to local agencies if they had regional significance, or sale if they did not.
- In the past, acquisitions were the result of land donations; now the primary sources of funding are the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) and the Trust Land Transfer (TLT) program. Recent legislation established the Park Land Acquisition Account, which allows State Parks to use proceeds from land disposals as a source for funding acquisitions.
- Acquisitions are usually to obtain inholdings or land contiguous with an existing park. There has not been a new state park since 1992.
- Parks staff prioritize proposed expansion and improvements based on the significance of the park. All acquisitions must be approved by the State Parks and Recreation Commission.
- State Parks has its lands mapped on GIS, but as simple shape files and not at a survey level of accuracy.

WDFW:

- WDFW has a dual mandate: conserving fish and wildlife and providing public recreational opportunities.
- WDFW owns or manages about 900,000 acres; most is open to the public; the agency also provides about 600 water access sites.
- Acquisitions are typically identified by field staff, often resulting from opportunities for purchase or donation from adjacent landowners or from identifying critical habitat or land needed for habitat connectivity.
- The agency tries to use land exchanges as a way to acquire inholdings.
- All acquisitions and disposals are approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.
- WDFW has all of its lands mapped on GIS.

DNR:

- DNR owns and manages about 2.9 million acres of uplands for a variety of institutional trust beneficiaries. About 2 million acres of aquatic lands are held in public trust.
- In addition, the agency stewards high quality ecosystems called natural area preserves (NAPs) and natural resource conservation areas (NRCAs). NAPs are preserved for research and education; NRCAs for conservation restoration, scenic values, and recreation.
- DNR follows a formal public process when setting boundaries for proposed acquisitions.
- Funding comes from WWRP, Sec. 6 (HCAs), and TLT.
- DNR has its lands mapped on GIS, including appropriate attributes.

During the presentations a number of observations were offered:

- ▷ The public and local elected officials need to know agencies' plans for acquisition, transfer and disposal of lands in their area.
- ▷ Although some parts of the state prefer private over public ownership of land, in some cases public land ownership is better than dividing the countryside into 20-acre parcels.
- ▷ There are other useful tools for conservation that can provide an alternative for acquisition, such as landowner incentives.
- ▷ The US Forest Service should be invited to participate in the HRLCG since they are a major public landowner and should be part of a coordinated approach to providing recreation and habitat land.

- ▷ There are opportunities for public and private land exchanges that can benefit all of the participants.
- ▷ Although it is important for GIS maps of publicly owned lands to be available to agencies and the public, it can be detrimental to map archeological sites and locations of rare plants or endangered animal species.
- ▷ There is a need for a common portal to access public land ownership records in a common format.

Opportunities for the Habitat and Recreation Coordinating Group were offered by participants:

- To coordinate the efforts, with the state agencies working together.
- Opportunities for acquiring more recreation land.
- There are growing demands on public lands, and there is no choice but to coordinate efforts.
- To improve transparency on land acquisitions.
- To develop a state-wide vision for public land acquisition, coordinating activities, while recognizing the different missions of the state agencies.
- To develop a strategic approach to acquisition, exchange, disposal.

The group decided to adopt Okanogan county as a pilot to look at land ownership, ownership data, and short- and long-term plans for acquisition, exchange and disposals. It was also suggested that experts be brought to meetings to provide relevant information, such as information on the “green printing” effort in King County.