



STATE OF WASHINGTON

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August 31, 2006

TO: IAC Board Members and Designees

FROM: Laura E. Johnson, Director *LEJ*

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SUBJECT: Potential Change in Direction for Urban Wildlife Habitat:
Recommended Procedure
Notebook Item #9

BACKGROUND

At the June 2006 meeting, members of the Interagency Committee reviewed a staff report and discussed the direction of the "Urban Wildlife Habitat" category of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP). The staff report provided some history on funding decisions, and noted that significant changes were made to the program in 1999. These changes were recommended by a stakeholder group and were partly in response to growing trends in looking at parcels of habitat land as part of an overall system, rather than in isolation. The resulting modifications changed the types of projects that were successful.

Following discussion, the Board asked staff to come back this September with a proposal to review and propose policy changes during the next year.

ISSUES

The criteria and policy changes made in 1999 were primarily:

- Broadening eligibility to include additional rural areas in densely populated counties
- Modifying the evaluation criteria to favor habitat-focused elements over people-focused elements
- Placing state and local projects in head-to-head competition, instead of a guaranteed amount for each level of government



The types of funding results that have occurred from these changes include:

- A preliminary trend indicating that more state projects than local projects are receiving funding
- The average grant size has increased (and thus a smaller total number of projects funded)
- Shift in location of projects from urban core to the urban fringe and rural areas

The issues raised by the Board during their discussion in June 2006 include the intent of the category, the desirability of encouraging appropriate or compatible human interaction with habitat areas, and the type of land on which the category needs to focus. Board members indicated a desire to revisit the various policies that have resulted in these changes, and asked for a proposal and timeline from staff.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND SCHEDULE

The key questions that staff have formulated to date are:

1. Is the current focus of the UWH category still appropriate?
2. Should we give localities more flexibility to establish their own priorities?
3. Should measures of success for the UWH Program be formalized?

In order to systematically address these and other relevant issues, staff recommends the following course of action.

1. Assemble a small advisory group. Appropriate members of the group should include the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, and local agency staff. The committee would be briefed on the Board's interests, and given background material including research documents already developed by staff.

A key element of discussion for the advisory group would be to review the criteria and policy changes made in 1999, review the results, and evaluate whether changes should be made to the program in view of the Board's concerns.

2. Concurrent with assembly of the advisory committee, interview some sponsors known to be active prior to 1999 to gather other opinion on these questions.
3. Based on advisory group discussion, and follow-up discussion with the Board, staff would draft proposed changes to the UWH program as warranted. This could include revising policies; revising evaluation criteria; and developing formal measures of success. It may be desirable to test the draft by using some recent applications that did not score well enough to be funded.

4. Once draft changes acceptable to advisors and staff are complete, we would then present them for public review. We propose electronic publication via e-mail to appropriate interest areas in the agency's mailing lists.
5. Based on public comment, staff would develop a formal proposal for Board consideration. The Board would be asked to approve the changes in an open public meeting.

Staff would intend to bring a report and recommendation back for Board review by June 2007.