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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

October 12, 2007

Topic #14: WWRP Project Ranking in the State Parks Category – Policy Issue

Prepared and Presented By: Marguerite Austin

Approved by the Director: 

Proposed Action: Decision

Summary

On August 27, Recreation and Conservation Office staff requested comment from interested parties on whether or not to revise the evaluation process for the State Parks category of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP). This memorandum summarizes the proposed options and comments, and outlines staff's recommendation for modifications to existing program policies.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends allowing the State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) to undertake its own evaluation and ranking of projects, and submit the list to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) for final adoption. Staff also recommends that the RCFB approve the evaluation process and criteria before implementation and approve any subsequent changes.

Recreation and Conservation Office staff will continue to review applications for eligibility, completeness and consistency with existing policy. RCFB will continue to have final responsibility for approving the ranked list that is submitted with the WWRP capital budget request.

Background

The Washington State Legislature established the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program¹ in 1990. The RCFB establishes program policies, including the evaluation and ranking process for the State Parks category.

¹ WWRP is codified in RCW 79A.15 and WAC 286-27.



The State Parks category is unique for two reasons. First, the Commission is the sole eligible applicant, and second, the WWRP statutes do not include specific criteria for assessing projects in this category. The current RCFB evaluation process involves in-person presentations to a team that uses evaluation criteria adopted by the RCFB for scoring and ranking projects. The evaluation team includes state parks staff, representatives from other governmental entities, and citizens-at-large.

Although the evaluation team scores and ranks projects, the RCFB has allowed the Commission to re-order the list if significant changes are supported with clear reasoning and all deliberations are conducted in an advertised public meeting following public comment. The revised list, along with justification for the changes made, is then submitted to the RCFB for final consideration and adoption.

While this process has worked in the past, last year the State Parks' Director requested, and the RCFB approved, a major re-ordering of the ranked list based on the justification that the revised order better met the Commission's priorities. This raised the question of whether the RCFB should modify the established evaluation process in order to take into consideration the priorities adopted by the Commission.

Analysis

Stakeholders commented on the following four options regarding evaluation of State Parks category projects.

- ➔ **Option 1:** Allows the Commission to undertake its own evaluation and ranking of projects. The Commission would submit the list of projects for final approval and adoption by the RCFB. The RCFB would not evaluate the projects.

Pros	Cons
This option avoids duplication of efforts, thereby conserving staff resources.	State Parks Commission priorities may not match RCFB priorities.
Avoids the awkwardness of asking a volunteer panel to rank projects, only to have the list reordered by the Commission.	The Recreation and Conservation Office is responsible for administering the grants. This option limits RCFB participation to simply approving the final ranked list.
Places greater emphasis on priorities established by the Commission through its planning and prioritization process.	Lack of RCFB review may be seen as delegating statutory responsibility for ensuring the best investment of WWRP funds.

- ➔ **Option 2:** Allows the Commission to undertake its own evaluation and ranking of projects and submit them to the RCFB for final adoption. However, the RCFB would require that the Commission use an evaluation process and evaluation criteria that were formally approved by the RCFB before the beginning of the grant cycle.

Pros	Cons
This option enjoys many of the pros listed above in Option 1. The major difference is that the RCFB has oversight regarding the evaluation criteria and process. While this option may not provide as much autonomy for State Parks Commission as Option 1, it does avoid the disadvantages of Option 1.	Eliminates an independent review of proposed projects.
RCFB involvement provides an opportunity for public comment outside of the State Parks arena.	

- ➔ **Option 3:** Modify the existing evaluation criteria to better reflect the priorities of the Commission. The evaluation process would remain the same.

Pros	Cons
Should lead to more consistent ranking between the State Parks and Recreation and Conservation Office lists of evaluated projects.	Process remains duplicative.

- ➔ **Option 4:** No change to the existing evaluation process

Pros	Cons
Existing criteria were designed to reward those projects that best meet the RCFB priorities for the State Parks category. Agency priorities may or may not match these priorities.	It is an inefficient use of resources to run two separate evaluation processes.
The external evaluation process is designed to obtain an objective evaluation of each project.	Recreation and Conservation Office and Commission lists will continue to be inconsistent, requiring last-minute rectification.

Generally, stakeholder comments did not see merit in the duplicative process of separate entities evaluating the projects. However, they also felt it was important for the RCFB to have some oversight regarding the process and development of the list.

Next Steps

Public comments on the proposed options referenced above were distributed to the Board at the September 14 RCFB meeting. Comments received by October 25 on staff's recommendation as presented in this memorandum will be distributed to the Board electronically in advance of the November meeting.

If the Board approves the staff's recommendation, staff will update Manual #10a, *WWRP Outdoor Recreation Account: Policies and Project Selection*, and send out notices to potential applicants and other interested parties. Adopted changes will affect grant requests beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.

Attachments

- Resolution 2007-30
- Resolution adopted by the State Parks and Recreation Commission

RESOLUTION #2007-30
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
Evaluation Process for the State Parks Category

WHEREAS, Chapter 79A.15 RCW established the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) and authorized the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) to adopt policies and rules for the program; and

WHEREAS, the program provides funds for projects submitted to the State Parks category of the Outdoor Recreation Account, which is open only to the State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission); and

WHEREAS, in the past the Commission and the RCFB have each independently evaluated and ranked State Parks category projects submitted to the RCFB for fund consideration; and

WHEREAS, this independent evaluation is duplicative and the results are sometimes inconsistent; and

WHEREAS, the RCFB desires to modify the policy regarding the evaluation process for the State Parks category to eliminate the inefficiency; and

WHEREAS, the proposed policy has been made available for review and comment by individuals and organizations that have expressed an interest in WWRP; and

WHEREAS, final adoption of this policy revision will be incorporated into Manual 10a, *WWRP Outdoor Recreation Account: Policies and Project Selection*;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the RCFB delegates to the Commission the evaluation and ranking of Commission projects to be submitted to the RCFB for funding following RCFB approval of the evaluation process and criteria to be used; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Recreation and Conservation Office staff continue to review applications for eligibility, completeness, and consistency with RCFB policies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that RCFB will continue to have final responsibility for approving the list that is submitted with the WWRP capital budget request; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Recreation and Conservation Office staff is directed to take the necessary steps for implementation of this revision beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.

Resolution moved by: _____

Resolution seconded by: _____

Adopted/Defeated/Deferred (underline one)

Date: November 1, 2007

**Resolution to Recreation and Conservation Office regarding
Washington Wildlife Recreation Program "State Parks"
Category**

As regards the evaluation process for the State Parks category of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, the Commission passed this at its September Commission meeting:

1. Expresses its support for "Option 2, wherein the Commission does project ranking.
2. It is the Commissions desire that project ranking criteria be mutually agreed upon by the Recreation Conservation Office and the Commission.
3. The Commission is supportive of the Recreation Conservation Office adopting the Commission created rank project list as certification that the agreed upon process was followed.
4. The Commission wishes to express its continued support of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, the work of the Recreation Conservation Office and the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.