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**Item #20:** **Enhanced Strategic Planning for Recreation and Open Space**

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**Presented By:** Jim Eychaner, Senior Outdoor Resource Planner

**Approved by the Director:**

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**Proposed Action:** Discussion and Direction

### Summary

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (Board) has expressed interest in “big picture” strategic planning for recreation and open space. This memo builds on the Board’s discussion at the January 2008 meeting and outlines alternative approaches for that planning.

### Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the appointment of a Board subcommittee to work with Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff to develop a preferred direction.

### Background

Members of the Board have expressed interest in participating in the development of a more strategic approach to recreation and conservation investments and a visionary look out into the future. This approach would build on the new State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) document that is scheduled to be submitted to the Governor and the National Park Service in June.

The Board directed staff to begin taking steps to develop a state strategic plan for the acquisition, renovation, and development of recreational resources and the preservation and conservation of open space. In addition, RCFB directed staff to develop options for Board direction and involvement.



This memo describes some scope of planning scenarios that need more thought and discussion. They are included here as examples of the kinds of strategic thinking that could go into a future vision for public investments in recreation and conservation.

#### Option 1: The most ambitious approach

*This “big picture” approach could focus on how public investments in recreation and conservation advance other big picture public policy agendas. For example, how can the investments strategically address our state’s response to global warming or the public health response to reducing obesity rates?*

To further explore the global warming example, how do our investments reduce greenhouse emissions and use of fossil fuel? In 2005, Governor Gregoire signed the Clean Car Bill, and Washington joined seven other states in enacting strong emission standards for automobiles. Should our grant programs that benefit motorized vehicles (Boating, NOVA) be modified to meet the intent of reducing greenhouse gas emissions? Should our other grant programs have incentives to encourage alternative modes of transportation and decrease the need for reliance on the burning of fossil fuels?

Under the Governor’s leadership, Washington became the first state to adopt mandatory green building standards for all new public buildings, requiring them to meet high standards of energy efficiency, water conservation, and other environmental protection measures. Should our grant evaluation criteria to measure or mandate “green building standards” and/or to reward sustainable design and materials?

The media have offered stories about the decline of public participation in nature-oriented pursuits and the decline of interest in the outdoors. Should our investment priorities shift (e.g., from capital acquisition and development to maintenance or from rural to urban) to take the outdoors to where people live and work?

#### Option 2: An ambitious, but more focused, approach

*This approach could look at how the state’s investments in recreation and conservation relate to existing local and state comprehensive planning, and what tools are needed to make this relationship work.*

For example, the Growth Management Act (GMA) places planning responsibility on local jurisdictions. This approach is essentially a bottom-up approach to land use decision-making, including how open space and recreation lands are identified or designated. However, other planning requirements (e.g., the open space planning requirement of RCW 79A.25.020) appear to conflict with the GMA by assigning recreation planning to both RCO and counties. There may be areas where the state

can assist the local governments in meeting their GMA (or RCO) mandates beyond what we do now. Should the state help local agencies to identify “open space corridors” within and between urban growth areas (RCW 36.70A.160)? “Corridors” could include trails, riparian areas, salmon habitat, and large resource-based parks, all of which are addressed by our grant programs. Should the state collect and publish all available data, including maps, that define and depict open space and critical areas – similar to the way RCO mapped all known recreational trails in 1991?

Another example that could be explored further is the recreation level of service concept. Tools used for recreation planning have not kept up with the changes in our understanding of recreation. RCO has developed a new concept in recreation planning called level of service (LOS). This new concept is intended to offer recreation professionals a composite set of measures to determine success in delivery of recreation sites and facilities. The new concept is already at work in a number of communities in our state. Staff has proposed a modest state-level test of this concept by incorporating LOS into the Land and Water Conservation Fund evaluation criteria. Should the Board take additional steps towards the implementation of LOS, perhaps by testing the concept in communities of different sizes across the state? Should this planning effort incorporate a GIS product that determines proximity of state recreation and access sites and lands to the state’s population? Should the board evaluate developing common facility construction standards?

Option 3: High-level strategic approach that incorporates or links the planning efforts of others.

*This approach could focus on how to link the various strategic planning efforts of others together. Numerous existing recreation-related planning activities have direct or indirect connections to recreation and open space lands and facilities. The Board could direct staff to work with partner agencies to help fill in staff or fund “gaps.” Examples include:*

State agency recreation planning. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is assessing sustainable access on its trust properties statewide. State Parks is implementing its Centennial Plan. The Department of Fish and Wildlife has its Vision 20/20 plan. RCO is working with these and other partners on the state land acquisition coordination strategy, based in part on the RCO-managed Public Lands Inventory Project.

Statewide infrastructure. Two current session bills, HB 2875 and SB 6613, direct the Office of Financial Management to develop a 20-year infrastructure plan for the state, including parks and open space.

Open space planning. DNR is part of a national pilot program called “LandScope.” Planned for release in fall 2008, LandScope America will bring together maps, data, photography, and information about our environment from a variety of sources and

present them in dynamic and accessible formats. See <http://www.landscape.org/preview/>.

Local land use planning. RCO influences land use planning through State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) data, grants, and compliance rules. The level of service concept, as it evolves, could prove to be an asset to growth management planning. Staff already is working with Washington Recreation and Park Association in a series of workshops to discuss and refine the concept. Staff could do further exploratory work with the Washington State Department of Community, Trade & Economic Development (CTED) and other groups to determine if there are areas in which RCO could provide assistance in addition to data and grants.

## **Analysis**

To avoid duplication of effort and inefficiency, to help meet objections of agencies already mandated to plan, and to clarify direction for staff, the Board should identify base assumptions and parameters. Staff suggests the Board think about:

- Where RCO planning could make a unique (and useful) contribution;
- How RCO work could add value to the planning and policy work of others, without duplicating or conflicting with that work;
- How in-depth policy and planning work can be accomplished without compromising the impartiality of the RCO's grant programs;
- How to be consistent with broader agendas and processes (such as the Governor's priorities of government efforts); and
- How or whether such efforts can be accomplished within current agency staffing and budget.

## **Next Steps**

1. Discuss whether any of the proposed optional approaches is the right direction, or whether a different course is preferred.
2. Appoint a subcommittee to work with staff.
3. Identify a clear objective.
3. Develop a recommended scope of work, including an outreach plan.
4. Identify the resources needed (staff, consultants, additional data, etc.).
5. Develop a cost estimate.
6. Recommend whether to seek additional budget in ensuing biennia.

## **Attachments**

None