



STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

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Item #8: Options to Address the Under-Subscription of the Farmland Preservation Program

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Approved by the Director:

Proposed Action: Briefing

Summary

In the event that the Legislature appropriates \$80 million or more for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) will have enough money to cover all projects approved by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (Board) in September 2008. In addition, the account will have an uncommitted fund balance.

As requested by the Board, Recreation and Conservation Office staff is presenting options that can inform potential future decisions about these uncommitted funds.

Staff Recommendation

Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff is not making a recommendation at this time. Staff will provide an update to the Board in March.

Background

Since its inception in 2005, interest in the FPP grant account has grown. Currently, there are 16 projects under agreement that will protect many acres, as shown below.



Total number of projects evaluated <i>(fiscal years 2006, 2007, 2008)</i>	42
Number of different project sponsors	16
Number of projects under agreement	16 projects totaling \$6.6 M ¹
Total acres to be protected	2,408

Many counties and cities are developing farmland preservation programs and creating partnerships with non-profit groups to assist in planning and acquisition. Most of these programs are in their infancy, so sponsors may not have established farmland preservation priorities or have extensive lists of willing participants. In addition, sponsors and their partners have told RCO staff that finding firm matching dollars is difficult.

In 2007, the FPP was under-committed by approximately \$4.0 million. As a result, the Board requested authority from the Legislature to conduct a second-year grant cycle and provide technical assistance grants to counties. The Board awarded the Conservation Commission a block grant of \$207,000 to fund eight county farmland technical assistance grants. The commission will provide a report on the accomplishments to the RCO in February 2009.

In the event that the Legislature appropriates \$80 million or more for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, the Farmland Preservation Program will have enough money to cover all projects approved by the Board in September 2008. In addition, the account will have an uncommitted fund balance, which will vary according to the total appropriation as shown in the following table.

Total WWRP Appropriation	Projected amount remaining in the FPP Account after all 2008 cycle projects are funded
\$80 Million	\$96,757
\$90 Million	\$1,066,757
\$100 Million	\$2,036,757

Analysis

The Board's decision about how to distribute any remaining FPP funds will depend on the final WWRP allocation. Options are limited if the FPP Account has only \$90,000 remaining, but having \$2.0 million provides an opportunity to implement a wider range of options.

¹ Includes a block grant to the Conservation Commission in 2007 that funded 8 planning grants

Option 1

Conduct a 2009 grant cycle to allocate any remaining funding available in the FPP Account. This option would require legislative approval in RCO's capital budget.

Option 2

Provide a second block grant to the Conservation Commission to provide technical assistance grants to counties and cities. This option also would require legislative approval in the capital budget.

Option 3

A third option would combine options 1 and 2.

At the post-project evaluation meetings in August 2008, the FPP Advisory Committee supported both a second round of farmland grants and additional funding for counties and cities to conduct farmland preservation planning.

Next Steps

As the budget is developed during the 2009 legislative session, staff will seek proviso language to give the Board the greatest amount of flexibility in the event that there are excess funds available in the Farmland Account. After the Governor signs the capital budget, the Board can decide which of the above options to pursue, depending on the amount of excess funds available.