

Possible effects of Natural Resource reform ideas on RCO programs

Reorganization

The section on reorganizing Natural Resource agencies would have significant effect on RCO programs depending on which option is chosen. The Subcabinet presented the following ideas for structure changes.

1. **Two-Agency Model** – Reorganize existing agencies into the following two new agencies
 - a. Department of Environmental Regulation, which would manage environmental permits, land use, and other environmental issues.
 - b. Department of Resource, Recreation, and Land Management, which would manage state lands and recreation. **RCO programs would be placed here under this model.**
2. **Three-Agency Model** - Reorganize existing agencies into the following three new agencies:
 - a. Environmental Protection Agency, which would manage pollution impacts and land use.
 - b. Agriculture and Natural Resources Land Management Agency, which would manage state conservation and working lands (agriculture, logging, etc.)
 - c. Recreation, Resources, and Ecosystem Conservation Agency, which would manage fish, wildlife and recreation; regulate hydraulic approvals; and address ecosystem-based management and recovery. **RCO programs would be placed here under this model.**
3. **Four-Agency Model** keeps the Departments of Ecology, Agriculture, and Natural Resources remaining as they are and creates a new “Department of Ecosystem Management and Recreation” through the merger of the Department of Fish and Wildlife and State Parks. **RCO programs would be placed in the “Ecosystem Management” department under this model.**
4. **Five-Agency Model** creates five independent agencies and shifts programs from current agencies to align related programs.
 - a. Environmental Protection Agency, which would manage pollution impacts and land use.
 - b. Agricultural Agency, which would support and promote agriculture.
 - c. Public Land Management Agency, which would manage state-owned lands.
 - d. Resource and Ecosystem Conservation Agency, which would manage public resources (fish and wildlife), regulate natural resources activities, and address ecosystem-based management and recovery. **Salmon recovery and monitoring programs, the Biodiversity Council, and the Invasive Species Council would be placed here under this model.**
 - e. Environmental and Natural Resources Financial Assistance Agency, which would provide leadership and accountability for all natural resources and environmental grant and loan programs. **RCO grant programs would be placed here under this model.**

The remaining reorganization ideas do not require agency consolidations to be implemented.

5. **Unified vision** – This idea creates a unified vision for all natural resources agencies to better enable state government to focus increasingly scarce time and money on the most important things. Under this idea, agencies would create a unified vision, mission, goals, and outcomes for natural resources management through strategic planning. Agencies would identify a common set of environmental threats and would prioritize and synchronize management strategies, and then collaborate to achieve the goals.

6. **Re-Align Regional Boundaries and co-locate regional offices** – Under this idea, agencies, over time, would combine and relocate their current regional offices into regional offices made up of multiple agency employees, supported by shared work centers.
7. **Collaborative Ecosystem-based Management** – Under this idea, agencies collaboratively would establish goals and priorities in eco-regions, which are large geographic areas (such as Puget Sound), that have topographical and ecological characteristics that differentiate them from other eco-regions. This idea could use science and local planning and prioritization processes to better focus state efforts.
8. **Formalize Multi-Agency Collaboration** – In this idea, cross-agency teams and formal working relationships would be established between agencies. These cross-agency teams would have dedicated employees, budgets, and missions that focus on strategy, coordinated responses, and shared responsibilities. This model is known as “structured collaboration.” **Examples are the the RCO-staffed Invasive Species Council, Biodiversity Council, and Habitat and Recreation Lands Work Group.**

Sharing Services and Functions

- a. Share Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, which is used to inventory, manage, and map information about Washington's natural and human built environment. This information is used to manage natural resources, protect Washington's environment, and ensure public safety.
- b. Coordinate Citizen Science – Agencies conduct diverse environmental monitoring that requires unique expertise. Under this idea, agencies and citizens better collaborate to gather data. **RCO would be the lead agency in scoping, testing and implementing the citizen science project.**
- c. Consolidate Natural Resources Law Enforcement Officers – Several ideas were presented, such as:
 - i. Reclassify all natural resource agency law enforcement officers to expand their authority to that of general police officers.
 - ii. Combine law enforcement officers from the Departments of Fish and Wildlife and Natural Resources into an independent agency.
 - iii. Create a Natural Resource Enforcement Bureau by merging law enforcement officers from the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources into the Washington State Patrol.
- d. Consolidate Grants and Loans – Two ideas were presented here:
 - i. Create a Natural Resources Financial Assistance Agency that would co-locate current grant and loan programs. This one agency would develop a web-based portal for customer access; standardize forms and reporting; and coordinate compliance of contractual obligations. **RCO would have a major role in mapping the current grant process and recommending appropriate realignments.**
 - ii. Create a Natural Resources Grants and Loans Council, which would create a centralized information portal and develop common forms, procedures, protocols, and performance measures. Under the council, grants and loans would remain in multiple agencies, but some of the current grant programs would be aligned along functional lines. **RCO would have a major role in mapping the current grant process and recommending appropriate realignments.**

Improving Environmental Protection, Permitting and Compliance

- a. Update the Growth Management Act.
- b. Expand current pilot projects testing consolidated and coordinated permitting systems.
- c. Give agencies authority to do permit by rule, which allows them to pre-package a set of requirements applicants must comply with to receive permits.
- d. Consolidate regulation of dairy's manure waste from two agencies to one.
- e. Target delivery of incentive-based programs for landowners – Under this idea, the state Conservation Commission would be the point-of-contact for incentive programs. Conservation districts would coordinate with state, federal, local and tribal agencies to provide a package of tailored incentives to a landowner. **This recommendation would affect landowner incentives included in RCO grant programs and those which are part of the Biodiversity Council strategy.**
- f. Implement Outcome-Based Environmental Management – Under this idea, the State would shift its emphasis for managing environmental resources from a single resource view to a view that attempts to achieve larger ecosystem objectives.

9. Streamlining quasi-judicial boards

- a. Move select environmental appeals from the Office of Administrative Hearings to boards with environmental expertise.
- b. Consolidate boards into a single agency – Under this idea the functions performed under the Environmental Hearings Office and the Growth Management Hearings Boards would be merged into a single adjudicative agency containing two major quasi-judicial components: Appeals of natural resources and environmental regulatory matters, and land use related appeals.
- c. Consider restructuring or consolidating the three regional Growth Management Hearings Boards.
- d. Eliminate duplicative administrative review for some agency decisions – This idea would eliminate the ability to request remission or mitigation of civil penalties from the Departments of Ecology and Natural Resources. Appeals of the civil penalty would go directly to the appropriate board.