



STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

November 2009

TO: Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Members

FROM: Kaleen Cottingham, Director

SUBJECT: Director and Agency Management Report, November 2009

2009 Grants Cycle

Evaluations are underway for 128 projects requesting nearly \$7.1 million in four grant programs: Boating Infrastructure Grants (BIG), Firearms and Archery Range Recreation (FARR), Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and Recreational Trails (RTP). We estimate that there is about \$2.8 million available for projects submitted this year.

Recruitment Underway for Evaluation Teams

RCO is recruiting for four standing advisory committees and for volunteers to help review and evaluate projects in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program during calendar year 2010. RCO needs more than 150 volunteers with expertise in various natural resource disciplines, such as design and development of public access sites, as well as experience with land use and land management. RCO usually recruits for advisory committee members annually for the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) program. Because there are no grant funds to award this biennium, we extended the terms for the entire committee. Regular recruitment of new members will resume in 2010 in anticipation of a 2011 grant cycle.

Helping our Partners Celebrate Success

I attended the opening of a pedestrian trail under the Elwha River Bridge. In this unique construction, the Olympic Discovery Trail hangs under the bridge to separate vehicle from people traffic. The work was funded by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. In another event, RCO attended the Skagit Watershed Council's annual luncheon in La Conner to celebrate the council's past successes and that of their partners, and to review their 2009 salmon restoration proposals. And finally several of us attended the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition's annual breakfast, at which the 20 years of investing a billion dollars in outdoor recreation and conservation was celebrated.

Washington Association of Land Trusts

This newly formed non-profit is an umbrella group to help keep the many local (and statewide) land trusts working together and to help advocate on issues that are important to them individually and collectively. They asked me to participate in their September meeting and to come to future meetings. This group can be helpful for reviewing policy options and to help get the word out about upcoming grant rounds and policy and process changes. The next meeting is in December.



Update of Legislative Assignments

- **Agriculture, critical areas, and RCO** – RCO staff has been participating in discussions on implementing Senate Bill 5248, which tasked the University of Washington's Ruckelshaus Center with examining the interactions between agricultural activities and the environmental regulation of critical areas, and to identify innovative approaches that will advance both. The committee is scheduled to continue to meet this fall. One possible outcome is that RCO may play a role in a new (or revised) agricultural-critical area grant program.
- **Coordinating Watershed Planning and Salmon Recovery Work** – The legislature tasked RCO with assessing opportunities for coordination between watershed planning efforts and salmon recovery efforts. RCO staff has been reviewing existing plans and literature and meeting with regional recovery organizations, lead entities, regional fisheries enhancement groups, watershed planning lead agencies, ecology watershed leads, and other key participants in areas where watershed and recovery planning is occurring. Discussions have focused on how coordination is occurring now, additional opportunities for coordination, identifying incentives to do so, and any obstacles impeding further coordination. The report is due to the legislature in early December.
- **Land Preservation tools** – The legislature directed RCO to evaluate various land preservation mechanisms such as fee simple acquisitions, conservation easements, term conservation easements, and leases. The study is considering the ability of each to respond to future economic, social, and environmental changes. Included in the assessment is an examination of the relative advantages, disadvantages, and costs of each. Due to internal staffing constraints, the law firm of GordonDerr has been contracted to do the assessment. The firm is reviewing existing literature, interviewing key stakeholders and experts in land preservation, and preparing a report due in December.
- **Sustainable Recreation Work Group** – RCO is participating in a sustainable recreation work group, organized by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to look at ways that its recreation activities might get sustainable funding. Among the options being discussed are user fees for DNR lands, changing the laws to reduce recreational liability in some circumstances, and creating a trust where proceeds would support recreation. The work group, which largely consists of citizens and interest groups, also is looking at DNR policies for acquiring and maintaining recreational lands. Recommendations are out for public comment now, with possible legislative recommendations to follow.

Setting Policy Priorities and Updating Manuals

Staff is revising RCO grant manuals on two fronts. Working with section staff and communications staff, Jim Eychaner will coordinate the annual process of updating grant manuals before the next grant round. We also have a team working on a major makeover of our manuals, focusing on ways to make them easier for sponsors to use, converting manuals into "plain talk" formats, and creating a more robust online version.

PRISM Modifications

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) revised its reporting metrics in the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund database, which requires RCO to make significant updates to PRISM. A portion of the 2008 and 2009 federal grants will fund the work. The NOAA modifications are designed to capture metrics for salmon recovery, but the RCO is using this as an opportunity to also capture information about conservation and recreation projects. When the modifications are complete, RCO staff will be able to provide more performance measures for its grants. For example, these measurements will allow us to determine how many miles of trail were maintained, how many acres were acquired for new parks, or the number of stream miles protected for salmon recovery. The measures could be taken across all programs, or by specific fund source. We hope to have most of the work completed this fall. In addition, RCO has been working on a module in PRISM for progress reports. This module will increase communication between RCO staff and sponsors. It is designed to allow staff to better monitor project progress and subsequently reduce re-appropriation requests. This new module should be available for use by mid-October.

Conversions and Compliance

I testified before the State Route 520 legislative work group about the conversions that will be caused by rebuilding the floating bridge and its approach at the Washington Park Arboretum in Seattle. Different construction options have different effects in terms of acres that will be converted. Once a construction plan has been selected, Seattle and the University of Washington will need to identify replacement properties to mitigate the conversion. Ultimately the plan will go before the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board and, if approved, will be recommended to the National Park Service.

Interns and outdoor grant managers have been inspecting grant funded sites all across the state this summer. The information gathered is entered into PRISM and immediate needs are prioritized and addressed accordingly. Staff continues to work with state agencies on outstanding compliance issues. RCO and the Department of Fish and Wildlife have been working through a "top ten" list of projects and progress has been made on several fronts. RCO is addressing 21 Department of Natural Resources grants that were funded through LWCF but transferred to other entities. Both agencies have recently shown a renewed effort in working with RCO to rectify compliance issues.

Board Updates

- **Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB)** – The SRFB will be meeting on October 16th to approve early action PSAR grants and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation small grant program. Almost the entire afternoon is dedicated to a discussion of monitoring, including reviewing the Monitoring Forum's recommendations for the future funding of SRFB monitoring programs. Following the recommendations, the SRFB will decide whether to continue funding for monitoring at several intensively monitored watershed (IMWs), effectiveness monitoring, and fish-in/fish-out monitoring. The SRFB will also decide whether to fund the development of near-shore monitoring protocols. The meeting will wrap with an overview of upcoming policy changes.

In preparation for final grant decisions at the December SRFB meeting, staff and the review panel are busy reviewing all the grant applications. The week of October 12th will be filled with four day-long meetings at which regions and reviewers exchange information on the projects.

- **Washington Invasive Species Council** – At the September meeting, the council discussed some of its top priority actions from its strategic plan, such as creating a grid for identifying the top 50 invasive species and what management actions would be needed, an education work plan, and new Web site. The council also formed an executive committee to compile council comments on transforming the natural resources agencies report and to provide comments on recent ballast water rules. And it discussed hot topics related to sudden oak death, new proposed Coast Guard ballast water standards, and an upcoming zebra mussel rapid response exercise.
- **Biodiversity Council** – In September, Biodiversity Council staff gave presentations about the council to a variety of organizations – the Natural Areas Association, the Wild Links Conference, and the North Central Washington Economic Development District. Staff also interviewed Okanogan Valley land use planners, farmers, and ranchers to gauge their understanding and opinions about wildlife corridors. These interviews followed an earlier set held in Olympia with representatives from a number of landowner associations, counties, and cities. The interviews are part of a larger stakeholder process the council is funding in support of habitat connectivity efforts statewide and at the request of the Governor's Office. A final report on stakeholder feedback will be available this fall.
- **Forum on Monitoring Salmon Recovery and Watershed Health** – At the September meeting, the forum adopted high level indicators for salmon recovery. These indicators were required by legislation enacted last session. At the next forum meeting, they expect to adopt high level indicators for watershed health. This effort has been a culmination of many years work. The forum also finalized its review of the monitoring program funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board. The forum's recommendations will be presented to the SRFB at its October meeting.