

**Item 2D**

Meeting Date: March 2010  
Title: Policy Report  
Prepared By: Steve McLellan, Policy Director

Approved by the Director:

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**Proposed Action: Briefing**

## Summary

The Policy Section is working on a number of issues at the request of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (board), the legislature, and the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff and director. This memo highlights the status of some key efforts.

### Grant Round Scheduling Options: NOVA and Boating Facilities

During the 2009 legislative session, Boating and Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activity (NOVA) funds were swept to help balance State Parks' budget. No applications were accepted in 2009.

Clients and RCO staff were uncertain about whether applications should be developed for these programs in calendar year 2010. It is time consuming and costly for clients to prepare applications, and it seemed unreasonable to accept applications for money that may not exist. The director instructed staff to consult with our clients on a preferred course of action. Staff surveyed a random sample of boating and NOVA clients from our PRISM "interest lists" to evaluate three options:

- Option 1: Hold a 2010 grant round with the normal May 2010 application deadline.
- Option 2: Hold a 2010 grant round with a December 2010 application deadline, evaluate and rank proposals in early 2011, and be ready for funding in the 2011-2013 biennium.
- Option 3: Do nothing in 2010, but hold a 2011 grant round with the normal schedule.

Nineteen people responded: four "voted" for Option 1, nine for Option 2, and eight for Option 3 (some respondents chose more than one option). Three suggested other possible actions as follows:

- Hold 2009 lists for future funding,
- Ask potential applicants for a letter of intent to help explain the need for the money
- Use the evaluation results from calendar year 2008 that were not funded due to legislative action.

Clients reminded us that preparing applications is time consuming and expensive; it would be unreasonable to ask them to put in the effort for likely unavailable money.

Staff has recommended to the director that no grant round be held in calendar year 2010, and that we monitor the 2010-11 Legislative session. If boating and NOVA money is forthcoming in the 2011-13 biennial budget, RCO should plan to conduct a 2011 grant round as soon as possible after the budget is approved. Staff also agreed with the recommendation to ask for letters of intent to gauge potential interest in the next round of the program. Staff does not believe that using 2008 evaluation lists is advisable because budget estimates, on-the-ground conditions, and other factors will likely have changed by 2011.

## **Manual Revisions**

Staff is working to revise program manuals for use in 2010. Policies already approved by the board have been incorporated. Any policies adopted at the March 2010 meeting will be incorporated, as well. Manuals have been reformatted for easier reading, and the text has been revised for "plain talk" as required by Governor's Executive Order 05-03. "Plain talk" does not change the substance of the manual. Staff also will be working this year to convert the manuals to an easily searchable, more useful online format.

## **Level of Service Test**

RCO's contractor, AECOM (formerly known as EDAW) is collecting data from agencies. AECOM reports some challenges in securing data from smaller jurisdictions that do not have the resources needed to generate data, and from state agencies. As a result, AECOM is using secondary data sources so the project, which is due in November of this year, is on time and within budget. The product from the test will be a written report and recommendation. The report will be referenced in the next edition of the state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP), which is vetted by public review.

## **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 considers the suitability of each mechanism 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. The RCO submitted the report to the Office of Financial Management and the appropriate legislative committees in January. It can be found at: [http://www.rco.wa.gov/doc\\_pages/other\\_pubs.shtml#salmon](http://www.rco.wa.gov/doc_pages/other_pubs.shtml#salmon).

## Compatible Uses and Structures on Board-Funded Acquisitions

When activities and structures on board-funded acquisitions are incompatible with the program purposes, this can reduce the project's ability to meet the goals of the grant program and can result in less impact of the public's investment. At the same time, sponsors need flexibility to implement projects.

Staff is considering the policy questions as they apply to this board and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB). We are examining the compatibility of activities and structures with grant program purposes on board-funded acquisitions. RCO's current policy allows compatible multiple uses on acquired lands as long as the uses are (1) clearly compatible with the approved use in the project agreement (2) clearly secondary to the approved use and (3) approved by the director in writing. An incompatible use is not eligible for program funding.

RCO staff and stakeholders will review current policies for clearly compatible and clearly incompatible activities and structures for each program. They will develop a recommended approval process and criteria for determining which activities and structures are eligible for program funding. Final recommendations will be submitted to the board later this year.

A separate workgroup is examining fund source limits (including legal restrictions on how state bond funds may be spent).

## Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

The Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group (lands group) hosted the Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum on February 3-4, 2010. The forum was designed to:

- make information about potential habitat and recreation land acquisitions open and accessible, and
- give state agencies a platform for coordinating grant requests.

About 33 people attended, including local government representatives, non-profit organizations, tribal representatives, and state agencies. Participating agencies included the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks), Department of Transportation (WSDOT), and State Conservation Commission (SCC).

State agencies presented information and maps about potential acquisition projects (funded by state, federal, and private sources) for the 2011-13 biennium. The presentations are available at [www.rco.wa.gov/doc\\_pages/other\\_pubs.shtml](http://www.rco.wa.gov/doc_pages/other_pubs.shtml).

- DFW presented 38 projects, with an estimated 169,050 acres planned for acquisition.
- DNR presented 17 projects, with an estimated 15,063 acres planned for acquisition.
- State Parks presented 15 projects, with an estimated 1,569 acres planned for acquisition.

The forum accomplished its purpose, as stakeholders had an opportunity to discuss the planned projects and identify opportunities for collaboration.

The information and maps presented at the forum will be updated after agencies submit grant requests in May 2010. An acquisition forecast report about projects planned for the 2011-2013 biennium will be published on the lands group website in June 2010.