

The Herald

Funds Needed for Parks, Habitat

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By Frank Urabeck for the Puyallup Herald
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For more than 60 years I have enjoyed the Tacoma waterfront, Point Defiance Park and especially the waters of Commencement Bay.

In recent years, I've fished and enjoyed the water with my friends and grandsons from our 24-foot cruiser. We often ride down the Foss Waterway from the Foss Landing Marina; spend some time off the mouth of the Puyallup River before working the waters off the "Slag Pile" near the boat house, stop at the "Clay Banks," then scoot over to Gig Harbor for lunch or dinner.

The Tacoma Waterfront has benefited from shoreline parks and paths along Commencement Bay and Foss Waterway. 18 acres here have been funded through the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP).

I have had the privilege of being part of the dedication of several Tacoma and Pierce County projects that received WWRP funds. These include Sprinker Park, Wards Lake Park and the Foothills Trail.

This spring, Bradley Lake Park in Puyallup is seeking funding from the WWRP grant program. To date Bradley Lake has received over \$750,000 in WWRP grants toward the purchase of this 59-acre park and the development of fishing floats, a playground, a picnic shelter, parking and an amphitheatre meadow.

If our state legislators support funding for the WWRP in the 2005 budget, Bradley Lake will get an additional \$300,000 for two baseball fields, walking trails, more parking and restrooms. 21st Street Park on the Thea Foss Waterway and the Buckley Foothills Trail are likely to receive WWRP grants this year, too.

Unfortunately, many other park and habitat projects around the state won't be funded because the proposed state budget allocates only \$45 million for the WWRP. Wedge Park in Fife is one such project. The city seeks \$70,775 for its first neighborhood park.

Unless our legislators support more WWRP funding, the local high school

students who helped plan a climbing rock, playground, and facilities for jogging, picnicking, and basketball will not see their dream realized.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program is a state grant program that helps local communities create new parks and protect wildlife habitat. Since 1990, a total of \$408 million has been provided for over 650 neighborhood parks, ball fields, trails, local beaches, wildlife habitat and state parks.

Local communities apply for grants and a competitive process is used to assess which projects should be funded. The governor and state legislature set the funding levels and approve the final list of projects.

Every day our population continues to grow, translating into nonstop development in our rural and urban areas. In addition, we continue to see shrinking city and county budgets. Rescuing, protecting and preserving our recreation areas are key to the vitality of our community and help to maintain our quality of life. Our communities have a responsibility to care for wildlife and outdoor recreation areas for our families and future generations.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition advocates for state funding for the WWRP grant program. This highly diverse group of citizen activists and leaders represent business, recreation, labor, fishing, hunting and conservation interests. The coalition is very effective but they need our help in communicating to our legislators how important this program is for our community.

Consider contacting the governor and your local state legislators to thank them for supporting the WWRP grant program. The WWRP helps provide the oxygen that breathes life into our community parks and protects our wildlife. They help make our communities a great place to live, work and play.

Frank Urabeck lives in Bonney Lake and represents Trout Unlimited on the board of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.