

# The Seattle Times

## For Generations to Come

EDITORIAL, Lance Dickey, The Seattle Times, Sept. 29, 2007  
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The festive breakfast ceremony in a Seattle hotel was packed, but the real celebration for outdoor recreation and land preservation is in hundreds of communities around the state.

Last spring, the state Legislature approved a two-year, \$100 million capital budget for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, to help counties, cities and the state acquire land for habitat conservation, farmland preservation, riparian protection and outdoor recreation. The jump from an average \$50 million a biennium to \$100 million will provide matching funds for 132 projects across the state, from Asotin to Island counties. These are capital projects financed by bonds that are repaid out of the state general fund.

Lawmakers doubled the funding for a program that has been around since 1989. Seeking higher funding was one of the four top priorities of the state's environmental community, which agreed to cooperatively and successfully target specific gains in the Legislature.

Presiding over the celebration were former Govs. Dan Evans and Mike Lowry, at the helm of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition since its inception.

Coalition really does fit in this case, with enviros, realtors, loggers and tree companies, land trusts, ports and all flavors of government finding a home. The nonpartisan intent, symbolized Evans and Lowry, has thrived and prospered in Olympia.

The program is run by the Recreation and Conservation Office with a citizen-oversight board appointed by the governor. Applications are reviewed using a formula that weighs the threat of development, the quality of the project and needs of the community.

Growth of the funding for 2007-09 was fundamentally driven by \$135 million in proposals. Local governments have to be ready with matching support. Combining local money, state funds and federal grants — plus private support — truly gives the coalition's slogan life: "Leveraging public funds for parks, wildlife and working farms."

The coalition gave awards to the top-scoring applicants in four categories. They illustrate the breadth of the projects and the reach of program geography: Game Farm Park Soccer Field in Auburn; Upper Yakima Riparian Protection in Kittitas County; Skookumchuck Watershed in Kittitas County; Dungeness Organic Farmland in Clallam County.

One year, the highest scoring project in all of Washington was a community swimming pool in a small town in the middle of the state. A tiny item in the scheme of things, huge for local citizens and a perfect expression of the goal of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.

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