

# SOUTH WHIDBEY RECORD

## Conservation Board OKs \$100 Million Request

Michaela Marx Wheatley, South Whidbey Record, October 4, 2008  
October 04, 2008

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Funding Board approved a record number of projects across the state to build parks and trails, and protect disappearing farmland and wildlife habitat. Among them are three Island County projects, for a total of \$1.6 million, that are now eligible for funding if approved by the governor's office.

Three local projects that had applied for funding didn't make the cut. County project managers had asked for a total of \$6.7 million.

Last week, the state funding board approved a list of 271 projects in 35 of the state's 39 counties to be forwarded to the Governor's office as a capital budget request. If the governor signs off on the proposal, these projects get state funds totaling \$100 million.

"This funding invests money in communities, provides jobs and builds free places for kids and adults to play and stay healthy," said Val Ogden, chair of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. "It is vital to keeping Washington a great place to live and work."

Island County got \$672,500 for protecting Ebey's Reserve Farmland, said Susan Zemek, a spokeswoman for the Recreation and Conservation Office.

The money will be used to buy a permanent agricultural conservation easement on 65 acres of farmland within Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve on Whidbey Island. The property lies on the south boundary of Coupeville and provides historic agricultural context for both the town and Ebey's Reserve. It is surrounded by hundreds of acres of protected land. While agriculture receives a high level of support on Whidbey, the threat of conversion to residential development is significant, the proponents of the project said.

The property is highly sought after because of its location adjacent to Coupeville with views of Admiralty Inlet, the Olympic Mountains and protected Ebey's Reserve farmlands. Once protected from development, the property will remain in agriculture and help guarantee the future viability of farmland within Ebey's Reserve.

Island County and the Whidbey Camano Land Trust would co-hold the easement. Island County would match the funds with local and federal grants.

The South Whidbey Parks & Recreation District may get \$56,198 for building Trustland Trails Park, Zemek said.

The district would use the grant to make the entrance, parking area and loop trail in Trustland Trails Park accessible to people with disabilities.

The district obtained the 200-acre park from the Washington Department of Natural Resources in 2007. Crews will build a parking lot, learning shelter, storage facility and half-mile trail, and install hitching posts, mounting stations, loading ramps, restrooms, tables, benches and a bike rack at the park. The South Whidbey Backcountry Horsemen are active stewards of the land and have committed to helping with trail development and maintenance. The district will contribute \$104,360 in voter-approved bonds, equipment, labor, materials and donations of cash.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission asked for \$4 million to protect Admiralty Inlet Heritage Forest, but got less.

“The project will be partially funded — at \$923,049 — if the Legislature approves the \$100 million allocation,” Zemek said.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission would use this grant to buy 54 acres that include an endangered prairie plant population, imperiled old-growth forest community, 2,200 feet of bluffs and numerous wildlife species dependent on these habitats.

The site abuts the south boundary of the Admiralty Inlet Natural Area Preserve, and together these two sites will protect more than 80 contiguous acres, more than one mile of shoreline, two rare-plant communities, and a rare natural forest community.

The property includes five waterfront lots with outstanding views that are threatened with residential development.

Island County projects aimed to protect Livingston Bay Beach and Riparian Areas; funding for buying land within Deception Pass State Park; and renovating the Cama Beach Marine Railway were not funded, Zemek said.

The board received a record number of requests this year. Grant applicants requested more than \$272 million in funding for 370 projects. The grants were

reviewed and ranked during the summer. Panels of experts evaluated projects against a dozen different criteria, ranging from the need for a project, to its cost-effectiveness, to how well it was designed, to the level of demonstrated community support.

After the evaluation, the board reviews the ranked lists, approves and forwards them to the governor.

While the board will forward a list of 271 projects, it has requested only \$100 million of those projects be funded, the same amount funded in the current capital budget.

“There’s a tremendous need out there,” Ogden said. “We’re seeing a nearly 60 percent increase in requests for funding. As cities and counties struggle with tighter budgets, these grant funds become more important. Without this money, city and county park departments would not be able to develop their local parks or protect valuable wild lands.”

But they don’t come empty handed. Grant applicants are offering more than \$152 million in matching resources, stretching the state’s limited dollars even further, he added.

The projects are seeking funding under the state’s Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, which was created by the Legislature in 1990 in response to increasing public demand for outdoor recreation land and growing concerns about loss of wildlife habitat.

Projects were forwarded to the governor’s office for consideration of funding.

Document