



## EDITORIAL: Don't Cut It in Half

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Two years ago, in a fit of wisdom, the Washington Legislature boosted biennial funding for the enormously successful Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program from \$50 million to \$100 million. That appropriation will be paying us all back for decades to come, and you don't have to go far to see why.

You may not have heard of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, but it is far from obscure. If you've thrown a Frisbee at Rotary Park in Wenatchee, or taken a dip at Lakeside Park in Chelan, climbed the Peshastin Pinnacles or marveled at the beauty of the White River or Camas Meadows, you've seen the program's money at work, and known the good it does.

It started in 1989 at the urging of former Gov. Dan Evans and governor-to-be Mike Lowry, who could see the enormous value in preserving open land and outdoor recreation for future generations. The program issues grants to select programs in a competitive process administered by the state Recreation and Conservation Office.

Projects undergo tremendous rigor to see money is wisely spent. State grants leverage local, public and private matching funds, which multiply the impact and ensure local support. They preserve land and opportunity that otherwise will be lost. They improve the quality of life, create jobs, generate taxes and enhance economic opportunity. There is a major return on investment.

In this year's budgetary suffering, Gov. Chris Gregoire asks that funding for the program be cut by half. While everyone is seeking ways to pare state spending in these dire times, such a disproportionate reduction in an extremely successful program will do double the harm.

The \$100 million appropriation should at least be maintained in the next capital budget if at all possible. Preserving this program and its wide-ranging statewide benefits will sustain their very genuine and proven economic stimulus.

We know, every state program is facing cuts and few will be spared. Every program has supporters trying to protect it. But this is one program where spending brings tangible benefits, where state spending is multiplied, and that

works to preserve resources that otherwise might be lost forever. This would be a cut we can't afford.

This is the opinion of The Wenatchee World and its Editorial Board: Editor and Publisher Rufus Woods, Managing Editor Gary Jasinek and Editorial Page Editor Tracy Warner.