



PORT TOWNSEND & JEFFERSON COUNTY

**LEADER**

## Perspective: Funding For Preservation on the Line

Op-Ed: Heidi Eisenhour, Port Townsend Leader, March 18, 2009  
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In these challenging economic times, local farms, open space and outdoor recreation become even more important. Washington families might not have money for vacations or a night at the movies, but they can always get out together and walk, hike or bike on trails and rest and rejuvenate in parks. They can eat food from local farms. They can walk on trails and play in parks open to the public.

This spring, Jefferson County can receive up to \$5.4 million in state funds for projects that will protect local family farms and wildlife habitat, enhance local trails and conserve our way of life.

These projects are eligible to receive funding from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), a state grant program for parks, habitat and farmland preservation projects. This session, the state Legislature will decide at what level to fund the WWRP through the 2009-10 biennium capital budget, determining the future of our projects.

In 1989, former governors Dan Evans and Mike Lowry cofounded the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition (WWRC), a group of leaders from businesses, conservation groups, community groups and agencies. This diverse group recognized that statewide population growth, if left unchecked, would threaten and overtake our finest landscapes that support wildlife and outdoor recreation. To address this concern, the coalition persuaded the Legislature to create the WWRP grant program as an ongoing source of funds to protect habitat and parks. Today the WWRC is made up of community leaders from all over the state. In fact, our own former Jefferson County commissioner and Chimacum schoolteacher Richard Wojt sits on the board.

### **Sustaining our way of life**

Here in Jefferson County, our local economy and our quality of life are dependent on the health and sustainability of our natural environment. Making wise investments now that will support our natural infrastructure well into the future will help maintain our lifestyles and local economy. In 2009, we can receive WWRP funding for the following land conservation projects:

Brown Dairy has been in operation since the 1850s and also contains salmon habitat in Chimacum Creek. A WWRP grant would purchase a conservation easement on 50 acres of this farm.

Dabob Bay affects the health of the Puget Sound. Two separate grants will protect high quality coastal sand spits, estuary habitats and upland riparian forests here.

Finnriver Farm is a 33-acre certified organic farm known for its U-pick berries and vegetables. A WWRP grant would preserve prime agricultural soils and habitat for salmon, beaver, trumpeter swans, bear, eagles, hawks and many other species.

The Dosewallips River contains some of the highest quality salmon habitat in eastern Jefferson County. WWRP funding would protect a one-mile stretch of the Dosewallips River.

The Larry Scott Trail will connect pedestrians, equestrians and bicyclists to a variety of recreational destinations such as the Olympic Discovery Trail if it receives a WWRP grant. The grant will cover trail construction of 4.5 miles as well as a parallel horse trail.

WWRP grants are funded in the state's capital construction budget, where they do not compete with human services or classroom size. The farmland protection and development projects create local jobs, and acquisitions and easements put money in the pockets of local landowners, fueling the economy and generating taxes that return to state and local coffers.

The coalition has requested sustaining the WWRP at \$100 million. This would fund 115 projects throughout the state. The governor proposes to cut the program to \$50 million to fund 62 projects. At this level, Finnriver Farm and the Larry Scott Trail would receive funding. This is 17 percent of the record-high number of applications that were submitted this cycle. At \$50 million, Jefferson County would lose funding for the Brown Dairy, Dosewallips River and Dabob Bay.

Having already contributed \$10,019,809 to Jefferson County, the WWRP is extremely vital to our way of life. The state can continue to make wise investments now and for future generations by sustaining funds for the WWRP and by working with our local agencies to apply for future WWRP grants.

Join us in voicing your support for \$100 million for this vital program. As Gov. Gregoire said at the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition's reception at the governor's mansion in Olympia on Feb. 12, "It's the right thing to do."