



Wildlife funding benefits harbor and beyond

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Improvements at Minter Creek and Wollochet Bay Estuary Park will be going ahead this year, thanks to funding secured during this legislative session by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition. The setting aside of \$70 million in the state construction budget for 95 wildlife habitat, farmland preservation and recreation projects was one of the few highlights of the 2009 session.

It's not like lawmakers were choosing between these worthwhile projects and smaller class sizes for kids or health care for the poor. Funds for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program come out of the state's construction budget, which is financed through the sale of bonds. These are not general fund dollars.

"In the current economic climate, \$70 million for the WWRP is a success," said Joanna Grist, executive director of the coalition. "The grant program helps many, many towns, cities and people in the state. We'll see immediate and long-term benefits for wildlife, families and the local economy as a result of this decision."

Gig Harbor has benefited in the past by \$500,000 for the Skansie Brothers Park, \$300,000 for the Westside Neighborhood Park and \$92,348 for the Skateboard Park.

Those lobbying for the wildlife and recreation grants had solid arguments. First, many of the projects will create jobs. They are, in the words of those who dole out so-called stimulus dollars – "shovel ready."

Secondly, some projects involve property acquisitions and conservation easements that will put dollars in the pockets of local landowners, also helping to stimulate the local economy.

The wildlife and recreation coalition was created in 1989 when former governors Dan Evans, a Republican, and Mike Lowry, a Democrat, assembled an incredibly broad, 130-member coalition of business and labor leaders, environmentalists, sportsmen and soccer moms who understood the need to create special places while that's still possible.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition has been a tremendous success.

Since the beginning of the effort, lawmakers have appropriated \$620 million in grants to buy wildlife habitat, increase public access to waterways, protect natural areas, invest in local and state parks and preserve farmland.

That \$620 million has been matched with \$440 million in state and local funds for a grand investment that will now top \$1 billion.

With the new infusion of funds, the coalition will have paid for more than 1,000 projects.