



Legislators Preserve Dollars For Trail Projects

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Plans to acquire land for a Cougar Mountain trail and upgrade trail bridges in the Tiger Mountain State Forest received a last-minute boost from state lawmakers before a special legislative session ended late May 25.

Before sending the \$32 billion state budget to Gov. Chris Gregoire, legislators allocated \$42 million to the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. The slice for the Issaquah area amounts to more than \$1.5 million.

In addition to the Issaquah Alps projects, lawmakers directed funds to Duthie Hill Park and the East Lake Sammamish Trail.

The proposed budget recommends \$500,000 for King County to acquire land for Precipice Trail near Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park and \$247,870 to upgrade Tiger Mountain trail bridges. In addition, the proposal recommends \$500,000 for the East Lake Sammamish Trail project and \$317,477 for Duthie Hill Park.

The agencies behind the projects promised matching funds to complete construction. King County is handling the Cougar Mountain, East Lake Sammamish Trail and Duthie Hill Park projects. The state Department of Natural Resources is responsible for the Tiger Mountain effort.

Leaders at the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, a nonprofit group set up to support the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, praised the decision.

The grant program “treats your area very well, and it’s because it’s a spectacular place to live,” coalition Executive Director Joanna Grist said the day after the special session ended.

Legislators selected more than 50 competitive projects statewide to receive funding through the program.

“These are long-term investments,” Grist said. “Many of these projects, if we don’t protect them now, then we may lose these opportunities forever.”

Issaquah Mayor Ava Frisinger said outdoor recreation projects often act as a boon for surrounding communities.

“Whenever the topic of WWRP funding comes up, I’m always likely to be sending emails or placing phone calls to folks in Olympia and saying, “This is why it’s important. This is what it does specifically in this community,” she said.

Grist praised state Sen. Steve Litzow, a freshman 41st Legislative District Republican, for supporting Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program funding. (Issaquah sprawls across the 5th, 41st and 48th legislative districts.)

“He showed some real leadership,” she said. “He stepped out in front of his caucus on this issue.”

Former Govs. Dan Evans and Mike Lowry formed the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.

“I want to applaud the House and Senate leadership, Democrats and Republicans alike, for coming together on this issue,” Evans said in a statement. “Funding conservation projects is an important part of maintaining our heritage and way of life in Washington state.”

Evans, a Republican, led the Evergreen State from 1965-77; Lowry, a Democrat, served as governor from 1993-97.

“Twenty-two years ago, when we founded this coalition, we wanted to create a program that serves generations of Washingtonians to come.” Lowry added in the statement. “I join communities around the state in thanking the Legislature for these vital recreation and conservation projects, which are so important to our quality of life and our economy.”