



OPINION: Senate Putting Wildlife Protection At Risk

By Bill Taylor, Taylor Shellfish Farms
Kitsap Sun
May 08, 2013

A proposal by the state Senate threatens the future of a program that is the epitome of government at its best and that has protected Washington's outdoors for more than two decades.

For 24 years, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program has been our state's primary tool for protecting fish and wildlife habitat, the largest source of funding for neighborhood parks and the only state source of funding for protecting farms and ranches. The program's success lies in its nationally recognized, competitive evaluation process. Projects are selected by a panel of independent experts based on merits alone.

This year, the Senate has chosen to ignore those rankings, threatening the integrity of the program and cutting essential projects across the state, including those on the Olympic Peninsula.

Some of the projects at risk include: the Stavis/Kitsap Natural Forest Area, the location of one of the best remaining salmon spawning habitats in the Hood Canal; Lake Tahuya Access, a Fish and Wildlife project to promote access to a quality trout fishery near Bremerton that would also prevent erosion; Woodard Bay Water Access, a project that would not only update a primitive boat launch and improve safety, but would also restore important estuary habitat in a historic shellfish producing inlet.

These projects remain unfunded unless the Senate restores the WWRP's ranking systems. Thankfully, the state House has respected this award-winning process in their proposed budget.

These projects are not just about wildlife conservation.

They would truly have a widespread economic impact.

All across Washington, from Benny's Inn in Colville to Master Marine Services in Mount Vernon, small businesses rely on income generated by public lands.

Hunting, hiking, camping and other outdoor activities directly support 227,000 jobs and a \$22.5 billion dollar outdoor recreation industry that generates \$1.6

billion in local and state tax revenue. We can attract and keep jobs in the state with the support of WWRP grants.

Cutting programs that protect our terrestrial and aquatic farms and natural spaces would slow the state's economic recovery. This is something we simply cannot afford.

We seldom look to our parks and natural areas as economic forces, but, as Washington continues to recover from the recession, our outdoors continue to be some of the best sources of jobs and revenue in the state.

By protecting our coastline from degradation through grants from the WWRP, we can keep our waters clean for recreational and commercial shellfish harvest and bolster the growing outdoor recreation industry.

A bipartisan coalition of more than 275 organizations, including timber companies, hunters, anglers, farmers, recreation businesses and others are asking the Legislature to restore the time-tested ranking system for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program this year, so our state can keep up with a growing population by protecting our natural resources.

Buildings fall, roads crumble, but the land will continue to provide for thousands of years.

The kind of land our grandchildren wake up to — parking lots or pristine shoreline — is entirely up to us.