

SPOKESMANREVIEW

Let's Do the Right Thing for Conservation

By Randy Barcus, Special to the Spokesman-Review

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Many good people have influenced me in my life, but three stand out in my mind: Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and John Wayne. It was not because they were famous singers and actors or horsemen; it was because they were businessmen with integrity, honesty and a simple understanding about "doing the right thing."

I have been a member of the Spokane County Parks Advisory Board for the past six years, and I believe acquiring open spaces with voter-approved property tax funds has been the right thing.

The countywide Conservation Futures program has integrity and honesty. We have worked to stretch our local tax dollars by using them as matching funds. And through programs such as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), our community has received state and federal matching grants for a number of years, including a recent WWRP grant for land on the Spokane River at the Washington-Idaho border, plus a series of federal grants for wetland restoration and wetland acquisition. At present, a WWRP grant is pending to help Spokane County acquire the McKenzie Conservation Area at Newman Lake. The Washington Legislature is considering whether to appropriate funding for this and 121 projects throughout the state.

Newman Lake is the largest lake in the county. The McKenzie property has over 3,000 feet of lakefront access, 117 acres along the water subject to the WWRP grant request, and another 304 acres of upland suitable for hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing or simply going for a walk.

It's a gorgeous piece of property, with scenic vistas, great opportunity for seekers of peace, tranquility and solitude, plus water access for swimming, kayak or canoe launching or bird watching. A nesting pair of bald eagles on the property provides a bonus.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program is a state grant program that helps local communities create new parks and protect wildlife habitat. Since 1990, \$408 million has been provided for over 650 neighborhood parks, ball

fields, trails, local beaches, wildlife habitat and state parks. Local communities apply for grants and a competitive process is used to assess which projects should be funded.

The governor and Legislature set the funding levels and approve the final list of projects.

Every day our population continues to grow, translating into nonstop development in our rural and urban areas. In addition, we continue to see shrinking city and county budgets. Rescuing, protecting and preserving our recreational areas are important to the vitality of our community and help to maintain our quality of life. Our communities have a responsibility to care for wildlife and outdoor recreation areas for our families and future generations.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition advocates for state funding for the WWRP grant program. This highly diverse group of citizen activists and leaders represent business, recreation, labor, fishing, hunting and conservation interests. The coalition is very effective but it needs our help in communicating to our legislators how important this program is for our community.

If you have a favorite place that needs protection or additional enhancements, contact your local park director about a WWRP grant, or contact the coalition to learn about projects in your community (www.wildliferecreation.org). Consider contacting the governor and your state legislators to thank them for supporting the program.

The WWRP helps breathe life into our community parks and protects our wildlife. It helps make our communities great places to live, work and play.