

Building healthy communities and a strong economy

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By J. Lennox Scott, for the King County Journal
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Being a Realtor is about much more than helping people buy and sell homes; many Realtors are also very involved in quality-of-life issues, acting as advocates for our local communities through affiliations with the local, state and National Association of Realtors. Realtors care because we too live in the local communities right along side the people we represent. Like our neighbors, we're concerned about the quality of life in our communities. Like our neighbors, we're concerned about the economic vitality of our communities. And like our neighbors, we're concerned about preserving the unique natural environment of Washington State.

The foundation of every strong community is comprised of key items, such as homeownership, schools, churches, and parks, to name a few. Maintaining a healthy balance of these items is essential to our local communities, to our economy, and to our quality of life. A local organization that is dedicated to protecting land for parks and the protection of wildlife is the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition (WWRC).

The Coalition is the advocating arm of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), a grant program that was established by the Washington Legislature in 1990. The Coalition works to ensure that the WWRP receives the state funding it requires in order to support the development of local, regional, and state recreation and wildlife areas. Through grassroots advocacy, community outreach, and education, the Coalition has helped to secure hundreds of millions of dollars for the WWRP. The broad-based coalition is comprised of an active Board of Directors from the business community, sports groups, governmental officials, and conservation groups. The strength and success of the Coalition lies in its diversity, as it effectively represents the broad public interest in outdoor recreation and wildlife issues.

In order to preserve open spaces and critical habitat for threatened, endangered and game species, the WWRP provides grants to local and state agencies for the acquisition of high-priority habitat and recreation lands statewide. Since the WWRP's inception, the Coalition has lobbied the Legislature in Olympia to fund the WWRP, raising \$408 million

for neighborhood parks, trails, state parks, athletic fields, wildlife habitat, local beaches, and more.

To date, there have been over 650 successful projects, encompassing over 160,000 acres of land across Washington State. The WWRP has protected sites such as: King County's Marymoor Park, Wenatchee's Apple Loop Trail, Cama Beach State Park on Camano Island, Tacoma's Point Defiance Park, the Centennial Trail in Spokane, Whidbey Island's Deception Pass State Park, and Squak Mountain State Park near North Bend. Thanks to the WWRP, young people in Kennewick can play in safety at the new Youth Skate Park. In Puyallup there are fishing and boating opportunities for anglers and families alike at Bradley Lake. And in Spokane the Quartz Mountain project provides trails for hikers and cross-country skiers.

Thanks to organizations such as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, our community has a better chance of maintaining a healthy balance. And a healthy balance leads to stronger communities and a strong economy. As a Realtor and member of my community, I understand the importance of the WWRC and commend them for the integral role that they play in maintaining a high quality of life for all Washingtonians.

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