



Budget Sets \$100 Million for Habitat

By John Dodge; March 20, 2007 © The Olympian
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The House capital budget unveiled Monday includes \$100 million for the purchase of parks, and fish and wildlife habitat.

The proposed funding level for the 2007-09 state budget for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program is double historic levels and mirrors the request to the Legislature by a coalition of diverse groups that includes the environmental community, the Boeing Co. and the Washington Realtors.

“We’re totally in support of preserving the environment, protecting our open spaces and providing affordable housing,” said Phil Harlan, an associate broker with John L. Scott Real Estate in Lacey. “It’s all intertwined.”

Since 1989, the program administered by the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation has awarded \$450 million to 775 projects totaling 160,000 acres. In South Sound, projects include the Chehalis Western Trail, the Woodard Bay Natural Resource Conservation Area and Camp Kenneydell Park on Black Lake.

But in that same time, the state population has grown by 25 percent and is expected to grow another 2 million people in the next 25 years.

“The more land we can set aside now, the better,” Olympia outdoor enthusiast Ken Guza said. “Land is only going to get more expensive in the future. We need to save the special places while we can.”

Improvements to the McLane Creek Nature Trail and a 1,200-acre expansion of the Bald Hills Natural Resource Conservation Area are among the South Sound projects that would benefit from the boost in funding.

The House capital budget now goes to the Senate, where the \$100 million funding level may be a harder sell, said Bill Robinson of The Nature Conservancy.

“We’re still pretty optimistic that we can come out of the Senate at the \$100 million level,” he said.

Gov. Chris Gregoire has proposed \$70 million for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program in her 2007-09 state budget.

