



## Our View: Public Property Should Be a Budget Priority

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The House capital budget unveiled a week ago includes \$100 million for the purchase of property for parks and habitat for fish and wildlife. Let's hope the state Senate hits the \$100 million mark when it releases its budget proposal this week.

In a state that is seeing a steady influx of new residents, one of the greatest gifts to leave future generations is a healthy recreation and wildlife environment.

In 1989, former governors Dan Evans and Mike Lowry teamed up to push legislation to set aside money in each state construction budget for wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities. Evans, a Republican, and Lowry, a Democrat, were able to assemble an incredibly broad coalition of business and labor leaders, environmentalists, The Boeing Co., Washington Realtors, sportsmen and soccer moms. They came together because people of all political stripes understand the need to preserve property today for future generations.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition has been a tremendous success, with \$450 million going into an incredible array of 775 projects statewide. The \$450 million has leveraged an additional \$300 million in matching funds and paid for projects encompassing more than 160,000 acres in all 39 counties.

Supporters last fall upped the ante. They began pushing the Legislature to double its allotment to \$100 million.

When the governor came out with her budget proposal of \$70 million, it was both a victory and a defeat - a victory because it was \$20 million more than the current budget, but still \$30 million shy of the goal. Members of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition were elated last Monday when the House hit the \$100 million mark.

"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."

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

South Sound certainly has been the beneficiary of the state wildlife and recreation funding. More than \$21 million has come to Thurston County and has gone for such projects as the Chehalis Western Trail, Pioneer Park in Tumwater, the Woodard Bay Natural Resource Conservation Area in the county, Camp Kenneydell Park on Black Lake, 45th Avenue Park in Lacey and Friendly Grove Park in Olympia. Local and state government agencies have put up an additional \$15.9 million in matching funds to give the South Sound community some of its most prized recreation opportunities and wildlife preservation areas.

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.

South Sound is fortunate that 22nd District senator Karen Fraser, D-Thurston County, is chairwoman of the committee writing the capital budget. She and her committee should match the House's \$100 million appropriation when the Senate construction budget is released this week. Future generations deserve nothing less.