



State Plan Would Send Millions to Thurston, Mason for Parks, Conservation Projects

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Thurston and Mason counties parks and conservation projects would receive millions of dollars in state grants under a ranking put out by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office today.

In the 2009 legislative session, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition will work to sustain the \$100 million to fund as many of the projects as possible.

Thurston County projects that would receive funding include:

- **Woodard Bay NRCA, almost \$1.3 million:** Additional acreage, including shoreline, will enhance riparian habitat in a rapidly developing residential area.
- **Black River Ranch, almost \$1.2 million:** Protects a 725-acre dairy farm containing wetlands, floodplain, riparian and upland habitat.
- **Black River Conservation Initiative, \$920,180:** Protects 330 acres of riparian and 70 acres of associated upland habitat.
- **Ward Lake Acquisition, \$750,000, Olympia:** 9 acres for public swimming beach.
- **South Sound Prairie and Grassland Bald Hill Restoration, \$270,380:** Restores south Puget Sound grasslands threatened by invasive plant species.
- **Tenino City Park Expansion, \$57,500:** 6.27 acres of land provides a trail corridor, wildlife habitat, birdwatching and environmental education.

Mason County projects include:

- **Harstine Island, more than \$2.55 million:** 112 acres for riparian protection and recreation facilities, connecting Harstine Island State Park to other public tidelands creating two miles of publicly accessible shoreline.
- **Ink Blot and Shumocher Creek Natural Area Preserves, almost \$1.75 million:** Protects wetlands and adjacent uplands within two state Natural Area Preserves.

Biennially, state and local agencies submit project applications in the spring. They are evaluated and rankings released each fall. The ranking process is highly competitive so that the most substantive projects with the most beneficial impacts on communities and wildlife receive state funding. A record-breaking total of \$272 million in project requests for a total of 370 project applications came in this year.

Joanna Grist, the coalition's executive director, said state legislators need to understand that funding is in the public interest.

"They'll hear from their constituents about the importance of creating places for families to play outside as well as the need to protect wildlife habitat and working farms from encroaching development," she said.