

## Local Trail and Farmland Projects at Risk in Funding Cuts

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In 2009, Whatcom County could receive up to \$2.3 million in state funds for a park in the Cordata neighborhood of Bellingham, creating public shoreline access at Lily Point and protecting local farmland.

These projects are eligible to receive funding from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, a state grant program that funds parks, habitat and farmland preservation projects. This session, our state legislators will decide at what level to fund the program, determining the future of four local projects.

In 1989, former governors Dan Evans and Mike Lowry co-founded the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, with a group of leaders from businesses, conservation groups, community groups and agencies. This diverse group recognized that statewide population growth, if left unchecked, would overtake our finest landscapes that support wildlife and outdoor recreation. To address this concern, the coalition persuaded the Legislature to create the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grant program as an ongoing source of funds to protect habitat and create parks.

This year, the coalition is asking the Legislature to again sustain the grant program at \$100 million. This would fund 115 conservation and outdoor recreation projects all over the state, including:

- **Cordata Park:** The Cordata neighborhood is underserved by parks and open spaces. This project will open up a host of outdoor recreational opportunities including wooded trails, a children's playground, a skate park, basketball court and a covered picnic area.
- **Protecting Lily Point:** A grant will protect 276 acres including 1.5 miles of shoreline, scenic bluffs, old growth trees and tidelands. Lily Point's diverse recreation options such as boating, fishing, beachcombing and shellfish

harvesting will attract people from throughout the county, state and nearby Vancouver, BC

- **Lake Terrell Float Replacement:** Known for its bass and warm water fishing, Lake Terrell hosts up to five fishing tournaments a year. Program funds will replace a 36-year old float that is a safety hazard. Also, ADA-approved bathroom facilities and parking facilities will be built.
- **Preserving Whatcom County Farmland:** This grant preserves 270 acres of productive farmland through conservation easements on two local farms. The easements will allow farmers to sell development rights on their land, reducing the pressure to develop and preserving this valuable farmland forever.

Over the past 20 years, the program has protected nearly 1,000 parks and outdoor recreation areas, granting \$620 million to communities in need throughout the state. Here in Whatcom County, we've received a total of \$19.5 million for projects that have made this part of the state such a desirable place to live.

As a Realtor, I recognize that among the top selling points for home investment in Whatcom County is proximity to outdoor recreation opportunities, from hiking and biking to fishing and camping. Environmental amenities raise the attractiveness of a community. Parks and green spaces sustain property values and provide for the Quality of Life we have come to enjoy.

The Washington Realtors and the coalition are natural allies, and we aren't alone in the business community. Other large employers such as Boeing, Weyerhaeuser, REI and Group Health recognize the social value in preserving state and local parks and wildlife habitat. We work together to safeguard our region's natural legacy for our children, grandchildren and all generations to come so that our livelihoods can thrive.

Because program grants are funded in the state's capital construction budget, they don't compete with human services or classroom size. The development projects create local jobs, and acquisitions and easements such as Whatcom County's farm grants put money in the pockets of local landowners, fueling the economy and generating taxes that return to state and local coffers.

The grant program has been a backbone for collaborative conservation efforts in Whatcom County. The state can continue to make wise investments in protecting our Quality of Life now and for future generations by sustaining funds for the program and working with our local jurisdictions to apply for future grants.

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