

## OpEd: Legislature Should Keep Parks and Trails Program

By Ryan N. Mello  
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The wonderful Bridge to the Beach pedestrian overpass provides public access to a magnificent stretch of beach near University Place. It was paid for in part by a \$750,000 Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grant.

This visionary program was created in 1989 by former Govs. Dan Evans and Mike Lowry to create new parks and trails and to preserve wildlife habitat and viable farmland throughout the state.

This year, it has allocated millions of dollars to create or improve parks, extend recreational trails and save working farms from development in Pierce County.

The program is funded through the state capital construction budget and does not compete with essential services, such as teachers or firefighters. Unfortunately, the governor's budget office has suggested that it be cut to save money in the operating budget.

Eliminating the program would not provide more money for services paid for out of the operating budget.

It would, however, interrupt a legacy of excellent work in this county, and it would shortchange future parks, open spaces and recreation areas for our children.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition is requesting \$100 million from the state biennial capital budget. If the Legislature approves the coalition's request, almost \$8 million would flow to Pierce County for a number of projects. Grant funding would provide for acquisition of land at Nisqually State Park and for the purchase of development rights to save the Reise Trust Farm and Chervenka Farm, in the Puyallup Valley.

Program funding would help pay for developments and improvements at a number of local parks, including the Playground by the Sound in University

Place, Franklin Park on the Hilltop, Frontier Park in Graham and the DuPont PowderWords skate park.

It also would purchase land at Leach Creek in University Place and at Knight Forest in Gig Harbor for park development.

Grant funding would provide money for the Bud Blancher Memorial Trail in Eatonville, the Cushman Trail in Gig Harbor and section four of the Sumner Urban to Mountain Trail, and it would provide money for acquisition of the DeMolay Property on Fox Island to provide water access there.

Now is not the time to eliminate a capital-side program that infuses our community with so much money, that creates jobs, and supports healthy people and a healthy environment. I urge the Legislature to fully fund this visionary program.

*Ryan N. Mello is the Pierce County director of the Cascade Land Conservancy and a member of the Tacoma City Council.*