



Senate Should Do As Experts Say: Fund North Head Trail Spur

By Matt Winters, Editor
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It must be one of the fundamental rules of the universe that when it's most affordable to buy land and build things, you often don't have enough money to act. But when it comes to a couple capital investments in south Pacific County, we should stand this rule on its head and move forward with long-term improvements.

The Washington State Senate has a hard job on its hands balancing the budget. We all sympathize with senators, representatives and the governor as the special session starts this week to begin finalizing our next two-year spending plan. But the Senate has gone astray in cherry picking projects within the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, leaving one Pacific County priority intact but dropping a second.

The WWRP is a state grant program funded from the capital construction budget that provides funding to protect habitat, preserve working farms and create new local and state parks. Independent experts rank the applications based on criteria such as the benefits to the public, level of threat to the property, or presence of threatened or endangered species.

The WWRP is funded by bonds in the capital construction budget, as opposed to the operating budget, which is used to pay for education and health care.

By relying on expert guidance, this program ensures the highest impact projects get funded, generating taxes and creating jobs along the way. Especially here on the coast, recreation is a major source of revenue and jobs. Parks, trails, water access and wildlife habitat promote recreation and tourism, generating millions of dollars and well-paying jobs across Washington.

The current Senate and House proposed budgets differ greatly in how they choose to fund the WWRP. The House set aside \$50 million for the WWRP and

chose to maintain the integrity of the program. The Senate only funded the WWRP at \$20 million, setting aside an additional \$16 million to cherry pick projects from the WWRP project list. This ignores the extensive ranking process, involving hundreds of community volunteers and professional agency staff.

In Pacific County, Washington State Park's Seaview Dunes acquisition is spared the ax in both budgets. This project is part of a multi-year effort to conserve the dunes north of Cape Disappointment State Park within its approved long-term boundary. However, the Cape Disappointment Multi-Use Trail Extension project is not funded under the Senate's budget. This development project would provide much-needed construction jobs as well as enticing more visitors to the park, increasing tourism dollars flowing into Pacific County.

The Cape D funds would construct a half-mile trail that will link North Head Lighthouse with the Lewis and Clark Discovery Trail. The lighthouse is the most visited area of Cape Disappointment State Park. It also is a key site on the Discovery Trail, which runs from Ilwaco's waterfront, to the state park at Beards Hollow, and to Long Beach. State Parks' portion of the trail connects at a county road and this grant will allow the agency to build a new connector that is separate from the county road and will link with the future Bell's View Trail. This grant is from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. This project was skipped over in the Senate proposal in favor of earmarks.

In its special session, the Senate should adopt the expert recommendations for the WWRP, including the North Head Lighthouse trail.