



Wildlife and Habitat Vital to State's Prosperity

By Bill Dewey, Taylor Shellfish Company
OPINION: Kitsap Sun
June 14, 2011

At Taylor Shellfish we depend on two things: clean, safe water where we can grow and harvest our oysters, and a way of life that makes the northwest a great place to do business.

That's why maintaining programs like the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) is vital to our company and our state. We represent one of thousands of businesses around Washington that rely on clean water, land conservation and wildlife to stay afloat each year. Today we join together in thanking the Legislature for saving this essential program.

The people of Washington have long understood that our future prosperity is inextricably bound to our success in preserving the environment in which we live. Over the past 21 years, the WWRP has grown into one of the state's most popular programs for its mandate to protect and improve state and local parks, preserve habitat for fish and wildlife, and save working farms.

For us, renewing WWRP is not simply an investment in our state's heritage and quality and life. Funding the WWRP also is an investment in the long-term prosperity of our community because of the number of jobs that outdoor recreation like fishing, hunting and hiking and more brings to our state. Annually, parks and recreation-based activities generate some \$8.5 billion in retail dollars and millions in tax dollars, supporting 115,000 jobs statewide. And industries based on clean water and healthy natural resources are important to the economy as well. Shellfish growers contributed \$107 million a year to Washington's economy and provide thousands of family-wage jobs in coastal communities in 2010.

In addition, businesses around the state recognize the importance of the outdoors and quality of life when attracting skilled workers. And the Realty industry knows that communities with recreation opportunities and parks are vital to growing home sales in our state. In tough economic times, industries and communities around the state have come to depend on both the short and long term benefits of investments like the projects the WWRP funds.

WWRP conservation and recreation projects are funded based on independent ranking criteria which determine which projects are the best. This means that every community, including here in Kitsap, has an equal opportunity to get their project funded, using a merit based criteria, whether it is saving the migration grounds of Washington's largest elk herd, creating parks for our children to play, or helping farmers keep their land in production.

Here in Kitsap County, WWRP funding means the final link of the Forest to Sky Trail can finally be completed and a \$1.8 million grant will be used to protect the Hood Canal and Stavis / Kitsap Forest. Across the water in Jefferson County, forests surrounding Dabob Bay will be conserved, protecting the clean, clear water that's vital to our business and also to the health of Hood Canal.

This year, in addition to setting aside \$42 million, funding over 50 projects in communities around the state, the Legislature also made sure that they maintained the core integrity of the WWRP, keeping in place the objective, transparent funding process that has won the program widespread support from conservation and business leaders alike.

It's no secret this year's legislative session was a contentious one. But 50 years from now, our children and grandchildren will still be enjoying the results of one important decision where legislators reached across the aisle and came together to protect one of the State's most respected programs, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP).

Thanks to the legislature's continued support of the WWRP during this [the 2011] session, citizens of our state will still be able to enjoy the sweeping lands and clean waterways that we have today for years to come. Despite a long and difficult session, legislators worked together, across party lines, and did what is best for our state and best for future generations.