



State Grant Program Needs to Be Increased

EDITORIAL © Nov. 17, 2006 The Kitsap Sun
November 17, 2006

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program has a name that's too long and has too many syllables — a dozen — to be easily remembered.

Its abbreviation, WWRP, doesn't even make a decent acronym.

But this program with a forgettable name will leave a permanent imprint on many lifetimes.

Here and elsewhere in state, if you see a news story where the words “recreation,” “habitat” or “park” are linked with “state grant,” the money came through the WWRP. The money has been used for acquiring, reclaiming and improving properties to benefit the public.

In Kitsap County, dozens of projects have received millions of dollars through the WWRP. A partial list includes partial funding for the Clear Creek Trail, Bremerton's Evergreen Park, Blakely Harbor Park, the Old Mill Site in Silverdale, North Kitsap Heritage Park, Point No Point beach access, Gazzam Lake on Bainbridge Island, and many, many more.

Counties, cities and other local entities submit a project for state funding to the Interagency Agency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, the IAC. In most cases, applicants will supply about 50 percent of the total project cost, matching the state grant. State agencies such as Parks, Natural Resources and Fish and Wildlife also apply for project grants, but are not required to provide matching funds.

Applications are screened by the IAC, evaluated by a team of experts and the general public and given a priority list ranking. Next, the recommendations are sent to the Legislature and, if approved, the money is distributed to applicants through the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

Behind all this is a non-profit citizens group, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition. The coalition, formed in the late 1980s by former governors Dan Evans and Mike Lowry, encouraged the Legislature to create the WWRP in 1990 to protect habitat and protect parks for future generations.

And it's made a difference. From 1980 to 1990, the state had spent an average of just \$2 million annually on land acquisition. Now, in the past 12 years, the Coalition had secured \$450 million in state funding for more than 775 projects over 250,000 acres in the state. Last year, the Legislature allocated \$50 million for WWRP projects in the 2005-2007 biennium.

We're writing this for three reasons. One is to explain the grant program with its even-handed, local/state approach to funding projects that benefit the public — and to commend the Coalition and all who support it.

Another is to show the impact this program whose name you won't remember has had and will have on our lives. Recommended for funding next year are a \$2 million grant for the Bremerton Boardwalk Trail from downtown to Evergreen Park, \$300,000 for Battle Point Park development on Bainbridge Island, \$1 million for acquisition of Miller Lake for a county park in North Kitsap, and more.

Finally, the Coalition is seeking to double the amount of grants funding — from \$50 million to \$100 — for the coming biennium. The first step would be getting it included in Gov. Chris Gregoire's capital budget next month.

The funding level has hasn't increased since 1990, although Washington's population has grown by 25 percent. In 25 years, another 2 million people are expected to live here. Additional grant funding will help meet that growing population's needs by setting aside more land for recreation. It also would protect more of our dwindling natural habitats from development.

We strongly support this request for additional grant funding, and encourage our local governments and elected officials to do the same.