

## Cheney, County Recognized For Conservation Efforts

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OLYMPIA – The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office recognized Spokane County and the city of Cheney at two special presentations on Tuesday for their outstanding projects to conserve wildlife habitat and develop a park.

Both Spokane County and Cheney were successful in their quest for funding in the very competitive Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, which is a statewide grant program created by the Legislature in 1990 to conserve land before it was developed. The Legislature recognized that the state's growing population would need more places for outdoor recreation and wildlife and it would be more economical to buy the land early. Today, the program is the largest state funding source for development of local parks and trails, and the preservation of farmland.

Cheney's project to develop baseball and softball fields at its 50-acre park on Betz Road was the second highest scoring project of 63 submitted in the local parks category of the grant program, earning the city a \$500,000 grant.

Spokane County's project to conserve wildlife habitat on Antoine Peak was the second highest scoring project from a local government in the urban wildlife habitat category of the grant program. The county was competing against 17 other projects for funding and was awarded a grant for \$1.6 million.

"Both of these projects are great examples of what the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program aims to achieve," said Kaleen Cottingham, director of the Recreation and Conservation Office, which administers the grant program.

"Using these grants, Spokane County will be able to conserve valuable land for wildlife, hikers and other recreationists, and protect a water recharging source for the city's drinking water supply. Cheney will be able to provide some great ball fields, helping that community supply a much needed place for its residents to enjoy the great outdoors."

With its grant, Spokane County will conserve nearly 340 acres around Antoine Peak, completing the last and final phase of the county's effort to conserve more than 1,000 acres on the mountain. Antoine Peak forms a prominent backdrop to Spokane, Spokane Valley, Liberty Lake and Newman Lake. The county wanted to

protect this critical habitat for wildlife and the expansive views it offers, and open the area for wildlife watching. It is rare, if not unique, for a natural area of this size and diversity to be within 1 mile of a large city.

“This wildlife habitat is an important part of a wildlife corridor that stretches north to Mount Spokane State Park and up into the Selkirk Mountains,” Cottingham said. “The land is used year-round by elk, moose, black bear, deer and many other animals, including more than eight different wildlife species at risk of extinction.”

Antoine Peak also offers a broad range of year-round outdoor activities such as hiking, wildlife watching, equestrian use, mountain biking, picnicking, trail running, and cross-country skiing. The county contributed \$1.6 million in conservation futures to match the state funding.

Cheney is using its grant to develop nine of the 50 acres in the park with a parking lot, a restroom, Little League-sized baseball field, a youth and adult softball field, and a smaller field designed for both T-ball and the challenger division for youth with physical disabilities. The city will contribute \$500,000 from its own funds and donations of cash and labor to match the state funding.

“These grants are very competitive,” Cottingham said. “To be awarded grants, the applicants had to show the projects were needed, supported by their communities and were reasonably priced and well-designed. This helps ensure that only the best projects get funded.”

Cottingham presented a symbolic check to the Spokane County commissioners at the commissioners’ regular meeting Oct. 23 in Spokane. She also presented a symbolic check to the Cheney City Council at its regular meeting Oct. 23.

Information about the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board is available online at [www.rco.wa.gov](http://www.rco.wa.gov). More information about the two projects also is available online at Antoine Peak project and Cheney Ball Fields project.