

Little Known Program Has Big Impact

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If you live in King County, chances are you and your family have enjoyed the work of a state program you probably know nothing about. It's called the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, and from Bothell to Black Diamond, and in every corner of our state, the WWRP funds the acquisition and development of outdoor amenities we all enjoy.

Those amenities are especially important as this region competes in a national — and increasingly international — marketplace for attracting new businesses, retaining existing businesses and keeping and attracting an educated work force. The mountains, the rivers, the remote hiking spots and the busy neighborhood parks around us are all integral to our quality of life. They keep our economy strong. That's why the WWRP is so essential to our future, and deserves our support.

Founded in 1990, the WWRP has provided over \$450 million in funding for close to 800 projects across the state. WWRP grants have always funded habitat acquisition and state and local park development. Last year, the program was broadened to include farmland preservation and shoreline protection.

Those new categories may lessen tensions between local governments and landowners, by enabling local governments to purchase some properties, or the development rights, where it's appropriate for shoreline protection or farmland preservation.

In King County, the WWRP has funded more than 160 projects, including land acquisition and trail development on Tiger and Squak mountains, the new playfields at Kent's Service Club Park and dozens of other worthwhile projects.

For the past 16 years the governor and Legislature have funded the WWRP at around \$50 million per biennium. With a growing population, higher real-estate prices and constant pressure to develop available land, it's no longer enough. It's time to increase our investment in the WWRP.

This year, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, a nonprofit organization that advocates for the WWRP, is leading a campaign to double the WWRP's budget to \$100 million. The coalition includes more than 135 sporting,

conservation and farming groups, along with businesses, such as Boeing and John L. Scott Real Estate, that know the value our quality of life brings to our economy.

Increasing funding for the WWRP to \$100 million will mean that dozens more worthwhile projects will be funded, benefiting communities across the state. In King County, many worthwhile projects would be funded through an increase in WWRP's budget, including:

- * Issaquah Creek WaterWays: wildlife and salmon spawning habitat in Issaquah's urban core.
- * Middle Fork Snoqualmie Natural Area: shoreline acquisition for hiking, biking, kayaking, fishing and other wilderness activities.
- * Beaver Lake Preserve Expansion: a forest in Sammamish.
- * Bass/Beaver Lake Complex: a wildlife and recreation area east of Black Diamond.
- * Flaming Geyser ADA Fishing Access: a fishing spot on the Green River for people with disabilities.
- * Eastside Trail (South Segment): a 13-mile trail along a former rail corridor between Bellevue and Woodinville.

To find out more, visit the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition's Web site at <http://www.wildliferecreation.org>.

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