



Washington

**Wildlife &
Recreation**
COALITION

Proposed Governor's Budget Includes Record \$120m for WWRP

December 14, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor Jay Inslee released his Capital Construction Budget for the 2023-2025 biennium today. The Governor includes \$120 million in funding for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP). This level is a notable increase from the 2021-2023 funding level of \$100 million. If funded at this proposed level, it will represent an all-time record for this critical funding program, providing an important investment in our environment and one of the state's largest economic engines: the outdoor recreation economy.

"In a tough budget year, we are thrilled that Governor Inslee has recognized the critical nature of outdoor recreation and conservation to the lives and well-being of all Washingtonians," said Christine Mahler, Executive Director of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition. "We greatly appreciate the level proposed by the Governor. As the legislature deliberates, we encourage them to consider Full Funding for the WWRP. We have seen the rise in demand in outdoor recreation and the necessary efforts to keep up with it—and to manage impacts on our environment. Full funding for the WWRP is critical to the recovery of ecosystems and wildlife, and would also ensure that future generations of Washingtonians will be able to recreate in places we hold near and dear to us."

The COVID-19 crisis has brought record numbers of Washingtonians outdoors, seeking the mental and physical health benefits that outdoor recreation provides. Unfortunately, Washington has already been lagging behind on investments in outdoor recreation and this surge only served to highlight the existing and growing need. Additionally, it further highlighted the need to balance surging recreation demand with the needs of our environment and the ecosystems surrounding us.

This makes robust funding for the WWRP today more important than ever. WWRP projects not only create all kinds of outdoor opportunities for families across the state, but they preserve and restore wildlife habitat, mitigate the effects of climate change, and protect working lands.

The WWRP is the state's premier grant program for habitat conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities. The program has played a significant role in our state's landscape and quality of life, leveraging over \$1.8 billion into state and local parks, trails, wildlife habitat, working lands, and other community priorities across the state. Funding is allocated via a nationally-recognized, impartial ranking process.

However, we recognize that impartial ranking processes do not always produce equitable outcomes. We once again thank the Governor and the Legislature for allocating funding for an Equity Review of the WWRP and other grant programs, which was completed earlier this year, and we look forward to partnering with the Recreation and Conservation Office in implementing the recommendations.

We were happy to see the Governor did include additional funding of \$5 million for recreation planning grants for underserved communities, but given the demand, we respectfully call on the legislature to fund an additional \$5 million in their budget, bringing the total to \$10 million for recreation planning grants and fully funding applications this cycle. Planning for recreation opportunities is a major capacity challenge for many communities, especially urban communities of color and small, rural communities—the communities who have been least served by state recreation grant programs in past years. The additional funding for these grants will help improve equitable recreation opportunities around the state.

“The WWRP has always been intended to serve all Washingtonians, and we are excited about the ongoing work to improve the equity of the program and other grant programs,” said Christine Mahler, Executive Director of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition. “We are especially excited to see the overwhelming demand for recreation planning grants—with application requests totaling more than four times the current funding available. It is critical for the future success of the WWRP and the state that we invest robustly in equity even while we continue to invest in the projects that are shovel-ready today.”

At \$120 million, the budget would fund 106 WWRP projects across the state, including:

- Acquisition of Bighorn Ridge, a rare opportunity to acquire over 134 acres of land to expand outdoor recreation access, preserve threatened habitats and provide critical trail linkages to a growing and underserved part of the Wenatchee valley.
- Restoration of the natural recovery processes along a 3-mile stretch of the North Fork Toutle River, on the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area. Restoration will consist of the construction of large wood and earthen structures to reduce channel migration and erosion, which will restore aquatic and riparian habitats for salmonids and protect crucial wintering habitat for elk.
- Acquisition of 16 parcels, totaling approximately 105 acres, in King County near Black Diamond by WA State Parks. State Parks plans for the Conservation Area include a trail along the south rim of the gorge, from Kanaskat-Palmer State Park to Flaming Geyser State Park. This acquisition will also protect habitat corridors between the Green River and properties in King County's Bass Lake Complex to the south.

However, increasing the funding to Full Funding will include additional projects of local import to communities across the state, including:

- Completing the development of an existing 8,000 square foot, above-ground skate park in Cathlamet, Washington, regularly used by school users and surrounding neighbors. Located in an underserved area with limited outdoor recreational opportunities, volunteers raised nearly \$31,500 in donations and local support in 2004 and 2006 to build the existing concrete slab and skating equipment.
- Improvements to trailhead facilities at Lacamas Creek trailhead on the south end of Lacamas Lake Regional Park. The improvements will include paved parking, restroom building, ADA accessible pathways, picnic areas, signage, landscaping, and stormwater improvements.

####

About the WWRC

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition is committed to creating a greener, healthier, more equitable, and better Washington for all through community outreach, network building, and advocacy for conservation and outdoor recreation funding. The WWRC is Washington's chief advocate for local conservation and recreation projects across the state. Over thirty years ago, the Coalition led the creation of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), and remains its chief independent nonprofit advocate and partner to this day. For more information, contact Andres Guerrero-Guzman at andres@WildlifeRecreation.org.

About the WWRP

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) is our state's premier conservation and recreation grant program which provides matching funds to create new local and state parks, protect wildlife habitat, and preserve working lands.