

January 17, 2023

Dear Budget Leaders,

The 8 undersigned organizations and entities extend our thanks for your past support of equity in Washington's great outdoors and request your continued support in the 2023-2025 capital construction budget and operating budgets.

The state legislature came together in 2021 and approved crucial funding towards a comprehensive equity review of the Recreation and Conservation Office's (RCO) grant programs. In addition to the funding approved in 2021 by the legislature, \$2,325,000 in funding was provided to RCO for planning, technical assistance, and predesign grants for projects. With this additional funding RCO kickstarted the Planning for Recreation Access grant program focused on funding planning projects in communities that lack adequate access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

This program specifically focuses on diverse urban neighborhoods, small rural communities, and those that are less experienced with the RCO grant process. There is a total of \$3 million available for grants via the Capital Budget funding and RCO's newly established Community Outdoor Athletics Facility Fund which is contributing an additional \$750,000. The applications for this grant closed November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022 with a significant number of applicants. There were a total of 99 applicants and about \$12.5 million in grant requests for planning grants, leaving a deficit in funding of \$9.5 million.

Planning for parks and recreation projects can be a complicated, confusing, and time-intensive process. That means it is especially challenging for smaller and under-resourced communities—including communities of color and rural communities—to plan for recreation and conservation projects. This is an issue of equity and one which the equity review highlighted.

We believe it is important for more funding to be allocated for this work, as there is demonstrated demand and because this Planning for Recreation and Access program serves as a key data source and learning opportunity to carry forward the equity review recommendations brought forward.

**We respectfully urge you to fund up to \$10 million to fully fund the projects that have already applied for Planning for Recreation Access Grants.**

With the significant oversubscription and demand of this RCO planning grant, the importance of planning and technical assistance highlighted by the equity review, and the opportunity for this to serve as a major data source and learning opportunity in carrying forward other equity review recommendations we view this funding as crucial for equitable access throughout Washington State.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this critical funding. This investment will expand equitable access to the outdoors for everyone.

Sincerely,

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