Ensuring Washington Stays a Great Place to Live, Work, and Play

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) is a small state agency that manages a number of boards and offices tasked with creating outdoor recreation opportunities, protecting the best of the state’s wildlife habitat and farmland, and helping return salmon from near extinction. This collection of boards and offices provides leadership, funding, and technical assistance to local communities, state, and federal governments, and others.

Contributing to Washington’s Economy

According to the Outdoor Industry Foundation, active, outdoor recreation in Washington:

- Contributes more than $11.7 billion annually to our economy.
- Supports 115,000 jobs across the state.
- Generates $650 million in annual state tax revenue.
- Produces $8.5 billion annually in retail sales and services.

Making Washington a Better Place to Live

The benefits of parks and wildlife lands are many, and numerous studies have shown:

- Parks boost local economies by attracting businesses, residents, and tourists.
- Parks increase the value of businesses, homes, and property values.
- Parks attract retirees, homebuyers, and educated workers.
- Parks can help people stay healthy, reducing health care costs.
- Parks and wildlife areas can help reduce the costs of flooding, fires, and other natural disasters.
Ensuring the Best Projects are Funded

All of RCO’s grant processes are open and competitive. Generally, grant applications first are reviewed by panels of volunteers, experts, and technical staff. The panels weigh the merits of the proposals against established program criteria, strategic plans, and in some cases, national priorities. They compile ranked lists of projects that go before RCO boards for funding consideration, helping to ensure that only the best projects receive funding.

Parks

Several grant programs provide funding for parks.

- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)
- Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF)

These programs provide funding to acquire land and to renovate, build, and equip outdoor facilities, including parks, ball fields, skateboard parks, tennis and ball courts, spray parks, and pools. Grants also provide funding to create access to the waterfront through parks or shoreline boardwalks.

These programs are the largest funding sources for local parks, outside of local levies.

Trails

Trails come in a variety of styles from connecting urban areas for bicycle commuters to providing backcountry experiences. They receive funding primarily through three grant programs.

- Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities (NOVA)
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)

These programs provide grants to buy land, develop trails and trail related facilities, and support other trail activities, such as planning, maintenance, education, and law enforcement.

Shooting Ranges

One grant program provides funding to support archery and firearm ranges.

- Firearms and Archery Range Recreation (FARR)

This program provides grants to acquire, develop, and renovate public and private nonprofit firearm range and archery training and practice facilities. It also funds equipment purchases, safety and environmental improvements, noise abatement, and liability protection.

Expenditures

Percent of $1.75 Billion 1964-2012

- Salmon Recovery 35%
- Recreation 26%
- Conservation 22%
- Trails 10%
- Boating 6%
- Farmland Preservation 1%
- Firearms, Archery <1%
INVESTING IN WASHINGTON’S GREAT OUTDOORS

**Boating**
There are two grant programs specifically designed to help Washington meet the needs of boaters.
- Boating Facilities Program (BFP)
- Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG)

These programs provide grants to acquire, develop, and renovate boating facilities on both freshwater and saltwater, and for both motorized boats and non-motorized craft, such as kayaks and canoes.

**Conserving Habitat**
There are three grant programs primarily aimed at protecting habitat for wildlife.
- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)

These grants allow for land purchases and restoration to help conserve Washington’s unique plants, fish, and other wildlife.

**Salmon Recovery**
There are several grants programs aimed at helping Washington restore its salmon populations to a sustainable level.
- Salmon recovery
- Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program (ESRP)
- Family Forest Fish Passage Program (FFFFP)
- Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR)
- Puget Sound Critical Stock (PSCS)

These programs provide grants to protect and restore salmon habitat and fix fish-blocking culverts.

**Farmland Preservation**
Since 1950, the number of Washington farms has decreased by more than 50 percent. To address the decline, one grant program provides funding to protect the state’s most valuable farmland.
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)

Grants may be used to buy development rights using voluntary land preservation agreements, also called conservation easements. Portions of grants also may be used to enhance the agricultural production of preserved farmland or help restore or enhance ecological functions.
A small state agency in terms of employees (under 50), the RCO has the fourth largest capital budget of any state agency.

**Investing in Washington’s Great Outdoors**

Since 1964, RCO’s boards:

- Awarded more than $1.7 billion in grants.
- Funded nearly 8,000 projects.
- Grant recipients contributed more than $975 million

**Total** = More than $2.7 billion investment in Washington's great outdoors.

**Managing Performance**

RCO offers a range of grants. Some projects, such as building trails that cross multiple counties, may take many years to accomplish.

To ensure the state’s investment is being spent wisely, efficiently, and timely, RCO has initiated multiple actions to improve its grant process.

- **Tracking Progress**

  RCO has created multiple reports that track the progress of grants. These reports aid staff in identifying projects that are falling behind so grant recipients can get additional help.

  Information on all projects funded through the agency also is available online. Using RCO’s Project Search feature ([www.rco.wa.gov/prism/ProjectSearch.aspx](http://www.rco.wa.gov/prism/ProjectSearch.aspx)), visitors to its Web site can find details of any project, such as the location, grant recipient, grant amount, status, pictures, and more.

- **Finishing Projects on Time**

  To ensure projects are completed on time and the Legislature doesn’t have to re-appropriate the money, RCO has:

  - Refocused its efforts to close older projects.
  - Increased communication with grant applicants who have large numbers of uncompleted projects to help them track and finish projects.
  - Instituted polices to terminate grants for poor performing grant recipients.
  - Adjusted internal procedures to speed up the delivery of grant funding.

Since 2005, the agency has successfully dropped its re-appropriations rate from more than 57 percent to less than 50 percent.