

STATE LAND ACQUISITION PLANNING FRAMEWORKS WORK SESSION RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

The following recommendations will inform the Lands Group as it develops formal recommendations to the legislature regarding how state agencies can acquire and dispose of lands in a coordinated, transparent and efficient way.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Work Session panelists completed a questionnaire designed by Lands Group members to gather information about the acquisition planning and prioritizing approaches and tools agencies and organizations are using and to solicit recommendations for coordination of state acquisitions and disposals. Specifically, the goals of the questionnaire were to:

- Learn general approaches to acquisition planning.
- Identify acquisition planning goals and priorities.
- Identify planning tools.
- Learn how plans and tools were developed.
- Learn how the Lands Group can utilize agency/organization planning and prioritizing techniques and tools in promoting acquisition and disposal coordination, transparency, and efficiency.

The following responses were compiled from nine returned questionnaires. Questionnaire responses varied greatly, not only because of the wide variety of interests they represent, but because of the wide scope of discussion. While some panelists came to the Work Session to discuss landscape-level acquisition planning, others came to discuss particular tools.

1. What is your approach to landscape planning or prioritizing acquisitions?

- Criteria-based approach.
- Portfolio approach.
- Coarse-, then fine-filter approach.
- Provide planning support to local government agencies.
- Identify focal areas based on specific priorities such as recreation priorities, priorities for maintaining working lands, species priorities, ecosystem priorities, etc.
- Identify local, state, and/or global priorities.

- Identify priorities based on short and/or long-term objectives.
2. ***Describe how your organization's conservation framework, agenda, or tool could be useful for prioritizing the strategic investment of public funds for recreation and habitat lands?***

- Inform planning and policy decisions.
- Identify acquisition projects that best fit plan objectives.
- Map success/effectiveness of acquisition projects.
- Provide neutral, objective information.
- Promote public interest.
- Reveal data trends.
- Build alliances by revealing where priorities overlap.
- Provide accurate forecasting.
- Promote balanced growth.
- Provide user-friendly system.
- Attract funding.
- Help develop strategic investment plans.
- Inform broad spectrum of interest groups and varying levels of government.
- Identify key areas for acquisition from state-level ecosystem perspective.
- Reveal comparable priority schemes within similar geographical areas.
- Increase land stewardship coordination opportunities.
- Narrow scope; define acquisition goals.
- Connect local needs with specific needs (ie: conservation, recreation, etc.).

3. ***How was this approach developed?***

- Some approaches were developed more recently than others.
- By following federal and state law guidelines.
- By using established planning principles, such as landscape ecology.
- By considering resource and maintenance issues.
- It is continually reviewed and revised.
- Data is managed by a global network.

4. ***How is it applied?***

- Utilize public participation and review processes.

- Collecting data and mapping.
- Research of local conditions.
- Identifying need.
- Analyzing data and research.
- Considering federal and state laws.
- Considering funding options.
- Collaborating with peers, agencies, interest groups.
- Building model/plan.
- Examining existing tools and methods.
- Testing.
- Training/workshops.

5. *Who else is using it?*

- The basic methodology is widespread.
- Federal agencies use identified priorities.
- Broad spectrum of state agencies and non-government organizations.
- General public.
- Schools, communities, private and public planners, foundations.

5.a. *If no one else is using it, why not?*

- This approach/tool is specifically applied to this organization's plan.
- Not fully developed, not implemented yet.
- Only recently developed.

6. *What other recommendations do you have to improve the coordination of the state's recreation and habitat land acquisitions?*

- Statutory authority and agency policies should reflect similar priorities across programs.
- Criteria for determining funding priority should reflect consistency with state and local priorities.
- Create a system that allows agencies to work together to identify potential acquisition projects, especially big-picture, high-priority projects, rather than simply sharing the wish list after it is made.
- Promote sharing of agency inventory/monitoring/research needs.
- Prioritize recreation by integrating recreational activity on various landscapes under their stewardship.

- Direct recreation to where it has the least impact on habitat protection by providing purpose-built sites and facilities.
- Develop mechanism to coordinate acquisition proposals based on shared priorities.
- Prioritize preservation of working lands.
- Use a clear, scientific and data-driven process to guide acquisitions.
- Community input is critical for success.
- Incorporate agency priorities into plans of other agencies.
- Ensure compliance with statutory guidelines.
- Use data tools already in place to identify priorities, etc.
- Hold annual agency meetings to compare and contrast acquisition goals, objectives, and criteria.
- Emphasize openness, transparency, and consistent approaches.
- Engage local land trusts and other conservation organizations to identify local priorities for conservation.
- Maintain an easy-to-access map that displays past and proposed acquisitions.
- Generate a commitment from the top levels of each agency to cooperate on conservation planning.
- Improve data-sharing and tools to analyze data.

7. *What tools and resources can you offer to support these recommendations?*

- Money.
- Good data.
- GIS expertise to assist with mapping or analysis.
- Help in convening discussion involving specific constituencies.
- Use of specific planning tools discussed today.
- Share information regarding agency/organization acquisition priorities, projects, plans, data, maps, etc.
- Provide guidance and support in using tools, evaluating data, etc.
- Incorporate review of local plans for consistency with state plans and priorities.

8. *What recommendations do you have for balancing conservation and recreation acquisitions with efforts to maintain working lands (e.g. forestry and agricultural lands)?*

- Advocate for a separate working lands-focused state funding source for land acquisition.

- Ensure the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and other relevant state agencies have the ability to maintain working lands (per necessary management requirements) after acquisition of ranch/farm/forest lands.
- Prioritize preservation of working lands in developing acquisition plans.
- Emphasize maintaining vibrant communities and traditional land uses.
- Integrate recreation values into the working landscape.
- Identify conservation priorities for planning in order to help understand where acquisitions would be the most beneficial while helping to maintain working lands.
- Look to agency agendas that already promote long term protection of working farms, forest, and shellfish farms to help maintain eco system function, sustain quality of life and improve the viability of rural communities.
- Use financial incentives, such as transfer of development rights, conservation easements and property tax incentives (A.4.1) and other actions to preserve working lands agriculture and forest lands.
- Community-based participatory planning.
- I think casting the issue as a need for ‘balance’ may create an unnecessary barrier. It sort of pits the various values against each other. We need to better understand and be able to better articulate the conservation values provided by working landscapes. But we also need to know the circumstances under which working landscapes do not provide adequate conservation value. My sense is that many conservation needs can be met within working landscapes. But some species and or ecosystem types may be at risk unless they’re in a land-use designation that is more restrictive regarding land uses.
- Identify lands that could serve multiple objectives by utilizing the conservation opportunity framework developed by the state Biodiversity Council.
- Prioritize agricultural and forest lands designated for long-term conservation by counties in their comprehensive plans, especially where they also provide high value habitat.
- Conservation districts should be consulted for potential management recommendations that reflect local knowledge.
- Recognition that acquisition is only one of a suite of tools to conserve habitat and resource lands, and is appropriate as a first option only rarely. If current landowners can remain working on the land while employing tools to manage it for the high values present, then that should be the first option.

Panelist Recommendations

In addition to questionnaire responses, Work Session panelists provided recommendations to the Lands Group during their presentations and other discussion before, after, and during the Work Session. The following list was compiled from those communications.

- Balance conservation and recreation with working landscapes by finding a common ground centered on preservation of open and undeveloped landscapes.
- Promote coordination by holding an annual state agency forum to identify compatibility among different “working land” uses.
- Use a flexible tool that all agencies can use for general planning purposes.
- At a landscape level, agree on high priority acquisitions.
- Identify highest priority habitat areas using scientifically-sound information. Have community input help guide recreation acquisitions.
- Consider a “Community-Based Planning” process to engage communities and support multiple interests, including working lands.
- Involving the local community in the prioritization process is the key to building support for informed acquisition. Local knowledge can help ground truth data and fill in some data gaps. And, involving the community provides an opportunity for education as well – educating about the importance of land conservation.
- Use GIS and modeling tools. GIS is a powerful tool, obviously – growing more powerful as more people become adept in its use.
- Local planning departments and natural resources departments can be excellent resources for making sure acquisitions are aligned with local priorities, or better coordinated. Land trusts can also help fill a role in coordination and provide local perspective.
- Conservation of working lands and recreational lands is highly dependent on the local need and demand. Habitat value may be able to be more objective, but there’s a level of subjectivity in work land and recreation land conservation that requires engagement of the local community to ensure conservation is strategic.
- Use tools that are compatible with other planning tools.
- Use tools that inform many layers of planning decision-making. For instance, use tools that assist in priority-setting and can also inform grant-making decisions.
- We need landscape level flexibility. As criteria develop, this shrinks opportunities. We need to look at processes and criteria that accommodate different agency needs.
- Use a planning approach that engages the public and connects personal values with planning.
- Use a simple planning system that is accessible to all agencies.
- Create transparent processes that foster support from the public, agencies, funding sources, and plan implementers.
- Balance demands for recreational access with protection of natural resources by developing a strategic recreation plan that matches land acquisition strategies. Also, be

ready to manage those lands that are already acquired, especially in areas that are in close proximity to a major metropolitan area.

- Be aware of changing demographics and shifts and how they may impact land acquisition strategies.
- Make information about disposals transparent. Some agencies (WSDOT, for example) need this information to provide better mitigation planning.
- Plan more intentionally.