

Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington St SE
Olympia WA 98501

PO Box 40917
Olympia WA 98504-0917



(360) 902-3000
TTY (360) 902-1996
Fax: (360) 902-3026

E-mail: info@rco.wa.gov
Web site: www.rco.wa.gov

STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

October 12, 2007

Topic #8: WWRP Local Parks Category – Policy Issue

Prepared and Presented By: Darrell Jennings

Approved by the Director: 

Proposed Action: Decision

Summary

On August 27, Recreation and Conservation Office staff requested comment from interested parties on whether or not to increase the maximum grant request limits in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Local Parks category. This memorandum summarizes the proposed options and comments, and outlines staff's recommendation for modifications to existing program policies.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends increasing request limits for the Local Parks category. This includes increasing the development grant limit to \$500,000, the acquisition grant limit to \$1,000,000 and the maximum grant for a combination project to \$1,000,000, with the development portion not to exceed \$500,000.

Staff further recommends applicants seeking equal amounts of acquisition and development funds in a combination project type will now answer both the *Immediacy of Threat* and *Project Design* criteria. Each criterion will be worth half their current point value in order to retain the existing total points possible. Applicants retain the current option of requesting a majority of funding in either acquisition or development, in which case they answer only the criteria related to the major elements.

Background

The Washington State Legislature established the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program¹ (WWRP) in 1990. The limit on the grant amount requested for each project is a policy decision made by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB). The limits for the Local Parks category are currently \$300,000 for development projects,

¹ WWRP is codified in RCW 79A.15 and WAC 286-27.



\$500,000 for acquisition projects, and \$500,000 for combination (acquisition and development) projects. In combination projects, the grant limit for development costs may not exceed \$300,000.

The existing limits have been in place since 1992. With increases in property values and escalating construction costs, proponents have requested the RCFB increase the grant limits for the Local Parks category.

Analysis

Stakeholders commented on the following options regarding limits to grant awards.

- ➔ **Option 1:** Increase the development project limit to \$500,000, leave the acquisition project limit at \$500,000 and increase the total cost for a combination project to \$1,000,000, with a limit of \$500,000 on development elements.

Pros	Cons
The maximum grant limits have not been adjusted for inflation or increasing costs since the program's inception. An increase in the limits acknowledges escalating construction costs.	Fewer projects might be funded, depending on the size of grants requested.
Under current policy, the grant limit for acquisition projects is higher than the limit for development projects. Increasing the limit for development projects minimizes the current policy emphasis on acquisition projects, as expressed through a larger grant limit. ²	Some local agencies may not be able to take advantage of the larger limit due to the difficulty of raising the 50% required match.
	Does not adjust for increased property values over the past fifteen years when the current cap limit was set.
	Increases the likelihood that RCFB will have to skip over higher ranked development projects in order to fund lower ranked acquisition projects to meet the legislatively required 50% of funding going towards acquisitions.

² Current grant limits may reflect the high cost of land relative to development costs that existed when the program began in 1989, rather than a preference for acquisition projects. There is a legislative requirement that not less than 50% of the Local Parks category funding go toward acquisitions. None of the proposed options will change the fact that Recreation and Conservation Funding Board funding decisions will continue to meet this requirement.

- ➔ **Option 2:** Increase the development limit to \$500,000, the acquisition limit to \$750,000 and the total cost for a combination project to \$1,000,000, with a limit of \$500,000 on development elements.

Pros	Cons
The maximum grant limits have not been adjusted for inflation since the programs inception. An increase in the limits acknowledges escalating construction AND property acquisition costs.	Fewer projects might be funded, depending on the size of grants requested.
Balances the need to address escalating land and construction costs with the concern that fewer projects may be funded if the limits are increased.	
Increases an applicant's options for pursuing lands that are more expensive.	Some local agencies may not be able to take advantage of the larger limit due to the difficulty of raising the 50% required match.
Decreases the likelihood that RCFB will have to skip over higher ranked development projects in order to fund lower ranked acquisition projects to meet the legislatively required 50% of funding going towards acquisitions.	Increases the likelihood that we will have to skip over higher ranked development projects in order to fund lower ranked acquisition projects to meet the legislatively required 50% of funding going towards acquisitions.
Emphasizes the importance of acquisition projects and supports the legislative intent of being able to secure the most important lands before the opportunities are lost.	

- ➔ **Option 3:** Increase the development limit to \$500,000, the acquisition limit to \$1,000,000 and the total cost for a combination project to \$1,000,000, with a limit of \$500,000 on development elements.

Pros	Cons
Same as the first pro for Option 2 above.	Same as for Option 2 above.
Offers the most flexibility for local governments facing increasing costs.	
Increases an applicant's options for pursuing lands that are more	

expensive.	
Same as the fourth pro for Option 2 above.	
Same as the fifth pro for Option 2 above.	

- ➔ **Option 4:** No change: Leave development limit at \$300,000, acquisition limit at \$500,000 and total project cost at \$500,000, with a limit of \$300,000 on development elements.

Pros	Cons
Many deserving projects already go unfunded. Increasing the limits will likely lead to an even greater percentage of unfunded projects.	Does not achieve the advantages listed for Options 1 - 3 above.
This option is the most likely to ensure funds are distributed among a larger pool of grantees, and therefore a larger geographic area.	In years where there are too few applications, grant funds may be uncommitted.

Comments overwhelmingly favored increasing the grant limit for development and combination project types (those including both development and land acquisition costs), and increasing the limit on land acquisition only project types.

Several comments recommended setting grant limits based on the biennial WWRP appropriation in the state budget. Since applications must be evaluated before development of the budget, there is no way to know what the WWRP appropriation will be. Staff does not recommend adjusting grant limits after projects have been reviewed and scored by the evaluation team.

Next Steps

Public comments on the proposed options referenced above were distributed to the Board at the September 14 RCFB meeting. Comments received by October 25 on staff's recommendation as presented in this memorandum will be distributed to the Board electronically in advance of the November meeting.

If the Board approves staff's recommendation, staff will update Manual #10a, *WWRP Outdoor Recreation Account: Policies and Project Selection*, and send out notices to potential applicants and other interested parties. Adopted changes will affect grant requests beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.

Attachment

- Resolution 2007-25

RESOLUTION #2007-25
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
Grant Limits for the Local Parks Category

WHEREAS, Chapter 79A.15 RCW established the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) and authorized the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) to adopt policies and rules for the program; and

WHEREAS, in 1992 the RCFB adopted a policy that allowed a maximum limit of \$300,000 for development projects, \$500,000 for acquisition projects, and \$500,000 for combination (acquisition and development) projects with no more than \$300,000 toward development; and

WHEREAS, the costs of property acquisition and construction have increased but the RCFB has not changed the limits on grant requests since their original adoption; and

WHEREAS, the RCFB desires to incorporate a change to the WWRP policy manual regarding grant request limits for the Local Parks category; and

WHEREAS, the proposed policy has been made available for review and comment by individuals and organizations that have expressed an interest in WWRP; and

WHEREAS, final adoption of this policy revision will be incorporated into Manual 10a: *WWRP Outdoor Recreation Account: Policies and Project Selection*;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the grant request limits for the Local Parks category will be increased to \$500,000 for development projects, \$1,000,000 for acquisition projects and \$1,000,000 for a combination project, with the development portion not to exceed \$500,000; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that combination projects requesting equal amounts in both acquisition and development elements will answer both the "Immediacy of Threat" and "Project Design" evaluation criteria. In such cases each criterion will be worth half their current point value in order to retain the existing total points possible; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Recreation and Conservation Office staff is directed to take the necessary steps for implementation of this revision beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.

Resolution moved by: _____

Resolution seconded by: _____

Adopted/Defeated/Deferred (underline one)

Date: November 1, 2007