

Recreational Trails Program Annual Meeting

Date: November 16, 2015, 10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Location: Natural Resources Building, Room #285, Olympia, WA
Prepared by: Darrell Jennings, Senior Grants Manager
Recreation and Conservation Office

Welcome and Overview

Darrell opened the meeting at 10:05 am and took roll. The following committee members were in attendance, either in person or on the phone:

Name	City	Represents	Attendance
Charlotte Claybrooke	Olympia	State Department of Transportation	Yes - phone
Daniel Collins	Seattle	Citizen at Large	Yes
Darrell Jennings*	Olympia	Recreation and Conservation Office	Yes
Dean Moberg	Olympia	Federal Highway Administration	No
Don Crook	Sammamish	Water trail recreation	Yes
Durlyn Finnie	Allyn	Citizen at Large	Yes – phone
Gary Paull	Darrington	Federal agency	Yes – phone
John Hansen	Olympia	WA Department of Fish and Wildlife	Yes
Kevin Farrell	Spanaway	Hiking	Yes
Marc Toenyan	Mossyrock	Off-road motorcycle	Yes
Matt Lyons	Wenatchee	Mountain bicycle	No
Pattie Wibble	Port Orchard	Equestrian	No
Sandy Sternod	Kent	Snowmobile	Yes – phone
Steve Brand	Olympia	WA State Parks	Yes
Ted Jackson	Auburn	ATV recreation	Yes – phone
Vacant		Local agency	
Vacant		4x4	

*State Trails Administrator

Darrell provided an overview of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), its funding source, allowable uses, and Assured Access Requirement (30-30-40 funding rule). He further described that in WA State RTP funds are used to fund projects that “reduce the backlog of deferred maintenance on trails that provide a backcountry experience, and to operate education programs that promote user safety and environmental protection.”

RTP Grant Funding

- Darrell shared the ranked list from the 2014 application round and described the projects funded with FFY 2015 funding using the Assured Access Requirement. Projects funded = 21 General and 7 Education.
- Darrell explained that we accept and review applications every other year in the even numbered years and allocate two federal fiscal years (FFY) of funding to each list as funding becomes available. FFY 2016 has not been apportioned from FHWA and is contingent on a federal transportation budget authorization, which had not occurred at the time of the meeting. Darrell identified which projects would be candidates for funding should FFY 2016 RTP funding be authorized at current levels.
- Sandy Sternod asked how funding for State Parks winter grooming projects would be allocated as a result of a very poor snow year in 2014-2015 and could not be implemented. RCO will evaluate the funding that

would go to these projects and timing for when projects would occur to ensure project funding remains available to implement viable projects this winter.

2016 Grant Cycle

- Darrell reviewed the key dates that have been established for the 2016 grant cycle. The schedule was adjusted to:
 - Applications due November 1, 2016
 - Technical completion January 9, 2017 [*changed from Friday January 8*]
 - Evaluation period February 1 – March 10, 2017
 - Grant results meeting March 23, 2017

Federal Grant Rules

- The federal government has issued revised rules for administering and for recipients on the treatment of federal grant awards that apply to all awards made after December 26, 2014. The revised rules consolidate many existing federal circulars into a common set of rules (2 CFR Part 200); referenced as the Omniscircular.
 - The Omniscircular required changes to our Project Agreement and Standard Terms and Conditions, as well as our PRISM database (ongoing).
 - The most notable change for how RCO administers the RTP program is now grant recipients may request reimbursement for costs related to their organizations overhead using an indirect rate. Indirect means overhead or administrative costs that cannot be directly attributed to a specific project e.g. office rent, office supplies, postage, internet, phones, etc. To receive reimbursement for indirect costs, an organization must have:
 - A federally negotiated indirect rate;
 - A charge a de minimus rate of 10% (only non-profits without a federally negotiated rate);
 - Negotiated a rate with the administering agency (RCO); or
 - Voluntarily declined including indirect.
- Federal grant sponsors may not charge indirect rates.
- Daniel Collins asked if the indirect rate would be included in the application materials. It will be, however, the Omniscircular requires it to not be a factor in deciding which organizations receive, or do not receive, federal grant awards.
 - Don Crook asked about administrative costs in projects. Currently administrative costs are limited to direct costs that can be specifically identified and allocated to project work. The most likely administrative costs are related to grant progress reporting and billing requirements.

Policy Topics

Darrell presented several policy topics to the advisory committee for their comments and recommendations on whether or not RCO staff should proceed in developing policy recommendations to the RCFB for changes to the RTP program.

- Evaluation criteria – #5: Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship
 - Need a commonly understood definition for what is meant by sustainability (Jackson, Toenyan, Crook, and Farrell).
 - 10 points is excessive and disadvantages snow-grooming projects because snow trails are temporary. (Sternod, Paul); Exclude snow-grooming from this criteria (Farrell, Jackson, Sternod).
 - Needs better definition for sustainability, but liked having the criteria (Crook). This thinking goes into the early design and is good for trails and has value (Collins).
 - Consider using the current criteria for nonmotorized projects, but use a different (new) criteria to measure motorized projects (Claybrooke). There is some valuable criteria to measure motorized projects, recommend keeping for motorized but exclude for snow-grooming (Farrell).
 - Guidance seems geared towards development projects, more so than maintenance. Importing materials and equipment increases costs and impacts. Reduce point value (Toenyan).

- Applicants use key words to gain points in the criteria, but doesn't necessarily change or influence the project. Cost is what drives a project design (Hansen).
- Evaluation criteria – #6: Readiness to Proceed
 - Not much of a factor for any project. Either they are ready or they are not (Sternod).
 - Able to evaluate projects on whether or not they have equipment and materials (Claybrooke). Maybe less valuable for evaluating maintenance projects since there is very little for design or permitting. Applicable for development projects requiring permits (Brand, Collins).
 - Good to be able to evaluate an applicant's control and tenure e.g. Ecology's worksite on Whatcom Land Trust lands (Farrell).
- Evaluation criteria – #7: Cost Benefit
 - More information that goes into the cost of developing or maintaining trails would help evaluators understand costs better (Toenyan, Crook, and Farrell).
 - Ask for justification for costs over \$X amount (Farrell).
 - Costs were extremely varied and not well documented. Westside costs can be 3 times the costs of eastside work, so applicants need to document better (Paull).
 - Provide better instruction in manual to look beyond cost/mile. Maybe look at cost/users (Brand, Hansen).
 - Modify point value to 10-point question. Move Stewardship question to 5-points and bump this one up to 10 (Farrell, Collins, and Paull).
 - Look at matrix using USFS and DNR trail standard information (Jackson). Standards are guidelines but can be varied based on-site conditions but may be useful for making comparisons (Paull).
 - Remove "unacceptable harm to the environment" guidance from this criterion and put into criteria #5: Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship (Claybrooke). Keep points between #5 and #7 equal (Claybrooke, Finnie).
 - Increase points for #7 Cost Benefit because environmental work has been factored in already (Paull).
- RTP Goal: Reducing the backlog of maintenance of trails that provide a backcountry experience
 - The RCFB and applicant survey responses have expressed interest in expanding the scope of projects in RTP beyond performing maintenance on backcountry trails. Darrell briefly described the NOVA and WWRP Trails grant programs for comparison to RTP. How does the committee feel about expanding the breadth of projects allowed in RTP?
 - Since RTP is from federal source, additional preference should be given to federal agencies for trails on their lands (Jackson).
 - Backcountry is desirable, but urban trails are important to people too. Open to expanding to urban trails (Collins). Keep RTP focused on backcountry experience, WWRP Trails can fund more urban trails (Toenyan, Farrell).
 - Backcountry is difficult for some to get to and there are still some trails in urban settings that provide natural experience. Keep focused on backcountry, but alter the criteria so some urban trails with wilderness-type experience could be more competitive (Claybrooke, Brand, Sternod). Cross-state trails cross rural landscapes but not "backcountry" that should be able to have funding from this category. Backcountry implies wilderness settings (Brand).
 - The long-term success of trail sports and activities (and these grant programs) depend on users and their trail experiences begin close to home. Could tweak language to help fund some trails that are located in more urban settings to ensure trail experiences happen close to home (Sternod).
 - Could we set aside 5% for trails located in urban settings (Farrell)? Maybe 5% could be set aside for new development in urban settings (Sternod).
 - Need to understand the available funding sources for trails before making changes (Toenyan).
 - Reminder that top grant recipients (WTA) contributes ½ their efforts on trails that are non-federal lands. Federal road systems are declining through closures, and federal trails maintenance budgets are declining – RTP is critical for USFS to keep their trail systems open (Paull).

- Modifying RTP grant limits
 - Darrell reviewed the current per project grant limits of:
 - General projects \$150,000
 - Education projects \$20,000
 - Consider a category specifically for trail bridges. Maybe each cycle allocate up to a maximum amount for 1 or 2 major trail bridges that are important to be replaced per cycle (Paull). This is contrary to spreading limited grant funds across the state (Crook).
- State Trails System Act
 - Darrell described the recommendation from the 2013 WA State Trails Plan to evaluate establishing and designating a system of state recreation trails as provided in RCW 79a.35 and sought committee feedback on this priority.
 - State Parks strongly supports and has also been looking at this statute. Many routes have been created and are now part of inventory (Brand).
 - Sounds like a good idea, but concerned about the resources necessary to implement (Crook). State Parks started similar work in 2003 as part of their Centennial celebration planning. (Sternod).
 - Strongly support (Finnie).

Changes to the Grant Process and Materials

- Evaluation packets
 - Increase the number of pages that applicants have to respond to evaluation criteria from 3 to 4. Projects with multiple worksites and partners may need more room to explain project (Farrell, Sternod). Other members were indifferent about increasing the number of pages.
 - Standardize maps or establish map requirements (topo maps) and provide examples that all applicants must adhere to (Toenyan, Crook, and Claybrooke). Is there a way to use the Trails Website/Database as resource for mapping (Jackson)?
 - Would like to know more about the scope of work (brushing vs. heavy maintenance) (Toenyan, Crook).
- Definitions
 - Staff are considering modifications to the definitions for Development and Maintenance project types
 - Try to standardize the definition of “maintenance backlog” to get consistent data about the trails proposed for project work.
- Miscellaneous
 - Improve coordination efforts between applicants so that evaluators can be sure that work is not double-counted. Some sponsors were using WTA as volunteers in their projects but WTA has their own projects (Claybrooke). Darrell and Gary Paull explained the current coordination efforts and process between WTA and USFS projects to ensure projects and labor are not double-counted.
 - Advisory committee previously requested information on an applicant’s track record on previous grants (applicant success with grants, final report information comparing application with final metrics). Do not go back more than 1 or 2 grant cycles and do not disadvantage new applicants (Farrell, Collins, and Crook).
- Limiting the number of grants awarded to a single organization
 - Applicant and Advisory committee survey responses suggested limiting the number of grants that could be made to a single organization.
 - Recommended to not limit the number of grants to organizations.

Other

- Coalition for Recreational Trails Achievement Award
 - Darrell explained that RCO received a recognition award for its administration of the RTP program.

- WA Recreational Trails Database
 - Darrell described the trails database project that was performed by the Office of the Chief Information Officer and RCO's NOVA funding for the project. The database aggregated existing data from as many land managers that they could obtain data from during the project and attributed the line work. Approximately 12,000 miles of trail data.
 - Project details and information can be found at: <https://ocio.wa.gov/initiatives/geospatial-program-office/washington-state-trails-database-project>

Meeting adjourned at approximately 12:45 pm.