

March 23, 2017

Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Advisory Committee Meeting
10:00-12:00 pm
Room 259 Natural Resources Building, Olympia

Welcome and Overview

Meeting opened at 10:07 am by Darrell Jennings, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) State Trails Administrator. The following committee members were in attendance, either in person or on the phone:

Name	Representing	Agency/Organization	Present
Steve Brand	State Agency	WA State Parks	Yes
Charlotte Claybrooke	State Agency	WA Dept. of Transportation	Yes
Daniel Collins	Citizen at Large	Community	Yes
Darrell Jennings*	Ex-Officio	Recreation/Conservation Office	Yes
Don Crook	Nonmotorized - Water	Community	Yes-phone
Durlyn Finnie	Citizen at Large	Community	Yes-phone
Kevin Farrell	Nonmotorized - Hiking	Community	Yes
James Hall	Motorized – 4 x 4	Community	Yes
John Hansen	State Agency	WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife	No
Ted Jackson	Motorized - ATV	Monroe	No
Jonn Lunsford	Local Government	City of Anacortes	Yes
Mat Lyons	Nonmotorized - Mountain Bike	Community	No
Dean Moberg	U.S. Federal Highways Admin.	Federal Highway Administration	Yes
Gary Paull	Federal Agency	U.S. Forest Service	Yes-phone
Patricia Wible	Nonmotorized - Equestrian	Community	No
Sandy Sternod	Motorized - Snowmobile	Community	No
Marc Toenyan	Motorized – ORV Motorcycle	Community	Yes-phone

*Washington State Trail Administrator

Darrell Jennings facilitated the meeting. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss and review the results of the evaluation and ranking of the 2016 grant cycle projects, including the application process, the evaluation process and the criteria used for the rankings. Another reason for the advisory gathering is to fulfill the requirement that the advisory committee meet at least once annually during the federal fiscal year to maintain Washington State's eligibility for the Recreational Trails Program (RTP).

2016 Grant Requests

Category	Applications	Request	Match	Total
General Category	43	\$4,365,782	\$5,882,061	\$10,247,843
Education Category	14	\$257,143	\$292,960	\$550,103
TOTAL:	57	\$4,622,925	\$6,175,021	\$10,797,021

Meeting Summary

- RCO received 57 grant request applications. There were 43 from the general category which are primarily trail maintenance requests with a couple of new construction projects, and 14 education category proposals. Requests totaled approximately 4.6 million dollars and combined with match funds equaled approximately 11 million dollars.
- There were 22 fewer applications submitted this grant cycle: 79 applications submitted in the last grant round and 57 in the current grant round. One possible variable for fewer RTP applications could be due to an increase in NOVA funding and an increase in NOVA applications this grant cycle.
- Committee members received a scoring summary report, a ranked list report, top ranked project and an evaluator ranking list by grant category.

Committee Discussion on Project Rankings / General Category

Darrell invited committee members to review the top projects and asked for feedback. Topics for discussion include: why were these projects ranked at the top, any surprises about the list, and what did you like about these projects?

- Darrell comments that the top 4 projects are the same as the previous grant round.
- Marc comments that these groups were rather non-specific about where the work would occur, and yet they still scored at the top of the list.
- Dean inquires about the maximum possible score? Darrell replies 85 as the most points possible.
- Daniel comments ...WTA scored high, because they are doing the kind of work land managers cannot do...
- Marc comments that this is not true for #40 of 43, the Jones Creek OHV Trail Riders Association. They are doing the work for the land manager, DNR, yet they scored so lowly.
- Daniel comments about Jones Creek OHV, that he was not sure that the Polaris machine being replaced had reached the end of its life.

Next, Darrell asks the group to comment on the bottom ranked projects. The committee discusses why these groups ranked lower on the list. And, they talk about what these groups could do to improve their scores on future requests.

- Darrell asks the group about #43 of 43, Town of Coulee Dam, and why it ranked at the bottom.
- Daniel commented that the project was trying to maintain a historic structure. And, he did not get anything in the application about walls, roof or anything about maintaining the structure. Letters

of concern stated that there were perhaps 7 bathrooms existing in the area. The letters questioned putting capital into building new bathrooms when existing bathrooms already exist in the area and are not being maintained.

- Darrell poses the question that within the RTP program, the committee has the option to recommend a “Do Not Fund Category” and whether or not the committee would opt to not fund a project. “Project, #43 scored so low, but not enough to recommend as a Do Not Fund Category?”

Daniel replies, that he believes the project has potential and, not losing a historical site would be important. Daniel states that the applicant could maybe modify their request in the future.

- Steve Brand comments that the project was not very “trail” focused. I like the project, but there is not enough bang for your buck. “That’s why I scored it so low.”
- Gary, I had similar thoughts, the trail project sounded good, but leery of the development and ongoing maintenance of the structure.
- Durlyn commented that in her view, when someone is a first time applicant and they don’t put in very much on their match, then it tells me they don’t find it important either.
- Next, Darrell asks the advisory committee to talk about the next low scoring project, #42 of 43, the Leavenworth Hatchery Trail project. It was for the development of a new construction for a 1 mile trail at the hatchery.
- Daniel states, that it was not clear to him in the map submitted, that the new trail would link up with a larger system of existing trails. And, that he felt that the design of their plans did not have a natural trail plan, when including LED trail lights. It did not have a natural approach.
- John comments, that it did not have a back country appeal. “Cool concept, wrong program.” It is a hatchery project not a back country trail.

Moving forward to the next two low scoring groups, Darrell explains the importance of the discussion. Asking these questions helps to inform the applicant about the decisions we make about our program. This dialog also helps RCO in understanding the scored rankings and to convey this information to the applicant. In doing this, it helps the applicant to find a right fit within our various programs or to help them restructure their project in a way that is a better fit for RTP. Project #43 of 43 had a 6 point gap between it and the next project #42 of 43. This discussion helps RCO understand how and why you scored these two bottom projects. It is clear that this group was not in favor of the Coulee Dam Project, as evidenced by the 6 point drop in scoring.

The next group for discussion is the snow grooming and snow trail maintenance group. The first snow project begins at number 25 of 43 which is the Nooksack Nordic Ski Club and number 30 of 43 which is the State Parks, Mt. Spokane Nordic System for plowing and grooming.

- Darrell asks, “What are your thoughts about snow grooming and snow trail maintenance projects within RTP and why did you rank these two groups as you did?”

- Another committee member asks, “Historically is this where these projects fall?” Darrell replies, “It is not uncommon.” Member replies, “...ok, I was a little surprised about where they were on the list, considering it was State Parks, and this program is fairly important, or at least I thought, but to be honest, I don’t really remember even, how I ranked them...”
- Another committee member states, “I tend to take the mindset, if the grooming is not there then the opportunity is not there. I ranked them a little higher perhaps than other folks. I just think if there is grooming not done, then how are folks going to have the opportunity? So that’s one thing I try to keep in mind. I see it basically as the same thing as being a bunch of felled trees across trails, it doesn’t matter if it is back country or front country, not grooming keeps people from being able to enjoy the environment.”
- Jonn Lunsford says, “...I was surprised to see how many of them there were, in Anacortes we don’t have any snow plowing. So it was fun to review those. To me it seemed as if it were a two for one, you get both trails grooming, and get folks out in the winter time for snowmobiling and skiing. I can’t remember how I scored them, but it was attractive to me because I felt they got people out into areas and did work to benefit the area in later months.”
- I had a view on that too. Number 33 of 43, Methow Valley Sport Trail Association, I thought they were offering two things, grooming and also buying a chipper, to chip out wood for fire breaks. I thought this made a lot of sense for taking the idea of clearing a trail one step further.
- Yeah, I’m in agreement with that. Commonly when we brush out a trail, we try to get it to the side of the trail. In this particular area, I was left with the impression there was a lot of debris in this area that is prone to fires and some kind of machinery is needed to dispatch it. And, that material would be used as much elsewhere.
- Jim says, “...I marked them down because they have other options, for state parks funding sources through fees, the Discover Pass and they just raised their rates again. Yet, they are still coming forward for funding for basic maintenance. I’d like it to not take away back country funding for other programs...”
- Charlotte commented, “...So you have...a requirement that a certain percentage of projects be motorized and awarded?” Darrell confirms with a “yes”, RTP has an Assured Access funding requirement. Charlotte then continues with, “...I typically find that snowmobile maintenance projects are better quality in terms of their application. And, I typically rank those higher than the other ones, based on the criteria you used. I assume that some of those snowmobile projects are awarded based on your award zone”.

Charlotte says, “What I was thinking when we reviewed these applications is that it might be useful to have a non-motorized subset and have a scoring criteria for that and a motorized subset. Because, I think the motorized and non-motorized together, you might change some of your criteria, if you know that they are going to be motorized projects. It made sense to me when you think about need, sustainability and those kinds of things, compared to the other projects.

- Daniel comments, “I have one more point on Methow Valley, if they spend the money on a chipper, designated just for firebreak work, and it can’t be used for anything else, that’s a lot of money in one piece of equipment. I just thought they could come up with a better solution.

Marc comments, “I was thinking along the same lines, and then I thought gosh... the potential of fire damage far outweighs the cost of the chipper. So I rated this a little higher when I looked at capital cost verses the environment and things like that.

Gary comments, “I thought the project was interesting. When I first opened it up I was thinking, no way! I read through it and they pretty much sold me on it as beneficial to the trail system. And needed to protect the community around it. The chipper, I don’t know, I was supposing that they would get it and rent it out to other communities elsewhere around town to help pay for the thing. I’ve seen this with other trail machines maybe bought for other projects. And the machines wind up getting used much more widely. So... that was my thought...”

Dean Moberg of Highways cautions about renting RTP purchased equipment because it’s being paid for by a grant program from the federal highway administration and is not permitted.

Committee member says, “I read it to mean specifically for their use, I didn’t see any partners. They didn’t have any mutual agreements with land managers to help and things that that. I didn’t want to see a piece of equipment sit there 11 months out of the year, when other people who need stuff like that go wanting. So if they could have made a little more cooperative effort, then I think they could have gotten a lot better score from me.”

- Darrell asks the group for any additional comments.

Someone comments, “It is intriguing to me that you have projects at the top of the list (WTA), scoring at approximately 85% of you maximum score, that are requesting far more money than they are bringing to the table, and they are still being funded. And, I am intrigued that given the fact that you have a box that you can check to recommend non-funding. And, hearing some of the comments about the bottom two projects, namely one is not a back country trail. If it is a fishery trail within a fish hatchery it is probably not open when the hatchery is closed. The last one, the town of Coulee Dam, if it is in fact a building project, and not a trails project, then I question that. So... my suggestion would be that you review your instructions to recommend not funding, and what does and does not make a project truly representative of the project you are trying to fund. Because, I don’t think anything says you have to spend all your money. Alright? Then, I got to tell you, if I’m up here at number 1 and number 2 contributing 3,4,5,7,8 times what I’m requesting, I get a little anxious when I see somebody getting funding for 4 times the amount of what they are contributing as a match.”

- Daniel says, “I have one point. The Back Country Horsemen put together a difficult application and their list of equipment expenses, they listed radios. And, that didn’t come up or were listed on any of the others. I think good communication for back country programs is important. Organizations should know that we give priority to good communication especially in fire country. Darrell confirms that, “we don’t require them to have radio’s in the back country, and if they already have them that’s good and if they need to purchase them, that is fine too. The program allows for it.”

- Charlotte asks about how much funding is available and if all the projects will be awarded. Darrell replies, “No, they will not. And, this list of projects are waiting for our fiscal year 17 & 18 funding. Which we just received our 17 year funding apportionment.

Marc comments, “If we are being asked not to fund a project or group, then that should be one of the columns to score or have the score available on the spreadsheet. I was also under the assumption that all these projects were eligible for funding. I don’t see how saying these projects should be asking for money from other sources is relevant to the scoring process. They are asking for the funds, the funds are there to provide a variety of recreational experiences. If projects are not meeting the criteria, then we should be able to update the score sheets to reflect the do not fund ranking.”

- Darrell qualifies some questions and responds with, “Everything has been reviewed and is eligible for funding in the true sense of the RTP program. Our board has a priority that projects are there to reduce deferred maintenance on back country trails. Whether or not that says, eligibility threshold, that’s kind of a gray area that we work in, so we have to evaluate that on a case by case basis. Trailhead support facilities are an allowable use so these projects at the bottom are eligible in the general sense of RTP, but whether or not they meet the priorities that the board has set currently is one of those gray area questions. So that’s why we have an evaluation panel of such qualified people like yourselves, to help us score and rank them.”
- Darrell invites the group to comment again about the general category. Someone in the group states, “In reading through this thing there are a significant number of volunteer hours that are used as match. And, when I look at 27,000 hours, I wonder, how is that audited?”

Darrell clarifies that this is a reimbursement program and when projects are underway, we strike a formula based on what their application says. An applicant cannot achieve their full grant award, unless they achieve their full match award as well. That documentation comes in with their billings, and our grant managers review every billing that comes in. Our fiscal team also performs “monitoring” checks which are less than true audits to review compliance.

- A member makes one more comment, “I have a hard time giving the Washington Trails Association so much money every cycle. I ranked them along with everyone else, very high, they are a great organization, and they do a lot of really good work. But \$398,000 out of the pot of money we have, I personally have a hard time with that.”

Darrell replies, “We are going to engage Adam in future discussions, as we look at this program over the long term. I do appreciate you bringing it up and having it in the last notes as well.”

Committee Discussion on Project Rankings / Education Category

Next, Darrell introduces the ranked list for the education category. “Here in contrast to the other list. The government agencies ranked at the top and the non-profit agencies ranked at the bottom. Which also what happened in this category the last grant cycle.”

- Per Charlotte, “The non-profits did not appear to know how to apply or answer the questions. Or at least that’s how I perceived it. I scored them low, because I could not give them any credit for answering them correctly. I might have really liked the project, but my job was to follow the review criteria.
- Marc comments, “One of the things I had in mind, if the land manager doesn’t have one of the key positions available, then the other volunteer organizations can do anything. At least, not in an official capacity. And, by default, I think the land managers scored a little higher just on that basis alone. You got to have a boss to go talk to.”

Darrell asks, “How about the top 3 ranked projects? Are they appropriately scored?”

- Committee member responds, “I certainly gave some weight to the number of users in this area. Particularly the top 3 ranked on my list.” Another member says, “I feel the same way in this area. If these folks can be reaching more people with their infield contacts, that’s valuable.
- Per Daniel, “1 of 14, the Snoqualmie Volunteer Ranger Coordinator, you get a lot of bang for your buck. You have a large group of volunteers with the project and you are serving a large metropolitan area with a good program.
- Dean Moberg comments, “...A good program spends time developing a leadership program for volunteers. And, your volunteers are the ones who do the job.”

Next, Darrell asks, “Any advice for the bottom 3 ranked projects, other than, make sure you answer the criteria?”

- Daniel says, “I wasn’t sure about Washington Water Trails, it looked like their priorities were all over Washington State, and they did not have a geographic spectrum.”
- Someone else said, “They said that their outreach would be field contacts as their method of approach. That seemed like a pretty low capacity approach. And, it wouldn’t reach many people. And, these people are probably already pretty well versed in trail use. And, not leveraging partnership opportunities.”
- Daniel adds ...It seemed a little organic without specific structure. If they had been more specific and focused, I would have scored them a little higher....

Evaluator Rankings

Darrell introduces the topic of evaluator rankings. “This is the last report we sent to you. And, we put this together just for fun. This a report that tells you the evaluator, how you rated and prioritized the ranked list in comparison to the rest to the team.”

“The column on the far right shows how the rest of the team ranked these proposals. The order they are sorted in, shows how your scores panned out. For example, evaluator 354 ranked Mount Si & Middle Fork as number 1 on their list, but as a collective group it was number 5 of 14. So, this is just something fun to look at and to see how your work compares to others. You would have received a report for both the General Category list and the Education Category list.”

Program Funding & Federal Grant Rules 30-30-40

Funding for RTP comes from the Federal Transportation budget. Through the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act and from the Transportation Alternatives Program. About \$270 million in fuel tax from the off-highway recreation activities trust fund. And, about \$84 million comes to the RTP Recreational Trails Program. And, that how we get our funding to administer this program.

Assured Access Requirement 30-30-40 Rule

- Is a federal requirement to ensure all user types get a little piece of the pie.
- Each proposal is categorized on how they target certain trail types:
 - Motorized single use trail / multiple use trails get 30% of funding
 - Non-Motorized single use trail / multiple use trails get 30% of funding
 - Compatible use designed to allow both types of motorized and non-motorized trail uses. And get 40% of funding.
- No more than 5% may be used for educational projects.

Funding & Fiscal Year 2017 Apportionment

- This is one year of funding towards a two year funding cycle. We would continue to go down the list in 2018, in the same award process as today. Any excess 30/30/40 monies left over from this process would go back into the general fund category, and be distributed according to the rankings.
- Giving us \$1,867,407 million dollars for the RTP program
 - Administration portion is budgeted at \$73,893
 - Education portion is budgeted at \$86,676
 - General portion is budgeted at \$1,703,839
- Assured access category funding is as follows
 - Education Category
 - 30% Non-motorized \$26,903 (Able to fund projects 1, 2, and part of 3 of 14)
 - 40% Compatible \$35,870 (Able to fund projects 2, 3 and part of 4 of 14)
 - 30% Motorized \$26,903 (Able to fund projects 8 and part of 10 of 14)
 - General Category
 - 30% Non-motorized \$511,152
 - 40% Compatible \$681,535
 - 30% Motorized \$511,152

Darrell asks the committee, "If they would like to recommend to the board, funding the full 5% of the allotment to the education projects?"

- Daniel, Charlotte, Don and Gary all reply in favor of the full 5%. "5 of 5 is good."
- No one is opposed

Darrell acknowledges the "yes" recommendation by the committee and qualifies by stating this is a recommendation to the RCFB Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. And, the board has final approval for funding projects.

Next steps, an evaluator survey will go out by email to ask you questions about how to improve the process. Our grants staff will be working on issuing agreements. And we will be working with our applicants to be sure they have control and tenure, their legal right to do work on land that is not their own. And they have to have all their environmental clearances approved and done before we can enter into an agreement with them. And, they need to certify their match is in place.

Our board will review and approve the ranked list on May 10th & 11th meeting. This is a formality to approve the project rankings as they scored. Then on July 12th & 13th the board will meet to approve funding for the projects.

State Policy and Planning

Darrell talks about the upcoming planning work happening with the RCO agency. We are in the midst of updating our Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). This plan guides our outdoor recreation plans, priorities and investments in our grant programs. Chapters or subsets within the SCORP are the Trails plan and the NOVA plan. The planning work is underway. The resident survey is underway and wrapping up soon. Contractor has 70% of the responses collected.

We will also be taking a look at RTP when the new SCORP documents is done. We will be looking at the data, outcomes and grant limits. This will allow us to make sure we are using RTP in the best way possible for the state.

And, we will be taking a look at evaluation criteria to include sustainability, environmental stewardship, readiness to proceed and cost benefits of our programs. We will also be looking at how we define things such as deferred maintenance, the difference between development and maintenance projects and direct versus indirect costs.

Other Work at RCO

We continue to work on our State Recreational Trails System Act. That is a priority in our current RTP trails plan and our NOVA plan. And, we will be taking more information to our board later this summer. We are also working on our Washington State Trails database project, in conjunction with the Office of Chief Information Officer (OCIO). The OCIO is collecting trails data from providers and trail managers.

Darrell wraps up this meeting session by asking for questions or comments. Darrell thanks everyone for their time and input into the projects.

Meeting is adjourned at 12:02 pm.