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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

November 2008

Item #12: Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group Update

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Presented By: Heath Packard, Policy and Planning Specialist

Approved by the Director:

Proposed Action: Briefing

Summary

In 2007, the Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 5236, which created the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group (lands group). The lands group is charged with coordinating state lands acquisition and disposal by improving communication, documentation, reporting, transparency, and planning. Its work will result in a final report and recommendations to the Legislature in January 2012.

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides the staff support for the lands group.

Background

The authorizing statute (Attachment A) requires the lands group to include representatives of state natural resource agencies and authorizes the RCO director to appoint additional stakeholder representatives to the group. As a result, the lands group includes state agencies, local governments, private landowners, and conservation organizations (Attachment B). The RCO provides staff support to and



coordination of the group's efforts. The lands group is dedicated to a collaborative approach to improving state land acquisitions and disposals.

The lands group has met five times since September 2007 to organize, develop an action plan, and begin evaluating agency acquisition plans and policies. To accomplish the 13 assignments required by the authorizing statute, the group created several workgroups to implement the action plan. Each workgroup met for the first time in the fall of 2008 to set their tasks, timelines, and assignments. In October, staff brought the workgroups' plans to the lands group for critique and approval.

Workgroup	Area(s) of Focus
Workgroup 1	This workgroup has focused on coordinating land acquisitions. The workgroup is finalizing a review of agency transaction plans and policies and designing a biennial forecast of state land acquisitions and disposals. Workgroup 1 is planning and hosting an annual forum to coordinate near-term acquisitions and is developing an inventory of potential land transfers.
Workgroup 2	Workgroup 2 has focused on recordkeeping and documentation. The workgroup is developing recommendations for centralized and standardized acquisition/disposal recordkeeping and recommendations for using graphic information systems (GIS) to reflect this data.
Workgroup 3	Workgroup 3 is developing an approach to monitor the success of acquisitions.
Workgroups 4	Workgroups 4 is determining if agencies can improve their coordination of transactions by changing the planning eligibility requirements of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.
Workgroup 5	Workgroup 5 is developing options for centralizing coordination of federally-funded land transactions.

Current Status

The action plan is nearly complete and plan implementation is underway. The action plan will evolve, and regular updates will allow the lands group to track its progress. The lands group is considering adopting a charter to clarify roles, responsibilities, expectations, and governance for the lands group members.

From this point forward, much of the lands group work will happen at the workgroup level. The quarterly lands group meetings will be a forum for workgroup updates, providing strategic advice to workgroups, and for big-picture state lands coordination efforts. Each workgroup has begun implementing the tasks necessary to complete their assigned action items on time.

RCO staff developed a website (<http://www.rco.wa.gov/rco/h&rlcg/default.htm>) to share lands group information and provide regular updates for the general public, agencies, and for the group members. The website includes information about the group's meetings, agendas, action plan, reports, and recommendations.

Analysis

The lands group may develop some policy recommendations for Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (Board) consideration. Their enabling statute includes a requirement to revisit the "Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program's planning requirements to determine whether coordination of state agency habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal could be improved by modifying those requirements."

Lands group members have expressed an interest in expanding their work beyond those action items required by their enabling statute. For example, some group members have suggested that the group should identify ways to increase coordination with local governments. Other members have suggested exploring ways in which coordination and planning could contribute to more strategic investments in habitat and recreation resources.

The lands group has agreed that these and other ideas are worthy of the group's attention, but only after the group has made significant progress towards completing its statutory requirements. In the future, the group may identify and prioritize additional action items that are consistent with the lands group's statutory mandate.

Next Steps

The group has scheduled its quarterly meetings for 2009. One of the workgroups is developing the first annual forum to coordinate state lands acquisitions. The date and location for this forum will be announced through the website.

The lands group expires July 31, 2012. Its work will culminate in a final report and recommendations to the Legislature in January 2012. Between now and then, RCO staff will keep the Board apprised of lands group work and policy developments that may require Board consideration.

The RCO will submit the first land group yearly report to the Office of Financial Management in November.

Attachments

- A. Lands group authorizing statute (RCW 75A.25.260)
- B. Lands group membership

Attachment A

RCW 79A.25.260

Habitat and recreation lands coordinating group — Members — Progress reports — Duties. (Expires July 31, 2012.)

(1) The habitat and recreation lands coordinating group is established. The habitat and recreation lands coordinating group must include representatives from the *committee, the state parks and recreation commission, the department of natural resources, and the Washington state department of fish and wildlife. The members of the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group must have subject matter expertise with the issues presented in this section. Representatives from appropriate stakeholder organizations and local government must also be considered for participation on the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group, but may only be appointed or invited by the director.

(2) To ensure timely completion of the duties assigned to the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group, the director shall submit yearly progress reports to the office of financial management.

(3) The habitat and recreation lands coordinating group must:

(a) Review agency land acquisition and disposal plans and policies to help ensure statewide coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisitions and disposals;

(b) Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisitions [acquisition] and disposal plans;

(c) Establish procedures for publishing the biennial forecast of acquisition and disposal plans on web sites or other centralized, easily accessible formats;

(d) Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans;

(e) Develop a recommended method for interagency geographic information system-based documentation of habitat and recreation lands in cooperation with other state agencies using geographic information systems;

(f) Develop recommendations for standardization of acquisition and disposal recordkeeping, including identifying a preferred process for centralizing acquisition data;

(g) Develop an approach for monitoring the success of acquisitions;

(h) Identify and commence a dialogue with key state and federal partners to develop an inventory of potential public lands for transfer into habitat and recreation land management status;

(i) Review existing and proposed habitat conservation plans on a regular basis to foster statewide coordination and save costs.

(4) The group shall revisit the *committee's and Washington wildlife and recreation program's planning requirements to determine whether coordination of state agency habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal could be improved by modifying those requirements.

(5) The group must develop options for centralizing coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisition made with funds from federal grants. The advantages and drawbacks of the following options, at a minimum, must be developed:

(a) Requiring that agencies provide early communication on the status of federal grant applications to the *committee, the office of financial management, or directly to the legislature;

(b) Establishing a centralized pass-through agency for federal funds, where individual agencies would be the primary applicants.

(6) This section expires July 31, 2012. Prior to January 1, 2012, the *committee shall make a formal recommendation to the appropriate committees of the legislature as to whether the existence of the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group should be continued beyond July 31, 2012, and if so, whether any modifications to its enabling statute should be pursued. The *committee shall involve all participants in the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group when developing the recommendations.

[2007 c 247 § 1.]

Notes:

*Reviser's note: Chapter 241, Laws of 2007 amended RCW 79A.25.010, changing the definition of "committee" to "board."

Attachment B: Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group Members

September 2008 update

Affiliation / Organization	Members/Alternates
State Legislature	Senator Linda Parlette <i>Alternate: Erika Keech</i>
Recreation and Conservation Office	Heath Packard Jim Fox Kammie Bunes
Washington Department of Natural Resources	Pene Speaks <i>Alternate: Clay Sprague</i>
State Parks and Recreation Commission	Steve Hahn <i>Alternate: Shannon Stevens</i>
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	Elizabeth Rodrick
Department of Ecology	Jeanne Koenings <i>Alternate: Kathy Taylor</i>
Conservation Commission	Ron Shultz
Washington Biodiversity Council	Sarah Gage
County Governments / Okanogan County	Commissioner Andrew Lampe
City Government Park Planners / Washington Recreation and Parks Association	Leslie Betlach <i>Alternate: Shelley Marelli</i>
Western Washington Agricultural Association	Mike Rundlett
Pacific Coast Joint Ventures / Ducks Unlimited	Joe LaTourrette
The Nature Conservancy / WWRC	Bill Robinson
Private forest landowner	Eric Beach (proposed)