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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

November 4, 2008

TO: Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Members
FROM: Kaleen Cottingham, Director
SUBJECT: Director and Agency Management Report, October 2008

Recreation and Conservation Grant Evaluations

In October, staff and its evaluation committees finished reviewing 158 grant applications for three grant programs – Boating Facilities, Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities, and the national Recreational Trails Program. There are some excellent grants in these categories and staff and evaluators did a great job sorting through them all.

Changes to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board

As you have heard, we will be saying goodbye to two members of the board at the November meeting. Board Chair Val Ogden, who has been a member since 2003, and its chair since December 2003, has announced her retirement from the board. During Val's tenure, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program budget increased from \$45 million to \$100 million and the Legislature gave the board two new grant categories.

Department of Natural Resources representative Craig Partridge also will step down because of other duties in his agency. He has served on the board since 2002, and has provided valuable policy perspectives. He will be replaced by Steve Saunders, who is the manager of the Asset Management and Protection Division for the Department of Natural Resources.

We will miss their expertise, wisdom, and good humor.

Improving Grant Processes

We recently hired Strategica, Inc. to evaluate our grant processes with an eye toward making them more efficient. The consultants have finished meeting with staff and grant recipients and drafting maps of the grant processes to identify areas of inconsistency. A report is due mid-December.



Legislative Preview

Given the bleak revenue forecast and state of the economy, much of the legislative session likely will focus on budget issues. Some of our funding sources, such as marine fuel taxes and nonhighway fuel taxes, while dedicated sources have been experiencing reductions due to reduced fuel consumption. Other sources, such as state bonds, will be under increasing pressure to address capital construction at our K-12 and higher education institutions, as well as to address housing needs. Although the capital budget historically has been more stable, several factors are at play that could threaten some of our grant programs. Climate change and cleaning up Puget Sound are likely to dominate discussions around natural resource issues. RCO, on behalf of the RCFB, has received permission from the Governor to submit one bill, which would remove mitigation bank eligibility in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. There appears to be no opposition to the bill. RCO, on behalf of the Biodiversity Council, is working on a legislative proposal to more permanently establish the council in statute. A final decision on this bill has not yet been made.

How RCO Faired in POG?

We participated in two Priorities of government (POG) groups working to develop the 2009-11 budget. One of those groups, the Natural Resources POG group, evaluated 127 natural resource agency activities proposed to be continued in the new budget and 88 decision packages seeking new funding. The programs were rated on how well the performance measures met agency targets, the alignment with POG goals and strategies, importance, and efficiency. Decision packages were rated on alignment with POG goals and strategies, importance, cost, and agency priority. The group was given an "allocation" of \$938 million for all new and carry-forward activities, including new Puget Sound and climate change programs. All of RCO's carry-forward activities were above the funding cutoff, but all of RCO's decision packages were below the cutoff, with the requests for our sister boards' (Invasive Species and Biodiversity Councils) ranking the highest. POG is only one of a number of factors that advise the development of the Governor's 2009-11 budget.

Performance measures and work plan for 2009

I recently approved performance measures for each of RCO's sections that will be used to provide reports to the Office of Financial Management and for the Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) process. The measures may need to be adjusted as we learn more. We also developed a new format for our agency work plan, which specifies the actions we need to take during this fiscal year to meet our strategic goals and objectives. It is more comprehensive than our previous format, but the items it includes are not new to the agency. My intent is to use it to track and prioritize our work.

Board Survey Results

The survey you recently took about materials and meetings indicated an overall high level of satisfaction with staff work, including timeliness, quality of board notebooks, and staff presentations. You did recommend changes to more closely tie the materials to the strategic plan.

News from our Sister Agencies

Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB): The SRFB is reviewing more than 130 applications for its annual grant award in December. The SRFB's scientific review panel has met with regional organizations to discuss project applications of concern, which traditionally do not get funded. Meanwhile, a SRFB subcommittee is working on funding formulas for how it allocates its funds by region. At its October meeting, the SRFB approved funding for a second year of the Intensively Monitored Watershed project, which is aimed at providing information about how well salmon restoration activities work, and funding for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's smolt monitoring project.

Washington Biodiversity Council: The council is writing a report, due to the Governor in November, to recommend who should provide leadership for biodiversity efforts in the future. The draft report includes a recommendation that the existing organizational model for biodiversity leadership, which is a public-private partnership administered by a state agency, be codified in statute. The permanent council would guide implementation of the strategic plan.

Washington Invasive Species Council: The council held workshops in Parkland and Pasco to prioritize actions to implement the top five priorities of its strategic plan. A total of 168 experts from around the state participated. The workshops resulted in substantive suggestions for specific actions to implement the top five recommendations, identification of entities that need to be involved, and suggestions on how to fund the work. Staff is preparing a summary report of the results to be combined with the council's annual report due in December.

Meetings with Partners

DNR's Sustainable Recreation Task Force

The Sustainable Recreation Work Group will make recommendations to the Legislature on a long-term vision for the future of recreation on lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Commissioner of Public Lands, Doug Sutherland, asked RCO's director to sit on the work group. In addition, RCO has provided Jim Eychaner to assist DNR on this effort. DNR last officially addressed recreation issues 37 years ago, and since then, recreation has changed considerably. Not only has the diversity and intensity of recreation changed, but the growing population has put additional pressures on our public lands. The work group has held two meetings and a tour so far, with additional work planned later in November.