

Washington Recreation & Park Association – 2020 Legislative Agenda

Top Priorities

***Provide Local Parks and Recreation Agencies with new Funding Options to Address Vital M&O and Preservation Needs and to Enhance Economic Development**

(Policy/Fiscal Bill) Parks and recreation are outdoor, quality-of-life amenities that are highly valued by the public. They offer activities that help us maintain physical health and well-being; protect open spaces and facilities that make our communities attractive and vibrant; they help to sell homes. Just as importantly, local parks and recreation programs enhance jobs-creation and economic development efforts and build trail networks that connect our communities. But investments in local parks and recreation suffered during the Great Recession and have lagged behind areas such as public safety in the years afterward. At the same time, a WRPA survey of parks agencies has shown a growing M&O deficit and backlog. ***WRPA will work with key lawmakers on a modified bill that is narrower than 2019 legislation authorizing the creation of Parks Benefit Districts. The 2020 bill will allow parks and recreation agencies to take a .1 percent sales tax increase to voters and bond against new sales tax proceeds upon voter approval. A few parks and recreation agencies have this authority, but the overwhelming majority – including all Metropolitan Park Districts (MPDs) and Park Districts – do not.***

Strongly Support \$50,000 Allocation to Update Outdoor Recreation Sector Economic Analysis

(Operating Budget) WRPA joins a broad-based coalition of organizations in urging the legislative or executive branch to expend \$50,000 to update the “***Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State***” first released in January 2015. The initial report showed that the outdoor recreation sector generates \$21.6 *billion* a year in economic activity, \$12.5 billion in direct sales, and \$4.7 billion in household wages. The study should be regularly refreshed and updated to give fiscal and policy decision-makers current information on the economic, social, health, and environmental benefits of the outdoor recreation sector.

Protect Funding for Dedicated Accounts within the Capital Budget

(Capital Budget) As the Legislature considers its 2020 Supplemental Capital Budget, WRPA urges lawmakers to ***refrain from diverting funding from dedicated accounts*** that are focused on

funding outdoor recreation activities. Additionally, WRPA urges legislators to utilize the dedicated accounts for fund outdoor recreation programs and avoid the use of “bond backfill” that ends up putting funding in jeopardy and in competition with other critical construction projects. Dedicated accounts that are key to WRPA include the Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program (WWRP), Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF), and Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA), as well as others including the Boating Facilities Program (BFP), Non-Highway Off-Road Vehicle Account (NOVA), and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). WRPA urges lawmakers to keep top-of-mind studies showing that the outdoor recreation sector generates nearly \$22 billion a year in economic activity for the state, as well as 200,000+ jobs.

“Support/Oppose” Items

Efforts to Address Mental Health, Homelessness, Affordable Housing

(Policy Bills, Budgetary Items) WRPA will ***strongly support efforts*** led by cities and counties, the Low-Income Housing Alliance, and others, ***to ensure the Legislature provides ongoing tools for local governments to address growing mental health, homelessness, and affordable housing crises*** in their communities. Without a systematic plan for addressing housing, homelessness, and mental health, those in need of shelter will seek out other public lands to use, leaving parks officials attempting to manage issues they are ill-equipped to resolve.

Legislation to Ban Sales/Transport of English and Atlantic Ivy in our State

(Policy Bill) The City of Olympia is likely to lead a 2020 legislative effort to ban the sale and transportation of English and Atlantic Ivy in Washington State. Such a step is necessary because these types of ivy cause significant environmental damage to parks, trails, shorelines, and forest areas. The State of Oregon already has acted to ban the sale of these types of ivy. WRPA will support this bill – or other mechanisms (via State Agencies) to achieve the ban.

“Big Tent” Outdoor Recreation Coalition

(Budgetary, Policy Items) WRPA strongly supports the continued work of the “Big Tent” Outdoor Recreation Coalition, an umbrella organization comprised of several dozen outdoor retailers, non-profits, and others that seek to ensure Washington State recognizes and maximizes the economic, societal, tourism, and health benefits of outdoor recreation. WRPA is prepared to support 2020 legislative and budget efforts by the Big Tent Coalition.

Advocate for Key “Healthy & Active Communities” Funding within the State Budget Process

(*Capital, Transportation, Operating Budgets*) As part of its ongoing “Healthy and Active Communities” initiative begun several years ago, the **WRPA will work to ensure adequate funding of grant programs and budgetary items that help youth and adults to live active and healthy lifestyles**; enhance public health; and combat a growing obesity trend in Washington and across the country. WRPA supports these key budgetary items and wants to ensure that within expenditures, a strong role for parks and recreation is identified and included:

- Public Health District and “Healthiest Next Generation” funding -- *Operating Budget*;
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant, Safe Routes to Schools, and “Complete Streets” funding in the *Transportation Budget*;
- Dedicated accounts and grant programs in the *Capital Budget* such as WWRP, YAF, ALEA, NOVA, BFP.

Support Increased Funding Associated with the “No Child Left Inside” Grant Program

Washington State Parks seeks an increase of nearly \$1.2 million for NCLI – with \$750,000 of that going toward an increase in the approved grant-funding level for 2019-21 (\$1.5 million). The remainder of the funds would go toward community outreach, public engagement, and staffing for things such as a Junior Ranger program as well as initiatives to help get youth outdoors, broaden diversity, and enhance cultural inclusiveness in the use of State Parks. WRPA is poised to **support** this request and also supports the \$500,000 increased included in the Governor’s proposed budget.

Agency Collaboration Items

1) “Sustainability” Definition Used by Recreation & Conservation Office (RCO) in

Evaluating and Scoring for Grant Programs: WRPA is working closely with RCO to ensure that the ‘sustainability’ questions and criteria within its grant programs act as a filter and a factor, vs. a somewhat-subjective tool that can negatively impact scoring for certain types of project applications.

2) Statewide Trail Plan: WRPA wants to provide support for efforts by the State Parks

Commission to update the Statewide Trail Plan, and to provide technical assistance as well as strategic input on construction and maintenance options to be utilized for local jurisdiction trail segments.