

Outdoor Alliance Washington

Access Fund • American Alpine Club • American Whitewater • El Sendero Backcountry Ski Club •
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance • The Mountaineers • Washington Climbers Coalition
Washington Trails Association

The Access Fund, American Alpine Club, American Whitewater, El Sendero Backcountry Ski Club, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, The Mountaineers, Washington Climbers Coalition and Washington Trails Association – all human-powered recreation organizations in Washington state – come together as a coalition on issues relating to recreation, access and conservation. Outdoor Alliance Washington organizations represent more than 34,000 members who recreate on public lands in Washington.

We present the following recommendations to the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation:

1) **Seek greater opportunities for public-private partnerships on state lands**

Issue

For some areas and trails, Washington's outdoor recreation and state land agencies could benefit from a greater willingness to partner together on the part of local land managers. At Washington State Parks, the 2014 task force is a perfect follow-up to the Transformation Strategy of 2013 to "promote meaningful opportunities for volunteers, friends and donors" and "form strategic partnerships with other agencies, tribes and nonprofits."¹

Recommendation

Further direction from the task force, Governor, and state agency directors would encourage greater partnerships at the local level. Residents and visitors of Washington are fortunate to experience the benefits of many positive public-private partnerships where non-profit organizations can help coordinate, fundraise, install improvements, provide volunteer support, help manage recreational resources, educate its user group and aid in protecting these areas' natural resources.

While Outdoor Alliance Washington's organizations already provide substantial support to state land agencies that manage important recreational opportunities, the potential exists to greatly increase partnerships and, in turn, public benefits. For example, these partnerships can be expanded in many areas, including state trust lands and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife lands (WDFW). We recognize that the primary purpose of state trust lands is often timber sales, grazing leases, and other revenue-generating uses to fund public schools and other critical public services. As such, outdoor recreation opportunities are not always an appropriate fit depending on the area, nature of the activity and scope of use. However, extensive opportunities exist to explore and consider recreation as a secondary use. Timber activities and human-powered recreation are not mutually exclusive when managed in partnership with nonprofit support and resources.

¹ Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. Transformation Strategy: Adapting to a new way of operating Washington's state parks. Adopted March 21, 2013.

Examples of a successful partnerships that should be expanded and replicated include the ski hut system maintained by Mount Tahoma Trails Association; building and maintaining multi-use trails by Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance on the Washington Department of Natural Resource's Tiger Mountain State Forest; the partnership between Washington Climbers Coalition and Forks of the Sky State Park at the Index Town Walls; and the efforts of Mountains to Sound Greenway to facilitate an integrated system of trails among different land managers and user groups. On WDFW lands where wildlife protection and traditional wildlife-dependent activities such as fishing and hunting are prioritized, there is a growing recognition that other human-powered recreation uses can also be compatible on these lands and land managers should openly explore partnerships with nonprofits to help manage these low-impact uses. When successfully carried out, land managers can find their efforts and tax dollars matched by nonprofit partners and volunteers. For example, Washington Trails Association partnered with 26 land managers to improve 190 trails with more than 1,100 days of trail work in 2013 for a value of \$1.5 million.²

In a time of diminishing appreciation of nature and reduced visitation of Washington's amazing state resources, land managers should employ a public process and adaptive management practices that encourage more citizens to visit and serve as stewards of our state lands.

2) Create a simpler, more stream-lined pass for land access

Issue

Many citizens, and many of our members, continually express frustration about the confusion caused by multiple passes for land access. While the Discover Pass can be used in many areas of Washington, the state's Sno-Park permits are needed to access many areas in winter, fish and wildlife areas have a different access plan and county roads often transect other lands. Meanwhile, the U.S. Forest Service's Northwest Forest Pass is used for many federal recreation sites, adding confusion for recreationists who are uncertain about which pass is needed for their intended outing. For example, a Nordic skier headed to Snoqualmie Pass needs a different set of passes depending on which trailhead they use, a situation that is not obvious to someone seeking winter recreation opportunities for the first time.

Recommendation

We recommend a plan to simplify access to the many types of public lands be created and implemented to further encourage people to get outside in Washington state while lowering costs by eliminating redundant administration expenses. Pass fees could be adjusted to cover the greater combined costs of multiple agencies and funds could be distributed to the respective agencies according to visitor and sales data. The authority for multi-entity pass agreements between federal and state agencies currently exists with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.³ At a minimum, trailhead signage can be significantly improved to clearly inform users about the correct pass to display and agencies should provide more readily available and user-friendly methods of payment.

3) Develop a State of Washington Office of Outdoor Recreation.

Issue

² Washington Trails Association. http://wta.org/about/2013_accomplishments.

³ 16 USC § 6804(e)

With no long-term state focus on outdoor recreation, we are concerned that Washington is missing many opportunities to grow and benefit from our recreation economy.

Recommendation

The Office of Outdoor Recreation would be directed to develop and implement a vision and strategic plan to enhance Washington State's outdoor recreation. The State of Utah's new Office of Outdoor Recreation is an example of a state making outdoor recreation an integral part of its identity, tourism and economic driver. The Washington state office could provide continuous support, resources and active encouragement to state agencies as well as federal, county and local partners that own and manage important state outdoor resources. Washington state currently has a Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), but the mission, values, and goals of this agency are primarily focused on distribution and management of grants. As an alternative to establishing a new department, it may be possible to broaden the scope of RCO to actively promote our state's natural assets and their ability to sustain economic growth and quality-of-life dividends for years to come.

4) Develop a Task Force to research new mechanisms for funding Washington State's parks and other state lands.

Issue

Funding for our state public lands is chronically a problem.

Recommendation

We would like to see the task force research innovative funding models from around the United States and other countries to increase funding to state parks and other state lands, and outdoor recreation infrastructure, education and maintenance for facilities and trails. As one example, Great Outdoors Colorado invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers and open spaces.

5) Increase support between federal and state agencies and programs and look for new partnerships.

Issue

Public lands comprise a total of 17.5 million acres in Washington State. Of that, 13.0 million acres are federal (74% of all public land in Washington), 3.8 million are state (22%) and 659,000 acres are locally owned or managed (4%).⁴ Maintenance backlogs for recreational trails and access roads have increased significantly in the past few decades and the backlogs now total an estimated figure of well over \$100 million.

Recommendation

State interest and support of federal recreation lands should be increased and new partnerships should be identified to help bolster recreation and access on federal lands. Adequate funding and resources could be provided, in part, through unique state-federal partnerships that enhance improvements and maintenance on federal lands. In addition, active state support of federal funding programs such as Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Recreational Trails Program (through TAP), Land and Water Conservation Fund and other funding initiatives should continue. Given the importance of these federal funding sources for recreation in our state, the Governor's office needs to continually highlight the importance of these programs with the state legislature, Congressional delegation and colleagues at the Western Governor's Association.

⁴ Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office. *The 2013 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*.

6) Form a long-term advisory committee on outdoor recreation in Washington State

Issue

We are concerned that this focus on outdoor recreation will end when the Task Force is dissolved in September.

Recommendation

We recommend that a long-term advisory committee on outdoor recreation be created so that this effort doesn't end with the conclusion of the task force. This group should be made up of volunteer members to ensure fiscal longevity and sustainability.

7) Provide and protect recreational opportunities and access close to population centers

Issue

Suburban sprawl and development in some formerly undeveloped areas even in the city take areas close-in out of recreational usage, requiring people to go further from where they live in order to find open space or making it effectively impossible for large numbers of citizens. A combination of factors including law enforcement problems, trash dumping, and misuse or overuse issues tend to drive road closures and even trail closures in areas that are easy to reach.

Recommendation

Recreational opportunities like hiking and cycling trails, swimming holes, or climbing areas closer to population centers would be easier to reach for many different populations, encouraging more Washingtonians to get outside. Outdoor recreation facilities closer to urban centers would serve more people and be more environmentally responsible for them to use. Outdoor Alliance Washington partners find that regular use by human-powered recreationists often reduces inappropriate activities common at urban or suburban recreational areas such as vandalism and dumping. Community planning efforts and master development plans should be required to include a recreation plan for trails for walking and biking that create linkages with regional trail networks. Reconstruction of bridges should include a formal evaluation of opportunities for water access within the public right-of-way as required in other states.

Thank you for considering our input.

Best regards,

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