

February 10, 2023

Dear Senators Rolfes, Robinson, Wilson and Gildon:

Last year the Legislature made a critical investment in our public lands by providing \$30m per biennium ongoing (\$10m per agency) for Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) and Washington State Parks to help address their recreation lands maintenance backlog (operating). **Thank you for your investment in reducing Washington's recreation lands and trails maintenance and operations backlog.**

Washington is a great place to work, live and play. More than ninety percent of Washingtonians recreate outside, and the state's population is projected to grow by 2 million people (26%) by 2040. During the past few years, estimated visits have increased on some state lands by more than 100%. Yet state funding to maintain our public lands has not kept up with the demand. State land management agencies estimate a combined maintenance backlog of \$50m to \$75m annually.

The 16 undersigned organizations are writing to respectfully request your continued support of the ongoing \$10m per agency per biennium for each of these three agencies so they can help keep our public recreation lands better maintained and safe to access for the people of Washington.

We do have one request to ensure that all three agencies get the full amount ongoing. It has come to our attention that Washington State Parks' part of this state investment needs clarification. While the 4-year outlook from the 2022 legislative session assumes ongoing funding from the state general fund for all three agencies, State Parks only received \$1.25 million per fiscal year. The \$5 million appropriation for State Parks in FY 2023 was paired with a separate agency request of \$3.75 million from the agency's dedicated Parks Renewal and Stewardship Account, which was intended to be one-time and is not sustainable moving forward. Our understanding based on conversations with legislators and the 4-year outlook adopted with the 2022 supplemental budget is that this funding was intended to be ongoing support for all three agencies from the state general fund. We would appreciate your attention to this matter to ensure there is parity for all three land management agencies moving forward and that State Parks also receives \$5 million per fiscal year from the state general fund.

Last year's investment by the Legislature provided critical and sustainable maintenance and operations funding that has already enabled agencies to start addressing critical recreation infrastructure costs, as well as funding the staff capacity required to plan, manage and monitor recreation lands to be ready to meet the highest priority needs into the future. Early investments by land management agencies include:

Department of Natural Resources

- DNR hired six new field positions focused on maintenance work – two in the Northeast Region, two in the Olympic Region, one in the Northwest Region and one in the Snoqualmie/South Puget Sound Region.

- Trail maintenance at Middle Fork Snoqualmie Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA), Morning Star NRCA, Mount Si NRCA, Raging River State Forest, Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area, Reiter Foothills Forest, Tiger Mountain State Forest, West Tiger Mountain NRCA, Yacolt Burn State Forest and two trails on the Olympic Peninsula.
- Restroom maintenance at Cottonwood and Hoh Oxbow campgrounds.

Washington State Parks

- Created two seasonal maintenance positions dedicated to the Palouse to Cascades Trail and a Marine Facilities Maintenance Manager position.
- Camping infrastructure improvements such as yurt repairs, new tent platforms, electrical and pad improvements to RV hookup sites, new fire rings at state parks.
- Trail resurfacing and other improvements on the Palouse to Cascades Trail.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

- Hired over twelve new permanent staff positions, including five Regional Water Access Area positions supporting maintenance and operations, two Natural Resource Specialists focused on education and outreach, a North Puget Sound Assistant Regional Program Manager overseeing partnerships and management, a dedicated recreation planner, a real estate coordinator to support use permits in North-Central Washington and a GIS app developer and a Partnership Coordinator to coordinate trailwork projects with nonprofit partners.
- Installation of ten gates at the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area and five gates at water access areas throughout the South Central Region (Kittitas, Yakima, Franklin and Benton counties)
- Road improvements on WDFW's road system, including Green Dot roads in Kittitas and Yakima counties, which provide access for camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, and ATV and off-road vehicle riding.

We deeply appreciate the investment made by the Legislature in 2022 and request your continued support of this invaluable funding as it has already provided critical improvements to recreation lands across the state and with your support, will continue to do so into the future.

Sincerely,

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