



February 10, 2023

Senator Christine Rolfes, Chair
Senator June Robinson, Vice Chair, Operating & Revenue
Senator Lynda Wilson, Ranking Member, Operating
Senator Chris Gildon, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating
Senate Ways & Means Committee
311 John A. Cherberg Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Senators Rolfes, Robinson, Wilson and Gildon:

Outdoor Alliance Washington and the 19 undersigned organizations and businesses are writing to express our strong support for Governor Inslee's 2023-25 operating budget request of \$10.7 million to manage recreation on state land. This funding request would enable Washington State Parks (State Parks - \$1.59M), Department of Natural Resources (DNR - \$7.91M), and Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW - \$1.3M) to better manage recreational use of state public lands and waters, in collaboration with Tribal governments and stakeholders.

Washington's state-managed lands and shorelines provide valuable opportunities for residents and visitors to access the outdoors. These opportunities support vibrant communities through better health, well-being, jobs, and economic benefits. While visitation to state parks and recreation lands has been increasing for years, the COVID-19 pandemic brought a 12% increase in visitors to state-managed lands. Agencies view current use as a baseline that will only continue to grow.

Growing interest in outdoor recreation and a rising state population are placing ever-increasing pressure on the state's public lands and waters. The public, agencies, Tribal governments, and stakeholders have voiced concern about the impact of increased visitation on natural and cultural resources. Tribal leaders have raised concerns that increased outdoor recreation is negatively impacting their sacred sites,

cultural resources, Tribal sovereignty and inherent rights and lifeways, including their ability to exercise treaty-reserved rights to hunt, fish, and gather on open and unclaimed lands.

Recreation impacts coupled with other stressors such as climate change and land development threaten the sustainability of our cherished outdoor spaces. The Governor's proposed budget request will begin to address these issues by providing agencies with the necessary tools and resources to effectively manage public lands and ensure their sustainability for generations to come. The request includes:

- Funding to develop a methodology and framework for assessing, monitoring, and adaptively managing recreation impacts on the ecological condition of state land. These tools will be used to improve recreation management while protecting the ecological health of public lands and waters. The Governor's budget includes provisos directing State Parks, DNR, and DFW to work jointly to develop these tools and to "collaborate with tribal governments to ensure cultural resources and cultural practices are considered and incorporated into management plans."
- Funding to work with Tribes and stakeholders to pilot and adapt the methodology and framework, including agency internal planning, survey, and data management needs. Pilot locations will be selected incorporating information on sensitive habitat, high recreation demand, and areas in need of protections for tribal and cultural resources.
- Funding to hire additional law enforcement to allow DNR to better protect our public lands, waters, and cultural resources. DNR has twelve officers covering 5.6 million acres of DNR-managed lands and aquatic reserves - equivalent to two agency officers covering an area the size of Rhode Island. This increased capacity is necessary to address public safety concerns, Tribal concerns about impacts to cultural resources, and prevent illegal activities.
- Funding to help DNR establish a long-term outdoor access and recreation plan to set goals and measure outcomes for safe, responsible public access and recreation use on DNR lands and waters.
- Funding to establish a First Foods pilot program at DNR, which works in partnership with Tribes to promote traditional foods and Indigenous agricultural or harvest practices. Public recreational use of lands and waters can effectively reduce Tribal access to first foods, compounding loss of access to traditional food practices and sources due to decades of development and land use.

We commend the agencies and the Governor for collaborating on a thoughtful, data-informed approach to addressing our shared concerns of the growing impact of outdoor recreation and other stressors on the sustainability of natural and cultural resources. In particular, we are heartened to see a coordinated approach to meaningful consultation with Tribal governments, which is essential to crafting just and durable solutions.

We urge the Legislature to support this request and include the \$10.7 million and associated proviso language in the final operating budget.

Sincerely,

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The Mountaineers
Washington Program Manager
Outdoor Alliance

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Advocacy Director
Washington Trails Association

Yvonne Kraus
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American Rivers