



GOVERNOR'S BLUE RIBBON PARKS & OUTDOOR RECREATION
TASK FORCE | **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

October 2014

“We want our children to experience, enjoy, learn about, and become lifetime stewards of Washington’s magnificent natural resources.”

- Governor Jay Inslee

Acknowledgements

The following is an executive summary of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation final report submitted to Governor Inslee on September 19, 2014. The final report and appendix are available on the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Web site:
www.rco.wa.gov/boards/TaskForce.shtml

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Why focus on outdoor recreation?

We stand poised at a critical moment in time. We can, and must act now to ensure the stewardship of our parks and public lands, to inspire our children to live a life grounded in recreation in the great outdoors, and to nurture a vital and growing business sector. This was the premise when Governor Jay Inslee signed the visionary executive order in February 2014 creating the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation. Over the course of 6 months, the 17 task force members journeyed around the state, listened to hundreds of people who took time out of their busy lives to show up and speak, and read thousands of comments submitted via e-mail and through an online town hall.

What we heard universally confirmed the importance of acting now before the very qualities that make Washington the great state we love are lost. Everything we stand to gain from bold, transformational initiatives is also everything we stand to lose if we do not demonstrate leadership and a commitment to:

Healthier people – Experiencing and recreating in the outdoors contributes to both mental and physical health for everyone from our children to returning veterans and aging Baby Boomers.

Stronger communities – Communities that invest in parks, trails, and other outdoor spaces offer the quality of life that helps every resident thrive, and gives them a competitive edge in the quest for business creation, recruitment, and retention.

A thriving economy – An entire business spectrum rests on the quality of our parks, public lands, and recreational opportunities. Outdoor recreation creates jobs, and is a star attraction for recruitment of new businesses and a talented workforce. The economic contribution to Washington from outdoor recreation is significant, estimated at \$22.5 billion annually by the Outdoor Industry Association. Travel for recreation boosts the economy of gateway communities through the purchase of gas, food, accommodations, outfitting, and other services. Washington residents essentially receive a “second paycheck” in the form of our unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities.



Photo courtesy of Russ Carmack

Priority Action Areas

To increase the participation in outdoor recreation and the resulting social and economic benefits, the task force identified five priority action areas: (1) grow the outdoor recreation economy; (2) lead the way to outdoor recreation; (3) inspire an outdoor recreation culture; (4) open more outdoor recreation opportunities; and (5) sustain our outdoor recreation assets. Within those action areas, members proposed 12 high priority, near-term actions: the first 6 outline what we need to accomplish and the final 6 recommend how to fund it. Task force members stand ready to assist Governor Inslee with implementation of the recommendations in their final report. The time is now to move forward and build on the work already accomplished through the executive order.

Priority Near-Term Actions: What We Need to Accomplish

1. Designate outdoor recreation as a specific industry and create a sector lead
2. Establish an outdoor recreation coordinating council
3. Reinvest in No Child Left Inside Program
4. Incorporate outdoor recreation into elementary through high school core curriculum
5. Diversify appointees to outdoor recreation state boards and commissions
6. Enact the marine tourism legislation

Priority Near-Term Actions: How We Fund It

7. Retain the Discover Pass until a long-term, dedicated funding source can replace Discover Pass revenues
8. Establish annual motor home and travel trailer excise tax, bottled water sales tax, and watercraft excise tax
9. Fund the Youth Athletic Facilities grant program
10. Allow continued use of the real estate excise tax for local park operations by repealing sunset clause (December 31, 2016)
11. Fund and protect current outdoor recreation grant programs
12. Remove 23-cent cap on gas tax attributed to off-road recreation



Photo courtesy of YMCA

Proposed Recommendations for the Future

Grow the Outdoor Recreation Economy

The task force’s subcommittee on economic development conducted extensive outreach among business interests and user groups across the state. Those conversations yielded a range of more detailed and sometimes longer-term objectives. For instance, an intensified focus on growing the outdoor recreation economy would include:

- Provide assistance to smaller towns in planning, designing, building, and marketing outdoor recreation opportunities in their area, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations when appropriate.
- Continue to educate public officials that recreation can be a key contributor to the economic well-being of Washington and generates important benefits for public, community, and environmental health.
- Increase and better coordinate the promotion of Washington's many, diverse recreation opportunities to attract more travelers from overseas, across the nation, and within Washington, and to show that our amazing quality of life is a great reason to build businesses and families here. Utah offers a good example.

Lead the Way to Outdoor Recreation

The task force finds a huge need for communication and coordination across local, state, federal, tribal, and nongovernmental providers of outdoor recreation lands, facilities, and programs. In addition, there is a need to collaborate with public health and healthcare providers to promote outdoor recreation as a way to improve health and reduce medical costs, and with educators involved in physical and outdoor education.



Photo courtesy of Steven Seiller

Inspire and Outdoor Recreation Culture

- Ensure integration of outdoor recreation into physical education programs in Washington schools, providing teachers with resources to connect an outdoor curriculum to the state-mandated Common Core learning standards. Evaluate and address the extent to which school districts are waiving the state-mandated health curriculum.
- Establish, market, and promote events for youth—with a particular focus on diverse audiences, minority populations, and ethnic groups—in partnership with State Parks, schools, local parks agencies, and nongovernmental program providers.
- Increase promotion of programs such as Fish Washington, which help retain and enhance fishing and hunting opportunities.
- Offer start-up matching or challenge grants for establishing youth outdoor recreation programs or events statewide, with the goal of getting more kids outside and getting more kids exposed, perhaps for the first time, to the joys of recreating outside.

Open More Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

The task force noted a number of barriers to accessing outdoor recreation opportunities, on both public and private land that should be addressed in the future:

- Lack of easily accessible information
- Fees, passes, and tax policy
- Permit requirements
- Closures of private land and some public land
- Government planning

Sustain Our Outdoor Recreation Assets

- The Legislature should provide stable, long-term funding for Washington's state parks and other state recreation lands, facilities and programs, recognizing that they provide essential public services and should be supported primarily by General Fund revenues, with user fees supporting services that are primarily of benefit to the user.
- Promote expanded use of metropolitan parks districts to provide an additional funding source for local, regional, and state park systems.
- Enhance concession and lease revenues on State Parks.
- Expand recognition of donor and sponsorship programs for operation and maintenance at State Parks to other state lands consistent with Chapter 86, Laws 2014.