



2023 RECREATION AND CONSERVATION PLAN

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan outlines the strategic direction for state investments in the conservation of public lands and development of outdoor recreation opportunities.



WASHINGTON STATE

POPULATION: 7,864,400
NICKNAME: The Evergreen State
STATE CAPITAL: Olympia

- 1 MOUNT RAINIER, RAINIER NATIONAL PARK**
Highest point in Washington State: 14,410 ft
Location: 46.8523° N, 121.7603° W
- 2 CAPE ALAVA, OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK**
Western most point of the continental US
Location: 48.1662° N, 124.7308° W
- 3 COLONIAL CREEK FALLS, NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK**
Tallest waterfall in continental US: 2,568 feet / 13 drops
Location: 048.6698° N, -121.1400° W
- 4 PALOUSE FALLS STATE PARK, FRANKLIN & WHITMAN COUNTIES**
Named Washington's State waterfall in 2014 / 198 feet
Location: 46.6889° N, -118.2276° W

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March 1, 2023

Charles F. "Chuck" Sams III
Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

RE: 2023-2028 Washington State’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Dear Director Sams:

It is my pleasure to present the 2023 Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan to meet the requirements of a state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan, per the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. This plan provides the latest information on outdoor recreation in Washington State including resident participation rates in outdoor recreation activities, key issues related to future demand, and recommendations and actions for meeting residents’ outdoor recreation needs as well meeting the needs for conservation of our public lands and waters where recreation is most popular.

As Governor, I am committed to recognizing Washington’s unique natural resources and expanding the enjoyment and protection of those resources for all Washingtonians. The results of the resident survey conducted in cooperation with Eastern Washington University, as well as extensive outreach and public process, guided development of the plan and its four priorities:

- 1. Provide meaningful access to outdoor recreation for all
- 2. Protect natural and cultural resources while managing increasing demand
- 3. Demonstrate the essential nature of parks, natural areas, and recreation infrastructure
- 4. Support healthy, adaptable, and connected communities

The plan also includes an implementation strategy to guide the State’s Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, a governor-appointed board charged with meeting the recreational needs of Washington's residents. The strategy specifically includes guidance to the board for administering funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Funds over the next five years. The plan also provides guidance for our own state grant programs such that both state and federal programs are aligned and complimentary.

I approve this plan and certify that the public had many opportunities to engage during its development. Please direct any questions about the plan to the State Liaison Officer, Megan Duffy, Director of the Recreation and Conservation Office, at (360) 902-3000 or megan.duffy@rco.wa.gov.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Inslee", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jay Inslee
Governor

cc: Samantha Stivers, National Park Service, Omaha NE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan was created with the support and contributions of many Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff, consultants, volunteers, and the public. The National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund provided financial support for the development of this plan.

This plan was developed under the authority of RCO’s director, Megan Duffy, and with the advice of its executive management team. The Unified Strategy was developed under the authority and with the advice of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB). Special thanks to board chair Ted Willhite for the consistent conversations and unwavering dedication to developing this plan.

RCO wishes to acknowledge the contributions of everyone involved in the creation, review, editing and publication of this plan. Thanks especially to Katie Knight Pruitt, for her initiation and ongoing support of this planning process. Thanks to Matt Chase, Jeremy Josted, and Jeremy Schultz from Eastern Washington University for their work on the *Assessment of Resident Demand*. Extra thanks to Jeremy Shultz for his work on a literature review that informed Chapter 3, and the experience survey, provider survey, and tribal survey reports that accompany this plan. Thanks to Alexis Rodgers and Mark Williams at Esri for their work on the Outdoor Recreation Inventory map and dashboard applications. Finally, thanks to all the planning advisory committee members for their input and guidance on the development of the plan, assistance with the public engagement strategy, and development of the plan’s strategic framework.

The *Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan* supports the recreation and conservation efforts of the Governor, Legislature, and other state agencies. Below is a list of other State planning efforts that applicants can use for reference. Applicants are encouraged to consult these additional statewide plans to evaluate the need for their projects.

- *Department of Ecology’s Wetlands Program Plan*
- *Department of Ecology’s Integrated Climate Response Strategy*
- *Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Washington’s State Wildlife Action Plan*
- *Department of Fish and Wildlife’s 10-year Recreation Strategy*
- *Department of Natural Resources’ State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*
- *Department of Natural Resources’ Forest Action Plan*
- *Department of Transportation’s Washington State Active Transportation Plan*
- *Governor’s Salmon Strategy Update (2021)*
- *Puget Sound Action Agenda*
- *Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement*
- *Washington Office of Equity Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Plan and Playbook*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington State is home to abundant public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities. Outdoor recreation is embedded in the state’s history and culture. Fishing, hunting, walking and rolling on trails, exploring high mountain peaks, and enjoying afternoon picnics in the park are among the many ways in which Washington residents enjoy outdoor spaces. Outdoor recreation helps drive thriving local economies, connect people with the natural world, and improve physical health and mental wellbeing. Washington has a long history of State support for developing and safeguarding outdoor recreation opportunities. Established in 1964, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) is the state’s primary source of funding for outdoor recreation and public lands conservation.

The *Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan* outlines the strategic direction for State investments in the conservation of public lands and development of outdoor recreation opportunities. The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board update the plan every 5 years to ensure grants fund the most important needs and management challenges throughout the state. The plan serves as Washington’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and satisfies the agency’s planning obligations required by Washington state law, the National Park Service’s Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the Federal Highway Administration’s Recreational Trails Program.

Participation in outdoor recreation is growing across the country, and Washington State is no exception. Since 2019, national outdoor recreation equipment sales are up exponentially across all major product categories. In Washington State, 20 outdoor recreation activities showed double-digit increases in participation rates since 2017. Non-motorized trials, nature and wildlife viewing, camping, paddling, winter recreation, and leisure activities in close-to-home parks are consistently cited as the opportunities Washington residents want more access to. With a population increase of 2 million residents expected in the next 25 years, planning for future demand on outdoor recreation facilities is more important than ever.

Increasingly, residents are looking for close-to-home access to a variety of developed and primitive experiences that enable the integration of nature-based recreation into busy work and family schedules while avoiding crowds and traffic congestion. Fortunately, Washington’s 22 million acres of public lands, 23,000 miles of trails, and more than 12,800 recreation sites help to maintain high levels of satisfaction in outdoor recreation throughout the state.

However, balancing outdoor recreation access with protecting natural and cultural resources remains a central concern across the state. Outdoor recreation impacts concentrated at highly-popular sites increasingly result in resource degradation and diminished user experiences. Overburdened communities disproportionately lack access to meaningful outdoor recreation opportunities and residents struggle to find the time, money, and the information to support their outdoor recreation pursuits. As the State pursues a goal of encouraging equitable access to outdoor recreation’s social, health, and economic benefits, extreme care must also guide outdoor recreation management to ensure natural and cultural resources are protected.

This plan was developed with significant public input to understand and address the needs and current issues faced by Washington residents and public land managers.



Five public surveys and an analysis of outdoor recreation site availability informed the priorities and goals. In total more than 12,000 survey responses informed this plan. RCO also relied on the advice of two advisory committees to frame the public engagement strategy and guide the plan development process. The advisory committees consisted of representatives from state and federal land management agencies, county and local government, non-governmental organizations, Native American tribes, and the public.

The *Outdoor Action Compass* provides a framework for the state’s updated priorities, goals, and implementation strategies. As a critical element of the “10 essentials”¹ for a safe outdoor recreation experience, the compass is a guide for moving in a desired direction. Similarly, RCO’s *Outdoor*

Action Compass identifies four core values that weave through four strategic priorities. Each priority has a series of goals that collectively set a course for addressing the most important outdoor recreation and public lands conservation challenges and opportunities in Washington State. Through the life of this plan, RCO and the Recreation Conservation Funding Board will implement actions in the Unified Strategy using the outdoor action compass as guide for managing statewide investments.

THE OUTDOOR ACTION COMPASS

Core values, statewide priorities and goals

The outdoor action compass guides Washington State's investments in outdoor recreation and public lands conservation. Four core values - equity, resiliency, connection, and collaboration - act as touchpoints for each of the four priorities. The priorities address the most pressing public lands and outdoor recreation issues in the state as identified through a robust public engagement process. The Outdoor Action Compass will help guide investments in Washington State's public lands and outdoor recreation facilities.

FOUR PRIORITIES

PRIORITY 1

Provide meaningful access to outdoor recreation for all

PRIORITY 2

Protect natural and cultural resources while managing increasing demand

PRIORITY 3

Demonstrate the essential nature of parks, natural areas, and recreation infrastructure

PRIORITY 4

Support healthy, adaptable, and connected communities



UNIFIED STRATEGY

RCOs Action Plan

The Unified Strategy is RCO and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's implementation plan to advance the statewide priorities and goals. Where the action compass identifies statewide priorities, the Unified Strategy is an internally focused set of strategies and actions to guide RCO and the board in advancing the plan. The Unified Strategy consists of seven implementation strategies each with broad goals to apply within the grant programs.

SEVEN STRATEGIES

- STRATEGY 1** Update grant evaluation criteria to reflect statewide priorities and goals
- STRATEGY 2** Review and revise grant program policies to adapt to emerging community needs and challenges
- STRATEGY 3** Support, collaborate, and coordinate with federal and state agencies, counties, cities, tribes, and non-governmental organizations to adaptively manage the state's portfolio of public lands and outdoor recreation facilities
- STRATEGY 4** Maintain and improve data, decision support, and technical assistance resources to address statewide priorities and goals
- STRATEGY 5** Improve and expand community engagement practices
- STRATEGY 6** Research and communicate the multiple intersecting benefits, challenges, and opportunities to align outdoor recreation with healthy communities and ecosystems in Washington State
- STRATEGY 7** Develop, deploy, adaptively manage, and maintain support for emerging programs

The difficult work of acquiring, building, and maintaining the state's complex portfolio of public lands and outdoor recreation assets is the work of many federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, and nonprofit partners. In addition, every year thousands of volunteers spend countless hours helping agencies and nonprofits maintain, improve, and keep Washington's outdoor recreation facilities open and accessible to residents and visitors.

Washington State hosts a broad spectrum of outdoor recreation experiences that span urban and rural landscapes and waterways and connect people in all the places they live, work, and play. Outdoor recreation supports physical health, mental wellbeing, environmental stewardship,

economic prosperity, social cohesion, active transportation, climate resiliency, and many other public benefits. Washington State's investments in recreational assets are essential to quality of life and critical components of the State's infrastructure. This plan envisions a sustainable system of parks, trails, public lands, secure wildlife habitat, and thriving working lands that support meaningful access to these opportunities and benefits for all Washington residents now and for future generations.

Questions about how this plan will be implemented can be directed to info@rco.wa.gov

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan guides the State’s investments in outdoor recreation and public land conservation. The plan is comprehensive and identifies the Recreation and Conservation Office's strategic priorities for outdoor recreation and conservation of wildlife habitat and working farms and forests across the state for the next 5-10 years. The Unified Strategy, or implementation plan, identifies actions for RCO and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board to advance the statewide priorities and goals through grant programs. The priorities and goals provide broad direction for the State, while the Unified Strategy describes how the board and RCO will get there.



CREATING THIS PLAN

This plan was developed with the generous support of the National Park Service through a Land and Water Conservation Fund planning grant. RCO contributed a matching share with state funding and staff time. The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office has the authority to represent and act for the State in dealing with the Secretary of the Interior for purposes of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended.

WHAT IS OUTDOOR RECREATION?

RCO defines outdoor recreation very broadly. Quite simply, it includes all the ways in which Washington residents and visitors spend time outside – everything from playing sports, going to the beach, picnicking, walking, rolling, paddling, sailing, fishing, and hunting – and all the infrastructure and resources used for these activities – the public land, playgrounds, state parks, beaches, boat ramps, fishing piers, trails, and more.

WHAT IS CONSERVATION?

Conservation refers to the preservation of land and natural resources for public benefits, such as providing wildlife habitat, ensuring waterfront access to all, sustaining valuable working farms and forests, or safeguarding historic resources and cultural traditions. The conservation programs discussed in this plan are used to buy land and conservation easements and restore natural areas. This plan is not a habitat conservation plan, species recovery plan, or regulatory guide. A more complete glossary of terms and acronyms is in Appendix 1.

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) is a small state agency that manages grant programs to create outdoor recreation opportunities, protect the state’s wildlife habitat and working farms and forests, and help return salmon and orcas from near extinction. RCO’s recreation and conservation programs are administered under the authority of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. Since the agency and board were established, more than \$2.6 billion in grants to more than 10,000 projects have been awarded statewide. RCO was established in 1964 by Citizen Initiative 215.²

“ Washington is uniquely endowed with fresh and salt waters rich in scenic and recreational value. This outdoor heritage enriches the lives of citizens, attracts new residents and businesses to the state, and is a major support of its expanding tourist industry. Rising population, increased income and leisure time, and the rapid growth of boating and other water sports have greatly increased the demand for water related recreation, while waterfront land is rapidly rising in value and disappearing from public use. There is consequently an urgent need for the acquisition or improvement of waterfront land on fresh and salt water suitable for marine recreational use by Washington residents and visitors.

Session Law 1965 c.5 § 1

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

Then, the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, RCO’s original name, was a dedicated team of public servants funded primarily from a small percentage of the state’s marine fuel tax. The agency’s focus was on expanding, safeguarding, and promoting opportunities for recreational boating. RCO’s relationship with the state’s boaters continues today, and boating is considered a foundational outdoor recreation opportunity available throughout the state.

Over time, the committee added programs and priorities to its portfolio of grant programs. The committee’s name changed in 2007, and today, RCO administers 27 grant programs focused on developing outdoor recreation opportunities, acquiring public lands and water access sites, conserving working lands, restoring wildlife habitat, and recovering salmon and orca. RCO’s 2019-2021 Biennial Budget included nearly \$650 million in capital investments. The majority of this funding is passed through to cities, counties, state and federal agencies, tribes, and nonprofits that do the hard work of planning, building, and maintaining the state’s public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities.

RCO’s current list of recreation and conservation grant programs covered by this plan includes the following:

- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account
 - Boating Facilities Program
 - Boating Infrastructure Grants
 - Community Forests Program
 - Firearms and Archery Range Recreation program
 - Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities program
 - Planning for Recreational Access
 - Recreational Trails Program
 - Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
 - Youth Athletic Facilities



Sidebar: Accomplishments from 2018 Plan and Unified Strategy

CATEGORY	COMPLETED ACTION / PERFORMANCE MEASURE
1 Build, renovate, and maintain parks and trails	ONGOING Since 2018; 2018-2022 / 673 projects Funded with \$295.8 million and \$277.6 million in sponsor match Total investments of \$573.4 million
2 Distribute funds equitably across the state	Equitable grants map developed in 2022 displays funded and unfunded projects
3 Support state plans, strategies, and initiatives	Revised evaluation criteria in WWRP Habitat Programs, WWRP Local Parks, LWCF, and YAF (2018); Developed the Application Data Tool to aid grant applicants from 2018-2022
4 Maintain and improve mapped inventory	Revised evaluation criteria in WWRP Habitat Programs, WWRP Local Parks, LWCF, and YAF (2018); Developed the Application Data Tool to aid grant applicants from 2018-2022
5 Improve program outreach	ONGOING
6 Conserve habitat	ONGOING
7 Climate change	Climate change application questions and evaluation criteria added (2018, 2020)
8 Wetlands	Revised Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program riparian evaluation criteria to better assess projects' benefits (2019)
9 Ecosystem Services	Carbon credits and ecosystem services policy enables RCO funded projects to be used for carbon offset crediting (2021)

CHANGES TO GRANT PROGRAMS	STATUS
1 Review matching grant policy	Completed 2020
2 Revise Land and Water Conservation Fund evaluation criteria	Completed 2018
3 Revise State Need evaluation question	Completed 2018 / Updated 2020
4 Review Urban Wildlife Habitat Category	Completed 2019
5 Review Matching Share policy in the Youth Athletic Facilities program	Completed 2018

PLAN PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan is also known as SCORP, an acronym that stands for “State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.” Maintaining a state comprehensive plan is a federal requirement to receive grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund administered by the National Park Service. Since the inception of the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 1967, Washington State has received \$92.7 million for 610 projects across the state. States are required to maintain and update their SCORP every 5 years.

For 2023, RCO’s thirteenth SCORP builds upon concepts and updates priorities from the 2018-2022 Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan. The plan provides a common, statewide vision for public investments in outdoor recreation and public land conservation. It is the key to unlocking critical federal and state funding and serves as a guide for allocating that funding across the state. This plan is created at the direction of multiple state and federal laws and grant program requirements.

While this planning effort is broad and strategic, the federal and state laws highlighted below identify the specific topics this plan must address.

Federal Requirements

The National Park Service publishes detailed guidance³ for developing state comprehensive plans. According to this guidance, the plan must do the following:

- Describe the methodology used
- Include ample opportunity for public input
- Evaluate demand for outdoor recreation opportunities
- Evaluate supply of outdoor recreation opportunities
- Be comprehensive: identify issues of statewide importance, how the Land and Water Conservation Fund will address these issues, and what issues will be addressed through other means
- Identify the State’s strategies, priorities, and actions for the obligation of its Land and Water Conservation Fund apportionment

The Service also encourages states to include plans for recreation and historic trails and wild, scenic, and recreational river areas.

The Federal Highway Administration requires that Recreational Trails Program funds be used for recreational trails and related projects that do the following:

- Are planned and developed under the laws, policies, and administrative procedures of the State
- Are identified in, or further a specific goal of, a recreational trail plan or a statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965



State Requirements

Multiple state laws direct RCO and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board to develop and update comprehensive and program-specific plans. This plan satisfies the following state planning requirements:

Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.005(1)a – Mission of the Board – Create and work actively for the implementation of a unified statewide strategy for meeting the recreational needs of Washington’s citizens.

Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.020(3) – Powers and Duties of the Director – RCO’s enabling legislation requires routine statewide planning for outdoor recreation.

The plan must include the following:

- 1 Inventory of current resources
- 2 Forecast of recreational resource demand
- 3 Identification and analysis of actual and potential funding sources
- 4 Process for broad-scale information gathering
- 5 Assessment of capabilities and constraints to achieve plan goals
- 6 Analysis of strategic options and decisions available to the State
- 7 Implementation strategy coordinated with executive policy and budget priorities
- 8 Elements necessary to qualify for participation in or receipt of federal aid

Revised Code of Washington 79A.35.040 – Statewide Trails Plan – The Director shall prepare a state trails plan as part of the statewide outdoor recreation and open space plan.

Revised Code of Washington 46.09.370 – Nonhighway Offroad Vehicles Activities – The board shall maintain a statewide plan which shall be updated at least once every third biennium and shall be used by all participating agencies to guide distribution and expenditure of the funds.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

RCO convened two advisory committees to help guide the development of this plan. Each committee included representatives of state and local government agencies, advocacy organizations, and tribes residing in Washington State. One committee advised on the Recreation and Conservation Plan generally, while the other committee focused on motorized and non-motorized trail-based recreation. Advice from both committees has been merged into this comprehensive plan.

The state trails committee included representatives from motorized and non-motorized trail advocacy and volunteer organizations, state agencies, federal land managers, and one tribe located in Washington State. Committee members also were selected from a cross section of RCO’s three standing trails grant program advisory committees. The advisory committees for the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities, Recreation Trails Program, and Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program were represented on the State Trails Plan Committee.

THE RECREATION AND CONSERVATION PLAN COMMITTEE

- DAVE ERICKSON :: City of Wenatchee
- WILLIAM MARCHAND :: Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- JON SNYDER :: Governor’s Office
- HANSI HALS :: Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe
- HEATHER RAMSAY AHNDAN :: King County
- TIM NAGEL :: Outdoors for All
- SHILOH BURGESS :: Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
- MICHAEL SHIOSAKI :: Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
- PAUL KNOWLES :: Spokane County
- DAVID PATTON :: Trust for Public Land
- GEN DIAL :: Washington Department of Commerce
- JOEL SISOLAK :: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- CHRIS ZIPPERER :: Washington Department of Health
- LEAH DOBEY :: Washington Department of Natural Resources
- ANDREA MARTIN :: Washington Department of Natural Resources
- SAM HENSOLD :: Washington Department of Natural Resources
- BARB CHAMBERLAIN :: Washington Department of Transportation
- NIKKI FIELDS :: Washington State Parks
- LAURA MOXHAM :: Washington State Parks
- CHRISTINE MAHLER :: Washington Wildlife Recreation Coalition

THE STATE TRAILS PLAN COMMITTEE

- HEIDI STAHELI :: Back Country Horsemen of Washington
- HOLLYANNA LITTLEBULL :: Confederated Tribe and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- YVONNE KRAUSE :: Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance
- GAIL GARMAN :: Nooksack Nordic Club
- MARC TOENYAN :: Northwest Motorcycle Association
- ALMA BUSBY-WILLIAMS :: Outdoor Afro
- KATHRYN GARDOW :: Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
- BETSY ROBBLEE :: The Mountaineers
- ZACH JARRETT :: U.S. Forest Service
- ALEX ALSTON :: Washington Bikes
- JOEL SISOLAK :: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- HEIDE ANDERSEN :: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- SAM JARRETT :: Washington Department of Natural Resources
- ANDREA MARTIN :: Washington Department of Natural Resources
- SAM HENSOLD :: Washington Department of Natural Resources
- BRIAN WOOD :: Washington Department of Transportation
- JAKOB PERRY :: Washington Off-Highway Vehicle Association
- JAKOB PERRY :: Washington State Trails Coalition
- ROXANNE MILES :: Washington Recreation and Parks Association
- NORRIS BOYD :: Washington Snowmobile Association
- LISA ANDERSON :: Washington State Parks
- RANDY KLINE :: Washington State Parks
- ANDREA IMLER :: Washington Trails Association
- DON CROOKY :: Washington Water Trails Association
- ANDREE HURLEY :: Washington Water Trails Association

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The National Park Service requires this plan include “ample opportunity for public input.” RCO engaged the public and stakeholders in a robust input process to gather information before the plan was developed. RCO initiated the public engagement strategy in September 2021 with the launch of a planning information website, the Recreation and Conservation HUB, and the first of five public surveys. Public engagement included direct outreach to groups that represent the recreation and conservation interests of communities of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, women and girls, and other historically marginalized communities. This input directly shaped the plan’s priorities, goals, and strategies.

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION PLAN HUB

The backbone of RCO’s public engagement strategy was the Recreation and Conservation HUB. The Hub is a website that enabled RCO to easily publish information about the plan, post maps and geographic data, integrate public surveys, and create an online platform for public engagement. Ultimately, he HUB will convey the final components of the plan, such as maps and survey results, and track implementation of the plan’s priorities, goals, and strategies. The HUB can be accessed at <https://wa-rco-scorp-2023-wa-rco.hub.arcgis.com/>.

By integrating the public surveys and recreation maps in the HUB, RCO created a consistent public portal for collecting information and updating the public on components of the plan as they were developed. Members of the public could easily access the Recreation Experience Survey, Recreation Provider Survey, Tribal Natural Resources Survey, Favorite Places Survey, Outdoor Recreation Inventory map, and the Statewide Trails Database. Since the HUB was published in October 2021, more than 7,000 unique page views have been logged, mostly around the time the surveys were active. Now, the HUB continues to serve as a public information platform for communicating the plan priorities and implementation and showcasing the 2023 mapped inventory and survey results.

DIRECT OUTREACH

RCO staff held at least 20 meetings and public presentations with advocacy and interest groups to raise awareness and gather input on the plan. In one example, RCO staff presented the plan update process at the State Trails Coalition’s 2021 Trails Caucus. This presentation included a live, online survey with more than 80 participants. Participants were able to answer questions based on the Experience Survey and see their anonymous responses in real time. Valuable insight from this event on trail-based recreation opportunities and challenges directly informed the development of the plan’s priorities and goals.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SURVEYS

RCO commissioned or conducted five surveys to gather early public input on the development of this plan. The surveys were made available through the Recreation and Conservation HUB and e-mailed invitations. Each survey’s primary purpose, methodology, and summary of results are discussed in Chapter 3, with full reports included as appendices to this plan.

MAP YOUR FAVORITE PLACE

RCO developed the Map Your Favorite Place survey as one way to engage Washington residents in the planning process. Using the ArcGIS Survey 123 platform integrated in the Recreation and Conservation HUB, the survey asked Washington residents to place a pin on a map of the state representing important outdoor recreation sites. The survey then asked participants to describe why the place was important to them and provided an option to upload a photo of the site.

More than 160 participants identified sites across Washington that provided important outdoor recreation opportunities. The survey continues to collect responses and will remain a fun way for the public to engage with the implementation of the plan. A map of Washington’s Favorite Places⁴ displays a live feed of the survey results.

HOW TO CONNECT

The Hub is RCO's public information portal for the 2023 Recreation and Conservation Plan. Survey results, supplemental reports and the maps can all be accessed by visiting <https://wa-rco-scorp-2023-wa-rco.hub.arcgis.com>



PLAN REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

RCO posted the draft plan for a 30-day, public review and comment opportunity on November 18, 2022. The plan was posted on the HUB and RCO’s policy and planning web page. RCO sent notice of the public review to the plan advisory committees, Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, and more than 2,000 individuals who had expressed interest in the plan. A media release was issued to more than 400 news outlets.

The public review period closed December 18, 2022. RCO received 18 comments. Appendix 7 includes a table summarizing the comments received and RCO’s responses. Many suggestions received through the public engagement process have been integrated into the final plan.

The HUB displays the final components of the plan such as maps, supplemental reports, and survey results. It will also help track implementation of the plan's priorities, goals and strategies.

OUTDOOR RECREATION AND CONSERVATION IN WASHINGTON STATE

Washington State has a rich history of outdoor recreation and public lands conservation. This chapter highlights recent statewide trends and challenges in conserving public lands and providing outdoor recreation opportunities.



WASHINGTON STATE POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION TRENDS AND FUTURE GROWTH

Washington State’s population is growing rapidly. The Washington State Office of Financial Management estimates the current population to be 7,864,400 residents.⁵ This is an increase of 14.2 percent since 2010 and an average increase of about 1.3 percent, or roughly 100,000 residents, every year. Most of the population change is due to people moving to Washington. Even amidst the challenges related the coronavirus pandemic, Washington State added 124,000 residents in 2020 and nearly 60,000 in 2021.⁶ Between 2010 and 2020, Washington was among the top ten fastest growing states in the nation.⁷

Washington’s population growth is not evenly distributed. Five counties experienced nearly 65 percent of the state’s population growth during the past decade. Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Spokane Counties, the state’s metropolitan counties, outpaced the state’s growth by 27 percent. “Retirement counties” such as Clallam, Island, Jefferson, and San Juan also grew faster than expected, while remote, rural counties struggled to maintain population or attract new residents.⁸ In 2021, 13 of Washington’s 39 counties experienced a growth rate greater than 1 percent.⁹

Looking to the future, Washington’s population is expected to grow faster than previously thought.¹⁰ By 2050, Washington’s population is predicted to increase by nearly 2 million residents. Most of that growth, 82 percent, is expected to come from people moving to the state and be concentrated in metropolitan and retirement counties.¹¹

WASHINGTON STATE DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

Washington’s population also is aging. According to the American Community Survey, the median age of Washingtonians rose by nearly a year in the past decade from 37 to 37.8. More importantly, the proportion of Washington’s population older than 65 years of age increased 3.5 percent to 15.4 percent since 2010. Washington residents older than 60 years are the fastest growing age group in the state (up 4.6 percent) between 2010 and 2020.¹² Further, the population of those 85 or older is expected to quadruple between now and 2050.¹³

Younger population groups are not increasing as rapidly in Washington State. The proportion of people under 18 years of age declined slightly from 22.5 percent in 2017 to

22 percent in 2020.¹⁴ However, in the coming years, the school-aged population, or those between the ages of 5 and 17, is expected to increase. By 2050, the population of school-aged Washington residents is expected to increase approximately 11.2 percent to about 1.3 million. Proportionately school-age children are expected to make up about 14 percent of the state’s population in 2050.¹⁵

The population of working-aged Washington residents, those between the ages of 20 and 64, stayed relatively steady between 2010 and 2020. However, the proportion of working-age residents relative to the state’s total population is declining. In 2010 working aged adults made up 61.5 percent of the state’s population, while in 2020 that proportion declined by nearly 8 percent to 53.8 percent.

WASHINGTON STATE DEMOGRAPHICS

Race and Ethnicity

While Washington is aging, the population also is becoming increasingly diverse. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a diversity index to measure the “...probability that two people chosen at random will be from different race and ethnicity groups.” In 2020, Washington State’s diversity index score shifted to 55.9 percent from 45.5 percent in 2010. By comparison, the United States diversity index score shifted from 54.9 percent in 2010 to 61.1 percent in 2020.¹⁶

Washington residents who identify as Hispanic or Latino make up the largest ethnic group in the state, increasing 2.5 percent during the past 10 years. In 2010, the Hispanic or Latino population was 11.2 percent of the population and 13.7 percent in 2020, having grown to more than 1 million residents. In fact, people who identify as Hispanic or Latino are the majority in three Washington counties: Yakima, Franklin, and Adams Counties.

Washington residents who identify as two or more races are the fastest growing demographic segment in the state. This is consistent with national trends. The proportion of the state’s population who identify as two or more races increased by 2.9 percent between 2010 and 2020 and now make up 6.6 percent of the state’s total population.

Washington residents who identify as Asian alone are the third fastest growing racial demographic segment. The population grew 2.3 percent during the past decade and now represents 9.7 percent of the total population.¹⁸

The population of the other three measured racial demographic groups fluctuated slightly between the 2010 and 2020 census counts. Washington residents identifying as Black or African American increased by 0.4 percent to represent 3.8 percent of Washington’s population. Residents identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native alone decreased by 0.1 percent to represent 1.2 percent of the total population. Residents identifying as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone increased by 0.2 percent to represent 0.8 percent of the total population. Finally, Washington residents

identifying as Some Other Race increased by 0.4 percent to represent 0.6 percent of the total population.

Washington residents who identify as White declined by 8.7 percent in proportion of total population between 2010 and 2020. Similarly, the proportion of the state’s population who identify as one race alone declined by 5.5 percent in the past decade indicating a greater percent of the population identifies as multi-racial. Washington, like the United States as a whole, is rapidly becoming an increasingly multi-cultural state. Both the Washington State Office of Financial Management and the U.S. Census Bureau predict the state and the country will continue to diversify. Asian and Hispanic/ Latino demographic groups are expected to make up the greatest proportionate increase.¹⁹

OUTDOOR RECREATION ACCESS EQUITY

When looking at conservation of public land and outdoor recreation, some segments of the population are more vulnerable to social, environmental, and economic challenges such as over-exposure to environmental pollution, climate-related impacts, and barriers to accessing public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities.

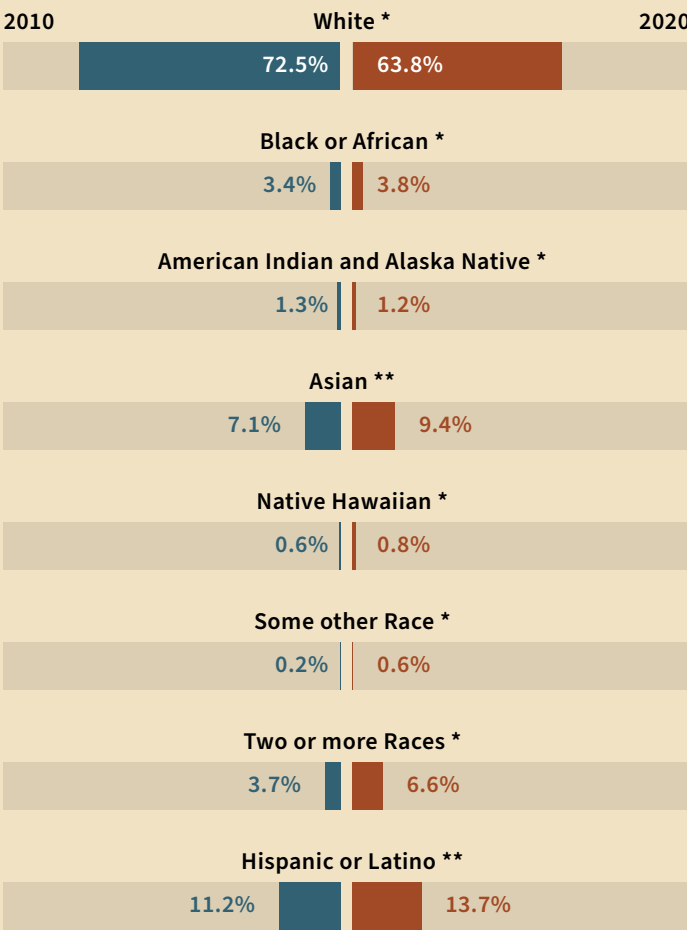
Washington State has made progress on issues of environmental justice in recent years by enacting laws like the Climate Commitment Act²⁰ and the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act.²¹ These laws are guiding the State to evaluate business practices and focus on opportunities to reduce disparate environmental and health-related outcomes experienced by vulnerable populations and overburdened communities across the state.

Washington State’s previous SCORP, the 2018-22 Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan, identified strategies to improve equity of parks, trails, and conservation lands, and plan for culturally relevant parks and trails to address changing demographics. In the intervening years, RCO advanced these strategies by revising grant evaluation criteria and implementing new tools to lower barriers to funding. Equitable access to meaningful outdoor recreation experiences is now a central pillar of the outdoor recreation community.²² RCO and Washington’s outdoor recreation community collectively have much more work ahead to ensure opportunities to access parks, trails, and conservation areas are equitable statewide.

Some communities disproportionately lack access to outdoor recreation opportunities across the United States. A U.S. Forest Service report compiled in 2018 looked at nationwide visitation to federal recreation sites.²³ The report emphasized discrepancies in visitation when compared to the general population, specifically noting the following:

- Blacks or African Americans, who make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for about 1 percent of national forest visits.
- Hispanics or Latinos, who make up about 17 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for less than 6 percent of national forest visits.
- Non-Hispanic whites, who make up about 63 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for well more than 90 percent of national forest visits.

Figure 1: U.S. Census Diversity Index for Washington State



* Non Hispanic or Latino ** Alone

U.S. Office of Management and Budget standards for data collection on race and ethnic origin:

The U. S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) sets minimum standards for data collection across a range of issues for the federal government. One such issue is data on race and ethnic origin used by the U.S. Census Bureau for understanding and comparing changes in the U.S. population composition. The U.S. Census Bureau, according to the OMB guidance, collects data on Hispanic origin (ethnicity) and race in two separate questions. Hispanic origin is divided into two categories, Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino. The Census Bureau divides race into six categories, the five minimum categories recommended by OMB: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and one additional category: Some Other Race, for people who do not identify with any of the OMB categories. The OMB standards emphasize self-selection in reporting race and ethnicity status and clarify that people of Hispanic origin may be of any race. More on how the Census Bureau calculates overall population composition and the Population Diversity Index using these categories can be found: Measuring Racial and Ethnic Diversity for the 2020 Census.¹⁷

State parks in Washington appear to share a similar story to federal lands. A 2021 study commissioned by the Washington State Parks Foundation confirmed, “Washington state park visitors are less diverse than the state’s general population... state park visitors tend to be whiter, older, and of higher socioeconomic status than the state as a whole.”²⁴ Through a series of phased public engagement opportunities the study identified common barriers and key challenges facing more diverse and inexperienced visitors. The report also recommended immediate and long-term opportunities to reduce the most significant barriers. Recommended actions to improve visitor experiences included updating the state parks website, improving park signage, increasing availability and variety of interpretive programs, addressing park safety issues, and improving access to parks through multi-modal transportation networks.

A 2018 report from the National Recreation and Park Association showed that 75 percent of Americans live within walking distance of a local park or other recreational opportunity.²⁵ These parks often are closer to urban centers and show more balanced visitation. On average, White people made 28.2 visits a year to local parks and recreational facilities compared to Hispanic (24 times a year), non-Hispanic (27.1 times a year), and non-White (25.4 times a year) people.

— *Barriers to Participation*

National, state, and local research is starting to identify the many major impediments to experiencing the outdoors. The National Health Foundation reports, “...close to 70 percent of people who visit national forests, national wildlife refuges, and national parks are white, while Black people remain the most dramatically underrepresented group in these spaces.”³¹ The causes for this disparity are complex and interrelated with a long history of unequal access to public services and resources in the United States. As the study further notes, “Racialized economic policies, employment discrimination, unequal access to quality education, and other fundamental tools that can build a person’s economic standing have historically been denied to BIPOC³² communities, which makes camping, hiking or any similar ventures inaccessible.”³³

The National Recreation and Parks Association cites proximity to parks and recreational facilities as one of the most significant factors that influences participation.³⁴ Costs of participation, cultural factors, and safety concerns also commonly are reported barriers to recreating outdoors.³⁵ The coronavirus pandemic had numerous effects on outdoor recreation in the United States. While many parks saw increased visitation,³⁶ many urban parks saw significant declines in visitation especially in socially vulnerable communities.³⁷

However, the Trust for Public Land recently found that across the nation, “parks serving primarily nonwhite populations are half the size of parks that serve majority white populations and nearly five times more crowded.” Additionally, “Parks serving majority low-income households are, on average, four times smaller and nearly four times more crowded than parks that serve majority high-income households.”²⁶

As government agencies and private organizations invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoors, new energy, approaches, and programs are emerging to increase outdoor participation. For example, Trailhead Direct is a pilot program conducted by King County Metro and King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks to reduce transportation barriers to outdoor recreation participation along Interstate 90.²⁷ In recent years, advocacy organizations such as Outdoor Afro and Latino Outdoors have made significant strides encouraging participation in outdoor recreation. With 90 leaders in 30 states, including in Washington, Outdoor Afro’s mission, “celebrates and inspires Black connections and leadership in nature.”²⁸ Organizations such as these work in their local communities to create belonging, understanding, and environmental awareness while improving access to outdoor recreation opportunities.^{29,30}

A lack of nature, or as Richard Louv, author of the international bestseller “Last Child in the Woods,” coined it, nature-deficit disorder, is a major concern of outdoor educators and recreation practitioners.³⁸ Today, it is more important than ever to understand the many complex barriers preventing people from participating in outdoor recreation. As research has historically shown “...the benefits of time spent in nature are endless.”³⁹

CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Washington State established the Office of Equity in 2020 “to promote access to equitable opportunities and resources that reduce disparities and improve outcomes statewide across government.” One of the office’s earliest actions was to outline 15 Determinants of Equity for Washington State, or social conditions that, “everyone in Washington needs to flourish and achieve their full potential.”⁴⁰

The following four determinants directly intersect with RCO’s mission:

- *Access to parks, recreation, and natural resources*
- *Affordable, healthy, local food*
- *Transportation and mobility*
- *Strong, vibrant neighborhoods*

RCO administers grant funding that underpins each of these social conditions. As such, the need for equitably investing in public lands and outdoor recreation facilities has never been greater.

Since the 2018 Recreation and Conservation Plan was published, RCO completed several studies that highlight the multiple benefits and linkages between outdoor recreation, public lands conservation, and these critical determinants of equity. These studies document the physical and mental health, environmental, and economic returns on investing in outdoor recreation opportunities and public lands conservation.

Sidebar: RCO’s Equity Review of Grant Programs

Beginning in July 2021, the Prevention Institute coordinated a multi-faceted effort to review RCO’s grantmaking structures, processes and outcomes. The analysis considered opportunities to reduce gaps in the distribution of greenspace and the resources that support them. [The report is] based on an extensive review of RCO manuals and proposal records (2016-2020), interviews with 35 subject matter experts, 11 community and stakeholder engagement sessions, and iterative dialogue over the year-long period with RCO staff and key stakeholders who have engaged with RCO.

Pursuing greenspace equity requires closing gaps in access to parks, trails and open space that disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color. This includes considering elements such as the geographic distribution of recreational facilities and greenspaces, funding and the grantmaking structures that determine allocations, and the organizational policies and norms that have created and maintained greenspace inequities over time.

This equity review revealed several opportunities to forge a pathway toward more equitable grantmaking and outcomes. These are organized by the following six overarching categories:

- 1 *Prioritize funding for high-need areas*
- 2 *Modify scoring criteria to elevate projects addressing park and greenspace inequities*
- 3 *Change processes and procedures to support equitable proposal development and review*
- 4 *Proactively build applicant capacities to attract and support equity-driven sponsors and projects*
- 5 *Build in structures and criteria to promote community involvement in shaping project proposals*
- 6 *Fund projects that address intersecting social and economic challenges in communities*

Full Report Available: Equitable Grantmaking: A Comprehensive Review of Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Grant Programs

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Washington State Department of Health identifies physical activity as a critical social determinant of health,⁴¹ yet most Washington youth do not meet the recommendations for daily physical activity. In fact, 82 percent of Washington’s twelfth graders did not meet physical activity recommendations in 2021. Over time, the proportion of students that meet the physical activity guidelines decreases as grade level increases.³² However, 66 percent of twelfth graders spend 3 or more hours a day engaged in screen time.

At the same time, 45 percent of twelfth graders reported feeling sad or hopeless in 2021, a rate that has increased significantly during the past 10 years. One in five (20 percent) of twelfth graders reported they considered attempting suicide in 2021. This rate is down from 22 percent in 2018 but has otherwise increased year over year since 2010.⁴³



Washington’s adults are not doing much better. In 2021 more than 23 percent of adults in Washington State reported having some form of depression and 64 percent are overweight or obese.⁴⁴ At the same time, nearly one in five adults in Washington do not participate in any leisure time physical activity.⁴⁵

While outdoor recreation is no panacea for complex public health challenges, it is certainly part of the solution. In 2019, RCO commissioned a literature review, Health Benefits of Nature Contact, which surveyed more than 100 studies that identify health benefits associated with being outdoors. The full report is available online.

Key findings of the review include the following:

- *Nature contact can be associated with a wide range of health outcomes including cardiovascular health, cancer, respiratory illness, and diabetes.*
- *Outdoor exercise, such as on trails, improves mood, restores attention, and decreases anger, depression, and stress compared to indoor exercise.*
- *A positive association exists between park proximity and recreational walking.*
- *Access to green space is linked to less depression, mental health complaints, and stress. Positive improvements are shown to overall mental well-being, resiliency, and quality of life, especially among youth.*
- *Those who spend time outdoors reported less depression.*
- *Health benefits may be particularly impactful for the 12.2 percent of Washington residents below the Federal Poverty Level.*

The National Park Service and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest, “The public health benefits of parks and trails are broad and cross-cutting. For individuals, benefits include providing places for physical activity, improving mental health, reducing stress, providing connections to nature, and increasing social interactions.”⁴⁶ Improving access to parks and recreational facilities through mixed land use development and connecting bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure are critically important community planning approaches to promote physical activity.⁴⁷ Increasing access to opportunities for physical activity is an important health intervention identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Washington State Department of Health, especially for people of lower socioeconomic position.

FULL REPORT - <https://rco.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HealthBenefitsofNature.pdf>

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Recent attention on the recreation economy, especially for rural communities, is widespread. Investments in outdoor recreation directly result in visitor spending that supports jobs, businesses, and industries across the country. According to a Headwaters Economics report published in 2021, the outdoor recreation industry employed nearly 5.2 million people in the United States in 2019 and contributed \$459.8 billion to the economy, representing 2.1 percent of Gross Domestic Product. These economic impacts are 2.4 times greater than oil and gas development, 2.8 times greater than motor vehicle manufacturing, and 3 times greater than air transportation.⁴⁸

In Washington State, residents and visitors spent nearly 600 million user-days recreating in 2019. Direct spending on outdoor recreation exceeds \$26.5 billion annually and supports 264,000 jobs. In fact, nearly 6 percent of all jobs in Washington State are related to outdoor recreation spending. When accounting for secondary expenditures that result from outdoor recreation spending, the overall contribution to Washington State’s economy is \$40.3 billion. Additionally, ecosystem service benefits, such as water storage and carbon sequestration, provided by Washington’s public lands account for between \$216 billion and \$264 billion every year.⁴⁹

Local examples of outdoor recreation’s economic impact abound in Washington State. The Methow Valley’s trail systems in Okanogan County, for example, support \$6 of local worker’s salaries for every \$1 spent to develop and operate the trails.⁵⁰ The Centennial Trail in Spokane County contributes roughly \$2.6 million in annual direct spending to the local economy. Accounting for the ripple effects of that spending, the trail’s overall economic contribution to Spokane County is estimated at \$12 million annually. In rural Snohomish County, the Lake Serene Trail, a single U.S. Forest Service site in the eastern end of the county, is estimated to contribute \$1.4 million, 12 jobs, and \$314,000 in wages and compensation to the local economy every year. These are but a few examples of outdoor recreation supporting local economies in Washington State.⁵¹



Environmental Benefits

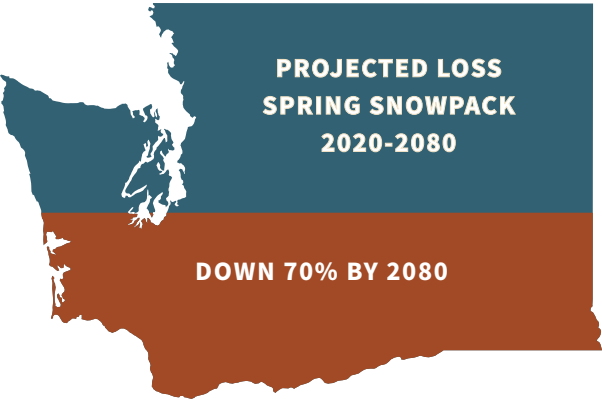
The impacts from climate change are affecting nearly every aspect of life on earth. Community development, public health, food systems, wildlife, and outdoor recreation are all increasingly affected by a warming planet.

The past 7 years have been the hottest ever recorded, according to the World Meteorological Organization.⁵² Long-term impacts of global climate change such as record atmospheric and ocean temperatures, rising sea levels, increased drought periods, shrinking glaciers, wildfires and storm surges are occurring more frequently and at alarming rates.⁵³

In Washington, similar climate trends are occurring. Findings from a recent University of Washington Climate Impacts Group study reported the following five significant effects:⁵⁴

- Spring snowpack is down 30 percent on average from 1955-2016.
- Glaciers in Washington’s north Cascade Mountains have decreased by 56 percent in one area between 1900 and 2009.
- Sea level measurements at Friday Harbor rose more than 4 inches from 1934 to 2018.
- Peak spring streamflow was 20 days earlier along the Puget Sound (snow-dominated watersheds) from 1948 to 2002.
- Washington’s coastal waters are warming and acidifying with surface temperatures having increased from 0.9 to 1.8°F from 1990 to 2012.

The Climate Impacts Group also provided the following projections for Washington for the remainder of the twenty-first century:



- Coastal waters will continue to acidify.
- Sea surface temperatures will increase around 2.2° F by the 2040s.
- Spring snowpack will decrease by 56% to 70% by the 2080s. (under low or moderate greenhouse gas scenarios).
- Rising seas will increase flooding, inundation, saltwater intrusion, and bluff erosion.

Wildfires are having greater impacts on outdoor recreation as well. The number of acres burned in 2022 was lower than recent years, but even still, Seattle recorded the worst air quality in the world for several days in October due to wildfire smoke.⁵⁵ Some of the worst wildfire years in recent history occurred in 2020 and 2021, with more than 800,000 acres burning each year.

In 2015 alone, Washington saw more than 1 million acres burn.⁵⁶ The 2015 fires killed three firefighters, destroyed

more than 500 structures, caused more than \$733 million in agricultural losses, and triggered the death of hundreds of thousands of salmon and other fish species. Post-wildfire impacts such as landslides, floods, human deaths and sickness, and smoky air are having huge effects, particularly on low-income, vulnerable, and historically disadvantaged communities.⁵⁷ Wildfires also forced many Washington state parks to close temporarily and damaged park infrastructure.⁵⁸



Parks and public lands can be part of the climate solution by cooling urban heat islands, buffering flood impacts, improving water quality, and cleaning the air.⁵⁹ Parks and trees can act as cooling oases in urban areas, lowering temperatures by as much as 17 degrees compared to areas without trees or green space.⁶⁰ In addition, urban tree canopy in parks and along city streets across the country is estimated to remove 711,000 metric tons of air pollution annually (a \$3.8 billion value) and sequester more than 90 million metric tons of carbon.⁶¹

Parks, trails, and open space also can help minimize flooding and improve water quality by storing or mitigating stormwater runoff. Across the country, cities like New York, Houston, Atlanta, and Boston are investing millions of dollars to create parks and greenways along storm-affected coastlines to help buffer impacts of anticipated flooding due to sea level rise, storm surges, and increased precipitation.⁶²

In Washington, the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department recently published a Climate Resiliency Strategy that focuses on resilient shoreline development, green stormwater infrastructure, and increased tree groves as strategies to help buffer the city’s residents against the anticipated impacts of climate change.⁶³

There is a delicate balance between promoting recreation opportunities and protecting the people and places that support them. As the climate changes, the outdoor recreation product becomes more inconsistent. Visitor-use patterns everywhere, including at ski resorts, trails, shorelines, and water bodies are being directly and indirectly affected by climate change. Recreation planners and managers need to be able to provide the recreation opportunities that enthusiasts are seeking out.⁶⁴ As such, outdoor recreation professionals increasingly play a critical, frontline role in climate resiliency not only by providing opportunities but protecting vulnerable resources on which those opportunities rely.

— *Habitat and Working Lands*

Protecting natural, historic, and cultural resources while facilitating highly satisfying outdoor recreation experiences is a bedrock principle of sustainable outdoor recreation.⁶⁵ Washington State has a long history of outdoor recreation access on public lands, but the state’s growing population, widespread urbanization, and dramatic increase in participation is impacting sensitive wildlife populations, habitat, and working lands.

Washington’s forests, streams, prairies, and shorelines are complex ecosystems that have evolved during thousands of years. However, the pace and scale of human development across the state has resulted in habitat loss, smaller and more scattered fragments or patches of habitat, diminished habitat quality within remaining patches, increased road mortality, reduced water quality, and increased competition between native species.⁶⁶ Finding the balance between developing infrastructure to support outdoor recreation and protecting a thriving natural environment is a complex challenge and a primary concern in Washington State.

Washington’s forests are especially struggling. Forestland acres declined by 394,000 (2 percent) between 2007 and 2019 and 100,000 acres of that loss was due to conversion of small forests to alternative land uses.⁶⁷ Private forestland loss is now estimated at 0.7 percent a year and conversion risk likely will remain high in the most rapidly urbanizing areas of the state, where arguably, forest cover is needed most.⁶⁸ A study of urban tree canopy cover between 2001 and 2011 in the Puget Sound Area shows vegetation and tree canopy declined by 37 percent resulting in a 35 percent increase in stormwater runoff.⁶⁹

At the same time, more people recreating on the landscape is creating noticeable impacts to wildlife and habitat quality. A 2020 literature review conducted by the Tulalip Tribes highlights the myriad impacts that human disturbances, including outdoor recreation, can have on wildlife and their habitat. The study notes that even quiet, non-consumptive forms of outdoor recreation may affect wildlife behavior, physiology, and reproductive capacity. Unfortunately, the report acknowledges, “land managers often lack baseline site-specific formal wildlife surveys to inform their work in development of recreational sites and access.”⁷⁰

A 2022 report from Conservation Northwest⁷¹ includes three broad recommendations for supporting sustainable recreation on Washington’s public lands:

- 1 *Identify wildlife-recreation overlap using spatial data*
- 2 *Measure site-specific recreation intensity and frequency*
- 3 *Protect spatial and temporal refugia for wildlife*

The report also emphasizes the need for locally scaled recreation and wildlife information to best manage recreation and protect habitat.

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife’s 10-year recreation strategy’s primary purpose is to enhance recreation access and experience while increasing protections for natural and cultural resources.⁷² The plan’s six strategic priorities emphasize the delicate balance Washington State faces in protecting healthy and sustainable fish and wildlife populations while providing a spectrum of outdoor activities to a diversifying public. The plan outlines the steps the department is taking to accommodate outdoor recreation where it is compatible with conservation and other management priorities.

Conserving Washington’s valuable forests, aquatic lands, and natural areas not only has outdoor recreation benefits but also provides economic and environmental benefits for Washington’s communities. The Washington Department of Natural Resources’ *2020 Forest Action Plan* outlines a multi-part strategy to reduce the risks of forest conversion, protect existing forests, and build “...the social, cultural, and economic links between communities and forests.” The plan emphasizes that, “recreation is the primary way that Washingtonians experience forests...” which, “provide residents and visitors access to a range of world-class activities.”⁷³

The U.S. Forest Service suggests that recreation may have lesser impacts on protected lands than other human disturbance such as logging, mining, and residential or commercial development.⁷⁴ Acknowledging that outdoor recreation impacts wildlife and habitats, the Service provides a series of management recommendations for sustaining wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities. Management strategies when planning for new recreation infrastructure include the following:

- *Minimize overlap with important habitat for species sensitive to recreation.*
- *Implement buffer zones for sensitive species.*
- *Maintain existing large, unfragmented landscapes.*
- *Maintain connectivity between habitat patches.*
- *Reduce noise and visual disturbance.*
- *Time recreation to minimize negative impacts for wildlife.*

Adequately funding recreation planning and management is critical to preserving the natural, cultural, and historic resources that are the backbone of Washington’s outdoor landscapes. Park and recreation agencies are important contributors to environmental conservation through conserving green infrastructure, maintaining public lands, cleaning the air and water, and preserving wildlife habitat, all the while enhancing the human-nature connection in open spaces.⁷⁵

The research is clear that outdoor recreation plays an important role in Washington’s economic and social vitality. As such, supporting outdoor recreation planning, responsible development, and management is a necessary strategy in sustaining wildlife, wildlife habitat, and working lands for future generations.





Goat Rocks Wilderness, Gifford Pinchot National Forest

ASSESSMENT OF DEMAND, SUPPLY, AND STATEWIDE ISSUES

Washington State’s population is increasing, aging, and becoming more diverse. Much of that increase is the result of people moving here, in part, for the outdoor recreation opportunities that contribute to a high quality of life in the state. Population growth is simply creating a greater demand on public lands and outdoor recreation resources.

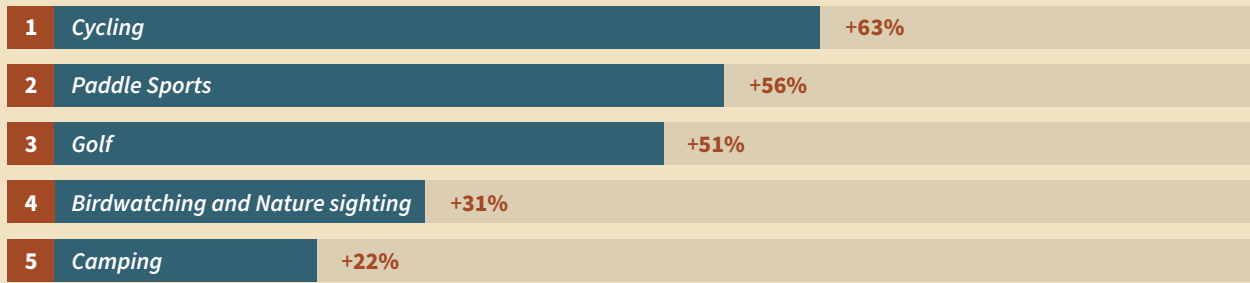


OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION AND EXPERIENCE

The coronavirus pandemic also had incredible influence on outdoor recreation. Pandemic-induced participation and demand for outdoor recreation opportunities has been well documented. For example, the Outdoor Industry Association’s 2020 national outdoor recreation participation survey indicated that 7 million more people participated in some form of outdoor recreation in 2020 than in 2019. In fact, 53 percent of Americans over age 5 participated at least once in 2020, the highest participation rate ever.

This increasing demand is reflected by outdoor recreation industry sales figures which increased dramatically in 2020 compared to 2019 across the following five important product categories:⁷⁶

Figure 2: Outdoor Recreation Industry Sales: 2019-2020



Source: NPD Group

To assess demand and satisfaction with recreation opportunities in Washington State, RCO staff developed a series of public surveys. The 2022 *Assessment of Outdoor Recreation Demand* and *Outdoor Recreation Experience Survey* were companion surveys conducted back-to-back. The experience survey focused on Washington residents’ desired experiences, motivation, and barriers to participating in outdoor recreation generally. The demand assessment focused on understanding rates of participation for 88 outdoor recreation activities across 10 activity categories.

RCO also conducted two companion surveys to better understand issues and challenges faced by public land and natural resource managers. The first surveyed local, state, and federal land managers while the second focused on tribal natural resource agencies.

Findings are organized into two sections. The first section summarizes the demand assessment and experience surveys. The second section summarizes recreation and conservation challenges identified by land managers, nonprofit organizations, and tribes.

ASSESSMENT OF OUTDOOR RECREATION DEMAND

RCO commissioned a research team from Eastern Washington University to conduct the 2022 *Assessment of Outdoor Recreation Demand*. For methodological consistency in and familiarity with the plan development process, RCO selected the same survey team that conducted the 2017 assessment. The full report, along with a description of the methods used, is available in Appendix 2.

The assessment is a random survey of Washington State residents that aims to calculate rates of participation in a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities. The survey is used to determine outdoor recreation needs and anticipate future demand for outdoor recreation. One goal of the survey is to collect a statistically representative sample of the state’s population that can guide planners, project managers, and policy makers in the distribution of funding and resources across the state.

For 2022, the survey instrumentation was redesigned from the 2017 questionnaire. The intent of the redesign was to reduce the amount of time required to complete the survey and to better align the activities with the recreational facilities that support those activities. The streamlined questionnaire included 88 unique activities organized into ten activity categories. This, along with other changes, reduced the average time to complete the survey by 6 minutes – from 20 minutes in 2017 to 14 minutes in 2022.

Each activity was assessed for rates of participation and participation frequency. Respondents were asked which activities they participated in and how many times they had participated in the previous 12 months. For each activity, respondents could choose:

- A Did not participate
- B 1-9 days
- C 10-19 days
- D 20-29 days
- E 30-49 days
- F 50+ days

The survey also asked respondents where they participated in the activity. This was measured for the activity category rather than the individual activity to limit the number of questions asked in the survey. The survey also asked about participant satisfaction, barriers to outdoor recreation participation, park proximity, the importance of outdoor recreation, and future demand.

Data was collected using SurveyMonkey,® an online survey provider. The questionnaire was available from December 2021 to April 2022. The final survey sample was 6,171 completed questionnaires. The goal was to represent the

THE TEN ACTIVITY CATEGORIES:

- 1 Camping
- 2 Trail and road (nonmotorized) activities
- 3 Motorized vehicle activities
- 4 Water activities
- 5 Snow and ice activities
- 6 Nature and culture activities
- 7 Hunting, fishing, shooting sports
- 8 Leisure activities
- 9 Athletics
- 10 Outdoor Adventures

population of the state and each of ten regions at a 95 percent confidence level with a +/- 5 confidence interval. The 2020 U.S. Census was used as the benchmark for population and demographic composition.

While the sample in this survey is very close in most of the demographic categories from the 2020 Census, there are a few discrepancies. The effects of these discrepancies are very minor and did not require any weighting of the data. Full details on the sample, survey methodology, and results are available in the final report.

Summary of Results

Results are available for the statewide population sample and for representative population samples within ten regions across the state.

The top 20 activities statewide are listed in Table 1.

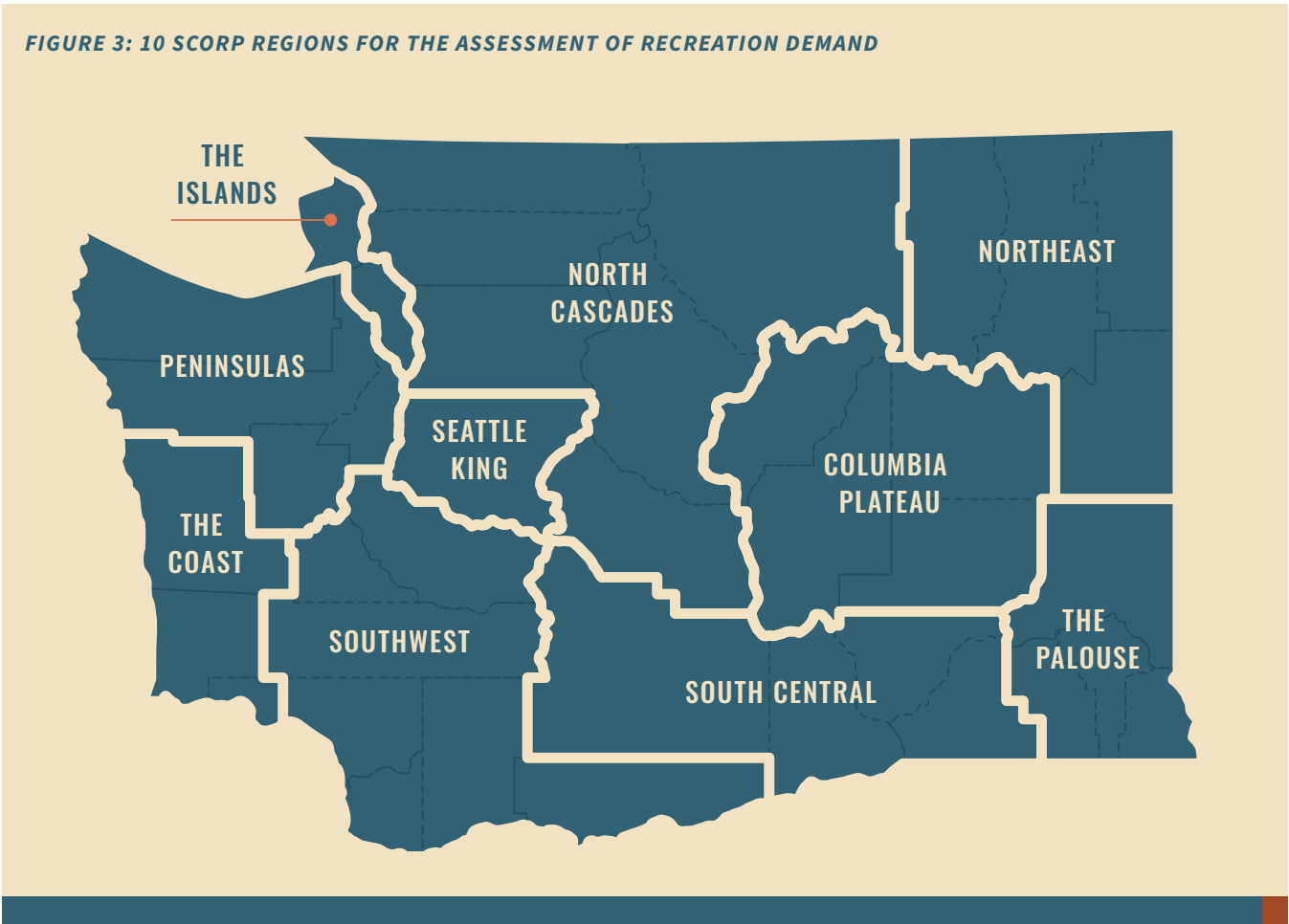
Survey Overview

- 88 activities
- 10 activity categories
- 14 minutes - average response time
- 6,171 total statewide participation
- Survey dates - December 2021 -April 2022

TABLE 1: TOP 20 OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES IN WASHINGTON STATE by participation rate - % of population, N = number of responses			
ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY CATEGORY	%	N
Walking or Using Mobility Device on Roads or Sidewalks	Trail- and Road-Based Activities	91%	5390
Walking or Day Hiking or Using Mobility Device on Trails	Trails and Road-Based Activities	90%	5331
Wildlife and Nature Viewing	Nature- and Culture-Based Activities	85%	4812
Scenic Driving (Sightseeing)	Nature- and Culture-Based Activities	85%	4767
Hanging Out	Leisure Activities in Parks	70%	3679
Picnic, Barbecue, or Cookout	Leisure Activities in Parks	68%	3639
Community Garden or Farmers’ Market	Leisure Activities in Parks	66%	3556
Visiting Outdoor Cultural or Historical Facility, - Includes Attending Cultural Events	Nature and Culture-Based Activities	62%	3413
Swimming in Natural Settings	Water-Based Activities	61%	3374
Paddle Sports (Whitewater, Canoes, Kayaks, Stand-Up Paddle Boards, Rowing)	Water-Based Activities	52%	2910
Outdoor Concert or Special Event	Leisure Activities in Parks	49%	2602
Gathering or Collecting Anything in Nature	Nature- and Culture-Based Activities	49%	2635
Tent Camping (Developed Campground)	Camping Activities	44%	2510
Backpacking	Trail- and Road-Based Activities	42%	2349
Playground	Leisure Activities in Parks	41%	2148
Tent Camping (Undeveloped Area)	Camping Activities	41%	2247
Road Cycling	Trail- and Road-Based Activities	40%	2240
Yard Games (Beanbag Toss, Horseshoes, etc.)	Leisure Activities in Parks	38%	1966
Volunteering (Restoration Projects, Citizen Science, etc.)	Nature- and Culture-Based Activities	37%	1984
Jogging or Running on Roads or Sidewalks	Trail- and Road-Based Activities	35%	1944
Snowshoeing	Snow and Ice Activities	35%	1821

Regional Participation Summary

RCO began to focus data collection at the regional level in 2017 to better understand how activity participation preference varies across different parts of the state. At the time, the regions coincided with the Washington State Tourism Regions. For 2022, to maintain consistency and comparability with the previous resident survey, RCO used these same ten regions used in 2017 which are shown in Figure 3.



The top four activities with the highest rates of participation were consistent across all ten regions: Walking or Using a Mobility Device on Roads or Sidewalks, Walking or Day Hiking or Using a Mobility Device on Trails, Scenic Driving (Sightseeing), and Wildlife or Nature Viewing. There was some variability within the top four places, according to region; however, these activities stood out as the most popular according to participation rates.

The middle of the list, places five through seven, included activities such as Hanging Out; Picnic, Barbecue, or Cookout; and Community Garden or Farmers’ Market. All three activities fall within the category labeled: Leisure Activities in Parks. In a few instances, Swimming in a

Natural Setting or Visiting Outdoor Cultural or Historical Facilities and Events also were found in this middle tier.

There was a bit more variability in places eight through ten; however, activities such as Swimming in a Natural Setting, Paddle Sports, Gathering and Collecting Anything in Nature, and Visiting Outdoor Cultural or Historical Facilities and Events consistently were rated as the eighth, ninth, or tenth most popular activities according to participation rates. Community Garden or Farmers’ Market and Outdoor Concert or Special Event also were seen, although not as frequently, toward the bottom of the top ten list of activities.

Participation Trends Since 2017

In the 2022 Assessment of Resident Demand, participation rates for 45 activities were compared to 2017. All but two of those activities (Technology-based games and Collecting or Gathering Things in Nature) showed an increase in participation. Activities that had the greatest increase in participation include the following:

- Wildlife or nature viewing increased by 28%
- Paddle sports increased by 28%
- Visiting outdoor cultural or historical facility increased by 27%
- Tent camping (undeveloped area) increased by 26%
- Backpacking increased by 25%
- Playing yard games (in a park) increased by 25%
- Snowshoeing increased by 23%
- Tent camping (developed area) increased by 19%
- Hanging out (in a park) increased by 19%
- Mountain biking increased by 18%

Understanding where people participate in specific activities is an important factor for recreation planning. The demand survey focused on the ten activity categories to assess where residents recreate. Respondents were asked to choose all locations that applied to each activity category. Responses are listed in Table 2.

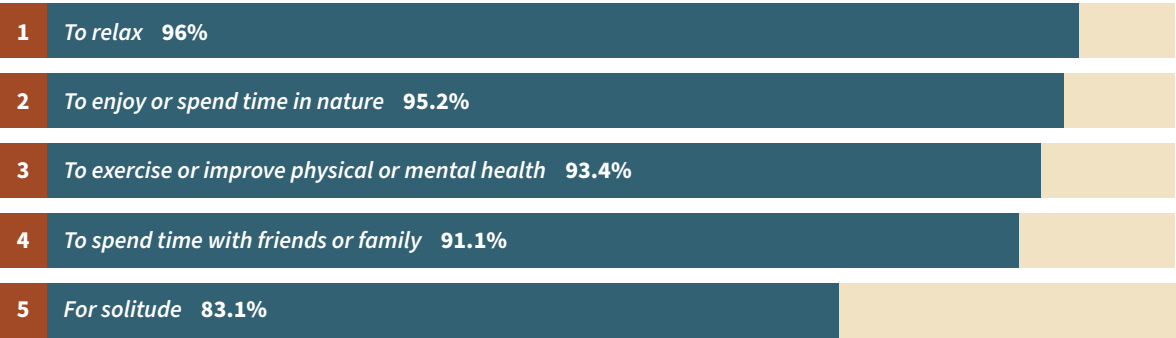
TABLE 2: LOCATIONS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION						
CATEGORY						
Camping	12.3%	2.2%	55.9%	4.4%	3.3%	15.3%
Trail and Road	60.7%	12.7%	74.6%	8.0%	3.8%	25.1%
Motorized Vehicles	5.3%	2.6%	22.8%	3.9%	1.9%	8.8%
Water	33.3%	3.6%	51.5%	4.6%	5.2%	20.8%
Snow and Ice	16.7%	4.5%	39.0%	2.4%	3.3%	16.9%
Nature and Culture	50.3%	8.0%	71.3%	15.4%	6.3%	24.8%
Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting	8.5%	2.3%	29.3%	2.8%	3.1%	16.5%
Leisure Activities	63.8%	15.7%	51.1%	5.5%	4.3%	27.5%
Athletics	29.2%	16.1%	12.0%	2.1%	2.1%	14.7%
<div><div>*Note: School park refers to recreation activities occurring at a local school playground or other school yard space.⁷⁷</div><div>LOCAL PARK</div><div>SCHOOL PARK *</div><div>STATE OR FEDERAL</div><div>TRIBAL</div><div>DONT' KNOW</div><div>OTHER</div></div>						

Participant Satisfaction

Overall, respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with their outdoor recreation pursuits. The largest category of activities showing negative feelings was the Land-based Motorized Activities group with 13.6 percent of respondents indicating either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied. The second most dissatisfied activity category was Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting with 11.9 percent of respondents indicating either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied.

Importance of Outdoor Recreation

Respondents were asked about what factors were most important in motivating them to participate in outdoor recreation. When adding together the percentages for “very important” with “moderately important,” the five strongest factors were the following:



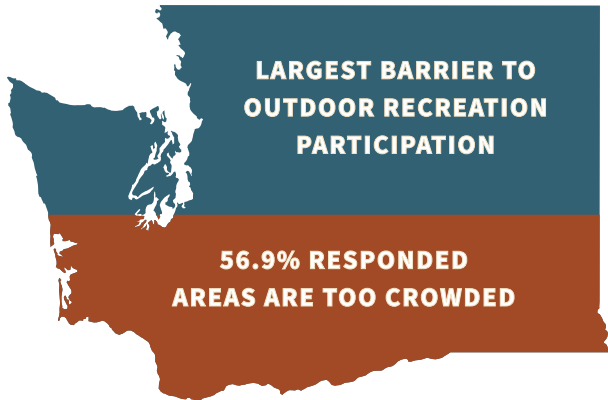
Barriers to Outdoor Recreation Participation

Survey respondents were asked what prevented them from participating in outdoor recreation. When adding together responses for major and moderate barriers, the three largest barriers to outdoor recreation participation were the following:

- 1 Outdoor recreation areas are too crowded (56.9%)
- 2 Limited access to outdoor recreation areas (53%)
- 3 Not enough time due to work, family, or other commitments (41.4%)

In comparison, the three factors that respondents indicated to not be a barrier were the following:

- 1 Not enough information about outdoor recreation (63.1%)
- 2 Do not feel safe or comfortable in outdoor recreation areas (61.1%)
- 3 Health constraints (55%)



OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCE SURVEY

For the first time, RCO administered the *Outdoor Recreation Experience Survey* to collect additional data on outdoor recreation user experiences. As a supplement to the demand survey, which assessed activity-based participation rates and frequency, the experience survey focused more on the quality of experience in outdoor recreation activities. The goal was to further explore motivation, desired experiences, modes of access, barriers, and other factors that may influence participation. A full profile of the sample population and detailed results are available in the *Outdoor Experience Survey Final Report* in Appendix 3.

Methods

RCO staff developed the questionnaire using the ArcGIS Survey 123 platform and posted it on the Recreation and Conservation Plan HUB. The plan advisory committees guided the questionnaire’s development and RCO staff reviewed and tested the questionnaire before public release. A link to the survey was posted on RCO’s website, emailed, featured in an agency news release, included on the agency’s social media platforms, and distributed by partner advocacy organizations to their membership and communication networks. The survey was available in English and Spanish. Responses were collected from October 13, 2021 through November 30, 2021. Data collection consisted of a convenience sample based on RCO and partner organizations’ outreach. As such, unlike the demand assessment, the experience survey was not designed to obtain a representative geographic or demographic sample of the state’s population. Emails were sent to more than 2,000 individual and organizational contacts with the explicit request to complete the survey AND distribute the survey link to other people in their networks.

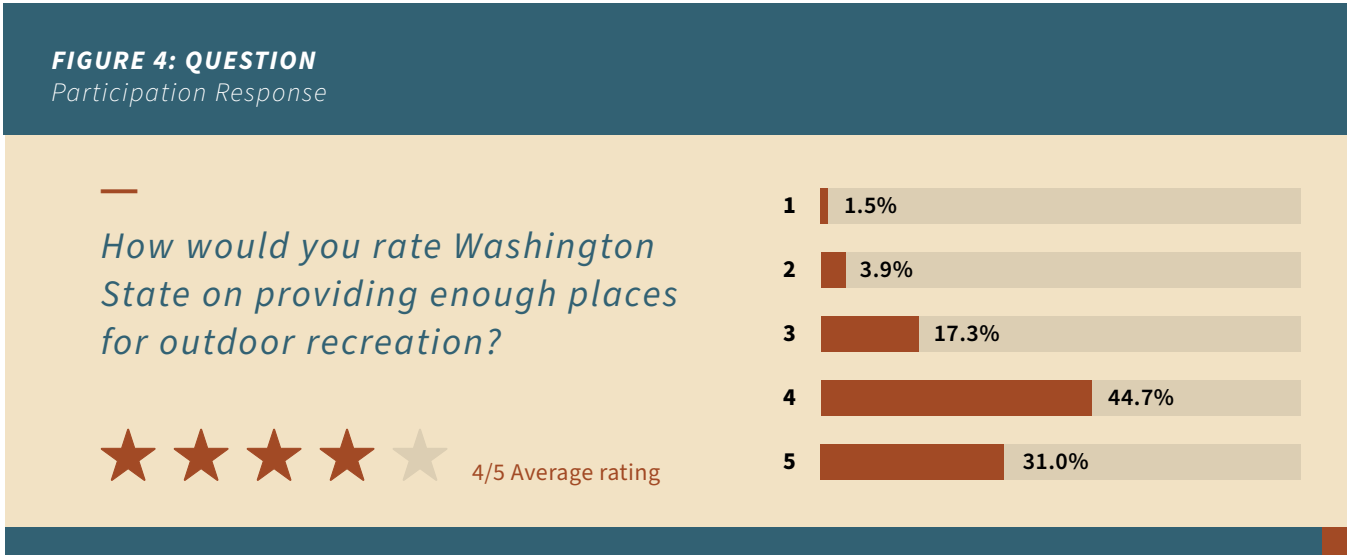
Results

A total of 5,426 questionnaires were completed in English and 1 questionnaire was completed in Spanish for a total of 5,427 usable questionnaires. RCO received responses from people in 37 of Washington’s 39 counties and more than 97 percent of the respondents were Washington residents. The participants in this study were mainly White (81.5 percent), 35-54 years of age (42.3 percent), and skewed slightly male (55.2 percent). A large proportion of the respondents lived in King County (35.7 percent), slightly more than King County’s representative population of 29.4 percent. The average household income of the survey respondents was between \$100,000-\$149,999, slightly above the state’s median household income of \$84,247.⁷⁸



Summary of Results

The initial question asked participants to rate Washington on a scale of one to five stars when asked if there were enough places for outdoor recreation in the state: 75 percent of respondents gave Washington a four- or five-star rating.

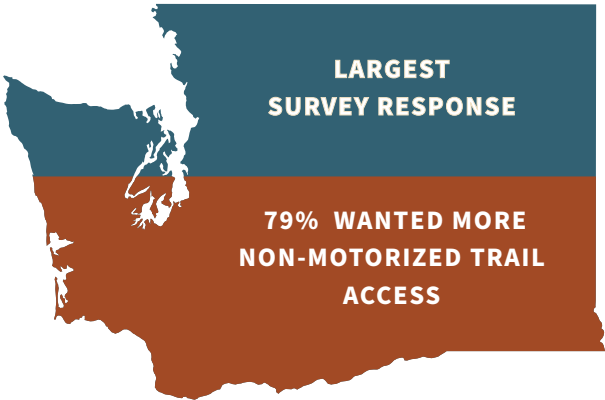


Mode of Travel

Participants were asked to indicate what types of transportation they use to reach recreation sites. Most drove their personal vehicles with 91 percent of respondents choosing this option either “always” or “frequently.” A moderate number of survey participants used bicycles, electric bicycles, walking, running, or personal mobility devices to reach recreation areas. Few respondents used public transit, all-terrain vehicles, off-road vehicles, or off-road motorcycle—more than 80 percent of respondents indicated they “never” use those travel modes.

Desired Access

Participants were asked what types of outdoor recreation opportunities they would like to see more of. Overwhelmingly, survey participants wanted to see more non-motorized trail access (79 percent of respondents), camping (61 percent of respondents), and winter activities (42 percent of respondents). Contrarily, motorized trails (68 percent of respondents); hunting, gathering, or fishing (49 percent of respondents); and athletics or physical fitness (41 percent of respondents) showed the least amount of desire for increased opportunities.



Motivation

Respondents were asked to choose their top three motivations for spending time outside. The following are the top five collected responses:

- 1 Exercise or improve physical fitness (62%)
- 2 Connect with nature or observe wildlife (47%)
- 3 Fun, excitement, or adventure (46%)
- 4 Solitude or peace and quiet (40%)
- 5 (tie) Improve mental health
- 5 (tie) Spend time with family, friends, or pets (34%)

Barriers to Participation

Participants were asked to indicate the most significant barriers that prevented them from recreating outdoors in Washington. The following were the top five identified barriers:

- Too many people (82.8%)
- Not enough time (76.3%)
- Environmental factors such as wildfire, flood, poor snow, weather, etc. (75.9%)
- Public health concerns due to the coronavirus (49.7%)
- No one to go with (35.2%)

Encouraging Participation

Participants were asked to indicate the most significant motivators that would increase the amount of time they spend recreating outdoors in Washington. The following were the top five identified factors:

- More opportunities near where I live (79.4%)
- Better facilities near where I live (64.2%)
- More parking (58.0%)
- Better neighborhood access (50.7%)
- More information about opportunities and requirements (48.6%)



OUTDOOR RECREATION AND CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

RECREATION PROVIDER SURVEY

To better understand the issues and challenges faced by recreation facility and service providers, RCO surveyed land managers and non-governmental organizations that provide volunteers to land managers. The Recreation Provider Survey questionnaire was developed on ArcGIS Survey 123 and available for responses from December 10, 2021 to January 20, 2022.

The questionnaire consisted of the following main categories:

- Background information
- Management issues and challenges
- Management priorities
- Funding and investment needs
- Mapping and data
- Additional thoughts



Eighty-three questionnaires were completed. The questionnaire asked participants to identify the type of organization they represented. The highest participation with 24 respondents (28.9 percent) came from the city or town sector and tribal government was the only type of organization that had no respondents. RCO administered a separate survey of tribal natural resources managers, the results of which are highlighted in the next section of this report.

Nearly 64 percent of responses were from land management agencies or organizations (federal, state, county, and city/town respondents). Organizations identifying themselves as land trusts were considered land managers. The remaining 36 percent were from private or other (mostly nonprofit volunteer) organizations.

While differences certainly exist in the type, scope, and complexity of challenges faced by land management agencies and volunteer or advocacy organizations, the survey results aggregate the responses from both organization types. Where participants were asked open-ended questions, responses from land managers and non-government organizations are organized separately.

More information is included in the Recreation Provider Survey Final Report in Appendix 4.

Summary of Results

Recreation Facilities:

Neighborhood or community parks (46 percent of respondents); regional, county, local trails, or greenways (43% of respondents); and water access (41% of respondents) were the most common types of outdoor recreation or conservation areas that participants managed.

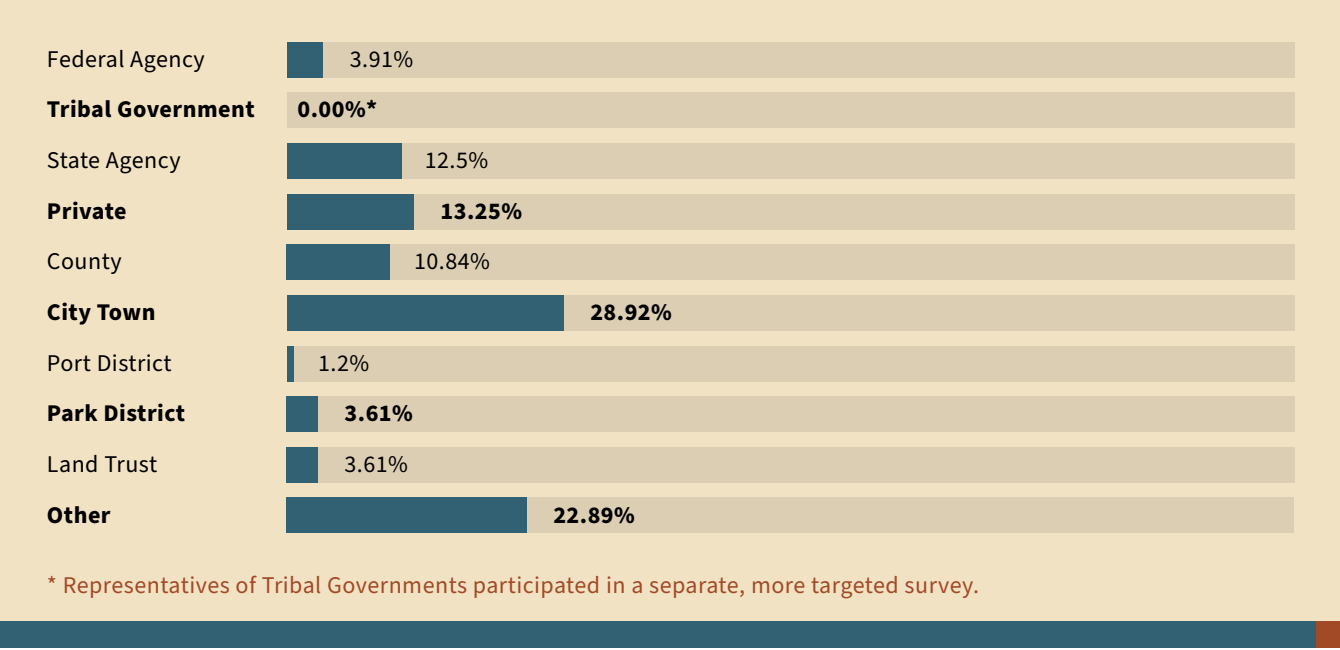
Trails and Pathways:

Walking, hiking, or personal mobility device trails were the most common (80% of respondents) types of trail that respondents managed, developed, or maintained. Cycling trails (58%) and equestrian trails (39%) were the other most common types of trails indicated by respondents. Twenty-nine percent of respondents indicated that their organizations allowed e-bikes on non-motorized trails. Almost half (45%) of the respondents, however, indicated “unknown/does not apply” regarding the topic.

Planning

More than 75% of the respondents indicated that their organizations had planning documents to help guide their decisions about the areas they managed. When asked about climate adaptation plans, almost 87% of the respondents indicated that their organizations either did not have plans, it did not apply, or it was unknown if there were plans.

FIGURE 5: RECREATION PROVIDER SURVEY
Responses by Organization Type



— *Most Important Issues Ranked*

Participants were asked about the most important issues for outdoor recreation and conservation in their service areas in the next 3-5 years.

- 1 *Maintaining existing recreation resources (97.6%)*
- 2 *Coordination with other organizations that manage outdoor recreation (94.0%)*
- 3 *Capacity of facilities to serve a growing population (91.6%)*
- 4 *Adapting to changing user expectations (89.2%)*
- 5 *Engaging partners for programming; Improving access for people with a disability (tied, 85.5%)*

Respondents also were asked an optional, open-ended question: What other important issues, not listed above, is your organization considering in the next 3-5 years? 65 participants responded to this question.

Themes of “other” responses from land managers include the following:

- *Maintaining and improving access to meet increasing demand and changing demographics*
- *Coordinating with neighboring land managers*
- *Tribal engagement and coordination to address mutual concerns and challenges*
- *Funding and staff capacity for planning, capital development, and maintenance and operations*
- *Overuse and capacity of existing facilities*
- *Resource restoration and mitigating adverse impacts of recreation*

Themes of “other” responses from non-government organizations include the following:

- *Maintaining access to and high-quality experiences at existing opportunities*
- *Overcrowding and capacity at existing sites*
- *Coordinating with land management agencies and tribes to address recreation access and impacts to natural and cultural resources*
- *Climate change impacts to recreation opportunities*
- *Expanding access to provide close-to-home opportunities that meet growing demand and evolving expectations*



— *Challenges to Addressing Identified Issues*

Participants were asked about the biggest challenges for their organizations to address the issues they identified. The following are the top five identified challenges:

- 1 *Competing demands for limited funds (89.2%)*
- 2 *Not enough staff capacity (81.9%)*
- 3 *Ability to raise local funds for projects (78.3%)*
- 4 *Lack of political or management support (49.4%)*
- 5 *Ability to create and coordinate partnerships (47.0%)*

Respondents were asked an optional, open-ended, follow-up question: What other significant challenges, not listed above, is your organization facing? 36 participants responded to this question.

Themes of “other” responses from land managers included the following:

- *Balancing the impacts of increased recreation demand with resource protection and conservation values*
- *Balancing competing interests for parks and public lands access*
- *Adapting to and addressing climate change impacts*
- *Growing and retaining staff capacity to address evolving recreation patterns, plan for future development and management, effectively manage and use volunteers, and compete for limited grant funding*

Themes of “other” responses by non-government organizations included the following:

- *Coordinating and convening collaborative approaches to recreation planning and development across overlapping jurisdictions*
- *Chronic underfunding and understaffing of natural resource agencies*
- *Meeting evolving and increasing demand for recreation while preserving rural character and natural resources*



— Management Priorities

Participants were asked: Looking ahead at demand over the next five years, what types of outdoor recreation sites or activities will be a priority for your agency/organization to provide?

- 1 Expanding community trail systems (79.5%)
- 2 Connecting regional trail systems (79.5%)
- 3 Renovating aging infrastructure (74.7%)
- 4 Expanding the amount of public lands (67.5%)
- 5 Developing nature-based parks (55.4%)

Participants were asked an optional, open-ended, follow-up question: What other sites or activities are a priority for your organization? 37 participants responded to this question.

Themes from land managers included the following:

- Conserving and restoring nature, nature reserves, wildlife habitat to protect against recreation impacts
- Providing better or expanded access to a wide variety of opportunities for all people
- Connecting public lands and open space through regional trails and multi-modal transit
- Boosting agency capacity to maintain facilities, manage impacts, apply for funding, and address increasing demand

Themes from non-government organizations included the following:

- Expanding access to a spectrum of opportunities and for a diversity of users
- Engaging diverse communities
- Connecting recreation sites and public lands through trail networks



— Trail-Related Priorities

Participants were asked about their trail-related priorities for the next 5 years and the themes are as follows:

- 1 Maintaining existing trails (91.6%)
- 2 Planning and coordination with partners (86.7%)
- 3 Providing connections between existing trails (83.1%)
- 4 Re-routing or improving trails to modern, sustainable design (74.7%)
- 5 Creating new opportunities for non-motorized trail users (e.g., hikers, equestrians, mountain bikers) (73.5%)

Respondents were asked an optional, open-ended, follow-up question: What other trail and trailhead related priorities does your organization have in the next five years? 25 participants responded

Themes from land managers included the following:

- Improving parking capacity and other trailhead facilities
- Expanding capacity and connecting trail systems
- Acquiring additional trail corridors
- Improving safety and security at trailheads
- Completing ongoing planning and permitting processes

Themes from non-government agencies included the following:

- Completing ongoing planning and permitting processes
- Securing and improving public access and connecting trail systems
- Providing safety and security at trailheads
- Protecting natural resources



TRIBAL NATURAL RESOURCES SURVEY

RCO administered a *Tribal Natural Resources Survey* to better understand challenges and issues facing tribal natural resource departments. The survey was based on the general recreational provider survey, but RCO staff worked with tribal representatives on the advisory committees to better tailor the questions to the target audience. This was the first time RCO administered a separate tribal survey to inform the state recreation and conservation plan.

An invitation to participate in the survey was emailed by RCO’s director to the natural resources department or program directors of all 29 federally recognized tribes and 7 other tribal organizations that reside in Washington State. Follow up emails were sent to encourage participation. The survey was developed using the ArcGIS Survey 123 platform and was available for submissions from January 10 to February 14, 2022. Six responses were submitted to the survey.

Because of the limited responses, the final report presents the data differently from the *Recreational Provider Survey*. For each question, the responses from all participants were tabulated. A summary of selected results is included below. The full results are available in Appendix 5.

Top five land management issues were as follows:

- Coordinating with other organizations that manage outdoor recreation
- Capacity of facilities to serve a growing population
- Adapting to changing user expectations
- Recreation impacts to fish, wildlife, or natural resources
- Vandalism or illegal dumping

The top five land management challenges were as follows:

- Not enough staff capacity
- Competing demands for limited funds
- Ability to raise local funds for facilities or land acquisition
- Ability to create and coordinate partnerships
- Lack of user education and awareness

The top management priorities included “restoring fish and wildlife habitat” and “acquiring new recreation and conservation lands.”

“Developing community athletic facilities” and “developing swimming pools or water play parks” were the lowest identified management priorities.

The top trail-related priorities included “connecting community assets,” “reducing user conflicts,” and “providing education and interpretive opportunities.” The remaining choices were evenly split with three participants indicating moderate to high priorities and three others indicating low or no priority.

The tribal survey also asked about funding and investment needs.

The most significant funding challenges included the following:

- Lack of a dedicated funding source
- Insufficient resources to fund tribal government’s land management needs
- Difficulty competing with state and local governments for RCO grants



Our citizens live a cultural-based lifestyle, very family oriented and gather subsistence resources that are ever dwindling due to pollution, population growth, climate change, and huge state harvests.

One could say tribal members recreate on occasion but it’s very different than non-tribal citizens.

- survey respondent



OUTDOOR RECREATION SUPPLY AND AVAILABILITY

Washington State has an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities. More than 23,000 miles of trails stretch across 22 million acres of public lands that offer a spectrum of parks, nature reserves, boat launches, campgrounds, places to hunt and fish, and much more. This abundance of outdoor recreation opportunity is a special resource that the residents of Washington have routinely invested in.

Knowing the location, intensity, and scope of public lands and outdoor recreation facilities on the landscape is a critical element of recreation facility planning and determining funding priorities. To better understand the supply and availability of recreation assets in Washington, RCO partnered with a team from Esri to update the Washington State Outdoor Recreation Inventory and develop the service area analysis.

MAPPED INVENTORY

For this plan, RCO updated and expanded the capacity of the mapped inventory from the 2018-2022 *Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan*. The inventory includes almost 20 percent more records and a summary dashboard, which allows the public to easily search for and highlight data based on recreational activities or a specific land manager. The dashboard displays summary statistics for the selected results and can help tell the story of recreational access across the state.

The updated inventory includes information from four data sets maintained by Washington Hometown, RCO’s recreational inventory data partner. The data sets categorize the recreational inventory into the following elements:

Recreational Areas: *Represented by polygons or a defined geographic space on the map, these land areas are unique land management units and are color coded by land manager agency type. The inventory includes 5,576 records of individual recreational areas representing more than 22 million acres of publicly accessible recreation and conservation lands.*

Recreational Points: *Represented by a single location on the inventory map, these are specific recreational facilities or park sites like a boat launch, trailhead, day-use area, or athletic facility. The inventory includes more than 12,879 records of unique recreational facilities.*

Recreational Lines (MOTORIZED AND NON-MOTORIZED): *These lines represent trails and are grouped as motorized or non-motorized based on what activities are allowed on the trail. It should be noted that many trails categorized as motorized also allow non-motorized activities. The inventory includes 7,705 trail segments representing just more than 23,000 miles of public recreational trails.*

Recreational Roads: *These lines depict roads that allow wheeled all-terrain vehicles (WATV). The inventory includes 41,000 records representing an expansive recreational road network.*

FIGURE 6: HOW TO USE INTERFACE
wa-rco-scorp-2023-wa-rco.hub.arcgis.com

The Outdoor Recreation Inventory Dashboard can be found on RCO's Recreation and Conservation Plan Hub. Access the hub by visiting <https://wa-rco-scorp-2023-wa-rco.hub.arcgis.com>



STEP 1 - ACCESS FINAL PLAN

- VISIT <https://wa-rco-scorp-2023-wa-rco.hub.arcgis.com>
- Click on **FINAL PLAN**

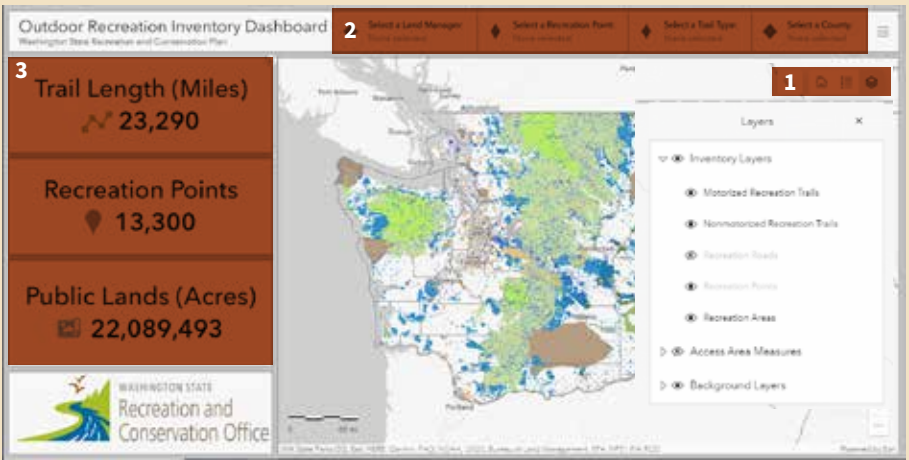
STEP 2 - INVENTORY DASHBOARD

- Scroll down to the green section
- Look for **OUTDOOR RECREATION INVENTORY**
- Click the **MAP** to access the dashboard

STEP 3 - DASHBOARD

The 2023 Outdoor Recreation Inventory Dashboard includes a map display, interactive dashboard, summary statistics, and a service area analysis for selected recreational features that align with the 2022 Resident Demand Survey activity categories.

MAP OUTDOOR RECREATION INVENTORY



- 1 **LAYERS AND LEGEND** Turn on/off active features
- 2 **FILTERS** Select specific features within active layers
- 3 **SUMMARY STATISTICS** Dynamic based on layers and filters selected

LAYER LIST GROUPS

INVENTORY LAYERS

Areas, Points, Trails, Roads (pg. 56)

ACCESS MEASURES

Service area for selected features

BACKGROUND LAYERS

Geographic and political boundaries

— Access Analysis

Using data in the mapped inventory, RCO and the Esri team developed an outdoor recreation service area analysis. Geographic buffers around specific features in the inventory identify recreation access service areas. The goal of this analysis was to identify gaps in access to “foundational” recreational opportunities as defined by RCO’s 2019 *Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance* study.⁷⁹ The buffer layers correspond with the ten activity categories in the Resident Demand Survey.

The guiding question for this analysis was: Where are critical gaps in public land, trails, and water access? To complete the analysis, Esri first identified and isolated the recreational features corresponding with each of the activity categories in the Resident Demand Survey. Next, service area measures were defined for each of the recreational feature layers to represent the potential for accessing those features.

The service area measures used for this analysis were based on service areas identified in RCO’s *Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance* report. That report established service areas for Foundational Recreational Assets, which it defined as facilities that support the most popular recreational activities in the state (exceeding 30 percent participation in the 2017 Resident Demand Survey). These facilities were considered foundational to satisfying the recreational needs of Washington’s residents. Walking trails, community parks, and public swimming areas are examples of foundational recreation facilities.

Nearly all the activity categories surveyed by the 2022 Resident Demand Survey were identified as “foundational” in the recreational assets report. However, in some cases, RCO staff worked with the planning advisory committees, individual recreational user groups, and Esri consultants to create or modify service area measures to account for all ten activity categories. RCO relied on Esri’s consultant team to finalize and map the service area measures used in this analysis.

One significant enhancement from past efforts to analyze statewide service area gaps was the incorporation of a “multi-modal service area” for local parks, trails, and water access sites. A “multi-modal service area” refers to the different ways a person might travel to a site. The intent is to simulate the accessible service area for a recreation participant who is walking (or using a personal mobility device), riding a bicycle, driving, or using public transit. These multi-modal layers display access opportunities for a 10-minute (1/2-mile) walk, 15-minute (3-mile) bike ride, and 15-minute (5-mile) drive or transit ride. The walk and bike buffers follow routes known to be walkable or bikeable. The transit layers simulate 15-minute drive access and were used as a proxy for public transit but follow all public roadways. Unfortunately, the analysis was not able to account for existing public transit routes for the entire state due to data availability. Table 3, shows the selected map features, corresponding demand survey activity category, and the service area measure used for the analysis.



— SCORP Map Analysis Summary

Table 3: Access Analysis Mapped Features

1 PARK OR NATURE AREA (polygons)		
SELECTION	DEMAND SURVEY CATEGORY	ACCESS / SERVICE AREA MEASURE
All	Leisure Activities	½ mile walk (10 minutes)
	Nature and Culture Based	3 mile bike ride (15 minutes)
		5 mile drive/transit ride (15 minutes)
Park with fields or courts	Sports / Athletics	10 minute walk (urban)**
Public Schools with sports facilities		10 minute drive (Rural)
		45 minute drive regional athletic complex
Park or nature area > 500 acres (State and Federal lands only)	Hunting/Shooting Sports	30 minute drive
	Outdoor Adventures	
2 TRAILHEAD OR TRAIL ACCESS POINT (lines and points)		
SELECTION	DEMAND SURVEY CATEGORY	ACCESS / SERVICE AREA MEASURE
All trailheads and trail junctions with a public road	Road and Trail Activities	½ mile walk (10 minutes)
	(nonmotorized – Walking/PMD/ Hiking, Bicycling, Equestrian)	3 mile bike ride (15 minutes)
		5 mile drive/transit ride (15 minutes)
All motorized trailheads and trail junctions with a public road	Road and Trail Activities (motorized)	90 minute drive*+
		30 minute drive (goal)
3 CAMPING		
SELECTION	DEMAND SURVEY CATEGORY	ACCESS / SERVICE AREA MEASURE
Camping Point	Camping	30 minute drive *+
4 WATER ACCESS POINTS		
SELECTION	DEMAND SURVEY CATEGORY	ACCESS / SERVICE AREA MEASURE
All general water access points, pools, splash pads	Water-based Activities	½ mile walk (10 minutes)*+
		3 mile bike ride (15 minutes)
		5 mile drive/transit ride (15 minutes)
Boating access points	Boating and Paddling Activities	30 minute drive*
Fishing access points	Fishing	30 minute drive*+
5 Winter Recreation Point		
SELECTION	DEMAND SURVEY CATEGORY	ACCESS / SERVICE AREA MEASURE
All winter recreation points	Snow and Ice Activities	90 minute drive*
		30 minute drive (goal)

* Adopted from Recreational Assets Study access metrics (2018)
** Adopted from Physical Activities Task Force Report (2021)
** Modified from Recreational Assets Study metric

Assumptions and Findings

Before highlighting select findings from the service area analysis, a few methodological assumptions must be addressed.

- 1 First, access measures and service area assessment does not account for the quality of the facility. Even though a neighborhood may have access to a recreation opportunity based on the mapped inventory, the quality of facilities or capacity limitations of the site still may create barriers to access.
- 2 Second, access to a recreational facility may not actually satisfy a participant’s needs. While a neighborhood may have access to a pocket park with a playground, community members still may need a soccer field to support a local club or a plaza to hold a farmers’ market to access local food.
- 3 Third, access to the facilities via safe routes or low-stress transportation options have not been analyzed. The service area buffers follow routes that are available for walking, biking, or public transit but conditions on the ground still may create barriers to access. For example, bike lanes that abruptly end, gaps in sidewalks, and unsafe street crossings are high-stress situations that create access barriers.

In general, the larger the service area distance measure for a given activity, the greater the geographic area of the state served by a single facility. This means a single facility may serve a greater population than it was designed for. The capacity of that facility may or may not be able to accommodate, with a high degree of satisfaction, the number of users seeking access it. In any planning scenario, public engagement and on-the-ground verification will be critical to bridge the gap between the data and site-specific conditions or local context.

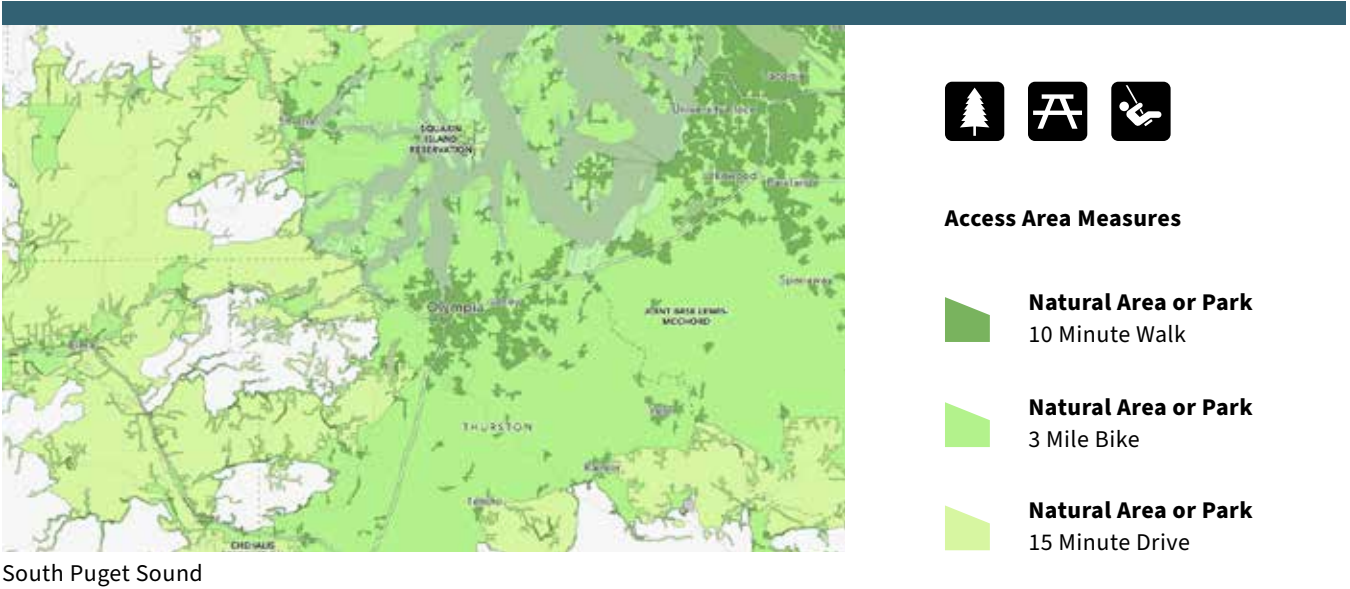
The following are a few examples of how the service area analysis maps can be used to identify areas where further investigation into developing outdoor recreation opportunities would be warranted.

Parks and Natural Areas

The recreational inventory includes 4,807 sites classified as a park, day use, or natural area. These sites total 21 million acres of public lands across the state that host playgrounds, picnic areas, general purpose fields, and community open space. Natural areas also include all the state and federally managed public lands, places like Deception Pass State Park, Mount Rainier National Park, and the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest that offer the state’s most scenic places for nature viewing and wildlife watching.

Parks and natural areas were the first and largest feature set analyzed with a multi-modal service area measure. Most residents living within the urban footprint of the state have access to a park or natural area within a 15-minute drive, transit ride, or bike ride. However, when looking at the 10-minute walk analysis, significant gaps emerge across the urban footprint. Figure 7 shows the service area layers for the South Puget Sound Metro Region, Ellensburg, Seattle, and Spokane at 15-drive or transit ride, 15-minute bike ride, and 10-minute walk measures.

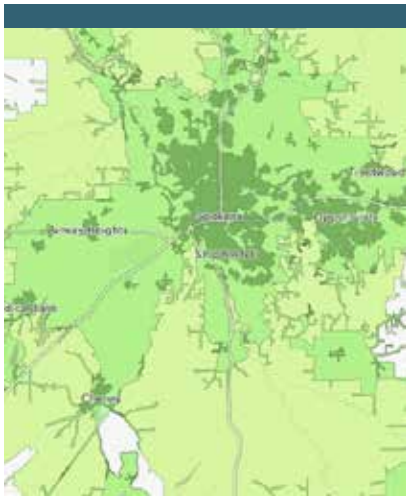
Figure 7: Natural Area or Park Access



Ellensburg



Seattle



Spokane

Activity Categories for Access Analysis

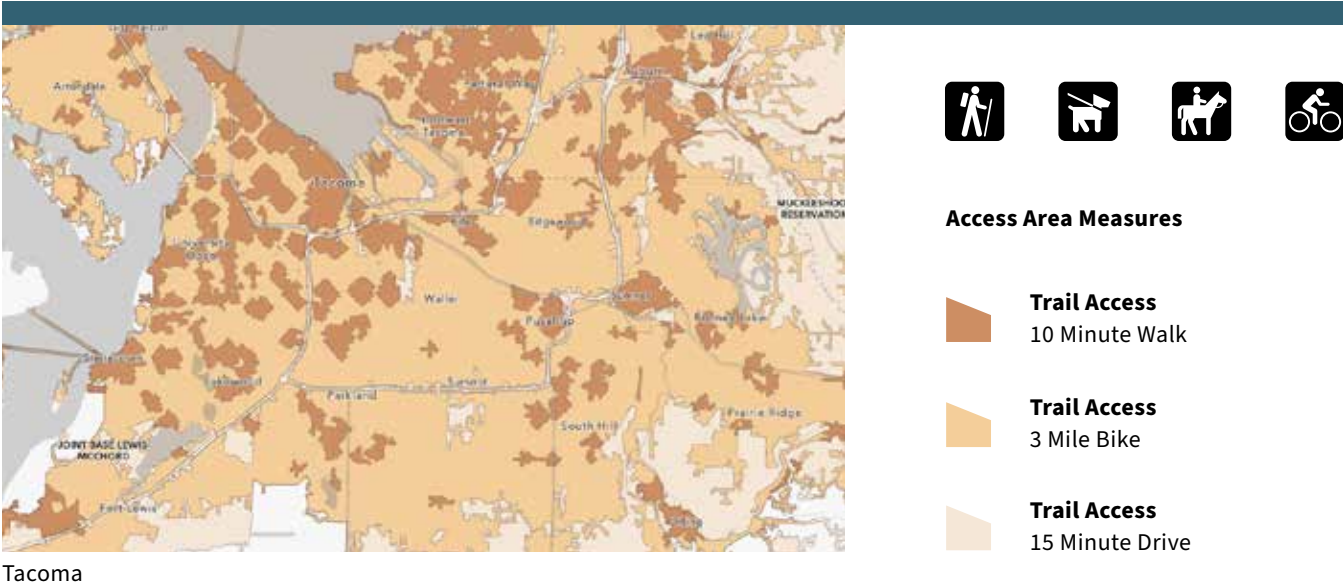
- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Parks and Natural Areas | Outdoor Adventures |
| Nonmotorized Trails | Camping |
| Motorized Trails | Boating Access |
| Water Access | Fishing Access |
| Athletic Facilities | Winter Recreation |

Trailhead or Trail Access

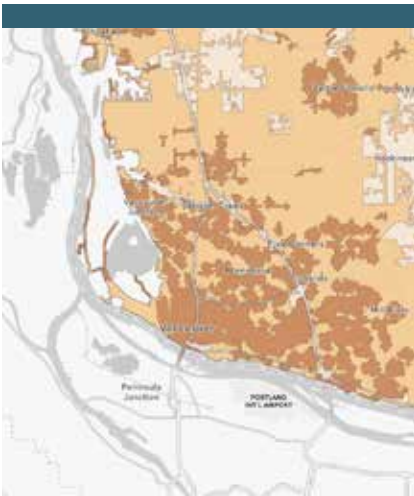
The recreational inventory includes 23,290 miles of motorized and nonmotorized trails across Washington State. These trails occur across every jurisdiction of land manager from federal agencies such as the National Park Service and Forest Service to the smallest of municipalities. Walking on trails is the second most popular (behind walking on roads or sidewalks) recreational activity for Washington residents. Trails may seem abundant throughout the state, yet 79 percent of respondents to the Experience Survey want more access to trails and trail facilities.

Trails and trailhead access was the second feature set analyzed with multi-modal service area measures. When looking at the access measures for trails and trail facilities at the 15-minute drive and 15-minute bike ride measures, most residents within the urban footprint have some form of access. However, at the 10-minute walk service measure, significant gaps emerge. Figure 8 shows the service area layers for trail and trailhead access in Tacoma, Tri-Cities, Vancouver, and Wenatchee at 15-drive or transit ride, 15-minute bike ride, and 10-minute walk measures.

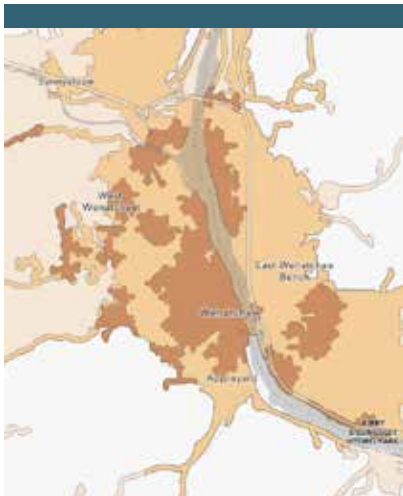
Figure 8: Trail Access



Tri-Cities



Vancouver



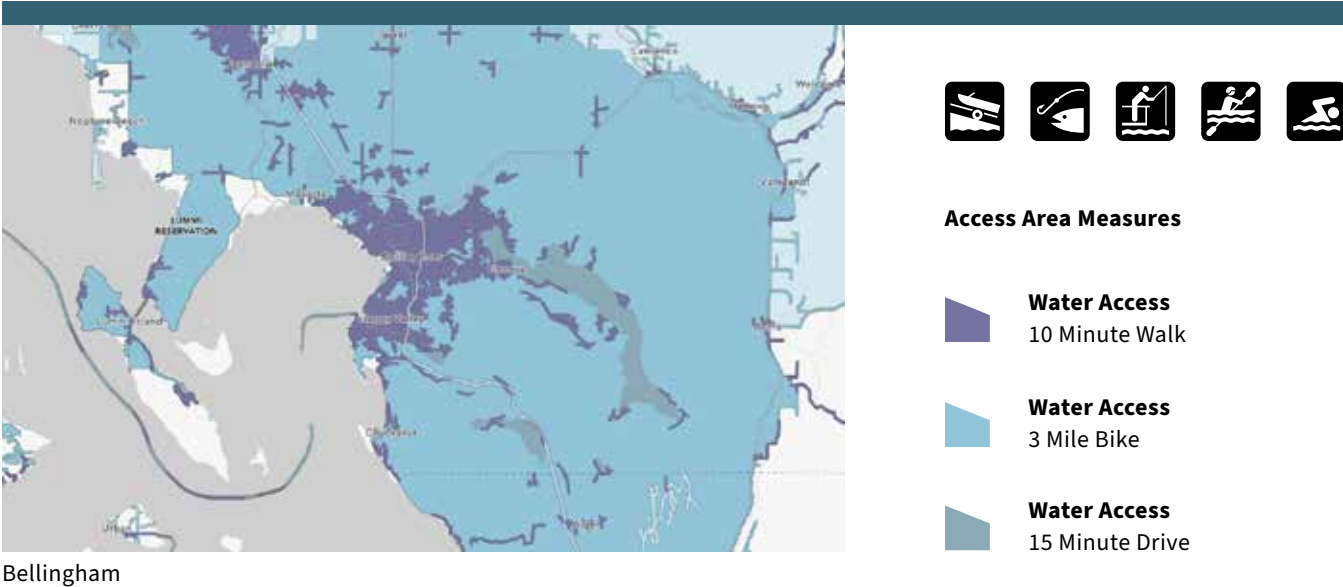
Wenatchee

Water Access

The recreational inventory includes 1,991 boating, fishing, and general water access sites and facilities. These sites include 13,615 acres of public lands and offer opportunities for motorized boating, paddling, swimming, fishing, and exploring beaches, tidal areas, and estuaries. Sixty-two percent of Washington residents went swimming in a natural setting and 52 percent participated in paddle sports in the past year. Additionally, one-third of Washington residents participated in motorized boating, 13 percent went sailing, and 30 percent went tubing or floating in the past year. Access to water is clearly a vital component of outdoor recreation in Washington.

Water access was the third and final feature set assessed with a multi-modal service area analysis. Most residents in the urban areas of the state have some access at the 15-minute drive and 15-minute bike ride measures. However, at the 10-minute walk service measure, significant gaps emerge. Figure 9 shows the service area layers for water access sites in the greater Bellingham area, Omak, Port Angeles, and Walla Walla at 15-drive or transit ride, 15-minute bike ride, and 10-minute walk measures.

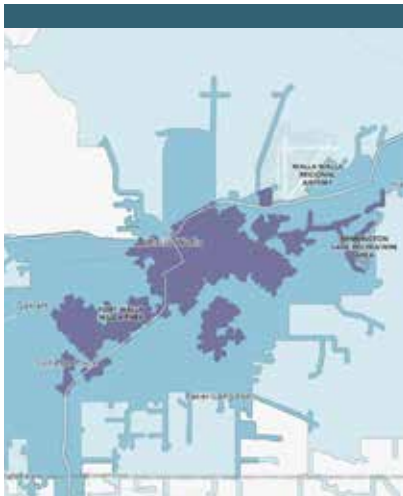
Figure 9: Water Access



Omak



Port Angeles



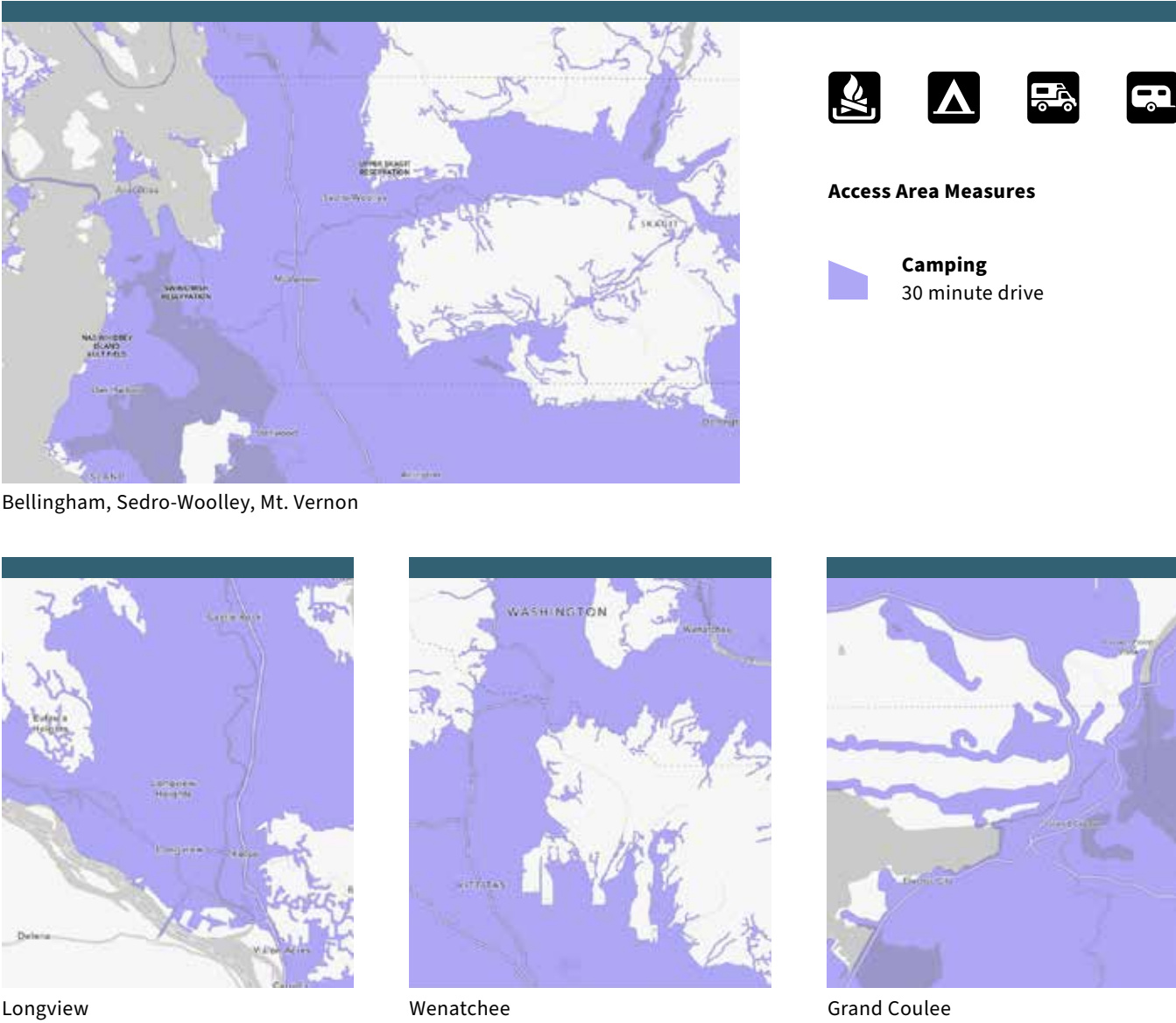
Walla Walla

— Camping

Tent camping and backpacking are two activities that showed dramatic increases in participation between 2017 and 2022 Resident Demand Surveys. Forty-four percent of Washington residents tent camped, and 32 percent camped in a motorhome or recreational vehicle in the past year. Camping amounts to just more than \$1 billion in annual expenditures across Washington State.⁸⁰ Clearly, Washington residents see camping as an important outdoor activity and a way to connect with nature, relax, and spend time with friends and family.

The recreational inventory includes 974 camping facilities encompassing 81,383 acres of public lands. Most Washington residents have access to at least one camping facility within a 30-minute of drive of their homes. Figure 10 shows the service area for residents who have access to camping facilities within a 30-minute drive of the Bellingham-Mount Vernon-Sedro-Woolley area, and the cities of Longview, Wenatchee, and Grand Coulee.

Figure 10: Camping Access

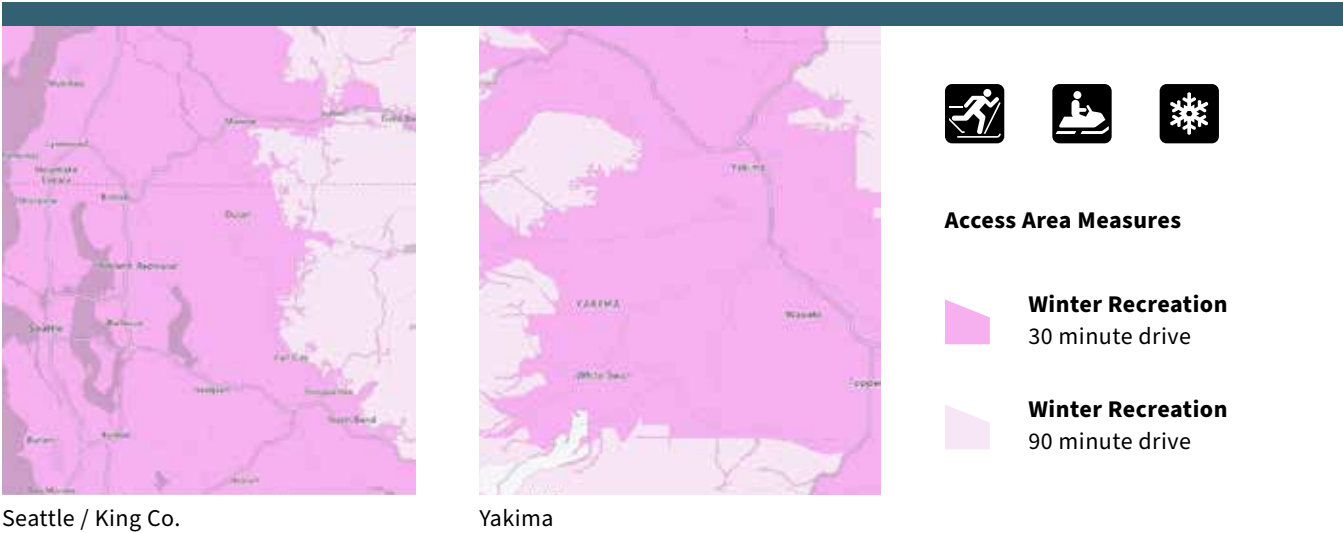


— Winter Recreation

Winter recreation was defined as activities on snow and ice such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, down-hill skiing, snowboarding, and snowmobiling. Individually, these activities have more limited participation across the state. An exception is snowshoeing, which was included in the top 20 statewide activities with a 35 percent participation rate. It also was one of the fastest growing activities in 2022, with a 23 percent increase in participation from 2017. Winter recreation activities also are limited to areas of the state that receive adequate snowfall and consistent cold temperatures, which further concentrates recreational use. With a combined \$1.7 billion in annual recreational expenditures, winter recreation activities are a significant economic driver in the state.

The recreational inventory includes 198 unique sites and 6,095 miles of trail across the state. Two service area measures were used to analyze for winter recreation opportunities – a 90-minute drive time and an 30-minute drive time. This analysis looks at a wide range of winter recreation opportunities, including seasonal ice-skating rinks, which may distort the service area coverage. However, at 90 minutes, the analysis shows that nearly everyone in Washington has access to some winter recreational facility. Figure 11 shows King County and Yakima County residents that have access to a winter recreation opportunity within a 90-minute drive and a 30-minute drive of where they live.

Figure 11: Winter Recreation Access



Summary

While this summary is a very high-level overview of the results of the analysis, it demonstrates the potential to use this tool for statewide recreation planning. Future possible enhancements to this tool may include data quality control and alignment, refining the service area measures, developing a carrying capacity measure to estimate potential for overcrowding at specific sites, and adding data to assess socioeconomic characteristics of gap areas. Future development will rely on staff capacity and funding.

STATEWIDE PRIORITIES AND UNIFIED STRATEGY

The statewide priorities are broad strategies and goals to help coordinate and guide acquisition, development, and management of the spectrum of public lands and outdoor recreation infrastructure to meet the most pressing needs of Washington residents. The Unified Strategy is the Recreation and Conservation Office and Recreation and Conservation Funding Board’s action plan for advancing the statewide priorities.

OUTDOOR ACTION COMPASS

A map and compass are critical elements of the “10 essentials”⁸¹ for any safe outdoor recreation experience. The map orients a traveler to their surroundings while the compass guides in the desired direction. Similarly, RCO’s Outdoor Action Compass identifies true north and charts a path through four priorities that aim to improve outdoor recreation and public lands conservation across Washington State for years to come.



The plan identifies four core values that act as the four cardinal directions: Equity, Resiliency, Connection, and Collaboration. These core values are RCO’s top-tier standards and weave through each of the four priorities, acting as touchpoints for each goal. The strategic priorities and goals address the most pressing public lands and outdoor recreation issues and challenges identified through the public engagement process, direct stakeholder outreach, the two planning advisory committees, and RCO staff. The core values, strategic priorities, and goals identified in the Outdoor Action Compass will guide the prioritization and distribution of RCO’s funding programs for outdoor recreation and conservation.

CORE VALUES

Equity

Equity means valuing and empowering all individuals by providing opportunities for them to fully participate, recognizing that we do not all start from the same place, and we must meet people where they are. We must identify and overcome barriers arising from bias and systemic structures. RCO recognizes a need to provide greater support to communities that have experienced underinvestment in public land and outdoor recreation resources.

Connection

Connections are strengthened through networks that enable movement and resource sharing. These connections can include physical interactions with or between places, new and expanding interpersonal and interagency relationships, or deepening cultural and spiritual bonds. Forging strong connections creates a more hopeful and resilient future for individuals, communities, and nature. RCO strives to be a dedicated partner that empowers communities to achieve their goals by providing pathways to funding, resources, and technical assistance.⁸²

Resiliency

Resiliency is durability in the face of change and challenge. Communities across Washington have shown incredible resiliency through the myriad responses to the coronavirus pandemic and other recent social and environmental challenges. A resilient network of public lands and outdoor recreation facilities depends on secure and equitable investments in proactive, science-based approaches to planning, site design, facilities development, resource conservation, and adaptive management. RCO recognizes that investing in resiliency results in many overlapping benefits to Washington’s social, economic, and environmental wellbeing.

Collaboration

Ensuring the positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes of outdoor recreation and protected public lands equitably benefit the public will require the efforts of many individual public and private entities working together. Achieving the strategies outlined in this plan will require joint initiatives that integrate outreach, policy, and project development activities. RCO is well-positioned to be a convener and supporter of such efforts, but long-lasting success requires the participation of all its partners and stakeholders. RCO strives to be a trusted partner in protecting and improving the best of Washington’s natural and outdoor recreation resources.

STATEWIDE PRIORITIES

The following statewide priorities and goals will help to guide RCO’s funding for outdoor recreation development and public lands conservation for the next 5-10 years.

PRIORITY 1

Provide meaningful access to outdoor recreation for all

- GOAL 1.1** Washington’s public lands, trails, waters, and outdoor recreation resources feel safe, welcoming, and inclusive to all.
- GOAL 1.2** Physical, social, and economic barriers to accessing outdoor recreation opportunities are well understood and reduced.
- GOAL 1.3** A broad spectrum of parks, trails, public lands, and water access opportunities are available for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities and users.
- GOAL 1.4** Recreation users maintain high levels of satisfaction across the spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities.

PRIORITY 2

Protect natural and cultural resources while managing increasing demand

- GOAL 2.1** An expanding mosaic of protected public and private lands supports outdoor recreation, public health and community development, natural resource and wildlife conservation.
- GOAL 2.2** Agencies and communities have the capacity and resources needed to inclusively plan for, acquire, develop, and adaptively manage public lands and recreation facilities.
- GOAL 2.3** Impacts to natural and cultural resources from social and environmental stressors, including climate change, are understood, anticipated, managed, and reduced.
- GOAL 2.4** Accurate, up-to-date recreation, land, and resource data, including traditional ecological knowledge, is continually compiled, refined, and used to guide management activities.

PRIORITY 3

Demonstrate the essential nature of parks, natural areas, and recreation infrastructure

- GOAL 3.1** Public lands and outdoor recreation is supported as critical infrastructure and an essential public service.
- GOAL 3.2** The multiple, intersecting benefits and challenges of outdoor recreation on public lands and waters are researched and communicated.
- GOAL 3.3** Inclusive public feedback guides planning, management, and development to ensure experiences with public lands, waters, and recreation facilities align with the needs and expectations of all Washington residents.

PRIORITY 4

Support healthy, adaptable, and connected communities

- GOAL 4.1** Agencies and communities have the capacity to respond to changes in outdoor recreation participation, satisfaction, and resource conservation priorities.
- GOAL 4.2** Resources for climate-smart planning, land acquisition, management, site design, and construction are widespread and universally available.
- GOAL 4.3** A safe, accessible, statewide system of multi-modal trails connects communities, outdoor recreation destinations, and active transportation facilities.
- GOAL 4.4** Existing outdoor recreation facilities meet the needs of current and future recreation users.
- GOAL 4.5** Access to outdoor recreation and conservation funding is inclusive and funding outcome are equitable.

UNIFIED STRATEGY

The Unified Strategy is RCO and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board’s action plan to advance the statewide priorities and goals.

The Unified Strategy, as required by state law, represents RCO and the board’s implementation plan for meeting the needs of Washington’s residents. Where the action compass identifies statewide priorities, the Unified Strategy is an internally focused set of strategies and actions to guide RCO and the board in advancing the plan.

In developing the Unified Strategy, RCO staff worked with board members to refine and prioritize a suite of potential actions identified by the advisory committees and RCO staff. The result is seven strategies composed of specific actions. The actions cover policy development, program management, and agency administrative activities and are intentionally broad to enable each grant program to implement the strategies’ intent without being overly prescriptive. Actions within each strategy are numbered for ease of identification but do not necessarily indicate a prioritization preference.

STRATEGY 1

Update grant evaluation criteria to reflect statewide priorities and goals (Months 3-9)

- ACTION 1.1** Washington’s public lands, trails, waters, and outdoor recreation resources feel safe, welcoming, and inclusive to all.
- ACTION 1.2** Identify, incorporate, and weight measures to help address disparate outcomes in outdoor recreation and conservation funding.
- ACTION 1.3** Prioritize projects that demonstrate how public engagement influenced project placement and design.
- ACTION 1.4** Assess how applicants engage with tribes on project planning, placement, and site designs.
- ACTION 1.5** Assess how climate change impacts and other environmental stressors are addressed through planning, site design, and carbon mitigation strategies.

STRATEGY 2

Review and revise grant program policies to adapt to emerging community needs and challenges (Months 3-18)

- ACTION 2.1** Reduce barriers to grant funding for under-resourced communities.
- ACTION 2.2** Encourage collaborative partnerships for planning, development, and maintenance of public lands and outdoor recreation facilities.
- ACTION 2.3** Support visitor services that expand pathways to experiencing new opportunities.
- ACTION 2.4** Support integrated solutions to land use, resource conservation, community development, public health, and safety challenges.
- ACTION 2.5** Promote multi-site projects to address needs across recreation and public land systems.
- ACTION 2.6** Leverage innovative acquisition strategies for outdoor recreation and conservation lands.
- ACTION 2.7** Improve opportunities to preserve, protect, and restore quiet spaces for solitude and wildlife refuge in both urban and rural settings.
- ACTION 2.8** Implement recommendations from recent RCO studies, including the following:
 - Equitable Grantmaking: A Comprehensive Review of Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Grant Programs
 - Youth Physical Activity Task Force Report
 - Health and Economic Benefits of Recreational Trails
 - Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance

STRATEGY 3

Support, collaborate, and coordinate with federal and state agencies, counties, cities, tribes, and non-governmental organizations to adaptively manage the state’s portfolio of public lands and outdoor recreation facilities (Months 12-48)

- ACTION 3.1** Work with natural resource agencies to develop, refine, coordinate, and implement methods for measuring and monitoring visitor use and resource condition across public lands.
- ACTION 3.2** Support natural resource agencies’ work to improve resource conditions and visitor management activities across jurisdictional boundaries.
- ACTION 3.3** Work with public land managers, tribes, and non-governmental organizations to align management intensity where significant resources and recreational use intersect to optimize recreational capacity and resource protection.
- ACTION 3.4** Work with transportation agencies, public land managers, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and communities to develop and connect a multi-modal trail system with a spectrum of recreational opportunities and community destinations.

STRATEGY 4

Maintain and improve data, decision support, and technical assistance resources to address statewide priorities and goals (Months 6-60)

- ACTION 4.1** Normalize Resident Demand Survey activities and categories to create year-to-year consistency and comparability with other state and national participation research.
- ACTION 4.2** Support, maintain, and add value to the Washington State Trails Database, Recreation Inventory, Public Lands Inventory, and other data resources.
- ACTION 4.3** Maintain and improve access analysis mapping for foundational recreation assets.
- ACTION 4.4** Work with land managers to develop, improve, and maintain resource libraries to support technical assistance and recreation planning.

STRATEGY 5

Improve and expand community engagement practices (Months 3-60)

- ACTION 5.1** Establish methods for more frequent feedback and evaluation of recreation demand and satisfaction.
- ACTION 5.2** Ensure public engagement reach and participation is representative of state population demographics and socioeconomics.
- ACTION 5.3** Establish performance and outcome measures for grant program policies and processes resulting from implementation of this plan.
- ACTION 5.4** Develop systems to increase frequency, consistency, and diversity of participation in public engagement.
- ACTION 5.5** Evaluate barriers to accessing outdoor recreation facilities, opportunities, and funding programs.

STRATEGY 6

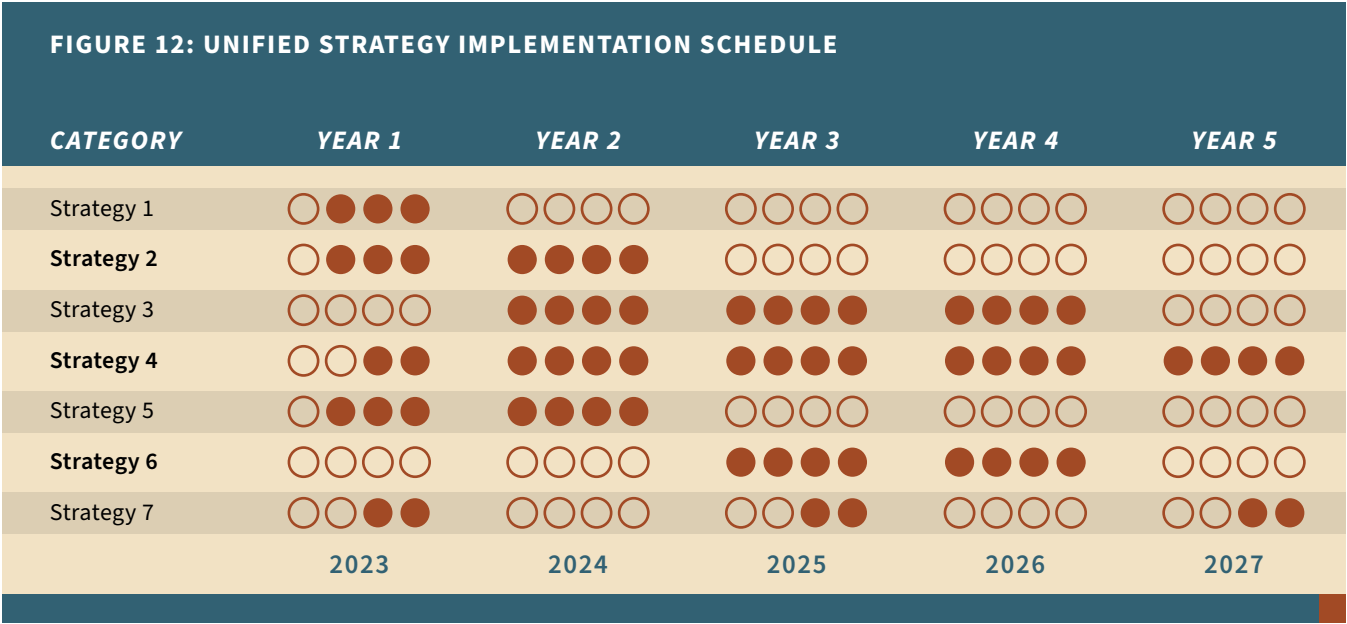
Research and communicate the multiple intersecting benefits, challenges, and opportunities to align outdoor recreation with healthy communities and ecosystems in Washington State (Months 24-48)

- ACTION 6.1** Update the 2003 Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities Fuel Use Survey to:
 - Determine vehicle and ORV miles driven on nonhighway roads and trails;
 - Update the Off-Road, Nonhighway, and Wheeled All-Terrain Vehicle revenue allocation in RCW 46.09;
 - Identify strategies to continue current gas tax supported recreation programs as the state considers a transition to a road usage charge.
- ACTION 6.2** Identify, track, and pursue opportunities to grow and leverage state funding with additional federal and private funds including non-traditional funding programs that benefit health, transportation, education, and community development.
- ACTION 6.3** Better understand and identify opportunities to mitigate any unintended impacts of outdoor recreation.
- ACTION 6.4** Continue updating the *Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State* report every five years with the next update anticipated in 2025.
- ACTION 6.5** Continue monitoring and evaluating the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation and spending time in nature.

STRATEGY 7

Develop, deploy, adaptively manage, and maintain support for emerging programs (odd years)

- Community Forests Program
- Planning for Recreation Access
- Community Outdoor Athletic Facilities



- STRATEGY 1** Update grant evaluation criteria to reflect statewide priorities and goals
- STRATEGY 2** Review and revise grant program policies to adapt to emerging community needs and challenges
- STRATEGY 3** Support, collaborate, and coordinate with federal and state agencies, counties, cities, tribes, and non-governmental organizations to adaptively manage the state’s portfolio of public lands and outdoor recreation facilities
- STRATEGY 4** Maintain and improve data, decision support, and technical assistance resources to address statewide priorities and goals
- STRATEGY 5** Improve and expand community engagement practices
- STRATEGY 6** Research and communicate the multiple intersecting benefits, challenges, and opportunities to align outdoor recreation with healthy communities and ecosystems in Washington State
- STRATEGY 7** Develop, deploy, adaptively manage, and maintain support for emerging programs



IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH GRANT PROGRAMS

This chapter provides an overview of RCO grant programs used to implement the priorities and strategies outlined in Chapter 4. RCO administers these programs either on behalf of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board or other state and federal partners. Each program has unique goals and outcomes identified in state or federal laws and grant program rules.



RCO’S OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

All RCO’s outdoor recreation and land conservation grant programs are competitive, and the selection process is open to the public.⁸³ Staff and panels of volunteers review the grant proposals and rank them, creating prioritized lists that are submitted to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board and ultimately the state Legislature or federal government for funding consideration. Eligible applicants for each program are determined by state law and grant program rules. The application materials, grant program rules, and the selection process are all publicly accessible.

Guidance manuals, available on RCO’s website, display the rules, eligibility requirements, project selection criteria for each funding program. General guidance manuals for common activities funded by grants such as land acquisition, restoration, facility development, and long-term compliance obligations are also available.⁸⁴

Applicants submit grant proposals through PRISM, an online project management tracking system.⁸⁵ Staff review the applications to ensure compliance with program rules and eligibility standards. In most cases, applicants are invited to make presentations to volunteer advisory committees about their projects. Advisory committees, which are made up of residents with experience in the subject area, then evaluate and score the projects based on criteria adopted by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board and published in the grant manuals. The committees weigh the merits of the projects against the criteria, then score the projects. RCO submits the ranked lists to the board for funding consideration.

— Advisory Committees

Every year, more than 200 people from across Washington join RCO staff to volunteer and make a difference for the outdoors.⁸⁶ They serve on advisory committees that evaluate grants, assist applicants, help inform policy decisions, and ultimately guide the future of how Washington’s environment and outdoor recreation destinations are protected and improved.

More information on RCO's volunteer advisory committees including how to volunteer for a committee can be found at: <https://rco.wa.gov/get-involved/volunteer-advisory-committee/>

PRISM LINK:
<https://secure.rco.wa.gov/prism/search/projectsearch.aspx>

— Programs Addressed by this Plan

The programs listed below are organized by program topics: Parks, Recreation and Open Space; Habitat and Conservation Lands; Trail-Based Recreation; Water Access, Boating, and Paddle Sports; Working Lands; and Wetlands and Aquatic Resources. Each program funds a broad spectrum of outdoor recreation or public lands conservation activities. This is not a complete list of funding programs available in Washington State for conservation or recreation projects.

Individual projects often combine, or leverage, funding from different grant programs and categories. For example, a city may apply for Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program funding to develop a playground in a regional park at the same time it applies for Youth Athletic Facilities program funding to construct multi-purpose fields in the same park.

PARKS, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE

The programs listed below provide funding for public lands conservation and developing outdoor recreation opportunities, including local and state parks, playgrounds, and green spaces. The programs provide funding for “leisure activities in parks,” which occupied 6 of the top 20 most popular activities in the 2022 Resident Demand Survey.

THESE ACTIVITIES ARE:

- Hanging out in a Park
- Picnic, Barbecue, or Cookout
- Visiting a Community Garden or Farmers’ Market
- Attending an Outdoor Concert or Special Event
- Visiting a Playground
- Playing Yard Games

In addition to those six activities, these grant programs fund many other outdoor recreation opportunities from this program area, such as hiking and walking, youth and community athletics, swimming, pump tracks and skate parks. Projects funded with these grants often are the most highly developed outdoor spaces that offer close-to-home recreation opportunities.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 1965, Congress created the Land and Water Conservation Fund to provide money to states for outdoor recreation areas. Grants may be used to buy land and develop outdoor recreation facilities for the public, including parks and trails, and to conserve wildlife lands. In 2014, Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program, which provides grants to help urban communities with 30,000 or more people buy or develop land to create or reinvigorate public parks and other outdoor recreation spaces. Priority is given to projects in economically disadvantaged areas that lack outdoor recreation opportunities. The National Park Service is the federal agency that ultimately receives and approves funding for projects. Funding comes from offshore oil and gas drilling royalties. The federal government distributes funding to states by a formula based on population and land area. Typical projects funded include buying land and developing or renovating outdoor recreation facilities.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE BELOW:

- Local governments
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$14 million ⁸⁷
More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/land-and-water-conservation-fund>



Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

The state Legislature created the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program in 1990 to: 1) Acquire valuable recreation and habitat lands before they are lost to development and 2) Develop recreation areas for a growing population. The program is funded from the sale of state bonds and comes to RCO through the biennial capital budget. Funding is distributed through three accounts: the Outdoor Recreation Account, Habitat Conservation Account, and Farm and Forest Account.

The Outdoor Recreation Account is the state’s largest grant program for local parks and many other types of active outdoor recreation. This account is divided into five categories: Local Parks, State Parks, State Lands Development and Renovation, Trails, and Water Access.⁸⁸ Each category receives a portion of the funding based on a formula established in state law.⁸⁹ Typical projects include buying land for a park; building ball fields, sport courts, and regional athletic complexes; renovating community parks; developing regional trails; building waterfront parks; and developing state-owned lands.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local governments
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

All land acquired or developed with these grants must remain in recreation or conservation status forever, protecting the State’s investment and ensuring Washington’s natural heritage remains intact.

Local Parks Category

Grants in this category provide funding for parks and may be used to buy land or develop or renovate land or facilities for parks.

State Lands Development and Renovation Category

Grants in this category are available only to the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources for development and renovation of outdoor recreation facilities on their existing recreation lands.

State Parks Category

Grants in this category are available only to the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission for acquisition and development of state parks.

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$40 million (Outdoor Recreation Account)
More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/Washington-wildlife-and-recreation-program-recreation/>

— Youth Athletic Facilities

The Youth Athletic Facilities grant program was created to offer funding to acquire and improve athletic fields, sports courts, and other community athletic facilities. The grants must be used for outdoor facilities for playing sports or participating in competitive athletics and exclude playgrounds, tot lots, vacant lots, open or undeveloped fields, and open areas used for non-athletic play. The program’s primary goal is to enhance facilities that serve people through the age of 18 but compatible, multi-generation use is strongly encouraged. Washington voters created the program in 1998 as part of Referendum 48, which provided funding to build the Seattle Seahawks’ stadium. After the initial funding was spent, the Washington State Legislature continued to provide funding for this program through the sale of state bonds.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Cities
- Counties
- Nonprofits involved in community athletics
- Park districts
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$11.2 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/youth-athletic-facilities/>



— Firearms and Archery Range Recreation

Recognizing a need for public facilities, the Legislature created the Firearms and Archery Range Recreation program in 1990 to provide funding for places where gun and bow enthusiasts can practice safely. The program funds projects that acquire, develop, and renovate firearm and archery ranges and practice facilities. The program’s goal is to increase access to firearm and archery ranges by law enforcement, the public with concealed pistol or hunting licenses, and people enrolled in firearm or hunter safety education classes.

Funding for this program comes from a portion of fees collected for concealed pistol license permits. Funding may be used for land acquisition, development or renovation of range facilities, noise abatement and safety improvements, and liability insurance. To qualify for grants, ranges must be open regularly to hunter safety classes, law enforcement, and the public.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local governments
- Nonprofit shooting organizations
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$630,000

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/firearms-and-archery-range-recreation-program/>

HABITAT AND CONSERVATION LANDS

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s Habitat Conservation Account is RCO’s most significant funding source for wildlife habitat conservation on public lands. The program is funded from the sale of state bonds and comes to RCO through the biennial capital budget. The program provides funding for a broad range of land conservation efforts, from conserving natural areas near urbanizing areas to protecting the most pristine and unique collections of plants in the state, including some of last remaining plant species in the world.

According to the 2022 Resident Demand Survey, 85 percent of Washington residents participated in wildlife or nature viewing in the past year and 73 percent of respondents to the Experience Survey said they wanted more access to wildlife viewing and birdwatching opportunities, while 51 percent said they wanted more access to hunting, gathering, and fishing opportunities.

The programs in this account fund conservation and restoration of some of the most important fish and wildlife habitat in the state and create opportunities for people to observe, research, and connect with the natural world.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Cities, counties, towns
- Federally recognized Indian tribes
- Nonprofit nature conservancies
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$40 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/Washington-wildlife-and-recreation-program-habitat/>

— Critical Habitat Category

This category provides grants to acquire habitat for wildlife including habitat for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species. Funding also may be used for development of public access facilities such as parking areas, wildlife viewing areas, and nature trails.

— Urban Wildlife Habitat Category

These grants provide funding to acquire or develop quality native habitat near urban and urbanizing communities. A primary goal of this category is to increase human’s interaction with nature by providing close-to-home opportunities for nature-based activities. Other goals are to connect habitats, increase landscape permeability, enhance resilience to future climatic impacts, and protect the benefits provided by nature, such as clean air and water.

— Natural Areas Category

These grants provide funding to acquire areas set aside to protect high-quality, representative, native ecosystems; unique plant or animal communities; habitat for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species; rare geological features; or features of significant scientific or educational value.

— State Lands Restoration and Enhancement Category

These grants provide funding to restore or enhance habitat and natural areas owned by the State Parks and Recreation Commission, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, or the Department of Natural Resources. Restoration means a project that brings a site back to its historic function as part of a natural ecosystem or improving the ecological functionality of a site. Enhancement means to improve the ecological functionality of a site.

TRAIL-BASED RECREATION

RCO administers three grant programs dedicated to recreational trails and backcountry recreation opportunities: The Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities program, the Recreational Trails Program, and the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s Trails Category. These programs typically fund projects that build or maintain motorized and nonmotorized trail systems, day-use areas, campgrounds, and other outdoor recreation opportunities that provide a backcountry or wildland experience. RCO is required by state law to maintain a statewide trails plan and a Nonhighway Off-Road Vehicle Activities program plan as part of the state’s comprehensive outdoor recreation plan.⁹⁰

A remarkable 90 percent of Washington residents regularly walk on trails. Road cycling, backpacking, running or jogging, and snowshoeing also are among the top 20 activities for statewide participation. Of the Experience Survey participants, 78 percent said they “very much” wanted more access to non-motorized trails, 81 percent said they either “somewhat” or “very much” wanted more opportunities to access snow parks and snow trails.

The programs highlighted here provide funding to buy land, plan, develop, and maintain trail systems that connect communities and people with the natural world.

Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities program

This program provides funding to develop and manage trails and facilities that support opportunities such as cross-country skiing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain bicycling, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, motorcycling, and riding all-terrain and four-wheel drive vehicles. Funding for this program comes from off-road vehicle permits and part of the state gas tax paid by users of off-road vehicles and non-highway roads (roads not supported by state fuel taxes).

State law requires that 70 percent of the funding be used for planning, acquiring, developing, and maintaining recreation facilities. Further, this funding is split equally between nonmotorized, motorized, and nonhighway road projects (projects that fund campgrounds and day-use areas). Another 30 percent of the funding to the program is reserved for education and enforcement projects that encourage environmentally responsible use of the outdoors and for helping minimize conflict between visitors through positive management techniques.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local agencies
- Special purpose districts
- Native American tribes
- State agencies
- Federal agencies
- Nonprofit off-road vehicle organizations

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$10 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/nonhighway-and-off-road-vehicle-activities-program-trails/>



In addition to funding RCO distributes through grants, funding is allocated to state natural resources agencies through a formula established in state law. The Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and State Parks and Recreation Commission each receive a portion of the overall revenue collected in this account. RCO hosts an advisory committee that plays a special role in administering the program and advising these agencies about the allocation of funds received.⁹¹

It should be noted that Washington State is currently considering a transition from a motor vehicle fuel tax to a Road Usage Charge funding model to support the upkeep of state roads and bridges.⁹² This transition has the potential to severely impact recreation programs like NOVA that are funded through the motor vehicle fuel tax. RCO continues to monitor the potential impacts from this transition and support strategies to maintain current gas tax supported recreation programs.

Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program provides federal funding to maintain trails and trail-related facilities. In Washington State, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board has targeted these funds to support maintenance of trails that offer a backcountry experience. As public agencies face funding shortages, maintenance often is delayed or eliminated and this funding is vital to keeping trails open to the public. Typical projects include maintaining and rerouting trails, building trail-side and trailhead facilities, and running environmental education and trail safety programs.

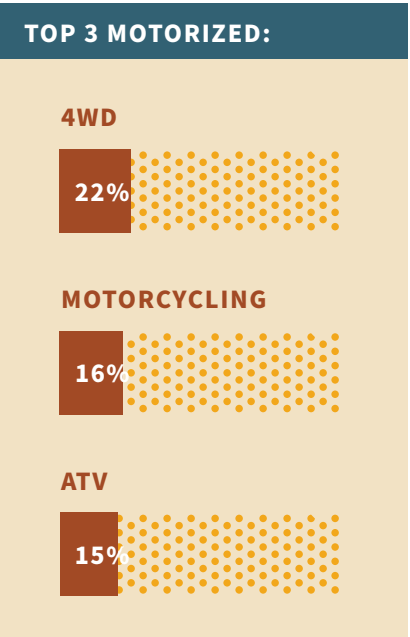
This is an assistance program of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration and funds come from federal gasoline taxes attributed to recreational, non-highway uses. States must use 30 percent of their funds for motorized trail uses, 30 percent for nonmotorized trail uses, and 40 percent for diverse trail uses. Diverse motorized projects (such as snowmobile and motorcycle) or diverse nonmotorized projects (such as pedestrian and equestrian) may satisfy two of these categories at the same time.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local governments
- Federal agencies
- Nonprofits
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$3.6 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/recreational-trails-program/>



— Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s Trails Category

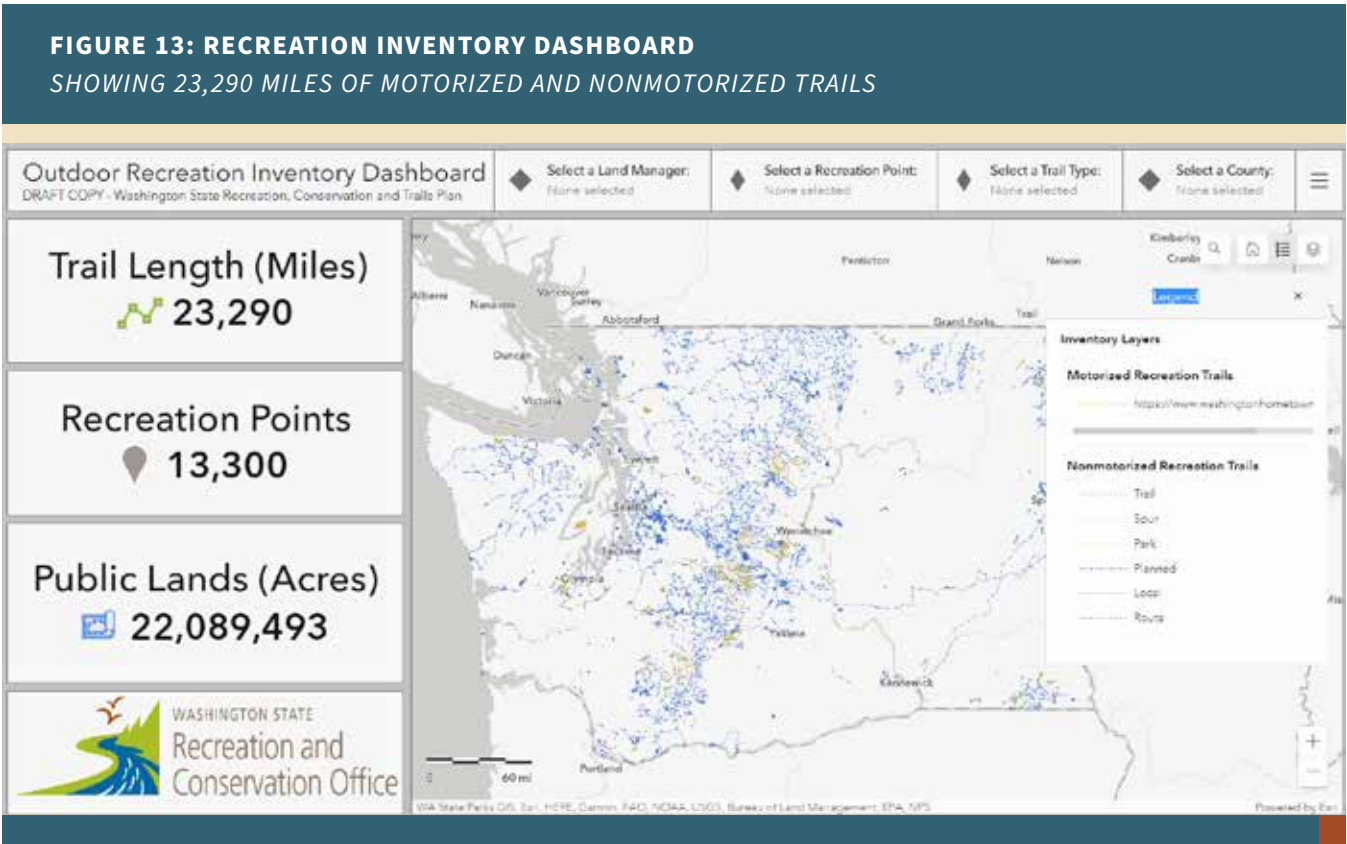
This program funds projects to develop trails and trail-related facilities. Grants provide for projects with the primary intent to acquire, develop, or renovate pedestrian, equestrian, bicycle, or cross-country ski trails. The program is funded from the sale of state bonds and comes to RCO through the biennial capital budget. Projects may include land or facilities, such as trailheads; parking, rest, picnic, or view areas; and restrooms that directly support a public trail. The intent of this funding source is to acquire, develop, or renovate statewide, regional, and community-oriented recreational trails that link communities or other trails or provide access to destinations of interest to recreationists. Trails in this category must be for nonmotorized use.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local governments
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$7.8 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/Washington-wildlife-and-recreation-program-recreation/>

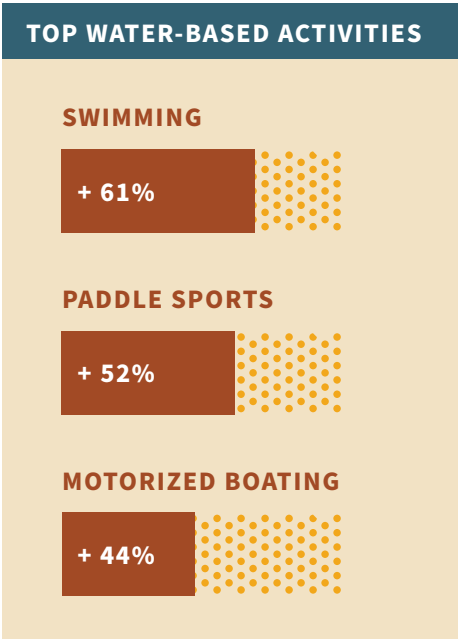


WATER ACCESS, BOATING, AND PADDLE SPORTS

Washington is fortunate to have abundant water resources across the state. From the marine coastlines of the Pacific Ocean and Puget Sound to the freshwater lakes and rivers of the Cascade Mountains, eastern forests, and prairies, water-based recreation is important to Washington residents. RCO administers three grant programs that primarily fund water-based recreation and boating opportunities.

Swimming (61% participation) and paddle sports (52% participation) are among the top 10 activities with the highest statewide participation rates. Recreational boating continues to be an important outdoor activity in the state. Nearly 44 percent of Washington residents participated in some form of motorized boating in the past year while 14 percent went sailing and 11 percent went jet skiing or used another form of personal watercraft.

The programs here fund land acquisition and development of swimming or boating facilities to access to water-based recreation activities. This can include development and renovation of swimming pools, natural beaches, motorized and non-motorized boat launches, guest moorage, and marina facilities for large boats.



— Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s Water Access Category

This category funds projects that predominately provide physical access to shorelines. Projects acquire land and develop facilities for nonmotorized, water-related recreation activities such as boating, fishing, swimming, and beachcombing. The program is funded from the sale of state bonds and comes to RCO through the biennial capital budget. Projects may include land and facilities that support water-dependent recreation such as parking, restrooms, picnic areas, access trails, fishing piers, platforms, swim beaches, boat access facilities, and water trails for nonmotorized watercraft such as canoes and kayaks. The program is funded from the sale of general obligation bonds and comes to RCO through the biennial state capital construction budget.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Cities, counties, towns
- Special purpose districts
- Tribes
- State agencies

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$3.9 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/Washington-wildlife-and-recreation-program-recreation/>

— Boating Facilities Program

RCO’s original grant program was created in 1964 with the establishment of the agency. The Boating Facilities Program provides grants to acquire, develop, and renovate facilities for motorized boats and other watercraft that includes launching ramps, guest moorage, and support facilities. This program was created to ensure there always would be places for people to boat in Washington. Funding comes from state gasoline taxes paid by boaters and is divided equally for projects from state and local agencies.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local governments
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$14 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/boating-facilities-program/>

— Boating Infrastructure Grants

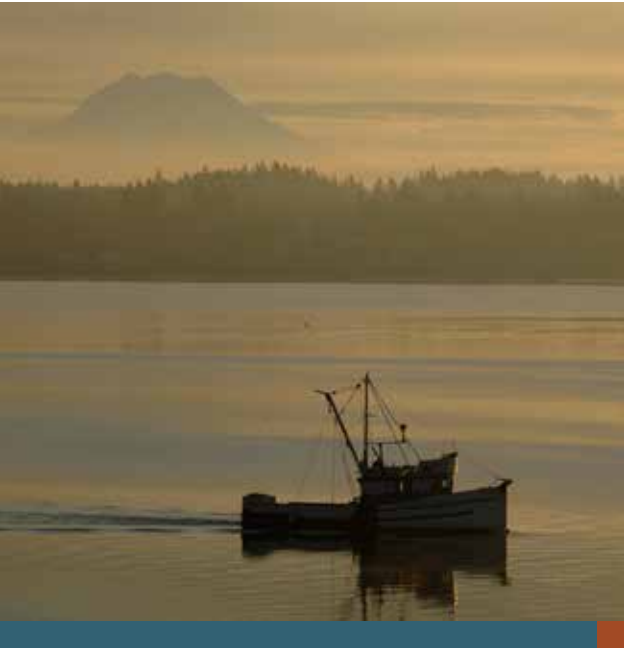
Congress authorized the Boating Infrastructure Grant program under the Sportfishing and Boating Safety Act of 1998. The program provides funds to states for development, renovation, and maintenance of boating facilities for recreational vessels 26 feet and longer. Funds also may be used to provide information and enhance boater education. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service within the U.S. Department of the Interior manages this federal grant program. The Service ultimately receives and approves all projects. Funds for this program come from a portion of the federal Aquatic Resources Trust Fund.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local agencies
- Nonprofit organizations active in recreational boating
- Qualified private marina operators
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$2.2 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/boating-infrastructure-grant-program/>



WETLANDS AND AQUATIC RESOURCES

Wetlands in Washington serve multiple important functions. They provide critical ecosystem services, opportunities for recreation and environmental education, and priority habitat for sensitive plant and wildlife species. The Washington State Department of Ecology maintains *Washington’s Wetland Program Plan* and is the primary state agency with jurisdiction over wetlands.⁹³ Ecology’s wetlands plan is organized around six core elements based on the Environmental Protection Agency’s guidance for effective wetland programs. The core elements are regulation, monitoring and assessment, voluntary restoration and protection, water quality standards, education and outreach, and sustainable financing.

RCO supports and collaborates regularly with the Department of Ecology. The administration and management of the Wetland Program Plan is a critically important component of the State’s natural resource conservation efforts. RCO plays an important role in implementing the voluntary restoration and protection element of Washington State’s Wetland Program Plan. RCO administers grant programs that support voluntary wetlands restoration and protection, many of which were created to benefit the state’s salmon recovery efforts.

RCO hosts the Governor’s Salmon Recovery Office which maintains the State’s Salmon Recovery Strategy⁹⁴ and has an entire division that is uniquely focused on supporting the State’s habitat restoration efforts through the Salmon Recovery Funding Board. RCO’s salmon recovery funding programs are outside the scope of this planning effort. However, two programs that benefit aquatic lands conservation and restoration managed by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board are within this plan’s scope. These programs are the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account and the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s Riparian Protection Category.

Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account

The Legislature created the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account in 1984 as a way to invest revenue raised from Washington’s shorelines into projects meant to preserve and restore these valuable lands. Aquatic lands are all tidelands, shore lands, harbor areas, and the beds of navigable waters. These lands were dedicated at statehood for maritime trade, transportation, agriculture, and commerce, and are vital to the state’s economy. These grants are funded entirely by money raised by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources from activities on those lands, such as leases to marinas on state-owned waterfront sites and the sale of harvest rights for geoduck clams. The grants may be used to buy, improve, or protect aquatic lands for public purposes. Grants also may be used to provide or improve public access to aquatic lands. The program is guided by the multiple goals of re-establishing naturally, self-sustaining ecological functions; providing people with access to the water; and increasing public awareness of aquatic lands as a finite natural resource and irreplaceable public heritage.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Local agencies
- State agencies
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$9 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/aquatic-lands-enhancement-account/>

Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s Riparian Protection Category

This category provides grants to acquire land next to a water body or its submerged lands. By law, riparian habitat may include shorelines, near-shore marine habitat, estuaries, lakes, wetlands, streams, or rivers. Projects must include land acquisition but also may include restoration. The program is funded from the sale of general obligation bonds through the biennial state capital construction budget.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Cities, counties, towns
- Nonprofit nature conservancies
- Special purpose districts
- State agencies
- Tribes

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$5.9 million

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/Washington-wildlife-and-recreation-program-habitat/>



WORKING LANDS: FARMS AND FORESTS

Washington’s working farms and forests are a hard-driving engine of local economies and provide food, fuel, and building materials that drive the state. However, Washington’s growing population and expanding urban footprint increasingly threatens the precious remaining working farms and forests.

Working lands provide local food security, opportunities for recreation, and wildlife habitat. Examples of working forests that support recreation and wildlife habitat include the Department of Natural Resource’s Teanaway Community Forest near Ellensburg, which hosts campgrounds, trails, and nearly 400 miles of free-flowing streams.

Community Forests Program

One of RCO’s newest grant programs, the Community Forests Program was created in 2020 under legislative direction. The program balances the many benefits forests provide – from providing money from use of the land, to safeguarding against climate and other environmental changes, to providing opportunities for recreation, education, and cultural enrichment. As Washington’s population continues to grow and forestlands increasingly are threatened by development, the Community Forests Program is a valuable tool for preserving working lands for the benefit of Washingtonians now and into the future. Grants from this program may be used to acquire land, restore forest health or wildlife habitat, and develop recreational facilities. Funding for this program comes from the sale of general obligation bonds through the biennial state capital budget.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Cities, counties, and towns
- Nonprofit nature conservancy organizations
- Special purpose districts
- Tribes
- State agencies (in partnership with one or more of the above groups)

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$16 million (awarded for the first time in the 2021-23)

More information is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/community-forests-program/>



Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s Farmland and Forestland Preservation Categories

In 2005, the Legislature expanded Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s land protection goal by creating the Farmland Preservation Category to protect the state’s valuable agricultural land for future farming. In 2016, the Legislature again expanded the program to include preservation of working forests that also provide habitat for wildlife, environmental benefits, and public access. These two programs fund conservation easements to help keep working lands in private ownership while protecting conservation values and rural ways of life. In some cases, these grants also may be used to restore conserved lands. Funding for this program comes from the sale of general obligation bonds and through the biennial state capital budget.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS ARE:

- Cities
- Counties
- Nonprofit nature conservancies
- State Conservation Commission

AVERAGE BIENNIAL FUNDING AVAILABLE: \$7.9 million for farmland and \$880,000 for forestland

More information on the forestland category is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/Washington-wildlife-and-recreation-program-forestland-preservation/>

More information on the farmland category is at <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/washington-wildlife-and-recreation-program-farmland-preservation/>

OTHER WASHINGTON STATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

While RCO is one source of funding in Washington State for outdoor recreation and conservation projects, many other funding programs are managed by other agencies across state government. Some of programs may compliment and be used to leverage RCO administered grant programs. Project proponents are encouraged to search the Washington Fund Directory for information on programs that could contribute to the success of their projects.

<https://www.wafunddirectory.wa.gov>



CONCLUSION

PARTNERSHIPS ARE CRUCIAL

While the responsibility for creating the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan rests with RCO, implementing it will require the efforts of the collective outdoor recreation and conservation community across the state. RCO is a financial partner, but not a land manager. The difficult work of acquiring, building, and maintaining the state’s complex portfolio of public lands and outdoor recreation assets is the work of many federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, and nonprofit partners. In addition, every year thousands of individual volunteers spend countless hours to help agencies and nonprofits maintain, improve, and keep Washington’s outdoor recreation facilities open and accessible to residents and visitors. Washington would not have such a rich history of outdoor recreation and public lands conservation without the significant efforts of the collective outdoor recreation and conservation community.



VISION 2050

Washington State is blessed with abundant natural resources and a rich tradition of outdoor recreation and public land and water conservation. Unfortunately, increasing urbanization and population growth is leading to loss of these important landscapes, resulting in detrimental impacts to natural, cultural, and outdoor recreation resources. Impacts from recreation on natural and cultural resources, habitat lands, and endangered species are a critical concern. These impacts will only be compounded by a changing global climate. Without sufficient funding for planning, development, adaptation, and management of outdoor recreation sites and infrastructure, precious resources may be lost forever. Maintaining a quality recreational experience while protecting natural, historic, and cultural resources is one of the most important issues Washington State faces in the coming years.

At the same time, land managers struggle with staff capacity, maintaining resources, the ability to raise local funds, and competition for limited grant funding. Other identified challenges include coordinating activities with multiple land managers across large landscapes and developing facilities that adapt to evolving user needs. Ensuring existing funding is sustainable, improving opportunities to access funding, exploring new funding sources, and coordinating data and map resources can help with these challenges, but cannot be done in isolation. RCO is one partner in the Washington State outdoor recreation and conservation community. It will take many partners to ensure the next generation of Washington residents continue to have high-quality, sustainable outdoor recreation experiences.

The National Park Service has a current 5-year strategic plan that views parks as an essential component of a “healthy, just and sustainable world.” “Healthy Parks, Healthy People is a global movement...to advance the fact that all parks -- urban and wildland are cornerstones of people’s physical, mental, and spiritual health, social wellbeing, and sustainability of the planet”⁹⁵

This plan envisions a sustainable system of parks, trails, public lands, secure wildlife habitat, and thriving working lands that support meaningful access to recreation opportunities and benefits for all Washington residents now and for future generations.

Washington State hosts a broad spectrum of outdoor recreation experiences that span urban and rural landscapes and waterways and connects people in all the places they live, work, and play. Outdoor recreation supports physical health, mental wellbeing, environmental stewardship, economic prosperity, social cohesion, active transportation, climate resiliency, and many other public benefits. Washington State’s investments in recreational assets are essential to quality of life and critical components of the State’s infrastructure. This plan envisions a sustainable system of parks, trails, public lands, secure wildlife habitat, and thriving working lands that support meaningful access to recreation opportunities and benefits for all Washington residents now and for future generations.

LIST OF APPENDICES

- APPENDIX 1Glossary of Terms and Acronyms
- APPENDIX 22022 Assessment of Outdoor Recreation Demand Final Report
- APPENDIX 3Outdoor Recreation Experience Survey Final Report
- APPENDIX 4Recreation Provider Survey Final Report
- APPENDIX 5Tribal Natural Resources Survey Final Report
- APPENDIX 6Mapped Inventory Service Area Analysis Methodology
- APPENDIX 7Public Comment Summary
- VIEW HEREhttps://wa-rco-scorp-2023-wa-rco.hub.arcgis.com

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Terms

Definitions of select terms used in this plan.

- ACTIVE TRANSPORTATIONUsing a human-scale and often human-powered means of travel to get from one place to another; includes walking, bicycling, using a mobility assistive or adaptive device such as a wheelchair or walker, using micromobility devices, and using electric-assist devices such as e-bikes and e-foot scooters.
- COMMUNITYIn this plan community is defined in the broadest sense. Communities of place can mean a political jurisdiction or other geographic boundary that identifies a collective group of people. Communities of practice can mean formal or informal associations of people organized across political or geographic boundaries for the purpose of advancing a common interest or addressing a shared concern.
- EQUITYThe act of developing, strengthening, and supporting procedural and outcome fairness in systems, procedures, and resource distribution mechanisms to create equitable (not equal) opportunity for all people. Equity is distinct from equality which refers to everyone having the same treatment without accounting for differing needs or circumstances. Equity has a focus on eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of historically and currently oppressed groups.
- FOUNDATIONAL OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIESOutdoor recreation facilities that support the most popular activities in the state, or those exceeding 30 percent participation in the Assessment of Outdoor Recreation Demand. The first set of foundational opportunities was identified for RCO’s 2019 study, Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance.
- MEANINGFUL ACCESSAll people have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of public lands and outdoor recreation facilities, spaces, programs, and services that support their mental, physical, social, and environmental wellbeing.
- MULTI-MODAL TRAILSMulti-modal transportation networks include bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that provides access to jobs, education, health care, recreation destinations, and other essential services in urban, suburban and rural areas. Multi-modal trials, also known as shared use paths, are one component of a multi-modal transportation network.

- OVERBURDENED COMMUNITIESA geographic area where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts, and includes, but is not limited to, highly impacted communities as defined in RCW 19.405.020.40⁹⁶
- PUBLIC LANDSAreas of land open to the public and managed by federal, state, county, or municipal governments.⁹⁷ In some cases, land acquired with public funds by private entities, such as a nonprofit land conservancy, may also have public access requirements and are considered to be public lands for the purpose of the outdoor recreational inventory developed for this plan.
- RECREATION OPPORTUNITY SPECTRUMA diverse range of outdoor recreation opportunities from which people can derive a variety of experiences. This is a managerial framework that accounts for the social, managerial, and physical attributes of a place that, when combined, provide a distinct set of recreation opportunities.⁹⁸
- VULNERABLE POPULATIONSPopulation groups that may be more likely to have adverse health outcomes in response to environmental harms.⁹⁹

ACRONYMS

Listing of common acronyms used throughout this plan

- All Terrain Vehicle (ATV)
- American Community Survey (ACS)
- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA)
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)
- Boating Facilities Program (BFP)
- Boating Infrastructure Grants (BIG)
- Community Forests Program (CFP)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Firearms and Archery Range Recreation program (FARR)
- Four Wheel Drive Vehicle (4WD)
- Interagency Committee on Outdoor Recreation (IAC)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- National Park Service (NPS)
- No Child Left Inside (NCLI)
- Nonhighway Off-Road Vehicle Activities program (NOVA)
- Outdoor Learning Grants (OLG)
- Personal Mobility Device (PMD)
- Planning For Recreational Access (PRA)
- Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO)
- Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB)
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
- Revised Code of Washington (RCW)
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
- United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
- United States Forest Service (USFS)
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
- Washington State Department of Health (DOH)
- Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
- Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM)
- Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (Parks)
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)
- Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF)

APPENDIX 6: MAPPED INVENTORY SERVICE AREA ANALYSIS

Methodology summary

PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION *Where are critical gaps in public land, trails, and water access?*

- STEP 1 *Identify and define measures of access to critical outdoor recreation infrastructure*
- STEP 2 *Identify specific places within the state that have access to recreation areas and points within defined measures*
- STEP 3 *Identify specific places within the state that do NOT have access within defined measures.*
- STEP 4 *Identify desired outcomes, measures and indicators for addressing access gaps (e.g., socioeconomic, health outcomes, community financial capacity, and staff capacity for grant seeking, etc.)*

ASSUMPTIONS:

Access measure does not account for quality or condition of the facility
Access does not reflect whether the recreational needs of the community are fulfilled
Accessibility through safe routes and modes of transportation have not been assessed

ANALYSIS QUESTIONS:

- 1 Using the map inventory, what recreation features are highest priority for gap analysis?
- 2 For which features is a multi-modal metric relevant? What features most affect urban quality of life?
 - *Multi-modal buffer (10-minute walk, 3-mile bike ride, 15-minute drive). Aligns with WSDOT active transportation standards.*

RCO, WITH GUIDANCE FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEES, ESTABLISHED SERVICE AREAS FOR:

- 1 *Public lands (areas)*
 - *Parks and open space (any size) using a multi-modal service area measure*
 - *proxy for Nature and Culture, and Leisure Activities*
 - *State and federal lands greater than 500 acres using single service area measure*
 - *proxy for Outdoor Adventures, and Hunting and Shooting Sports*
- 2 *Athletic facilities and schools with athletic facilities (points) using service area methodology from the 2021 Physical Activities Taskforce report*
 - *10 minute walk (urban)*
 - *10 minute drive (rural)*
 - *45 minute drive – regional athletic complex*
- 3 *Trail and trailhead access (points and trail-road junctions)*
 - *Nonmotorized trail access using multi-modal service area measure*
 - *Motorized trail access using single 45-minute service area measure. A secondary analysis developed an aspirational 30-minute access goal.*

- 4 *Water Access (points)*
 - *Water access generally using multi-modal service area measure*
 - *Boating access using single service area measure*
 - *Fishing access using single service area measure*
- 5 *Camping (points) using a single service area measure*
- 6 *Winter Recreation (points) access using a single service area measure, integrating an aspirational 30 minute access measure.*

MULTI-MODAL ACCESS MEASURE

Graduated access analysis based on multiple modes of transportation access.

Measures included:

- *¼ mile, or 10-minute walk*
- *3-mile, or 15-minute bike ride*
- *5 mile, or 15-minute drive/transit ride*

CITATIONS

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