

TUESDAY 6/25/2024 - ORC Summit, Ellensburg

WELCOME

Opening remarks from Co-Chair Representative Barkis and Representative Dent. Also present was Senator Warnick (who gave remarks during the previous day's tour).

OUTDOOR EDUCATION WITH KITTITAS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION NETWORK (KEEN)

Jill Scheffer – President, KEEN

- Has worked to build support for an interpretive center
- KEEN holds a variety of outdoor education programming for kids
 - 6-week summer camps at Helen McCabe State Park
 - Year-round adventures for older kids, travel around the state
- Holds regular plantings and weed management activities at Helen McCabe Park
- Received two No Child Left Inside grants early on, but hasn't been successful since then. Could be due to a lack of racial diversity in Kittitas county and lower overall population?

Comments

- A future caucus agenda item could be to review the distribution of funding of the NCLI program, RCO could do this analysis.
- Some schools are cutting outdoor education, that shows the importance of sharing the impact that these program have.

AGENCY LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEWS

Recreation and Conservation Office: Brock Milliern

- In 2023 RCO requested \$135M for WA Wildlife and Recreation Program, the coalition (WWRC) advocated for \$150M, we received \$120M, which was a high-water mark. The 2025 budget request numbers for WWRC and other programs will be set by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board in August.
- Youth athletics
 - RCO is seeing increased requests related to youth athletics facilities. The agency received preapplications for Community Youth Athletic Facilities (COAF) totaling over \$165M. There is currently \$12M available (down from \$43M due to a sweep from the legislature in 2024).
 - Youth Athletics Facilities (YAF) program has received 2.5 - 3 times the value of request this year over past years, illustrating significant need.
- Passed out map showing \$20M investment in Kittitas county from 1966 to 2022. A significant amount of projects are maintenance.
- Responses to comments/questions
 - Trails that are used primarily for competition were eligible in the COAF program, such as cross-country running or mountain biking trails, this is broader than what has been eligible in the YAF program.

State Parks: Owen Rowe

Legislative items will go to the State Parks Commission in July for a decision on what will be officially requested.

- Parks is considering changes to the limit in camping stays and is currently collecting public comment on a concept that would limit stays to 10 days in a 30-day period and 90 days in a

calendar year. This will impact 1% of visitors but could help alleviate challenges with visitors who take residence in parks.

- Cama Beach State Park is at risk from sea level rise, has a failed septic system, and other backlogged needs. Parks is holding a public meeting on July 15 to gather input. The Commission will then make a decision about how to address these challenges at their July meeting.
- Operating budget request items may include:
 - Funding to alleviate inflation pressure on the agency's fund balance
 - Addressing ADA compliance issues
 - Additional FTEs in the parks to meet public request for more contact with staff
 - Planning for interpretive centers/services
 - Funding to match last biennium's NCLI investment
 - Website upgrades, such as interactive maps and language translation
 - Staffing for marine buoy work
- Capital Budget request may include:
 - \$120M request, 80% is preservation of what they already have and 20% for new projects.
- Request legislation items may include:
 - Continuing to pursue the reinvesting account revenue bill (2024's SB 5902)
 - Increasing limits on lodge lease at Saint Edwards State Park
 - Increasing registration fee for snowmobiles (currently collecting public feedback)
- Responses to comments/questions:
 - Current camping stay limits have long caused issues for parks staff. Reducing limits could push use elsewhere, but people at State Parks are often looking for services that are not available elsewhere on state lands.
 - All options are still on the table at Cama Beach State Park, including moving buildings at
 - Interpretive staff are an important part of user experiences

Department of Natural Resources: Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn and Andrea Martin

Requests are still being prioritized internally but are expected to be fairly conservative due to unknown future of Climate Commitment Act funding and that DNR will have a new Commissioner of Public Lands in January.

- Recreation program
 - No recreation operating request in 2025
 - Capital requests may include funding for PugetSound Corps and recreation development projects
- Conservation program
 - Capital request for the Trust Land Transfer Program
 - Operating request may include funding for Natural Heritage Program ecological integrity assessment and Youth Outreach & Education Program to develop workforce

Department of Fish and Wildlife: Cynthia Wilkerson

Requests are still being prioritized internally

- Agency request legislation
 - Increasing license plate renewal fee by \$10 to better fund biodiversity work
 - Modify violations from criminal to civil

- The agency will be building support and talking with legislators about future potential changes to the recreational immunity statute, possibly in 2026
- Capital budget request may include:
 - Funding for previous commitments (including several hatcheries, Duckabush restoration) and pier 86 restoration in Seattle
- Operating budget request may include:
 - Operating costs for newly acquired lands and new restoration projects
 - Policy stewardship
 - Funding to implement their recreation strategy
 - Ecological assessments

BREAK

BOATING SAFETY PLUG

Rob Sendak, State Parks

- Park's boating education program is partnering with the Seattle Mariners on a lifejacket campaign
- Parks is also exploring ideas to strengthen lifejacket requirements for canoes, kayaks, and stand up paddle boards.

DEI IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

Reco Bemby and Brit Kramer, Big Tent Coalition and Outdoor Equity Coalition

- The Big Tent Coalition developed the Outdoor Equity Coalition as a need emerged of incorporating equity in outdoor policy and the work that agencies are doing
- This new Coalition aims to amplify voices and share the work that agencies are doing with organizations and communities. This will help communities understand their ability to drive policy, and the importance of doing so
- Highlighted importance of partnering and collaborating with organizations regarding budget development and policy development

FUEL TAX IMPACT ON OUTDOOR RECREATION

Leah Dobey, Recreation and Conservation Office

- The state collects fuel taxes to fund transportation, however some of that fuel is used in places or for activities that aren't supported by those transportation services (4x4s, ATVs, snowmobiles, boats, driving to trailheads).
- To account for this, 1% of fuel tax revenue is distributed to benefit ORV and nonhighway activities and an additional 1% to support boating. Another portion is refunded to benefit snowmobile activities. These refunds are distributed to RCO, DNR, WDFW, and State Parks at various rates.
- With more fuel-efficient vehicles, gas tax revenue is declining, so the state is considering an alternative to the gas tax, namely, a Road Usage Charge, or RUC. Under this model, rather than paying tax on fuel purchased, drivers would pay a rate based on the number of miles driven.
- In the near term, the legislature and transportation commission will consider how and which vehicles would be subject to a RUC, how miles would be reported, how privacy is protected, and what a RUC rate would be. In the longer term (3-5 years), the allocation of such revenues will be addressed.

- If outdoor recreation is not considered at the onset, it could be left out of the equation of a fuel tax replacement, and difficult to reestablish funds for such purposes. Therefore, it's important to spread understanding of the tremendous impact that fuel tax revenue has on recreation. And updated fuel use study could help inform this work.

Comments

- Implementing a RUC is much more complicated than a gas tax and is still a ways off, but is viable.
- Agencies should quantify the specific value of fuel tax that funds their programs and whether they've seen a decline already. Consider the narrative of how to describe the recreation that is provided with tax revenue.

FOR GOOD OF THE ORDER:

- Ideas were shared for potential changes to recreation tabs and items those could be used to pay for. Groups can suggest self-imposed fees to fund benefits to their use type.
- The future is unknown, but change is good, but it's important to keep communicating!
- The caucus intends to meet in person several times next session.
- The planning group will work to set up an ORC meeting in early December to debrief on the November election and budgets going into session.

ADJOURN