



## State Highlights in Conservation: Washington

### Profile of State Program(s)

**Washington 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 best of the state's wildlife habitat and farmland, and help return salmon from near extinction.

To achieve this mission, the RCO manages a variety of grant programs that focus on building the state's communities and protecting its diverse wild areas. These grants are primarily administered by two separate funding boards within RCO, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board.

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) was created in 1999 by the state legislature to grant funds to protect or restore salmon habitat and assist related activities and receives funding from the state and federal governments. Eligible recipients must provide at least 15 percent matching funds in either cash or in-kind contributions and include municipal subdivisions (cities, towns, counties, and port, park and recreation, conservation, and school districts), tribal governments, private landowners and state agencies.

For the years 2015-2017, the SRFB will work with a \$4 million operating budget and a \$222.1 million capital budget to administer the Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program, Family Forest Fish Passage Program, and Salmon Recovery Program.

Similarly, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) helps finance recreation and conservation projects throughout the state. The eight-member board consists of five citizens appointed by the Governor and three state agency members. Since it was established by citizen initiative 215 in 1964, the board has improved the state's quality of life through its investment of public funds in parks, trails, beaches, boating facilities, wildlife habitat, and natural areas.

Over the years 2015-2017, the RCFB will work with a \$6.7 million operating budget and a \$141.2 million capital budget to administer the programs listed below.

- ALEA – Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account

- BFP – Boating Facilities Program
- BIG – Boating Infrastructure Grant Program
- FARR – Firearms and Archery Range Recreation Program
- LWCF – Land and Water Conservation Fund
- NOVA – Non-Highway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities Program
- RTP – Recreational Trails Program
- WWRP – Washington Wildlife Recreation Program
- YAF – Youth Athletic Facilities

Since the Recreation and Conservation Office was established in 1964, it has awarded more than \$1.7 billion in grants to fund more than 7,500 projects. Leveraging this significant state investment, grant recipients have contributed more than \$950 million in matching funds to complete these projects. Since 1990, the agency averages 230 grant awards for \$60 million each fiscal year.

**Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program:** The primary land conservation grant program managed by the RCO is called the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), which was created by the Legislature in 1989. WWRP is funded by appropriations in Washington State's capital construction budget, primarily from the sale of general obligation bonds. The legislature establishes funding levels for WWRP on a biennial basis at approximately \$50 million. According to state statute, WWRP funds must be distributed equally between Outdoor Recreation and Habitat Conservation purposes. Local agencies, special purpose districts (such as park and recreation districts), state agencies, Native American tribes, salmon recovery lead entities, and nonprofits can apply for WWRP funding. Local agencies, special purpose districts, salmon recovery lead entities, and nonprofits must provide 50 percent match and at least 10 percent of the total project cost must be from a non-state, non-federal contribution. State agencies do not have to provide match. Native American tribes must provide 50 percent match.

WWRP provides funding for a broad range of land protection and outdoor recreation, including park acquisition and development, habitat conservation, farmland preservation, and construction of outdoor

recreation facilities. Typical projects include protecting wildlife habitat, building athletic complexes, building or renovating community parks, protecting farmland, and developing regional trails. In 2016, the Washington legislature revised the program to create a way to conserve Washington's working forests by creating a new forestland preservation grant category. Grants may be used to protect forestland for growth and harvest of timber, as well as to restore wildlife habitat. The new grant program will begin accepting applications in spring 2017.

**Washington Department of Natural Resources:** In partnership with citizens and governments, the mission of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is to provide innovative leadership and expertise to ensure environmental protection, public safety, perpetual funding for schools and communities, and a rich quality of life for the people of Washington. The DNR manages 5.6 million acres of forest, range, agricultural, aquatic, and commercial lands that generated \$265 million in 2014 to support public schools, state institutions, and county services. The DNR is also in charge of managing these lands to provide fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, and public access for recreational use.

Within DNR, the Trust Land Transfer and Natural Areas Programs are designed to maintain, monitor, and manage the productivity of Washington's 3 million acres of state trust forest. Launched in 1989, the Trust Land Transfer Program is a unique program that funds school construction while protecting Washington's natural resources. The program transfers school trust lands suitable for natural or wildlife areas, parks, outdoor recreation, or open space to appropriate ownership while providing funding to schools equal to the timber or lease value of the transferred land. The program has successfully transferred ecologically valuable land out of trust lands and into appropriate conservation status with legislative appropriations.

Often this kind of land transfer will result in the creation of a Natural Area Preserve (NAP), generally a habitat for endangered and threatened plants and animals, or a Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) in the case of lands offering scenic beauty. Both types of undisturbed ecosystems are designated and managed by the Washington Natural Areas Program. Aside from the natural areas preserved through the Trust Land Transfer Program, additional NAP and NRCA sites have been created through the acquisition of private land, funded mainly by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program as well as some federal grants. Initial acquisitions for the natural areas were funded by revenue from a 1987 real estate transfer tax.

The Natural Area Preserves system presently includes over 38,000 acres in 56 sites, while over 118,000 acres in

roughly 36 sites have been designated as Natural Resource Conservation Areas.

**Washington Forestry Riparian Easement Program:** The DNR's Forestry Riparian Easement Program was established in 1999 to help small forest landowners (who own at least 20 contiguous acres) keep their land in forestry by compensating these landowners in exchange for a 50-year easement that prohibits any cutting or removal of trees so that wildlife habitat and water quality are sustained. Landowners participating in the program receive a minimum of 50 percent of the fair market stumpage value of qualifying timber. Legislative appropriations fund the program. Easements protected through this program are not included in the Almanac due to their temporary nature and lack of data availability.

**Washington Rivers and Habitat Open Space Program:** Enacted by statute in 2000 and originally named the Riparian Open Space Program, DNR's Rivers and Habitat Open Space Program first received funding in 2002. The program's funds are used to acquire forestland conservation easements on islands of timber along rivers or streams that tend to migrate or change channels. The program also funds forestland that provides habitat to state recognized threatened and endangered species. Since 2002, 16 easements have been purchased. The program is funded through legislative appropriations and although it was unfunded for several years, the DNR has \$1 million available to purchase Rivers and Habitat Open Space conservation easements for the 2015-2017 biennium.

**Washington Community Forest Trust:** The Washington Community Forest Trust (CFT) was created in 2011 and is managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The program provides policy and management tools for the DNR, and has an emphasis on sustainable, active forest management and a community working forest management plan. It is designed to prevent the conversion of working forests into housing or other types of development and is a new tool for communities large and small to buffer working forestlands from development. Land can be acquired as fee lands or conservation easements, and through a variety of means including purchase, donation, and transfer. The program requires a local financial commitment to the acquisition – at least 50% of land's development value – with the remaining funding by state capital appropriation. After the initial costs, the CFT lands are intended to fund their own management. As of 2015, one community forest had been created through this program. The 50,241-acre Teanaway Community Forest was purchased in 2013 and is located at the headwaters of the Yakima Basin watershed. The forest contains nearly 400 miles of free-flowing streams and prime habitat for fish and wildlife.

**Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission:** The Washington State Parks system acquires land in fee

title. The system's operating budget was historically funded from general fund tax support; however, operations are increasingly being funded by user fees. For example, while 70 percent of the funding in 2007-2009 was from the general fund, only 8% was from the general fund in 2013-2015. The Governor's 2015-2017 budget for parks provides \$136 million for general operations, including \$29 million (21 percent) from the general fund. In addition to the Discover Pass that is used to generate user fees, the State Parks Donation Program is still in place within the vehicle license renewal process.

**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife:** In an effort to protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitat, the Department of Fish and Wildlife owns or controls land for wildlife areas, recreation purposes, and hatchery and rearing pond facilities. The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program provides most of the funding, followed by federal and miscellaneous grants, Salmon Recovery Board funds, and donations.

### Substantial State Investment

The State of Washington relies upon a combination of tax credits, general obligation bonds and legislative appropriations to provide revenue for land conservation. For example, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) received appropriations of \$55 million for the 2015-2017 biennium, \$65 million for the 2013-2015 biennium, \$42 million for the 2011-2013 biennium, and \$70 million for the 2009-2011 biennium.

### State Incentive for Local Conservation Funding

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) makes grants to local agencies, special purpose districts (such as park and recreation districts), state agencies, Native American tribes, salmon recovery lead entities, and nonprofits. Local agencies, special purpose districts, salmon recovery lead entities, and nonprofits must provide 50 percent match and at least 10 percent of the total project cost must be from a non-state, non-federal contribution. Native American tribes must provide 50 percent match.

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) was created to grant funds to protect or restore salmon habitat and assist related activities. Eligible recipients are required to provide at least a 15 percent match including cash, bonds, donations, federal, state, local or private grants, labor, equipment, or materials.

### Conservation Tax Credits

Washington's Open Space Taxation Act allows property owners to have their open space, farm and agricultural, and timberlands valued at their current use rather than at their highest use for property taxation purposes. The state, however, does not provide for any type of income

tax credit program for donations of conservation land or easements to any governmental or nonprofit agency.

### Local Financing Enabled

Both municipalities and counties may adopt general obligation bond measures for open space acquisition through a ballot measure, although support of 60 percent of voters is required. In addition, the Conservation Futures property tax and Real Estate Excise Tax are two other options that enable local governments to levy taxes for acquiring land for open space and parks. Washington State permits counties to levy a Conservation Futures Tax (CFT) at a maximum 6.25 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, with proceeds available for use directly by the county or as grants to local governments and nonprofits. A Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) may be imposed by counties and cities for park and open space acquisition and capital purposes, but not operations and maintenance. Traditionally, however, voters outside of resort areas in the state have not favored the REET.

### Local Programs Included

Local conservation programs tracked in the Conservation Almanac include:

- King County, WA
- San Juan County, WA
- Seattle, WA
- Spokane County, WA

Visit [www.landvote.org](http://www.landvote.org) for detailed information on these programs.

King County utilizes several different mechanisms to protect open space and resource lands, including voter-approved bonds and dedicated tax revenue, which are included in the Conservation Almanac. Additionally, the county has Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program. Although not included in the Almanac, King County's TDR program is a voluntary and market-driven approach to preserve land and steer development growth away from rural and resource lands into urban areas. The County's TDR Program allows landowners of designated sending sites to separate the right to develop land from the bundle of other property rights. Through TDR, the separated rights are turned into a tradable commodity that can be bought and sold – just like land. When a landowner chooses to separate some, or all, development rights, the property is preserved through a conservation easement. These transferable development rights or "TDRs" are typically bought by developers of designated receiving sites. TDRs give developers the ability to build additional houses or dwelling units that exceed the number allowed by the zoning base density. To date the program has protected 141,500 acres of rural/resource land.

## Federal Partnerships

Federal agencies and programs that have conserved land in Washington include:

- Bonneville Power Administration
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Department of Defense – Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Section 6 Grant
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Forest Service – Forest Legacy Program (FLP)
- U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP)
- U.S. National Park Service
- U.S. National Park Service – LWCF Stateside
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service – Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service – Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service – Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

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### The Conservation Almanac

A comprehensive database of land conservation and public conservation funding in America, the Conservation Almanac provides a context for assessing impacts of conservation and the growing conservation finance movement. The Almanac offers information on public dollars spent and acres conserved, details on local, state, and federal conservation programs, and geospatial mapping of conserved land.

Almanac data collection efforts focus on land conserved using public dollars; contributions funded by private and non-governmental organizations are not tracked comprehensively. Federal data is complete from 1998-2017. State and local data is complete from 1998-2017. In the tables and charts below, acres are allocated to each program proportionate to the size of the contributions to each acquisition. For example, if an acquisition had two contributions, and each program contributed equal dollar amounts, each program receives 50% of the acres. If you have questions or want to provide updated information, please contact Jessica Welch at [jessica.welch@tpl.org](mailto:jessica.welch@tpl.org).

[www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)

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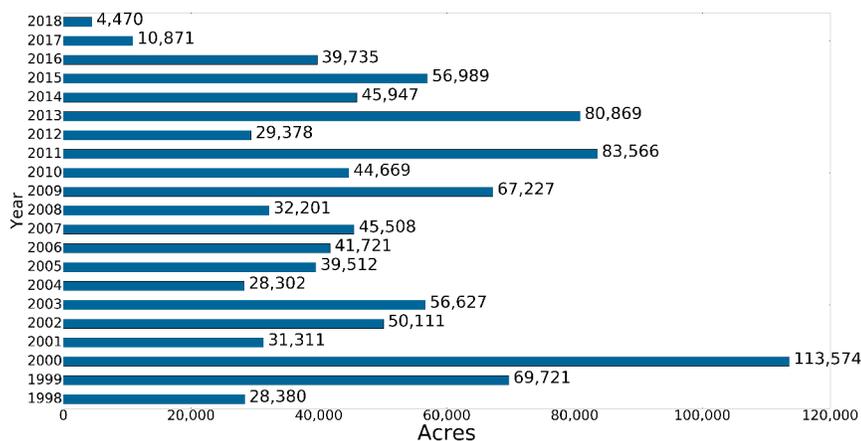
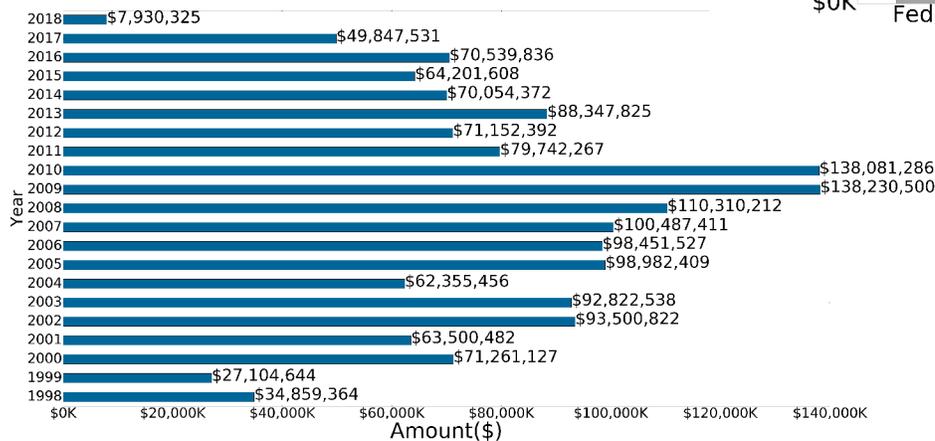
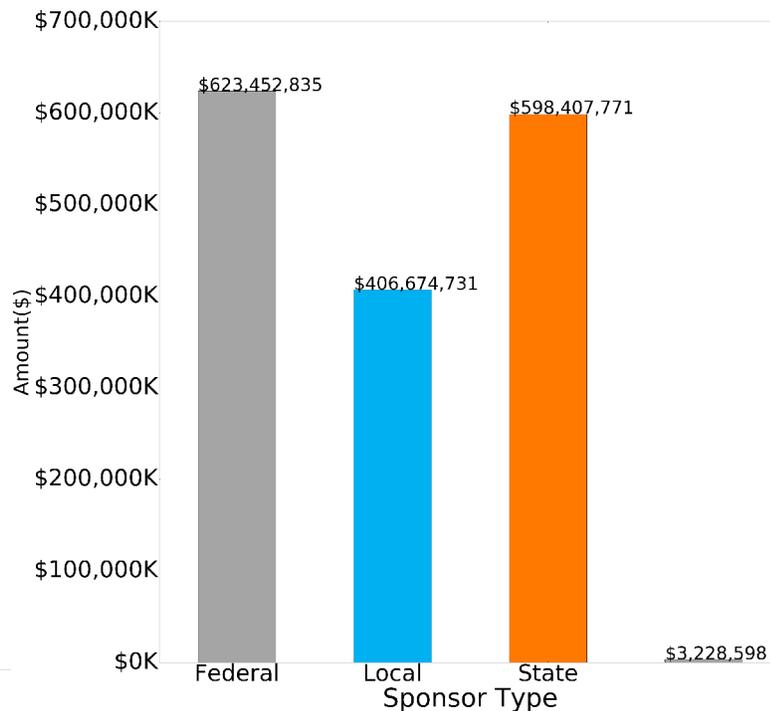
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# State Conservation Report Washington



CONSERVATION ALMANAC  
Tracking Investments in Protected Lands

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The data in the Conservation Almanac track the impacts of public spending on land conservation. Created by The Trust for Public Land, the Conservation Almanac brings those data together along with state policy profiles, current conservation finance news, and an interactive map, to provide a powerful online tool.