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# Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

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**2023 Progress Report**

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Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group  
Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office  
P.O. Box 40917  
Olympia, WA. 98504-0917

(360) 902-3000  
TTD (800) 833-6388

[www.rco.wa.gov/](http://www.rco.wa.gov/)



## Background

In 2007, the Washington State Legislature created the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group<sup>1</sup> to improve the visibility and coordination of habitat and recreation land purchases and disposals by state agencies. The Legislature wanted to ensure that state agencies acquiring lands were coordinating their efforts with one another and making their efforts more visible to the public.

### WHAT STATE LAWMAKERS ASKED STATE AGENCIES TO PROVIDE

In creating the lands group, state legislators are expecting that state agencies acquire habitat and recreation lands strategically and not just as opportunities arise. They also are expecting state agencies to talk to each other about land transactions regularly, not duplicate roles, and maintain programs that have distinct purposes complementary to one another.

### WHAT CITIZENS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ASKED STATE AGENCIES TO PROVIDE

A combination of state, federal, and nonprofit land buyers using different planning processes has made it difficult for citizens to know what recreation and conservation land purchases are being planned and occurring in their communities. Citizens and local governments want to know which purchasers are planning to buy recreation and conservation land in their communities. What land is planned for purchase? Why is the land being purchased? What are the longer-term priorities and how are they set? How can citizens get involved in the planning process?

Since 2007, the lands group has been the key vehicle for improving the visibility, coordination, and transparency of land purchases by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission. The lands group makes state land acquisitions more visible and coordinated at key points before, during, and after the acquisitions are completed.

The lands group process occurs on the biennial funding cycle and includes the following components:

- **Annual Coordinating Forum:** The Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum brings together legislators, state agencies, local governments, non-government organizations, landowners, tribes, and citizens to learn about and share ideas on proposals for state habitat and recreation land purchases and disposals.
- **Biennial Forecast Report:** The *State Land Acquisition Forecast Report* gives information about state land purchases and disposals planned for the next biennium.
- **Biennial Performance Monitoring Report:** The *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* shows whether state agencies achieved their initial acquisition project objectives.

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<sup>1</sup>Substitute Senate Bill 5236

The lands group membership includes representatives from the following state agencies:

- Department of Ecology
- Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Department of Natural Resources
- Department of Transportation
- Puget Sound Partnership
- Recreation and Conservation Office
- State Conservation Commission
- State Parks and Recreation Commission

The lands group also includes representatives of local governments, the Legislature, and others including the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Washington Forest Protection Association, Pacific Coast Joint Venture, and Washington Association of Land Trusts (see Attachment A for a list of members). The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides staff support.

The lands group is assigned 11 legislative directives aimed at improving state land acquisition and disposal coordination and visibility. If resources are scarce, five of these tasks are to be prioritized. The lands group meets quarterly and makes a difference in the following ways:

**Improving coordination**—The annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum and the quarterly meetings enable interagency coordination of land acquisition projects to improve strategic planning; help agencies identify partnering opportunities and reduce duplicative efforts; and help produce best management practices for land purchases. Another benefit is improving coordination of information between local governments and citizens in counties where acquisitions are proposed.

**Addressing key policy issues**—The annual forums encourage open discussion of key policy issues, such as funding for land maintenance, with citizens and state lawmakers. With an increased interest in public land conservation, the forum gives an opportunity for agencies to hear about the issues that are important to lawmakers and the public, and for legislators and citizens to learn about projects in their areas and about state land purchasing practices.

**Improving transparency**—The lands group reports give timely information to citizens about land purchase plans in their areas. The annual progress report (this document) is submitted on behalf of the group to satisfy the reporting requirement in Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.260.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Attachment B: Enabling Legislation

## 2023 Progress on Statutory Tasks

The lands group is responsible for accomplishing 11 statutory tasks. In 2012, the Legislature amended the statute to prioritize five. The 2023 progress achieved for each of the five priority tasks is outlined below.

### **TASK 1 | REVIEW AGENCY LAND ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL PLANS AND POLICIES TO HELP ENSURE STATEWIDE COORDINATION OF HABITAT AND RECREATION LAND ACQUISITIONS AND DISPOSALS.**

The review of agency land acquisition and disposal plans occurs on a biennial basis and will occur again in the fall of 2024.

### **TASK 2 | PRODUCE AN INTERAGENCY, STATEWIDE BIENNIAL FORECAST OF HABITAT AND RECREATION LAND ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL PLANS.**

The lands group completed a comprehensive update of the [State Lands Acquisition Forecast Dashboard](#) in the fall of 2022 to include planned acquisitions and disposals for the 2023-2025 biennium. This electronic forecast report provides reporting information about the state land purchases that are being planned around the state and allows land acquisition data to be summarized and analyzed and viewed in different ways (by biennium, by agency, by county, etc.). This electronic reporting process provides advance notification to stakeholders and the Legislature about planned purchases in their areas, meaningful opportunity to engage in the planning process, and complete and accessible information about proposed projects. This dashboard will be updated in the fall of 2024 to include planned acquisition and disposals for the 2025-2027 biennium.

### **TASK 3 | ESTABLISH PROCEDURES FOR PUBLISHING THE BIENNIAL FORECAST OF ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL PLANS ON WEB SITES OR OTHER CENTRALIZED, EASILY ACCESSIBLE FORMATS.**

The [State Land Acquisition Forecast Dashboard](#) provides early notification about plans for land purchases by the state natural resource agencies. This electronic reporting dashboard also gives a comprehensive look at what's being planned around the state, through county-wide, statewide, and project-specific maps and data. In preparing the electronic reporting dashboard, RCO partners with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and State Parks and Recreation Commission to compile and refine state land acquisition data for each biennium. This dashboard will be updated in the fall of 2024 to include planned acquisition and disposals for the 2025-2027 biennium and will be shared publicly in conjunction with the completion of the 2024 annual report.

### **TASK 4 | DEVELOP AND CONVENE AN ANNUAL FORUM FOR AGENCIES TO COORDINATE THEIR NEAR-TERM ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL PLANS.**

The lands group hosted the twelfth annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum on November 16, 2023, which was the biennial monitoring forum. Participating agencies presented maps and information about the status of acquisition projects that had been proposed for funding in the 2019-2021 biennium. A roundtable discussion offered the opportunity to identify lessons learned from projects submitted for

funding, or potential projects that ultimately did not move forward. The forum is intended to generate questions and discussion about policy and coordination with other state agencies.

#### **TASK 5 | DEVELOP AN APPROACH FOR MONITORING THE SUCCESS OF ACQUISITIONS.**

The seventh *Biennial State Land Acquisition Performance Monitoring Report* was initiated in the fall of 2023 and is being published in the spring of 2024. This report monitors the success of state habitat and recreation land acquisitions by examining whether state agencies achieved their acquisition objectives. Data from the report can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in state acquisition processes and inform decisions made by the Legislature, state agencies, local governments, and others. The next edition of the monitoring report is planned for 2025 to analyze proposed acquisitions from the 2021-2023 biennium.

### **2024 Action Plan**

- Host Annual State Land Acquisition Coordinating Forum
- Update *State Land Acquisition Forecast Dashboard* with planned acquisitions from the 2025-2027 biennium

## Attachment A | Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group

As of December 2023

Affiliation / Organization	Member / Alternate
City Government Park Planners / Washington Recreation and Park Association	Leslie Betlach
Forest Products Industry / Washington Forest Protection Association Member	Rick Schmel
Puget Sound Partnership	Don Gourlie
The Nature Conservancy	Justin Allegro
Trust for Public Land	Mitsu Iwasaki Alternate: Bill Clarke
Washington Association of Land Trusts	Vanessa Kritzer
Washington Department of Ecology	Heather Kapust
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	Cynthia Wilkerson Alternate: Karen Edwards Alternate: Joel Sisolak Alternate: Lisa Coffman
Washington Department of Natural Resources	Tim Stapleton Alternate: Mark Reed
Washington Department of Transportation	Paul Wagner
Washington State Conservation Commission	Kate Delevan
Washington Recreation and Conservation Office	Megan Duffy Alternate: Brock Milliern
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission	Nikki Fields Alternate: Tanya Moore
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition	Christine Mahler Alternate: Andres Guerrero-Guzman

## Attachment B | Enabling Legislation

### REVISED CODE OF WASHINGTON 79A.25.260

#### **Habitat and recreation lands coordinating group—Members—Progress reports—Duties.**

*(Expires July 31, 2017)*

- (1) The habitat and recreation lands coordinating group is established. The group must include representatives from the office, the state parks and recreation commission, the department of natural resources, and the department of fish and wildlife. The members of the group must have subject matter expertise with the issues presented in this section. Representatives from appropriate stakeholder organizations and local government must also be considered for participation on the group, but may only be appointed or invited by the director.
- (2) To ensure timely completion of the duties assigned to the group, the director shall submit yearly progress reports to the office of financial management.
- (3) The group must:
  - a. Review agency land acquisition and disposal plans and policies to help ensure statewide coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisitions and disposals;
  - b. Produce an interagency, statewide biennial forecast of habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal plans;
  - c. Establish procedures for publishing the biennial forecast of acquisition and disposal plans on web sites or other centralized, easily accessible formats;
  - d. Develop and convene an annual forum for agencies to coordinate their near-term acquisition and disposal plans;
  - e. Develop a recommended method for interagency geographic information system-based documentation of habitat and recreation lands in cooperation with other state agencies using geographic information systems;
  - f. Develop recommendations for standardization of acquisition and disposal recordkeeping, including identifying a preferred process for centralizing acquisition data;
  - g. Develop an approach for monitoring the success of acquisitions;
  - h. Identify and commence a dialogue with key state and federal partners to develop an inventory of potential public lands for transfer into habitat and recreation land management status; and
  - i. Review existing and proposed habitat conservation plans on a regular basis to foster statewide coordination and save costs.
- (4) If prioritization among the various requirements of subsection (3) of this section is necessary due to the availability of resources, the group shall prioritize implementation of subsection (3)(a) through (d) and (g) of this section.
- (5) The group shall revisit the planning requirements of relevant grant programs administered by the office to determine whether coordination of state agency habitat and recreation land acquisition and disposal could be improved by modifying those requirements.



- (6) The group must develop options for centralizing coordination of habitat and recreation land acquisition made with funds from federal grants. The advantages and drawbacks of the following options, at a minimum, must be developed:
  - a. Requiring that agencies provide early communication on the status of federal grant applications to the office, the office of financial management, or directly to the legislature;
  - b. Establishing a centralized pass-through agency for federal funds, where individual agencies would be the primary applicants.
- (7) This section expires July 31, 2027. Prior to January 1, 2027, the group shall make a formal recommendation to the board and the appropriate committees of the legislature as to whether the existence of the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group should be continued beyond July 31, 2027, and if so, whether any modifications to its enabling statute should be pursued.

[2012 c 128 § 1; 2007 c 247 § 1.]

#### **Notes**

Finding–2012 c 128: "The legislature finds that participation by the state's habitat and recreation land management agencies in the habitat and recreation lands coordinating group is an inherent part of transparent, efficient, and effective state habitat and recreation land management, and must be conducted within existing resources." [2012 c 128 § 2.]