Washington Secures Grant To Encourage Public Access to Private Land

Local News

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OLYMPIA – More private landowners in eastern Washington will have an incentive to open their lands to fishing and hunting, thanks to a new federal grant of nearly $1 million to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The new grant, authorized by the federal Farm Bill, is the second awarded to WDFW in as many years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Last year, WDFW received $1.5 million to increase recreational access to private lands around the state. “Hunters and fishers consistently rank access to the land and water as one of their top concerns,” said Nate Pamplin, assistant director of the WDFW wildlife program. “This new funding will bolster current state efforts to expand recreational opportunities in our state for years to come.”

Don Larsen, WDFW private lands coordinator, said the new $993,231 grant will be used in three ways: Provide incentives to private landowners to allow hunting on forested properties in Kittitas, Klickitat, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens and Yakima counties. Work with landowners in Columbia, Garfield, Lincoln, Walla Walla and Whitman counties to improve habitat enrolled in both the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and WDFW access programs. Initiate a “Feel Free to Fish” program in southeast Washington, paying private landowners for shoreline access to river fisheries. Washington was one of 11 states to receive grant funding in this second year of the Farm Bill’s Voluntary Public Access (VPA) and Habitat Incentive Program (HIP), administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). “This federal and state partnership with private landowners creates recreational opportunities for the public that might not exist otherwise,” said Judy Olson, state executive director for the USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA), which administers the federal grants. “This access program is one of the ways the Farm Bill benefits more than just farmers.” Through July 21, the USDA is accepting public comments on its finding that WDFW’s plan for using the $1.5 million awarded last year would not have a significant effect on the environment. The federal findings, consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act, are posted on the Internet at http://bit.ly/mpufNQ, along with information on submitting public comments. “We look forward to working cooperatively with private landowners to expand fishing, hunting and wildlife-viewing opportunities on private lands," Pamplin said. “Once we get final approval from USDA, we plan to sign up as many suitable properties as possible in time for the fall hunting season.”