

## **Public Comment Welcome on Federal Grant to Provide Hunter Access to Private Lands**

### **Local News**

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will accept public comments through Dec. 15 on a \$1 million federal grant designed to provide incentives for more private landowners to open their lands to hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation in eastern Washington.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) was one of 11 agencies nationwide to qualify for funding in the second round of the USDA's Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, established under the 2008 federal Farm Bill.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, USDA's Farm Service Agency recently determined that the department's plans for the grant money would not have a significant effect on the environment.

The federal findings are posted at <http://bit.ly/mpufNQ> . Public comments on those findings may also be submitted on that site.

Nate Pamplin, assistant director of the WDFW wildlife program, said the state agency has also raised \$400,000 to expand hunter access to private lands through additional fees paid by hunters who apply for new permit-only hunts.

"Hunters consistently rank access to suitable hunting areas as one of their top concerns," Pamplin said. "With the additional federal funding, we'll be able to build on current state efforts to expand hunting opportunities for years to come."

WDFW also received a three-year \$1.5 million grant to expand access to hunting and fishing on private lands throughout the state during the first round of the program. The department is currently using that funding to establish contracts with landowners to open their lands to outdoor recreation.

Pamplin said the new \$993,231 grant will be used to expand hunting and fishing opportunities in eastern Washington in several 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.