

State Parks Commission May Request Budget Revisions After Discover Sales Slump

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : October 19, 2012 at 6:20 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - At its regular meeting next week in Vancouver, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission will consider amendments to its 2013-15 operating budget request.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 25, in the Council Chambers of Vancouver City Hall, 415 Sixth St., Vancouver. A full Commission meeting agenda is available online at www.parks.wa.gov/agency/commissionmeetings/. Time for public comment is provided at all regular meetings, which are scheduled seven times a year at pre-determined locations around the state.

The Commission in September requested \$18 million in General Fund for 2013-15. In an earlier report to the Office of Financial Management, the Commission said it would amend its first General Fund request if actual revenues earned in the months just following budget development turned out to be significantly different than projected. Subsequently, State Parks' Discover Pass revenues for the months of June through September came in approximately \$4.7 million short of expectations. Based on expenditures necessary to support the agency operation without any increases or further reductions throughout 2013-15, the Commission will consider requesting an additional General Fund appropriation of \$9.2 million above its original General Fund request, for a total of \$27.2 million.

State Parks has gone through a radical budget change. The State Legislature determined that the state park system would be primarily funded through fees for service rather than general tax dollars. This change in funding approach occurred in the 2011-13 budget cycle when state General Fund dollars allotted to support operations were decreased to only 12 percent of the agency budget, reduced from a previous high of 70 percent. The agency has been informed that the 2013-15 budget for parks is being built with no General Fund contribution to State Parks.

In its August 2012 report to the Office of Financial Management, the Commission took the position that it is not achievable or desirable for State Parks to be completely self-supporting and that it would request General Fund.

In other business, the Commission will consider endorsing an appropriation request of \$90 million from the Washington Wildlife Recreation Program as part of its 2013-15 capital budget. The program is administered through the state Recreation Conservation Office. State Parks' listed projects for consideration include trail development, property and tideland acquisitions for future development and improvements for such things as picnic shelters and cabins.

Also, the Commission will consider appointing six citizens to two State Parks Winter Recreation advisory boards – one for snowmobile advisory issues and one for non-motorized winter recreation. Nominations are through a public process, and terms will run from Nov. 1 through Sept. 30, 2015. Also to be considered are proposed revisions to the Washington Administrative Code, including allowing overnight camping in approved areas of designated Sno-Parks; allowing operation of electric generators in RVs during the winter season; and campfire restrictions at Crystal Springs and Easton Reload Sno-Parks.

Reports to the Commission

The Commission will hear a variety of program updates and progress reports, including:

- Progress on a proposed Mount Spokane State Park ski area expansion
- Progress and considerations regarding the potential of Fort Worden State Park being managed by the Port Townsend Lifelong Learning Center Public Development Authority (this report scheduled for 1 p.m.)
- Status update on the State Parks statewide trails program
- Highlights and program accomplishments of the Winter Recreation Program
- Marketing program update
- Aquatic Land Enhancement Account expenditures report
- State Parks’ Revenue and Efficiency Task Force report
- Centennial 2013 celebration planning

Work sessions

Work sessions are open to the public, however, no public testimony and no formal Commission action are taken. Two work sessions are planned in conjunction with the Vancouver regular meeting.

• General session: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 24, in Council Chambers at Vancouver City Hall, 415 Sixth St., Vancouver. Topics include budget update and revised revenue projections; sponsorship policy; operations update; wind-powered vehicles in Seashore Conservation Area; volunteer and friends programs; special events; entitlements; 2014 fee schedule; request legislation; legislative outreach and commissioner discussion and reports.

• Session to discuss Centennial 2013 celebrations: 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 23, at the Hilton Hotel, 301 W. Sixth St., Vancouver.