

Sam Benn Park Among 124 Washington Projects Independently Ranked "Top Notch" For Funding

Local News

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ABERDEEN, Wash. - Sam Benn Park in Aberdeen is among more than one hundred recreation, wildlife habitat and working lands projects around the state of Washington that have been ranked as priority projects by the Recreation Conservation Office (RCO). Realizing these critical conservation projects, released with official ranking numbers by the RCO last week, is dependent on adequate funding of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), established in 1989 by former Governors Evans and Lowry as way of conserving critical lands and waterways in Washington state. "The independent ranking system used by the RCO is unique in its ability to determine which projects best meet the conservation, recreation and community needs in our state," said Joanna Grist, executive director of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, which advocates for WWRP funding. "This year the projects that made the cut are, once again, ones that will have a positive effect on Washington for years to come. We must continue to invest in preserving our land and water in order to protect and grow the jobs and businesses that depend on our recreation economy." From developing trails near Yakima, Spokane and Wenatchee, to restoring the Seaview Dunes near Aberdeen, conserving Kitsap forests, building an ice rink in the Methow, saving farms in the Skagit or creating parks in Clark County, the projects ranked as best for the state will protect valuable land, improve opportunities for recreation businesses to thrive and have a positive effect on Washington state's quality of life. A complete list of projects is attached.

Over the last 20 years the WWRP grant program has taken root as one of the state's most popular and successful programs---enjoying broad bipartisan support in the legislature as well as support from over 250 organizations representing conservation, business, recreation, hunting, fishing, farming, and community interests--for its mandate to protect and improve state and local parks, preserve habitat for fish and wildlife and save working farms. In recent years the bipartisan support for the WWRP has meant that the program, which is funded through the capital budget has been able to give grants for top ranked projects in communities across the state--improving trails, establishing local parks, repairing shoreline, preserving farmland and protecting forests throughout Washington. However in 2010, the WWRP was threatened with elimination in Governor's Gregoire's budget. Through a strong bipartisan effort in both the House and Senate, the program was restored \$42 million--only half its 2008 funding. The fifty percent cut meant devastating losses for communities around the state as many approved projects went unfunded. In order to meet the goals of this year's approved list, the Coalition will advocating for restored funding for the WWRP at \$90 million.