

## **CALLING INPUT FROM ALL WASHINGTONIANS!**

### **DNR Seeks Public Comment on First Statewide Recreation Strategic Plan**

**Public comment period is open until November 21 on DNR's Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation Strategic Plan**

Fellow Washington Residents,

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources is looking for our commentary on a recreation strategic plan that they have been working on since 2023. This is our chance to make our voices heard before this strategic plan draft gets finalized in the attempt to keep their efforts aligned with the wants and needs of our residents. Northwest Motorcycle Association President, Marc Toenyan, played an active role in on the Committee for this plan development.

This initiative is hoping to target not only recent users of the accessible land here in Washington for the various recreational activities but those who have not yet found the opportunities and benefits of the outdoors. This plan hopes to drive funding, education and land stewardship while reducing the negative impact that our lands and wildlife have been subject to with the increase in people using them.

We ask that you take the time to provide your thoughts, feedback, ideas on solutions etc. Our government has heard our wants for these areas of public land use to be addressed and now is the time we make the most of this future development of Washington's focus to expanding recreation and all the categories involved. Our land is one of the most precious attributes our state has to offer, let's do our part to make the most of it!

We created a Comment Form to make providing feedback as seamless as possible! There is no requirement to use the form, but your input should be submitted before November 21, 2024. [\*\*Public comment for the Plan is open until Nov. 21, 2024 and can be submitted here\*\*](#)

Share this link with family and friends & help us reach as many people as we can! Know people that come from out of state to enjoy the recreation here? Send it to them too!

We encourage you to read the full plan here [\*\*DNR Seeks Public Comment on First Statewide Recreation Strategic Plan\*\*](#) but below you'll find some of the main points of the article.

Stronger Together,



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# OUTDOOR ACCESS AND RESPONSIBLE RECREATION STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARIZED

## Context & Purpose:

Washington lands used for recreation range from conserved natural areas to lands currently being utilized for livestock grazing, timber harvest etc. and the majority of the 5.6 million acres are mostly undeveloped. The current spike in visitor traffic to these lands calls the DNR to action to ensure they expand outdoor recreation activities and management of the land itself to keep up with the demand which is only going to grow with the population growth Washington is experiencing. The Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation Strategic Plan (OARR) is DNR's attempt to be as effective and proactive as possible to address the needs of recreation management while keeping in line with the legislated obligations the agency has. DNR has taken great measures to ensure this plan has actively involved Washington Tribes, trust beneficiaries, partners and the public to implement sustainable and proactive land management; the Northwest Motorcycle Association has participated in this process.

## Need for OARR Strategic Plan:

- **Managing outdoor access and recreation impacts:**

While outdoor recreation grew in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation did not meaningfully decline after pandemic restrictions were lifted (Mojica, J., et al., 2021). As a result, DNR-managed lands have been overwhelmed by visitors, which has led to overcrowding, development of unsanctioned trails, litter and dumping, disruptive effects to wildlife and natural ecosystems, and other resource damage. Systematically addressing the impacts of increased visitation and public abuse is critical to sustaining the long-term health of these landscapes. DNR recognizes that additional collaboration is needed to manage recreation impacts. The OARR Strategic Plan will guide this work.

- **Equitably enhancing economic and social benefits of recreation:**

Washington's outdoor recreation opportunities provide immense economic value, estimated at \$26.5 billion in annual spending, which supports 264,000 jobs and approximately \$40.3 billion in economic activity annually across the state (Mojica, J., A. Fletcher, 2020). While recreation provides significant economic benefit to Washington, it also enhances quality of life. The OARR Strategic Plan enables DNR to leverage those benefits, identify ways to remove barriers, and enhance recreation opportunities for communities who have not traditionally had access.

- **Insufficient funding:**

DNR's current 2023–2025 funding allocation leaves an estimated \$9 million gap in identified need and limits the agency's ability to consistently provide safe and quality recreation experiences that are also consistent with DNR's responsibilities. This gap in funding is due to multiple issues, including declining state gas tax funding, insufficient revenue sources, and inconsistent funding streams.

- **Working in a complex management environment:**

DNR manages lands in a way that balances public use with its fiduciary obligation to state trust beneficiaries. In addition, DNR manages lands adjacent to those managed by other state and federal agencies, as well as private interests. The OARR Strategic Plan, which was informed by consultation with Tribes and broad engagement with multiple parties, will help DNR meet the needs of all partners.

- **Integrating recreation management into DNR's Divisions and Programs:**

To successfully and responsibly manage recreation, DNR's Recreation and Conservation Division must be further integrated into the planning processes and management tools across the agency. This is

particularly important as issues such as recreation, forest health, timber sales, and wildfire management— each managed by different divisions within DNR—are increasingly interrelated.

- **A roadmap for the outdoor recreation community:**

The OARR Strategic Plan not only helps DNR establish an internal agency-wide approach to recreation, it also provides a roadmap for what to expect and how to engage in future recreation management processes for DNR’s external partners, including Tribes, volunteers, and user groups.

## Goals

The OARR Strategic Plan strategies are guided by six aspirational goal statements for how outdoor access and recreation will be managed by DNR. The goals were developed in coordination with Tribes during the [fall 2023 Tribal Forums](#) and address multiple challenges, including the growing demand for recreation, increasing concerns about recreation impacts, funding shortfalls, and more.

### Goals

#### **Conserve and Enhance the Natural Environment and Cultural Resources**

- 1 Actively address outdoor access and recreation activities that impact natural and cultural resources on DNR-managed lands, including the health of fish, wildlife, and habitat.

#### **Cultivate a Stewardship and Responsibility Ethic through User Education and Engagement**

- 2 Improve user awareness of recreation’s impacts on natural and cultural resources and understanding of appropriate etiquette in different landscapes, rights and interests of all groups, and how to safely engage in activities.

#### **Improve Equitable Access**

- 3 Reduce barriers that disproportionately impact overburdened and vulnerable communities’ ability to access DNR-managed lands in an ecologically sustainable manner.

#### **Respect Reserved Rights and Improve Collaboration in Recreation Planning**

- 4 Engage Tribes, trust beneficiaries, partners, and stakeholders proactively on planning activities, and ensure DNR staff have the tools, resources, and expertise to foster meaningful participation.

#### **Secure Financial Stability for Management, Operations, Infrastructure, and Stewardship**

- 5 Achieve a sustainable operating model that supports program goals through identifying current and future funding needs. Leverage existing investments in outdoor access and recreation to achieve sustainable program funding to meet current and future needs, protect the environment and benefit the economy.

#### **Mitigate Climate Impacts and Build Resilience**

- 6 Prepare for extreme climate-related events, implement climate-resilient infrastructure design and maintenance, and integrate management and operations techniques that improve resilience and human safety, in alignment with DNR’s Plan for Climate Resilience.

## OARR Strategic Plan

The OARR Strategic Plan is organized by 15 strategies and 5 strategy topics—planning tools and processes; resource protection, enforcement, and public safety; equitable access; education and stewardship; and funding.

Strategies and their associated actions describe how DNR will achieve the desired goals listed on the previous page. Strategies are guiding statements about what will be done and actions are specific tasks nested under a strategy.

It is important to note that the 15 strategies are interrelated and have the potential to fall into more than one strategy topic. Each strategy topic is also related to one or more OARR Strategic Plan goals.

## Strategy Table

- S1 Fill data gaps regarding visitation levels and recreation-use impacts to natural and cultural resources.
- S2 Develop and use landscape planning tools and frameworks to ensure natural and cultural resources are protected, and recreation use is sustainable, equitable, and safe.
- S3 Develop, staff, and implement a consistent and transparent planning process at the state and regional levels including coordination with Tribes, beneficiaries, partners, and the public.
- S4 Proactively plan for climate-related impacts to DNR-managed lands and operations.
- S5 Work across DNR programs to advocate for an adequate education and enforcement presence to address resource damage, unsanctioned use, and other abuse to DNR-managed lands and resources, whether driven by recreation or other outdoor activities.
- S6 Work across DNR programs to develop a comprehensive strategy for managing illegal dumping and vandalism on DNR-managed lands.
- S7 Increase public safety on DNR-managed lands through the development of a safe target shooting program.
- S8 Coordinate internally to ensure DNR's Recreation Program is prepared from an accessibility, and diversity, equity inclusion and belonging (DEIB) perspective to engage with communities who are underrepresented in the outdoors.
- S9 Develop strategies to improve the accessibility of DNR managed lands, including the ability to access recreation opportunities for communities underrepresented in the outdoors in a manner that is ecologically sustainable.
- S10 Collaborate with Tribes, partners, and volunteers to foster public stewardship of DNR-managed lands.
- S11 Implement public education and information campaigns to improve visitors' understanding of DNR-managed lands.
- S12 Implement education focused on climate resiliency and safety for those who use DNR-managed lands.
- S13 Evaluate and prioritize internal funding mechanisms to support DNR operational needs.
- S14 Evaluate and prioritize state funding tools involving legislative action to increase sustainable funding for recreation.
- S15 Evaluate and prioritize support from private partners and funding opportunities from recreation activities, increasing sustainable funding for recreation