

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission Winter Recreation Strategic Plan 2018-2028



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“The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission acquires, operates, enhances and protects a diverse system of recreational, cultural, historical and natural sites. The Commission fosters outdoor recreation and education statewide to provide enjoyment and enrichment for all, and a valued legacy to future generations.”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why update the Strategic Plan?

The last major planning exercise completed by the Winter Recreation Program was in 2008. At that time, there was a high level of mistrust and skepticism related to the winter recreation programs (snowmobile and non-motorized) and the strategic planning effort was an approach to address those concerns. That Plan was met with skepticism and mistrust and yet created a glimmer of hope and optimism for change and improvement. That glimmer of hope and optimism has resulted in stronger working relationships within the Advisory Committees, and among groups, clubs, organizations and other governmental partners. Some of the notable accomplishments have been the involvement of stake holders, accountability and transparency with users, contractors, stakeholders and the Advisory Committees. The Plan itself called for regular reviews.

What the Plan seeks to accomplish.

- Capturing and expressing the desires of the users and building stronger relationships with users. Clear expression of constituents' desires for the program in the years to come.
- Continue to emphasize building and maintaining strong relationships with advisory committees, volunteers and partners.
- Continued emphasis on customer service and transparent management.
- Provide guidance to the Program in meeting increasing recreational demands, especially in the I-90 Corridor, and other areas exhibiting high demand.
- Adopt the use of GPS and GIS technologies as Program Management tools, for purposes including tracking of trail groomers, producing data regarding grooming miles and grooming speed, and to provide accurate interactive and mobile friendly maps to the public that show all Sno-Park locations and trail routes.
- Identify strategies on how to protect dedicated funds for both winter programs.

The Winter Recreation Program Mission:

The mission of the Winter Recreation Program is to provide a variety of snow-based winter recreational opportunities to the public while protecting natural and cultural resources throughout the state.

Winter Recreation Program Vision:

The Winter Recreation Program is a well-managed and respected program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission providing effective and efficient service that: 1) is responsive to the recreational demands of the public; 2) facilitates public access to diverse snow-based recreational opportunities; 3) encourages responsible use and protection of natural and cultural resources; and 4) is closely integrated into the communities it serves through effective relationships with volunteers, federal, state and local governments and private property owners.

Culture and Core Values:

In interacting with one another, the Commission, staff, Advisory Committees, partners, supporters and volunteers, foster a collaborative culture in which people:

- Maintain a working environment to **nurture innovation**
- **Encourage exploring new opportunities and ideas** and accept responsibility for outcomes
- **Respectfully challenge** assumptions and work traditions
- **Give and accept** constructive criticism
- **Accept that conflicts** between ideas may be a necessary step toward finding solutions
- **Act with civic courage** and the highest ethical standards
- **Take pride** in the work, mission and vision of the Program

The Winter Recreation Program staff, Advisory Committees, partners, supporters and volunteers share core values that **demonstrate a commitment** to:

- Providing **access** to recreational and educational opportunities statewide;
- **Meaningful public engagement** and participation in developing and operating the Winter Recreation Program
- **Supporting one another** by working together to achieve the Program's mission
- **Quality and value** in all work accomplished

Who are we and what do we do

The Washington State Parks Winter Recreation Program has 123 sno-parks on public land and approximately 3,300 miles of groomed trails. Washington offers users a destination for winter activities. Washington's winter program is unique in comparison to other states in that Washington's Winter Program manages winter recreation for snowmobilers and non-motorized recreationists on a statewide basis. Other states may have separate programs or even separate agencies managing the two different programs.

Washington's winter program is guided by two Advisory Committees consisting of citizens from around the state, appointed by the State Parks Director to serve staggered, three-year terms. The Advisory Committees help establish operating procedures for the program and provide advice regarding budgeting of dedicated funds and policy guidance for program activities

Washington State Parks' Winter Program has expertise in providing opportunities for winter recreation, including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snow play, and skijoring, dog-sledding, fat tire bicycling and snowmobiling.

Introduction and Historical Overview

In the state of Washington, a variety of highland areas, including the Cascade, Blue and Selkirk mountain ranges, and the Okanogan Highlands, offer winter snow conditions that are conducive to a variety of recreational activities, including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, sledding, tubing, skijoring, dog-sledding, fat tire bicycling, and general snow-play. Although nature has provided the climate and the terrain, gaining access to locations where the public can engage in these recreational opportunities has become the charge of a variety of government agencies assisted by a host of dedicated volunteers and associations. Coordination of government efforts to provide the bulk of snow-based recreational access has coalesced under the administration of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (also referred to in this document as either the Commission or State Parks).

The development of State Parks' initial winter recreation program evolved over a period of about ten years. In 1966, the Commission allowed motorized snow vehicles in designated areas of Lake Wenatchee, Mount Spokane, and Pearrygin Lake State Parks on a one-year trial basis. This authorization was continued in 1967 and also expanded to include specified areas in Alta Lake, Brooks Memorial, Fields Spring, Lake Wenatchee, and Riverside State Parks.

In February of 1970, the Commission, aided by the volunteer efforts of an *ad hoc* task force, initiated a project to define the problems and areas of concerns created by snowmobile use. The report investigated nine primary aspects of snowmobiling: the industry; users; recreational and environmental effects; safety; facilities; regulations; enforcement; legislation; and financing. The resulting report was entitled "Snowmobiling in Washington State" dated November 1970, and served as the basis of the Washington State Snowmobile Act of 1971.

The Commission implemented the Snowmobile Act by entering into agreements with other agencies, organizations and individuals to remove snow from parking areas; and to certify volunteer instructors to provide safety training classes. A staff position of Snowmobile Coordinator was also established and the distribution of brochures containing snowmobile regulations commenced.

Legislative action requested by cross-country skiers in 1975 established the Winter Recreation Parking (Sno-Park) Permit program. Like the snowmobile legislation, this program was designed to provide fee-based services primarily to cross-country skiers.

A third body of Winter Recreation related legislation gave State Parks the responsibility for the Downhill Ski Lift Safety Inspection Program. This program and the Commission's management of downhill skiing facilities are not included in this Strategic Plan.

The Sno-Park Program implemented in 1975 became the core of State Parks' new Winter Recreation Program, now consisting of two administrative components, the snowmobile program and the non-motorized program, with separate funds supporting the cost of each program. The

snowmobile program is funded from snowmobile registration fees and a percentage of the state gasoline tax. The non-motorized program is funded by the proceeds from Sno-Park parking permit fees. It is important to note for any proposed future changes in funding structures, that both programs were established by the Legislature to be financially self-supporting, using dedicated fund sources, without significant additional support from the Parks Commission. Changing the current funding model would require the concurrence of the Governor's Office and the Legislature.

Two citizen advisory committees were also established to advise State Parks in the administration of the Winter Recreation Program, and include the Winter Recreation (Sno-Park) Advisory Committee (pertaining to non-motorized uses), and the Snowmobile Advisory Committee.

In 1992, the Commission prepared a Winter Recreation Program Plan that was the first comprehensive review of State Parks' involvement in the provision of winter recreation access. It included an extensive history, a program description, an assessment of user demand, and a discussion of future directions. In 2008, the Commission completed and adopted the Winter Recreation Program Strategic Plan.

The August 2012 *State of State Parks* report and the March 2013 *Transformation Strategy* provide context and background for the agency's strategic direction over the subsequent six years. Those documents and other support materials, including public involvement efforts, can be found on the agency website at: <http://parks.state.wa.us/149/Strategic-Plan>. Clear descriptions of the agency's Mission, Vision, Culture and Core Values and a comprehensive set of strategies and initiatives have emerged from those documents. Strategies are geared toward meaningful changes, and the creation of a successful, sustainable foundation. Additionally, the mission, vision and core values will ensure that quality, public trust and confidence are maintained. The winter recreation strategic plan is consistent with and supportive of the Agency's Strategic Plan.

The need for an updated Winter Recreation Strategic Plan has been demonstrated by continually changing conditions over the past several years, including:

- Funding continues to be outpaced by recreational demand in some locations, and the costs of providing services are increasing.
- Sno-Parks in some areas are becoming overcrowded, with vehicles turned away on busy weekends, primarily in the non-motorized recreation areas.
- New forms of snow-based recreation are being introduced, including fat tire bicycles, snow bike snowmobiles, and other over-the-snow vehicles.
- Large variations in winter weather and snowpack in the mountains.
- Availability of management resources

Over the more than 40 year lifespan of the Winter Recreation Program, the program has experienced ebb and flow when it comes to growth, and now includes 123 Sno-Parks statewide. Approximately 81 of these Sno-Parks are used primarily for snowmobile trail access, with another 42 provided exclusively for Non-motorized trail access. A number of these Sno-Parks are shared by both the motorized and non-motorized programs. Associated with these Sno-Parks

are approximately 3,300 miles of groomed trails, (snowmobile and non-motorized combined) that are provided and maintained in cooperation with federal, state, county and local agencies, snowmobile clubs and private landowners. State Parks has also designated five snow-play areas that are serviced by Sno-Parks, providing opportunities for tubing and other snow-based recreational activities. The dramatic increase in recreational demand since inception of the program has necessitated an evolving management response to ensure that parking lots are constructed, maintained and plowed, restrooms provided, trails maintained and groomed, signs posted, rules enforced, equipment purchased, safety training provided, conflicts resolved, and visitors kept informed; and all within the available financial resources provided by current funding mechanisms.

Guiding Principles, Goals and Objectives

Guiding Principles:

In fulfilling the mission and vision statements, guiding principles are helpful in the development of program goals and objectives, and the strategies to accomplish them. The following guiding principles were adopted by the Commission in 2008 and should continue. The Winter Recreation Program will:

1. Actively involve people in decisions that affect them; help people to participate by providing them with credible, timely, and objective information; and, develop programs with a clear understanding of public expectations for Program services.
2. Advocate for responsible management and for equitable allocation of resources.
3. Create and strengthen cooperative relationships with individuals, organized groups, local governments, and state and federal resource management agencies.
4. Manage programs in a consistent manner, and use innovation and technology to improve services. Safety is a priority and will always be considered in our planning and actions.
5. Be receptive to, and consider advice from all organizations and individuals relating to winter recreation programs, and not limit topics to only those identified by staff.
6. Be more clearly integrated as a program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.
7. Demonstrate a cooperative, mutually supportive working atmosphere for staff, volunteers, and partners.
8. Commit to stewardship that transmits high quality park and recreation assets to future generations.
9. Pursue dedication to outdoor recreation and public enjoyment that welcomes all our citizens to their public lands.
10. Strive for excellence in all we do.
11. Involve the public in our policy development and decision making.
12. Support one another as we translate our mission into reality.

Upper Level Objectives and Supplementary Goals:

- 1. Access to snow-based recreation will be our primary product.**
 - Recreational access opportunities are responsive to user demands while reflecting sensitive environmental stewardship.
- 2. The Program has viable planning functions.**
 - There is adequate separation of incompatible or conflicting recreational uses.
 - Well maintained, clearly signed and usable parking areas and trails, accurate maps.
 - Effective, safe trail grooming is provided.
- 3 We will build enduring partnerships.**
 - A vigorous, organized, skilled, and respected volunteer program, i.e., advisory committee members, grooming councils, grooming coordinators, associations and clubs.
 - Viable Advisory Committees that are regarded as full partners.
- 4. We will maintain open and responsive communications with the public.**
 - Safety, education and resource stewardship are high priorities.
 - We provide accurate and up to date information to the public.
 - We respond to complaints and disputes in a timely and sensitive manner.
 - We strive to improve technology-based communication, i.e. mobile friendly maps and GPS tracking.
- 5. We will exercise transparent decision-making, with clear, understandable, and concisely written procedures, practices, grants and contracts.**
 - We actively involve people in decisions that affect them, and help people participate by providing them with credible, timely and objective information.
 - We employ effective contract management principles and techniques, and maintain high standards of financial accountability and management effectiveness, including responsive budgeting and clear financial reporting.
- 6. We manage public resources in a consistent and responsible manner.**
 - Winter Recreation services are adequately and equitably funded.
 - We plan ahead to compensate for variables that affect service delivery.

Future Trends

As explained above, the Winter Recreation Program continues to evolve since its inception nearly 40 years ago. Most of the growth has occurred in the non-motorized program with some variability dependent on snow conditions. Attendance data, although limited and based on vehicles rather than individuals, is collected through the sale of sno-park permits and snowmobile registrations. Some general information has also been provided by the Washington State Recreation Conservation Office (RCO).

The assessment of the supply of outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities in Washington suggests that the supply of recreation is not completely meeting public demand, and meeting that demand is further challenged by the pressure of population growth and urbanization in Washington.

An assessment of outdoor winter recreation in Washington in 2015 estimated that there are:

- 231,443 cross country skiers, 344,593 snowshoers, and 123,436 OSV (over the snow vehicles)
- Overall growth between 2002 and 2013 shows a 105% increase in cross country skiing, 807% increase in snowshoeing and a 26% increase in OSV use with 31.3 percent of Washingtonians participating in general winter recreational activities. On average, Washingtonians spend 56 days per year recreating outdoors. Note: Snowmobile data alone does not support this level of growth. (1)

Snow Play: There has been significant growth in general snow play activities, as demonstrated by the popularity of State Parks’ designated Sno-Play areas and the addition of tubing hills at ski resorts. Included within this category are those visitors seeking to enjoy just being in the snow, some perhaps experiencing snow for the first time.

Miscellaneous: Other winter recreation activities that have grown considerably include dog-sledding, skijoring (a skier towed by one or more dogs), fat tire bicycling, snowshoeing, snow hiking (without snowshoes, often early or late in the season when snow depths are reduced), ice climbing, snow bikes (a hybrid between a motorcycle and a snowmobile), and snow camping.

The Outdoor Recreation Participation Study of 2005 concluded that activities which meet the following characteristics will have broader appeal. (2)

- Easy access
- Easy to learn
- Done in a day
- Less specialized technical gear required

CLIMATE CHANGE:

“Preparing Washington State Parks for Climate Change” *A Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment for Washington State Parks* June 2017. Prepared by The University of Washington Climate Impacts Group in partnership with Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. (Excerpts related to winter recreation from the recent Washington State Parks Climate Assessment)

Our Snowpack Defined:

Changes in snowpack: The Washington Cascades and Olympic Mountains contain the highest fraction of “warm snow”, or snow falling within a few degrees of freezing (32 degrees F).

Shorter Winter Season and Warming Temperatures:

Warming seasonal temperatures also contribute to a shorter snow season overall. Warmer fall temperatures delay the start of accumulation in the fall while warmer spring temperatures

contribute to earlier spring snowmelt. Snow season length in Washington State is projected to shorten by -33 days on average (range: -45 to -21 days) and -55 days (range: -68 to -39 days) on average by the 2050s and 2080s, respectively, under a high greenhouse gas scenario 9RCP 8.5)²¹ As with snowpack, natural variability will continue to produce above average and below average conditions on a year-to-year basis. However, what is considered above average and below average will be redefined over time as the long-term effects of warming winter temperatures are realized.

The Projected Change in snow season length for a low greenhouse gas scenario (RCP 4.5) is -25 days (range: -31 to -18) for the 2050s and -35 days (range: -46 to -24 days) for the 2080s, relative to 1970-99.

Challenges:

Staff noted that managing the Winter Recreation Program is becoming more challenging as winter snowpack and access to Sno-Parks becomes more variable and as population growth creates more demand. These factors create what staff considered a “double whammy” for the program. Declining snowpack and a shorter snow season are likely to lead to a drop in Sno-Park permit purchases and snowmobile registrations over time. Lower sales would affect annual revenue for the Winter Recreation Program and may reduce emergency budget reserves, leaving the program more vulnerable to year-to-year variability in snowpack and funding. Staff noted that revenue during the snow drought of 2014-2015 declined 30%. Because the Winter Recreation Program is self-funded with an operating budget based on the previous season’s revenue, variability in snowpack and snow quality can create both challenges and opportunities for the program. For example, if a low snowpack year is followed by a high snowpack year, operating expenses for plowing and trail grooming may exceed available budget. Plowing costs for years with more rain-on-snow events can also be higher than budgeted, since rain-on-snow makes snow heavier and more difficult to clear and groom. Winter Recreation may have to stop plowing some locations before the season ends, limiting access to affected Sno-Parks or leading to pre-season closures. In other cases, funds may be pulled from budgets for equipment replacement/repair to maintain access. On the positive side, high snowpack years create an opportunity to place extra funds in an emergency reserve.

Adapting to Future Challenges:

Winter Recreation staff noted that adapting program operations to decreasing snowpack may require moving Sno-Park access points (e.g., parking lots) to higher elevations. This kind of shift would create several challenges. First, moving Sno-Parks may require accessing existing or building new roads at a time when the US Forest Service is focusing more on decommissioning roads. Second, moving Sno-Parks to higher elevation will reduce usable trail miles. Staff estimated that moving the system up in elevation could shrink the amount of usable trail miles from 3,300 miles to 1,500 miles. Moving to higher elevation would also push more trail users into avalanche territory, increasing safety risks.

For a full report contact the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

Program Funding: It is difficult to make accurate financial predictions in a program that is dependent on the weather, fuel costs, and user participation. All of these factors impact the

number of sno-park permits that are sold and the number of snowmobiles that are registered. With the work of the Washington State Snowmobile Association and the Washington State Legislature, snowmobile registrations and fuel tax refunds have been increased over the past 3 years which has resulted in a positive impact on the snowmobile program's funding.

Despite the uncertainty, the Non-Motorized Program has experienced some financial stability with fee increases in 2009, and the elimination of reciprocity with neighboring states in 2010. The program is striving to meet increasing demands over the past decade, and is working to maintain current service levels. Opportunities to provide program expansion and growth will depend upon the ability to sustain funding levels. When contemplating the future, a prudent course of action may be to determine what service level can be sustained and budget accordingly, and examine the demands put on the Sno-Park system.

ISSUES IN PROVIDING RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES – According to SCORP:

- ❖ Among local providers, three issues repeatedly emerged as the most important: funding, maintenance of existing facilities, and problems related to access.
- ❖ Among federal, state, and not-for-profit recreation providers, public access is by far the top issue of concern.
- ❖ Among all providers, creating new partnership opportunities and increasing public access are priorities.
- ❖ User conflicts and recreation compatibility are key issues of concern to providing quality outdoor recreation experiences to user groups. User conflicts can have serious consequences, including safety issues, user displacement, and even participation desertion.
- ❖ There are three trends that may pose challenges to outdoor recreation providers in the future: increasing demand for outdoor recreation due to population growth, increasing diversity of recreation experiences, and the contemporary retraction of government programs (e.g., anti-tax initiatives in Washington). An additional factor is that the Legislature did away with the Tourism promotion agency board. Washington is the only state that does not have an active agency to promote state tourism. ⁽⁴⁾

(1) Estimates of Future Participation in Outdoor Recreation in Washington State. A Report by the Washington Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) 2015

(2) Outdoor Recreation Participation Study, 8th Edition. Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC), 2005

(3) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2014.

(4) The 2013 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) – Recreation and Conservation Office

Plan Implementation

The plan includes an expansive list of strategies to accomplish its goals. There is certainly no expectation that the Program could or should be obligated to implement each and every one of these strategies during the next ten years. However, the list should be viewed as a menu of different opportunities that can be actively pursued. It is likely that, during plan implementation, other strategies will be discovered that are not currently included in this edition of the plan.

The following is a discussion of the most important aspects to be considered in implementing the Strategic Plan.

Relationships and Volunteer support are truly essential components of the Winter Recreation Program, so efforts to strengthen existing and develop new relationships with advisory committees, individual and group volunteers should continue, especially with local grooming councils and coordinators.

The roles and responsibilities of staff, Advisory Committees and volunteers have been clarified and education provided. This education continues with the dissemination of operating procedures given to each new Advisory Committee member and Grooming Coordinator.

The two existing advisory committees have established a Steering Committee made up of each Chair, Vice Chair and one additional member of the opposite committee. The combination of representatives of each committee into a unified Winter Recreation Steering Committee has led to the development of Operating Procedures and Program Policy.

Written operating procedures provide a vehicle for process improvement throughout the life of the Program. Procedures reflecting current and best practices have been prepared by the Steering Committee and Program staff, and shared for review, and approval, by the Advisory Committees. These Operating Procedures should be revisited on a regular basis to ensure that they reflect the latest thinking. Additional and/or modified administrative code may also be a necessary step in administration of the program.

Equitable and adequate funding will be a necessity to enable the Winter Recreation Program to respond to future growth in recreational demand. Increased funding for non-motorized recreational uses should be reevaluated over the next ten years. An attempt to simplify sno-park permit options should be explored while maintaining adequate and dedicated levels of funding. The motorized and non-motorized funds should remain separate. Motorized funds cannot legally be re-directed for non-motorized purposes, and the plan does not advise combining the funds.

The Winter Recreation Program has become more visible and better integrated as a regular program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. Being recognized as a viable program within the agency has benefited our partners and users due to the assistance that is now being obtained from other agency programs and supporting services.

The goals of securing **recreational access** and **separating incompatible uses** should be pursued concurrently by means of **viable planning functions**. Area-specific plans would identify where access is needed, where Sno-Parks should be established or removed, where “snow-play” and trail systems should be developed or altered, and how to satisfy the recreational demands of a given area of the state. The local area plans would then become the seedbed for germination of project applications that are submitted to the Advisory Committees for funding decisions.

Safety, education and resource stewardship should be enhanced throughout the state, with a better law enforcement presence at Sno-Parks and increased on-trail enforcement. Earlier winter season enforcement presence has proven to be an effective tool for education and rule compliance. Law enforcement at Sno-Parks and on trails is now accomplished by a broad coalition of agencies including State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, State Fish & Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, local county Sheriff’s offices, and sometimes the State Patrol. Establishing more rules and regulations for the use of Sno-Parks and trails without the ability to enforce them would not be productive.

Information provided to the Public regarding trail and snow conditions must be accurate and timely, especially for weekends and holidays. This could be accomplished by more aggressive management of the Winter Recreation website and by providing links to the websites of other state agencies, non-profit organizations including the Washington State Snowmobile Association, local Nordic clubs, and local Chambers of Commerce. GPS trackers on grooming machines will also provide more up-to-date information and accountability. Providing information that is not accurate or up-to-date generates visitor complaints and is detrimental to public perception of the program and agency.

The remaining goals and strategies regarding **signs, trails and parking areas, grooming, contract management, financial accountability, management effectiveness, and responding to complaints and disputes** are all self-explanatory.

Overall, elements of the plan should be prioritized and reflected in operating procedures and work of the advisory committees and staff to ensure they are carried out in an orderly manner. Over the life of this Strategic Plan there should be a growing emphasis on local input regarding the location and manner of providing snow-based recreational services, recognizing the need to maintain a distinct identity for the Program, and striving for consistent high quality services that equitably represent the interests of the recreating public.

Upper Level Objectives, Goals and Strategies

The following are proposed upper level objectives, supporting goals, and some suggested strategies for attaining them. Those strategies in bold type are suggested priorities. Strategies followed by a dollar sign (\$) indicate that additional funding will be necessary to implement the strategy.

Upper Level Objective 1. Access to snow-based recreation will be our primary product.

GOAL:

- 1. Recreational access opportunities are responsive to user demands, while reflecting sensitive environmental stewardship.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Plan for or relocate more Sno-Parks, if trail system has the capacity to handle increased usage; and seek opportunities to expand trail systems to meet the needs of current and future populations, including non-groomed trail routes into backcountry areas (\$).
- B. Identify a list of desirable trailheads that currently do not have winter access, but have future potential for back country access.
- C. Develop opportunities to provide “snowplay” areas, including sledding and tubing runs.**
- D. Pursue adequate plowed access to off-trail recreational activities, such as snowshoeing, climbing, backcountry camping, sledding and general snow-play (\$).**
- E. Actively participate in land use planning processes carried out by various land management agencies to advocate for recreational access, and participate in annual meetings with land-owners OSV travel would be of particular interest for snowmobilers and motorbikes with conversion kits...**
- F. Investigate the need for more “doggy” trails, skijoring and dog-sledding opportunities.
- G. Explore new opportunities for overnight lodging (cabins and yurts) and warming huts at Sno-Park areas and back-country areas accessed by trail (\$).
- H. Pursue permanent easements or long-term agreements for trail routes across public and private lands (\$).
- I. Improve definitions of roles and responsibilities of land owners and user groups.**
- J. Establish fat tire bike designated trail locations and use guidelines.**

GOAL:

- 2. The Program has viable planning functions.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Plan and develop future facilities and services will be responsive to user needs and concerns, will assess and address environmental impacts, safety concerns, overcrowding and user conflicts; and will involve stakeholders and the Advisory Committees.
- B. Encourage local stakeholders and volunteers to assist State Parks in developing area-specific plans that are guided by, consistent with, and help implement the Strategic Plan. As part of this, plan criteria needs to be developed and existing Sno-Parks evaluated.**

- C. Analyze the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) data on the number of motorized and non-motorized users in the state in a cooperative effort with outdoor equipment retailers and other public agencies.
- D. Continue to survey users and land owners on a regular basis to identify present and future needs and provide feedback, including demographics or economic impacts. Consider surveying people coming off trail, regarding the services provided (snow removal, sanitary conditions, trail head and trail signing, trail surface, etc). (\$)**
- E. Explore opportunities for more Sno-Parks and comprehensive trail systems that are easily accessed from population centers, to decrease drive times and help alleviate congestion at existing sites.
- F. Planning and development of future Sno-Parks and “Sno-Park Zones”, and trails, will consider reliability of snow cover, higher elevation access points to parking and potential links to other attractions and amenities, including national, state and local parks, historic sites, scenic views, and private lodging and food services.
- G. Utilize the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and input from other governmental organizations (such as the U.S. Forest Service and counties) in the planning of facilities and services specific to non-motorized use.
- H. Promote recreation activities that enhance health and fitness.
- I. Move towards a more streamlined sno-park permit system requirement and remove the need for a discover pass with a one-day sno-park permit on state owned land.**

GOAL:

- 3. There is adequate separation of incompatible or conflicting recreational uses.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Sno-Park areas should serve dedicated trail systems when possible to meet the needs of a variety of incompatible or conflicting uses.**
- B. Separate “snow-play” areas should be provided.
- C. Educate recreational users about the needs and desires of the various users.
- D. Where conflicts develop, manage uses more intensely, and consider alternating uses by time or space as a means to avoid conflicts.
- E. Consider using Sno-Park hosts or other volunteers to provide on-site education concerning rules, regulations and trail etiquette.**
- F. Target enforcement efforts in response to incident reports and complaints (\$).
- G. Continue to closely examine what other states and provinces are doing to mitigate use conflicts, i.e., Fat Tire Bicycles on snowmobile trails and/or groomed ski trails, side-by-sides and other over the snow vehicles (OSV) on winter trails.

GOAL:

- 4. Well maintained, clearly signed and usable parking areas and trails, with accurate maps.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Snow removal should be a first priority for funding and contracting so that users can expect the parking lots to be plowed.**
- B. Signing should be provided to clearly designate trails dedicated to certain uses, i.e. “Snowshoe only”, “Skijoring only”, “Dogs not permitted on Trail”, etc. and to let people know where they are, and where access is prohibited.**
- C. Install more restrooms where needed, and provide ADA compliant restrooms, where practical. (\$)
- D. Pursue opportunities to expand trail route identification and selection with volunteers, local clubs and organizations.**
- E. Review and enhance directional signing from highways and roads to parking areas and trailheads.

GOAL:

- 5. Effective, safe trail grooming is provided.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Implement “condition-responsive” grooming as opposed to “fixed-schedule” grooming, and provide flexibility for grooming schedules to address local conditions.**
- B. Apply cost-benefit and feasibility analyses when determining how to provide grooming services in any given area, considering private businesses, non-profit organizations, other agencies, or State Parks’ staff and equipment.**
- C. Analyze the need for additional groomed trail routes where necessary to reduce crowding, and improve trail safety and quality.
- D. The need and identification of ungroomed or intermittently groomed trails should be evaluated and communicated to the users.
- E. Implementing GPS technology to validate grooming data and provide 24/7 snowcat location ability for emergencies and breakdown assistance.**
- F. Lease GPS equipment and implement equipment tracking safety system.**

Upper Level Objective 2. We will build enduring partnerships.

GOAL:

1. A vigorous, organized and respected volunteer program.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Accurately define the roles and responsibilities of volunteers, and provide related orientation and training.**
- B. Increase the use of individual and group volunteers to carry out certain components of the program, such as monitoring, periodic evaluations, scheduling, and day-to-day operations.**
- C. Train volunteers that can be contacted on-site by users to supplement State Parks' staff and troubleshoot issues needing attention, help with user surveys, register complaints, and do car and people counts.**

GOAL:

2. Viable Advisory Committees, Associations, Councils, Clubs and Organizations that are regarded as cooperative partners.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Accurately define the roles and responsibilities of advisory committee members, grooming councils, etc., and provide related orientation and training, when appropriate.**
- B. Give advisory committees, associations, councils, etc., meaningful involvement in creating operating procedures, policies and management of the program, and not relegate them to menial tasks only.**
- C. Seek assistance and leadership from these partnerships in advocating for programs priorities, funding and growth.**

Upper Level Objective 3. We will maintain open and responsive communications with the public.

GOAL:

1. Safety, education and resource stewardship are high priorities.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Upgrade security at Sno-Park areas, and improve enforcement on trails in those areas that have experienced user conflicts (\$).**
- B. Explore and implement online snowmobile and general winter recreation safety programs and certifications.**
- C. Advisory Committees should make the allocation of a pre-determined percentage of each fund for enforcement of rules at Sno-Parks and on trail systems a priority.**

- D. **Staff and volunteers to receive avalanche awareness and safety training, with more certified instructors (\$).**
- E. Work with land managing agencies and other local agencies to provide on-the-ground education/enforcement.
- F. Provide a strong emphasis on education and interpretation regarding the preservation of wildlife habitat and environmentally sensitive areas, and low-impact recreation.
- G. Conduct emphasis programs on respecting property rights of others; including trespass issues, wilderness encroachment, noise and pollution.

GOAL:

2. We provide accurate and timely information to the public.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Utilize a variety of delivery methodologies; social media, websites and links, including those maintained by State Parks, Outdoor Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, WSSA, CCWRC, and regular news releases about Winter Recreation Program functions, activities and projects.
- B. Provide consistent and periodic updated information on trail conditions and status on the Winter Recreation website, or on linked websites.**
- C. Publish and distribute updated Winter Recreation publications, including maps and brochures showing the locations of recreational opportunities (including groomed and ungroomed trails) and explaining program funding mechanisms.
- D. Enlist volunteer assistance with update or redesign of maps, brochures and other publications.
- E. Do a pre-season press kit to newspapers about the Winter Recreation program.
- F. Participate in trade shows, and submit articles to trade magazines.
- G. Research on-line interactive web based mapping technology, integrated with GPS equipment to provide the public with near real-time “groomed trail maps”.**

GOAL:

3. We respond to complaints and disputes in a timely and sensitive manner.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Review the procedure for resolving disputes and conflicts between grooming councils and contractors, and among user groups.**
- B. Review the procedure for thoroughly investigating and responding to complaints in a timely manner.**

Upper Level Objective 4. We will exercise transparent decision-making, with clear, understandable, and concisely written contracts, procedures and practices, grants and contracts.

GOAL:

- 1. We actively involve people in decisions that affect them, and help people participate by providing them with credible, timely and objective information.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. In consultation with the Advisory Committees and stakeholder groups, staff will develop and write policies, procedures and operational guidelines to direct program administrative functions.**
- B. New administrative codes (WACs) should be developed that regulate program activities, as necessary.**
- B. Policies, procedures and guidelines will be reviewed at regular intervals, and modified as necessary.
- C. Operating guidelines are approved by the Chairs of Advisory Committees.

GOAL:

- 2. We employ effective contract management principles and techniques, and maintain high standards of financial accountability and management effectiveness, including responsive budgeting and clear financial reporting.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Streamline and modernize application and contracting processes to reduce administrative workload for staff and applicants.**
- B. Ensure congruity between grant applications and the contracts.**
- C. Provide timely and detailed budget information and fund status to Advisory Committees and others.**
- D. Modernize accountability regarding annual revenues, grant funds received, funds realized from sale of excess equipment and management of state-owned property.
- E. Provide agendas for Advisory Committee meetings at least one week before meetings, and disseminate Advisory Committee minutes within one month following meetings.
- F. Program staff should receive training targeted to enhance management effectiveness (\$).

- G. Evaluate the program’s management and divisional reporting structure and identify administrative efficiencies and inefficiencies and effectiveness. This should include a determination if the program needs additional staff to maintain or enhance service levels, and if funding support is available.**

Upper Level Objective 5. We manage public resources in a consistent and responsible manner.

GOAL:

- 1. Winter Recreation services are adequately and equitably funded.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Advocate for regional or state-wide organizations (comparable to the Washington State Snowmobile Association) that gives voice to non-motorized recreational users, to coordinate legislative relations. Consider approaching the Washington Trails Association and other similar organizations with this idea.
- B. Funds collected from Commercial Use permittees and Concessionaires that use Sno-Park areas should be directed into the Winter Recreation Program budget.**
- C. Higher Sno-Park permit fees for private charter buses and vehicles with larger capacities, or requiring larger parking spaces, should be explored.
- D. Applications for funding will give preference to applications that show local volunteer and stakeholder support, and/or that involve multiple funding partners, and how projects link to local and regional systems and local economic interests.
- E. Applications to the Advisory Committees for funding should be consistent with the Strategic Plan and any local or regional plans that are subsequently developed.
- F. Scoring of funding applications by each Advisory Committee should consider the impacts of the projects on other users, and there should be coordination in project funding between the Advisory Committees, when appropriate.
- G. Evaluate state ownership of grooming equipment by tracking the full ownership cost of the state-owned equipment.**
- H. Ensure efficient and effective use of established Accounts (Snowmobile and Non-Motorized), keeping administrative costs at appropriate levels.
- I. Explore ways to ensure that all snowmobiles are registered.
- J. Continue to seek grants and funds from other sources such as the Recreation Trails Program.

GOAL:

- 2. We plan ahead to compensate for variables that affect service delivery.**

STRATEGIES:

- A. Establish snowmobile and non-motorized emergency funds that can be used to supplement program expenses and provide flexibility in years when snow is abundant and the season can be extended.**
- B. Develop criteria to determine funding and funding levels based on length of snow season, consistent snow cover, higher altitudes, visitor use, and explore varying season start and end dates based on local conditions.**
- C. Develop criteria for consideration when reducing services or early closures of under-utilized Sno-Parks to ensure adequate funding for the remainder of the season.**

Approved and Adopted:

G. Mike Sternback, Assistant Director
Operations Division
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

Date