

July 29, 2020

Mr. Ted Willhite, Chair, and Board Members
Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB)

Sent Via Electronic Mail

RE: Requested Funding Levels for WWRP, YAF, and ALEA Programs

Dear Chair Willhite and Board Members:

We are writing in our roles as President, Executive Director, and Legislative Steering Committee Chair of the Washington Recreation and Park Association (WRPA), a 501(c)3 organization with over 2,100 members and a 73-year history of representing the interests of local parks and recreation agencies throughout the state.

As you prepare for an Aug. 12 Board Meeting that will involve decisions on Capital Budget funding levels to request for key programs such as the Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program (WWRP), Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF), and the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA), we wanted to go on record in asking you to be bold in your thinking. The 2021-23 Capital Budget presents a unique opportunity to use capital infrastructure investments to stimulate the economy and create construction jobs; to steward the great outdoors that is a foundation of our quality of life; and to reinforce parks and open and natural spaces that our residents have increasingly flocked to since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Now more than ever, our residents have gained a recognition of the importance of outdoor recreation and the fitness, public health, and social growth values provided by our local parks systems.

We would also note, at a time when our nation is working to combat system racism and as we see the Black Lives Matter movement shining an even brighter spotlight on the critical battle for racial justice and equality, that our parks can be hallmarks of equity. One of the best things about our local parks is that they are available to everyone regardless of race, income, religious faith, or sexual orientation. These local parks systems truly belong to all of us.

Looking ahead, we respectfully urge you to recommend robust funding levels for WWRP, YAF, and ALEA, especially in light of a severe economic downturn that is making it exponentially harder for local agencies to construct projects and find matching funds. That means the funding you provide, and in some cases the reduced match you are requiring, becomes even more of a lifeblood to parks agencies run by cities, counties, Metropolitan Park Districts (MPDs), and Park Districts.

We ask you to consider the following funding levels:

WWRP -- \$140 Million

We concur with the suggested funding level put forth by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition (WWRC). Similar to the analyses performed by Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff, the principals at WWRC looked at several models in arriving at their \$140 million recommendation.

We know RCO staff determined levels such as \$127 million based on available bond capacity and over \$130 million based on a 75 percent level of funding of applications received. We believe 140 million, in light of the importance of Capital Budget as a stimulus tool, is an appropriate figure to shoot for.

In advocating for this funding level, we underscore that the WWRP is a national model for funding local parks, trails, water access, habitat, and more in a fair and equitable manner. The WWRP is a program our state should be justifiably proud of.

YAF -- \$11.3 Million

We urge a YAF funding level that would cover the approximately \$11.3 million in applications to date and keep this important program near the \$12 million funding level set by the Legislature in the 2019-21 Capital Budget.

We would suggest that the slight dip in YAF applications is directly attributable to the economic difficulties and uncertainties our local communities are facing. Financing projects that supply fields and courts and spaces for our youth is a challenge even in the best of economic times – and these are among the most trying times in our state's and nation's history.

Thus, we ask that you fund the approximately \$11.3 million in applications received. The value you get in funding YAF is incredible, as it enables our local agencies to build or renovate ballfields, courts, swimming pools, mountain bike tracks, skate parks, and more. YAF funds can be used toward both new construction and renovation/maintenance, and while the program puts an emphasis on youth, it nearly always results in fields and courts and spaces that are available to all ages.

ALEA - \$9.1 Million

Similar to our YAF request, we ask that the Board provide a \$9.1 million funding level for ALEA to cover the value of applications received for this program.

The ALEA is another of Washington's hallowed grant programs, with a 3 ½-decade-long track record of using leases from aquatic lands to protect and enhance those lands adjacent to lakes, rivers, tidelands, shore lands, and harbor areas. ALEA funds help our local communities protect the areas abutting our navigable waterways and give those same communities a powerful community restoration and economic development tool to provide the access and the open spaces their residents cherish.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for funding levels of \$140 million for WWRP, \$11.3 million for YAF, and \$9.1 million for ALEA. We will plan to be at your Aug. 12 Board meeting to speak to these funding requests and stand ready to answer any questions you may have.



Paul Simmons, President



Tiffany Hanzo Martin, Exec. Dir.



Roxanne Miles, Legislative Chair