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Director



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

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January 30, 2025

### **Item E-5: 2024 Winter Recreation Program - Report**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** This report provides the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission with an update on the Winter Recreation Program's 2024 non-motorized and snowmobile programs accomplishments and challenges.

**SIGNIFICANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission Winter Recreation Program manages 130 Sno-parks in cooperation with federal, state, and county agencies, snowmobile clubs and private landowners around the state for both motorized and non-motorized use. The program is assisted by two volunteer advisory committees, the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SMAC) and the Winter Recreation Advisory Committee (WRAC). The program provides snow removal, sanitation, and education and enforcement at Sno-parks and grooming for over 800 miles of non-motorized trails and 2,300 miles of snowmobile trails throughout the state.

Snow removal and sanitation in motorized sno-parks, along with trail grooming, equipment, and administrative support, is funded primarily by annual snowmobile registration fees and a portion of state gasoline taxes tied to the number of snowmobile registrations. The program currently receives \$94.20 per registered snowmobile.

Funding from annual snowmobile registration fees and corresponding gas tax allocation:

- \$50 Snowmobile Registration Fee
- \$45.70 Gas Tax (assumes 135 gallons average yearly fuel usage per snowmobile x 34.9 cents per gallon of gas x annual number of registered snowmobiles.)

The non-motorized program is funded by the sale of daily and annual Sno-Park Permits. The revenue received from the sale of Sno-Park Permits provides funding for trail grooming, snow removal, sanitation, equipment, and administrative support.

Funding from non-motorized Sno-park permit fees:

- \$25 Daily permit
- \$50 Seasonal permit
- \$70 Special groomed sticker
- \$120 Combination of seasonal and special groomed

Non-motorized Program Accomplishments:

### *New Franklin Falls Sno-park*

In coordination with the USFS Snoqualmie Ranger District, a new Sno-park was created at the Franklin Falls Trailhead located off exit 47 just below Snoqualmie Pass. The Sno-park accommodates parking for approximately 100 vehicles during the winter and features a 2-mile snowshoe trail to Franklin Falls and an area for general snow play. The creation of this new Sno-park is intended to help alleviate Sno-park parking along the I-90 corridor and expand winter recreational opportunities to the west of Snoqualmie Pass.

### *Youth low income/underserved outreach*

Working with Washington State Parks DEI staff, Lake Easton State Park staff, and REI, the Winter Recreation Program was able to provide funding for three snow outings to Hyak Sno-park for 58 youth and 42 adults from Toppenish and Wenatchee. The outings provided the opportunity for families to enjoy snow shoeing and some general snow play, many for the first time. The Winter Recreation Program looks forward to providing additional opportunities for low income/underserved youth and families to enjoy the snow this winter season and future seasons to come.

### Snowmobile Program Challenges:

#### *Budget Reduction Exercises*

Due to declining snowmobile registrations and a missed grant opportunity, the Winter Recreation Snowmobile program faced a 25 percent reduction in available funds for the 2024-25 season. The number of registered snowmobiles has decreased by 52 percent over the past two decades, from a high of 38,331 in 2002 to 18,434 in 2024. Working closely with the Snowmobile Advisory Committee over the summer was instrumental in developing this season's budget. Maintaining access to motorized trails was the top priority of the advisory committee and the Winter Recreation Program.

#### *Temporary Closure of Selected Sno-parks*

Fourteen motorized Sno-Parks have been temporarily closed for the 2024-2025 winter season in response to the 25 percent reduction in available funding from last season's budget. The Winter Recreation Program worked with the Snowmobile Advisory Committee, local snowmobile clubs, and managers of lands on which the sno-parks are located to finalize the list of sno-park closures. The principal goal was continuing operation of the most used sno-parks and preserving access to the broader network of groomed snowmobile trails. Budget reduction discussions addressed the feasibility, practical limitations, and implications of closures.

#### *Recreational Trails Program Grants Submitted in November 2024*

The Winter Recreation Program staff submitted five Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant requests to the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for funding last November. If successful, the grants will provide supplemental financial support for snowmobile trail grooming, snow removal, and repairs to state owned equipment.

*Legislation to Increase Snowmobile Registration Fees*

Commission request legislation for increasing the snowmobile registration fee from \$50 to \$75, and the vintage snowmobile fee from \$12 to \$18 has been approved by the Governor's Office for the 2025 legislative session. Prior to submitting the proposed legislation, support was received from the Snowmobile Advisory Committee, the Washington State Snowmobile Association, and feedback from a survey of the snowmobile community that received over 1,000 responses. The survey indicated that over 65 percent of respondents support an increase in snowmobile registration fees.

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**Reviewer(s):**

**Owen Rowe, Policy and Governmental Affairs Director**

**Van Church, Fiscal Impact Statement:** Report only, no fiscal impact.

**Kira Swanson, SEPA Review:** Pursuant to WAC 197-11-704, staff have determined that this Commission agenda item is a report and therefore is not subject to State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review.

**Andy Woo, Assistant Attorney General:**

**Approved for Transmittal to Commission**



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**Diana Dupuis, Director**