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Governor Inslee's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation

As parents and grandparents, we want our children to experience, enjoy, learn about and become lifetime stewards of Washington's magnificent natural resources. As Washingtonians, we recognize the importance of improving the preservation of and access to our state parks and state recreation lands for ourselves and for the tourism industry. We all see the need to promote Washington's outdoor assets and recreation opportunities across the state. By so doing, we will not only encourage the growth of the many businesses now operating in these sectors but make Washington an even more attractive place for others to start and grow their companies.



Recent research from the Outdoor Industry Association indicates that outdoor recreation businesses in Washington directly support 227,000 jobs (more than 7 percent of non-military jobs), and consumer spending on recreation-oriented gear, apparel, lodging and services generates \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenue.

Yet despite this sizable economic contribution, the infrastructure for outdoor recreation — the natural settings and places we have to play — is perceived as 'nice to have' instead of 'must have.' As a result, parks and recreation facilities are at chronic risk of underfunding. State parks, for instance, accumulate a mounting maintenance backlog while the demand for open spaces and local playfields fields outstrips supply in many locations. Outdoor recreation is often undervalued as a means of improving public health even as childhood obesity rates are at an all-time high. And public lands are not fully appreciated for their contribution to environmental health as practices promote clean water and mitigating the harm done by climate change.

Other states are ahead of Washington in recognizing that the outdoors and, in particular, recreation in the outdoors, deliver benefits to individual health, to community cohesion and to the economy. With the variety of stunning outdoor assets distributed across our state, Washington should be a national leader in sustaining our natural settings and in cultivating the many

benefits that outdoor recreation offers. Today, Washington addresses outdoor recreation policy in piecemeal fashion, undervaluing a sector that can be a major contributor to individual, community, environmental and economic health.

To set a new course, Governor Jay Inslee proposes to create the Blue Ribbon Parks and Outdoor Recreation Task Force, a public/private/nonprofit partnership that will develop a holistic strategic plan and provide solid policy direction for how Washington's outdoor assets can be better leveraged. The task force will develop a strategic plan and policy recommendations that will:

- » Support Washington's outdoor recreation economy and grow jobs in the sector.
- » Use Washington's recreation assets for recruiting and retaining top talent for all areas of the economy.
- » Improve access to and preservation of State Parks and other state outdoor recreation lands for the benefit of all Washingtonians.
- » Raise public awareness by more deliberately tying recreation at local fields and parks to the broad benefits of the outdoors.
- » Create energy behind outdoor recreation as a way to improve the health of children and adult alike.
- » Promote education on value of nature and the environment, with a particular focus on educating young people about the science of the environment.
- » Integrate outdoor recreation in the state's overall economic development plans and ensure recognition for outdoor recreation pursuits is built into our state's tourism strategies.

The task force will include representatives from outdoor recreation businesses and other key industries, recreation and conservation nonprofit organizations. It will also include elected officials and other opinion leaders. The group will conduct up to six listening sessions across Washington and assure the state's diverse range of interests is fully represented.

The task force will deliver its strategic plan and recommendations to the Governor in September 2014.

By making outdoor recreation a key focus of his administration, we will:

- » Enable outdoor experiences where children and their families can connect with, understand more deeply and grow to appreciate the outdoors.
- » Foster a healthier planet so future generations have the same (if not better) opportunities we have.
- » Provide adequate resources to maintain State Parks and other state outdoor recreation lands and facilities.
- » Promote healthier lifestyles for children and adults, reducing obesity and reliance on health care services.
- » Ensure outdoor recreation is integrated with economic development and tourism goals.
- » Add to the list of Washington's innovative sectors by recognizing that our recreation businesses are among the most creative in the country.
- » Help other Washington businesses recruit and retain top-notch employees by drawing attention to our exceptional quality of life.

When we can deliver on these goals, we will shift the ethos of our citizens, young and old. The Governor looks forward to cultivating a statewide community of stewards, a community of people engaged with and caring for the outdoors for the long term.