

The News Tribune

September 18, 2008

State parks foundation seeks \$4 million for four projects

Since it began operations in 2001, the Washington State Parks Foundation has invested \$2.2 million in our state's 123 parks.

Last year, the foundation made about \$70,000 in commitments to fund projects and programs. It includes money for a new amphitheater at Sun Lakes/Dry Falls State Park and for Inside Out, a program that introduces minority and children from low-income families to the outdoors and careers in the outdoors.

Now, in its seventh year, the foundation has far loftier goals.

The foundation has kicked off a \$4 million capital campaign, one executive director Tom Lattimore admits is ambitious.

But, he said, there is a crucial need for this additional infusion of funds. There are about 40 million to 50 million visits to state parks each year.

"We're in danger of loving our state



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parks to death," he said in a recent chat.

To reverse that trend, the foundation has identified four projects it wants to fund with money raised during the campaign.

"These are signature projects that the state otherwise would not do," he said.

They are:

■ Rosario Beach at Deception Pass State Park: The plan is to build a 2,000-square-foot interpretive center and convert an old bathhouse into a classroom.

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The goal is to help protect the tide pools and the fragile life forms that call them home. The estimated cost is \$1.2 million.

■ **Cama Beach State Park.** The money would assist with the second phase of the state's newest park by assisting the Center for Wooden Boats refurbish buildings to allow them to offer marine programs at the Camano Island park. Estimated cost is \$1.2 million.

■ **Build 100 miles of trails** around the state. Lattimore said this would be a mix of hiking, biking, multi-use and water trails. "We haven't identified where they would be," he said. There is no cost estimate.

■ **Build 25 new yurts and cabins** in state parks. This would help the State Parks Department meet its goal of building 100 new units by the 2013 centennial of the state parks system. There is no cost estimate, but Lattimore said it costs \$15,000 to buy and furnish a yurt.

Lattimore recognizes this won't be easy in today's economic environment.

"The big challenge I've experienced in my year on the job is 'Why should I give money to the government, I already pay taxes?'"

"When I came on board, I did some research. We have 123 state parks. You can go from ocean beaches to the desert. I don't think many states can boast that kind of diversity," Lattimore said.

"Our state park system offers affordable recreation opportunities for young families and people on fixed incomes."

In doing his research, Lattimore also discovered a tradition of citizen support, one he hopes will serve as a precedent for the campaign.

"We wouldn't have a park system or one of the caliber that we do have today without the private donations of both land and money. There is a legacy of giving that created this state park system."

He cited individual and group efforts that led to the creation of parks such as Federation Forest, Cama Beach and Joemma. He hopes to build upon that spirit of giving.

"Giving to the parks is giving to yourself, too."