

LITTLE SPOKANE RIVER

\$243,497

Billion-Dollar Birthday

Little Spokane River:
Spokane County: 216 acres to
Riverside State Park for hiking
and interpretive trails

Preserving land one parcel at a time:
The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program's
20 years of success

The three natural and critical areas represented in these photos were among the first to be purchased and preserved by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), our state's least-known and most successful land-acquisition program. To date, the program has funded protection of a staggering 350,000 acres of Washington's great outdoors.

This year the program marks 20 years of continued success, with land conservation supported by the Legislature's cumulative funding of \$550 million and matching grants to surpass \$1 billion. In all, 921 grants have helped build parks, trails and access to water, in addition to purchasing natural habitats and critical areas all across Washington. More recently, funds are also restoring riparian habitat and preserving farmland.

Ronald Reagan was president when Elliot Marks, then the Washington state director of The Nature Conservancy, gathered a host of sportsmen's clubs, county parks departments, the Bullitt Foundation, environmental organizations and state agencies to create the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.

The coalition, which today claims 135 members, wrote the legislative bill in 1989 to make it "...the policy of the state to acquire as soon as possible the most significant lands for wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation purposes before they are converted to other uses." Gov. Booth Gardner not only signed the bill (RCW 79A.15), but also ensured that the WWRP would be woven into the state budget plan throughout the decade.

Photos and Story by Joel W. Rogers

CYPRESS ISLAND

\$1,421,970

Cypress Island:
Skagit County: 140 waterfront acres to
the Washington Department of Natural
Resources to preserve the island's
native ecosystem

The program has provided dedicated funding for county parks and Washington state's Parks Department, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW).

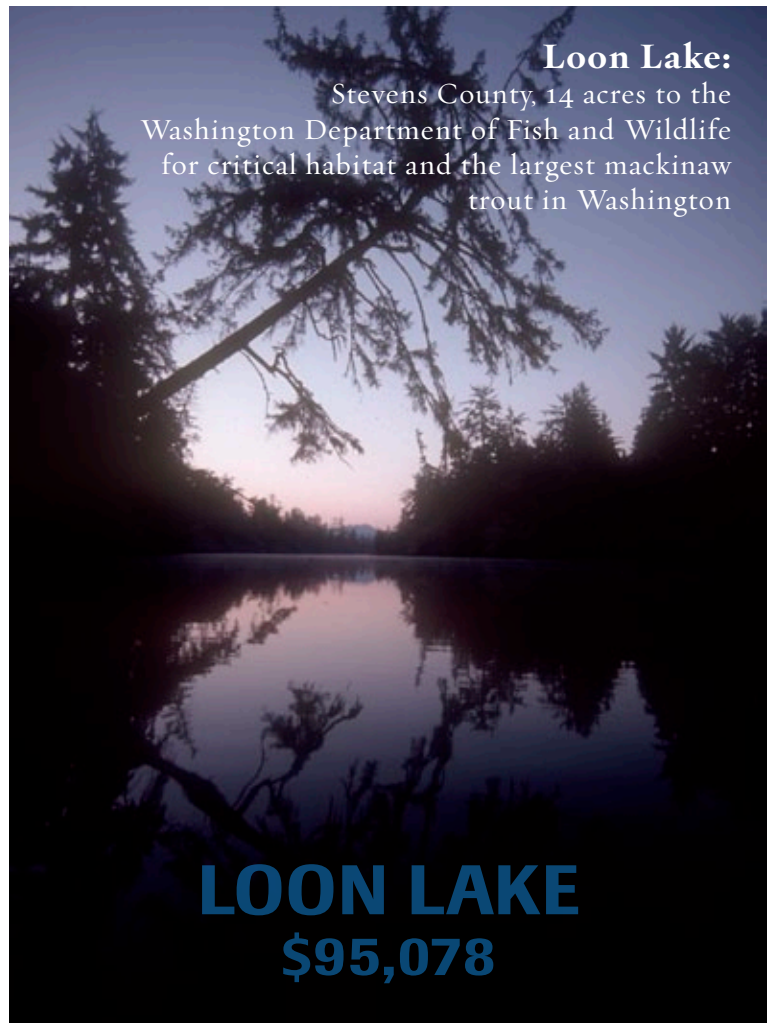
"For many years, citizens of Clark County had little access to the Columbia River or to regional parks," says Florence Wager of the Vancouver-Clark County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission. "But with the advent of the WWRP, beautiful areas were opened up to the public for their recreation and good health." The program also allowed agencies to plan and expand for the future in new and unprecedented ways.

"State Parks had never been able to obtain capital funds commensurate with future needs until this program came along," said Joan Thomas of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

Pene Speaks, assistant division manager of the Department of Natural Resources, concurred. WWRP represents "our primary tool of acquisition of private land, allowing us to protect some of the most critically threatened areas of the state such as the Washougal Oaks and the Elk River."

And over time the WWRP enabled the various agencies and counties to strengthen habitat diversity and outdoor opportunities throughout the state by using matching grants and donations to connect conservation lands.

Dave Brittell, assistant director of wildlife for WDFW, explained how this can work. "The Methow Wildlife Area is an example where we already owned land in the drainage, and with the WWRP we were able to expand and connect our ownership with other public lands. Additionally, the WWRP provides a match for federal grants such as the Endangered Species Act, Section 6, grants for species preservation; if you have a state match, you



Learn more about any of the 921 sites online at the coalition's Web site (wildliferecreation.org).

can leverage the federal dollars in a one-to-one match."

Looking back over the past two decades, Elliot Marks reflected on the teamwork, continued loyalty and energy of the people who made the WWRP a success.

"The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition has really created an unusual cross-over community in conservation. It is the principal meeting place for people who care about outdoor Washington...It just makes a lot of people happy."

The Nature Conservancy continues to play a leadership role in the Coalition and advocate for funding for WWRP. You can be a leader, too, by letting your elected representatives in Olympia know that you want this program to continue to get vital state funding.

SCIENCE

Independent experts rank applications for WWRP grants based on criteria such as the benefits to the public, level of threat to the property, or presence of threatened or endangered species.

RESTORATION

ADVOCACY

The Conservancy led the effort to create this program and continues to advocate for funding.