

## “State Parks’ panel approves John Wayne Trail funding”

July 27, 2016

By Garth Meyer  
Gazette Reporter

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission has finished its public planning process for the John Wayne Trail, approving a two-year \$800,000 capital budget and \$400,000 operations budget. The recommended money would be used in permitting and design work for a list of projects from Beverly Bridge at the Columbia River to Malden, including upgrades for safety and maintenance. The money is part of State Parks’ \$96 million overall budget proposal for 2017-19 which will need to be approved by the state legislature.

The state Parks’ commission – a seven-member volunteer board appointed by the governor – approved the numbers July 21 at a meeting in Clarkston. “This is a cautious approach, if you will,” said Randy Kline, Parks’ spokesman. On the list for permitting and design work are two trestles and two tunnels at Rock Lake, a missing 1,500-foot trestle at Cow Creek and six new trailheads: Kenova (west of Malden), Rock Lake, Revere, Marango, Ralston and Lind. Tekoa is outside the planning area for this study. The design and permitting work would ultimately be used to apply for grant funding and for use in the state legislature in seeking money.

As far as trail maintenance, a key point of controversy for many landowners along the trail, the \$400,000 may further fund a state Parks’ employee on weed control. Earlier this year, a seasonal worker was hired and has been on the trail since May. As far as improvements, the trail package is 59th on the state Parks’ list of more than 100 projects for 2017-19. Top project is the final phase of a lighthouse restoration project at Cape Disappointment, for which previous phases have already been funded. “Overall, this was really where we wanted to get through this planning process,” Kline said. The two-day meeting in Clarkston began with a work session followed by a staff presentation led by Kline on day two. After public comment, the commission voted.

Will there ultimately be an uninterrupted, cross-state John Wayne Trail? “That’s what we’re going to be working toward. The commission has explicitly called out and identified it as a priority,” Kline said. “That’s a big one.” Four miles of private property gaps mark the 135-mile stretch between Lind and Malden. From Lind to the Columbia River, 30 miles of active rail line compromise the trail, along with 20 miles overseen by the Department of Natural Resources. A road detour is an option for the active rail line.

West of the Columbia, the trail is largely continuous, except for gaps near Ellensburg and Easton. It ends at North Bend. To aid state Parks’ study of the particular eastern Washington section of trail, an advisory committee was formed – including Tekoa’s Ted Blaszk, Ritzville landowner Brandon Spencer and Rosalia’s Jay Allert. Kline said they will now be asked to help with streamlining the permit process to use the trail as well as simplifying its name/identity: “Iron Horse State Park John Wayne Pioneer Trail.”

The state legislature will convene next January on the 2017-19 budget. The session is scheduled to conclude with a new budget July 1, 2017. “Since we’re just asking for design and permit money, hopefully it shouldn’t be too much heartburn,” Kline said.

As for whether state Parks will put another weed control-employee out on the stretch of trail next year, it is undecided. “I don’t have the answer to that, but I would be very surprised if we didn’t,” Kline said. Will the trail’s adjacent landowners ultimately be satisfied? “We heard what they were saying and we can address their concerns,” Kline said. “What we’ve found nationwide, on trails like this, you literally get opponents coming back saying, ‘We like this trail.’ But this is a little more remote than most trails.”

The state Parks’ formal planning process began in December after a failed budget proviso last September in the legislature almost closed the section from Beverly to Malden.