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Forest when the county and state legislature teamed to transfer the property from the Department of Natural Resources trust for public lands. The IAC granted a waiver of retroactivity that would allow the county to use it as match... though this was about to expire just when the news came.

Kitsap County Parks was recently awarded \$620,000 in grant funding through the Interagency Committee's (IAC) Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) "Urban Wildlife Habitat Category" to acquire property along the Illahee creek corridor if they can complete the acquisitions and spend these funds before June 30 of 2005.

"That's the importance of doing a good job preparing and submitting an application, because with alternate projects, you retain your spot on the list should something like this happen," she said.

Kitsap County Parks was notified by IAC in mid-September they would receive partial funding for two grants applied for in 2002, the \$620,000 for Illahee and another \$200,000 for the acquisition of the Coulter Creek property in south Kitsap for the Coulter Creek Heritage Park (CCHP) Trail.

Marguerite Austin, former project manager and currently Manager of IAC Habitat Section staff, explained, "I tried to call you on Sept. 9 when one of the projects didn't use all their funding and I wondered if your project was still viable given somewhat less than the \$800,000 requested."

Commissioner Patty Lent announced the award at the Illahee Forest Stewardship Committee meeting on Sept. 21. Lent has been an enthusiastic supporter of the IFSC and added, "I envision Illahee Park as the future Central Park."

"Permanently preserving this property will provide vital rearing areas and help maintain the hydrology of the watershed central to a heavily urbanized area," commented Dr. Christopher May, who ranked Illahee as an important refuge watershed in the draft 2002 Refugia update. "Retention of natural stream hydrology is imperative to maintaining suitable habitat for salmonids and conditions in streams in these undisturbed areas appear to be very stable."

Rob Purser, Fisheries Manager for the Suquamish tribe added, "Protecting quality habitat is a great way to protect all of our natural resources including salmon and wildlife. Several other benefits include protecting aquifer recharge areas and providing important greenbelts for city folks as well as increasing property values for the areas around these greenbelts. This is another important land acquisition within Kitsap County to protect habitat and leave a legacy for our future. Congratulations to all the citizens, City, and County staff involved in this successful project."

Community, local government, and legislative support was key to the project's ranking. Phil Rockefeller and Frank Chopp championed the project and support in the legislature, while the Suquamish Tribes Salmon Enhancement program manager Paul Dorn, North Perry Water District, WDFW and DNR, local environmentalist Irwin Krigsman, and urban forester Jim Trainer provided historical references, fish counts, and other scientific data.

Acquisition of land on approximately 229 acres and easements on 60 acres of near pristine quality habitat, together with the 350 acre DNR purchased land, comprises near entirety of the Illahee Creek watershed and sub-watersheds just north of Bremerton.

This corridor will sustain populations of important wildlife, old growth trees, and fish including four species of the family Salmonidae. Limited public access may include nature trails for educational and scientific value.

During a joint meeting of the IFSC and Port of Illahee commissioners, East Bremerton Rotary representative and IFSC member himself, Victor Ulsh announced, in honor of the 100-year anniversary, they have selected the forest for a centennial service project. Phase 1 will consist of the Thompson Lane entrance of the park.

Said Ulsh, "This will be the first step of a longer term relationship between the East Bremerton Rotary and the future Illahee Forest Preserve." Ulsh will also assist with the project at hand, to acquire the IAC properties in eight months time, lending some expertise borrowed from his "day job" at Bradley Scott Commercial

Real Estate (479-6900 vic@bradleyscottinc.com). Members Jim Aho, Audrey Boyer, and Judith Kringsman will round out the rest of the special committee formed.

The Port of Illahee is taking the lead on a Department of Ecology Centennial Clean Water Fund grant application to create a comprehensive surface water management plan for the watershed. Agreeing to assist with monitoring, implementation, and other in-kind match during the two-year project, the IFSC also voted to approve "support and work with the Port and their grant writer, with the preparation of the DOE water quality grant application."

These groups, after so many struggles, will make headway on preserving the forest, fish and water quality of this important wildlife corridor and deserving of more respect for their efforts than just the garbage they have removed!

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