



## House Releases 2003-05 Operating Budget

On Wednesday, April 16, the House Democrats released their 2003-05 Operating Budget. It is better than the Senate's Operating Budget because the House does raise a few new taxes, but like the Senate it also demands that agencies take across-the-board "efficiency cuts" that could hurt environmental programs.

Overall, how did the environmental programs fare? We are still at less than 1.3% of the budget, but the good news is that when Audubon specifically reviewed the budget, we found that our many bird-related issues are funded.

### Bird-related Budgets:

- ☛ \$402,000 is in WDFW's budget for marine bird monitoring
- ☛ spartina control funding is in DNR, Agriculture and WDFW budgets
- ☛ lead shot poisoning research is funded at WDFW
- ☛ nature tourism (which includes an opportunity to fund birding trails) is funded at Community, Trade and Economic Development
- ☛ \$900,000 at WDFW can be used for wetland restoration work for migratory waterfowl
- ☛ \$139,000 is appropriated to the Conservation Commission to work in the Skagit Valley to help farmers, environmentalists, tribes and others agree on how to increase habitat for salmon while preserving farmland

### Good News for the Environment in House Operating Budget:

- ☛ The oil spill response rescue tug was funded to protect Neah Bay and the Straits
- ☛ \$2 million was appropriated to carry out the new Shoreline Management regulations
- ☛ Funding was restored to the Growth Management Program and the Growth Management Hearings Boards (the Senate's budget had severely cut funding for both)
- ☛ Funding for the Energy Office was restored.

### Bad News in the House Operating Budget:

- ☛ \$500,000 was cut out of \$800,000 in Ecology's program to test and monitor persistent bio-accumulative toxics (PBTs).
- ☛ Across-the-board "efficiency" cuts that are the hardest to understand or critique because these cuts are done internally at the agencies and happen after the Legislature leaves Olympia. Audubon will have to constantly watch each agency as it takes those across-the-board cuts.

When you read the House's Operating Budget you see how little goes toward the environment. We compete with HUGE social and health services programs and education. Both almost make up 90% of the budget.

House members' budget priorities are to protect the health of children, keep their commitment to education and eliminate or curtail lower-priority programs. To meet those goals, the House had to fill a \$2.7 billion gap between revenue and expenditures. How did the House fill the hole?

- ☛ \$1.71 billion in program cuts or reductions
- ☛ \$76.9 million from nursing home bed fees
- ☛ \$247 million by transferring funds between different accounts
- ☛ \$653.4 million in new revenue

The new revenue comes from increasing taxes on cigarettes by 50 cents; 5% retail sales tax on hard liquor; penalties for not paying taxes; eliminating sales tax exemption on gum and candy; no tax deduction for business and occupation "cash discounts"; and limiting tax deductions for fees to associations. The new revenue goes to support children's health care, the state's basic health care plan and pre-natal care for 12,000 women.



## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP FUND BECOMES LAW



EE advocates join Governor Locke as he signs HB 1466 on April 16, 2003. From left: Cindy Mitchell, Washington Forest Protection Association; Margaret Tudor, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Representative Rodney Tom, (R-Medina); Beverly Isenson, Governor's Council on Environmental Education; Martin Flynn, representing Woodland Park Zoological Society; Representative Jeanne Kohl-Welles (D-Seattle); Lynne Ferguson, Washington Forest Protection Association; Bruce Beckett, Weyerhaeuser; Representative Dave Quall, (D-Mt. Vernon); Representative Kathy Haigh, (D-Shelton); Nina Carter, Audubon Washington; Erin Walker, Public Affairs; Heath Packard, Audubon Washington

Late Wednesday afternoon, April 16, 2003, Governor Gary Locke signed the state's first law focused solely on environmental education: **HB 1466, the Natural Science, Wildlife and Environmental Education Partnership Fund Act**. This bill creates an account in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide grants for proven and innovative environmental education programs across the state.

"This fund holds incredible promise for today's students, who will be tomorrow's citizens and leaders," said Jeff Parsons, executive director for Audubon Washington. "Research nationwide shows that students exposed to hands-on, field-based natural science education consistently perform better on all subjects throughout their academic careers."

Eligible grant recipients are not-for-profit organizations that partner with schools, agencies,

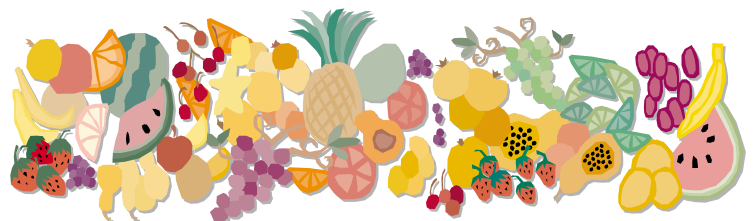
businesses, and other organizations to provide quality, balanced natural science curricula and materials on Washington's lands and waters, flora and fauna, and human use and impact. No appropriation to the fund was made this session.

"This fund could dramatically increase our efforts to assist public schools teach kids about the wonders of natural science in fun and innovative ways." Said Deborah Jensen, President and CEO of the Woodland Park Zoo.

"I have been very impressed with environmental education programs across the state and their positive effects on students' enthusiasm and learning and teachers' motivations," said Rep. Dave Quall, (D-Mt. Vernon) primary sponsor of HB 1466. "A broad-based coalition supported this effort which can, when funded, serve a diverse cross-section of Washington's students."

Washington's Director of the Fish and Wildlife Dept., Jeff Koenings, praised the fund's potential to foster local partnerships between schools and the public and private sectors. "It will nurture students as citizen scientists as well as responsible recreationists," he said.

First introduced in 2001, HB 1466 received support and endorsements from an unprecedented coalition of elected public officials of both parties, as well as organizations and agencies including: Audubon Washington, Environmental Education Association of Washington, Governor's Council on Environmental Education, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Principals Association, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Education Association, Washington State Farm Bureau, Washington State School Directors' Association, Washington Forest Protection Association, and the Woodland Park Zoological Society.





## SHORELINE PROTECTION BILL PASSES WITH FUNDING FROM THE HOUSE DEMOCRATS

**SSB 6012: Updating Shoreline Master Programs** passed the House today with a 67-31 vote. This means local governments will have to follow a schedule to update their Shoreline Master Plans between now and 2014 and they will have state funding to help pay for the work. A coalition of environmental organizations (including Audubon), business, construction industry, agriculture and mining interests worked together to pass this bill. Now it goes to the Governor for signature.

## CONSERVATION DISTRICTS CONTINUE AS SEPARATE AGENCY

### **EHB 2140: Reaffirms Role of Conservation Commission**

This bill passed the Senate unanimously, meaning the Conservation Commission will continue as a separate agency. The Conservation Commission and the Conservation Districts could be strong allies with Audubon because we are interested in restoring and preserving farmlands for agricultural purposes and for bird habitat. Audubon Washington encourages each chapter to find their Conservation District in the Yellow Pages and have coffee or lunch with your local district representatives.

## WILDLIFE AND NATURE TOURISM

### **2SHB 1973: Promoting Tourism.... including Nature Tourism**

The Senate voted unanimously to increase the coordination between WDFW, Community Trade and Economic Development (CTED) and non-profit organizations to promote nature tourism. Rep. Velma Veloria (11<sup>th</sup> District – Beacon Hill, Seattle) was a very energetic sponsor of this bill and appreciated our support.



### **SB 5011: Promoting Wildlife Viewing**

Senators Jacobsen, Winsley and Kohl-Welles deserve credit for getting this bill through the Senate and the House. It is now on the way to the Governor for signature and will direct WDFW and CTED to host a conference on promoting wildlife viewing tourism. This will be yet another opportunity to increase birding and our birding trails throughout the state.

### **SB 5204: Providing Opportunities for Wildlife Viewing**

This bill made it out of the House with only 4 nay votes. It is on the way to the Governor for signature and will create a revenue source for WDFW to develop a Watchable Wildlife Program. Audubon will work with WDFW to help craft the program that will sell watchable wildlife decals to raise funds for this program.

### **SB 5179: Relating to Body-gripping Traps**

Even though this bill did not make it out of the House Fish, Ecology and Parks Committee as of April 17, we still don't know if Rep. Mike Cooper and Rep. Hans Dunshee will be pressured to put this bill onto the House floor for a vote. Both are opposed to overturning the citizen initiative.

### **SSB 1418: Skagit Valley Farmlands and Migratory Birds**

The Senate voted out a bill (44 to 4) that creates a task force in the Skagit Valley to find common solutions to the needs of farms, fish and birds. Audubon supports this task force, but is still concerned about a provision that gives a statewide exemption for tidegates and floodgates to have fish





passage. This problem may be worked out in a conference committee next week.

### PARKS AND FOREST LANDS

#### **SHB 1698: Distribution and Use of Funds for Off-road Vehicle and Non-highway Road Recreational Activities (NOVA)**

The Senate's "Study Bill" was voted out unanimously. The Inter-Agency Committee on Outdoor Recreation will ask "users of the outdoors" to work on a fair and equitable formula to distribute a portion of the "gas tax" that should go to off-road vehicle users, hikers, equestrians and other "non-highway" folks. Anyone from Audubon interested in knowing more about this study or in serving on the task force should call Audubon's Policy Director Nina Carter at 360-786-8020 x 208.

#### **SB 5235: Concerning Environmental Impact Statements on Certain State Trust Lands.**

This bill would have exempted state trust lands timber sales from SEPA for Class I, II, and III forest practices. It is dead.

#### **SB 5352: Encouraging Farmers to Enroll in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program is an important federal grants program to help farmers take their land out of production near fish bearing streams. Congress created it in 1999 and the enrollment was very slow at first because farmers did not understand or trust the requirements of the program. A controversial point was the size of the buffer required to be "taken out of production" by the farmer.

The bill had two original intents to help farmers enroll in CREP. First, the bill sponsors wanted to adopt the federal CREP buffer standard of 35-150 feet *depending on the site* to clearly explain CREP

requirements to farmers when enrolling in CREP. Second, the bill stated that local governments should NOT adopt buffers along streams in agricultural lands because federal grant funds could not be used in those areas. (Why would the feds give a farmer a grant to take his land out of production when they would be legally required to do so?)

The first issue was resolved on March 27 when Governor Locke sent a letter to US Department of Agriculture asking that the federal CREP standard be adopted in Washington State. This seems to have satisfied the farmers.

But, the second issue was not so easily solved. The environmental community and tribes did not want to have an exemption for requiring buffers. Farmers wanted to still be eligible for CREP grants even if their local governments adopt a buffer. This uncertainty and lack of resolution killed the bill. This is still a problem for farmers and should be studied further by the legislators, environmental groups, tribes and farmers.

### **NEXT WEEK: April 27 is the last day of Session !**

#### **Capital Budgets:**

The House Capital budget will be released on Friday, April 18 and it will need to be reconciled with the Senate's Capital Budget that was adopted by the Senate today.

#### **Operating Budgets:**

The Senate and House will seek to resolve differences between their Operating budgets.

If they cannot agree on a common budget, then the Legislators will officially adjourn this 105 day Legislative Session on April 27th, but then they will come back into a "special session" to resolve the budgets. Stay tuned!





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# Audubon WASHINGTON

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