

# SPOKANE COUNTY CONSERVATION FUTURES PROGRAM 2005

## **INTRODUCTION**

“Conservation Futures” is a property tax on all lands within Spokane County. Enabled by the Washington State Legislature in 1971, Spokane County adopted and began a local program in 1994. The Program levies a \$6.00 tax per \$100,000.00 value on all properties within Spokane County. This equates to approximately \$1 million dollars a year. Spokane County’s Conservation Futures Program is intended to protect, preserve, maintain, enhance, restore, limit the future use of or otherwise conserve selected open space land, farmland, forests, wetlands, wildlife habitats, and other lands having significant recreational, social, scenic or aesthetic values within the boundaries of Spokane County. Acquired properties will not be developed as a typical park (no ball fields, playgrounds, irrigated turf, etc) but kept in an enhanced natural state consistent with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW Chapter 84.34).

This is a fancy way of explaining how Conservation Futures funds are used towards acquisition of property and/or property easements that ensure public access and enjoyment of our greatest resources in perpetuity. To date, more than 3,993 acres of open space lands have been acquired in Spokane County with Conservation Futures funds. Most recently, Spokane County Voters supported an additional 5-year extension (through 2007) of the Conservation Futures Tax.

**PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION:** Chronological overview.

### Nominations:

Nominations are submitted by the public for review and consideration by the Conservation Futures Lands Subcommittee. The Lands Subcommittee is typically comprised of four (4) to seven (7) citizen volunteers, members of the Spokane County Parks Advisory Committee and representatives of the City of Spokane Park Board. Utilizing several forms of local news media, the Lands Subcommittee calls on the community for nominations of properties to be considered for acquisition. The nomination period typically runs for 6 to 8 weeks. Staff is available to assist nominators with completion of nomination forms. The 2005 Nomination period shall begin March 14th and extend through May 2nd 2005.

### Forms:

Nomination forms, complete with instructions are available in various formats and can be obtained online or in person at either Spokane County or City of Spokane Parks Departments business offices. Nominations must be complete and accurate in the information requested to be considered by the Conservation Futures Lands Subcommittee.

Any individual(s), group(s), city, town or organization(s) may nominate a candidate property(s) and/or property easements for consideration by the Conservation Futures Lands Subcommittee for acquisition with Conservation Futures funds. Nominated properties must have a willing seller(s) who will sell at fair market value, as determined through an appraisal by a Member of Appraisal Institute (MAI). Past practice has shown that willing sellers seeking to donate back a percentage of the purchase price in the form of an endowment fund to assist with the long-term stewardship of the specific property are enthusiastic about the Program and therefore, seem to close the sale of their land quicker.

### Form Submittal:

Based on the success of the 2003 electronic nominations, Spokane County is striving to conduct a “paperless” nomination process again this year, taking full advantage of today’s common computer technology. Thus, nominators must complete the required forms and insert graphics using a Microsoft

Word for Windows 97 or greater format. Additional information and supporting materials beyond that outlined in the nomination form will NOT be accepted. Nominators that do not have computer equipment available may schedule an appointment with County Parks Staff for assistance in transferring completed nomination forms to the appropriate electronic format. At time of submittal, all nominators are encouraged to schedule an appointment with staff to go over the nomination form to assure completeness.

For additional questions, comments or assistance related to property nominations located in Spokane County (outside City of Spokane Municipal Limits), please contact John Bottelli, at (509) 477-2529 Spokane County Parks, Rec. & Golf Department, 404 N. Havana, Spokane, WA 99202-4663 or [jbottelli@spokanecounty.org](mailto:jbottelli@spokanecounty.org)

For additional questions, comments or assistance related to property nominations located within the municipal boundaries of the City of Spokane, please contact Pamela McKinzie at (509) 625-4653 Spokane Parks and Recreation Department, Seventh Floor City Hall, Spokane, WA 99201-3317 or [pmckinzie@spokanecity.org](mailto:pmckinzie@spokanecity.org)

#### Parks Staff Review and Recommendation of Nominated Sites for Consideration by the Lands Subcommittee:

Due to the anticipated large number of nominated sites for consideration by the Conservation Futures Program, staff from both Spokane County and the City of Spokane shall work together to narrow the list of nominations to those most deserving of further review and consideration. This shall be done by a formal evaluation of each nominated property using the same method outlined below for the Lands Subcommittee (*Property Tour/Inspection/Evaluation Scoring*). Upon completion of this task, staff shall forward a list of the most desirable candidate sites to the Conservation Futures Lands Subcommittee. The Lands Subcommittee shall review the staff recommendation and formulate a Final Nomination List by adding to, or subtracting properties from the list proposed by staff. Once agreed upon, the Final Nomination List shall be the formal starting point for the Lands Subcommittee to begin their task.

#### Property Tour/Inspection/Evaluation/Scoring:

Spokane County and City Parks Department staffs shall take the time to assure all files are complete and that all required related information is available necessary for adequate review and scoring of nominated sites utilizing the Evaluation Criteria.

Parks staff will tabulate the scores of each of the nominated properties and report the conclusions back to the Lands Subcommittee for purposes of discussion. Past experience has demonstrated the need to consider and discuss both quantitative (items incorporated into the evaluation criteria) and qualitative (attributes not completely addressed via the evaluation criteria) of each submittal in order to formulate the final "Priority Acquisition List."

#### Evaluation Criteria:

The nomination submittal forms request certain types of information to assist the Lands Subcommittee in determining many key factors in assigning a point value to the property. To assist the Subcommittee in selecting the property(s) that ensure public access and enjoyment of the greatest resources they will visit each site to evaluate the nominated property using a set list of standard quantitative criteria with a point system. The criteria assigns points in considering the identified need for open space within the area, whether the nominated property owner(s) is willing to donate to an endowment fund for the long term maintenance of the property and does it contain any major environmental concerns. Evaluation criteria considers the size of the property, its' riparian/wetland habitat and/or corridor values or critical links to such along with the ability for the public to access water systems. Other questions address the degree of demonstrated public support for the acquisition. The nominated property will be evaluated for its ease of

access to the public and whether it will likely become a destination for various types of public passive recreational uses.

Discourage Seller Special Restrictions of Use or Conditions:

Owners selling property to be part of this Program should not expect to add “special conditions” or “stipulations” otherwise known as encumbrances to the property that have the potential to impact the management or usage of a property once it has been purchased/sold. Unique encumbrances on a property stand to reduce the value, which is based on highest and best use. It is in the public interest to maximize flexibility of stewardship and usage within the confines of the Conservation Future Program as stipulated by the Revised Code of Washington (RCW Chapter 84.34).

Public Meeting/ Lands Subcommittee Evaluation:

Once the on-site evaluations have been completed, a public meeting is scheduled for the Lands Subcommittee to provide an overview to the public of all of the nominated properties and receive input to assist the Lands Subcommittee as part of the overall evaluation process. Shortly after this public meeting, the Lands Subcommittee will meet to discuss all of the nominated properties taking into account both quantitative (items incorporated into the evaluation criteria) and qualitative (attributes not completely addressed via the evaluation criteria) aspects of each submittal gained through on-site visits, written materials, and public comments to formulate a “Priority Acquisition List”.

Spokane County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PAC) Evaluation:

The Spokane County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PAC) will convene to discuss the Conservation Future Priority Acquisition List as recommended by the Lands Subcommittee. The PAC will review the list and make a formal recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners of Spokane County for its final approval.

Board of County Commissioners of Spokane County Final Approval:

The Board of County Commissioners of Spokane County will review and consider the Conservation Futures Priority Acquisition List as recommended by the Spokane County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. The Board of County Commissioners may consider public comment on the “Priority Acquisition List” prior to final adoption by Resolution. The Board, solely at their discretion may adjust the Priority Acquisition List, as they deem appropriate. Once adopted, the Board will typically direct the applicable Parks staff members to initiate appraisals and begin to negotiate the purchase(s) of the properties contained on the “Priority Acquisition ‘A’ List” for public ownership under the Conservation Futures Fund #117.

Unforeseen Opportunities:

In the interest of making the Spokane County Conservation Futures Program the most viable and superior program possible for the citizens of Spokane County, the Lands Subcommittee has developed a process to provide for the rare occurrence of unforeseen acquisition opportunities that may present themselves after the Open Nomination process has closed i.e. change in ownership, foreclosure proceedings, etc. that may make a property available for public ownership, that was not available during the normal nomination period. In order for such a nomination to be considered, a nominator must submit a completed nomination form and a written request for consideration to the Lands Subcommittee. The Lands Subcommittee shall complete a review of the request. The Lands Subcommittee shall vote on whether or not they wish to further consider the nomination. Further consideration shall require a majority vote in favor of the request. Those nominations approved for further review shall be evaluated against the highest ranked properties, consistent with the evaluation processes outlined herein.