Funding real solutions for Washington’s Environment

WASHINGTON HOUSE REPUBLICANS
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Overview of the ORCA Plan

Passed in 2021, the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) provides the Department of Ecology the authority to set a cap on carbon pollution and sell allowances to regulated businesses for emissions above the cap. The CCA is expected to raise $4 billion over 10 years, starting in 2023. Democrats dedicate all of the $4 billion of pollution auction revenue to projects to be named later.

The CCA directs this money away from the general fund into certain named accounts to be used for special, loosely defined purposes. More than 70% of all revenue in most years, will be directed to the Carbon Emissions Reduction Account (CERA). This account is exclusively for “transportation carbon emission-reducing purposes.” The purposes may include electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure and emission reduction programs for freight transportation, ferries, and port activities.

Over the next 10 years, about $100 million will go into the Climate Investment Account each year. Out of this account, the CCA directs $25 million per year to Indian tribes to adapt to climate change. The remaining funds, about $75 million per year, may be used for a laundry list of specific allowable purposes, such as implementing the Working Families Tax Rebate, growth management planning, renewable energy, and electrification of buildings. The key takeaway from this spending distribution is that the CCA directs a disproportionate amount of dollars to carbon emissions reduction programs—more than 70%, leaving very little for forest health, Puget Sound recovery, flood risk mitigation and drought preparedness.

### 5126 E2SSB AMH ENGR H1619.E, Revenue Estimates, Fiscal Year Allocations

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1 Senate Bill 5126 (2021).
3 RCW 70A.65.100(7).
4 RCW 70A.65.240.
5 RCW 70A.65.260(1)(m).
Republican ORCA Plan: Invest in Outdoor Recreation and Climate Adaptation

Republicans believe the focus for state policy should turn now to the question of climate adaptation – how to make Washington secure against climate impacts that we can expect due to global carbon emissions. The CCA money should be spent to benefit Washington’s environment and to enhance our ability to recreate sustainably in the outdoors as our population grows.

The Republican ORCA plan directs the $4 billion of CCA revenue toward two principal areas:

- It provides an Outdoor Recreation benefit for Washingtonians by eliminating the Discover Pass, paying for all the needed maintenance and upgrades at our state parks, and growing our state parks to meet the needs of our growing region.

- It significantly funds Climate Adaptation and a healthier environment. This plan uses CCA auction proceeds to help the natural environment endure the climate impacts that scientists tell us we will face locally: increased flood, drought, and wildfire. The plan also uses dollars to pay for the best pollution control technology at wastewater treatment facilities and boatyards to improve Puget Sound. It fully funds the forest health treatment plan unanimously approved by the Legislature, but for which there is no dedicated funding source. It makes dollars available to established flood control authorities to improve floodplains and flood protection infrastructure. It funds sustainable water supply projects that will secure our agricultural industry against the risks of a changing climate.

In short, the Republican plan invests in the outdoors and our ability to enjoy it for generations to come.

To the extent that Democrats have a plan for the $4 billion environment tax that is the CCA, it appears to be weighted heavily toward non-highway transportation projects, such as electric ferries and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Republicans have a better way to fund our transportation needs.

Republicans believe that Washington residents should get something they can use from the CCA, such as more and safer parks, playgrounds, and trails. They should be able to enjoy these things without the expense of an annual Discover Pass, and overnight camping should be cheaper. Republicans believe Puget Sound’s water quality recovery has proceeded too slowly. The public deserves a Puget Sound with beaches that are not closed due to sewage overflows, and one that is healthy for all species. Republicans believe a sound investment of the CCA money would be funding forest health treatment and a working forest economy. Another smart investment would be to make us more drought resilient, protecting agricultural jobs through efficient and sustainable water supply efforts.
The Problem

Washington’s state parks are poorly maintained, lack appropriate amenities and visitor conveniences, and the overall number of parks has stagnated for decades. Our parks have a $424 million deferred maintenance backlog.⁶

Since 1990, Washington’s population has grown by 2.7 million residents to 7.6 million. Over the last 30 years, Washington’s State Park system has added only 28 camping sites, five vault toilets, and four composting toilets. The state is projected to have 8.9 million residents by 2040 (Office of Financial Management [OFM] forecast from November 2020), with just one new approved state park in the works that will add 52 campsites: Nisqually State Park. Washington’s top 10 parks are full and must be booked a year in advance, which means some of Washington’s best outdoor experiences are beyond the reach of families who work jobs with scheduling uncertainty. Washington State Parks has acquired 39 properties since 1990. Just three of those properties have been developed into parks.

Washington’s state parks are also increasingly expensive. A standard campsite fee during the summer season is now $27 to $37 per night. There are additional fees of $8 to $10 to create a reservation. Parking an additional vehicle costs extra. Use of a shower costs extra. State Parks offers “free days”, but that does not apply to overnight stays. There are no free days from June 19 to Sept. 25. The Discover Pass, created in 2011, costs $30 a year. Before 2012, there was no fee in Washington. Approximately 700,000 Washingtonians now pay an annual fee that raises the fourth-largest amount of parks revenue of all the states in the nation⁷, only to have a $424 million maintenance backlog, expensive camping, and stagnant park growth. A study commissioned by the Legislature in 2016 found that “pass-free access” for state lands would be the simplest and most fair system.⁸

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The Solution

Outdoor recreation is a meaningful part of our economy. In 2019, a total of $26.5 billion was spent on outdoor recreation in Washington state, supporting more than 260,000 jobs⁹. Public recreation lands also provide “non-market benefits” that are not accounted for within traditional economic indicators. Those benefits include ecosystem services like providing habitat, air quality, climate stability, and reduction of risk from natural disturbances like floods and storms. The total economic benefit of public recreation land “ecosystem services” has been valued in the range of $216 - $264 billion per year.

Republicans support a historic level of investment to eliminate the maintenance backlog and build out the needed capacity for outdoor recreation. We need to build new state parks and work on programs and amenities that would distribute state park visits more evenly to relieve pressure and congestion on our most visited parks.

Republicans support a state goal to double the number of recreational trail miles and to improve trailhead safety, garbage collection, and restrooms.

Republicans support the elimination of the $30 annual Discover Pass. State parks should be accessible regardless of wealth. Considering the additional environment tax imposed by the Climate Commitment Act on fuel and natural gas heating now is the time to provide Washington residents a tangible benefit: more and better parks and trails, without an access pass.

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Due to decades of misplaced funding priorities, Washington is woefully unprepared for the impacts of climate change. Investments in forest health, drought resilience, and flood control have been not been a priority.

Adaptation is a term used by the climate change community to describe actions taken to prepare for or respond to current or projected impacts of climate change.¹⁰

Expected impacts in Washington from climate change include

1) More very hot days (above 90°F);
2) Reduced snowpack;
3) Higher winter streamflow;
4) Lower summer streamflow; and
5) Sea level rise.

In short, we should expect that global warming results in heavier precipitation that falls as rain in the winter, rather than as snow, and early snowmelt. This earlier mountain runoff will increase flood risks in spring.

These climate impacts will increase risks of heat-related illness and death, reduced water storage and irrigation shortages, winter and summer recreation losses, river flooding and increased costs of stormwater management, negative impacts on salmon populations, and coastal flooding and inundation. Public policy changes, some of them in programs and some of them in the form of capital investments could positively impact the risks that these impacts will create.

Republicans propose smart investments in programs and infrastructure that thoughtfully address the impacts we are feeling today, and the risks from drought, fire, flood, and sea-level rise that scientists say Washington will experience in the future.

Importantly, Washington’s emissions footprint is only 1/100th of China’s emissions. A recently published study by University of Washington researchers found that even if all countries meet their promises under the Paris Agreement and continue to reduce emissions at the same rate thereafter, it is unlikely that warming would stay under 2 °C.¹¹

Even if Washington state eliminated our greenhouse gas emissions immediately, we will be experiencing climate impacts from the pollution that will continue from around the globe. That’s why Washington’s House Republicans support action now to use the dollars Washington residents will pay at the pump and in their heating bills to invest in climate adaptation that will make our state safer and healthier.

The Republican ORCA proposal is not a list of themes we want to pay for, but actual items that can be verified to be accomplished, whether that’s the maintenance backlog at parks, acreage of forest thinned according to the state forest health plan, or technology upgrades at all wastewater treatment facilities that discharge pollution to the Puget Sound.

Democrats direct three-fourths of CCA money to transportation emission reduction and a variety of projects to be named later.

Republicans would invest climate dollars in state parks and trails, eliminate the Discover Pass, and in smart climate adaptation, such as funding forest health, flood control, water storage, and Puget Sound pollution control.

¹¹ Liu, P.R., Raftery, A.E. Country-based rate of emissions reductions should increase by 80% beyond nationally determined contributions to meet the 2 °C target. Commun Earth Environ 2, 29 (2021). Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-021-00097-8
Forest Health

The Problem

Our state has a forest health crisis. Hot, dry conditions, coupled with diseased and dying forests, are leading to explosive wildfires. In central and eastern Washington alone, we have 2.7 million acres of unhealthy\textsuperscript{12} forest.

Forest and rangeland wildfires have grown larger and increased in intensity and destructiveness in Washington state. Wildfires result in significant greenhouse gas emissions. In 2015, when 1.13 million acres of forest burned in Washington, wildfires were the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Washington – second only to transportation. The Legislature has recognized that our forests and the wood products economies are a natural carbon solution and critical component of our state’s carbon reduction strategy. The Department of Natural Resources has a 20-year strategic plan and action plan.\textsuperscript{13} The Legislature has unanimously expressed an intention to provide $125 million per two-year budget cycle for forest health measures consistent with our state action plan.\textsuperscript{14} The Legislature has not identified a source of those funds.

“We do not have healthy forests here (in Central Washington). Our forests are not resilient to climate change,” said Mike Kaputa, Chelan County Natural Resources director. “They’re not prepared for future wildfires and lack of precipitation. They’re going to get drier and drier, and the fires are going to get bigger and bigger. We’re at a turning point to address these forests.”

In the past 20 years, 53 wildfires in Chelan County have reached 1,000 or more acres, according to the county. One way to make Central Washington forests healthier and more resilient to wildfires is by thinning the trees and processing them at a mill, Kaputa says.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan. Washington State Department of Natural Resources. Available at: https://www.dnr.wa.gov/ForestHealthPlan
\textsuperscript{13} Legislative findings, Second Substitute House Bill 1168 (2021).
The Solution

The Republican ORCA plan designates $125 million per biennium from carbon emission auctions to forest health treatments. On top of that, dollars would be made available to small forest landowners for carbon sequestration. The Republican plan also fully funds the Forest Riparian Easement Program, which is a program for conservation easements for forested areas that are unsuitable to use for environmental reasons due to being in a riparian area. Money is also set aside for a new grant program to be administered by the Community Economic Revitalization Board that is specifically for investing in the institutions and infrastructure that make timber and farming towns sustainable and vibrant.

As noted by researchers at the University of Washington’s Climate Impacts Group, communities dependent on natural resource economies are the hardest impacted. Our economy needs them, and they need our support.

“In 2015, the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors of Washington had $58.8 billion in sales revenue and collectively employed 303,321 people. Those on the front lines of climate change – tribes, economically-disadvantaged communities and those dependent on natural resource economies – are expected to experience impacts first and most severely.”

–UW Climate Impact Group

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Drought Resilience

The Problem
In 2021, the Washington State Department of Ecology declared a drought emergency, meaning water supply is projected to be below 75% of average for all areas of Washington, except the area of Seattle, Everett, and Tacoma. Drought is particularly damaging for Washington’s threatened salmon populations, which migrate upstream to spawn in the summer months. Warm water and low-flow stress freshwater aquatic life. Drought conditions impact Washington agriculture with lost crops and livestock. For example, following the historic dry summer of 2021, Washington wheat growers had their lowest yield since 1964. Historic heat and drought conditions prompted an eight-week closure of state lands to recreation.

The Solution
The Republican ORCA plan directs CCA funds to an existing Drought Preparedness and Response Account, which currently has no dedicated source of funding. It could be used to match federal dollars for big water storage and efficient irrigation projects.

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Flood Risk Mitigation

The Problem
The UW Climate Impacts Group predicts that climate change will drastically alter flood risk in Washington state, resulting in a need for new flood management policies and investments.

Washington has experienced catastrophic flooding, such as recently in Whatcom and Skagit counties, and during the December 2007 flood in the Chehalis River basin. Learning the lessons of these floods means being prepared for the more intense floods we expect in the future and building in strategies to improve and restore habitat for aquatic life. Our flood strategies, set by existing boards, require funding through appropriation, with no dedicated funding source – which forces these long-term investments to compete with other priorities and to depend on the overall health of the economy. In the Chehalis basin alone, inaction on flood projects is expected to cost Washington $3.5 billion\textsuperscript{20} from:

- Repairing or replacing flood-damaged homes, businesses, and public infrastructure;
- Disruptions to local community, economic, and agricultural activities from flooding;
- Intermittences to state road and rail transportation corridors due to flooding; and
- Continued aquatic habitat degradation and loss.

The Solution
The Republican ORCA plan sets aside revenue from the Climate Commitment Act to reduce flood damage and improve aquatic species’ habitat in the basins most at risk of catastrophic flooding.

Puget Sound Water Quality and Recovery

The Problem
State efforts to recover the environmental health of the Puget Sound are underperforming the expectations set by lawmakers in 2007, when a state coordinating agency was established called the Puget Sound Partnership.²¹ According to the Chair of the Puget Sound Partnership’s Leadership Council, “[The Puget Sound] is one of the most important marine estuaries in the whole world. It is not healthy right now. The trend lines are in the wrong direction.”²²

Puget Sound is the largest estuary by water volume in the United States and it is in terrible condition. Ten major river systems in Western Washington feed Puget Sound with fresh water, but also with polluted runoff. Fifty-eight publicly owned wastewater treatment facilities discharge pollution either directly to the Sound or to waters that feed the Sound, contributing to low oxygen levels in Puget Sound.

According to recent investigative journalism, since 2006, between 19% and 23% of Puget Sound has failed to meet oxygen standards mandated by the federal Clean Water Act. It is the dumping of untreated sewage that exhausts the water’s supply of oxygen, harming aquatic life²³.

These and other developments highlight a pressing state of environmental decay in Puget Sound that requires a multibillion-dollar solution.

Environmentalists have sued the state over the sewage treatment plants’ waste dumping, pointing out that the last time the Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) required major modernization of wastewater plants was in 1987 — and that was an upgrade to a technology first deployed in the early 20th century.

Puget Sound Water Quality and Recovery

What will it cost to upgrade the pollution control technology at our wastewater treatment plants? At a hearing of the House Environment and Energy Committee in October 2021, the City of Tacoma estimated that it would cost several hundred million dollars to be borne by the city’s sewer utility ratepayers. Paying for that locally could result in $125 more per month in utility bills in Tacoma. King County, similarly, expected enormous costs to upgrade treatment systems under the proposed DOE permit. King County estimated a cost of compliance as high as $14 billion, with an increase of up to $150 per month to resident utility bills.

“The city [Tacoma] is concerned that overburdening low- and moderate-income households with rate increases will exacerbate our affordability housing crisis and harm our residents that are living on the margins.”
Dan Thompson, Division Manager, Wastewater Operations, City of Tacoma

“[For King County] this would require significant sewer rate increases that could be financially devastating for many of King County residents.”
Mo McBroom, Deputy Director, King County Department of Natural Resources

In short, Puget Sound area utility ratepayers face enormous costs if the state does not offer some financial assistance for the infrastructure needed to improve the health of Puget Sound.

In 2019, the State of the Sound Report by the Puget Sound Partnership showed poor results on state efforts to recovery the ecological health of the Sound. Of the 31 indicators for which the Partnership established recovery targets to be achieved by 2020, four were reported to be at or near the target, and 27 were well below their target.

In 2021, the Puget Sound Partnership published an updated report. For 12 measures related to water quality in the Puget Sound, progress was made in only one measure and 10 of 12 measures had results below the 2020 target. None of the 2020 targets for protecting the species and food web of the Puget Sound had been achieved, and none were improving.

The Puget Sound Partnership is directed to monitor and report on how the Puget Sound is

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24 Dan Thompson, Division Manager, Wastewater Operations, City of Tacoma – testimony at House Environment & Energy Committee hearing on the proposed Department of Ecology Puget Sound Nutrient General Permit, October 13, 2021. Available at: [https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2021101016](https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2021101016)

25 Mo McBroom, Deputy Director, King County Department of Natural Resources & Parks – testimony at House Environment & Energy Committee hearing on the proposed Department of Ecology Puget Sound Nutrient General permit, October 13, 2021. Available at: [https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2021101016](https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2021101016)


supporting a healthy human population through air quality, outdoor recreation, and local foods like Dungeness crab and shellfish. Of 12 performance metrics, only two were improving, but none were meeting 2020 targets.

In 2022, the Partnership will change its vital sign indicators, citing longstanding concerns and critiques²⁸.

### Overview of target status and progress of indicators

#### STATUS OF VITAL SIGN INDICATORS COMPARED TO THE 2020 TARGETS

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#### PROGRESS OF VITAL SIGN INDICATORS

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### The Solution

Under the ORCA plan, Republicans propose to use Climate Commitment Act funds to pay for effective pollution control technology for municipal wastewater treatment plants and boatyards, both of which are activities regulated by a water quality permit issued by the Washington State Department of Ecology. By paying for these costs, DOE can set permit requirements that maximize the cleanliness of Puget Sound, without concern that certain technology costs will be financially infeasible for the permittee in the near term.

Republicans support clarifying who is responsible for recovery of Puget Sound water quality. Is it Ecology or the Puget Sound Partnership, or a combination of both?
What is the ORCA plan?

ORCA is a plan to change the funding commitments in the recently passed Climate Commitment Act (CCA). The plan would direct the dollars from CCA toward protecting the outdoors and fostering outdoor recreation opportunities. The ORCA plan addresses areas of underinvestment in our natural environment.

We have a massive backlog of maintenance at our state parks, and we overcharge our residents to visit and enjoy our parks through the Discover Pass. Our state forest health plan has no dedicated funding. Needed wastewater treatment plant upgrades to prevent pollution of the Sound are unfunded, and if they remain unfunded will drive up sewer utility rates for Puget Sound area residents. Drought resiliency and flood mitigation projects that we need to protect our communities and key sectors of our economy from climate impacts are insufficiently funded. In short, the ORCA plan will protect fish, forests, farms, and coastal communities. It will also provide an outdoor recreation benefit, so Washingtonians can continue to enjoy the natural beauty in our state.

Why change the CCA funding?

In 2009, the Legislature directed state agencies to prepare a climate adaptation strategy.²⁹ In 2012, Ecology published the strategy. It places a priority on funding flood risk reduction, improved water management for drought resilience, and forest health to reduce the risk of wildfire.³⁰ The ORCA plan is more aligned with that strategy than the funding plan included in the CCA. The ORCA plan emphasizes that there is an urgent need to invest in climate adaptation – adjusting to the expected localized impacts from climate change. We recognize that we are experiencing climate impacts. The University of Washington Climate Impacts Group has studied and documented what these impacts will look like for Washington. Among these impacts are more river and coastal flooding, irrigation shortages, warmer streams stressing salmon, and winter and summer recreation losses.

These climate impacts will continue for decades no matter how much carbon emission reduction occurs in Washington. In 2019, China emitted 100 times more carbon dioxide than Washington state: 10.2 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide for China³¹ compared to 99.6 million metric tons for Washington (using 2018 numbers, the most recent year for which data were available)³².

Washington state has climate mitigation policies in place to dramatically reduce emissions from its electric sector, building sector, and transportation sector. What we do not have is a plan and dollars to fund a climate adaptation strategy. As written, the CCA drives most of its dollars toward climate mitigation policies—further driving down carbon emissions. We would miss a huge opportunity if we left CCA spending as-is. We would miss an opportunity to protect Washington’s environment. We would also miss an opportunity to make needed investments in safe and sustainable recreation in our natural environment. The ORCA plan seizes upon these opportunities to reimagine our climate for a better future in Washington.

²⁹ RCW 70A.05.010
Funding real solutions for Washington’s Environment

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