LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR EQUITABLE PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

Four Key Washington State Policy Initiatives

1. **Parks and Recreation Funding.** Maintaining a high level of service for robust parks and recreation programs will be a challenge in the decades ahead for MPT and many other parks agencies and local governments throughout Washington. With restrictions on property taxes combined with the increasing cost of doing business, our operating revenues will not keep pace with operating expenses. *MPT supports the WRPA initiative to allow parks and recreation agencies to take a 0.1 percent sales tax increase to their voters and to bond against new sales tax proceeds upon voter approval.*

   As part of its ongoing “Healthy and Active Communities” initiative begun several years ago, *MPT will support the WRPA work to ensure adequate funding of grant programs and budgetary items that help youth and adults to live active and healthy lifestyles; enhance public health; and combat a growing obesity trend in Washington and across the country.*

2. **Homelessness.** MPT operates as a partner in addressing the rising issues of homelessness in Tacoma and supports and coordinates with the City, State, and non-profit strategies to address and solve the root causes of chronic homelessness. The rise in homeless encampments in the City of Tacoma has affected the maintenance and use of park properties, and the general safety for park users. *MPT supports the City of Tacoma in seeking new funding opportunities and leverage possible strategies in utilizing local housing trust funds, modifying the real estate excise taxes, and other opportunities to enhance the construction of affordable housing. MPT will also track and support policies focused around local agencies authority to change and enforce policies addressing allowing or disallowing encampments on park properties, and address inconsistent policies and procedures between MPT and the City of Tacoma.*

3. **Youth Education and Programming.** MPT is working with Tacoma Public Schools (TPS), The Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, Graduate Tacoma,
Pierce County and other community partners to develop a plan for the **Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA)** in Pierce County. These dollars could inject near-term investments in our communities that will directly serve students in achieving a wide range of educational outcomes, which includes implementation of the Whole Child Initiative programs. **MPT opposes any effort to sweep these funds out of the PSTAA, and urges Pierce County to adopt a transparent and equitable process to disburse these funds throughout Tacoma and Pierce County.**

Support Increased Funding Associated with the **“No Child Left Inside” Grant Program**. Washington State Parks seeks an increase of nearly $1.2 million for NCLI – with $750,000 of that going toward an increase in the approved grant-funding level for 2019-21 ($1.5 million). The remainder of the funds would go toward community outreach, public engagement, and staffing for things such as a Junior Ranger program as well as initiatives to help get youth outdoors, broaden diversity, and enhance cultural inclusiveness in the use of State Parks. **MPT supports the Washington State Parks request for a $1.2 M increase in NCLI funding.**

4. **Environmental Conservation, Health and Safety.** Metro Parks has become increasingly involved in efforts to limit single-use plastics in our region through guest and community engagement, modeling operational sustainability, and engagement of the business community through the Ocean Friendly Restaurant program. **MPT stands united with a broad coalition to advance state-wide legislation banning plastic bags and other plastic items known to threaten ocean wildlife.** In addition, the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park have long supported anti-wildlife trafficking initiatives. PDZA and Northwest Trek have joined the US Wildlife Trafficking Alliance in partnership with AZA and are developing an action plan to include consumer awareness and support for federal policy to reduce trafficking. **MPT supports funding the enforcement of anti-trafficking work at the State Department of Fish and Wildlife.**

**Three Key Washington State Budget Initiatives**

1. **MPT urges the passing of a comprehensive and bold supplemental capital budget.** MPT will request a local parks acquisition or partnership development in the South East/Central Tacoma. This section of the city has large of level of service gaps segments where community members cannot walk to a park within 10 minutes of their residence. **MPT seeks a capital budget allocation ($500,000) to help close this gap through a shared Metro Parks/Tacoma Public Schools project to plan and develop a new schoolyard park and related facilities in SE Tacoma.**

2. **Salmon Habitat Restoration at Titlow Lagoon.** MPT is working with the South Sound Salmon Enhancement Group (SSSEG) to restore the Titlow Lagoon to a critical salmon habitat, which includes the rebuild of a BNSF Rail bridge. **MPT requests $1.0 M in funding for the full design and permitting of the Titlow lagoon restoration BNSF rail bridge project from the State Transportation Budget. This will give this exciting salmon habitat and educational project an important injection of funds and energy that will leverage additional state and federal grants.**

3. **Support recreational active transportation networks.** Through existing funds and future transportation packages, MPT urges the legislature to continue to support grant programs that will deliver safe streets and infrastructure for the community. **MPT supports funding sources that include but are not limited to, complete streets, safe routes to schools, and other people focused transportation grants. Specifically, MPT supports the City of Tacoma’s efforts to fully fund the Schuster Parkway Promenade, a critical missing link between the Downtown and Point Defiance Trail network.**
Key Federal Policy & Budget Related Initiatives

1. Environmental Conservation, Health and Safety. Conservation education and awareness is a growing part of Metro Park’s mission and work plan. With Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park taking the lead, we are expanding our reach to raise environmental awareness and action among our constituents and visitors. **MPT will continue to support the following initiatives and policies:**
   
a. *Ocean policy initiatives of the Aquarium Conservation Partnership relevant to our region regarding fisheries, marine protected areas, salmon and orca recovery.*
   
b. *The Washington State Congressional delegation’s Save our Sound effort,* a federal package to assist in the cleanup of Puget Sound. Ocean conservation and cleanup are key educational messages and actions of the Zoo’s new $51 million Pacific Seas Aquarium, opened in September 2018.
   
c. *Re-introduction of wild grizzly bears into the North Cascades.* Re-introducing grizzlies to the Pacific Northwest is good for our ecosystems and is simply sound policy.
   
d. *Ban the sale and imports of shark fins and other anti-wildlife trafficking efforts.*
   
e. *Protect the Endangered Species Act in its current form and oppose any rollbacks proposed by the Administration or the U.S. Congress through executive actions or legislation respectively.*

2. Federal Funding Initiatives for Parks and Recreation Infrastructure, Programs and Audiences
   
It is crucial the federal government maintain core social service funding for our community’s most vulnerable populations. In particular, **MPT supports fully funding the USDA summer meals program,** which MPT is a provider of throughout the summer, and senior meals programs, which our non-profit partners host at our community centers.

Thorough our partnerships at **Joint Base Lewis-McChord,** MPT has received Adaptive Sports Grants from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in support of our award winning and unique adaptive recreation programs for veterans in our region. This program connects veterans with disabilities to their community and each other and improves their quality of life. In 2019 the grant was not funded, putting strains on the program’s delivery level. **MPT supports restoring and increasing this grant to fully fund and expand our local adaptive veterans programming, in order to serve this significant community in our region.**