

2023 Supplemental Department Questions

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Strategic Goals

- 1. Provide your 2023 strategic goals; how are they different from 2022? In what way, if at all, are your strategic changes demonstrated in your budget request?**

DCNR's mission is to partner with Snohomish County communities to steward resources and manage infrastructure for the purpose of protection, enhancement, use, and enjoyment of our land, air, and water now and into the future. Below are some examples of the higher priority strategic goals that are included in the 2023 budget request.

2023 DCNR Strategic Goals:

- *Land Conservation Initiative (LCI)* – The 2023 proposed budget will continue this initiative that is focused on land conservation and enhancement of critical resource lands in the county. Forterra is being hired in 2022 to develop a strategic plan for land conservation, including criteria for priority funding, mapping of priority conservation targets, analysis of tools and mechanisms to accelerate land conservation, and resource needs for implementation. The LCI also includes funding to seed a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) bank and hire a third-party program administrator, as well as to continue the Healthy Forest Project. Collectively, these elements represent Phase 1 of a multi-phase effort.
- *Snohomish County Food and Farming Center (SCFFC)* – After receiving initial funding in the 2022 budget, the SCFFC is currently in progress. In early 2023, work on progressive design build validation will continue as well as the presentation of the project to the Project Review Committee to receive approval to move forward with the Progressive Design Build process. The contractor will be selected and the design of the SCFFC will be initiated. Operators will be identified and contracted.
- *Kayak Point Park* – Construction of Phase 1 Renovation of Kayak Point Park is expected to be started in 2023. This project will address aging infrastructure at this popular regional park and also provide environmental enhancements through incorporation of stormwater system improvements, partial removal of a shoreline sheet pile wall and replacement with soft shore armoring, replacement of an at-grade boat launch with an elevated structure and adjustments to address anticipated sea-level rise. Overall, this project will ensure continued enjoyment of this popular facility while also making improvements for overall sustainability.

- *Trails* – 2023 will continue Snohomish County’s emphasis on Regional Trail provision through continued design of missing segments of the Whitehorse Trail, review of options for moving the Centennial Trail South project forward and design initiation for the Snohomish to Everett Trail.
- *Fair Park Improvements* – Funding has been identified for continued improvements at the Evergreen State Fair Park. Capital improvements identified for completion in 2023 include removal of the Commercial Building, installation of the beef judging pavilion and installation of a wash rack for compliance with Snohomish County’s National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Other needed projects are being evaluated for revenue producing/retaining values, opportunities for reducing maintenance needs and opportunities for visitor experience enhancement.
- *Communitywide Climate Action & Environmental Stewardship Plan* – This plan is intended to recommend actions and goals across the county that would help to address the causes and impacts of climate change and promote environmental stewardship. This plan will involve input from the community and stakeholders and will be coordinated with the new Climate Action Element that is being developed as part of the County’s update to its Comprehensive Plan.
- *C-PACER* – The C-PACER Program allows private owners of eligible commercial, industrial, agricultural properties and multifamily residential property to obtain long-term financing from private capital providers (i.e. bank, credit union, etc.) for qualifying improvements to the property. Such improvements include energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, potable water lead reduction, and resiliency investments. This program will begin to be implemented in 2023.
- *Expansion of Fish Passage Culvert Program* – The SWM capital program has increased its focus on designing and constructing projects that eliminate fish passage barriers under county roads. The program expansion began in 2021, was continued in 2022, and will continue again in 2023. Based on the culvert inventories, hundreds of existing county road culverts act as partial or complete barriers for fish passage. SWM is currently in the process of designing 35 culvert barriers for replacement with larger, fish passable culverts to be constructed in the coming years. Public Works also addresses fish passage barriers as part of their road improvement projects.
- *Chinook Marsh Restoration Project* – The SWM capital program will continue to make progress on this large (~400 acre) estuary restoration project that was originally begun by SWM in the mid-90's and then recently reinitiated. Following the pending acquisition of additional property for restoration in 2022, the next steps in 2023 involve the completion of design and funding options and the beginning of the design process. Intertidal restoration is integral to the success of salmon recovery in the Snohomish watershed, as these areas provide essential refuge and rearing habitat to out-migrating juvenile salmon.

- *Commitment to Work in Partnership with Boards, Commissions, the Public and Other Partners* – DCNR is committed to working in close partnership with the unprecedented number of boards and commissions that are facilitated by our staff. DCNR is also committed to working transparently and in partnership with the public and our numerous partners that help us to accomplish our mission.
- *Commitment to Racial and Social Equity* –The department’s leadership is committed to addressing racial and social equity. In 2022, DCNR started two justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) committees. These committees will continue in 2023, with the purpose of completing a DCNR culture survey and identifying priority projects, that the department can move forward on to advance justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in the department.

National, state and local landscape:

1. What are the federal, state and local issues facing your work? What risks or opportunities does that create for you in 2023 and beyond? What is your plan to leverage the opportunity or mitigate the risk? What support do you need?

- *Fish Blockage Culverts in County ROW* – Together with Public Works, SWM continues to design and construct fish passage culverts within county right-of-way. Of the culverts inventoried to date, over 200 existing county road culverts are complete barriers to fish passage and over 300 more are partial barriers, so the need is very high. The 2022 budget includes a proposal to expand the number of culverts that are replaced by SWM in the coming years. Funding for this proposal comes from a combination of SWM utility revenues, REET II, grants, and proceeds from the recent sale of county property.
- *Electrification of DCNR Fleet / Charging stations* – DCNR is exploring options for expanding the electrification of Department vehicles and has identified specific units that could go electric. DCNR is working with Fleet to determine how these vehicles could be transitioned. In addition, DCNR is researching the cost and availability of theft and vandal resistant Electric Vehicle Charging Stations for public use in County parks. This would expand the number of existing charging stations available at County parks and would increase public access in non-urban areas.
- *Permitting Issues for Projects* – Some required permits for project construction, such as permits issued by the Army Corps of Engineers, can be particularly long and/or unpredictable in their timing, which can sometimes cause project delays. Several County departments, including DCNR, have an agreement with the Corps that is intended to decrease permit timelines, which has helped some, though the timelines can still be somewhat unpredictable. In addition, DCNR coordinates with tribes in the early stages of projects that they will review in order that they have input and familiarity with projects prior to the permit review stage. Increased federal funding

is expected to increase the demand on federal and state agencies to deliver permits, which has the potential to slow permit timelines.

- *Emergency Use of Fair Park* – In 2020/2021 and again in 2022 the Evergreen State Fair Park was utilized for emergency response support. In 2020/2021, the Fair Park was utilized for COVID testing, vaccinations, PPE storage/distribution and quarantine housing. In 2022, the Fair Park was again used as the command center and base camp for response agencies responding to the Bolt Creek Fire. Parks continues to look for opportunities to enhance the Fair Park for these emergency response services.

2. What, if any, new mandates do you have impacting your work? Are they funded or unfunded? What is the plan for accomplishing the work?

- No new mandates in 2023. The next NPDES permit for the County is expected to be issued in August of 2024.

Programs

1. List programs, projects and services within your department funded through federal COVID/ARPA funds. What, if any, of those programs are you recommending ongoing funding for and what is the source of ongoing funding?

- The Office of Recovery and Resilience has provided a separate list of projects within DCNR that are funded by ARPA funds.

2. What new programs are you launching for 2023? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?

- *Conservation Futures Forester* – The proposed 2023 budget includes funding for establishment of a Forest Management program, which would consist of a Conservation Futures funded Forester position as well as support infrastructure (i.e. vehicle, equipment, ½ time WCC (or other) crew and overhead). It is envisioned that the Forester position will focus on active forest management for the purposes of stand health, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and climate change resiliency. Funding is proposed to be provided through increased availability of Conservation Futures funding, which can be utilized for operation and maintenance of Conservation Futures acquired properties. This program is planned to provide better management of DCNR custodial natural spaces.
- *SWM's Capital/Construction Support Programs* – SWM is requesting new positions in the 2023 budget in order to replace capital and construction support programs that were previously provided to SWM by Public Works, who can no longer continue this support. This includes support for construction management, construction

contracting, and property acquisitions and easements, all of which are vital for SWM to continue to be able to deliver capital projects. The amount of the expenditures for SWM will be roughly the same, but instead of paying Public Works to provide these services, they will instead be provided directly by these new positions. The revenues used to fund SWM's capital program will be the same, and they are sustainable sources, including SWM utility revenues, grant funds, and REET II funds.

3. If different than #2, what are your areas of significant investment? What are you not doing because of that investment?

- *Surface water capital projects* – The proposed 2023 budget for SWM's capital program is roughly \$18.9 million, which represents roughly 40% of SWM's total proposed budget. The larger categories of projects within SWM's capital program include fish passage culverts, habitat restoration projects, drainage/water quality improvement projects, and community floodplain solutions acquisitions and easements.
- *Parks Capital Projects* -Parks' proposed capital budget includes a range of projects that address park renovation, development and property acquisition projects. In total, this program for 2023 includes \$15.2 million in projects, which represents approximately 28% of Parks total proposed budget. Funding for this program is primarily provided through park impact mitigation fees, REET 2 and grants, all of which are focused toward park capital work.
- *Snohomish County Food and Farming Center (SCFFC)* – While the scope and design of the SCFFC is still being developed, this facility represents a significant investment that will support the agriculture sector of Snohomish County for many years to come. This project has garnered the support of at least one State elected official to propose a multi-million dollar appropriation of State funds toward this project.
- *Land Conservation Initiative (LCI)* – The LCI will develop a comprehensive Land Conservation Strategy for Snohomish County. This strategy will be used to focus acquisition efforts into the future and preserve important park, habitat, agricultural, forest and general open space lands. This first phase of the project involves a total investment of \$4 million, will future phases are intended to build upon this investment.

Internal Operations

- 1. What is your department doing to streamline processes or deliver services in a new way? How do your budget allocation requests play into these innovations? Are there ways which a different budget approach, e.g. several departments sharing a resource, could achieve the same or better results in a more cost-effective way?**

- *SWM Utility Billing Database Updates* – SWM is in the process of updating the database used to calculate surface water utility charges and provide billing information to the Assessor’s Office. Utility billing drives a revenue stream for SWM and four contract cities that presently totals over \$30M annually, and is essential to the financial functioning of the division. The current billing database was built in Microsoft Access, and work is underway in 2022-2023 to update the backend database to SQL. Working with DoIT, this update will make the system more robust, with much faster processing times. In 2023, SWM has budgeted \$250,000 to also update the frontend user interface to the database. Currently, there are 76 distinct surface water levies, serving over 168,000 county and city ratepayers, and those numbers change with every annexation or change of property ownership. SWM must be able to make frequent and rapid adjustments to the billing database to ensure charges are accurate. Updating the billing database and interface will simplify the process for making billing adjustments for improved accuracy, ensure that the system remains functional as support for Access is phased out, and also expand the number of users with knowledge of the database functionality, providing redundancy and backup support for this critical role.
 - *DCNR Transition Planning Working Group* – In 2022, CNR formed an internal working group to address business functions that were formerly done separately across the divisions that now form a single department. Initial transition plans for the formation of CNR are continually evaluated and adapted to meet functional needs as the department becomes fully operational. This group meets regularly to collaboratively evaluate and adapt transition plans, and respond to process questions or issues as they are encountered throughout the year. The group will continue to meet in 2023, providing ongoing opportunities to create consistency and efficiency across the department. As resource sharing and ongoing business needs are better understood for the department, this group will also use available information to inform future CNR budget planning.
 - *SWM’s capital/construction support programs* – As previously mentioned, SWM has requested new positions in the 2023 budget in order to provide capital and construction support directly with SWM staff instead of with Public Works staff. This will allow Public Works to maximize the use of their staff on the increasing capital program demands that their department is experiencing. This will also allow DCNR to function more independently as a department.
 - *Continuous Improvement* – A number of Continuous Improvement projects are being pursued with, and without, from the OPEX team. This includes a fair management system, use of cartegraph for ADA evaluations, implementation of Daily Readiness Reporting and standardization of Parks’ planning process. This is a continuing effort and staff regularly identify initiatives that will help improve efficiency of operations.
- 2. What, if any, hiring challenges are you experiencing? How is that affecting your level of service or internal operations? How are you mitigating those operational challenges and/or what is your plan for recruitment?**

DCNR is experiencing hiring challenges across all areas of the Department. Fewer applications are being received for vacant positions and the Department is also seeing significant turn over as staff leave for other jobs. While there are hiring challenges across all positions, DCNR is especially challenged to fill higher level engineer positions.

- *Hiring of Higher Level Engineering Positions* – DCNR has experienced continued difficulties with recruiting higher level engineer positions that require a Professional Engineers license. This challenge has limited SWM's ability to deliver as many capital projects as we would be able to do if these vacant positions were all filled. SWM has used a variety of approaches to address this challenge, such as changing the engineering requirements for a supervisor position, reclassifying some engineer positions to non-engineer project management positions, and underfilling some higher level engineer positions at a lower level (and then promoting in the future when skills and experience have increased sufficiently).

3. Please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, date vacated, and date first posted. This should be a separate page or spreadsheet attachment.

See attached file.

4. What effect has the increase of inflation and/or supply chain issues had on your department? What, if any, services, or projects have you had to adjust to accommodate for this? (i.e. moving to outside contracted services, delaying of project starts and/or purchasing, redistribution of workload, etc.)

No specific issues have been identified.

Successes

1. Take this opportunity to share one significant success in your department over this past year. What made it a success?

Meadowdale Project Construction – After many years of planning, design, and permitting the Meadowdale Park Improvements project is nearing completion. In 2022 two railroad bridges were installed, which replaced an undersized culvert with a five-span opening, which has supported creation of 1.3 acres of estuary, 1 acre of stream riparian buffer enhancement, accessible beach access and paved pathways. This project is a joint SWM and Parks endeavor and the collaboration on this project truly make it a DCNR success, supporting both natural process enhancements as well as public access and enjoyment of the area. This project stands out as a success based on the many hurdles that had to be overcome in order for it to occur.