



By Increasing the Distribution Threshold, the Amended Discover Pass Bill May Disproportionately Impact Some Recreationists

Outdoor recreation funding for state lands in Washington may not be well understood.

ESSB 5390

“Relating to access to a recreation site or lands”

All three state land management agencies in Washington are underfunded for recreation and the original bill would benefit all users.

The amended bill may disproportionately impact some users by failing to backfill expected GF-S cuts to all state land management agencies. This is due to changes in the distribution threshold currently set in RCW 79A.80.090.

Under current budget projections, DNR users will pay 50% more and experience reductions to services such as education, enforcement, safety, sanitation, and basic maintenance.

Why the Discover Pass was created.

Anticipating budget cuts following the Great Recession, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) convened a working group and engaged partners and the Legislature to develop a multi-agency access pass. This later included Washington State Parks (Parks) and became the Discover Pass, which prevented closures of state recreation lands. All three agencies have other funding sources, but the Discover Pass is critical for all of them.

Belief: General Fund cuts will not have a large impact on DNR users.

In 2025, 57% of DNR’s recreation operating budget comes from the State General Fund (GF-S). DNR’s other funding sources are less flexible, less stable, and do not adjust with visitation.

In 2011, the Legislature set an 84/8/8 funding split between Parks, DFW, and DNR to offset cuts each agency received to their GF-S at that time. Since then, the funding mix and operational needs for each agency has changed significantly.

The below table illustrates DNR’s projected GF-S cuts for recreation, alongside expected new revenue from a Discover Pass fee increase. Increasing the distribution threshold set in RCW 79A.80.090 is the primary driver of agency revenue differences between the two bills.

	ESSB 5390 (\$100M threshold)			SB 5390 (\$71M threshold)		
	DFW	DNR	Parks	DFW	DNR	Parks
Proposed GF-S Reduction		(\$2.5M)			(\$2.5M)	
New Revenue from Bill	\$1.2M	\$1.2M	\$12.7M	\$3.6M	\$3.6M	\$10M
Net Gain/Loss		(\$1.3M)			\$1.1M	

Table 1: Projected DNR GF-S recreation budget cuts and projected new revenue from ESSB 5390 vs SB 5390. Sources: Gov. Inslee’s budget, Gov. Ferguson’s budget cuts, and [fiscal note assumptions](#).

Belief: DNR manages forests, not recreation.

[DNR provides recreation opportunities](#) on over 5 million acres of state-owned uplands and aquatic lands. Visitors can enjoy hiking, biking, hunting, kayaking, horseback riding,



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motorized recreation, camping, and more. Table 3 illustrates the substantial growth in DNR’s recreation infrastructure between 2012 and 2024 in response to unmet demand. Compared to other state-managed lands, DNR has more dedicated motorized and downhill-specific mountain bike trails. These trails are significantly more costly to maintain, with many added since 2012. Additionally, unlike most options in Washington, DNR campgrounds are free with a Discover Pass.

	DNR		Change Qty	Change %
	2012	2024		
Total Rec Sites	142	217	75	53%
Campsites	871	1,076	205	24%
Total Trail Miles	973	1,430	457	47%
Motorized Multi-Use Trail Miles	400	534	134	34%
Non-Moto Multi Use Trail Miles	452	644	192	42%
Hiking Only Trail Miles	121	252	131	108%

Table 2: DNR Recreation Infrastructure changes since the Discover Pass was created and original fee set. Source: OFM Excess Liability Report

During DNR’s [Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation Plan \(OARR\)](#) outreach, users such as equestrians, mountain bikers, motorized, and longer distance hikers/runners shared that they heavily rely on DNR lands for these activities. While the visitation estimates in Figure 1 are known to be less accurate for DNR and DFW than for Parks and operational costs per visitor vary greatly by use-type and infrastructure, it is the best estimate available to understand relative use by agency.

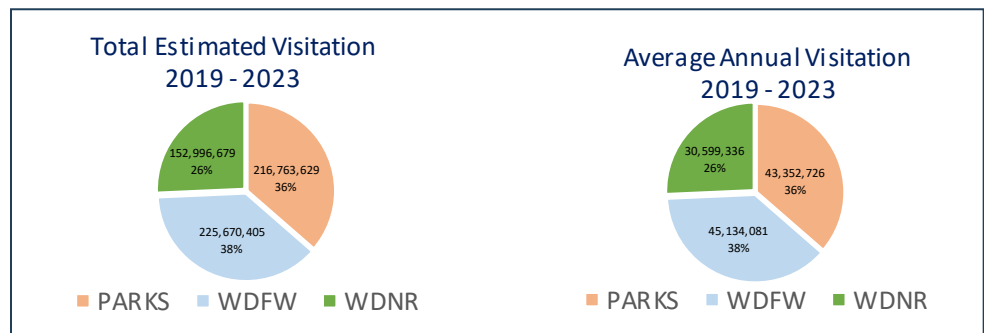


Figure 1: Estimated total and average annual visitation from 2019-2023 for State Parks, DNR, and DFW. Source: Earth Economics, 2025, Addendum, Outdoor Recreation on State Lands in Washington.

Belief: If the Discover Pass fee is adjusted for inflation, the distribution threshold should be adjusted as well.

The Discover Pass statute addresses the fee and inflationary adjustment (79A.80.020). The Recreation Access Pass Account statute addresses distribution and is silent on changes to distribution for inflation (RCW 79A.80.090). A lot has changed since 2012 for all state land management agencies and there are valid reasons to consider re-assessing distribution to best meet the needs of Washingtonians. However, it is a logical fallacy that an inflation-based threshold increase should follow a fee increase.