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Public can help shape management of natural resources

Readers of The Olympian, and other citizens of our state, have a unique opportunity to participate in government reform – in particular, improving natural resources management in Washington.

The Olympian's Sept. 22 editorial, "Streamlining still a dream for state government," missed a key principle of the reform effort when it concluded that agency leaders "punted" instead of developing a concrete plan for natural resources reform.

In fact, the reform ideas recently announced by the Natural Resources Subcabinet are the opening kickoff in a public dialogue over which ideas for reforming natural resources management have the greatest promise — and which ones are less likely to work.

Reforming the way Washington manages and protects its waters, lands, wildlife, fish and other resources is a significant undertaking that won't be successful without involvement of the public, including anglers, hunters, recreationists, farmers, ranchers, conservationists and businesses – as well as tribal and other governmental partners.

Over the summer, resource agency leaders, along with policy and budget staff of Gov. Chris Gregoire and Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark, started the process by carefully considering a wide range of possible strategies for reforming natural resource management and then selecting 26 specific ideas for further consideration.

Now, these leaders have asked the public to weigh in – and have made it easy for people to do so. After comments and ideas have been received and considered, the subcabinet will select specific reform strategies that they believe are most promising, and will recommend them to the governor and the Commissioner of Public Lands.

A select set of choices, along with an implementation strategy, will follow soon after. These choices will be strengthened by what our leaders have heard from Washington residents. A major public policy plan without public discussion isn't the way we do business in Washington.

In identifying the most promising and viable reform options, we will refine and evaluate up-front and ongoing costs, as well as net savings, for each of the selected strategies. Financial data should be available for the state's 2010 supplemental budget.

Here's how Olympian readers can participate:

The individual reform ideas developed by the natural resources leaders are explained in considerable depth in a document titled: "Ideas to Improve Management of Washington's Natural Resources." It is available on Gov. Gregoire's Web site: www.governor.wa.gov.

From the governor's homepage, click on the "Government Reform" button in the center column. Then click on "Natural Resources. The direct link is:
www.governor.wa.gov/priorities/reform/naturalresources.asp.

Any member of the public can either contribute feedback through an easy-to-use online survey form, or can submit comments and ideas to a special e-mail address.

In Washington state, we have a strong tradition of public involvement and open government. We know that good ideas become better ideas when the public becomes involved. By engaging the public now, Gov. Gregoire and Commissioner Goldmark will make a strong, smart plan for reforming natural resources management.

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