

# Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

## Winter Recreation Strategic Plan 2008-2018



*“The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission acquires, operates, enhances and protects a diverse system of recreational, cultural, historical and natural sites. The Commission fosters outdoor recreation and education statewide to provide enjoyment and enrichment for all, and a valued legacy to future generations.”*

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **Why a Strategic Plan?**

- The last planning exercise completed by the Winter Recreation Program was in 1992.
- Program funding has stagnated, overcrowding is reported, and use conflicts are occurring.
- Staff, advisory committee members and users alike recognize that it is time to do an evaluation, identify needs, and set clear and achievable goals for the future.
- To align the Winter Recreation Program with the Centennial 2013 Plan.

## **What the Plan seeks to accomplish.**

- Clear expression of constituents' desires for the program in the years to come.
- Bolster program funding, with special attention to the non-motorized program.
- Strengthen relationships with advisory committees and volunteers.
- Increase emphasis on customer service.
- Right-size the Sno-Park system.
- Better integrate the Winter Recreation Program into the agency.
- Review management and operational practices.
- Enhance local control of service delivery.

## **Plan Elements.**

### **Mission:**

The mission of the Winter Recreation Program is to provide a variety of snow-based winter recreational opportunities to the public while protecting natural and cultural resources throughout the state.

### **Vision:**

The Winter Recreation Program is a well-managed and respected program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission providing effective and efficient service that: 1) is responsive to the recreational demands of the public; 2) facilitates public access to diverse snow-based recreational opportunities; 3) encourages responsible use and protection of natural and cultural resources; and 4) is closely integrated into the communities it serves through effective relationships with volunteers, local governments and private property owners.

### **Upper Level Objectives and Supplementary Goals:**

#### **1. Access to snow-based recreation will be our primary product.**

- Recreational access opportunities are responsive to user demands while reflecting sensitive environmental stewardship.
- The Program has viable planning functions.
- There is adequate separation of incompatible or conflicting recreational uses.
- Well maintained, clearly signed and usable parking areas and trails, accurate maps.
- Effective, safe trail grooming is provided.

- 2. We will build enduring partnerships.**
  - A vigorous, organized, skilled, and respected volunteer program.
  - Viable Advisory Committees that are regarded as full partners.
  
- 3. We will maintain open and responsive communications with the public.**
  - Safety, education and resource stewardship are high priorities.
  - We provide accurate and up to date information to the public.
  - We respond to complaints and disputes in a timely and sensitive manner.
  
- 4. We will exercise transparent decision-making, with clear, understandable, and concisely written procedures, practices, grants and contracts.**
  - We actively involve people in decisions that affect them, and help people participate by providing them with credible, timely and objective information.
  - We employ effective contract management principles and techniques, and maintain high standards of financial accountability and management effectiveness, including responsive budgeting and clear financial reporting.
  
- 5. We manage public resources in a consistent and responsible manner.**
  - Winter Recreation services are adequately and equitably funded.
  - We plan ahead to compensate for variables that affect service delivery.

### **Implementation Strategies**

The plan includes an extensive list of strategies to accomplish the above goals. The list is so extensive that there is no expectation that, by simply adopting the plan, the Commission will be able to implement each and every one of these strategies. The current funding problems and the state budget climates may preclude that possibility. However, the list should be considered a menu of desires and opportunities that could be pursued in the future. Certainly, not all of the strategies can be applied, even over the next ten years, and it is likely that, as plan implementation is underway, a number of the strategies will not be considered. New strategies will also be discovered and can be incorporated into the plan, which should remain flexible and be reviewed regularly. Evaluation and application of strategies should be incorporated into annual work plans for staff and advisory committees. Because of current funding limitations, those that can be engaged at little or no cost should be the first to be considered, and may result in revenue benefits to the program that will enable pursuit of more expensive strategies.

## **Introduction**

In the state of Washington, a variety of highland areas, including the Cascade, Olympic, Blue and Selkirk mountain ranges, and at times certain stretches of the Columbia Basin, offer winter snow conditions that are conducive to a variety of recreational activities, including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, down-hill skiing, sledding, tubing, skijoring, dog-sledding and general snow-play. Although nature has provided the climate and the terrain, gaining access to locations where the public can engage in these recreational opportunities has become the charge of a variety of government agencies assisted by a host of dedicated volunteers.

Coordination of government efforts to provide the bulk of snow-based recreational access has coalesced under the administration of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (also referred to in this document as either the Commission or State Parks).

The Winter Recreation Program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission has been in existence for more than 30 years. Over its life, the program has grown exponentially, and now includes 120 Sno-Parks statewide. Approximately 80 of these Sno-Parks are used primarily for snowmobile trail access, with another 40 provided exclusively for non-motorized trail access. Associated with these Sno-Parks are approximately 3,300 miles of groomed trails that are provided and maintained in cooperation with federal, county and local agencies, ski areas, snowmobile clubs and private landowners. State Parks has also designated five snow-play areas that are serviced by Sno-Parks, providing opportunities for tubing and other snow-based recreational activities. The dramatic increase in recreational demand since inception of the program has necessitated an evolving management response to ensure that parking lots are constructed, maintained and plowed, restrooms provided, trails maintained and groomed, signs posted, rules enforced, conflicts resolved, and visitors kept informed.

In 1992, the Commission prepared a Winter Recreation Program Plan that was the first comprehensive review of State Parks' involvement in the provision of winter recreation access. It included an extensive history, a program description, an assessment of user demand, and a discussion of future directions. However, the need for a new Winter Recreation Strategic Plan has been demonstrated by changing conditions over the past several years, including:

- Funding being outpaced by recreational demand, and the costs of providing service;
- Sno-Parks in many areas becoming overcrowded, with vehicles turned away on busy weekends; and
- Complaints about trail grooming, user conflicts and management responsiveness.

This Winter Recreation Strategic Plan addresses diverse recreational activities, including cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, skijoring, dog-sledding, and other snow-based recreational activities carried out in state parks or on lands administered by the Commission under agreements with other organizations. Downhill skiing as carried on within existing alpine ski areas is not directly included in this Plan. The Commission has one major alpine ski area, located within Mount Spokane State Park and managed under a concession contract that is currently the subject of a separate planning effort. However, alpine ski areas do not exist in a vacuum and are certainly impacted by the wide array of recreational activities covered by this

plan. Accordingly, goals and strategies contained herein should be useful to them in future planning efforts.

Since the concept of doing a new Winter Recreation Strategic Plan was proposed, it has been assumed that clear and achievable goals could be attained with the Program continuing in its historical and authorized form, as directed by the Legislature and as administered by the Commission (see Appendices “A” and “B” for applicable statutes and administrative codes). With this backdrop, the planners undertook the most extensive public review process in the history of the program (see Appendix “C”). The Plan was completed following more than a year of study, collecting input from a wide spectrum of recreationists, volunteers, agency staff, standing advisory committees, and partner agencies.

## **The Commission Looks to the Future**

### Core Values:

The Winter Recreation Strategic Plan must be mindful of the Core Values of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission:

- A Commitment to stewardship that transmits high quality park assets to future generations.
- A dedication to outdoor recreation and public enjoyment that welcomes all our citizens to their public parks.
- Support for one another as we translate our mission into reality.
- Excellence in all we do.
- Involving the public in our policy development and decision making.

### The Centennial 2013 Plan:

In 2003, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, eager to do its part in making Washington a global leader in environmental stewardship and eco-tourism, seeking to improve the aging park system and ensure a healthy park system for the future, adopted a vision and plan for a second century of state parks. *Centennial 2013* is the agency’s vision for the future and implementation plan to get the State Parks system to where it wants to be. It focuses the agency, the public and policy-makers on the common goal of preparing the park system for a second century of excellent service. The Centennial Plan is the corner stone that anchors the agency’s strategic plan. To guide preparations, the Commission adopted the Centennial 2013 Vision:

“In 2013, Washington’s state parks will be premier destinations of uncommon quality, including state and regionally significant natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources that are outstanding for the public experience, health, enjoyment and learning of all people.”

The proposed Winter Recreation Strategic Plan is consistent with this vision, and the three Priorities for action:

1. Fix what we have.
2. Expand existing parks, trails and services.
3. Build new parks and trails for the future

The complete text of the Centennial 2013 Plan is attached as Appendix “D”.

### The Agency’s Strategic Plan:

The Centennial 2013 effort has been streamlined to 11 measurable goals and objectives, which align with the Priorities of Government, the Governor’s Priorities as outlined in Government, Management, Accountability, and Performance (GMAP), the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission’s Mission and the Commission’s Centennial 2013 Vision and Plan.

The 11 goals of the strategic plan are the focus of the agency’s GMAP process, with work groups reporting their strategies, progress, and challenges. For a complete report, please contact the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

## **Historical Overview**

The Washington State Legislature, through a series of statutes, directed the Parks and Recreation Commission to develop a Winter Recreation Program to open winter recreation opportunities across the state for all types of outdoor fun in the snow.

The development of State Parks’ initial winter recreation program evolved over a period of about ten years. In 1966, the Commission allowed motorized snow vehicles in designated areas of Lake Wenatchee, Mount Spokane, and Pearrygin Lake State Parks on a one-year trial basis. This authorization was continued in 1967 and also expanded to include specified areas in Alta Lake, Brooks Memorial, Fields Spring, Lake Wenatchee, and Riverside State Parks.

In February of 1970, the Commission, aided by the volunteer efforts of an *ad hoc* task force, initiated a project to define the problems and areas of concerns created by snowmobile use. The report investigated nine primary aspects of snowmobiling: the industry; users; recreational and environmental effects; safety; facilities; regulations; enforcement; legislation; and financing. The resulting report was entitled “Snowmobiling in Washington State” dated November 1970, and served as the basis of the Washington State Snowmobile Act of 1971.

The Commission implemented the Snowmobile Act by entering into agreements with other agencies, organizations and individuals to remove snow from parking areas; and to certify volunteer instructors to provide safety training classes. A staff position of Snowmobile Coordinator was also established and the distribution of brochures containing snowmobile regulations commenced.

Legislative action requested by cross-country skiers in 1975 established the Winter Recreation Parking (Sno-Park) Permit program. Like the snowmobile legislation, this program was designed to provide fee-based services primarily to cross-country skiers.

A third body of Winter Recreation related legislation gave State Parks the responsibility for the Downhill Ski Lift Safety Inspection Program. This program and the Commission's management of downhill skiing facilities are not included in this Strategic Plan.

The Sno-Park Program implemented in 1975 became the core of State Parks' new Winter Recreation Program, now consisting of two administrative components, the snowmobile program and the non-motorized program, with separate funds supporting the cost of each program. The snowmobile program is funded from snowmobile registration fees and a percentage of the state gasoline tax. The non-motorized program is funded by the proceeds from Sno-Park parking permit fees. It is important to note for any proposed future changes in funding structures, that both programs were established by the Legislature to be financially self-supporting, using dedicated fund sources, without significant additional support from the Parks Commission. Changing the current funding model would require the concurrence of the Governor's Office and the Legislature.

Two citizen advisory committees were also established to advise State Parks in the administration of the Winter Recreation Program, and include the Winter Recreation (Sno-Park) Advisory Committee (pertaining to non-motorized uses), and the Snowmobile Advisory Committee.

With the financial resources raised by current funding mechanisms, State Parks covers the associated costs of snow removal, maintenance of restrooms, trail grooming, enforcement, equipment purchases, safety education and training, trail signing and maps, and program administration.

## **Future Trends**

As explained above, the Winter Recreation Program has grown exponentially from its inception more than 30 years ago. Historical attendance data is lacking and no current method of accurately collecting attendance is employed by the Program. However, some general information has been provided by the Washington State Recreation Conservation Office (RCO).

An assessment of outdoor recreation in Washington in 2002 estimated that there are:

- 112,942 cross-country skiers
- 38,000 snowshoers, and
- 98,072 snowmobilers

participating in the state. The study concludes that, "growing demand is resulting in more reported crowding, increased specialization, increased user conflicts, and increased management actions to limit adverse impacts." (1)

## Use Projections

**Cross-country skiing:** Growth projections for next 10 years are +23%. (2)

**Snowshoeing:** Snowshoeing increased significantly over the past eight year period (83%). (2)

However, there has been relatively stable participation with between 5 and 6 million participants annually since 2000. Outings peaked in 2000 and 2001, but outings still generally total between 20 and 30 million a year. Trend results show a steady growth in 16 to 24 year-olds snowshoeing since 1999---over one-third (34%) of snowshoers were within this age group in 2005. 30% are over the age of 45 (mean age of 36). Most are likely to live in the Northeastern region of the US. Snowshoeing is more gender balanced in 2005 compared to the prior three years where more males participated in the sport. (2)

**Snowmobiling:** Growth projections for next 10 years are +42%. (3)

This growth projection for snowmobiling was made before 2003, so is now about 5 years old. Sales of snowmobiles and snowmobile registrations however, are not reflecting such growth. Following are sales and registration information for past years.

### International Sales (4)

1998 - 257,936  
1999 - 230,887  
2000 - 208,297  
2001 - 208,592  
**2002 - 203,153**  
2003 - 186,627  
2004 - 181,336  
2005 - 173,733  
**2006 - 164,860**  
2007 - 160,217

### Washington State Sales (4)

1997-1998 - 3711  
1998-1999 - 3649  
1999-2000 - 3922  
2000-2001 - 3758  
**2001-2002 - 3045**  
2002-2003 - 2742  
2003-2004 - 2924  
2004-2005 - 2382  
2005-2006 - 2393  
**2006-2007 - 3083**

### Washington State

Snowmobile Registrations (5)  
2000-37,703  
2001-38,140  
**2002-35,396**  
2003-38,346  
2004-30,833  
2005-35,363  
**2006-36,120**

**Snow Play:** There has been significant growth in general snow play activities, as demonstrated by the popularity of State Parks' designated Sno-Play areas and the addition of tubing hills at ski resorts. Included within this category are those visitors seeking to enjoy just being in the snow, maybe experiencing snow for the first time.

**Miscellaneous:** Other winter recreation activities that have grown considerably include dog-sledding, skijoring (a skier towed by one or more dogs), snow hiking (without snowshoes, often early or late in the season when snow depths are reduced), ice climbing, and snow camping.

The Outdoor Recreation Participation Study of 2005 concluded that activities which meet the following characteristics will have broader appeal. (2)

- Easy access
- Easy to learn
- Done in a day
- Less specialized technical gear required

**Climate Change:** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2007 concluded that “Winter recreation, such as skiing, snowmobiling, and ice fishing, are likely to be affected by climate change, as might the businesses associated with them. Recreational opportunities may be decreased by reduced snow pack and fewer colder days, although snowmaking may make ski areas less vulnerable.” (6) Although the record snowfalls of the 2007/2008 winter season did not reflect this prediction, over the life of this strategic plan, the program may have to respond to reduced snow cover in the future.

**Program Funding:** Most of the projections referenced above were made between 3 to 6 years ago, and over the past year, there have been exceptional increases in fuel costs for visitors, grooming contractors, and the agency. Recent economic downturns have been linked in part to the rising price of oil, and will likely produce a significant impact on recreational use trends. The possibility exists that winter recreationists will examine opportunity costs, and spend their money on other forms of recreation, or recreate closer to home. That could increase crowding of those Sno-Parks that are closer to urban areas, and reduce use of some outlying Sno-Parks. Rising fuel prices could also result in reduced sales and use of snowmobiles and other recreational equipment.

The Winter Recreation Program is now at a critical juncture, striving to meet demands that have been growing rapidly over the past decade, and yet struggling to maintain current service levels. The increase in operating costs required to keep existing Sno-Parks open and trail systems roomed has prevented the program from responding to increased recreational demands. It has also prevented the program from responding to user conflicts, new forms of winter recreation activities and extended winter seasons with exceptional snowfall. Without structural changes in funding mechanisms and funding levels, it is unlikely that the program can grow in the future. The result could be stagnation or even contraction of the system, as some Sno-Parks are abandoned in order to keep other areas open and as trail grooming is reduced. When contemplating the future, a prudent course of action may be to determine what service level can be sustained and budget accordingly, and right-sizing the Sno-Park system.

(1) An Assessment of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State. Interagency Committee on Outdoor Recreation, October 2002.

(2) Outdoor Recreation Participation Study, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Outdoor Industry Foundation, 2005.

(3) Estimates of Future Participation in Outdoor Recreation in Washington State. A Report by the Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC). March 2003.

(4) International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association

(5) Washington State Department of Licensing

(6) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2007.

## **Mission and Vision Statements**

Mission and vision statements are useful tools to provide overall strategic direction. Although the Winter Recreation Program has had formal goals and objectives in the past, and a mission that can be derived from State Parks' statutory authority, no formal or specific mission or vision statements have been adopted. Such mission and vision must be consistent with the overarching mission and vision of the Commission. The following statements are proposed.

### **Mission Statement:**

The mission of the Winter Recreation Program is to provide a variety of snow-based winter recreational opportunities to the public while protecting natural and cultural resources throughout the state.

### **Vision Statement:**

The Winter Recreation Program is a well-managed and respected program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission providing effective and efficient service that: 1) is responsive to the recreational demands of the public; 2) facilitates public access to diverse snow-based recreational opportunities; 3) encourages responsible use and protection of natural and cultural resources; and 4) is closely integrated into the communities it serves through effective relationships with volunteers, local governments and private property owners.

## **Guiding Principles**

In fulfilling the above mission and vision statements, guiding principles are helpful in the development of program goals and objectives, and the strategies to accomplish them. The following guiding principles are proposed. The Winter Recreation Program will:

1. Actively involve people in decisions that affect them; help people to participate by providing them with credible, timely, and objective information; and, develop programs with a clear understanding of public expectations for Program services.
2. Advocate for responsible management and for equitable allocation of resources.
3. Create and strengthen cooperative relationships with individuals, organized groups, local governments, and state and federal resource management agencies.
4. Manage programs in a consistent manner, and use innovation and technology to improve services.
5. Be receptive to, and consider advice from all organizations and individuals relating to winter recreation programs, and not limit topics to only those identified by staff.

6. Be more clearly integrated as a program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.
7. Demonstrate a cooperative, mutually supportive working atmosphere for staff, volunteers, and partners.

## **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

Another helpful tool in development of goals and strategies is an assessment of the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOTs) that are either characteristics of the program, or characteristics of the external environment in which the program functions. After a broad public review process and a thorough evaluation of the Winter Recreation Program, an extensive SWOT analysis is attached as Appendix "E". The Plan attempts to build on strengths, resolve weaknesses, exploit opportunities, and avoid threats.

## **Upper Level Objectives, Goals and Strategies**

Keeping in mind the mission and vision statements, the guiding principles, and the SWOT analysis of the program, a daunting catalogue of suggested goals and strategies have been developed through the public review process. With these goals and strategies, selected targets and measurements have also been proposed to demonstrate performance. The entire list is attached as Appendix "F", and will be valuable in guiding work plans for the next ten years.

## **Plan Implementation**

The plan includes an expansive list of strategies to accomplish its goals. There is certainly no expectation that the Commission should be obligated to implement each and every one of these strategies. The current funding problems and state budget climate probably preclude that possibility. However, the list should be thought of as simply a menu of different opportunities that could be pursued. Certainly, not all of the strategies can be exercised over the next ten years, and it is likely that, as plan implementation is underway, a number of the strategies will not be considered. It is also likely that, during plan implementation, other strategies will be discovered that are not included in this edition of the plan.

The following is a discussion of the most important aspects to be considered in implementing the Strategic Plan.

**Volunteer support** is truly the backbone of the Winter Recreation Program, so efforts to strengthen existing and develop new relationships with advisory committees, individual and group volunteers should begin immediately, especially with local grooming councils and

coordinators. State Parks has a well-established and newly energized Volunteer Program, and closer coordination between the Volunteer Program and the Winter Recreation Program should pay short and long term dividends.

The roles and responsibilities of staff, Advisory Committees and volunteers in general need to be clarified and education provided.

The two existing advisory committees should seek opportunities to communicate more effectively with each other. Combination of the two committees into a unified Winter Recreation Advisory Committee should be studied to determine if it would yield substantial savings without hampering the effectiveness of these volunteers. Combining the committees would require legislative action, as each was established by statute, but the funding sources would remain separate, and not be mixed.

**Written operating procedures** will provide a vehicle for process improvement throughout the life of the Strategic Plan and beyond. Procedures reflecting current practices are being prepared by Winter Recreation Program staff, and should be shared with Advisory Committee members for review, approval, update or modification. The procedures should be revisited on a regular basis to ensure that they reflect the latest thinking. Additional administrative code may also be a necessary step in administration of the program.

**Equitable and adequate funding** will be a necessity to enable the Winter Recreation Program to respond to future growth in recreational demand. Increased funding for non-motorized recreational uses should be a high priority, as these activities are currently under-funded. However, the motorized and non-motorized funds should remain separate. Motorized funds can not legally be re-directed for non-motorized purposes, and the plan does not advise combining the funds. Ways should be pursued to increase non-motorized funding without diminishing motorized funding.

Neither the motorized nor the non-motorized program budgets have grown substantially in recent years, and it would seem prudent to concentrate efforts to stabilize the budget and sustain the existing system of Sno-Parks before contemplating any future growth. The program has a responsibility to fairly represent the users it represents, both motorized and non-motorized.

Most importantly, however, the Winter Recreation Program must be better recognized and more fully integrated as a regular program of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, including the agency's budget process. Although the program was established and has been managed over the years as a self-supporting program that does not require additional funding support from State Parks, consideration should be given, upon concurrence from the Commission and the Governor's Office, to seek authorization from the Legislature to modify the funding mechanisms for the Winter Recreation Program and provide supplemental funding.

Supplemental funding for administration of the Winter Recreation Program and to secure law enforcement services would allow the Program to direct more of the traditional funding sources to snow-based recreational services. Without changes in funding mechanisms and funding levels, it is unlikely that the Winter Recreation Program will be able to meet growing recreational demands, and may have to reduce the size of the Sno-Park system or reduce overall service levels.

The goals of securing **recreational access** and **separating incompatible uses** should be pursued concurrently by means of **viable planning functions**. Establishment of volunteer area councils that would expand upon the role of the current snowmobile grooming councils is a key step. These councils would include snowmobilers and non-motorized users and would become the core groups for development of area-specific plans that are guided by, consistent with, and help implement the Strategic Plan. These area-specific plans would determine where access is needed, where Sno-Parks should be established or removed, where “snow-play” and trail systems should be developed or altered, and how to satisfy the recreational demands of a given area of the state. The local councils and plans would then become the seedbed for germination of project applications that are submitted to the Advisory Committees for funding decisions.

**Safety, education and resource stewardship** should be enhanced throughout the state, with better security at Sno-Parks and increased on-trail enforcement. Law enforcement at Sno-Parks and on trails is now accomplished by a broad coalition of agencies including State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, State Fish & Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, local county Sheriff offices, and sometimes the State Patrol. The combined efforts of all of these agencies need to be coordinated on a state-wide basis, so that adequate coverage is provided to the Sno-Parks and related trail systems. As discussed above, funding of law enforcement services should be clarified, modified, and handled separately from the project application process, either by direct contract or interagency agreement. Establishing more rules and regulations for the use of Sno-Parks and trails without the ability to enforce them would not be productive.

**Information provided to the Public** regarding trail and snow conditions must be accurate and up to date, especially for weekends and holidays. This could be accomplished by more aggressive management of the Winter Recreation website and by providing links to the websites of other state agencies, non-profit organizations including the Washington State Snowmobile Association, local Nordic clubs, local Chambers of Commerce, and commercial ski resorts. Providing information that is not accurate or up to date generates visitor complaints and is detrimental to public perception of the program and agency.

The remaining goals and strategies regarding **signs, trails and parking areas, grooming, contract management, financial accountability, management effectiveness, and responding to complaints and disputes** are all self-explanatory.

**Overall**, elements of the plan should be prioritized and reflected in operating procedures and work plans of the advisory committees and staff to ensure they are carried out in an orderly manner. Over the life of this Strategic Plan there should be a growing emphasis on local input regarding the location and manner of providing snow-based recreational services, recognizing the need to maintain a distinct identity for the Program, and striving for consistent high quality services that equitably represent the interests of the recreating public.

**Paying for implementation of the plan** is a major concern. A number of the strategies included in Appendix “F” are followed by dollar signs (\$) indicating possible budget impacts. Determining estimated costs of implementing these strategies is beyond the scope of this plan, and would probably be vague at best. However, ignoring the budgetary implications of the plan would be to leave the plan incomplete.

Given that the Winter Recreation Program has been unable to grow in response to increasing demands, and covering annual operating costs becomes more challenging each year, it is unlikely that, given current revenue levels and funding structure, a surplus of funds will be available to implement many of the plan’s elements. So, paying for implementation of the plan must begin by attempts to reduce operating costs while pursuing ways to generate more revenue for the program within the existing self-supporting funding structures. The plan itself provides strategies to accomplish these ends, and those that can be engaged at little or no cost, or that have revenue benefits, should be the first to be considered. As funding is increased, more expensive or complex strategies can then be explored, including changes in the program’s statutorily authorized funding structures. Without fundamental changes in the Program’s funding structure for the long term, hard questions will need to be answered, including:

- Should the system be reduced in order to improve service to the Sno-Parks and trail systems that remain?
- What is the right size of the Sno-Park system, and the right level of service delivery?
- In order to best serve the entire winter recreation community, should existing funds be reallocated by the Advisory Committees by reducing service levels at existing sites, but increase general access, i.e. groom less and direct the funds to plowing snow at more access points?

Implementation of the Strategic Plan will help answer these questions, and should provide helpful guidance to the Winter Recreation Program well into the future.