

Commissioner of Public Lands proposal  
for improving access to DNR-managed trust lands  
→ behind DNR-controlled gates

Background

At the September 13-14 Statewide Tribal Summit, Commissioner Goldmark and tribal leaders agreed to form a Tribal/DNR workgroup to address the objective of improving access to DNR managed trust lands, including behind DNR-controlled gates. Commissioner Goldmark committed to developing a proposal intended to result in practical on-the-ground improvements in access before the next Tribal Summit planned for Fall of 2011.

Core Concept

The principle of government-to-government relations lies at the heart of Washington State's interactions with tribes. DNR respects the sovereign status of Washington's federally recognized tribes, and their tribal governments. DNR believes the government-to-government relationship provides the basis for a pragmatic approach to improving access to DNR-managed trust lands.

Specific Proposal

DNR proposes to provide improved access to DNR-managed trust lands to tribal governments on a government-to-government basis. DNR respects tribal government authority and capacity to provide for well-organized access by tribal members under the jurisdiction of a particular tribal government. Individual tribal member access to DNR-managed trust lands would be subject to oversight by the respective tribal government. DNR would rely on tribal governments to be partners in addressing mutual concerns related to access, including safety and resource protection.

Implementation

DNR proposes that participants at this statewide meeting work by consensus in the next few months to develop a statewide template for tribal government access to DNR-managed trust lands. DNR further proposes that the specifics of tribal government access would be developed as a result of individual tribes planning with DNR regional managers and their staff, consistent with the statewide template. These tribe-specific plans would be formalized in a mutually acceptable agreement between DNR and tribal governments. The agreement could specify, for example, geographic areas, access mechanisms, anticipated activities, and periodic meetings to assess on-the-ground experience and adjust as needed. The tribe-specific plans could be developed over the coming year on a geographically phased and prioritized basis agreed to by the statewide workgroup. The statewide workgroup would also develop guidance for accounting for interest by multiple tribal governments in access to the same geographic area.