

PUBLIC TESTIMONY SUMMARY

I-900 STATE AUDITOR'S PERFORMANCE AUDIT:

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (December 23, 2008)

As Heard by the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Sub-Committee on I-900 Performance Audits
on January 7, 2009

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Title: Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

Audit Scope and Objectives:

The audit focused on whether the agency's strategic plan is a well-documented, comprehensive, and cohesive roadmap to achieve its vision. The audit also focused on whether the Commission has appropriately assessed and obtained the human, financial, and information technology resources it needs; if it is monitoring and appropriately measuring its performance; and if its operations are efficient and economical. In addition, the audit addressed the nine elements outlined in Initiative 900.

The auditors reviewed data from 2005 through 2007. They conducted fieldwork between September 2007 and April 2008.

SAO Findings:

The overarching conclusion is that improvements are needed in the Commission's strategy development and governance, including its performance management and information technology systems.

The audit raises issues in the following six areas:

1. Strategic planning;
2. Governance;

SAO Recommendations:

The audit includes recommendations to the State Parks and Recreation Commission in each of the six issue areas.

The audit also recommends that the Department of Information Services provide assistance to the Commission to research and identify a possible connectivity solution (connecting headquarters with the parks).

<p>SAO Findings (cont.): 3. Performance information; 4. Information systems; 5. Human Resource Management System impact; and 6. Economy and efficiency of operations.</p>	
<p>Agency Responses in Audit Report?</p>	<p>Yes. Responses from the Commission and the Office of Financial Management are included within the body of the report by individual issue. Appendix K includes a separate Commission response related to Issue No. 6, economy and efficiency of operations.</p>
<p>Legislative Action Requested?</p>	<p>No. However, there is a recommendation to the Commission to continue to pursue its request for money from the Legislature to provide a technology solution for connectivity issues.</p>

Agencies Testifying:

The State Parks and Recreation Commission (Rex Derr, Director, and Joan Thomas, Commissioner)

Summary of Testimony from Audited Agencies:

The audit could not have come at a better time, right in the middle of the State Parks and Recreation Commission’s Centennial improvement decade. The agency will benefit from this audit. This audit on agency operations complements earlier reviews of the agency’s capital programs. We have responded to the audit with a plan of action, translating the 28 recommendations into 46 actions. Of the 46 actions, 22 have been completed; 16 are underway, and eight will require a substantial investment by the state. We have learned over time that we need to do a better job of telling our story and now, of documentation. We will wait to see how the legislative process unfolds for state parks in these difficult economic times.

Other Parties Testifying:

Ray Benish, Citizens for St. Edward Park
Manny Mankowski, Citizens for St. Edward Park
Jim King, Citizens for Parks and Recreation

Summary of Testimony from Other Parties:

My professional background is in performance auditing, and our group has been in conflict with the Commission about a particular park. The length of time to complete the audit appears excessive; six months should have been adequate rather than two years. At over \$1 million, the cost of the audit is amazing. The billing rate and how the time was spent should be looked at.

The importance of field work is mentioned numerous times in the audit, but we did not see the audit team in attendance at the Commission meetings. It is essential when conducting these audits to get out in the field and not just rely on paperwork. The review of strategic planning was highlighted by the audit. However, the Commission conducted a one and one-half day meeting in Westport on strategic planning, and the audit team was nowhere in evidence. To our knowledge, there has not been a formal presentation to the Commission regarding the audit findings and recommendations. We are stunned that the audit identifies only \$50,000 in cost savings. The agency could look at webinars to cut down on travel costs. There are concerned and motivated interest groups, and the audit team did not consult with any of them. The agency has a failure to reach out to stakeholders. A look at governance should have included a look at the tenure of the Commissioners and their professional experience and education. The audit did not look at the federal land and water conservation funding statutes, which are not being followed.

Some 60 citizens testified to the Commission with concerns about the idea of privatizing St. Edward Park. The Commission voted to approve the privatization proposal in concept but also to develop a Classification and Management Plan (CAMP) for the park. An advisory committee met extensively and worked hard to develop recommendations for managing the park. It was only at the end of this lengthy process that Park staff provided a draft of their own recommendations. Why have citizens spent 18 months and countless hours if the agency was going to renounce the ideas of its own advisory committee? I disagree with the audit's statement that the CAMP for each park engages citizens in a transparent public participation model. The Berk & Associates report noted that the key concern from user groups and environmental organizations is that the agency does not always follow through on promises and plans. The agency may try to close the swimming pool at St. Edward Park. Why didn't the audit report examine the pool contract?

I appreciate the respect the audit shows toward State Parks staff and the Commission. I also appreciated the recent capital studies that have been completed. I initially embraced the idea of having this performance audit of the agency. Shortly after SAO announced the audit, I met with SAO staff and provided them with my list of non-governmental contacts – over 50 organizations and key individuals. When I saw the actual report, I was disappointed. This report has limited usefulness for State Parks. To the best of my knowledge, nobody outside of state government was contacted to hear their concerns and interests. Many of us were looking for more in relation to program performance and assessment, for example, in resource allocation or in how revenues are generated or not. It's a plus that the Commission holds its meetings all around the state. In thinking about holding meetings on the web, remember that a lot of people aren't on the web. That \$1 million does not include all of the Parks staff time that was put into this. The audit was not worth \$1 million.