



Lewis County 2023 Legislative Agenda

The Lewis County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) generally believes that the Legislature must act to protect public safety, lower residents' tax burden, restrict the use of drugs, make housing more affordable, and protect private property rights. The Commissioners will continue to work closely with the members of the 19th and 20th Legislative Districts and jointly advocate for Lewis County residents on these topics. Separately, this Legislative Agenda is focused on specific Legislative actions to enable the BOCC to more efficiently and effectively provide critical county services to our residents.

Key Objectives

Improve Energy Efficiency of Key County Buildings

The County has worked with a third party to identify upgrades to two public buildings that will improve their energy efficiency and assist in meeting the state's carbon reduction goals. The County is investing \$5 million to replace the HVAC system in the jail. The County requests **\$2.75 million** in capital funding to replace the roofs on the jail and a facility used as a homelessness shelter.

Senior Services

The County needs both operating and capital dollars to care for the County's vulnerable seniors. In order to increase local funding for senior programs, the County requests a new credit against the State sales tax that would be dedicated to senior services in small, rural counties. The County also requests **\$2 million** from the state's capital budget to make improvements to the County buildings used by the nonprofit organizations who provide senior services.

Water Bank

The County is in the process of establishing a water bank for a variety of uses and is applying for a grant from the \$14 million provided to the Department of Ecology in the 2022 supplemental capital budget for county water banks. Whether from this grant or other State revenues, the County requires operating resources for consulting costs to establish and initially operate the bank, as well as capital resources to acquire water rights and have Ecology process them.

Dig Once

The Economic Alliance of Lewis County, in partnership with the County, has made great progress in developing a pilot dig once project. Lewis County supports the Department of Commerce request of \$10 million to implement the pilot.

Important Topics to Watch

Lewis County will emphasize the importance of the following issues when they are brought up for discussion by the Legislature.

Broadband

Significant portions of the County still lack acceptable internet speeds. The Legislature must continue investment in rural broadband, including exploring the possibility of subscribing certain unserved areas to alternative methods (non-fiber) service.

Fish Passage Funding

Given the significant number of culverts in Lewis County that will eventually need to be replaced, this is a significant issue. The state must assist local governments with the cost of providing fish passage.

Forest Management Issues

Ensuring a healthy forest products industry is critical to the County. Lewis County will closely monitor any proposals that could negatively impact this economic sector.

Growth Management Act

As the Legislature considers potential changes to the GMA, Lewis County will advocate for specific changes allowing it to more effectively balance all of the Act's goals, including:

- **Local Areas of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRDs)** – providing additional ability to expand commercial buildings located within LAMIRDs.
- **Rural Housing Alternatives** – The County seeks additional opportunities to provide affordable housing within rural areas.
- **Forest Resource Designation** – The County requires the ability to re-zone lands in the forest resource designation that were mistakenly designated to create responsible development options.

Homelessness

There is significant frustration that the state's resources to address homelessness are distributed to providers in the County without the ability to require substance use treatment, nor do they provide sufficient resources for individuals to receive behavioral health treatment. The County will advocate that homeless dollars spent in the County must be matched by funding for behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment.

Indigent Defense

This costs the County two to three million dollars a year, yet the state only reimburses Lewis County approximately \$100,000 for indigent defense services, placing a heavy burden on the County's discretionary budget. The County will continue to emphasize the importance that the state provide additional funding for these services.

Transportation

As the Legislature makes adjustments to projects funded in the Move Ahead Washington package, and contemplates the possibility of a new transportation revenue package, Lewis County will advocate for additional project funding to address critical needs, including the widening of I-5 and addressing safety issues at Exit 72/Rush Road.

Voluntary Stewardship Program

Lewis County has a very successful Voluntary Stewardship Program; it is important that the Legislature not undermine it as they consider salmon recovery and agriculture buffer proposals.

