

ABOUT THE WHATCOM COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S HEALTHY COMMUNITIES PROGRAM:

- **Staff:** Melissa Morin, Community Health Specialist, Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) Healthy Communities Program
- **Healthy Communities Program goal:** The Healthy Communities program aims to prevent chronic diseases (such as heart disease and diabetes) and promote health by creating community environments where all people can lead healthy and active lifestyles.
 - One of the ways we do this is by promoting **healthy community design**.
 - A few examples of the elements of healthy community design are:
 - **Places to get outside and be active:** sidewalks, bike lanes, parks, trails
 - **Access to healthy and affordable food choices:** grocery stores, farmer's markets, community gardens
 - **Safety:** crosswalks, safe speed limits, street lighting
 - **Clean living environment:** Reduced air and noise pollution, smoke-free environments, clean water supply
- WCHD Healthy Communities Program accomplishes our goal by partnering with community members and with other community organizations and agencies.

ABOUT WCHD HEALTHY COMMUNITIES EFFORTS IN BIRCH BAY:

- In Birch Bay, WCHD is working together with the Waterfront Group, Whatcom County Public Works, the National Park Service (NPS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on a new collaborative project to ensure that the Birch Bay Drive and Pedestrian Project (aka Wolf's Beach Restoration) fully realizes the potential public health benefits of the new pedestrian trail, bike lanes and beach access.
 - *How?* In part, through a grant from the NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program). RTCA staff provides technical assistance to communities planning trails and greenways, including ways for community members to actively participate in trail planning and development.
 - <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/index.htm> (general description of RTCA project)
 - <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/whatwedo/projects/WA.pdf> (short descriptions of 2013 projects and several success stories from past projects. Birch Bay falls under the 4th project: Healthy Communities Initiative)
 - *What?* Through the NPS-RTCA program, Birch Bay was selected as a site for a national pilot project designed to: (1) assess the public health benefits of parks and trails, and (2) bring planning, public health and communities together to prioritize community health concerns and opportunities.

RTCA and the CDC have developed a tool, the **Parks, Trails and Health Worksheet**, that will be piloted in Birch Bay from February – May 2013. A team of Birch Bay residents will be working with WCHD staff and NPS-RTCA staff, Alex Stone, to collect data to establish a baseline measure of community health and safety that will be useful for ongoing tracking as the new amenities on Birch Bay Drive are constructed and residents

and visitors use the trail and bike lanes. In addition, the team will be considering how best to integrate community health into the design of the project and in future community planning for parks, trails, and transportation. This ***Birch Bay Healthy Communities Assessment*** project will help set the stage for creating a healthier Birch Bay.