

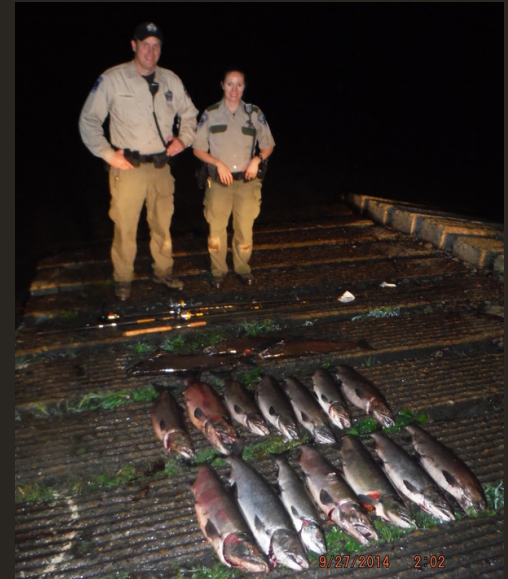
PROTECTING SPECIES

A career as a wildlife officer and detective

Meet Wendy Willette

Detective Willette was born and raised in Federal Way. She grew up travelling the state with her father. From hunting in Cle Elum to bottom fishing in Neah Bay, these experiences ignited her passion for protecting Washington's rich natural resources.

After graduating from Pacific Lutheran University with a degree in geoscience, she had no idea what she wanted to do with life. At a career fair she became acquainted with a program called Police Corps (no longer in existence). This program was designed for police officers with bachelor's degrees and would help recent graduates pay off student debt. Willette met with a handful of agencies, but was "blown away" by the professionalism and cadre of WDFW officers. Thus began her 20-year relationship with the agency.



WDFW officers have a diverse range of specializations. They help both people and wildlife in their rewarding careers.

According to Willette, a career as a wildlife detective is varied. Some days she's working undercover and other days she's behind the computer looking into accounts to try and "follow the money". She focuses on large-scale trafficking of natural resources and her primary goal is to identify how poachers move trafficked goods in and out of the state.

Her favorite part about being a detective is working cases that have had a large impact on the sustainability of the resource. In some of her cases, poachers have dramatically reduced a species' population which, "has large repercussions on ecosystems." Holding poachers and traffickers accountable can "send shockwaves through the entire industry."



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For those interested in pursuing a career as a wildlife officer or detective, Willette offers some advice. "It's important to understand how the resource works and what ramifications can come from removing that resource from the ecosystem. She recommends either majoring/minoring in biology and criminal justice. She also recommends getting involved with the agency. WDFW offers a competitive summer internship where interns get to be with officers for the summer. Other opportunities to get involved with the agency could include volunteering with your regional office. "It's a great way to get your foot in the door and build important relationships," she said.



A career as a WDFW officer is, "extremely rewarding and It's ever-changing. There isn't a day when I am bored," she said. From riding snowmobiles, horseback riding, diving, or working with Karelian bear dogs officers can find their niche and their passion with the agency. "There's so much opportunity for learning new things and trying different things. These are opportunities you're not going to find anywhere else," Willette said.



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