

FUTURE PATH FOR COMPLETING THE GAME MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Game Management Plan is a vital planning document used to assess populations, species, and species guilds (herein referred to as "populations") of hunted wildlife, evaluate issues affecting them, and establish management strategies for them. The current plan has been extended through June 2023, with an intent to complete a new Game Management Plan by December 2022.

The Department has recently proposed a two-step process for updating the Game Management Plan and has sought guidance from the Fish and Wildlife Commission regarding the best process for staging and prioritizing these updates. The Commission recommends that Phase One include the gathering and updating of science and data related to each population and the completion of the human dimensions work. Because policy is better formulated after a review of the science and data, the Commission suggests that Staff complete Phase One, and that the Commission and Staff then work together on Phase Two, the development of policy statements. The Commission asks Staff to advise on the timeline for the quickest possible completion of Phase One.

The Commission also believes that this process will be more successful if the Commission and Staff agree on the elements to be included in Phase One. Toward that end, the Commission would like Staff to consider and provide feedback on the following proposed templates for Phase One, which include many of the components in past Game Management Plans.

1. Assessment of the status and trends for each hunted and/or trapped wildlife population; evaluation of special issues and/or challenges facing each population; and summaries of the scientific information and data necessary for their management. Specifically, the Commission requests that for each population, Department Staff provide the following:
 - a. The best available information regarding population taxonomic status and structure, geographic distribution (including seasonal or temporal variation therein), abundance (including best and minimum estimates), trends, age and sex structure, and growth rates (current and maximum);
 - b. The sources of this information, including whether it is based on counts (and the method for those counts) or estimates (and the basis for those estimates);
 - c. An assessment of the importance to and impact of each population on the surrounding ecosystem, including a discussion of trophic cascades for carnivore species;
 - d. An assessment of the level and impact of all human-caused mortality for each population, including hunting, trapping, management actions, landowner permits, and poaching, together with information reported by hunters (including the rate and reliability of that reporting);
 - e. An assessment of challenges and issues facing each population, including an evaluation of the known and anticipated impacts of climate change and habitat loss;
 - f. A summary of the gaps, uncertainties, and flaws in the information used to assess the population, trends, and challenges for each population; and
 - g. A summary of ongoing and planned research projects related to each population and an identification of additional research necessary to improve the Department's management strategies for each of them.
2. For wildlife currently grouped as "small game and furbearers," the Commission asks the Department to consider the feasibility and timing for developing separate sections addressing the following populations, given concerns about these populations and their ecological importance to surrounding ecosystems: beaver, bobcat, coyote, marten, river otter, and snowshoe hare.
3. Regarding the human's dimensions work, the Commission would like to see the results and conclusions from the Department's general population and hunters' surveys, as well as discuss potential additional topics on which surveys would be informative and useful, including proposals for how to involve a larger cross-section of the Washington population in wildlife management issues, including communities that have been historically excluded from those discussions.
4. In preparation for the upcoming legislative session, evaluate a potential process and associated budgetary cost for obtaining outside peer review of the Department's science and data for each population, including the possibility of contracting for such a peer-review process with an outside organization such as the Wildlife Society, the Washington Academy of Sciences, or the National Academy of Sciences.

6/22/22