

Conservation Policy Draft v8

Commission Conservation Policy

Policy number: C-700X

Effective date: MONTH X, 2022

Signed by: Barbara Baker, Fish and Wildlife Commission Chair

The mandate of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW or Department) is to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage fish and wildlife and provide recreational hunting and fishing, and commercial fishing opportunities that do not impair the resource. The Department is encouraged to accomplish this mandate in cooperation with volunteers. Further, the mandate emphasizes that fish and wildlife resources are property of the state.

Conservation of fish and wildlife is becoming increasingly more difficult with the amplified effects of climate change, increasing human population, and continued habitat fragmentation and loss. Recognizing that the Department's Strategic Plan calls for proactively addressing these conservation challenges, the Commission sets out the following policy guidance.

Vision: Healthy ecosystems, healthy fish and wildlife populations, healthy people

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to guide the Commission and Department in preserving and protecting our state's diverse fish and wildlife resources by proactively addressing the conservation challenges.

Mission: The Commission supports the department, its partners and landowners in protecting and restoring ecosystems including fish and wildlife populations to healthy and sustainable levels and managing fish and wildlife populations in a manner that supports the needs of current and future Washington residents.

Definitions:

Conservation - Public policy, science, and management actions designed to preserve, protect, or restore healthy ecosystems, safeguard both the intrinsic and extrinsic (social, economic, and cultural) values of fish and wildlife resources, and provide equitable benefits to current and future generations.

Ecosystem - A community of organisms and their physical environment, viewed as a system of interacting and interdependent relationships and including such processes as the flow of energy through trophic levels and the cycling of chemical elements and compounds through living and nonliving components of the system.

Ecosystem-based Management - An environmental management approach that factors the full array of interactions within an ecosystem, including humans, rather than focusing on single issues, species, physical environment, or ecosystem services in isolation.

Equitable – The fair and impartial sharing of public resource costs and benefits.

Sustainability – The use of fish and wildlife resources in manners and at a rates that maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems, and the benefits they provide current and future generations.

Ecosystem-based Management Principles:

- 1) *Fish, wildlife and habitats must exist in a sustainable form.* Sustainability in this sense is intergenerational and not in terms of deliverables.
- 2) *Sound ecological models and understanding.* Ecosystem management requires research to be completed at all levels of ecological organization.
- 3) *Recognition of full complexity and connectedness.* Biological diversity and structural complexity strengthen ecosystems against disturbance and genetic resources necessary to adapt to long-term change.
- 4) *Ecosystem characteristics are dynamic.* Recognizing that change and evolution are inherent in ecosystem sustainability.
- 5) *Ecosystem processes operate over a wide range of spatial and temporal scales.*
- 6) *Humans are part of ecosystems.* Ecosystem based management values the active role of humans in achieving sustainable management goals.
- 7) *Adaptability and accountability are critical to success.* It is important to acknowledge that current knowledge and paradigms of ecosystem function are provisional, incomplete, and subject to change. Therefore, management actions should acknowledge risk and uncertainty and be monitored to assess whether intended objectives are realized.

Commission Guiding Conservation Policy Principles:

- 1) We sustainably manage fish and wildlife through ecosystem-based management principles. Success will require an aligned vision, strategies, and sufficient funding levels. We must continue both our ongoing foundational work and expand our efforts to meet many emerging conservation needs in order to protect the full diversity of Washington's fish and wildlife. Success also includes managing so as not to deny future generations the opportunities and resources we enjoy today.
- 2) Protecting and restoring healthy and resilient ecosystems that support fish and wildlife is necessary to achieve the vision, mission and mandate of the agency. Bold, innovative leadership and solutions are necessary. We understand that innovative projects do not always fully achieve the desired outcomes; we must be willing to fail on occasion in order to learn and to succeed. We need to strengthen our work in habitat and ecosystem protection, preserving habitat, land connectivity, and expand our ability to restore degraded lands and waters, across both private and public ownership.
- 3) Public, legislative, and executive branch engagement with the Department is essential for administering building and maintaining trust. We commit to ample opportunities for public input regarding Commission policies and decisions. We also commit to increased dialogue with the Governor and local and state-elected officials in order to ensure we have a shared understanding of the urgency and need for additional support, expanded partnerships, and necessary additional authorities and funding so that the Department and partner jurisdictions have the resources to fully realize the mandate.
- 4) Success in ecosystem-based management requires partnerships. Our work focuses on fish and wildlife, but a systems approach and strong coordination with all local, state, federal and tribal

governments, NGOs, and private landowners is essential. Fish and wildlife extend beyond artificial, geo-political boundaries. We actively collaborate with tribes to coordinate decisions for best management options. We value and seek to increase our joint work with academia, business, and non-profit partners.

- 5) Knowledge and science are key. Our actions and decisions must be grounded in knowledge. Science is our best tool for creating knowledge. Our science-based work requires taking a broad, multi-disciplinary approach, especially incorporating biological, ecological, economic, and social science information. We embrace new knowledge and use science to address changing conditions through adaptive management.
- 6) All actions and decisions contain risks and uncertainties and therefore, we must rely on scientific knowledge regarding the range of policy considerations and their associated risks and uncertainties when making decisions and ensure that follow-up monitoring and adaptive management actions are implemented, if necessary, to deliver and improve the intended policy or action outcomes.

The foregoing guiding conservation principles shall be incorporated by the Commission and the department in the development and approval of the budget, planning, and decision-making processes.