

WDFW BUDGET AND POLICY ADVISORY GROUP MEETING SUMMARY

July 20, 2021, 10am – 12pm

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1111 Washington St SE, Olympia WA 98501 –
Online Meeting

BPAG Attendance

Mitch Friedman, Conservation Northwest
Brittany Gallagher, The Nature Conservancy
Ron Garner, Puget Sound Anglers
Kathleen Gobush, Defenders of Wildlife
Lucas Hall, Long Live the Kings
George Harris, NW Marine Trade Association
Jess Helsley, Wild Salmon Center
Deborah Jensen, Washington Audubon
Greg Johnson, Commercial Fisher
Nora Nickum, Seattle Aquarium
Mark Pidgeon, Hunters Heritage Council

Kerston Swartz, Woodland Park Zoo
Lance Winecka, Regional Fisheries Coalition

Public

Chris Bachman, Wildlife First

WDFW

Nate Pamplin
Tom McBride
Patty Steele
Chalee Batungbacal
Carrie McCausland
Kathy Backman

Welcome, Introductions

Nate Pamplin welcomed the members of the Budget and Policy Advisory Group (BPAG) and BPAG members introduced themselves.

2022 Agency Request Legislation – Tom McBride

Tom McBride updated the BPAG on draft legislative requests for the Department, other legislative items of interest to the Department, and the draft 2022 Supplemental Capital Budget requests.

Carryover bills from 2021

The Department is following House Bill 1508 and House Bill 1172 from the 2021 legislative session. HB1508 would grant the Department of Health the authority to regulate crab with respect to health and safety in relation to biotoxin contamination. HB 1172 repeals the language of RCW 77.110, outdated text that does not comport with federal law.

Draft Agency Request Legislation for 2022 session

ADA Advisory Committee Composition: Removes preferences for committee appointment and allows the addition of experienced caregivers to participate on the committee.

Recruitment and Licensure: The request would change the required age of licensing for fishing from 15 to 16 to align with hunting licenses and allow full-time college students and military personnel stationed in Washington to qualify for resident licenses. It also allows for the use of temporary licenses during the lowland lake opener, among other changes. These updates are intended to improve recruitment and retention efforts and make it easier for people to participate in WDFW managed activities.

Electronic and Print from Home Licenses: This bill would modernize the process of licensing and allow for electronic licensing and presentation of e-licenses in the field.

Discover Pass Free Day Alignment and Vehicle Access Pass: This bill would allow for the annual State Parks 12 days of free state access to be updated to a Discover Pass Free day so that any state lands requiring a Discover Pass would be free. The request also includes adding a vehicle access pass for WDFW lands to shellfish license holders.

BPAG members had questions and comments about the required age for hunting and fishing licensing should be 16. Department research has shown that demographics of license buyers drop off during the late teens and early 20s—likely due to competition with many other activities, college, etc. Analysis of licensing revenue as part of a fiscal note from a 2021 bill also indicates that increasing the youth discount age above 16 would have a negative economic impact to the Department without back-fill of State General Fund.

BPAG members also indicated support for the electronic licensing proposal and noted that it should improve the timeliness of catch record data to inform in-season management.

Other Bills the Department is Following

Hydropower fee expiration date extension. These fees collected by Ecology allow the Department to participate in re-licensing negotiations and hydro operations of facilities operated by non-federal utilities. The fee is currently scheduled to expire at the end of the 2021-23 biennium.

RFEG fund percentage splits. This bill would shift the methodology of providing funding to RFEGs from a proportion of license funding based on an annual fishing participation survey to a more stable, predictable fixed 'split' of a proportion of angling fishing revenue.

Governor's Salmon Recovery Bill. There is potential for a large Governor initiative to support salmon recovery. Tom will share more details as they become available.

Highway 97 Wildlife Underpass. Mitch Friedman reported that he does not have an update on funding through the transportation budget. If congress were to pass an infrastructure bill, it may have a highway underpass component.

2022 Supplemental Capital Budget Summary

Deschutes Watershed Center Hatchery(\$2.2M) – The Deschutes Watershed Center complex is complete; however, it does not include a hatchery. The Department is seeking a location upstream to site and construct a hatchery. The requested amount would include the property, but not construction of a hatchery.

PSNERP State Match for the Duckabush Estuary (\$59.5M)- This funds the state portion of a large federal appropriation to restore the estuary function at the mouth of the Duckabush River.

Toutle River Collection Facility (\$0.0M)—adjustment to proviso language.

Hoffstadt Hills Habitat Acquisition (\$14.5M) –acquisition of critical elk habitat along the Toutle River that is not covered as part of other mitigation responsibilities.

Beaver Creek Hatchery (\$0.1M)—planning and design funding to update the hatchery and allow it to fulfill the production closed at Grays River due to sedimentation and water quality problems.

Klickitat Wildlife Area - Simcoe Fencing (\$0.5M) — this will provide for boundary fencing to separate the Yakama Reservation and the wildlife area.

Taneum Creek - Brain Property (\$0.4M)—post acquisition, capital eligible costs for fencing and building removal.

2022 Supplemental Operating Budget Requests

Nate Pamplin provided the BPAG with an overview of the Department’s operating budget, and how the long-term structural deficit has been resolved in large part due to the BPAG’s efforts and response to the 2017 legislative proviso and the development of a long-term funding plan.

Nate reviewed spending over the last biennium and identified where the agency spends it’s money by activity.

He reviewed sixteen maintenance level requests for increasing costs to the agency and ten policy level requests for new budget items. Nate also reviewed an additional eight requests for policy level requests from the limited fish and wildlife account to access positive fund balance within restricted accounts.

The total of policy level requests for the 2022 session will are \$15M; \$11M from the state general fund, \$4M from restricted accounts. The total of maintenance level requests is \$9M. The details of these requests is in the attached presentation.

The next step will be to present the requests to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for approval in August before submitting them to the Office of Financial Management in September. The Governor’s budget will be released in December, and the BPAG will meet the first week in January to discuss what was included from the Department’s request.

Strategic Engagement Plan Update

Nate reported to the BPAG that the Department has contracted with MFA/Triangle Associates to conduct an assessment of WDFW’s current outreach and communication capacity and to develop a strategy for improving its engagement with the public. Nate will provide contact information for BPAG members to the consultants and members may be contacted for their suggestions to improve the Department’s outreach strategy. After the assessment is complete, the BPAG will meet to discuss the results in October or November. The meeting will be in person at the Natural Resources Building if possible.