

28 September 2023 WDAC Meeting
North Bend, WA
Notes taken by Monika Wieland Shields

WDAC Members Attending: Patrick Gallagher, Sarina Jepson, Denis DeSilivis, Nancy Lee, John Farnsworth, Jerry Joyce, Glen Mendel, Monika Wieland Shields, Ann VanSweringen, Trina Bayard, Kathleen Gobush, Todd Wildermuth (PM only)

WDFW Staff Attending: Hannah Anderson, Tom O'Brien, Wendy Connally, Taylor Cotten, Janet Gorrell, Julia Smith, Jenna Becar

Start Time: 9:31

1. Welcome and Council Business

- Please include meeting attendees in WDAC meeting notes going forward
- Removal of WDFW supplemental budget request from the agenda – that summary is not currently available but there will be a follow-up e-mail
- No corrections to February meeting notes; motion to approve minutes accepted.
- Review of February action items – anything that still needs attention?
 - No SWAP technical team meeting minutes are available to send to WDAC committee members, but as decisions begin to be made those updates will be sent out
 - WDAC Priorities should be a standing agenda item (didn't make it to agenda today but will do so going forward)
 - Taylor still needs to send list of tentative upcoming PSRs
- Correction to May meeting minutes: SWAP is NOT federally mandated but is required if you want SWG (State Wildlife Grants). May meeting minutes approved as amended.
- Review of May action items – anything that still needs attention?
 - Send copy of Kara's presentation to WDAC members

Action Items: Hannah – send out commission briefing on supplemental budget request to council members
Nancy – make sure WDAC priorities makes it on to future agendas

Remaining action item from previous meetings:

Taylor – list of candidates needing attention, full list of species that need PSR and tentative list of upcoming PSRs to all

Tom – Send out Kara's presentation from the May meeting.

2. State Wildlife Action Plan update (due Oct 2025!) and Subcommittee Report

- SWAP sub-committee update from John: Initial input provided on proposed themes that were strong, areas that were too ambiguous, suggested candidates for SWAP interviews. Any WDAC members not on the sub-committee can contribute at any time.
 - Wendy is engaging with SWAP steering committee on how they want various councils to engage; anticipate that WDAC will still be one of the leads
- SWAP progress update from Wendy: Outreach and engagement strategy is being developed to gather scoping information; WDAC members will be key in encouraging public engagement
 - The steering committee doesn't direct progress but has encouraged getting public input in advance of developing content (so not just in the review phase)
 - Wendy's aspiration is that the plan will represent conservation needs for the State of Washington (NOT just for WDFW) – thus she is asking for name change to the Washington Conservation Action Plan. Wants it to be something bigger than just a work plan for WDFW.
 - Positive comments from the committee: It encompasses the importance of being habitat-centric/makes it more wholistic. It moves beyond the perception of wildlife = terrestrial animals. Could encourage buy-in by incorporating things that have already been agreed upon by other conservation groups.
 - Concerns from the committee: That's a huge undertaking! Would it leverage the massive work and public outreach already done by other entities? Is there enough time to complete this logistically? They money all comes through WDFW and WDFW creates it, so in that sense it isn't it a WDFW plan?
 - Need an FAQ about this process sooner rather than later before engagement begins (would be good to have WDAC sub-committee review this). Now that Wendy is in this position she will be the one relaying things to the sub-committee for input.

Action Items: Wendy – Send draft SGCN criteria, two-year timeline, and FAQ (once developed) to John and Glen who will decide how to distribute to WDAC/sub-committee for feedback

3. Species of Concern Subcommittee Report

- Western gray squirrel and Mardon skipper letters complete; these two species will be presented to the commission and will voted on this fall
- Northern spotted owl, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, killer whale, yellow-billed cuckoo, common loon, pygmy rabbit, Taylor's checkerspot butterfly all upcoming soon.
- State-level listing recommendation for Island marble butterfly upcoming
- Aug 22 sub-committee meeting had presentation from Julia Smith on the gray wolf; sub-committee decided input from WDAC as a whole would be helpful before drafting a letter, leading to the next agenda item

Action Items: None

4. Wolf Periodic Status Review: Presentation and Discussion

- Julia gave an overview presentation to WDAC members before discussion. Grey wolf has never had a periodic status review since their listing in 1980; the result of this current long process is a recommendation to down-list the grey wolf in Washington from endangered to sensitive (and specifically recommending not to de-list at this time).
 - Key fact: down-listing would not remove protections for wolves or open additional avenues for hunting

- A recording of her presentation to the Commission can be found [here](#) or her slides can be found [here](#)
- The Commission has specifically asked what WDAC thinks about this
- WDAC members had various feelings on the down-listing recommendation – some worried the science wasn't complete or peer-reviewed, while others pointed out there is more data on wolves than for nearly any other listed species. Julie pointed out that if a decision is delayed while more data is collected, the next PSR may very well recommend total de-listing.
- Since there was a lot more to discuss on this topic and many had additional thoughts to share, there will be an additional separate meeting to finalize what will be included in a WDAC letter, with specific mention of possibly including a minority opinion

Action Items: Taylor – will send out a Doodle poll for further discussion on development of grey wolf WDAC letter

5. Wildlife Area Planning Subcommittee Report

- Reminder: WDAC letters are being sent in prior to public review
- Update from Denis: Two letters sent out in mid-July: Jeff Kozma did an extensive review of the Simcoe Mountain Wildlife Management Unit Plan and wrote a great letter. Denis reviewed the Skagit Wildlife Area Management Plan with a letter focused on non-consumptive uses.
 - SEPA 30-day public review of Skagit management plan likely to be in November
- Janet: LT Murray response letter coming soon. Two plans just beginning: pilot recreation planning for Methow Wildlife Area and Cowlitz

Action Items: Denis – Will send out the two wildlife area letters and one response received to the full committee

Janet – Will find out what public review process is for stand-alone recreation plan

6. WDFW Biodiversity Investments

- There is a new WDFW hire focused specifically on biodiversity communications
- Where is the increase in legislative funding going? Hannah and Tom will provide an update for WDAC while Jenna Becar is also here and will be helping to shape public messaging around how this funding will be used

Species and Habitat Recovery – Hannah

- FY 24 focus is on the species that are most imperiled
- FY 25 continue that focus but add engagement in new efforts for species that have yet to begin
- FY 26 – Focus on SGCN which have significant data gaps
- FY 27 – Expanded team fully in place
- Adding 8 FTE to the Diversity Division HQ staff, 4 FTE to science division staff, 11 FTE to regional diversity biologist field teams. Some new positions are in place now, some are in recruitment.
- Emphasis areas include shrubsteppe, reptiles and amphibians, marine/coastal
- Specific species that will be highlighted include western gray squirrel, bats, invertebrates
- The advancement Washington has made is unprecedented relative to other fish and wildlife agencies – that's a story in itself

Land Use Policy and PHS Data Delivery – Tom

- For the first time they will a habitat connectivity specialist; also new staff to focus on on shrubsteppe, riparian, and nearshore habitats
- One big focus area will be advising where solar projects should/shouldn't go

- Will be hiring 5 new high level policy leads, including for toxic contaminants, climate policy, and beaver management consultant

Seeking WDAC feedback on messaging

- Trina: For people who are fairly engaged, knowing that new staff capacity is coming is super exciting
- Denis: Think the proposed emphasis areas will resonate with people
- John: Likes the focus on partner capacity – do people even know WDFW has partners? Partnerships make good stories
- Kathleen: Visual of what the ecosystem looks like now vs. what we are going to move it towards. People don't even necessarily know what used to be or should be in a certain habitats.
- Todd: Species stories always make people happy – focus on what sells
 - Including the popular species like pygmy rabbits and fishers and the breadth of variety of species WDFW is invested in

Action Items: None

7. Discussion: WDAC review and recommendations for species classification rule regarding endangered, threatened, sensitive species (WAC 220-610-110)

- Two hand outs: 1) Updated draft WAC with comments and Todd's responses and 2) draft letter to Director Susewind
 - In the draft WAC: Black = existing WAC, blue = original proposed additions, red = original proposed subtractions, green boxes = new additions based on WDAC member feedback
- 5 WDAC members provided feedback to Todd on the last draft – in general it feels like we are nearing consensus, but we are reviewing those comments today for refinement
- There was a discussion about clarifying the letter by adding brief justifications to each of the proposed changes, or perhaps including this as an appendix. Todd had concerns about diluting the letter with the "whys".
- Any of these discussion points (e.g. 5 vs. 7 vs. 10 years for PSRs) will be further reviewed and debated during the official process and we will all have another opportunity to weigh in there
- What happened to the proposed addition of deference to federal plans in certain cases, such as where a species occurs only in Washington? Todd plans to leave that topic for a WDFW staff proposal.
- From staff: 3.2 could use further clarification – e.g. what defines "newly listed"? What if a species goes on and off the list? Also consider adding "federally listed anywhere in Washington".

Action Items: Todd – Will send out a final draft of the WAC and revised letter for consensus

8. Council Business

- Vice Chair nominations: Patrick Gallagher the new vice-chair, passed unanimously.
- Next meeting dates: Everyone liked the format of the last year and we will repeat that general structure again with a virtual February meeting, a west side Woodland Park Zoo meeting with a turtle visit in May, and an east side meeting in September, perhaps with a second day for pygmy rabbit or leopard frog visit. Hannah will choose the dates.
- Notetaker selection for February meeting: Jerry Joyce.

Action Items: Hannah will set meeting dates for the next year.

Adjourn: 15:50