

Summary

Meeting dates: February 6-7, 2015

Agenda item: Steller Sea Lion and Tufted Puffin Status Review – Briefing and Public Hearing

Presenter: Penny Becker, Ph.D., Acting Diversity Division Manager and Gary Wiles, Biologist, Wildlife Program

Background summary:

The department will brief the commission on status evaluations for Steller sea lions and Tufted puffins.

Steller sea lion: The department has reviewed all relevant data pertaining to the population status of Steller sea lions in Washington. These data show that the Washington population has strongly increased since the 1980s and is small, but breeding in increasing numbers. This information indicates that the species is no longer in decline or at risk of becoming endangered in Washington. Thus, Steller sea lions should be removed from the state's threatened species list. The National Marine Fisheries Service federally delisted the eastern Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of Steller sea lions, which includes the Washington population, in 2013. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has conducted its own review of the status of Steller sea lions in Washington and finds that the species should be delisted at the state level as well.

Tufted puffin: The department has reviewed all relevant data pertaining to the population status of tufted puffins in Washington. These data show that the population has strongly declined in recent decades, both in numbers of birds present and in numbers of active breeding sites. This information indicates that if the current rate of decline continues, the species is at serious risk of extirpation in Washington over the next few decades. Thus, tufted puffins should be added to the state's endangered species list.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Listing/delisting criteria as described in WAC 232-12-297.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The status documents for Steller sea lions and tufted puffins each underwent two simultaneous periods of public review: a 90-day comment period on the draft reports from September 12-December 11, 2014, as required by WAC 232-12-297, and a 14-day comment period on the final reports from January 9-23, 2015, under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). The initial comment period was advertised to the public through a department press release to media statewide. For SEPA review, a request for comment was sent to over 9,000 individuals and organizations through the rulemaking process. Additionally, these individuals and organizations were informed of the opportunity to provide verbal testimony at the February 6-7, 2015 Commission Meeting in Olympia.

For Steller sea lions, the department received 18 comments and one petition signed by 74 people during the initial public review period and 33 comments during the SEPA review. With the exception of the petition, the majority of respondents supported the recommendation to delist the species under state law based on a number of reasons, including that the species is too numerous in the Columbia River now and that it is harming fish populations and causing

conflicts with people. Most opponents of delisting feared that it will lead to future lethal control of the species.

For tufted puffins, the department received 18 comments during the initial public review period and 10 comments during the SEPA review. All but one respondent supported listing as endangered based on the species' declining abundance.

Action requested:

Consider briefing and public comment provided. Adoption will be requested at the March 20-21, 2015 Commission meeting in Moses Lake.

Draft motion language:

NA – Briefing only

Justification for Commission action:

NA – Briefing only

Communications Plan:

WDFW Website
News Releases