



Director's Report to the Commission August 7-8, 2015

Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Programs

Drought Report

A lack of snowpack from an unusually warm winter has resulted in drought conditions throughout much of Washington. Many streams have reached record-low stream flows this year, most with a period of record exceeding 65 years. In recent weeks the Department has taken the following actions to minimize impacts on fish and wildlife.

- The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) distributes a weekly drought status and response update within the Department to share information agency-wide about climate forecasts and drought response activities.
- Implemented “hoot owl” fishing regulations (fishing closures between 2 p.m. and midnight during the hottest part of the day) or complete closures in areas where fish are vulnerable to harvest.
 - Closed or restricted fishing on more than 30 rivers throughout Washington.
 - Closed fishing for sturgeon in the Columbia River Basin upstream of Bonneville Dam.
 - Closed fishing for sockeye salmon in the Columbia River from Rocky Reach Dam upstream to Chief Joseph Dam.
- Reviewing fish science and collecting streamflow and temperature data to determine whether or not we need to restrict certain Hydraulic Project Approvals
- The Department is in the process of establishing a contract with the Department of Ecology to fund our agency’s drought needs as well as distribute drought funds to external entities assisting with fish needs during the drought
- We’ve lost about 1.5 million juvenile fish so far this year due to warm water conditions at our hatcheries. Water temperatures and reduced water supplies have presented a much greater challenge than we anticipated when we started planning our drought response back in February. The Department has taken steps to reduce the effects of drought on fish at hatcheries across Washington State, and will continue to adapt our hatchery operations to maintain fish health as drought conditions persist. Steps include:

- Using re-circulation pumps and aerators to reduce the effects of warm water temperatures at hatcheries.
 - Provide medicated feed to fish in some situations to combat fungal and bacterial infections.
 - In some cases moving fish to facilities with cooler water and better water circulation.
 - Releasing fish early when doing so will improve chances for survival.
 - Re-conditioning wells at hatcheries in order to maintain or increase water supply.
- The Wildlife Program is moving forward with drought projects for boat ramp extensions at four water access sites in Washington.
 - Media interest in drought stories has led to a number of articles and videos featuring Department responses to drought challenges.
 - Staff and partners have removed dozens of recreational rock dams statewide and identified the locations of many more. Citizens are making use of the drought observations reporting form on the Department drought web page, as well as the WildComm reporting mechanism, to report these illegal structures.
 - The Department is developing programs to work with Recreational Fisheries Enhancement Groups and other partners to mobilize volunteers that can assist agency staff to identify low flow blockages and recreational rock dams and collect other data.
 - Staff have been working with power and water utility providers to adjust reservoir outflows at 13 projects in Western Washington. Most outflows are reduced from licensed levels by emergency agreement among the fish managers and utilities. Main objectives are to maintain fish habitats in flow-regulated streams and ensure that reservoirs retain enough water to provide strong outflows into the fall to support salmon migrations.
 - Water is being drawn from Dworshak Reservoir in Idaho to cool the lower Snake river to aid in fish passage, and Idaho Department of Fish and Game is trapping and hauling wild adult sockeye from Lower Granite Dam upstream to spawning areas.

Wildlife Program

Wolf

Capture and Monitoring Update

State, federal, and tribal biologists have captured 11 wolves and fitted them with radio collars since January 2015. There are now 14 active collars on wolves distributed among 10 of the state's 16 known wolf packs.

The Department has captured three wolves since May, when we started our summer capture effort. On May 31, Department staff captured and collared an adult female wolf in the area we believe the Profanity Peak pack resides. On June 14, U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Service staff captured and collared an adult female wolf in the middle of the Dirty Shirt Pack territory. On June 16, Washington State University researchers captured and collared an adult female wolf from the Lookout Pack area. Location data from these recently collared wolves are being shared with livestock producers and county commissioners with data sharing agreements.

Wolf Conflict-Deterrence Updates

Department Wildlife Conflict staff have been busy summarizing information for our new Wolf-Conflict Deterrence Updates (previously called “deterrence plans”) for each wolf pack. The Wolf-Conflict Deterrence Updates include information such as the location of the pack, pack size, number of collared wolves, overlap with livestock, communications between the Department’s Conflict Specialists and livestock producers, and non-lethal measures being used to reduce potential wolf-livestock conflict. The Wolf-Conflict Deterrence Updates are now available online under the main wolf webpage and will be updated periodically as conditions change. A news release referring the public to this information was distributed July 10 and is available online.

Dirty Shirt Pack Depredations

We have documented four confirmed wolf depredation events on three adult cows and one calf in the Dirty Shirt Pack area between July 9 and July 15. No additional depredations have been reported since July 15. The investigation on the depredations indicates that all four confirmed livestock depredations occurred prior to July 10, when staff and additional preventive measures were mobilized to the area.

The depredations occurred on the North Fork of Chewelah Creek allotment managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The producer grazes 83 cow-calf pairs.

On July 10, the day of the first investigation, the Department reviewed a suite of preventive measures to identify those that were feasible in the area, and implemented range riders, night patrols by staff, sharing of wolf locations from the collared wolf in the pack, deploying fox lights opportunistically around bedded cattle at night, and opportunistically hazing any wolves encountered. The calf carcass was removed from the allotment and the three cow carcasses were surrounded with fladry and treated with lime to reduce the scent attractant. On July 20, the Department also began proactively hazing wolves detected in the vicinity of livestock and initiated hazing efforts by the U.S. Air Force survival training members who were in the area for several days. The Department also contacted the three other producers that operate cattle on Forest Service allotments within the packs’ territory. The use of range riders, sharing of wolf locations from the collared wolf, and staff involvement will continue for the remainder of the grazing season.

A “chronology of events” that describes the preventive measures in place, the number of confirmed depredations, and other pertinent information for the Dirty Shirt Pack situation is available online on the main wolf webpage.

The Department has updated the Wolf Advisory Group and Interagency Wolf Committee throughout the time period of the depredation events, and coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service.

If another depredation occurs and we confirm that livestock was killed after July 10, the Department will offer a permit to the producers with a Forest Service grazing permit within the Dirty Shirt Pack territory to kill up to two wolves, in total from the pack, in the vicinity of livestock. That kill permit authority would extend to the producer’s family and hired employees. Department staff, working in concert with the producers and range riders, would also be instructed to carry out the permit if they encountered a wolf. However, this permit would not authorize the hunting or baiting of wolves by the producers, their family and hired employees, or Department staff.

Teanaway Pack Depredation

On July 16, the Department received a report of a suspected wolf depredation on livestock in the Teanaway Pack area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead agency for gray wolf management in the area where the depredation occurred and issued a public bulletin stating a Washington State University graduate student conducting research on gray wolf ecology in the range of the Teanaway Pack discovered a livestock mortality. Department experts were notified and arrived on scene to gather evidence and look for additional cattle mortalities.

A partial carcass of a yearling Angus was recovered, and examination of the hide and bones showed evidence of gnawing and bite marks consistent with a wolf depredation. Other signs of wolf activity in the area included tracks, scat and hair; several days of GPS collar locations confirmed wolf presence at the site. After reviewing the evidence and coordinating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife (Service), Department experts confirmed the depredation was caused by a wolf.

The carcass was found in the allotment of a livestock producer north of Cle Elum. The producer operates under a grazing permit issued by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and a livestock damage prevention agreement with the Department. The Department agreement is designed to implement preventative measures, such as calving on fenced property, using range riders to increase human presence near cattle and removal of dead livestock to avoid attracting wolves.

In Washington, the gray wolf is federally listed as endangered west of U.S. Highway 97, State Route 17, and U.S. 395. Gray wolves are also listed as endangered by the state of Washington throughout the state. The Service and the Department will continue to monitor the area and work with partners, including state and federal agencies, tribes, the livestock industry and private landowners to minimize conflict and benefit wolf conservation across the state.

Department staff are writing a new chronology of events for the Teanaway Pack, which will also be available online.

Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) Meeting and Facilitator Selection

The WAG facilitator contract was awarded to the Human-Wildlife Conflict Collaboration team with Francine Madden. Francine will continue our efforts working with WAG through a conflict transformation process for collaborative decision-making. The next WAG meeting is scheduled for September 3, 2015 in Olympia and will be open to the public.

Wolf Policy Lead Update

Donny Martorello is the new Wolf Policy Lead in the Wildlife Program. Donny was the Carnivore Section Manager for Wildlife Program's Game Division, where he managed black bears, cougars, and wolves from 2012. Prior to the addition of wolves, Donny also managed bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and moose, starting when he joined the Department in 2000. Donny received his BS in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from the University of Idaho. He earned his MS in Wildlife Resources from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he also earned his Ph.D. in Ecology. He is excited about the challenges this position brings and is eager to work with the Wolf Advisory Group and other stakeholders to ensure that the goals outlined in the Department's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan are achieved.

Legislative Update

The Legislature did not pass SHB 2107 (related to amending the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan) or SHB 1676 (related to the wolf/ungulate assessment).

Fisher Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) Update

- 1998: State listed as endangered
- 2014: Federally proposed to be listed as threatened.
- 2016: Final decision on listing is expected in April 2016

Current Status

The Department, along with the Service and private and tribal stakeholders, has developed a draft Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA). The draft is now beginning the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, including a public comment period. The Department and the Service have worked closely with Washington Forest Protection Association, small forest landowners, and interested tribes to develop appropriate conservation measures. After going through the NEPA and approval processes, landowners will then be able to sign on to the agreement, committing to the conservation measures for the species. By doing so, they will not be subject to additional requirements beyond those in the CCAA, should the proposed listing of the species become final in April of 2016 or at a later date.

Deer and Elk Baiting Update

At the April Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting, the issue of using bait to hunt deer and elk was extensively debated. Based on the discussion, a regulation was not adopted; however, the Department was asked to further investigate the use of bait and bring the issue forward again at the 2016 March/April Commission meetings. To that end, Department staff met with the Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC) in June and developed a process that would utilize a sub-committee of GMAC members along with a few other individuals who were not on GMAC, but had informed opinions on the issue.

The baiting sub-committee was assembled in July by Matt Monda, Region 2 Wildlife Program Manager, and was attended by Dr. Kristin Mansfield, Department veterinarian. The objective for the group was to review available science, existing regulations in other states, and opinions brought forth by different user groups with the ultimate goal of developing one or more recommendations to bring back to GMAC for discussion. The GMAC would then provide the Department with a recommendation for consideration.

The baiting sub-committee discussed:

- A. Existing rules and proposals that were discussed at the April Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting
- B. How the 2015-21 Game Management Plan addressed Hunter Ethics and Fair Chase
- C. The differences between winter or emergency feeding and baiting for hunting purposes
- D. Nutritional aspects of artificial feeding
- E. Disease and predation associated with concentrated deer and elk
- F. Attraction and redistribution of deer and elk
- G. Baiting Rules from other states

Members from the sub-committee expressed a variety of perspectives and opinions. The largest issues surround the amount of bait used, the months during which bait is used, impacts on success rates (for a variety of user groups), and perceptions regarding fair chase. Members are discussing potential middle ground and what possible recommendations may look like. The sub-committee is currently planning their next meeting and remains hopeful that agreement on one or more recommendations can be reached. The issue will be discussed at the August 29 GMAC meeting and work will continue leading up to December, when the Department will put forward potential options for the March/April Commission meeting in 2016.

Fish Program

The Director and Fish Program senior staff met with Puget Sound and Washington coastal tribes in the 2015 Annual Co-Management Meeting. The discussion included:

- Coordinating budget and legislative requests
- North of Falcon process improvements

- Management of the winter recreational fishery in Areas 6, 9, and 10
- Strategies to attain Puget Sound Hatchery ESA coverage
- Implementation of electronic fish tickets
- Developing a multi-year Puget Sound Harvest Management Plan
- Pacific Salmon Treaty issues
- Potential to accelerate recreational fishery catch reporting
- Genetic analysis of mark-selective fishery catch samples
- Drought response coordination