



Director's Report to the Commission

December 9-10, 2016

Wildlife Program

Wolf Report

The Department is currently working on a final report of the removal action in the Profanity Peak pack, which will be available this month. The final report will be emailed to the "WAG and interested parties" email distribution list and posted on the Department's website. The Department will also present a summary of the removal action in the Profanity Peak pack to the Commission at the January 13-14 meeting.

Related to the Commission's discussion during the November meeting, a panel of Department wolf experts will also be presenting a summary about the current science on wolf management during the January 13-14 Commission meeting. The summary will also be presented to the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) in early February.

The next two WAG meetings are February 1-2 and March 29-30, and both are in Olympia. WAG and Department staff members will be working on potential revisions to the protocol for lethal removal of wolves.

Fisher Reintroduction

In a celebration of renewal and homecoming, 10 fishers (six males and four females) were released into Mount Rainier National Park last Friday as part of the Department's collaborative multi-year fisher reintroduction project with Conservation Northwest and the National Park Service. This release is the second installment of fishers into the South Cascades and represents the first of 40 animals targeted for release in winter 2016/17. Fishers were trapped in south central British Columbia, checked over by veterinarians, and fitted with implant transmitters before being transported into Washington. Chair Smith attended the event to represent the agency, and provided some uplifting remarks celebrating the "good thing" we are doing with fisher conservation.

The release event was well-attended by Department biologists, partners, funders, media, and perhaps most importantly the fishers were given a cultural and spiritual welcome from local Washington tribes and Canadian First Nations Bands. In particular, the Nisqually Tribe welcomed the fishers home. The release occurred on

the Nisqually's designated special use area in the park. Considerable media attention has been paid to the event, making national and even international news. Department staff and our partners will track these animals with aerial telemetry to assess survival, distribution, and reproductive status. More fishers are planned for release in the near term, with a second Mount Rainier release likely to occur this Saturday, December 10.

Enforcement Program

Endangered Species Act Case

A well-known Washington State fishing guide pleaded guilty recently to a federal misdemeanor charge that he violated the Endangered Species Act by helping clients keep a pair of wild coho salmon during the closed season. The guide took three clients fishing on the Cowlitz River in October 2014, where he clubbed two wild coho salmon and cut the adipose fins off in an effort to disguise the violation (hatchery fish have removed adipose fins and were lawful to retain). The clients were instructed to mark the fish down on harvest cards as "hatchery" origin in an effort to further conceal the violation. Department Police received numerous complaints and demand for action when members of the public viewed photos of the fishing trip and fish posted on social media. Department Officers and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement investigated the case, which was ultimately filed in U.S. District Court. The guide will be sentenced in March.

Staffing

The Enforcement Program continues to fill vacant officer positions. The program also conducted promotional testing in November, and recently elevated Jeff Wickersham to the Region 5 Captains position, Brad Rhoden to the Chehalis Field Sergeant position, Chris Zuchlewski to the Headquarters Training and Recruiting position, and Justin Maschhoff to the new South Sound Detectives position with a focus on geoduck protection. The Program is in the process of selecting new sergeants to Vancouver and White Salmon.

New Administrative Hearings Officer

Mark Ebbeson started this month as the Department's new full-time Administrative Law Judge. He will be conducting administrative actions and hearings involving equipment seizures, recreational and commercial license revocations, master hunter program actions, wildlife violator actions, crop and livestock damage, and informal hydraulic project denial appeals. For years, the Department has relied upon non-attorney volunteers to conduct our hearings. Failing to have consistent professional standards and available hearings officers has resulted in more appeals to Superior Court and a public perception of unfairness. Mark is one of the longest serving and most experienced administrative law judges in state government and began his career in 1977.

Improving Service

A number of tools have been implemented to increase the public's access to law enforcement, to include the build-out of a dispatch center (known as WILDCOM) that operates during core business hours. Housed in the Department Police Headquarters, four dispatchers and customer service representatives were added to the two staff already assigned to the communications center to address an increase in calls for service. During the month of November, a single dispatcher handled 724 calls for service.



Expanding the communications center also parallels apparent public interest and conscience related to turning in violators. For example, a busy week during the second half of the modern firearm deer season meant 34 calls for service for a single officer in Okanogan County, resulting in 22 filed criminal charges and nine seized mule deer. Building out internal capacity with subject matter expertise is expected to enhance better business practices and responsiveness compared to the services received by relying so heavily on local dispatch services.

Technology and Financial Management / Licensing

Washington Interactive Licensing Database

The Department is on track for deploying a new Washington Interactive Licensing Database (WILD) with a new vendor, JMT, on December 19, 2016.

This large-scale IT/business project has been divided into a three-phase approach. This first phase establishes online sales and deploys new Point-of-Sale Terminals to approximately 600 dealers across the state. This phase includes the core functionality of the current system, such as creating a customer profile, license sales, harvest reporting, and financial management. A subsequent phase will be completed in February 2017, which will include modules for the special hunt drawings and inventory management, and will round out the functionality of our current system, but on the new, improved platform. Phase 3 development will initiate this winter and will include a variety of new features, including easier field validation for law enforcement, a commercial license module, and a mobile application.

One of the largest and most complex parts of changing any IT/ business system is the migration of all the data from the old system to the new database. The Department and JMT's teams are working very well together and a solid plan is in place to ensure all data is migrated when we "cutover" to the new system.

Since the November update, the following items have been completed:

- The Security Design review, required by the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Office of Cyber Security, has been completed and approved.
- New Point of Sale Terminals have been sent to approximately 600 dealers.
- Weekly communications have been distributed to the retail dealer network, alerting them to the transition, notifying them of training opportunities for the new system, and explaining what to do with the legacy equipment. Approximately 200 dealers have already set up the new equipment.
- The system has gone through complete testing and is being "hardened" by JMT developers. Further technical changes to the system will cease until after full deployment in mid-December.

Prior to "going live" with the new system, the Department will:

- Distribute a news release ensuring customers are aware of the transition to the new system. In particular, notify the public that WILD will be temporarily down for maintenance on December 18 while the technical transition occurs to the new sales platform. License Year 2017 products will be available for sale in mid-January.
- Train Department staff and partner with JMT to provide training to the retail dealer network.
- Continue to assist dealers with installing new equipment.
- Prepare for final "cutover" to the new system during the weekend of December 17-18.
- Complete requirements gathering for Phase 2 deployment and relay information to JMT.

Habitat Program

Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (BiOp) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process

In May of this year, Judge Michael Simon of the Federal District Court for Oregon ruled for environmental and fishing plaintiffs, and against federal defendants and allies (including the State of Washington), holding that the 2014 BiOp for Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead was invalid for several reasons. The reasons included failing to meet the “recovery prong” of the Endangered Species Act’s jeopardy standard, failing to adequately analyze the impacts of climate change on salmon and steelhead, and a failure to provide an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act on river system operations. After hearing from both plaintiffs and defendants regarding scheduling, Judge Simon ordered that an interim 2018-2021 BiOp be released by the end of 2018, with a final EIS and longer-term BiOp due by March 2021. Currently the federal action agencies (Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Reclamation, and U.S. Army Corp of Engineers) are scoping the EIS, and the Department is working with the Governor’s office to provide scoping comments by January 17, 2017. We will lay out suggestions regarding the “purpose and need” of the EIS as well as alternatives that should be considered, with an emphasis on hydrosystem operations and habitat mitigation. The action agencies will consider the scoping comments as they prepare a draft EIS to be released by March of 2020.

Columbia River Habitat Coordination

Department staff played a key role over the summer in briefing the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC) on Columbia-Snake River temperatures during 2016 and steps that were taken based on lessons learned during the record-breaking warmth of 2015. In July, Washington NPCC member Phil Rockefeller retired, and in September was replaced by former Department Region 5 Director Guy Norman. Recently, the NPCC identified about \$600,000 in fish and wildlife cost savings. Department staff are currently working with NPCC members Norman and Tom Karier to identify Department projects that could benefit from reallocation of these savings, including maintenance at Sherman Creek hatchery on Lake Roosevelt, sturgeon research, and fish screen rehabilitation at Glead Diversion on the Naches River.

Chehalis Basin - EIS Update

At the beginning of October this year, after four years of data collection and stakeholder engagement, the Department of Ecology released a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on a long-term strategy to reduce catastrophic flood damage and address aquatic habitat restoration needs in the Chehalis River Basin. Unique in Washington because of its extensive and generally well-connected floodplains, amphibian diversity, relatively healthy and robust salmon runs, and the absence of ESA-listed salmonids, the Chehalis Basin has nonetheless experienced significant habitat degradation over the past 100 years. Over the past 30 years, poor returns of one or more species of salmon have significantly limited tribal and non-tribal harvest.

Meanwhile, the five largest floods on record, resulting in significant community impact and prolonged closures of I-5, have all occurred over the past 30 years.

Building off the success of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, the Governor's office is focusing on an integrated package that addresses both issues simultaneously as the only way to make progress on either flood damage reduction or addressing habitat degradation. Over the past five years, the state has invested over \$90 million to study these two issues to provide the Governor with recommendation for an integrated path forward and to invest in shovel-ready flood reduction and habitat restoration projects on the ground. Department staff have made a substantial contribution to the technical analysis and also to the development and analysis of policy recommendations.

Each action alternative in the PEIS includes implementation of an ambitious Aquatic Species Restoration Plan at the scale of between \$375-\$767 million, addressing ecosystem processes through strategic fish barrier removal, riparian enhancement, off-channel habitat restoration, habitat acquisition, and bank erosion strategies. The Department's leadership and coordination with co-managers and the regional restoration community has been instrumental to this plan. The action alternative supported by the Governor's appointed Chehalis Basin Work Group includes a major dam in the upper basin of the mainstem Chehalis River near Pe Ell, along with targeted flood reduction projects downstream to protect I-5 and the airport, and a program of flood-proofing and revised land management policy. Another action alternative of interest addresses flood damage through upstream restoration actions that aim to better activate the floodplain and temporarily retain flood water – this alternative has potentially less flood damage reduction and higher social and economic costs. In December, Governor Inslee will likely recommend \$30-\$60 million in capital funding for 2017-19 for the Office of the Chehalis Basin to implement components of the final strategy coming out of a final PEIS.