

Summary

Meeting dates: January 6, 2017

Agenda item: Policy on Improving the Conservation of Washington's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources – Decision

Presenter(s): Penny Becker, Diversity Division Manager, Wildlife Program; Amy Windrope, Ecosystem Services Division Manager, Habitat Program

Background summary:

In December, Department staff briefed the Commission on National (Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources) and Washington State efforts (Washington Wildlife Leaders Forum) seeking additional capacity and funding to conserve species and habitats of greatest conservation need and connect people with nature. The Commission received related guidance from Governor Inslee, heard public testimony and received public input on the draft policy.

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

The purpose of the policy is to establish strategies for the Department to better preserve and protect our state's diverse fish and wildlife resources. The Commission recognizes that in order to succeed, both the Commission and the Department must engage in active efforts to involve Washingtonians in achieving the Department's mission to conserve our natural heritage and provide opportunities for its enjoyment. The policy includes actions for the Commission and guidance to agency staff that seek to better fulfill the mission by securing additional resources and better partnerships.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The draft policy was made available on the Fish and Wildlife Commission webpage on November 30th. Public testimony was heard at the December meeting and further written public comments were received through January 2nd.

Action requested:

Decision to adopt the policy "Actions and Guidelines to Improve the Conservation of Washington's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources", which includes some small word changes supported by public comment.

Draft motion language:

I move to adopt the policy as presented.

Justification for Commission action:

Increase the capacity for the Commission and the Department to conserve species and habitats of greatest conservation need and connect people with nature.

Communications Plan:

WDFW Website
News Releases
Social Media

POLICY: Actions and Guidelines to Improve the Conservation of Washington's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources

Effective date: _____ **2016**

The purpose of this policy is to establish strategies for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to better preserve and protect our state's diverse fish and wildlife resources. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) recognizes that in order to succeed, both the Commission and the Department must engage in active efforts to involve Washingtonians in achieving the Department's mission to conserve our natural heritage and provide opportunities for its enjoyment.

Washington is home to more than 1,900 species of animals, including at least 40 that are found here and nowhere else on earth. Fish and wildlife are protected public resources, held in trust for all Washingtonians now and into the future. Our quality of life, outdoor traditions and prosperity are tied to the health and sustainability of these treasures. Yet we are facing an impending fish and wildlife crisis that could alter the opportunity for future generations to benefit from these resources.

To safeguard our state's natural heritage, the Department, along with private citizens and community partners, completed a conservation strategy called the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), which was approved by the Commission in 2015. The plan outlines actions needed to preserve 268 species of greatest conservation need and the habitats they depend on. The plan also determined that over half of the identified species are not receiving adequate conservation attention. The Department currently lacks the necessary capacity to fully implement the SWAP.

Congress passed the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts that established a fund to support conservation and management of game and sport fish species by surtaxing gear used by hunters, recreational shooters, fishermen, and boaters. In addition, hunter and angler license dollars have provided critical funding for state-based fish and wildlife conservation for decades. Nationally, a dedicated and sustainable funding mechanism is lacking for the many species of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates that are not hunted or fished. In Washington State, the sale of personalized license plates has been a primary source of funding for the management of non-game wildlife for more than 40 years, helping to support the management of over 250 animal species that are off-limits to hunting, fishing or trapping. None-the-less the funding base for wildlife conservation in Washington and throughout the nation needs to be expanded if we are going to successfully protect and sustain these species and their habitats. Increased funding will complement and augment the contributions of hunters and anglers and others and will allow all citizens to share in the responsibility of conserving natural

resources for future generations. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) hosted a Blue Ribbon Panel to develop strategies to support this work nationally. Several states have followed suit and are now exploring state-based solutions.

The Commission supports the Blue Ribbon Panel (Panel) on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources recommendation that Congress dedicate 1.3 billion dollars annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program. If passed, states will require one quarter match to receive their shares. With or without additional federal funding, Washington will need to identify new sources of revenue to conserve our fish and wildlife resources. The Commission is committed to working with Department staff and our partners to identify sustainable funds to meet this critical need. The Commission also supports the Panel's call for the need to engage and serve broader constituencies while, at the same time, maintaining close partnerships with traditional fish and wildlife constituents.

The conservation of Washington's fish and wildlife, including the protection of species not hunted or fished, was highlighted by a strong community message heard in recent statewide listening sessions as part of the Department's Wild Future Initiative. In particular, hunters and anglers expressed that they would welcome an opportunity for non-traditional constituents such as bird watchers, hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts to share the financial burden of the conservation of our natural resources so that everyone might enjoy and benefit from our state's rich diversity of fish and wildlife. Members of the general public and conservation groups also communicated that they would like to more fully contribute to and be part of wildlife conservation in our state.

To achieve these ends, the Commission and the Department commits to the following:

Actions:

- The Commission will request the Washington Congressional delegation to sign on to the federal fish and wildlife conservation funding bill;
- The Commission will reach out to other western state fish and wildlife commissions to urge their congressional delegations to support the federal funding bill; and
- The Commission will support and participate, where appropriate, to seek new potential funding sources for wildlife conservation in Washington State.

Guidance:

The Director will position the Department to better preserve and protect our state's diverse fish and wildlife resources according to the following guiding principles:

- Prioritize Washington-specific efforts to develop new funding sources and increase agency relevancy to a broader public;
- Provide resources to support national efforts related to the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations;
- Ensure that hunters, anglers, private landowners and non-traditional constituent groups are engaged and all perspectives are included in the process to increase conservation capacity in Washington;
- Include outreach to non-traditional constituents and funding for non-hunted wildlife and non-game fish as major next steps in the Wild Future Initiative;
- Direct on-the-ground investment of federal or state conservation dollars resulting from these efforts toward implementation of the SWAP, in addition to outreach and education; and
- Wherever possible, utilize partnerships including local governments, private landowners, conservation groups, federal agencies, schools, businesses, universities, and others to better deliver conservation programs.

Comments on “POLICY: Actions and Guidelines to Improve the Conservation of Washington’s Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources”

Commenters:

National Audubon Society, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pacific Northwest Native Pollinators Protection Association, Defenders of Wildlife, Tahoma Audubon Society, Conservation Northwest, Wildlife Forever, Black Hills Audubon, Wildlife Diversity Advisory Council Members, Woodland Park Zoo, Private Individuals

Key points from commenters:

- It is key moving forward that WDFW and the FWC have sufficiently focused attention on conservation priorities relative to our native pollinators. This can help prevent degradation of our native plant communities, help reverse declining populations of our native pollinators, and support the other wildlife species dependent on a diverse flowering plant community.
- Watchable wildlife is not just about vertebrates. Audubon chapters and the Washington Butterfly Association lead field trips to view butterflies, bees and other pollinator species around the state. Helping market WDFW wildlife lands as good view areas may help increase the sales of Discovery Passes and are key in any new efforts to broaden conservation efforts.
- Suggest changing the language about crisis. This word could be seen as political and it implies an urgency that does not really fit the situation well.
- I suggest you break paragraph four into two paragraphs, with two sentence below making their own paragraph. I also suggest that the following phrase be used to better match the wording that AFWA uses on its messaging: To avoid/address the looming wildlife conservation crisis...
- It is important that the needs of marine species and habitats is represented in what WDFW does and in the efforts to seek more funding to support conservation. In addition, please look to include the tourism industry, specifically whale watching and other marine-based businesses in your thinking and in a Task Force to work on this issue.
- We support the statements, actions, and guidance put forward in the draft policy document regarding improving the conservation of Washington’s fish and wildlife resources. We stand ready to partner with the Commission to help increase state funding to facilitate programs and acquisitions of WDFW.
- WDFW needs more state funding than just the amount to leverage Federal funding. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Blue Ribbon Panel recommendation is not enough. Also, the state legislature needs to find additional resources to support Washington’s biodiversity above and beyond the support of the hunting and fishing communities. Expanding the funding base would be a good first step in providing the fiscal resources needed to ensure that future generations have thriving ecosystems in our state.
- Suggest that a simple change to volunteer purchases to mandatory fees on license tabs is the next step in finding shared funding for State Parks, WDFW and DNR. Along with this, allow the public to enjoy public lands without paying admission fees in order to get more support for an increase in taxes and the expansion of WDFW preservation efforts.
- WDFW needs to strengthen relationships with partners such as the National Audubon Society and American Bird Conservancy to determine goals of continued land purchases in the next decade to fight climate change.
- I am a birder. I support the contents of this policy. I would also like to say that birders have had a “free ride” as a user group. It’s time to find a way for us to contribute financially to the work that WDFW does. I have friends that fish and they pay for the right to fish. Birders and other user groups need to ante up to support the necessary work that the department does. It is not likely going to come from the general fund.

- We would like to encourage the Commission to express to AFWA that the federal Blue Ribbon Panel efforts should include funding for USFWS and NOAA so that they can better support the states in wildlife conservation.
- We believe that the states should manage wildlife and not the federal government and therefore fully support efforts to find more resources that would help the state conserve wildlife before it becomes federally listed.
- The funds need to be used for more than threatened and endangered species, but also for all the species that are not yet in conservation trouble.
- Conservation efforts need to include all lands including private, federal, state and tribal lands.
- Efforts to seek more funding should look for development to pay for habitat that is lost.
- WDFW needs to do a better job of letting the public know what they do and what services they provide for us. This will ensure that they get more support.
- We welcome a tax to help pay for fish and wildlife conservation.
- We encourage WDFW, the Commission and the conservation community to have a state plan to fund wildlife conservation and not rely upon federal efforts around the Blue Ribbon Panel.
- We suggest that a carbon tax could be successful if the funds generated were to be earmarked towards wildlife conservation and recreation. This would be a new source of funds that is not yet being used for another purpose.
- I encourage the Department to reach out to non-hunters and non-fishers. I don't feel like the Commission or the Department represents me. The Department needs to recognize us and make sure we have a seat at the table. This could be your chance to do more.
- The truth is that hunters and anglers are tired of paying more and more and getting less and less in return...all while watching WDFW's budget become bloated with unnecessary overhead and expenditures that don't directly relate to increasing hunting and fishing harvest opportunities. The "bird and butterfly crowd" pay almost nothing into the system and are increasingly perceived as deriving an outsize portion of WDFW's time, energy and funding.
- I feel it is important that the department, in its entirety, MUST come to grips with the fact that there is an absolutely massive groundswell of so-called traditional stakeholders that are fed up with the WDFW and want to see some positive change. If pushed too far - and the proposed Wild Future Initiative fee increases are only fanning the flames, they will rebel and gut the Commission and leadership of WDFW of anyone and everyone that they perceive as being too much "bird and butterfly" and not enough "fish and game". I merely present this as a warning so that this particular message doesn't add more fuel to the proverbial fire and end up backfiring against the Department's efforts to serve more of the state's populace.
- I urge the Commission to pass the proposed policy with the actions and guidance as drafted, but also to speak out more boldly and directly to congressional representatives and state legislators about the detrimental wildlife conservation funding gap, explaining why it is important for DFW to protect our state biodiversity (i.e. the why goes far beyond recreation, commercial fishing and other traditional uses of our resources, but moving forward the why is to ensure our citizens' quality of life and to help create a sustainable, resilient Washington for future generations). However, we must realize that that this new enlarged scope of work goes beyond DFW alone. The Commission and DFW ought to more proactively urge new "planning and implementation partnerships" aimed at protecting biodiversity (at species and landscape levels) among and between various state agencies --- and between and among DFW and various private sector entities doing congruent work, including academia, businesses and non-profit organizations.