



Director's Report to the Commission

June 2-3, 2017

Employee Recognition and Service Award Ceremony

The Department of Fish and Wildlife's annual Employee Recognition and Service Award Ceremony took place on May 16 in Olympia. Citizen organizations were also recognized for their contributions to fish and wildlife resources and recreation.

- Organization of the Year: Youth Outdoors Unlimited and Kittitas County Conservation District
- Landowner of the Year: Tacoma Power
- Volunteer of the Year: RiverJunky
- Educators of the Year: Loren and Norma Holthaus

Wildlife Program

Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly Recovery

The Department has been spearheading Taylor's checkerspot butterfly reintroductions and prairie habitat restoration for just over ten years. In early May, Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, one of the initial focus areas of this work, produced the highest butterfly count at any one site in the history of the program. The 700 flying adults in a single day produced a beautiful scene and that number even overshadowed the number of butterflies counted at the original source population. This is great news for the species, as we have been able to document both good reproduction in the wild as well as the animals moving to newly restored areas on their own. These are great steps towards recovery of this state and federally listed species in the South Sound.

Red Knot Migration

In early May, Wildlife Program personnel worked with partners from Mexico to Alaska to collaboratively capture and band red knots to study the northward migration of the species. In total, 141 red knots were captured at Grays Harbor, and 23 satellite transmitters were deployed. By the end of the banding week, one bird had already migrated to Alaska and a second was just north of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Red knots are a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Washington and a Species of Concern in Alaska, Canada and Mexico. By monitoring the satellite transmitters on each bird's back, staff can identify important migration corridors, nesting locations, and forage grounds. Since red knots migrate such long distances, data collected from this project will help to recognize potential threats to the species across the continent.

White-nose Syndrome in Bats

White-nose syndrome was confirmed from a second dead bat in Washington. The bat, a Yuma Myotis, was initially reported sick to a rehabilitation facility in King County. This is the second confirmed bat mortality in Washington from white-nose syndrome. In addition, this is the first confirmed case of white-nose syndrome for this bat species. Since 2006, white-nose syndrome has spread to 31 U.S. states and five Canadian provinces. The first confirmed case in Washington was in 2016 on a little brown bat in King County. With mortality rates as high as 90-100 percent for some bat species, white-nose syndrome is a major threat to North America's bat populations. Wildlife Diversity Division staff are working closely with the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to better understand our local bats and locate and sample bat colonies for white-nose syndrome.

Monthly Wolf Updates

Starting in June, the Department will be providing the public with monthly updates on Department activities related to wolf conservation and management. These updates will include items like:

- Newly documented wolf packs, changes in known wolf occurrence areas, and non-dispersing lone wolves wearing an active radio collar. This will include updates to the wolf pack maps on the Department website.
- Recent wolf collaring activities.
- All known wolf mortalities.
- Department activities related to implementation of deterrence measures to reduce wolf-livestock conflict.
- All livestock depredation events that resulted in the classification of a confirmed or probable wolf depredation.
- Public notice when the criteria for lethal removal has been met and the Director has authorized lethal removal actions.
- Highlights of wolf-related work activities by Department field staff.
- Wolf outreach and information sharing activities by Department staff.
- Information on wolf ecology and coexistence measures.
- Notice on all Wolf Advisory Group meetings and work items.

In the past, the Department has used an email list to provide these types of updates. That email list is no longer maintained or used by the Department. Any member of the public can now request to receive these monthly updates by signing up for an email notification at http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/gray_wolf/email_notices.html.

All wolf-related updates will also be available on the Department's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/gray_wolf/.

Protocol on Wolf-Livestock Interactions

The Department and its Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) are currently completing final edits on the Protocol for Wolf-Livestock Interactions, which will be posted on the Department's website today. The revised protocol reflects a wide range of values and extensive participation from livestock producer, environmental, and hunting perspectives. It also reflects extensive public input and involvement from two WAG meetings, two Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings, and numerous one-on-one meetings between staff and members of the public. WAG and Department staff had sufficient consensus supporting the recommendation for the revised protocol, which the Department has accepted for managing wolf-livestock interactions.

Scotch Creek and Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan finalized, and Wildlife Area Planning Status Update

The Scotch Creek and Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan (Okanogan County) was finalized last month. The plan covers 38,000 acres and addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities. This is a culmination of months of work spearheaded by Environmental Planner Lauri Vigue, Wildlife Area Managers Justin Haug and Jim Olson, and the entire team in District 6 (Okanogan County). The plan was developed by an interdisciplinary team of Department personnel, with significant public involvement, including input from the local stakeholder-based Scotch Creek and Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Advisory Committee, input from Okanogan County and other public agencies, and input from other interested citizens gathered from two public meetings. The work of this team was interrupted by the 2015 fire season and the capacity that had to be diverted to response. The final plan can be found on the Department website. This is the third pilot in the new Wildlife Area Planning process, which was launched in 2014 (Swanson Lakes and Klickitat were the first two). Staff are currently working on finalizing the fourth pilot – Oak Creek – and are working on the Snoqualmie and Blue Mountains Complex, which just had public meetings May 23-24. We are also in the beginning stages of the Chelan Wildlife Area planning work. These plans are robust updates of the current wildlife area plans and include a description of the values and agency management priorities. These plans are developed with cross-programmatic input internally and external public input through the Wildlife Area Advisory Committees and State Environmental Policy Act.

Prescribed Fire Program

The Department's Prescribed Fire Program continues to burn on Department lands as weather permits. Due to the wet spring that Washington has witnessed, prescribed burns have been challenging to accomplish. Early rains and mild temperatures in the fall of 2016 created a new flush of green grass, and a late snow-off date postponed work. Continuous rain this spring set back burning as well.

The Prescribed Fire Program has taken advantage of possible opportunities and has managed to burn a total of 230 acres to date, including 80 acres of a grass unit on the

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area in early April and another 150 acres of a timber harvest unit on the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area in May.

Starting in March, training and orientation were the priorities to build the foundation. Also during that timeframe, the team did site prep for new burn units and pre-commercial thinning. The team has prepped over 500 acres of units to burn and thinned approximately 60 acres.

Enforcement Program

Poaching Across State Lines: What began as an investigation into headless mule deer lying across the Eastern Oregon landscape last winter has morphed into almost 100 illegally taken animals from two states. Based upon information from the Oregon State Patrol (OSP), Department Police initially searched the homes of two Vancouver men and recovered 26 mule deer heads, many of which were from trophy class animals poached from the Dalles, Oregon. That unleashed over 20 search warrants served on 10 suspects by Department Police in partnership with OSP. Deer, elk, bear, bobcat, and other animals had either been taken outside of seasons, in excess of limits, killed



with illegal methods, or without proper tags or licenses. Washington black bears were routinely illegally taken with hounds during closed seasons. Many carcasses had been left in the field to rot. We hope to file charges soon, but a case of this magnitude takes time to sort through the evidence. Many suspects catalogued their escapades on video and through photos.

The Invisible Sea Cucumber: This long-term investigation involves an animal you don't usually hear about, and a conspiracy to overharvest by failing to account for the harvest. The sea cucumber has a high demand overseas market. With high prices paid to meet the demand, incentives to cheat increase.

Beginning in late 2015, multiple circumstances led to an investigation of a Washington based fish company that purchases, processes, and sells sea cucumbers. Detectives from the Department's Statewide Investigative Unit learned that the amount of cucumbers purchased from commercial fisheries was often as much as 40 percent more than was documented on catch reports (fish receiving tickets).

A search warrant was obtained for financial documents, including check images. After months of painstaking analysis, suspect interviews and surveillance, it appears that 131,424 pounds of tribal sea cucumbers were harvested but unreported during the 2014

season. For the 2015-16 season, about 107,537 pounds of tribally harvested sea cucumbers were undocumented.

Four non-tribal fishers were also engaged in the undocumented harvest and sale of sea cucumbers. The four divers sold an undocumented 4,825 pounds during the 2014-15 season, 7,219 pounds during the 2015-16 season, and 2,914 pounds in August 2016. In November 2016, Department Enforcement Officers served a search warrant on the fish dealing facility and interviewed the owner. He admitted to his collusion with harvesters to under-report commercial harvest. The effect these violations had on exceeding the total allowable catch for the fishery is still being determined. Department biologists have observed classic signs of sea cucumber over-fishing in some areas for quite some time. This includes reduced abundance, reduced catch per unit effort, a diver transition to deeper harvest, and a reduction in the size (weight) of sea cucumbers. Felony charges are being prepared for prosecutor review.

Public Safety: While Department officers are focused on natural resource protection, part of the mission, the public safety aspect, often appears out of nowhere and they have a duty to respond.

Detective Willette was on a stakeout as part of a poaching investigation when her surveillance was interrupted by a commotion between a man and a woman on a sidewalk. The man dragged the woman out into the street and then back onto the sidewalk, repeatedly punching her along the way. When the man attempted to leave the area in a car, the Detective detained him until local police arrived. Well known to the police, the man was taken into custody without incident.

While on patrol near Salmon creek, Officer Hughes learned of a man hiding behind cars in his underwear at the Park and Ride. The man had jumped out of a nearby motel window when Vancouver Police tried to contact him. Officer Hughes assisted with containment of the area and the subject was taken into custody on the 139th Street overpass.

On Easter morning, the Yakima County Sheriff's office requested assistance from local law enforcement agencies after two vehicles engaged in a shootout with each other at a Toppenish gas station. Video at the scene showed multiple suspects exchanging gunfire in a populated parking lot. Three suspects fled to a trailer park to escape. Officers from the U.S. Forest Service, Washington State Patrol, Yakima County Sheriff's Office, Toppenish, Zillah and Department Police responded and set up a perimeter. Hours later, numerous suspects were taken into custody without incident. It appears the same suspects may have also been involved in another shooting the day before in Yakima.

Hard Earned Halibut: Officers patrolled Marine Areas 4 and 5 to provide presence during the halibut season. Despite heavier than forecast seas on several days, most of those that weathered the offshore punishment found success. Other anglers found shelter in the Straits, where the harvest rate dropped, but they made up with good catches of lingcod and rockfish. One boat, however, enjoyed their success a little too much, keeping a dozen rockfish (five different species) that they were not allowed to

have, in addition to three undersize lingcod. At least one person in the group knew that there may be an issue and started to throw fish overboard after the patrol vessel approached for the boarding. He happened to pick the largest copper rockfish and, with its dive bladder distended, it did not sink and was quickly retrieved. The four were cited. Despite this case, most anglers are conscious of the bottomfish rules and are largely compliant.



Towing a Whale: Officers received a call from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) about a dead gray whale in Bellingham Bay. The whale was located not far from the marina. Officers were able to tow the whale to a designated area where NOAA scientists were able to conduct a necropsy. Department staff tow a lot boats, including “Whalers,” but towing a whale was a first.

Whale Trail: Sergeant Russ Mullins alongside Senator Sharon Nelson had the honor of unveiling the Point Robinson Whale Trail sign on Saturday May 20 on Vashon Island.



Reaching Out: Four months ago Becky McRoberts was hired to spearhead the concept of deepening relationships and developing new ones with stakeholders across the state. This initiative, called the Shared Values Alliance, forms an open line of communication to identify existing and potential problems/opportunities facing the state’s natural resources and allows for constructive problem-solving and discussion to achieve positive results for forward progress. This project-oriented approach ensures that Department officers continue to stay relevant with the public and resource-based industries’ values and needs.

Thus far, over 50 organizations/key members have been contacted, including conservation groups, such as the Audubon Society and Trout Unlimited, coastal and Puget Sound commercial fishing associations, volunteer-focused nonprofit

organizations, sportsmen associations and media, as well as specialty outdoor recreation alliances. We are not bringing Department issues to them but rather listening to how we can work together better. In addition to meeting new organizations, we hope to deepen relationships with partners whom we are already work with to further develop shared goals and evaluate potential problems or collaborations.

Based upon initial contacts, opportunities to get to a better place have been countless. Examples of collaborative projects underway with multiple internal and external partners include:

- Commercial Fisheries Puget Sound Boundary Marker Reform
- Duwamish Waterway Project – Spanish and Vietnamese Licensing Translations with King County Seattle Health and Just Health Action
- Volunteer Eyes in the Woods/CORT Presentation Update and Reform
- Timber Volunteer Protocol
- Website Small Business Portal for the agency to include educational videos, document examples, and user accessibility.
- Online Media Presence (Facebook Postings and Highlight Partners)
- Boating Under the Influence Emphasis Media Outreach in Partnership with Washington State Parks
- Initiative 1401 Informational Brochure/Campaign
- Outreach fishing clinic in the Wenatchee area to increase educational opportunities with the local Latino community and excite future interest in career recruitment with Department Police.

Boating Safety: Officers having been working hard to keep the public safe as they enjoy a wide variety of water activities. Multiple search and rescue missions by Department patrol vessels have averted certain tragedy. The Enforcement Program has also been engaged with State Parks to improve tools for law enforcement, such as cleaning up vessel impound laws when officers find themselves with few options and an intoxicated operator. Governor Inslee signed a related important measure into law recently.

Sgt. Olson and Wade Alonzo of State Parks with Governor Jay Inslee at signing ceremony.



Legislative Affairs

State Legislative Update

On May 23, the Legislature rolled into a second Special Session. We are hearing that budget negotiations have begun but are slow moving and the Senate and House remain divided on how to resolve McCleary. We have been continuing to meet with budget writers, as have commissioners, in order to highlight our budget needs and ensure they are not lost in the shuffle at the end of session.

Federal Update

At the federal level, the President's budget was released last week. It expands upon the budget blueprint that was released in March and provides more detail on funding for specific programs. The budget proposes cuts too many of the federal programs that the Department relies upon, the most concerning of which is the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. The congressional delegation is continuing to work hard to get it restored in the final budget.

Fish Program

Lower Columbia Sturgeon Fishery

Starting Monday, anglers can catch and keep white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River for the first time in three years under an agreement reached at the Columbia River Compact hearing on Wednesday, May 31. The fishery had been closed to allow the stock to rebuild.

The two states approved a limited retention fishery based on surveys indicating that the number of legal-size sturgeon below Bonneville Dam has grown each year since 2013. The fishery will be open for six days from the mouth of the river to the Wauna power lines (downstream from Longview) on the following schedule:

- Monday, June 5; Wednesday, June 7; Saturday, June 10
- Monday, June 12; Wednesday, June 14; Saturday, June 17

In designing the fishery, the two states adopted a cautionary approach with several risk control measures:

- Holding the harvest rate to 3.8 percent, compared to 14.5 percent in the years before the closure.
- Protecting larger-size fish by reducing the previous maximum size limit of 54 inches to a 50-inch maximum fork length.
- Reducing the range of legal-sized fish from 38-54 inches to 44-50 inches.

Discussions are occurring with the commercial fishery advisors regarding the potential for retention of sturgeon caught incidentally to other species. Recreational fisheries above the Wauna powerlines and in the Willamette River would not occur until an updated estimate of abundance is available this fall.

Wynoochee Mitigation Project

Since the last update, multiple discussions have occurred with the Quinault Indian Nation regarding production related to the Wynoochee Mitigation fund. Staff have also met with the key members of the public that have been involved for the last couple of decades to keep them informed of our progress.

The next meeting is scheduled with the Quinault Nation on June 16 at the Department's Montesano office. We believe agreement could be reached at this meeting, and we would provide information on the details of the agreement in future reports to the Commission. We will work with our constituents and Tacoma to prepare a document for submittal to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for consideration and authorization to utilize the funds held in trust for this project.

Point No Point Boat Launch

During the North of Falcon process, several conversations occurred with Suquamish Tribe policy representatives seeking the Tribe's approval of the Army Corps of Engineers permit for this important boat launch in Kitsap County. A proposal was provided in March 2017 that the Tribe rejected and internal discussion has occurred to develop our next strategic step in an attempt to resolve this issue. This next step will be taken next week with a letter to the Suquamish Tribe for their consideration.

Fish Program briefed Senator Rolfes earlier this week, and the Senator remains interested and supportive of our efforts and work to resolve our issues with the Tribe.

Columbia River Spring Chinook Update:

- Pre-Season Forecast = 160,400 adults at the mouth
- Adult Passage at Bonneville Dam through May 31 = 83,264
- In-Season Run Size Updates:
 - 5/15 = 83,000
 - 5/25 = 108,000
 - 5/30 = 118,000
 - Next update 6/5
- Counts will continue through June 15, then Summer Run accounting starts
- Staff have monitoring this closely
- 2017 is latest timed run on record
 - Peak Count was 5/22 in 2017 (next latest 5/9 in 2012, normal is ~May 1)
- Indicators of abundance include solid test fishery catches and positive lower river sport CPUE in poor fishing conditions
- Factors believed to affect run timing include cold water temps early in the season and extremely high river flows
- Predation tagging study also indicates slow migration as well
- At a 118,000 adult run size and a 1.7% ESA limit (Snake R. & Upper Columbia wild Spring Chinook), catch balance for non-treaty fisheries would be 9,794
 - 7,764 impacts to date in the non-treaty fisheries
 - 2,030 impacts available at 118,000 run size
 - Treaty fisheries estimated at 7,079 impacts to date

Adult Spring Chinook and Avg. Daily Flow Bonneville Dam

