



Director's Report to the Commission

September 14-15, 2018

Director's Office

Update on Southern Resident Killer Whale Recovery and Task Force

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) staff continue to work with the Governor's office and state agency partners to coordinate with U.S., Canadian, tribal, local governments, stakeholders and conservation partners to ramp up recovery actions for Southern Resident Killer Whales (Southern Residents). We are working to minimize or eliminate the major threats to southern residents: lack of salmon prey, high levels of contaminants, disturbance and noise from vessels, and the potential for a catastrophic oil spill.

The Task Force met in June once and twice in August to give directions to the Working Groups on potential actions and to begin deciding which recommendations on prey, vessels, and toxins should be included in the first Task Force report that is due November 16 (this date reflects a two-week extension given by the Governor). The next Task Force meetings are October 17-18 and November 6. More information on the Task Force is available on the Governor's website: <https://www.governor.wa.gov/issues/issues/energy-environment/southern-resident-killer-whale-recovery-and-task-force>.

Legislative Meetings

I have been meeting with legislators who play an integral role the Department's budget and policy. This includes committee chairs and ranking members for the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee; Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources and Parks Committee; Appropriations; and Ways and Means.

- During the week of August 27, I met with Senator Rolfes, Senator Ranker, Representative Fitzgibbon, and Speaker Chopp.
- On September 5, I met with Senator Van De Wege.
- The week of September 10, I am also meeting with Senator Schoesler, Representative Barkis, and Representative Dent.
- On September 12, I am presenting to the House Appropriations Committee along with members of the Budget and Policy Advisory Group.

I will be meeting with more legislators in the coming months as issues arise and we approach the legislative session.

Proviso Update

In 2017, the Legislature directed the Department to find efficiencies in current operations, examine the Department's management and operations, and develop a long-term funding plan with the help of a stakeholder advisory group. In response, the Department:

- Contracted with an independent consultant for an extensive management review, which concluded that the Department's management practices had not contributed to the funding problem.
- Identified \$2 million in spending cuts that will be implemented over the next six to 12 months, including reductions in habitat restoration and pamphlet production.
- Conducted a "zero-based" funding analysis that connected the dots between the Department's mission and its day-to-day operation.
- Developed a long-term funding plan, with help from the advisory group, describing the current budget situation and offering a vision to stabilize funding.

With a long-term funding plan in place, the Department will submit proposals to the Governor and Legislature to eliminate the projected \$31 million shortfall and make strategic, focused investments that will provide long-term benefits. The proposal to close the \$31 million gap will avoid cuts and preserve current services. The Department's Budget and Policy Advisory Group was emphatic about not just reacting to today's challenges but also anticipating future needs. The Department is submitting a budget proposal to Governor Inslee that would close the \$31 million funding gap and make another \$29 million of targeted investments. To view the individual documents, please visit the Department's budget information page.

Wildlife Program

Togo Pack Wolf Removal

On August 18, 2018, the Department documented the third wolf depredation by the Togo pack within the last 30 days, which is also the sixth wolf depredation by the pack within the last 10 months. The recent depredation prompted initiation of lethal removal provisions for the Wolf Conservation and Management plan (Wolf Plan) and wolf-livestock interactions protocol (Protocol).

On August 20, 2018, Judge Chris Lanese issued a temporary restraining order sought by the Center for Biological Diversity and Cascadia Wildlands, which filed the request for injunction following the authorization of lethal action.

On August 31, a Thurston County Superior Court Judge issued an order permitting the Department to initiate lethal action to remove the adult male wolf from the Togo pack upon the expiration of the temporary restraining order at 5 p.m. the same day.

On Sept. 2, 2018, a Department marksman fatally shot the collared male member from a helicopter within the pack's territory east of Danville. This wolf repeatedly preyed on

livestock in northern Ferry County and is the same wolf that was shot by a rancher and injured in self-defense on August 23.

Wolf managers will perform a necropsy of the wolf's carcass as soon as possible. Meanwhile, field staff members will continue to monitor the Togo pack's activities and work with the livestock producer to prevent further conflicts.

Skagit Elk

First, we have completed the North Cascade Elk Herd Plan. The plan has been through the State Environmental Policy Act process and is available on the Department website.

The North Cascade Herd Plan is a significant accomplishment many years in the completing. The plan lays out strategies and objectives including reduction of damage complaints, reduction of elk on private lands, and increasing public safety on Highway 20.

Second, we completed the legislative update. This legislative update provides a more in-depth report on activities over the last year to address agricultural damage issues.

On a monthly basis, our conflict specialist reports on elk complaints, fencing efforts, and damage harvest. I believe that Regional Director Windrope sent the August report to those Commissioners that have been tracking this issue.

The Damage season is just getting going. This year, we have increased the total number of hunters on the Valley floor by 28%, we have expanded the season, and we increased harvest on cows and increased opportunity for youth, senior, and disabled hunters.

Department Conflict Specialist Scott Witman is working with property owners on damage prevention plans, associated permits, and allowing recreational hunters on private property. The Point Elliott Treaty Tribes are also prepared to help with damage concerns. Conflict Specialist Witman is connecting private landowners with local tribal members who can help address damage.

Master Hunters are currently on the ground in the damage area. They are being deployed to deter agricultural damage on qualifying properties and to harvest limping elk.

Lands Showcase

The Lands Showcase Initiative, led by the Lands Division with cross-programmatic collaboration including leadership from Public Affairs and the Marketing team in Licensing, continues to make progress on efforts to improve how we communicate the great work and opportunities available on Department Lands.

The Lands Showcase project is on schedule and on budget. Currently the contractor, Northwest Research Group (NWRG), is conducting a statewide attitude, awareness, and understanding survey to panel members throughout Washington that will represent a statistically valid sample of the public. The Department sent the same survey to a different group of Washingtonians who purchased a recreational fishing/hunting license or Discover Pass through the agency's licensing system, WILD. The Department is expecting the summary report from NWRG explaining their analysis and findings towards the end of September, which will be used to develop initial messages that will be tested in online community forums.

The Lands Facility Inventory subteam, which includes staff members from headquarters and regions, spent the early part of August developing and prioritizing a list of facilities. This list was shared with the Public Affairs Office to develop a web interface. During this same timeframe, the subteam focused on developing a database, data migration, and tool development and training with all Lands personnel. The subteam will continue with testing the tool and making adjustments to the tool based on regional subteam feedback through late August. The website content subteam has been coordinating with Public Affairs to ensure consistent and critical content when the new website is launched later this fall.

Monthly status updates are available at:

<https://shared.sp.wa.gov/sites/dfw/wildlife/lands/landsshowcase/SitePages/Monthly%20Status%20Reports.aspx>