



Director's Report to the Commission

December 2018

Policy and Public Engagement

Legislative Update

Before session begins next month, I am meeting with as many key legislators as possible to get to know them and get their input on the Department's policies and budget challenges. I met with several legislators during Committee Assembly Days, to introduce myself and get to know their policy priorities for the session. The Senate held their Committee Assembly Days in November and the House held theirs in December. On the Senate side, I met with Senator Ranker, Chair of the new Environment and Tourism Committee; Senator Van De Wege, Chair of Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, and Parks; Senator Warnick, Ranking Member of Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, and Parks; and Senator Schoesler, the Minority Leader. In the House I met with Representative Sullivan, House Majority Leader; Representative Wilcox, Minority Leader; Representative Kretz, Deputy Minority Leader; Representative Blake, Chair of Agriculture and Natural Resources, along with many of the other natural resources committee members.

During Committee Assembly, the Department had the opportunity to present to legislators during a few key work sessions. In a work session of the Senate Transportation Committee, staff gave a presentation regarding fish passage barrier removal with the Washington State Department of Transportation. We also provided an update to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on cougar populations and management tools, along with an update on our budget and long-term revenue plan.

With new members and new leadership, both chambers are changing up their committee structures and membership. Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, and Parks Committee expanded its membership and will now include Senator Rolfes and Senator-elect Salomon as Vice Chair. A new committee called Environment & Tourism was added, with Senator Ranker as Chair and Senator McCoy as Vice-Chair. Finally, the Ways and Means Committee added Senator Ranker as the Natural Resources budget lead. In the House, the committees are likely to have small changes, but those changes have not been announced.

Public Meetings/Webinar

At the time of writing this report, I have attended five regional in-person open houses and held one webinar. The final public meeting is going to be held in Issaquah on December 12.

At each meeting, I shared my background and work experience, and an initial assessment of challenges and opportunities in the near future. In particular, I emphasized how the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife needs to be more relevant to all Washingtonians.

Some of the more frequent questions and concerns from the public included the following themes: wolf management; hatchery production; salmon restoration; public trust doctrine; complicated hunting and fishing regulations; co-management responsibilities; diminishing opportunities; allocation between commercial and recreational fisheries; recreational license fee bill; and recreational access. I am always impressed when people are willing to take the time out of their personal lives to participate in learning more about fish and wildlife and share their concerns. It is energizing and exciting to hear the passion that people have for fish and wildlife conservation and how they genuinely want us to be successful, and accountable, in our mission.

The digital open house was recorded and can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wumu65Ku4gU>

Wildlife Program

Wolf Conservation and Management Update

The wolf updates are associated with ongoing wolf-livestock conflict in three packs. Some information from earlier in the year is also provided for context and situational awareness.

OPT Pack Removal

On September 12, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) authorized the initial incremental removal of wolves from a pack that repeatedly preyed on cattle while occupying the old Profanity Territory (OPT) in Ferry County. Department field staff confirmed that the pack had killed one calf and injured five others during the previous eight days on a U.S. Forest Service grazing allotment in the Kettle Range.

The Department's action was consistent with both the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan and the Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol, which allows the Department to use lethal means to reduce future livestock depredations if the Department documents three depredations by a pack on livestock within 30 days, or four within ten months.

On September 28, the Department suspended the use of lethal measures after removing two wolves (a juvenile wolf and an adult female) from the pack, and initiated an evaluation period to determine whether that action would change the pack's

behavior. However, by October 23, the Department documented six more depredations by the pack during the evaluation period for a total of 16 depredations (13 injured and three killed livestock) by the pack in under two months. The additional depredations prompted reauthorization of the removal operation.

Department staff attempted to remove the remaining two pack members (a collared adult male and an uncollared juvenile wolf) multiple times over a two-week period. Staff were unable to locate the uncollared wolf from the air due to the dense forest canopy. On November 13, the Department paused action seeking to lethally remove the two remaining wolves; however, the agency has not moved into a formal evaluation period. The Department is assessing the situation before considering any further action.

Smackout Pack Removal

On November 7, the Department authorized the incremental removal of one to two members of the Smackout pack after field staff confirmed that the pack preyed on five cattle since August 20.

Four heifers were killed and one calf was injured in those depredation incidents, meeting the criteria for considering lethal action under the Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol.

The affected livestock producers had several proactive non-lethal wolf deterrent measures in place while livestock were on the range. Measures include calving outside of known wolf territory, containment of livestock in fenced pastures, human presence around livestock, range riders, fox lights and radio-activated guard boxes in specific pastures, hazing wolves with nonlethal munitions, fladry, and the removal and/or confinement of sick and injured livestock and livestock carcasses.

After moving their cattle to private pastures, the producers also maintained human presence around livestock, deployed range riders and fladry, and observed approved sanitation practices.

Because the most recent depredations involved larger cattle located on private pastures, Department wildlife managers expected the pattern of livestock depredation by wolves in this area to continue, leading to the recommendation of lethal removal. On November 8, a Department marksman shot and killed an adult male member of the Smackout wolf pack, which repeatedly preyed on cattle on private grazing lands in Stevens County. At that time, the pack included four to five adult wolves and no known pups.

After staff reported removing the adult male wolf, the Department suspended removal operations and initiated an evaluation period to determine if that action will disrupt the pack's pattern of depredating livestock.

Togo Pack Removal

On September 2, 2018, a Department marksman fatally shot the collared male member from the Togo pack. This wolf repeatedly preyed on livestock in northern Ferry County and is the same wolf that was shot and injured by a rancher in self-defense on August 23.

The Department initiated an evaluation period to determine whether removing one wolf from the Togo pack had changed the pack's behavior and reduced the potential for recurrent wolf depredations on livestock. The Wolf Conservation and Management Plan and Wolf-Livestock Protocol indicate that a post-removal evaluation period should consider any depredations that take place after one or more wolves are removed from a pack.

The Department documented a wolf depredation to a calf on September 7, which occurred after the removal period. That incident could have supported a decision to remove more wolves, but the Department sustained the evaluation period because there was no clear path to removing all the wolves without risking the orphaning of one or both pups given their age and size at the time.

The Department documented another wolf depredation to a calf on October 26, bringing the total to six depredations by the pack in the last ten months (and eight in the last 12 months).

On November 7, the Department reauthorized lethal removal in the Togo pack to remove the remaining three wolves that have repeatedly preyed on cattle in Ferry County. Lethal action was reauthorized because the latest depredation was an indication that the pack behavior of preying on livestock had not changed.

The Department decided to issue a permit to the livestock owner allowing him, his immediate family, or his employees to kill wolves if they are within his private fenced pasture where the livestock are located. The Department decided to issue a permit rather than having staff conduct the removal because of limitations of resources; three concurrent lethal removal operations were underway in the OPT, Smackout, and Togo packs.

The affected producer met the expectation in the wolf plan and 2017 protocol for implementing at least two proactive non-lethal deterrents and responsive deterrent measures. As of November 28, no wolves from the Togo pack have been removed by the producer or his agents.

Update on Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) Recovery and Task Force

The Orca Task Force met for the last time in 2018 on November 6 in Puyallup, where they made final decisions on recommendations to be included in the Year 1 report. The Year 1 report was sent to Governor Inslee on November 16. The Governor is now reviewing the 36 recommendations to develop his orca budget and policy priorities for the upcoming legislative session. Year 2 of the Task Force will focus on supporting

implementation of Year 1 recommendations and covering other important topics that have not yet been fully tackled by the Task Force. 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>.

Fish Program

Puget Sound Chinook Resource Management Plan Update

The comanagers have been working to revise the Harvest Management portion of the Puget Sound Chinook Resource Management Plan for resubmission to NOAA since the spring. Work has primarily centered around 1) addressing NOAA's comments on the December 2017 submission, and 2) resolving issues related to differences in the various fishery models and exploitation rate estimates used to determine appropriate conservation objectives for Puget Sound Chinook.

Many of NOAA's comments on the 2017 submission centered around the need to strengthen the explanations for how the Plan meets the requirements of the salmon 4(d) rule for a Fishery Management Plan – primarily related to showing how the plan meets the concepts of NOAA's 'Viable Salmonid Populations' document. Many of those comments have been addressed in the Management Unit Profiles for each watershed.

More difficult to address have been some of the issues related to exploitation rate estimates and conservation objectives. Last January, NOAA provided comparisons of their Rebuilding Exploitation Rates (RERs) and the comanager's proposed exploitation rate limits, and showed the comanagers' objectives were above the NOAA RERs for most stocks. A technical workgroup composed of Department, NOAA and tribal scientists was convened this summer to work on resolving issues caused by differences in the fishery models (FRAM model vs Chinook Technical Committee model) used to estimate exploitation rates on Puget Sound stocks, and resulting differences in calculations of RERs for those populations. Concurrently with that group's work, the comanagers developed new validation runs for the FRAM model, further refining our estimates of past exploitation rates on each stock. The larger workgroup reached an impasse on reconciling the differences in exploitation rate calculations – NOAA will continue to use their exploitation rate estimates, and the comanagers will continue to use our FRAM-based exploitation rate estimates.

The comanagers met with NOAA on November 20 for a policy discussion on how to proceed given this impasse in methods. NOAA stressed that their evaluation of the RMP will not be based solely on how it aligns with their RERs, as has been demonstrated by their past 4(d) and Section 7 consultations on Puget Sound fisheries. The state and tribes committed to continue work on the Plan's Management Unit Profiles, with a goal of submitting a list of management objectives to NOAA by January 10. This will require a series of state-tribal and comanager-NOAA meetings leading up to the 10th, as well as follow-up meetings to ensure that the comanagers' objectives

meet NOAA's criteria and will be used as guidance for the Pacific Fishery Management Council process in 2019.

The process for completion of the multi-year Resource Management Plan is still unsettled, but the intent is to resolve remaining issues for individual stocks and complete the Management Unit Profiles prior to North of Falcon. If successful, completion of the entire plan would require finishing revisions to the body of the Plan, which will be a much simpler task than completion of the individual stock profiles.

Technology and Financial Management / Licensing

Chum Fishing at Hoodspout

The Department hosted a chum fishing event for novice anglers at the Hoodspout Hatchery on Saturday, November 10, 2018. The goal was to provide participants with the ideal environment, equipment, and guidance to successfully harvest a chum salmon. A total of 48 participants were present for the event, 38 of which lived well over an hour away from Hoodspout. The event attracted a diverse crowd, including people historically underrepresented such as youth, women, people of color, and folks from urban areas.

Kelly Riordan, Department Marketing Account Representative and seasoned outdoorsman, provided a brief introduction to the importance of respecting private lands and how to harvest chum legally and safely. Participants also learned the purpose of each type of gear and how to assemble it onto their fishing rods.

Beau Mac Enterprises representative, Bruce Warren, also provided an intro to the types of lures and bait that could be used to fish for chum, and donated 30 sets of terminal tackle to participants. Verle's LLC in Shelton also donated 30 sets of terminal tackle and a handful of hats for the event.

The chum were plentiful and put on quite the performance, jumping out of the water and splashing anglers. Fish were being hooked and hauled out left and right, in what felt like more of a chum-wrestling derby. After participants successfully reeled in a fish, they were directed to the cleaning station and provided recipes so they could learn how to clean, filet, and prepare their fish for a tasty dinner.

The turnout was larger than expected and responses from participants and bystanders were supportive and encouraging. After the event, participants wrote in to us detailing their experiences.



The event even attracted the attention of local radio host, Tom Nelson from *The Outdoor Line*, who requested an interview from Kelly Riordan a week prior. Tom asked that future events be brought to his attention so he can continue to advertise on the Department's behalf. Kelly's interview can be found on *The Outdoor Line*.

website under '[podcasts](#)'.

"Thanks for an awesome day with my daughter and her boyfriend. You guys are awesome! Had a blast." – Wolf Konkel



Mentored Pheasant Hunt

The Department partnered with Pheasants Forever to organize a mentored pheasant hunt on Saturday, November 3, 2018. The purpose of this clinic was to provide instruction and hunting mentorship for beginner pheasant hunters. The hunt was open to both youth and adults. The registration was full with a wait list in less than 24 hours after opening, and all but one participant had never hunted pheasant before.

The event was held at the Davis Creek Unit of the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area in Oakville, Washington. Participants received instruction from Department staff that demonstrated the proper gear and resources for Washington pheasant hunting and instruction on hunting safety and best practices. Afterwards, participants were led onto the wildlife area where each participant was matched with Pheasants Forever mentors and their dogs. The mentors guided and instructed the hunters to harvest their first pheasant.

A cleaning station was provided for participants to use after they harvested their birds, and they received instruction and recipes on how to properly prepare their pheasants.



Pheasants Forever provided lunch and reimbursed the cost of all annual youth hunting licenses for participants.

A survey was provided after the event. Roughly 70 percent of participants purchased a hunting license specifically for this event and had never been hunting before. Participants raved about how much they enjoyed the event and how they hope to see and participate in events like this in the future.

