

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: December 14, 2018

Agenda item: 6. Pinnipeds—Briefing

Presenter(s): Nate Pamplin, Policy Director, WDFW
Dr. Scott Pearson, Senior Wildlife Program Scientist, WDFW
Dr. Joe Anderson, Senior Fish Program Scientist, WDFW

Background summary:

Given separate policy discussions over the past year regarding the Puget Sound Chinook Harvest Management Plan and the Governor's Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force, there has been increasing interest in understanding the role of pinniped predation on salmon. The Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a position statement regarding pinniped predation on salmon at the August 2018 meeting [\[link\]](#).

The Department has compiled recent data on diet and distribution of pinnipeds and has modeled pinniped predation impact on salmon. In the briefing, Department staff will present responses to the following management questions:

- What are the primary salmon-eating pinnipeds in Washington?
- Where are they located? How many are there? And what are their population trends?
- What do they eat?
- How many juvenile Chinook do harbor seals consume?
- How many adult Chinook equivalents does this rate of juvenile consumption represent?
- What level of seal removal is needed to achieve meaningful increases in adult Chinook return rates?
- What other information do we need?
- What administrative options are there to reduce pinniped predation?

The focus of the presentation is harbor seal predation impacts on Chinook in Puget Sound, given that they have the largest impact on salmonids in Puget Sound compared with other pinniped species, and is consistent with the findings in the Chasco et al. 2017 publication.

There are three management options for lethal pinniped removals within the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Department staff will share a preliminary analysis of the pros and cons of each option, as well as the applicability to Puget Sound and the Outer Coast. Finally, staff will present hypothetical estimates of Chinook adult equivalents that would return to the Salish Sea (applying different estimates of compensatory mortality) given a theoretical annual harbor seal removal level that is consistent with the limits in the MMPA.

Staff will outline next action steps identified in the Governor's Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force. The Task Force recommended additional collaboration and independent science panel review regarding pinniped predation impact and recommended the establishment of a forum of co-managers to assess appropriate management actions, if intervention is deemed necessary, to aid killer whale recovery.

Presentations about sea lion impact on adult salmon in the Columbia River system, and the associated management challenges under the MMPA, were presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission at the August and November 2018 meetings. While dissuading pinnipeds from haulouts or other nonlethal management actions to address localized predation are being considered by Department staff, those actions are also not part of the December 14 presentation.

Staff recommendation: N/A

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome: N/A

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation: N/A

Public involvement process used and what you learned: N/A

Action requested and/or proposed next steps: N/A

Draft motion language: N/A

Post decision communications plan: N/A
