



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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October 27, 2022

The Honorable Christine Rolfes
Chair, Senate Ways and Means
303 John A. Cherberg Building
Post Office Box 40466
Olympia, WA 98504-0466

The Honorable Timm Ormsby
Chair, House Appropriations
315 John L. O'Brien Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

The Honorable Kevin Van De Wege
Chair, Senate Agriculture, Water
Natural Resources, and Parks
212 John A. Cherberg Building
Post Office Box 40424
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Mike Chapman
Chair, House Rural Development,
Natural Resources, and Parks
132B Legislative Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chairs Rolfes, Ormsby, Van De Wege, and Chapman,

I am writing to provide you with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) report to the legislature regarding proviso (31) funding in our 2021-2023 operating budget for elk fencing in Skagit Valley. Funding and the proviso language requires a report to the relevant committees of the legislature per language that reads as follows:

“(31) \$600,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 is provided solely for the department to conduct a pilot project to test New Zealand style elk fencing, similar to the style used by the United States Department of Agriculture at the Starkey Experimental Forest and Range, including materials and construction techniques, and determine the cost and effectiveness of the fence design in reducing damage to school property and agricultural lands within the range of the north Cascades elk herd. The department of fish and wildlife shall work with at least one agricultural property owner in Skagit county with property abutting state highway 20 and one school district located in Skagit county with enrollment of less than 650 students that volunteer to build and test the elk fence design and, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, report back to the natural resources committees of the legislature by November 1, 2022, on the results of the pilot project.”

The Department worked with one school district and one property owner that met the specifications in the proviso: (1) the Concrete School District and (2) a landowner on Wilde Road near SR20 that was complaining of repeated damage to his pasture he leases to a Skagit County livestock producer for hay production.

Concrete School District Fence

The Department established an interagency contract (WDFW Contract #21- 19180) with the Concrete School District that would provide a maximum contract value of \$455,000. Per contract conditions, the Concrete School District was responsible for selection and hiring of a fencing sub-contractor for all phases of the project, including:

1. Removal of 5,750 linear feet (LF) of existing chain link fence.
2. Design and installation of 4,470 LF of 8' elk fencing, 891 LF of 6' chain link fencing, and 2,286 LF of 8' chain link fencing.
3. Installation of one 25' double swing chain link gate, ten 12' double swing gates, and five 4' single chain link gates.

The Concrete School District was concerned that the New Zealand style elk fencing (woven wire) specified in the proviso language was not a safe option for fencing the school's athletic fields and stated a desire to use a combination of chain link (athletic fields) and New Zealand style fencing (school perimeter) for the school property. Because chain link fence does not match the fence type specified in the proviso language, the Department contacted the proviso's author, Senator Keith Wagoner. He stated that he felt the proposed modified design, a combination of chain link on interior portions of the school grounds and New Zealand style fencing around the perimeter, met the intent of the proviso.



Photo detailing the two types of elk fencing installed by the Concrete School District. At this location, New Zealand style fencing extends along the school's southern boundary with the Concrete Municipal Airport, and chain link fencing surrounds the baseball field.



Detail of the New Zealand style fence installed along the school's perimeter.



Chain link fence installed around one of the school's recreation fields. The school's greenhouse is in the center of the photo.

All work was completed by June 30, 2022. To date, no elk have been seen inside the perimeter of the new fence. The Department covered costs with funds from the Operating Budget Proviso. All future fence maintenance and upkeep is the responsibility of the Concrete School District.

Wilde Road Fence

This landowner reported damage to his hay field that he leases to a local livestock producer for hay production. The Department provided the landowner with fencing materials for 4,900 feet of fence line on approximately 20 acres of pasture. The Department entered into a Fencing Cost Share Agreement (WDFW Contract# 22-20159) with the landowner in June 2022, prior to delivery of the final fencing materials by June 30, 2022. Per the Agreement, fence installation and maintenance are the responsibility of the landowner and any designee. The landowner completed fence construction in August 2022. To date, no elk have breached the fence.



New Zealand style elk fencing installed along the perimeter of a 20-acre hay pasture near SR20.



Install of New Zealand style elk fencing along hay pasture boundary.

If you have any questions or concerns about this report, please feel free to contact Tom McBride, WDFW's Legislative Director, at (360) 480-1472.

Sincerely,

Kelly Sussewind
Director