
Date: August 15, 2018

To: Chair Smith; Vice Chair Carpenter; Commissioners Baker, Graybill, Holzmiller, Kehoe, Mclsaac, and Thorburn

Dear Commissioners:

As leaders in fish and wildlife conservation representing hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation, nature conservation, working lands, and local government interests, we write to urge you to revisit the resolution you passed Saturday to request a 5% fee increase. That amount is far less than just the effect of inflation since the last (2011) fee increase and we fear will be frowned upon by legislators and force the Department into cuts that will harm our interests and our state's natural resources.

We are among the members of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Department's (WDFW) Budget and Policy Advisory Group, convened in response to a June 2017 budget proviso obligating the Department to scrutinize its operating and financial practices. We speak here not as an official WDFW advisory group, but as leaders of our respective organizations and constituencies. We are bringing our diverse interests together here to draw attention to the unprecedented risk to Washington's fish and wildlife and essential habitat, and also ***to project the unprecedented unity of intention shown by our diverse groups joining together.***

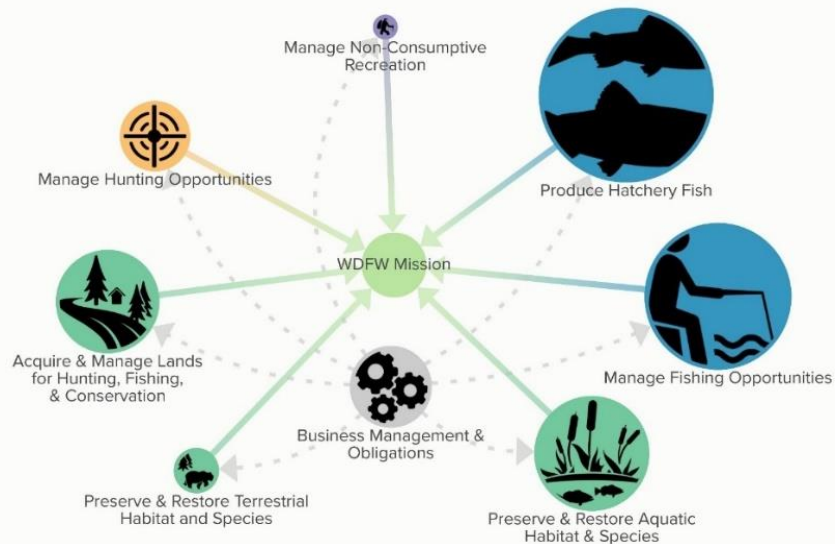
What we have learned together is substantial and unanticipated. We share here highlights of our acquired understanding in hope of bolstering your appreciation for the Department, its increasingly important mission, and its role in stewarding our wildlife and habitat. These resources are a wellspring for Washington's economy and quality of life, today and tomorrow.

The Department is efficient, comparing well with wildlife agencies in other states. Some believe that WDFW is not delivering sufficient impact for the resources awarded it, and that perhaps even some fiscal malfeasance contributed to its 2017 budget shortfall. The proviso directed the Department to undertake an evaluation by an outside management consultant; [the results of that audit](#) should retire the undeserved assumptions or allegations. *WDFW's management was not the cause of its budget shortfall and appropriate funding should be restored.*

The Department's mission reflects the public interest served, but its budget does not. We fully embrace its mission *To preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.* Fulfilling this mandate for the incredible diversity of fish, wildlife and outdoor experiences of our state is a unique challenge currently not supported by adequate funding from the legislature.

Expenditures say more than words, and the disproportionate spending shown in the below graphic is instructive. We hope to correct a perception that the Department's work on diversity (non-game) conservation and non-consumptive recreation is subsidized by sportsmen and sportswomen. WDFW license proceeds from (and expenditures on) hunting and fishing are significant, as are federal grants tied to excise taxes on fishing tackle, guns and ammunition. In comparison to those, spending on

diversity and recreation pales. More to the point, spending on diversity and recreation also pales compared to general fund appropriations to WDFW, which are a fitting expression of taxpayer interest in the health and enjoyment of natural resources. *We call on the legislature to improve the balance between these revenue sources—allowing the Department to increase sorely needed funding for wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation while providing ample hunting and fishing opportunity, consistent with its diverse mission.*



Each program graphic's size corresponds to its relative portion of DFW's overall expenditures. Graphic: WDFW

The Department confronts extraordinary challenges that warrant support. Over and above the demands on its peer agencies, WDFW manages endangered salmon and other anadromous fisheries, treaty obligations, species and habitat ranging from coastal rainforests to high deserts, and other demands making the WDFW mission extraordinarily complex. Compared to other Western states, Washington is the smallest, has the least amount of public land, and its human population is among the densest and fastest-growing, impacting the ability to provide abundant fish, wildlife, and recreational access. Most of the population lives in watersheds that drain into Puget Sound, where our southern-resident killer whales face extinction along with their primary food: Chinook salmon. Imperiled species from lynx to sharp-tailed grouse require substantial recovery attention. The return of wolves has compounded the staff's workload. Ungulate herds, while generally stable, are tenuous in certain localities, with growing concerns ranging from elk hoof disease to shrinking mule deer winter range to declines in moose and mountain caribou populations to crop damage from wildlife foraging. *Our fish and wildlife resources and recreation opportunities are struggling because of the Department's immense challenges, not its shortcomings. The world is changing, and WDFW must be given the resources to evolve to meet these diverse current challenges.*

Failure harms not just the agency, but also the state. We the people of the Evergreen State are renowned for our love of nature's beauty and bounty, which rely upon the health of our ecosystems and therefore on WDFW's success. The outcomes effect not just our Washington identity and lifestyle, but also our economy and health. To pursue fish, wildlife, and inspiration, we depart cities to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in areas like La Push, Ilwaco, Wapato, Wauconda, and Chewelah. As

salmon deliver ocean nutrients to upland soil, we thus distribute the riches of our modern economy. The taxes on these expenditures then flow to Olympia, from which they are dribbled out to WDFW. While WDFW received \$94M in GF-S for this biennium, a Department of Revenue report published in August of 2016 estimated that its work, leveraged with other Department fund sources, will generate \$340M in GF-S, a fiscal return on state investment greater than 350%. *The declining trend of Department funding as a share of the state budget risks these lifestyle and economic benefits.*

We care, and we're coming together for change. While WDFW's diverse stakeholders at times have competing interests, we share a common need for a strong WDFW to provide healthy and diverse wildlife and a full range of opportunities to enjoy it. We are now determined to work together in support of the Department, lest we lose our heritage. The proviso directed the Department to evaluate options for cuts. Department Staff earnestly complied, but we members of the Budget and Policy Advisory Group are gravely concerned about the level of cuts being suggested. *To succeed, the Department requires over \$60 million above its present funding (not including expected orca needs), half to fix the shortfall created by the legislature in the last biennium and half to invest in the future by helping correct inequities and the damage caused by a decade of underfunding. This is a huge goal that is only likely to be achieved if its weight is shared. Our belief is that an appropriate breakdown is for at least 25% (\$15M) to be covered by increased fees, challenging the Legislature to pass that fee bill and match it threefold from the General Fund.* Perhaps a combination of a modest surcharge and modest fee increase (plus CSSE) would avoid hitting too heavily on either end of the customer spectrum. Any less than 25% risks a response from the Legislature that could leave the department underfunded, impose yet higher fees on sportsmen and women, or both. Strong leadership from the Commission is our best chance for success. We also commit to working in the legislature to not only pass the fee bill that you approve, but to assure this funding is new to the natural resources portion of the state budget, not reallocated from other natural resource or environmental appropriations.

WDFW has been blamed for the consequences of its own victimization and factors beyond its control. We stakeholders are guilty of that, as is the Legislature. The BPAG process is worthwhile for having educated us all to the Department's competencies, efficiencies, and vital services upon which we all rely going forward. *We must remedy the failures of the past by providing the Department the means to successfully steward the resources all Washingtonians value and require.*

Sincerely,



Mitch Friedman
Conservation Northwest



Bill Clarke



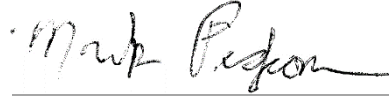
Jason Callahan
Washington Forest Protection Association



David Cloe
Inland Northwest Wildlife Council



Ron Garner
Puget Sound Anglers



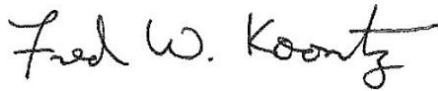
Mark Pidgeon
Hunters Heritage Council



Gail Gattton
Audubon Washington



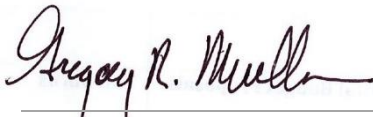
Butch Smith
Ilwaco Charter Association



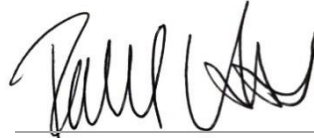
Fred Koontz
Retired Wildlife Biologist



Jen Syrowitz
Washington Wildlife Federation



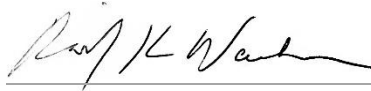
Greg Mueller
Washington Trollers Association



Rachel Voss
Mule Deer Foundation



Craig Partridge
Capitol Land Trust



Dick Wallace
Regional Fisheries Enhancement Group



Mike Peterson
The Lands Council

CC: WDFW Director Susewind
Jim Cahill, Office of Financial Management
JT Austin, Governor Inslee's Office
Senator Van De Wege
Senator McCoy
Senator Warnick
Senator Rolfes
Senator Frockt

Senator Braun
Representative Blake
Representative Chapman
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Representative Ormsby
Representative Robinson
Representative Chandler