

Director's report to the Fish and Wildlife Commission
presented by Jeffrey Koenings, Ph.D., WDFW Director
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A Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife

We serve Washington's citizens by protecting, restoring, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities.

GOAL I: HEALTHY AND DIVERSE FISH AND WILDLIFE POPULATIONS DEVELOP, INTEGRATE AND DISSEMINATE SOUND FISH, WILDLIFE AND HABITAT SCIENCE.

University of Washington's Science Day: Technical Applications (TAPPS) Division staff gave a poster presentation for Science Day at the University of Washington's (UW's) Tacoma Campus on Saturday, March 12, 2005. The event showcased environmental science, technology, and science education in the Puget Sound region. Approximately 400 people showed up for this public event, including families with children in elementary and high school, as well as college students considering future careers in environmental science. TAPPS presented information about salmonid habitat restoration, including the Aquatic Habitat Guidelines. This information was well received by citizens and students who were encouraged by WDFW's habitat restoration efforts and scientific guidelines. WDFW staff associated with the SalmonScape and Nature Mapping programs also gave presentations at UW's Science Day.

Presentation on Hatchery Reform Activities and the All-H-Analyzer to interested parties from WRIA 7, 8, 9, and 10: Staff made a presentation to interested technical staff from King County on hatchery reform activities, including a presentation on the All-H-Analyzer (AHA) model. Information on the history of the Hatchery Scientific Review Group's activities, review of regional hatchery programs and the development and application of the AHA model was shared. A case study using the Wallace River summer Chinook hatchery program was displayed.

Port Townsend Crab Survey: A Dungeness crab population survey was conducted at five index stations in Marine Area 9. A total of 23 legal-sized crabs (74% hard shell) were caught in 75 crab pots. The total crab catch, including female and undersized crab, was 323. The catch rates observed in this survey for both legal and sub-legal crab are the lowest since the stations were established in 2000.

Columbia River Winter Steelhead DNA Collections: The implementation of the live capture commercial fishery for spring Chinook has increased handle rates for wild winter steelhead and resulted in concerns regarding the stock composition of wild winter steelhead handled in this fishery. Questions have focused on whether handle rates, and resulting impact rates, vary by ESU or stock for wild winter steelhead handled in this fishery. In an effort to collect data regarding this issue, Region 5 is implementing a study to collect DNA samples from wild winter steelhead handled in the fishery and returning to natural

spawning areas. The Region 5 Fish Program is organizing volunteer anglers to collect genetic samples for wild winter steelhead spawning in the tributaries of the Lower Columbia River.

Puget Sound Fall Chinook: On March 21, 2005, WDFW adopted the federal FEIS for the Puget Sound Chinook Harvest Management Plan under SEPA rules. Adoption of this EIS under SEPA is the final step in a multi-step process that began in the fall of 2003 with a request by WDFW and the Puget Sound Indian Tribes for federal approval under ESA section 4(d) limit 6. As a result of a settlement agreement, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) was required to develop a federal EIS under NEPA, and to document recommendations made pursuant to that EIS.

The federal approval process continued with federal self-consultation under section 7 ESA, and concluded with approval under section 4(d) ESA on March 4, 2005. This "new" plan approval takes effect on May 1, 2005, and carries through April 30, 2010. Current Puget Sound salmon fisheries are covered through April 30, 2005, under the 2004 interim ESA approval.

Yakima Elk Study: During a 3-day effort (March 4-6), the helicopter capture team for the Yakima Elk Study darted and handled 51 cow elk. This exceeded our initial expectation of flying for 4 days with a goal of 40 elk. The team consisted of Deer and Elk Specialist Dr. Scott McCorquodale, WDFW veterinarian Dr. Briggs Hall, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Will Moore, Dr. John Cook and Rachel Cook from LaGrande, Oregon, and veteran wildlife capture pilot Jess Hagerman. Oak Creek Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Bruce Berry also assisted. The effort focused on recapturing radio-collared elk for condition evaluation and redeployment of GPS collars on selected elk. Following a tough ground capture operation due to unseasonably warm weather and early departure of many targeted elk from Yakima area feed sites, the highly successful helicopter capture facilitated the handling and sampling of a high proportion of the collared elk for the late winter capture session. In total, between the ground and helicopter captures, 66 of 78 available collared elk (85%) were captured. No mortalities occurred in either the ground or helicopter capture and no injuries occurred among the captured elk or crew.

Sinlahekin and LT Murray Prescribed Burns: Headquarters and regional staff discussed the status of the prescribed burns planned for this year on the Sinlahekin (640 acre burn) and LT Murray (200+ acre burn) Wildlife Areas. Burn plans were part of the timber practices presented to the Commission for these two cuts and are planned for this Spring, only if timing and habitat conditions allow; otherwise fall burns will be considered. The Sinlahekin has about a 2 week window at most due to green up and there is a 4-6 week window on the L.T. Murray (they still have snow on the ground). DNR will issue the required burn permits based on approved burn plans. Permits will specify required conditions for a burn including relative humidity, wind speed and direction, air temperature, fuel load and moisture, etc. Final approval for any burn will be issued by DNR on the day of a burn.

Mule Deer Hair loss in Yakima: Dr. Briggs Hall and Region 3 staff visited a landowner who reported hair loss in the mule deer for which he was providing winter feed. Staff immobilized a subject with mild hair loss and collected lice and sent samples in to Dr. Jim Mertins at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory. Dr. Mertins has identified the lice as *Bovicola tibialis*, another exotic louse species separate

from the exotic louse *Bovicola cervicola*, which is causing hair loss in the black tailed deer. *Bovicola tibialis* is the common louse of fallow deer. *B. tibialis* has been identified in North America on only four previous occasions. The locations were California and British Columbia. Per Dr. Mertins, *B. tibialis* is a parthenogenic species (no male required for reproduction) and as such can spread more efficiently. The other louse samples sent were all from black tailed deer suffering from hair loss and were identified as *B. cervicola*.

PROTECT, RESTORE, AND ENHANCE FISH AND WILDLIFE POPULATIONS AND THEIR HABITATS.

Drought 2005: Water Team staff met with Steve Keller, WDFW's new drought response coordinator, and drought leads from other programs for initial coordination. Staff are assisting Steve Keller in the drought effort by providing potential projects, budget, contract help, coordination with Ecology on permitting, and reviewing new projects. Staff collectively provided revisions to two drought documents (basin-by-basin issue summary and generic drought impact expectation). Staff also reviewed low flow records for the upper Nooksack River (glacial system), Methow River (snowmelt system), and Queets River (rainfall system). All three rivers are headed for new record lows by June, 2005. Bob Barwin (Ecology, Central Regional Office) was contacted regarding regulatory activities affecting WDFW hatcheries.

Mud Mountain Dam and Lake Tapps, White River: Staff worked with the Corps, Puget Sound Energy (PSE), NOAA Fisheries, Tribes, Pierce County, and others to address the concerns associated with rebuilding PSE's diversion dam. Concerns included the ability to fill Lake Tapps, operation of the Corps fish trap, minimum flows in the river, fish stranding, and previous losses of fish associated with rebuilding the dam. Habitat staff developed a method to rebuild the dam and minimize changes in the stream flow. After some difficulty in obtaining ESA coverage, the work was completed in about four days. The Lake Tapps Task Force was appreciative of WDFW's work to address the issues and quickly issue an HPA.

Pollution Fines Finance 14 Projects for Fish and Wildlife in the Lower Columbia River: The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service formally announced that 14 projects, all in or near the Columbia River Estuary, were selected to receive the first round of grants from the Columbia River Estuarine Coastal Fund (CRECF). The fund, established using penalty moneys from illegal offshore oil discharges, is one of the largest community service payments ever allocated to restoration in the Pacific Northwest. Penalty funds are not normally used in this manner. However, in the past few years, staff from the Departments of Fish and Wildlife and Ecology Oil Spill Teams has been working with Federal attorneys to consider ways to direct portions of these penalties toward projects that benefit natural resources impacted by the pollution. Following is a list of the grants and the projects that the CRECF will help finance, several of which will be funded in Regions 5 and 6. Oil Spill Team member Dan Doty has been representing WDFW on the CRECF advisory panel. More information can be found here: http://www.nfwf.org/press_columbiariver.htm

Columbia Springs Environmental Center, \$95,000: Acquire 4.5 acres of chum spawning habitat at Wood's Landing on the Columbia River in Vancouver, Washington.

Tillamook Estuaries Partnership, \$65,000: Replace a tidegate culvert on Vaughn Creek, opening up two miles of habitat for chum, coho, steelhead, cutthroat and lamprey.

Columbia River Study Taskforce, \$126,134: Restore 170 acres of tidal habitat.

Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, \$91,000: Remove invasive weeds and restore streambanks on 1,080 acres of the refuge.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$77,300: Conduct a census of 12 species of seabirds breeding from Cape Disappointment, Washington, to Oceanside, Oregon.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$42,976: Develop baseline data on species abundance and distribution to be used in the event of a future oil spill.

Columbia Land Trust, \$100,000: Permanently protect 155 acres of critical riparian habitat along the lower mile of Germany Creek to benefit chum, coho and Chinook salmon, elk, Columbian white-tailed deer, bald eagles and osprey, among others.

Columbia Land Trust, \$140,000: Acquire 55 acres of historic floodplain habitat in the Walluski River to restore tidal function and salmon access to 50 acres of estuarine wetlands.

Lower Columbia River Watershed Council, \$5,000: Conduct watershed education for 200 students and provide training in water quality monitoring, macro invertebrate sampling and identification, native plant propagation and riparian restoration techniques.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$150,000: Restore coastal habitat for the threatened western snowy plover and the streaked horned owl at Leadbetter Point, one of only three recent nesting areas in Washington for the western snowy plover.

The Wetlands Conservancy, \$68,450: Create a conservation/restoration plan for Sitka spruce swamp, estuarine marsh and freshwater riparian habitats in the Young's Bay watershed.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$43,390: Educate teachers and students in Clatsop and Tillamook counties about the ecology and conservation of seabirds, shorebirds and estuaries, with the goal of engaging at least one teacher from each of the 21 schools within the four districts in the two counties.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$160,000: Restore 40 acres of native riparian Sitka spruce tidal forest and 70 acres of pasture land for endangered Columbian white-tailed deer, waterfowl and amphibians.

Washington Department of Natural Resources, \$9,000: Protect and restore rare salt marsh ecosystems on the Boone and Niawiakum rivers.

Batt Slough Tide Gate Replacement: Staff negotiated replacement of a 50-year-old tide gate at the mouth of Batt Slough on the lower Snohomish River at Snohomish with the Marshland Flood Control District. Replacement of this gate will re-open an off-channel rearing area roughly a mile in length. Restoration of off-channel rearing areas is a top priority in the Snohomish Basin Salmon Conservation Plan. The project is more remarkable in that it represents a major breakthrough in the working relationship with this agricultural district. The Marshland commissioners have been highly resistant for many years to doing anything to enhance or maintain salmonid habitat.

Olympia Oyster Rebuilding Proposal: WDFW shellfish enhancement staff attended a meeting with DNR and the Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) regarding a proposal for a native Olympia oyster rebuilding project in Quartermaster Harbor, Vashon Island. DNR was very receptive to the proposal and strongly encouraged rebuilding native Olympia oyster habitat rather than strictly planting oyster seed. During a related meeting, WDFW staff provided PSRF with technical advice on the logistics of the Liberty Bay Olympia Oyster habitat-rebuilding project on WDFW tidelands located in Liberty Bay.

Land Deal Buys Salmon a Home: City of Vancouver votes to chip in \$350,000 toward a \$2 million purchase of a spawning ground site on the Columbia River; one of the last pieces of a complicated patchwork of land parcels near a rare chum salmon spawning ground on the Columbia River has been completed. Buyers and sellers have closed the deal on 4 1/2 acres along the Columbia River east of the Interstate 205 Bridge. The land is called Columbia Grove, but it is in a larger area known as Wood's Landing. Although the property is in a desirable, mostly undeveloped riverfront location, much of its value for conservationists is the spawning ground, one of the few on the main river channel for chum salmon listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Columbia River Late Stock Coho Returns: Columbia River Coho returns are expected to be down in 2005, especially late stock Coho. A total of 78,000 late stock Coho are predicted to return to the Columbia River mouth in 2005. The return of 78,000 late stock adults would be a significant drop from the 2004 return of 203,000 and, if accurate, would be the lowest return since 1998. Since 2000, late stock Coho returns have ranged between 203,000 and 496,000 adults. In response to the expected poor return of late stock Coho in 2005, Region 5 staff is developing contingency plans to ensure adequate escapement of late stock hatchery fish and protection for late stock wild fish.

Two New Reportable Shellfish Diseases For Washington State: Msx (*haplosporidium nelsoni*) and SSO (*haplosporidium coastale*) were detected in eastern oysters (*crassostrea virginica*) from Totten Inlet and Oakland Bay, respectively, as part of the routine shellfish health surveillance for aquaculture products last week. These protozoan parasites were responsible for the near collapse of the eastern oyster industry on the northeast atlantic coast, and in particular Chesapeake Bay. Both organisms are reportable to the world Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and have the potential to affect trade in aquaculture products with other states and countries. Staff consulted with other disease experts and state regulators as to the best management actions to employ and the best option at this time is to simple elevate the level of testing of oyster seed and broodstock through the use of a polymerase chain

reaction (PCR) test which is available for both organisms. All of the commercial hatcheries in Washington have already committed to further testing of broodstocks already within their hatcheries as well as their broodstock repositories.

Sea Otter Recovery Plan: The Endangered Species Section published the final Washington State Recovery Plan for the Sea Otter. The Sea Otter is a state endangered species. The recovery plan sets objectives for downlisting the otter from state endangered to state threatened and from threatened to either sensitive or monitor status. The plan outlines strategies for species and habitat protection, proactive steps to address potential fisheries conflicts, and outreach and education. The plan was presented by Steve Jeffries at the 4th Sea Otter Conservation Workshop sponsored by the Seattle Aquarium on March 18th. The conference on sea otter conservation and biology was attended by scientists, nongovernmental organizations, and aquarium experts from Washington, California, and Alaska.

Mountain Quail Reintroduction: The southeastern Washington mountain quail reintroduction project took a step forward on Saturday, March 12th. In a cooperative effort that included WDFW staff, University of Idaho staff and students, and staff from the Washington Department of Corrections, 73 mountain quail were released on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. Fifty of the quail were equipped with radio transmitters as part of a graduate student project that will conclude in 2006, with a report detailing habitat use, production, and survival of mountain quail released in Washington and Idaho. This project is a cooperative project that includes WDFW, Idaho Fish and Game, the University of Idaho, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife - the source of the released birds.

ENSURE WDFW ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS, FACILITIES, AND LANDS ARE CONSISTENT WITH LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL REGULATIONS THAT PROTECT AND RECOVER FISH, WILDLIFE, AND THEIR HABITATS.

Commercial Crab Pots Seized: The Marine Division received a complaint from Quinalt tribal enforcement officers regarding a non-tribal fisherman who was fishing inside the Special Marine Area (SMA). A boat patrol was planned and a total of 25 commercial crab pots were seized for various violations such as closed area and no buoy numbers. Enforcement efforts to substantiate complaints, let alone the effort required to develop the cases, required massive enforcement resources. It was calculated that the effort expended by the USCG and the Marine Division related to investigating a crab pot overage of 260 cost a total of 30K plus. Crab pot tags would make law enforcement more efficient in enforcing crab pot limits on the coast.

Trapping Case: Officers served a search warrant in Clallam County in conjunction with an investigation into illegal trapping activities associated with our Nuisance Wildlife Control (NWCO) program. The subject is being investigated for falsifying information in order to obtain permits, failing to provide harvest reports, and selling the pelts. 73 pelts were seized. NWCO emphasis patrols are being planned and implemented statewide.

INFLUENCE THE DECISIONS OF OTHERS THAT AFFECT FISH, WILDLIFE AND THEIR HABITATS.

National American Planning Association's Annual Conference: Regional Habitat Program Manager Chris Parsons attended the National American Planning Association's annual conference held in San Francisco last week. Chris was invited to participate on a panel along with speakers from NatureServe and the National Wildlife Federation titled, "Wildlife Conservation Planning at Different Scales, Land Use Planning Data Sources and Uses." Chris presented information about Washington State's efforts with developing Ecoregional Assessments, the Coordinated Wildlife Conservation Plan, and how to use this data to inform local land use plans through a process called Alternative Futures. Providing scientifically sound data is essential for informing local land use decision making to protect ecological processes necessary for maintaining viable fish and wildlife habitats.

North Lynden Drainage Initiative: A town hall meeting was held in Whatcom County to give community members an opportunity to share concerns about past flooding and drainage in the area north of the city of Lynden. The Whatcom Conservation District, the Agriculture Preservation Committee, and WDFW hosted the meeting. An estimated 80-100 people attended, including the Whatcom County Executive, the City of Lynden's mayor, Director Koenings, WDFW Commissioner Roehl, Lummi Nation's Randy Kinley, a representatives of the Department of Ecology, and NRCS.

Major issues centered on flooding which occurred this past winter damaging 20 homes, degrading pasture, etc. Most in the audience blamed the lack of maintenance of the roadside drainage system, while County and City Public works indicated the work had fallen behind due to HPA permitting issues. Several of the roadside "ditches" (along Double Ditch, Assink, Guide, Benson and Bender, Badger Roads) are altered, relocated natural watercourses and support salmonid populations, thus are clearly subject to the Hydraulic Code. As commonly experienced, HPA applications were not submitted and assertions are then made that WDFW is the cause of the drainage problems.

The principal problem is resolving ultimate responsibility for completion of needed work, the true responsibility for which is fragmented. Overall the meeting was productive. WDFW committed to lead a collaborative problem solving effort. Anticipated outcomes of this effort are the development of a long-range strategy to maintain drainage and improve salmon habitat in the North Lynden watershed. In the short term, it is critical that Whatcom County and WDFW work together to permit and complete necessary drainage maintenance work this summer along Double Ditch, a perennial roadside watercourse supporting steelhead, cutthroat, and salmon (including Chinook).

MINIMIZE ADVERSE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN HUMANS AND WILDLIFE.

Spokane River Contaminants Clean up: District 2 Fish Biologist Chris Donley met with Dept. of Ecology representatives at locations on the upper Spokane River near the Idaho State boundary to review proposed heavy metal clean-up sites at Starr Road Bar and the Islands Complex. These proposed remediation efforts are part of the Bunker Hill Super Fund site clean-up efforts in WA.

Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS) will soon be initiating an update to its Sanctuary Management Plan. The plan establishes a framework of management strategies to address activities in research, education, administration, coordination, and resource protection. Of particular interest to tribes, WDFW managers, and stakeholders is the definition of compatible uses within the sanctuary. Other sanctuaries along the Pacific Coast have recently petitioned the Pacific Fisheries Management Council to adopt regulations restricting fishing activities to provide resource protection on those sanctuaries. In addition, similar issues have surfaced among state agencies in relation to management of both terrestrial and aquatic Natural Area Preserves in Washington. Clearly, balancing between protection of natural resources and opportunities for utilization of those resources continues to be one of our most challenging public service responsibilities. The OCNMS will be working with coastal tribes through the spring to identify the process by which the OCNMS management plan will be updated. Public meetings will be held this summer to share information about the management plan update process and to gather public input.

Project CAT: The Big Game Management Roundtable of Kittitas County hosted a community workshop on Project CAT in Cle Elum on March 16th. Gary Koehler, Ben Maletzke, Rocky Spencer, and students from Cle Elum-Roslyn School District presented findings and management and safety considerations from the cougar research, which began in 2001. Students and scientists presented findings on cougar captures, home range and density estimates, mortality causes, and various projects conducted by students. We are scheduled to provide similar presentations in April through June at several state and local Audubon Society Conferences, WDFW sponsored programs, and Kittitas County Field and Stream Sportsman Club.

GOAL II: SUSTAINABLE FISH AND WILDLIFE-RELATED OPPORTUNITIES

WORK WITH TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS TO ENSURE FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES ARE ACHIEVED.

Nooksack watershed planning (WRIA 1): Steve Seymour (Watershed steward) and Water Team staff discussed the new phase beginning in Nooksack watershed planning. The first phase nears completion with adoption of the watershed management plan. The new phase has potential to be precedent-setting as tribes and other water users attempt to reconcile unquantified senior tribal water rights, including instream flows, with technical instream flow study results and out-of-stream water rights and uses. The negotiations require a confidentiality statement to be signed by all parties; staff reviewed and recommends that WDFW participants sign.

White River Spring Chinook: The stream flows in the White River, as with many other watersheds impacted by this year's drought, are low and dropping. The Puyallup Tribe has informed us that the Clearwater Creek acclimation pond, used to acclimate White River spring Chinook reared at the Hupp Springs Hatchery, is not usable this year. The Clearwater Creek acclimation pond had been scheduled for 200,000 fish, which will now be released directly from Hupp Springs rearing pond.

National Aquatic Animal Health Pan: Staff participated in a two-day workshop held in Seattle sponsored by USDA - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). This workshop was one of seven workshops held around the country to develop a national aquatic animal health plan. This plan will contain the necessary components to provide for safe interstate and international transfer of aquatic animals, protect farmed and wild aquatic animal resources from exotic diseases and pests, help the U.S. meet international aquatic health obligations, and ensure the availability of diagnostic and certification services for public, private, and tribal entities. If this plan is completed and implemented, it could provide a coordinated response plan between state, tribal and private interest for exotic diseases if they were to occur here. A working plan is expected to be available in 2007.

Fines Imposed by Tribal Court: Officers received a disposition back from Lummi Nation Tribal Court on an investigation he referred to the Tribe. Two tribal members killed a calf elk in GMU 418, which is closed to tribal and state hunters. WDFW's Detachment Twelve Officers (Skagit County) caught the violators when they returned for the elk they had shot earlier on Crown Pacific Timber lands near Hamilton. The Tribal Court imposed a sentence of \$4,000 on one violator and \$3,500 on the other. In addition, both violators had their hunting rights suspended for at least one year. The Lummi Nation Hunting Committee must reinstate their hunting rights.

IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF WASHINGTON BY PROVIDING DIVERSE, HIGH QUALITY RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES.

Shellfish Opportunities: Two of Hood Canal's most popular recreational shellfish harvesting beaches, Duckabush and Point Whitney tidelands, opened for harvest March 1st. Last year, 8,434 recreational harvest trips were recorded at the Duckabush during a nine-month harvest season, and 1,258 harvest trips recorded for Point Whitney with only one month open to claming.

Lowland Lake Opener: Lake anglers are dusting of their fishing gear as the Lowland Lake opener is coming up on April 30th (always the last Saturday in April each year). Anglers are calling for information regarding regulations, as well as the new two other popular documents, Hatchery Trout Stocking Plans and the Washington Fishing Prospects. We are gladly taking addresses, in preparation for our large mail out. 5-10 Calls per day.

Deep River Spring Chinook Releases: As part of the Select Area Fishery Enhancement (SAFE) Program spring Chinook smolts are annually released into Deep River. Past survival rates for these releases have not been good primarily due to a late release date. Spring Chinook smolt releases typically occur in March or early April; however, in order to avoid interactions with chum salmon from Grays River releases in Deep River have regularly occurred in May. The extended holding time has resulted in significant pre-release mortalities and low smolt to adult survival rates. In 2005 Region 5 staff is initiating a net-pen towing program that is aimed at alleviating the problems of pre-release mortalities and low smolt to adult survival rates.

GOAL III: OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

PROVIDE EXCELLENT PROFESSIONAL SERVICE.

Multi-Car Accidents Due to Dust Storm: On March 12, the Moses Lake area experienced extremely high winds and blowing dust that resulted in zero visibility in some areas. As a result, officers were advised at about 10:00 a.m. of numerous multi-car and truck accidents occurring east of Moses Lake. Fish and Wildlife Officers (FWO's) were the first on the scene and observed blowing dust so thick that visibility was limited to about 6 feet. Donning goggles and a respirator mask FWO's walked along the edge of the freeway securing victims and attempting to stop traffic. As more vehicles crashed in the blinding dust, FWO's asked Washington State Patrol to shut the freeway down between Moses Lake and the county line. Once traffic was stopped, medical crews and troopers were able to drive the freeway to the various accident scenes. FWO's did a phenomenal job providing first aid to six injured individuals in three separate cars including one man who had been run over. This individual was seriously injured after he had walked around to the front of his damaged car just as a semi-truck struck the back of his vehicle at 30 miles per hour. The man was then run over by his own car as the truck slammed into the back of it. FWO Erhardt, who is an accident re-constructionist, assisted troopers sort out a very complex and confusing accident scene involving numerous vehicles in extreme wind conditions.

Cougar Incidents: (1) Officers deserve special mention for responding to a cougar call in which the reporting party alleged she had been outside near her Arlington home when she was stalked and chased by a cougar narrowly missing injury by taking cover in a vehicle. A Stillaguamish Tribe game warden happened by and stopped to offer assistance. Both the woman and Stilly employee called in on a cell phone and reported seeing a cougar in the brush and later stated seeing as many as three cougar near the attack scene. WDFW Officers responded immediately with hounds and a handler. Not only did they not see a cougar or cougar tracks, the hounds were unable to pick up any scent. At this point, we have no choice but to question the veracity of the report.

(2) WDFW Officers responded to a cougar sighting near 92nd Avenue and 100th Street in Vancouver, Washington. Cougar sightings came into Clark County dispatch several times throughout the day. The area was thoroughly searched by WDFW Officers as well Sheriff's Deputies but no cat was found. Portland Air 1 used their FLIR system to attempt to locate the cat from the air but was unsuccessful. Credibility on the sighting began to deteriorate as the evening went on. WDFW Officers took shifts patrolling the area the next day contacting homeowners and just being seen in the area. The Columbian Newspaper, as well as the local TV stations, ran stories on the sightings.

(3) WDFW Officers responded to a complaint of subjects hunting cougar at night. The reporting party provided a license plate number for subjects she had contacted and who advised the reporting party that they had treed a cougar on the Pearrygin Lake Road. WDFW Officers stopped the subjects on the upper Beaver Creek Road. The suspects had two dogs on the strike board driving through the Methow Wildlife Area and down Beaver Creek. The subjects refused to cooperate and locked the doors of the vehicle. Assistance was requested from the county. Both subjects continued to resist arrest. They were booked into the county jail. The following day the reporting party took WDFW Officers to the location where she had observed them. Officers found spent .22 cartridges and also found a dead house cat

belonging to the reporting party. One subject was held on \$20,000 bail and the other was held on \$7,500 bail. Charges to be filed: Obstruction, resisting arrest, intimidation, possession of marijuana, cruelty to animals, and trespassing.

(4) WDFW Officers responded to a report that a cougar had chased a 16-year-old juvenile on a hiking trail at Smallwood Park in Eatonville. According to the juvenile, who reported the incident to Eatonville PD, he was walking on an established trail when he saw a cougar approximately 50 feet away in the brush. The cougar allegedly ran towards him and the juvenile ran away. When he looked back, the cougar was gone. WDFW Officers brought out a hound hunter and the dogs had the scent but lost it when it got to a well-used game trail with elk and deer tracks.

(5) WDFW Officers received a phone call from a Washington State Patrol (WSP) radio maintenance person regarding a missing house cat and a purebred puppy. When the house cat went missing, the reporting party's son went outside and saw a young cougar next to the door. An hour later the dog was missing. When WDFW Officers arrived with a dog handler to check the area for evidence, they observed the cougar on the neighbor's driveway. A short time later the cat was treed by the hound dogs and dispatched. The remains of the dog were located in the stomach of the young female.

(6) Clark County Officers continued to monitor the cougar sighting near the elementary school in early March with follow up sightings reported that were quickly checked out. Officers assisted the principal of the school in preparing a safety memo for the kids to take home for parents explaining the incident.

(7) WDFW Officers investigated a reported cougar attack on a horse near Brewster. The horse was lacerated on the right flank. A farm trailer was discovered in the enclosure. There was blood and hair on the edge of the trailer and it had been moved laterally 2 feet. The horse apparently ran into the side of the trailer and cut itself. This incident, however, is being portrayed as cougar caused and is being forwarded via e-mail as an example of cougar problems.

IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF WDFW'S OPERATIONAL AND SUPPORT ACTIVITIES.

Oiled Wildlife Rescue Training Materials: The Oil Spill Team is engaging University of California (Davis) Wildlife Health Center staff to update instructional manuals that are used as part of WDFW's training and certification of personnel who would be called upon to assist in wildlife rescue efforts during oil spills. Two years ago the Oil Spill Team contracted with the University to provide WDFW with a science-based study on rehabilitation facility requirements for treating oiled birds. Recommendations from that study were incorporated as changes to WDFW's WAC 232-12-275, and are proving to be a major step forward in assisting rehabilitation organizations and oil industry representatives in understanding and preparing for future oil spills. The present discussions are part of an overall effort to improve the quality of training that we have provided to volunteers for over a decade, while continuing a meaningful partnership with the world's leaders in oiled wildlife care and research.

Hatcheries Drought Issues: Even with the recent rains, drought related issues are continuing at a number of hatchery facilities. The following is a list of new items identified.

Lakewood/Chambers Creek: Well water is holding, but the spring flows are receding. Fall Chinook will be released the night of March 30th, which is two days earlier than planned, from Lakewood and Chambers Creek the night of March 30th.

Skookumchuck/Marblemount: Recent fish health examinations by Jed Varney have revealed the Coho at Marblemount destined for Skookumchuck are in poor fish health. Further investigation revealed well water to each pond is flowing at 175 gpm vs. 500 gpm normally needed to keep these fish within safe loading densities. This water shortage has just now been revealed even though the problem appears to have been going on for some time.

Marblemount Hatchery: Low flows have caused concerns about flow densities for the spring Chinook that are scheduled to be moved to the channels. If the fish cannot be moved, flow indices will be a concern for all fish in the raceways. In order to move them, tagging in May is necessary. Staff is coordinating this with tagging crews.

Cottonwood Acclimation Pond: The release channel has been hand dug and is completed. There still is no water in the creek to trap returning adult summer steelhead so, Lyons Ferry hatchery staff have made arrangements to take eggs from returning adult steelhead at the ODFW Wallowa Hatchery located further upstream on the Grande Rhonde River.

Colville Hatchery: The only water supply for this facility is a well. This well should have approximately 12 feet of water to draw down and only has 6 feet. Without additional recharge this spring staff is anticipating that the facility will run low on water by July. We are working with Engineering staff to see what can be done to put the second well on line to alleviate the situation.

Washougal Hatchery: Because of low flows, the decision was made to release Coho smolts from Washougal Hatchery into the Klickitat River last week. They had been scheduled for April 1st. The water programmed for these fish as well as new brood fall Chinook, is 2000 gallons per minute less than expected for this time of year and much less than needed for proper fish loadings.

Goldendale and Vancouver Hatcheries: Actions have been take to relieve the pressure of loadings at Goldendale Hatchery by transferring rainbow trout to Vancouver Hatchery for Region 5 plants in April. Vancouver has problems as well, however, early monthly scheduled plants will give us some measure of flexibility.

Transition to New Generation Recreational Licensing System: Another significant step in the progress toward replacing the current automated licensing system (Washington Interactive License Database - WILD) occurred on Thursday March 31st. A vendor conference was held in Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building. Vendor conferences provide a forum between vendors interested in developing,

implementing, and operating the Department's automated licensing system to ask questions directly of Department staff about the Department's Request for Proposal (RFP). Prior to Thursday's conference, the Department's RFP Coordinator had received 115 questions from vendors regarding the RFP. Some of the 115 questions, as well as additional questions were unofficially answered at the conference. Over 20 vendors were sent RFPs, while 10 attended the vendor conference. Department staff will be answering all the questions that have been asked and those answers will comprise the Department's official response. All vendors, whether they attended the vendor conference or not, will receive the Department's official answers to the 115 plus questions. The answers are due back to the vendors by April 7th. By April 11th, vendors serious about the project must submit a letter of intent to bid. Vendor responses to the RFP are due to the RFP Coordinator on May 5th at 5:00 p.m. Internal review and evaluation of the RFPs will occur between May 7th and June 3rd. The apparently successful bidder is to be selected in June. Work on the new system is anticipated to begin in July.

RECRUIT, DEVELOP AND RETAIN A DIVERSE WORKFORCE WITH HIGH PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS.

HPA Intranet Page: The HPA Links intranet page is now online. This page has helpful links to web pages and WDFW documents that might be helpful to Area Habitat Biologists and other staff when considering Hydraulic Code issues. The page will be updated as necessary to remain current. The link is: <http://inside.dfw.wa.gov/programs/habitat/hpa/>

Enforcement In-Service Training: The Enforcement Program conducted in-service training in two separate sessions. The February 27-March 5 training included: legal updates on investigating domestic violence, trespass, tribal hunting, hunting accident classroom and practical, water safety, model policy on vehicle pursuit and accreditation, migratory birds (taught by USFWS), etc. Officers also received annual required gas mask fitting, computer upgrades, and radio frequency upgrades. Awards were also given.

RECONNECT WITH THOSE INTERESTED IN WASHINGTON'S FISH AND WILDLIFE.

Community Shellfish Aquaculture: Technical advice was provided to the Whatcom County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) on challenges community shellfish aquaculture projects may face when enhancing or rebuilding native clam species, including genetic and disease concerns. The MRC is evaluating opportunities for native clam enhancement/restoration in Birch Bay, Whatcom County.

Resident Fish Conference and 29th International Kokanee Workshop June 6-8, 2004 at the Double Tree City Center Spokane, Washington: The Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Authority (CBFWA) Resident Fish Committee and Lake Roosevelt Forum invite you to attend their upcoming Resident Fish Conference and 29th International Kokanee Workshop June 6-8, 2005 at the Double Tree City Center Spokane, Washington. The interactive CBFWA website for this meeting will be available beginning Friday, March 11, 2005.

"Go Play Outside" (GPO) event: The Yakima fairgrounds will be the site for a major new "Go Play Outside" (GPO) event, the Yakima Outdoor Expo, to be held April 15th and 16th. The first day of the expo will be exclusively for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students in several area school districts, including Yakima, Selah, West Valley and Union Gap, and home schooled students, with no admission charge. About 750 students are expected to attend Friday through school field trips. Saturday's session, which is from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., is open to the public and there will be a small admission charged. More than 25 outdoor groups are scheduled to take part. Among the hands-on activities planned are fishing ponds, archery and air rifle ranges, and a rock climbing wall. There will also be exhibits for backpacking, backcountry horseback riding, camping and Dutch oven cooking, along with Native American and pioneer encampments. This is the first GPO expo in the state. "We're really excited about this event and what it will offer to the folks of this community," said Ray Wilson, GPO Coordinator for the Washington Wildlife Coalition. "We have held great outdoor events geared to young people (in the past) but never one that provides so many outdoor activities at one location."

PROVIDE SOUND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF WDFW LANDS, FACILITIES AND ACCESS SITES.

Willapa Field Station: Staff at the Willapa Bay Field Station worked on bid specifications and on obtaining bids for 2,500 oyster cultch bags. These bags will be used to catch the natural oyster set in Willapa Bay this summer. The majority of the seed caught will be placed on Willapa Bay Oyster Reserve lands for grow-out to increase production and ultimately revenue to the Oyster Reserve Account. A portion of the seed will be placed on the Nahcotta Tidelands Interpretive Site to maintain recreational oyster harvest at the site.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF): At the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation annual meeting in Portland, RMEF identified \$100,000 to support the Cowiche-Tieton acquisition project. This project provides long-term habitat protection for the Yakima elk herd in Region 3. Kevin Brown of RMEF made a brief presentation.