

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE
FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION**
August 6 - 8, 2009

FISH AND WILDLIFE GOAL:

ACHIEVE HEALTHY, DIVERSE AND SUSTAINABLE FISH AND WILDLIFE POPULATIONS AND THEIR SUPPORTING HABITATS

Wolf Management:

Lookout Pack – The Lookout Pack has moved from the natal den site to a rendezvous site approximately 4-5 miles away. This site is more remote than the previous year, making it increasingly difficult to gather information on the pups. Staff confirmed the presence of multiple pups in a howling survey. The effort also confirmed at least one adult in addition to the collared alpha pair (perhaps one of last year's pups).

The pack is likely two weeks away from being mobile and heading to high country to follow the deer herd. A decision on whether or not to try and deploy a GPS/satellite collar will have to be made soon. Adults are already ranging widely for food – the male was gone from the area for several days last week. Camera deployment and evening site visits to listen for howling will be used to try to gain more information on pack demographics.

Blue Mountains Wolf Report – Staff received a wolf report from the local outfitter who hikes in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. On July 3, he and his wife heard multiple wolves, possibly with pups, howling near his camp. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) staff backpacked into the wilderness to conduct a howling survey, although no responses were heard. A follow-up survey will occur in several weeks.

Pend Oreille County – Department of Fish and Wildlife and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff will check for the presence of a wolf pack in northeast Pend Oreille County after a remote camera captured images of an apparent male and female wolf together, and genetic tests confirmed a male Rocky Mountain gray wolf is in the area.

Images of the two animals were recorded in May on a remote, motion-triggered camera maintained by DNR biologists. One of the photographed animals appeared to be a lactating female wolf, indicating she is nursing pups. Recent genetic tests on a hair sample collected from the camera area showed it to be from a male gray wolf from southern Alberta/northern Montana stock.

Update - Washington's second wolf pack confirmed, wolf activity monitored in Pend Oreille County: Washington's second gray wolf pack has been confirmed and an adult wolf has been equipped with a satellite-telemetry tracking collar by state biologists in northeast Washington's Pend Oreille County. Department staff, led by a wolf capture specialist from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) temporarily captured a 105-pound wolf—believed to be the alpha-male pack leader—to equip it with a satellite-telemetry collar so its movements can be tracked. Two wolf pups also were temporarily captured, equipped with ear tags and released.

The collared wolf's movements will be monitored with periodic relocation data transmitted by satellite and downloaded on a computer. The Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment allows monitoring without the aerial or ground tracking required in standard radio telemetry.

Biologists found earlier evidence of the wolf pack—they have named the Diamond Pack—through howling responses from multiple wolves of various ages, and from photos of up to four young wolves recorded on a remote, motion-triggered camera. A wolf pack is defined as two or more wolves traveling together.

Department and DNR biologists have been monitoring the area in recent weeks, after a DNR remote camera recorded images in May of what appeared to be an adult male and female gray wolf. The female wolf was lactating, indicating she was nursing pups. Subsequent genetic testing of a hair sample collected from a camera station indicated the hair came from a male gray wolf from the northwestern Montana/southwestern Alberta wolf population.

Property Acquisitions:

Heart of the Cascades – The Department has completed the purchase of the 2,675.2-acre Plum Creek Timberlands property located northwest of Yakima. The property consists of mature pine, mixed-conifer forests, basalt cliffs, and cottonwood riparian forest habitat. This purchase was a joint effort of the Department, The Nature Conservancy and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. It was funded by grants from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the Habitat Conservation Plan grant program. The property will be managed as a unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area.

Mesa Lake – The Department has completed the purchase a 256 acre property from Mesa Lake Investments, Inc. The property is located in Franklin County, approximately 25 miles north of Tri Cities, off the Sheffield Road. It includes a unique and diverse mix of wetlands and shrub-steppe uplands. This is the first phase of a multi-phase transaction that will include Mesa Lake. This purchase was funded by the Waterfowl Habitat Fund. It will be managed as part of the Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area.

Proposed Teanaway Solar Reserve near Cle Elum: A \$100 million, 75-megawatt "solar park" has been proposed near Cle Elum. Teanaway Solar Reserve has apparently already leased 400 acres of land where the power plant will be built if it gets the approval from Kittitas County and proves economically viable. The solar array would require 400,000 panels. The plan has already been endorsed by many officials, including Senator Maria Cantwell, despite the fact that there has been no detailed information provided, or an analysis of environment concerns related to the project proposal. The project will be reviewed locally by Kittitas County. Region 3 Habitat Program staff has yet to receive any formal information regarding the project proposal. Staff anticipates a variety of potential concerns including impacts on winter range for big game, documented high densities of cougar, spotted owl circles, changes in hydrology of small streams due to stormwater runoff from large areas of impervious surfaces, risks associated with leaking heavy metals from photovoltaic cells, and the need for intensive vegetation management around the site to preclude damage or fire. Staff has created a map within the project area and all the cougar locations available to date in that area. Because the area where the proposal is located is a large clear-cut, there is less activity by wildlife directly within the footprint of the solar project. However, the surrounding forested area and bluff above the Teanaway River is prime

winter range area for deer, elk, and cougars and the development of roads and activity will likely impact movements of large mammals along the ridge and north face of the ridge.

Figure 1 shows the cougar use from the Cougars and Teaching (CAT) project in and around the project proposal area. Cougars heavily use this area of the Cle Elum Ridge, frequently in the winter. The map of cougar use is also a surrogate for big game use and travel routes across the landscape. We know from experience at the nearby Suncadia Resort that even simply the activity associated with clearing lots for development was enough to displace cougars off their part of the territory where the resort is located. Staff has begun discussing mitigation alternatives for the project in preparation for discussions with the project proponents.

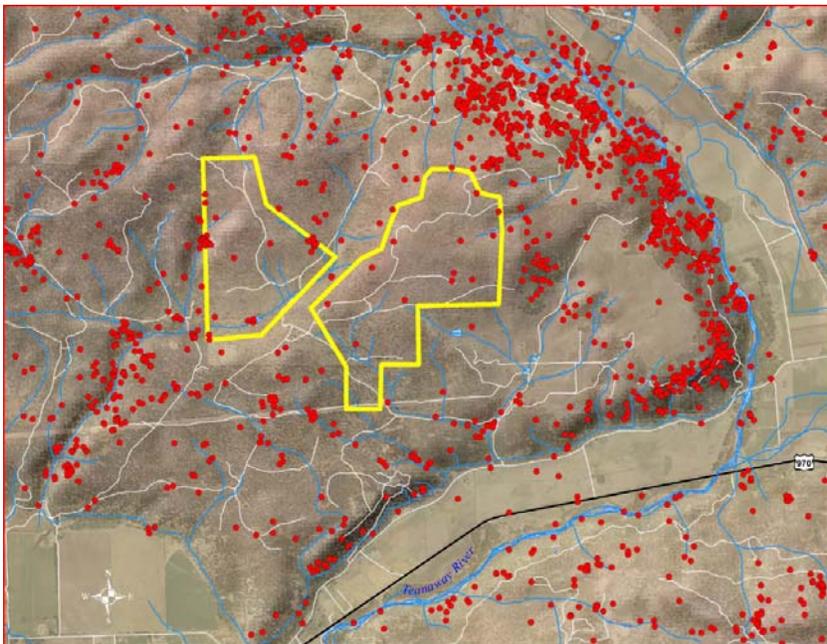


Figure 1 - CAT Cougar Locations at Proposed Teanaway Solar Park

Jackson Hydroelectric Project Relicensing - Settlement Reached: Local, state, and federal agencies reached agreement with Snohomish Public Utility District (PUD) on recommended license terms to be jointly presented to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. In exchange for a recommended 40 year license to continue operating the Jackson Project, the PUD agreed to provide improved flows, passage into six miles of the river (that has been blocked for at least 50 years), numerous fish habitat enhancement features, a resident fish stocking plan, and 6,700 acres of land that will be at least partially managed for wildlife habitat. A signing ceremony originally scheduled for August 12 at the powerhouse will be rescheduled during September to allow the local tribal interests to participate.

Williams Creek Screening Project: A request for technical assistance was received from a Williams Creek diverter that was triggered by the Department of Ecology's (DOE) metering program. As part of the metering requirements, the diverters are also informed of the need for compliance with state fish screening criteria. This cooperative project screened and metered a historically unscreened diversion on Williams Creek, a tributary to Swauk Creek, which flows into the Yakima River. This project was also a great example of inter-agency cooperation. DOE's Water Resource Metering group came up with the idea of incorporating a submerged

orifice measuring weir in the Department's modular rotary wiper fish screen, which was incorporated in the screen by the Yakima Construction Shop. The Kittitas County Conservation District provided the stream and ditch survey, assisted the irrigators with the permit applications, and provided the screen from their inventory of Department modular screens. The Area Habitat Biologist initiated and coordinated the project and wrote the Hydraulic Project Approval. Helpful hands from all of the groups assisted the irrigator with the screen/weir installation.



Western Pond Turtle Management / Environmental Education: Department staff partnered with staff from Oregon Zoo Conservation Division and USFWS Refuge to conduct a day of environmental education and outreach centered on the annual release of western pond turtles at the Pierce Unit of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Staff discussed western pond turtles in general, the head-start program, the western pond turtle recovery goals, and fielded questions regarding this state endangered species. Additionally, older western pond turtles (from prior releases) and western painted turtles were captured for display during the event. An excess of 75 children / students were in attendance, this included grade-school-aged children (Skamania County Gorge Explorers), Skamania Youth Success Program, students associated with the AmeriCorps Program, participants in the Federal Youth Conservation Corps, and interns and students associated with the Portland Zoo. Crew leaders and associated agency leads along with media folks pushed the number in attendance to around 100.

Each annual release presents a significant milestone in the management of this species, with 2009 marking the tenth year of release at the Pierce Refuge site. Concurrent with release at Pierce Refuge, staff facilitated for the third year the release of head-started pond turtles at Beacon Rock State Park. Additional animals were also released at the Sondino Ponds and Bergen Road western pond turtle sites. Personnel from the Portland Zoo and USFWS gathered video and still photographs and conducted interviews during the event. This material was passed on to *KATU* television (Portland channel 2), with text from their report available on-line at (<http://www.katu.com/news/51320542.html>).

Farm Bill:

Wildlife Programs participation in several working groups regarding the Farm Bill:

- In a teleconference with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recommendations were made to the national Farm Service Agency (FSA) on what to do with 30,000 acres from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). State Areas for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) holds these acres in reserve for at-risk species and the Department requested that some be available to Douglas County for sage-grouse. The Douglas County SAFE proposal was forwarded to the FSA national office by the Washington State FSA Programs Chief. If the Department receives acres it will likely be a smaller portion of the 30,000 acres currently in reserve, however, this will be the start of a program where additional acres are added in the future.
- At the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies summer meeting, staff attended meetings with the Habitat Committee and Private Lands Access and Conservation Committee. Along with the Coordinator for the Intermountain West Joint Venture, a letter was drafted requesting United States Department of Agriculture assistance in building technical service delivery capacity through agreements with partner Farm Bill biologists. This would consist of state fish and wildlife agencies and *non-governmental* organizations.
- While participating in a subcommittee of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Technical Advisory Committee, staff helped review this year's Conservation Innovation Grants applications. Ranking and comments were provided to the NRCS state office.

PUBLIC GOAL:

ENSURE SUSTAINABLE FISH AND WILDLIFE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Lower Columbia River Summer Chinook Fishery: The preseason forecast for upper Columbia summer chinook was for a return of 70,700 adults to the river mouth. Counts for summer chinook over Bonneville Dam occur from June 16 through July 31. In late June, based upon variable counts over Bonneville, the summer chinook run size was updated to 58,000. Bonneville Dam passage from June 16 through July 7 totaled 36,143 adults and 17,046 jacks. Adult passage at Bonneville is typically 50% complete around July 1. The escapement goal for this run of fish is 20,000 over Priest Rapids Dam. Passage as of July 9, over Priest Rapids Dam was over 29,000 adults.

Based on the updated forecasts and the harvest rate schedules in the 2008-2017 *U.S. v Oregon* Management Agreement, treaty and non-treaty fisheries are allocated 13,500 summer chinook each, (reduced from the preseason expectation of 18,263 fish each). Despite the downgrade, the below Bonneville sport and commercial fisheries were managed consistent with the pre-season plan because catches early in the season were lower than anticipated. Thus, the expectation is that the fisheries as implemented will meet both the sport/commercial allocation policy, as well as the upriver/downriver harvest sharing objectives.

Preliminary data is as follows (subject to update in final):

Recreational: In the area below Bonneville Dam, adult chinook retention was allowed from June 22 through July 5 and sockeye retention was allowed beginning June 12. Preliminary catch estimates include 2,167 adult chinook and 942 sockeye kept from 21,100 angler trips.

The area above Bonneville Dam to Highway 395 Bridge opened for adult chinook retention July 1 and sockeye retention beginning June 16. Season totals for these ongoing fisheries are expected to be less than less than 500 adult chinook and 100 sockeye. The area above Highway 395 Bridge also opened to chinook retention July 1 and through emergency regulation allowed the retention of sockeye concurrent with chinook season. No catch information is available as yet.

Non-Indian Commercial: Three commercial fishing periods took place between June 18 and July 1. Preliminary catch estimates include 2,495 chinook, 216 sockeye, and 587 white sturgeon.

Treaty fisheries: Four weekly commercial fishing periods took place between June 16 and July 11. Platform and hook and line fisheries are ongoing. Preliminary catch estimates include 11,595 chinook, 10,322 sockeye and 726 steelhead. The tribes will likely fish during the week of July 13.

FUNDING GOAL:

ENSURE EFFECTIVE USE OF CURRENT AND FUTURE FINANCIAL RESOURCES IN ORDER TO MEET THE NEEDS OF WASHINGTON STATE'S FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Section 6 Grants: Staff met with other programs to develop a strategy for submitting Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 6 funds that are administered through NOAA. The funding from NOAA is significantly increased from \$500k to \$12 million this year and we anticipate Department projects to score well in the process. Right now, staff are planning on submitting projects related to: 1) green sturgeon, 2) eulachon, 3) Puget Sound rockfish, 4) Steller sea lions, and 5) listed whales. Final proposals are due to NOAA by October of this year.

COMPETENCE GOAL:

IMPLEMENT PROCESSES THAT PRODUCE SOUND AND PROFESSIONAL DECISIONS, CULTIVATE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND BUILD PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND AGENCY CREDIBILITY

Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management (CRM): Staff met in Ellensburg to discuss the timeline for completing and issuing the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). New timelines were set to:

1) finish addressing public comments; 2) make edits to develop the final EIS; 3) complete the grazing plan and permit; 4) acquire final approvals; and then complete fencing and spring work by the third week of October.

Staff is preparing an additional section which summarizes rangeland health and condition across the multiple ecological sites and pastures in the CRM area. This will allow the development of more site-specific analyses of livestock grazing impacts, and will allow interpretation of broad-scale patterns in the status of different rangeland ecological sites as they relate to grazing history. Public comments on the EIS indicated concern over the lack of site-specific analyses. Staff continued developing the Public Comments section of the EIS which will include Department responses to specific comments.

Seabird Sanctuary – Human Remains: USFWS reported that human remains were found on the Zella M. Schultz Seabird Sanctuary. A Jefferson County Deputy investigated and thought they were old. The Refuge contacted the Jamestown Tribe and their archeologist dug-up the skulls and reburied them away from the water on Department property. The State archeologist was contacted and stated the site should remain undisturbed. The Jamestown Tribe would like to excavate all of the human remains and rebury them. It is not uncommon to find mastodon bones and other fossils in the banks of the Refuge.

Summer School Presentations: Regional staff spent several hours over four days participating in a middle school summer school program in Columbia County, giving presentations on wildlife population modeling, fish habitat requirements and demonstrations, wildlife and fur identification, local geology associated with volcanic activity, and other science related presentations.

Agency rule-making website: The rule-making webpage was completed and incorporated into the main Department website on July 24. Created to comply with HB 1475, the site provides the public with links to permanent agency rules, emergency rules, and rules under development. Information on comment periods and public hearings on rules under development also will be supplied. Further enhancements will be made to the website over the next two weeks

Illegal Fishing Guide Arrested: Enforcement Detectives and Officers along with British Columbia (B.C.) Fisheries Investigators took an undercover fishing trip with an illegal guide. They left from Blaine Marina, and headed to Saturna Island to fish for bottom fish. The plan was that if they caught and retained and/or wasted rockfish, B.C. Fisheries and Oceans would be called in to arrest the guide and seize his vessel. Within two hours they had caught an overlimit of rockfish, and two lingcod (one over 25 pounds caught by the Officer). The guide had wasted five rockfish (by high-grading and feeding rockfish to eagles) and had retained five (the limit is one per person). The guide was arrested without incident, and his boat was seized. Then Officers executed a search warrant on the guide's Blaine residence and vehicle. The vehicle was seized for forfeiture. This concludes a 3-month investigation of the unlicensed fishing guide.

SCIENCE GOAL:

PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT AND RESPONSIBLE USE OF SOUND AND OBJECTIVE SCIENCE TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING

Lands Forum: The Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordination Group is sponsoring its first Lands Forum Public meeting. State agencies will be presenting and coordinating their respective efforts on land acquisitions and disposals for the 2009-11 biennium. The GIS shop is generating a prototype map of all planned (funded) land acquisition projects for display and discussion at the public meeting.

Prairie Grouse Publication: Mike Schroeder was a co-author on a manuscript titled “Greater Sage-Grouse Population Trends and Likelihood of Persistence” for a monograph in Studies in Avian Biology (Cooper Ornithological Society). The senior author was Oz Garten (University of Idaho). The manuscript is the most important manuscript in the monograph because it outlines the current status of sage-grouse in North America. The manuscript was sent out for review and was a topic of conversation at the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies summer meeting in Newport Beach, California. Although this is the third range-wide review of sage-grouse data since 2004, all three analyses have illustrated the same points, despite the fact that the types of analyses have differed substantially.

Pierce County Crescent Valley Biodiversity Management Area Stewardship Plan: Wildlife Program and Habitat Program staff completed a wildlife analysis to assist the local community with development of the Crescent Valley Biodiversity Management Area (BMA) Stewardship Plan. The analysis included development density recommendations based on primary stressors to focal species. The analysis informed zoning amendments proposed by the Pierce County Biodiversity Alliance and the Crescent Valley Alliance to the Pierce County Planning Commission. Department staff testified in support of the revised Crescent Valley BMA boundary to include the entire Crescent Valley watershed and zoning amendments that would require low impact development techniques in the BMA.

A New Concept in Fishery Survey Method: Marine research section staff was invited to speak on a new concept in fishery survey method with the title “An alternative sampling approach for spatial fishery survey based on stereology” in an international Spatial Pollock modeling workshop held in Seattle, July 7-10. Pollock is the largest fishery in the world. They live in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, which is the largest marine ecosystem in the world. The invited speakers and attendants came from different parts of the United States and other countries, e.g., South Korea, Argentina, Chile, New Zealand, and Australia.

Stereology is a spatial version of sampling theory. It was initially developed in biology and materials science as a quick way of analyzing three-dimensional solid materials from information visible on a two-dimensional plane section through the material. Stereological methods are almost “assumption free.” This means we do not need to know the spatial distribution of habitats within the target survey area. In addition, it may be not bias or change with time. Examples from Monte Carlo integration of a surface with points generated by random and systematic sampling were given. Extension to high dimensions, e.g., the spatial and diurnal scale in fisheries and salmon redd survey, were provided. Comparison of the assumptions and restrictions of fishery and stereological survey samplings were discussed. Edge effect and bias correction were illustrated with fishery examples, IPHC longline rockfish survey, and groundfish bottom travel survey. With the combination of stereology and other existing survey methods, e.g., stratified sampling or adaptive sampling, it can provide extra unbiased spatial survey designs that can help fishery managers and scientists to reduce the transportation cost and staff time.

In the final discussion of the workshop, stereological survey will be adopted in developing new pollock survey design to investigate the effect of spatial, temporal, and environment changes on its density changes.