

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE  
FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION**

December 12-13, 2008

**FISH AND WILDLIFE GOAL:**

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

**Steelhead Resource Management Plan:** The Steelhead Resource Management Plan was submitted by the deadline of November 14, 2008, to NMFS to meet the requirements for the 4(d) take exemption. All the tribes participated in some form (from a little to extensive participation) in developing the plan. It is up to NMFS to decide if the plan meets the requirements for the 4(d) take exemption. No timeline has been given by NMFS for review of the harvest plan.

**Department Ineligible for Farm Bill Programs:** Don Larsen, Wildlife Program, met with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff to discuss how the new 2008 federal Farm Bill made state government owned lands ineligible for the Direct and Counter-cyclical program (DCP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP and CREP). However, lessees who rent Department agricultural lands will continue to be eligible for these programs. Existing CRP contracts will not be affected, although in the future the only means for the Department to derive CRP income will be through cash leases. In recent years, the Department has annually received \$25,000-\$32,000 in direct CRP payments and \$17,000-\$21,000 in DCP payments.

**Olympic Fisher Update:** Recently an adult male fisher died in a vehicle collision on Highway 101, north of Forks. This is the third mortality for this project; two adult females have also died (1 to a bobcat and 1 to an unknown cause). With the assistance of the wildlife manager of the Makah Tribe's Forestry Department, staff were able to capture and radio-collar a male whose abdominal implant transmitter was malfunctioning (August 30, 2008). This male gained approximately 3 pounds since he was released on January 28, 2008, and appears in excellent condition. He continues to use an area on and around the Makah Reservation in the northwestern corner of the Olympia Peninsula.

**Buckhorn Mine Coordination Meeting:** Habitat Program staff, along with the Department of Ecology (DOE) and the Okanogan Highlands Alliance (OHA), recently attended the first annual coordination meeting held at Buckhorn Mine. The Buckhorn Mine, presently operated by Kinross Gold from Toronto, Canada, recently began processing gold ore after almost 20 years of environmental review and several major legal battles. The Department, DOE, and OHA met with Kinross representatives and their consultant to discuss project monitoring and mitigation requirements as spelled out in the Department's, DOE's, and OHA's separate written mitigation agreements. This meeting was more informational than substantive, but helped lay the groundwork for future meetings between Kinross, the agencies, and OHA, and helped establish timelines for necessary project monitoring and mitigation requirement completion.

**Proposed Timber Sales and Forest Fuel Reduction:** Region 2 Habitat staff have been working with the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition to provide input to the U.S. Forest Service Wenatchee River Ranger District concerning a Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) timber harvest proposal. It is recognized that the Chumstick watershed in Chelan County is extremely vulnerable to catastrophic fire and that restoration forestry must be done judiciously to prevent a high intensity forest fire. The group of stakeholders, including local residents, timber interests, and federal, state, and local governments have drafted a 16-page set of recommendations. This consensus report provides specific recommendations for landowner safety in areas where private lands are close to where controlled burns will take place. It also provides direction about roads and helicopter logging by emphasizing the need to minimize re-opening closed roads and closing them again after harvest. It provides guidance for the protection of wildlife habitat through retaining all big/old trees, using regeneration cuts only as a last resort, and protecting spotted owl habitat where it occurs. The group has had the opportunity to work with the Forest Service on this sale prior to the formal SEPA process.

**Comments on Puget Sound Action Agenda:** Habitat Program staff participated in a review of the draft Puget Sound Partnership Action Agenda, which recognizes many ongoing programs, as well as new actions, in which the Department is a lead or key partner. Comments focused on the need to recognize and provide support for the Department's technical assistance to salmon and steelhead recovery efforts, land use/shoreline planning, forest management, and implementation of watershed planning. Staff also pointed to omissions in the action list related to HPA improvements and the successful Lead Entity Program.

**Rocky Reach Hydro Project – Chelan PUD:** For several months, Habitat Program Major Projects staff have assisted an ad hoc group of Department and Chelan PUD employees to develop a fairly detailed initial five-year management plan anticipated to be required by FERC upon issuance of the new license for Rocky Reach. Approximately \$2,580,000 should be available for wildlife developments on the Chelan Wildlife Area. The Department has provided Chelan PUD with cost estimates for the restoration of about 1,300-1,400 acres of abandoned agricultural fields, primarily on Chelan Butte, and for other projects. Mitigation funds will be used to create self-maintaining shrub-steppe habitat vegetated by bunchgrasses and shrubs such as lupine, bitterbrush, etc. An additional objective is to maintain strips of forage crops within the larger expanses of restored shrub-steppe. These strips would provide annual, high quality forage and would serve as firebreaks.

**Critical Areas Ordinance Settlement Conference:** Habitat Program staff attended another settlement conference with Yakima County staff and a county commissioner regarding Washington State's appeal of Yakima County's Critical Areas Ordinance. We have reached preliminary agreement on our three primary concerns: the protection of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and habitats; species and habitats of local importance; and protection of Type 5 streams. In addition, we are in agreement with Yakima County's progress on the maps that designate and protect habitat that have sensitive, threatened, and endangered species as a primary association. While it appears that negotiations are complete, all commissioners must agree upon a final draft of the proposed changes and maps and additional public review processes must occur prior to adoption.

**PUBLIC GOAL:**

*ENSURE SUSTAINABLE FISH AND WILDLIFE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFIT*

**November Razor Clam Opener:** Most recreational razor clam diggers who participated in the November opener were rewarded with limits of 15 clams and good weather in which to dig them. We estimate a total of 25,300 digger trips were made on the four beaches that were open for harvest. The average catch was 14.0 clams per digger trip. The average size of the clams was similar on all beaches and estimated at 4.3 inches. Overall, catch estimates are on track with pre-season predictions and we hope to soon announce some additional harvest dates in January and February 2009.

**Voights Creek Hatchery:** On Wednesday, November 12, the Voights Creek watershed received over seven inches of rainfall, which caused significant flooding at the Voights Creek Hatchery. The high water caused a significant amount of bedload movement. Hatchery staff worked constantly through the night, brushing and flushing the upper gravity intake, and cleaning incubation headtroughs and vertical incubators of sand and silt. The water level peaked approximately 4 inches below the “recent record” flood of 2006, but still caused significant problems. Chest waders were necessary in order to access the hatchery building from the parking area. A layer of sandbags kept yearling coho and steelhead from escaping their rearing ponds. As water began to drop on November 13, it became apparent that the lower pumped intake screen box was totally full of gravel and that water flow was not going to be adequate to keep the fish alive. Maintenance staff arrived and began excavating gravel. Over 200 yards of gravel were excavated by Friday afternoon and yet there was still not enough water being supplied to the intake. Maintenance had a 6 inch diesel powered water pump delivered and installed, which kept the pumped intake supplied with water through the weekend.

We appreciate the efforts of all the staff for their hard work and diligence to keep the hatchery functioning. Because of everyone’s teamwork and dedication, no fish were lost during this flood.

**Boating Facilities Program:** The Department did very well in this year’s Boating Facilities Program (BFP) evaluations. We are slated to receive funding for six full projects and one partially funded project, for a total of \$3,729,949. The approved projects include Olson’s Resort, Newman Lake, Patterson (Columbia River), Langsdorf Landing, Lake Samish, and Long Lake.

**St. Helens Land Access Program:** So far this year nearly 50 people have signed up as Department volunteers during special permit elk hunts and have participated in weekday motorized access facilitation to the northern portion of the Weyerhaeuser St. Helens Tree Farm. Hunters are appreciative of the effort and individuals from many volunteer groups are enjoying the opportunity. We would like to thank the volunteers for all their time and effort and look forward to continuing to work collaboratively in implementing a safe and successful program.

**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*

**Lead Entity Contract Amendments Completed:** The Lead Entity Program has completed contract amendments for 15 Puget Sound lead entities for the Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration Funds (PSAR) program. Late last year the Puget Sound lead entities were awarded 5% capacity funds through the Recreation and Conservation Office in the amount of \$1.88 million. The activities funded through this program include current project implementation, future project development, implementation of the Habitat Work Schedule, and marketing the recovery plan. The Lead Entity Program is in charge of administering this program.

**COMPETENCE GOAL:**

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

**2009 License Catalog Delivered Ahead of Schedule:** Each year our hunting and fishing licenses are made available for purchase starting on or before December 1 to allow citizens to plan ahead for the upcoming seasons. In 2006, issues with the new automated licensing system (WILD) delayed the availability of the 2007 licenses for purchase. However, in 2007, the Licensing Division was successful in having the 2008 licenses available on time, delivering the license catalog on November 30. This year, the Division delivered the license catalog on November 24. Customers were now able to buy their 2009 licenses a full seven days early at any of the more than 550 licensed dealers or online at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/>.