

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

November 7-8, 2008

**FISH AND WILDLIFE GOAL:**

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

**Salmon Creek Estuary Restoration:** Thirteen acres of marine estuary have been restored at two sites near the mouth of Salmon Creek, Jefferson County. This was a cooperative project with the North Olympic Salmon Coalition (NOSC). Twenty-four thousand cubic yards of wood waste and gravel fill was removed from an old mill site. Material was removed to the pre-fill vegetative mat. One hundred fifty cubic yards of contaminated materials were also removed. A second site along Salmon Creek was also restored with the removal of 36,000 cubic yards of soil. Both sites are now complete. Total cost for the project contract was \$1 million, provided by NOSC generated grant funds.

**Great Fishing in Sprague Lake:** Sprague Lake was treated with rotenone in the fall of 2007 to reestablish a favorable gamefish fishery. The intent was to increase angler use and economic activity in rural eastern Washington. Following rotenone treatment, the lake was restocked with approximately 350,000 rainbow trout (fry and catchables), 25,000 bluegill, 10,000 black crappie, and 7,500 largemouth bass. Fish managers' expectations were that the trout fishery would develop enough to support a recreational fishery for five years until the warmwater fish populations developed enough to provide for harvestable fisheries.

After a slow start to the recreational fishery this spring, fishing activity has taken an upturn in the last 45 days. To the anglers' pleasant surprise, they have discovered that the rainbow trout fishery is much better than anticipated. The trout are averaging 15 to 17 inches, with the occasional fish up to 22 inches. Since the "discovery" of this fishery, there have been 50 shore anglers and 15 to 50 boats per day, weather permitting. Although the fishing has been outstanding, there are some problems with regulation compliance, crowd control, and littering. The Fish and Enforcement Programs are coordinating efforts to address these issues and to create signage in multiple languages to communicate fishing regulations to anglers.

**White River (Wenatchee) Spring Chinook Captive Broodstock:** On October 21, the remaining BY2007 White River captive broodstock located at AquaSeed were transferred to Little White Salmon National Fish Hatchery. In addition, a pilot transfer of BY2006 (93 fish total) was completed. As of October 31, there had been only one fish lost from BY2007 and no losses from BY2006. If no significant mortality occurs during the 21-day observation period, the remaining BY2006 fish will be moved in November.

**Tokul Creek Hatchery:** The Fish Program is proposing operational changes at the Tokul Creek Hatchery in Fall City. The proposed changes are primarily designed to support naturally spawning salmon and steelhead in the Snoqualmie watershed. In addition, the proposal would provide reductions in operating costs. The initial proposal would have discontinued steelhead

production at Tokul Creek Hatchery and transferred 80-90 percent of that production to another state hatchery in the watershed.

Public meetings were conducted September 9 (WDFW Mill Creek Office) and September 11 (Issaquah Hatchery) to explain the initial proposal and receive public input. More than 150 people attended the two public meetings. Most of the public stressed the importance of maintaining steelhead fishing opportunities in the Snoqualmie River and strongly opposed eliminating steelhead production at Tokul Creek Hatchery.

We reviewed the public comments, our conservation objectives, and our budgetary constraints and developed a revised proposal. Under the revised proposal, the Department would continue to produce and release steelhead at the Tokul Creek Hatchery. However, the Department would eliminate out-plantings – juvenile fish releases at locations other than the hatchery – of summer and winter steelhead in the Snoqualmie River and its tributaries.

The Department previously initiated discussions with the tribes and will now expand the discussion to include the revised proposal. We will also discuss the revised proposal with legislators and the Steelhead and Cutthroat Policy Advisory Group.

**Critical Areas Ordinance Settlement Conferences:** Staff from the Department’s Habitat Program, the Attorney General’s Office, and Community Trade and Economic Development have attended two sessions of settlement conferences in the past month regarding Washington State’s appeal of Yakima County’s Critical Areas Ordinance. The Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearing Board is mediating the settlement conferences. Significant progress has been made with regard to our three primary issues of concern. Our concerns pertaining to the process for designation and protection of Species and Habitats of Local Importance, and protection of Type 5 streams have been largely resolved, provided the draft Critical Areas Ordinance being developed by Yakima County includes the agreed upon changes in language. In addition, progress has been made with regard to the designation and protection of habitat of which sensitive, threatened, and endangered species have a primary association. While we have largely agreed upon the process by which designated critical habitats are reviewed and protected, we have not yet agreed on the maps and habitat descriptions. We have provided alternative maps to Yakima County for its consideration and we anticipate being able to develop an agreed upon mapped area of designation soon.

**Selah Gap to Union Gap Restoration Project:** Central Pre-Mix Concrete Company (CPM) was issued a conditional permit to mine gravel in the Selah Gap to Union Gap reach of the Yakima River at the eastern edge of the floodplain. A comprehensive flood management plan was also recently completed by Yakima County within this stream reach. As part of the permit mitigation requirements, CPM committed to mitigation that included removing a dike and establishing a new location for a setback dike that would significantly reconnect the Yakima River to its historic floodplain and improve juvenile salmonid rearing habitat and production. A “Gap to Gap” Committee was established to work on restoration and mitigation efforts for CPM’s mining proposal, including other restoration components involving land acquisitions by the Bureau of Reclamation and significant bridge enlargement by the Department of Transportation. Recently, the long-time operations manager of CPM was inexplicably fired and

an attorney was appointed as its Committee representative. The new representative is suggesting that the old representative's prior commitments are not valid. CPM is now suggesting significant changes to its original project proposal and mitigation plan and expects that environmental permitting will move forward as planned under the existing SEPA review. Resource agencies, including Department Habitat Program staff and the Yakama Nation, suggest that SEPA review should be reinitiated, or amended, to address the impacts associated with proposed changes. The new proposal by CPM has significant potential to affect Yakima County's efforts to remove and setback a dike that is currently out of compliance with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers standards. Approximately \$15 million has been spent by involved parties to reconnect the Yakima River to its historic floodplain and implement Yakima County's recently completed Flood Hazard Management Plan. Habitat Program staff continue to work with our partners to preserve these and future investments in this major floodplain restoration project.

**Red Tail Reach Salmon Enhancement Project in Whatcom Creek:** In October, contractors for the city of Bellingham completed the initial phase of the Red Tail Reach salmon restoration project in Whatcom Creek. This project is designed to increase rearing habitat for juvenile salmon and holding habitat for adult salmon in the creek. The project involves removal of man-made fill from the floodplain, creation of backwater areas and oxbows, and placement of large woody debris in a 1,550-foot section of the creek. The area will be planted with native vegetation in the coming months. Funding for this project came from a settlement for natural resource damages resulting from an Olympic Pipe Line gasoline spill into Whatcom Creek in 1999. The Whatcom Creek Trustee Council and the city of Bellingham have now nearly completed implementing the restoration plan for the 1999 gasoline spill.

**Withrow Wind Power Project (Douglas County PUD):** Douglas County Commissioners wrote the Governor, asserting that the Department had obstructed the Withrow Wind Power Project and the environmental analysis of the project. A letter of reply has been prepared for the Governor's Office. The letter references notes from the September 5 meeting with Douglas County PUD. At the meeting, we expressed our inability to support the project in the current project area and current configuration. The Department did recommend to the PUD that it move its project away from the Douglas County greater sage grouse population. Also in the letter, we restated our inability to stop a project or the environmental analysis of one. The Department is greatly concerned with this proposal to build a wind power project in and near the largest island of greater sage grouse habitat in the Douglas County population. The project area also includes two grouse lek complexes. Building in the current project area will degrade and fragment sage grouse habitat in an area with documented use by sage grouse.

**Vantage Wind Power Project (Invenergy):** Invenergy has offered some mitigation money for greater sage grouse studies, land purchase, or translocations to mitigate for the overhead lines and center substation placement. At an internal Department meeting with the sage grouse experts, we determined that we could accept mitigation instead of avoidance on the overhead line with the correct amount of mitigation to offset the impacts. We decided to pursue land purchase/easements as a preferred mitigation, followed by the removal of two of the most eastern turbines, followed by money for studies and translocations. Mitigation will revolve around the preservation of the migration corridor for sage grouse between the Yakima Training Center and the Department's wildlife areas to the north.

**Admiralty Inlet Tidal Power:** In a meeting on October 2, Snohomish County PUD announced that it intends to proceed with just one of seven proposed sites. The PUD made it clear that it was a pilot project. The PUD plans to place one tidal turbine near the Whidbey Island port of Keystone. It would be completely submerged and placed in deep water to avoid conflicts with boats. If unacceptable impacts occur, then the turbine would be removed. Environmental and engineering studies will be performed in conjunction with this project. Actual placement of the experimental turbine is one to two years in the future. The Department and other resource agencies are discussing research needs.

**FERC License for the Baker Project (Skagit Basin):** FERC issued a new license to Puget Sound Energy (PSE) on October 17 to operate the Baker River Hydroelectric Project for another 50 years. Highlights of the new license include articles requiring the construction of new fish collection facilities to move juvenile fish downstream and adult fish upstream; replacement of the existing salmon hatchery with a more modern facility designed to incubate up to 7,000 pounds of eggs and to rear up to 20,000 pounds of fish; to acquire deciduous forest habitat for birds; to acquire and enhance land for elk; to acquire riparian habitat; and to replace the powerhouse so the project can release a minimum of 1,000 cfs at all times instead of the 80 cfs now released during non-peak power demand periods. There is a 30-day appeal period. The license does contain all of the articles from the settlement agreement signed by 22 organizations four years ago, reducing the likelihood of an appeal.

**Touchet River Tree Felling:** Staff began implementation of a large woody debris enhancement project on the Tucannon River (Wooten Wildlife Area). This is a cooperative project between the Department and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Umatilla National Forest. The Tucannon River in this area has experienced two severe wildfires in the past five years, leaving many dead and dying trees in the riparian area. Direction felling of approximately 90 trees along the river, and adjoining Cummins Creek, will provide wood to an area that is considered wood starved. By felling the trees manually, they can be placed in a manner that will maximize their use as habitat and increase stability. All trees marked for felling met the Department's Stream Habitat Restoration Guidelines. Project cost was essentially nothing. Department staff took care of permitting and marking of trees and the USFS utilized this as a training exercise and supplied workers at no cost.

**Methow Wildlife Area Fish Passage:** The Department construction crews recently completed the removal of two fish passage barriers in the Methow Wildlife Area. One site, on Ramsey Creek, was totally removed and not replaced as part of the Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP). The other site is on Cougar Creek where an undersized culvert with an outfall drop was replaced with a properly sized culvert.

**Stillwater Wildlife Area Fish Passage:** Department construction crews recently completed the removal of eight fish passage barriers on independent tributaries to the Snoqualmie River on the Stillwater Wildlife Area, located three miles north of Carnation. Two dams were removed and roughened channels were constructed. Two culverts were replaced with pedestrian bridge crossings. Two culverts were replaced with larger fish passable culverts. Two culverts were removed completely. These projects will provide salmonids better access to floodplain rearing habitat.

**Monitoring Fisher Reintroduction Success:** Continued tracking of 15 fishers with functional radio-collars has indicated that all are still alive. Additional good news is that every one of the males and 7 out of 10 females appear to have established home ranges. The established home ranges are throughout much of the Olympic Peninsula and indicate habitat suitability beyond the Olympic National Park.

The goal for this second year of reintroduction is to capture 40 British Columbia fishers. The trapping coordinator is already distributing traps to participating trappers and preparing the captive facility. More information on the reintroduction can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/diversity/soc/fisher/updates.htm>.

**Hunting Season Openers:** The opening day for modern firearm deer and waterfowl hunting seasons was October 11. Overall, this was a mild opener, with deer harvest and hunter participation somewhat lower than in past years and waterfowl harvest about normal.

## **PUBLIC GOAL:**

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

**Region 5 High Lake Fish Plants Completed for 2008:** The annual planting of trout into the high lakes of southwest Washington was completed in September. Over 65 lakes were stocked by Department staff and volunteers who trucked, backpacked, horse packed, and helicopter stocked these fish throughout the mountains of the region. The thousands of fry, fingerling, and catchable rainbow, cutthroat, brown, and sterile eastern brook trout were from Mossyrock and Goldendale hatcheries.

## **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***

**Surplus Vehicle Sales:** Last fiscal year; the Department cleared \$87,097 from the sale of surplus vehicles and farm implements through the General Administration Surplus Program. These sales were facilitated through auctions at the main service center in Auburn, as well as special auctions through EBay.

## **COMPETENCE GOAL:**

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

**Workshop with Canadians on Removal of Derelict Gear:** On October 8-9, Department staff participated in a workshop with Canadian representatives on the removal of derelict gear in marine waters. The workshop was jointly sponsored by the Governor's Office and the premier of British Columbia, facilitated by our Department, and hosted by the Northwest Straits Commission. The workshop was attended by nearly 40 representatives from both sides of the border. The first day was spent on discussions of the problem of identifying and removing derelict gear and the second day was a field trip to observe the removal of gillnets near Lummi

Island. We have been involved in the removal of derelict nets and crab pots since 2003. Currently, we estimate that approximately 4,000 derelict gillnets and 15,000 derelict crab pots remain in Puget Sound. There is interest among the Canadians in expanding the program into British Columbia and we discussed ways we could help make that expansion happen.

**Senator Patty Murray and Representative Brian Baird – Willapa Bay Spartina Press Conference and Reception:** Department staff attended the Willapa Bay spartina press conference in South Bend. The success of the spartina eradication program in Willapa Bay was highlighted, as was the need for continued vigilance and control work, including funding to support this work. Speakers included Senator Patty Murray, Congressman Brian Baird, and others. The Department has been a major player controlling spartina in the bay for over a decade. The Department's dedicated Spartina Control Crews work in challenging, harsh conditions, at all hours of the day, planning around tide levels and access obstacles in order to control spartina in Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and in Puget Sound.

## **SCIENCE GOAL:**

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

**Midwater Survey of Hood Canal:** In conjunction with the University of Washington and the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group, the Department conducted a survey of the abundance of aquatic life in the southern portion of Hood Canal. The purpose was to investigate the effects of low levels of dissolved oxygen on the abundance and distribution of aquatic life in the Canal. The survey was done over three nights at the end of September. As was the case in the July survey of the same area, fish abundance was low. The catch was dominated by jellyfish, with a few dogfish, anchovy, and a very few immature salmon. The red lion's mane jellyfish were quite large, averaging over 20 pounds each in some areas.

**ROV Pilot Survey of Yelloweye Rockfish Habitats off Washington Coast to Determine Optimal Survey Design:** During the week of September 15, staff of the Marine Fish Science Unit conducted an 8-day remotely operated vehicle (ROV) survey off the Cape Flattery area. The objectives of this survey include: 1) quantifying yelloweye rockfish densities along the tracks of the long line survey; 2) quantifying yelloweye rockfish diel migration, if any; 3) detailed habitat mapping of areas of high yelloweye abundance; and 4) collecting other *in situ* information that may affect yelloweye rockfish abundance. This project is supported by a rockfish research fund, established by the Legislature and funded through license sales. The survey was successful due in part to favorable weather conditions.

**EMPLOYEE GOAL:**

*CREATE AN AGENCY ENVIRONMENT THAT NURTURES PROFESSIONALISM, ACCOUNTABILITY, ENTHUSIASM, AND DEDICATION IN ORDER TO ATTRACT, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN A WORKFORCE THAT CAN SUCCESSFULLY CARRY OUT THE MANDATE OF THE AGENCY*

**Spokane Region 1 – Laboratory Building:** The Ginno Construction of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, was awarded the contract for the laboratory building in Spokane. The contractor started preliminary clearing of the site on October 20. The footing excavation started October 31.