

**Director's Report to the Fish and Wildlife Commission**  
**October 3-4, 2008**  
*“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.

**Fish and Wildlife Goal:**

*Achieve healthy, diverse and sustainable fish and wildlife populations and their supporting habitats*

**Tokul Creek Public Meetings:** Two public meetings were held, one on September 9 at the Mill Creek office, and one on September 11 at the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery, to discuss proposed operation changes at the Tokul Creek Hatchery. These changes are designed to support naturally spawning steelhead in the Snoqualmie watershed and provide for efficiencies in operations.

During the meetings, Department staff outlined the proposed changes to operations at the Tokul Creek Hatchery as implementation steps considered within the context of recommendations by the Hatchery Scientific Review Group, policy guidance from the Statewide Steelhead Management Plan, and direction through the Hatchery Reform process. Within this context, it was reiterated that protection of wild steelhead stocks was the highest priority through promotion of region-wide conservation goals and implementation of hatchery program modifications while supporting sustainable fisheries.

The proposed changes at Tokul Creek were eliminated off-station winter steelhead plants and relocation of on-station winter steelhead releases, off-station summer steelhead releases, and trout produced for the lowland and high lakes programs. Implementation of these changes could allow for all or part of the Snoqualmie watershed to be designated as a “wild steelhead management zone” that would be managed exclusively for wild fish populations. These changes could help increase production of the river system's wild steelhead populations by minimizing the number of competing hatchery-produced fish on the spawning grounds.

Public comments during the meetings were generally not favorable to the proposed steps. Since the public meetings, staff have met internally to incorporate the public comments into their considerations and are continuing to do so.

**Snake River Fall Chinook Fishery:** The Department opened a fall chinook fishery on a limited portion of the Snake River on Thursday, September 25. The fishery is projected to run through October 15. Lower Snake River chinook fisheries are set up under the umbrella of ESA allowable impacts established for the Columbia River mainstem fishery. The new U.S. v Oregon 10-year agreement allows the state the option for a Snake River fishery under the expanded ESA impact (above 8.25 %) for non-tribal fisheries when two conditions are met: 1) the Upriver Bright (URB) fall chinook estimate meets or exceeds 200,000 at the Columbia River mouth, and 2) the Snake River wild fall chinook estimate at the Columbia River mouth exceeds 6,000 fish. Those conditions have been met with the recent run update (Sept 18) by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that increased the URB return

estimate to 212,500 and the preseason estimate for Snake River wild fall chinook at the Columbia River mouth was 6,388. The ESA limit for 2008 is now 11% (increased from 8.25%) for Columbia River non-tribal fisheries because of the increased run size estimate. The Department has set aside 0.5% of the total 11% impacts for sport fisheries in the lower Snake River. Approximately nine miles of the Snake River, from one half mile down stream of the Tucannon River mouth to one mile above Little Goose Dam, will be open for this limited fishery. Angler catch rates will be monitored closely and Washington Snake River salmon fisheries may be closed prior to October 15 based upon ongoing harvest quota evaluations.

**Oregon Spotted Frog Release:** Wildlife Diversity and Regional staff coordinated and supervised the release of over 536 Oregon Spotted frogs onto Fort Lewis. This cooperative frog propagation project involved several agencies, zoos, and nongovernmental organizations. Eggs were collected from wildlife populations in Thurston and Klickitat counties in March and April 2008 and delivered to Northwest Trek and Oregon Zoo. Both facilities head-started frogs to increase survival of vulnerable life stages. Prior to release, each frog was injected in the hind foot with a plastic elastomer that contained a unique color indicating its source, while a smaller subset was fitted with transmitters upon release to track movements.

The Oregon Spotted frogs have not occupied Fort Lewis for several decades. There are historical records for Oregon Spotted frogs throughout the lowland Puget Sound, however the current range has been dramatically reduced. The Fort Lewis release event was enthusiastically covered by the media throughout Washington and Oregon.

**Offshore Energy Development:** Habitat Program staff prepared and submitted comments and recommendations on rules proposed by the federal Mineral Management Service (MMS) to open the offshore areas in Washington to the development of alternative energy facilities. These facilities may include wind power, wave power, current power, and solar power. MMS has the authority to lease offshore areas beyond a three mile offshore boundary. One proponent is currently interested in developing wind and wave generation facilities off Grays Harbor. The MMS proposed rules and procedures require multiple environmental assessments prior to leasing and construction activities. Habitat staff expressed concerns that the rules lack a process to determine potential fish and wildlife losses, impacts to offshore fishing grounds, economic losses to fishermen, and mitigation.

**Wind Power News:** The third Wind Power Guidelines draft is near completion. Additional comments are anticipated. Once the comments are received and incorporated, the draft will be circulated for additional review in preparation for the next stakeholder meeting. In the meantime, wind power projects continue to be proposed and monitored by Major Projects staff. Staff has expressed concerns with the proposed Grayland Wind Farm's potential impacts to migrating marbled murrelets, shorebirds, raptors, and waterfowl. The Habitat Program is waiting to provide comments to the project proponent, Coastal Community Action Program (CCAP), until the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has commented regarding possible take of marbled murrelets. On the other side of the state, monitoring of wildlife mortality at the Nine Canyon Wind Farm near Tri-Cities continues. During a recent meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee for this project, a major wild fire broke out on Jump Off Joe Mountain as a result from a shorted out turbine, according to news reports. Local and regional fire fighting resources as well as an air tanker out of Richland were used to fight the fire.

**Public Goal:**

*Ensure sustainable fish and wildlife opportunities for social and economic benefit*

**Epidemic at Mayr Brothers:** Coho rearing at Mayr Bros Rearing Ponds are undergoing an epidemic due to botulism. Loss at this time is declining after initiation of a tetracycline treatment. Loss to date is estimated to be approximately 110,000 fish with 220,000 fish remaining. Since the loss from botulism is caused by a toxin, it is difficult to control. Clostridium, the bacteria causing botulism, is always present in soils and if mortality accumulates on the pond bottom in low oxygen conditions, this bacterium can grow in the dead fish and produce the toxin. Treating the fish with antibiotics does not prevent them from dying from the toxin, but will prevent growth of the bacteria after they die. Effective treatment is dependent on being able to keep the pond clean and remove mortality frequently.

Botulism has been a routine problem in this pond over the years. It is a large dirt bottomed rearing pond which is too deep to effectively remove the mortality and cannot be cleaned until the fish are released. The pond has poor flow patterns and is supplied by river water, which is high in organic material providing a perfect environment for the bacteria to grow. Due to this recurring problem and the difficulty of mass marking at this site, the production was moved to Humptulips Hatchery for summer rearing the last several years. However, due to the IHNV detections in the Humptulips River basin this program could no longer utilize the Humptulips Hatchery. Staff is evaluating what can be done to avoid this level of loss in the future, but until capital dollars are made available for major improvements botulism will likely be an ongoing issue at this facility.

**Three-year Hunting Season Package Public Meetings:** September 4 was the last of seven public meetings held throughout the state to discuss alternatives for the upcoming three-year hunting season package. Deer and elk hunting issues were the most popular discussion topics, with specific interest in antler point restrictions for deer, increased muzzleloader opportunity, baiting for deer and elk, and making antlerless white-tailed deer permits more effective in northeastern Washington. Other topics of high interest included adjusting special permit drawing odds for big game, the potential restriction on the use of lead shot for upland game, and hunting bear and cougar without a valid deer or elk transport tag. Comments on all of the alternatives were collected using an internet-based survey at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/seasonsetting/index.htm>. The Game Division staff will work with Regional staff to develop recommendations that will be presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission in March 2009.

**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*

**Federal Fishery Disaster Aid:** As compensation for severe limitations on 2008 coastal salmon fisheries, up to \$22 million of federal disaster relief aid is available to commercial fishers, charter boat owners, wholesalers, processors, and other businesses dependent on ocean salmon fishing in Washington.

The funds, which are part of a \$170 million disaster relief package approved by Congress earlier this year, will be provided as a grant to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC). The Commission will distribute the funds to qualified applicants in Washington, Oregon, and California.

**Competence Goal:**

*Implement processes that produce sound and professional decisions, cultivate public involvement and build public confidence and agency credibility*

**Watchable Wildlife Conference:** The sixth annual Watchable Wildlife Conference was held in Leavenworth at the Sleeping Lady Mountain Retreat. Hosted by the Department's Watchable Wildlife staff and the Tourism office at Community, Trade and Economic Development, the conference focused on recent trends in geotourism, and the developing National Geographic Central Cascades Map Project. Approximately 75 people from a variety of backgrounds participated. Attendees bestowed high praise for the presenters and the facility.

**Wildlife Diversity Wildlife Rehabilitation Project:** The Wildlife Rehabilitation Manager has conducted eastside and westside Wildlife Rehabilitators Workshops. She communicated with rehabilitators on the procedures and criteria to apply to the Department for grant funds. Funds were authorized (starting this biennium) in a special account by the Legislature to revitalize rehabilitation management by the Department. Information was also presented on federal and state rehabilitation permits, and changes in federal falconry regulations that relate to falconers being specifically authorized to conduct limited rehabilitation of raptors.

**Bank Protection Efforts on the Sauk River:** Habitat staff continue to work with several residents along the Sauk River in the town of Darrington, in Snohomish County, to approve a project that provides adequate bank stabilization with minimal impacts to the fish resources. The Sauk River is a healthy, relatively pristine river that supports all of the northwest salmon, along with steelhead and bull trout. The river flows off the north slopes of Glacier Peak and feeds into the Skagit River in Skagit County. Flows in the river regularly exceed 110,000 cfs, causing substantial bank erosion and meandering. Habitat staff are proposing a meeting with the residents and their engineer to review proposed plans and evaluate options that preserve fish habitat features.

**Online Puget Sound Crab Reporting:** This is the second year that Puget Sound crabbers have been able to report their catch on the Internet. This year, the website was available for use on the first day of reporting, September 1, and closed on September 15. The ability to report online is a valuable tool for customers to report quickly and efficiently. This option also reduces costs to the Department in staff time compiling and counting Catch Record Cards.

**Science Goal**

*Promote development and responsible use of sound and objective science to inform decision-making*

**Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV):** Shellfish fisheries staff worked in coordination with the Marine Science group, the Groundfish group and Department Enforcement to locate acoustically tagged yelloweye rockfish off the coast of Washington. Staff from Montesano

and Olympia met in Westport on in mid-September to assemble ROV equipment and set up the ROV electronics aboard the vessel *Corliss*. The following week the *Corliss* launched from Westport and headed 35 miles off the coast. The ROV was deployed in the vicinity of the last recorded locations of five tagged yelloweye. The ROV was flown over rock structures 84 meters below the surface and navigated toward tagged rockfish using a hydrophone. Department Enforcement staff positioned the *Corliss*, despite wind and currents, above the rock structures and the ROV pilot was able to get visual confirmation that these tagged rockfish were alive and well.

### **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 Office Phase 2 – Laboratory Building:** The Spokane project is to provide a fully furnished and operational Laboratory Building structure and site work at the Department's Spokane Region 1 Office. Bids were received in September, with the lowest bidder at \$1,223,396 which is 11% below the estimated cost. The top three lowest bidders were all within \$46k of each other. After completing successful reference checks, the Department is awarding the contract to the lowest bidder.