Washington Department of FISH and WILDLIFE

Fiscal sustainability—fishing and hunting license fees

SB 5385 & HB 1387: Increasing revenue to the state wildlife account

Problem: The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) faces a projected shortfall of up to $30 million in the 2011-13 biennium, due to declining State General Fund (GFS) support and expiration of a temporary surcharge on recreational fishing and hunting license sales. The department lost nearly $35 million in General Fund support in the 2009-11 biennium, resulting in a loss of 163 positions and service reductions.

In this severe budget climate, WDFW is seeking new ways to meet its basic mandate of conserving fish and wildlife resources and managing sustainable fishing and hunting opportunities.

Proposed solution: WDFW is seeking to reduce its reliance on state general funds by increasing fees for activities that benefit specific users. In this effort, WDFW has worked with stakeholders to craft proposed recreational and commercial license fee increases to sustain fishing and hunting opportunities. Base hunting and fishing license fees, which are subject to approval by the Legislature, have not changed since 1999.

The department's legislative request aims to maintain fishing and hunting opportunities through license fees that:

- Align revenue with the costs of providing opportunities
- Are competitive with fees charged in neighboring states
- Encourage family participation by continuing current youth and senior discounts
- Retain recreational license revenues in the state Wildlife Account
- Increase non-resident fishing and hunting participation
- Recover administrative costs of issuing commercial licenses.

Benefits: Fishing and hunting contribute over $1.4 billion each year to the state's economy, benefitting local communities, small business owners and the people they employ. Maintaining fishing and hunting opportunity is vital to Washington's economy and quality of life.

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WDFW fiscal sustainability—Proposal detail:

Recreational license fee increase: Would increase specific recreational license fees to maintain hunting and fishing opportunities. Revenues would range from $6 to 16 million annually, depending on the options approved.

Shift recreational license revenue to state Wildlife Account: Would deposit revenues and interest from recreational saltwater fishing, shellfishing and razor clam licenses and permits into the state Wildlife Account (WLS), shifting approximately $1.5 million annually from the state General Fund (GFS) to the WLS. GFS revenues to WDFW would be reduced by the same amount.

Commercial license fee increase: Would create license application and renewal fees to recover WDFW's direct costs for processing commercial license applications and permits. Would shift commercial license fee deposits from GFS to WLS. (Note: Aquaculture registrations would be assessed an application fee, but this proposal does not institute an aquaculture license or permit fee.)

Standardized license-transaction fees: Would create a consistent recreational license pricing structure, by adding transaction and dealers' fees to the cost of temporary fishing licenses and Puget Sound crab endorsements, raising $247,000 additional annual revenue that would be deposited to the state Wildlife Account.

Consistent dealer fees: Would impose the dealer fees on recreational licenses sold at WDFW facilities, as are currently charged for sales at retail dealers and over the Internet. A small number of recreational licenses are sold at WDFW locations to people needing assistance with purchases. By not charging a dealer fee, WDFW competes with retail dealers. Revenue from fees would be nominal and be used to offset existing WDFW staff costs for issuing license documents.

Automated commercial licenses: Would allow commercial licensees to renew commercial licenses through retail dealers or over the Internet, through WDFW's automated recreational licensing system. Currently 6,000 commercial licenses are issued manually at WDFW's headquarters. Sales would include a 10 percent transaction fee. Selling the commercial licenses through the automated system would save 300 hours of WDFW staff time annually.

Discontinue migratory bird collector stamps: Would discontinue or contract the printing and sales of migratory bird collector stamps, for an overall savings of approximately $49,000 per year. WDFW no longer uses a physical stamp to designate migratory bird validation for hunters.