



State of Washington
Department of Fish and Wildlife

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September 18, 2008

TO: The Honorable Christine O. Gregoire, Governor

FROM: Jerry Gutzwiler, Chair, Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
Jeff P. Koenings, Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

SUBJECT: Progress Report on Key WDFW Initiatives

In your letter of July 11, 2008, you asked the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to provide a review, by January 1, 2009, of four key initiatives of considerable importance to the entire state of Washington. In response to that request, we would like to provide you with this interim update on our progress on those important topics.

More than 49 percent of Washington residents (a 25 percent increase over 2001) participated in wildlife viewing, recreational fishing and hunting activities in 2006, according to a national survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In the same year, \$2.7 billion was spent on recreational fishing, hunting and wildlife-viewing activities in Washington State. (*Source: 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation, US Fish and Wildlife Service*).

We are very proud of your support for our efforts to protect and restore salmon and steelhead and, in particular, we appreciate your strong support for hatchery and harvest reform.

This state has placed the highest priority on conservation of these valuable resources and is a lead agency on the Pacific Coast in using innovative methods such as selective fisheries to control harvest. The renegotiated 10-year agreement between the U.S. and Canada, under the Pacific Salmon Treaty, is a recent example of "conservation first," and will result in thousands more Washington-origin fish returning to Washington waters to support recovery of wild fish and harvest of marked hatchery fish.

Hatchery Reform (Please refer to attached Hatchery Reform Investment Atlas):

- We have implemented nearly 800 hatchery improvements recommended by the independent Hatchery Scientific Review Group to benefit wild-fish recovery, including modifying hatchery broodstock collection protocols at 28 hatcheries associated with Chinook, coho and steelhead programs in Puget Sound and on the Washington Coast.

- We are developing a schedule of hatchery-reform actions through 2029 to align hatchery programs with wild-fish recovery plans, principles of the Hatchery Scientific Review Group and environmental regulatory requirements.
- We are implementing hatchery reform and ESA compliance on the lower Columbia River by closing one hatchery, partially re-opening another, building two new weirs and changing fish production at eight facilities, while keeping overall fish production at over 92 percent of past levels.
- We are incorporating wild salmon into our hatchery programs so the characteristics of hatchery fish more closely mimic wild fish. For example, we are incorporating natural-origin broodstock into 42 genetically integrated programs in Puget Sound and on the Washington Coast.
- We are improving the treatment of effluent in two of our four Hood Canal-area hatcheries, to meet Clean Water Act standards and help address dissolved-oxygen concerns in Hood Canal in 2005 through 2008.
- We have made costly improvements to intake screens, screen structures and fish-passage facilities at five hatcheries over the past three years, to reduce impacts to wild salmon and steelhead.

Selective Fisheries (Please refer to attached Mark-Selective Fisheries Investment Atlas):

- We are mass marking nearly all the 30 million coho salmon and 100 million Chinook salmon raised in Washington's state and tribal hatcheries for selective fishery harvest.
- We have led the way in developing scientifically sound and responsible selective harvest techniques in West Coast salmon fisheries.
- We have established 10 new marine selective fisheries for Chinook salmon since 2003, with the bulk implemented last year. A dozen freshwater selective fisheries have been expanded in recent years throughout the state for Chinook and coho salmon. In total, these selective fisheries bring more than \$63 million in economic benefit to Washington.
- Washington State is providing technical assistance and expertise for implementing new mark-selective Chinook salmon fisheries in Canada, with federal funding support, as part of the renegotiated Pacific Salmon Treaty.
- Your 2008 supplemental budget provided more than \$500,000 to expand selective sport fisheries this summer, fall and winter in Puget Sound, without which these fisheries could not be implemented.
- The Pacific Salmon Treaty was recently renegotiated, cutting harvest of thousands of Washington salmon by Canada and Alaska. We will be pursuing additional selective-

fishing opportunities to harvest additional hatchery fish provided by this agreement, while passing wild fish on to Washington spawning grounds.

- We have developed the 21st Century Salmon and Steelhead Initiative, an integrated, interdisciplinary management framework that plots a course for salmon and steelhead recovery and sustainable fisheries over the coming 50 years. The framework integrates efforts to protect wild fish, improve habitat, manage fisheries, improve hatcheries, work collaboratively with tribal resource co-managers, align WDFW staff effort and build external support for wild-fish recovery.

Economic Benefits:

- Selective fisheries across the state generated over \$63 million in economic activity in the 2007-08 fishing season.
- With the assistance of an economic consultant, the Department is further assessing the economic benefits of all Washington's fisheries, and will provide a report by January 2009.
- We have prioritized recreational use of Chinook and coho in Puget Sound, in recognition of the economic importance of these fisheries.
- Department harvest management, selective fishery implementation and our efforts to secure \$22 million in federal disaster-relief funds in response to Washington's 2008 coastal fishery restrictions all support rural communities that rely heavily on funds generated by commercial and recreational fisheries.

Tourism Expansion:

Increasing awareness of Washington State as a fishing destination is an important aspect of state tourism development. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Department are developing concepts to promote fishing opportunities and we look forward to sharing those in more detail in our January report to you. We also are working on several fronts to develop and promote wildlife-related tourism opportunities. These actions are driven by a strategic plan for wildlife-related tourism, developed jointly by WDFW/CTED and presented to the Legislature in 2004. With this plan, the two agencies continue on a mutual path of promoting wildlife viewing and nature-based tourism, highlighted by an annual conference to promote wildlife-viewing festivals and related tourism.

This year's Watchable Wildlife conference was held Sept. 3 - 4 in Leavenworth. Participants greatly appreciate the combined WDFW/CTED effort to host these gatherings. This year's conference focused on sustainable tourism and introduced the concept of "geotourism" and the new National Geographic Central Cascades Geotourism Map Project. This project will engage rural communities from Mount Rainier to White Salmon in producing a high-quality, printed map and on-line interactive map of the region's natural and cultural resources.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife also developed a plan that integrates actions to increase opportunities for wildlife viewing. That plan was presented to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission in June 2008.

Examples of the plan's action items include:

- A land-based "Whale Trail" of sites where whales can be seen from land, and those with significant whale heritage. The initial product, to be produced by early 2009, will be a map-brochure of sites, with plans for subsequent development of interpretive signage, depending on fund-raising efforts.
- A partnership with the state ferry system to display videos of underwater marine life beneath select ferry routes. Also scheduled for implementation in 2009, the project will use video monitors already installed on state ferries to display representative images of sea life under ferry routes that cross Puget Sound.
- Continued information on current fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities across the state, including coastal communities, publicized through Weekender, the Department's bi-weekly recreation report, news releases and website information.
- Wildlife viewing maps for the Interstate 5 and U.S. 97 portals to Canada. Scheduled for completion later this year, the maps are intended to entice visitors traveling through Washington to the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, B.C., to extend their stay or return here.

Finally, we will continue to develop a more detailed response to your request by January 1, 2009. If we can provide further updates or information in the meantime, please let us know, because we are proud of the progress we've made over the last several years.

Attachments (2)

cc: Fish and Wildlife Commission