

“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: November 7-8, 2008

Agenda Item 5: The Department and Tourism Expansion – **Briefing**

Prepared By: Michael O'Malley, Mick Cope, John Kerwin

Presented By: Michael O'Malley, Watchable Wildlife Coordinator, Wildlife Program
John Kerwin, Hatcheries Division Manager, Fish Program
Michelle Campbell, Product Development Manager, CTED
Marsha Massey, Director of Tourism, CTED

Background:

Commissioner Solomon attended the 2008 Watchable Wildlife Conference in Leavenworth, Washington in early September and witnessed some of the energy and enthusiasm about this subject generated by the participants, and the economic engines generated by wildlife-related recreation. She asked how we could build on this and expand to fishing and hunting as well.

In 2003, the Washington State Legislature passed SB 5011 requesting that the Departments of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) develop a strategic plan to promote wildlife-viewing tourism in Washington. These guiding principles and activities were developed:

- Provide premium wildlife viewing recreational opportunities, ensuring participant safety, conservation, and protection of the wildlife being viewed; while not diminishing existing hunting and fishing opportunity.
- Market the state as a premier national and international wildlife-viewing destination.
- Develop sites to safely accommodate viewers and wildlife.
- Utilize interpretation and development activities for wildlife sites to inform and educate visitors, communities, and vendors on ethical viewing activities.

Hunting activities contribute millions of dollars to Washington's economy each year. In 2006, 182,000 hunters in Washington spent 2.1 million days hunting. According to the 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife national survey, these hunters spent \$313 million on things such as equipment, transportation, and food and lodging, much of the latter being spent in more rural communities. In 2006, Washington hunters generated over \$17 million dollars for conservation and management through their equipment and licensing purchases.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife works with the public through advisory groups, and public outreach (e.g., meetings and surveys), to identify the best options for effectively managing game animal populations while addressing the needs and desires of a variety of hunting enthusiasts. While participation often follows population increases or decreases, the Department has tried to diversify hunting seasons so a variety of options are available and season “openings” provide multiple opportunities for participation while ensuring effective population management.

Surveys have shown that lack of hunter access is the most common reason for hunter dissatisfaction. In addition, “lack of access” is one of the top reasons given by hunters when asked why they stopped hunting. Improving hunter access to private and public lands can improve hunter participation and economic impacts on rural communities, and is a very important task for the agency to address in the future.

According to the "2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation" conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, recreational angling in Washington State has in excess of 745,000 anglers participating with expenditures that exceed \$867 million annually. These 745,000 anglers spend over 9,051,000 angler days fishing for sport and game fish throughout the state. In excess of 95% of the trout caught statewide, 75% of the recreationally caught salmon in Puget Sound and 90% of the salmon caught in the Columbia River is produced by hatchery facilities. The future of this recreational fishing industry is dependent on fish produced at WDFW hatchery facilities. Hatcheries also provide a method to recover depressed salmon stocks by offering supplemental and recovery programs.

Utilizing input from 23 citizen advisory committees, the Fish Program conducts many fisheries in Washington, which involve the redistribution of economic wealth from the more urban areas of central Puget Sound to rural communities elsewhere in the state. Examples of these types of fisheries include:

- Razor clams – Staff works with coastal communities and constituents to structure digs for economic impacts. As a portion of this effort there are five public meetings held every year. We consistently hear that the greatest benefits to coastal communities are from openers spread from October – April. These are designed to draw people to the coast when there are few coastal visitors. Generally we attempt to schedule a clam dig every month. It is estimated that these digs attract an average of 260,000 digger trips. WDFW is currently working with the University of Washington to determine the economic impact this fishery has to coastal communities.
- Puget Sound Dungeness Crab – This fishery results in an estimated 280,000 angler trips annually. The fishery is conducted throughout Puget Sound, including Hood canal where it benefits local communities.
- Selective Fisheries – The development of selective salmon fisheries has allowed recreational anglers to harvest hatchery fish while releasing wild fish. These fisheries are conducted in marine waters often in rural areas such as the Washington Coast, lower Columbia River, and Strait of Juan de Fuca. They benefit these local rural communities by attracting recreational anglers from the metropolitan areas of King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties.

The Fish Program is working with an economic consultant to determine the economic value these and other fisheries have to local communities. Figures from that effort should be available later this year.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Over 49% of Washington's residents participate in wildlife viewing activities annually, generating a \$1.483 billion economic boost for the state in 2006. This is a 51% increase over 2001, reflecting a dramatic change in societal demographics and recreational preferences. In spite of this increase, this is only the tip of the iceberg of potential economic spending on wildlife viewing, nature/ecotourism, and, recently, Geotourism, for Washington.

Key policy issues include:

- Enhancing and encouraging the increasing demand for Geotourism.
 - Coordinating watchable wildlife activities with opportunistic hunting, fishing, clamming, and crabbing seasons.
 - Enhancing our current coordination with CTED and the tourism Commission to implement the above.
 - Providing hunting and fishing seasons that ensure population goals are met while maximizing public recreation and improving economic benefits of both activities.
 - Creating private lands hunting opportunities that benefit hunters, landowners, and the economic well being of the state.
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Public involvement process used and what you learned:

In the development of the Wildlife Viewing Activities in Washington: A Strategic Plan and a web-based input and review process was implemented, with all comments included in the Appendices of the final plan. A web-based social network is currently being developed (www.wildlifemou.com) to facilitate continued communication among all affected participants.

Three director-appointed citizen groups provide the Wildlife Program with input regarding game animal population management and hunting related activities. The primary group, the Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC), deals primarily with big game issues, but all game animals and hunter access are discussed as well. Two sub-groups of GMAC, the Waterfowl Advisory Group (WAG) and the Upland Game Advisory Committee (UGAC), and ad-hoc groups (e.g., Hunter Access Task Group and Hunter Allocation Sub-committee), meet to discuss specific management issues in more depth. The GMAC formally meets at least three times per year, while the WAG and UGAC meet two times per year. Game Division staff also share information and solicit feedback from members throughout the year as issues arise.

As outlined in the background section the Fish Program utilizes input from 23 citizen advisory committees to conduct many fisheries in Washington, which involve the redistribution of economic wealth from the more urban areas of central Puget Sound to rural communities elsewhere in the state.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None, briefing only. This is a Commission request from the October 3-4, 2008 Commission meeting.

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A
