

Summary

Meeting dates:
January 10, 2014

Agenda item: Youth Advisory Council: Activities to Date, Status and Next Steps

Presenter(s): Jason Wettstein, Public Affairs and Community Relations

Background summary:

Department staff will brief the commission on efforts to explore the concept of a youth council, work to date, and focus group activities. This can serve as a launching point for further planning and conversation on next steps.

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

Briefing on status

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

None at this time.

Action requested:

None at this time.

Draft motion language:

Not applicable

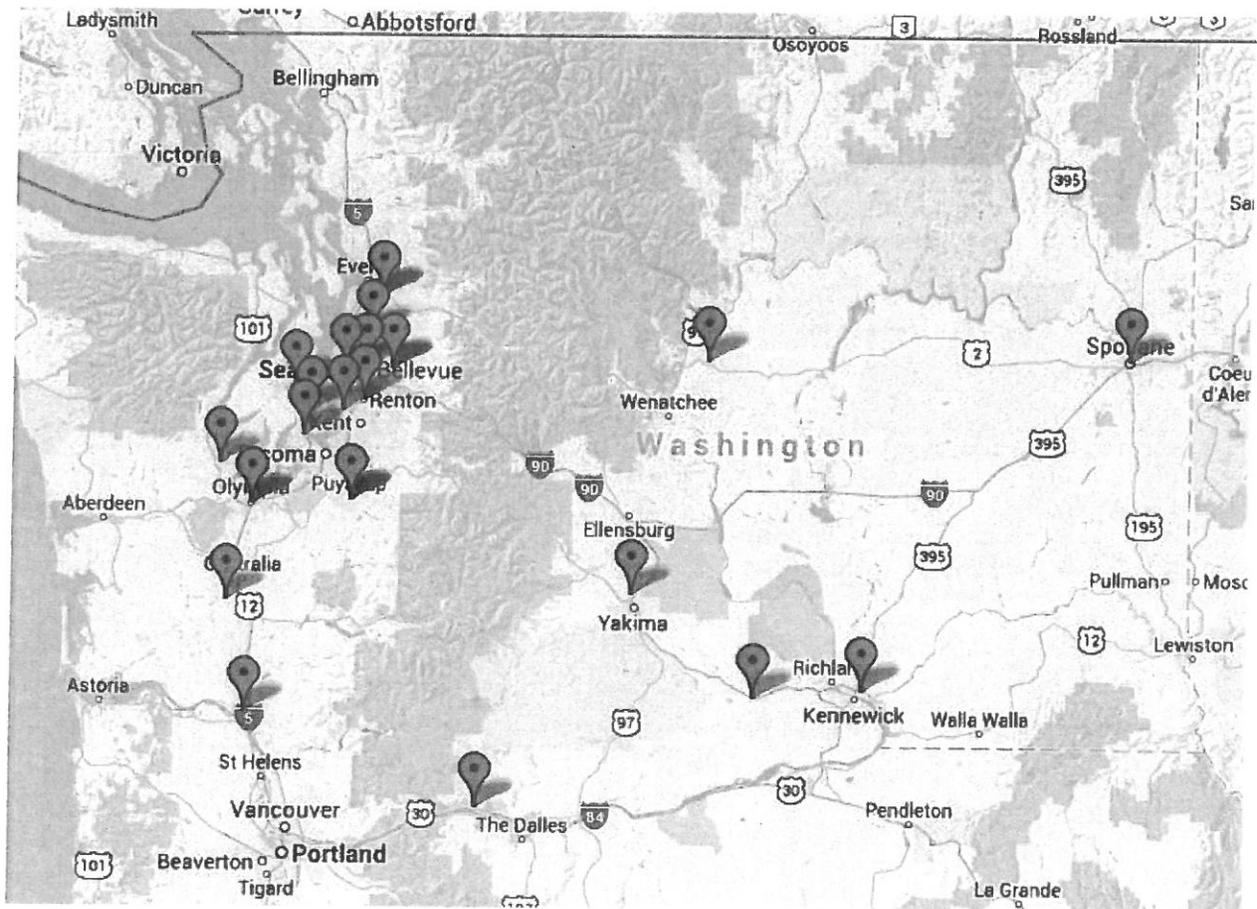
Justification for Commission action:

Communications Plan:

Youth council initial focus group participants

1. LaFawn Sutton, Spokane
2. Michael Bervell, Snohomish
3. Allie Spadaro, White Salmon
4. Austin Chu, Renton
5. Michaela Burchett, Longview
6. Molly Sherwood, Bellevue
7. Noah McCord, Olympia

Geographic distribution of applications:



Direct outreach to these groups seeking applicants for initial focus group

1. Pheasants Forever (multiple state offices)
2. National Wildlife Federation
3. Trout Unlimited
4. Safari Club International
5. Sea Horse Dive Club
6. Yakima Dive Club
7. WDFW Coastal Marine Resources Committees
8. Washington Wild
9. Wild Fish Conservancy
10. Audubon Washington (multiple locations)
11. 4-H (statewide)
12. Future Farmers of America
13. Partnerships and Planning at Washington State Parks
14. Puget Sound Anglers
15. Washington Waterfowl Association
16. Boy Scouts
17. Girls Scouts (multiple locations)
18. Conservation Northwest
19. Inland Northwest Wildlife Council
20. Ducks Unlimited
21. Cascade Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group
22. Sierra Club, Inner City Outings Program (Spokane and Seattle)
23. Washington State Youth Conservation Camp/Washington State Junior Sportsmen's Conservation Camp (Boys and Girls camps)
24. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
25. Yakima Greenway Foundation
26. Marine Life Center in Bellingham
27. Lincoln Skills Center in Port Angeles
28. Pacific Education Institute
29. Teens in Public Service
30. YMCA Earth Corps.
31. Pacific Education Institute
32. Washington Outdoor Women
33. Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups
34. Big Tent Coalition
35. Tacoma Sportsmen's Club
36. Washington Bowhunters
37. Wild Sheep Foundation
38. Vancouver Wildlife League
39. Wenatchee Sportsmen
40. Fiero Marine Life Center
41. Backcountry Horsemen
42. Washington Trails Association
43. Cast for Kids
44. Urban Wilderness Project
45. Student Conservation Association
46. North Cascades Institute
47. Clark Skamania Flyfishers

October, 2013

**[DRAFT- FOR COMMENT] WDFW Youth Advisory Council Workshop Group
Consensus & Recommendations**

Following the October workshop on the formation of a Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife Youth Advisory Council, the participants have identified the following points as primary areas of interest for the group and respectfully submit the following recommendations to the Department and the Commission.

Part One: Increasing Youth Involvement

1. *Important ideas or actions*

During the workshop and in responses submitted following, the group agreed that increasing understanding, accessibility, and participation in all areas of outdoor recreation and environmental education is vital. The group agreed that misconceptions or misunderstanding about the nature of recreational activities such as hunting not only prevent youth from trying the activities, but also result in those who do participate being associated negatively.

All group members expressed interest in and support for citizen science programs, both in and out of the classroom. The group feels that citizen science should be supported publicly and privately, may help to mitigate negative connotations held in regards to outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing. The group feels that by increasing youth exposure to the outdoors, they will be more likely to become outdoor recreationalists, and will likely involve their family or peers outside of the classroom.

The workshop participants also felt that it is important to consider that by increasing youth awareness and participation in the outdoors and outdoor recreation of all types, we build a foundation of support for our natural resources which will ideally lead to support for conservation and the development of a generation of stewardship ready to preserve Washington's wide range of natural resources.

Unanimously, it was agreed that the formation of a youth council would benefit Washington State as a whole and that it is of the utmost importance to maintain an active state youth council.

2. *Ideas for increasing youth participation*

Reiterated throughout the workshop and reflected in post-workshop responses was the idea that peer-level contact and communications targeted specifically towards youth are vital to increasing youth awareness and participation. Workshop members expressed support for citizen science and basic ecology being represented and well-supported in K-12 curriculum within the state, along with the adoption of citizen science and similar curricula to encourage teachers and administrators to use the programs within their schools.

The group also discussed partnering with other public entities, private businesses, and conservation and sports organizations to make outdoor recreation activities including fishing, hunting, hiking and others more accessible and visible to youth. There was general support for these partnerships, and many participants expressed interest in exploring different ways of forming these partnerships. It was generally felt that this would be a good example of a major, ongoing business item that a Youth Advisory Council could take on both as an advisory body and a supportive group demonstrating youth commitment to this cause and exploring partnerships on behalf of/with staff of the Department should such a body be formed.

Many members also expressed interest in supporting direct peer-to-peer engagement in outdoor recreation, including the possible formation or expansion of campus clubs. Members also saw the importance of partnering with existing school clubs in order to involve more students in the recreational world. In this same realm, youth council participants see the importance of giving small rewards, if any, to those who participate regularly in Youth Advisory Council activities.

3. Barriers & how to overcome them

Major barriers identified through the workshop included attitude/perception, access (physical and financial) to recreational opportunities, and communication.

The group felt that the attitude towards various activities can define those that participate in them among youth, and that the anticipation of this labeling or stigma can be a barrier to those youth who otherwise would be interested in participation. General consensus was that this was a topic that would require more extensive discussion and work by an eventual Advisory Council, but that through education about these activities and the natural resources available, these stigmas could be mitigated. Additionally, the group considered that within many school communities, especially those in sub-urban and semi-rural areas, the general population of the communities may not be aware of the prevalence of various outdoor recreational activities among their peers, and when this participation is made clearer to all, youth may be more inclined to take the step into participation. Also, the many school-related and extra-curricular activities present in students' schedules fill time that may otherwise be spent recreating outdoors. Many group members felt that the key to addressing this issue is to encourage recreating outdoors with peers—making outdoor recreation a more attractive option.

Access to outdoor recreation can be limited by geographical restrictions, parental considerations, or financial concerns as recognized by advisory council members. All of these restrictions could be at least partially mitigated by the pursuit of community partnership with sporting organizations, private business, and other state agencies or schools. It was reiterated that the planning and possible pursuit of such partnerships would be an ideal function of a youth council. All members seemed to agree with several presenters that in order to increase youth interest and engagement, especially at a younger age, parents also need to be targeted.

Both of the aforementioned points require extensive, specialized communication from a variety of sources. Many group members support peer-to-peer education (including school, faith, or community based clubs or sections of clubs devoted specifically to youth recreation), as well as the provision of opportunities to experience the outdoors as part of co-curricular programming, allowing initial exposure to outdoor recreation and encouraging participation in recreation and conservation.

All members of the group expressed interest in programs such as citizen science or privately-sponsored events targeted at youth and families, and considered this an important function of a potential Youth Advisory Council.

4. *Better reaching youth*

All group members agreed that communications encouraging youth participation in outdoor recreation must be carefully targeted and adapted depending on age group and community background. One way that this could be accomplished is by putting communication into the classroom—educators generally understand their students and what they best respond to, and will usually adapt a message so that it is understandable and relatable. This could be accomplished through environmental/citizen science programs throughout all levels of education, as well as inclusion in physical education and life health and wellness programs.

The group emphasized the importance of showing our peers across the state that outdoor recreation isn't something that is only done by older people, and therefore marketing and communications would likely be very effective if they conveyed this message and made outdoor recreation seem like a 'cooler', accepted activity among their peers. One example of this, which was cited by almost all members, was the Foss Science Curriculum kits which were used in elementary school to educate individuals about environmental science. Using this concept on the high-school or teenage scale could re-invigorate an interest in the outdoors.

The Advisory Council, if formed, could aide Department staff in identifying the best media through which to contact the youth of Washington of all ages. The council would also play a crucial role in keeping the community engaged by updating content and format as the popularity and rapidity of specific media change.

Part Two: Formation of a Youth Council

1. *Formation of a youth council*

The workshop participants unanimously agree that a youth advisory council should be established. Whatever format it takes, the council will be an effective tool for the Department in connecting with youth to increase awareness of topics relating to the Department. Members' justifications for the creation of a youth council varied slightly, but all felt that it is important when engaging youth to be able to understand what it is that motivates and engages them, as well

as communicate and engage in an effective way. The group respectfully suggests that as a department which primarily interacts with adult customers/constituents, the WDFW may not be as experienced at communicating with youth as they are with adults, and could benefit from having the ability to pull feedback from a reasonably diverse group of Washington youth as to the best methods of communication and engagement. The formation would, of course, take time but it would be a worthy, worthwhile investment.

2. How a youth council should be formed

The group consensus after hearing input from OSPI staff and discussing alternatives was that the development of a core nine-person council of varied demographics (including geographic location, preferred means of recreation, income, and others) would be the most sustainable, low-risk way of moving forward. By having nine people, the group felt that a wide range of demographics could be represented while still keeping the group familiar, manageable, and better able to connect and work with one another.

The group's final consensus was that decisions regarding the structure of such a body should be left to Department staff or those selected to the council in its early stages, however it was generally felt that the selection of a chair person(s) or group of members to serve various positions (including potentially vice-chair, secretary, etc) would be wise. Two members supported the idea of a rotating chairperson, while others felt that this person should be appointed for a specific season/length of time. The group eventually tabled this discussion, referring it to the discretion of the office of the Director or the first members of the council to decide.

All members supported the implementation of a Council Constitution, to be designed by the initial 9 council members: to outline the mission, goals, and format of the council. Although this was in part left to the discretion of Department staff or the initial council members, it was felt that to ensure fair representation of the youth of our state younger college-aged students should be included, and that a bottom age limit be set somewhere around fourteen to fifteen years. The members did agree that input should be heard from younger and older youth of Washington on a regular basis, and considered by the council before actions are taken.

There was significant discussion about the need for a clear mission statement, slogan, and identified values held by the council. The information that was brainstormed has been provided to WDFW staff and tabled for consideration by a potential council.

All members agreed that the first priority would be to establish a youth council by the end of calendar year 2013, and move forward with the process of establishing a constitution, policies, work plan, etc. Several members expressed hopes that the youth council would be fully implemented and functioning to involve multiple districts around the state by the end of calendar year 2014, while others preferred a longer term trial of a core body before expansion into wider district-specific bodies

3. *Qualities of Councilmembers*

All members agreed during and after the meeting that it is important to seek members who are committed to Washington's natural resources, their preservation, and the promotion of youth outdoor recreation. Members also indicated that it is important for potential council members to be open-minded in relation to the issues that may be discussed by a youth council to ensure the best service to our fellow youth in Washington.

The following central characteristics were also identified as 'The Big 6' priorities for the group:

- **Passion** for the outdoors, and a desire to share this passion, involving other youth
- **Respect** for differing opinions
- **Reliability**
- **Creativity**
- **Flexibility** in order to achieve a common goal or purpose.
- **Leadership** - the majority of members indicated that they would desire leadership, although several clarified that leadership can mean different things, and often will not be readily apparent through an application or interview process.

4. *Factors that would encourage participation*

Members identified the following factors that would encourage them to participate in a youth council:

- Ability to connect with like-minded individuals
- Working to achieve a common goal and enact real and tangible change in support of our natural resources and our fellow youth, and future generations
- Having a good and worthy cause to support
- Ability to understand varying perspectives of different topics
- Opportunity for leadership
- Gaining real-world experience that will allow support of education and career, while supporting a good cause

5. *Factors that would deter participation*

Many members indicated that time and travel considerations could deter participation; however all seemed to agree that individually they were willing to participate regardless of these considerations. Several members also indicated that the fear of straying from an identified mission or goal, or otherwise not being able to work productively as a cohesive team, should interpersonal conflict arise, would be a possible deterrent from participation.

6. *Naming and description of the youth council*

Members supported a name that provides for easy identification of the type and purpose of the group. Several variations on the 'Washington State Fish and Wildlife Youth Council' or '...Youth Advisory Council' were suggested. 'Washington Youth Council for the Outdoors' was also suggested as a name which would quickly establish an association with the younger generations. Several members also supported language indicating that the purpose of the council was to plan for and protect the future of our natural resources and ability to recreate outdoors as we can today.

7. *Decision making*

As previously mentioned, structural decisions were referred to the WDFW staff or initial youth council meeting for further consideration by all member who are chosen, however all members supported a system of majority voting, which is part of the reason why an odd number of council members was previously recommended. Most members agreed that this voting process should be facilitated (however formally or informally the final group and Department staff deem necessary) by the chair or co-chairs of the group, should either of those positions exist.

Members also emphasized the importance of ensuring that the entire group understands the position of all other members completely and that all other voices are being heard before someone speaks to an issue on behalf of the group and before any vote is taken up.

8. *New perspectives a youth council could provide*

Members identified the following areas where a youth council could provide fresh insight to the Department:

- Fresh, creative ideas for reaching out to and connecting with the youth of Washington
- The culture and interests of a younger generation which are not represented or sometimes understood by older generations
- Ideas for activities and modes of engaging with youth
 - The ability to serve as youth mentors
- The ability to be the face and voice of youth environmental issues for the community and government.

9. *Resources the council could bring to the WDFW*

- The ability to connect with peers and engage them in our issues

- Connections to various different community groups and sports organizations for support and direct contact (events) with youth
- The ability to draw other teens into the outdoors
 - An understanding of how our peers think, and what motivates them
 - The ability to connect with our peers in a way adults can't—peer to peer connections are more likely to succeed and engage
- The ability as young, professional representatives of our generation, to represent our interests to the Department and the Commission and bridge a generational gap, encouraging communication across age groups
- Connect outdoor enthusiasts of all ages in support of a common goal

10. *Questions for youth*

- What is stopping them from recreating outdoors?
 - What is it that makes them decide not to 'get off the couch'?
- What does the outdoors mean to them?
- How does the outdoors affect their lives, on a daily or a long-term basis?
- How often do they enjoy the outdoors, in any form?
 - 'Have you been outside today?'
- What motivates you to go outside?
- Why do you choose to experience the outdoors?