

WDFW responses to public comments received during public review of the final *Washington State Periodic Status Review for the Steller Sea Lion* conducted under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) from January 9-23, 2015. The comments presented here are summaries of the remarks provided by one or more people.

Comment	WDFW Response
<p>1. I agree with state delisting of Steller sea lions.</p>	<p>WDFW is recommending that Steller sea lions be removed from the Washington threatened species list because the species no longer meets the definition of threatened under state law (WAC 232-12-297, Section 2.5). The species also does not meet the definition of sensitive status under state law, thus delisting is the most appropriate action to take regarding the species' legal status (WAC 232-12-297, Section 2.6). The eastern distinct population segment (DPS) of Steller sea lions (i.e., those animals that breed from Southeast Alaska to California, including Washington) showed steady growth of about 3% (non-pups) and 4.2% (pups) per year on average from 1979 to 2010. This resulted in the population reaching an estimated 70,174 animals by 2010. Based on this information, NOAA Fisheries determined that the eastern DPS was sufficiently recovered to allow federal delisting in 2013. Steller sea lion abundance has grown more rapidly in Washington than in the overall DPS, with an average annual growth rate of 9.13% (non-pups) from 1989 to 2013. Numbers in Washington during the summer survey period increased from about 250-300 animals during the early 1990s to 2,157 animals during 2014. The species has also shown increased breeding activity in Washington since 1992, when pupping was recorded for the first time in the 20th century. Pup numbers had expanded to 60 individuals by 2014.</p>
<p>2. The Steller sea lion population has recovered now and there is no valid reason to not state delist them. Delisting by the federal government should be sufficient for WDFW to do the same.</p>	<p>WDFW agrees with the first remark. See the response to Comment 1. Federal delisting is an important consideration, but WDFW must consider the status of a species in Washington only before it proposes delisting a species.</p>
<p>3. Please protect Steller sea lions and do not remove them from the state threatened species list.</p>	<p>See the response to Comment 1.</p>
<p>4. The precautionary principle should be followed when considering whether to state delist Steller sea lions.</p>	<p>See the response to Comment 1.</p>
<p>5. Sea lions are overabundant now and are causing many problems. They (1) negatively affect sturgeon, salmon, and bottom fish populations, and aquatic ecosystems, (2) are a nuisance and a danger to people using docks, (3) are a source of beach pollution, and (4) are too tame and readily steal fish from fishing lines.</p>	<p>By law (WAC 232-12-297), species listings and delistings by the state must be based solely on the biological status of the species and its continued existence in the state.</p> <p>California sea lions far outnumber Steller sea lions during much of the year in Washington and it is likely that this is the species being referenced by some commenting citizens.</p>

Comment	WDFW Response
6. Sea lions are overabundant in parts of the state, such as the Columbia River, and should be lethally controlled.	The only action being evaluated under the current proposal is whether Steller sea lions should be delisted under state law (WAC 232-12-297). Management of the species after delisting is not part of the proposal and is beyond the scope of the current recommendation. Significant future management actions by WDFW, such as any control actions, would be evaluated through a separate public review process if proposed.
7. WDFW should work with federal agencies and other entities to pursue all appropriate means necessary (active hazing, removal, lethal removal, etc.) to reduce predation on federally listed salmonids by Steller sea lions.	See the response to Comment 6.
8. State delisting will allow WDFW to better manage the threat that Steller sea lions pose to white sturgeon on the Columbia River.	See the response to Comment 6.
9. I'm afraid that a lethal control program for Steller sea lions will begin soon after they are delisted.	See the response to Comment 6.
10. Greater support for healthy fish runs is needed by building more hatcheries, managing for truly sustainable harvest levels, public education, proper management of hatcheries, and minimizing pollution rather than by controlling sea lions.	See the response to Comment 6.
11. Sea lions bring nothing to the economy, whereas salmonids bring in millions.	See the response to Comment 5.
12. Steller sea lions contribute to local economies through increased wildlife-related tourism.	See the response to Comment 5.
13. Steller sea lions do little for the enjoyment of people along the Columbia River.	See the response to Comment 5.
14. Steller sea lions threaten salmon recovery and the many taxpayer dollars spent to date on salmon recovery.	See the response to Comment 5.
15. Hot branding of sea lions should not be conducted.	The only action being evaluated under the current proposal is whether Steller sea lions should be delisted under state law (WAC 232-12-297). Research or management methods involving the species are not part of the proposal and are beyond the scope of the current recommendation.