Crossing Paths

WITH WILDLIFE IN WASHINGTON TOWNS AND CITIES

Summer 2007

State invests in wildlife habitat and viewing access

By Jeff Koenings, Ph.D. WDFW Director

An unprecedented investment in wildlife habitat and viewing access is part of the 2007-09 state budget, thanks to Gov. Chris Gregoire and the Washington Legislature.

A total of $100 million for grants administered by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) was approved to fund critical wildlife habitat and natural area acquisitions, state land restoration and enhancement, park and trail development and riparian protection.

The single biggest WWRP project for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is acquisition of one of the largest remaining areas of undeveloped shrub-steppe habitat in our state— 25,000 acres of the Skookumchuck watershed, located between the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick wildlife areas in Kittitas County. Home to sage grouse, jackrabbits, golden eagles, elk, bighorn sheep, wild steelhead and other species, this property 12 miles east of Ellensburg was once considered a likely area for development. Instead, with $4.67 million in WWRP funding, it will be preserved as critical habitat.

Other habitat and wildlife-viewing projects funded through

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Photo by Georgene Mellom

Summertime can bring clashes with critters

In the heat of the summer, a deer decides your well-watered roses are much tastier than dry brush in the nearby woods.

After wild berries are spent, a black bear and her cubs find your garbage cans can be opened to provide a virtual feast.

The dining-on-the-patio evening routine for your finicky cat is discovered by a family of skunks looking for an easy meal.

It's the season when clashes with critters peak, mostly because both people and wildlife families are more active outdoors.

The animals, of course, are just doing what comes naturally – following their survival instincts to fulfill their needs for food, water and shelter in the most convenient way.

So it's up to us to think about what those animals are looking for, what we may be doing where we

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Crossing Paths is a quarterly newsletter for Washington residents enrolled in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program and others interested in urban/suburban wildlife.

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Summertime can bring clashes with critters, (cont. from page 1)

live or recreate that unintentionally attracts them, and what we might do to minimize potential conflicts.

In the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary program, we're trying to attract wildlife through landscaping for year-round habitat and other efforts. But as many program enrollees can attest, there can be too much of a good thing with some species.

What's at stake is not just the disappointment of losing prized roses, the inconvenience of strewn garbage, or the task of removing a stench. Some wildlife is potentially dangerous, either inadvertently by fight-or-flight instincts or sheer size, or deliberately when animals interpret our actions as a threat or even mistake us for prey.

When conflicts become human safety issues, wildlife always loses. The bear habituated to human garbage who starts prowling the front porch and house windows and doors for more food is removed, usually lethally.

Even when safety isn't the problem, wildlife usually loses. Deer that become regular consumers of irrigated landscape plants are targeted for herd reduction, and skunks that help themselves to pet food left out at night are trapped and euthanized.

The key is to learn some co-existence strategies and be one step ahead of the wildlife. WDFW's "Living with Wildlife" information series by species and groups of species, is available on-line and downloadable for printing at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/index.htm.

There you'll learn to avoid deer problems by planting rhododendrons instead of roses, daffodils rather than tulips, and other deer "resistant" plants instead of deer "candy store" varieties. There is no such thing as a completely deer "proof" plant, especially when plants are young and tender, so at least initial protection with netting and repellents, and long-term protection with high fencing, is also recommended.

Photo by Alan Bauer

The number one reason for 95 percent of the calls to WDFW offices about black bear problems is access to a food source for these omnivores that can smell things a mile away — trash, pet food, bird feeders, fruit trees, barbecue grills, picnic and camp food, and so on. The obvious solution is to keep those food sources inaccessible – use bear-proof trash bins or keep trash cans securely inside a garage, never leave pet food outside, remove bird feeders, harvest fruit quickly and pick up fruit when it falls to the ground, clean grills thoroughly after each use, store picnic and camp food in secure vehicles or campground bear-proof containers.

Skunks are also omnivores, eating everything from chickens to garbage, so problems with them can also be avoided by keeping pet food inside, fencing the vegetable garden, enclosing poultry securely, and so forth. You can also minimize chances of skunk encounters by preventing access to denning sites under your house, garage, shed, or other structures; close off these areas with ¼-inch hardware cloth, boards, metal flashing, or other sturdy barriers.

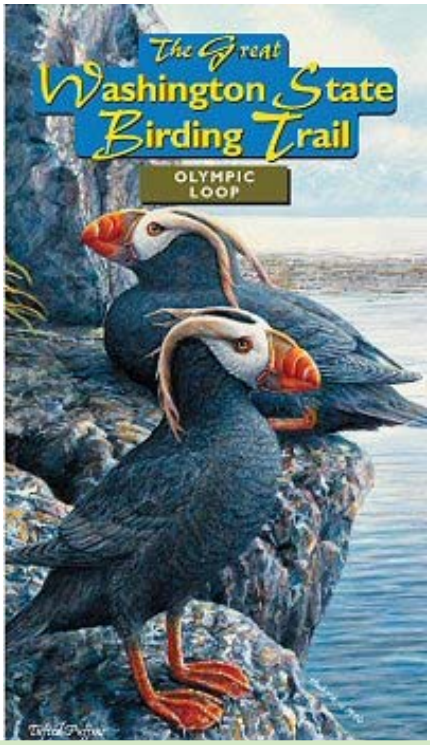
And never, of course, deliberately feed deer, bears, skunks or other wild animals that can become a problem. Feeding may seem innocent enough initially to get a close-up view or photo of a wild animal, but it only teaches that animal to associate humans with easy food and it's only a matter of time before there's a problem. Addressing the created problem too often means lethally removing an animal — a fed deer/bear/skunk/you-name-it is a dead one.

There's lots more to learn about living with wildlife this summer and beyond at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/index.htm.

Great Washington State Birding Trail grows

The fourth and newest route of the Great Washington State Birding Trail map series – the Olympic Loop – was completed earlier this year and is available for purchase through Washington Audubon at http://wa.audubon.org/.

Featuring more than 200 of Washington's 365 bird species, the newest map showcases the Olympic Peninsula, including Olympic National Park, four national wildlife refuges, and several state and local parks. The four-county, 400-mile self-guided driving route runs from the Nisqually River delta in south Puget Sound, west to the Pacific Ocean, north to Cape Flattery, east along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and back south by Hood Canal.



The other three trail maps – Cascade Loop, Coulee Corridor, and Southwest Loop – are also available for $4.95 each. The project began in 2000 and will be completed in 2010 with three more maps of the Columbia River, Spokane, and Puget loops.

The Coulee Corridor map was recently honored with a federal interpretation award by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and the Federal Highway Administration.

The trail map series is supported by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and many other public and private organizations.

New Klickitat County birding map available

A bird watching map is now available of Klickitat County, where over 290 species have been observed throughout the area's diverse habitats.

The map was produced last fall mostly by local birders with help from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) southwest regional wildlife biologist David Anderson, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and the Mt. Adams and Goldendale Chambers of Commerce.

It features 16 sites, from the Big Lava Bed - Pacific Crest Trail Segment on the west end of the county, with its Swainson's and hermit thrushes and Townsend's and hermit warblers in the forest, to the Columbia River and Foothills East of Rock Creek area on the east end, with loggerhead shrike, sage thrasher, and Brewer's and sage sparrows in the sagebrush habitat and American white pelicans on the river.

For copies, contact the WDFW Vancouver office at 360-906-6700 or WDFW Yakima office at 509-575-2740.

For more on Klickitat County birding, see http://community.gorge.net/birding/ .

Share your backyard bird videos

A new website was recently created for bird enthusiasts to watch and share original bird videos.

"Bird Cinema" at http://www.birdcinema.com/ is designed to provide a free on-line community for both amateurs and professionals to post bird videos and share information and education about birds.

Check it out, or contact Albert Mitchell, Associate Creative Director of ACR International llc, at 801-235-9958 for more information.

American goldfinch

10,000 by 2010 campaign continues

As of mid-June 2007, the tally of properties currently certified by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife as Backyard Wildlife Sanctuaries across the state was 6,406.

Of those, 5,506 are in western Washington, as shown in the concentration of red dots on the map in the Puget Sound area from Bellingham to Olympia and in the Vancouver area of southwestern Washington.

The other 900 are in eastern Washington, mostly in the state's second largest metropolitan area — Spokane –- with some in the Tri-Cities and Yakima areas.

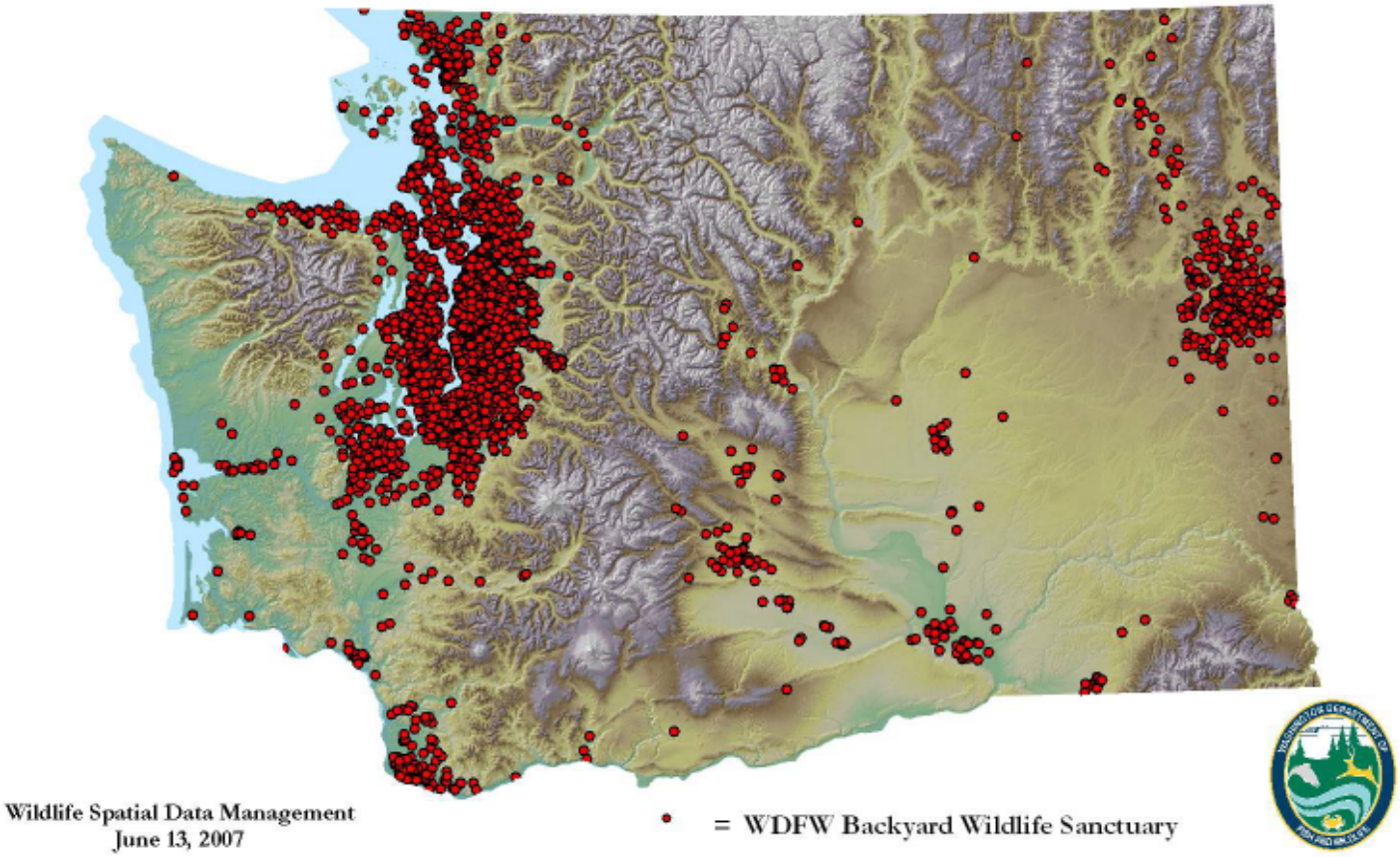
Since Washington's Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary program began in 1986, a total of about 9,000 properties have been enrolled (with ownership changes reducing today's total.)

In the next three years, some 3,594 properties need to be enrolled to reach our "10,000 by 2010" campaign goal.

If you're currently a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary manager, help spread the word to your neighbors, family, and friends about helping and enjoying wildlife on their own property.

If you're not in the program, apply on-line today at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/application.pdf and put yourself on our map!

Let's put your Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary on the map!



Where are rufous hummers?

WDFW wildlife biologist Russell Link reports lots of backyard sanctuary managers and other birders wondering what's happened to rufous hummingbirds in western Washington in recent years.

An example is this note from Cleo Andreasen of Anacortes:

"The Rufous Hummingbirds seem to have left the Anacortes area. Having kept a daily bird log for 30 years, gone are the days when males left in July and the females and kids left in August. In the past four years they have pretty much cleared out by the first part of July. Migrants come through and you can tell who they are as they are not interested in the feeder. We seemed to have had two sets this year, plus an extra male. Only the one set came to the feeder with a young one and it was the male showing the young the ropes.

"Last year, at this time, Kitsap County seemed to have a sudden influx so perhaps things are better over there. I have an old friend who lives in a retirement center in Silverdale. She told of four males in her flowers on the patio. She made a quick trip to the local feed store to purchase a bottle feeder. She got safely home, cooked some syrup, cooled it, filled the feeder and went to dinner. When she got back the birds were already using the feeder."

Photo by Russell Link

Russell says he's looking into the hummer fluctuations and hopes to have some answers in a future edition of "Crossing Paths."

"BioBlitz" of Lower White River continues

Nearly 600 species of plants and animals were counted by 40 volunteers on the Lower White River on the Pierce-King county line this spring in a continuation of last year's "BioBlitz" of the unique area.

"BioBlitzing is a citizen survey technique sweeping the country," explained Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologist Michelle Tirhi. "It's a concentrated effort to collect wildlife data within a biologically rich area to help landowners learn how to maintain that richness and, in some cases, save taxes."

Pierce County offers a tax break to those who dedicate portions of their property to wildlife habitat preservation. The property must qualify for the tax break with a wildlife assessment, like the BioBlitz.

Washington first BioBlitz was conducted in the Crescent Valley near Gig Harbor in 2005. Last year's second event on the Lower White River involved about 80 biologists, botanists, and citizen scientists who counted some 569 species. But the area is so vast and diverse that a continuation of the effort was needed.

The count on April 21, 2007 was based at the Game Farm Wilderness Park and emphasized the cities of Auburn and Pacific and nearby property in unincorporated Pierce County. According to Michele Cardinaux with the Tacoma Nature Center, the Lower White River has been identified as one of 16 unique places in the South Sound that sustains healthy populations of fish, mammals, birds, insects, reptiles and amphibians. Some of the new finds during this year's count were mink, Townsend's warbler, and osprey, she said.

The information is being entered into the state Nature Mapping database coordinated by the University of Washington (UW) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

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Some garden plants are bad for fish and wildlife

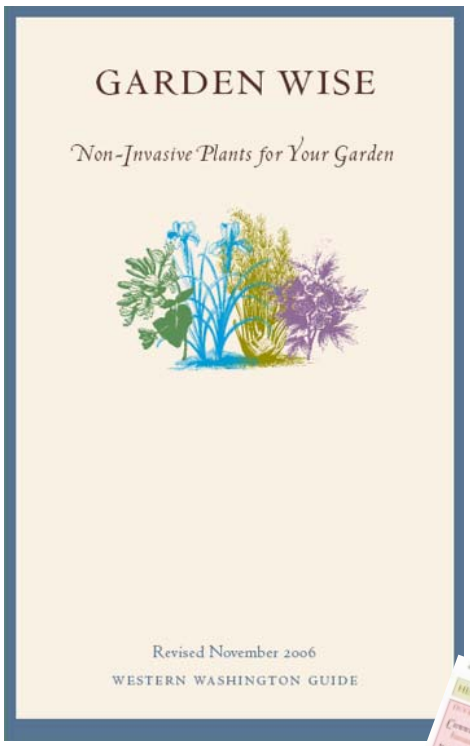
Today's gardeners have access to a wide range of both exotic and native plants to add color and variety.

While most exotic plants will not invade wild areas and are safe to plant in your garden, a handful will escape and can dramatically change natural systems, harm fish and wildlife, and even have economic impacts.

Invasive plants can spread into the wild in many ways: humans can spread them, especially when they are not careful with yard waste; birds can spread them; and wind and water can carry seeds and plant parts out into natural areas. Once present in the wild, the plants can multiply and be extremely difficult and expensive to remove.

To help prevent the introduction and spread of highly invasive plants, gardeners, landscape architects, nursery professionals, government agencies, and botanical gardens across the country have worked together to develop voluntary "Codes of Conduct."

The Washington State Nursery and Landscape Association formed a Task Force with The Nature Conservancy, retail and wholesale nursery owners, growers, and other experts to launch a study of the impacts of implementing the Codes to horticultural practices and business.



The Task Force identified several plants available to gardeners in western Washington as invasive to the area, ranging from English ivy and holly to European hawthorn and mountain ash. Several nurseries volunteered to avoid selling these plants, replace them with safe alternatives, and determine how these actions impact sales and customer satisfaction.

Last year the Washington Invasive Species Coalition produced a booklet, entitled "Garden Wise: Non-Invasive Species for Your Garden," that lists these and other invasives and suitable replacement plants. The booklet, revised and reprinted this year, is available for downloading at http://invasivespeciescoalition.org/ or by e-mail request to noxiousweeds@agr.wa.gov.

An eastern Washington version of the booklet will be available on-line soon.

"BioBlitz" of Lower White River continues, (cont. from page 5)

"Because we saw a fair amount of diversity during this BioBlitz, despite the recent flooding, it is apparent that the Lower White River corridor is maintaining adequate habitat for a diversity of species," said UW's Nature Mapping coordinator Karen Dvornich.

The BioBlitz was funded in part by the Environmental Protection Agency, Washington Biodiversity Council, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park. The project is a joint effort of the Puyallup River Watershed Council and the Pierce County Biodiversity Alliance (PCBA). The goal of the PCBA is to work with interested citizens, community groups and cities to develop voluntary stewardship plans for the Lower White River area.

A group called the Friends of the Lower White River that includes friends and neighbors from Buckley to Sumner, has formed to work for the biodiversity and health of the Lower White River basin and its communities. For more information about the group contact Jeanne Fancher at 253.924.0211 or PacificNaturalist@clearwire.net.

Wildlife watching and spending increases

More Americans are watching wildlife and spending more money to do so.

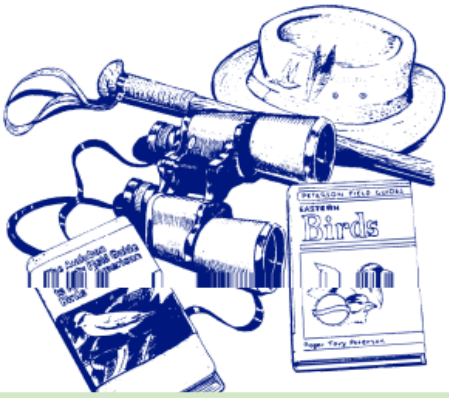
The preliminary data from the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and

Wildlife Associated Recreation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) shows that 71 million Americans spent $45 billion in some form of wildlife observation.

That's up from the last survey in 2001 when 66 million spent $43 billion in pursuit of wildlife viewing, photographing, feeding or other similar recreation.

Although the breakdown by state is not yet available from the 2006 survey, chances are the Washington portion is similar to what it was in 2001. At that time, 2.5 million wildlife viewers spent $980 million in Washington on goods like binoculars and bird feeders and wildlife viewing trip services like restaurants and lodging.

USFWS, which has conducted the survey every five years since 1955, reported more than 87 million Americans, or 38 percent of the United States' population age 16 and older, hunted, fished or observed wildlife in 2006. They spent $120 billion that year pursuing those activities – an amount roughly equal to Americans' total spending at all spectator sports, casinos, motion pictures, golf courses and country clubs, amusement parks and arcades combined.



"This very important survey shows in real economic and participatory terms the impact that wildlife has on the nation's economy," said USFWS

Director H. Dale Hall, "but simply talking about dollars and cents doesn't fully capture the importance of wildlife to our nation. Wildlife related recreation rejuvenates our spirit and gets us outside pursuing healthy activities. Americans should be proud that the outdoor tradition continues to be such a prevalent part of our lives."

Wildlife watching is the only recreation surveyed that is increasing. The preliminary data shows decreases in both angling and hunting. In 2001, 34 million fished compared to 30 million in 2006. In 2001, 13 million hunted compared to 12.5 million in 2006.

The preliminary report is available at http://library.fws.gov/nat_survey2006.pdf .

Owl nest box is finally used

It took about 15 years, but a western screech owl finally nested in a box placed for it on a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary in Brier.

Julie O'Donald wrote us the following:

"I have lived in Brier for 20 years. Nearly 18 years ago I registered our backyard with the Washington Department of Wildlife Program. We have the good fortune to live next to a greenbelt, so approximately 15 years ago my husband built a western screech owl nest box and put it up on a large Douglas fir tree. For years gray squirrels took over that box and in the meantime our backyard forest filled in around it.

In early May 2007, I happened to be looking at the box around 7 a.m. Instead of the usual squirrels clunking in and out, my eyes met the wide-eyed gaze of a western screech owl. From what I've read, screech owls don't build a nest. They move into a previously occupied cavity or nest box.

By late May I could hear little chirrup sounds from inside and quietly watched the owls feeding their young in the evening. In years past, screech owls have fledged their young in our yard, with test flights from the trees, down to grassy areas and back again. It is a special privilege that this year they found the nest box suitable as well.

Sharing our yard with wildlife, planting native vegetation and creating natural areas has enriched our lives, benefited the neighborhood, and given something back to the birds and other fauna who have lost so much habitat in our area. Thanks for a great program!"

Western screech owl

Photo by Gary M. Stolz, US Fish and Wildlife Service

State invests in wildlife habitat and viewing access, (cont. from page 1)

WWRP include:

- First-phase acquisition of property on the west branch of the Little Spokane River to protect habitat for species ranging from moose to Townsend's big-eared bats; funded at $3.6 million.
- Development of streamside wildlife-viewing facilities and stream restoration for endangered steelhead at Beebe Springs, a 185-acre property adjacent to WDFW's Chelan Fish Hatchery north of Chelan; funded at $492,888.
- Development of wildlife viewing trails, blinds and interpretive signs, and restoration of native grassland at the Reardan Audubon Lake Wildlife Area, a popular birding spot west of Spokane; funded at $345,803.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife also received WWRP funding for a variety of other projects, ranging from spartina removal in five areas of Willapa Bay to prevent the invasive weed from crowding out fish and foraging shorebirds, to stabilizing stream banks at the Mount St. Helen's Wildlife Area to prevent the periodic loss of elk forage area and salmon spawning and rearing habitat.

These projects all represent a strategic investment in the future of fish and wildlife in Washington. In many cases, these habitat restoration efforts will help maintain the biodiversity of our state, keeping "common species common." In other cases, these projects offer the best chance to preserve species that might otherwise be threatened with extinction.

Support for WWRP projects is just one example of the important investments in Washington's natural resources made during the recently concluded legislative session. Another is Gov. Gregoire's plan for Puget Sound, which targets $238 million to restore damaged shorelines, clean up pollution and reduce stormwater runoff.

Despite pressing budget demands, lawmakers have clearly recognized the importance of protecting our natural environment and investing in the lands and facilities that support wildlife viewing and other outdoor recreation. These investments will benefit Washingtonians for a long time to come.

WASHINGTON Watchable Wildlife

Picture one of these on YOUR car, truck, trailer or motorcyle!

www.wdfw.wa.gov

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will provide equal opportunities to all potential and existing employees without regard to race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age, marital status, national origin, disability, or Vietnam Era Veteran's status. The department receives Federal Aid for fish and wildlife restoration. The department is subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin or handicap. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any department program, activity, or facility, or if you want further information about Title VI or Section 504, write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240, or Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia WA 98501-1091.