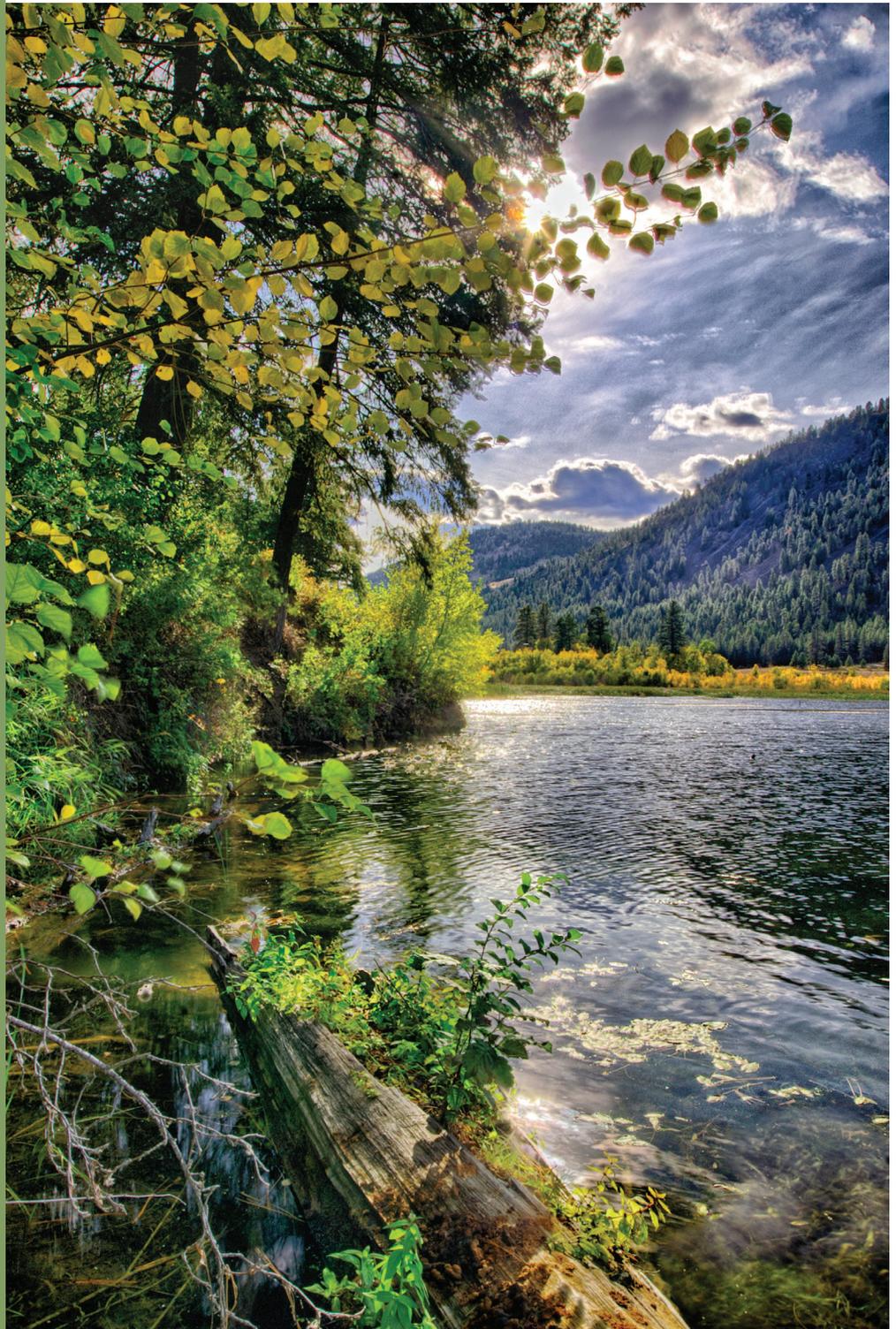


Washington's Wild Future: A Partnership for Fish & Wildlife

Progress Report – December 2015



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



Washington's Wild Future

A rapidly growing population, a changing climate, and years of uncertain funding have made fish and wildlife management an increasingly challenging endeavor.

Washington's Wild Future is a multi-year initiative by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to build a stronger and more effective state agency that is better positioned to tackle major management challenges in the coming years.

Under the leadership of Director Jim Unsworth – who assumed his position in early 2015 – WDFW began this effort by asking Washingtonians to share their thoughts on what the department is doing right, where it can improve, and where the agency should focus its efforts over the next five to 10 to 20 years.

Feedback from people who either commented online or attended six regional forums hosted by WDFW this fall form the foundation of this initiative and are summarized in this report.

Ultimately, the department's goal is to strengthen relationships with Washingtonians and their communities, increase support for conservation and participation in outdoor recreation, and ensure WDFW programs and services meet the needs of the public.

Public input: Statewide issues

WDFW launched the new initiative with public “listening forums” in Lacey, Mill Creek, Selah, Spokane, Vancouver, and Wenatchee.

The department also created comment opportunities for the public through email (wildfuture@dfw.wa.gov), Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/WashingtonFishWildlife>), and its website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildfuture/>).

More than 400 Washington residents attended at least one forum, and WDFW received about 2,500 email and online comments through mid-December.

Most of the emails were generated through single-issue advocacy campaigns, so the in-person forums generated significantly more unique ideas than the online communications.

Where do Washingtonians stand?

Most WDFW stakeholders understand the challenges of fish and wildlife management in an increasingly urbanized state, where the current population of 7 million is expected to grow by another 1 million in just 15 years. But understanding these challenges doesn't mean Washingtonians agree on how to meet them.

This fall, WDFW heard broad support for:

- **Expanded and restored recreational access:** Many comments have focused on (1) addressing restrictions imposed by private landowners, especially industrial timberland owners, (2) preserving and improving access to public lands, and (3) expanding opportunities for people who do not fish or hunt.
- **Increased law enforcement:** Many people support expansion of WDFW's Enforcement Program, recognizing that violators can undermine conservation efforts, reduce recreational and commercial opportunities, and harm local economies and natural resource industries.
- **Simplified fishing rules and clearer explanations:** The public strongly supports simplified fishing rules, and anglers expect them to be presented more clearly in the annual rule booklet and on the website. Many people want the department to create a mobile app to help anglers find the rules for specific bodies of water.
- **Land stewardship:** WDFW heard a wide range of views about land management, but there was widespread support for increased stewardship activities, such as habitat restoration and noxious weed control.
- **Habitat protection:** Representatives of conservation groups urged stronger enforcement of permits issued through the Hydraulic Project Approval program; improved protection of riparian areas; and correction of barriers that prevent salmon and steelhead from reaching their spawning grounds.
- **Outreach to an increasingly diverse population:** Many participants urged WDFW to do more to reach out to young people, and several recommended the department make more information available in Spanish and other languages.
- **More opportunities for public engagement:** Individuals and representatives of outdoor groups consistently urged WDFW to create more opportunities for volunteers and for partnerships with non-profit groups. Many others cited the need to improve the WDFW website and its ease of use.



However, the public differs on other issues:

- **Land management and acquisition:** Some commenters urged the department to increase its efforts to conserve habitat by purchasing property and conservation easements. However, others object to actions that remove private property from local tax rolls or block future development.
- **Wildlife management:** The department's carnivore management program and endangered species protection and recovery efforts drew a wide range of comments, from full support to strong opposition.
- **Salmon management:** WDFW has received many comments about salmon management. Opinions are divided over many issues, including the allocation of salmon stocks among recreational, commercial, and tribal fishers; the effectiveness of the North of Falcon negotiations; and salmon management tactics for specific bodies of water.
- **Steelhead management:** There is broad support for conserving and recovering wild steelhead, but strong differences of opinion over how to achieve those goals. Some would boost hatchery steelhead production, but others would restrict or end the release of hatchery steelhead in western Washington rivers.
- **The relative weight of science and community preferences:** Some Wild Future commenters believe science alone should drive fish and wildlife management decisions. Others believe additional factors, such as public acceptance of coexistence with predator species, must also be considered.

What's next for the Wild Future initiative?

In the next phase of the project, WDFW will continue to solicit public input while using the results to improve current operations and address future needs. Projects will include:

- **Continued outreach to the public and outdoor-focused advocacy groups:** An additional public forum is planned in Pacific County in early 2016, as are meetings with local governments, tribes and groups representing the department's key constituents. Online comment opportunities will remain available.
- **Local and regional improvements:** WDFW regional managers have begun reviewing specific suggestions to identify practical, cost-effective changes that could be made without additional funding or changes in state law.
- **Opportunities for WDFW employees to contribute their ideas:** Staff members are being asked to offer their own proposals and to help evaluate suggestions received from the public. This effort will be ongoing throughout 2016.
- **Development of proposals to change laws and increase funding:** Many of the public's ideas would require additional resources or revisions of state law. In addition, several laws that provide specific direction and dedicated funding are scheduled to expire within the next two years. WDFW will devote significant effort in 2016 to identifying funding options and potential license fee increases to ensure the department can meet its legal responsibilities and public expectations in coming years.
- **The startup of initiatives that will require significant time and/or new funding:** WDFW has already embarked on a major fishing rule simplification project and has identified several other initiatives, such as improving hatchery management, rebuilding the department website, and addressing fires, droughts, and other aspects of climate change.



For the record: Summaries of regional listening forums

Selah

September 10, 2015

Selah Civic Center

About 70 central Washington residents provided their views and concerns about the management of WDFW wildlife areas, including vehicle access, fire control, signage, and the need for active advisory committees. Several people suggested the department should enlist volunteers to help improve wildlife habitat and tackle other projects on state lands.

Others saw a need for additional WDFW enforcement officers to patrol lands inside and outside of the wildlife areas.

WDFW's fishing and hunting regulations drew criticism from several participants. Some called for simplifying the rules pamphlets, and others proposed simplifying the regulations

themselves. Others requested better distribution of the rules, better maps, and the development of a mobile app to find fishing opportunities and update catch record cards.

Representatives of two conservation groups credited WDFW for employing "hoot owl" rules to help protect fish during the drought. They also expressed support for expanding wild gene banks to help recover wild steelhead populations.

Hunters proposed a variety of changes, ranging from increasing opportunities for big game, master hunters and disabled hunters to legalizing hound hunting for cougars.

Notes from the meeting appear here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildfuture/>

Spokane Valley

September 30, 2015

Center Place

Attendees expressed several concerns, including a desire for better communication with WDFW and greater public involvement in land-use issues. Many of the 60-70 participants urged the department to broaden support for common goals by increasing collaboration with volunteer groups, conservation groups, the agricultural community, and people who do not hunt or fish.

A number of comments suggested that WDFW could improve communication with the public by simplifying its fishing and hunting rules, redesigning its website, and holding more meetings like the Wild Future forum.

Participants proposed various changes to fishing and hunting rules, ranging

from deregulating bass and walleye to adjusting deer seasons to reflect the impact of bluetongue disease. More than a dozen comments focused on conflicts with wildlife, including wolves, bears, cougars, coyotes, beavers, and wild turkeys.

Many called for more projects to restore wildlife habitat, rehabilitate lakes, and improve WDFW water-access sites (particularly Sprague Lake). Some also support hiring more enforcement officers.

To help support new initiatives, several in attendance favored imposing new fees on wildlife watchers and other recreationists who do not hunt or fish.

Notes from the meeting appear here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildfuture/>



Mill Creek

October 6, 2015

WDFW Mill Creek Regional Office

A common theme at the Mill Creek forum was that WDFW needs to simplify its fishing and hunting regulations and do a better job of explaining its goals and management actions to the public. Several of the nearly 80 participants said they appreciated the Wild Future forums and want the department to further expand its public outreach and increase opportunities for volunteers.

Many participants represented outdoor groups that expressed a desire for WDFW to provide more recreational opportunities beyond fishing and hunting.

A number of anglers questioned the fairness of tribal fishing allocations, and several suggested that the North of Falcon season-setting process for salmon

fisheries is “broken.” Several people favored designating some regional rivers as wild fish sanctuaries (“gene banks”) to help recover native steelhead populations. However, some anglers opposed including the Skagit River in that strategy.

Participants expressed strong support for maintaining access to public recreation, and several proposed using tax laws to penalize industrial timber companies that have closed access to hunters. Others said WDFW should provide more support for Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups (RFEs), and some proposed ways to generate funding for stewardship of state lands.

Notes from the meeting appear here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildfuture/>

Lacey

October 8, 2015

Saint Martin's University

About 70 people participated in the Lacey forum, offering proposals to expand partnerships with fishing and hunting groups, watershed councils, RFEs, land trusts and other organizations.

Several suggested new volunteer opportunities for habitat restoration, and one person proposed that WDFW sponsor a statewide volunteer day to encourage citizen involvement in conservation.

A number of participants expressed support for creating wild steelhead gene banks in Puget Sound rivers, but others said they would oppose that approach if it reduced production of hatchery fish.

Comments were also divided on the allocation of salmon between

recreational and commercial fisheries.

Most comments about WDFW land management suggested the department should ease existing restrictions and expand public access. Others proposed taxing wildlife watchers and using some automobile-license fees to increase funding for fisheries and wildlife habitat.

One comment struck a common theme at the forum: “Maintain two-way communication.” Many participants expressed a desire for more – and better – information from the department. Specific requests included simplifying the fishing pamphlet, improving WDFW’s website, and developing a mobile app for catch reporting.

Notes from the meeting appear here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildfuture/>



Vancouver

October 14, 2015

Water Resources Education Center

No subject received more attention at the Vancouver forum than fishing and fish management. More than 100 people attended the forum, and WDFW received nearly 100 specific comments on issues ranging from barbless-hook requirements to problems with hatchery production on the Kalama and North Fork Lewis rivers.

Several anglers urged WDFW to expedite seine-fishery tests and pursue a commercial license buyout program as steps toward restricting commercial gillnetting to off-channel areas of the Columbia River by 2017. Others asked the department to provide more advance notice of emergency fishing-rule changes, sought a boost in coho salmon production and called for expanding kids fishing events.

Hunters, meanwhile, expressed concerns

about access restrictions on industrial timberlands in the region and herbicide spraying by private timber companies. Several urged WDFW work with those companies to restore access to those lands. Other issues raised by hunters included poaching, predatory wildlife, and the desire to use dogs during the fall turkey season. The agency's western Washington pheasant release program drew praise.

Several participants urged WDFW to make greater use of volunteers and to expand partnerships with conservation groups, RFEFGs, port districts, and other groups who support WDFW's mission. Licensing options proposed at the forum included reducing fees for seniors and issuing free licenses to wounded veterans.

Notes from the meeting appear here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildfuture/>

Wenatchee

October 20, 2015

Port of Chelan County Confluence Technology Center

Many of the nearly 60 participants at this forum proposed changes to hunting and fishing regulations, but the highest number of comments called for stricter conservation standards and for preserving public access to outdoor recreation.

Conservation concerns raised during the meeting included fish-passage barriers, invasive species, lead shot, gillnetting, suction dredging, ATVs in wildlife areas, and catch-and-release fishing for sturgeon.

Several comments also suggested that WDFW should improve monitoring of wildlife species and put more enforcement officers in the field to prevent poaching.

Many also called for new partnerships between WDFW and "non-consumptive users" such as hikers and birdwatchers to achieve shared goals for conservation and outdoor recreation. Some suggested that

new excise taxes on sporting equipment should be imposed to achieve these objectives.

Hunters and anglers pressed WDFW for better maps, clearer rules, and a mobile app for viewing regulations.

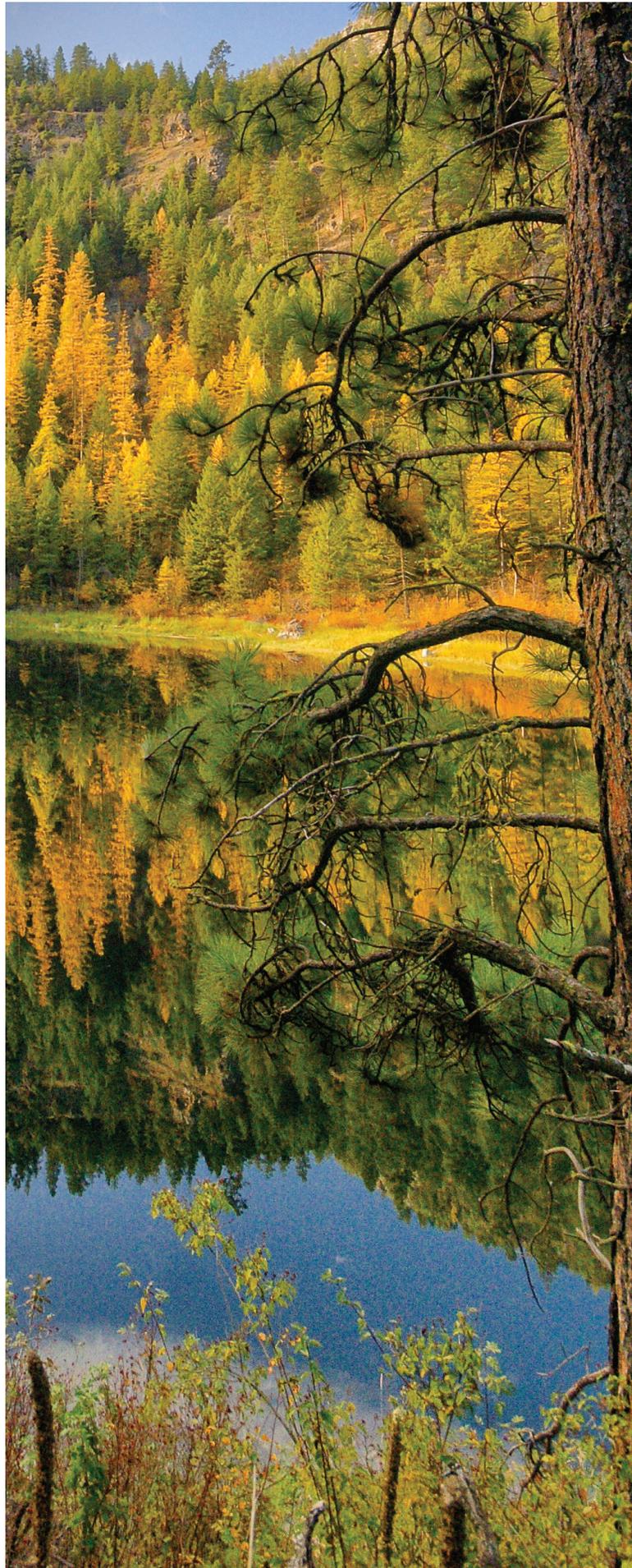
Eight people commented that the rule pamphlets for fishing and hunting are too complicated and should be overhauled.

Relatively few hunters attended, in part because the event took place during the general deer hunting season.

Department managers have continued to reach out to hunting organizations and have urged hunters and others with a stake in resource management to use the online comment option to provide input for the Wild Future initiative.

Notes from the meeting appear here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildfuture/>





WDFW: Supporting recreation and the outdoor economy

As state government's principal steward of fish and wildlife resources, WDFW directly and indirectly supports \$4.5 billion in economic activity each year and more than 60,000 jobs across the state. State law directs the department to conserve native fish and wildlife, protect and enhance the environment, and provide recreational and commercial fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, and other sustainable opportunities for Washington residents and visitors.

WDFW employees:

- **Manage fishing and hunting resources** to maximize recreational and commercial opportunities and economic benefits while conserving fish and wildlife species.
- **Operate 83 fish hatcheries** that produce salmon, steelhead, trout, and other game fish.
- **Manage programs to benefit** hundreds of species, including those protected under endangered species laws.
- **Oversee nearly 1 million acres** of public wildlife lands to provide public access and protect the environment.
- **Maintain 700 boat launches** and other water access sites.
- **Conserve and restore habitat** with a special focus on ecosystems that support native fish stocks.
- **Enforce laws and regulations** that protect natural resources and public safety.

WDFW is overseen by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, whose nine members are appointed to six-year terms by the Governor. The commission's most important responsibilities are to appoint and supervise the director, and to establish policy to guide the department's priorities and operations.

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