



## Director's Report to the Commission

June 14-15, 2019  
Port Angeles, Washington

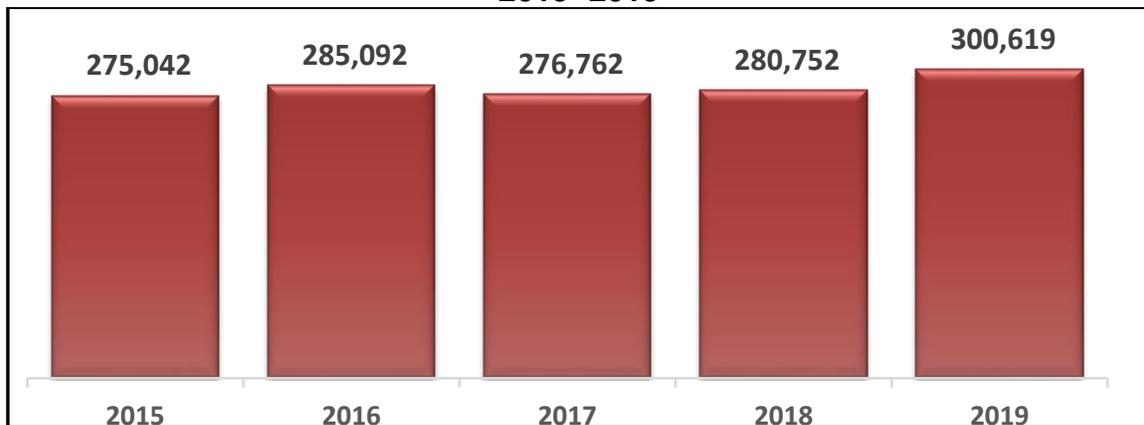
### Technology and Financial Management / Licensing

#### License Sales

The Licensing Division completed their busiest time of the year in May, where the agency had \$2 million license sale days. In the months of April and May, the Division completes 42% of their workload due to the start of the new license year and completing the special hunt application sales and submittal.

This year, the Licensing Division set a new record for special hunt application sales. The Division sold over 300,000 applications and generated over \$2.5 million for the agency. As you can see from the table below, previously 2016 was our best year with 285,092 applications sold.

**Total Special Hunt Applications Sold  
2015 -2019**



The Licensing Division was able to have a successful busy season by working as a team, assisting customers with questions and executing a tailored special hunt marketing campaign.

During the months of April and May, the Division assisted customers by:

- Answering over 15,000 phone calls at headquarters and another 7,715 through the after hour call center.
- Processing over 3,100 emails.
- Printing and fulfilling over 60,000 license transactions purchased online.

The tailored special hunt marketing campaign included:

- Spring bear special hunt
  - During this campaign, the Division tried a ‘Last Day Email’ to all hunters. The outcome was outstanding, seeing a 37% increase in applications sold from 2016.
- Turkey special hunt
  - During the month of May, the Division sent out two emails regarding turkey special hunts. Increasing the awareness of these applications resulted in a 110% increase from 2016.
- Sheep special hunt
  - With the additional 50 tags in the sheep category, an email and social media boost went out, creating an increase of 12% from 2016.

**Special Hunt Applications Sold  
2019 vs. 2016**

Species	2019	2016	% Difference
Deer	78,619	60,811	29%
Elk	98,588	99,132	-1%
Bear	5,805	4,236	37%
Moose	43,934	41,740	5%
Goat	13,945	16,078	-13%
Sheep	25,837	23,001	12%
Turkey	1,899	906	110%

- Multiple season deer and elk applications and tags
  - The Division directed social media posts and targeted emails to hunters who had never purchased a multiple season permit before. This resulted in an increase of 12% from 2016.
  - Throughout the months of April and May, the Division sent emails to multiple season winners, letting them know the benefit of buying their tag now and using it for submitting special hunts. The Division saw an increase in tag sales of 19% for deer and 14% for elk.

**Multiple Season Deer and Elk Applications and Tag  
2019 vs. 2016**

Applications	2019	2016	Difference	% Difference
Multiseason Deer	16,079	13,433	2,646	20%
Multiseason Elk	16,040	14,330	1,710	12%
Tags	2019	2016	Difference	% Difference
Multiseason Deer	3,900	3,290	610	19%
Multiseason Elk	742	650	92	14%

The Executive Management Team (EMT) recently visited the Licensing Division. During that time, we were able to congratulate the Division on their success and thank them for all of their hard work.



*Executive Management Team and Licensing Division*

## Public and Policy Engagement

On May 8, 2019, the state of Washington signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service on Shared Stewardship. Through the MOU, the Washington Departments of Natural Resources and Fish and Wildlife, along with the Forest Service, established a framework to work collaboratively to accomplish mutual goals, further common interests, and respond to the increasing suite of challenges facing communities, landscapes, and natural and cultural resources of the state of Washington.

## Habitat Program

### **Oiled Sea Otter Response Equipment Grant**

The Department's Oil Spill Team joined with Sealife Response, Rehabilitation and Research (SR3) and was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology to purchase equipment to respond to oiled sea otters. The funds were used to acquire equipment that cannot be obtained commercially at the time of a spill and/or would be needed almost immediately to implement the response. Eight 8-foot diameter and 4-foot deep saltwater pools with filtration systems, nets and sky kennels for sea otter recovery teams, and cages were purchased. The equipment is being staged at the SR3 facility in Seattle. This equipment would likely be deployed at zoos or aquariums who would have staff that are familiar with handling sea otters. It is always the hope that oil spills can be prevented, but if the worst happens, the Northwest now has a ready supply of equipment to implement an oiled sea otter response and rehabilitation effort.

# Fish Program

## Crab Management

Nearly all crab management plans have been completed and July 4 has been identified as opening day in most regions. The summer crab fishery will continue through Labor Day. Crabbing will start later in the San Juan Islands, due to late softshell in this part of the state. Marine Areas 11 (Vashon Island) and 13 (South Puget Sound) will remain closed due to low abundance and recruitment. The southern part of Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal, south of Ayock Point) will be closed as well, for the same reasons. Marine Area 10 (Central Puget Sound) will have a shortened season from July 4 through August 3, to target the quota in that area.

## Mass Marking and Coded Wire Tag Update

Mass marking and coded wire tagging is in full swing for the Fish Program. Staff have currently marked and tagged approximately 53% of all of our fish this calendar year. Since February, staff have marked and tagged more than 62 million fish and counting. There have been some unique challenges this year that they have had to overcome. Colder than normal temperatures have resulted in most projects being delayed due to fish being too small to run through the trailers. In addition, staff have had to meet the demands of increased production for Southern Resident orcas without an increase in resources. Our dedicated staff have been putting in a tremendous amount of work to include overtime and working double shifts to ensure that we get all of the fish marked in time for their scheduled releases.

## Hatchery Evaluation and Assessment Team (HEAT) Update

To date approximately 98% of the Hatchery Genetic Management Plans (HGMPs) statewide have been submitted to NOAA. Out of that 98%, NOAA has completed review on 50%. Broken down by region, Puget Sound has 98% submitted with NOAA completing review of 4%. The Lower Columbia has 95% submitted with NOAA completing review on 58%. These numbers do not reflect new HGMPs currently being worked on as a result of the increases in salmon production related to Southern Resident orca recovery.

WDFW Hatchery Programs	Number	HGMP Not Submitted	HGMP Submitted	Letter of Sufficiency	NOAA Approved	Under Review
Statewide	121	3	118	24	60	34
Puget Sound	57	1	56	19	25	12
Lower Columbia	38	2	36	1	22	13

	WDFW Submitted HGMP	NOAA Review Completed
Statewide	98%	50%
Puget Sound	98%	44%
Lower Columbia	95%	58%

## Wildlife Program

### **White Nose Syndrome in Washington Update**

In March 2016, the first detection of the invasive bat disease, white-nose syndrome (WNS), west of the continental divide occurred in King County. This initial detection occurred in a little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*). As of December 2018, there are 31 detections of either WNS or the fungus that causes WNS, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd), in King County and five others in Lewis County, about 50 miles from the initial detection. White-nose syndrome has now been detected in the bat species Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*). These detections in King and Lewis counties indicate that WNS may be more widespread, and environmental reservoirs are likely within or near the immediate area of these detections. Despite our limited understanding of bats in Washington, it is reasonable to assume that WNS has the potential to cause significant mortalities among some species and perhaps species imperilment or local extirpations in Washington. Because of these risks, the Department implemented a comprehensive WNS response plan after the initial detection including passive and active surveillance, population monitoring and public outreach. The agency, along with support from partners, has made progress over the last few years, but there is still more that needs to be achieved to develop informed disease management and treatment plans. This may include understanding life history of Washington bat species, and the ecology of Pd (e.g., persistence) in Washington landscapes.

### **Wolf Update**

The Department will begin a public engagement process later this year that will propose the development of a post-recovery wolf conservation and management plan. The evaluation of wolf translocation will be incorporated into this process.

The post-recovery planning process is being initiated proactively because the Department anticipates it will likely take two to three years to complete. The post-recovery plan will guide the Department in long-term wolf conservation and management, and will evaluate various wolf management tools, including translocation. The Department will announce the public scoping for the post-recovery plan and associated public meetings later this year.

In collaboration with Department staff and with input from the public, the Wolf Advisory Group is updating the Wolf-Livestock Interaction Protocol for 2019. The last revision was in 2017. The protocol describes a variety of proactive measures livestock producers can take to reduce the probability of wolf-livestock conflicts and establishes a framework for the Department's response when conflicts between wolves and livestock do occur.

### **Columbia Basin and Scatter Creek/South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Update**

On May 1, the first meeting of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Advisory Committee was held in Ephrata. The meeting covered their roles, wildlife area planning, and key issues. The committee has a good representation of interests, including waterfowl hunters, farmers, climbers, the weed board, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service. The advisory committee will meet again in the summer to work with staff members on recreation management on Quincy Lakes, and later in the fall to work on the wildlife area plan objectives.

On May 2, a public meeting was held in Moses Lake to introduce the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area planning process and have an open house to gather input from the public about their use and concerns on the wildlife area. While not a large turnout, another potential member of the climbing community was interested in sitting on the advisory committee.

The South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Advisory Committee met on April 10 at the Nisqually Reach Nature Center. This is a new advisory committee formed as the kick-off for the wildlife area management planning process. Nine members of the committee represent interest groups, including local landowners, recreational interests (hunting, fishing and birding), Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group, Black Hills Audubon, North Mason School District, Department of Corrections, Washington Waterfowl Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Nisqually Billy Frank Jr National Wildlife Refuge, and the Nisqually Reach Nature Center. Topics discussed at the advisory committee meeting included McNeil Island access, western pond turtle recovery, the need for environmental education, Theler acquisition (Union River Unit), disabled access, and non-game values that should be included in the plan (amphibians, invertebrates, and pollinators). The South Puget Sound Wildlife Area includes seven units totaling 5,560 acres. The new management plan is expected to be completed in 2020.

### **Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly Reintroduction – South Puget Lowlands 2019**

The abundance of Taylor's checkerspot butterflies in the South Puget Lowlands reached remarkable levels for a second straight year. Two consecutive years of strong numbers across three sites has this federal and state endangered species dispersing in significant numbers across the larger landscape and moving towards recovery. On Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), butterflies have been sighted on nearly every prairie, at distances two or more miles from the nearest source site. Reports of adult checkerspots at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area's north unit indicate similar movement distances there. From a single source site in the northwest corner of the Artillery Impact Area (AIA), captive rearing and reintroduction efforts have produced two new large populations, one on the south side of the AIA and a second at Scatter Creek's south unit. A third reintroduction site on JBLM is also off to a strong start, and is the main focus of current release efforts. Overall, the Taylor's checkerspot reintroduction project has close to doubled numbers in the Puget Lowlands since the last peak in 2012, and increased overall numbers by a factor of 27 since the all-time low recorded in 2009.

## **Enforcement Program**

Our spring enforcement season has been busy. There have been multiple boating safety rescues with an increase in contacts for missing personal floatation devices and boating safety cards. The bears are out and there has been a steady increase in the amount of public safety calls across the state that officers have responded to. Public safety is our priority and these responses demand a lot of officer time. Several fish and

shellfish openers took place with a variety of fishing violations found up and down the coastline and Puget Sound.

## **Records Management System Replacement**

We did not receive the funding needed to continue the project of replacing the Department's outdated and unsupported records management system, and this will greatly affect our operational capacity. This project was ranked 13th in order of priority for IT projects for the state, and we are working to determine what happened and our path moving forward.

## **Meet Puddles!**

The Department has just acquired its newest member of the Aquatic Invasive Species Unit, "Puddles." Puddles was a rescue dog acquired and trained by Debi Deshon of "Mussel Dogs." The acquisition was made possible through a grant received from the Bureau of Reclamation.

Sergeant Pam Taylor spent two weeks in California, Arizona and Utah training with Puddles and Mussel Dogs, and soon the team will be assisting with the inspection of watercraft entering Washington in attempts to stop the introduction of quagga and zebra mussels. She can detect mussels that humans cannot see. Welcome aboard Puddles!



## **Non-Lethal Pursuit Training Opportunity**

On April 30, Governor Inslee signed House Bill 1516 into law establishing a Department directed nonlethal program for the purpose of training dogs.

*(1) The commission shall adopt by rule a process and criteria to select persons who may act as agents of the state for the purpose of using one or more dogs to hunt or pursue black bear, cougar, or bobcat to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety. The commission rule must outline the requirements an applicant must comply with when applying for the program including, but not limited to, a criminal background check. (2) The department shall administer a training program to enable persons who have been selected pursuant to subsection (1) of this section to train dogs for use consistent with this section.*

This program will be monitored and administered through the Department's Enforcement and Wildlife Conflict programs. A limited number of individuals will be selected to participate in the program utilizing a permit application process, to include an extensive background and conduct investigation.

## Wildlife Conflict Updates

The Enforcement Program has had ongoing communication with Stevens County Sheriff's office and has attended several community meetings. Officers are continually responding to dangerous wildlife calls. Since January 1, 2019, a total of 20 cougars have been removed from Stevens, Pend Oreille, and Ferry Counties. To put that into perspective, for the 2018 calendar year a total of 80 cougars were removed across the state in response to a threat to public safety, livestock, pet or other relevant concerns. In comparison, 32 cougars were removed in Washington in 2017, 27 removed in 2016, and 26 in 2015.

## Shrimping Offenses

Officers patrolled Marine Area 10 during the shrimp opener in May. A boat was



contacted just after the 11 a.m. closure pulling up a shrimp pot. When asked how many shrimp on board, they said just over one limit. In the end, they were found to have 382 shrimp between two people. The shrimp were seized and they were both cited for first degree over limit. The captain was also cited for failure to submit, fishing closed season, and no rotten cotton on shrimp pots.

While on patrol for the shrimp opener in Elliott Bay, Officers contacted two subjects near Elliott Bay Marina. Upon contact, the two subjects immediately admitted to possessing approximately 400 shrimp. An exact count found 529 shrimp between the two subjects. The shrimp was seized and citations for unlawful fishing first degree were filed with the King County Prosecutor's Office.

## Marine Vessel Rescues

Officers responded to a distress call from a Canadian whale-watching vessel on May 9, west of Whidbey Island. Multiple Department Officers in conjunction with the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection took passengers to safety as their whale-watching vessel took on water. The boat, out of Victoria, British Columbia, had beached at Smith Island, west of Whidbey and south of Lopez islands.



On Saturday, May 4, the opening day of boating season, officers patrolling Marine Area 7 responded to a call for assistance from the sailing vessel *Zodiac*. The *Zodiac* reported an unconscious person onboard requiring medical assistance and transport. Officers boarded the *Zodiac* within seven minutes of the initial distress call. The patient was transferred to the Department's vessel and transported to EMS in under 30 minutes.

## Region 2

### **Rattlesnake Population Monitoring Continues**

Department and U.S. Forest Service biologists, working collaboratively, visited three Northern Pacific rattlesnake dens in the upper Methow Valley. They observed around 100 snakes between the three sites, including individuals from all age classes, suggesting these sites are supporting healthy, self-sustaining populations. This is part of a long-term effort to document the distribution, status, and ecology of this often misunderstood species near the edge of its range.

### **Forest Restoration Work and Recreation Planning Work Continues in the Stemilt Basin of Chelan County**

In collaboration with Chelan County Natural Resources, Department personnel from Wildlife and Habitat Programs and Regional Director Brown continued work to finalize a recreation planning document for future recreation management and to identify needed improvements, all while enhancing wildlife habitat conditions on the newly acquired lands in the Stemilt basin area of southern Chelan County. The goal is to adopt the recreation plan by the Department for application on state lands as well as county lands. This joint effort also involves providing proposed recreation improvements and sanitation while improving habitat through controlled burning, retiring old primitive roads, rerouting roads away from sensitive areas, and building shaded firebreaks for better control line placement and safety in the event of a wildfire. Resources and staff have been pooled with the County to maximize the amount of work being done over a wider area and to take advantage of economies of scale in getting the work done.

### **Fence Replacement**

Regional staff met near Ramsey Creek on the Methow Wildlife Area to help re-construct a boundary fence that has allowed neighboring U.S. Forest Service cattle to drift onto Department lands. Employees from the Methow, Sinlahekin, Scotch Creek and Chelan Wildlife Areas helped reconstruct nearly one mile of fencing and repair additional segments in the area. Improving the fencing in this area will allow this landscape to be restored and recover following the suspension of a grazing permit in this area. The Methow Wildlife Area staff appreciate all the extra help from their peers during this project and look forward to additional cooperative projects in the future.

### **Drought Response Preparations in Region 2**

Cross-program staff continue to watch for emerging drought impacts connected to the well-below average snow pack in North Central Washington and the Okanogan Basin in British Columbia. Time will tell when those impacts will become apparent, but early season warm periods are taking off the remaining snow pack very quickly. Recent heavy rains in the area have had a positive effect on area reservoirs, but the outlook remains very concerning, especially given the low salmon and steelhead return projections and the need for reproductive success and survival for outmigration.

## Region 3

### **Elk Shed Antler Hunting**

The opening of the winter closure areas in Region 3 proved again to be a popular event for the public interested in collecting shed elk antlers. At the Oak Creek Wildlife Area headquarters parking lot, people started lining up and camping four days before they could enter the winter closure area. At 6:00 a.m. on May 1, 84 vehicles went through the main gate with 159 people in those vehicles. An additional 64 people went through a walk-in gate at headquarters. Six cars went through another gate at Oak Creek Road gate for a total of 13 people. Another 21 vehicles went through the upper gate on Bethel Ridge Road. The Cowiche Unit had 42 vehicles with over 80 individuals accessing by foot and horses. The Oak Creek Volunteers provided the necessary capacity to ensure the morning was a safe and organized activity for all those who participated. Shed antler collecting is also very popular at the Wenas, LT Murray, and Colockum Wildlife Areas.

## Region 4

### **Partnership with Snohomish Sportsmen's Club and Sky River Anglers for Steelhead Youth Fishing Event.**

On Saturday, June 1, region staff supported a wonderful youth steelhead experience at Reiter's Ponds. It was the first of three events to be spread out over the summer. The next two available dates are the first Saturday of July and August to be held at the same location. The event started with a few dozen waiting at the gate and they were all very excited to be there! The stream of kids was a nice constant flow, and 67 youth attended. The Snohomish Sportsmen's Club and the Sky River Anglers had volunteers geared up and in the water to help first timers who had never fished. They also coached parents of kids that wanted advice. Local adult anglers that walked by the Department's table were genuinely curious and supportive of the kids opportunity. Many even thanked Department staff for being there.

The Department was there to support and engage with the public. Staff had a Trade Show license terminal there to sell licenses, Discover Passes, or create profiles for youth so they could get their Catch Record Cards. The Department's Fishing Derby and the National Hunting and Fishing Day were promoted, and over a dozen new customers were added into WILD.

### **Whale Update**

Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW): There are two new SRKW calves! The two new babies (L-pod and J- pod) have been sighted traveling with their pods and appear to be healthy. NOAA continues to be concerned with J17. Her body condition continues to deteriorate with a pronounced "peanut head."

Gray Whales: Since January 1, 2019, there have been 70 gray whale standings along the west coast of North America from Mexico to Alaska. NOAA has declared this an “unusual mortality event.” In Washington alone, there have been 27 gray whales found dead. In Puget Sound, there have been five stranded gray whales. Preliminary findings in several of the whales have shown evidence of emaciation, though the findings are not consistent across all whales examined. The Department will continue to support and collaborate with NOAA as requested. Department Enforcement was asked to tow two dead whales away from beaches and to necropsy sights.

## Region 5

### **Toutle River Fish Collection Facility**

The Department received \$6.775 million for upgrades to the Toutle River Fish Collection Facility (FCF). The capital budget contains \$2.775 million for feasibility, design, and maintenance work for the FCF upgrades, and real estate purchases for sediment retention and flood risk management in the Toutle basin. The remaining \$4 million is allocated for the first phase purchase of property adjacent to the Hoffstadt Unit of the St. Helens Wildlife Area. This project is an important step toward perpetuating viable fish and wildlife populations in the future. The FCF upgrades help move the state closer to the goal of recovering listed coho and steelhead populations in the Toutle basin. The additional acreage added to the St. Helens Wildlife Area helps provide stable wildlife habitat to compensate for losses associated with the Toutle Sediment Retention Structure. The work in the Toutle basin is being done with the support and engagement of the Governor’s office, in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers, and includes fish, habitat, and wildlife components.

### **Columbia River Management**

Spring Chinook runs size has been downgraded from the preseason forecast. It appears several hatcheries are expected to have shortfalls, which led Drano/Wind to close to help cover other regional broodstock needs, potentially including Idaho. The estuary sport sturgeon fishery is underway and generating thousands of angler trips to the lower river where spring Chinook seasons were closed due to low forecasts of Cowlitz spring Chinook. Catch rates for legal-sized sturgeon has been low and is expected to start picking up as flows stabilize and river temperatures warm up in June.

### **Wolf Status Review and Management Plan**

Region 5 staff have been meeting with tribes and county governments to discuss the upcoming status review of wolf populations in the state, as well as the development of a post-recovery wolf management plan. Public meetings on these processes will begin in the fall, and staff want local communities to be aware of these opportunities to learn more and weigh in with questions and concerns.

## Region 6

### **Razor Clam Management**

The 2018-19 razor clam season on the Washington coast has concluded. Digging opportunities were similar to recent ten-year averages on all beaches with the exception of Long Beach. Long Beach was only open four days during the 2018-19 season due to low abundances of harvestable clams identified during the preseason population assessment. In total, razor clam diggers made approximately 273,000 trips and harvested and estimated 3.7 million clams during the season. Department staff estimate the economic benefit to coastal communities associated with recreational razor clam digging during 2018-19 at approximately \$24 million. Staff are beginning to assess populations for the 2019-20 season, a process that will conclude in late summer. These data will be shared with recreational diggers and coastal communities during the fall of 2020 to help develop future opportunities.

### **North Rainier Elk Herd Management Plan**

The Department is excited to announce that we are nearing the end of a very long process to develop a management plan for the North Rainier elk herd. This plan and process is unique in that it has involved in-depth participation by one of our tribal biologist partners which goes beyond the norm. The lead biologist with the Muckleshoot Tribe has joined District 11 and 12 biologists as a full co-author of the plan and has provided important data to inform the plan objectives and priorities. The new draft plan objectives include slight increases in population size in natural habitats as well as reductions in areas where elk-human conflicts are problematic. The Draft North Rainier Elk Herd Plan also includes provisions for increasing our monitoring efforts to provide sound information upon which management decisions, including hunting season recommendations, are based. An announcement of a public meeting and comment opportunities will be coming out soon, and we look forward to continuing to work with our partners to finalize the plan and begin its implementation.