

# Commission Conservation Policy

Policy number: C-700X

Effective date: MONTH DAY, YEAR

Signed by: Barbara Baker, Fish and Wildlife Commission Chair

The mandate of the Department is to preserve, protect and manage fish and wildlife and provide commercial and recreational hunting and fishing opportunities that do not impair the resource. The Department is encouraged to accomplish this mandate in cooperation with volunteers. Further, state law emphasizes that the resources are property of the state.

Conservation of fish and wildlife is becoming increasingly more difficult with the amplified effects of climate change, increasing human population and continued habitat fragmentation and loss. Recognizing that the recently adopted Department Strategic Plan calls for proactively addressing these conservation challenges, the Commission sets out the following policy guidance.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to guide the Commission and Department in preserving and protecting our state's diverse fish and wildlife resources by proactively addressing the conservation challenges.

## **Definitions:**

*Abundance:* Healthy and sustainable species population within the context of ecosystems.

*Conservation:* Public policy, science, and management actions to preserve, protect, or restore healthy ecosystems, safeguard the intrinsic and extrinsic (social, economic, and cultural values) of abundance, and provide equitable benefits to current and future generations.

*Ecosystem:* A community of organisms together with their physical environment, viewed as a system of interacting and interdependent relationships and including such processes as the flow of energy through trophic levels and the cycling of chemical elements and compounds through living and nonliving components of the system.

*Ecosystem-Based Management:* An approach to natural resource management that recognizes the complexity and full array of interactions within ecosystems, and whose goal is to protect and restore the health and resilience of ecosystems for the benefit of all organisms, including humans.

## **Washington's Wildlife Trust and Public Engagement**

Natural resources, including fish, shellfish and wildlife, in Washington are managed in trust for current and future residents. Public engagement with the Commission and Department is

essential for building and maintaining trust. We commit to ample opportunities for public input regarding Commission and Department programs, policies and decisions. We take the role of Department Advisory Groups seriously and appreciate the importance of their contributions.

## **Principles for Commission and Department Conservation**

Being mindful of our challenging environmental context, definition of conservation, and deep responsibility for preservation and management of Washington's wildlife in trust of the public, the Commission sets the following guiding principles and strategies for the Commission and Department:

- 1) Conservation first.** Our top priority is the preservation of Washington's native and naturalized fish, shellfish and wildlife for the benefit of all state residents and future generations. Successful conservation is the foundation for providing sustainable recreational and commercial opportunities, including hunting, fishing and wildlife recreation.
- 2) All species, habitats and ecosystems are important.** Our work must strive to conserve all native and naturalized fish and wildlife, even common species, because we understand the value of preserving functional ecosystems. Species conservation is of primary importance, but so is protecting species diversity as it adds resilience in the face of uncertainty; each species provides ecological benefit toward ecosystem health.
- 3) Conservation complexity requires partnerships.** Our work focuses on fish, shellfish and wildlife, but a systems approach and strong coordination with all local, state, federal and tribal governments, NGOs, and private landowners is essential. Fish and wildlife ignore artificial boundaries: we should look toward increasing collaborations with our neighboring states and Canada. We actively collaborate with tribes to coordinate decisions for best management options. We value and seek to increase our joint work with academia, business, and non-profit partners.
- 4) Knowledge and science are key.** Commission actions and decisions must be grounded in knowledge. Science is our best tool for creating knowledge. Our science-based work requires taking a broad, multi-disciplinary approach, especially incorporating biological, ecological, economic and social science information. We embrace new knowledge use science to address changing conditions through adaptive management.
- 5) Take precautionary approaches in turbulent times.** Climate change and rapid human development (habitat loss) when coupled with a relatively limited understanding of the working of ecosystems and mechanisms of long-term biodiversity health and resiliency -- and considering our deep responsibility for future generations -- suggests taking precautionary approaches that are becoming increasingly important moving forward when there are identified uncertainties and risk.

**6) Bold, innovative leadership and solutions are necessary.** A rapidly changing world has created challenges for current fish and wildlife management practices.. Increasing occurrence of fire, drought, and warming water and air temperatures present new and serious challenges to our ability to achieve our mandate. Our environmental health is degrading, and as a result, conservation priorities require more focused and deliberate action. The Commission understands that innovative projects do not always fully achieve the desired outcomes; we must be willing to fail on occasion in order to learn and to succeed. We need to strengthen our work in habitat/ecosystem protection, land connectivity, and expand our ability to restore degraded lands and waters, both private and public.

**7) Modern conservation requires an aligned vision, strategy and funding level.** A rapidly changing world that is threatening our living environment requires the Commission to adapt. The challenge is to continue both our traditional work and expand our efforts to meet many new conservation needs that are required to meet our mandate. The Commission must strengthen our communication to the public, legislature, and Governor regarding the need for additional support, expanded partnerships, and additional authorities and funding to fully realize the mandate.

**OR:**

- 1) Proactive conservation.** Innovative, evolving, science-informed conservation management must receive high priority to overcome the challenges to fish and wildlife conservation.
- 2) Landscape approaches to effective conservation.** While individual species protection is important, preservation of biodiversity and overcoming challenges to fish and wildlife conservation can only be accomplished by working to conserve abundance, biologic communities, and ecosystems across landscapes.
- 3) Conservation partnerships.** Proactive conservation honors and sustains our traditional conservation partners and seeks to expand these important relationships.
- 4) Management prudence.** Conservation management must be flexible and adaptive to respond to changes in abundance, new threats, and other conservation challenges that might emerge.
- 5) Aligned conservation vision, strategy, and funding.** The “shared earth, shared ocean” vision<sup>1</sup> of biodiversity conservation involving communication and outreach to mobilize communities around their needs and aspirations for fish and wildlife conservation will strengthen opportunities to gain increased support and resources from the public, legislature, and governor.

**The foregoing conservation principles shall be incorporated by the Commission and Department in the development and approval of the budget, planning, and decision-making processes.**