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**[wdfw.wa.gov/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/)**

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WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

# Advisory Group Handbook



## WDFW Mission

*To preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.*



## Reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities

WDFW welcomes the participation of persons with disabilities in all of its programs and related outdoor activities, including membership in advisory groups.

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More information is available on the WDFW website at:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/>.

## Public Records Act (RCW 42.56)

The Public Records Act (<http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=42.56>) ensures access to most public records created by state and local governments, unless a specific law applies for exempting the public record (in whole or part). “Public records” include written information relating to the conduct of government or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function prepared, owned, used or retained by any state agency. The public may inspect or obtain copies of most public records by filing a public disclosure request with the agency.

WDFW takes the position that advisory group records are public, and therefore subject to disclosure. The department’s public disclosure specialists will respond to all requests for the records of its advisory groups. To ensure that all relevant records are available for disclosure, individual members should include their WDFW staff point-of-contact in any communication related to the business of the advisory group.



## Welcome and introduction

Thank you for your willingness to serve on one of the advisory groups that helps the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) fulfill its mission and legal responsibilities as state government’s principal steward of fish and wildlife resources. Washington residents can choose to contribute their time and energy to many worthy groups and causes, so we are honored that you have volunteered to assist WDFW.

This booklet explains the role of advisory groups and the responsibilities of the individual members. It also contains information about two state laws that pertain to advisory groups, the Open Meetings Act and the Public Records Act.

Now that you’ve been appointed to an advisory group, you will be asked to register with the department as a volunteer at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/volunteer/>.

## Overview – WDFW advisory groups

State government advisory groups are created by the Governor, the Legislature, or individual agencies and commissions. They offer Washington residents an opportunity to have significant impact on the state's actions and policies. Advisory committee members dedicate their time, share their knowledge and experience, and communicate the public's opinions and priorities.

About 30 advisory groups provide recommendations to WDFW on many topics, including game management, habitat restoration, law enforcement, fisheries management, wildlife conservation, and hunter education. In addition, the state Fish and Wildlife Commission has an Americans with Disabilities Act Advisory Committee to provide advice on improving services for people with disabilities.

WDFW typically selects members to advisory committees who represent a broad range of perspectives and who reflect the state's geographic and demographic diversity. Committee members who represent an advocacy or special interest organization can also play a valuable role by informing their group's members about emerging issues, policy alternatives, and related activities.

Advisory group members' terms of service usually do not exceed three years, and members may be reappointed or removed at the department's discretion. When they accept an advisory group appointment, members assume certain responsibilities that are summarized in the following pages. Some responsibilities are common to all advisory committees; others reflect the specific focus of the individual group.

Unless specifically authorized, advisory groups do not have the authority to create rules or adopt policies, but WDFW seriously considers their recommendations when making decisions.



## Two important state laws affect the operation of WDFW advisory committees

Many laws guide state government operations, but the following statutes are especially important to WDFW advisory groups.

### Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30)

The Open Public Meetings Act (<http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=42.30>) applies to almost all state boards and commissions. Generally, the law requires the board to (a) notify the public of a proposed meeting, and (b) allow interested persons to attend. However, the Open Meetings Act does not guarantee the public a right to speak or actively participate in the meeting.

WDFW staff will help each advisory group understand the effect of the law on its specific responsibilities. In all cases, the department encourages advisory groups to conduct their business in an open, transparent manner, consistent with the intent of the act.

## How does the department support advisory groups?

WDFW does everything possible to assist its advisory groups. For example, the department will:

- Clearly define the advisory group's role in an official charter or other document.
- Designate a staff person to schedule, organize, and help to conduct meetings.
- Work with the committee members to develop meeting agendas.
- Facilitate meetings and conference calls as needed.
- Provide relevant background and other briefing material.
- Provide timely opportunities for the group to advise the agency and provide timely communication on emerging issues.
- Respect all views and perspectives represented by advisory group members.
- Communicate advisors' recommendations and perspectives to agency leaders in time to influence their decisions.

WDFW staff members play an additional, equally important role. Just as certain actions and commitments can help advisory groups and their members succeed, some behaviors can have the opposite effect. WDFW personnel will work with the committee and its members to identify and avoid actions that might undermine their group's effectiveness.



## How do advisory committees operate?



WDFW personnel support and coordinate advisory committee activities, and each committee has a designated point-of-contact with a specific staff person. Each committee also has a charter that spells out the group's responsibilities and method of operation. Most advisory groups contain fewer than 20 members.

In some cases, state law or WDFW will direct an advisory group to elect one of the members to serve as the chairperson. In those cases, committee meetings and discussions are governed by Roberts Rules of Order. Other committees operate less formally, with WDFW staff members coordinating the discussions.

Most WDFW advisory group meetings are open to the public, and the department's website has a section that includes advisory group membership rosters, schedules and agendas, and meeting-related documents: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/>.

Some, but not all, advisory committees permit a member to be represented by an alternate if he or she cannot attend a meeting. Arrangements for an alternate should be coordinated in advance with WDFW staff.

Generally, advisors are responsible for their own travel and meal expenses, but members may be reimbursed in some cases, such as when overnight accommodations are required.

## What are the characteristics of an effective advisory group member?

Individual advisory committee members have the opportunity to influence the actions and recommendations of their committee and the decisions of WDFW. Each member should stay informed about key issues, legislative activity, and the state laws and administrative rules that relate to their advisory responsibilities.

In a nutshell, effective members:

- Strive to attend all meetings.
- Prepare in advance for meetings and other activities, to ensure they effectively present their perspectives and those of the organizations they represent.
- Fully participate in meetings, group discussions, and work group activities.
- Recognize that the group must operate openly and transparently.
- Respect and carefully consider the views of others.
- Examine all available evidence before making a judgment.
- Understand that the authority to advise the department is granted to the advisory group as a whole, not to individual members.
- Recognize that individual members often will have to compromise to enable the advisory group to reach a recommendation.

In helping to develop recommendations, effective members consider potential impacts on:

- The conservation of fish and wildlife resources.
- Local communities and their economies.
- Constituent groups and their priorities for fish and wildlife management.
- User groups that sometimes have strongly opposing views.
- The department's ability to effectively enforce state natural resource laws.



## How can advisory groups maximize their effectiveness?

Advisory groups whose members fulfill their roles as described above are often able to develop recommendations that provide lasting benefits to the State of Washington. Such groups:

- Include discussion of alternate viewpoints with their recommendations.
- Express ideas and recommendations in clear, concise, language that is understandable to non-experts. WDFW staff members help advisory groups develop the written record.
- Propose recommendations that are both feasible and cost-effective.
- Establish clear procedures for how advisors and advisory groups interact with the public and other organizations. When expressing personal opinions or perspectives, members should clarify that they are not speaking for the entire group.