

# WDFW BUDGET AND POLICY ADVISORY GROUP MEETING SUMMARY

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**January 9, 2025**  
**Time 9am-Noon.**  
**Virtual Meeting**

## **Attendees**

### BPAG Members

Butch Smith, Ilwaco Charter Association  
George Harris, NW Marine Trade Association  
Mark Pidgeon, Hunters Heritage Council  
Colin Reynolds, Defenders of Wildlife  
Bill Richardson, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
Larry Phillips, American Sportfishing Association  
Lucas Hall, Long Live the Kings  
Kerston Swartz, Woodland Park Zoo  
Trina Bayard, Audubon WA  
Mindy Roberts, WA Conservation Action  
Alexei Calambokidis, Trout Unlimited  
Marie Neumiller, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
Tom O'Keefe, American Whitewater  
Ron Garner, Puget Sound Anglers  
Nora Nickum, Seattle Aquarium

### WDFW

Kelly Susewind  
Nate Pamplin  
Morgan Stinson  
Brandon Bean  
Melena Thompson  
Chalee Batungbacal  
Margen Carlson  
Kimmy Jarvela  
Tami Lininger  
Margen Carlson  
Comm. Lorna Smith

### Members of the Public

Claire Davis  
Paula Sweden  
Jen Syrowitz  
Dan Wilson

## **Meeting Notes**

### Welcome, Introductions, and Agency Update with Director Susewind

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Nate Pamplin welcomed the Budget and Policy Advisory Groups (BPAG) members and other guests to the meeting.

WDFW Director Kelly Susewind provided agency updates that noted change of administration in the Governor's office, and a new policy advisor to the Governor. Director Susewind noted that three Fish and Wildlife Commissioner terms have expired and can continue to serve until re-appointed or filled by other individuals. The Ruckelshaus report on WDFW governance was finalized and thus far, he hasn't heard of inquiries from the Legislature about the report. Director Susewind briefly addressed the budget conversations and WDFW's approach for the new session. Director Susewind also provided some staffing updates including hiring Melena Thompson as Legislative Director, some new intergovernmental forums assigned to Nate Pamplin, Director of External Affairs, including an appointment as an alternate to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council and the Energy Facility Siting and Evaluation Council. And to make room for that new work, the Communications and Public Engagement team that previously reported to Nate

has been moved under Deputy Director Amy Windrope and still remains part of the Director's Office. Director Susewind also updated that wildlife rehabilitation facilities in Region 1 will no longer be accepting cervids to slow the spread of CWD. Finally, Director Susewind updated the group on Regional Engagement committees as the pilot project applications for Region 2 and Region 4 have now closed, and applicants will be selected soon to participate on those committees.

## Legislative Update

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New WDFW Legislative Affairs Director Melena Thompson took a moment to introduce herself to the group and provide a bit of information about herself. Melena then shared with the group a presentation covering key points to note for the upcoming session including:

- Committee chair information
- Agency request bills in the upcoming session: 1) Increase renewal fee for personalized license plates and ) Increase efficacy of Enforcement violation options.
- Melena also shared other pre-filed bills that the agency is tracking, such as: kelp forest state symbol; habitat recovery pilot program; wildlife connectivity; Puget Sound nonspot shrimp pot license; and wolf management.

BPAG members discussed the wildlife connectivity bill and asked questions about the scope and types of enforcement violations that were included in the agency-request bill.

## Governor Budget Update

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CFO Morgan Stinson and Budget Officer Brandon Bean provided an overview of the following:

- Outline of the operating budget outlook, WDFW's problem statement, ending of the current biennium, WDFW's strategy moving forward, and the Capital Budget.
- Washington state is facing a \$10+ billion shortfall over the next four years, revenue growth has slowed due to caseloads and inflationary costs that have gone up. To balance the budget, either revenue must increase or budget cuts will be needed.
- The Governor's suggested balance proposal is a wealth tax and a B&O tax.
- Current Law Book 1, a budget proposal that doesn't assume new review, would leave WDFW with an \$80 million shortfall.
- New Law Book 2 budget proposal suggests new proposed revenue which would leave WDFW at an \$28 million shortfall. There would be cuts in Lands Maintenance, Forest Health, and Biodiversity and many of the one-time to ongoing budget requests would either be not funded or partially funded as a one-time appropriation.
- Ending the 2023-25 Biennium, Governor's budget introduces a \$3.7 million reduction to the Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Account (24N). WDFW anticipates addressing this issue this biennium even because of the hiring and purchasing freeze along with measures WDFW put into place after early signals of budget problems.
- Currently WDFW's session strategy is to focus the ask of new funding for a stream-lined Safety proposals and to avoid cut to Biodiversity, Lands, and ensure that the one-time to ongoing requests are funded. Essentially, request that current work remains funded, and to fund our Safety request.
- BPAG also discussed revenue ideas. The group discussed some of the principles in the long-term funding plan that BPAG helped developed, including when to seek State General Fund and when to pursue user-pay/user-benefit funding models. The last time recreational licenses were adjusted was in 2011 and the last time commercial licenses were adjusted was in 2017. Given the scale of the budget challenges, it was noted that the likelihood of the legislature looking at revenue bills was high and that WDFW would articulate impacts, advocate for principles that align with the long-term funding plan, and encourage broad stakeholder engagement by the Legislature.
- BPAG also discussed how to avoid reductions to biodiversity and there was interest by some BPAG members on pursuing a letter in support of this appropriation.

Please contact Morgan Stinson at [Morgan.Stinson@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Morgan.Stinson@dfw.wa.gov) for additional information.

## Closing

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Nate closed the meeting and expressed gratitude for BPAG's support and engagement.

The next BPAG meeting date will be posted to the intranet page, likely in March. Please email Kimmy Jarvela at [Kimberly.jarvela@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Kimberly.jarvela@dfw.wa.gov) to pre-register.