

WDFW BUDGET AND POLICY ADVISORY GROUP

MEETING SUMMARY

June 24, 2025

Time 3pm-5pm.

Virtual Meeting

BPAG Members

Dan Wilson, BHA
Lance Winecka, Regional Fisheries Coalition
Rachel Voss, First Hunt Foundation
Alex Baier, RMEF
Marie Neumiller, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Larry Phillips, American Sportfishing Association
Lucas Hall, Long Live the Kings
Kerston Swartz, Woodland Park Zoo
Mindy Roberts, WA Conservation Action
Alexei Calambokidis, Trout Unlimited
Nora Nickum, Seattle Aquarium
Mitch Freedman, Conservation NW
Jason Callahan, Green Diamond
Caleb Gwerder, WA Farm Bureau
Ryan Johnson
Jake Weise, B&C

WDFW

Kelly Susewind
Nate Pamplin
Morgan Stinson
Brandon Bean
Margen Carlson
Chalee Batungbacal
Kimmy Jarvela
Melena Thompson

Members of the public

Meeting Notes

Welcome, Introductions, and Agency Update with Director Susewind

Nate Pamplin welcomed the Budget and Policy Advisory Groups (BPAG) members and other guests to the meeting. Nate then provided updates on new BPAG members and members who are retiring or have moved, as well as shared feedback from recent one-on-ones with BPAG members about how the advisory group is functioning.

Director Susewind shared agency highlights beginning with sharing his appreciation for our BPAG members, without them our legislative session may have looked a lot different. Director Susewind highlighted budget items as a big focus for the department right now, noting that we had a reasonable budget considering the current budget shortfall and constraints the legislature is facing. WDFW had 29 formal layoffs, in addition to cutting numerous vacant positions. WDFW also saw a two million dollar cut to the biodiversity appropriation and a cut to Law Enforcement, among other impacts. Director Susewind mentioned the fee bill, SSB 5583, and its impact on the hunting and fishing community with a 38% increase. He emphasized that the bill wasn't agency request legislation, that if it was, we would have done more outreach to impacted customers in bill development, and he stated that the Department is

messaging to the angling/hunting public to buy licenses for the 2025-26 license year before July 1 when the bill goes into effect. Director Susewind also briefly touched on the federal funding conversations that are happening as well, not sure where the Congress will ultimately fund programs in FFY2026, but we are already seeing big impacts to conservation/wildlife funding and programs cut in the President's budget. Director Susewind wrapped up his updates by mentioning the Commission meeting later this week and noted salmon seasons are opening on the coast.

Legislative Update - 2025

Melena Thompson, WDFW Legislative Director, presented a brief overview of agency request legislation bills that passed for 2025. Melena discussed briefly the following bills, 1325, 5444. Fee related bills, 2003, 5390, 5583. Other bills that passed that impact WDFW, 1163, 5076, 5165, 5303, 5343. For more details, please see the bills list attachment.

Please contact Melena Thompson at Melena.Thompson@dfw.wa.gov for additional information.

Budget Update - 2025

CFO Morgan Stinson and Budget Officer Brandon Bean provided an overview of the operating budget that came out of the 2025 session. Morgan covered the 29 employee layoffs and shared that WDFW also cut vacant positions after a hiring freeze was implemented in December. Morgan also shared motor pool vehicle and admin costs like travel were used to help target cuts. Biodiversity lost two million for the biennium. The Toutle and Skamania Hatcheries funding was reduced by more than half, resulting in the loss of the Skamania hatchery. WDFW anticipates it will take three years to fully close the hatchery down, due to adult returns and needing to sort hatchery from wild fish. The ALEA grant program, Lake WA Predation program and the Salmon and Steelhead monitoring program, Columbia River evaluation program, prescribed burns, and more were all defunded or not renewed for funding. Morgan shared other impacts to WDFW's programs mentioning the pheasant program and wildlife disease management funding were all cut significantly. Other areas of impact include, streamflow policy support, fish barriers, riparian system assessments, and a reduction of enforcement officers. Morgan also mentioned the License fee increase impacts and how the legislature 'traded' State General fund from within the agency for the revenue that the new fee bill will generate.

Please contact Morgan Stinson at Morgan.Stinson@dfw.wa.gov for additional information.

2026 Legislature requests

Melena Thompson, WDFW Legislative Director, shared with BPAG the agencies current thoughts on future requests for the 2026 session.

- Increase agency efficiency by reducing frequency and number of required reports.
- Fish and Wildlife Financial Transparency Act
- Improving diver safety in Geoduck fishery
- Protecting staff from harassment by the public while performing their duties

Please contact Melena Thompson at Melena.Thompson@dfw.wa.gov for additional information.

2026 Supplemental Budget Request

CFO Morgan Stinson provided the group with the June 2025 Revenue Forecast sharing that Washington has a balanced budget with an over four-year budget outlook.

- Revenue forecast decreased compared to March.
- Federal budget introduces increased uncertainty.
- Increased tort claims have impact

Our key priorities are keeping current work whole and to secure funding for a number of Maintenance Level items. Morgan shared the draft policy level budget requests include enforcement, facilities, STRII (State Tribal Recreation Impacts Initiative), Riparian and high-resolution change detection. He also mentioned two supplemental capital project requests: the Snow Creek water access site in Clallam County and the Bob Oke Pheasant Farm.

Please contact Morgan Stinson at Morgan.Stinson@dfw.wa.gov for additional information.

Closing

In closing, Nate mentioned that there would be a Long-Term Funding workshop and department governance processes workshop coming this fall and for the group and will share more information soon. The next BPAG meeting will be held July 31 virtually. Nate closed the meeting and expressed gratitude for BPAG's support and engagement.