

WDFW BUDGET AND POLICY ADVISORY GROUP MEETING #7 –SUMMARY

Thursday, November 29, 2018, 9:00 am-3:30pm

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia Washington

Committee Members in Attendance

Dick Wallace	Gail Gatton	Kevin van Bueren
Andy Marks	Greg Mueller	Mike Peterson
Mitch Friedman	Nick Chambers	Jason Callahan
Fred Koontz	Butch Smith	Jen Syrowitz
Andrea Imler	Jess Helsley	

Facilitator

Elizabeth McManus, Ross Strategic assisted by Tess Wendel

Staff Representation

Nate Pamplin-Policy Director	David Giglio—Technology and Financial Management Assistant Director
Morgan Simpson- Budget Director	
Jon Snyder- Governor's office	

Introductions & Agenda Review

Nate Pamplin (WDFW Policy Director) welcomed the group and new members. Conversations are ongoing with other representative to expand BPAG membership further.

Elizabeth McManus (facilitator) outlined the agenda, which included:

- Status updates from WDFW 2019 budget requests and the open houses
- Discussion about alternative sources of revenue from non-consumptive users
- Soliciting guidance from BPAG for a DFW Strategic Plan.

Status Updates

Open Houses

Nate welcomed the group and provided updates about the recently completed open houses with the new Director. Five open houses have been completed at this time and one more is scheduled in Issaquah. Attendance at the open houses has ranged from 30 to 70 people. Most of the comments at the open houses have been related to carnivore issues along with some questions about hatchery production and impacts to wild stocks. The attendees were primarily people who regularly track fish and wildlife issues. They also tried a new format with a digital open house that occurred on 11/28. The on-line webinar went smoothly and lasted about 1.5 hours.

Budget

Nate provided an update regarding status of the operating budget. Budget proposals were approved by the Commission and submitted to the Governor's Office in September. The Governor's budget should be released in mid-December.

Further, the Governor's Office of Financial Management requested that lead agencies submit cost estimates for the recommendations in the Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) Task Force report. Nate highlighted some of the types of work in the recommendations that called out WDFW and how those elements aligned or not with the current budget proposals.

A member commented that there is a likelihood for some new revenue processes, for example maybe related to carbon tax. However, it would be great if the WDFW budget request would come from the general fund only, irrespective of new revenue sources.

Another member expressed that hatcheries should continue to be a top priority because the SRKW task force put food for orcas as the most important thing.

Bill Updates

The recreational recruitment bill was going to get merged with the bill for recreation fees.

The bill focused on making the Columbia River salmon and steelhead endorsement permanent was modified to be a four-year extension in order to garner support.

Fees from people who do not buy hunting or fishing licenses.

Advisory group members were in general agreement that the priority for funding should be to find a dedicated fund rather than a voluntary conservation fee. It was noted that the word "dedicated" might not be the right word. Some preferred the term "sustained" funding. There was also discussion about word choice for fees, taxes and/or initiatives, perhaps not using conservation, maybe fish and wildlife as more descriptive or bring in concept of "climate change" or just use the term "outdoor."

There was discussion about whether an excise tax on outdoor gear would make sense. Some are worried about how to define what is taxed since some outdoor items may be used for other activities (e.g., backpacks for school). And the existing excise taxes on outdoor gear already are high, so additional taxes might be difficult for the outdoor industry (and hunters and anglers are taxed again as they are already buying outdoor gear, too). A few members suggested that it should be up for discussion anyway and that the details on what gear is taxed could be hammered out. Additionally, perhaps the tax is so small that it is less of an equity issue than believed. It is hard to make a decision without more data but there was interest from the group that other states have excise taxes on outdoor gear.

There was some interest in a capital gains tax.

There was some interest in additional marketing for current voluntary fees (e.g., personalized license plates). A member cited potentially bringing in more boating communities beyond fishing boats. Another member mentioned that it would be nice to be able to give a credit to those who have already paid hunting licenses.

Outreach to students about land management and natural resource awareness was emphasized by multiple members.

Members discussed some of the pros and cons of bringing multiple agencies together for more holistic discussion about dedicated fish and wildlife conservation funding. Others discussed the idea of marketing as a health initiative where there is funding for natural resources and mental health issues. Everyone benefits when land is managed well and there is clean air and clean water available.

A few members cited initiatives that weren't successful because they didn't have specific projects associated with the tax/\$ or that some were successful because the money said it was going towards recreation in addition to water or conservation issues.

The discussion ended with a group decision to look into the possibility of a legislative proviso to convene stakeholders to determine what it would take to have long-term sustainable fish and wildlife conservation funding at the state level. Nate offered to help write the initial draft.

Update on Discover Pass studies. Jon Snyder from the Governor's office presented an update on the Discover Pass study. There is discussion about changing the two car Discover Pass system to a one car system with a lower price or eliminating the pass altogether and substituting a fee on license tabs. A new report explores potential revenue from different options and looks at potential demand. Originally, the license plate system was thought to require a fee between \$7 and \$15 while it looks like it might only take a \$4 fee to raise the same amount of money as the current system. Out-of-state visitors would use the pass structure that is currently in place. The report was just finished, so OFM will be reviewing the information and determining how to move forward.

WDFW Strategic Planning

Rob Geddis presented some initial ideas for a WDFW strategic planning process. It is anticipated that helping to guide strategic planning will be the main activity of the BPAG in 2019.

A strategic plan should provide a framework for tracking progress and setting priorities in light of current performance and future challenges. The two main pressures that the Department will face in the future are population increases (22% more people by 2040) and climate change.

WDFW's initial concept is for a 25-year plan that addresses two broad focus areas:

1) Available resources

- Long term funding
- Increase relevancy to the general public

2) Species and habitat pressures--- perhaps taking a triage approach

Relevancy: What does it mean for DFW?

Members noted that if you are trying to target audiences outside of fishers and hunters you need a strategy and it might require partnering with an advertising firm. There is agreement that there is a lot of outreach in the fishing community but groups like climbers and birders are left out of fee structure and the outreach structure. Rob showed a map with potential population increases and members noted that might serve as a way to prioritize certain geographic areas for outreach.

There was discussion about whether it is important for outreach to build support for fish and wildlife/natural resources more generally or for the Department's work specifically. There was a suggestion that the Department could do a better job showing up to meetings with federal partners, counties, and rural communities. Another member highlighted that the focus needs to be on habitat conservation rather than specific species. One member suggested that the Department leads bird walks or other nature outings in addition to hatchery tours, which may be a great way to change the conversation and broaden support. Many non-profit partners already do these outings, the Department would just need to show up and strengthen some of their current relationships.

Members wanted to reach clarity on which problem the Department is trying to solve to help focus the planning process. Some noted that the term "relevancy" is a buzzword that is being used a lot. Others suggested that having some wildlife governing principles outlined that are transparent to the public.

Members also agreed that instead of getting stuck talking about species, the Department needs to reframe this into a habitat discussion. The Department needs to prioritize habitat areas where animals can thrive and where recovery has a good chance of success. The Department might also want to think about how to build in more urban programming to engage more Washingtonians, but this programming needs to be habitat and biodiversity focused.

Specifically, members noted that millennials interact with nature in a different way than other generations. They also care more about climate change but perhaps are less optimistic.

There was general agreement that looking 15 years out or maybe even 10 years out makes more sense than trying to outline a 25 year strategic plan.

Geddis walked through his vision which was inspired by John Kotter's ideas in "Leading change."

A picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that vision was suggested. The focus should be on something that is imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible, and communicable.

Another suggestion was to review and incorporate the America's wildlife values report. The Washington part of the paper should be published soon. It would be good to write the Department's vision from the view point of Washingtonians rather than Department staff. And to have an honest discussion about whether the agency is client-centered or expert-centered.

Members suggested that Nate invite Fish and Wildlife Commissioners and the Director so that the BPAG's guidance and efforts are aligned with those ultimately adopting the strategic plan.

Next Steps

- WDFW noted that they are going to send out a written update to the advisory team when the Governor's budget is released.
- The group is meeting March/April to review the next iteration of thinking about the strategic plan.
- Legislative outreach group will keep the larger advisory group in the loop.
- Nate will send some draft thoughts on the possibility of a legislative proviso to explore sustainable sources of funding around to people who expressed interest.