

Effective Date:

POLICY 5004

Approved by and Date: 5/22/13

Approved By: /s/ Joe Stohr

POL-5004 THE DEPARTMENT'S CONSERVATION INITIATIVE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This policy applies to all WDFW employees. However, if policies and procedures are in conflict with or are modified by a bargaining unit agreement, the agreement language shall prevail.

PREAMBLE:

Throughout our history, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has worked with our partners to fulfill our legislative mandate to "preserve, protect, and perpetuate" fish, wildlife and habitat for future generations. Together, we have protected and restored natural areas to fish, hunt, or just enjoy the quiet and peace of nature. We have developed and implemented recovery plans to bring back depleted fish and wildlife. Our efforts have been recognized for their innovation, effectiveness, and for the Washington State model of collaboration and consensus building. Now the challenge of conserving Washington's natural heritage in the face of an uncertain future requires a broader perspective and greater level of collaboration than in the past.

By applying WDFW's Conservation Principles outlined in this policy, the Department will be prepared for the future, including adapting to climate change and increasing human population and development pressures. Implementation of this policy will result in our ability to articulate integrated conservation priorities and better address unmet conservation needs. Our intent is to have strong interdisciplinary headquarters and regional teams that coordinate conservation priorities across all programs in the agency at both the state and local level.

The Agency's Conservation Principles are best summed up by Aldo Leopold, who once said "Conservation is not merely a thing to be enshrined in outdoor museums; it is a way of living on land".

Definitions:

Conservation: The protection, preservation, management, or restoration of natural environments and the ecological communities that inhabit them. This includes the management of human use for public benefit and sustainable social and economic needs. (Modified from The American Heritage Science Dictionary)

Conservation Initiative: A strategic framework to improve how we work with each other and with our partners to implement ecosystem based management

District: The Department's administrative units that serve as a geographic unit for describing staff work plans. Districts are composed of multiple WRIsAs or subareas in the marine environment.

Ecological Integrity: A measure of an ecosystem's composition, function, and resiliency from disturbance, compared to its natural or historical range of variation.

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: Ecosystem-based management is an approach 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.

Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA): Administrative and planning boundaries described in Washington State law, as defined by the natural resource agencies. Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 90.54

1. **The Conservation Vision is:**

Ensure Washington's fish, wildlife, and the ecosystems they depend on are conserved for the benefit of future generations.

2. **The Following Conservation Principles Apply to Management Decisions and Employee Workplans:**

- A. We practice conservation by managing, protecting and restoring ecosystems for the long term benefit of people, and for fish, wildlife and their habitat
- B. We are more effective when we manage fish, wildlife and their habitats by supporting healthy ecosystems
- C. We work across disciplines to solve problems because of their connections among organisms, species and habitats

- D. We integrate ecological, social, economic, and institutional perspectives, into our decision making;
- E. We embrace new knowledge and apply best science to address changing conditions through adaptive management
- F. We collaborate with our conservation and community partners to help us achieve our shared goals

3. **WDFW Shall Establish Cross-Program Interdisciplinary Teams to Develop Conservation Priorities, Resolve Potential Conflicts at Appropriate Geographical Scales and Apply Improvements to these Activities Based on Experience and Learning. WDFW Staff Work Collaboratively at all Levels Across Programs and Regions to Advance Ecosystem Based Management in our Work.**

- A. The Conservation Steering Committee is composed of the Director, Deputy Director, ADs (or DADs), one eastside RD, one westside RD, Special Assistants to the Director, Chief Scientists, , ITS manager, Performance and Accountability Manager, and Climate Change Coordinator. A Director's appointee will chair the Steering Committee and determine meeting frequency to assess implementation of this policy. The Conservation Steering Committee will develop an annual summary of progress related to implementing the policy and will provide progress updates to the Executive Management Team on a quarterly basis.
- B. The Statewide Conservation Senior Management Team consists of division manager staff from each Program Division, and facilitated by the staff delegated by the Director. Responsible for establishing and assessing progress towards reaching conservation targets identified at the statewide scale for the Conservation Initiative.
- C. Regional Management Teams (RMT) are composed of the Regional Director, Regional Fish, Habitat, and Wildlife Program Managers, and Enforcement Captains. Regional Directors facilitate weekly meetings to address emergent conservation challenges within the region. Regional Management Teams will meet quarterly to review the progress towards reaching conservation priorities identified at the regional scale.

- D. District Teams will be composed of staff providing the appropriate expertise for the geographical area or for the issues under review such as the following: District Fish Biologist; District Area Habitat Biologist; District Wildlife Biologist; Hatchery Complex Manager; Sergeant; Watershed Steward; supervisory Private Lands Biologist; and Wildlife Area Manager. Marine component staff will be included for activities involving or affecting marine areas. At the discretion of the RD or with a recommendation from the RMT, any regional staff member may be asked to participate as an invited team member. Regional Directors, or a designee from the RMT, will facilitate District or Issue Team meetings to assess progress towards addressing emergent conservation challenges within the district.
- E. Ad hoc Emergent Conservation Issue Teams will be coordinated by the Special Assistant to the Director. The Director's Office will maintain a list of conservation challenges that require cross-Program, cross-Region, interdisciplinary staff representation to be addressed by these teams. The list will be reviewed by the Conservation Steering Committee and topics will be prioritized. Team work products include issue-specific management recommendations to the Director or the development of Department policies or procedures on how an issue can be addressed using Conservation Management Principles.
4. **WDFW Will Develop a Strategic Plan that Reflects the Conservation Principles and that Will Help Guide and Document WDFW Priority Strategies, Intent, Progress and Results.**
 5. **Applying the Conservation Principles Outlined in this Policy Will be a Major Driver in the Agency's Budget, Planning and Decision Processes.**
 6. **WDFW will Actively Seek and Engage Other Agencies, Co-managers, Stakeholders and Interested Parties in Developing and Coordinating Conservation Goals that Guide Agency and Partner Efforts in this Conservation Effort. Initiative Success Depends on Partnering with Other Entities to Better Manage Natural Resources and to Coordinate and Leverage Limited Resources.**