



Director's Report to the Commission

March 17-18, 2017

Wildlife Program

Lands Division

The Lands Division has worked diligently on the priority for forest health treatments on Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) lands. The Department owns and manages approximately 205,000 acres of forests on its Wildlife Areas, well over 50 percent of which are overstocked with unnatural fuel loads and are highly susceptible to insects, disease, and catastrophic fire. The Department has a Forest Management Strategy that would treat approximately 100,000 acres over ten years and restore the forests to a more manageable annual maintenance treatment level. Currently, staff are doing good work with the resources the Department has been able to secure, but there is a long way to go. In the 2015-17 biennium, over 3,000 acres were treated using a combination of Recreation and Conservation Office grant funds, a forest hazard fuels reduction appropriation, and timber sale revenues. The Department currently has a \$12 million Capital Budget request in the Governor's budget that covers the cost of thinning 20,000 acres of Department forests near high-risk communities, and 3,000 acres of prescribed forest burning while building capacity to double prescribed burn acres treated in the next biennium. The Department's prescribed fire crew is critical for management of Department lands and these funds are essential to its success.

Over the past month, the Department has joined with its partners at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), The Nature Conservancy, the State Conservation Commission, the Washington State Association of Land Trusts, the timber industry, and others to educate key legislators on the importance of funding for forest health treatments. The Forest and Community Resilience Roundtable members supporting the Department and DNR's capital budget requests participated in more than 40 meetings with legislators at Forest and Community Resilience Advocacy Day on February 9. Despite the closure of all three passes and several airports, more than 30 individuals participated, including representatives from all eight Washington forest health collaboratives, the timber industry, non-profits, landowners, mill operators, Washington Prescribed Fire Council, and Fire Adapted Communities. On February 28 and March 1, Department forest health leadership attended a Smoke Management Workshop hosted by the U.S. Forest Service and DNR. DNR is revising the Smoke Management Plan and Department staff were on hand to provide input on how best to improve the process of burn approvals such that it functions well for the Department's prescribed fire program.

Special Hunt Permit for Terminal Illness

The Wildlife Program approved 14 special hunt permits for terminal illness in 2016, including seven permits for bull elk, three for any elk, and four for any moose. Of these permits, eight were issued in Region 1, three in Region 3, two in Region 5, and one in Region 6.

The Department offers special hunt permits to terminally ill persons in certain circumstances. One permit can be offered to a hunter, and there are specific requirements on the application for qualification. Applicants must be diagnosed with a terminal illness, be within six to nine months of entering hospice care, must provide an official certification from their physician, and must give a description of their hunt preferences.

Enforcement Program

Professional Fishing Guide Fined \$7,500

A long-time professional fishing guide who killed two protected wild salmon and tried to pass them off as hatchery fish was fined \$7,500 for violating the Endangered Species Act. Billy Swann, owner and operator of Swanny's Guided Fishing service, which operates on the Lower Columbia and Cowlitz rivers, pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor charge last year and was recently sentenced in Tacoma U.S. District Court.

On October 1, 2014, Swann led a promotional fishing trip on the Cowlitz River with the top salespeople from a national fishing bait company. The trip was being broadcast over the Internet. Swann encouraged two men on the trip to catch two native coho salmon. Native coho on the Cowlitz River are protected by the Endangered Species Act and Washington law, and may not be removed from the water. After the clients landed the fish, it was alleged Swann clubbed both of them and then cut off the adipose fins on each fish to make it appear they were hatchery fish and, therefore, legal to catch and keep. A vigilant fishing public thought the photos smelled fishy and contacted Fish and Wildlife Police, who partnered with a NOAA agent to investigate.

When someone violates laws intended to protect animals under the Endangered Species Act, in many cases Enforcement officers have two toolboxes to draw from – state or federal jurisdiction. Department Enforcement made the decision to pursue this case in a federal venue. It was important to send a strong message in this situation given that this type of behavior adversely affects all sectors of the fishing community, along with everyone that spends a tax dollar protecting the state's natural resources. It is also important to remember, though, these acts are not reflective of the professional guide community, but of an individual who, unfortunately, allowed his ethics to take a vacation in favor of a dollar. The vast majority of Washington State's fishing guides are the ultimate stewards of the outdoors – their livelihoods depend on it, and in the end, they were the most vocal that Mr. Swann be held accountable.

Bear Poaching

Officer Day from Region 2 is investigating numerous incidences of bear poaching in Okanogan County from last year. He recently submitted 12 state charges related to malicious mischief and trespassing to the Okanogan County District Court. The suspects destroyed several gates on public and private roads to gain access to closed areas while in pursuit of bears. The officer identified as least one bear that was discarded in the field, resulting in wasted meat. The officer served a search warrant and obtained additional information related to a total of 32 state and tribal violations. He is coordinating with Colville Tribal Officers on the investigation.

Lakes

In Grant County, an officer contacted two suspicious vehicles preparing to leave Caliche Lake. The fishing season is closed, but the officer observed six men loading fishing gear into the trunks of their cars. They initially claimed not to have been fishing, but the officer found several large plastic bags full of fish in both cars. The officer found a total of 143 rainbow trout that had been planted for the March opener. Even if the season had been open they would have been 118 trout over their daily limit. The 143 trout were seized and donated to the Moses Lake Food Bank.



Comfy Cougars



Responses to wayward wildlife continues through the winter months. While most folks appreciate the opportunity to see animals up close that ordinarily are more elusive, some situations are too close for comfort. In this case, officers in the Wenatchee area received a call of two cougars sitting on a residential porch in East Wenatchee. A photograph was obtained before the cats left the area.

Shellfish Overharvest

Officers constantly keep an eye on miles of shoreline in Puget Sound to ensure that shellfish are either not harvested from polluted areas, and where beaches are open, harvesters do not exceed limits. In one of many examples like this one, Officers in Region 6 observed three people harvesting clams at the Oakland Bay Recreational

Area. The officers contacted two women and a man walking back to the parking area carrying a large bucket. They found it contained more than 12 times the allowable daily limit of clams. Officers also found another container stashed in the bushes that had several illegally shucked oysters. They were cited for first degree exceeding the bag limit and harvesting without licenses.

Recovered Department Equipment



Officers in Region 4 are working with King County deputies on the recovery of a Fish and Wildlife vehicle stolen from the Issaquah Fish Hatchery last fall. The vehicle was found partially disassembled on a piece of private property in the Carnation area. The property owner has been arrested and booked for a variety of violations. Recovery efforts are complicated due to the location and the condition of the truck.

Illegal Netting

Officers in Region 5 located two closed season gill nets set near the Cascade Locks on the Columbia River. They contacted Intertribe and helped with the seizure of the nets. Intertribe has identified possible suspects.



Staffing

The Enforcement Program has hired five new officers in the last month. One individual is a lateral entry hired from a city police department, and is scheduled to go to Okanogan County after training. The other four candidates are entry level, and scheduled to attend the police academy in the next couple of months.

Community Outreach

Shared Values Alliance: This alliance forms an open line of communication to identify existing and potential problems facing our natural resources and the communities that are impacted by them. This open communication line allows for constructive problem solving and discussion, to achieve positive results for forward progress. This project-oriented approach ensures that Fish and Wildlife Police Officers and the Department are connected with changing public and resource-based industry values and needs.

In an effort to establish relationships with organizations across the state, an informative handout and introductory script were developed to clearly articulate the need, purpose, and awareness for working together on shared values and goals. Using these materials, 40 organizations have been contacted, including Coastal and Puget Sound Commercial Fishing Associations, volunteer and conservation nonprofit organizations, fish sportsman associations and media, as well as specialty outdoor recreation alliances. Many of these organizations have little to no awareness of the operations of the Department's Enforcement Program or the agency. Initial relationship building is key to informing organizations about the Department's role in protecting natural resources and the public's safety. In addition to meeting new organizations, staff hope to deepen relationships with current partners to further develop shared goals and evaluate potential problems or collaborations.

Based upon initial contacts, several opportunities have come to light in which action is now being taken. All of the below projects are being collaboratively worked on by multiple partners within the Department and community partners.

- Commercial Fisheries Puget Sound Boundary Marker Reform
- Duwamish Waterway Project – Spanish and Vietnamese Licensing Translations
- Website Small Business Portal for Agency
- Volunteer Eyes in the Woods/CORT Presentation Update and Reform
- Online Media Presence (Facebook Postings - Highlight Partners)
- Timber Volunteer Protocol
- Boating Under the Influence (BUI) Emphasis Media Outreach in Partnership with Washington State Parks

Further outreach opportunities include several outdoor conferences and events. In addition, the Enforcement Program is spearheading the organizational duties of re-establishing an outreach fishing clinic in the Wenatchee area to increase educational opportunities with the local Latino community. This event hopes to address several opportunities; increase awareness of the benefits of fishing, develop positive relationships with both state Department Police as well as the local law enforcement, and hopefully excite future interest in career recruitment with Department Police.

1. H2O Scuba Show, Washington Scuba Alliance / March 31- 2
2. Puget Sound Anglers Sportsman Show / April 7-9

3. North Olympic Peninsula Puget Sound Anglers chapter's "Kid's Fishing Day" / May 19
4. Wenatchee Fishing Clinic, WDFW Enforcement Day / June?

Technology and Financial Management / Licensing

A new internal communication SharePoint site was launched in early January to provide a single source of staff-centered information to serve our widely dispersed workforce. The goal is to keep staff up-to-date, engaged and informed on new developments as the Department goes through an important legislative session. This site has been used as a central point of information and updates for: the Wild Future project, the legislative session, Executive Management Team meeting agendas and notes, staff feedback, sharing the successful completion of the Fir Island Farms estuary restoration project, as well as a new photo and media gallery as a resource to staff.

In its first two months, the staff communication page had an average of 241 daily hits from an average of 57 unique daily visitors.

Future efforts will focus around sharing stories of success between programs and regions in an effort to recognize staff accomplishments and break down geographical and organizational barriers.

The screenshot shows the WDFW Staff Communication SharePoint site. The main content area is titled "Message to Staff" and includes a video titled "Interview with Director Jim Unsworth". Below the video, there is a call to action to "Take the 5-minute survey" by Jan 31. The "WDFW Current Features" section contains several tiles: "Wild Future Info" with a logo, "EMT Updates" listing "Agendas", "Notes", and "Members", "Staff Input" with a survey link, "Featured Staff Resource" with a photo gallery, "Featured Story" with a video thumbnail, and "Share Your Story" with a placeholder box.