

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCY FUNDING

Prepared for the Budget and Policy Advisory Group for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Draft of January 31, 2018

I. Overview

To support the deliberations of the Budget and Policy Advisory Group, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Ross Strategic researched the authorities, funding sources and budgets, license fees, and recommendations for alternative funding for fish and wildlife agencies in the following 16 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.

This memorandum describes key themes from the state fish and wildlife agency funding research, which is compiled in the accompanying spreadsheet. The first three tabs (State and Department Profile, Funding Portfolio, and License Fees) summarize information across the 16 states. The remaining tabs provide detailed information and sources for each state. Both WDFW and Ross Strategic have contacted state agency representatives to verify the budget and license fee information. To date, 11 states have confirmed the data included in Figure 1 and the attached spreadsheet. States that have been verified are marked with an asterisk.

II. Themes

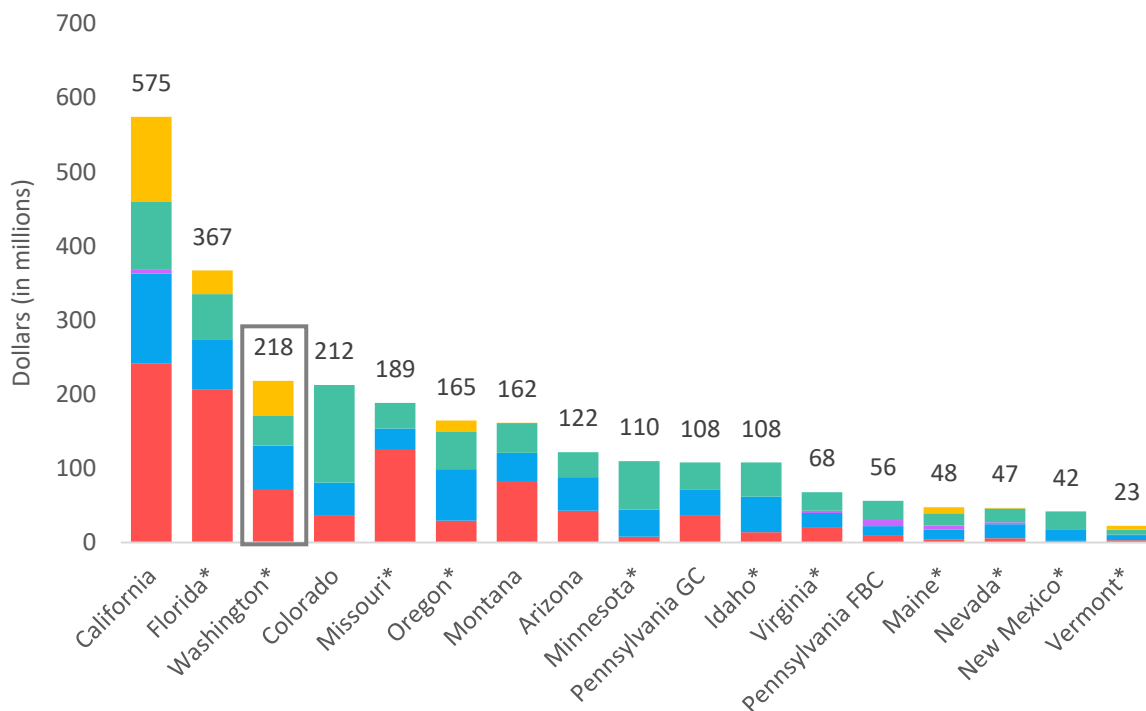
A. State portfolios varied, especially based on dependence on general funds.¹

Figure 1 below shows a comparison of states' budgets based on the following five funding categories: general fund, license fees, nonconsumptive user fees, federal, and other. Across the 16 states, the two most prominent agency funding sources were state general fund and license fees. Seven of the states examined do not receive any general fund revenue. Five states receive under 10% of their budget from general fund. Washington, California, Maine, and Vermont receive approximately a fifth of budget funding from general fund. Percent of total funding from license fees ranged from 63% in New Mexico to 16% in Florida, with the average percent total funding from license fees across the 16 states being 35%. Washington receives 18% of its budget from license fees, which is the second lowest percent.

In addition to general fund and license fees, states receive federal funding and a variety of other funding sources, such as dedicated state accounts and sales taxes. Six of the 16 states receive funding from nonconsumptive users through a pay-per-use model, such as the Discover Pass in Washington.

¹ Note: State budget information is based on publicly available information on agency website and in published reports. We are in the process of verifying these numbers with state agencies.

Figure 1. Fish and Wildlife Agency Funding Levels



Notes: Pennsylvania's fishing and game are managed by two different commissions, the Fish and Boat Commission, and the Game Commission. We have shown each commission separately in the chart above. The Minnesota Division of Fish and Wildlife is part of the Department of Natural Resources; the budget data displayed are for the Division of Fish and Wildlife rather than the full Department of Natural Resources.

These data were gathered using each state agency's website or budget publications for the most recent year available. State budget information is based on publicly available information on agency website and in published reports. An asterisk (*) indicates the budget information has been confirmed.

B. Fish and wildlife agencies have diverse management responsibilities and authority, which is a contributing factor to the wide range of budget appropriations.

Most agencies examined are responsible for fish, wildlife, habitat, wildlife areas, and enforcement, but only four states (including Washington) have marine fish responsibilities. About half of the departments are responsible for setting their own license fees, and only two departments (Montana and Colorado), are responsible for managing parks. Across the 16 states, the wildlife area acreage ranges from 106,000 acres managed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to 5.8 million acres managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. WDFW is responsible for 1 million acres. These factors, along with others such as tribal co-management and hydropower impact mitigation, contribute to variability among state agency budgets; this variability makes high-level comparisons of state agency funding portfolios difficult.

C. There is a wide range of total license fee costs across states.²

Resident and non-resident angling and hunting licenses had a wide range of prices across the states examined; Table 1 and Table 2 compare Washington’s license fees for deer, elk, small game/turkey, freshwater fishing (recreational, not commercial fishing), and sports packages (which are typically a combination hunting and fishing licenses), to the low, median, and high prices of all 16 states.³

Table 1. Resident Licenses

	Washington	Low	Median	High
Deer	\$67	\$5 (FL)	\$41 (CO)	\$82 (AZ)
Elk	\$73 (median)	\$25 (NM)	\$73 (WA)	\$493 (CA)
Small Game	\$41 (high)	\$10 (MO)	\$22 (ID)	\$41 (WA)
Freshwater Fishing	\$30 (median)	\$12 (MO)	\$30 (WA)	\$48 (CA)
Sports Package	N/A	\$40 (NM)	\$57 (AZ)	\$191 (OR)

Table 2. Non-Resident Licenses

	Washington	Low	Median	High
Deer	\$532	\$5 (FL)	\$172 (MN)	\$600 (OR)
Elk	\$594	\$75 (NM)	\$651 (CO)	\$1,529 (CA)
Small Game	\$184 (high)	\$25 (MT)	\$80 (MO)	\$184 (WA)
Freshwater Fishing	\$85	\$42 (MO)	\$66 (CO, NM)	\$130 (CA)
Sports Package	N/A	\$10 (CO, NM)	\$138 (VT)	\$201 (NV)

D. Several States have implemented measures to simplify the license buying process.

Table 3 outlines three common license simplification measures implemented by state wildlife agencies. Of the 16 states researched, Washington was the only state that has not implemented one of the license simplification measures examined, although WDFW has done research on some of these options and is looking into the creation and implementation of a multi-year license in Washington.

Table 3. License Process Simplification Measures

	WA	AZ	CA	CO	FL	ID	ME	MN	MO	MT	NV	NM	OR	PA	VT	VA
Lifetime License		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓
Multi-Year License					✓	✓		✓						✓	✓	✓
Sports Package		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

² Note: License fee information is based on agency websites. We are in the process of verifying these fees with the state agencies.

³ License fees researched include the annual, total out-the-door price for an adult.

E. Several agencies established a budget review workgroup or process to produce recommendations on alternative funding opportunities.

Some states have implemented processes similar to the BPAG process to review agency funding options. While many of these efforts resulted in recommended funding sources (see box), many recommendations have not yet been implemented. This could be because dedicated funding sources often require statutory or legislative action that can be politically challenging and time intensive. Below are several examples of funding mechanisms that have been implemented:

Common Recommended Funding Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicated percentage of state tax (e.g., sales, rooms/meals, severance, lodgers, real estate transfer, resource extraction) – FL, MO, MN, NM, ME• Dedicated percentage of lottery funds or dedicated lottery ticket – MN, VT• Hunting and fishing license fee increases – CO, MT, MO• Tax on products (e.g., wholesale beverage, outdoor equipment) – NM, OR, MN• User fees (boat launch fees, recreation license, watercraft/ATV gas taxes)

- **The Price Lock Program** introduced by Idaho Fish and Game allows residents to “lock in” the 2017 license price for the next five years, if the license is renewed each year within the set timeframe. The goal of this program is to increase license fee revenue by incentivizing hunters, anglers, and trappers to consistently purchase licenses.
- **A percentage of state sales tax** has been specifically dedicated to providing funding for the fish and wildlife agency. This provides sustainable, long-term and often significant funding. In Minnesota, voters approved a three-eighths of one percent increase to the state’s sales tax in 2008. These dollars are used to restore, protect and enhance land and water for fish, game, and wildlife. Missouri dedicates one-eighth of one percent of sales tax directly to the fish and wildlife department. This revenue accounted for over 60% of the agency’s total budget in 2017.

F. Criteria for Evaluating Funding Options

The Washington State Legislature laid out the following criteria in the proviso to analyze and prioritize potential funding options: impact on achieving financial stability, impact on the public and fisheries and hunting opportunities, and impact on timeliness and ability to achieve intended outcomes. Four other states (Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, and Vermont) also developed criteria to evaluate potential funding sources. These criteria included:

- Sufficient funding to meet needs
- Long-term stability
- Cost-effectiveness
- Ease of administration
- Political viability
- Success in other states
- Fair to all license buyers
- Effectively target the intended customer
- Contribution from individuals that benefit
- Maximize recruitment and retention of hunters and anglers

These criteria evaluate the effectiveness, feasibility, and fairness of each funding option. These are broadly in line with the criteria laid out by the Washington State Legislature, but provide another level of detail and additional considerations that can be used to analyze funding options.

G. Principles

While not all states researched have made specific recommendations for funding mechanisms, several states—California, Colorado, Montana, Oregon, and Pennsylvania—provided higher level principles that offer recommendations on how to sustainably fund and efficiently manage state fish and wildlife agencies for the benefit of all its customers. The principles below generally relate to either agency funding or agency activities and management.

- Diversify funding sources
- Provide mechanisms in addition to license dollars to fund resource management
- Make small adjustments to license fees over time
- Advocate for legislative opportunities to maintain and increase revenues
- License fees should be reviewed and adjusted to reflect the cost of providing licenses
- Evaluate and implement efficiencies
- Simplify the license structure
- Regularly review budget expenditures and revenues
- Implement open and transparent accounting
- Use effective outreach when changing license fees
- Develop broad public understanding of the agency's benefits, challenges, and opportunities
- Monitor and manage to outcomes
- Consider opportunities for partnerships
- Balance the needs of fish, wildlife, and humans

While these are not the only principles the Budget and Policy Advisory Group could adopt, they can provide a starting place for the group's consideration.

III. Conclusion

The research of these 16 state agencies provides context for examining WDFW's funding portfolio as well as some options for considering alternative funding sources. Washington's unique characteristics should be considered in making future funding decisions. Additional information is provided in the accompanying "Research on State Fish and Wildlife Agency Funding" spreadsheet.