



Director's Report to the Commission

April 12-14, 2018

Policy and Public Engagement

Bonneville Dam Sea Lion Management

Congresswoman Herrera Beutler toured Bonneville Dam to highlight the growing presence of California and Steller sea lions and the impact their predation is having on salmonids, sturgeon, and lamprey. Nate Pamplin, Steve Jeffries, and Meagan West attended on behalf of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department). Also in attendance were several media outlets, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and staff from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The tour's primary theme was that fish and wildlife managers' inability to manage sea lions in problem areas is undermining the efforts and millions of dollars invested to address harvest, hatchery reform, habitat, and hydropower to recover Endangered Species Act listed stocks. Relative to her bill – *H.R. 2083: the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Prevention Act* – the discussion focused on the application steps for a Section 120 take permit under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the extensive documentation process required to lethally remove California sea lions. Her bill seeks to streamline both the application and documentation processes to address sea lions before they habituate at the Dam or other man-made bottle necks in the tributaries of the lower Columbia River.

Region 2

Priest Rapids Dam

On March 28, 2018, Region 2 Director Jim Brown was contacted by Grant County Public Utility District (PUD) Fish Policy shop and advised that they had been doing routine inspection work, including drilling into the structure of their Priest Rapids dam. During that inspection they found water "flowing under pressure" within a void that they would not have expected to see. Here is an excerpt of the email they sent that same evening to the members of the *Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee*, of which the Department is a member:

"Committee Members;

Grant PUD will be activating the emergency action plan for a non-failure emergency condition at Priest Rapids Dam. During field investigations today within the spillway at Priest Rapids Dam, crews found flow and pressure readings that warrant further investigation.

As the on-going investigation continues, Grant PUD will lower the Priest Rapids Reservoir by 3 feet (484.5 to 481.5). From my understanding, the first foot will occur within the next 24 hours. Although the forebay will be lower by 3', this is still within the normal operating elevations for the project reservoir. It is also my understanding that we could be in this condition for up to 2 weeks for the investigation to be conducted and will include the entire spillway.

I do not expect any impacts related to upstream or downstream fish passage, as the Priest Rapids Reservoir will be operated within its normal operating range. If this condition were to continue into the fish passage season, Grant PUD will be able to operate the fish bypass, operate turbines in fish mode and the fish ladders will be up and operational.

The one area that Peter Graf and I will be monitoring closely will be the flow band constraints for the Hanford Reach Fall Chinook Protection Program. I suspect that we will rely heavy on Wanapum to meet constraints. Peter and I will be working with dispatch on a daily basis to monitor the situation and try to meet the constraints of the agreement.

My intention is to provide biweekly updates via the facilitators or more often as necessary.

*Thanks
Tom Dresser"*

Jim Brown will keep the Director's office apprised of any updates from Grant PUD as they come forward. The Department has offered to them whatever assistance that we may be able to provide. Until then, we are taking a "wait and see" approach. Based upon the 2014 Wanapum dam fracture incident, our experience has been that Grant PUD is aggressive in responding to such issues and will work diligently to address any fish or habitat related impacts, should they be identified.

Wildlife Program

Wolf Management and Conflict Prevention 2017 Annual Report

The 2017 annual wolf report was released on March 30, 2018. In 2017, the state was home to at least 122 wolves, 22 packs, and 14 successful breeding pairs, based on field surveys conducted over the winter by state, tribal, and federal wildlife managers. The full 2017 annual wolf report can be found on the Department's website.

Wolf Internal Group and Wolf Advisory Group Meetings

Department staff attended the wolf internal group (Department staff members) and Wolf Advisory Group (Department staff members and external stakeholders) meetings to discuss topics on wolf conservation and management in Washington, including topics

related to post-delisting management, recent legislative funding, ongoing research, and the upcoming grazing season.

Inter-State Wolf Discussions

The Department's carnivore section manager and the statewide wolf specialist attended a meeting in March with wolf managers from other northwest states and jurisdictions to discuss similarities and differences in their approaches to wolf management. This meeting will likely result in standardization of methods and further collaboration on research.

Wolf-Related Legislative Updates

One-time funding of \$183,000 from the state general fund was provided for the Department to implement Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2771, which calls for conducting an Environmental Impact Statement for the translocation of wolves. In addition:

One-time funding (\$100,000 GFS) was provided to the Department for the implementation of nonlethal deterrence measures in fiscal year 2019.

One-time funding (\$80,000 GF-S) was granted for the Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to work with the Sheriff's Departments of Ferry and Stevens counties in cooperation with the Department on wolf management activities.

Funding (\$172,000 GF-S) was provided to the University of Washington to conduct a three-year study of wolf use and density in the South Cascades, as well as the impact of wolf recolonization on the predator-prey dynamics of species previously inhabiting the area.

Wolf Packs in Kittitas County

There was one reported incident of domestic dogs trying to engage wolves in the pack territory. No injuries to domestic pets or wolves were reported or suspected, and collar data shows the wolves moving away from that area.

Wolf Packs in Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties

On March 17, Department staff investigated a report of a dead cow and calf in Stevens County. The investigation determined it was an unknown cause of death due to the lack of predator signatures on the carcasses. However, coyote tracks were identified in the area.

On March 20, Department staff met with a livestock producer in Pend Oreille County who had two young calves go missing within a week. After a field search that lasted several hours, the calves were not discovered. One set of cougar tracks was noted in the general area.

North Cascades Grizzly Bear Restoration Environmental Impact Statement

On March 23, Penny Becker and Hannah Anderson attended the announcement in Sedro-Woolley by Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke that the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Restoration Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will resume. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Park Service are moving forward with an expedited schedule in order to complete a final EIS and record of decision by the end of 2018.

The Department and the U.S. Forest Service have participated as cooperating agencies in the EIS process. As a cooperating agency, the Department is providing technical assistance, ensuring State Environmental Policy Act requirements are addressed, and identifying legal, resource, environmental, social, and economic issues to be addressed in the EIS, among other roles. The EIS process and grizzly bear recovery is challenging for the Department due to an existing state law directing that the Department may only use bears “native” to the state for management.

“RCW 77.12.035: Protection of grizzly bears -- Limitation on transplantation or introduction -- Negotiations with federal and state agencies.

The commission shall protect grizzly bears and develop management programs on publicly owned lands that will encourage the natural regeneration of grizzly bears in areas with suitable habitat. Grizzly bears shall not be transplanted or introduced into the state. Only grizzly bears that are native to Washington State may be utilized by the department for management programs. The department is directed to fully participate in all discussions and negotiations with federal and state agencies relating to grizzly bear management and shall fully communicate, support, and implement the policies of this section.”

The Department is directed to “fully participate in all negotiations” and can effectively participate as long as the EIS evaluates all options for achieving recovery in the North Cascades, including how challenges to those alternatives may be addressed. The statute is clear, however, that if the EIS results in the reintroduction of grizzly bears into Washington from out of state, the Department cannot participate in that particular action. However, if grizzly bears were to be reintroduced, the Department is responsible for the conservation of all grizzlies in the state and would likely need to respond to any reports of bears that are endangering public safety or damaging private property. The draft EIS was released in January 2017. A public comment period and public meetings followed. The alternatives in the EIS include the potential for the USFWS to designate any reintroduced population in the North Cascades a 10(j) non-essential experimental population, which would provide managers with increased flexibility, in order to help to ensure grizzly bear restoration does not result in the restriction of other land uses and resource development activities or compromise public safety.

Staff are meeting with USFWS officials to discuss a potential 10(j) proposal and working with USFWS and the National Park Service to respond to public comments and complete the EIS/plan within the new timeline that has been set.

Fish Program

Pacific Salmon Treaty Negotiations

The Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) provides for the conservation and management of salmon that cross the international border between the United States and Canada. Since ratification in 1985, the PST has been instrumental in reducing interceptions, preventing overfishing, and improving salmon management.

Negotiations have been underway for more than two years to update species- and region-specific chapters. Negotiating teams have successfully completed updates to three chapters (Transboundary Rivers, Coho, and Southern Chum) and a fourth is nearing completion (Northern British Columbia and Southeastern Alaska).

Updating the Chinook Chapter is proving to be extremely challenging. Conservation concerns for Puget Sound, Georgia Strait, and Fraser River stocks have been one focus of the negotiations. Since the 2009 update to the Chinook Chapter, survival rates for Salish Sea stocks have declined and productivity is low, the average number of spawners declined for 5 of 6 Puget Sound escapement indicator stocks, and 8 Puget Sound populations had spawner numbers below the critical status level. The U.S. is seeking a reduction in the interceptions of Puget Sound Chinook salmon by Canadian fisheries to address these conservation concerns.

Developing a package of conservation measures and harvest allocation acceptable to Alaska, the southern states and tribes, and Canada has proven elusive. The consequences of not reaching agreement are high. These potentially include no Endangered Species Act coverage for Alaska's fisheries, termination of the *Yakima v. Baldrige* stipulation regarding the accounting of Chinook salmon in Alaska pursuant to *U.S. v Washington* and *U.S. v Oregon*, cessation of Southern and Northern Endowment funding, and substantial uncertainty in the exploitation rates on Washington stocks in Alaskan and Canadian fisheries.

The U.S. and Canada have scheduled additional negotiations for the weeks of April 16 and April 30. Successful completion of these negotiations is critical to the future of our salmon stocks and fisheries. Compromises by all sides will be required, and federal funding of mitigation measures, as occurred with the 2009 agreement, will likely be an essential component of the package.