



Director's Report to the Commission

February 8-9, 2019

Public and Policy Engagement

Partial Federal Government Shutdown

The partial federal government shutdown began December 22, 2018, and lasted 35 days. The President signed a continuing resolution that reopened the government through February 15, 2019.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) assessed the near-term and long-term implications during the shutdown. From a budgetary standpoint, the majority of the Department's federal contracts and grants have been awarded and thus the shutdown did not impact our operations, staff, or contractors. The Department's primary concern pertained to our ability to coordinate with our federal partner agencies on activities such as permitting, rulemaking, and on-the-ground recovery efforts. A number of obstacles emerged included delaying negotiations around fishing seasons, habitat restoration projects, and wildlife surveys.

While the government is funded until February 15, negotiations around a Federal Fiscal year 2019 spending package remain in flux. At the time of writing this report, there remains a potential that we are facing another partial government shutdown.

We are working with the Governor's Office of Financial Management to anticipate impacts should this occur. There are a few pending federal contracts that are subject to the passage of a Federal Fiscal Year 2019 spending bill/package that would impact our operations if they are not funded. We continue to monitor the situation and communicate our concerns with the Governor's Office and the Washington State congressional delegation.

Legislative Update

The legislative session is a quarter of the way through, and I have been very engaged in the agency's legislative work. Thus far, I have participated in work sessions on wolf management, hatchery production, forests and fish law, and shellfish funding. I have met with numerous legislators to discuss the agency's budget shortfall and request, legislative proposals, and policy issues, including many of the newly elected officials. I have also testified on legislation related to orca recovery. Below is an update on the agency's request legislation and other bills of interest to the Department.

Agency Request Legislation

The Department's bill to increase recreational fishing and hunting license fees, extend the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement, and improve recruitment of hunters and fishers ([HB 1708/SB 5692](#)) is prime sponsored by Representative Blake and Senator Rolfes. Both bills are currently in policy committee in their respective houses, and we are waiting for hearings to be scheduled.

The Department's Americans with Disabilities Act bill ([HB 1230](#)) is prime sponsored by Representative Barkis. This bill broadens the eligibility for reduced recreational hunting and fishing licenses for people with permanent disabilities. This bill has had a public hearing and was voted out of committee on February 1.

Bills of Interest

The Fish and Wildlife Officer collective bargaining and interest arbitration bill ([HB 1217/SB5481](#)), is prime sponsored by Representative Blake and Senator Warnick. This bill seeks to remove fish and wildlife officers from their current bargaining unit, and to establish a new coalition of commissioned officers, detectives, and sergeants of the Department of Fish and Wildlife for the purposes of collective bargaining, including interest arbitration. The bill received a public hearing on January 24 and was voted out of committee on January 29.

The Department is working closely with stakeholders on a bill ([HB 1516/SB 5320](#)) to provide non-lethal cougar pursuit opportunities for houndsmen. The bill is prime sponsored by Representative Blake and Senator Takko. The senate version had a hearing in committee on January 24 and was voted out on January 31.

A bill to reform Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) ([HB 1662/SB 5696](#)) is sponsored by Representative Dent and Senator Warnick. This bill simplifies the PILT process, moves payments to the Treasurer's Office budget, and develops a consistent formula to calculate PILT payments. Both the House and Senate versions are in committee. (Additional detail is provided in the Wildlife Program section of this report.)

Legislation to ban nontribal gill nets ([SB 5617](#)) is sponsored by Senator Salomon. This bill creates a buy-back program for nontribal gill nets that would sunset December 31, 2022, thereby banning the gill net fishery beginning January 1, 2023. This bill is currently in committee and has not had a hearing.

Legislation to Protect Southern Resident Orcas

Oil Transportation Safety related to orca recovery ([HB 1578/SB 5578](#)) is prime sponsored by Representative Lekanoff and Senator Van De Wege. This bill aims to improve safety in oil transportation via water. The Senate version had a hearing in policy committee on January 29.

A bill to protect orca whales from vessel noise ([HB 1580/SB 5577](#)) is prime sponsored by Representative Blake and Senator Rolfes. This bill legislates the "No-Go Zone" and

“Go Slow” zones established by the Department in an effort to minimize orca/vessel interactions. Both versions have been referred to committee.

Companion bills have been introduced in the House and Senate to implement task force recommendations to recover Southern Resident Killer Whales by increasing habitat, as well as forage fish abundance. [SB 5580](#) and [HB 1579](#) are sponsored by Senator Rolfes and Representative Fitzgibbons. Both bills are currently in committee and the House version had a public hearing on January 29.

Tribal Affairs

Proposed Consultation Policy

Tribal Policy Advisor Jim Woods is working through a planning process to develop a communication protocol or policy that may ultimately address/improve consultation and coordination with tribal governments (co-managers). The Department participates, shares and coordinates with tribes often, from all realms of resource management that include hunting, fisheries management, enforcement activities, conservation of sustainable resources and habitat restoration.

Ultimately, the intent for a proposed policy would be to affirm the unique Department-Tribal government relationship and meet the consultation and coordination provisions as reiterated in the 1989 Centennial Accord and subsequent Millennium Agreement.

Currently we are surveying to soliciting input from Washington tribes, and Jim is interviewing Department staff and managers who regularly work with our co-managers.

Project Team: Jim Woods (Lead), Joe Stohr, and Amy Windrope

Next steps:

- February 2019 - First draft review / Attorney General and Executive Management Team
- Tribal outreach
- Tribal review, 60-day comment period
- Public comment period ____ days
- Final Draft to Executive Management Team
- Report out to Fish and Wildlife Commission
- Director’s Approval

Wildlife Program

Wolf Population Survey Underway

Department biologists initiated the annual survey effort to assess the minimum number of wolves in Washington State in early January. Biologists survey for tracks, place remote cameras, and conduct aerial surveys to count wolves in known packs. They

also surveyed in areas with recent wolf reports outside of known pack territories in the Methow and areas south of Interstate 90 to try to locate recent wolf sign. The 2018 minimum population count is expected to be available in late March.

Fisher Reintroduction

The Department, along with the National Park Service, Conservation Northwest and our conservation partners, have recently initiated a fisher reintroduction in the forest ecosystems of Washington's North Cascades. This reintroduction is the third phase of fisher restoration in Washington and, like the efforts on the Olympic Peninsula and in the South Cascades, this effort benefits from a partnership of wildlife, conservation, and land management organizations as well as the efforts and contributions of our partners at Calgary Zoo and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park. We also have the good fortune of working with the Alberta Ministry of Environment and Parks and the Albert Trappers Association to capture and deliver Alberta fishers to the Calgary Zoo before they make their way to Washington. There have been three release events so far this fall and winter, where 18 fishers (11 females and 7 males) were released at two release sites: at Newhalem in North Cascades National Park, and in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest near Darrington. The Department is planning to release six more fishers soon, and we anticipate releasing as many as 50 by March 2019. In total, our goal is to release at least 80 fishers in the North Cascades by 2020, and we are optimistic that these 80 will be the founders of a self-sustaining population restored in this part of their historical range in Washington.

Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT)

On January 28, the Department closed on the third and final phase of the Merrill Lake property in Cowlitz County (140 acres) which included a donation of 30 acres. This phase included riparian ground with frontage on the Kalama River. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) stepped in and purchased the property after Phase 2 when the landowner would not wait for more grant funds. This completes a total of nearly 1,450 acres for this forested acquisition with tremendous wildlife and scenic values. We are looking forward to a celebration of this acquisition sometime near the end of June.

The Legislative Affairs team coordinated with the Washington Association of Counties to develop a consistent methodology for calculating the Department's PILT payments that has been endorsed by the Washington State Association of County Assessors. Wildlife Program Lands Division staff worked with legislative sponsors Senator Warnick and Representative Dent, and the PILT Coalition. The PILT Coalition includes:

- Washington Association of Counties
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- The Nature Conservancy
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition
- Trust for Public Land
- Trout Unlimited, and
- Yakima County

The purpose of the meeting was to gather bi-partisan co-sponsors for the PILT policy bill that has been dropped (SB 5696/HB 1662). The bill accomplished three things:

1. Moves the PILT payments into the Treasurer's Office budget (akin to DNR);
2. Removes the requirement to choose between PILT and wildlife violation fees, fines and forfeitures (so counties can receive both if they opt in), and
3. Creates a consistent formula to calculate the PILT payments that is endorsed by the Washington Association of State Assessors at a rate close to the open space rate.

These payments are critical to local government and junior taxing districts, especially in rural Washington with large acreages of state ownership.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF)

Our relationship with RMEF continues to pay off with habitat work and protection of wildlife habitat. I met with RMEF officials last month to discuss the great work that is occurring. The update included some of the land purchases that RMEF has been helping with including the Merrill Lake purchase that was recently finalized.

The RMEF Project Advisory Committee (PAC) met in early January to review 14 projects submitted to the PAC for consideration of funds to support management, habitat stewardship, or research that benefits elk and other wildlife. In total, the PAC recommended awarding funds to 13 projects for a total allocation of \$299,235. These recommendations must be approved through the national RMEF office. Department staff submitted six projects and allocated \$136,500 or 47 percent of the total allocation. Department projects included:

- 460 acres of forest restoration on the Oak Creek Wildlife Area
- Planting 2,000 deciduous shrubs and trees on 60 acres of the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area
- Fire restoration on 350 acres of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Areas, fire restoration on 350 acres of the Wenas
- Winter forage plot enhancements on 200 acres of the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area
- Weed control on 500 acres of the Blue Mountains Wildlife Area

Hunter Education Division

Hunter Certification

The Hunter Education Division works with approximately 1,000 volunteer hunter education instructors each year. In 2018, the instructors held 708 hunter education classes, and volunteer instructors certified 9,669 hunter education students. The number of students certified in 2018 is lower than the 11,163 certified in 2017. Instructors volunteered over 28,000 hours in 2018.

In 2018, the Department certified 1,061 military members and 103 peace officers.

One-time Deferrals

The Department offers a one-time deferral of the hunter education requirement. To qualify the deferred hunter must be at least 10 years old, not have failed a hunter education class in the past 12 months, and have an accompanying hunter. The accompanying hunter must be over 18 years old and held a Washington license for the previous three years. The Department authorized 1,238 deferrals in 2018. Data from license year (April 1 to March 31) 2011 to license year 2017 showed that 45 percent of deferred hunters then take a hunter education course and purchase a license.

Master Hunters

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting in Washington State. These dedicated sportsmen and women donate approximately 12,500 hours of their time each year. Master Hunters volunteer on wildlife projects such as the mountain goat translocation, fence repairs, ungulate hazing, habitat restoration and improvements, and Department outreach programs.

As of January 4, 2019, there are 1,671 certified Master Hunters in good standing. There were 310 applicants to the program in 2018, and 104 completed the requirements to become a Master Hunter. The renewal rate of Master Hunters in 2018 was 70 percent (162 renewed out of 231), which is well above the six-year average of 59 percent.

Hunting incidents are tracked each license year, and the information is published on the Department's website (https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/hunting_incidents.html). In license year 2017, there were three non-fatal hunting incidents.

Outreach and Education

In 2018, the Hunter Education Division collaborated with several nongovernmental organizations to provide hunting clinics as well as a limited number of mentored hunts. The division held 12 clinics consisting of five turkey clinics, six upland bird clinics, and one waterfowl clinic. The Department also assisted the National Wild Turkey Federation with a women-oriented turkey clinic and mentored hunt in November. Ten participants took part in the hunt and several were able to harvest a turkey.

The National Hunting and Fishing Day celebration took place in September in Moxee. The Department collaborated with hunting and conservation organizations to provide a great introduction to Washington's outdoors. Sixty-five youth participated in the celebration.

Fish Program

Minter Creek Hatchery

Recall that on December 14 shortly after 5:30 p.m., there was a power outage and associated generator failure. This resulted in the loss of approximately 6.2 million Chinook. As a result, the Department has initiated two investigations that are being conducted by outside contractors. An engineering firm is investigating the mechanical failure, and we have a personnel consulting firm that is investigating the personnel aspect of the incident. Both of the investigations are currently underway.

On January 17, the Department was invited to conduct a work session for the Senate Water, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee to discuss our statewide hatchery program, Southern Resident Killer Whale production, and an overview of the Minter Creek Hatchery incident. We promised to come back to them with the results of the investigations, and we will do the same for the Commission.

Domoic Acid and Coastal Crab

In the third week of January, an emergency rule was adopted for the coastal Dungeness crab fishery to address crab with higher levels of domoic acid from California and southern Oregon that may be landed by vessels into Washington. Specifically, crab from California are prohibited and crab from southern Oregon must be eviscerated in facilities with specific permits that allow this activity. Crab that are harvested in an area with high domoic acid levels that are landed into California or Oregon and then transported into Washington (e.g., by truck) are regulated by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as this activity affects interstate commerce. Department staff have been working with the state Departments of Health and Agriculture and, together, with the FDA.

Due to the federal government partial shutdown, it has been challenging to reach the appropriate staff at the FDA. Further, there has been confusion relative to the appropriate action levels for domoic acid—the states of Washington and Oregon biotoxin management plans indicate action should be taken when levels are at or above 30 ppm. However, California's interpretation is that action should be taken when levels are above 30 ppm. At present, levels in California crab are at exactly 30 ppm. FDA staff in headquarters are actively researching this difference in interpretation; however, a final "official" determination may take some time.

A notice was sent to industry members and updated information has been posted on the Department website to do what we can to ensure contaminated crab is addressed quickly to protect public health in Washington and, ultimately, their broader crab markets. We also continue to coordinate with the states of California and Oregon and with the Washington Department of Health on this issue. Regardless of the outcome of the FDA's determination, they recognize the need for an improved coordinated effort to address how the three West Coast states would like to address this interstate commerce issue for the long-term.

Soos Creek Hatchery Rebuild Status

Progress on the Soos Creek Hatchery rebuild continues forward. The intake, heavy settling, distribution tower, fine settling, adult holding/rearing ponds, rearing ponds, pollution abatement and the access bridge are mostly complete from the concrete and supply/exit piping standpoints. Details remain such as roof structures, control panel installations, pump installation, generator installation, functional weir, etc. Currently, the incubation building is being formed and getting ready to pour the foundation. The hatchery office, round pond installation, Wilson Spring hookup, and water treatment have yet to be started.

The government shutdown has effected the completion of the operational BiOp, which is needed to test the major water delivery components of the new facility. Prior to the shutdown, it was slated to be issued in February. Obviously, it is of paramount importance for full system testing and confidence before we begin demolition of the existing hatchery structures.

The demolition of the existing intake, and other existing hatchery structures, is scheduled for this summer. Site restoration and plantings will begin once that is complete. The new facility is scheduled to begin operation this fall.

Skagit Catch-and-Release Fishery

Angler groups and communities on the Skagit River have asked the Department to expand angling opportunity by providing a catch-and-release fishery for steelhead on the Skagit River. The Department has met with officials from the City of Darrington to discuss possible way to create economic benefits from local recreational fishing opportunities. Prior to last year, the fishing opportunity had not been allowed on the Skagit River since 2010.

Since then, the population of native steelhead in the Skagit has been increasing and is now beyond the threshold needed to offer this popular recreational opportunity. However, because these fish are protected under the Endangered Species Act, this fishery will need to be closely monitored and managed.

Last year, in spring of 2018, a pilot-directed steelhead catch-and-release sport fishery (C&R fishery) was open from April 14 through April 29, excluding Mondays and Tuesdays. The fishery occurred on the Skagit River from the Dalles Bridge in Concrete (RM 54.1) to the Cascade River Road bridge in Marblemount (RM 78.3), and on the Sauk River from the mouth to the Sauk Prairie Road Bridge (RM 20.1). Fishing hours were limited to daylight hours only, which are described as from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset. Gear was restricted to artificial lures or flies only, no bait or scent, with only single barbless hooks allowed (selective gear rules). Fishing from boats was allowed, but not while under power on the Skagit River. On the Sauk River, fishing from a boat equipped with an internal combustion motor was proposed.

This year, based on the pre-season Skagit wild steelhead forecast of 6,657, at a tiered harvest rate of 20 percent, the season will look like:

The area open and gear rules for 2019 will remain the same as in 2018. The time period open will be February 1 to April 30, open seven days a week. The maximum calculated impact rate allowed will be 8 percent; if the impact is projected to exceed this rate in season, the season will be closed by emergency rule to keep the impacts at or below this level. In 2018, the indirect fishery impacts from fisheries other than the C&R fishery were calculated to be 0.3 percent. A maximum 8 percent impact rate in the C&R fishery for 2019 will allow for a buffer due to forecast error, or other sources. The impact of the C&R fishery with the proposed season, based on the limited data collected during the 2018 season, is projected to be 6.8 percent.

Based on the data collected this last spring during a much abbreviated season extrapolated out for a full three-month season, up to 11,000 angler days could be expected. At \$58 an angler trip, this short-term fishery will have a positive benefit of \$638,000 to those struggling communities.

Technology and Financial Management / Licensing

Information Technology

The Department's Cybersecurity Unit (CSU) was initially funded in 2017 to provide confidentiality, integrity, and availability of agency data, systems, and services while ensuring operational security and regulatory compliance. Over the course of 2018, CSU recruited personnel, developed an agency policy framework utilizing federal and state cybersecurity standards, and began implementing technical and administrative controls to reduce agency liability in relation to cybersecurity risks. The next year will see the CSU engage in process and procedure maturation as it relates to the policy framework, continue to provide technical controls which reduce both the likelihood and the impact of cyber-attacks, and work with the State Auditor's Office to perform a three-year assessment of the agency's IT security.

Capital and Asset Management Program

Deschutes Watershed Center

Project Summary

- Construct an educational building and salmon hatchery facilities in the Deschutes River Basin, to meet community desires for educational opportunities on an ecosystem basis, and the continued demands for Chinook production in the South Puget Sound Region.
- The existing facility at Tumwater Falls lacks adequate space to rear fish. Currently, based on life stage, these fish spend their time in four different hatcheries, thus, subjected to four different water sources and must endure

multiple trips up and down Interstate-5. Consolidating the operations eliminates the need for other hatcheries to assist with the production, frees up rearing space at these hatcheries for their own local stocks, and reduces juvenile mortality. The proposed facilities will produce 3.8 million Chinook annually.

- The project will increase Chinook health and survival to release age, and increase adult return, resulting in additional fish available for recreational and commercial harvest. This will provide additional economic activity to local communities and the Puget Sound Region.
- The project supports the Department's strategic plan by conserving and protecting native fish.
- The project will improve the quality of discharge water from the existing hatchery facilities, bringing it into compliance with the Clean Water Act.
- The education building will provide a key focal point for local organizations that have partnered with the Department, and provide education opportunities for the community and students of all ages.

Project Scope

- The **Tumwater Falls Facility** component consists of constructing new adult holding/juvenile rearing ponds, pollution abatement pond, construct a new surface water intake, modify the existing fish ladder, and provide a public fish viewing area.
- The **Pioneer Park Facility** component consists of construction of a new hatchery building for incubation; water aeration tower; rearing ponds; pollution abatement pond; new surface water intake; education building; walking trails and interpretive displays.

Budget and Description

- Total project budget is \$42 million funded with state building construction account funds over four biennia and will renovate the existing Tumwater Falls Facility and construct new hatchery facilities at Pioneer Park.
- Fiscal Year 2013-15 Capital Budget appropriated \$7.3 million for the initial phase of the project to renovate the Tumwater Falls Facility; initial site work and parking at the Pioneer Park site; and improvements to the water delivery system at the Pioneer Park site.
- Fiscal Year 2015-17 Capital Budget appropriated \$5 million for design and permitting of the Pioneer Park facilities.
- Fiscal Year 2017-19 Capital Budget included \$9.5 million of re-appropriated funding and no new appropriations for construction.
- **Fiscal Year 2019-21 Capital Budget** initial request included \$29.7 million for construction of the Pioneer Park facilities.
 - **The Department submitted a revised request to the Office of Financial Management to phase the Pioneer Park construction over the next two biennia. Fiscal Year 2019-21...\$18.7 million to construct the education center, hatchery building, utility buildings, pollution abatement pond, settling pond, standby generator building and site work. Fiscal Year 2021-23...\$11.0 million to construct the river intake, pumping station, rearing ponds and final site work. The**

Governor's proposed capital budget for Fiscal Year 2019-21 did not include funding for the Pioneer Park Facility.

Current Status

- Tumwater Falls Facility. The design and permitting of the new facility is complete, as well as the revised real estate easement with the property owner Olympia Tumwater Foundation. **Construction contract was awarded to Stellar J Corporation in the amount of \$5.1 million. Anticipate construction to be completed in October 2019.**
- Pioneer Park Site. Continuing to negotiate a ground lease agreement and intergovernmental operating agreement with the City of Tumwater for the proposed hatchery site. The water right for the new hatchery has been approved by Department of Ecology. **Design and permitting efforts continue to address a number of challenging city, state and federal environmental requirements including wetland impacts, floodplain, riparian habitat, channel migration zone, and water quality. Targeting permitting in Spring 2020.**

Region 1

Cloverland Elk Update

Region 1, District 3 staff (Southeast Washington) continue to work with landowners in the Cloverland area to alleviate elk pressure on commercial crops. For the second year in a row, the Wildlife Program was able to fund a seasonal technician to assist with elk hazing. Natural Resource Technician Chris Heitstuman started December 17 and has been hazing between 80 to 300 head of elk daily in three separate groups. Elk activity has been spotty with extremely heavy use in some areas. There is one canola field in particular to the west of Back Road that we are especially concerned with. By emergency rule, the Commission adopted a new 2018–2019 muzzleloader season developed by the District Wildlife Biologist in coordination with Wildlife Conflict staff. The season ran from December 1 through January 20, and Wildlife Conflict staff have been coordinating with some of the permit holders to pair hunting with hazing efforts to help discourage the elk from frequenting the commercial crops. Another positive for this year, as reported by staff, is that the elk are heavily utilizing areas of the wildlife area where the Department conducted controlled burns last spring. Elk are also utilizing the area burned in the Warner Gulch wildfire last summer. All the burned areas are providing green growth for elk to utilize this winter on the wildlife area. Staff are quick to point out that there are many more areas where prescribed burning can be utilized to enhance forage on Department land. The situation has also been assisted by the weather since the area has not received any heavy snow this year. In addition to the hazing efforts, conflict staff have been developing a map database to track elk movements. This will help identify patterns of elk movement and assist with future hazing efforts.

“Women in Wildlife” Featured Articles

The Spokesman-Review newspaper on January 24 ran a series of articles, written by Rich Landers, on women in wildlife. The three articles gave an overview of the history of women at the Department, the growing number of women in wildlife management positions. The articles featured five Region 1 biologists and scientists (Annemarie Prince, Melia DeVivo, Sara Hansen, Kristin Mansfield and Carrie Lowe) and a Region 2 Habitat Program Manager (Carmen Andonaegui). The articles described how the subjects got into the field, their body of work, and how diversity in the workforce has helped to improve the Department’s ability to connect with the public. Two sidebar articles profiled veterinarian Kristin Mansfield and Carrie Lowe’s specialty areas and experiences in the field.

Region 2

City Permit Appeal

The Attorney General’s Office filed an appeal on January 29 in Chelan County Superior Court regarding a Wenatchee city permit being approved for a 13-acre development in mule deer habitat. The Department believes the city was in error in its process of reviewing and approving a development permit application and the inadequacy of mitigation for impacts to deer by not using best available science as required under their city regulations.

Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Plan Update

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area is beginning its wildlife area plan update process. There will be public meetings affording opportunities to provide input to the Department in the plan update process. It is still early, and we have no details at this juncture.

County Off-Road Vehicle Ordinance

The Department has been working cooperatively with the Okanogan County Board of Commissioners on ways to mitigate risks to wildlife and habitat from their new off-road vehicle ordinances, opening many miles of county roads through critical lands. The County has shown a demonstrable willingness to remove roads of major resource concern and develop strategies to reduce impacts on others.

Recreation Plan for the Squilchuck and Stemilt Basins

The Department, in concert with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), is working with Chelan County Natural Resources Department on the concept of adoption of a newly completed detailed recreation plan for the Squilchuck and Stemilt Basins. The plan was developed with grant funding over the last year, in a public process, and will need to go through the State Environmental Policy Act process as an additional step before adoption would even be considered. This latest plan is

considered the 'next step' in the already adopted programmatic Naneum Ridge to Columbia River plan that was adopted by the Department and DNR a few years ago, of which these basins constitute a mere 8 percent of that planning area.

Tribal Agreement Update

Region 2 is working with the Colville Tribes on updating and renewing our seven-year agreement regarding enforcement and fishing recreation on Rufus Woods Reservoir. We have a six-month extension on the current agreement while the details are worked out. No significant changes to the agreement are anticipated at this time.

Region 3

Colockum Elk Herd Pilot Project

During the 2017 legislative session, HB 1353 (Colockum Elk Herd Pilot Project), passed into law. The pilot project was sponsored by Representative Tom Dent (District 13) and developed in response to landowner elk conflicts, primary in the Thorp area of Kittitas County, and an unusually large number (70+) of elk-vehicle collisions on Interstate 90 between Ellensburg and Vantage during the winter of 2015/2016. HB 1353 directed the Department to:

- Work with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to reduce elk collisions on Interstate 90.
- Increase the use of depredation hunts and general hunting opportunity within the Colockum Herd. Three hundred additional depredation permits (above the normal 300 available statewide) were made available.
- Prohibit the feeding of elk by the public within the range of the herd.
- Use managed livestock grazing to attract elk away from roads and private property.
- Invite the Yakama Nation to participate in the project.
- Provide a report (WDFW & WSDOT) to the Legislature by October 31, 2020

The Department has been working with stakeholders, WSDOT and Representative Dent since 2017 to implement the pilot project. The Department's work with WSDOT along Interstate 90 has included the hazing of elk groups, installation of fladry along the existing fence to deter elk crossing, and researching the costs associated with installation of a standard 8-foot-high elk fence and wildlife crossing structures. Conservation Northwest estimated fencing and crossings would cost about \$1.2 million per mile. WSDOT estimated it would cost \$20 million for just the fence. Fortunately, the high elk-vehicle collision rate of 2015/2016 has not occurred in subsequent winters.

Private land conflicts included elk tramping and eating newly planted Timothy hay, eating of stored hay in barns, and damage to fences and irrigation pipes. Exacerbating the problem was the feeding of elk by some landowners and the lack of hunter access on key properties. In order to address landowner conflict, a tracked all-terrain vehicle

for snow travel was purchased and a seasonal technician, Marcus Leuck, was hired to assist Conflict Specialist Steve Wetzel in hazing elk from private lands. The added staff capacity, reduction in landowner feeding due to communication efforts, and new access to key properties has significantly reduced landowner complaints. The last two winters have been mild with minimal snow in the Thorp likely reducing elk presence as well. Coordination meetings in the spring and fall have been held since 2017 by Representative Dent and the Department. Meeting participants have included private landowners, WSDOT, the Cattlemen's Association, the Army's Yakima Training Center, Conservation Northwest, Kittitas County Field and Stream Club, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. During meetings, information and ideas have been shared regarding progress made on the pilot project and how to improve success.

Elk Conflict Management

An innovative approach to addressing landowner elk conflict adjacent to the Army's Yakima Training Center (YTC) has been yielding good results. During the 2018/2019 season, Region 3 Conflict Specialist Steve Wetzel and District Biologist Jeff Bernatowicz worked with the YTC and adjacent private landowners to provide ten damage prevention permits to active duty service members stationed at Joint Base Lewis McCord. Nine of 10 service members took advantage of the hunting opportunity and three of them successfully harvested an antlerless elk. The arrangement has helped address elk conflict in the area and has also provided hunting opportunity for military service members who otherwise would not get to hunt. For future years, the Department and YTC are exploring the potential of teaming up experienced master hunters to mentor active service members during elk depredation hunts.

Region 4

Implementing Initiative 1401

In Region 4, the Enforcement Program's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) continues to develop innovative tools to implement Initiative 1401. This citizen-supported initiative banned the sales of products manufactured from elephant, rhino, tiger, lion, leopard, cheetah, pangolin or marine turtle, shark or ray that are either listed in CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) Appendix I or II, or as vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. The Region 4-based SIU detectives are creating a training program to help other Department officers identify traditional East Asian medicine products that contain banned animal parts or products. Educating officers supports the Department's ultimate goal of reducing the international market for these endangered and rare animals. Next, SIU will be working on outreach methods and materials to ensure that traditional East Asian medicine purveyors have the information they need to stay within the law.

Trumpeter and Tundra Swans

The Skagit Valley is famous for drawing visitors from throughout Washington and the world to view the wintering snow geese, trumpeter and tundra swans. Over the last 20 years, the trumpeter and tundra swan population has gone from 300 individuals to over 22,000. In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Canada, Puget Sound Energy, Whatcom Humane Society, and Northwest Swan Conservation Association, we have turned this population around. Right now, the Department has dedicated staff on the ground collecting sick and dead swans for lead monitoring. We are also analyzing the yearly swan surveys now conducted by Department staff and citizen volunteers and will have updated numbers in the near future.

Region 5

Columbia River Management Unit (CRMU) Update

Joint state staff (ODFW and WDFW) are supporting the joint commission workgroup to improve concurrency and review potential modifications to the policy guiding salmon fishery management on the Columbia River.

Regional staff are working with CRMU staff on spring Chinook fishery planning in preparation for meetings with advisory groups and for upcoming Columbia River Compact meetings.

Western Pond Turtle

Western pond turtle recovery is a priority in Region 5, and staff have been working with both Region 6 and Headquarters staff as well as multiple project partners on a variety of aspects of western pond turtle management. Recently at an annual partners meeting this January, Department staff and partners met to discuss accomplishments from 2018 as well as priorities and needs for 2019. Our partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Oregon Zoo, Woodland Park Zoo, Sustainability in Prison Project, University of Illinois, Shedd Aquarium, PAWS, and retired western pond turtle researchers Frank and Kate Slavens. Research and information were shared and discussed, including fascinating research from the University of Illinois and Shedd Aquarium, observations from the turtles currently in treatment for shell disease, updates on husbandry practice improvements, and the Department's work on shell disease, population estimation, habitat improvement, and bullfrog removal.

Stream Surveys

Region 5 Fish Program staff are wrapping up the fall stream survey season which completes spawning ground surveys for spring/fall Chinook, chum and coho. Next steps are to continue utilizing this information for estimating abundance, run-reconstruction and run-size forecasting. Additionally, preparation for spring steelhead surveying and juvenile trapping projects has begun.

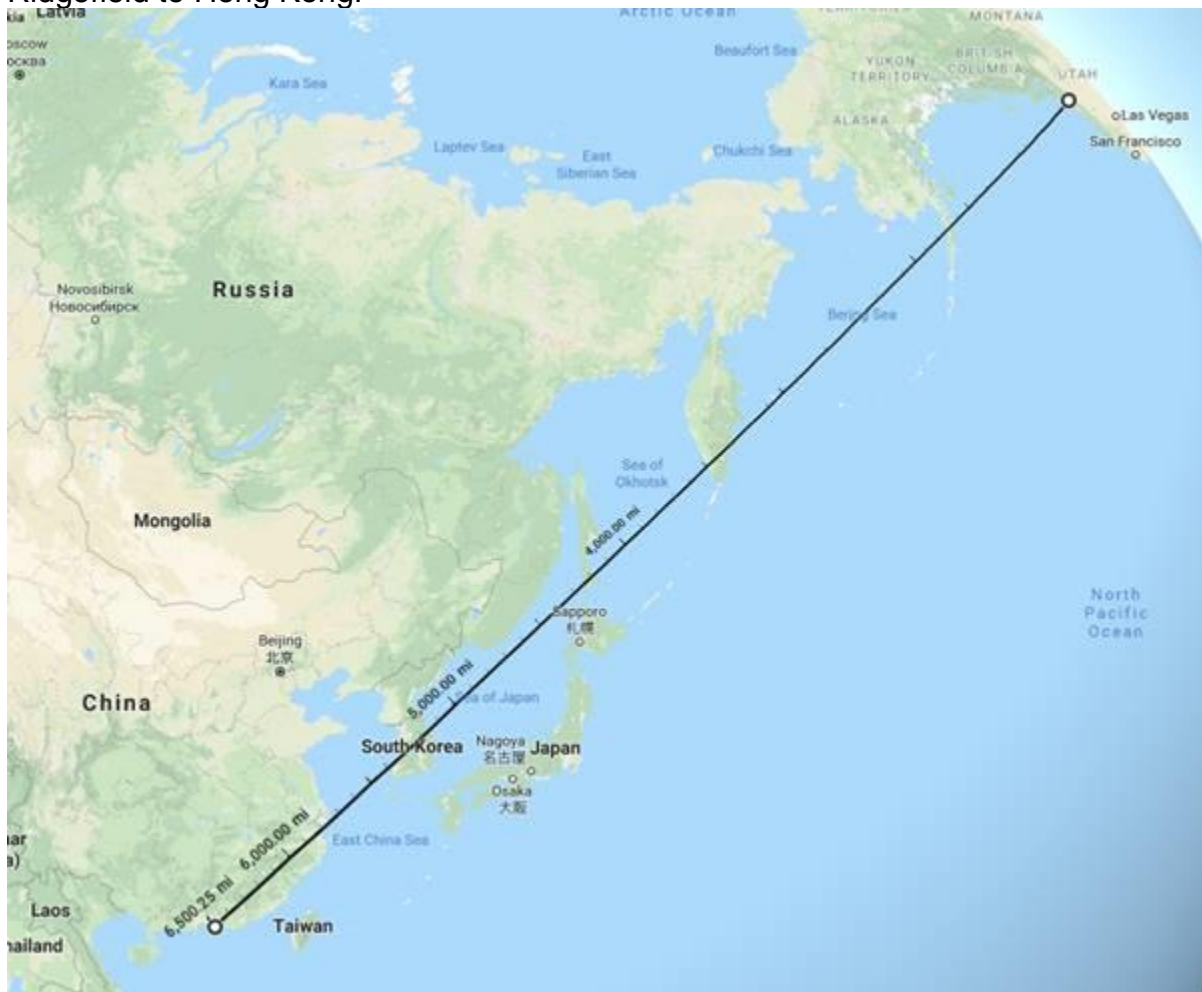
Steelhead surveys run roughly February through June, and the fall surveys run from about August through early February. As part of related work, one of our Region 5 staff, Daniel Warren, calculated the distances covered by staff during spawning surveys. These numbers include a variety of methods of travel: foot, raft, and jet-boat.

The distances do not include walking from the truck to the survey start point, nor surveys that were only partially completed. Thus, the total distance travelled by crews in the field is even greater. Long story short, our awesome crews go a **long** ways looking for fish!

Survey Season	Return Year	Total Miles	Unique Reaches Surveyed
Steelhead	2017	1,860.69	244
Fall	2017	6,086	500
Steelhead	2018	2,087.16	259
Fall	2018	6,497.31*	499

**Data still being collected.*

According to Google Maps, 6,500 miles in a straight line takes us all the way from Ridgfield to Hong Kong!



Region 6

Razor Clam Digging on Washington Coast

The 2018-19 razor clam digging season is off to a great start on most coastal beaches. As of January 21 (about the mid-season point), recreational digging has been open 33 days. Staff estimate that approximately 91,000 recreational trips were completed and over 1.1 million clams were harvested. This has resulted in approximately \$8 million of economic benefit to coastal communities. Local communities are also preparing for the much anticipated razor clam festivals on Long Beach and Ocean Shores where participation is expected to be very high. To date, no digs have been delayed or canceled due to high levels of marine toxins.

Theler Wetlands Public Meeting

Program Manager Calkins and Wildlife Area Manager Lowery participated in a public meeting sponsored by the North Mason School District to hear public testimony regarding the proposed transfer of the property from School District to Department ownership. The site, including adjacent Department lands is an extremely popular birding, hiking, and educational site. The meeting was well attended by local residents and a few waterfowl hunters who use the designated blinds in the Union River Delta. Many of the individuals who spoke supported the transfer, but a variety of concerns were voiced as well. These included suggestions that the state should reimburse the district for the value of the land and concerns related to future management and maintenance of existing public trails and habitats and enforcement needs. The Department thanks the North Mason School District for allowing us to take part in this forum and for their past and future partnership.

Clallam County Brant Hunt

This was the second year of brant hunting in Clallam County after being closed for many years (perhaps as many as 50—no one is certain). This new opportunity has been very well received, in part because the area is relatively easy to access and also seems to have a broader tide window when the birds are moving which makes it easier for hunters to figure out how to set up. Region 6 staff conducted a fairly intensive hunter check during the three-day hunt and checked more birds this year than last. Two bird limits were common at the checks, and we saw mostly black brant which is good as a large harvest of “gray bellies” or western high arctic brant would be concerning.