

STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
WILDLIFE PROGRAM

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION MEETING APRIL 9-10, 2015
CONCISE EXPLANATORY STATEMENT – Steller sea lion

WAC 232-12-011 Wildlife classified as protected shall not be hunted or fished.

A. Agency reason for adoption:

The department has reviewed all relevant data pertaining to the population status of Steller sea lions in Washington. These data show that the Washington population has strongly increased since the 1980s and is breeding in increasing numbers. This information indicates that the species is no longer in decline or in risk of becoming endangered. Thus, Steller sea lions should be removed from the state's threatened species list. The National Marine Fisheries Service federally delisted the eastern Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of Steller sea lions, which includes the Washington population, in 2013. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has conducted its own review of the status of Steller sea lions in Washington and finds that the species should be delisted at the state level as well.

B. Changes, if any, from the text of the proposed rule and reasons for difference:

No Changes

C. Agency response Written Comments Received During Official Comment Period:

Written Comments Received During Official Comment Period:

WDFW received 41 comments on this proposed rule change during the official comment period. Twenty-five people (61%) supported the proposed change and one person (2%) opposed the proposed change. The comments of 15 people (37%) did not directly address the described proposal, but all were in apparent support of it based on the overall content of their remarks.

Supporting Comments:

Some of the commenters gave simple, straightforward support for the delisting proposal, without providing additional commentary. However, 18 comments indicated that sea lions were a problem for fishers and management of fish stocks. Property-related concerns and human safety were additional issues raised by single commenters. Many of the commenters believed that sea lions have become too common, although in some of these cases, these people appeared to lump Steller sea lions and California sea lions into a single category and did not distinguish between the two species. California sea lions are much more common in Washington than Steller sea lions and are the species that people routinely see.

Opposing and Other Comments:

The one person opposed to delisting Steller sea lions stated that he believed protection of the species outweighed the cost inflicted on salmon management programs.

Direction and Rationale:

As described in WDFW's background report (Washington State Periodic Status Review for the Steller Sea Lion) accompanying this proposal, Steller sea lions have experienced strong and steady population growth in both Washington and in the eastern distinct population segment (DPS) since the 1980s. Increases have occurred both in total numbers of non-pups (defined as adults and immatures that are one or more years of age) and pups. Based on this evidence, WDFW believes that the species no longer meets the definition of a threatened species and recommended that it be removed from the state threatened list.

Public Testimony Received During February 6-7 Commission Meeting:

Public testimony was not provided on this issue.