



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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April 6, 2023

Senator Christine Rolfes, Chair
Senator Lynda Wilson, Ranking Member
Ways and Means Committee
Washington State Senate
311 John A. Cherberg Building
Post Office Box 40482
Olympia, WA 98504-0482

Representative Timm Ormsby, Chair
Representative Drew Stokesbary, Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
Washington State House of Representatives
222A John L. O'Brien Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-060

RE: 2023 Session Conference budget

Dear Senators Rolfes and Wilson; Representatives Ormsby and Stokesbary,

Thank you for the support you have given to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in the 2023-25 operating budget. I especially appreciate the funding for our top agency priority, Restoring Washington's Biodiversity. I want to share our recommendations for your consideration as you develop a final conference budget.

Specific details regarding operating budget lines, including our rationale, are provided below.

As you continue to finalize the budgets, please don't hesitate to contact me, or WDFW Legislative Director Tom McBride at 360-480-1472, if we can be of any service. Thank you again for all you do to support the Department's ability to conserve and manage the fish, wildlife, and ecosystems that make Washington such a great state.

Sincerely,

Kelly Susewind
Director

WDFW Conference Comparison Table – Operating Budget
(Dollars in thousands)

Item code - Name	Senate	House	Preferred
RB/SBID - Restoring Washington's Biodiversity	\$16,000	\$23,000	House
CM - Critical Infrastructure Maintenance	-	\$1,771	House
MT - Fish Passage Maintenance Team	-	\$1,482	House
WC - Expand Wildlife Conflict Response	-	\$1,540	House
WD - Wildlife Disease Surveillance	\$644	-	Senate
PE - Columbia River ESA Permitting	-	\$1,394	House
BC/BC01 - Building a Climate-Resilient WDFW	\$5,306	\$4,424	Senate
CN/CN01 - Building a Carbon-Neutral WDFW	-	\$1,752	House
BA/BA01 - Body Cameras and Public Records	\$1,589	\$915	Senate

The table above shows agency preferences between the comparative operating budget proposals.

The priority for the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is the package for Restoring Washington’s Biodiversity. WDFW’s preference is the stair-step approach found in the House version of the 2023-25 Operating Budget. This approach includes \$8M in the first fiscal year and \$15M ongoing in the second.

WDFW also supports supplementing this approach with one-time Natural Climate Solutions account funding as proposed in the Senate 2023-25 Operating Budget. Climate impacts will accelerate risks to biodiversity and resilient landscapes. With funding from the Natural Climate Solutions account, WDFW would focus on the nature-based climate solution components of the authorizing language and identify actions that align with high benefit to wildlife species affected by the impacts of climate change. Research shows that healthy ecosystems are the most effective carbon sinks, and ecosystems in the process of restoration have a high carbon sequestration rate.

Onetime items, requested ongoing:

The below items were requested ongoing, but funded onetime in the 2021-23 biennium, and are now at risk of being funded onetime again.

- EW/SRIP - Riparian Systems Assessment
- EW/S4B - Toutle & Skamania Hatcheries
- EW/A5A - Salmon and Steelhead Monitoring
- EW/C4 - Columbia River Pinniped Predation
- EW/A9 - Streamflow Policy Support
- EW/A4A - Salish Sea Marine Mammal Surveys
- EW/A5C - Crab Fishery and Humpbacks
- EW/S11/S111 - Prioritization of Fish Barriers
- EW/FP - Fish Passage Rulemaking

Recommendation: Please fund the above items ongoing.

Rationale: Challenges in hiring “project” staff will put these items at risk of delays and possible failure to meet the Department’s obligations set within the provisos and budget notes. Funding these items ongoing will allow the Department to keep staff needed for implementation. Further, in some instances, there is insufficient time to complete them within one biennium and WDFW will not be able to completely deliver the intended results.

WDFW Notes on Suggested Positions for Budget Line Items
Operating Budget

Item Code/Name	Senate	House	Preferred
SL/SL01 - Manage Impact to State Lands (Ecological Assessment)	\$ 150	\$ 982	House

Recommendation: Align with House.

Rationale: WDFW has worked closely with State Parks and the Department of Natural Resources and fully supports a multi-agency approach to delivering the desired outcome. The funding provided in the House budget for WDFW allows us to effectively engage in the joint process. We also support full funding for Parks and DNR.

Item Code/Name	Senate	House	Preferred
EW/WLFA - Wolf Advisory Group	\$ -	\$ 260	House

Recommendation: Align with House.

Rationale: The Wolf Advisory Group and the Wolf-Livestock Protocol establishes a framework for the department's response when conflicts between wolves and livestock occur. It also serves to increase the transparency and accountability of the department's activities and management actions related to wolves.

Item Code/Name	Senate	House	Preferred
FHF - Forest Health and Fuel Reductions	\$6,000	\$4,000	Senate

Recommendation: Align with Senate.

Rationale: The Forest Health and Fuel Reductions authority first arrived in the 2021-23 Capital budget was 95% spent by the 16th month of the biennium. The Governor’s budget placed that authority in the operating budget for the next biennium. Due to rising costs, it will be spent even more quickly. Reduced Forest Health funding in the House proposed budget will result in a 40% drop in forest acres treated. Acres treated will be reduced by 20% due to lower timber market prices and increased hauling costs. Reduced funding will cause reduced forest health; higher wildfire risk; half-completed projects (restoration includes thinning and prescribed burning); and an inability to achieve goals in the 20-year Forest Health Strategic Plan.

Item Code/Name	Senate	House	Preferred
9Q - Equipment Maintenance and Software	\$2,041	1,500	Senate
FC - Survey Flight Cost Increases	\$209	-	Senate

Recommendation: Align with Senate.

Rationale: Each of these items include legally unavoidable costs, introduced at maintenance level. WDFW would need to reduce current activities to pay these increased costs or trade the difference for a line item above.