

# WDFW BUDGET AND POLICY ADVISORY GROUP MEETING SUMMARY

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**November 10, 2021**

**10am - 12:30PM**

**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1111 Washington St SE, Olympia WA 98501 -  
Online Meeting**

## Attendance

### **BPAG Members**

Jason Callahan, Washington Forest Protection Association

David Cloe, Inland NW Wildlife Council

Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau

Mitch Friedman, Conservation Northwest

Brittany Gallagher, The Nature Conservancy

Kathleen Gobush, Defenders of Wildlife

Lucas Hall, Long Live the Kings

George Harris, NW Marine Trade Association

Jess Helsley, Wild Salmon Center

Nora Nickum, Seattle Aquarium

Tom O'Keefe, American Whitewater

Mark Pidgeon, Hunters Heritage Council

Bill Richardson, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Mindy Roberts, Washington Environmental Council

Butch Smith, Ilwaco Charter Association

Jonathan Stumpf, Trout Unlimited

Kerston Swartz, Woodland Park Zoo

Lance Winecka, Regional Fisheries Coalition

### **Other**

Kate Elliott - Maul, Foster, & Alongi

### **WDFW Staff**

Kelly Susewind

Nate Pamplin

Tom McBride

Joel Sisolak

Cynthia Wilkerson

Kathy Backman

Tami Lininger

Carrie McCausland

Rachel Blomker

Matthew Trenda

## Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Q&A with Director Kelly Susewind

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Nate Pamplin welcomed the members of the Budget and Policy Advisory Group (BPAG) and introduced WDFW Director, Kelly Susewind.

Kelly provided BPAG with an update on recent and upcoming Department work.

- The Fish and Wildlife Commission will hold a special meeting on November 2 on the Willapa Bay policy. Department staff will present suggested changes to the policy to the Fish Committee for feedback and the recommendations will be presented to the full Commission in December.

- The third of four town hall meetings to increase public engagement on coastal steelhead fisheries is scheduled for November 9. At the meeting, the forecast for next year will be presented along with proposals for next years fishery. The public will have the opportunity to provide input and the proposal will be presented to the full Commission on November 19.
- The Fish and Wildlife Commissions of Washington and Oregon will meet on November 8 to discuss concurrency between the two states on the Columbia River policy. The Commissions have made progress and agreed on conservation language. The goal is to design a policy that both Commissions can support.
- The annual Centennial Accord was held on October 26 and 27. The Accord provides a framework for the government-to-government relationships between the state and the twenty-nine federally recognized tribes in the state of Washington. At the natural resources meeting the following topics were discussed:
  - Riparian efforts
  - Recreation on state lands and growing concern from tribes to protect treaty and cultural resources
  - Improving co-management of salmon fisheries
  - Monitoring and enforcement of salmon fisheries
  - The Governor's 3-year Salmon Strategy
- Kelly will attend a meeting this week with tribes to discuss off-reservation hunting rights.
- There is a special Fish and Wildlife Commission Wildlife (FWC) Committee Meeting on November 15 to respond to Commissioners' questions about spring bear hunting. The Commission is scheduled to make a decision about the 2022 spring bear season at their meeting on November 19.
- Kelly reported to the BPAG that 38 staff were separated from the agency for non-compliance with the Governor's vaccine mandate. There are still several dozen staff pending full review of their vaccine exemption request or their reasonable accommodation request.
- The Department will host virtual open houses in each region to address local issues with Kelly and Regional Management Teams. The open house in Region 5 will be on November 2, and in Region 4 on November 4.
- Kelly mentioned several federal funding actions in play that, if passed, would change the situation in our state for fish and wildlife resources including Build Back Better, Recovering America's Wildlife Act, and the Federal Infrastructure Bill.

Members of the BPAG asked for clarification about the recreation task force requested by the tribes at the Centennial Accord and asked if there would be an opportunity for public engagement. There was also a question about support for agencies implementing the Governor's vaccine mandate.

## Outreach and Engagement Plan – Preliminary Insights and Recommendations

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Nate Pamplin introduced Kate Elliot from Maul, Foster, & Alongi who, along with Joy Juelson from Triangle Associates, is working with the Department to assess WDFW's outreach and engagement capacity to implement the Strategy 2 in the Department's 25-year strategic plan.

Kate reviewed the goals and the timeline for development of the outreach and engagement plan. Input on outreach needs has been gathered through an all-staff survey, other Washington state natural resource agencies, and other state F&W agencies. Members of the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Budget and Policy Advisory Group were also interviewed.

Key insights from the feedback include the lack of cohesive and branded messaging, the need to expand the audience for messages, and to embed key messages in Department communication. The feedback also indicated that WDFW staff are dedicated to seeing the organization succeed and want to prioritize messaging to improve our conservation mission and that partners are willing and eager to work with WDFW. Other needs identified were the balance between engaging traditional and new user groups and using digital media to effectively engage all user groups.

Outreach and engagement capacity needs are proposed to be addressed through adding regional outreach staff, engaging volunteers and partners, adding digital and media experts to the staff, and adding a dedicated team for urban area outreach. Skills the Department needs to grow to improve outreach and engagement are improvements to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, language access, social and event outreach, social media, app development, data analytics, messaging, and social science for human dimensions.

BPAG members asked if we were working with the Governor's Office of Equity and suggested that Puget Sound Partnership would be a resource for DEI outreach strategy. BPAG members shared outreach experiences from the organizations that they represent, and Nate asked their opinion on asking the legislature for direct support for efforts to increase outreach capacity.

With the assessment complete, the consultant team is finalizing a suite of recommendations to the Department and will brief the Commission in February.

## Recreation Strategy for WDFW-managed Lands

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Joel Sisolak last visited the BPAG in February of 2020 to discuss the Department's recreation strategy. At that time the BPAG recognized that recreation is the number one factor in continued relevancy for WDFW, and the Department needs to strike a balance between conservation and access. Recreational access needs to be managed to reduce conflict, and WDFW must work to establish their niche and brand. Communication will be an important part of this work.

In order to address these needs, Joel has been working on a plan to identify where, when, and how users of WDFW lands can recreate safely and avoid conflict. The landscape has changed with shifts in recreational preference, frequency of participation, increased recreational use during Covid, and climate change. The goals of the recreation strategy are to protect natural and cultural resources, enhance recreation

opportunities, and strengthen relationships. The draft plan has six strategic initiatives to meet the goals of the plan. These initiatives will be reviewed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in January and if approved, will be adopted later that month.

#### Draft strategic initiatives for the WDFW Recreation Strategy on Agency-managed Lands

1. Use and impact monitoring
  - Track visitation levels, visitor demographics and recreation use preferences
  - Monitor recreation impacts on wildlife, habitat, and recreational facilities
2. Regional and local planning
  - Define recreation use levels and buffers to guide development and management
  - Plan at regional and local scales in response to current and emerging demands
3. Statewide and local rulemaking
  - Reduce regulatory uncertainty on recreation related uses
  - Area specific rules to manage access and use of specific wildlife areas, game management units, and water access areas
4. Travel management
  - Clear guidance for managing travel networks on WDFW managed land
  - Inventory and assess the uses and condition of travel routes and networks
  - Close informal roads and trails pending review
  - Establish travel management areas
  - Monitor and manage travel networks
5. Education and engagement
  - Engage underrepresented communities in recreation planning and program development
  - Implement statewide R3 plan for fishing and hunting
  - Develop an interpretive framework
  - Engage volunteers in supporting recreation needs
  - Equip local managers to manage conflicts
  - Educate visitors on how and where to recreate responsibly
6. Capacity and funding
  - Increase statewide capacity for leading and supporting recreation planning and management.
  - Increase regional capacity for recreation planning and management
  - Develop sustainable funding to support WDFW statewide recreation strategy implementation

Near term actions for implementing the recreation strategy are:

- Make WDFW lands more welcoming
- Collect and analyze data
- Curtail illegal activity
- Learn by doing
- Ramp up capacity

Cynthia Wilkerson reviewed some specific actions to be addressed in a potential recreation decision package. Cynthia will provide Nate with a fact sheet and Nate will provide the information to the BPAG.

Members of the BPAG recommended organizations such as Outdoor Afro and Latino Outdoors as organizations that represent black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities in outdoor connections and leadership and may be resources for outreach opportunities. BPAG members also requested an updated report on sources of agency funding. Cynthia noted that funds in the decision package request will be for operations and maintenance costs of implementing the recreation strategy and will not include capital costs. There was also a question about the number of roads that might be affected in the plan. Joel clarified that the biggest impact will be to informal or legacy roads, and an inventory will be made of roads before any decisions are made.

#### Next steps for the recreation strategy

- Joel is continuing to collect comments from state partners, tribes, and the BPAG at this time.
- Two briefings are planned in December: one for recreation focused groups and one for conservation focused groups. Joel welcomes feedback from BPAG on groups that should be included in the briefings.
- The public comment under SEPA will open in early January and will be the last phase of the public comment period.
- Joel continues to revise the plan as comments are received.
- Joel will share the current draft recreation plan with BPAG
- Implementation will begin in early 2022, pending approval of the recreation strategy by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

#### Review and Update BPAG Charter

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Nate Pamplin circulated a draft of the updated BPAG charter to members. Updates incorporate feedback Nate heard from check-ins this past summer. BPAG members were asked to let Nate know if there are any other updates or edits to the charter.

#### Public Comment

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There was no public comment at the meeting

#### Next Steps

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The next BPAG meeting will be held virtually on January 5, 2022. The Governor's budget will be released in mid-December and bills pre-filed for the 2022 legislative session will be available for review. The focus of the meeting will be the 2022 supplemental legislative session.