



Director's Report to the Commission February 26-27, 2016

Wildlife Program

The Wildlife Program's contribution to the Director's Report to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for the February 2016 meeting include updates on the following topics: wolf conservation and management; manuscripts; fisher conservation; the 4-0 ranch acquisition; and the "Governor's" bighorn auction tag.

Wolf Conservation and Management

Capture and Monitoring Update

During the week of February 16, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) staff captured and radio-collared six wolves utilizing a helicopter. Two wolves each from the Smackout pack and greater Huckleberry pack area were captured, and one each are from the Profanity Peak and Dirty Shirt pack were captured. Department personnel are also conducting ground and aerial surveys to estimate the minimum known number of wolves and packs in Washington. This effort helps determine reproductive success and breeding pair status. All wolf information will be compiled into an annual report for the 2015 season, which will be completed in late-March or early-April.

Wolf-Dog Encounter

On Monday, January 25, there was an encounter between members of the Dirty Shirt wolf pack and two dogs – and the dogs' owners – northeast of Chewelah in Stevens County. Shortly after dark, a Chewelah resident reported to the Stevens County Sheriff's Office that at least five wolves had surrounded his female Great Pyrenees in a field outside his home on Burnt Valley Road. He said his German Shepherd-mix dog was also nearby. The area is within the Dirty Shirt pack's range. The resident said he and his wife became alarmed when the wolves approached the dog. The wolves surrounded the Great Pyrenees and there was posturing and jumping, and the German Shepherd-mix also approached the group. The resident got his firearm and fired two or three shots over the heads of the wolves and dogs. At that point, the wolves moved away from the house and the dogs went inside. There was a drop of blood at the site of the incident, but the owners did not find any injuries on the dogs. Because female wolves are in estrus at this time, it is feasible that the drop of blood may have come from one of the wolves. The Department is taking this incident very seriously. Fortunately, the dog owner did everything right in harassing the wolves out of the area, and the couple has been working with our staff to ensure their animals' safety and avoid

further conflict with the wolves. Given the imminent threat to the dogs – and the fact that the incident occurred in the portion of the state where wolves are not listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) – under the current rule pertaining to wolf interactions with domestic animals the dog owners had the right to shoot one of the wolves in this situation but did not.

Since the encounter, Conflict Specialist Jay Shepherd has visited with the dog owners on a number of occasions, as well as Regional Director Steve Pozzanghera, to discuss ideas and steps for increasing the security of their dogs. Both the dog owner and Department staff are concerned about future encounters as there is some evidence that one or more wolves have visited their property in the past.

We've discussed a number of potential ideas to increase the security in this situation, including purchasing a kennel, installing gates on the porch, installing a RAG box, sharing collar data, using fox lights or a spot light, etc. Of those, implementing preventive measures that give warning that wolves are in the area and physically protect the dogs fit this situation the best and are the highest priority.

To give warning that wolves are in the area, the Department has loaned the owners a telemetry receiver and antenna, which allows them to check if the collared wolf is within the vicinity of their home site (generally detection is within ½-mile line-of-sight) in real-time. This tool was preferred due to some limitations of the collar data-sharing program. The data sharing program shows, by default, past locations of where the collared wolf has been, with no advanced real-time warning. The collar data sharing tool is also intermittent, with locations every four hours at best; with a more typical output of one location a day. That being said, we are sharing the locations of the collared wolf via maps or verbal updates a couple times a week so the owner can become familiar with the travel patterns of the collared wolf.

To increase the physical protection of the dogs, the Department is contributing \$1,000 to the owners via a cost-share agreement to help purchase a kennel and/or porch gates. The Department's cost-share program is limited to livestock, but in this rare situation and given the elevated level of concern for future encounters, outside entities have anonymously contributed the \$1,000 to help off-set the cost for this dog owner.

The Department confirmed several incidents last summer (between July 5 and 10) in which wolves from this pack killed livestock, so the Department will continue to follow the movements of these animals closely.

Asotin County Carcass Disposal

Wildlife Conflict staff in Southeast Washington have established an arrangement with the Asotin County landfill to receive livestock carcasses from operators. An existing account has been modified and identified as "Carcass Removal." Local livestock owners can take carcasses directly to the landfill. The landfill will collect an invoice from each operator, which will include the operator's name, vehicle description, and description of the carcass(es). Headquarters Conflict Section staff members identified

funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wolf-Livestock Demonstration Grant to be used for this effort.

The arrangement was first used during the first week of February. On February 2, the Department Blue Mountains District Wildlife Biologist located OR-29 near a livestock carcass during a reconnaissance flight. A cow carcass died three to five days prior from internal issues (the owner is a vet). Department staff helped the producer load the carcass into his trailer and the producer delivered it the next morning to the landfill and indicated everything went smoothly.

Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) Update

The WAG third-party-neutral, Francine Madden, was on medical leave, so the Department made some changes to the WAG meeting plans for February. The February 1-2 WAG meeting in Tumwater was cancelled and the Department scheduled two conference calls for information sharing, the first of which was on February 2. The purpose of the call was for the Department to update the WAG on the Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for Livestock revision progress since the December WAG meeting. The second conference call is scheduled for February 29. The next WAG meeting is scheduled for March 14-15 in Olympia. All WAG meetings and conference calls are open to the public.

Manuscripts

Biologist Gary Wiles worked with Dr. Thor Hanson and Dr. Joe Gaydos (SeaDoc Society) to publish a journal paper titled “A novel public-private partnership model for improving the listing of endangered species” that appeared in the January issue of *Biodiversity and Conservation*. The paper describes the collaborative process used by the SeaDoc Society and the Department to produce the status review that resulted in the listing of tufted puffins as a state endangered species in 2015. It recommends the model be applied by other jurisdictions having a backlog of species waiting to be listed.

Fisher Reintroductions and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances

Department staff are focusing on fisher recovery on two major fronts: reintroductions to the Cascade Mountains and landowner incentives.

Since November 2015, 23 fishers have been translocated from British Columbia to Washington’s South Cascades. The Department is working closely with National Park Service, Conservation Northwest and other partners to reestablish the species in the state. Releases are set to continue on federal lands for the next two years in the South Cascades to achieve 80 total animals released, then additional releases are planned to begin in the North Cascades, aiming for the reintroduction of a similar number of animals in that region.

At the same time, Department staff have been working with Washington Forest Protection Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, tribes and others for more than a year on a joint strategy to help protect fishers. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is

currently reviewing an agreement proposed by the Department that, if approved, will extend incentives to landowners who take steps to protect fishers that move onto their lands. Under the proposed Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), landowners who adopt specified conservation measures will not be subject to any additional land restrictions if fishers are listed for protection under the federal ESA.

Currently, the Department is reaching out to additional landowners that might be interested in enrolling in the CCAA. Due to a pending decision on whether to include Washington's fishers in a federal listing in April 2016, timing is tight. To qualify for the program, landowners must enroll before the species officially becomes listed under the ESA.

Landowners interested in learning more about the program can contact the following Department staff: Gary Bell (360-902-2412, Gary.Bell@dfw.wa.gov) or Jeff Azerrad (360-696-6211 ext. 6754, Jeffrey.Azerrad@dfw.wa.gov).

4-0 Ranch Acquisition Update

The purpose of the 4-0/Mountain View acquisition project in the Blue Mountains is to protect streams for the benefit of steelhead and bull trout, and to protect upland habitat for the benefit of deer, bighorn sheep and elk. This landscape level project supports many target species and connects state and federal public lands. The first phase of this proposed 11,270-acre project was acquired in January 2012. Historical management practices have focused on wildlife benefits, which have resulted in some of the highest quality habitat of this type in the state. The lands will be managed within the Wildlife Program as part of the 4-O Ranch Unit, Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. In January 2016, Phase 5 was completed and added 2,063 acres to the Wildlife Area.



Fish Program

Smelt Fishery

On Saturday, February 6, the Department opened recreational smelt dipping for six hours in the lower Cowlitz River. The fishery attracted 16,700 dippers with most getting their 10-pound limit. A total of 141,050 pounds were harvested. This translates to about 1.6 million individual smelt. The fishery was opened for just one period under an agreement between the Department and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Another Saturday would be considered only if there are indicators that the return is larger than expected. This year's return is not expected to be as large as last year's run of 127 million smelt.

Enforcement officers worked in teams and utilized undercover patrols to monitor the thousands of harvesters. All told, officers seized in excess of 900 pounds of smelt in six hours.

Sturgeon

Per the Commission's guidance at the January Commission meeting, Department staff initiated a discussion with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife staff concerning elimination of the sturgeon catch and release fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam. The Oregon Commission conferred on the issue and decided not to support any changes in the regulations regarding catch and release or consideration of a retention fishery.

Habitat Program

Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) Program Update

As you know, the Department requested a formal Attorney General Opinion (AGO) regarding the extent of our HPA jurisdiction. We anticipate seeing the opinion published this spring.

The request for the formal AGO triggered legislators to introduce Senate Bill 6287 clarifying the HPA jurisdiction to apply only at or below the ordinary high water line. Several entities testified in opposition of the bill and had numerous discussions with key legislators about how such a clarification was an actual reduction in fish protection at a time where we need improved fish protection. Thanks to the support and hard work of commercial fishers, recreational anglers, tribes, and the environmental community, Senate Bill 6287 did not move out of the Senate.

The Department has a lot of work to accomplish despite the pending results of the formal AGO and the outcome of SB 6287. The Department has been hosting "listening sessions" for the HPA Program, where we are seeking input from the public on what they think is working, what they would like to see changed, and how those changes

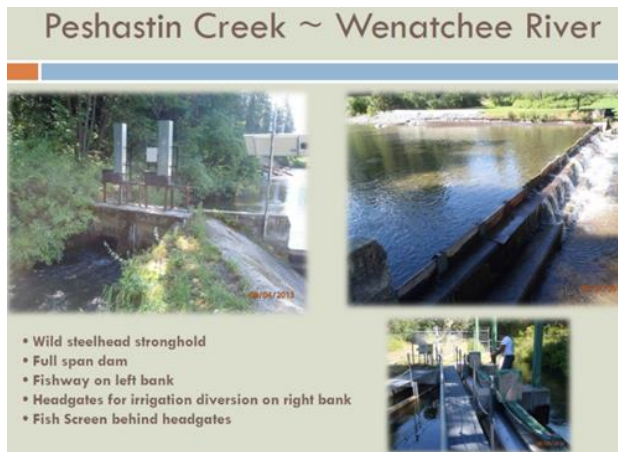
should be developed to address their concerns. We intend to take this feedback into mid-May and then begin separating the solutions into statutory changes, rule changes, operational improvements, and technical assistance improvements, which will inform the Department's proposed 2017 HPA legislation.

Department staff will continue to work with the Commission's Habitat and Enforcement committees as we make progress in the development of our agency request legislation and other HPA Program improvements.

Eastside Irrigation Diversion Screening

Jenni Novak, along with Danny Didricksen, presented a progress update on the Upper Columbia River Fish Screen Monitoring Program to the Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee (PRCC) on January 27. They received great praise from the group for their resourcefulness in projects, program accounting, and overall professionalism in carrying out the No Net Impact Contracts in the Columbia basin. The Team facilitated Capital projects in the Peshastin, Chiwawa, Clear Creek, and Goat Creek basins last year.

Fires on the landscape can wreak havoc on screening sites (photo-right) so the team will be handling these issues as well. Jenni has also made significant progress working with Habitat engineers, and on her own, with the proposed Upper Wolf Creek project description for permitting. The project is set to begin this fall on U.S. Forest Service land. Jenni also gained financial support for the project from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Fish Passage Division Leads Fish Passage Symposium at American Fisheries Society (AFS) Meeting

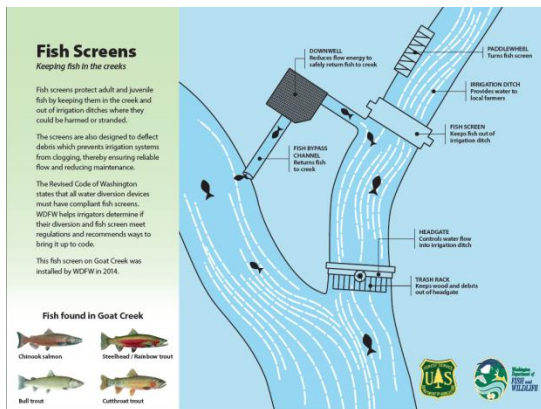
Representing statewide leadership in fish passage restoration and technical assistance, the Fish Passage Division is developing a day-long Symposium entitled "Fish Passage for the Future: Using our Knowledge Base to Bolster Fish Passage Solutions for the Next Generation." The symposium will take place on March 30, 2016, at Lake Chelan.



Read more about the symposium at <http://agm.wabc-afs.org/2016-agm-symposia-list/>. The Department is a key regular sponsor of the Annual General Meeting, and there are many AFS members within the Department. The Meeting also co-hosts the annual Pink and Chum Workshop <http://pinkandchum.psc.org/Background.html>.

Project Signage Well-received by Methow Valley Trail Users

Fish Passage and Screening staff led the Department in Forest Service partnering efforts to make improvements to a fish screen on Goat Creek in the Methow Valley near Mazama. The Methow Valley Trails system crosses the creek through Forest Service land directly above the new fish screen site. Due to the heavy use of these trail systems year-round for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, biking, or equestrian use, the Department took the opportunity to place an interpretive sign that explains what a fish screen is and why it is important.



Fish Passage Barrier Removal Board Progressing Towards Statewide Strategies

Since April 2015, the Fish Passage Barrier Removal Board (Board) has met monthly to provide guidance for the challenging task of removing barriers across the state. The data suggest that there are about 14,000 known barriers across the state, but efforts in recent years to identify new culverts suggest an estimate of about 35,000. The enormous task requires a systematic approach to prioritize the work at a watershed level in order to best support a viable salmon recovery strategy. This might seem like a very fundamental task, but with the variety of ownerships, jurisdictions, funding constraints, and habitat conditions, this effort is more than knocking door to door. Fish Passage Division staff are working with salmon recovery regions and lead entities to prioritize watersheds and identify high value fish passage projects statewide. The Board, chaired by Restoration Division Manager Dave Price, is comprised of multiple

state agencies, cities, counties, and tribes who are using this information to develop funding scenarios for the Legislature in coming years. Read more about the Board progress and past work: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/fbrb/>.

In addition, the House and Senate budget proposals appear to provide the Department staff capacity funds necessary to complete work necessary to advance a scoped project list for the Legislature's consideration in 2017. This work includes completing stream inventories in priority streams that were identified by regional recovery groups as well as some preliminary engineering review necessary to develop project concepts and cost estimates. We hope to provide training and resources to Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups and Conservation Districts in these priority areas so they can help accomplish this work.

Enforcement Program

In-Service Training

The entire Enforcement Program attended In-service training in Leavenworth. Training ranged from current search and seizure laws to swift water rescue to public disclosure rules and records retention.

Legislative Update

Agency request legislation that closes several loopholes associated with law enforcement appear to be moving through committees with broad support. Senate Bill 6400, a technical bill, and Senate Bill 6401, seafood related, strengthen law related to the unlawful possession of wild salmon and steelhead and require seafood records to remain with the product so that it can be linked with a lawful origin.

The House Budget was amended to support funding for I-1401 enforcement.

Shellfish Trafficking

A number of felony level shellfish trafficking cases are making their way through the judicial system with strong support from prosecutors. Unfortunately, the scale of trafficking appears to be on the increase, involving many species, including wildlife.

Another bite at the apple when officers miss poaching avails itself in the marketplace, where officers follow the important trail of paper from fish backwards to harvest grounds. For a full week in February, officers across the state focused on businesses and locations where we can intercept seafood involved in trade. Many discoveries of illegal fish and shellfish were made in numerous establishments. A patrol ground component revealed two subjects in the process of poaching hundreds of pounds of clams during a closed season.