

POLICY: Actions and Guidelines to Improve the Conservation of Washington's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources

Effective date: _____ **2016**

The purpose of this policy is to establish strategies for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to better preserve and protect our state's diverse fish and wildlife resources. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) recognizes that in order to succeed, both the Commission and the Department must engage in active, assertive efforts to involve Washingtonians in achieving the Department's mission to conserve our natural heritage and provide opportunities for its enjoyment.

Washington is home to more than 1,900 species of animals, including at least 40 that are found here and nowhere else on earth. Fish and wildlife are protected public resources, held in trust for all Washingtonians now and into the future. Our quality of life, outdoor traditions and prosperity are tied to the health and sustainability of these treasures. Yet we are facing an impending fish and wildlife crisis that could alter the opportunity for future generations to benefit from these resources.

To address this crisis, the Department, along with private citizens and community partners, completed a conservation strategy called the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), which was approved by the Commission in 2015. The plan outlines actions needed to preserve 268 species of greatest conservation need and the habitats they depend on. The plan also determined that over half of the identified species are not receiving adequate conservation attention. The Department currently lacks the necessary capacity to fully implement the SWAP.

Congress passed the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts that established a fund to support conservation and management of game and sport fish species by surtaxing gear used by hunters, recreational shooters, fishermen, and boaters. In addition, hunter and angler license dollars have provided critical funding for state-based fish and wildlife conservation for decades. Nationally, a dedicated and sustainable funding mechanism is lacking for the many species of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates that are not hunted or fished. The funding base for wildlife conservation in Washington and throughout the nation needs to be expanded if we are going to successfully protect and sustain these species and their habitats. Increased funding will complement and augment the contributions of hunters and anglers and will allow all citizens to share in the responsibility of conserving natural resources for future generations. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) hosted a Blue

Ribbon Panel to develop strategies to support this work nationally and several states have begun to explore state-based solutions to the wildlife conservation crisis.

The Commission supports the Blue Ribbon Panel (Panel) on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources recommendation that Congress dedicate 1.3 billion dollars annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program. If passed, states will require one quarter match to receive their shares. With or without additional federal funding, Washington will need to identify new sources of revenue to conserve our fish and wildlife resources. The Commission is committed to working with Department staff and our partners to identify funds to meet this critical need. The Commission also supports the Panel's call for the need to engage and serve broader constituencies while, at the same time, maintaining close partnerships with traditional fish and wildlife constituents.

The conservation of Washington's fish and wildlife, including the protection of species not hunted or fished, was highlighted by a strong community message heard in recent statewide listening sessions as part of the Department's Wild Future Initiative. In particular, hunters and anglers expressed that they would welcome an opportunity to share the financial burden of conservation of our natural resources with other non-traditional constituents that enjoy and benefit from fish and wildlife. Members of the general public and conservation groups also communicated that they would like to more fully contribute to and be part of wildlife conservation in our state.

Actions:

- The Commission will request the Washington Congressional delegation to sign on to the federal fish and wildlife conservation funding bill;
- The Commission will reach out to other western state fish and wildlife commissions to urge their congressional delegations to support the federal funding bill; and
- The Commission will support and participate, where appropriate, to seek new potential funding sources for wildlife conservation in Washington State.

Guidance:

The Director will position the Department to better preserve and protect our state's diverse fish and wildlife resources according to the following guiding principles:

- Prioritize Washington-specific efforts to develop new funding sources and increase agency relevancy to a broader public;

- Provide resources to support national efforts related to the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations;
- Ensure that hunters, anglers, private landowners and non-traditional constituent groups are engaged and all perspectives are included in the process to increase conservation capacity in Washington;
- Include outreach to non-traditional constituents and funding for non-hunted wildlife and non-game fish as major next steps in the Wild Future Initiative;
- Direct on-the-ground investment of federal or state conservation dollars resulting from these efforts toward implementation of the SWAP, in addition to outreach and education; and
- Wherever possible, utilize partnerships including local governments, private landowners, conservation groups, schools, businesses, universities, and others to better deliver conservation programs.