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Brad Smith, Ph.D., Chair
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
Via Email: commission@dfw.wa.gov

March 22, 2018

RE: Qualities for New Director

Dear Commissioner Smith,

Conservation Northwest has substantial interest in the department, its success in executing its mission in the years ahead, and therefore in the abilities of its next director to lead into a challenging future. The commission's director choice is a monumental decision.

The amazing diversity of Washington's geography has long translated into a daunting task for WDFW, having to manage resources spanning from salmon runs to wolf recovery, with related complex treaty obligations. This inherent challenge has grown larger in recent years: The sporting community is distressed and agitated over declining hunting and fishing opportunities. The active sporting community is also [shrinking](#). Population growth, land use changes, and increasingly climate change that primarily drive the diminished opportunity are unlikely to abate. Those same pressures impact biodiversity, which has an equal footing in the department's mission but is sadly far from adequately funded in the budget or provided for with dedicated revenue. The department's political ability to obtain sufficient appropriations from the state's diminished discretionary budget pie is impaired by the stakeholder concerns and squabbles.

To succeed, some sort of bold change will be required in how the department embraces and communicates its mission and relates to its stakeholders and to legislators. The status quo would likely lead to an increasingly intractable spiral down. The recent Matrix audit found that the department is functioning at a relatively high level. While that's good news, it also means that there are not large enough internal reform options to attenuate the external needs. The opportunities for major change relate to the department's posture, not structure or efficiencies.

I therefore believe the agency needs a new kind of leader with unique abilities to take it forward. The person must have great vision to see the path forward, great management ability to design the needed changes and sustain/build agency moral through the transition, great communication skills to keep stakeholders on board while building new constituencies and broader public support, and the transparency and trustworthiness to build the needed political capital on the hill. The new director must have the energy to sustain great leadership for the many years this transitional will require. All this is needed on top of the familiarity with the state's tribes, fisheries processes, and wildlife passion without which not even the first steps can be taken.

I have heard compelling names mentioned as having interest in the job. Hopefully you'll have these and many more options. I wish the commission the wisdom to make the right choice.

Sincerely,

Mitch Friedman
Executive Director

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