



January 3, 2020

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Real Estate Services
P.O. Box 43158
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear WDFW Lands Staff:

Conservation Northwest enthusiastically supports the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife's 2020 land acquisition priorities. In particular, several of the proposals would have strong benefits for the wildlife within some of our priority program areas including our Sagelands Heritage Program and Cascades to Olympics program.

We strongly believe that the 1,105 acres in the Wenas/Cleman Mountain Addition is an extremely important conservation easement to maintain north-south connectivity between the Wenas Wildlife Area and shrub-steppe habitat to the south. Scientific least-cost corridor mapping identifies the wildlife habitats along that route as critical to a permeable landscape that are under increasing pressure from small-acre developments.

This area and property is also a top priority for our Sagelands Heritage Program, which works to maintain, restore and connect shrub-steppe landscapes from British Columbia's Okanogan Valley to south-central Washington's Horse Heaven Hills. Tours we have attended on this property also support the very economical inclusion of buildings onsite as a logical way to provide a more public headquarters and improve educational opportunities for Washington's citizens about our endangered shrub-steppe habitat. This headquarters will be a great place for visitors and locals to access wildlife and experience outdoor education in the community.

The Flat Lake 60-acre acquisition also occurs within our Sagelands Heritage Program area and supports multiple recreational opportunities. This acquisition is located in a narrow but important band of shrub-steppe habitat, allowing options for wildlife to move north to south in Grant County.

To the north, the Okanogan County Hunter Mountain 420-acre acquisition and 208-acre Rendezvous inholdings should both be high priorities. The Hunter Mountain project cumulates a decade-long process to build land acquisition and conservation easement partnerships with Okanogan County Commissioners, while protecting crucial lower Methow Valley sagebrush habitat. WDFW collar data shows that the Rendezvous inholding acres are critical to the migration and stopover habitat needs of the biggest mule deer herd in the state. This project

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would also protect rare wetland habitats and quaking aspen stands used by many species of wildlife. Development pressure on key habitats like these is a constant threat that makes timely acquisition of every acre increasingly important.

The Davis Creek 416-acre acquisition fits within our Cascades to Olympics program area, which aims to improve habitat connectivity between the Cascade Mountains and the Olympic Peninsula and allow wildlife to move across I-5 and Highway 12. This acquisition has multiple high-value fish and wildlife benefits based on its rich tapestry of floodplain, wetland, river oxbow, and riparian habitats. Maintaining riparian corridors on this property would provide high-value by itself, while also connecting upland wildlife habitats.

We are excited to see all of these land acquisition and conservation easement opportunities in the 2020 program and give each of them our full support.

Sincerely,

Mitch Friedman
Executive Director

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