

# Stakeholders call for legislature to fully-fund Department of Fish and Wildlife

Today (January 13, 2020), a set of diverse organizations representing hunters and anglers, wildlife advocates, and outdoor recreation interests called on the Washington State Legislature to appropriate all of the \$26 million in operating funds requested for the coming fiscal year by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in the upcoming session. This is substantially more than what Governor Inslee included in his budget request, which contains just \$15.6 million in general operating funds for WDFW, though the Governor's budget also includes \$8.2 million that would accrue in the unlikely event that a bill passed to increase certain hunting and fishing license fees.

Many of these same groups worked last year in favor of the Legislature appropriating \$45 million in biennial operating funds (plus \$17 million from a license fee increase bill that did not pass), of which a mere \$24 million was provided onetime, rather than ongoing. Greater funding is needed to preserve and restore the Evergreen State's fish and wildlife heritage, especially given growing challenges ranging from salmon and orca recovery to elk hoof disease, habitat loss and wolf management.

If the Legislature were to fund the entire \$26 million requested today, the total \$50 million bump for this biennium would allow the agency to continue its existing level of service—providing recreational and commercial opportunities for Washingtonians while stewarding our state's fish, wildlife and the habitat they depend on. This basic level of service has been put at significant risk by a structural deficit in the Department's budget, where ongoing costs (like mandated payroll increases, Endangered Species Act requirements, and demand for outdoor opportunity from the state's growing population) have been funded for only the initial year by onetime money. The costs continue in later years. This exacerbates an agency budget that is still not restored from cuts dating to the 2008 recession. This deficit grows each biennium as onetime solutions temporarily fill the gap, only to expire and leave a larger hole.

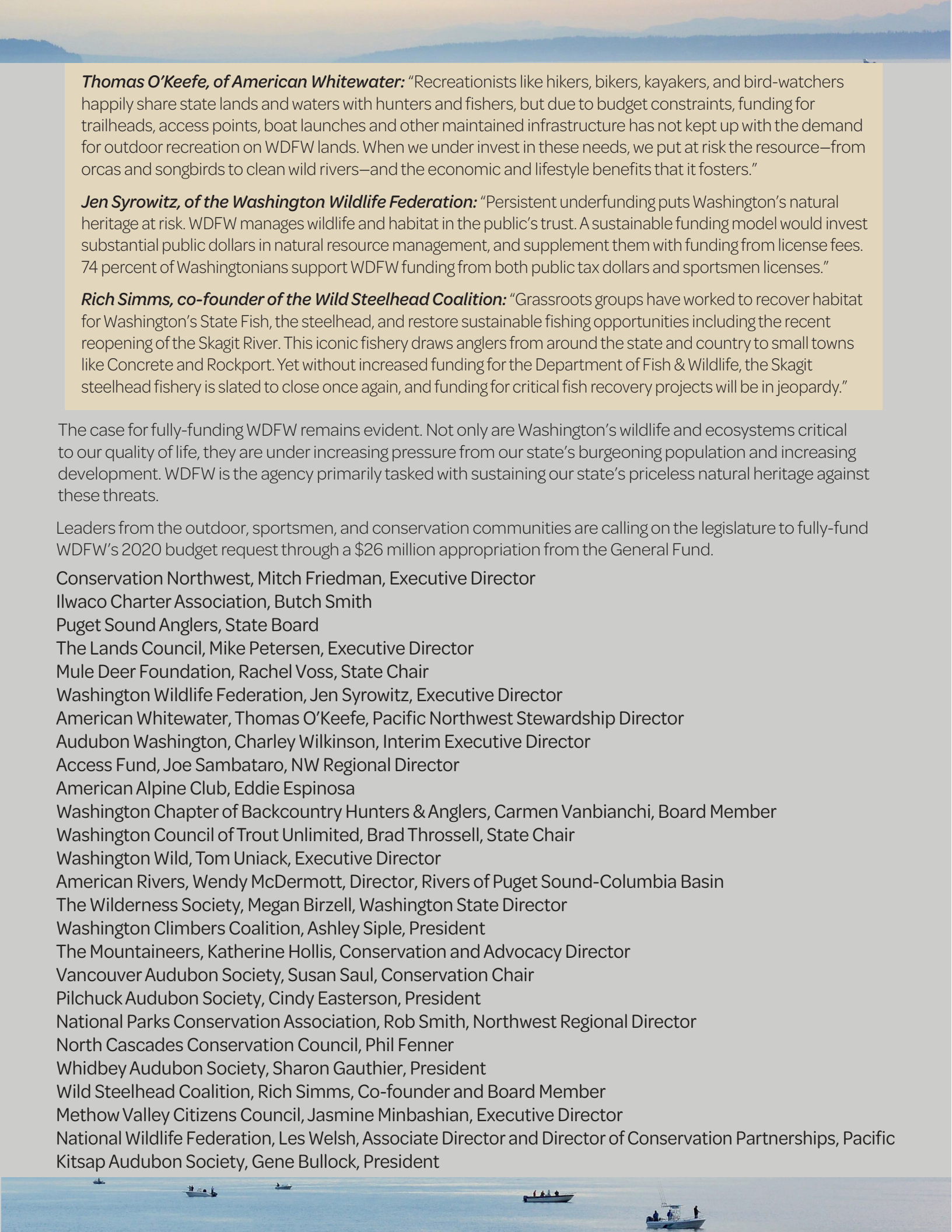
In 2017, the Legislature challenged the Department to find savings, requiring it to submit to evaluation by an outside management consultant, undertake a zero-based budget exercise, and assemble a citizen advisory group to identify areas for budget cuts. That citizen advisory group, the Budget and Policy Advisory Group (BPAG), seeing what damage such cuts would cause, coalesced in support of the Department's mission and in favor of it being sufficiently funded to succeed. This statement from leaders of diverse WDFW stakeholder groups reinforces that demand. Perspectives from BPAG representatives and other outdoor leaders are available below:

**Butch Smith, of Ilwaco Charter Association:** "Department of Revenue estimates that wildlife watching, hunting and fishing contribute about \$170 million dollars per year to the State General Fund. Rural communities and businesses like mine depend on the activity that generates those tax revenues. Salmon is our life blood and WDFW is an essential investment for our economy and lifestyle."

**Rachel Voss, a Tieton resident with the Mule Deer Foundation:** "Hunting is what I live for. Our game populations and experiences face countless challenges these days, and only a strong agency offers the chance of answering those challenges and passing on our hunting heritage."

**Mitch Friedman, of Conservation Northwest:** "Spending on wildlife diversity and outdoor recreation is particularly lacking, representing less than four percent of the Department's budget and only a small share of General Fund appropriations to WDFW. WDFW has only enough money to implement five percent of its State Wildlife Action Plan. Biodiversity is at growing risk with this weak funding trend."





**Thomas O'Keefe, of American Whitewater:** "Recreationists like hikers, bikers, kayakers, and bird-watchers happily share state lands and waters with hunters and fishers, but due to budget constraints, funding for trailheads, access points, boat launches and other maintained infrastructure has not kept up with the demand for outdoor recreation on WDFW lands. When we under invest in these needs, we put at risk the resource—from orcas and songbirds to clean wild rivers—and the economic and lifestyle benefits that it fosters."

**Jen Syrowitz, of the Washington Wildlife Federation:** "Persistent underfunding puts Washington's natural heritage at risk. WDFW manages wildlife and habitat in the public's trust. A sustainable funding model would invest substantial public dollars in natural resource management, and supplement them with funding from license fees. 74 percent of Washingtonians support WDFW funding from both public tax dollars and sportsmen licenses."

**Rich Simms, co-founder of the Wild Steelhead Coalition:** "Grassroots groups have worked to recover habitat for Washington's State Fish, the steelhead, and restore sustainable fishing opportunities including the recent reopening of the Skagit River. This iconic fishery draws anglers from around the state and country to small towns like Concrete and Rockport. Yet without increased funding for the Department of Fish & Wildlife, the Skagit steelhead fishery is slated to close once again, and funding for critical fish recovery projects will be in jeopardy."

The case for fully-funding WDFW remains evident. Not only are Washington's wildlife and ecosystems critical to our quality of life, they are under increasing pressure from our state's burgeoning population and increasing development. WDFW is the agency primarily tasked with sustaining our state's priceless natural heritage against these threats.

Leaders from the outdoor, sportsmen, and conservation communities are calling on the legislature to fully-fund WDFW's 2020 budget request through a \$26 million appropriation from the General Fund.

Conservation Northwest, Mitch Friedman, Executive Director

Ilwaco Charter Association, Butch Smith

Puget Sound Anglers, State Board

The Lands Council, Mike Petersen, Executive Director

Mule Deer Foundation, Rachel Voss, State Chair

Washington Wildlife Federation, Jen Syrowitz, Executive Director

American Whitewater, Thomas O'Keefe, Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director

Audubon Washington, Charley Wilkinson, Interim Executive Director

Access Fund, Joe Sambataro, NW Regional Director

American Alpine Club, Eddie Espinosa

Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Carmen Vanbianchi, Board Member

Washington Council of Trout Unlimited, Brad Throssell, State Chair

Washington Wild, Tom Uniack, Executive Director

American Rivers, Wendy McDermott, Director, Rivers of Puget Sound-Columbia Basin

The Wilderness Society, Megan Birzell, Washington State Director

Washington Climbers Coalition, Ashley Siple, President

The Mountaineers, Katherine Hollis, Conservation and Advocacy Director

Vancouver Audubon Society, Susan Saul, Conservation Chair

Pilchuck Audubon Society, Cindy Easterson, President

National Parks Conservation Association, Rob Smith, Northwest Regional Director

North Cascades Conservation Council, Phil Fenner

Whidbey Audubon Society, Sharon Gauthier, President

Wild Steelhead Coalition, Rich Simms, Co-founder and Board Member

Methow Valley Citizens Council, Jasmine Minbashian, Executive Director

National Wildlife Federation, Les Welsh, Associate Director and Director of Conservation Partnerships, Pacific

Kitsap Audubon Society, Gene Bullock, President



North Cascades Audubon Society, Robert Kaye, Conservation Committee Chair  
 Skagit Audubon Society, Tim Manns, Conservation Chair  
 Defenders of Wildlife, Quinn Read, Northwest Program Director  
 Sound Action, Amy Carey, Executive Director  
 The Nature Conservancy in Washington, Justin Allegro, External Affairs Advisor  
 Seattle Aquarium, Dr. Erin Meyer, Director of Conservation Programs and Partnerships  
 WA Forest Protection Association, Jason Callahan Director of Governmental Relations  
 Washington Environmental Council, Becky Kelly, President  
 Washington Conservation Voters, Shannon Murphy, President  
 Methow Valley Fly Fishers, Kevin van Bueren, Board Member  
 Regional Fisheries Coalition, Sherry Penney, President  
 Inland Northwest Wildlife Council, David Cloe, Trust and Immediate Past President  
 Seattle Audubon Society, Claire Catania, Executive Director  
 Black Hills Audubon, Elizabeth Rodrick, Vice President  
 Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association, Margaret A. Pilaro, Executive Director  
 Northwest Trek Wildlife Park and Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Alan Varsik, Director  
 Washington Trollers Association, Greg Mueller, President/Executive Director  
 Woodland Park Zoo, Peter Zahler, Vice President of Conservation Initiatives  
 Spokane Audubon, Alan McCoy, President



Washington Trollers Association



Protect America's Climbing



Northwest Trek Wildlife Park  
METRO PARKS TACOMA



THE MOUNTAINEERS

