



February 12, 2020

Kelly Susewind, Director  
Jeff Davis, Director of Conservation Policy  
Sent via email

RE: Recommendations for the Department's 25-year strategic plan

Dear Kelly and Jeff,

Thanks for taking time to hear input from Paula and me on the strategic plan, and for meeting with Chase to discuss additional suggestions and the sentiments of WDFW's diverse constituency. I appreciate our front row seat to the process through my participation in the BPAG and our productive and candid relationship. It nonetheless seems worthwhile to put our thoughts in writing. We drafted the below prior to receiving the update from Jeff and Rob at last week's BPAG meeting. From what I heard there and read in the update handout, you're on a good path.

In mid-century, WDFW will clearly be a different agency. The size, demographics, and values of the population are changing. Pressure on our resources from the growth of the population, its use of the land, and especially climate change is daunting. The resource and the public *need* you to be both stronger and different in the years ahead. The major questions are the degree to which you can make the necessary changes without losing the trust, engagement, and activity participation of traditional constituencies and while retaining enough legislative and funding support to face the challenges successfully. I genuinely wish I had confident guidance to assure your success instead of just the following well-wishes and suggestions, much of which tracks our input to the Department's recent Wild Futures process.

**Increase focus and funding on non-game species**, protecting and restoring Washington's vast biological diversity. It's unnerving to me that so little of the Department's budget goes to implement the State Wildlife Action Plan, and that so little of that quality plan is being implemented. We remain your partner in trying to bring more federal support through the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, more state general funds, and perhaps a new source of dedicated state revenue. All those and more will be needed to enable the Department to be more proactive in pursuing conservation action and policy to recover threatened or endangered species and to reduce the number that become listed, often by undertaking strategic partnerships and collaborations that can to be more cost efficient over the long term. All this must be done while also addressing concerning declines in ungulates and other game species, which remain critical to conservation interests, hunters and anglers, and many other Washingtonians.

**Incorporate policies that address the threats of a changing climate into the Department's planning and management.** This should include the carbon storage benefits of old forests when considering management actions regarding WDFW-operated land, as well as fish and wildlife's need for increased habitat connectivity, intergovernmental coordination (such as with British Columbia), and ecosystem resilience to help them adapt to a changing climate.

**Advance and maintain science-based policy.** Public sentiment, social tolerance, harvest opportunity and other factors are vital and their influence must be a factor of consideration, but not above science-based wildlife management recommendations. Investment in science will help inform increasingly complex climate adaptation decisions.

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**Diversify your staff, including leadership.** The recent America's Wildlife Values report indicates that 84.4 percent of WDFW employees are white and 65 percent are male. Diversifying to better reflect the public will also allow you to better serve the public.

**Boost efforts to recover keystone and iconic species including carnivores like grizzly bears, lynx and wolverines, as well as other wildlife such as pronghorn, sage grouse and pygmy rabbit.** Native species of all sizes are vital for healthy ecosystems and are important to our state's natural heritage. The Department should continue to build on recent work on fisher reintroduction and for wolf recovery and coexistence, including education and outreach. Conflict avoidance and resolution will continue to be a priority for the management of these and other species, but the Department should continue to seek cost share or alternate funding and implementation mechanisms through other agencies and cooperatives.

**Continue to actively and strategically acquire land for Wildlife Areas and other WDFW-owned or managed wildlife habitat,** as well as for outdoor recreation including hunting, fishing and wildlife watching. Despite concerns from certain counties, it's clear the state will need much more public land and quality protected habitat in the future to meet resource and recreation demands. State investments in critical connectivity fracture zones can have outsized impact. Lands that provide habitat, outdoor recreation and water access, and fish and wildlife opportunities close to population centers should also be a priority to maximize public benefit, preserve vulnerable habitat, and better connect all Washingtonians with our natural heritage.

**Provide leadership on highway mitigations for wildlife crossings.** Investments in wildlife-safe transportation infrastructure benefit everyone, including taxpayers, by reducing collisions and keeping our wildlife three-dimensional. Connectivity infrastructure is increasingly critical given ongoing loss of wildlife winter range to development and predicted climate changes.

**Regulate and enforce motorized use, especially Off-Highway-Vehicle, All-Terrain-Vehicle and Off-Road-Vehicle use, on all WDFW owned or operated areas to reduce negative impacts to sensitive wildlife** such as elk. Doing so also protects quality hunting, hiking, wildlife watching and other outdoor recreation opportunities that can be negatively impacted by excessive motorized use. Roads that severely harm wildlife and habitat security or are unsustainable ecologically or economically should be removed.

Thank you for considering this input. We look forward to the process and its resulting plan.

Sincerely,

Mitch Friedman, Executive Director

*“Keeping the Northwest wild” since 1989, Conservation Northwest is a regional non-profit organization that protects, connects and restores wildlands and wildlife from the Washington Coast to the British Columbia Rockies. Staff operate in local communities and rural areas around Washington and into southern B.C., using dialogue to find common ground and collaborative solutions for challenging issues including habitat corridors, wilderness conservation, forest restoration and endangered species recovery.*

*Conservation Northwest represents 4,000 dues-paying members and more than sixteen thousand activists, supporters and online followers, with a main office in Seattle and field offices in Bellingham and Twisp.*

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