

May 18, 2026

Director Kelly Susewind  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
PO Box 43200  
Olympia, WA 98504-3200



Commissioner Dave Upthegrove  
Washington Department of Natural Resources  
MS 47001  
Olympia, WA 98504-7001

Dear Director Susewind and Commissioner Upthegrove,

The Washington Prescribed Fire Council (WPFC) and its members are dedicated to expanding, preserving, and promoting the responsible use of prescribed fire on all lands in Washington. It is with this focus that we are alarmed by recent news of budget cuts across state government, including at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and the decision by the agency to effectively eliminate the Prescribed Fire Program. **This is a worst case scenario with wide-reaching consequences that will set back prescribed fire progress and dismantle the infrastructure of a successful program which would take years to rebuild.** WDFW's Prescribed Fire Program has been a leader in prescribed fire implementation for over 20 years, and the permanent loss of staff reduces essential capacity to meet the state's goals to reduce wildfire risk. We write to request that all means and solutions necessary to maintain WDFW's Prescribed Fire Program be explored.

WDFW manages 1 million acres of publicly owned land across the state, including dry east-side forests, west-side prairies, and oak woodlands for the benefit of flora and fauna, game management, and wildfire risk reduction. These lands are critical havens of conservation and are often in checkerboard ownership with other state, federal, county, and private lands. In addition to lowering the risk of wildfire impacts, prescribed fire is a critical tool to sustain habitat for culturally important and at-risk species of fish and wildlife, such as the endangered Taylor's checkerspot butterfly that relies on the open prairies of the Puget Trough, and ungulates and game birds that need fire to reinvigorate forage. Without prescribed fire as a tool, these habitats are at further risk of degradation.

Since the Prescribed Fire Program was developed in 2005, 12,000 acres of prescribed fire have been completed. Critically, these cost-effective treatments have shown their benefit to forests and resilience to wildfires, including in the [2015 Okanogan Complex Fires](#) that burned through prescribed fire treatments in the Sinlahekin Wildfire Area and [2018 Boyds Fire](#) where prescribed fire treatments in the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area were instrumental in slowing and controlling the spread of the fire. The program has a proven track record of improving safety, reducing risk, and strengthening outcomes after a larger scale fire.

Over the past decade and more, Washington state has identified the issues surrounding our forest health crisis, the resulting wildfire impacts to habitat and communities, and the need to return fire to ecosystems as a critical ecological process. The 20-Year Forest Health Plan identifies a 2 million acre restoration target for eastside forests, and the Commissioner of Public Lands has published a Letter of Intent to complete **100,000 acres of prescribed fire** a year on all lands to support the goals of the

20-Year Plan. **We cannot meet that goal if our state agencies are losing their people and resources to implement prescribed fire.** This knowledge and infrastructure is difficult to rebuild. **WDFW's leadership is not easily replaced.** As a result of this loss in capacity, the number of prescribed burns will decrease, fuel concentrations will increase, and public and environmental health and safety will be jeopardized.

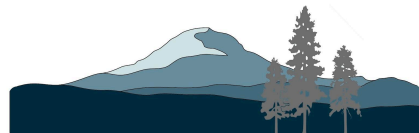
Prescribed fire requires an all-lands approach, and practitioners consistently express the need for agencies to work collaboratively to remove barriers, build capacity, share resources, and train for prescribed burning. This will prove to be even more challenging with the loss of one agency's capacity altogether. As leaders in wildfire and forest resilience, the WPFC believes there are solutions that support the collective mission of our state to protect our communities and preserve the landscapes we all rely on.

We urge Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Washington Department of Natural Resources to work together to find a solution to keep the WDFW Prescribed Fire Program operational through the 2026-2027 state fiscal year. For the upcoming 2027 state legislative session, WPFC would like to partner with our state agencies and stakeholders to develop solutions for the next budget cycle that supports the state's goal of 100,000 acres of prescribed fire a year, ensures WDFW can effectively treat the lands it manages, and improves wildfire safety and environmental outcomes.

Prescribed fire treatments are a proven tool with a much smaller price tag compared to wildfire suppression costs. We recognize the state faces many difficult budget decisions, but we can't afford to abandon WDFW's program as the intensity and threat of wildfire continues to grow in all corners of the state.

Sincerely,

Washington Prescribed Fire Council Board of Directors



cc: Amy Windrope  
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