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Resolution

Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee (WSACC)

Summary:

Resolution for Audubon Chapters in Washington to join Audubon Washington and other statewide organization in a coordinated effort to:

- 1) Increases the state Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget for the biennium of 1919-1920 and;
- 2) Identify permanent long-term funding to replace the declining funding from hunting and fishing licenses which would support the WDFW mission to conserve all Washington species and their habitats.

Title of Resolution:

Call for cooperative lobbying strategy to increase WDFW budget and identify long term funding for all species.

Sponsored by Tahoma Audubon Society and Black Hills Audubon Society in cooperation with Seattle Audubon Society, Kittitas Audubon Society and Pilchuck Audubon Society.

- **Date submitted:** October 1, 2018

- **List contacts**

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Definition of the issue:

Whereas, the State Department of Fish and Wildlife's budget has been declining for several years as hunting and fishing licenses can no longer fund the departments programs. State population has increased and both game and non-game species have felt the decline in habitats and decline in several species numbers.

Whereas, WDFW staff's budget proposal calls for minimum increase of \$30 million to avoid a deficit. But an additional \$28.1 million is needed to protect all habitats and provide species restoration.

Whereas, several studies have shown it is time for a sea change in how the department funds its programs. As license fees have increased, the numbers of fishermen and hunters has declined. A significant increase in fees can not cover budget deficit of funds needed for all habitats and provide species restoration. As funds collected from fees have declined, over last several years state legislature funding has also declined for non-game species programs as well. To date only 5% of the departments funds go to non-game wildlife.

Whereas, public opinion polls show that there are more people who enjoy wildlife viewing than hiking and other outdoor recreation in refuges, state parks and DNR lands. In fact wildlife viewing is the highest rated outdoor recreation activity. The recreational benefit to rural community returns \$340 million to the general fund through sales tax and business and occupation taxes.

Therefore, be it resolved that state Audubon chapters will develop and implement a legislative strategy to involve members in advocating for an increase WDFW biennial budget and support an increase in long-term funds to fulfill the department's mission to preserve all of the states wildlife.

Therefore, be it resolved that Audubon chapters will cooperate with other state environmental groups and wildlife advocates to make WDFW funding a legislative priority in the 2019 session and continue to strategize with wildlife groups until such time as an independent funding sources are identified and implemented that benefits all species and all habitats.

- **Action item: Legislative strategy:** TAS chapter members and Black Hills chapter members will research legislative committees to determine which key House and Senate committees are responsible for the Budget and; TAS will contact Audubon Washington's campaign coordinator and the appropriate chapters whose legislative members serve on the budget committees in House and Senate. TAS will work cooperatively with WDFW lobbyists to coordinate talking points, appearances at public hearings and share knowledge about legislative proposals.
- **Cooperation on lobby days:** Chapters ask that the Audubon Washington's Campaign manager to coordinate with Washington Environmental Council and other state wildlife organization to make wildlife budget and long range funding a priority in next session.
- **Role of Audubon Washington Campaign Manager:** Manager will share information and research developed by wildlife groups that have examined alternative long-range funding for all species. Manager will distribute information to chapters from WDFW about changes in budget proposal, legislative meetings and hearings, etc
- **Chapter Commitment:** TAS members will work with Campaign Manager to provide weekly updates for cooperating with chapters about the status of the WDFW budget. TAS members and Black Hills AS will attend legislative committee meetings when budget is being reviewed. TAS and BHAS can coordinate lobbying visits and letter campaigns to target votes during the session.
- **Strategic Timing:**
Coordinate with WDFW. In August TAS members met with WDFW lobbyist and discussed methods to improve communications and exchange information. In October we hope that Directors of Audubon Washington and other chapter directors will meet with WDFW director and staff to discuss Audubon's commitment to increase WDFW budget.

Coordinate with Governor. TAS has plans to for a delegation of legislators from Pierce County to meet with Governor in November before Governor's budget is prepared in December.

- **TAS Chapter's position on this issue.** Tahoma Audubon Society Board has approved this legislative strategy and this resolution.

- **List points in support of your chapter's position.**

1. Legislature has not adjusted the department's budget to reflect 10 years of cost increases in salaries and operating costs. WDFW's General Fund contribution is less now than it was in 2008. And hunting and recreational fishing license fees have not increased in ten years.
2. During this period hunting has declined by 22%. Fishing too. The reality is there is a dramatic reduction in the amount of fish and game. Equally endangered are hunters and fishermen who buy licenses.
3. The Discover Pass fee has not increased since it was established. WDFW receives just 8% of the fee or \$3.6 million of the \$24 million collected each year.
4. General fund contribution to WDFW has not kept up with 16% increase in state population.
5. Prior to recession, the budget was \$55 million annually. By 2017 it only partially recovered. If the current budget was adjusted for Inflation over 10 years the current proposal would stand at \$60 million instead of the current \$46.6 million.
6. Ninety five percent of the species in Washington are neither hunted nor fished. Programs to preserve these species are needed *before* extinction is critical
7. To maintain current programs, hatchery production, land management and conservation programs the department needs \$30 million. This amount continues costs and salaries to keep current programs from declining further.
8. To protect all habitats and provide species restoration, conservation and recovery of Killer Whales an additional \$28 million is needed. This is a total budget of \$58 million annually.
9. This budget proposal includes a \$13 million increase in hunting and fishing fees. Likely a portion of these fees will not be collected as the increase in fees can further decrease the total purchase of licenses.
10. This budget proposal of \$58 million still has a huge imbalance between conservation program and the fishing and hunting programs. The annual budget allocation short-changes the conservation mandate of the Department by spending only about 5% of its operating budget on "preserving and restoring terrestrial habitat and species." What is not clear is how the state wildlife fund, Federal funds which make up 54% of the departments funds are shared between game and non game species.
11. Of all the state agencies, however, WDFW programs care more for the birds and wildlife habitat which is important to Audubon Chapters. The department manages over 300,000 acres of wildlife lands and adds new lands each decade.

- **Who takes a different position on this issue?**

We have identified several state senators who are opposed to the budget increase. Also we anticipate that state-wide the hunting and fishing groups will protest the 15% increase in hunting and fishing licenses. This increase of \$13 million is not enough to pay for the \$30 million needed to maintain current services. A general fund increase is essential. But the protest against the license increase will cloud the reality that fees are not enough to pay make a significant contribution to the department's expenses any longer.

Auduboners and non-game users of WDFW facilities are opposed to the department's under funding of programs and maintenance. Boaters and travelers find restrooms and facilities not maintained despite having to pay a \$30 Discovery Pass. After 10 years of budget decline and cuts in programs and salaries, the department has not effectively communicated their crisis to non-game users.

- **Contact information for at least one person or group from both or all sides of the issue and position taken.**

The Fish and Wildlife Commission proposed a 13% increase in hunting and fishing license for the first time in 10 years. As a result instead of concentrating on increasing General Fund budget to maintain services, the hunters and fishing people will oppose license fees. Hunting and fishing groups have effective lobbyists.

A Wildlife Coalition group had a conference in 2016 to examine an increase in alternative funding for non-game programs of the department. The group invited leaders from zoo societies, Auduboners and other wildlife groups to participate. They have had some influence in encouraging the state Wildlife Commission to look at alternative long term funding.

What is the rationale for the different position?

There is a movement by conservative legislators in the American West to close public lands and wildlife areas and turn them over to private development and local management. These legislators believe that reducing government services and taxes will better serve the people in their rural communities. They are not aware of the public opinion and other polls that show the popularity of wildlife viewing and of the support for endangered species programs.

They are also not aware of the \$340 million in taxes collected in rural Washington communities from sales of recreational services from restaurants to guide services, etc.

The Washington Department of Revenue estimates that hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching will contribute nearly \$340 million dollars to the State General Fund in 2018-2019 through sales tax and business and occupation taxes.

This revenue is more than three times the General Fund investment in the Department's budget. In 2007 WDFW the annual budget was \$55 million. In 2017 the budget declined to \$46.6 million. If adjusted for inflation over 10 years, the 2019 budget should be \$60 million. Proposed budget for 2019 is \$58 million.

In every legislative session after each economic recession, one state agency often becomes a scapegoat by conservative legislators. Their funds are reduced, used for other state agencies and some facilities closed entirely. After the 2000 recession, state library building was closed, budget slashed and books moved to a rental facility in Tumwater, where only a few managers remain. The five-story state library building is now an office for Code Reviser and some Senate offices. Care for mentally ill in state hospital in Tacoma lost 100 beds each year with staff reductions. In 2018 the hospital lost their accreditation.

Since 2007, a similar dysfunctional treatment by the legislature has created a crisis at WDFW. A declining budget can not keep pace with the service demands of a state population growing by 16%. People resent paying fees for poorly maintained facilities and program managers who can not respond to the public's growing demands.

- **This request addresses the following WSACC conservation objectives:**
 - **Protects & Conserves at-risk birds.** WDFW manages state listed species of concern which is in addition to managing programs for federally listed species. WDFW Staff writes recovery plans while purchasing and protecting habitats.
 - **Protect & conserve at-risk habitats.** Between 1990-2015, the department acquired close to 300,000 acres of fish and wildlife habitat through out state. Every year, in each county WDFW staff proposed for purchase high-value habitat in forest lands and on working farmland. These funds are matched with funding from counties and land trusts.
 - **Focus:** The Department's budget provides on going programs for birds, wildlife and their habitats.
 - **Biological Diversity:** State listed birds and wildlife make a significant contribution to the biological diversity of the wildlife in this state.



Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee Resolution Adoption Process

Goal

Create a strategic “One Audubon” agenda of conservation priorities to protect birds, wildlife and habitat. Provide a formal and transparent process for the Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee (WSACC) to establish policy positions on conservation issues.

Procedure

Any Audubon chapter (certified by the National Audubon Society) or the State Office may solicit policy positions, resolutions and conservation actions from WSACC. Requests for policy positions or actions by any non-Audubon organizations must be sponsored and proposed by a voting WSACC member.

To request WSACC actions or positions please follow the instructions below.

Timing

A completed resolution form and a proposed resolution/policy statement/action request must be received by the Resolution Coordinator four weeks prior to the meeting you wish to request WSACC action on.

Instructions

1. Complete the attached WSACC Resolution Form.
2. Generate a Formal Resolution to be considered by WSACC
 - a. Use standard resolution format including
 - i. Appropriate *whereas* clauses and
 - ii. A *therefore be it resolved* clause to state the formal policy position and/or request for action
 - b. E-mail copies of the Resolution Form and proposed Formal Resolution by 4 weeks prior to the WSACC meeting to the Resolution Coordinator.

Motion by Judy Hallisey (Kittitas Audubon); 2nd by Randy Smith (Vashon Audubon)
Vote: 16 in favor, 1 abstention (Kitsap Audubon)