



Establishing a Conservation Task Force

Washington faces a stewardship challenge

All Washingtonians benefit from the over 1,900 species of animals, at least 40 that are found here and nowhere else in the world. Conserving Washington's natural heritage is part of WDFW's mission and promotes our quality of life, outdoor traditions and a resource based economy throughout the state. Hunters and anglers make major contributions to conservation when they buy licenses and equipment subject to special taxes. Sportsmen and women have been integral players in the conservation of game and non-game species, including successfully bringing deer, elk, waterfowl, and an array of others species back from the brink of extinction. But efforts to conserve more of Washington's species and ecosystems and efforts to engage the state's growing population, are limited by the lack of permanent, dedicated revenue to fund the full breadth of WDFW's mission. The Governor proposes the creation of a task force, supported through a public private partnership, to develop recommendations to ensure long term sustainable funding for conservation in Washington to benefit habitats and all wildlife species.

Governor proposes conservation task force

Gov. Jay Inslee's proposed 2017-19 state operating budget would begin to address this problem through the creation of a public-private partnership. Section 307(8) would create a task force of conservation and recreation leaders to evaluate funding options to improve conservation. The task force would also develop strategies that recognize the importance of outdoor related businesses, engages all Washingtonians in conservation, and increases outdoor opportunities, with a special focus on young people.

Under the governor's proposal, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) would establish a conservation task force to:

- **Assess existing programs** and funding.
- **Solicit public input** on regional priorities and options for state action.
- **Develop recommendations for improving** the effectiveness, relevancy, and inclusiveness of conservation programs.
- **Identify sustainable funding options** to support the conservation efforts of WDFW and other state resource and recreation agencies.
- **Suggest environmental and outdoor education** strategies for residents of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds.
- **Improve state support for Washington businesses** that rely on the natural resources that provide the state's high quality of life.
- **Provide draft recommendations by April 2018** and a final report about two months later, so the Governor could include specific proposals in the 2019-21 biennial budget.

The task force would reflect a public-private partnership

Financial support for the task force would come from (1) donations by task force supporters, and (2) existing WDFW fund sources. Funding would **not** include hunting and fishing license revenue or money from federal excise taxes on sportsmen and women. The Governor is **not** proposing a budget increase to finance the task force.



Participants reflect Washington's diversity

The task force would reflect the state's diverse population and a wide range of perspectives on effective fish and wildlife conservation. Participants would include fish and wildlife conservation organizations, private landowners, and hunters and anglers. Other important partners would include recreation advocates, and tourism promotion groups, outdoor-related businesses, local governments, K-12 schools and universities, and tourism promotion groups. This task force would identify ways to provide dedicated funds for successes similar to the collaborative efforts for rockfish and fisher highlighted here.



New study results in delisting

Several rockfish species in Puget Sound have declined significantly since the 1980s. Habitat degradation, pollution, over-fishing, and food web changes are all factors.

Not all rockfish species have suffered dramatic abundance declines, but some populations had become so small that in 2010, canary rockfish were listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Spurred by this listing, WDFW worked with the Puget Sound Anglers, Kitsap Poggie Club, Puget Sound Charterboat Captains Association, Seattle Aquarium, and federal fisheries experts on a study that determined canary rockfish in Puget Sound were genetically identical to those on the outer coast, where they are more abundant. As a result, ESA protection was removed from canary rockfish in January of 2017.

In recognition of recent abundance increases, fishing regulations on Washington's coast were modified in 2017 to allow for canary rockfish retention, and similar changes may be allowed in the future in other marine areas if collaborative research and recovery efforts continue to make progress.

Conservation is saving the fisher

Fishers are a member of the weasel family that vanished from Washington's forests more than 70 years ago. Across the country, the fisher's range was dramatically reduced by trapping, predator control, and habitat loss.

WDFW is leading a pro-active effort to re-establish the species in its native habitat with support from private forest landowners, federal agencies, and conservation organizations.

Since 2008, WDFW and partners have reintroduced more than 150 fishers to federal forestlands in Olympic National Park and the southern Cascade Mountains.

In April 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that protection for fishers under the federal Endangered Species Act was unnecessary, due in part to these fisher conservation efforts.

Dedicated funding and related coalition-building would increase the potential for more success stories like this, for threatened species like the fisher, as well as at-risk game animals and bighorn sheep.

