



December 7, 2016

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, Washington

Dear Governor Inslee:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has met with our organizations several times to outline their proposed 2017-2019 operating budget request, which relies upon increased General Fund State (GF-S) support and a recreational license fee increase proposal to maintain programs important to our members and the public. We appreciate WDFW's outreach efforts as well as this opportunity to highlight key budget and policy issues as you prepare to submit your budget request to the legislature.

We believe there is a significant need for increased GF-S support to cover the cost of WDFW's programs and services that benefit all user groups and the public at large. Currently, recreational anglers are funding many agency services that benefit other user groups – these services should be funded through GF-S or by the other user groups. We also support your efforts to direct increased state resources and leadership in support of management policies that are responsive to the significant impacts of climate change within Washington's waters, including adopting the science to address the acidification and cleanup of Puget Sound.

A recreational license fee increase will likely also be needed to maintain and grow recreational fishing opportunity and we look forward to working with you, the Legislature, and WDFW to develop a proposal that is equitable and responsive to the desires of the license buying public. It is also important to recognize that there are also several overarching policy issues that will have major impact WDFW's efforts to increase recreational fishing opportunity, including:

- Implementation of key Commission policies, including specifically the bi-state Columbia River fishery reform plan;
- Creating a North of Falcon process that is more transparent and results in more equity and stability for state fisheries in Puget Sound; and

- The implementation of hatchery reform and selective fishing, and receiving federal approvals of hatchery genetic management plans under the Endangered Species Act.

Making continued progress on these critical policy issues will be essential to selling a recreational fishing license fee increase – particularly at the level being proposed by WDFW. If it would be useful, we would be happy to meet with you or your staff to provide additional context on these issues and potential solutions.

Your recognition that recreational anglers are already the single largest source of funding for WDFW -- as noted in your October 28, 2015 letter to the Fish and Wildlife Commission -- is greatly appreciated. The Commission also recognized this fact in their 2015-2017 Budget Policy:

The Commission recognizes the benefits of sport fishing across the state in generating funding for agency activities well beyond fishery management cost. Deposited in the Wildlife Account, user fees support such things as native fish recovery, fish production, and a variety of costs associated with management of the fisheries

It is the policy of the Department to ensure that recreational license fees are used for the benefit of the sport fishery. To be successful, the Department is committed to working closely with the sport fishing community to define the new fee structure and to identify specifically the use of the new revenue created from the new fees.

It is also worth noting that in your October 28, 2015 letter you urged the Commission to:

“. . . fully implement the budget policy you recently adopted and seek ways to expand public access to the recreational fishery, promote selective fisheries, implement scientifically credible hatchery practices that ensure hatchery production and consider economic factors when setting seasons for both the recreational and commercial fishing industry.”

We concur with these important principles, including the need for WDFW's fishery management decisions to better reflect the revenue contributions of the recreational and commercial sectors when determining fishing opportunity. This principle is fundamental to showing the license buying public that increased fees will ultimately be spent on hatchery production, programs, and services that support fishing opportunity for those who are providing the revenue. We have been working with WDFW to ensure that its proposed budget is reflective of this important principle.

We will continue working with WDFW and the Commission to address these and other challenges facing the agency. While Director Unsworth has provided leadership and significant

staff time and expertise, we also believe it is important for you and your staff to be aware of the relationship between these policy issues and the Department's proposed budget.

It is critical that WDFW has the resources it needs to conserve and effectively manage our state's fish and wildlife resources and we look forward to working with your office and the Legislature in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Nello Picinich, Executive Director
CCA Washington

George Harris, President
Northwest Marine Trade Association

Curt Smitch, President
Fish Northwest

Ron Garner, State Board President
Puget Sound Anglers

Liz Hamilton, Executive Director
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association

Cc: Director Jim Unsworth
Commission Chair Brad Smith