



WDFW Fee Increase Fails, Legislature Funds Hatchery Production Increases

On April 28th, the legislature wrapped up the 2019 legislative session with the passage of a 2019-2021 operating budget for state government, as well as transportation and capital project budgets. Overall, increased tax collections and new tax increases adopted by larger Democratic majorities resulted in a state operating budget that will spend about 17.5 percent more (~\$8 billion) than the 2017-2019 operating budget. Due to this, many state agencies received increased funding.

WDFW Budget & Hatchery Funding

WDFW received large funding increases for hatchery production and other activities to benefit Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). Much of the increased funding was only provided for one-year, which means WDFW will likely face another budget shortfall next year. Below are the highlights of the budget:

- \$24 million in one-time funding to partially address WDFW's structural operating budget deficit;
- \$15 million for increased salmon hatchery production to benefit SRKW's through state, tribal, and PUD hatcheries;
- \$1.5 million to implement legislation related to vessel noise and habitat protections to benefit SRKWs as requested by the Governor's SRKW Task Force;
- \$58 million in capital budget funding, including tens of millions in hatchery infrastructure improvements.

Fee Bill

The legislature did not act on WDFW's agency request legislation ([HB 1708/SB 5692](#)) to increase recreational fishing and hunting fees and reauthorize the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement (CRSSE), which would have generated about \$17 million during the 2019-2021 biennium. The recreational fishing community urged legislators to consider WDFW's alarming recent policy decisions harming conservation and recreational fisheries in Puget Sound, Willapa Bay, and on the Columbia River (see coalition letters from [February 14](#) and [March 27](#)) in any potential fee increase legislation.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission's March 2 vote in Spokane to undo the bi-state Columbia River fishery reforms in favor of year-round, non-selective mainstem gillnetting generated substantial opposition to a fee increase. The Senate version of the fee bill ([SB 5692](#)) included important policy reforms to reverse the Commission's Columbia River gillnet decision and promote selective fisheries to protect ESA-listed salmon, harvest hatchery-reared salmon, and allow for increase hatchery production. Unfortunately, that legislation was opposed by WDFW, many Tribes, and gillnet advocates in the House.

Columbia River Endorsement

The CRSSE was still alive in the final hours of the legislative session before ultimately failing to pass. At the end of the day, the Commission's March 2nd vote on Columbia River gillnets was the greatest roadblock to its reauthorization. In fact, the final operating budget assumed its reauthorization through the passage of [HB 1708](#), which was pending on the floor of the House with an [amendment](#) by Rep. Pat Sullivan (D-Covington) to limit the bill to a one-year reauthorization of the CRSSE. There was also a last-minute attempt in the Senate to reauthorize the program for an additional four years through [SB 5871](#) (sponsored by Sens. Warnick and Takko), which also would have been limited to a one-year extension under an [amendment](#) by Sen. Jesse Salomon (D-Shoreline).

Moving Forward & Thanks

CCA Washington greatly appreciates the efforts of our coalition partners throughout the legislative session. We also owe a great deal of gratitude to leaders in the Senate and House, including Sens. Kevin Van De Wege (D-Sequim), Jesse Salomon (D-Shoreline), Christine Rolfes (D-Bainbridge Island), Ann Rivers (R-La Center), Lynda Wilson (R-Vancouver), Marco Lias (D-Mukilteo), John Braun (R-Centralia), Jim Honeyford (R-Sunnyside) and Reps. Pat Sullivan (D-Covington), Derek Stanford (D-Bothell), Joe Fitzgibbon (D-Burien) Gerry Pollet (D-Seattle), and Drew Stokesbary (R-Auburn).

Most importantly, a big THANK YOU to CCA members and concerned anglers from across the state who wrote, called, and met with their legislators urging them to hold WDFW accountable on key policy issues.