



*National Marine Manufacturers Association*

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James Unsworth  
Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
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Director Unsworth:

As part of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) request for input on WDFW's conservation and outdoor recreation priorities, we, the undersigned recreational fishing and boating advocacy groups, respectfully submit the recommendations below for consideration by the Department. Populations of salmon, steelhead, trout, and other fish species in the Pacific Northwest have been the lifeblood and cornerstone of the area's economy and cultural heritage for centuries. The presence of healthy fish populations, seemingly boundless other natural resources, an abundant water supply and the sheer beauty of the region undoubtedly contributed to accelerated settlement and development in the area's watersheds over the last century. Given the critical role that angling plays in Washington, it is imperative that the WDFW follow a path that takes into strong consideration the interests of the state's angling community.

We first want to emphasize our support for using the best available science when making management decisions. Whether it be setting fishing seasons, bag limits, size restrictions, habitat restoration, or determining the suitability and sustainability of fish populations for a given waterbody, management must always be founded first and foremost on sound science.

Science-based management is the cornerstone of the hugely successful North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, wherein professional fish and wildlife managers manage fish and wildlife as public trust resources for the good of the public at large. This model, adopted around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and championed by conservation luminaries such as Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and Gifford Pinchot, relies on trained scientific and wildlife experts who analyze fish and wildlife health, habitat, populations, and other factors in order to determine how best to sustain these species. Anglers were among the first to endorse this Model, and played a major role in the creation of state agencies charged with managing our nation's fish and wildlife, as well as the adoption of laws and programs to conserve these resources. The results of this management paradigm are readily evident by the fact that

sportfish populations in Washington can be pursued recreationally, under carefully devised rules and regulations developed by WDFW, without fear of depleting fish stocks.

Attempts to politicize fisheries management, however, which are only becoming more prevalent, subvert this successful and longstanding scientific management ethic, often attempting to force fisheries managers to adopt regulations and policies not based on hard data and analysis, but rather baseless rhetoric and/or popular opinion. Groups advocating for narrowly-focused, scientifically unjustified regulatory actions have found success in pushing their agendas by singling out well-known management techniques and programs that they claim negatively impact sportfish species, while ignoring numerous other factors demonstrated to be harmful to fish health and habitat. Such groups continue to deploy these tactics despite the fact that their ill-informed attempts to politically influence fisheries management have negative repercussions for angling and those who rely on income generated through angling opportunities. This sort of anti-scientific management constitutes a serious threat to the health of fish and their habitat, and only reinforces the notion that trained professionals are best suited to manage our fisheries resources. In order for Washington's fisheries to continue to exist and contribute the substantial conservation and economic benefits that result from the state's angling opportunities, the state and tribes must be allowed to continue their tradition of responsibly providing for healthy fish populations through their highly successful, science-based hatchery and fisheries management programs, without interference from groups who do not have the best interests of angling in mind.

The contention over native vs. hatchery fish is one of the most well-known examples of how fisheries management can become politicized. While we recognize that hatchery-origin fish may present some challenges to the recovery of natural-origin salmon and steelhead, those advocating for complete removal of hatchery fish often completely disregard other factors that have significantly contributed to the population declines of these cornerstone species. A wide range of factors, including habitat alterations/loss, water quality (inland, estuarine and marine), forage availability (inland, estuarine and marine), cyclic weather patterns, changes in carrying capacity, and exploitation, have all contributed to the loss in native-origin salmon and steelhead stocks in Washington. Yet, through targeted lawsuits, anti-hatchery groups have had success in singling out and drastically reducing the release of hatchery fish under certain hatchery programs. This perversion of fisheries management is extremely dangerous and completely disregards the remarkable work that hatchery programs operated by WDFW and certain tribes have done in protecting natural-origin spawning stocks, while mitigating for the loss of naturally-sustainable salmon and steelhead populations and providing continued recreational angling and tribal harvest opportunities through production of hatchery-origin fish. This sort of single-focus advocacy does nothing to improve fish stocks or angling opportunities, as the greatest factors affecting the health and recovery of these fish remain unaddressed.

Our second recommendation for the Department is to pursue enhanced funding flowing to the state from proven, sustained fisheries management funding models. As with every other state in the U.S., Washington has benefitted immensely from the American System of Conservation Funding, the "user-pays, public-benefits" system that has provided the vast majority of funding for fish and wildlife management in the U.S. Through purchasing fishing licenses and tags, and by paying excise taxes on fishing tackle and motorboat fuel, anglers help drive conservation funding in Washington. The 1950 Dingell-Johnson Act, authorized on the heels of the hugely successful 1937 Pittman-Robertson Act, and later the Wallop-Breaux Amendment in 1984, provide funds from excise tax revenue to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Last year alone, Pittman-Robertson, Dingell-Johnson and Wallop-Breaux combined to contribute over \$6,975,332 to the state, and in 2013, Washington fishing licenses brought in \$23,498,406 to fund conservation and education efforts. All Washingtonians benefit from

these monies through improved access to public waters, habitat restoration, improved water quality, and numerous other Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife projects funded through this System. In order to maintain these critical revenue streams, and to ensure that the public continues to enjoy the benefits of robust fish populations, it is essential that WDFW continue to manage fish species to maximize recreational access, providing ample opportunities for anglers to pursue fish across the state and thus ensuring that angling-related license revenues and excise taxes will continue to fund this highly successful model.

Our third and final recommendation to the Department is that WDFW consider implementing new and increased avenues for soliciting angler input. Specifically, WDFW should consider expanding the number of citizen advisory groups and management boards that work with the Department when proposed regulations are being developed for a particular fishery or region. As with the state's other citizen advisory groups, such entities should be comprised of a broad cross-section of local anglers and sportfishing industry members familiar with the area, who can work with the Department to help develop regulations prior to solicitations for comment from the public at large. This system allows anglers and industry to provide to WDFW with their desired outcomes for each fishery, and for the Department to educate these anglers and industry members on what is best from a biological and ecological perspective, thus increasing the chances that new regulations will be based on best available science and provide for the greatest recreational opportunity.

As noted in the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation's (CSF) 2013 Sportsmen's Economic Impact Report, in 2011 alone, Washington's 938,000 anglers accounted for nearly \$1.19 billion in economic activity in Washington, employing over 16,000 Washingtonians and providing nearly \$120 million in state and local tax revenues and more than \$150 million in federal tax revenue. These impacts are especially important to natural resources-based rural communities, many of which rely heavily on angling and associated trip-related expenditures as a significant portion of their economies. As the primary user group utilizing the state's fisheries resources, anglers are best suited to advise the Department on the sorts of steps that will improve angling opportunities and boost angler participation. Incorporating angler input with the best available science will ensure sustained funding for WDFW through angler license and excise tax dollars. Anglers have long been strong supporters of science-based fish and wildlife management, as this system produces the greatest number of fish and, thus, the most angling opportunities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our recommendations. We feel that WDFW's renewed interest in user group input on recreational and conservation priorities provides a tremendous opportunity for both WDFW and the angling community to chart a course that ensures quality angling for current and future generations of Washingtonians. We look forward to working with you to ensure that Washington's anglers continue to have ample opportunities to fish across the Evergreen State, and that Washington continues to reap the immense economic and conservation benefits that anglers provide.

Regards,

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

B.A.S.S. LLC

American Sportfishing Association

National Marine Manufacturers Association