



## Coastal Conservation Association

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September 10, 2010

Mr. Phil Anderson, Director  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
600 Capitol Way N.  
Olympia, WA 98501-1091

Director Anderson:

CCA Washington appreciated the opportunity to participate in the Department's recently concluded budget and revenue stakeholder process. We believe it was an important initial effort to solicit input from stakeholders on potential revenue and cost reduction proposals being considered by the Department. We understand the Department faces stark budget realities as state general fund revenue continues to decline. As you consider potentially contentious recreational license fee increases to weather this difficult economy, we offer the following recommendations to help bolster your efforts to build public and legislative support for any proposal.

Over the years, recreational anglers have consistently supported endorsements, surcharges and license fee increases. With state general fund dollars even more scarce now, recreational angler license and endorsement fees are now funding a greater portion of the Department's resource management and conservation activities. Recreational anglers support the Department's important mission generating over \$54 million each biennium in the form of license fees, endorsements and federal Dingell-Johnson Act funding tied to sportfishing activities. This represents nearly 17 percent of the Department's \$327 million biennial budget and is double the \$27 million in state general fund support received by the fish program.

Recreational anglers are also committed to the conservation of our fish and wildlife populations and are often the first to make the sacrifices sometimes needed to conserve this important resource. Unfortunately, recreational anglers are increasingly concerned that their financial and conservation contributions have not been met with corresponding Departmental policies and management decisions to provide them equitable opportunities to fish. In fact, there is a real perception that both the quantity and quality of fishing opportunity has arbitrarily decreased over the years.

The current imbalance in the harvest of Puget Sound Dungeness crab is a particularly noteworthy example. Nearly a quarter-million Puget Sound recreational crabbers generate over \$3.4 million annually in license and endorsement fees. Meanwhile, 250 commercial users take nearly two-thirds of the harvest and generate less than \$200,000 in revenue to the state (license fee and excise tax revenue). When coastal Dungeness crab harvests are taken into consideration, the commercial sector is receiving 90 percent of the total state harvest. The current Puget Sound Dungeness crab management policy has both reduced opportunity for recreational fishers while also limiting additional revenue for the Department through increased recreational participation and license sales.

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The same dynamic overshadows the management of salmon fisheries in the Columbia River basin. There, an estimated 190,000 recreational anglers are projected to purchase Washington state licenses as well as the new \$7.50 endorsement stamp for salmon and steelhead. This is anticipated to generate over \$7 million in fee revenue for the Department this year. In contrast, less than 150 Columbia River commercial salmon licensees generate less than \$130,000 in annual revenue to the state. This includes \$72,000 in license fees and an estimated \$57,000 in excise tax revenue. Despite this gross disparity in revenues, the Department frequently makes policy and management decisions that reduce recreational fishing opportunities in the Columbia River and its tributaries.

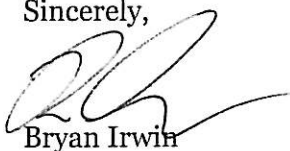
These and other examples have led to a real perception that the recreational community has ultimately been supporting and subsidizing commercial fisheries. While over \$54 million in revenue is generated for the state and Department through the sale of 1.2 million recreational licenses, less than \$4 million in license fee and excise tax revenue is generated by non-tribal commercial fisheries.

As budgetary pressures and considerations increase for the Department, they also increase for the license-purchasing public. In fact, unless steps are taken to increase and promote recreational fishing opportunity we believe the number of fishing licenses sold -- and the revenue generated for the Department -- will see further reductions. For example, despite population growth of nearly 40-percent between 1990 and 2009 the number of recreational licenses sold in Washington has actually decreased during this same period. By taking steps to increase recreational fishing opportunity and restore previous participation rates, the Department could see a large increase in license sales. Using conservative estimates, we believe this could generate approximately \$4.5 to \$9 million in increased annual revenue for the Department. This additional revenue could offset or exceed the state general fund reductions the Department may face in the 2011-2013 biennium.

Simply raising fees on existing license holders without better prioritizing the Department's management of the state's fisheries resources is unlikely to address the fundamental budget challenges facing the agency. Our members have also clearly indicated they are unlikely to support increased fees, endorsements, or surcharges unless accompanied by clear decisions and actions on the part of the Department to increase recreational opportunity consistent with the conservation needs of the resource. The pending decision on the proposed Puget Sound Dungeness crab policy is one important example.

Again, we appreciated the opportunity to participate and we look forward to discussing proposals that will enhance the Department's long-term budget stability, increase high quality recreational opportunities for Washington's citizens and benefit the conservation of the state's fish and wildlife resources.

Sincerely,



Bryan Irwin  
Executive Director  
CCA Pacific Northwest

Cc: WDFW Commission, Governor Gregoire, Puget Sound Anglers, Fish Northwest