Commission approves hunting rules, new special-hunt permit applications

Local News

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Posted on : April 12, 2010 at 7:00 am

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission set this year’s general hunting seasons and special-hunt permit drawings during a public meeting here April 9-10.
The nine-member citizen commission, which sets policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), also approved several land transactions and heard public comments on proposed new rules designed to address property damage and other conflicts between landowners and wildlife.

New hunting rules approved by the commission reflect changes in game populations since the current three-year plan was adopted last year. They include:

Reducing antlerless elk hunting in the Yakima area.
Reducing antlerless deer hunting in northeast Washington and the Olympic Peninsula.
Providing additional permits for spring black bear hunting and delaying start dates for fall black bear hunting in some areas.
Increasing permit hunting for cougar in southeast Washington.
Changing the fall turkey hunt in southeast Washington from a limited permit-only hunt to a general hunt.

Along with the new hunting rules, the commission also approved a new application system for special-hunt permits that will give hunters more options by allowing them to apply for deer and elk permits in several different categories. The system applies "points" accrued by unsuccessful permit applicants from previous years to each of the new permit categories.
Another change allows hunters who use archery or muzzleloader equipment to carry hand guns for personal protection.
The amended hunting rules, which take effect May 1, will be included in WDFW’s new Big-Game Hunting pamphlet, which will be available by late April at license dealers, WDFW offices, and online at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regs_seasons.html .
On another matter, the commission approved an easement on 16.5 acres of WDFW’s Chelan Wildlife Area for a Chelan County Public Utility District (PUD) electrical power transmission line. The PUD will pay WDFW $6,748 as compensation for the easement, plus an annual mitigation payment of $4,217 for wildlife habitat impacts.
The commission also approved the acquisition of:

29 acres in Pierce County as a new site for WDFW’s Voight Creek Fish Hatchery, supported by $440,000 from a state legislative capital budget appropriation.
Almost 150 acres of tidelands and uplands in Mason County for salmon, shorebird and waterfowl habitat as part of WDFW’s South Puget Sound Wildlife Area. Those lands will be secured with $197,000 from federal wetlands grants and state wildlife grants.

The commission also received public comments on new rules proposed to address property damage

and other conflicts between landowners and wildlife. As directed by the 2009 Washington Legislature (SHB 1778), the proposal includes specific requirements for both lethal and non-lethal control, and identifies new sources of technical assistance for property owners. Claims for crop damage would be paid only after an assessment by a professional crop insurance adjustor.

The commission, which originally heard public comments the proposed "wildlife interactions" rules at a March 12-13 meeting in Olympia, will be briefed by WDFW staff on adjustments to the proposal during a May 7 conference call.

The commission directed staff to make additional landowner outreach efforts regarding the proposal before final action is taken at a June 4-5 public meeting in Spokane. The proposed Wildlife Interaction Rules are posted on the commission’s website at http://bit.ly/db1aCT .