WDFW Commission Hears Hunt Proposals; Amends Puget Sound Clam, Oyster Seasons

Local News

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Spokane, WA - The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission heard public input on proposed 2011-12 hunting season rules, adopted amendments to Puget Sound recreational clam and oyster seasons and approved three land transactions during its March 4-5 meeting in Spokane. The proposed 2011-12 hunting season rules will be considered for final adoption at the commission's April meeting in Olympia. The hunt proposals include: Landowner hunting permits to increase deer and elk hunters access to private lands in Asotin County. Public-conduct rules on private lands open for hunting under cooperative agreements with WDFW. Increases in spring black bear hunting seasons and permits in western and northeast Washington, to help reduce timber damage and bear nuisance activity, and to expand recreational opportunity within management guidelines. Adjustments in moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat hunting permit levels, based on population surveys. Simplification of Game Management Unit boundary descriptions for deer and elk hunting. Adjustments in elk and deer general seasons and special-permit levels, in response to population increases or declines and/or crop and property damage problems in various parts of the state. The modifications include proposals to reduce antlerless white-tailed deer hunting in northeast units, while maintaining opportunities for youth, senior and disabled hunters. There also is a proposal to implement antler point restrictions for white-tailed deer in two northeast Washington game management units.

The commission also approved modifications to 2011 Puget Sound recreational clam and oyster seasons, based on annual species surveys and expected sport fishing effort. The changes will result in longer seasons on eight public beaches, shorter seasons on four beaches, and a shift in season timing on one beach. Details of the season modifications are available on the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/commission/meeting ... 0511_04_clams_oysters.pdf . In other business, the commission approved the following land transactions: Purchase of nearly 78 acres of wetlands and flood plain in Grays Harbor County, adjacent to WDFW's Chehalis Wildlife Area, for $175,000 from a USFWS grant and a pipeline mitigation project. Acquisition of shrub-steppe habitat for sage grouse and recreational access in Moses Coulee near Jameson Lake (Douglas County), as a unit of WDFW's Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. That 473-acres acquisition will be funded with $120,000 from a Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grant. A conservation easement on 320 acres of land in the Methow Valley, for large mammal migration corridors, mule deer winter range and shrub-steppe habitat. The land will be managed as part of the Frazer Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area. The easement will be purchased for $1,020,000 from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and WWRP grants. Those funds are part of WDFW's capital budget and are not available for use in operating budgets. The commission also was briefed on proposed changes in state bald eagle management plan requirements. Bald eagles are no longer listed as an endangered species and are considered recovered in Washington state. The proposal would reduce current management plan requirements to require site-specific management plans only if bald eagles were again listed as a state threatened or endangered species. Bald eagle habitat protection would continue through the USFWS under the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection

Act. The proposal will be considered for adoption at the commission's April 8-9 meeting in Olympia.