

Commission Will Focus on Hunting Permits, Sportfishing Proposals at Olympia Meeting

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider increasing the number of multiple-season hunting permits available each year after hearing public comments on the issue at a meeting scheduled Jan. 6-7 in Olympia. The commission, which sets policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), also will accept public comments on proposed changes to the 2012 sportfishing rules, but will not take action on those proposals until its regular meeting in February. The public meeting is scheduled to convene Jan. 6 at 9:30 a.m. and Jan. 7 at 8:30 a.m. in Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington St. S.E. in Olympia. An agenda is available on the commission's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/commission/>. Multiple-season hunting permits allow selected hunters to hunt for deer or elk during all general hunting seasons, rather than having to choose among archery, muzzleloader or modern firearm seasons. Hunting data show that the wider range of options increases hunters' chance of success in the field. WDFW has proposed increasing the number multiple-season hunting permits available each year to 8,500 deer permits and 1,250 elk permits. In 2011, WDFW conducted a drawing for 4,000 deer permits and 850 elk permits from among the hunters who paid an application fee.

State wildlife managers say increasing those permit levels will not pose a risk to Washington wildlife, adding that fees generated by applicants for a higher number of permits would be used to expand efforts to prevent property damage caused by wildlife. The public hearing on new fishing-rule proposal, scheduled Jan. 7, is the last in a series of public meetings held around the state in recent months. All changes proposed by WDFW are posted at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/rule_proposals/. They include: Closing fishing early for steelhead and other game fish in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures, ranging from mid-January to mid-February, would apply to the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Green and Puyallup river systems, along with several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The proposal also includes closing the upper section of the Samish River on Dec. 1 and the lower section Jan. 1 to fishing for all species. Allowing anglers to fish with two poles on the Pend Oreille River and the lower Spokane River. Closing fisheries on a number of small coastal streams that drain into Washington's ocean waters to protect juvenile anadromous fish. Changing the opening day of the lowland lake fishing season from the last Saturday in April to the fourth Saturday in April. Closing sturgeon retention in Puget Sound, as well as its tributaries. The proposal is designed to protect Columbia River sturgeon that venture into Puget Sound to feed. Under the proposal, catch and release fishing for sturgeon would still be allowed. The deadline for submitting written comments on these and other proposed changes in state fishing rules ends Dec. 30. Until then, comments can be submitted to WDFW Rules Coordinator Lori Preuss at Lori.Preuss@dfw.wa.gov or 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA, 98501.