

Fish and Wildlife Commission extends octopus protections and sets hunting seasons for migratory waterfowl

Local News

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OLYMPIA - The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission extended protections for giant Pacific octopuses in Puget Sound today by prohibiting the recreational harvest of the species at seven popular scuba diving sites from Whidbey Island to Tacoma. The commission, a nine-member citizen panel appointed by the Governor to set policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), also adopted 2013-14 hunting seasons for migratory waterfowl and approved several land acquisitions designed to conserve fish and wildlife habitat during the first day of its Aug. 2-3 meeting in Olympia. The commission considered several options for managing the recreational harvest of giant Pacific octopuses before unanimously deciding to prohibit their harvest at Redondo Beach in Des Moines; Three Tree Point in Burien; Seacrest Park Coves 1, 2 and 3 near Alki Point in West Seattle; an area adjacent to the Les Davis Fishing Pier in Tacoma; the Alki Beach Junk Yard in West Seattle; the Days Island Wall in Tacoma; and Deception Pass north of Oak Harbor. The new rules will take effect this fall.

The commission called for a review of state rules governing the recreational harvest of octopuses in January, following the legal - but controversial - taking of an octopus at Seacrest Cove 2 in late October 2012. Working with a 12-member citizen advisory committee that included members of the sportfishing and diving communities, WDFW developed options that ranged from making no rule changes to banning the recreational harvest of the octopuses throughout Puget Sound. The department received hundreds of comments on the management options during and after a pair of public workshops in the spring in Port Townsend and Seattle. Craig Burley, WDFW Fish Management Program Manager, said many sportfishers preferred the status quo, while many divers favored a Puget Sound-wide ban. Burley said the octopus population in the Sound appears to be healthy and that the current recreational harvest is very small. Several commission members said they favored some additional protections in recognition of the broad appeal of the species to recreational divers around the world, and the potential economic benefits of enhancing the reputation of Puget Sound as a premier diving location. "Washington is an important dive location, and protection of the octopus is important both to the dive community and to the economy of the state," said Commissioner Conrad Mahnken of Bainbridge Island. He said Washington state is the fourth most popular dive location in the U.S. and the only northern state in the top 10. Also on Friday, the commission established the 2013-14 hunting seasons for migratory waterfowl. The general duck season will be open for 107 days - from Oct. 12 through 16 and from Oct. 19 through Jan. 26. A special youth hunting weekend will take place Sept. 21 and 22. WDFW Wildlife Program staff members said surveys in the Pacific Flyway show duck populations are near long-term averages, while goose populations are generally at or above management goals. Approved seven land acquisitions - five purchases and two conservations easements - for parcels ranging from 1.3 to 191.4 acres in Pacific and Okanogan counties. Each parcel is either adjacent to existing state wildlife lands or surrounded by other publicly owned land, said WDFW Director Phil Anderson. The Pacific County acquisitions will help WDFW preserve and restore salmon habitat. The Okanogan transactions will protect shrub-steppe habitat, mule deer winter range, and migration corridors used

by deer, bighorn sheep and other wildlife. Took public testimony on several proposed amendments to wildlife interaction rules that are designed to implement actions by the 2013 Legislature and to ensure the WDFW administrative rules are consistent with the department's 2011 Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. The amendments include a proposal that would make permanent an emergency rule adopted earlier this year, which permits ranchers, farmers, and other pet and livestock owners in the eastern third of the state to kill a wolf that is attacking their animals. The commission will accept written public comments through Friday, Sept. 20, and is scheduled to adopt the regulations later in the fall.