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**Mark Personius**  
Director

## Memorandum

TO: Honorable County Council Members and  
Honorable Executive Satpal Singh Sidhu

THROUGH: Mark Personius, Director, Whatcom County PDS

FROM: Jon-Paul Shannahan, Natural Resources Manager PDS

DATE: November 29, 2022

SUBJECT: 2018-2022 Accomplishments of the Wildlife Advisory Committee

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The Wildlife Advisory Committee (“Committee”) has recommended to the Council that the Committee be reauthorized for another term to complete its current tasks and continue to provide County staff with pertinent advice as needed. Over the expiring term, the Committee has been successful despite the significant challenges of supporting staff and member turnover, and remote meetings and postponements related to the COVID pandemic. In support of our recommendation, the Committee would like to highlight some of our accomplishments and ongoing work that justifies a four-year extension.

First, the Committee has developed a legally and scientifically defensible process to identify Species of Local Importance as defined by the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO). Three species—Western Toad, Coastal Tailed Frog, and Townsend’s Big-Eared Bat—were so identified and nominated by the Committee, and were designated by the Whatcom County Council on September 28, 2021 pursuant to CAO 16.16.710(13). In addition, the Committee identified a number of other vulnerable species to be placed on a “Watch List” to be monitored for adverse trends in their populations and distributions.

The Committee has also made progress to address the purpose and intent of the CAO Article 7 Habitat Conservation Areas. In 16.16.700 the purpose of the Article includes language aimed to protect, restore, and maintain wildlife populations by protecting ecological processes, regulating development so that populations of species are not isolated, and habitat degradation and fragmentation are minimized. The final purpose is to maintain the natural geographic distribution, connectivity, and quality of wildlife habitats. In this

effort, the Committee supports the use of state-of-the-art computer models combined with local data to provide an accurate and effective tool to inform land use decisions into the future, and specifically, to ensure these land use decisions are addressing Article 7 of the CAO. The Committee has reviewed and supports the approach of the Wildlands Network, which has, at no cost to the County, taken the first steps to use available models and data to map existing conditions for habitat connectivity. This approach is scalable and can be applied to the best-available local remote sensing data, including LiDAR and Pictometry, and verified with on-the-ground data to better meet the objectives of the CAO.

Finally, the Committee was tasked with updating the 2017 Whatcom Ecosystem Report in time for the next Comprehensive Plan update. To date the Committee has not completed this task, which will be a priority if the Committee is granted an extension. The Committee will make recommendations to use best available science to map, summarize, and analyze existing conditions to support the update using data to be available in 2023, and will assist County staff in seeking resources to perform the analysis, which is beyond the scope of the Committee or the capacity of County staff.

It is with this list of accomplishments and plans for addressing a known data gap that this committee is advancing a request to renew the Committee's tenure for the next four years.