

**WHATCOM COUNTY**  
Planning & Development Services  
5280 Northwest Drive  
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097  
360-676-6907, TTY 800-833-6384  
360-738-2525 Fax



Additional Information  
(unofficial) was not  
Council packet included in  
in error  
**J.E. "Sam" Ryan**  
Director

## Memorandum

TO: The Honorable Whatcom County Council

FROM: Mark Personius, PDS, Assistant Director *MP*

DATE: June 2, 2015

SUBJECT: Wildlife Advisory Committee - PDS Comments

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We would like to thank Council for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Wildlife Advisory Committee (WAC).

PDS already serves and/or staffs more than a dozen "advisory committees" (including the Critical Areas CAC and TAC) as well as the Planning Commission and County Council on a bi-monthly to quarterly basis. We fully appreciate the importance of and support a strong public participation program when it comes to planning issues. However, coordination of those efforts as well as the commitment of public resources are vital considerations to improving the efficiency of our public involvement strategies. PDS is concerned that establishing a new *permanent* Wildlife Advisory Committee (WAC) will *permanently* draw additional staff resources away from other existing programs and/or could duplicate the efforts of other existing advisory committees. If the goal is to inform the 2016 Comp Plan Update and/or implementation of the WRIA 1 Nooksack Watershed Management Plan, then the WAC should be created to serve those purposes and in that time period, specifically, as needed.

We understand the mission of the WAC is to advise the Whatcom County Council and the Whatcom County Planning and Development Services Department on wildlife and habitat issues as they relate to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, with the goal of integrating wildlife management and protection into the community planning process.

Based on Council discussion and public input at the May 26, 2015 Natural Resources Committee meeting, PDS recommends:

- Create the Wildlife Advisory Committee (WAC) as a temporary committee to provide input to the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update process specifically to

update/prepare an "Existing Conditions Report" to evaluate the status and condition of the County's ecosystems, including wildlife habitat. A Resolution may be more appropriate than an Ordinance for this type of Committee.

- According to public-interest testimony, the main mission of the WAC would be to update the technical work completed in the past (inventory and analysis of wildlife habitat and management activities); assess the status of those habitats (How are they functioning? Are they primarily on public or private lands?); and make recommendations on what voluntary actions the County and/or landowners could take to protect/preserve those habitats.
- PDS assumes no funds will be budgeted separately for the WAC. From public-interest testimony, it appears County Council and the WAC anticipate that staff support from PDS (or other departments) be limited to GIS, technical data collection and meeting and record-keeping coordination, as required to meet the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA). Since PDS staff resources and current biennial budget do not account for this staff support, *we anticipate the need for an additional 0.25-0.5 FTE to support the WAC*. PDS has an existing qualified part-time staff member that could serve the WAC—without having to hire additional new staff—were that position's hours increased accordingly. PDS would recommend using Conservation Futures funds to pay for that additional conservation planning related staff work, anticipated to include:
  - Help the committee understand its role
  - Provide timely opportunities for committee members to comment on policy
  - Provide timely communication on emerging issues
  - Schedule meetings in consultation with the WAC and provide meeting places
  - Provide background and other briefing material
  - Facilitate meetings and conference calls as needed
  - Develop meeting agendas and minutes
  - Communicate the committee comments, views, and perspectives to Whatcom County leadership prior to decision-making
  - Provide feedback regarding how the Whatcom County uses committee input
  - Prepare any reports for which the committee is responsible
- The WAC is intended to be comprised primarily of technical experts in the field of wildlife management who will be charged with the responsibility of updating the existing ecosystem inventory and analysis. Federal, state, and tribal agency staff appointments appear to be required as part of the proposed WAC as well. Have these agencies been consulted as to their availability and agreement to populate and commit to the WAC 's mission? Should the entire 11-member WAC and not just the 7-member "Technical

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Advisory Sub-Committee" make management recommendations, as presently indicated in proposed Exhibit A, Section 2.118.030.C.?

Anticipated 2015-2016 Wildlife Advisory Committee (WAC) roles, responsibilities and major tasks:

#### 2015 Tasks

- ✓ Recruit Wildlife Advisory Committee members (newspaper article, personal communications, set up website)
- ✓ Set up first meeting (find location, time, etc.)
- ✓ Set up regular meetings after conferring with WAC
- ✓ WAC to develop Existing Conditions Report - This report will provide an initial inventory, characterization, and assessment of fish and wildlife populations, communities, and habitats in Whatcom County. It will be compiled from existing maps, documents, and information collected from community partners and available resources.
  - Research and compile existing relevant information regarding wildlife populations, distributions, habitat requirements, threats.
  - Compile list of other agencies' and groups' efforts, jurisdictions, etc.
  - Create maps of info
  - Identify data gaps

#### 2016-Beyond

- ✓ Using best available science, make 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update management recommendations on how to provide and protect appropriate habitat conditions for Whatcom County wildlife. Recommendations may include conservation subdivision design, wildlife corridors, landscape ecological planning, wildlife management and efforts to minimize or avoid human/wildlife conflict
- ✓ Provide Annual Report to County Council
- ✓ Provide periodic updates to the Existing Conditions Report