



Fact Sheet and Talking Points Regarding the Appointment of Dr. Tim Ragen and Lynn O'Connor to the WA Fish and Wildlife Commission

Background

Before leaving office in January, former Governor Jay Inslee reappointed Dr. Ragen to the Commission and appointed Ms. O'Connor to replace former Commissioner Molly Linville. After consulting with incoming Governor Ferguson, Governor Inslee left a third seat on the commission open so the new Governor could make that appointment. Governor Inslee's appointments then went to the state Senate for its advice and consent. [Almost immediately upon taking office](#), Governor Ferguson wrote to the Senate asking for both appointments to be returned to his office. The Governor's office indicated it had received multiple letters asking him to rescind this appointment and conduct a more transparent, extensive process for selecting commissioners.

On Feb. 5, the Senate sent the appointments back to Gov. Ferguson's office as requested. Commissioners normally continue serving after the expiration of their term until a replacement has been appointed—as Commissioner Jim Anderson continues to do, even though his term ended on Dec. 31, 2024. However, the Governor's office interpreted the Senate's action as an immediate dismissal of both Commissioners and abruptly called both Commissioners to tell them they were fired.

This decision was made and executed without prior communication with Dr. Ragen, Ms. O'Connor, or Commission leadership. Governor Ferguson's office contacted Dr. Ragen afterward and informed him he was dismissed, effective immediately. Meanwhile, Ms. O'Connor discovered her appointment had been rescinded from media reports as she was preparing for her first meeting. Commission leadership also was taken by surprise and left to figure out a path forward with a short-staffed Commission and continued uncertainty about the appointments.

Dr. Tim Ragen

Qualifications and Expertise

- Dr. Tim Ragen, former Executive Director of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, brings unparalleled expertise in marine conservation and species recovery, making him one of the most qualified fish and wildlife commissioners Washington has ever had.
- His leadership in the recovery of endangered species such as the Steller sea lion and Hawaiian monk seal highlights his ability to evaluate and direct effective, science-based conservation strategies.

- Dr. Ragen’s research on the impacts of climate change on species and ecosystems, coupled with his expertise in adaptive management, is critical as Washington confronts the growing threats posed by climate change to its wildlife.
- His unwavering commitment to science, evidence-based decision-making, and precaution with human impacts on wildlife has made a lasting impact on the protection of both marine and terrestrial species, including his advocacy for maintaining strong protections for vulnerable species like wolves, cougars, wild salmon and orcas.

Why Dr. Ragen Has Been, and Will Be, a Great Commissioner

- Dr. Ragen’s extensive experience in high-level wildlife policy, combined with his ability to listen and consider the concerns of various stakeholder groups, makes him an invaluable asset to the commission.
- His focus on ethical stewardship and scientific integrity positions him as an ideal leader to guide the commission through the difficult decisions ahead, particularly with respect to endangered wildlife like the Southern Resident orcas, which face an imminent risk of extinction.
- The Commission has shown its faith in Dr. Ragen’s leadership by recently electing him vice-char. His leadership will be essential if striving for the implementation of science-driven, transparent policies to protect Washington’s wildlife and habitats from the growing pressures of overextraction, habitat destruction, and climate change.
- We should be honored and grateful that Commissioner Ragen has offered his experience and expertise to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. Failing to reappoint him would signal a troubling disregard for science and a lack of commitment to the recovery of our Southern Resident orcas and threatened and endangered salmon.

Lynn O’Connor

Qualifications and Expertise

- Lynn O’Connor is a dedicated conservationist, outdoorswoman, wildlife rehabilitator and former park ranger with deep roots in Ferry County and extensive experience in environmental stewardship. She and her husband live on a 1,000-acre ranch in Kettle Falls, a portion of which they lease to local ranchers, and she has been a leader in the local Rotary Club for the past 20 years.
- She has a lived understanding of the needs of Washington’s rural communities and a strong track record of collaboration with a wide variety of people in her community, representing a wide range of perspectives on wildlife. This experience may allow her to bridge some of the gaps between different interests on the Commission and the community that have struggled to find common ground.
- As an engaged conservationist and large landowner, Ms. O’Connor provides invaluable on-the-ground experience in balancing conservation efforts with community and land-use needs, particularly in northeast Washington.

- A [recent encounter with a bear](#) on her property shows Ms. O'Connor's strength, fortitude, and commitment to wildlife. She was attacked by a bear when she was out walking her dogs, and after all other efforts failed, punched the bear in the nose to try to save herself. She was injured in the attack, but her dogs returned to chase the bear off and likely save her life. Following the attack, Ms. O'Connor discovered the bear was a mother bear defending her cub and asked the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to leave her alone. Unfortunately, WDFW refused. The Department hunted and killed a different bear in the area (a male with a different coat color) before agreeing to desist. Ms. O'Connor has taken responsibility for this conflict and used it as [an opportunity to teach people](#) about hiker safety, and the importance of carrying, and knowing how to use, bear spray.

Why Ms. O'Connor Would Be a Great Commissioner

- Ms. O'Connor's leadership in the local Rotary Club and her commitment to community building make her an ideal candidate to bridge divides between various stakeholder groups, including hunters, ranchers, and conservationists.
- Her deep roots in the Ferry County community offer much-needed representation from a rural perspective, ensuring that conservation decisions reflect the diverse needs of Washingtonians.
- Ms. O'Connor's practical experience with land stewardship, wildlife rehabilitation, and community engagement uniquely equips her to address Washington's pressing wildlife conservation challenges, particularly in the context of rural and resource-dependent communities.

Why Were These Appointments Rescinded?

Governor Ferguson's Statements. In the letter sent to the Senate, Governor Ferguson said he had received "multiple letters, emails, and other correspondence from individuals, tribes, and other entities" expressing disapproval for the appointments and a desire for a more transparent, extensive process. The Governor's spokesperson explained that this move would allow for more interviews and further evaluation of the qualifications of the candidates before they were presented for Senate confirmation. On a later call with supporters, Governor Ferguson said he is merely trying to ensure an open and transparent process, in light of the [recent report from the Ruckelshaus Center](#) that indicated that some think the Commission is "dysfunctional." He also said he may ultimately choose to reappoint Dr. Ragen and Ms. O'Connor.

- **The Role of Special Interest Groups.** The Governor's office reportedly received more than 2,000 emails asking Governor Ferguson to rescind former Governor Inslee's commission appointments. Well over half of these emails appear to be from people outside Washington who were activated by out-of-state special interest groups. Most of the comments came from trophy hunters, who represent a tiny fraction of the WA public. (Hunters in WA comprise just 2.2% of the population, while only a fraction of a percent are trophy hunters.). These voices are actively supporting the appointment of a candidate affiliated with Safari Club International.

These groups have been critical of commissioners like Dr. Ragen and Ms. O'Connor because they prioritize science-based conservation and precautionary policies over the recreational and commercial exploitation of wildlife. One of the primary disputes was over the Commission's proposed Conservation Policy, which would reiterate the Commission's mandate by making clear that the Commission must place conservation concerns first when making decisions. Out-of-state special interests have tried to turn these disputes into a culture war by knowingly making false statements, such as claiming that these commissioners are opposed to hunting and fishing. All commissioners have repeatedly reaffirmed their support for sustainable hunting and fishing.

Ruckelshaus Report

A legislative proviso approved during the 2023 state legislative session directed funds to the Ruckelshaus Center for a comprehensive review of WDFW, including how it lives up to its mandate to "protect, preserve, and perpetuate" wildlife, as well as whether it fulfills its responsibility to serve as a public trustee of wildlife on behalf of current and future generations.

Unfortunately, the Ruckelshaus report includes very little meaningful analysis of WDFW. Instead, it is little more than a catalogue of anonymous opinions from its select focus group, including many people whom the report acknowledged had limited information about the agency.

The Ruckelshaus Report is often misinterpreted as finding that the Commission is "dysfunctional," even though the report merely said that "many" had labeled the Commission as "dysfunctional." In truth, it is *the governance system* that is dysfunctional, because it expects nine volunteers, with a single staff member, to control the state's fish and wildlife policy and set all rules relating to fish and wildlife. This system is only "functional" if the Commission acts as a rubber stamp on proposals by Department management, but at that point, there is no reason for the Commission to even exist. Any perceived "dysfunction" is the result of dedicated commissioners like Dr. Ragen trying to do the fulfill their mandate to "protect, preserve, and perpetuate" state fish and wildlife—by carefully examining Department proposals, asking sometimes difficult questions, and engaging in lively discussions, and, sometimes, debates over crucial policy issues.

Governor Ferguson's Response Will Tell Us a Lot About his Administration

It is important to emphasize that many eyes are watching what Governor Ferguson does with the Commission appointments, and that it will tell us a lot about his administration. A decision to reappoint Dr. Ragen and Ms. O'Connor will show the following:

- **A Commitment to Science-Based Wildlife Conservation.** By reappointing Dr. Tim Ragen and Lynn O'Connor, Governor Ferguson would show a commitment to a balanced, science-driven approach to wildlife policy. Dr. Ragen's extensive work on the recovery of endangered species is critical for helping the Southern Resident orcas, and Lynn O'Connor's unique perspective as a rural representative is vital to ensuring that all Washingtonians have a voice in wildlife decisions.

- **Respect for Washington Values.** Reappointing these commissioners would demonstrate the Governor's commitment to upholding Washington's values. [Our poll](#) showed that 69% of Washingtonians believe wildlife has intrinsic value, while 91% care about the issue at least a moderate amount, and 56% care a great deal. This reappointment would show the Governor prioritizes the broad interests of current and future generations of Washingtonians over the immediate demands of out-of-state special interest groups, reflecting a deep commitment to preserving the state's wildlife and ecosystems.
- **Prioritization of Washington's Wildlife and Ecosystems.** Reappointing Dr. Ragen and Ms. O'Connor demonstrate that the Governor values the long-term health of Washington's wildlife over the pressures of narrow special interests. This decision would highlight his leadership in ensuring that the state's wildlife and ecosystems thrive for generations to come.
- **Determination to Save Southern Resident Killer Whales and Salmon.** If the Governor is serious about saving the critically endangered Southern Resident killer whales, he could not do better than reappointing Dr. Tim Ragen. Dr. Ragen is not only an expert on fish and marine mammal issues, but has spent his career saving and recovering imperiled wildlife species.
- **Washington Will Protect Its Wildlife from National Threats.** This will be a difficult few years for the nation's wildlife. The Trump Administration has already taken steps to weaken the National Environmental Policy Act and the federal Endangered Species Act, slashed staff and spending at vital agencies like NOAA and the EPA, announced plans to drill in wildlife refuges, and directed a massive increase in logging in public forests. Governor Ferguson has an opportunity to strengthen Washington's wildlife protections to provide a safe haven for the state's wildlife, even as federal protections fall.
- **Respect for Dedication and Expertise:** The way Gov. Ferguson's decision to rescind these appointments was conveyed (or not conveyed) to the appointees was unfortunate, because it failed to show respect for the expertise, experience, and dedication these volunteers bring to a very difficult job. Reappointing them would make a statement that the state respects and values them, providing a stark contrast to the cruelty and indifference being shown to federal workers by the Trump Administration.