

Francisco J. Santiago-Ávila
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Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting

Chair, commissioners. My name is Francisco J. Santiago-Ávila, science and advocacy director with Washington Wildlife First.

Yesterday, Columbia Insight revealed that Director Susewind has aligned himself with an out-of-state trophy-hunting and gun-rights group in their effort to oust the four remaining commissioners who took away his ability to kill bears during the spring. Parroting the language of this extremist hunting group, the Director wrote the governor asking him to investigate those commissioners, without showing any independent thought or identifying any specific misconduct.

We were shocked by this audacious and irresponsible play for power. The Director has long prioritized serving hunters over his duty to the public trust and his responsibility to preserve, protect, and perpetuate Washington's wildlife. Even so, we were stunned that he would openly join an orchestrated smear campaign against commissioners who disagree with him, throwing his weight behind unsupported and inflammatory allegations designed to fuel a dangerous culture war. The Director bears responsibility for whatever happens next.

We are pleased the governor plans to investigate, as that is the only way to clear the cloud hanging over the commission. But any good-faith investigation should not stop with just four commissioners. It should encompass the entire commission, including those commissioners the trophy hunting lobby has shielded from scrutiny through selective use of heavily redacted documents. It must also include the Director, examining his motives for attacking those commissioners who have refused to yield to his demands.

Washington's wildlife needs leadership grounded in ethics, science, and public values. Instead, the Director repeatedly shows contempt for the law, disdain for Washington values, disregard for employee safety, disrespect for the commission that oversees him, and indifference to the plight of wildlife he is sworn to protect.

Washington Wildlife First is calling for Director Susewind's removal and asking the people of Washington to join us.

Thank you.