



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Dear Ms. Frostic:

Thank you for your recent letter outlining concerns regarding the legality of aspects of the Bear Timber Damage Management Program. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) understands that this program is controversial. Over the past two years, we have been working to improve processes within that program to reduce the likelihood of conflict. Our initial efforts included assembling an internal team to evaluate the program. That team recommended a list of improvements and the Department has since adopted many of these recommendations.

Since that effort, interested stakeholders of all views have voiced additional concerns. To address these concerns in a comprehensive manner, we have initiated a Conservation Conflict Transformation (CCT) process with the intent of including representative from known stakeholders. Through this process, we hope to address stakeholder concerns using peace-building methods that should result in policies that all sides can accept. We were in the process of assembling that group of stakeholders when we received your letter. We are committed to moving forward with this process that internal employees with sufficient training and experience will facilitate. This group will include a diverse assemblage of internal and external stakeholders including a representative from your organization.

Regarding the 2018 spring season adjustments, we have decided to make the following changes to the program to address some of the concerns conveyed in your letter. One of your concerns regards permitted spring bear hunts that occur in areas where supplemental feeding may occur. In 2016, there were 20 hunt areas that encompass 23 Game Management Units (GMU) where spring bear permits were available. Thirteen of those hunt areas do not have any supplemental feeding. Of the remaining seven hunt areas, one has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that requires removal of all supplemental feeding stations from the hunt boundary. Only a few of the remaining six hunt areas use supplemental feed. The most recent harvest data shows bear harvest in all those hunt areas combined was 19 bears in 2016. We consider hunting on top of supplemental feeders baiting, which is illegal. For education on this point, we plan to send letters to all hunters that draw permits in those units informing them to be aware of possible

feeding stations, and to avoid hunting near them. However, the timber companies are not always willing to divulge the location of their feeders, and we can only provide hunters the information that we have regarding feeding stations. We will also place signage on gates in areas where we know feeders are used reminding hunters that hunting over bait is a violation of Washington Administrative Code 220-415-080 and Revised Code of Washington 77-15-245. We also plan to update our website to include language that reminds hunters to be aware of supplemental feeders and avoid mistakenly hunting over bait.

Another issue you raise regards permits that we issue to address specific tree damage. We plan to undertake the following measures to address concerns with this aspect of the program:

- We will increase enforcement patrols associated with timber damage hunts. To increase effectiveness, we will require permit holders to provide the Department's Enforcement Program with the bear damage location and surrounding removal area, including GPS location and detailed directions, 24 hours prior to starting the removal effort. We will also require the landowner to provide the Department with access, including keys or combinations to locked gates within the hunt area.
- We will introduce a background check of hound handlers and trappers, similar to the check we currently have in the Master Hunter program. Currently all that is required is the ability to purchase a hunting license.
- We will add to the terms of the permit clear language requiring landowners to remove all supplemental feed and feeders prior to the permit start date.
- We will require GPS locations of all feeder stations within a permitted removal area in the terms of the permit.
- We will ask those issued a trapping permit to use culvert traps whenever possible. The Department only has a few culvert traps and we will offer those to trappers to use if available.
- We will change the terms of the permit to disallow the retention of bears taken under these permits.
- We will ask landowners if they considered reasonable non-lethal methods to avoid tree damage prior to applying for a bear removal permit.

The Department realizes there are many more issues that we hope to resolve through an inclusive stakeholder process. We will implement these measures for the upcoming season and hope you will consider our proactive steps and forgo any lawsuit that could inhibit a more peaceful process.

Sincerely,



Joe Stohr
Acting Director

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