

December 17, 2021

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Contact:

Samantha Bruegger
Executive Director
Washington Wildlife First
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VIA Email and Web Form

RE: Urgent Plea to Fill Vacant Seats on Fish and Wildlife Commission with Commissioners who will Emphasize Conservation, Science, and Reform

Dear Governor Inslee,

The 30 undersigned fish, wildlife, and environmental conservation organizations urge you to immediately fill the vacant and expired seats on the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. It is imperative that you select Commissioners who understand and value science, who support your agenda to conserve and protect our environment, and who will focus on bringing critically needed reforms to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

These appointments are long overdue, with one seat on the Commission remaining vacant for one year and another Commissioner serving in a seat that expired in October 2020. Earlier this week, yet another vacancy was created with the departure of Commissioner Fred Koontz, whose resignation letter accurately described a Fish and Wildlife Commission that is “stuck in a politicized quagmire,” which has “largely lost the ability to have civil public conversations.”

Commissioner Koontz’s resignation will exacerbate the problems of a divided Commission, and prevent it from rising to the challenge of exerting meaningful supervision over the Department, rather than just serving as a rubber stamp for management recommendations. These management recommendations are too often focused on placating entrenched special interests rather than on conserving the fish and wildlife that the Department is supposed to manage in trust for *all* Washingtonians. In fact, as we saw during the recent debate over the spring bear rule, management sometimes presents inaccurate, incomplete, and misleading information to both the Commission and the public, often misrepresenting the fine work that has been done by its own biologists. This leaves the Commission without a reliable source of accurate information, crippling rational public debate and making a reasoned decision-making process impossible.

The dysfunction within the Commission has also left the Department without meaningful oversight, at a time when such oversight is desperately needed. Indeed, [the recent state audit](#) described a Department in which unethical and illegal activity is common, bullying is rampant, and employees who report unethical behavior frequently face retaliation from their supervisors.¹ That is unacceptable by any measure, and we

¹ Some of the key findings of the audit include that one in ten WDFW employees has directly witnessed a WDFW employee or supervisor commit a legal or ethical violation in the past year; more than 10% experienced retaliatory behavior as a result of reporting unethical or illegal behavior, challenging a supervisor, or talking to the auditors; more than two dozen employees interviewed by the auditors described decisions that WDFW had made on hot-button issues based on purely political considerations, ignoring the Department’s own research and expert recommendation; less than half of the employees believe

owe better to the many fine biologists, enforcement officers, and other employees who work for the Department. We understand that your office cannot take direct action to address these disturbing findings, but it is critical that you appoint Commissioners who will make it one of their first priorities to do so.

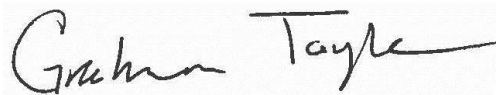
Governor Inslee, the hundreds of thousands Washington residents who support our collective organizations are among your most devoted supporters. We care deeply about our environment, and are dedicated to fighting climate change, preserving biodiversity, and countering the increasingly powerful “anti-science” agenda of which you often speak. We are asking you to demonstrate that you care just as deeply about the threats to biodiversity within Washington as you do about environmental threats at the national and international level—and to work with your Washington supporters to address these urgent concerns.

Please, Governor Inslee, assert your political courage to stand up with us for the fish and wildlife of our state. Please fill the vacant seats on the Commission immediately, before more damage is done by its continuing division and dysfunction. And please, work with us to appoint Commissioners who are dedicated to the principles of conservation and scientific integrity, who will take action to bring lasting reforms to the Department, and who will represent the interests and values of *all* Washingtonians.

Sincerely,



Samantha Bruegger
Executive Director
Washington Wildlife First



Graham Taylor
National Wildlife Committee Chair
Sierra Club



Sophia Ressler
Washington Wildlife Advocate
Center for Biological Diversity



Kurt Beardslee
Executive Director
Wild Fish Conservancy



Dan Paul
Senior State Director, Washington
The Humane Society of the United States

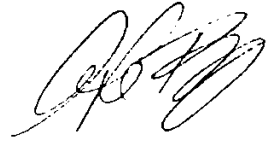


Debra Chase
Chief Executive Officer
Mountain Lion Foundation

that managers are held accountable when they behave inappropriately; more than 20% of WDFW employees have been the victim of workplace bullying, including yelling, demeaning comments or intimidation in the last year, which are often based on gender; and 25% of employees the auditors interviewed reported instances of gender discrimination at the Department, where only 33% of the workforce are women.



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Jocelyn Leroux
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Western Watersheds Project



Tim Coleman
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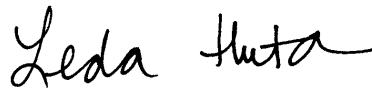
Janet Thomas
Executive Director
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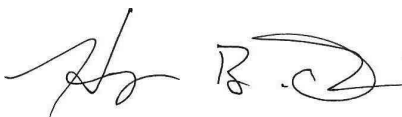
Lizzy Pennock
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Claire Loeb Davis
Managing Partner
Animal & Earth Advocates



Lynn Mason
Coexisting with Cougars in Klickitat County



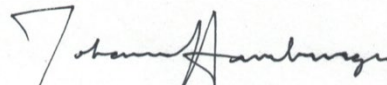
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Kathryn Townsend
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Johanna Hamburger
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cc: Jamila Thomas, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor; Kelly Wicker, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor; Keith Phillips, Policy Director, Office of the Governor; JT Austin, Senior Policy Advisor, Natural Resources, Office of the Governor; Ambar Algera, Director of Boards and Commissions, Office of the Governor; Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission; Kelly Susewind, Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife