



Date: 8-3-21

Yakima County Farm Bureau (YCFB) Issues With Regards To The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

1. The YCFB is opposed to land purchases by the Department, which remove lands from the tax base of Yakima and Klickitat Counties and also create the loss of productive agricultural lands.
 - a) Yakima County's privately held land base (including non-profit ownership) stands at 19%. This is unsustainable. PILT payments have also been dwindled down to the point of being nearly irrelevant.
 - b) The loss of productive agricultural lands is also significant. As less land is available to grazers and farmers, the environmental pressure on the land that is still available to graze upon or farm increases. As WDFW continues to purchase even more land, that pressure is further exacerbated. The opposite occurs if the Department were to allow lands closed to grazing to be opened. As more lands were to become open, the environmental pressure would lessen on a per acre basis and the net gain to wildlife of controlled grazing would spread the benefit to increasing numbers of wildlife. The same applies to the Department reducing the amount of land it owns.
 - c) WDFW does a substandard job of managing its lands. As a result, wildlife that the Department bought land for instead seek out neighboring properties more to their liking. This places added strain on those neighbors unfortunate enough to be involved in those situations resulting in damage to their property and crops.
 - d) The Department is loath to offering its lands to livestock grazing. Due to lack of management on Department lands, unprecedented wild fires and noxious weeds also result.

2. Recently, the YCFB has become aware that there are a number of substantial Solar Complexes being planned for Yakima County. In reviewing the planning of the Goose Prairie project, our Farm Bureau has discovered that the WDFW is set to acquire even more private lands under the banner of "mitigation".

The YCFB opposes large scale monolithic solar industrial complexes and has several concerns about them and as we oppose loss of agricultural lands that have some degree of productivity, we also oppose lands purchased by any government to mitigate the effects of a solar complex. The YCFB believes that a different structuring of the solar complex as well as better siting and design would provide adequate mitigation on its own. The YCFB is wary of solar energy as a matter of principle.

3. Lower Snake River Dam breaching: The YCFB is most opposed to the loss of any of our Columbia/Snake River Dams. The most recent reason stated for needing to breach the Lower Snake River Dams is to save the South Resident Orcas. The YCFB finds this to be a very illogical solution when one examines the facts. These facts were not derived by the recent past Administration but rather, studies completed during the Obama Administration by NOAA Fisheries in 2016. The plight of the South Resident Orcas is complex and much of their problems are traced right back to their home territory of Puget Sound. The disposition of the Snake River dams ranked 9th in importance according to NOAA to benefitting the Orcas because the Salmon from the Snake River and the Upper Columbia River reaches traverse the Washington and British Columbia coast line farther from the shore than the Lower Columbia River fish do and beyond where the Orcas feed when they are in the Ocean.
4. Depredation Issues
 - a) Large Ungulates, mainly elk are damaging crops on private lands and the Department is issuing FEWER cow tags. The YCFB finds this inexplicable! Further, the lack of grazing by livestock removes a tool from the WDFW "tool kit" which could enhance habitat for the wild ungulates on the Departments lands.
 - b) Predators
 - 1) Cougars and Bears, The YCFB believes that the Department is getting more realistic about incursions by these apex predators but this trend is only recent. Prior to this shift, the WDFW regularly deflected concerns about what may have caused any alleged Cat problem.
 - 2) With respect to Wolves, WDFW has been directed to hand off the required innovation of non-lethal measures to the affected livestock operators. These folks are the least able to create whole cloth measures such as these and the YCFB sees this shifting of responsibility, that of the Department handing the problem to the victims (ranchers) as a very disappointing development. The Department promised full cooperation and having the Ranchers backs so to speak in ushering in Wolves into the State. Now, as the issue of having to kill wolves gets very politically unpalatable, the Department just hands off its responsibility to provide effective non-lethal solutions upon those ill-equipped to deal with it.

Solutions

1. The YCFB believes that the Department must refrain from purchasing more land and concentrate on better management of the lands it already owns. Moreover, much of the land the Department currently owns should be returned to private ownership.
2. The WDFW needs to encourage selective livestock grazing to assist in the renovation of its dilapidated properties it currently controls.
3. Instead of out-right land purchase the Department should begin working with willing land owners and contract with them or their surrogates to create the desired beneficial outcomes. This would save money and create good will with WDFW's neighbors and result in real improvement for wildlife.
4. To graze Department lands, the infrastructure that was destroyed by WDFW, either intentionally or through neglect needs to be re-constructed. This involves mainly fencing and watering locations and fixing this problem belongs with the State.
5. WDFW must better account for pressures placed upon private lands by wildlife than it previously has to date. Where grazing damage cannot be eliminated, the use of Reciprocal Grazing should be more fully utilized. Where crop damage exists, farmers and ranchers must be fairly compensated.
6. The WDFW must adopt and abide by common sense management of its elk population. The point to begin is to actually measure the elk numbers in a fair and equitable fashion that can be trusted by all concerned parties. Then apply modern range science to cause the herd to conform to the reality on the land.
7. Non-Lethal control of wolf depredation is a most daunting goal. However, the YCFB believes that the Department must remain fully engaged and not transfer the burden to the livestock producers to deal with that which they are not equipped for. The YCFB believes an idea which has recently surfaced and has been scientifically tested could show great promise. The idea involves adding a shock collar function to wolf tracking collars and a transmission feature to Radio Activated Guard (RAG) boxes. When a wolf with a shock enhanced collar moves to the proximity of a sufficiently equipped RAG box, it receives a shock.

One unintended consequence would be that over time, the wild prey of the wolf would also learn that areas guarded by this method would be a safe area and thus the livestock operator would have an issue with added grazing pressure. Only a large scale field test could answer the question: Is the added grazing pressure less damaging than the cost of the wolf depredation?

8. With respect to the South Resident Orcas, the WDFW needs to reinvigorate its fish hatchery program. The Tribes have done landmark work in this area while the State of Washington has abrogated its role. The YCFB believes this is wrong and needs to be corrected. Furthermore, the YCFB also believes that the WDFW should play a role in laying out facts as they are on the ground. Breaching the Snake River Dams will add CO2 to our atmosphere since the Green Renewable (GR) sources meant to replace those dams are not reliable. Carbon based sources that fill in the gaps for the GRs unreliability will add to CO2 emissions. If we are to accept the concept of Man Made Global Climate Change and need to reduce Man's carbon foot print then Hydro-electric generation needs to be preserved, not destroyed.

Summary

The YCFB offers this critique and solutions with the best of intentions, not with malice. We as farmers and livestock raisers understand the environment in ways few realize. We witness a resource squandered and our privately owned resources threatened as a result and it's unfortunate and unnecessary.

Simply put, it's time to create a partnership between Agriculture and Wildlife interests that respects what should be respected and change what is not working, even if it's not politically popular.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Herke
President, Yakima County Farm Bureau