

Final Review Draft: FW Commission Policy on the Use of Best Available Science

3.25.24

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction to the Department and Commission on the development, use of, and access to, best available science and to ensure the integrity of scientific information in addressing decision-critical questions throughout Commission decision making.

Policy

- a. The Commission is a policy setting body with statutory authorities and responsibilities to manage public trust fish and wildlife resources and its management decisions should be informed by salient and credible science. Therefore, it is a priority of the Commission that science provided to the Commission comports with accepted scientific principles and is, as much as possible, without bias.
- b. The Commission will identify policy objectives and related decision-critical information needed from the Department to inform decision making. The Department will work with the Commission to co-create key questions for decision making in an iterative fashion while recognizing the time and financial resources that agency scientists may need to provide that information, and the fact that some information may be unknown or incomplete. The Commission should weigh the need for greater scientific certainty against the costs (in time, money, and management outcome [e.g., wildlife population declines, extinction, etc.]) of reducing uncertainty. The Department will inform and develop risk analyses that inform tradeoffs at the request of the Commission, including the risk of no action.
- c. The Department will work through the Science Divisions to create and maintain scientific integrity and ensure the best possible scientific support for Commission decision making.
- d. The Commission shall use Best Available Science, including Social Science, in decision making. See Attachment 1.
- e. The Commission and the Department will be explicit in how natural and social science information is used in conjunction with applicable law and WDFW's legal mandate for decision-making and recommendations. It is understood that while consideration of scientific findings must form the basis for Commission decisions, social values, (including risk tolerance) and the professional experience of Commissioners are integral to the decision-making process.
- f. Commissioners should work through the Committee process or with the appropriate science and management staff from Divisions/Regions (in small groups) prior to public presentation to ensure a common understanding of the presentation's major scientific outcomes, conclusions and areas of remaining disagreement or uncertainty. Commissioners may provide additional scientific references or information for consideration in the development of science products by the Department.
- g. The Commission and the Department will seek to avoid bias in their interpretation of scientific studies by considering all relevant sources of scientific information used by the agency in developing recommendations. In areas of contested interpretation or application of science, or conflicting results of important scientific studies, the information provided by Department staff shall be considered acceptable and sufficient. However, the Commission may request third-party review (vetted with explicit criteria and a transparent process) or the Washington Academy of Sciences to review key scientific disagreements. The Commission will provide specific questions about the contested science or uncertainty that is decision critical. (refer to f)
- h. The Commission or the Department may request the use of decision support tools e.g. Structured Decision Making, as a process for considering tradeoffs for achieving specific goals and objectives for resource management. The Commission and Department may request an adaptive management approach to address risk to resources or opportunity.

Attachment 1: Sources and characteristics of scientific information to describe Best Available Science

<p>SOURCES OF SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION adapted from (WAC 365-195-905)</p>	<p>CHARACTERISTICS OF SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION – The sources of scientific information should include the following (adapted from WAC 365-195-905 and Charnley et al (2017))</p>
<p>Research Research data collected and analyzed as part of a controlled experiment (or other appropriate methodology based in the scientific method) to test a specific hypothesis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear statement of objectives, research purpose, and/or questions • Thorough review of literature, ensuring inclusion of recent literature, and other relevant information • A conceptual model or theoretical framework for characterizing system relationships, testing hypotheses, and making predictions • Data gathered are objective, value-free • Data and information limitations, sampling biases, scientific uncertainties, known or potential rates of error are disclosed • Sound logic and rigorous statistical quantitative, qualitative, or alternative methods used for analyzing and interpreting data and making inferences from samples • Conclusions are well supported by the data • Findings communicated in a manner that is accessible and understandable
<p>Monitoring Monitoring data collected periodically over time to determine a resource trend or evaluate a management program.</p>	
<p>Inventory Inventory data collected from an entire population or population segment (e.g., individuals in a plant or animal species) or an entire ecosystem or ecosystem segment (e.g., the species in a particular wetland).</p>	
<p>Survey Survey data collected from a statistical sample from a population or ecosystem.</p>	
<p>Modeling Mathematical or symbolic simulation or representation of a natural system. Models generally are used to understand and explain occurrences, and may predict outcomes, that cannot be directly observed.</p>	
<p>Assessment Inspection and evaluation of site-specific information by a qualified scientific expert. An assessment may or may not involve collection of new data.</p>	
<p>Synthesis A comprehensive review and explanation of pertinent literature and other relevant existing knowledge by a qualified scientific expert.</p>	
<p>Expert Opinion Statement of a qualified scientific expert based on their best professional judgement and experience in the pertinent discipline. This is only used where we have no other type of specific science that speaks to the question.</p>	