

---

**Agriculture & Natural Resources  
Committee**

---

**HB 1685**

**Brief Description:** Restructuring fish and wildlife governance.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Springer, Fitzgibbon, Parshley and Bernbaum.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes the Director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Director) as the executive head of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).
- Transfers powers and duties of the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) to the WDFW.
- Maintains the Commission as an advisory body and establishes advisory duties.
- Requires the Director to convene a workgroup of representatives from other state agencies and organizations whose work significantly impacts fish and wildlife and provide a report to the Legislature.

**Hearing Date:** 2/19/25

**Staff:** Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

**Background:**

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is composed of the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) and the Director of the WDFW (Director). The Commission is the executive head of the WDFW, which operates under a statutory mandate to preserve, protect,

---

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

perpetuate, and manage Washington's wildlife, food fish, game fish, and shellfish. The Commission has a variety of statutory duties related to the mandate including: classifying fish and wildlife; establishing basic rules and regulations governing the time, place, manner, and methods to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife; and coordinating with other federal, state, tribal, and local agencies and organizations in managing the state's fish, wildlife, and habitats. The Commission must meet annually with the Governor to review and prescribe basic goals and objectives related to the mandate of the WDFW; review the performance of the WDFW in implementing fish and wildlife policies.

The Commission is composed of nine members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Each even-numbered year, three Commissioners are appointed for six-year terms. Three members of the Commission must reside in Eastern Washington, three in Western Washington, and the remaining three members are appointed at-large. No two members may reside in the same county. In order to be eligible for appointment to the Commission, a person must have general knowledge of the habits and distribution of fish and wildlife, and may not hold another state, county, or municipal elective or appointive office. In making appointments to the Commission, the Governor must seek to maintain a balance reflecting all aspects of fish and wildlife, including representation recommended by organized groups representing sportfishers, commercial fishers, hunters, private landowners, and environmentalists. If a vacancy occurs on the Commission before the end of the Commissioner's term, the Governor must appoint a successor within 60 days to complete the term.

The Commission selects its own staff and appoints the Director of the WDFW (Director). The Commission may delegate to the Director any of the powers and duties vested in the Commission. In order to be eligible for appointment by the Commission, candidates for Director must have practical knowledge of the habits and distribution of fish and wildlife in the state, general knowledge of the state's fisheries and wildlife resources, and of the commercial and recreational fishing industry in the state and may not have a financial interest in the fishing industry, or a directly related industry. The Director may appoint and employ necessary personnel and may delegate, in writing, to WDFW staff the duties and powers necessary for efficient operation and administration of the WDFW.

### **Summary of Bill:**

#### Fish and Wildlife Commission and Director.

##### *Powers and Duties.*

The Director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Director) is the executive and administrative head of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and current powers and duties of the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) are transferred to the WDFW, including rulemaking authority. The qualifications that candidates for Director must have practical knowledge of the habits and distribution of fish and wildlife in the state, general knowledge of the state's fisheries and wildlife resources and of the commercial and recreational

fishing industry in the state, and may not have a financial interest in the fishing or a directly related industry, are deleted.

The Commission is maintained as an advisory body and new advisory duties of the Commission are established including: holding public hearings and submitting written recommendations on various aspects of the WDFW's policies, activities, agreements with other governments, and other issues the Commission deems to be of significant public interest or importance; obtaining information from the Director; and convening panels of experts on various issues. The requirement that the Commission meet annually with the Governor is deleted. Communications between commissioners to facilitate the development of written recommendations do not constitute a meeting under the Open Public Meetings Act.

The Director must consider public input on recommendations from the Commission and respond to public input in writing describing why recommendations were or were not followed, how the chosen course of action is consistent with the WDFW's mandate, strategic plan, other applicable high-level policies and plans, any applicable laws, and the WDFW's responsibility as a public trustee of fish and wildlife.

#### *Appointment processes.*

The current appointment process for Commissioners is maintained, and current commissioners must, by January 15, 2026, be given the opportunity to continue their appointments until the end of their respective terms. If Commissioners decline to continue, the Governor must appoint replacements as soon as practicable.

The Director must be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, instead of appointed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission). If a vacancy occurs while the Senate is not in session, the Governor must make a temporary appointment until the next session of the Senate. The Governor must consult with the Commission in shaping the search for the Director whenever the position is open. The Commission must interview final candidates for the Director position and provide written recommendations to the Governor.

#### Fish and Wildlife Interagency Workgroup.

The Director must convene a workgroup of representatives from other state agencies and organizations whose work significantly impacts fish and wildlife to improve interagency cooperation and collaboration on fish and wildlife issues, and keep the public regularly apprised of the activities of the workgroup.

At a minimum, the workgroup must include the following people or their designees: the Commissioner of Public Lands, the Director of the Department of Ecology, the Director of the Department of Commerce, the Director of the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Secretary of the Department of Transportation, the Director of the Puget Sound Partnership, and a representative of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs.

By August 1, 2026, the Director must report to the Legislature on areas where other agencies impact fish and wildlife and suggest ways to improve interagency collaboration, cooperation, efficiency, and effectiveness on fish and wildlife issues. The workgroup expires following the completion of the report.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Preliminary fiscal note available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.