

## COMMENT LETTER ON 2020 LAND EXPANSION PLANS BY DFW

December 31, 2019

To: Department of Fish and Wildlife

From: North East Washington Counties (Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, and Okanogan)

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2020 Land Expansion Plans suggested by the DFW.

The right to own property was established when our country was founded. The system of taxing that property was developed to generate funds for towns, cities, counties, and states to provide services and infrastructure for their respective citizens. When a state government agency steps in and purchases private property, it subsequently takes those properties off the tax revenue of the towns and counties that they lie in. While the state may pay some remuneration to the counties, it is at a greatly reduced amount and economic impact to the county, especially rural counties that are made up of vast amounts of federal and state land.

Pend Oreille County consists of 912,441 acres with approximately 65% local government, state, or federal land. Designated forest land or current use farm and agriculture make up 27%, both designations with a lower tax rate. While other counties within the state may not have such an imbalance of public land vs. private, any conversion of private to public affects the county's economic base.

In addition, Pend Oreille County's PILT payment in 2019 was \$5,546. Based on our Assessor's Report, the calculated billing for 2019-2020 is \$20,259.54 for 3,546 acres. Our payment is an approximately 75% shortfall of what the state's contribution should be, by statute. When acres are removed, it reduces the amount of taxes we receive.

DFW's plan to attain an additional 18 tracts of land totaling more than 6,900 in 14 counties across the state is unacceptable. We realize that every private property owner has the right to sell their land to whomever they choose but the impact to the counties and general public is not taken into account. In purchasing private land, DFW has essentially developed an increase to their revenue with an economic decrease to the counties these lands lie in.

The mission of DFW is "working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat for the continuing benefit of the American people." DFW is continuing to grow its land holdings while neglecting the protection of undulant population being devastated by the introduction of the wolves. Fewer hunters and fishermen are buying licenses these days, due to DFW's not protecting a segment of the wildlife in their mission statement.

Allow American citizens the right to protect their farms and ranches, build their homes, pay their property taxes, and/or sell their property to other private individuals to retain the land in the private sector. The state using taxpayer dollars to purchase private land at prices that the general public cannot afford is unacceptable.

We are opposed to any private land acquisitions by DFW now and in the future.