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## WSDOT LIAISON PROGRAM AT THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE: BENEFITS TO TRANSPORTATION AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

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### Abstract

Funding Source: TEA-21; FHWA; WSDOT with In-Kind Contributions from the USFWS

Project Period: Ongoing

The Western Washington Office (WVO) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is one of several state and federal agencies participating in the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Liaison Program. Through this program, WSDOT provides funding to support staff that is dedicated to working on transportation projects. The WVO currently has two liaison positions. These positions are filled with Fish and Wildlife Biologists. The liaisons work on transportation projects directly or support other staff so that they can work on transportation projects.

USFWS liaisons participate in a wide variety of transportation-related tasks and projects including:

- Representation on steering and technical committees for transportation planning projects undergoing NEPA review;
- Conduct consultations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act;
- Review Environmental Impact Statements;
- Assist with the development of Programmatic Biological Assessments;
- Review wetland mitigation banking instruments and agreements;
- Assist with the development and refinement of policy and guidance related to identifying and evaluating transportation impacts (stormwater treatment and assessing indirect effects);
- Develop training curriculum and materials for WSDOT biologists; county and city transportation agencies, and consultants on endangered species, consultations, and minimizing adverse effects;
- Fulfill additional USFWS responsibilities under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act; the Clean Water Act; and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act;
- Provide for rapid response to emergency situations and violations.

Liaisons receive specialized training on transportation-related topics such as:

- Road maintenance activities;
- Erosion control measures;
- NEPA streamlining; and
- Construction methods

Benefits to WSDOT include:

- Early involvement of agency personnel;
- Dedicated staff time for project review;
- Staff within the agency that are familiar with their methods (speak their language), needs, and constraints;
- Known points-of-contact and communication conduits for sharing the latest policy updates and best available science;
- Contacts available during emergency situations (i.e. earthquakes; floods) that may impair road systems
- Enhancement of opportunities for streamlining

Benefits to the USFWS include:

- Minimization of impacts to endangered species
- Staff availability in an environment of decreased funds and increased workload;

- Biologists with transportation expertise;
- Avenue for early involvement in transportation planning;
- Improved project tracking and monitoring;
- Better understanding of transportation impacts to endangered species and baseline conditions;
- Enhanced awareness of streamlining opportunities

The Liaison Program creates a framework for streamlining the regulatory process with people dedicated to the both the needs of the transportation industry and the needs of the environment.