

Annual State Agency Performance Survey

Background on the Survey

In accordance with RCW 90.16.05 (3)(c) the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Department of Ecology (Ecology) consult with water power license fee payers and other interested parties. This includes annual meetings and annual state agency performance surveys. The purpose of these consultation efforts is to solicit feedback on the responsiveness of department staff, clarity of staff roles and responsibilities in the hydropower licensing and implementation process, and other topics related to the professionalism and expertise of department staff assigned to hydropower project. The statute further stipulates the survey must be designed by WDFW and Ecology after consulting with hydropower licensees, and the results of the survey must be included in the biennial progress report.

These additional accountability reporting requirements placed into law in 2016 are inclusive of the original (2007 law) requirements to consult with hydropower project operators, and other interested parties. As such the new required annual survey, work plans, and annual stakeholder meeting meet the state agency reporting requirements under and RCW 90.16.050(1)(c)(i)(A) [amended in 2007] and RCW 90.16.050(3) [amended in 2016].

In 2017 Ecology and WDFW created an initial survey in order to effectively get feedback from all of the hydropower licensee fee holder and stakeholders. The purpose was to meet the new survey requirements as well as get formal feedback on how best to conduct surveys in the future in order to meet the intended purpose of the statute. Results of the 2017 survey was presented at the 2017 Annual Hydropower Fee Stakeholder meeting and several stakeholders expressed an interest in participating in a workgroup to improve the survey.

In September and October of 2018, Ecology and a group of stakeholders developed an annual survey workgroup. This workgroup participated in three meetings, approximately 1.5 hours in length. The tasks of this workgroup were to analyze the structure of the initial survey created and distributed in 2017, provide suggestions for improvement, determine the best method to receive feedback, draft new questions, and finalize a new and improved survey. As a result, a new and improved survey was complete and then distributed to all the hydropower fee holder and stakeholders on October 16, 2018. The new survey incorporated a modified structure to allow for respondents to provide feedback on each topic in several ways; condensed and expanded questions, and free form text options to provide narrative detail. The following is a summary of the results of this survey.

About the 2018 Survey

In October 2018, Ecology sent a survey with 39 questions to relevant hydropower project staff and other industry stakeholders. The survey began with three optional questions about the participant (Questions 1 thru 3), followed by 33 multiple choice questions; four were required and 29 were optional. The multiple choice response options were, *strongly agree*, *agree*, *undecided/neutral*, *disagree*, *strongly disagree*, and *N/A*. The questions were divided into four

major topic areas. The first question of each topic was required and the remaining questions in each topic was optional. To ensure respondents had the opportunity to share any specific ideas, each topic section included a final free form text option. These four major topics were:

1. Responsiveness – overall performance of staff response time (Questions 4 thru 12).
2. Clarity of staff roles and responsibilities – overall effectiveness of communication between Ecology and hydropower project operators (Questions 13 thru 19).
3. Professionalism – overall professionalism of Ecology staff when communicating and working with hydropower operators (Questions 20 thru 27).
4. Expertise – Overall knowledge and familiarity of Ecology staff of the hydropower projects they manage. (Questions 28 thru 37).

Lastly, the survey included three final questions that asked for any additional feedback, comments, or questions from the participant (Questions 37 thru 39).

Survey results

The statute directs that the biennial progress report include results from the performance survey. We are providing an overview of survey results in this section. Appendix A includes result summaries for each question, showing the range of answer choices, and specific narrative survey responses (Questions 12, 19, 27, 37, 38) regarding state agency responsiveness, clarity of staff roles and responsibilities, professionalism, expertise, and other comments. Question 1 of the survey requested email addresses for the respondents; this information does not affect the outcome of the survey or the feedback provided by Ecology and WDFW. Therefore, Question 1 is not included in Appendix A or in this report.

About the respondents

The survey was completed by 18 participants. To ensure that Ecology and WDFW received authentic and meaningful feedback, the survey allowed for anonymous participation. Nine participants remained anonymous while the following nine participants provided optional identifying information;

- Mason County PUD #1
- Hancock Creek & Calligan Creek Hydro
- Sunset Fish passage and Energy Project
- Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project
- Lewis River Hydro Projects
- PacifiCorp
- City of Centralia (Yelm Hydro Project)
- Cowlitz PUD
- Spokane River Project
- Okanogan County PUD
- Tacoma Power

Topic 1: Responsiveness

This topic section included nine questions, one required question followed by seven optional questions, and one free form text question. Out of the 18 survey participants, nine participants answered the seven optional questions in this topic section, and five participants provided additional feedback for the free form text question. In general, we received favorable responses (*Agree* to *Strongly agree*) for the majority of multiple choice questions related to the responsiveness of Ecology and WDFW staff in the last year. Areas included satisfaction with agency staff working on hydropower projects, including:

- Timely and sufficient assistance on questions, technical requests, and decisions.
- Timeliness of reviews.
- Collaboration effectiveness to help develop and/or implement project 401 certifications.

State agency response to feedback

Some responses indicate this expectation was not consistently met for all hydropower projects. Ecology and WDFW are committed to focusing on timely responses that include the appropriate legal, technical, and policy staff in each meeting and decision. Each hydropower project is assigned an assistant attorney general (AG) from the state AG office and staff frequently consult with the AG office for guidance on issues. AG attorneys participating in meeting where appropriate or when their participation is requested by a hydropower utility. Ecology has also included staff engineers when water quality or water resource modeling is under review. Policy issues that need to be reviewed by state agency managers for consistent application of regulation are coordinated by regional and headquarter staff. Each project is assigned one staff person from each state agency and can ask to include a manager to review any decision that affects the hydropower project.

Topic 2: Clarity of staff roles and responsibilities

This topic section included seven questions, one required question followed by five optional questions, and one free form text question. Out of the 18 survey participants, nine participants answered the five optional questions in this topic section, and five participants provided additional feedback for the free form text question. Responses on clarity of staff roles and responsibilities for Ecology and WDFW agency staff received for this topic were predominantly favorable (*Agree* to *Strongly Agree*) and suggest water power license fee payers know who to contact if they have regulatory questions about their hydropower project. Areas included satisfaction with agency staff working on hydropower projects, including:

- Knowing which agency to contact.
- Agency staff are engaged in the projects and effectively share workload.
- Agency staff collaborate to solve problems with each other and with the projects.

State agency response to feedback

Though responses were mostly positive, some comments indicate this expectation were not consistently met for all hydropower projects. Ecology and WDFW have committed to ensure greater consistency with decision-making by continuing to develop agency-to-agency relationships and through better coordination by the development of an Inter Agency Agreement. We continue to develop and participate in agency workgroup meetings. These

meeting are used to discuss current issues, share decisions among regional staff, and continue to develop our knowledge and understanding of complex hydropower projects.

Topic 3: Professionalism

This topic section included seven questions, one required question followed by five optional questions, and one free form text question. Out of the 18 total survey participants, nine participants answered the five optional questions in this topic section, and two participants provided additional feedback for the free form text question. Responses received for this topic were mostly favorable (*Agree* to *Strongly Agree*) and suggest that most water power license fee payers have a positive experience working with state agencies. Areas included satisfaction with agency staff working on hydropower projects, including:

- Agency staff used professional judgement versus person opinion.
- Agency staff followed through with commitments.
- Agency staff communicated clearly and professionally and were prepared for meetings.

State agency response to feedback

Agency staff will continue to work on policy issues with state agency managers for consistent application of regulation and coordinate with regional and headquarter staff. Each project is assigned one staff person from each state agency and can ask to include a manager to review any decision that affects the hydropower project. By agency staff continuing to participate in trainings and agency workgroup meetings allows for continued development of growth by increased knowledge, and understanding of specific hydropower projects and related complex issues.

Topic 4: Expertise

This topic section included nine questions, one required question followed by seven optional questions, and one free form text question. Out of the 18 total survey participants, nine participants answered the seven optional questions in this topic section, and three participants provided additional feedback for the free form text question. Responses received for this topic were mostly positive (*Agree* to *Strongly Agree*) and suggest that most water power license fee payers are satisfied with the level of competency of Ecology and WDFW agency staff. Areas included satisfaction with agency staff working on hydropower projects, including:

- Agency staff demonstrate knowledge and experience in their area of expertise.
- Agency staff are familiar and knowledgeable with project's 401 WQ Certifications.
- Agency staff communicated clearly state requirements and provided technical support.

State agency response to feedback

Properly training and retaining staff is important to the state hydropower regulatory programs. Each agency continues to improve on communication among regional staff for consistency. We have increased the frequency of regular internal meetings and agency headquarter staff oversee technical and policy decisions to improve consistency across all hydropower projects in the state.