

Chapter 77.44 RCW
WARM WATER GAME FISH ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Sections

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RCW 77.44.005 Public interest declaration. The legislature declares that the public and private propagation, production, protection, and enhancement of fish is in the public interest. [1991 c 253 s 1. Formerly RCW 77.18.005.]

RCW 77.44.007 Definitions. Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter.

(1) "Contract" means an agreement setting at a minimum, price, quantity of fish to be delivered, time of delivery, and fish health requirements.

(2) "Fish health requirements" means those site specific fish health and genetic requirements actually used by the department of fish and wildlife in fish stocking.

(3) "Aquatic farmer" means a private sector person who commercially farms and manages private sector cultured aquatic products on the person's own land or on land in which the person has a present right of possession.

(4) "Warm water game fish" includes the following species: Bass, channel catfish, walleye, crappie, and other species as defined by the department. [2000 c 107 s 262; 1993 sp.s. c 2 s 76; 1991 c 253 s 2. Formerly RCW 77.18.010.]

Effective date—1993 sp.s. c 2 ss 1-6, 8-59, and 61-79: See RCW 43.300.900.

RCW 77.44.010 Warm water game fish enhancement program—Created. A warm water game fish enhancement program is created in the department. The enhancement program shall be designed to increase the opportunities to fish for and catch warm water game fish including: Largemouth black bass, smallmouth black bass, channel catfish, black crappie, white crappie, walleye, and tiger musky. The program shall be designed to use a practical applied approach to increasing warm water fishing. The department shall use the funds available efficiently to assure the greatest increase in the fishing for warm water fish at the lowest cost. This approach shall involve the minimization of overhead and administrative costs and the maximization of productive in-the-field activities. [1998 c 191 s 39; 1996 c 222 s 1.]

Effective date—1998 c 191: See note following RCW 77.32.410.

Effective dates—1996 c 222: "(1) Sections 1, 2, and 4 through 6 of this act shall take effect July 1, 1996.

(2) Section 3 of this act shall take effect January 1, 1997."
[1996 c 222 s 8.]

RCW 77.44.030 Freshwater, combination fishing license—

Disposition of fee. (1) As provided in RCW 77.32.440, a portion of each freshwater and combination fishing license fee shall be deposited into the warm water game fish account.

(2) The department shall use the most cost-effective format in designing and administering the warm water game fish surcharge [account].

(3) A warm water game fish account shall be used for enhancement of largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, black crappie, white crappie, channel catfish, and tiger musky. [1998 c 191 s 29; 1996 c 222 s 3.]

Effective date—1998 c 191: See note following RCW 77.32.410.

Effective dates—1996 c 222: See note following RCW 77.44.010.

RCW 77.44.040 Program goals. The goals of the warm water game fish enhancement program are to improve the fishing for warm water game fish using cost-effective management. Development of new ponds and lakes shall be an important and integral part of the program. The department shall work with the department of natural resources to coordinate the reclamation of surface mines and the development of warm water game fish ponds. Improvement of warm water fishing shall be coordinated with the protection and conservation of cold water fish populations. This shall be accomplished by carefully designing the warm water projects to have minimal adverse effects upon the cold water fish populations. New pond and lake development should have beneficial effects upon wildlife due to the increase in lacustrine and wetland habitat that will accompany the improvement of warm water fish habitat. The department shall not develop projects that will increase the populations of undesirable or deleterious fish species such as carp, squawfish, walking catfish, and others.

Fish culture programs shall be used in conditions where they will prove to be cost-effective, and may include the purchase of warm water fish from aquatic farmers defined in RCW 15.85.020. Consideration should be made for development of urban area enhancement of fishing opportunity for put-and-take species, such as channel catfish, that are amenable to production by low-cost fish culture methods. Fish culture shall also be used for stocking of high value species, such as walleye, smallmouth bass, and tiger musky. Introduction of special genetic strains that show high potential for recreational fishing improvement, including Florida strain largemouth bass and striped bass, shall be considered.

Transplantation and introduction of exotic warm water fish shall be carefully reviewed to assure that adverse effects to native fish and wildlife populations do not occur. This review shall include an analysis of consequences from disease and parasite introduction.

Population management through the use of fish toxicants, including rotenone or derris root, shall be an integral part of the warm water game fish enhancement program. However, any use of fish toxicants shall be subject to a thorough review to prevent adverse effects to cold water fish, desirable warm water fish, and other biota. Eradication of deleterious fish species shall be a goal of the program.

Habitat improvement shall be a major aspect of the warm water game fish enhancement program. Habitat improvement opportunities shall be defined with scientific investigations, field surveys, and by using the extensive experience of other state management entities. Installation of cover, structure, water flow control structures, screens, spawning substrate, vegetation control, and other management techniques shall be fully used. The department shall work to gain access to privately owned waters that can be developed with habitat improvements to improve the warm water resource for public fishing.

The department shall use the resources of cooperative groups to assist in the planning and implementation of the warm water game fish enhancement program. In the development of the program the department shall actively involve the organized fishing clubs that primarily fish for warm water fish. The warm water fish enhancement program shall be cooperative between the department and private landowners; private landowners shall not be required to alter the uses of their private property to fulfill the purposes of the warm water fish enhancement program. The director shall not impose restrictions on the use of private property, or take private property, for the purpose of the warm water fish enhancement program. [1996 c 222 s 4.]

Effective dates—1996 c 222: See note following RCW 77.44.010.

RCW 77.44.050 Warm water game fish account—Created—Use of moneys. The warm water game fish account is created in the state treasury. Moneys in the account are subject to legislative appropriation and shall be used for the purpose of funding the warm water game fish enhancement program, including the development of warm water pond and lake habitat, culture of warm water game fish, improvement of warm water fish habitat, management of warm water fish populations, and other practical activities that will improve the fishing for warm water fish. Funds for warm water game fish as provided in RCW 77.32.440 shall not serve as replacement funding for department-operated warm water fish projects existing on December 31, 1994. During the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium, moneys from the warm water game fish account may be transferred to the fish, wildlife, and conservation account. [2025 c 424 s 985; 2020 c 148 s 25; 2009 c 333 s 43; 1999 c 235 s 1; 1996 c 222 s 5.]

Effective date—2025 c 424: See note following RCW 9.46.100.

Intent—Effective date—2020 c 148: See notes following RCW 77.12.170.

Effective date—1999 c 235: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [May 10, 1999]." [1999 c 235 s 4.]

Effective dates—1996 c 222: See note following RCW 77.44.010.

RCW 77.44.060 Specifications—Purchases from aquatic farmers.

If the department requires, pursuant to its authority relative to environmental permits or licenses, that resident hatchery game fish be stocked by the permittee or licensee for mitigation of environmental damage, the department shall specify the pounds or numbers, species, stock, and/or race of resident game fish that are to be provided. The department shall offer the permittee or licensee the option of purchasing under contract from aquatic farmers in Washington, those game fish, unless the fish specified by the department are not available from Washington growers. [1991 c 253 s 3. Formerly RCW 77.18.020.]

RCW 77.44.070 Purchases from aquatic farmers for stocking purposes. Any agency of state or federal government, political subdivision of the state, private or public utility company, corporation, or sports group, or any purchaser of fish under RCW 77.44.060 may purchase resident game fish from an aquatic farmer for stocking purposes if permit requirements of this title and the department have been met. [2001 c 253 s 53; 1991 c 253 s 4. Formerly RCW 77.18.030.]