

OFFICIAL STATE CABINET AGENCY RESPONSE TO PERFORMANCE AUDIT ON ASSESSING THE WORKPLACE CULTURE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE – SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Office of Financial Management provide this management response to the State Auditor's Office performance audit report received on August 18, 2021.

SAO PERFORMANCE AUDIT OBJECTIVES:

This performance audit was a broadly scoped assessment of workplace culture designed to address these questions:

- What factors at the Department of Fish and Wildlife shape its workplace culture?
 - How does the agency's culture affect its performance and ability to achieve its mission?
 - What steps could leadership take to improve the agency's workplace culture?
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Recommendations to the WDFW:

SAO Recommendations 1-3: To ensure managers and staff consistently address unprofessional behavior in the workplace, as described on pages 21-37, we recommend the agency:

1. Develop a professional conduct policy, which clearly identifies the consequences for all types of unprofessional behavior. Establish controls to ensure all employees are aware of and understand the policy. For example, have all employees sign to acknowledge they have read and understand the policy or develop training to educate employees on the policy.
2. Ensure all supervisors receive required training on how to effectively manage personnel, including how to respond to observed or reported incidents of unprofessional behavior. Review training content to ensure it emphasizes the necessary soft skills required to manage personnel.
3. Implement a process, such as 360 evaluations, for employees to provide feedback on their supervisors' behavior and effectiveness.

STATE RESPONSE: WDFW recently completed three new policies directed at creating a respectful workplace. The policies outline specific responsibilities of employees, supervisors and leadership. They also describe specific behaviors that are unacceptable. All staff currently sign the policy acknowledgement each year.

Over the course of the pandemic, virtually all non-COVID safety training was halted to redirect resources to COVID and safety-related training. Efforts include:

- Developed agency values in 2019: accountability, service, professionalism, integrity, respect, and empathy.
 - Developed educational and training materials. Almost all internal messages reference agency values and we have included them in performance expectations.
- Contributing to the statewide DEI training development team by working with OFM to implement enterprise-wide training around DEI.
- Exploring online bystander training.

- Promoted “Picture a Scientist,” a movie in August 2021 that illustrates the toll of gender discrimination and sexual harassment within STEM fields. WDFW also made this film available to all natural resources agencies. A series of reflection sessions is planned for September 2021.
- Review of the mandatory supervisory training that began in August 2021. We plan to restart this training, which includes soft skills and responding to unprofessional behavior, at the beginning of next year (COVID dependent).
- During the 2020-21 evaluation season, the Director’s Office piloted a 360-evaluation process which allowed colleagues and direct reports to provide feedback to executives. We will use the lessons we learned to develop a 360-approach agency-wide.

Action Steps and Time Frame:

- Launch an agency-wide 360 evaluation approach. *By June 31, 2022.*
- Assist with implementing enterprise-wide DEI training. *By December 31, 2022.*
- Review the online bystander training options. *By January 31, 2022.*
- Promoted a movie that illustrates the toll of gender discrimination and sexual harassment within STEM fields. *Completed August 2021.*
- Offer a series of reflection sessions on “Picture a Scientist.” *By September 30, 2021.*
- Review of the Mandatory Supervisory Training. *By December 31, 2021.*
- Restart mandatory supervisory training. *By January 31, 2022 (COVID dependent).*

SAO Recommendation 4: To ensure employees report incidents of unprofessional behavior, as described on page 36, we recommend the agency:

4. Establish clear policies and procedures that outline the investigation process of reports so investigations are handled in a consistent manner and employees know what to expect.

STATE RESPONSE: WDFW updated the Red Flag Reporting page on the agency intranet site in August 2021. The updated page lays out training on how to make a complaint, provides additional resources for making a formal complaint, and provides links to the Employee Assistance Program.

Action Steps and Time Frame:

- Add a summary of the investigative process to the internal Red Flag Reporting webpage. *By January 31, 2022.*

SAO Recommendations 5-7: To help the agency overcome silos and improve communication, as described on pages 38-49, we recommend the agency:

5. Expand opportunities for employees to interact with employees from other programs/regions and different levels of management.
6. Create controls to ensure employees receive and know how to access important information.
7. Establish mechanisms to facilitate regular communication up the chain of command to understand and address the needs and concerns of all employees.

STATE RESPONSE: Since the beginning of the SAO audit, WDFW has undertaken multiple efforts to help break down silos and improve communication.

- The agency continues to grow the use of district teams, which allows cross-program coordination and interaction within regions. District teams are described in the Conservation Policy, which was signed in 2019.
- Regional directors and program directors hold monthly all-staff meetings to share information and hear concerns. Program all-staff meetings began in April 2020. Regional meetings began in most regions in September 2020.
- The agency recently developed an internal communication plan with specific metrics.
- The agency developed an employee engagement action plan to address priority areas tied to specific OFM employee engagement survey questions.
- The deputy director has held an all-staff online “coffee chat” every other Tuesday morning since April 2021. The coffee chats are designed to provide time for staff to communicate directly with the deputy director around topics of broad interest.
- The diversity, equity, and inclusion manager holds an online “Minute with Marvin” every other Tuesday (on the Tuesdays between the coffee chats), where staff explore issues around inclusivity.
- The DEI manager holds listening sessions throughout the state with regional staff to gather input on how WDFW can be an inclusive workplace. This started in March 2021 and will continue for the next several years. The DEI manager briefs the deputy director on outcomes and recommends next steps which then become part of the employee engagement action plan and/or internal communication plan.
- Additionally, the Diversity Advisory Committee plans on creating employee affinity groups to create internal support structures that would be cross-program/cross-region.

Action Steps and Time Frame:

- Launch the first Employee Affinity Group. *By June 30, 2022.*
- Implement internal communication plan and track metrics. *By December 31, 2022.*

SAO Recommendations 8-9: To ensure current and future workplace culture improvement initiatives succeed, as described starting on pages 50-54, we recommend the agency:

8. Review and update the current initiatives to incorporate the following leading practices:
 - a. Use a combination of data sources, including performance metrics and feedback from staff, to regularly assess areas for improvement
 - b. Update existing initiatives or develop new efforts to address the areas for improvement identified in the monitoring assessment from 8a
 - c. Establish performance metrics to evaluate whether the initiatives are successful
 - d. Clearly and consistently communicate the purpose of the initiatives and how they relate to the core values of the agency to employees and other stakeholders
9. Incorporate these leading practices in all future improvement initiatives.

STATE RESPONSE: WDFW's 25-year Strategic Plan describes specific initiatives that WDFW will undertake over the coming 25 years. WDFW encouraged every supervisor to connect staff work to activities in the strategic plan during the 2020-21 evaluation cycle. As the strategic plan matures, WDFW will review and revise to maintain up-to-date metrics and ensure initiatives are well communicated.

Additionally, WDFW recently published Red Flag Reporting dashboards on its intranet. The agency also plans to add its communication metrics on the intranet later this year.

Metrics have also been developed for the priority questions that WDFW is focusing on for improvement in the OFM employee engagement survey. A dashboard to measure progress will be developed by spring of next year.

Action Steps and Time Frame:

- Launch strategic plan tracker to track metrics and implementation. *Completed August 2021.*
 - Encourage all supervisors to connect staff work to activities in the strategic plan during 2020-21 evaluations. *Completed August 2021.*
 - Publish Red Flag Reporting dashboards on the WDFW intranet. *Completed August 2021.*
 - Publish internal communication plan metrics on the WDFW intranet. *By January 31, 2022.*
 - Develop a dashboard for priority questions that WDFW is focusing on for improvement in the state employee engagement survey. *By April 30, 2022.*
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