

PERFORMANCE AUDIT



Office of the
Washington
State Auditor
Pat McCarthy

Assessing the Workplace Culture at the Department of Fish and Wildlife

September 13, 2021

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Executive Summary

State Auditor's Conclusions (page 55)

We conducted this audit in response to publicized incidents of sexual harassment and ongoing concerns from stakeholders about the overall culture at the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). We did not find evidence of a highly sexualized culture. Instead, the information we compiled showed staff who were committed to and enjoyed many aspects of their work, but who also had real concerns about different forms of unprofessional behavior, communication breakdowns across the agency, and a general lack of confidence in management's ability to address these issues.

Executive management has taken a number of important steps during the past several years to address concerns about the agency's culture. Ongoing initiatives could be strengthened by incorporating some of the leading practices we identified. But the most important thing DFW's leaders must do is maintain their commitment to change. Keep focusing on improvement and don't get discouraged. It takes time to build trust.

DFW employees are passionate about their work and appreciate their close colleagues. They want things to get better, but they are also skeptical that changes initiated by the executive management team have staying power. For real change to take hold, leadership must remain committed to the process it has begun.

Background (page 8)

DFW is responsible for conserving native fish and wildlife and their habitat, while also supporting sustainable fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreational opportunities for Washington residents and visitors. The Office of the Washington State Auditor initiated this audit in response to legislators' concerns about past incidents of sexual harassment, inconsistencies in the way employee complaints are reported and resolved, and practices related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Taken together, these concerns suggested problems might exist within DFW's workplace culture. This audit assessed DFW's culture to determine if there are ways agency leaders can promote a more respectful and productive workplace to enable them to better serve the public.

At the team level, DFW employees' strong positive views were driven by a sense of meaningful work, camaraderie and confidence in direct supervisors (page 16)

Most of the DFW employees we communicated with had a positive view of the workplace culture they experienced with their teammates – the people they worked with most closely. The overwhelming majority of DFW employees felt their work was very meaningful. Many DFW employees who frequently work together shared a sense of camaraderie. DFW employees also held mostly positive views of their direct supervisors.

Although sexual harassment was DFW's highest-profile problem, survey responses indicate it is not a pervasive issue (page 20)

DFW has been at the center of high-profile cases of sexual harassment in recent years. DFW said that after the two high-profile incidents, addressing this type of behavior and preventing it from happening again has been an agency priority. Survey responses from DFW employees offer some assurance that sexual harassment is not a pervasive issue, as it was the least reported type of unprofessional behavior. Instead, we identified other more prevalent issues the agency will need to also focus on in addition to continuing efforts to address sexual harassment.

Less positive views of the agency's culture were driven by other types of unprofessional behavior, a perceived lack of accountability and communication challenges (page 21)

People's opinions about the workplace culture at DFW varied depending on the level of the organization they were describing. Employees' views were somewhat less positive when they talked about the agency's overall culture compared to talking about their teams. There are many employees who enjoy their work, coworkers and immediate supervisor, yet still have concerns about certain aspects of working at the agency. During the course of the audit, we identified three

factors that drove negative views of the agency's culture, which were employees' experiences with unprofessional behavior, a perceived lack of accountability, and a desire for better two-way communication. The remainder of this report illuminates their perspectives.

Employees described widespread unprofessional behavior that has not been successfully addressed, lessening trust in agency leadership (page 23)

Staff expressed concerns about a variety of unprofessional behaviors at DFW that were unrelated to sexual harassment, but were also less likely to be addressed. The most frequently cited type of unprofessional behavior was bullying in various forms, but employees also described other problematic behaviors, including perceived discrimination, retaliation and legal or ethical violations. When it is not addressed effectively, such unprofessional behavior harms staff morale and wellbeing, ultimately affecting workplace culture.

Employees described a pattern of unprofessional behavior that management had not consistently or effectively addressed: among their greatest concerns was a perceived lack of accountability for those behaving unprofessionally at work. The agency's HR department has history of low morale and high turnover, which also contributed to negative staff perceptions around accountability. DFW has taken steps to address the issues within the HR department, including hiring a new director in 2019. The internal culture within HR has shown significant improvement in the last year, but wider agency perceptions take time to change. Clearer policies and procedures for handling complaints could improve staff perceptions of accountability and the reporting process.

DFW has not been consistent in evaluating employee conduct in the past. It is now showing improvement. Increasing opportunities for staff to provide input on supervisor performance could help ensure agency values and expectations are followed. To increase consistency in addressing personnel issues across the agency, managers may need more guidance and training. Finally, consistent and transparent accountability could build trust and encourage more staff to report incidents.

Management can prioritize more open, transparent, two-way communication to strengthen trust and cohesion throughout the agency (page 38)

The history and structure of DFW have created workplace silos that have contributed to communication challenges, which in turn have diminished employee trust in management and hindered cooperation across programs.

Infrequent interaction with management left some staff less confident in the agency's ability to address their needs. Poorly communicated decisions left some staff feeling they could not do their jobs properly. Field staff need to understand the agency's positions and the rationale behind its decisions to effectively communicate with the public and enforce those decisions. Employees also want reassurance that decisions made by management are evidence-based. Some people became less engaged when they felt managers didn't listen or seriously consider their suggestions. Some also believed program silos hindered collaboration and led to inefficiencies.

DFW has taken steps to address silos and communication issues, but it can do more. Implementing leading practices may help it overcome silos and help employees feel more connected.

DFW has taken steps to improve workplace culture, and more can be done to gain staff confidence and ensure long-term success (page 50)

Since 2017, DFW has taken steps to improve its workplace culture by addressing past incidents and agency challenges. Employees saw these initiatives as positive steps, yet many remained skeptical of lasting improvements. While DFW has laid the foundation, adding leading practices may make it more likely improvement efforts will succeed over time. So far, DFW has used few of these practices in its cultural improvement initiatives. Cultural change can take years, so DFW should persist in its efforts.

Recommendations (page 56)

We made a series of recommendations to the Department of Fish and Wildlife to improve its processes for identifying, reporting and investigating unprofessional behavior, including consequences for unprofessional behavior. We also recommend DFW establish and follow through on improving agencywide communication around workplace behavior and improvement initiatives.

Next steps

Our performance audits of state programs and services are reviewed by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) and/or by other legislative committees whose members wish to consider findings and recommendations on specific topics. Representatives of the Office of the State Auditor will review this audit with JLARC's Initiative 900 Subcommittee in Olympia. The public will have the opportunity to comment at this hearing. Please check the JLARC website for the exact date, time and location (www.leg.wa.gov/JLARC). The Office conducts periodic follow-up evaluations to assess the status of recommendations and may conduct follow-up audits at its discretion. See **Appendix A**, which addresses the I-900 areas covered in the audit. **Appendix B** contains information about our methodology. See the **Bibliography** for a list of references and resources used to develop our understanding of workplace culture

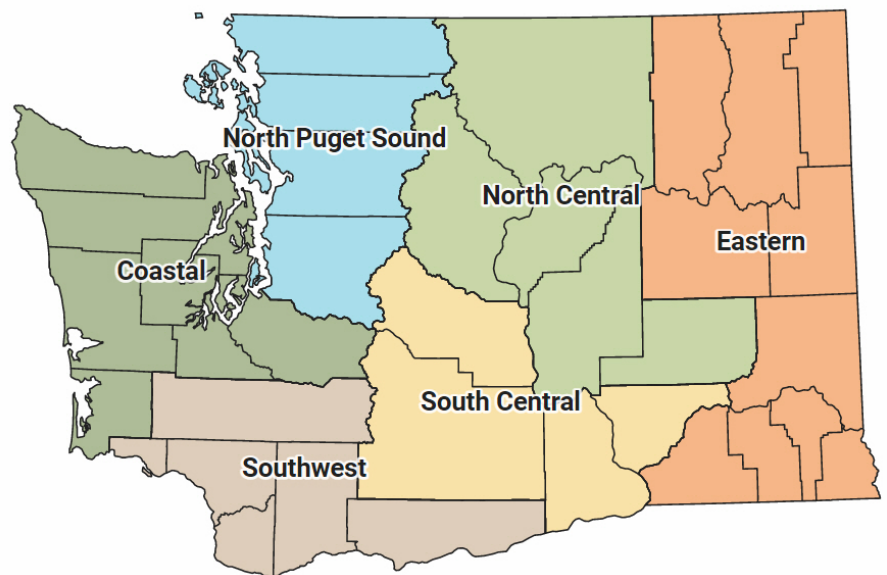
Background

The Department of Fish and Wildlife balances conservation and recreation across Washington

In 1994, the state Legislature merged the Department of Fisheries and the Department of Wildlife to form a single agency, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), overseen by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. The new agency's mission was "to preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities." DFW manages dozens of wildlife areas and hundreds of water-access areas around the state to conserve native fish and wildlife and their habitat.

DFW's complex organizational structure is divided into six regions (shown in the map in **Exhibit 1**), each with its own regional office and management team. DFW also operates six programs within the regions, each with specialized policy issues to manage. Some policy issues are region-specific and at times controversial, ranging from cougar and wolf population control in Eastern Washington, to orca whale conservation in coastal regions. Three of DFW's programs (Fish, Wildlife, Habitat) are responsible for collecting scientific data on species and habitat statewide to help shape policy and regulations. The Capital Asset Management Program (known as CAMP) executes the agency's \$178 million capital budget by building and maintaining structures, such as fish hatcheries. The Technology and Financial Management team provides support for technology, administration, and marketing and sales for licenses the agency issues. Finally, DFW's police enforce laws and regulations related to human-wildlife conflict, hunting and fishing, and protecting fish, wildlife and habitats. DFW also spends significant effort coordinating conservation and recreation activities with 29 federally recognized tribal governments.

Exhibit 1 – Map of Department of Fish and Wildlife regions



Source: DFW.wa.gov.

DFW is the state's eighth-largest agency, with about 1,800 employees. About a third are based in Olympia; the rest are stationed in more than 120 communities across the state, with half of those locations having fewer than five DFW employees.

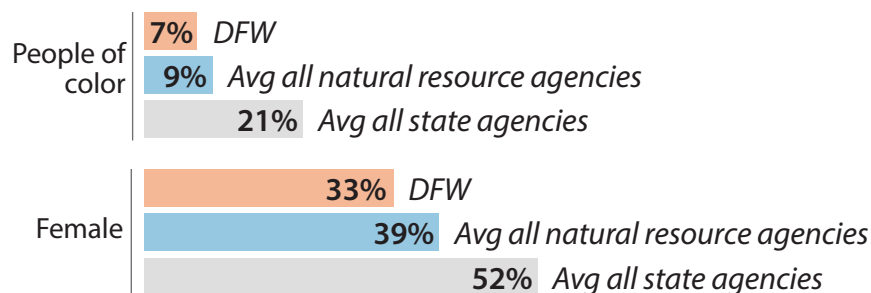
Like many natural resource agencies, DFW lacks diversity in its workforce

State agencies focused on natural resource management often struggle with attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. In Washington, the Department of Ecology, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, and the Parks and Recreation Commission all rank among the lowest – and below the state average – in key demographic areas: race, ethnicity and gender.

According to 2020 data published by the state's Office of Financial Management (OFM), DFW is one of the least diverse in these areas when compared to averages from all state agencies as well as other natural resource agencies (see Exhibit 2). It has the second-lowest percentage of people of color in its workforce (7 percent) and the fourth-lowest percentage of female employees (33 percent). The average for all state agencies combined is much higher in both these demographic areas: people of color form 21 percent, women 52 percent, of the state's workforce.

Exhibit 2 – Diversity data for race and gender

Dept of Fish & Wildlife compared to average for natural resource agencies and state average

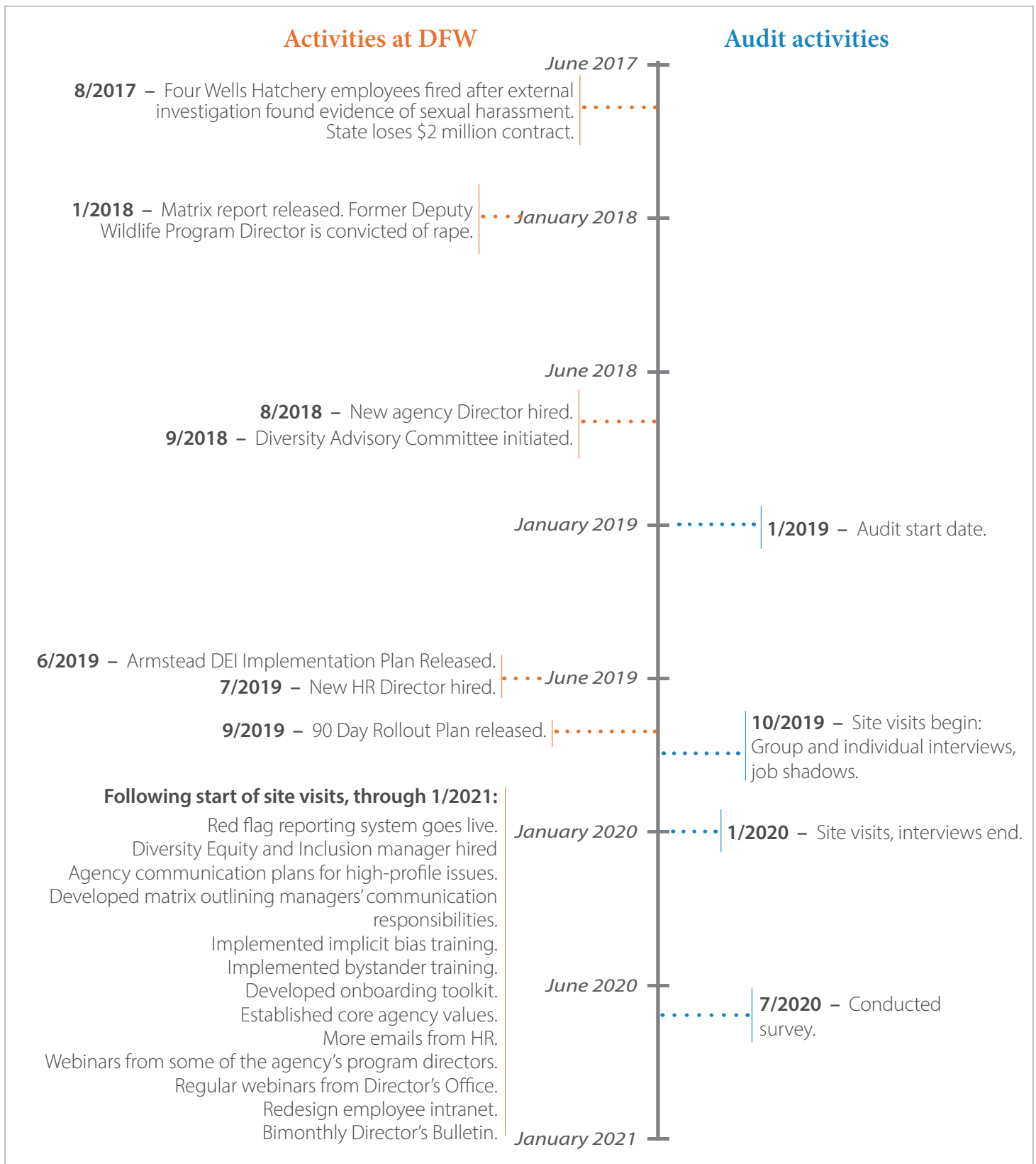


Source: OFM 2020 state agency data.

The agency faced significant and high-profile incidents of sexual harassment in 2017 and 2018

Research shows that predominantly male organizations are more likely to experience higher reported rates of sexual harassment (“Workplace Sexual Harassment: Experts Suggest Expanding Data Collection to Improve Understanding of Prevalence and Costs,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, September 2020). While independently collected data on the rate of reported sexual harassment at DFW was unavailable prior to this audit, DFW has been the subject of considerable media attention since 2017 due to two high-profile incidents of sexual assault and harassment. The timeline in Exhibit 3, on the following page, illustrates key dates of events and activities discussed in this report.

Exhibit 3 – Timeline of DFW workplace activities and audit activities



Source: Auditor created from DFW and audit data.

In 2017, DFW hired a private investigator to look into complaints of sexual harassment and other misconduct at Wells Hatchery, one of DFW's remote fish hatcheries located in Okanogan County. The investigation confirmed most of the allegations and concluded there was a "sexualized atmosphere" at Wells Hatchery. As a result, four employees were fired, including the complex manager, who was found to have condoned and personally contributed to the sexual atmosphere. State operation of the hatchery was shut down immediately following publication of the investigator's report, costing DFW a \$2 million contract.

In 2018, a former deputy director for the Wildlife Program was convicted and sentenced to prison for raping a staff member after an employee holiday party in 2014. Several other women at DFW came forward during an independent investigation immediately following the incident, claiming either to have been harassed by the same deputy director or to have witnessed his inappropriate behavior. The investigation revealed that management had received at least two complaints about the deputy director prior to the investigation.

In the years that have followed, DFW took a number of steps to address sexual harassment. For example, the agency established an anonymous reporting hotline and developed bystander training, which teaches employees when and how to intervene if they observe harmful or hurtful behaviors in the workplace. DFW also formed a Sexual Harassment Prevention sub-committee within its new Diversity Advisory Committee.

Legislators and other stakeholders have expressed concerns about DFW's workplace culture

During the scoping phase of this audit, legislators and stakeholders, including union representatives, members of the Fish and Wildlife Commission and agency officials, expressed their concerns about DFW's diversity challenges and instances of sexual harassment. They also noted issues around accountability, communication and silos between programs. Research indicates that many of the issues described by stakeholders are risk factors associated with underlying cultural problems within an organization.

Among the organizational risk factors researchers identify are:

- Male dominated and lacking diversity
- Complex hierarchy that impedes the flow of information up, down and across the organization
- Failure to enforce codes of conduct and related policies and procedures
- Lack of accountability, especially at the senior manager or executive management levels

The materials we used to understand these issues are listed in the "Organizational culture resources and methodology" section in the Bibliography.

Organizational culture affects employee morale and thus an organization's ability to achieve its goals and objectives

Workplace culture is often described as the patterns found in beliefs, perceptions and experiences of the people within an organization. These intangible models are manifested through conduct – the tangible actions, behaviors and decisions of individuals. Culture goes beyond individual experiences, as a single event directly experienced by one person can have a cascading and lasting effect on the perceptions of all those who witnessed the event or believe accounts of it to be true. (See “Organizational culture resources and methodology” section in the Bibliography for further references and resources.)

The Institute of Internal Auditors' (IIA) guide *Auditing Culture* notes that “a positive, affirmative, open culture supports the organization's attainment of its goals and objectives because it generally creates a more enjoyable place to work, enhances productivity, and leads to overall improved performance.” An organization's culture deteriorates if unethical employees can “operate freely until their behavior becomes the norm, and other employees who behave honestly may leave the organization or become corrupt themselves.” When unethical behavior becomes acceptable among employees at all levels, there is clearly a negative effect on organizational productivity and performance.

This audit examined the workplace culture at DFW

Due to the wide range of issues stakeholders raised about broader cultural problems within DFW, our Office conducted a broadly scoped workplace culture audit. The audit was not designed to review only the consequences of past issues within the agency. Instead, we sought to gain a more complete understanding of the workplace culture at DFW to better identify recommendations that would provide the most benefit to the agency without making predetermined conclusions about what the main issues were. Therefore, this audit was designed to address the following questions:

1. What factors at the Department of Fish and Wildlife shape its workplace culture?
2. How does the agency's culture affect its performance and ability to achieve its mission?
3. What steps could leadership take to improve the agency's workplace culture?

Because the evidence needed to understand an organization's culture comes from the direct and indirect experience of its employees, one of the most effective ways to assess that culture is to engage with as many employees as possible, using a combination of techniques. Drawing on research methods used in the field of applied cultural anthropology, we employed a two-stage approach to data collection:

- In the first phase, we employed a variety of qualitative methods to gain a rich understanding of DFW's workplace culture and to identify key themes.
- In the second phase, we administered an agencywide survey of DFW employees to determine how isolated or widespread the themes were throughout the agency.

These two phases are summarized in the following sections. Please see appendices B through E for more detailed explanations of the methods and summaries of the data we collected.

Qualitative research to understand and identify key themes in DFW's culture

In the first phase of audit fieldwork, we conducted qualitative research – group and individual interviews, job shadows, and meetings with regional management – in order to hear directly from employees about their experience working at DFW. In total, we spoke with 222 of DFW's approximately 1,800 employees, comprising people from every region and program of the agency.

DFW employees were invited to participate in these activities through sampling strategies that together would generate a detail-rich data set. Our research design aimed for maximum variation, which allowed us to learn about the experiences of a very broad range of DFW employees (for example, people working on different sides of the state) and then identify what they have in common to begin to understand the factors influencing culture at the agency.

“Maximum variation sampling ... aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principle outcomes that cut across a great deal of participants or program variation... Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program.”

Michael Quinn Patton, (*Designing Qualitative Studies*, 1990)

In the qualitative phase of data gathering, our goal was to develop rapport so that people felt comfortable sharing their honest views and details of their experiences. Since the purpose was to understand the experience of the individual, each research encounter was different, with follow-up questions responding to the topics of interest and of greatest concern for that person. In group settings, we did not seek to reach consensus, but rather to hear a variety of differing individual perspectives.

We did not restrict comments to a set time period because long-serving employees bring their past experiences to work with them every day and may share those memories with newer employees. However, comments about events that occurred more than 10 years ago were not usually factored into our analysis.

The notes and transcripts from these various activities were treated as a single data set and coded by audit staff to identify themes. Experienced interviewers conducted all activities – group interviews, individual interviews and job shadows – and avoided leading questions or sharing comments other interviewees made. When analysis found similar topics and experiences were reported independently by respondents who did not know each other, the result suggested that we had identified a common theme in the organization's culture.

Quantitative survey to assess the prevalence of the key cultural themes

In the second phase of audit fieldwork, we formulated these themes into survey questions. We designed the survey to help us understand how isolated or widespread those experiences and attitudes were across the entire agency; to identify if they were more prevalent in some programs or regions; and to indicate if they had been overrepresented in the qualitative data and were not actually widespread in the agency. We invited all DFW employees to take the survey; we received more than 800 responses, which represents almost half of all agency employees.

Combining the qualitative research, quantitative survey and other sources

In this report, we share the results of our survey of DFW employees and other surveys next to extracts from the qualitative data because they illuminate each other. The survey data show how common the attitude or experience was, and the words of DFW employees illustrate the variety of experiences that shaped that attitude or belief.

Furthermore, we did not apply one uniform standard as a threshold for significance. In some cases, we found that a pattern was significant because it was widespread and common across multiple regions and programs. In other cases, the pattern might have been more isolated yet highly concerning because of the nature of the issue. In all cases, the direct testimony of DFW employees gave us confidence that patterns of behavior we identified from multiple, independent sources were representative of the workplace dynamics at DFW. Furthermore, these interviewees repeatedly said they were willing to be forthcoming, honest and frank about their experiences precisely because they saw the State Auditor's Office as impartial, independent and – most importantly – outside of the chain of command of their employment.

Where relevant comparisons were available, we also compared DFW to similar state agencies using performance indicators from OFM and results from the statewide employee engagement survey. We identified eight agencies that were similar to DFW in either mission or size for comparison purposes because, as a large natural resources agency, the factors influencing DFW's culture may be similar to other large agencies, to other natural resource agencies, or both.

The very nature of soliciting employee opinions means the results will reflect the views and experiences of those who volunteered to respond. To address any potential bias in the groups of people we spoke with, we confirmed findings described in this report using more than one data collection method. We also checked to see if the patterns we identified were prevalent in every program and region, repeatedly reported through various group and individual interviews, or posed high risk to the agency. While we did not attempt to investigate or verify any of the incidents employees reported, we included them in our findings because we found these incidents had influenced employee views of DFW's culture. Findings discussed in this report are based primarily on employee experiences, which drive beliefs, subsequent behaviors, and – ultimately – the organization's culture.

Note: Throughout this report, we often refer to “group and individual interviews” as shorthand for all of our qualitative data collection activities. This term includes job shadows and regional management meetings, which we consider to be types of interviews.

For additional information on our methodology, see Appendix B, which includes an overview of sampling strategies, data collection activities, analysis approaches and participant characteristics. **Appendix C** contains a summary of our initial analysis of this qualitative work. **Appendix D** contains a summary of the results of our employee survey. **Appendix E** contains summary tables of the OFM comparison results. Finally, our Bibliography lists references and resources we used to develop our understanding of workplace culture and outline best practices.

Audit Results

At the team level, DFW employees’ strong positive views were driven by a sense of meaningful work, camaraderie and confidence in direct supervisors

Workplace culture can be experienced at different levels of an organization, from the overarching organizational culture to smaller subcultures within regions, divisions and work sites. The majority of the DFW employees we communicated with had a positive view of the workplace culture they experienced with their teammates – the people they worked with most closely. More than three-quarters of survey respondents agreed with the statement, “I have a positive view of workplace culture on my team” (see Exhibit 4a). Results were high across all programs, and highest in the Director’s Office and the Capital Asset Management Program (CAMP). In group and individual interviews, employees often spoke positively about their teams.

“I love my whole little group of people.... They’re all kind, they’re all professional. Easy to come to work because of people you work with.”

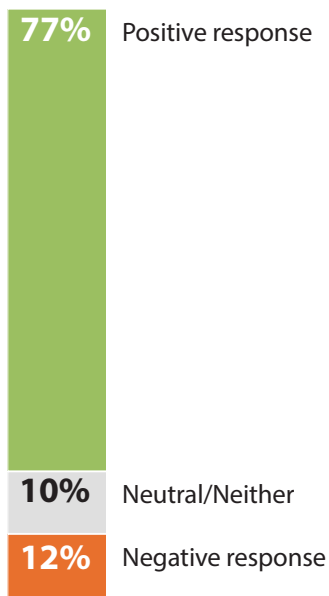


Quotes appearing in *italics* in the Results section of the report are drawn from conversations held during various interviews.

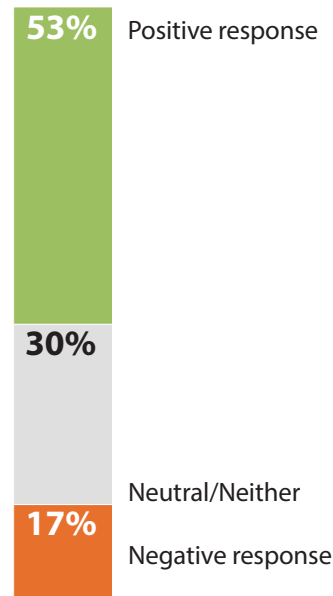


Exhibit 4a, 4b – Views on team culture

I have a positive view of workplace culture on my team



The culture on my team has improved in the last year



Furthermore, the positive perception of culture on teams may be growing stronger. Slightly more than half of survey respondents thought the culture on their teams had improved in the past year (Exhibit 4b).

Source: Auditor survey.

The overwhelming majority of DFW employees felt their work was very meaningful

Nearly 90 percent of survey respondents were passionate about the issues they work on (Exhibit 5). In group and individual interviews, people described having a lifelong interest in the outdoors – fish and wildlife, hunting and conservation. People possessed expertise developed through years of experience and academic study. Because they saw their work as important, they worked hard at their jobs. Employees also described a shared sense of purpose, and said they liked working at an organization where their colleagues were similarly motivated and hardworking.

“I value the work, and I know I’ve made a difference in the protection of the resource and have improved conditions of my home state.”

“I came here because ever since I was a kid I wanted to work with fish. And the purpose is still there.... You feel that in the whole agency.”

Many DFW employees who frequently work together shared a sense of camaraderie

About three-quarters of those who took the 2018, 2019 and 2020 State Employee Engagement Survey said a spirit of cooperation and teamwork existed in their workgroup (Exhibit 6). This was on par with the comparison agencies’ average score. In group and individual interviews, employees described positive relationships and friendships with team members. For many, this spirit of camaraderie was rooted in a shared sense of purpose, effective teamwork and mutual support. They said they could turn to for each other for help – either for work or emotional support – which helped them be resilient in the face of challenges they encountered. This spirit of camaraderie, especially within teams, made work more enjoyable and motivated them to work hard and stay with the agency.

“As far as being on teams, the teams I’ve participated on, everyone is motivated. There’s a lot of energy and interest. It’s like ‘go team go.’ It’s fun to be a part of.”

“One of the best things about my job is 97% of the people that work in [my program] are fantastic, wonderful. If I broke my leg, I’d have dinners, it’s family like that.”

Exhibit 5 – I feel passionate about the issues I work on



Source: Auditor survey.

Exhibit 6 – A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my workgroup

Percent answering ‘yes’



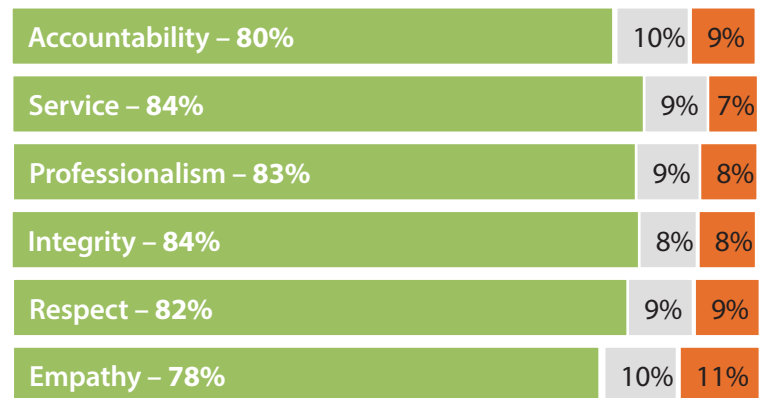
Source: OFM Employee Engagement Survey.

DFW employees held mostly positive views of their direct supervisors

More than three-quarters of survey respondents believed their direct supervisor upheld each of the agency's stated values: accountability, service, professionalism, integrity, respect and empathy (Exhibit 7). Many employees also described having a very good relationship with their immediate supervisor.

Survey results show that more than 80 percent of respondents believed they are trusted to execute their duties without being micromanaged (Exhibit 8). About the same percentage said they would feel comfortable reporting inappropriate behavior to their supervisor (Exhibit 9a), and would feel confident their supervisor would take appropriate action to address safety concerns (Exhibit 9b).

Exhibit 7 – My immediate supervisor models the following values:



Source: Auditor survey data.

Exhibit 8 – My direct supervisor trusts me to do my job effectively without micromanaging



Source: Auditor survey.

Exhibit 9a, 9b – Reporting issues to my direct supervisor

I would feel comfortable reporting unethical or inappropriate behavior



Source: Auditor survey.

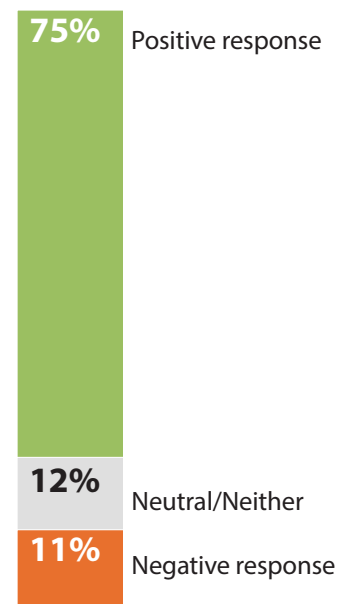
If I were to report a safety concern, I am confident they would take necessary action to make me feel safe



A similar proportion (three-quarters) felt their supervisor cared about their professional development (Exhibit 10).

“It really helps when we have a supervisor that is able to help connect the team, and I feel like most of mine have. They’re just another part of the team. They’re not really considering themselves, like, higher or anything like that. I feel like it’s a pretty good community, and ... they’ve all been where we are. So we know they know what we’re going through, and they can empathize and understand...”

Exhibit 10 – My supervisor cares about my professional development



Source: Auditor survey.

Although sexual harassment was DFW's highest-profile problem, survey responses indicate it is not a pervasive issue

DFW was at the center of high-profile cases of sexual harassment in recent years. Two highly publicized incidents of sexual harassment raised concerns from stakeholders about the prevalence of this type of behavior throughout the agency, which contributed to the initiation of this audit. (See the Background section for more detail.)

DFW told us that after these two incidents, addressing this type of behavior and preventing it from happening again has been an agency priority. The current agency director, who joined DFW in August 2018, has expressed a commitment to improving the agency's workplace culture through new initiatives and investments. These actions included establishing an anonymous reporting hotline, developing bystander training, and forming a sexual harassment committee. We discuss the cultural improvement initiatives the agency has taken in section 6 of this report.

Sexual harassment is a very serious matter, and once it is discovered, organizations rightly fear it may be more widespread than previously assumed. The survey responses from DFW employees offer some assurance that this is not currently the case: sexual harassment was the least frequently described type of unprofessional behavior at DFW workplaces. Two percent of all survey respondents, and 4 percent of female respondents, said they experienced sexual comments or unwanted sexual advances within the last year. Six percent said they had witnessed it happening to someone else. These numbers generally correlate to national averages established by a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) survey of workplace sexual harassment. However, the gravity of these experiences should not be diminished due to the potentially devastating effects they can have on those experiencing sexual harassment. During our conversations with staff that had experienced sexual harassment, some described suffering from physical and emotional distress. Therefore, performing better than the national average would help DFW fully achieve its agency goal of developing a “culture that promotes physical and emotional safety.”

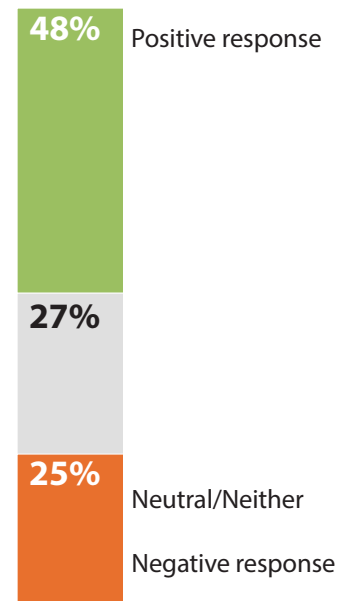
Less positive views of the agency’s culture were driven by other types of unprofessional behavior, a perceived lack of accountability and communication challenges

People’s opinions about the workplace culture at DFW varied depending on the level of the organization they were describing. Overall, employees’ views were somewhat less positive when people talked about the agency’s overall culture. Not quite half (48 percent) of survey respondents agreed with the statement, “I have a positive view of workplace culture at my agency” (Exhibit 11). Survey results for questions about agency-wide culture varied widely across programs, with views being most positive in CAMP (81 percent agreed) and least positive in the Enforcement Program (27 percent agreed). We discuss some of the factors we believe contributed to these lower scores on the overall agency culture in this and following sections of our report.

As the rest of our report shows, while many DFW employees enjoy their work, coworkers and immediate supervisor, they may also have concerns about certain aspects of working at the agency. This report brings forward their concerns. Furthermore, it is important to consider the experiences of the minority. For example, 23 percent of survey respondents indicated morale is low on their team – this represents more than 400 employees for whom the effects of low morale are very real. Their views could have effects on the larger organization.

We have prepared this report in the spirit of supporting the agency as it endeavors to make DFW a better place to work. For example, in its 25-year strategic plan, the agency set forth an ambitious goal that 90 percent of employees would recommend DFW as a great place to work, a question on the Employee Engagement Survey. This is a target no comparison agency has currently achieved. DFW’s result on that question has been improving in the last three years, from 63 percent responding positively in 2018 to 69 percent in 2020. This report elaborates on some of the negative factors affecting workplace culture so that agency leadership and management can continue to make DFW a more supportive, positive work environment.

Exhibit 11 – I have a positive view of workplace culture at my agency



Source: Auditor survey.

We identified issues the agency will need to focus on to further improve agency culture

During the course of the audit, we identified three factors that drove negative views of the agency’s culture. They were: employees’ experiences with unprofessional behavior; perceived lack of accountability; and desire for better two-way

communication. Although people discussed several other workplace culture concerns with us, we chose to focus on these three factors because:

- They were prominent in the results of our analyses (in both the employee survey and discussions with staff)
- They were raised by employees in every region and program
- Stakeholders expressed particular concern about these areas
- We believe DFW can take action to address these factors to strengthen its workplace culture

The next sections of our report explore these contributing factors to DFW's workplace culture, their effect on employee morale and performance, and the agency's efforts to address them.

Employees described widespread unprofessional behavior that has not been successfully addressed, lessening trust in agency leadership

Summary of results

The audit found that unprofessional behaviors unrelated to sexual harassment are more common at DFW but also less likely to be addressed. The most frequently cited type of unprofessional behavior was bullying in various forms, but employees also described other problematic behaviors, including perceived discrimination, retaliation and legal or ethical violations. When it is not addressed effectively, such unprofessional behavior harms staff morale and wellbeing, ultimately affecting workplace culture.

Employees described a pattern of unprofessional behavior that management had not consistently or effectively addressed: among their greatest concerns was a perceived lack of accountability for those behaving badly at work. The agency's HR department has history of low morale and high turnover, which also contributed to negative staff perceptions around accountability. DFW has taken steps to address issues in HR, which has shown significant improvement in the last year, although wider agency perceptions take time to change. Clearer policies and procedures for handling complaints could improve staff perceptions of accountability and the reporting process.

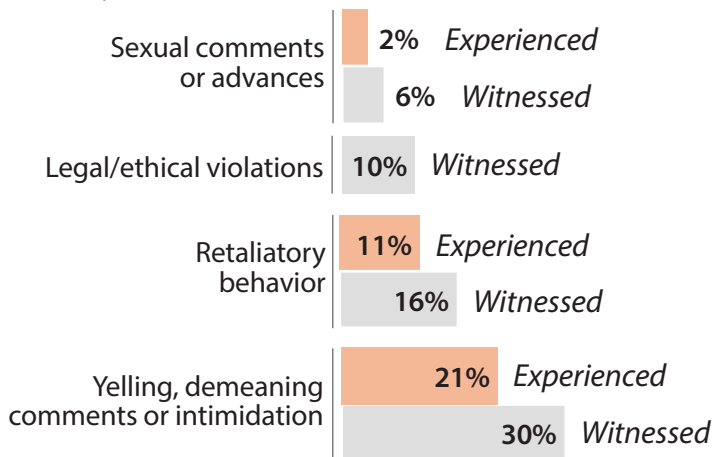
DFW has not been consistent in evaluating employee conduct in the past. It is now showing improvement. Increasing opportunities for staff to provide input on supervisor performance could help ensure agency values and expectations are followed. To increase consistency in addressing personnel issues across the agency, managers may need more guidance and training. Finally, consistent and transparent accountability could build trust and encourage more staff to report incidents.

Unprofessional behaviors unrelated to sexual harassment are more common at DFW but also less likely to be addressed

Sexual harassment in any workplace setting is the highest concern for both management and workers. Several years ago, this was the case at DFW, but it is not the agency's most prevalent or concerning issue now. Rather, our group interviews, individual interviews and employee survey responses indicate other unprofessional behavior is far more common in many areas of the agency's workplaces.

As Exhibit 12 shows, it was far more common for employees of either sex to experience verbal abuse or to suspect their colleagues of retaliatory behavior or unethical behavior, than to see or experience sexual harassment. For example, about one-fifth of survey respondents said they had directly experienced someone yelling at them, making demeaning comments or attempting to intimidate them in the last year. Bystanders were also affected: a third of respondents said they had witnessed such things happening to someone else. Other problematic behaviors – including perceived discrimination, retaliation, or legal and ethical violations – were also almost twice as likely to be observed as sexual comments or advances. Nonetheless, these types of unprofessional behavior can harm staff morale and wellbeing, affecting workplace culture.

Exhibit 12 – Unprofessional behavior experienced by DFW staff in the last year



Source: 2019-2020 auditor survey of DFW staff.

When employees elaborated on their concerns, they described a workplace in which management did not address patterns of unprofessional behavior consistently or effectively. Indeed, the perceived lack of accountability for unprofessional behavior was one of their most often expressed problems.

One factor that contributed to this perception was the inconsistent responses given to employee complaints by DFW’s Human Resources (HR) department. Employees who turned to the HR team for support in dealing with bad behavior on the part of a colleague or supervisor were too-often disappointed, complaining of unreliable service. The agency’s HR department has a history of low morale and high turnover. DFW management took action by hiring a new HR director, and employee engagement within HR has shown significant improvement in the last year.

This section of our report reflects employee survey responses, as well as comments made in interview settings, from 2019 and 2020. As such, they reflect people’s experiences with problematic behavior and inattention by management in the preceding years. Although DFW may have taken action, wider agency perceptions take time to change.

The most frequently cited type of unprofessional behavior was bullying in various forms

Survey responses and results from group and individual interviews show bullying and general harassment were much more common in the workplace than any other form of unprofessional behavior. As Exhibit 13 shows, 21 percent of our survey respondents said they had directly experienced yelling, demeaning comments or intimidation in the last year and 30 percent said they had witnessed it happening to someone else. This type of behavior was reported by employees in every program and region within the agency.

Group and individual interview participants who had experienced this type of behavior described other DFW employees screaming and cursing at them, physically threatening or intimidating them aggressively, or being berated in front of coworkers. Almost 45 percent of survey respondents who experienced this type of behavior said it happened at least monthly or more often.

“I’ve been yelled at, cussed at by my supervisor. I mean, screamed at.”

“It was a person much larger than me, basically threatening my job and then stepping into me and pushing his finger at my chest.”

The percentages of people at DFW reporting abusive behaviors in the workplace are higher than the national average for bullying. The Workplace Bullying Institute, an organization focused on understanding workplace bullying and reducing its occurrence, conducts surveys every few years as part of its research program. According to its national 2021 survey, 13 percent of respondents said they had experienced this type of behavior at work in the last year, compared to 21 percent at DFW. The same percentage said they had witnessed it happening to someone else, compared to 30 percent at DFW.

Exhibit 13 – In the past year, have you experienced unprofessional behavior such as yelling, demeaning comments or intimidation?

National data

13% Yes, directed at me¹

13% Yes, directed at others¹

Auditor survey data

21% Yes, directed at me²

30% Yes, directed at others²

33% Heard about indirectly²

48% No, have not heard about or experienced²

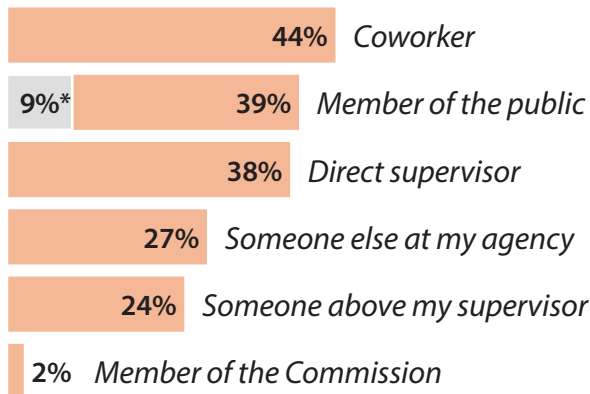
Sources: 1. Workplace Bullying Institute 2021 national survey. 2. Auditor survey data.

A note on comparisons to Workplace Bullying Institute data

Results from the Workplace Bullying Institute’s 2021 national survey were from a time period covered in its entirety by the COVID-19 pandemic—a time period the national report says created an uptick in bullying, with 25 percent of national survey respondents reporting an increase in bullying as a result of remote work. DFW survey respondents were asked about their experience in July 2020 for the entire previous year, most of which fell outside the parameters of the pandemic.

Although most DFW staff held positive views of their colleagues and supervisors (as discussed in this report’s first section), this was not true for everyone. As Exhibit 14 shows, the aggressor in most of the staff-described bullying and harassment incidents occurring within the organization was a coworker or direct supervisor.

Exhibit 14 – Of the 21% of staff who experienced yelling, demeaning comments or intimidation, it came directly from:



*Note: 9% said this behavior was exclusively external or from a member of the public.
 Source: Auditor survey data.

Furthermore, as the second bar in Exhibit 14 shows, many people who experienced aggression within the agency also regularly encounter similar aggression from members of the public. These employees more likely work directly with people outside the agency, for example in customer service or enforcement roles. The behaviors of the general public are outside DFW’s control. However, only a small number, about 15 people, said they experienced aggression only from the public (noted in Appendix D). For the rest who are experiencing the stresses of abusive behavior from multiple sources both within and outside the agency, it is all the more important that DFW fully support these staff by resolving the issues they do have control over.

Employees also described other problematic behaviors, including perceived discrimination, retaliation and legal or ethical violations

Although aggression was the most commonly reported unprofessional behavior experienced by staff, other concerning behaviors brought up by staff were perceived gender discrimination, retaliatory behavior, and legal or ethical violations (shown in Exhibit 12). Survey respondents and employees in group and individual interviews voiced numerous concerns of a serious nature about these behaviors. We did not verify particular claims or verify if they had already been reported to DFW’s Internal Audit Office, as it was not necessary to understanding employee perceptions around unprofessional behavior and the effect those perceptions have on DFW’s workplace culture.

Perceived gender discrimination

As is the case at other natural resource agencies (see the background section of this report), employees at DFW are primarily male. This could explain why one of the bigger concerns we heard from staff was perceived discrimination against women. Of the 172 survey respondents who said they experienced aggressive behavior, 20 percent said they believed gender was a factor. Furthermore, about one-quarter of group and individual interview participants (more than 50 people) described what they perceived to be gender discrimination.

Gender discrimination was described in the following ways:

- Women must work harder than men to prove their abilities
- Women and their input were not taken seriously. For example, three women cited instances when their ideas were ignored, while the same suggestion made by a man was well-received and carried more weight.
- Women were offered fewer opportunities for training or advancement within the agency than men
- Women were treated differently or with less respect by both the public and male DFW employees

Legal or ethical violations

Ten percent of survey respondents indicated they had witnessed a DFW employee commit what they believed were legal or ethical violations in the past year. Accounts of this behavior were described by employees in every program and region. Some of the examples given in group and individual interviews included:

- Unethical use or issuance of untracked hunting permits between managers
- Allowing the over-harvesting of game
- Mismanagement of funds through inaccurate record-keeping or non-transparent data. Several people, in separate interviews, said that when they brought the mismanagement of funds or data issues to the attention of management, they were told to “leave it alone.”
- Unethical hiring or promotion practices exhibiting favoritism. Examples included hiring an employee’s family member, hiring someone unqualified, or rewriting a job description to fit a specific person.

Retaliatory behavior

About a tenth (11 percent) of survey respondents described experiencing what they perceived as retaliatory behavior in the workplace. More than half of the incidents of retaliation were alleged to be committed by managers or supervisors. Accounts of this behavior were described in every program and region. Group and individual interview participants who experienced or witnessed retaliation described it as a

consequence of reporting inappropriate or unethical behavior, speaking up to or challenging a supervisor, providing negative feedback about a supervisor or the agency, and, in a few cases, for speaking with the auditors during the course of this audit. Retaliation took many forms: official letters of reprimand in their employee files; job duties taken away or reduced; suddenly receiving bad evaluations that were out of character; and being fired or forced out of the agency.

When not addressed effectively, unprofessional behavior harms staff morale and wellbeing, ultimately affecting workplace culture

Persistent unprofessional behavior harms the overall workplace culture and can negate otherwise positive aspects for some employees. Research shows that these kinds of unprofessional behaviors in the workplace can lead to low self-esteem, stress, depression and physical illness among employees. The negative atmosphere can affect the wider organization, resulting in reduced productivity, loss of reputation, and the inability to recruit or retain good employees. (See the “Unprofessional Behavior and Trust” section in the Bibliography for references and resources.)

At DFW, unprofessional behavior has likely contributed to low morale. Although most DFW employees felt a sense of camaraderie on their teams and had good relationships with their direct supervisors, this was not the case for everyone. For example, 23 percent of survey respondents said morale is not high on their teams. For people working on teams with lower morale, concerns about unprofessional behavior likely factored into their responses: survey responses showed that unprofessional behavior affected at least 30 percent of employees in the last year.

Of the group and individual interview participants who discussed their experience with unprofessional behavior at DFW, at least 25 employees expanded on the effects these behaviors had on them. Most notably, those who experienced such behaviors described low morale, emotional and physical distress, staff turnover, reduced motivation and productivity at work, feelings of disappointment toward the agency, and embarrassment at working for DFW.

“I just can’t get anyone to listen. My morale is low, I don’t feel like doing more than the minimum. Why would I come here and work extra hard for this jerk, who micromanages me, who shuts the door to my office and yells at me, why would I give that guy extra?”

Employees described a pattern of unprofessional behavior that management had not consistently or effectively addressed

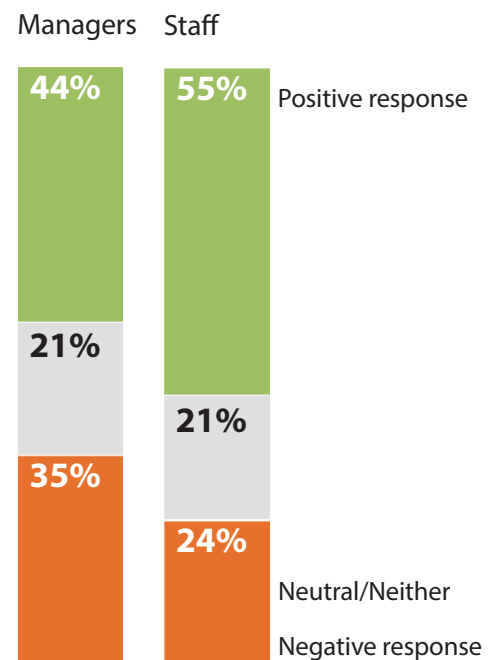
Personnel issues, particularly those involving formal investigations and disciplinary action, are complex for all parties involved. Management and HR departments in any organization are bound by privacy restrictions that prevent them from discussing investigations with other employees. It is particularly difficult to balance privacy protections with a desire to validate the experience of the person who brought the issue forward and provide a sense of resolution. Nonetheless, it is critical that management and HR departments take every step possible to handle complaints well and regularly communicate what they can, such as the status of a report. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, failing to follow up with those involved is a key mistake in the investigation process, and a “poorly conducted internal investigation can cost [an organization] financially, damage its reputation and decrease employee morale.”

Among the greatest concerns was a perceived lack of accountability for unprofessional behavior

Many employees said that reported incidents of unprofessional behavior often lacked adequate accountability and resulted in little if any follow-through. One of the strongest patterns we discovered in the qualitative data from group and individual interviews was a mistrust of management and HR to adequately handle reported incidents—half of these participants brought up accountability and the handling of incidents in negative terms. Most often, their negative views involved how their supervisor handled an incident, issues with the reporting process, and lack of follow-through after an incident is reported. How issues were handled in the past significantly informed staff views on accountability, and continued to have a negative effect on staff confidence in leadership’s ability or willingness to adequately address unprofessional behavior.

Numerous participants perceived limited consequences for unprofessional behavior. Only about half of survey respondents agreed that people were held accountable when they behaved inappropriately, and even fewer felt that managers were held accountable (Exhibit 15). Interview participants expanded on some of the reasons why they felt accountability was a problem in the agency. Some who felt this way said that problem employees involved in an incident were simply transferred to another worksite. Others expressed frustration because they knew of an employee who exhibited unprofessional behavior that was eventually promoted to higher levels of management.

Exhibit 15 – People are held accountable when they behave inappropriately



Source: Auditor survey.

“This person said basically ‘I’ll strangle you,’ screaming and yelling at another employee in the building. The whole thing was handled with ‘Just go tell them you’re sorry and it will be fine.’ Then the person was promoted into a manager position.”

“I literally have seen where one guy [offered another employee] more hours if she’d go out with him. And that person has continually been promoted through this agency. And management knew how he was.”

Events from several years ago also continued to influence attitudes about accountability. For example, some people specifically raised the two past sexual harassment incidents as examples of poor follow-through on the part of agency leadership and/or HR. They said that while the agency took disciplinary action for some people involved, consequences for all those involved in or who had knowledge of the harassment were perceived to be inadequate. They also felt the underlying issues were not properly addressed, producing a lasting negative effect on the agency’s culture.

“That was a big deal when bad things were happening... [An employee] got a slap on the wrist, temporarily demoted, and is now back on the top. It just kind of feels icky...that doesn’t settle well with some of us locally.”

Some described this perceived lack of accountability as a byproduct of a “good ol’ boys” club of favoritism. Participants said that, in some cases, management’s solution has been to transfer the victim.

Even after reporting unprofessional behavior, people described management follow-through as insufficient. Of the criticisms made by employees who talked about their experiences with reporting incidents, the biggest problem they described was poor follow-through by management. Nearly 40 employees in group and individual interviews spoke about this challenge, and said they believed that some managers were aware of issues as they happened, but appeared to do nothing.

“I’ve experienced the behavior from staff, then in bringing it to the attention of my supervisor, the supervisor doesn’t do anything.”

“I’ve felt frustrated because I’ve talked to my counterparts, one who supervises a difficult person, and I kind of gave up hope after hearing how bad it got. Employees don’t feel safe because of this individual, yet nothing from management. This has been going on for years. I don’t know why.”

“I’ve been witness to instances in which employees have had issues with other employees or supervisors, complaints are made, and nothing comes of it... That kind of culture and attitude contributes to where we are now and what we’ve gone through with [the former deputy director] and the Wells Hatchery. People are aware of things, they just don’t act on them.”

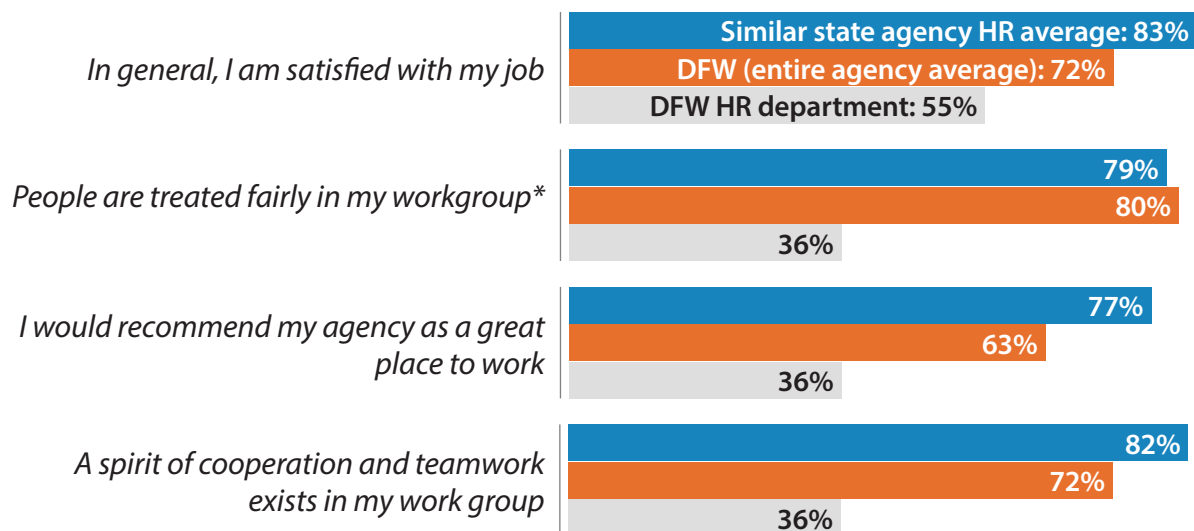
Several of these people said they have reported incidents to management or HR and never heard about them again, in some cases even after they specifically asked for follow up on the status of their complaint. While the agency was often prohibited from disclosing specific details of a grievance or investigation, these employees said they had not even received general communication about the status or result of their complaints. The 2020 Association of Fish and Wildlife Professionals’ survey also indicates that follow through could be better. Of the minority of union members (38) who said they have approached HR with questions or complaints about harassment or discrimination, 61 percent said HR did not respond in a timely manner and 39 percent said their complaint had been “ignored/unresolved.”

The agency’s HR department has a history of low morale and high turnover, which may contribute to negative staff perceptions around accountability

Past issues within the HR department likely contributed to years of low morale and staff turnover within that team. More widely, they have contributed to some employees’ continued distrust in HR’s ability to investigate complaints or hold people accountable. Past surveys have pointed to problems within DFW’s HR department. For example, in the state’s 2018 Employee Engagement Survey, DFW’s HR employees scored nearly all aspects of employee engagement lower than the rest of the agency and similar agencies’ HR departments (see Exhibit 16 for a sample of questions related to morale). Responses for 2019 questions related to morale did not show notable improvement.

Exhibit 16 – In 2018, DFW’s HR Department’s survey results trailed the rest of DFW’s results, as well as HR offices at other state agencies

2018 State Employee Survey results



* The text in this survey question changed between 2018 and 2019.

Source: OFM.

The HR department has experienced very high turnover rates in recent years. Data provided by the state’s Office of Financial Management (OFM) showed that one-third of DFW’s HR employees quit in both 2018 and 2019 – more than half the division’s staff in two years. By comparison, DFW’s total turnover rate in 2019 was 6 percent.

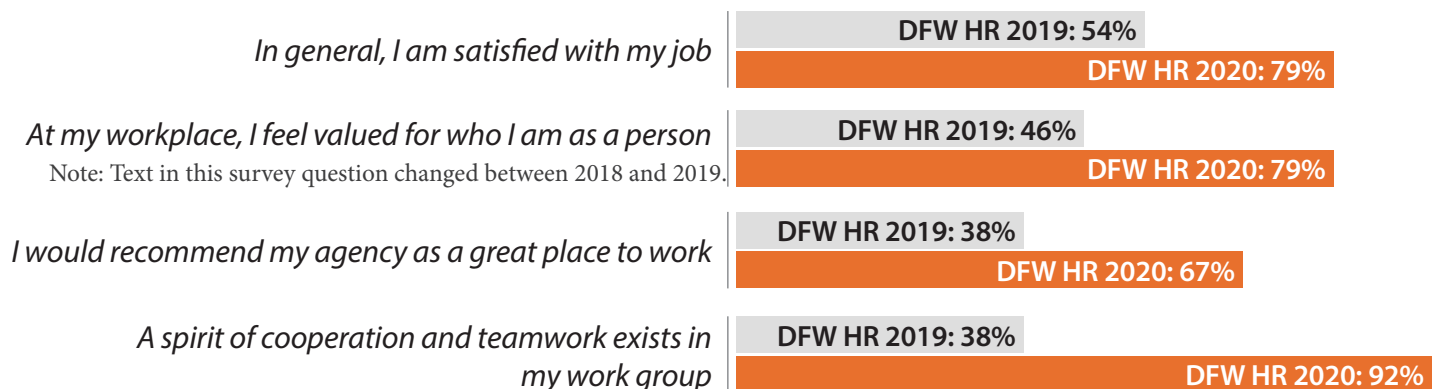
Group and individual interview participants independently mentioned high turnover within the HR department as a problem. They specifically linked it to problems in the agency’s overall process for reporting complaints of unprofessional behavior or other issues. (The reporting system is discussed further below.) They offered examples of investigation information that had been lost, complaints that were not received, a backlog of delayed investigations, and having to start “from square one” each time a new HR employee took over an active case.

“I mean it’s a different batch of people each time.... It’s been a revolving door in HR. In my years of service I believe there’s only one person who has remained in that office, maybe two.... If you’re involved in an active case, you’re going to be beginning all over again, right? Each time you have to start from day one, and that wears you down.”

DFW has taken steps to address issues in HR, which has shown significant improvement in the last year

The internal culture of the HR department has shown great improvement over the last year, but it will take time to overcome poor staff perceptions of HR and the reporting process. DFW leadership confirmed a history of issues within the HR department, including high turnover. In response, the agency hired a new HR director in July 2019. One year into HR’s new leadership, HR employees’ responses to the 2020 State Engagement Survey drastically improved for most questions, including those related to morale. As Exhibit 17 shows, 67 percent of HR employees recommended DFW as a great place to work, and 92 percent said a spirit of cooperation and teamwork existed in their work group. OFM data from 2020 also suggests that turnover within the HR department has improved in the last year.

Exhibit 17 – DFW’s HR Department’s morale improved significantly from 2019 to 2020
 2019 and 2020 State Employee Survey results



Source: OFM.

However, low opinions of the HR department across the agency may take longer to change. Several people – whom we met in group and individual interviews after new HR leadership had been brought in – described a long-standing and persistent distrust of the agency’s HR department. In 2019, the Wildlife Program assessed the program’s own work sites and made recommendations around providing a better workplace for employees. The resulting Safe and Best Workplace report completed in 2019 highlighted a lack of trust in HR among the program’s staff. In addition, the agency’s largest union, the Washington Association of Fish and Wildlife Professionals, which represents about half (roughly 900) DFW employees, conducted its own workplace survey. The 2020 union survey, administered nine months into the tenure of HR’s new leadership, showed that 43 percent of respondents said they did not feel that HR fosters a culture to assist employees, improve agency efficiency and to help improve agency morale. Although a historically weak HR function has challenged the agency, DFW management should sustain its current efforts to rebuild credibility across the agency.

Clearer policies and procedures for handling complaints could improve staff perceptions of accountability and the reporting process

The perception that HR neither conducts nor communicates about its investigations properly or consistently may also stem from unclear policies and procedures around employee complaints. In speaking about the minority of employees who have recent experience interacting with HR, the union summarized in its 2020 survey that those employees “report disturbing trends of substantial delays in response time and a lack of resolution to critical issues.” While the union’s survey results showed that these people felt they had been treated in a professional manner by HR, it went on to say “competency of HR staff, a lack of understanding about the work employees do, and a lack of informational consistency are all noted problems.”

The Safe and Best Workplace report stated that employees did not understand HR’s role or the process for resolving staff complaints. People interviewed for the Safe and Best assessment suggested the agency clearly articulate HR’s role and its responsibilities toward employees and the agency. The report also found that HR’s policies describing how to conduct investigations were vague, and recommended updating them to clarify what staff can expect from the reporting process. Our review of the general administrative investigation policy and the sexual harassment investigation policy and procedure showed that DFW has not implemented these recommendations. Although it is not incumbent upon DFW to make these changes at employees’ request, the Society for Human Resource Management guidance for conducting investigations suggests that organizations include in their policies details around specific investigative tasks and what action steps employees can expect. Providing this level of detail may give DFW employees – including HR staff – more consistent information and clarity around expectations related to the investigative process.

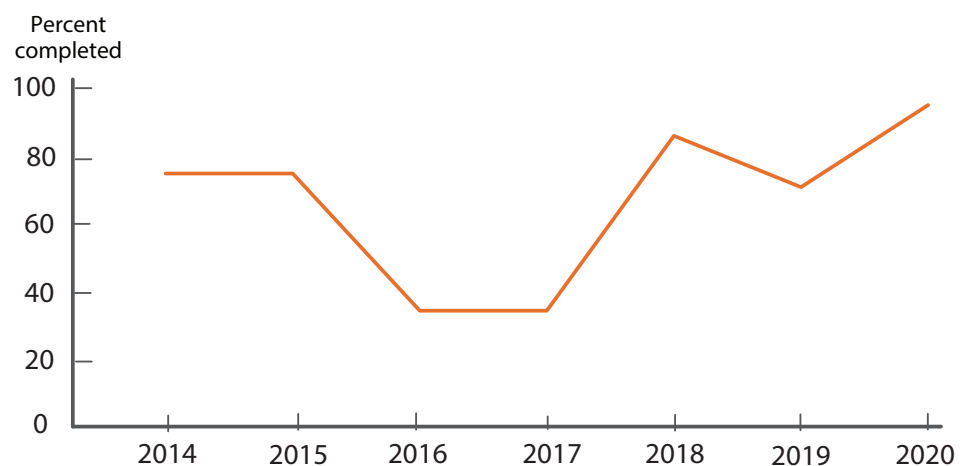
DFW has not been consistent in evaluating employee performance, but is showing significant improvement

Washington state agencies are required by law to conduct annual evaluations and use them to guide and develop staff. However, some DFW employees we spoke with between October 2019 and January 2020 said they had not received an annual evaluation. At the time we conducted our fieldwork and staff interviews, OFM data showed that less than 72 percent of all agency staff had a current performance evaluation on file, which was 12 percentage points lower than the average for other similar agencies.

As Exhibit 18 shows, DFW's success in completing employee evaluations varied widely in the six years prior to 2020. However, DFW managers said they have prioritized making improvements in this area, and as of July 2020, 92 percent of staff evaluations had been completed.

This is a promising development, and maintaining greater consistency in this area could help DFW managers and supervisors identify and address unprofessional behavior as it occurs. In turn, this could help strengthen accountability by ensuring complaints of unprofessional behavior are routinely documented, discussed and considered as part of employee performance reviews.

Exhibit 18 – The percentage of DFW employee evaluations completed annually fluctuated over the years 2014–2020



Source: 2014-2019 data provided by OFM; 2020 data provided by DFW.

Increasing opportunities for staff to provide input on supervisor performance could help ensure newly implemented agency values and expectations are followed

DFW has incorporated recently developed agency values into staff expectations and evaluations. OFM guidance suggests that “expectations for promoting and managing an organization’s values are integrated into supervisor performance plans and evaluations.” It goes on: “...values are cascaded down through the organization and represented in employees’ individual performance plans [and] integrated with behavioral competency requirements.”

In 2019, DFW rolled out its new agency core values: accountability, service, performance, integrity, respect and empathy. Officials said that employees have not yet been assessed on their adherence to agency values because the values are so new. However, they said they had incorporated expectations around the agency values into professional development plans for management and most other employees so that employees can be assessed against the expectations at the end of the current evaluation cycle.

Adding a feedback mechanism could help further ensure supervisor conduct is in alignment with agency values. As part of the evaluation process, OFM guidance suggests that “supervisor performance is systematically reported to senior management.” However, many DFW employees said they did not have the opportunity to provide general feedback on their supervisor’s performance or behavior. Only 33 percent of survey respondents said they could provide feedback on their supervisor as part of their supervisor’s evaluation (Exhibit 19). Furthermore, the agency’s 2021 evaluation plans do not include soliciting feedback from staff about how well supervisors and managers uphold the agency values. Doing so could help ensure supervisors and management are held accountable for conduct or behavior that does not align with the agency’s new core values.

To increase consistency in addressing personnel issues across the agency, managers may need more guidance and training

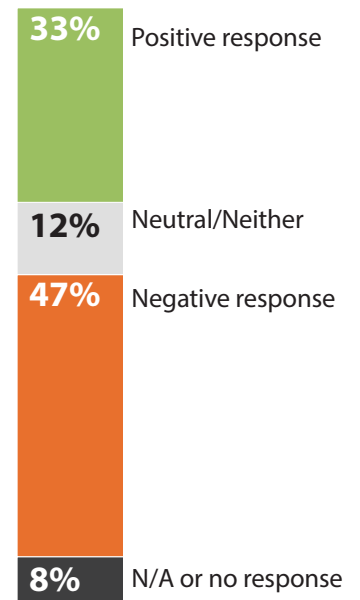
More than one-third of survey respondents said managers were not consistent in how they responded to inappropriate behavior (Exhibit 20). In conversations with staff, people expressed doubt that all supervisors and managers could deal with personnel issues as effectively as they should.

Several people commented that supervisors are usually promoted because of their scientific capabilities rather than their management skills, and without receiving adequate supervisory training. Some supervisors may naturally have the skills to navigate personnel issues and others may not.

“They are very nice people but in many cases they are not suited for the jobs and don’t have the skills necessary to lead and to care for people. They don’t see that as their role. They are hired for their technical skills, not human skills.”

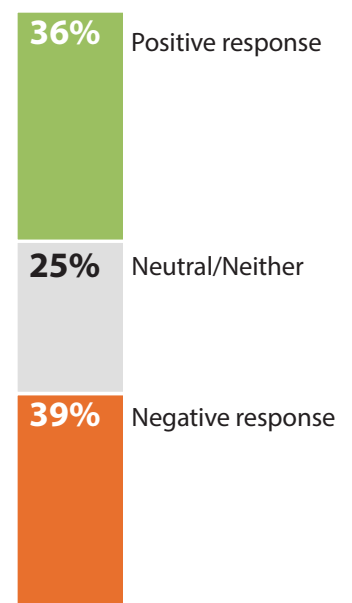
The need for consistency and training surfaced repeatedly in group and individual interviews. Although many people had positive views of their direct supervisors and teams, some felt their supervisors lacked the soft skills or training required to deal effectively with personnel issues when they arise and could use extra support in this area. The 2020 Washington Association of Fish and Wildlife Professionals survey produced similar results—only 55 percent of union members agreed that their supervisor was well trained to supervise staff.

Exhibit 19 – I have the opportunity to provide feedback about my supervisor’s performance for his/her evaluation



Source: Auditor survey.

Exhibit 20 – Managers are consistent in how they respond to inappropriate behavior



Source: Auditor survey.

DFW officials said that employees who are promoted to supervisory roles are required to complete a Supervisor Academy training at least once. Among the topics covered are agency values, workplace culture, and onboarding new employees. As of April 2021, DFW reported that 65 percent of its supervisors had completed the Supervisor Academy. While the agency said it tracks and notifies those who have not completed a required training, DFW will need to establish stronger measures to ensure all supervisors are indeed completing those trainings. This could help increase consistency in how supervisors are dealing with personnel issues.

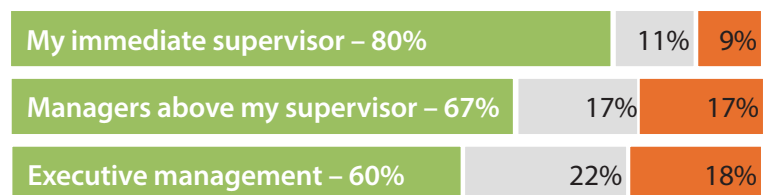
Consistent and transparent accountability could build trust and encourage more staff to report incidents

Research shows that when employees see managers display behaviors such as favoritism or inconsistency, trust is broken. Lost trust harms workplace culture through reduced productivity, disengagement, low morale, greater turnover and reduced communication. (See the “Unprofessional behavior and trust” section of the Bibliography for references and resources.) As evidenced throughout this section of the report, survey results and interviews suggest that many DFW employees lack confidence and trust in agency leadership to hold people accountable. In their view, agency management displays inconsistent accountability, does not follow through on issues raised, and sometimes even rewards those who have exhibited unprofessional behavior. When only half of survey respondents believe employees and managers are held accountable for their behavior, there are opportunities to improve these perceptions by practicing more consistency in holding employees accountable and communicating agency processes around accountability.

On the subject of accountability, it is important for staff to trust all levels of management. First, because in any organization, tone at the top is critical to establishing a strong culture and building trust between employees and management. Second, because the issues staff report are likely to move up through the management chain. Staff may trust their supervisor with sensitive information but not believe a higher level manager will take steps to resolve the situation. At DFW, positive perceptions of accountability decreased somewhat as employees were asked about managers beyond their immediate supervisor and further up the organizational hierarchy (Exhibit 21). Regardless of the reasons why this pattern exists, there could be consequences for staff willingness to report incidents.

More than 50 people in group and individual interviews said they distrusted management because they had not always seen action taken to hold people accountable for their

Exhibit 21 – These people model the value of accountability



Source: Auditor survey data.

behavior. This distrust extends to a lack of faith in new cultural improvement initiatives. Because these employees do not trust all levels of management to adequately handle unprofessional behavior when it occurs and as it is reported up the management chain, they were reluctant to report new issues. Staff in group and individual interviews who did not feel comfortable reporting problems said they thought nothing would come of it or else they feared they would be punished if they did file a report.

“Why even say anything when nothing is going to get done about it. You complain four or five times about the same thing and nothing happens. It’s going to be on the agency to show us otherwise.”

“I think employees are afraid to report because of how people have been treated in the past.... Employees have witnessed too many times the appearance of nothing to do when they did report.”

“You just don’t report stuff ... that’s signing your death warrant.”

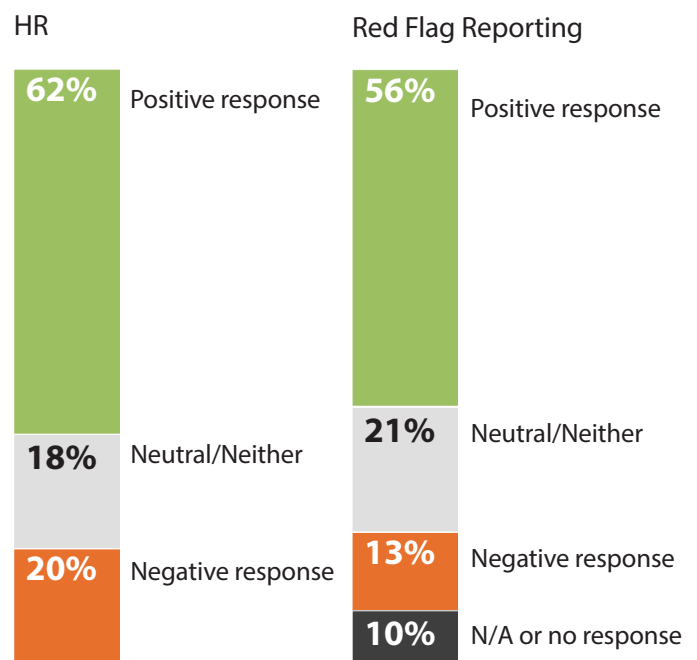
The agency’s dedicated avenues for reporting problems have so far produced mixed results.

Survey results indicate some hesitation among employees about using the dedicated avenues for reporting that DFW has set up. As the two bars in Exhibit 22 show, only about 60 percent of survey respondents said they felt comfortable reporting inappropriate behavior through HR or the agency’s Red Flag Reporting system. (The anonymous Red Flag Reporting system is discussed further in the next section of the report.)

In addition to the complaints mechanism that goes through the agency’s HR department, DFW also makes use of its Internal Audit Office to investigate reports of misconduct, particularly concerning violations of the agency’s legal and ethics policies. Eighty people who responded to our survey in July 2020 said they had witnessed legal or ethical violations in the last year. By comparison, DFW said its Internal Audit Office had received and subsequently investigated only six claims of alleged legal or ethical violations from January 2019 through December 2020.

This disparity suggests many employees feel reluctant to report these matters through official channels within the agency, if at all. For whatever reason, it represents a missed opportunity for communication between management and employees. If employees feel they cannot report issues, DFW cannot address them — creating a circular problem of mistrust between staff and management.

Exhibit 22a, 22b – I would feel comfortable reporting unethical or inappropriate behavior to:



Source: Auditor survey.

Management can prioritize more open, transparent, two-way communication to strengthen trust and cohesion throughout the agency

Summary of results

The history and structure of DFW have created workplace silos that have contributed to communication challenges, which in turn have diminished employee trust in management and hindered cooperation across programs.

Infrequent interaction with management left some staff less confident in the agency's ability to address their needs. Poorly communicated decisions left some staff feeling they could not do their jobs properly. Field staff need to understand the agency's positions and the rationale behind its decisions to effectively communicate with the public and enforce those decisions. Employees also want assurance that decisions made by management are evidence-based. Some people became less engaged when they felt managers didn't listen or seriously consider their suggestions. Some also believed program silos hindered collaboration and led to inefficiencies.

DFW has taken steps to address silos and communication issues. For example, DFW has begun centralizing core business functions (budgeting, IT, HR), and has enhanced internal communications through several new processes. Implementing leading practices may help it overcome silos and help employees feel more connected.

The history and structure of DFW have created workplace silos that have contributed to communication challenges

Silos are isolated groupings within an organization that can and often do function independently from each other and can make communication more challenging for any organization. Historically, DFW has been siloed because of how it was formed, structured and funded. Four key characteristics contributed to the development and persistence of silos at DFW:

- **Formation from a merger of two separate agencies in 1994.** The agency's largest program – the formerly independent Fish Program – was separate from other DFW programs before the merger.

- **Organization into six programs and six regions**, each with distinct policy issues to focus on, duties to carry out, and varying communication needs. This siloed structure has contributed to barriers between programs, between regions, and between the regions and Olympia headquarters.
- **A variety of funding streams**, including federal funds, user fees and grants. Roughly half of DFW’s funds are restricted by state or federal law, which can limit the agency’s ability to shift funds to where they are needed most. At times, this has led to unequal distribution of resources within and across programs, and occasional competition between them for funds. Some interviewees said that programs and teams that rely on state funding tend to have fewer resources than those that are grant-funded because DFW has operated with a budget deficit for more than a decade. Most notably, employees said fish hatcheries funded by the state generally have fewer financial resources than those funded by a Public Utility District.
- **Physical distance between staff and management** contributes to a barrier that effectively siloes each group. Executive management is mostly concentrated in the Olympia headquarters, while most employees work in the different regions throughout the state. Additionally, many managers are based in centralized regional offices while many of the employees they manage work at more remote job sites. Even then, employees often do not work in the same buildings as their direct supervisors.

Although silos in themselves are not problematic, especially at a large agency, they do create challenges to effective communication. More than half of all group and individual interview participants said something negative about the silos they perceived in their workplace. They spoke most often about two types of silos: barriers between different programs, and barriers between management and staff. The latter was sometimes described as a divide between Olympia (or headquarters) and the regions.

“I think as an agency, in some places, we have this issue where everyone is going down their own road and they may or may not intersect. And that’s not only amongst programs – whether it be habitat, fish science or whatever – it’s also at the different tiers of management. We have a hard time bridging the gap along the ladder.”

Silos can bring a variety of challenges to an organization. Business management publications note that heavily siloed organizations can struggle to develop and communicate a unity of purpose and to ensure all parts of the enterprise cooperate to achieve the stated mission. Several of the negative effects of silos include a constrained flow of information, task duplication, poor customer experiences, a lack of coordinated decision-making, and poorly aligned priorities.

A note about communication during the pandemic

These audit findings primarily reflect DFW’s communication problems before the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited in-person meetings.

Specific issues around employee attitudes and behaviors include:

- “Us versus them” and seeing other departments as competitors
- Regression to the status quo, “Our team has always done things this way, and no outsider is going to change it.”
- Disengagement, low morale and feeling excluded
- Lack of awareness or interest in the work of other employees

Group and individual interview participants at DFW expressed similar feelings and saw these types of behaviors in others.

Communication challenges diminished employee trust in management and hindered cooperation across programs

Overall, DFW employees cared deeply about their work; they wanted their efforts to produce strong results and have real impact on conservation and recreation in Washington. Silos get in the way of these goals. As this section demonstrates, a lack of collaboration and communication across programs made people feel they were not as effective as they would be otherwise. Furthermore, they felt the lack of two-way communication and interaction between staff and management made it harder for them to do their jobs. It also diminished their trust in management. In order to improve the culture at DFW, management must work to communicate across silos and strengthen trust throughout the organization. The concerns we repeatedly heard from employees are described below.

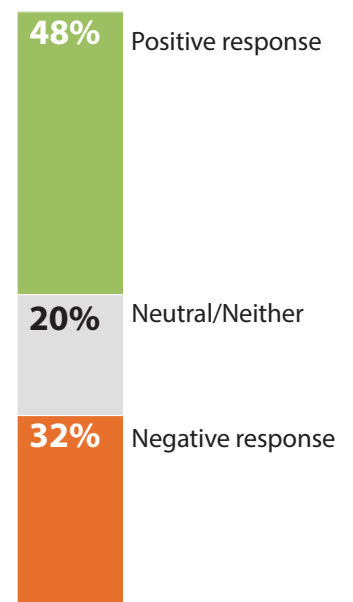
Infrequent interaction with management left some staff less confident in the agency’s ability to address their needs

Less than half of survey respondents agreed with the statement, “Program management understands the barriers and challenges I face on the job” (Exhibit 23). When the issue came up in group interviews, employees questioned whether management knew what they did on the job or why their work mattered.

“I know people around me value my work, but as an agency, do they even recognize what I’m even doing or even care? It doesn’t seem like these people who are a ‘head’ are really fighting for what I feel like is important.”

When describing why they felt management did not understand the challenges they faced, some people said it was because managers (mostly those based in Olympia) rarely visited job sites to observe problems first hand or speak with staff in the field about their work. This was especially true for hatcheries staff, who work in some of DFW’s most remote locations.

Exhibit 23 – Program management understands the barriers and challenges I face on the job



Source: Auditor survey.

“When I first started, Olympia managers would come into the field once a month and work with us. Quite a few managers did that. One of our great managers would visit every office and work with people. That is one thing I think is really lacking, our current manager doesn’t even know what we do. She makes all the rules and micromanages everyone but has no idea.”

“I would say at hatcheries level, for the regional office or Olympia, it’s very rare we get people out here. They don’t come to see what we’re doing. The only time they visit is after something bad happens. Like after Wells [Hatchery, site of an investigation into sexual harassment], in relation to stopping sexual harassment and workplace violence.”

When people do not feel their needs are understood, they can lose confidence that their needs will be addressed. This appears to be reflected in our survey of DFW employees, in which only 37 percent of respondents agreed program management takes action to remove barriers they face (Exhibit 24).

Business management literature shows that when managers are accessible to employees and engage with them, it helps to increase trust. DFW may have room to improve in this area. Several employees said they would feel more confident in management’s ability to make good decisions if managers visited the field more often to sincerely listen and better understand their work and its challenges.

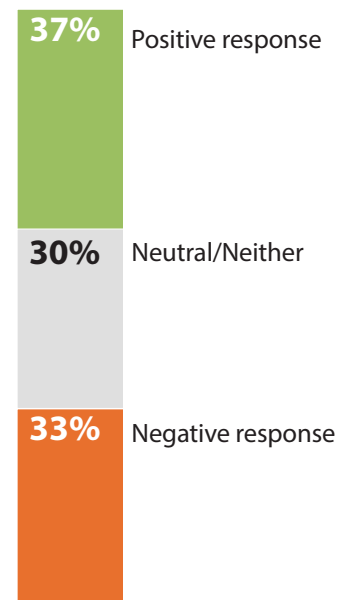
“With leadership positions, I think it would be good to see them getting out more to get more familiar with the places and the people that they are managing.... It’s not so much important that you understand these numbers, but when people talk about something that is happening on a river, it’s not just [from] a couple lines of description from a spreadsheet that you know about this place. It’s actually why this thing affects a fishery, or why [that] thing affects a survey crew, whatever it might be.”

Communicating key decisions more clearly could increase staff confidence in those decisions and help employees excel at their work

Working with the Fish and Wildlife Commission, DFW management makes many decisions about how resources will be managed, on issues as diverse as the length of a fishing season on a particular river and what to do if someone finds a cougar in their backyard. Some decisions touch on high-profile and politically charged issues, involving both scientific evidence and political considerations, and can be particularly difficult to explain.

Employees said they wanted to stay up to date on the decisions that affect their work; they also acknowledged that management must take many things into consideration when making decisions. However, it can be challenging for staff to stay informed. For example, only 45 percent of DFW respondents of the 2019 State Employee Engagement survey agreed that they usually received clear information

Exhibit 24 – Program management take action to remove barriers and challenges I face on the job



Source: Auditor survey.

about changes at the agency. This was six percentage points lower than comparison agencies' average score. (Note: 2019 data was the most recent available, as this question was not asked on the 2020 survey.) Moreover, employees want to know more about the rationale behind agency decisions. On our survey, nearly all survey respondents (95 percent) agreed it was important for them to receive information about why decisions are made (the first bar in Exhibit 25a), yet only 57 percent said they received that information (shown in the second bar, Exhibit 25b).

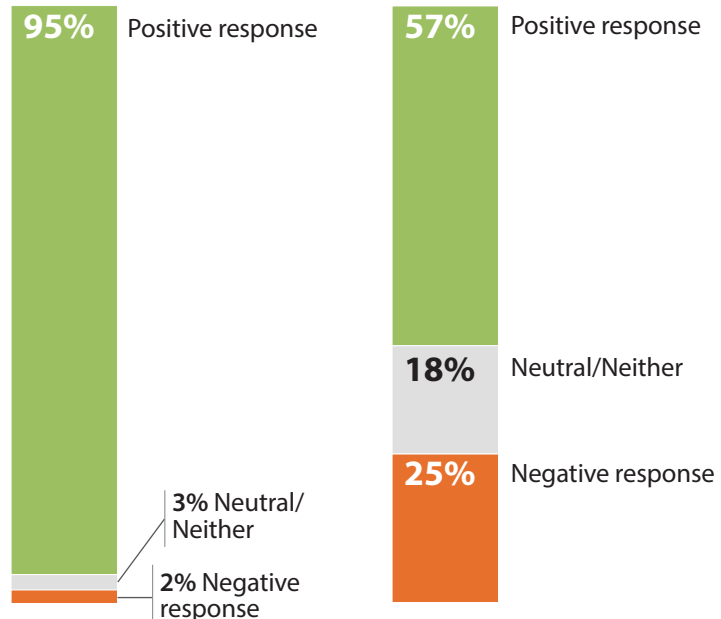
Meanwhile, it can be challenging for managers to explain these decisions in a way that satisfies staff. Managers in all six regions acknowledged the agency could improve how it communicates policy decisions. Some regional managers explained that, in their experience, explaining changes to every staff member could be difficult and time-consuming, especially for controversial or complicated decisions. They also said they were trying to do a better job at it.

Employees who felt they had not received clear, timely information about a decision or the factors that went into decisions described a few different types of negative effects.

Field staff need to understand the agency's positions and the rationale behind its decisions to effectively communicate with the public and enforce those decisions.

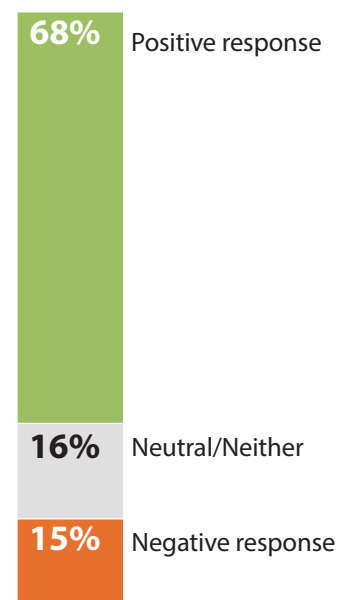
Most DFW employees said they were confident they could communicate the agency's positions on key issues. More than two-thirds of survey respondents agreed they would know how to respond to a question from the public. However, 15 percent disagreed (Exhibit 26); comments in group interviews demonstrated considerable frustration. These employees said they wanted more timely information on agency decisions, more explanation on how decisions were made, or more guidance on how to talk about the agency's more controversial decisions to help them deliver better customer service. For some, lacking such information had been highly stressful at times, such as when explaining a rule to an agitated customer.

Exhibit 25a, 25b – When a decision is made that affects my work:
it's important for me to understand the reasons behind the decision
I receive information about why the decision was made



Source: Auditor survey.

Exhibit 26 – If a member of the public asked a question about my agency's position on key issues, I would know how to answer or who to refer them to



Source: Auditor survey.

“[Local people] all know who you are around here. And they’re going to ask you things. It’s challenging to give accurate information when you don’t know the information because the agency hasn’t told you what we’re doing.”

“Let’s say the regional director says one thing, but a politician says something else. And the captain has a spin on that. You know, sometimes we just don’t know what to do.... For us, if we don’t know what you want us to do, we’re getting a lot of stress.... The guys get stressed out, then they get to where they’re not making the best decisions.... It snowballs.”

“If we had a better way to communicate our thought process – not just what the line on the news release says what we are doing ... but explaining why we made our decisions, how we made our decisions, and why we didn’t do something else, I think it would go a long way.”

The agency has taken some steps to improve communication of key policies, as described later in this report.

Employees want assurance that decisions made by management are evidence-based.

In discussions with employees, over two dozen told us they feel the agency had made decisions on sensitive topics – such as managing populations of wolves and elk, orcas and fisheries – that appeared to contradict DFW’s own research and staff recommendations. These employees believed their research had been ignored. Employees repeatedly said they understood both science and political considerations have to be factored into decisions. However, when staff do not receive explanations on decisions they are more likely to assume the decisions were made entirely for political reasons. Regardless of the actual decision, these employees hoped managers would let them know when their work was consulted or had proven valuable.

“You see this with the [species] meetings. Senior staff feel they get to decide what information is important to incorporate. It blows my mind that it’s your job to provide this information, but they don’t use it, they throw it away. And that is pervasive.”

“How much are you guys [executive management] talking to the people who are collecting data you’re basing this on?... It feels like there is a lot of political decisions that happen that are made without a whole lot of attention paid to the data that should be going into those decisions...”

Employees’ comments suggest DFW could put greater effort into consistently distributing clear and timely information about agency decisions – along with feedback about the research considered during decision-making – to those employees who need or want it. Doing so may increase staff confidence in agency decisions and better support employees in providing high quality customer service.

Employees became less engaged when they felt managers didn't listen or seriously consider their feedback

Business management publications note that effective internal communication includes ensuring employees are comfortable expressing their concerns to management. When managers solicit feedback, actively listening to employees and hearing all sides of an issue – even contrary views – doing so helps build employees' trust in management, increasing their willingness to bring their concerns to managers. Managers do not need to act on everything employees suggest, but should always respond to staff in a way that shows their input is worthy of respect and will be considered. Employees should also feel confident that when managers do accept a suggestion, they will follow through and put it into action. (See the “Communication and silos” section of the Bibliography for references.)

Surveys show a majority of DFW employees do feel that management is listening to them, yet there is room for improvement. On our survey, slightly more than half of respondents (56 percent) agreed their input was valued (Exhibit 27).

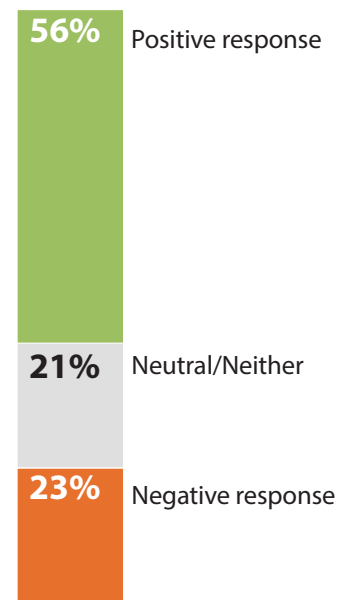
Questions on the 2020 State Employee Engagement Survey were more specific, and respondents offered more encouraging results. Around two-thirds indicated they usually have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting their work (69 percent), and usually felt encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things (64 percent). Both results were on par with comparison agencies in 2019 and 2020.

In group and individual interviews, people gave both positive and negative examples of how individual managers had responded to their ideas and suggestions. While this topic was not discussed in all settings, more than 60 participants described positive experiences sharing their ideas with managers. These people described supervisors and managers who had been (or who they believed would be) receptive to their opinions, which made them feel valued and respected. For example:

“I feel I am valued a lot by supervisors and people that end up making final decisions.... They're like, ‘You guys saw this on the ground. You guys were there in person. What did you think of it? What do you think is the way we should be toward this?’ If we have a question or we have input, they want it. At least they say they do. I feel like they also want it.”

While most employees felt that management did value their input, many did not; the latter were less engaged when they felt they were not being listened to. More than 80 participants described experiences with managers who did not value their input. These people described managers who were too quick to shoot down ideas in meetings or who rejected suggestions that differed from the standard way of doing things. Some said their managers never consulted with them, had not listened to their concerns, or had listened but appeared to take no action. Such episodes discouraged these people, making them feel their work experience and expertise were not valued; they became reluctant to express their suggestions and concerns

Exhibit 27 – My input is valued when decisions are made that impact my work



Source: Auditor survey.

going forward. Furthermore, they were disappointed that managers had passed up opportunities to improve work processes or public services, or to address problems before they ballooned.

“We’re so top down, you know, and management doesn’t want to listen. And you can tell them, ‘hey, we’ve got a problem, we need to fix this.’ But if it’s not a problem in their eyes, it doesn’t matter that it’s a problem for staff. They’ll just ignore it.”

“In my office, morale is so incredibly low. Employees feel powerless. We don’t feel like management wants to listen or hear our opinions. They’ll ask but really don’t care, no follow-through or actions really taken.”

Employees’ mixed experiences with offering feedback to managers suggests an opportunity for the agency to stress its values of respect and empathy at all levels of management. This might include training for managers on how to engage respectfully with staff and how to provide considerate responses to staff suggestions.

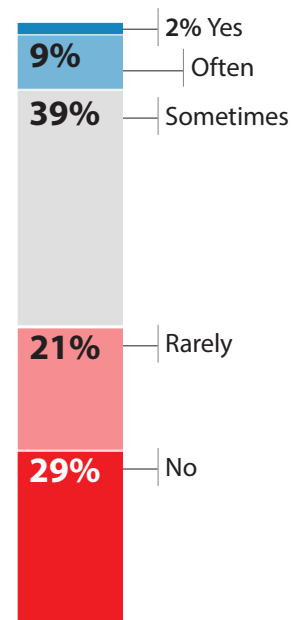
Better communication across program silos could lead to greater efficiency and more opportunities to collaborate

The 2020 union survey asked whether members believed executive management has done enough to break down silos and promote cross-program interaction. As Exhibit 28 shows, half of respondents said “rarely” or “no.” Almost three dozen participants in our own group and individual interviews were concerned about a lack of collaboration and communication across programs. They described programs (or divisions within a program) that operated independently, and sometimes clashed or competed with one another.

The people we spoke with said silos had led to task duplication and missed opportunities for them to collaborate and work together toward a common goal, to support each other, and to apply for funding in a coordinated way. For example, one participant said two biologists in neighboring regions could be monitoring the same species using different approaches because they do not talk to each other. A different participant described how biologists working to restore the habitats in the same area can end up competing for grant money instead of applying together for greater impact on the area. Another described feeling that her work was redundant because someone in a different program was working on something similar.

“We could help a lot of people who do similar work to what we do, but they don’t reach out, or we don’t reach out. When they need help, they don’t always call us.”

Exhibit 28 – Do you feel executive management does enough to actively break down silos and promote cross-program interaction?



Source: 2020 Union survey.

“You’re working in an agency that everyone has their own budgets they work with, they’re completely isolated and they’re totally focused on what they’re doing, they’re really not sharing, collaborating or crossing over.”

“Sometimes where you would waver is if you look around the agency and you’re like ‘okay do we have the same goal as a different program, or as people in headquarters versus our region versus another?’”

The agency can make the organization function more efficiently and effectively by continuing to address issues around program silos. For example, some employees described ways in which more cross-program training, more collaboration, and improved knowledge transfer could help them be more effective in their jobs. Comments also indicated stronger communication across silos could help employees feel more engaged, while making people in more remote worksites feel supported and included.

“[It’s] fascinating for most of us to see what our compatriots are doing. Professional development-wise it’s essential. There’s a lot of buck passing in our department, ‘Well, we can’t do this because this person said it...’ It’s really good to see how other people in the department are doing it. To build that respect for each other, it’s better for problem-solving and communication. It’s really essential and we don’t get a lot of it.”

“We are the non-existent part of the state from DFW in a lot of ways. We don’t have a lot of support outside of our little groups. ... There isn’t a lot of support from regional offices or upper management.”

More than 40 participants offered suggestions to reduce the effects of silos; their ideas included structural changes as well as small, local changes that could make it easier for staff to work together across units and programs. Some examples included:

- Improved communication from headquarters
- More open communication between programs or divisions (through newsletters and webinars, for example)
- Offices redesigned to include meeting rooms and drop in workstations to encourage collaboration

DFW has taken steps to address silos and communication issues, but it can do more

The agency has been laying the groundwork to address cross-program silos and strengthen internal communication. Since this audit began in 2019, DFW has made several structural and administrative changes to reduce silos across all its programs.

For example, the agency has begun centralizing core business functions (budgeting, IT, HR) that previously operated at both the central level and the program level. Cross-program interactions have been the norm for managers at executive and regional management meetings, and agency leaders said they were planning to begin bringing program directors together more frequently, on a weekly basis.

To further improve collaboration, a 2019 policy established that each region would be divided into districts. The formation of districts enabled quarterly district meetings comprised of employees from the Enforcement, Fish, Habitat and Wildlife programs. When we conducted fieldwork in late 2019, some regions were holding cross-program quarterly district meetings. Agency leadership said district teams were active in all regions at the time of publishing this report.

DFW has also enhanced internal communication through several new processes. Agency leadership told us these changes included: a bimonthly Director's Bulletin; redesigning the employee intranet; regular webinars from Director's Office; webinars from some of the agency's program directors; more email communications from HR; a matrix that outlines which managers are responsible for which internal communication tasks; monthly executive level meetings to discuss the effectiveness of communication; and agency communication plans and talking points for high-profile issues such as wolf recovery and management.

Groups and individual interview participants mentioned a few of these changes. Several employees said they appreciated having access to notes from executive level meetings (even if they did not regularly read them), and saw the newly implemented Director's webinar and bimonthly Bulletin as informative and positive signs that the agency was serious about enhancing top-down communication efforts. One employee also described how webinars led by the Habitat Program Director helped them feel more connected to Olympia.

“On a positive note, I feel in the last six months there's been a lot more information about the agency coming out of the director's office, with the webinars. And rather than me being really super focused on our small little isolated group, I have taken a step out and actually watched the webinars and actually read some of those emails, in that I'm trying to feel more connected to the agency. I feel like if they're making an effort then I need to make an effort, too, to feel that connection. So that feels like a shift...”

However, because other efforts to bolster internal communication throughout the agency had not yet begun or were in early stages when we conducted our interviews in October 2019 to January 2020, we do not know how those more recent efforts may have changed the perceptions of DFW employees. Attitudes on communication may have improved after fieldwork completed. As noted earlier, Employee Engagement Survey results showed some improvement from fall 2019 to fall 2020, with results increasing by as much as four percentage points.

Implementing leading practices may help the agency overcome silos and help employees feel more connected

Business management publications provide leading practices around effective internal communication techniques and overcoming the challenges related to silos. (See the “Communication and silos” section of the Bibliography for references and resources.) They suggest organizations develop communication protocols that are strategic, use the most effective methods to deliver messages, measure the effectiveness of communication efforts, and ensure employees are comfortable voicing their concerns to management. To improve cross-silo cooperation, leading practices suggest the following actions:

- Ensure all employees understand the agency’s mission and strategy and how they contribute to progress
- Develop and celebrate shared goals across team and division silos
- Keep employees informed with newsletters, regular meetings and management walk-arounds (in-person or virtual)
- Give employees opportunities to get to know people from other teams and programs. Encourage them to learn who does what, share knowledge, and discover ways to work together to achieve the agency’s goals.
- Ensure managers discuss cross-department conflicts with higher levels of management and know when to elevate issues to the agency’s director

Additionally, an organizational assessment of DFW prepared by Matrix Consulting as well as the Wildlife Program’s Safe and Best Workplace report (submitted to DFW executive management in 2018 and 2019, respectively) also identified ways to improve agency communication. These recommendations included: improving how leadership rolls out its decisions, devising ways for employees to spend more time with supervisors and program directors, and establishing and structuring meetings to allow staff members to interact across programs, divisions and teams.

More than 80 employees in our group and individual interviews said they wanted the agency to improve communication. This theme was among the most-often discussed when we asked participants how they would improve workplace culture. Their suggestions included:

- More transparency in decision-making, including how executive management makes decisions and what information is factored into decisions
- More timely, clear and detailed information on agency policies and who to call with questions
- More opportunities for employees to give feedback up the chain of command
- More staff interaction with management, so those responsible for making decisions better understand the realities and challenges of their work

- More opportunities for employees to connect with one another across units, divisions, programs and regions

In conclusion, a variety of communication challenges inherent to agency operations – including organizational silos, the geographic distribution of staff, and programmatic and regional differences – heighten the importance of prioritizing communication efforts throughout the agency. DFW has an opportunity to continue improving communications in ways that increase employees' confidence that their input is valued, that management understands the barriers they face, and that their work is having maximum impact. Multiple resources, including employees themselves, have emphasized the importance of timely, clear and effective communication from leadership, as well as safe opportunities for staff to speak openly to each other and different layers of management, regardless of their position in the agency.

By adopting some of the best practices described above throughout the various levels of the organization, monitoring the effectiveness of communications, and continually making adjustments to increase effectiveness over time, the agency may be able to strengthen trust and cooperation throughout the agency, which could help create a culture that more fully supports agency goals.

DFW has taken steps to improve workplace culture, and more can be done to gain staff confidence and ensure long-term success

Summary of results

Since 2017, DFW has taken steps to improve its workplace culture by addressing past incidents and agency challenges. Employees saw these initiatives as positive steps, yet many remained skeptical of lasting improvements. While DFW has laid the foundation, adding leading practices may make it more likely improvement efforts will succeed over time. So far, DFW has used few of these practices in its cultural improvement initiatives. Cultural change can take years, so DFW should persist in its efforts.

Since 2017, DFW has taken steps to improve its workplace culture by addressing past incidents and agency challenges

The current agency director, who joined DFW in August 2018, has expressed a commitment to improving DFW's workplace culture through new initiatives and investments. In addition, DFW managers have acknowledged that various challenges have impaired the agency's culture. They said the agency addressed some of these issues by introducing numerous cultural improvement initiatives since 2017. Among the agency's actions:

- Implemented Red Flag Reporting, an anonymous reporting hotline aimed at making staff feel more comfortable reporting incidents. DFW managers said they had received about a dozen hotline reports in the first five months following implementation in November 2019.
- Taken multiple steps to help increase diversity within the agency and address other workplace challenges. DFW created a Diversity Advisory Committee, hired a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion manager and established leadership team subcommittees. One of these subcommittees focuses on prevention of sexual harassment, sexual violence and bullying.
- Established a set of core agency values to guide staff and management behavior: accountability, service, professionalism, integrity, respect and empathy
- Hired a new HR director to help address long-standing issues in the HR department

- Conducted a workplace culture assessment within the Wildlife Program. The resulting Safe and Best Workplace report highlighted challenges and recommendations. Some of the recommendations were incorporated into an agency-wide action plan; the Wildlife Program is working on program-level recommendations.
- Developed an onboarding toolkit for new employees, describing Red Flag Reporting, contacts for the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion program, and the agency mission and values statements
- Started offering new types of training. This included bystander training required for senior managers, implicit bias training geared to managers who hire staff, and a required supervisor training that incorporates diversity, equity and inclusion topics.

We noted that many of these activities were introduced in 2019 or after, and will likely require additional work before they can be considered fully implemented. Due to their recent introduction and the lack of performance measures associated with them, we were not able to assess the effectiveness of these efforts. However, we did seek employee opinions on the initiatives that had been implemented at the time of our fieldwork, and we compared DFW's initiatives to leading practices.

Employees saw these initiatives as positive steps, yet many remained skeptical of lasting improvements

Both managers and staff perceived these changes as positive steps. We asked group interview participants for their views on three targeted initiatives: the Red Flag Reporting system, the Diversity Advisory Committee, and the Safe and Best report and recommendations. Just over half said these efforts were steps in the right direction. These people said the Diversity Advisory Committee and the Safe and Best report had helped to increase awareness of important issues in the workplace, and said Red Flag Reporting would benefit employees who were uncomfortable reporting a problem to a manager. A little more than half of survey respondents also thought the culture on their teams had improved in the last year.

Nevertheless, the predominant opinion – even among people who regarded the initiatives positively – was that they were unlikely to produce any lasting improvements. As discussed earlier in the report, some staff have been reluctant to trust leadership due to past and current experience that managers have not held problem employees accountable. This mistrust is evident in many staff attitudes to more recent cultural improvement initiatives. Of the 97 group and individual interview participants who discussed DFW improvement efforts, 77 voiced negative or mixed views of the initiatives and were skeptical these actions could create

real change. Several of these people described the initiatives as “lip service,” or a response to bad press in an effort to “make it look like they’re doing something.” Many of these staff doubted the agency would follow through in the long term, citing a historical lack of action and unclear consequences for failure to act. These employees said past improvement efforts lacked management commitment and measurable results that staff could observe, furthering skepticism that new efforts would lead to real change.

“I think the intention was good, but it seems like none of these initiatives—maybe I can just speak for Safe and Best—[have] no consequences outlined.... It’s fine to say ‘respect this person by not doing this, come to work on time,’ but if there aren’t consequences or systems set up that would make it clear ‘Strike 1, 2, 3’—I don’t see there actually being any substantial change from something like that.”

“Is it going to be the thing where they just say they’re going to do it but they don’t actually do it? They do a pretty good job of saying they’re going to do something. We get an email saying ‘This is what we’re going to do.’ Then you never hear about it ever again.”

“I was a new employee when the Diversity [Advisory] Committee started... everybody was like, ‘yeah, let’s see how long that lasts.’ You know I haven’t seen a lot come out of it, they put out the meeting notes. I think it’s that disappointment when you don’t see change, when they say there’s going to be change.”

Implementing additional leading practices may strengthen the success and sustainability of improvement efforts

Although a certain amount of employee skepticism toward new initiatives is perhaps inevitable, using effective change-management techniques can reduce resistance to change. Leading practices in change management from the Harvard Business Review, Gallup and OFM — as well as recommendations in DFW’s own Safe and Best report and an independently contracted gap analysis — suggest that effective change management includes the following five actions.

- **Consistently monitor aspects of the organization’s culture.** If needed, develop new metrics to measure the desired change, particularly those that are indicative of risk, such as turnover or low productivity. Identify behaviors and work units that do not appear aligned with the desired culture.
- **Measure initiative progress and success.** For individual change initiatives, establish specific goals that reflect desired outcomes of specific activities being implemented. Review progress regularly, and prepare an annual assessment to share with staff, other agencies and the public.

- **Establish policies and procedures around new practices.** Policies and procedures reflect how the values are integrated into standards and practices.
- **Involve employees when developing initiatives.** When planning major changes, solicit feedback and engage employees in the process, and put in place a consistent process to enable staff to contribute their ideas. This helps build ownership in the change, and makes employees more likely to support and even champion it.
- **Clearly convey the purpose, goals and progress of each initiative or project to employees over the long term.** Routinely communicating throughout the life of every initiative or project demonstrates consistent commitment. Messages need to be consistent over time and across messengers, as conflicting messages can create distrust and cynicism. This is especially important for DFW because its employees have seen multiple initiatives come and go over the years.

So far, DFW has used few of these practices in its cultural improvement initiatives

DFW's 25-year strategic plan does include goals around cultural improvement. For example, one of the goals is to prioritize certain actions over the next four years. Some of these action items include:

- Support the recommendations of employee resource groups and the Department's internal Diversity Advisory Committee
- Track workforce diversity, equity and inclusion measures
- Develop measures for strengthening employee satisfaction and adopting best practices for staff retention and advancement
- Develop a culture that supports physical and emotional safety, including a goal that 90 percent of employees would recommend DFW as a great place to work

However, the agency has not yet established performance measures to determine the success and outcomes of improvement initiatives already under way: the Diversity Advisory Committee, the Safe and Best Workplace action plan, or the Red Flag Reporting system. DFW has not developed policies and procedures for Red Flag Reporting, and could not provide information on the process for managing and tracking reports. DFW has also not established a systematic way to assess culture or risk throughout the entire agency that is comparable to the culture assessment conducted by the Wildlife Program.

As for agency policies, our review showed DFW still lacks policies addressing bullying, diversity, equity and inclusion. The sexual harassment policy has not been updated since 2008, despite known sexual harassment incidents within the agency

and the heightened awareness of issues around sexual harassment and assault brought about by the global #MeToo movement. Nor has the agency spelled out the consequences for all types of unprofessional behavior in policy.

Furthermore, numerous employees indicated the agency has not effectively communicated initiative goals, processes or outcomes, and does not have reliable practices for keeping them regularly informed and engaged on its workplace initiatives. More than 25 staff in group and individual interviews indicated they either did not know what progress these initiatives were making, or what the goals and outcomes were. Staff responses on the 2020 Association of Fish and Wildlife Professionals survey confirmed similar sentiments, with 139 survey respondents (55 percent) saying they did not know if the Diversity Advisory Committee had “measurably helped to create an inclusive workplace that supports diversity.” The survey summarized that the “efficacy of the Diversity Advisory Committee is not apparent to the majority of respondents.” A small minority of these survey respondents said they had not even heard of these initiatives: 34 people said they were not aware of the Red Flag Reporting system and 22 said the same for the Diversity Advisory Committee.

While multiple communication plans specific to certain efforts are currently in place or in development, DFW has not established a successful mechanism to monitor that all staff receive important information about these initiatives or that staff input on improvement efforts is elevated to the appropriate level of management.

Cultural change can take years, so DFW should persist in its efforts

Organizational change requires effective monitoring and accountability metrics, but it also requires persistence over time. Research examining workplace effects on employee attitudes and organizational performance has shown that new hires eventually develop attitudes that come to resemble the pre-existing favorable or unfavorable attitudes of longer-tenured employees. Unsurprisingly, employees who have experienced problems in the past may share these experiences and attitudes with new employees, and thus create a general atmosphere of skepticism regarding organizational change that will take time to overcome.

Organizations that work on changing workplace culture usually see the strongest gains in three to five years, making diligent follow through crucial. Until improvement and accountability can be measured over time and effectively communicated, employees will likely continue to doubt that efforts will be effective and real change achieved. To improve its organizational culture, DFW leaders should implement leading practices, monitor and measure results, and stay the course.

State Auditor's Conclusions

We conducted this audit in response to publicized incidents of sexual harassment and ongoing concerns from stakeholders about the overall culture at the Department of Fish and Wildlife. We did not find evidence of a highly sexualized culture. Instead, the information we compiled showed staff who were committed to and enjoyed many aspects of their work, but who also had real concerns about different forms of unprofessional behavior, communication breakdowns across the agency, and a general lack of confidence in management's ability to address these issues.

Executive management has taken a number of important steps during the past several years to address concerns about the agency's culture. Ongoing initiatives could be strengthened by incorporating some of the leading practices we identified. But the most important thing DFW's leaders must do is maintain their commitment to change. Keep focusing on improvement and don't get discouraged. It takes time to build trust.

DFW employees are passionate about their work and appreciate their close colleagues. They want things to get better, but they are also skeptical that changes initiated by the executive management team have staying power. For real change to take hold, leadership must remain committed to the process it has begun.

Recommendations

For the Department of Fish and Wildlife

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

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

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 in order to understand and address the needs and concerns of all employees

To ensure current and future workplace culture improvement initiatives succeed, as described 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.

Agency Response



STATE OF WASHINGTON

September 9, 2021

Honorable Pat McCarthy
Washington State Auditor
P.O. Box 40021
Olympia, WA 98504-0021

Dear Auditor McCarthy:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the State Auditor's Office performance audit on workplace culture at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). WDFW and the Office of Financial Management (OFM) jointly prepared this response.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recognizes that past instances of sexual harassment have significantly harmed those staff who were victims as well as witnesses of harassment. We also know that these events decreased morale, reduced trust in leadership, and hindered our ability to meet our collective mission. WDFW's history is important because when it comes to our culture, past actions echo into the future, with lasting consequences. The work done by the State Auditor's Office in describing WDFW's culture and identifying recommendations is important and appreciated as we continue to heal, learn and grow in our shared commitment to a respectful workplace.

We are heartened by the finding that sexual harassment is not a pervasive issue within the department. WDFW has been focused on this issue for several years, and the evidence suggests the improvements are starting to shift the culture. The timeline (pg. 10 of the audit report) illustrates the number and breadth of changes WDFW has undertaken in the last two years that have increased accountability and strengthened our ability to ensure a respectful workplace. For example, WDFW established and deployed a set of core values that we can all abide by and stand up for; invested in a third-party reporting tool; hired a diversity, equity, and inclusion manager; increased training; and improved communication throughout the agency. In fact, the majority of the director's tenure overlaps with the audit time period, creating an opportunity to use the auditor's data as a baseline from which we can measure progress.

The WDFW Executive Management Team is committed and focused on improving the department's culture. To that end, leadership has articulated a vision for a respectful and inclusive workplace and is focused on improving accountability to WDFW values and increasing investments in training and staff to support these efforts. Changes at the executive level have a cascading effect throughout the agency and are directly implemented by supervisors and the 1,900 staff at WDFW. We appreciate all the efforts by our staff and their commitment to building strong, inclusive teams. We see the results of their work in the SAO's findings that show the majority of WDFW staff have a positive view of their team's workplace culture and feel that their team's culture has further improved in the last year. Importantly, most supervisors are reported by their staff as modeling WDFW's values of accountability, service, professionalism, integrity, respect and empathy.

We understand how critical it is to have robust reporting and the expectation that when people see something, they say something. The results of the audit further show that staff feel comfortable reporting improper behavior to their supervisor (80%). The Executive Management Team and senior leaders have been focused on creating conditions that encourage reporting – through bystander training,

frequent leadership conversations, and the purchase of Red Flag Reporting. But it is individual line staff and supervisors who have stepped up to the daily commitment of inclusivity and respect. We cannot overstate the importance of their leadership throughout WDFW.

The audit also revealed that 21% of employees are exposed to yelling, demeaning comments or intimidation. This is an area for improvement within WDFW. Upon review of the SAO data, the frequency of this behavior at WDFW is similar to what is experienced by the overall employed population in the United States (20%). Our goal is to significantly reduce the occurrence of these events at WDFW and ensure that every employee experiences a safe workplace free from demeaning behavior.

Like other natural resource agencies, WDFW continues to have some of the lowest diversity in state government. WDFW also continues to struggle to achieve gender parity — nearly 35% of our workforce identifies as female or non-binary. To address this, WDFW must create a respectful workplace where inclusivity is broadly demonstrated so we can successfully recruit and retain a diverse workforce. Therefore, issues of gender, racial discrimination, or other forms of discrimination are of particular concern. The finding that management is not perceived as consistently addressing concerns necessitates action in order to become an employer of choice and to ensure that every employee is respected.

In the past year, after the conclusion of SAO's work, WDFW finalized three new policies to increase respect in the workplace: a DEI policy requiring all employees to promote and practice inclusion and respect for diversity, a policy on providing a respectful work environment, and an anti-discrimination and harassment policy. Additionally, WDFW has focused on including our values in staff expectations and completing annual evaluation processes, with 92% completed in 2020 and in 2021. WDFW can build on this work while acknowledging how much the department must do to fully realize a respectful workplace for every single employee.

As a large, multi-disciplinary organization with staff in every corner of the state, WDFW struggles to effectively communicate from the top down, from the bottom up, and across region and program areas. The audit highlighted the need to strengthen internal communication: two-way communication, one-way communication from leadership, and cross-program communication to reduce silos. Although WDFW has made improvements throughout the pandemic, the department looks forward to continuing efforts to further engage employees both remotely and in-person. In June 2021, we completed our first internal communication plan, which outlines strategies and measures to evaluate success.

We appreciate the iterative approach that led to this final product. We thank the State Auditor's Office for its time, commitment, and willingness to assist us on our journey. Your findings confirm that while the department still has work to do, we are headed in the right direction.

Sincerely,



Kelly Susewind
Director
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



David Schumacher
Director
Office of Financial Management

cc: Jamila Thomas, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Kelly Wicker, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Keith Phillips, Director of Policy, Office of the Governor
Christine Bezanson, Director, Results Washington, Office of the Governor
Tammy Firkins, Performance Audit Liaison, Results Washington, Office of the Governor
Scott Frank, Director of Performance Audit, Office of the Washington State Auditor
Amy Windrope, Deputy Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Mario Cruz, Internal Auditor, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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?

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.*
-

Appendix A: Initiative 900 and Auditing Standards

Initiative 900 requirements

Initiative 900, approved by Washington voters in 2005 and enacted into state law in 2006, authorized the State Auditor’s Office to conduct independent, comprehensive performance audits of state and local governments.

Specifically, the law directs the Auditor’s Office to “review and analyze the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the policies, management, fiscal affairs, and operations of state and local governments, agencies, programs, and accounts.” Performance audits are to be conducted according to U.S. Government Accountability Office government auditing standards.

In addition, the law identifies nine elements that are to be considered within the scope of each performance audit. The State Auditor’s Office evaluates the relevance of all nine elements to each audit. The table below indicates which elements are addressed in the audit. Specific issues are discussed in the Results and Recommendations sections of this report.

I-900 element	Addressed in the audit
1. Identify cost savings	No. This audit focused on assessing the workplace culture at the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and was not designed to identify cost savings.
2. Identify services that can be reduced or eliminated	No. The audit did not evaluate the services provided by DFW.
3. Identify programs or services that can be transferred to the private sector	No. The audit did not evaluate the services provided by DFW and so did not assess if any could be transferred to the private sector.
4. Analyze gaps or overlaps in programs or services and provide recommendations to correct them	No. While the audit did analyze relationships between programs and services and made recommendations to improve their communication, it did not analyze gaps or overlaps in programs or services.
5. Assess feasibility of pooling IT systems within the department	No. The audit did not assess the feasibility of pooling information technology systems within DFW.
6. Analyze departmental roles and functions, and provide recommendations to change or eliminate them	Yes. The audit analyzed departmental roles and functions to determine their impact on workplace culture, but did not make recommendations to change or eliminate them.

I-900 element**Addressed in the audit**

7. Provide recommendations for statutory or regulatory changes that may be necessary for the department to properly carry out its functions	No. While the audit assessed agency policies and procedures and how they are implemented, it did not make any recommendations for statutory or regulatory changes.
8. Analyze departmental performance data, performance measures and self-assessment systems	Yes. The audit reviewed and analyzed DFW’s performance data, performance measures and self-assessment systems relevant to workplace culture, and made recommendations for improvement.
9. Identify relevant best practices	Yes. The audit identified relevant best practices and made recommendations on areas in which the agency can use them to improve workplace culture.

Compliance with generally accepted government auditing standards

We conducted this performance audit under the authority of state law (RCW 43.09.470), approved as Initiative 900 by Washington voters in 2005, and in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards as published in *Government Auditing Standards* (December 2011 revision) issued by the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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Appendix B: Scope, Objectives and Methodology

Scope

This performance audit of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) was conducted with a broad scope to assess the agency's overall workplace culture. While performance measures and survey results from other state agencies were reviewed, these agencies were not included in our audit and were only used for comparison purposes. Survey results from other agencies are summarized in Appendix E.

Organizational culture is embedded in all elements of an organization. For this reason, this audit engaged employees at all levels of management and staff, as well as all programs and regions within DFW.

Objectives

The purpose of this performance audit was to evaluate the workplace culture at DFW and identify areas for improvement. The audit sought to address the following objectives:

1. What factors at the Department of Fish and Wildlife shape its workplace culture?
2. How does the agency's culture affect its performance and ability to achieve its mission?
3. What steps could leadership take to improve the agency's workplace culture?

For reporting purposes, the audit results have been organized into key findings. The messages relate to the original objectives as follows:

- At the team level, DFW employees' strong positive views were driven by a sense of meaningful work, camaraderie and confidence in direct supervisors – This finding addresses Objective 1.
- Although sexual harassment was DFW's highest profile problem, survey responses indicate it is not a pervasive issue – This finding addresses Objective 1.
- Less positive views of the agency's culture were driven by other types of unprofessional behavior, perceptions of no accountability and communication challenges – This finding addresses Objective 1.
- Employees described widespread unprofessional behavior that has not been successfully addressed, diminishing trust in agency leadership – This finding addresses Objectives 1 and 2.
- Management can prioritize more open, transparent, two-way communication to strengthen trust and cohesion throughout the agency – This finding addresses Objectives 1, 2 and 3.
- DFW has taken steps to improve workplace culture, but more can be done to gain staff confidence and ensure long-term success – This finding addresses Objective 3.

Methodology

This section expands on the methodology briefly described in the Background section of this report. We obtained the evidence used to support the findings, conclusions and recommendations in this audit report during our fieldwork period (August 2019 to December 2020), with some additional follow-up work afterward.

To address our audit objectives, we performed the following work:

Objective 1: What factors at the Department of Fish and Wildlife shape its workplace culture?

Objective 2: How does the agency's culture affect its performance and ability to achieve its mission?

To address objectives 1 and 2, we held various types of group and individual interviews, job shadows and management meetings; conducted an employee survey; reviewed the results of previous surveys; and conducted a literature review of organizational culture resources.

Objective 3: What steps could leadership take to improve the agency's workplace culture?

To address this objective, we conducted a criteria review to identify leading practices related to the key themes discussed with employees during the group and individual interviews and job shadows. We reviewed recommendations from a previous DFW-commissioned report and an assessment conducted within the Wildlife program. We also compared DFW policies and procedures to leading practices, and held interviews with DFW executive management to identify initiatives DFW has implemented to improve the agency's workplace culture.

Participation was voluntary for all activities. DFW leadership encouraged employees to participate in all audit activities, as did the Washington Association of Fish and Wildlife Professionals, the agency's largest union. We believe such support strengthened employee participation overall.

This audit had a broad scope and employed a mixed-methods research design. The first phase of data collection was inductive. Using qualitative methods, we began fieldwork by listening to employees' concerns and looking for patterns, rather than testing predetermined hypotheses about where problems might exist. Qualitative methods provided sufficient depth for us to learn about employees' experiences, motivations, values and behaviors at the agency, and then identify a variety of factors that influence the agency's culture. During qualitative analysis, we developed models of what we understood to be the causes and effects of those cultural factors. The second phase of data collection was quantitative, founded on an employee survey. The results provided sufficient breadth for us to understand which of the many cultural factors we had identified during qualitative fieldwork applied most strongly to the organization as a whole and to test our models. These results were then compared and contrasted to the results of other data sources. Overall, triangulating qualitative, quantitative and secondary data sources strengthened our confidence in the findings and helped to minimize potential bias in the results.

Qualitative research

From October 2019 to January 2020, we spoke with 222 DFW employees from every region and program of the agency. This included 184 people who participated in group and individual interviews and job shadows, as well as 38 people who spoke with us during regional management meetings.

Note: Throughout this report, we often refer to “group and individual interviews” as shorthand for all of our qualitative data collection activities. This phrase includes job shadows and regional management meetings, which we consider to be types of interviews.

Data collection

As is best practice with qualitative research, the audit team prepared a semi-structured protocol for each type of qualitative activity. This plan outlined the major topics to be covered, offered a logical sequence to guide the process, and suggested common ways to pose questions. These protocols were the subject of extensive review and discussion by the interviewers and others on the audit team to ensure a shared understanding of how to use them. All interviewers received guidance on how to discuss difficult topics and avoid asking leading questions by two team members with extensive experience in conducting workplace investigations and sensitive interviews. During the first intensive week of fieldwork in Region 1, a team of four traveled together to continue practicing how to conduct activities similarly and debrief afterward, and to refine the protocols if necessary. Nearly all activities were conducted in teams of two or three; the composition of those teams rotated to further assure consistency in how group and individual interviews were conducted.

Since the purpose of these conversations was to understand the experience of the individual in front of us in depth, each research encounter was different, with follow up questions responding to the topics of interest and concern that were most salient for the DFW employee(s). Interviewers were not required to ask every question in exactly the same way every time. Follow-up questions posed to a group included soliciting differing perspectives and experiences. The team also asked standard probing questions to ground individuals’ perceptions in direct experience, such as by asking for specific examples and the effects of an experience on the participant. We did not restrict comments to a set time period because experiences from many years ago can still color current employee attitudes. Long-serving employees bring their past experiences to work with them every day, and may share those memories with newer employees. However, we did ask probing questions to determine when an event occurred and if the issues discussed were ongoing or not. (Events that happened in the past that were not described as ongoing or having current lasting effects on staff perceptions were tagged with a unique qualitative code and not counted during analysis.)

Participation in all activities was voluntary. We told the people we invited to group and individual interviews and job shadows that they could decline the invitation. We advised participants to say as only much as they felt comfortable sharing. We informed DFW employees about the risks of participation through a statement provided over email, and verbally reminded participants at the start of each discussion. We took measures to protect participant anonymity, such as not including the names of participants in fieldwork notes and transcripts.

Each qualitative data collection method is described below.

We conducted 27 group interviews with DFW staff members. We held group interviews to give employees an opportunity to discuss their work experiences and ways the workplace culture might be improved. Each group interview consisted of three to 10 employees. Discussions were conducted in a semi-structured format, meaning we developed questions and protocols to facilitate the discussion, but did not ask the same questions in every group. Instead, we let the participants guide the conversation in order to gain an understanding of the areas of greatest importance. These discussions were structured around six essential aspects of workplace culture identified by the O.C. Tanner Institute: purpose, opportunity, success, appreciation, wellbeing and leadership (“The Six Essential Aspects of Workplace Culture to Focus on Today,” 2017). In addition to conversations on those topics, we asked participants for their opinions on existing agency culture improvement initiatives and for suggestions to strengthen the culture at DFW. We held these groups off-site rather than at DFW facilities to encourage more-candid conversations. The audit team designed and conducted two primary types of group interviews.

Mixed-program, consisting of people from different programs within the same region. These discussions helped highlight similarities and differences between programs. We invited two people from each of the programs that operate in all six regions – Enforcement, Fish, Habitat, Wildlife – plus the Hatcheries division because it is larger than some programs. (Actual participation varied due to participants’ availability, interests and privacy concerns.)

In addition, we held a few mixed-program group interviews focused on a specific subpopulation, either women or temporary employees, to give these employees an opportunity share their experiences with people similar to them but working in different programs.

Program-specific, consisting of people from the same region and program. These discussions helped highlight similarities and differences between individuals within a program. With the exception of the Director’s Office, we held at least one group interview for each program. The number of program-specific groups depended on program size. For example, Fish Program groups were the most numerous because this program has the most employees.

A few program-specific group interviews consisted only of women working in the same region. These groups were conducted to give DFW’s female employees an opportunity share their experiences without the presence of male colleagues.

We conducted 10 job shadows with DFW staff and managers. Job shadows allowed us to speak with employees individually while observing their work environments. The activity included at least one semi-structured interview and, in most cases, a walk-through of the employee’s job site. In some instances, the sample focused on managers so we could learn more about operations from a management perspective.

We conducted individual interviews with 40 DFW staff members and managers. These interviews were held to offer employees an opportunity to speak about their experiences at the agency in a private setting, in person or on the telephone. This allowed people to talk about sensitive issues, like sexual harassment, with increased anonymity. Participants were encouraged to discuss the topics of greatest importance to them. To recruit participants, we sent an email to all DFW employees inviting them to contact the audit team by email or telephone. Some employees reached out to set up an interview, while others left an anonymous voice message on a dedicated audit phone line accessible by audit team members only. The phone line was opened in October 2019 and closed in January 2020. We returned the calls of everyone who left a message with contact information on the audit phone line, and offered to set up an interview to discuss their experiences. We also interviewed people who had declined to participate in a group interview or job shadow for reasons such as availability or privacy concerns.

We conducted meetings with regional management teams from each of the six regions. Meetings were held with members of each of the six regional management teams to gain an understanding of the regional workplace culture from a manager’s perspective, as well as any unique issues they faced. Any regional management team member could join for the meeting, but actual participation varied by availability and the discretion of the Regional Director. The meetings included a semi-structured group interview guided by an interview protocol.

Sampling strategy

Qualitative research is most suited to answering questions about “why” a particular pattern of behavior or attitudes is seen in a group of people and to understanding the impact or consequences of those patterns. Researchers use **purposeful sampling techniques** to find individuals who can provide detail-rich examples that reveal both common and less common patterns in the topic under study.

This audit’s specific purposeful sampling strategy aimed at maximizing variation among the DFW employees we interacted with. Purposeful sampling does not aim to achieve statistical representativeness, but to understand all of the important dynamics occurring in the population, including things that are uncommon but important. Ultimately, this allows the researcher to gain a much clearer and more nuanced picture of what is happening in the population.

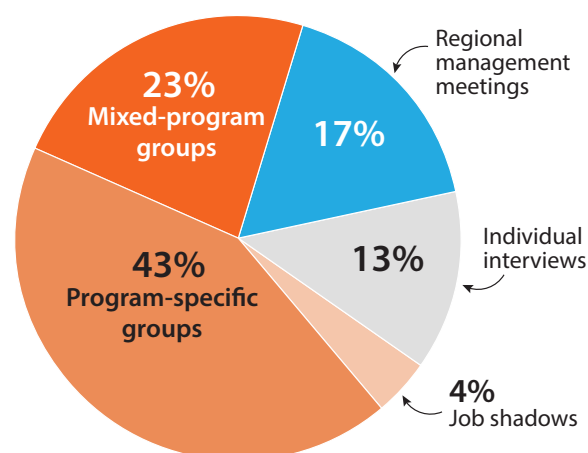
Purposeful sampling stands in contrast to random sampling, which aims to draw a sample that mirrors the overall population. With random sampling, patterns that are prevalent in the population will show up frequently in the sample, while less common patterns will appear less frequently in the sample, if at all. When done correctly, random sampling may provide the researcher with a statistically representative but potentially incomplete or simplified picture of the population.

“Studying a random sample provides the best opportunity to generalize the results of the population but is not the most effective way of developing an understanding of complex issues relating to human behavior.” (Martin N. Marshall, “Sampling for Qualitative Research,” 1996)

To assess the factors that influence culture throughout the agency, and their effects, we decided on a sampling strategy that aimed at maximum variation. (See Michael Quinn Patton, “Designing Qualitative Studies,” 1990, for more information on sampling strategies.) With this strategy, we could learn about the experiences of a broad range of DFW employees and then look for shared patterns across those differences, in such a way that allowed us to better understand the central, shared factors influencing culture at the agency.

This aim for maximum variation was also the guiding principle of our design for qualitative research. Because people tend to talk about different things depending on the setting and who else is around, we wanted to learn about culture through dynamic conversations between coworkers outside of their regular work environment (group interviews) and individual conversations where people work (job shadows). These participants comprised the bulk of our actual participant sample (70 percent, see **Figure 1**), and were selected using purposeful sampling methods described below.

Figure 1 – Qualitative sample by type of fieldwork activity



Source: Auditor created.

We also wanted to hear managers' perspectives (regional management meetings, 17 percent of the sample) and leave room for individual employees to contact us and talk about their experiences (13 percent of the sample).

Our sampling strategy was in large part informed by what we learned about agency dynamics during the scoping and planning phases of the audit. At that time, members of the agency's executive management team and regional management teams described several variables they believed would be important for us to consider in order to understand the agency's culture. To expressly address the variables leadership described, we:

- Traveled to every region and spoke with people in every program because leadership expected differences by program and region
- Held a few group interviews made up of only women or temporary staff because leadership thought they may have different experiences from other employees
- Held some comparable activities (for example, Fish Program group interviews) on both eastern and western sides of the state because leadership thought views could differ on the two sides of the state
- Visited the regional office and a more distant location in each region because leadership thought employees stationed in more remote job sites might have different perspectives than those based in regional offices

Had we not taken these measures, we would not have learned nearly as much about the wide range of experiences employees have at the agency – nor would we know the importance of the commonalities that cut across all of these groups.

In order to cover all of these variables, the audit team had to speak with many people. After talking to 222 employees, and with no new themes emerging from our conversations, we were confident we had reached a point of data saturation and had achieved sufficient representation of the intended groups through our qualitative fieldwork.

Subsequent sampling decisions were built upon decisions and information.

1. **The number of group interviews and job shadows to conduct in each region.** To achieve broad geographic coverage, we decided to conduct five to seven fieldwork activities in each of the agency's six regions and nine fieldwork activities for its Olympia headquarters. This included one mixed-program group interview in each region and headquarters.
2. **The number of group interviews and job shadows to conduct for each program.** The number of activities conducted for each major program (Enforcement, Fish, Habitat, Wildlife, plus Hatcheries) varied by program size. Every program had at least two program-specific group interviews and one job shadow. Additional group interviews were assigned to the larger programs based on the proportion of staff working in all programs. Additionally, we conducted one group interview with TFM and one with CAMP.
3. **The selection of regions where we would hold which program-specific activities.** Since we could not feasibly talk to people from every program in every region, we allocated different program-specific group interviews and job shadows to different regions. Most often this was based on where programs had the most employees. To a lesser extent, we considered factors such as balancing representation from both sides of the state and where programs scored particularly

low or high on the State Employee Engagement Survey or WAFWP's annual member survey. (Of the 27 group interviews conducted, 17 were based on neutral considerations, such as size; five were held in a region where a program had on average relatively high scores; five were held in a region where a program had on average relatively low scores. These scores did not influence where in a region we actually held an activity or who was invited to participate.)

4. **The selection of cities and towns where we would hold group interviews and job shadows.** We focused on cities and towns with large enough concentrations of employees to hold group interviews, one near the regional office and one an hour or more away. Job shadows were held near group interview locations.
5. **The selection of people to invite to each group interview.** We decided to exclude leadership and high-ranking managers, such as directors and WMS positions, from group interviews to create an environment in which participants felt comfortable sharing their views and experiences with peers. Working from a list of all DFW employees, we created a list of program employees who worked within 60 to 90 minutes' travel time of interview locations. Next, we randomized the remaining names on the list and selected people from the top of the list to invite. Finally, we checked to see if any of the selected individuals directly supervised anyone else on the list. In instances where they did, we excluded the supervisor and invited someone else to fill the spot because we wanted participants to feel comfortable sharing candid views that touch on staff-management relationships.
6. **The selection of people to invite to each job shadow.** Job shadow participants were selected through a similar process as the group interviews. However, because we wanted to speak with people who had more experience at the agency, managers and supervisors were not excluded from the sample, and temporary staff were excluded. On some occasions, we interviewed more than one person at the selected employee's job site.

Qualitative data analysis

Fieldwork activities were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed for accuracy. The audit team checked the quality of the transcripts by listening to the associated audio file and making any needed corrections. The resulting finalized transcripts were uploaded into a qualitative analysis software, NVivo, for analysis. The audit team developed a coding framework through an iterative process and tested the framework against a subset of transcripts. Three team members coded the transcripts. To ensure codes were applied consistently by different people over time, the audit team took multiple precautions, including inter-coder reliability testing, frequent discussions between the coders to clarify issues as they arose, and spot-checking conducted by the coders, the audit lead and the audit principal. Through preliminary analysis, the audit team identified which themes were discussed by the greatest proportion of employees and in which programs and regions (see Appendix C for a summary of results). Subsequently, the audit team chose 20 topics to examine in greater depth, and did so by analyzing employees' comments on those topics and preparing summary workpapers.

Quantitative research

We designed and conducted an employee survey. To determine the prevalence of employee opinions, we administered a survey to all DFW employees (about 1,800 people). Using results from group and individual interviews, we worked with a methodologist experienced in survey administration and analysis to develop survey questions. To avoid duplication, we removed any questions from our survey that resembled questions asked in other surveys administered to DFW employees. For this reason, we complemented our survey results with data from the Washington State Employee Engagement Survey and the Washington Association of Fish and Wildlife Professionals union member survey. Before we finalized the survey, eight DFW employees reviewed our questions for understandability.

The survey was sent via email using SurveyMonkey to all DFW employees in July 2020. All employees received an email inviting them to take the survey as well as a follow-up email reminding them about the survey deadline and requesting participation. In total, 817 DFW employees completed the survey, producing a response rate of 45 percent. The survey was open from July 7 to July 22, 2020. Before survey results were analyzed, the audit team conducted data reliability testing on the data received from SurveyMonkey. This included checking for inconsistent responses and verifying that the number of responses did not exceed employee counts for the agency as a whole or any of its programs. (See Appendix D for the survey questions and a summary of the results.)

Secondary data analysis

We compared DFW performance measures and employee engagement survey results to similar state agencies. We reviewed culture-related performance measures reported by OFM (2019 and 2020), as well as results from the annual state-administered Employee Engagement Survey (2018) during the scoping phase of this audit, using the most current data available at that time, to understand if issues identified were common across other similar state agencies. (For the results of those comparisons, see Appendix E.) Later, during the reporting phase, we also incorporated DFW's 2019 and 2020 results into the report. For reference, the 2019 Employee Engagement Survey was conducted around the same time the audit team conducted group and individual interviews.

We reviewed other relevant resources. We conducted a literature review that included major theoretical frameworks and methodologies for studying organizational culture, transmission of workplace culture, and how culture is connected to issues such as hiring and promotion, sexual harassment, workplace bias, and workforce diversity. We conducted a criteria review to identify leading practices related to the key themes discussed with employees during the group and individual interviews, as well as the affect those themes can have on employees and workplace culture overall. We also reviewed recommendations from previous DFW-commissioned reports, compared HR DFW policies and procedures to leading practices, and had meetings with DFW executive management to identify initiatives DFW has implemented to improve the workplace culture at the agency.

Staffing and contributions

The audit team included a core group who worked on all aspects of the audit and additional team members who provided strategic guidance and support. The core audit team was composed of a performance audit principal, manager, and two to three staff auditors. A cultural anthropologist and a methodologist joined the team for several months during the scoping and planning phases of the audit; they made significant contributions to decisions around research design, sampling strategies, protocol

development and testing. In addition, the methodologist contributed to survey development and data analysis planning (for example, qualitative coding structure and interpreting survey data). The cultural anthropologist trained the team to conduct observations and job shadows, and conducted several fieldwork activities. During the reporting phase, the anthropologist also contributed to discussions of major findings and reviewed drafts of the report.

Before qualitative data collection began, the audit team was also joined by two State Auditor's Office employees who provided guidance on advanced interviewing techniques, drawing from their expertise in interviewing on sensitive topics and conducting workplace investigations; these employees were a senior performance auditor and an auditor in the Whistleblower division. These two team members also reviewed protocols and traveled with the core team to conduct group and individual interviews and job shadows across the state. Early in the audit, we also contracted with a candidate for a Master of Science in applied environmental anthropology to conduct a literature review on organizational culture.

Work on internal controls

Past incidents of sexual harassment and stakeholder concerns regarding diversity, accountability and communication indicated potential problems with the workplace culture at DFW. To address these concerns, the agency relied on its existing policies related to sexual harassment and administrative investigations and implemented several workplace improvement initiatives. Therefore, we considered agency policies and procedures and the new initiatives as key controls in this audit. As such, we assessed the agency's policies and procedures as well as cultural improvement initiatives to determine if the agency had effectively implemented leading practices.

External review

In response to DFW's concerns about our draft audit report, we engaged an external expert to assess our methodological approach and whether it was consistent with commonly accepted anthropological methods. We also asked the expert to assess the reasonableness of our audit results considering the approach we used and the evidence cited in the report. The expert we hired is an anthropologist with 40 years of experience in research design. She has special expertise in public sector program evaluation, evaluation research, and case study methods with an emphasis on linking findings to both quantitative and qualitative evidence. While the reviewer recommended some changes to the report's appendices to better reflect the rigor of the qualitative analysis and suggested methodological improvements to consider for future work, she had no concerns about the qualitative research design. She furthermore found the findings to be accurate, adequately supported, and consistent across the rigorous and multiple data sources.

Based on the reviewer's recommendations, we changed references to "focus groups" to "group interviews" to better reflect the audit methods used. In addition, we added figures to the Qualitative Data Analysis Summary (Appendix C) listing the major themes that emerged from our qualitative analysis. We also added information on DFW employee demographics to figures 9 through 11 in Appendix D to show how survey respondent demographics compare to those of the full DFW employee population.

Appendix C: Qualitative Summaries

Participant demographics

Figures 2 through 6 summarize participation in qualitative fieldwork activities – group and individual interviews, job shadows and regional management meetings.

The qualitative sample did not aim to mirror the population of DFW employees. It was designed to ensure participation from employees with diverse views and experiences, although some agency characteristics, such as program size, were factored into the sample design. The actual sample composition (as presented below) differed from the intended sample due to outside factors, including:

- The number of employees who contacted us for interviews
- The number of unfilled group interview seats, including employees who canceled late or did not keep the appointment
- The availability of regional managers, which was sometimes limited
- The seasonal nature of temporary employees' assignments, with fewer working when our fieldwork was conducted

Figure 2 – Participation by program

Program	Number of participants	Percent of participants
CAMP	9	4%
Director's Office	18	8%
Enforcement	29	13%
Fish	57	25%
Habitat	36	16%
Hatcheries	18	8%
TFM	7	3%
Unassigned	3	1%
Wildlife	51	22%
Total	228	100%

Figure 3 – Participation by region

Region	Number of participants	Percent of participants
HQ	66	29%
Region 1	28	12%
Region 2	26	11%
Region 3	23	10%
Region 4	42	18%
Region 5	15	7%
Region 6	27	12%
Unassigned	1	0%
Total	228	100%

Figure 4 – Participation by gender

Gender	Number of participants	Percent of participants
Female	95	42%
Male	124	54%
Unassigned	9	4%
Total	228	100%

Figure 5 – Participation by employment status

Status	Number of participants	Percent of participants
Permanent	205	90%
Temporary	18	8%
Unassigned	5	2%
Total	228	100%

Figure 6 – Participation by employee type

Race / ethnicity	Number of participants	Percent of participants
Regional managers	38	17%
Other employees	189	83%
Unassigned	1	0%
Total	228	100%

Data notes for all tables

1. Some values are “Unassigned” because some participants preferred to remain anonymous.
2. The total of 228 shown here includes the 222 people who participated in qualitative fieldwork plus six short excerpts. The excerpts were extracted from larger transcripts to protect participant anonymity or because a comment transcribed from audio could not be attributed to a specific participant. It is unlikely these excerpts were double counted during analysis given their abbreviated content and efforts taken by the audit team.

Preliminary qualitative analysis results

The figures below provide the high-level results of a preliminary analysis conducted to identify prominent themes in the qualitative dataset. The results helped us determine which topics to examine in more depth through additional qualitative analysis and our employee survey. They summarize the perspectives of the people we spoke with in group interviews, job shadows, management meetings and individual interviews. Participants were asked different questions in each setting or group, with conversations moving toward whatever participants wanted to speak about.

After transcribing and coding the conversations in NVivo, we identified 38 themes (aggregated from more than 130 individual qualitative codes) and queried the results – along with a concurrent sentiment code – to determine what percentage of participants made a positive or negative comment related to the theme.

- **Figures 7 and 8** show differences by gender and participation type – that is, participants the audit team contacted directly, asking them if they wanted to participate (“invited”), versus participants who contacted the audit team for an interview (“self-selected”). These two figures are sorted from highest to lowest percent of **total** respondents that mentioned that theme.
- **Figure 9** summarizes similarities by region and program across the most prominent themes we identified.

Because this is qualitative data, the information presented below is not intended to be generalized to the broader population of DFW employees in the way that, for example, survey data might be. The numbers are also approximate, as subsequent analysis allowed us to carefully examine individual comments and cull and summarize those most directly related to the themes and subthemes discussed in this report.

Figure 7 – Percent of participants that spoke about a theme in a positive way

Theme	Total (228)	Male (124)	Female (95)	Invited (200)	Self-selected (27)
Relationships (support, respect)	58%	54%	67%	57%	67%
Purpose and mission	53%	61%	45%	54%	44%
Work (duties, schedule, workload)	48%	54%	44%	49%	48%
Camaraderie	46%	43%	56%	49%	30%
Management style	43%	44%	44%	45%	30%
Communication	36%	39%	36%	38%	22%
Collaboration	30%	34%	28%	34%	7%
Aware of issues/availability	29%	28%	32%	30%	19%
Training and mentoring	28%	27%	32%	30%	15%
Public (interactions, comms)	27%	31%	23%	27%	33%
Management skills	25%	23%	28%	25%	30%
Efforts and initiatives	21%	16%	28%	21%	19%

Figure 7 – Percent of participants that spoke about a theme in a positive way, continued

Theme	Total (228)	Male (124)	Female (95)	Invited (200)	Self-selected (27)
Autonomy	20%	23%	17%	22%	7%
Accountability	20%	17%	24%	20%	19%
Equipment (tools, vehicles, space)	20%	21%	18%	21%	11%
Promotions	18%	19%	18%	17%	26%
Silos	18%	17%	20%	19%	11%
Wellbeing (stress, health, morale)	15%	18%	13%	14%	22%
Diversity	14%	9%	23%	16%	7%
Decisions (agency)	14%	15%	15%	14%	15%
Hiring and recruitment	14%	13%	16%	14%	19%
Safety (physical)	14%	15%	14%	15%	7%
Reporting and retaliation	11%	10%	13%	11%	11%
HR	11%	9%	13%	10%	15%
Follow through (process)	9%	8%	11%	8%	22%
Bad behavior (not appropriate/ethical)	9%	7%	12%	10%	4%
Seasonal/temp concerns	9%	8%	11%	10%	0%
Discrimination	8%	2%	16%	9%	0%
Funding	7%	9%	4%	8%	0%
Pay and benefits	6%	8%	3%	6%	4%
Incidents	5%	8%	1%	6%	0%
Metrics	5%	4%	5%	5%	4%
Turnover and quitting	4%	4%	5%	4%	7%
External pressure (public, officials)	3%	4%	1%	3%	0%
Favoritism and cliques	3%	2%	3%	2%	11%
Staffing	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%
Employee evaluations	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Job security	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%

Figure 8 – Percent of participants that spoke about a theme in a negative way

Theme	Total (228)	Male (124)	Female (95)	Invited (200)	Self-selected (27)
Wellbeing (stress, health, morale)	71%	73%	68%	69%	85%
Communication	64%	65%	68%	65%	63%
Relationships (support, respect)	62%	55%	75%	61%	78%
Work (duties, schedule, workload)	61%	62%	60%	60%	70%
Silos	58%	59%	57%	58%	63%
Accountability	54%	49%	59%	49%	89%
Promotions	50%	52%	49%	49%	59%
Training and mentoring	46%	41%	57%	48%	37%
Public (interactions, comms)	45%	50%	42%	48%	26%
Management style	43%	36%	54%	41%	63%
Funding	43%	48%	37%	45%	30%
Aware of issues/availability	42%	37%	51%	42%	48%
Bad behavior (not appropriate/ethical)	42%	34%	53%	39%	70%
Equipment (tools, vehicles, space)	42%	39%	46%	45%	19%
Follow through (process)	42%	39%	47%	39%	67%
Decisions (agency)	39%	42%	38%	40%	41%
Hiring and recruitment	39%	37%	42%	35%	70%
Management skills	36%	35%	39%	36%	41%
Purpose and mission	35%	33%	40%	35%	37%
Reporting and retaliation	35%	30%	40%	31%	67%
Turnover and quitting	34%	33%	35%	31%	56%
Efforts and initiatives	33%	30%	39%	30%	56%
External pressure (public, officials)	30%	36%	25%	32%	19%
Favoritism and cliques	30%	29%	34%	28%	52%
Safety (physical)	30%	27%	36%	29%	41%
Staffing	30%	35%	24%	32%	19%
HR	30%	25%	37%	26%	63%
Camaraderie	29%	27%	32%	27%	44%
Pay and benefits	28%	29%	27%	30%	15%

Figure 8 – Percent of participants that spoke about a theme in a **negative** way, *continued*

Theme	Total (228)	Male (124)	Female (95)	Invited (200)	Self-selected (27)
Diversity	25%	17%	38%	25%	26%
Discrimination	25%	16%	38%	24%	33%
Collaboration	24%	20%	27%	25%	19%
Job security	20%	23%	18%	22%	7%
Seasonal/temp concerns	18%	18%	20%	19%	15%
Autonomy	15%	11%	20%	16%	11%
Incidents	11%	12%	12%	11%	19%
Employee evaluations	10%	8%	14%	10%	15%
Metrics	8%	10%	5%	8%	7%

Figure 9 – Most prominent themes and their prevalence across regions and programs

Theme	Regional distribution	Program distribution
More than 50% of the 228 participants said something POSITIVE about:		
Purpose (53%)	At least 43% in all regions	At least 43% in all programs, except Enforcement
Relationships (58%)	At least 43% in all regions	At least 50% in every program, except Enforcement
More than 50% of the 228 participants said something NEGATIVE about:		
Wellbeing (71%)	At least 50% in every region, except Regions 3 and 5	At least 50% in every program
Communication (64%)	At least 50% in every region, except Region 3	At least 50% in every program, except Director's Office
Relationships (62%)	At least 47% in every region, except Region 3	At least 50% in every program, except Director's Office
Work (61%)	At least 50% in every region, except Regions 3 and 5	At least 50% in every program, except TFM, Director's Office, and CAMP
Silos (58%)	At least 48% for every region, except Region 3	At least 47% in every program, except CAMP
Accountability (54%)	Similar by region, except lower for Region 3	Around 50% or higher for all programs
A substantial proportion of participants also said something NEGATIVE about:		
Bad behavior (42%)	Range from 13% (Region 3) to 56% (HQ)	At least 42% for all major programs, except Habitat

Appendix D: Employee Survey Results Summary

This appendix contains the results of a survey we sent to all Department of Fish and Wildlife employees in July 2020. The survey received 817 responses, achieving an overall response rate of 45 percent. For those who responded to the survey, the response rate for the first four questions was 100 percent and, for the remaining questions, between 96 percent and 99 percent.

Data notes: In the figures below, we included program, region and gender representation for the entire agency alongside the demographics of those who responded to the survey, to take into consideration potential non-response bias. Upon comparison, there does not appear to be a large risk of response bias, as the percentage of respondents by program and region is very similar to program and regional representation throughout the agency as a whole. Gender representation varied more, but this may be due to the large number of respondents who chose not to disclose their gender on the survey. Questions included a “Don’t know/NA” response option, which was excluded from analysis.

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Figures 9-12 set out demographics for all survey responses.

Figure 9 – Survey respondents by program

Program	Number of these employees total	Makes up this percentage of all DFW employees	Number of these employees who responded to the survey	Percent of survey respondents who are in this program
Fish	543	30%	181	22%
Wildlife	308	17%	150	18%
Habitat	187	10%	117	14%
Hatcheries	264	14%	85	10%
TFM	153	8%	65	8%
Enforcement	177	10%	55	7%
Director's Office	91	5%	52	6%
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A	45	6%
CAMP	104	6%	33	4%
No response	N/A	N/A	34	4%

N/A indicates not applicable.

Figure 10 – Respondents by region

Region	Number of these employees total	Makes up this percentage of all DFW employees	Number of survey respondents who are in this region	Percent of survey respondents who are in this region
Olympia (HQ)	594	33%	314	38%
Region 6	375	21%	83	10%
Region 4	208	11%	77	9%
Region 5	215	12%	76	9%
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A	75	9%
Region 1	154	8%	71	9%
Region 2	157	9%	45	6%
Region 3	124	7%	41	5%
No response	N/A	N/A	35	4%

N/A indicates not applicable.

Figure 11 – Respondents by gender

Gender	Number of these employees total	Makes up this percentage of all DFW employees ¹	Number of survey respondents who checked this gender	Percent of survey respondents who checked this gender
Male	1,287	68%	400	49%
Female	596	32%	269	33%
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A	111	14%
Non-binary	– ²	– ²	2	0%
<i>No response</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	35	4%

Data notes: 1. Fiscal year 2019 gender information had to be obtained from OFM, which has a slightly different employee count than the information we received from the agency for the same year. The OFM count lists 1,883 employees instead of 1,827. We used the former number for this table. 2. Too few to report. N/A indicates not applicable.

Figure 12 – Respondents by job class

Supervisor	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
No	542	66%
Yes	191	23%
Prefer not to say	49	6%
<i>No response</i>	35	4%

Figures 13-18 over the next several pages set out a series of survey responses to questions about decisions and decision-making, allocation of resources, staff support and reporting workplace issues, accountability, general workplace satisfaction, and experiencing or observing unprofessional behaviors.

Figure 13 – Decisions

Issues	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Percent positive	Percent negative
When a decision is made that affects my work, I receive information about why the decision was made.	6%	19%	18%	42%	15%	57%	25%
When a decision is made that affects my work, it's important for me to understand the reasons behind the decision.	1%	1%	3%	30%	65%	95%	2%
My input is valued when decisions are made that impact my work.	7%	16%	21%	39%	17%	56%	23%
Hiring and promotion/ appointment decisions are based on clear criteria.	14%	19%	22%	33%	12%	45%	33%

Figure 14 – Resources

Issues	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Percent positive	Percent negative
When I have questions related to my job, I typically can get answers in a timely manner.	3%	11%	13%	50%	23%	73%	14%
I am able to get the training I need to do my job effectively.	4%	10%	18%	47%	22%	69%	13%
I frequently interact with the public as part of my job duties.	6%	18%	13%	26%	37%	63%	24%
If a member of the public asked a question about my agency's positions on key issues, I would know how to answer or who to refer them to.	3%	12%	16%	50%	18%	68%	15%
Within its current staffing level, my team can accomplish its goals effectively.	13%	24%	19%	34%	10%	44%	37%
I have the following resources to do my job safely:							
Safety equipment and vehicles in good, working condition	2%	7%	10%	50%	31%	81%	9%
Safety measures (such as safety protocol in place for working alone in a remote location, etc.)	3%	8%	13%	49%	27%	76%	12%
Physically safe work environment	3%	6%	12%	49%	31%	79%	8%
Safety training	2%	6%	13%	50%	29%	79%	8%

Figure 15 – Support and reporting

Issues	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Percent positive	Percent negative
My supervisor cares about my professional development.	6%	7%	12%	35%	40%	75%	13%
Agency leadership demonstrates through their actions that staff wellbeing is a priority at DFW.	9%	13%	17%	38%	24%	61%	22%
Program management understands the barriers and challenges I face on the job.	12%	20%	20%	35%	13%	48%	32%
Program management takes action to remove barriers and challenges I face on the job.	13%	20%	30%	28%	9%	37%	33%
If I were to report a safety concern to my supervisor, I am confident they would take the necessary action to help me feel safe.	3%	5%	8%	38%	45%	83%	8%
If I were to report a safety concern to someone above my supervisor, I am confident they would take the necessary action to help me feel safe.	5%	9%	20%	34%	32%	65%	15%
I would feel comfortable reporting unethical or inappropriate behavior to:							
My direct supervisor	5%	6%	4%	32%	53%	85%	11%
Someone higher in my chain of command	8%	11%	12%	35%	35%	70%	18%
Program director	10%	13%	16%	28%	34%	61%	22%
HR	10%	10%	19%	33%	29%	62%	20%
Director's Office	13%	14%	24%	24%	24%	49%	28%
Red Flag reporting	7%	6%	21%	27%	29%	56%	13%

Figure 16 – Accountability

Issues	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Percent positive	Percent negative
Managers are held accountable when they behave inappropriately.	16%	19%	22%	32%	12%	43%	35%
Staff are held accountable when they behave inappropriately.	7%	16%	21%	42%	13%	55%	24%
Managers are consistent in how they respond to inappropriate behavior.	16%	23%	25%	27%	9%	36%	39%
I have the opportunity to provide feedback about my supervisor's performance for their evaluation.	21%	26%	12%	18%	15%	33%	47%
My immediate supervisor models the following values:							
Accountability	3%	6%	10%	34%	46%	80%	9%
Service	3%	4%	9%	36%	49%	84%	7%
Professionalism	3%	5%	9%	35%	48%	83%	8%
Integrity	4%	4%	8%	33%	51%	84%	8%
Respect	4%	5%	9%	32%	50%	82%	9%
Empathy	5%	6%	10%	32%	47%	78%	11%
The managers above my immediate supervisor model the following values:							
Accountability	7%	10%	16%	35%	32%	67%	17%
Service	5%	6%	17%	39%	32%	72%	11%
Professionalism	5%	7%	15%	37%	37%	73%	12%
Integrity	7%	7%	17%	35%	34%	69%	14%
Respect	7%	8%	15%	36%	34%	70%	15%
Empathy	8%	8%	19%	35%	31%	65%	16%
Executive management models the following values:							
Accountability	8%	10%	22%	36%	24%	60%	18%
Service	5%	6%	22%	41%	28%	68%	10%
Professionalism	5%	4%	19%	42%	30%	72%	9%
Integrity	6%	7%	25%	34%	27%	61%	14%
Respect	7%	7%	22%	37%	27%	64%	14%
Empathy	7%	8%	25%	36%	25%	61%	15%

Figure 17 – Workplace satisfaction

Issues	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Percent positive	Percent negative
My direct supervisor trusts me to do my job effectively without micromanaging.	4%	4%	4%	30%	58%	88%	8%
Morale is high within my team.	10%	13%	16%	40%	21%	61%	23%
I feel passionate about the issues I work on.	2%	3%	8%	37%	50%	87%	5%
In the past year, I have been actively looking for other employment.	29%	24%	14%	20%	11%	32%	54%
I have a positive view of workplace culture:							
On my team	5%	7%	10%	37%	40%	77%	12%
In my program	7%	13%	17%	39%	25%	64%	20%
In my region/NRB	8%	15%	23%	38%	16%	54%	23%
At my agency	9%	17%	27%	34%	14%	48%	25%
Over the last year, workplace culture has improved:							
On my team	8%	9%	30%	31%	21%	53%	17%
In my program	8%	14%	31%	31%	16%	47%	22%
In my region/NRB	9%	15%	39%	26%	12%	37%	24%
At my agency	10%	15%	34%	29%	12%	41%	25%

Figure 18 – Unprofessional behavior

*Data note: Some respondents answered “yes” to multiple options and therefore percentages do not necessarily reflect a unique number of respondents. See column in bold, titled **Unique responses**, for the percentage of unique respondents who answered “yes” to either “directed at me” or “directed at others.”*

Question and context	Yes, directed at me	Yes, directed at others	Heard about indirectly	No, have not experienced or heard about	Unique responses
In the past year, have you experienced unprofessional behavior such as yelling, demeaning comments or intimidation?	21%*	30%	33%	48%	33%
<p>Additional context: Employees who experienced or witnessed unprofessional behavior said it most often came from coworkers, direct supervisors and members of the public. Note that the number of people who exclusively answered “member of the public” was minimal, about 15 people. Almost 45% of those who directly experienced this type of behavior experienced it as frequently as monthly, weekly or daily. Respondents said this behavior was most often based on personal or political beliefs (22%) and gender (20%).</p> <p>*About 5% of respondents said they had only experienced such behavior directed at them by members of the public. For the rest who indicated they had experienced bullying from members of the public, they also experienced it internally within DFW.</p>					
In the past year, have you experienced comments that were sexual in nature or unwanted sexual advances?	2%	6%	11%	82%	6%
<p>Additional context: Employees who had experienced or witnessed sexual comments or advances said they most often came from coworkers, members of the public, or someone else within the agency. These comments or advances typically happened a few times a year or less.</p>					
In the past year, have you experienced retaliatory behavior?	11%	16%	18%	68%	16%
<p>Additional context: Those who had experienced or witnessed retaliatory behavior said it was most often by their direct supervisor or someone above their direct supervisor. More than 40% of those who experienced retaliatory behavior said this behavior occurred as often as monthly, weekly or daily.</p>					
In the past year, have you witnessed legal or ethical violations?	n/a	10%	23%	72%	24%
<p>Additional context: Those who had witnessed legal or ethical violations said it was most often by someone above their direct supervisor or someone else at the agency. Those who had heard about legal or ethical violations said it was most often by someone else at the agency. About 25% of those who witnessed legal or ethical violations said they witnessed them as often as monthly, weekly or daily.</p>					

Figures 19-21 set out the demographic breakdown of persons experiencing or observing unprofessional behavior in the form of “yelling, demeaning comments or intimidation.”

Figure 19 – Respondents by program

Program	Percent of all program respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Hatcheries	26%
Wildlife	26%
Enforcement	25%
Fish	20%
TFM	17%
Habitat	15%
CAMP	12%
Director’s Office	12%
Did not identify program	28%

Figure 20 – Respondents by region

Region	Percent of all region respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Region 2	27%
Region 4	26%
Region 1	24%
Region 6	22%
Region 5	21%
Region 3	20%
Olympia (HQ)	18%
Did not identify region	22%

Figure 21 – Respondents by gender

Gender	% of all male/female survey respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Female	25%
Male	18%
Did not identify gender	23%

Figures 22-24 set out the demographic breakdown of persons experiencing or observing unprofessional behavior in the form of “**sexual comments or unwanted sexual advances.**”

Figure 22 – Respondents by program

Program	Percent of all program respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Enforcement	4%
Hatcheries	4%
Fish	3%
TFM	3%
Habitat	2%
Wildlife	2%
CAMP	0%
Director’s Office	0%
Did not identify program	1%

Figure 23 – Respondents by region

Region	Percent of all region respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Region 5	7%
Region 6	6%
Region 4	4%
Region 1	3%
Olympia (HQ)	1%
Region 2	0%
Region 3	0%
Did not identify region	6%

Figure 24 – Respondents by gender

Gender	% of all male/female survey respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Female	4%
Male	1%
Did not identify gender	1%

Figures 25-27 set out the demographic breakdown of persons experiencing or observing unprofessional behavior in the form of “retaliatory behavior.”

Figure 25 – Respondents by program

Program	Percent of all program respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Enforcement	18%
TFM	17%
Hatcheries	13%
Wildlife	11%
Fish	10%
Director’s Office	8%
Habitat	6%
CAMP	3%
Did not identify program	16%

Figure 26 – Respondents by region

Region	Percent of all region respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Region 2	20%
Region 4	19%
Region 1	13%
Olympia (HQ)	10%
Region 5	8%
Region 6	7%
Region 3	7%
Did not identify region	11%

Figure 27 – Respondents by gender

Gender	% of all male/female survey respondents who answered “Yes, directed at me”
Female	12%
Male	10%
Did not identify gender	12%

Figures 28-30 set out the demographic breakdown of persons experiencing or observing unprofessional behavior in the form of “legal or ethical violations.”

Figure 28 – Respondents by program

Program	Percent of all program respondents who answered “Yes, directly witnessed”
Enforcement	11%
Fish	11%
Wildlife	11%
Habitat	9%
TFM	8%
Hatcheries	7%
Director’s Office	6%
CAMP	3%
Did not identify program	10%

Figure 29 – Respondents by region

Region	Percent of all region respondents who answered “Yes, directly witnessed”
Region 2	18%
Region 4	13%
Region 3	12%
Region 1	11%
Region 6	10%
Region 5	9%
Olympia (HQ)	7%
Did not identify region	12%

Figure 30 – Respondents by gender

Gender	% of all male/female survey respondents who answered “Yes, directly witnessed”
Female	25%
Male	18%
Did not identify gender	23%

Appendix E: State Agency Comparisons

This appendix contains the results of comparisons between DFW and other state agencies using performance indicators from OFM (2019) and results from OFM’s statewide Employee Engagement Survey (2019). **Figure 31** and **Figure 32** provide three points of comparison:

1. The average across all state agencies (“State avg”)
2. The average across a group of four agencies with a mission focused on natural resources (“Avg NR”)
 - Department of Agriculture
 - Department of Ecology
 - Department of Natural Resources
 - State Parks & Recreation Commission
3. The average across a group of nine agencies with *either* a mission focused on natural resources *or* similar to DFW in regard to number of employees (“Avg comp”)
 - Department of Agriculture
 - Department of Ecology
 - Department of Natural Resources
 - State Parks & Recreation Commission
 - Employment Security Department
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Licensing
 - Office of Attorney General
 - Washington State Patrol

This appendix provides all three points of comparison to help the reader put the results into context. However, this report most often uses the latter point of comparison because as a large natural resources agency, we would expect DFW to face challenges similar to those faced by other large agencies as well as those agencies that work on similar kinds of issues.

Performance measure comparisons

Figure 31 compares DFW's 2019 performance measures to similar state agencies. It shows the performance measures related to diversity and culture for DFW, similar agencies and statewide averages. Similar agencies were selected based on agency size and mission focus. Cells highlighted in **green** mark the highest (or best) result for that performance measure. Cells highlighted in **yellow** mark the lowest result for the measure.

Figure 31 – Performance measure comparison

Notes: N/A indicated no data was available for the measure. *State average percentages are rounded

Measure	Comparison agencies										DFW	Avg NR	Avg comp	State avg*
	ATG	ESD	DOH	DOL	WSP	Natural resources agencies								
						AGR	ECY	DNR	PARKS					
Average sick leave used (per capita)	5.4	6.9	6.3	6.8	5.7	6.3	8.1	5.5	5.5	5.4	6.2	6.2	6.7	
Disciplinary grievances	n/a	7	5	n/a	1	1	2	n/a	2	7	3.0	3.6	n/a	
Non-disciplinary grievances	n/a	13	5	n/a	6	n/a	7	n/a	1	10	6.0	7.0	n/a	
Total disciplinary actions taken	5	7	6	11	9	4	5	12	1	7	5.8	6.7	n/a	
Disciplinary action: Dismissal	1	5	3	9	8	2	3	10	0	3	3.6	4.4	n/a	
Disciplinary action: Demotion	1	1	1	2	1	n/a	1	2	1	2	1.5	1.3	n/a	
Disciplinary action: Suspension	3	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	1.0	1.1	n/a	
Total turnover rate %	10%	12%	8%	12%	10%	10%	9%	9%	10%	6%	9%	9%	10%	
Resignation rate %	7%	6%	5%	6%	6%	5%	5%	4%	6%	3%	4%	5%	6%	
Current position descriptions	100%	100%	73%	97%	88%	60%	100%	86%	100%	58%	81%	86%	82%	
Current development plans	100%	56%	76%	98%	69%	56%	73%	76%	100%	83%	78%	79%	80%	
Current performance evaluations	95%	74%	75%	98%	90%	71%	73%	73%	100%	72%	78%	82%	78%	
People of color %	9%	28%	22%	28%	15%	9%	12%	5%	11%	6%	9%	14%	20%	
Female %	46%	63%	68%	62%	31%	47%	52%	30%	37%	32%	40%	47%	53%	
People with disability %	1%	5%	4%	8%	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%	

Key to abbreviations (in the order they appear, left to right, in these tables)

ATG – Office of the Attorney General; **ESD** – Employment Security Department; **DOH** – Department of Health; **DOL** – Department of Licensing; **WSP** – Washington State Patrol; **AGR** – Department of Agriculture; **ECY** – Department of Ecology; **DNR** – Department of Natural Resources; **PARKS** – State Parks & Recreation Commission; **DFW** – Department of Fish & Wildlife. **Avg NR** – Average natural resource agencies; **Avg comp** – Average agencies in table; **State avg** – Average all WA state agencies.

Employee engagement survey comparisons

Figure 32 compares DFW's 2019 employee engagement survey results to similar state agencies. It shows the percent-positive response rates for DFW, similar agencies and statewide averages. Similar agencies were selected based on agency size and mission focus.

Cells highlighted in **green** mark the highest positive rating. Cells highlighted in **yellow** mark the lowest negative rating.

Figure 32 – Engagement survey comparison, 2019 state employee engagement survey

Question	Comparison agencies									DFW	Avg NR	Avg comp	State avg*
	ATG	ESD	DOH	DOL	WSP	Natural resources agencies							
						AGR	ECY	DNR	PARKS				
I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.	74%	66%	65%	64%	63%	62%	74%	69%	73%	68%	69%	68%	62%
I have information needed to do my job.	88%	71%	74%	73%	80%	76%	79%	74%	76%	74%	76%	77%	72%
I know what is expected of me at work.	94%	88%	87%	89%	91%	87%	86%	86%	87%	85%	86%	88%	86%
I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.	79%	67%	64%	62%	68%	63%	69%	68%	68%	61%	66%	67%	64%
I have the tools and resources I need to do my job effectively.	84%	72%	74%	71%	76%	80%	75%	76%	72%	69%	74%	75%	71%
My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect.	94%	89%	89%	88%	89%	87%	89%	88%	90%	87%	88%	89%	86%
My supervisor gives me helpful feedback.	81%	73%	67%	72%	73%	66%	66%	62%	68%	62%	65%	69%	69%
I receive recognition for a job well done.	71%	60%	58%	59%	57%	48%	65%	56%	59%	56%	57%	59%	57%

Key to abbreviations (in the order they appear, left to right, in these tables)

ATG – Office of the Attorney General; **ESD** – Employment Security Department; **DOH** – Department of Health; **DOL** – Department of Licensing; **WSP** – Washington State Patrol; **AGR** – Department of Agriculture; **ECY** – Department of Ecology; **DNR** – Department of Natural Resources; **PARKS** – State Parks & Recreation Commission; **DFW** – Department of Fish & Wildlife. **Avg NR** – Average natural resource agencies; **Avg comp** – Average agencies in table; **State avg** – Average all WA state agencies.

Figure 32, continued – Engagement survey comparison, 2019 state employee engagement survey

Question	Comparison agencies										DFW	Avg NR	Avg comp	State avg*
	ATG	ESD	DOH	DOL	WSP	Natural resources agencies								
						AGR	ECY	DNR	PARKS					
A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work group.	83%	77%	77%	77%	77%	68%	77%	75%	74%	74%	74%	76%	66%	
I know how my agency measures its success.	69%	59%	49%	60%	68%	45%	54%	46%	55%	33%	47%	54%	72%	
My agency supports a diverse workforce.	85%	80%	79%	84%	82%	67%	78%	74%	72%	66%	71%	77%	74%	
I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.	69%	68%	60%	63%	58%	57%	66%	59%	62%	60%	61%	62%	57%	
At my job, I have the opportunity to make good use of my skills.	85%	74%	74%	73%	79%	73%	78%	77%	77%	77%	76%	77%	72%	
At my workplace, I feel valued for who I am as a person.	81%	72%	70%	70%	71%	67%	76%	71%	72%	71%	71%	72%	48%	
How satisfied are you with your flexibility?	85%	69%	82%	67%	74%	77%	78%	80%	74%	80%	78%	77%	70%	
How satisfied are you with your mobility?	79%	58%	76%	53%	56%	64%	61%	58%	50%	63%	59%	62%	56%	
In general, I'm satisfied with my job.	82%	77%	74%	74%	79%	73%	76%	75%	78%	73%	75%	76%	72%	
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	81%	66%	69%	63%	74%	66%	78%	71%	70%	62%	69%	70%	64%	
I receive clear information about changes being made with the agency	60%	53%	55%	56%	54%	44%	54%	38%	47%	45%	46%	51%	50%	

Source: OFM 2019 employee survey data.

Key to abbreviations (in the order they appear, left to right, in these tables)

ATG – Office of the Attorney General; **ESD** – Employment Security Department; **DOH** – Department of Health; **DOL** – Department of Licensing; **WSP** – Washington State Patrol; **AGR** – Department of Agriculture; **ECY** – Department of Ecology; **DNR** – Department of Natural Resources; **PARKS** – State Parks & Recreation Commission; **DFW** – Department of Fish & Wildlife. **Avg NR** – Average natural resource agencies; **Avg comp** – Average agencies in table; **State avg** – Average all WA state agencies.

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