

Statewide Elected Officials: Commissioner of Public Lands

Civics and Government: Middle and High School

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

In this lesson, students will examine the role of the Commissioner of Public Lands, the person who runs the Department of Natural Resources in Washington State. By focusing on the responsibilities that the Commissioner has over the millions of acres of public lands, students will understand the importance the state of Washington puts upon the management of our natural resources.

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the role of the Commissioner of Public Lands in State Government
2. Evaluate the Constitutional requirement to use funds from Washington's working forests on education
3. Explain how government is accountable to the people

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Teach with TVW's Statewide Electeds: [Commissioner of Public Lands Video](#) (7 minutes)
- [Student Notebook](#)
- Access to the [Department of Natural Resources](#) website

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What are the roles and responsibilities of the Commissioner of Public Lands?
- How does the Department of Natural Resources use land to support public schools?
- How does the Department of Natural Resources balance the need to protect our environment with continuing to raise money for the State?

ACTIVITY

1. **Class Opener (5 minutes):**
 - In Student Notebook: Individual writing/brainstorming:
 - On a scale of 1-10: where should the state prioritize funding for schools?
 - On a scale of 1-10, where should the state prioritize funding for habitat

restoration?

- Which do you think is MORE important? Why?

2. **Whole Class Discussion (5 minutes):**

- Popcorn Share out: have students share their rankings and reasons for placing them where they did.
- Share with students that today they will be learning about the Commissioner of Public Lands, who, due to the Washington State Constitution, makes decisions about both school funding and habitat restoration and preservation.

3. **Student Activity (15 minutes):**

- Watch video on [Commissioner of Public Lands](#)
- Have students complete the [Student Notebook](#) with a partner as they watch the video

4. **End of Lesson Task (20 minutes):**

- Four Corners Debate (10 min)
 - 3 minutes: have students brainstorm on this statement.
 - **Funding for schools should be tied to funds raised from forest management.**
 - 1 min: Ask students to circle on their worksheet whether they Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.
 - 1 min: Ask students to stand in the corner that corresponds to their opinion.
 - 5 min: Have one student from each group share why they chose that corner. Allow students to change their opinion as they hear arguments that sway them.
- Wrap up Writing (10 minutes)
 - After the debate, have students reflect on their learning by having them answer the following question in paragraph form:
 - Given the vast responsibilities that the Commissioner of Public Lands has, do you agree with the position being an elected one? Why or why not?

5. **Further Research Opportunities (optional):**

- Have students visit the [Department of Natural Resources website](#) to answer the question: How does the Commissioner of Public Lands affect your daily life?
- In a short one page essay, a creative OnePager, or a short presentation, have students use one of the examples below to explain why this role is important in Washington State.
 - [Habitat Conservation on State Trust Land](#): How does the State manage the forest to protect at risk species while also generating income for schools? What animals does it protect, specifically? Click [here](#) to see maps of land covered by the Habitat Conservation Plan.
 - [Aquatics](#): DNR are the stewards for more than 2.6 million acres of aquatic

land. How do they balance access to these lands with protection of them for future generations?

- [Forest Health Strategic Plan](#): How does DNR plan to restore more than a million acres of forest to healthy conditions? How does DNR plan to work with other stakeholders to achieve maximum buy in?
- [Recreation](#): In addition to managing millions of acres of land, DNR also provides multiple opportunities for recreation on these lands. Peruse these sites and learn about the different types of recreation possible in Washington State.