

D. LAND TRANSACTION

July 14, 2023

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Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

7/14/2023

Agenda item:

D. Land Transaction

Presenter(s):

Karen Edwards, Real Estate Services Manager

Item 1: Proposed Acquisition of 37.5(+/-) Acres in Okanogan County
Similkameen-Chopaka Unit, Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, Region 2

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff request Commission approval to acquire, by donation, a 37.5(+/-)-acre property in the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area pursuant to [RCW 77.12.037](#).

Background summary:

WDFW proposes to acquire 37.5(+/-) acres adjacent to the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit (Unit) of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area (WLA), in north central Okanogan County. This proposed acquisition property is bordered on the east by the Unit and all other sides by Washington Department of Natural Resources land, and includes state imperiled inter-mountain basins big sagebrush steppe, ponderosa pine woodland and savanna ecological systems, as well as riparian habitat. This parcel will protect a critical east-west movement corridor for species such as mule deer, riparian habitat for several PHS species like the Western gray squirrel, and provide for public recreation. Integrating this property into the Unit will also simplify management by clarifying the public's understanding of ownership.

This proposed acquisition property was approved through Lands 20/20 in 2022 and will be acquired via a donation.

The Unit is currently about 1,108 acres in the Okanogan Watershed, Columbia River Basin and located about 18 miles west of Oroville, situated at the bottom of the Similkameen Valley between the peaks of the Chopaka Mountains, and is known for big game hunting. The imposing [Chopaka Mountain Wilderness Study Area \(WSA\)](#) to the west is owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and provides spectacular scenery as it rises to elevations of 8,000 feet on Hurley Peak. The eastern boundary of the Unit is the Similkameen River and is lined with cottonwoods, aspen and alder. Deciduous shrubs include hawthorn, willow, dogwood, rose and snowberry, with native shrubsteppe with sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and bitterbrush with grasses including bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, and basin wild rye. Stands of conifers in this Unit include ponderosa pine and Douglas fir.

This Unit is home to bighorn sheep, mountain goats, black bear and cougar. The valley floor is mostly agricultural land, providing grass fields and forage for geese and waterfowl. Brushy riparian draws are a natural feature of the high-water table and provides habitat for upland birds, including ring-necked

pheasant, gray partridge, California quail, chukar and mourning dove. Each spring, the ponds and oxbows are filled with Canada geese, dabblers and diving ducks of all kinds, and trumpeter swans.

The Unit includes an ADA gravel parking area large enough for trailer turn around, an ADA trail to a [viewing blind](#), and a hand launch for non-motorized boating access to the Similkameen River, and is used by the recreating public for hunting, fishing, canoe and kayak access, wildlife viewing, and is a great place for birding, especially in early spring.

Once this 37.5(+/-)-acre property is acquired, it will be incorporated into the Unit and conserve over 1,145 acres of critical habitat and public recreational opportunities, and be integrated into the associated [Scotch Creek and Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan](#), [2019-20 Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan Update](#), that guide resource management, climate, recreation and public use, land ownership and management, along with management direction and approach.

Ongoing operation and maintenance costs for this proposed 37.5(+/-)-acre acquisition property is \$52.00 per acre, being a total of \$1,950.00 annually. This amount will be included in WDFW's 9v decision package for ongoing operation and maintenance for newly acquired land.

Grazing is currently occurring within the Unit but is not currently anticipated on the land being acquired. If determined to be consistent with the desired ecological conditions of the proposed acquisition property, grazing may be permitted pursuant to WDFW's [Grazing on WDFW Lands, Grazing Program guidance and tools](#).

The proposed acquisition property is within the Washington Department of Natural Resources Forest Fire Protection Assessment boundary and will be calculated per [RCW 76.04.610](#) at \$17.50 for the first 50 acres and .27¢ on each acre exceeding 50 acres, for a total expected annual fee of \$17.50.

Per RCW [77.12.201](#), Okanogan County does opt into PILT as provided in [RCW 77.12.203](#), and this additional payment will occur through the Washington State Treasurer's Office.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend Commission approval to acquire the 37.5(+/-)-acre property in the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area pursuant to [RCW 77.12.037](#).

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

Protecting habitat and providing public recreational opportunities.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

Operation and maintenance costs.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Approval of this land transaction.

Draft motion language:

Motion: I move to approve the land transaction as presented by staff.

Is there a "second"?

If so, then motion maker discusses basis for motion; other Commissioners discuss views on motion; amendments, if any, proposed and addressed.

Post decision communications plan:

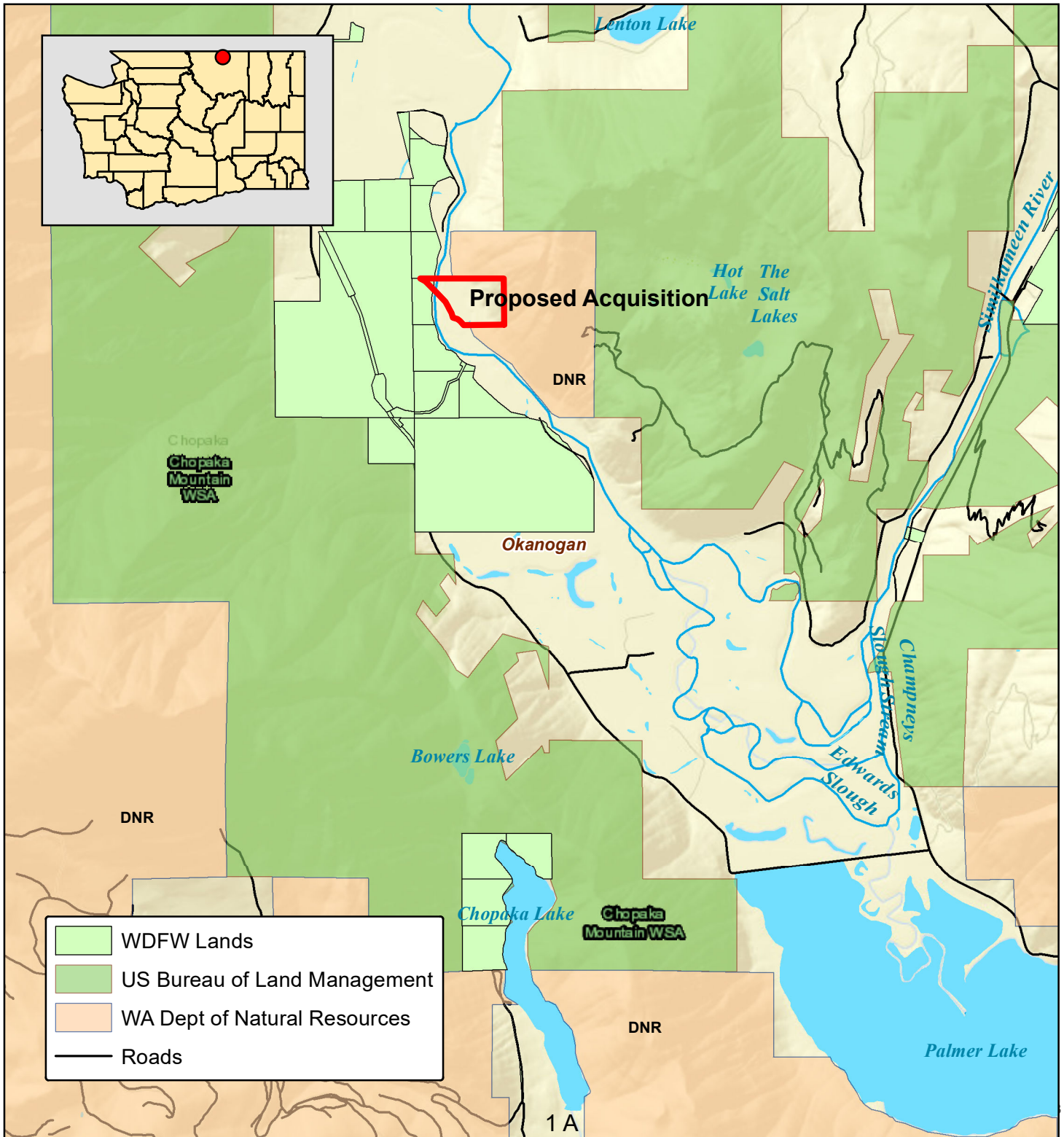
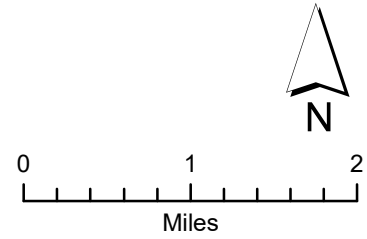
WDFW will distribute a press release informing the public of this action.

ITEM 1: SIMILKAMEEN-CHOPAKA UNIT, SCOTCH CREEK WLA

COUNTY: OKANOGAN

LEGAL: SECTION 16, TOWNSHIP 40N, RANGE 25E, W.M.

ACRES: 37.5 (+/-)



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