



Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

12/15/2023

Agenda item:

Lands 20/20 - Briefing

Presenter(s):

Cynthia Wilkerson, Lands Division Manager, and Lisa Coffman, Lands 20/20 Coordinator

Background summary:

The annual Lands 20/20 process has identified 20 potential land acquisition projects under consideration by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Director for the annual 2023 cycle. These projects have been through internal cross-programmatic technical and funding review, an opportunity for federally recognized Tribes with interests in Washington State to be briefed via a virtual presentation, an offer of consultation to those same Tribes, a three-week public comment process, and are being presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) as a briefing. The next step is for WDFW's Director to approve the list of projects to pursue funding through grants or other sources. This early review process provides the Commission with information on these potential land acquisition proposals, including a summary of public comments.

Projects:

Rustler's Gulch TLT – Pend Oreille County – Region 1:

This proposed acquisition project is a 40-acre inholding within and surrounded on all four sides by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Sherman Creek Wildlife Area, Rustler's Gulch Unit.

Rustlers Gulch provides significant habitat abundant with species such as the northern goshawk, pileated woodpecker, Lewis' woodpecker, Columbia spotted frog, moose, and white-tailed deer. Adding this parcel to the surrounding wildlife area would ensure its maintenance as undeveloped natural forest, with freshwater emergent wetland, providing for the benefits listed for each species above. This parcel matches the surrounding forest, augmenting priority habitat characteristics of mature forest, as well as snags and logs. Recreational opportunities include hunting, horseback riding, hiking, and wildlife viewing.

This property is owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and may be transferred through the [Trust Land Transfer Program](#).

Babcock Bench/Dusty Lake TLT – Grant County – Region 2:

This proposed acquisition project is up to 1,532 acres to be added to the Quincy Lakes Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

This site protects wildlife habitat connectivity at a known pinch point on the Babcock Bench. Sagebrush sparrow and other sagebrush obligates, requiring high quality, undisturbed habitat, occur within this project area, as well as golden eagle. Babcock Bench has many values including geology associated with the Ice Age Floods and important habitat connectivity along the Columbia River.

Recreational opportunities include connectivity for trail running, mountain biking, hunting and hiking from Ancient Lakes Trailhead to the Frenchman Coulee climbing area.

This property is owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and may be transferred through the [Trust Land Transfer Program](#).

Beezley Hills – Grant County – Region 2:

This project is the proposed acquisition of up to 9,297 acres in the Beezley Hills Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

This project would provide habitat on a large tract of shrubsteppe with suitable habitat for pygmy rabbit, greater sage grouse and Washington ground squirrel with current occupation or near occupation of these species.

Recreational opportunities include mule deer hunting opportunities, as well as upland bird hunting and wildlife viewing.

Gloyd Seeps Inholding – Grant County – Region 2:

This project is the proposed acquisition of 20 acres within the Gloyd Seeps Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

The goal of this project is to bring an inholding under Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife management along with the rest of the unit which contains intact shrubsteppe and provides habitat for Washington ground squirrel. Acquiring this property will improve management by reducing confusion around boundaries and mixed ownership.

Upland bird hunting and mule deer hunting are popular in the area.

Lenore Range – Grant County – Region 2:

The project is the proposed acquisition of 56 acres, comprised of two parcels, adjacent to the current Lake Lenore Shooting Range, in the Sun Lakes Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

Acquiring this property would secure a buffer for the current shooting range. The habitat in this location is known for its stair-stepped benches, and basalt cliffs where golden eagle can often be seen. In the lower sage brush elevations, many other species can be found such as chukar and sage thrasher.

A portion of these properties would be available for hunting and wildlife viewing.

Balky Hill TLT - Okanogan County – Region 2:

This proposed acquisition is to acquire 160 acres to be managed as part of the Methow Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area.

This project provides critical shrubsteppe habitat, known golden eagle nesting habitat, and links to existing public lands and conservation easement land that provide critical wildlife movement corridors. Along with the golden eagle, this area is also known to be the home of mule deer, gray wolf, and grouse.

Recreational opportunities include wildlife viewing, nature photography, fishing, big game hunting and upland bird hunting for pheasant and grouse.

This property is owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and may be transferred through the [Trust Land Transfer Program](#).

Chesaw Inholding – Okanogan County – Region 2:

This project would acquire a two-acre inholding surrounded almost entirely by the Chesaw Unit of Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.

The Chesaw project supports significant mule deer, elk and small mammal populations, and provides great foraging opportunities for wolves and golden eagles. This site is located within a mile of a known sharptailed grouse lek.

Recreational opportunities include hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities and will give the public the chance to experience high-quality shrubsteppe habitat in a less crowded environment enhancing the experience for those who already enjoy other nearby public lands.

North Okanogan Riparian – Okanogan County – Region 2:

This property would add 37 acres of riparian habitat to the Driscoll Island Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area in upper Okanogan County.

By acquiring this property, WDFW would protect critical riparian habitat and federal threatened upper Columbia steelhead. This parcel provides a north-south movement corridor for species such as mule deer and protects riparian habitat for several Priority Habitats and Species (PHS).

Recreational opportunities include hunting and wildlife viewing and will give the public the chance to experience high-quality riparian and riverine habitats.

Patterson Lake Easement – Okanogan County – Region 2:

This proposed project will add a perpetual easement of less than one acre adjacent to the currently managed Patterson Lake Water Access Area in Okanogan County. This easement is needed to secure the current investments in existing recreational opportunities at this site.

Recreational opportunities include fishing, boating, kayaking, swimming, and wildlife viewing.

Rendezvous Conservation Easements – Okanogan County – Region 2:

This proposed project consists of two properties totaling approximately 148 acres near the Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife area, adjacent to other conservation easement lands.

This acquisition would protect the state imperiled Inter- Mountain Basins Big Sagebrush Steppe. These parcels are within a crucial mule deer migration corridor required for their journey to and from higher elevations of the Okanogan National Forest and Pasayten Wilderness Area.

Recreational opportunities include hunting and wildlife viewing and will give the public the chance to experience high quality shrubsteppe.

If acquired by conservation easement public access may be restricted.

Big Bend Phase 4 Update – Douglas County – Region 2:

This property adds approximately 716 acres to a project area approved in Lands 20/20 in 2022 at the Big Bend Wildlife Area.

The project goal is the augmentation of the Big Bend Wildlife area to support the conservation of threatened and endangered species. The project would conserve known occurrences of Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and allow for the rehabilitation and protection of shrubsteppe and riparian habitats. Other important species here include mule deer, turkey and waterfowl.

Recreational opportunities include hunting for mule deer, upland birds, turkey and waterfowl. The site also provides 2.6 miles of Columbia River waterfront.

Upon approval, WDFW will continue to work with Douglas County Commissioners on viable ways in which to acquire and manage the property.

Yakima River Floodplain & Water Access – Kittitas County – Region 3:

This proposed acquisition project is for 89 acres adjacent to the Yakima River Unit of the LT Murray Wildlife Area.

This project would protect riverine, shoreline and riparian habitats, and has been identified as a priority for development of a river access site and new boat launch.

Provides improved and safer river access in support of fishing and river recreation as well as several acres for wildlife viewing.

Naches/WSDOT – Yakima County – Region 3:

This property is approximately 11 acres surrounded by the Oak Creek Wildlife area in Yakima County.

This proposed acquisition property contains Inter Mountain Basin Big Sagebrush Steppe. Bighorn sheep are often found in this area. WDFW ownership will avoid potential threats to the Cleman Mountain bighorn sheep herd which could be posed by domestic goats and sheep should the property be privately managed with those livestock.

Recreational opportunities include hunting and wildlife viewing.

Wenas Black Canyon – Yakima County – Region 3:

This proposed project would acquire approximately 150 acres bordered on three sides by the Wenas Unit of the Wenas Wildlife Area.

This property would conserve shrubsteppe habitat and other wildlife habitat, adding to winter range for mule deer. Other species include white headed woodpecker and loggerhead shrike.

Recreational opportunities include hiking, hunting, and bird watching.

Scroggie Canyon – Chelan County – Region 3:

This proposed acquisition project is 742 acres bordered on three sides by the Colockum Unit of the Colockum Wildlife Area.

This project would conserve shrubsteppe habitat, improve habitat connectivity, and provide opportunity for restoration of this critical ecosystem. Species include elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep as well as trout in perennial streams.

This property is ideally suited for hunting, hiking and wildlife viewing. It is also a popular roadless area for hiking, dog-walking and wildlife viewing.

Skagit Inholdings – Skagit County – Region 4:

This proposed acquisition project consists of two properties totaling approximately 20 acres. One property is located adjacent to the Milltown Island Unit and the other adjacent to the DeBay Slough Unit, both of the Skagit Wildlife Area.

This project would acquire inholding properties in two locations, both identified to expand habitat management and public recreation opportunities. Both properties border the Skagit River. One contains riparian off channel habitat and the other is connected to estuarine marsh. The habitat at these sites are valuable to waterfowl and shorebirds, bull trout, and a variety of salmon including chinook.

Recreational opportunities support waterfowl hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing.

West Wiser – Whatcom County – Region 4:

This project consists of the proposed acquisition of 117 acres near the town of Lynden and would be added to the Whatcom Wildlife Area.

This proposed project would conserve public access, improve freshwater wetland habitat for non-game wetland dependent species, manage over wintering waterfowl habitat, as well as provide the opportunity to restore seasonal wetland habitats. The larger watershed is an important waterfowl area near a large winter roost for several species of waterfowl.

The project would provide recreational opportunities for waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing with an opportunity to develop walking paths.

Johns River WLA Addition TLT – Grays Harbor County – Region 6:

This proposed project would acquire 235 acres adjacent to both the Grays Harbor Unit and the Johns River Unit of the Chehalis Wildlife Area.

This proposal contains over two miles of Grays Harbor Bay shoreline, will help maintain Grays Harbor water quality and aquaculture, and protects important bird habitat. Species found here include marbled murrelet, bull trout, and American green sturgeon.

Recreational opportunities include walk-in access to tidelands, waterfowl hunting, surf fishing and birdwatching.

This property is owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and may be transferred through the [Trust Land Transfer Program](#).

Lower Chehalis Valley – Grays Harbor County – Region 6:

This proposed acquisition project would acquire three different properties, all within different units of the Chehalis Wildlife Area in Grays Harbor County. The total estimated acres are 185.

The primary goal of this project is to preserve and protect aquatic habitats (wetlands and riverine) and their associated species along the lower Chehalis Valley. It will also expand opportunities for outreach and research and provide easier access to an isolated parcel.

Recreational opportunities include waterfowl hunting, fishing, boating and watchable wildlife.

Chimicum Addition – Jefferson County – Region 6:

This proposed acquisition project enhances a landscape-level conservation partnership with the Jefferson Land Trust and consists of .34 acre in the Chimacum Unit of the North Olympic Wildlife Area.

The acquisition would fill a gap in the protection of Chimacum Creek, which provides spawning and rearing habitat for federally threatened Hood Canal summer chum and Puget Sound winter steelhead, plus federal candidate coho. Recreation here would be dispersed use only with high

use not encouraged due to concerns of potential habitat impacts. Trails are present on other portions of this unit.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

Thorough analysis and evaluation of proposed land acquisition projects intended to protect and preserve critical habitats and recreational access. Outcome of Director approval is pursuit of funding. Upon receipt of funding eventual acquisition for either fee title or conservation easement.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

None

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Public involvement included regional staff coordination with tribal and local governments and conservation, recreation, and community partners, a virtual review of the Lands 20/20 process and proposed acquisition projects with federally recognized Tribes with interests in Washington State, offer of consultation to those same Tribes, and a three-week web based public review period. We received 28 public comments, 18 of which were positive. Positive comments were received on individual projects as well as all projects. There were 5 negative comments received. None were specific to individual projects but raised concern with public land management in general.

Organizational support letters were received from:

- Yakama Nation – Yakima/Klickitat Fisheries Project
- Jefferson County Commission
- Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe
- Jefferson County Conservation District
- North Olympic Salmon Coalition
- Washington Waterfowl
- Mt. Baker Beekeepers Association
- Wenatchee Outdoors
- Colville Confederate Tribes
- Grays Harbor Audubon Society
- Conservation Northwest
- Wild Fish Conservancy
- Pew Charitable Trust

One letter of opposition was received form the Grant County Commissioners

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Briefing only.

Draft motion language:

None, briefing only.

Post decision communications plan:

Briefing only.

Form revised 1-20-21