

Mount St Helens Wildlife Area Management Plan

Public Scoping Workshop Summary – Final

November 30, 2017

Introduction

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) hosted a public scoping workshop on Thursday, November 30th, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Region 5 Headquarters, Ridgefield. The purpose of the workshop was to share information about the wildlife area planning process and to solicit public and stakeholder input.

The workshop begins the planning process for developing a new Mount St Helens Wildlife Area Management Plan, one of 33 plans the department will revise every 10 years. The plans are updated every two years to reflect changes in landscape and management priorities; however, the larger plan efforts are more comprehensive and consider the status of wildlife species and their habitat, progress towards goals identified in earlier plans, and new wildlife area priorities. The plans will consider the interests and impacts of stakeholders and user groups; set goals for assessing and monitoring ecological integrity; outline forest management priorities; identify appropriate public use, recreation areas and facility improvements; as well as weed control practices and other operations and maintenance practices. Mt St Helen's current plan as developed in 2006, with subsequent updates, are available on the department website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/.

25 individuals attended and signed in at the workshop including interested parties from Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania County communities of Vancouver, Kelso, Washougal, Kalama, Toutle, Yacolt, Brush Prairie, Toledo, Carson and Battleground. Three individuals came from Portland and Beaverton, Oregon; and one from Seattle. Stakeholder groups included Sierra Club, Audubon, Vancouver Wildlife League, and Gifford Pinchot Accountability Group. Representatives from PacifiCorp and U.S. Forest Service attended the meeting. Several volunteers attended as well as a couple members of the Advisory Committee.

Workshop Format

The workshop was designed in a combination open house/presentation format. Individual maps of each of the eighteen wildlife area's units were posted, and participants were encouraged to share specific and general feedback after the presentation and at the map locations.

Staff presentation

Sandra Jonker, Region 5 Wildlife Program Manager, welcomed everyone and introduced WDFW employees. Lauri Vigue, project lead planner, gave an overview of the workshop format and reviewed the agenda topics. Other WDFW participants included:

- Daren Hauswald, Mt St Helens Wildlife Area Manager
- Chad Wildermuth, Mt St Helens Assistant, Wildlife Area Manager
- Eric Holman, Wildlife District Biologist
- George Fornes, Habitat Program
- Brad Rhoden, Enforcement
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager

- Alejandro Orizola, Real Estate
- Darric Lowery, South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Manager
- Shane Belson, Water Access Coordinator

Public scoping will include SEPA, shared agency priorities, collecting input and reporting in the plan. Lauri noted multiple methods for providing comments including flip charts notes, filling out the comment card, writing on the unit maps provided, speaking with staff and sending email comments directly to lauri.vigue@dfw.wa.gov

Lauri Vigue reviewed the department's overall process for updating all state wildlife area plans. The Mount St Helens Wildlife Area Advisory Committee met on October 25th. She noted the following new topics the plan will consider including:

- Wildlife Area Ecological Integrity Monitoring
- Forest Management
- Recreation Management
- Expanded public outreach including public workshops, information materials and Wildlife Area Advisory Committee meetings

Lauri summarized timeline for the Mount St Helens WLA plan; staff expects a draft plan by spring, 2018; and public review draft by fall 2018. Daren Hauswald, wildlife area manager for Mount St Helens Wildlife Area, provided an overview of each of the 18 units describing the current objectives, recreation and original funding source:

Nellie Corser Unit:

59 acres of late successional forest and waterfalls; species include: spotted owl, black-tailed deer, fisher, Larch Mountain salamander, western toad, northern goshawk, Cascade torrent salamander

Current Objectives: Managed as a late successional forest

Recreation: Hunting and hiking

Original funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office, donation

Duck Lake Unit:

Overview: 39 acres of wetlands and floodplain habitat along the E.F. Lewis River; species include: Chinook, chum and steelhead, waterfowl, Oregon spotted frog (suitable habitat)

Current Objectives: Managed for waterfowl habitat

Recreation: Hunting

Original funding Source: Ducks Unlimited

Two Forks Unit:

Overview: 49 acres of mature riparian forest habitat at the confluence of the N.F. and E.F. Lewis Rivers; species include: Columbia white-tailed deer, wading birds, songbirds and black-tailed deer.

Current Objectives: Managed for riparian habitat

Recreation: Hunting, wildlife viewing and fishing

Original funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office - WWRP

Cedar Creek and Jenny Creek Units:

Overview: Cedar Creek – 127 acres; Jenny Creek 20 acres. Both units have mixed forest and open pasture. Species include: band-tailed pigeons, black-tailed deer, western toad. Salmonids (coho, Chinook and steelhead) occur on the Cedar Creek unit.

Current Objectives: Managed for band-tailed pigeon habitat

Recreation: Hunting

Original funding Source: USFWS – Pittman and Robertson, Wildlife Funds, donation

Eagle Island Unit:

Overview: 279 acres of mature riparian forest, salmonid habitat; species include: steelhead, chum, Chinook, waterfowl, black-tailed deer, band-tailed pigeon

Current Objectives: Managed for riparian and forested floodplain habitat

Recreation: Hunting, fishing

Original funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office – Salmon Funding Recovery Board, Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account

Nelson Unit:

Overview: 20 acres of wetland, floodplain habitat; species include: waterfowl, eagle, osprey

Current Objectives: Managed for waterfowl production

Recreation: Hunting and wildlife viewing (only boat access)

Original funding Source: Port of Kalama mitigation

Fisher Island Unit:

Overview: 257 acres of forested floodplain; species include: Columbia white-tailed deer, waterfowl

Current Objectives: Managed for forested floodplain and waterfowl production

Recreation: Hunting, fishing

Original funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office, WWRP

Abernathy Creek Unit:

Overview: 138 acres of riparian forest, salmonid habitat;

species include: Chinook, chum, steelhead, eagle, osprey, marbled murrelet, black-tailed deer

Current Objectives: Managed for riparian and upland forest habitat

Recreation: Hunting and fishing

Original funding Source: Cowlitz County transfer

White Island Unit:

Overview: 130 acres of forested floodplain; species include: Columbia white-tailed deer, waterfowl, songbirds

Current Objectives: Managed as a Natural Area Preserve

Recreation: Hunting, fishing

Original funding Source: Wildlife Funds

Altoona Unit:

Overview: 177 acres of mature spruce forest, floodplain habitat in Grays Bay. Species include: bald eagle, shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl, elk, marbled murrelet

Current Objectives: Managed for forest, bald eagle habitat, waterfowl production and recreation

Recreation: Hunting, fishing, boating/boat launch and parking area

Original funding Source: USFWS – Coastal Wetland; Recreation Conservation Office - WWRP

Carnine Unit:

Overview: 37 acres of forest habitat; species include: black-tailed deer

Current Objectives: Managed as forest habitat

Recreation: none

Funding Source: Donation

Hall Road Unit:

Overview: 132 acres of wetland, riparian and upland forest habitat located near Silver Lake; species include: waterfowl, black-tailed deer, bald eagle, osprey

Current Objectives: Managed for riparian forest, waterfowl and big game habitats

Recreation: Hunting and fishing

Original funding Source: USFWS - Dingell Johnson

Canal Road (Silver Lake) Unit:

Overview: 121 acres of wetlands along Silver Lake; species include: waterfowl, bald eagle, osprey

Current Objectives: Managed for waterfowl production

Recreation: Hunting, fishing and boating

Original funding Source: USFWS - Dingell Johnson

Gardner Unit:

Overview: 43 acres of riparian and floodplain habitats along the N.F. Toutle River; species include: bald eagle, western toad

Current Objectives: Managed for riparian and floodplain

Recreation: Fishing and wildlife viewing

Original funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office - Bonds

Hoffstadt Unit:

Overview: 3,816 acres of old-growth forest, riparian habitat; species include: steelhead, coho, elk, black-tailed deer, bald eagle, fisher, waterfowl, ruffed and dusky grouse, spotted owl, amphibians

Current Objectives: Managed for elk habitat and salmon restoration

Recreation: Hunting and hiking

Original funding Source: State appropriation

Mud Flow Unit:

Overview: 2,744 acres of Mt St Helens debris flow, high concentrations of wintering elk, salmon bearing streams, and wetlands. Species include: steelhead, coho, elk, black-tailed deer, bald eagle, fisher, red legged frog, western toad, northern spotted owl

Current objectives: Managed for wintering elk habitat and salmon recovery

Recreation: Hunting, watchable wildlife, horseback riding

Original funding Source: Wildlife Funds, Recreation Conservation Office – WWRP, State appropriation

Merrill Lake Unit:

Overview: 1,453 acres of old-growth forest, lodge pole pine, falls, shoreline and riparian, ancient lava flow. Species include: elk, eagle, osprey, fisher, black-tailed deer, western toad, cascade torrent salamander, spotted owl, Larch Mountain and Van Dyke's salamanders, Townsend's big-eared bat, northern goshawk. Historic bull trout.

Current Objectives: Managed for elk habitat, riparian and old-growth forest

Recreation: Hunting, hiking, limited camping

Original funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office – WWRP

General Comments and Questions at Stations

Habitat and Restoration

- Manage invasive species – very important
- Landscape scale diversity management; not just WDFW lands
- Merrill Lake diversity of species and ecosystems

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- Canal Road restoration to native species, mitigation recipient site?

Wildlife Area Management

- Mitigation for Sediment Retention Structure raises
- A volunteer participates in work parties on the Mud Flow unit. He described tree planting, and mentioned that he is in favor of the wood structures that have been placed.

Recreation

- Secure public access to Hoffstadt Hills Unit – Rd 3100 acquire land, easement or exchange
- Include horseback riding into Merrill Lake
- What are the dog rules? Provide clear information
- Acquire more hunting areas
- Negotiate with Weyerhaeuser for free hunting access and others
- Need clarity and consistency regarding camping. Need review of the rules for consistency.
- Joint WDFW/DNR recreation plan for Mud Flow Unit
- One woman lives near the Gardner unit. She enjoys hiking on the unit and taking her dog for walks there. Said she saw a cougar on the unit once.

Fish and Wildlife

- Include mountain goats in the list of species managed for on the St. Helens WLA.
- Acid mine drainage in the Green River (Charlotte Persons, Willapa Hills Audubon)
 - o Reported seeing discoloration
- Access to PHS data (George to send links to online viewer)
- She would like to have the streaked horned lark map that Eric had made
- Participates in Christmas Bird Count, mentioned streaked horned lark, marbled murrelet, and northern spotted owl
- Fisher Island – are wakes from boat traffic affecting the streaked horned lark habitat?
- What is at the south end of Merrill Lake, and are there any plans to protect it?
 - o Daren explained how we do not own those lands but if they came up for sale we would look into their purchase.
- One individual reported seeing horned larks near Johnson Ridge Observatory, and asked whether they could be streaked horned larks (not likely)

Other topics per Eric:

Huge frustration with Weyerhaeuser

Huge frustration with Elk Hoof Disease

Frustration at the lower St. Helens Elk Population

Frustration with too many predators

Positive responses to the mountain goats on and near Mt. St. Helens

Positive responses to the proposal to offer hunts on the St. Helens goats

A desire to fix a goofed up GMU boundary

Report of a lark on Mt. St. Helens

A desire to reconfigure GMU 556 to exclude the public land part

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Some positive responses about the deer population
Frustration and confusion about WDFW's lack of action in purchasing the "High Lakes"
Frustration about WDFW Enforcement taking money from Weyerhaeuser for patrols of their fee-hunt areas

Additional Comments Received

I attended the WDFW Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Management Area public planning meeting last night and just want to give you a quick update on the comments I made.

1. I expressed in the planning process they need to evaluate the surrounding existing habitats to ensure there is a balance of habitats on and off the management area so that the management area habitat could be best balanced for the maximum number of species over the long term. It might or might not be part of the alternative to modify the management area habitat to best serve the species that are under represented in the area.

2. I pointed out that on all the Management Sites hunting and hiking was the priority value and direction. While these are important uses other values should be identified that could be managed for without conflicting with the primary use. This could create a more stable habitat and provide more opportunity for the management lands.

3. I had a long discussion with the WDFW staff on making sure the management sites needed to be managed for all species management to insure habitat for non-game species and species of concern are identified or developed.

4. On some of the management sites Noxious Weeds are an issue or becoming an issue and an aggressive control program should be developed.

Just thought you might want my input on the Mt. St Helens Wildlife Management Area planning effort.
Tom Linde

Comment Sheet from Tom Linde:

1. What interests you about the Mt St Helens Wildlife Area?
Habitat protection, development and all species management.

2. Units visited/season:

Cedar Creek/Jenny Creek – Summer

Abernathy Creek – Summer

Hoffstadt – Spring, Summer

Merrill Lake - Summer

3. Recreation Activities:

Cedar/Jenny Creek – wildlife viewing

Abernathy Creek – fishing and wildlife viewing

Hoffstadt – wildlife viewing and hiking

Merrill Lake – fishing

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4. What particular wildlife and/or fish species, and/or habitats are you most interested in or concerned about? All species, all habitats.
5. What changes or improvements would you like to see on the wildlife area? 1) control of invasive/noxious weeds on all. 2) Provide by modification habitats of concern.
6. What land management activities are you most interested in or concerned about? Habitat maintenance and modification to provide for all species management.
7. Provide any additional feedback:

I have a concern; my input was not valued. The WDFW employee at the habitat/restoration station did not record any of my input or concerns on the flip chart while I was there.

I attended the meeting about the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area plan on Nov. 30 and here are a few thoughts and suggestions.

I am a retired reporter for the Longview Daily News, and I used to report quite a bit on the Mudflow and Hoffstadt units. I think these are the most familiar parts of the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area to most people. I have spent quite a few enjoyable days walking or mountain biking through the area, either for stories or recreation. The last time I went there, I visited two mid-sized lakes I only knew about because a WDFW employee took me there years ago.

In general, I think WDFW should focus more on recreation on its wildlife areas, and on wildlife-watching and other forms of “non-consumptive” use rather than hunting. Consider that about 95 percent of the population does NOT hunt and research indicates that younger people are not taking up this activity. The department needs to build relationships with these non-hunting folks to help with funding and support in general, just as the U.S. Forest Service has gradually shifted its focus from timber production to recreation.

I understand that wildlife areas are primarily to provide habitat, but they can also be valuable areas for public recreation. This is particularly an issue with the Mudflow and Hoffstadt units since Weyerhaeuser has enacted a fee access system for its lands in the Toutle River valley.

Weyco is apparently still allowing free public non-motorized access to these units on its 3100 road, but the company could change this policy. I urge WDFW to secure permanent public access by acquiring land from Weyco, either through a purchase or trade of DNR lands. Sondra Jonker told me WDFW is working toward this.

As far as I know, there is no direct public access to the Hoffstadt unit.

Merrill Lake Unit – I’m glad WDFW was able to purchase these. Once upon a time, anyone could drive to Kalama Falls on Weyerhaeuser roads so it’s nice to be able to go there again, on foot, bike or horse. There’s a pretty good trail into this area from the Kalama Horse Camp that someone (possibly horse riders) has built. I would suggest trying to spread the word about this area.

Two Forks Unit – I learned about this through my former job, so one day a few years ago I explored it. I found a faint trail that was overgrown, and I couldn’t fight my way through brush to the Lewis River. It could be a nice little area for recreation.

Nellie Courser – I’d never heard of this unit until the meeting. I will try to visit soon!

Thanks for the opportunity to comment. Please keep me informed about this process.

Tom Paulu

To: Washington Fish and Wildlife
From: Donna Ruelas-Semasko
Re: Comment on Mt. St. Helen's Management Plan and other wildlife areas

Subject: Packgoat use

I have been a packgoat enthusiast for over 25 years now. I was happy to see that there is a possibility of increasing recreation for the public in the Mt. St. Helen's areas during certain times of the year. We use packgoats for hiking as it allows us to get to places without leaving a trace on the land nor any intrusion to the local wildlife. My husband has a bad back and bad knees which cause issues for him in hiking and backpacking, and I have two replaced knees, so both of us need the extra help when we backpack and hike. Indeed packgoats are the easiest and less impacting of all packstock which includes horseback riding. Packgoats do not smell, they are not loud, they do not leave their hiking partner's side, and should never be thought to be the same as a herd of goats. We as packgoat enthusiasts make sure our packgoats never cause issues in the wilderness, not getting lost, not intruding on wildlife, not intruding on the environment and thus being an acceptable packstock animal for use in many areas. We volunteer our time in packing in backcountry ranger supplies, helping man fire towers, and helping with trail maintenance, all with the use of our packgoats.

My comment is simple, please keep packgoats in mind when designing management plans for your wildlife areas such that you might include us/packgoat enthusiasts in your decisions for recreational use. We are more than happy to answer any questions you might have concerning packgoats. I would also be happy to be part of your advisory committee, if an opening arises in the future.

Thank you for your time,

Donna Ruelas-Semasko
Edelweiss Acres
Evergreen Packgoat Club

Meeting Materials

The following meeting materials are attached:

- Agenda
- Mt St Helens Wildlife Area Management Plan Fact Sheet
- Comment card
- News release