

# **Scotch Creek & Sinlahekin Wildlife Areas Advisory Committee Meeting**

## **Draft Meeting Notes**

September 29, 2016

Okanogan PUD Auditorium

1331 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North

2:00-5:00 pm

### Attendees

#### WAAC Members:

Tim Vugteveen, DNR  
Greg Bennett, Okanogan Fly Club  
Anna Lyon, Okanogan County Noxious Weed Board  
Char Schumacher, Okanogan County Planning  
Jerry Barnes, Okanogan County Cattleman's Association  
Dick Finch, Okanogan Wildlife Council  
Dave Sunde, Okanogan Valley Chapter – Backcountry Horseman  
Ted Scheer, Okanogan Valley Chapter – Backcountry Horseman  
Steve McKing, Okanogan Valley Chapter - Backcountry Horseman  
Cher Bower, Okanogan Valley Chapter – Backcountry Horseman  
Heather Findlay, North Central Washington Audubon Society  
Will Keller, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Stan Janowitz, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Allisa Carlson, Okanogan Conservation District  
Matt Marsh, U.S. Forest Service  
Tom Windsor, North Central ATV Club of Washington

#### WDFW Staff:

Justin Haug  
Jim Olson  
Patricia Jatczak  
Shane Belson  
Lauri Vigue

### Welcome and Introductions

Justin Haug, Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Manager welcomed everyone and introduced WDFW staff. Lauri Vigue, Planning Project Manager, explained the focus of the meeting is to provide a review of the wildlife area planning process and timeline; and to collect comments on the draft wildlife area management plan. Justin sent out the plan in the WAAC meeting announcement on September 14<sup>th</sup>. Comments are due October 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Scotch Creek & Sinlahekin WLA Planning and Process

The Okanogan Valley Wildlife Area Advisory Committee was introduced to the wildlife area planning process on February 11, 2015. Jeanne Demorest was the lead planner at that time. The primary purpose of this meeting is to review the outline of the draft plan and collect comments on the draft plan and goals and objectives. This is the third pilot in a series of wildlife areas that have been chosen to develop the wildlife area planning process. The process includes interagency coordination and integrating new internal initiatives. The purpose of the plan is to guide management activities for the next 10 years, includes public and stakeholder participation and ensures lands are managed consistent with WDFW’s mission and funding obligations.

The agency mission and strategic plan were introduced along with the WLA planning framework. The final wildlife planning framing document is available on the agencies website <http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01810/>

Timeline:

WAAC comments due	October 3
2 <sup>nd</sup> Public meeting	Tentatively either November 16 or 17 <sup>th</sup>
SEPA 30 day review	November – December
WAAC review final plan	December 2016
Final Plan	January 2017

Comments on Draft Plan:

Source	Location	Description	Response
Tim V.	Page 41	Sinlahekin Unit (south) map, the color for DNR needs to be corrected. The WDFW-leased DNR property needs to be better identified.	Will change polygon color accordingly to address issue.
Anna		County roads need to be corrected on the maps	Yes, the maps will reflect current county maps.
Tim V.	Page 56	McLoughlin Falls Unit, is there a future land exchange potential in this area?	Comment noted. Future land exchanges are not planned at this time.
Dave S.	Page?	Land purchased for mule deer winter range, focused on improving habitat for mule deer, and as a result, white-tailed deer populations have increased.	Current habitat restoration projects have improved habitat favorable to mule deer populations.
Tim V.	Page 79	Top paragraph regarding western gray squirrel, add language regarding the current practice of timber harvest and regular burns benefits western gray squirrel and mule deer.	Current ponderosa pine forest restoration projects addresses Priority Habitat and Species recommendations for habitat improvement of western gray squirrel.
Tim V.	Page 80	3rd paragraph, need to address the presence of salmon above the dam, science based	Will consult with Fish Program

		information.	
Tom W.		Include wolf depredation? Conflict avoidance? Add a study regarding monitoring game populations as a result of depredation – mid-long term issue.	These issues are addressed at a higher level than WLAs. Predator/prey studies originate in academic circles which then involve WDFW.
Matt M.		General prey/predator relationship	This issue doesn't really apply to wildlife area management. We could monitor deer use and wolf presence if it becomes a problem in the future.
Jerry B.		Manage for big horn sheep to reduce domestic sheep conflict. Cougar issues/address problem. Lambs are target.	Past, current and future habitat improvement projects will attract BHS into the WLA. Wildlife conflict is addressed through specific personnel.
Tim V.		Address the timing of grazing on the Similkameen – Chopaka unit, affects nesting waterfowl (DNR wildlife biologist).	The effect of grazing on waterfowl nesting in the Similkameen – Chopaka unit is unknown. I propose a spring survey in 2017 to determine species that might be affected and the extent of the problem, if any. Mitigation may include adding nest structures, changing the plan rotation, or avoidance. The answer will be in the first WLA plan update. Objective 3G, added to the plan, Appendix A.
Tim V.		What will be the effects on salmon, upland birds and waterfowl on the Driscoll Island bridge? Potentially from increased traffic, hunting pressure especially during high flows (DNR wildlife biologist).	Increased traffic would impact these populations. However, increased hunting and fishing opportunities addresses our mission and an important goal for WDFW.
Tom W.		Regarding new acquisitions on the wildlife areas, do we have the staff to accomplish everything we want to do? General operations and maintenance concerns.	Funding and staff limitations impact management on the wildlife areas. Acquisitions have been placed on hold in Okanogan County. In the past the agency has been able to leverage additional funding continued operations and maintenance (O&M). Future O&M on the newer

			acquisitions has to be absorbed into the annual budget. BPA funded WLA's (Scotch Creek) receives a cost of living increase periodically, to help with increased O&M costs.
Tim V.		Page 118, neighboring landowner concerns - regarding commercial harvest and prescribed fire, harvesting in winter is problematic due to ponderosa pine slash – influences the life cycle of the beetle. Why can't we harvest in the summer? Compaction to the soils (glacial till) will have no impact. Mortality near Forde Lake (commercial & non-commercial).	<p><i>Ips pini</i>, or pine engraver, is usually the beetle being referred to that benefits from slash created from December to June.</p> <p>Currently we conduct all harvesting on snow and/or frozen ground to reduce ground disturbance and soil compaction. While of the operating areas may not be as susceptible to compaction, it is still susceptible to erosion and rutting. Cultural resource protection plans and surveys were also developed to account for winter logging, and associated ground disturbing activities.</p> <p>However, we are utilizing a harvester-processor that will leave slash scattered throughout the unit where it will dry faster, and expose it to direct sunlight to make it unsuitable for beetle development in the spring. There will also not be the typical large landing slash piles that create a desirable breeding and development ground for <i>Ips Pini</i>. By thinning to 40-60 sq.ft./ac. basal area, we are increasing the stand vigor and decreasing susceptibility to beetle outbreak. Long term, the stands on the WLA will be less susceptible to beetle outbreaks.</p>
Dave S.		Address slash on trails (near Blue Lake).	The foresters will scatter slash away from trails in the future.

Dave S.		Concern over McLoughlin Falls Unit access. Provide future reasonable access for recreation.	The railroad won't allow access to property. A land trade with DNR in the future may help.
Dave S.		Road maintenance standards, are they included in the plan?	Road management is discussed on page 102. Road maintenance standards are not included in the plans.
Dave S.		Horse Spring Coulee Unit, provide access for horse trailers.	See objective 7D, in Appendix A.

Goals and Objectives Comments:

**Ecological Integrity**

Tim V. (2b) Loon nesting, improve diversion at Sinlahekin Creek; good opportunities to improve. Collaborate with Okanogan County, BLM, DNR, DOE. Coordinate with fish biologists for loon nesting and fish production.

Dave S. Upland bird habitat, grain fields in SWLA, opportunities to improve.

Tim V. Augmenting sharp-tail grouse populations – effects on adjacent landowners. Negative effects on neighbors.

Response I assume the concern here is if the listed species moves across boundaries and that may potentially result in land use restrictions for the adjacent property owner. This will only happen if the bird lands on the federal threatened or endangered species list. The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse has been petitioned for listing to the USFWS twice. Both times the service declined to list the sharp-tail based on the healthy portions of the population in Idaho, but also because the states are proactive in recovering the population. Washington State has acquired land, enhanced habitat and augmented sharp-tails since 1990 and these efforts have increased numbers. The best insurance that all landowners (including WDFW) have to avoid restrictions on land use is to increase the population levels to self-sustaining levels. Augmenting grouse from other states and provinces is helping achieve those goals. Language was added to objective 4A tasks, coordinate with local landowners, future re-introductions.

**Recreation**

Tom W. (7J) Bridge to Driscoll Island, need assurance that aquatic species will be protected.

Response Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) and Corp permits will be required prior to construction.

Dick F. (7G) Access to Pogue Mtn – work with federal and state agencies regarding junction of Salmon Creek and Spring Coulee, old wagon wheel trail, entirely on federal land.

Response Scotch Creek personnel are currently working on trail access to Pogue Mountain. The grant will be proposed to RCO in November 2016. We appreciate the comment and have already initiated communication with Dick to help with the best access route at this time.

Tim V. (7M) Shooting range, local fire suppression concerns, Sinlahekin a bad location. Need to look closer to the valley near irrigated lands. DNR has also been conducting public outreach regarding shooting ranges on their lands.

Response Staff will pursue numerous options as it pertains to developing future a shooting range.

Dave S. What is the status of the Carter Mountain Trail? Back Country Horseman received a grant (\$8,000). SEPA requires that non-motorized equipment for tree clearing.

Response SEPA and cultural resources survey and report completed. WDFW is waiting for groups and volunteer coordination to begin project.

Jerry B. WDFW needs to do its part with shooting ranges.

Response WDFW making shooting ranges a priority. WDFW staff is watching a current shooting range proposal underway Wenas WLA to determine if it will be successful or not. It has implications to other wildlife areas in the state.

Steve M.? Horse friendly camping opportunities along Hwy 97, needs a source of water.

Response Water at certain access sites would not be cost effective. Some sites already have access to water. WDFW could make this amenity more publicized in the future.

Dave S. Provide improved outreach information for people interested in camping. Lack of stock water in camping areas. See response above.

Tom W. Access management on Eder unit.

Response The Eder unit is open to the public for all non-motorized access at this time. Only during the deer season is it closed to the general public. The purpose is to provide a quality hunting experience for individuals selected for an access permit to hunt on the unit. At other times the area is open for hunting other game species in accordance with the WDFW pamphlet regulations, and for other wildlife oriented recreation. The unit is surrounded by private property on three sides, and Canada to the north. Public access to the unit is limited due and currently possible at only three sites, where WLA lands adjoin public roads.

Dave S. Horse Spring Coulee unit emergency grazing pasture, when was it last used?

- Response More than 10 years ago
- Will K. (9b) Page 10. There is a need for a center pivot at Scotch Creek.
- Response Scotch Creek will look into funding possibilities to improve on the irrigation systems for water efficiency and productive sharecropping opportunities.
- Tim V. DNR will provide edits in the DNR fire resources appendix G.
- Matt M. Work with other agencies to establish a local Washington Conservation Crew in Okanogan (to help with fence building and weed control).

### **Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Report (Jim Olson)**

Fire recovery is going well, with forbs, water birch and bunchgrass returning. It will take Scotch Creek 10-15 years for the water birch habitat to fully recover for sharp-tailed grouse wintering habitat. Where bitterbrush was lightly burned, approximately 20% is re-sprouting. Where it was heavily burned, 0% is showing signs of recovery. Annual weeds have increased (mustards, sweet clover and knapweed).

Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) damage assessment and repairs are continuing to take place. Fencing contracts will be out for bid next spring and will be in shorter sections than after the 2014 fire. 4-5 miles will allow smaller fence contractors to bid and completed sooner. 19 miles of dozerlines have been repaired.

Sharp-tail grouse – previously 116 documented on the Scotch Creek unit, only 22 documented after the fire. Monitoring will occur in spring 2017. Relocations are planned next year with emphasis on Scotch Creek and Tunk Valley units. WDFW received a Recreation Conservation Office grant for habitat restoration on 375 acres. Operations and maintenance is covered by funding from BPA. Statewide only 6 small populations of sharp-tail grouse remain.

### **Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Report – Justin Haug**

New species identified on the wildlife area include the sage thrasher and blue jay.

The wildlife area is still recovering from the after effects of two large fires. 20 miles of fencing was lost, a hay barn at McLoughlin Falls, and various signs will need to be replaced. We have a supplemental budget for some of these repairs and are currently working with FEMA for the partial reimbursement of various damages. The focus on management on the Driscoll Island unit is Russian knapweed and controlling the plumeless thistle infestation.

Horse Spring Coulee – grazed for six weeks from a leasee that had been impacted by the fire.

Carter Mountain – Backcountry Horseman and Mule Deer Foundation funds provided funding for improvement of the parking area. The pine creek parking area was improved using existing dollars. Funding was obtained through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to restore sagebrush steppe habitat.

McLoughlin Falls, 80% burned. The hay barn will need to be replaced.

Buzzard Lake, nearly 100% burned - mixed intensity fire.

Sinlahekin, 51% burned. Forest restoration project phase III is ongoing. Prescribed burns and fuels reduction activities planned over the next two years. WDFW was ranked #4 in an RCO Facilities Improvement Category grant for camping improvements on the Sinlahekin. Annual Dave Brittell hike will occur 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday in June. Good turnout this year, 40-50 individuals.

Chiliwist, Scotch thistle continues to be a challenging noxious weed. Russian skeleton weed present and becoming an increasing problem, also occurs on Carter Mountain now.

Wrap-Up:

- The WAAC will have an opportunity to review and provide comment on the final plan in December.
- The next WAAC meeting will occur in February 2017.