

Skagit Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

April 12, 2023
Teams Meeting

Attendees

Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC) Members

- Rick Billieu – Washington Waterfowl Association
- Richard Brocksmith – Skagit Watershed Council
- Nancy Crowell – Wildlife viewing, photographer
- Roger Fuller – Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Jed Holmes – Birds of Winter
- Art Kendall – Washington Waterfowl Association
- Martha Jordan – Northwest Swan Conservation Association
- Jeff Osmundson, Skagit Audubon
- Bruce Thompson – Washington Chapter – The Wildlife Society

WDFW

- Loren Brokaw, Assistant Wildlife Regional Program Manager
- Greg Meis, Skagit Wildlife Area Manager
- Curran Cosgrove, Assistant Wildlife Area Manager
- Lauri Vigue, Wildlife Area Planning Project Manager
- Joel Sisolak, Planning, Recreation and Outreach Section Manager
- Nina Taylor, Admin Region 4

Welcome & Introductions – Loren Brokaw

Loren thanked everyone for their time and commitment to this process. He acknowledged that this kick-off is an important first step to shaping the plan for the next 10 years.

Skagit Wildlife Area Planning & Process – Lauri

Lauri reviewed WDFW's mission statement before explaining the purpose of this planning effort, WAAC benefits, WAAC's responsibilities, and WDFW's responsibilities. She concluded by reviewing discussion guidelines and the Skagit Plan status.

Skagit WLA Overview - Greg

Greg provided background information on the Skagit Wildlife Area Units before reviewing of each of the 21 units individually. Ross Island was added to the wildlife area during this planning

process. Greg shared an overview of each Skagit Wildlife Area Unit including the unit's purpose, objective, and recreational use. Maps and aerial photos were also shared of most the Skagit Wildlife Area Units.

Skagit WLA Updates - Greg

Personnel changes:

Loren Brokaw, WDFW, Assistant Regional Wildlife Program Manager

Greg Meis, WDFW Skagit Wildlife Area Manager

Curran Cosgrove, WDFW, Skagit Wildlife Area Assistant Manager

Berkeley Johnson, WDFW, Skagit Wildlife Area Habitat Technician 3

Skagit Headquarters Unit:

New office building for staff, power line realignment, new deck, and ADA lift to be completed fall 2023.

Spur Dike Project was completed fall 2022.

Wiley Dike and Boat Launch Project expected to be completed by fall 2023.

Island Unit:

The flood event breach of East Lobe of unit occurred November 2021.

Currently managing the West Lobe of unit for waterfowl forage (approximately 40 acres).

Currently managing the East Lobe for noxious weed control.

Island Unit Restoration Project-Alternative Analysis and Modeling process is underway.

Samish Unit:

Experimenting with new crops such as millet and wild rice on the unit providing more variety of forage for waterfowl.

Samish River Unit:

A new parking lot (11 stalls) is expected by fall 2023.

Working with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to create tree/shrub planting areas, most soil management areas, add or improve water control.

Pilot Project-Waterfowl Hunting Zone is underway. There is a new seasonal access rule on the Samish River Unit, and it applies from the beginning of the general waterfowl hunting season on the second

Saturday in September and running through the first Saturday in February. Specific zones for different recreation opportunities have been established to support quality experiences and visitor safety.

Leque Island Unit:

New paved parking lot on Eide Road completed summer 2022.

North Leque Restoration Project completed summer 2022.

Milltown Island Unit:

The restoration Project will remove remnant dike segments, including new channel excavation, construction of tidal headwaters (waterfowl management areas), and create landing areas for public use.

Discussion and Comments

Question: If dike management is transferred to the dike district at Wiley, would public access to all those areas be retained?

Answer: The draft MOU with the dike district states that WDFW would retain authority to allow public access on the dikes.

Question: I assume dog training is for hunting dogs? How much space is required for that activity and will it possibly interfere with ground nest birds?

Answer: Yes, they are for hunting dogs. The size and placement will be determined with consultation from the WAAC.

Question: What's the difference between designated wildlife viewing and photography? I would assume most wildlife viewing areas are also photography areas.

Answer: Yes, there is a lot of overlap however there are some differences, so we designate both to honor that fact.

Question: Discuss the acquisition of land in South Skagit Bay from Snohomish Sportsman Association. Does it include land under the duck shacks?

Answer: It was a donation. We already own all the property around this parcel so it will make a large continuous unit, which is easier to maintain and improve. It does not include land under the duck shacks. It is all intertidal.

Question: What is the pet/wildlife issues at Telegraph Slough Unit?

Answer: people walking their dogs, which disrupts hunting and private landowners.

Goals and Objectives Discussion – Lauri

Lauri reviewed each goal in order giving a brief synopsis of each. She acknowledged the goals were initially drafted during planning team meetings (2019-2020) then reviewed in detail by the planning team during the past year. The draft goals and objectives were initially developed during the internal scoping process and based on comments received from the Advisory Committee and the public scoping process.

Question: Are you planning to provide updates on the Game Reserve issue on a timely basis as the process moves forward? This is a critical issue.

Answer: Absolutely. The intent is to keep everyone informed and engaged. The goal is to have a recommendation by 2027.

Question: Is the effort to stitch this coat of many colors together. The Skagit Wildlife area is many parts and is the effort underway enough to produce a cohesive, multifaceted wildlife area?

Answer: The Skagit Wildlife Area is unique. It may be hard to stitch them together to create a cohesive story. However, that is the goal. Looking to find new units that are nestled in among the units we already own. Our new budgeting, new technology, gives us opportunity. This isn't a corridor, and this impacts management. However, for certain species, like the bald eagle, the diversity of the wildlife area does offer key things those species need. They are all tied by all being in Skagit. Because hunting is declining, we as an agency are wanting to increase wildlife viewing, which is becoming more popular.

Response: This interest in raising the question about how to "stitch together" what the wildlife area units contribute toward the larger landscape over the longer haul is that seems to be a primary task for this this WACC to help with. The WACC likely should use its insight to help WDFW enhance the next 10-year management plan re: cohesiveness and synergy of natural values addressed. Reviewing the draft vision statement would be a good place to start (draft management plan). It is a priority to buy land as they become available as long the acquisitions make sense. Some have fell through. Other have been successful.

Question: Where are the potential funding sources from non-hunting/fishing activities? Discover Pass does very little. What ever happened to Conservation Permit that once was passed into law by legislator--funds went to non-hunting activities?

Answer: There are several different sources. The largest funding source is from General Funding through the legislature. The "Backpack" tax, as it got dubbed, didn't survive and was struck down.

Response: The Conservation Permit was specific to WDFW. This was a state RCW from many years back.

Comment: You lost 1 million duck days of food with the loss of Island Unit. Replacement seems to be on private land. As time passes, replacement on public land needs to be on NEW land, not converting some of your lands to waterfowl hunting priority from what they currently are.

Question: Is finding replacement lands in the goals and objectives?

Answer: We shy away from the term "Replacement" as replacement implies kind for inkind and that isn't always possible. However, yes, this is something we want make sure it's included.

Question: Can we have breakout meetings to discuss specific topics?

Response: Others are leery as this can lead to greater conflicts and secrecy. Any, and all, meetings that involve members or specific user groups needs to be shared with Advisory Committee members so they can attend if they choose.

Proposal: to have next meetings in person. Which was first and seconded.

Proposed idea: for a "unifying theme" on our delta sites that I think Bruce was asking for, waterfowl and salmon have both relied on estuary and river delta habitat for thousands of years. In the last 100 years 80%+ of those habitats have been displaced by development and other uses. With WDFW's conservation ownership we try to recapture some of that loss, both by restoring natural processes and estuary habitat, and by farming for waterfowl to provide high density caloric inputs to make up for ground that is now taken up by development.

Response: Wanted to get people thinking on the topic and today has been successful at that.

Response: Add in mitigate impacts to wildlife from climate change by providing critical habitat.

Next Steps:

- Goals and objectives comments are due April 19th.
- Goals and objectives will be revised based on comments received, a response to comments will be sent to the WAAC in May.
- The draft management plan will be sent to the WAAC for review May/June.

Schedule

- Tribal notification expected in May.
- The draft Skagit WLA Management Plan will be sent to the WAAC in May/June for review and comment.

- Public SEPA 30-day public review expected July
- Public workshop July/August
- Director expected to sign final plan September 2023