

Wenas Wildlife Area Target Shooting Advisory Committee

July 25, 2017 – North Park Lodge, Selah
Meeting Summary

Committee Members in Attendance

John Baranowski
Lee Davis
Bill Essman
Tim Funkhouser
Bret Hollar
Keely Hopkins
Walt Hyde

Brian Lund
Jim Lydigsen
Debby McCandless
Steve Miller
Clay Myers
Craig O'Brine
Norm Peck

Nick Perry
Mark Pidgeon
Scott Robertson
Robert Schafer
Tanya Stanley
Rachel Voss

Facilitators

Elizabeth McManus and Andy Chinn, Ross Strategic

Agency Representation

Aaron Garcia, WDFW
Ross Huffman, WDFW
Larry Leach, DNR

Mike Livingston, WDFW
Nathan Longoria, WDFW
Scott McCorquodale, WDFW

Melinda Posner, WDFW
Bob Weaver, WDFW

Welcome and Introductions

Elizabeth McManus welcomed meeting participants and reviewed the meeting agenda. Committee members, WDFW staff, and members of the public introduced themselves.

Safety Information

Elizabeth reviewed the summary of comments/complaints received by WDFW related to shooting at the Wenas Wildlife Area since the early 2000s. There were 84 comments/complaints, 15 of which were related to a firsthand experience at the Wildlife Area. Ross Strategic sorted and categorized the 84 comments/complaints several ways, including by topic; some comments/complaints spanned multiple topics. Committee members were also provided WDFW data on citations issued at the Wildlife Area from FY2013 to spring 2017. Captain Weaver noted that the citations are a result of officers encountering activities while patrolling as well as members of the public calling in to request service. WDFW's records management system does not capture all calls related to the Wenas but it tracks citations (i.e., there is no data available on number of warnings issued).

Committee member Clay Myers provided a summary of enforcement data from the Kittitas County Sheriff's Department. From 2010 to present there were 13 enforcement requests related to target shooting, 12 on state land and 1 on private property. Of the 12 calls on WDFW land, 2 were confirmed as illegal shooting that represented either risk to the public or a criminal violation, and 4 were confirmed as legal shooting activity. 3 calls were reported as fire hazards and 5 calls were from members of the public requesting information on where to shoot legally. There were 82 calls regarding shooting at Elk Heights and L.T. Murray, 32 calls for Badger, and 8 in Wilson-Coleman Canyon area (which is more

popular for shooting). Kittitas County Sheriff's Department has found both a perception issue (i.e., people may perceive a problem even though the shooting activity they see is legal) and an education opportunity (i.e., around what activities to expect where, and best practices for different user groups) related to target shooting on public lands.

Committee members had the following discussion on the safety data:

- **Data Interpretation and Use**
 - The data can be interpreted in various ways and human nature/confirmation bias will lead people to whatever conclusions they are already inclined to believe.
 - A number of Committee Members commented that it is important to identify what the Committee is trying to pull from the data, which is: Issues related to shooting. The Committee's report, and associated documentation, will send a message to the public, and much of the comment/complaint data is not related to shooting at Wenas Wildlife Area. The data might also lead non-Committee members to infer that a majority of users are in support of a designated range. All Committee documents are public and will influence public perception, so care should be taken to focus materials and not give the wrong impression.
 - Considering the data provided in email by Elizabeth McManus dated July 24, 2017, pertaining to existing laws, regulations and rules applying to Target Shooting, it becomes abundantly clear, law enforcement division of DFW and DNR already has in place law, regulation and rules, that if adequately enforced, are sufficient to significantly and positively impact, reduce and eliminate unsafe shooting practices, fire, and accumulation of trash and support the WDFW mission statement throughout all lands under management by WDFW.¹
 - One potential Committee recommendation is improved data collection on contacts at the Wenas, since having accurate and usable data is important.
- **Law Enforcement**
 - Law enforcement's prioritization of responses to calls/complaints depends on several factors, including the number of active calls at a given time and the urgency of response time based on what the call is about. Often with calls related to shooting, by the time a law enforcement representative arrives on scene, the shooters have left and there is no further opportunity to investigate.
 - Reckless endangerment is an RCW that covers a lot of illegal activities, including potential shooting violations.
 - The issue of enforcement is not whether enforcement officers are doing a good job, the issue is whether they can be deployed more effectively, paired with volunteers, or otherwise more strategically used.
 - A Committee Member commented that the safety data, along with the existing WACs and RCWs, seem to reinforce the point that WDFW has the tools to take care of the problems at the Wildlife Area.
 - There was a discussion of the differences between existing state regulations (WACs) on shooting between WDFW and DNR. Both Agencies have their own regulations on shooting on public lands. WDFW's regulations were put in place before DNR's and are less detailed. WDFW offered that given the checker-board nature of the lands, the difference between existing regulations can sometimes cause confusion; making the WDFW regulations the same as the newer DNR regulations would reduce this confusion

¹ This was a prepared statement read during the meeting.

and simplify and improve enforcement.

- **Observations**

- The WDFW website is too difficult to navigate if someone wants to find the rules related to target shooting.
- It is important to remember that shooters typically are wearing hearing protection and cannot hear someone yelling at them from 25 yards away. There also should be some personal responsibility taken by other users, to be aware when people are actively shooting.
- When you visit the Wenas Wildlife Area, there are no signs indicating where you are or where to go. At least half of the conflicts are likely due to misunderstanding or lack of knowledge.
- Predictability is important for all users, and education is key; however if an area is unsafe for shooting, it should be closed.
- The Buffalo Road area is prone to problems because if you are travelling up from the river toward the parking area it is a blind corner. You may be able to hear shooting but it is difficult or impossible to tell where the shooting is coming from or what direction it is in. The commonly used route to connect to the Sky Line trail takes hikers and horse riders through the area typically used for shooting.
- If a sign goes up to indicate an area is unsafe, and someone is hurt in another area that is not signed, then inevitably someone will ask why there was a sign in one place and not the other.
- The first rule of safety is institutional controls, not individual controls. If shooting is occurring in the wrong direction, then the institutional control is to point it in the right direction.
- If WDFW can focus on enhancing the better existing areas, and let people know about them, some of the more problematic areas will close themselves.
- A middle ground solution could be to limit Buffalo Road to a specific shooting activity, like shotgun, which has a more limited range. As always, predictability will be important.

Decisions

- Committee agreed (via straw poll) that it wants to develop draft recommendations on the following topics:
 - Education and Outreach.
 - Enforcement.
 - Managed Sites (one for the North and one for the South)
- Subgroups were formed for each topic and Committee members volunteered for subgroups
- The Committee discussed a set of preliminary ideas for each topic area (sub group work is not limited to these preliminary ideas, they are a starting place):
 - **Education and Outreach.** Develop and distribute more and clearer information to help users know: when they are on the Wildlife Area, applicable rules and regulations; expectations for each user group (how can each group behave responsibly; best practices for each group); where the traditional areas for concentrated shooting are; where the traditional areas for other uses are; where habitat conservation areas are.
 - **Enforcement.** Increase presence of officers; focus/emphasize patrols in knowing “problem” areas and coordinate approach with others such as Eyes in the Woods, Wildlife Area staff, local law enforcement; improve data collection; look at issues of difference between DNR and WDFW rules for shooting on public lands; look at how existing state-wide laws (RCWs) apply such as the reckless endangerment laws. And

- look at county ordinances and how they apply.
- **Managed Sites.** Identify locations that would work best for different types of shooting and manage them for shooting; look at existing sites of concentrated shooting including at least: Durr Rd., Umtanum Rd., Sheep Co., Cottonwood, Buffalo Rd.; make “low tech” improvements for each location to enhance safety feature such as benches, lanes, berms, fire breaks, trash cans, and signs; encourage people to practice shooting at the managed locations; provide information on the managed locations and other likely nearby uses.
- Subgroups will further deliberate on their issues and prepare draft recommendations (or outlines of draft recommendations) for consideration by the full Committee in August.

Next Steps

- Facilitators will coordinate subgroup scheduling, attend meetings when possible, and assist with drafting recommendations as requested.
- Subgroups will make the results of their work available before the August Committee meeting if possible, or bring it to the Committee meeting.

Fire Risk Discussion with Yakima County Fire District 2 Commissioner Rex Reed

Commissioner Reed provided some of his thoughts on fire risk reduction at the Wenas:

- Fire District 2 is neutral regarding shooting at the Wenas but can and will provide assistance to the Committee upon request.
- From the District’s perspective, having a designated area for shooting is much easier to manage for fire risk reduction and there are several ways to make such areas safer from a fire perspective, such as adding gravel to the shooting lanes, treating noxious weeds, and building berms. Other regular maintenance could include fire lines, vegetation control, and prescribed fires.
- Seasonal timing restrictions around shooting have been successful, although they are a compromise since the risk level from available fuels is probably more of a risk factor than the time of day.
- Enforcement is critical; when citations are issued for violations, the word spreads very quickly.
- Education is an important component of fire safety, including use of social media to provide information.
- Assumption is that none of the fires started on the Wenas were the result of using “traditional” ammunition types and targets.
- Fires that have occurred in 2017 are under investigation. There are many rumors but the official causes of these fires have yet to be determined.

Committee members had the following discussion:

- It might be more impactful to regulate type of ammunition used, rather than the time of day during which people can shoot.
- A USFS study of ignition by rifle ammunition concluded that solid copper and steel bullets are more likely to cause fire than lead ammunition.
- A melted lead core could potentially cause an ignition but traditional pistol caliber or shotgun ammunition are unlikely to do so.
- Besides risk of spark, there is the potential for ignition from bullets from transfer of kinetic energy to heat energy.
- WDFW asked the Committee’s perspective on whether additional restrictions on shooting

should be considered this year due to fire risk and the high number of fires that have already happened this season. The Committee discussed this issue and in general Committee members who responded thought that the risk from fires from shooting was not enough to warrant singling out that activity (as opposed to driving on the Wildlife Area roads, for example) for additional seasonal restrictions. Some Committee members thought additional restrictions could be helpful to reducing fire risk.

- A Committee Member asked WDFW why there were time of day and seasonal restrictions only at the Wenas Wildlife Area and not at all state lands, particularly since fuel loads were higher in some other locations. WDFW indicated that it looks at several factors including how much an area is used and history of fire when making these decisions.

Wenas User Survey

Elizabeth reviewed the draft survey. The survey is intended to be distributed broadly to Committee members' organizations and will also be promoted by WDFW.

Committee members had the following discussion on the survey:

- The user survey will be a critical part of understanding people's opinions about "who has the right of way" when out on the Wenas.
 - In order to gain this type of insight the survey should include several scenarios for people to react to.
- The survey will help identify knowledge gaps, which will allow better targeting of outreach and education efforts.

Next Steps

- Facilitators will update the survey as directed and distribute a link to the draft survey for Committee members to review.
- The survey will be distributed to the public prior to the August Committee meeting.

Public Comments

There were no public comments offered at the meeting. Between the June and July meetings 2 comments were submitted on the Committee website. These Comments were distributed to Committee Members and are available [here](#).

[Meeting adjourned]

Meeting Materials (available [online](#))

- Meeting agenda (distributed in advance)
- Letter from Trash No Land (distributed in advance)
- Key themes from one on one conversations (distributed in advance)
- Draft June WTS Meeting summary (distributed in advance)
- Summary of June listening sessions (distributed in advance)
- Public comments from online form (distributed at meeting, available online)
- Target shooting data tracking sheet (distributed in advance)
- Wenas Enforcement Activity Fiscal 13 to 7-2017 (information shown at meeting, available online)