

Waterfowl Advisory Group Meeting
Ranger Station, North Bend
Minutes of May 6, 2006 Meeting

Members and guests present: Don Kraege, Brad Bortner, Lora Leschner, Mikal Moore, Larry Boose, Chuck Bratton, Mark Burlington, Michael Crowder, Chris Dorrow, Ralph Engle, Scott Fink, Oscar Graham, Doug Hargin, Rick Haugen, Dan Howell, Frederick LeVering, Dick Price, Dave Sievers, Dan Friesz

Introductions: Members were requested to update contact information

Review of July minutes: Members voted to approve July 2005 minutes

Review of Duck Stamp and Print projects: Don Kraege explained that funds will be somewhat limited this cycle since it is the end of the biennium and requested that members rank projects as follows:

Capital budget: 1 high, 1 medium, 2 low

Operating budget: 3 high, 3 medium, 3 low

Members could also choose to only partially fund a project or put a cap on \$ amount

CAPITAL BUDGET PROJECTS

1. Cherry Valley Unit Wetland Restoration Project, Snoqualmie Valley WA

Introduction: This Region 4 DU proposal was considered previously. This unit is a previously productive corn farm but has deteriorated in recent years. Problems include reed canary grass, a pump threatening juvenile salmon, and a highway that has created a "bathtub effect". The plan calls for wetland restoration while preserving the traditional field trial area and pheasant release. This project has strong multi-agency support, including the Pacific Salmon Consortium. There are no plans to continue corn farming (too wet), but nearby dry land could be put back into farm production.

Presentation: The Snoqualmie river floods annually starting in November. The runoff is diverted to WDFW land in Cherry Creek basin. A self-regulating tide gate impounds water, fish come up ladder on back side. Heavy flows will be addressed by spillways. On-site water will be manipulated to control reed canarygrass, along with mowing and disking. Oxbows and channels will be recreated.

Discussion: Members discussed the need for post-monitoring. Concern was expressed whether this area will function as a production area. It was noted that westside focus is for wintering area. Members questioned whether this project will increase hunting opportunities given the state of zoning and development in the area.

2. Whatcom (formerly Tennant Lake) Wildlife Area Wetland Enhancement

Introduction & Presentation: This project will enhance 65 acres of wetlands by reshaping basins and installing a water control / fish passage structure. An area outside the wetland will be maintained for farming. Reshaping resulted in good wetland plant response in a similar project downstream. Fish ladders are necessary for projects in western Washington to gain multi-agency support. While fish are present in this system, it is not a priority project for Fisheries.

Discussion: It was noted that the project will not occur without fish passage accommodation. This is a good hunting area, but needs better water control. Without the water control structure, flooding and drawdown ability would be compromised. The structure also gives more options for managing reed canarygrass (e.g. disking earlier).

3. Leque Island Wetland Enhancement

Introduction & Presentation: The project is a 70 acre freshwater wetland enhancement. Upland farming will be phased out by moist-soil management. Independent control of water levels will be achieved in each unit. This has been a somewhat contentious project, importing to salmon and estuary restoration but takes away from hunter access. ADA accessible blinds and cover between blinds are also proposed to be installed.

Discussion: The pheasant release will probably not continue, but nearby larger acreage may be considered for pheasants. The future of hunting on this area is positive, but noise and perception of hunters by residents/non-consumptive users needs to be addressed. The project has garnered a lot of support from WWA and is a high visibility project. May also benefit from future 200-acres acquisition. \$200,000 will provide start to get other matching funds. Dave Sievers put forth motion to put monetary cap on Leque Island of \$50,000 until matching funds are secured. Larry Boose seconded motion noting it provides opportunity to spread money around. However, this tactic creates more work for grant writers, results in more expensive projects and would delay project for 1 year until we vote to provide remaining \$150,000. Motion failed. Dike was repaired prior to need for salmon restoration

4. Kandoll Farm Habitat Restoration Project

Introduction & Presentation: This project is at the mouth of Grays River. This is a Columbia Land Trust acquisition, bordering TNC & WDFW land. A pipe not allowing water into project was removed, replaced by 2 10' culverts. A levy along river breached in 3 locations and a tide gate was removed. The objective is to recover historical floodplain activity on a former dairy pasture by cutting more channels, filling in some ditches and enhancing the north levy to hold water back from private land. No fish ladder is needed because there is no impoundment.

Discussion: This is a new public hunting area, already utilized by dabblers, divers with current improvements. Road access is via Hwy 4, walk-in hunting. This project is in a remote area, no worries about development or encroachment.

5. Niqually NWR Estuarine Restoration

Introduction & Presentation: This is the biggest estuarine project in the state, \$6 million, half secured. Has gone through CCP and received public approval for preferred alternative. A portion of agreement with refuge is to open up tidal lands adjacent to state lands to hunting, but need to acquire lands south of I-5 to provide hunting access. The project includes an interior setback levy for wetland restoration, 400 acres of freshwater will be maintained, 700 new acres of estuary. This project is supported by numerous groups.

Discussion: This project will benefit fish and waterfowl. Hunting has been promised on refuge for a long time. What effect will dike removal have on duck numbers? Surveys show best waterfowl numbers in restored estuary, primarily American wigeon and American green-wing teal. Is this project legitimate for duck stamp funding? Yes because provides hunting access (N of removed dike). Motion to table project until next year, seconded. Motion passed.

OPERATING BUDGET PROJECTS

1. North Potholes Carp Control Project

- Will also benefit Northern Leopard Frog
- \$30,000, 182 acres treated
- Previous projects have increased duck production in same ponds (1980s)
- Carp cause turbidity, decrease invertebrates, oxygen in water
- Same project as last year, different area

2. Columbia Basin moist soil evaluation

- Carrying capacity of wintering mallards in Columbia Basin
- What is seed production in CB wetlands?
- Sample natural wetlands, apply to whole area using NWI
- \$20,000 (phase I), \$20,000 (phase II)

3. Lake Terrell Blinds

- Popular hunting area
- Blinds to assist with hunter crowding and distribution
- Blinds dilapidated, trail needs maintained
- Installation should use hunter input... facing wrong way, brush
- WWA has provided assistance in the past
- Duck stamp money is meant for these kinds of projects? Has been turned down before, did not want to set precedent for future similar projects...
- Low cost, good PR

4. Snow Goose Cover Crop

- Public access: geese are using agricultural fields, traditionally hunted in marsh, private clubs have leased ag land, people are also hunting snow geese from roads
- Snow goose depredation: dairy farms losing feed
- Increasing harvest is supported (late season hunt?)
- Enhancement: winter wheat cover plus access
- May lead to other waterfowl hunting opportunities on private lands
- What about hunting access, e.g. Feel Free to Hunt? Can limit by parking spaces, even though current state laws do not allow limited access with public funds
- May limit itself due to nature of snow goose hunting? Maybe not.
- Fallow ground can be planted with cover crop to redistribute geese
- Private hunting clubs may provide competition for this land, depending on landowners
- Price: paid per acre, negotiable

5. Breeding Mallard Habitat Evaluation: Phase II

- Trapping and monitoring breeding hen mallards in Eastern WA
- As of May 5, have completed trapping (30 public, 20 private), relocated 47 of 50 radioed hens. Six females on nests as of May 4, including roadside ditch, winter wheat field (private), rest on Desert Wildlife Area.
- Evidence of movement between private and public lands
- Will continue monitoring through end of July
- WDFW Game Management plan supports studies of waterfowl production in eastern WA
- Focus area is Potholes and west to George
- Want to improve recruitment, but don't know what is limiting production

6. Gloyd Seeps Dove Food Plot

- Previous experience: small, scattered food plots were not effective
- Did have some use at Adrian (Gloyd Seeps), beyond scope of project
- Planted barley, sudangrass, etc., water was limiting factor
- Area used to be sharecropped, but lease canceled, includes Willow Lake
- Disk 40 acres of dry land wheat stubble, plant 20 this fall for spring germination. Rest put in spring, barley and winter wheat.

- Equipment must be rented, 150 hp tractor (could do cheaper with 90hp).
 - Goal is permanent food source for doves, may see some benefits for ducks and geese
- 7. Stillwater Release Site Food Plot**
- Pheasant release site, but has some value for waterfowl
 - Old Carnation Farm, game reserve in 1980s
 - Corn from dairy farms good for pheasant and waterfowl, then mowed as farms died out
 - Soils too well drained for wetlands, why not farm? Corn and barley proposed
 - Wastewater is not an issue here anymore
- 8. Crescent Lake Release Site Food Plot**
- N of Stillwater Unit
 - Also proposing cereal crop enhancement
 - 112 acres are sharecropped currently, contract to put in food plots
 - Is pheasant and waterfowl use compatible? Probably not when seasons overlap
- 9. Flooded corn fields – Columbia Basin**
- Quincy Irrigation District interested in providing water from periodic turnouts
 - Provide quality public hunting that could compare with private clubs
 - What are implications for baiting? Not illegal.

Further discussion of projects

Motion to exclude flooded corn fields. Motion failed for lack of second.

Motion to exclude Terrell duck blinds. Motion failed for lack of second.

Discussed whether Capital Budget funds should be divided between projects

Members discussed pros and cons of 4 Capital projects

OTHER TOPICS

National Duck Hunter Survey presentation. Don Kraege presented results specific to Washington. **Website:** www.ducksurvey.com

Avian influenza presentation: Don Kraege reviewed general biology of avian influenza viruses and discussed the early detection plan for the Pacific Flyway.

WAG Mission Statement questionnaire. Please send completed questionnaires to Chris to help develop mission statement. Will discuss at next meeting. Note question 5: think big, e.g. regulations, fees, not specific projects

Merganser limits: Recommendation regarding separate mergansers limits would need to be brought up in July.

Cormorant population reduction rumors: Don Kraege explained that double-crested cormorants are overpopulated in mid-continent and SE U.S., not the western U.S. The bird is not listed as a game bird, need to go through special channel as protected by Migratory Bird Treaty. However, a study of effect of hazing on cormorants at Moses Lake will occur.

Telford Ranch Restoration project: Progress on this project was discussed

Pacific Flyway Council Meeting: Spokane, July 19th

NEXT MEETING: July 22nd, (motioned, seconded, approved) during public comment period for regulations. Location: TBD, Moses Lake suggested

Action Item for next meeting: Look into funding allocation for waterfowl stamp money (e.g. acquisition vs. habitat)