

**Washington Waterfowl Advisory Group**  
**July 10, 2004 Meeting**  
**Shilo Inn, Moses Lake**

Members and Guests Present: See attached list

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Staff: Jim Eby, Greg Schirato, Jim Tabor, Mike Davison, Dave Ware, Don Kraege, and Ron Friesz

Meeting called to order by Don Kraege

Introductions and welcome extended.

March 27, 2004, minutes reviewed: minutes approved.

**Potential License System Changes:** Jim Eby presented an overview of the current status of the contract for the WILD licensing system. Contract expires in 2006; current contract with MCI has worked fairly well overall; system sales include Internet, telephone, and dealers; includes license sales and raffles—is related, but does not conduct, the permit drawings.

Discussion: Razor clam license should be separate from the WILD system; the document was sturdy and wearing it was not a problem, but going through the system takes too long; how will WDFW gather information to determine what changes should be made to the system (Jim explained how the public will be engaged through Advisory Group meetings and opinion surveys); what licenses can a person purchase over the Internet and go hunting immediately (anything that does not require a tag); need to change the manual to tell dealers to make sure they hand out the stewardship permit when the license is purchased); should include the Game Management Unit (GMU) map with the spring turkey pamphlet; should allow the dealers to take hunter reports; difficult for out of state hunters to get all of the authorizations, and so on, to go hunting, need a better, more integrated system (the WILD system does not currently provide authorizations); how does the Harvest Information Program (HIP) survey work and how is the information used; why don't hunters get a duck stamp unless they ask for one (to reduce valued inventory that dealers are responsible for; currently need to send in a letter or copy of the receipt and request one); stamp sales may decline if collectors can not easily purchase them (collectors purchases have actually gone up); WDFW needs to consider the cost of switching to a new contractor.

**Estuary Restoration:** Greg Schirato presented information regarding wetland restoration impacts on waterfowl as well as salmon recovery; status of restoration efforts on the Olympic Peninsula; usually funded with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Ducks Unlimited as partners; assists with protection of wetlands and associated wildlife, fish rearing areas, generally our projects include access for hunting;

highlighted the conflicts between diked waterfowl projects and true estuary necessary for chum and Chinook salmon.

Discussion: What is the status of the Skagit estuary restoration now (planning process winding down; most of the restoration has been completed; most of the recommended restoration is on WDFW ownership which initiates the conflict); what standard is used to compare livestock use versus other techniques to recover desirable vegetation (for example, removal of canary reed grass), how much are cattle being used now (fairly limited because of state laws regarding grazing of state lands); seems like the conflicts started in the Skagit, but are now moving to the coast, what are local decision makers doing to mitigate potential conflict before the conflict escalates (because the area behind the dikes along the coast is not as high value cropland, it has not been as great a conflict and there are fewer listed salmon species); what about an attenuated system (partial restoration – do not seem to get all of the benefits of full estuary restoration); how do you deal with private land being flooded through restoration (either purchase the land or protect it with dikes).

Pat Shearer discussed the change in the waterfowl community's opposition to estuary restoration with the greatest issue now focused on mitigation of lost waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunity; there remains some level of distrust between salmon recovery and waterfowl advocates as demonstrated with other projects; the benefits of waterfowl advocates arguing their case is that they now have a seat at the negotiating table and can pursue mitigation for waterfowl needs; few now feel that the restoration should not go forward, they just need give sincere consideration to mitigation and/or for what is done to encourage/plant the right vegetation.

**Swan/Lead Shot Issue:** Mike Davison provided a presentation updating the status of WDFW's efforts to address swan mortality in the Whatcom County area; most mortality is from ingestion of lead shot; average of 20 to 40 shot in birds that are collected each year; currently between 300 and 400 birds die per year; have collared 126 birds with 18 mortalities; intensive recovery efforts to remove carcasses and prevent secondary poisoning; nine or ten of the mortalities that died from lead poisoning also used many of the same feeding areas; seems to be a strong correlation to field use in the Sumas area; concerned about how this issue impacts the public perception of hunters.

Discussion: What size shot are the swans picking up (the large majority was larger shot sizes used for waterfowl hunting); how can these birds pick up this much lead (there must be some extremely high levels on some sites, although there seems to be some level of lead in most of the fields and roost sites); what will WDFW do when they do find the source of the lead (remediation could be very expensive; hazing would need to be continuous; or could de-water or cover the fields that show high use; might just need to change the crop rotation); why the mortality spike in January (may be related to use of corn fields when swans first come into the area and a relationship of lead deposition on corn fields); can we tell how old the lead is (have not found an economical way to determine at this point); why aren't ducks and geese dying as well as swans (may be some ducks and geese dying, but they are smaller and may not be found as easily); so

swans actually dig while feeding (yes); how were the hunter compliance levels determined (this was preliminary data and not considered accurate at this point); should ask older hunters where historic blinds were so could look there (we have worked with local hunters on finding hot spots, but still looking for more information); when will WDFW make a decision on where the hot spot is located (have reduced area of focus to about 2.5 square miles, so will need another year to help further refine the location); would be helpful to get a packet of information to use in lobbying for additional funding; WDFW should be funding this issue at a greater level; and much of the information in the media seems to implicate current hunters as the cause of the problem; could we consider greater lead shot restrictions for upland birds etc.; should also consider increasing the penalty for waterfowl hunters continuing to use lead shot; need to make sure that we have a way to solve the problem; what percent of the swan population is dying each year as a result of lead poisoning (about 1 percent of the Pacific Coast population).

**Ducks Unlimited Wetland Project Summary:** Ivan Lines presented a summary of many of the projects in eastern Washington; explained that partnerships and funding for these projects comes from many sources; showed some specific examples of projects.

Discussion: What about all the funding going into private lands (it is going into wetland habitat that otherwise might be unproductive for waterfowl); what is the status of the channeled scablands project (just started).

**Corn Stubble Deferred Tillage:** Ron Friesz presented the results of the first year of a two-year project to address the trend that corn crops have been reduced in the Columbia Basin and fields are being tilled immediately after harvest; this project looked at the feasibility of paying farmers to defer tillage of corn stubble; the main goal was to provide more forage for ducks in the Basin; study area was near the Potholes Reserve; came to agreement with four landowners on 625 acres for \$14,000 (\$22 per acre); much variability in the amount of waste corn available.

Discussion: How did we set the price (based on discussions with other farmers and WDFW farm program expert); did the farmer have to provide public hunting (yes, all areas were open for Feel-Free-to-Hunt; one potential cooperator objected to allowing access and was not included in the program); should consider leaving strips of corn spread over more area; or paying landowners to just leave a field unharvested; need to consider the baiting laws; would like to have someone in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) enforcement come in and explain the baiting; should these areas be completely closed to hunting? (hunting did not seem to impact waterfowl use of the corn).

Mike Meseberg made a motion that farmers be paid to leave corn stubble and not all be required to allow hunting; motion passed unanimously.

**Background License Plates:** Don Kraege provided an explanation of what WDFW is proposing; then showed the four plate designs. Concern that dedication of funds is difficult to maintain in the legislative process.

Eleven supported number one with a better mallard; no votes for number two; one vote for number three; and one vote for number four.

**Waterfowl Season Proposals:** Don Kraege discussed proposed duck season recommendations. Similar duck season proposed as last year with date corrections. Continuation of later opening date to protect locally produced ducks. No information on canvasback or pintail restrictions at this time. WDFW is proposing more restrictive (permit hunting) for sea ducks and a bag limit of one harlequin duck per year. Similar goose seasons proposed but reductions in southwest Washington season due to budget cuts.

Discussion: Some discussion on purpose of split duck season; it was generally agreed the group favors season late as possible. Dick Price concerned about more restrictive hunting for sea ducks; may be playing into anti-hunters. Group concerned about timely issuance of sea duck permits (WDFW will be more lenient first year on application deadlines). Ben Welton favors WDFW research on sea ducks; he mentioned large drop in population of scoters. He mentioned that harlequin populations stable but population numbers low. Existing restrictions could potentially take large percentage of population "Could seriously hurt these birds". He supports the more restrictive regulations to give researchers a chance to learn about status of these birds - "Lets get a handle on the harvest". Most hunting for sea ducks is by trophy hunting because harlequin drake highly prized. Group discussed recommendation for change of bag limit from 7 to one harlequin. Discussion on reasonable way to make permits available for out-of-staters.

Dave Sievers made a motion to restrict bag limit of harlequin to one/year; seconded and passed unanimously. Chuck Bratton moved to drop the sea duck authorization application deadline for the first year; seconded and passed unanimously.

Group recommendation for liberal season: Oct 16-20 closed 21-22; open Oct 23-Jan 30; Group recommendation for moderate season: Eastside Oct 16-24, Nov. 6-Jan 30; Westside Oct. 23-31, Nov 13-Jan 30. Motion passed unanimously. If a restrictive season is prescribed by USFWS, Don Kraege will mail out alternatives for group input. Motion for pintail and canvasback season to keep same as last year; passed unanimously. Group adopted proposed goose season recommendations unanimously.

**Waterfowl Reserves and Closures:** Proposed change of Snake River closure reviewed and discussed. Pat Shearer reported Chris Highland still concerned, and if passed, the area should be monitored for any change of hunting quality. Steve Shultz still has concern about waterfowl numbers and hunting opportunity. Most of the reservoir (deep with steep sides) does not really offer good duck hunting opportunity. Motion to accept as presented, seconded; passed unanimously.

Moxee Reserve elimination presented. Some discussion about potential for habitat and hunting opportunity. Motion to accept as presented, seconded; passed unanimously.

Snipes Reserve creation presented. Motion to accept as presented, seconded; passed unanimously.

**Motorized decoys:** Pat Shearer proposed reinstatement of battery-operated quiver magnets decoys (not rotary winged). Considerable discussion pro-con.

Mike Meseberg made motion to reinstate motor driven decoys; more discussion followed pro-con. Motion seconded; two in favor, six opposed; motion failed. Mike Meseberg made motion to have Pat Shearer go before Fish and Wildlife Commission to ask for reinstatement of battery-operated quiver magnets decoys (not rotary winged). Motion seconded; three in favor, seven opposed; motion failed.

**Election of vice-chair:** Don Kraege passed out ballot for voting for vice-chair to replace Dave Sievers, who will become chair in January 2005. Chris Hyland was selected as vice-chair.

**Meeting adjourned 4:45 P.M.**