

**MINUTES**  
**Waterfowl Advisory Group Meeting**  
**July 23, 2011**  
**Moses Lake Fire Hall**

1. **Welcome and Introductions – Doug Hargin (Chair)**
2. **Approval of Minutes – Doug Hargin (Chair)**

Minutes of July 24, 2010 meeting were approved unanimously.

3. **Update on select duck stamp projects (including satellite tracking of E. WA geese) – Mikal Moore (WDFW)**

Mikal Moore and Rich Finger provided overview of Duck Stamp and Print Projects in progress, including Mansfield Pond, Mesa Lake, Ephrata Lake, small Canada goose research, Chinook/Willapa WRP, John's River, and Shillapoo.

4. **Waterfowl quality hunt areas – Rich Finger (WDFW), Don Kraege (WDFW)**

**Dick Price made a motion for Winchester and Frenchman regulated access area to open to 7 days a week with limited parking and close at noon.** Dick stated that the recreation provided is not sufficient, considering the cost associated with the projects. The problem is that the shallow water freezes in early winter at which point the hunting is over.

Discussion: Rich Finger gave an overview of all RAAs in eastern Washington, including Baile, Windmill, Frenchman, and Winchester. He suggested changing the Frenchman and Winchester to align with Bailie rules, including goose days, but open all day long. Rich also plans to add a Register to Hunt box to Frenchman and Winchester and increasing Frenchman to 7 car parking lot, but not Winchester at this point. Recommending to make it an ADA access area by allow access on service road on Frenchman and Winchester. Details of ADA parking need to be worked out, e.g. add an ADA parking spot. Dave Ware noted federal ADA rules changed last year, so compliance will need to be examined. Participation in the agency qualification process for ADA access has increased by almost 5,000 hunters. Dave Seivers did not recommend hunting all day long. Rich noted that the adjacent reserve keeps the birds concentrated on both areas. Michael Crowder agreed that afternoon hunting can provide good opportunity in the winter. Patric Shearer suggested that 7 days a week was excessive.

**John Arrabito seconded the proposal.**

**Chris Dorow made recommendation to follow department recommendations. Not seconded.**

**Vote: Ayes: 9 , Nays: 5, motion for original recommendation passed.**

Dave Ware gave a background on the development of “quality hunt areas”. He also noted that a reservation system is being developed and WDFW is interested in input on how to implement this program for upland and waterfowl hunting, primarily. Mike Meseberg suggested a questionnaire on the back of the Register to Hunt form.

**Chris Dorow made recommendation to add ADA parking spot to Winchester and Frenchman RAAs. Seconded.**

Discussion: Dick P would like the department to look in to what resources would be required.

**Motion amended: WDFW review the possibility of implementing ADA parking spot to Winchester and Frenchman RAAs. Seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

**5. Waterfowl status update / flyway update – Kraege**

Don Kraege played a short video summarizing the results of the USFWS May Survey. Pond conditions and duck numbers in the mid-continent were excellent. The group discussed the status of the western mallard model and Washington’s helicopter survey. Kraege thinks the Washington data may be incorporated within the next 3 years.

**6. Sea duck management review – Kraege**

Don Kraege gave a presentation on sea duck management to the group. Scoter breeding populations in Canada are experiencing a recent increase. Puget Sound wintering population is experiencing a long-term decline (-82% since 1970s). Possible factors include prey depletion, contaminants, disturbance, predation, harvest, and mortality events (e.g. algae blooms). Population may be experiencing wintering area shifts coupled with low recruitment. Scoter telemetry project identified breeding areas of surf and white-winged scoters in north-central Canada. Found scoters reside in Puget Sound for up to 8 months and are loyal to wintering areas. Band recoveries occurred almost exclusively within Puget Sound. Adult females had 93% survival rate, but low productivity (~10%). WDFW is concerned about sustainability of harvest rates among scoters due to low productivity, implemented reduced bags and mandatory harvest reporting. Current harvest rates exceed 3.5%, the threshold of sustainability. There is concern about the effect of harvest on other sea duck species if scoter bag limits decrease (e.g. goldeneye, long-tailed duck). No changes proposed for this year.

Discussion: Ben Welton: The number of mussel farms is increasing in B.C. More extensive mid-winter surveys in B.C. would help explain the declining wintering trend in Puget Sound. Molt populations seem to be higher this summer. Don Kraege: Sea Duck Joint Venture is implementing wintering counts in some unsurveyed areas (e.g.

California coast), but B.C. is not sold on the survey design. Chris Dorow: Complaints from sea duck hunters on new restrictions include: adequate notice on changes and adequate justification, particularly education on how compensatory harvest works with respect to goldeneyes. Don Kraege: complication of regulations is an issue. Do we want separate regulations for Barrows and common goldeneyes? Harvest impact will be evaluated over a 3 year period. Dave Drewry (guest): Unique opportunity to hunt sea ducks in Washington should be preserved. Sea duck hunters are concerned about being over-regulated out of the hunt. Two bird bag is enough to reduce participation noticeably. Goldeneyes and long-tail restrictions negatively affect opportunity as well. Long-tailed duck encounters are opportunistic due to southern edge of wintering range. Barrow's goldeneye can be selectively targeted based on location, but bag limit is reducing common goldeneye opportunity in southern counties (e.g. Pacific Co). Ben Welton: Agreed that Barrow's can be selectively targeted, but has seen a noticeable decline in populations on salt water.

**Ben W: Motion to recommend adding a 3rd goldeneye to the sea duck limit to allow sea duck hunters to have a full 7 bird bag. John Arrabito seconded.**

Discussion: Michael Crowder: is pressure from USFWS or state? Don: State's action based on increasing interest in sea duck hunting. Concerned about Barrow's goldeneye limited status, so chose to err on side of conservation until more information is gathered. Patric Shearer: Big picture is loss of puddle duck habitat (e.g. Farmed Island), we may see more interest in sea duck hunting. It is important to get Canadian cooperation in population estimation. Dave Drewry: Scoter numbers are approaching closed season threshold. Connecting other species to the scoter regulations could end the tradition of sea duck hunting. Micromanagement by the state is excessive. Agrees that surveys need to be improved. Rodney V: What about identification of Barrow's on harvest report? Identification of juveniles, females may be difficult for inexperienced hunters. John Arrabito: Cost of additional winter flight? \$75,000. Roy C.: Has observed significant depredation on scoters by eagles and seals. Don K.: PTT study, recovered several PTTs under eagle nests. Dan Howell: Why 7 birds? How likely is a 7 sea duck bag? Other birds can be used to fill the 7 bird bag such as bufflehead and bluebills.

**Ayes: 9. Nays: 3. Motion passed.**

## **7. Regulation proposals for August 6 Olympia Commission meeting – Kraege**

- Swinomish Spit Game Reserve. One of 2 brant reserves. Bayview was eliminated last year due to lack of use by brant. Swinomish boundaries have been changed slightly due to relocation of navigational buoys. Basically a housekeeping regulation.
- Migratory Waterfowl Season Package. Western mallards down slightly due to decrease in Alaska, but still in the liberal prescription. Washington mallards were up. Similar dates and limits as last year. September 2011 Canada goose

season will be closed in eastern Washington, but could offer a September eastern WA season next year. We would need to take 2 days off the end of the regular season. Dusky Canada goose trend was up, could result in increased quotas next year. Cacklers had big drop in counts this year. 3-year average dropped below the population objective. Unknown yet whether WA and OR will have 2 or 3 cacklers in the bag. Wrangel Island Snow Geese, breeding count similar to last year, excellent production year, record number of nests due to good weather conditions, low predation. Goose season proposal similar to last year, except cackler limit may change. Area 2B: special collar observation study, split season proposed to allow study. Same number of hunting days, but 1 week split.

- Snow Goose Harvest Management Program. Quality hunt provisions on Fir Island same as last year except Saturday authorization is not required. No drawing this year, just feel free to hunt. 24 attended, realistic decoys required on Fir Island. Other areas of Skagit County, 100 ft road buffer for snow goose hunting. Fir Island working group may have additional recommendations.

Discussion: Snow goose hunting days are not split. Request for better accessibility (e.g. online information) to information on location of FFTH. Information has been improved for this year on GoHunt. Brant season discussion: Gary Gibbs letter to the commission distributed. Whatcom county gets hunted out quickly because bays are so small. Can hunt 16 days in each county, can be different days.

Dick Price: **Motion to accept department's recommendation for season. Seconded.**

Discussion: Department would select 3 cacklers if offered.

John Arrabito: **Amendment to motion: Utilize full 16 day window offered in brant season, including non-overlapping days in Pacific County so hunters could hunt both areas, start a week earlier in Pacific, end a week earlier than the Skagit. Amendment seconded.**

Discussion: Willapa does not have WHA Brant, could open in November, but not Skagit. Intent is to even out pressure.

**Vote on amendment: 12 in favor of the amendment. Opposed: 0. Amendment carries.**

**Amendment to motion: Increase hunt days from 10 to 12 in Pacific and from 8 to 12 in Skagit. Seconded.**

Discussion: Gray-bellied brant (WHA) are a concern. M. Crowder, Keep Skagit at 8 days, increase should be focused on Willapa Bay.

**Ayes: 6. Nays: 7. Motion fails.**

**Request from chair: Brant presentation at next meeting.**

**Main motion as amended: Ayes: Unanimous. Main motion carries.**

**8. Legislative update – Dave Ware (WDFW)**

4 years of budget cuts to agency. \$110M to \$60M cut in general fund to agency. Wildlife Fund was 25% of budget, federal was 50%. Surcharge sunsets August 31. New fee structure starts Sept 1, 2011. No increase to youth fees, no increase to deer license, small increase to small game license (approx \$5). Waterfowl stamp increased \$5, remains dedicated fund. Goat/sheep/moose permits will triple to reflect cost of management. Waterfowl authorizations (dusky, snow goose, band-tail, brant, sea duck) are now \$12 for one or all. Discover Washington Pass is not needed for WDFW properties if you have a hunting license/ vehicle hanging tag. It is required for access on DNR and State Parks land. Created 2 additional officer positions. Pass enforced as a parking infraction (\$99) instead of a misdemeanor, but can be reduced by subsequent purchase. Dedicated accounts are under pressure to fund operational costs. Projection is more reduction in general fund next year.

**9. Future of the migratory bird stamp and print program – Kraege**

Mike Meseberg: **Recommendation to find avenue where Washington Waterfowl Association could administer stamp and print program as a non-profit, thereby reducing the overhead costs associated with the program.**

Discussion: Don Kraege: Licensing estimated cost of administration \$50K to \$60K. Legislature recommended eliminating physical stamp and art committee. Steiner Prints will terminate contract after this year as well. Outsourcing to private group is the only way to maintain a physical duck stamp. Bid package being developed, being reviewed by non-profits (Ducks Unlimited, WA Waterfowl Association, Audubon, Brant Foundation). Bid solicitation closes at end of month. Stamps are printed for this year. Group would mail out stamps to hunters and collectors after September 1, 2011. In 2012, the organization would pay for printing of stamps and art, and give royalties to WDFW. WDFW is bound to competitive bid process. John Arrabito: WWA plans to make a bid by the end of the month. Plans to use Washington state businesses. Migratory Waterfowl Art Committee is valuable for selecting the art, recommends keeping the committee, and having a Washington artist. Michael Crowder: Not appropriate for WAG to vote at this point considering conflicting interests.

**No second to motion.**

**10. Waterfowl guide permits – Kraege/Ware**

In July 2010 WAG voted to explore statewide guide permit similar to Region 2 permit. Department is discussing restrictive statewide policies on commercial guiding on WDFW land. There will be a public input process. Currently a permit is required for waterfowl guiding on state land. Committee within the agency has been formed. Mike Meseberg: Guiding on state lands since 1972, primarily a drop-off service, but offer guided hunts.

Last year hunted 24 days. Provide maintained blinds to the public on a first-come, first-served basis. Strong tradition of guided duck hunting on Potholes Reservoir, would reduce hunting opportunity to eliminate. Roger Reynolds (guest): Guiding on WDFW lands since the start of the permit. Numerous reasons why hunters want to be accompanied by a guide on WDFW land, there is a need for guides on public lands. WDFW should take responsibility for selecting the guides. Abolishing the activity will result in irresponsible/illegal guiding. Dave Drewry (guide): Professionalism in business requires responsibility (e.g. maintenance of business license, insurance). Endangerment of customers by unlicensed/irresponsible guide service is of concern. Don Kraege: Input would be welcome. Question: Is sanctioning guides on WDFW land reducing public hunting opportunity? No recommendations at this time.

## 11. Other topics

- Doug Hargin: Thurston County no shooting rules. Dave Ware: human encroachment in Puget Sound resulting in more conflict with hunters. Numerous communities proposing shooting bans, issue for big and small game. City of Snoqualmie passed no shooting, unless WDFW permitted activity, e.g. nuisance elk hunt. Thurston County has to prove a safety issue. WDFW testified it was not a safety issue, sheriff testified of no safety incidents reported. County insisted it was a safety issue. As of the last public meeting, county was still pushing for shoreline restriction. Focused on 3 inlets, but not Nisqually, adamant that some restriction will be passed. Need individual communities to weigh-in.
- Mike Meseberg: should group re-address the issue of motorized decoys? Patric Shearer: would like to see incremental return to motorized decoys and quiver magnets. Dick: Should be a personal choice, ban not supported by data after 15 years. Motion: **WDFW should legalize electronic decoys for waterfowl hunting. Seconded.** Discussion: Michael Crowder: Has testified 2 years in a row to no effect. **Ayes: 8 Nays: 5, motion carries.** Mike Meseberg and Dick Jacobs will represent WAG at commission meeting on robo-duck issue.
- Roy C: Motion: **Crow season should open September 1 and be open the full 120 days allowed. Ayes: 12. Nays: 1. Motion passes.**
- Roy C. Motion: **Recommends commission allow separate bag limit for mergansers. Seconded.** Discussion: Not allowed under framework. **Motion retracted.**
- Question: looming waterfowl issues. Willapa NWR CCP, pintail harvest strategy review, status of NAWCA, CRP, WRP federal programs. Dick Price: Department has a free fishing day. Why not a free hunting day?

## 12. Election of vice-chair for 2012 and housekeeping items – All

Based on action taken in 2010, Rodney Vandersypen will be the 2012 chair.  
**Nominations for 2012 vice-chair (chair in 2013): Dick Price, Chris Dorow, Mike Meseberg, Patric Shearer. Mike Meseberg elected the 2012 vice-chair.**

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.