

FINAL – approved April 8, 2017
MINUTES
Waterfowl Advisory Group Meeting
April 2, 2016
Rodeo City BBQ
Ellensburg, WA

1. Welcome and introductions – Ben Welton (Chair)

Members present included Jon Arrabito, Ted Blade, Roy Christopherson, Michael Crowder, Chris Dorow, Dave Drewry, Scott Fink, Art Kendall, Michael Miller, Dick Price, Fred Slyfield, Rodney Vandersypen, and Ben Welton. Guests included Kurt Benson and Michael Nilsen. WDFW staff included Sean Dougherty, Rich Finger, Don Kraege, and Matt Wilson.

2. Approval of August 1, 2015 minutes – Welton

Minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Migratory bird stamp and print program update – Don Kraege and Matt Wilson (WDFW)

a. 2016 legislative session

Kraege and Dorow reported on legislative actions that would have increased the cost of the state migratory bird permit from \$15 to \$25. The WAG had voted in the past to tie the price of the state permit to the federal stamp. The Senate committee considering the bill rewrote it to instead study the program and reinstate a program audit, but the bill died later in the session. The main concerns from the legislature included the need to consider all fee increases at once in 2017, and the size of the increase. An audit would be expected to cost \$9,000. Some WAG members asked how many acres of habitat enhancements could not be funded because of an audit, and asked for a cost per acre estimate for duck stamp projects. [Note: for 2015-17 projects this averaged \$35 per acre / year]

b. Past project highlights

Wilson provided an update on several projects approved by the group in past years. The group reiterated their past request to include more information on the WDFW web page, including the WAG presentation. Regarding the channeled scablands survey project to identify potential habitat enhancement sites, Crowder offered assistance from the Conservation Districts in securing easements.

c. WDFW recommendations for FY17 projects

Wilson presented 6 capital projects for approval and 3 operating projects. There is more funding available for capital projects in FY17 than for operating.

d. WAG recommendations

Concerns about the use of limited duck stamp funds for projects that should be paid for by other sources (restoration, access, weed control, retrofits).
Need to provide Ebey Island acquisition map.

Motion: Delete Tholme and Wiley Slough from the list. Failed 4-8.

Motion: Approve WDFW priorities in operating budget for I-82 Ponds and Jenny Creek. Approved 11-1.

Motion: WDFW should only bring forward projects to the WAG that are focused on habitat. Approved 10-2.

The group would like to review the legislation that specifies the use of duck stamp funds (<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=77.12.670>). Dorow would like a future discussion to look at the expenditure plan originally provided to the legislature when the duck stamp bill was passed in 1985 and re-examine the guiding principles of the policy. Members also requested a list of factors considered in ranking projects. [Note: these materials were provided to the WAG after the meeting]. The WAG would like to develop a list of project types supported for future funding.

4. **Columbia Basin Regulated Access Areas (RAAs) – Rich Finger (WDFW)**

Finger presented results of changes to RAAs in the Columbia Basin. The Frenchman RAA has had “jump days” (Wednesdays and weekends) for several years, but increased hunter success has not been documented. Finger wanted input from the group on whether to open the Frenchman RAA to hunting every day.

Motion: Open Frenchman RAA to seven day per week hunting. Passed 10-1.
There was no opposition to Finger’s proposal to remove the reservation system for the North Potholes RAA.

5. **Private lands access - Sean Dougherty (WDFW)**

Dougherty presented results from the corn stubble access program in the Columbia Basin, and was looking for input on the possibility of changing the reservation time to the beginning of shooting hours or earlier. The goal is to increase hunter use and minimize no shows.

Motion: Change reservation system to require hunters to be there by legal shooting time or the site becomes open to next hunter. Passed 11-1.

Several WAG members would like to have a WDFW representative from the westside quality hunt program at the next meeting.

6. **2016-17 migratory game bird seasons and regulations (Kraege)**

a. WDFW recommendations for 2016-17 seasons

Kraege reviewed 2015 wetland conditions and waterfowl numbers. Many populations are at record levels. New regulations timing considered data from 2015 surveys to propose 2016-17 seasons, and duck seasons are proposed to be similar to last year. Skagit brant numbers have generally declined since 2009, but counts may support limited hunting (e.g. 3 day hunt) in Clallam and

Whatcom counties in 2017-18 (these counties would need to be added to the federal brant season framework in September 2016). WDFW also proposes to increase opportunity for snow geese in 2017-18, through increased bag limits and possibly later seasons. WDFW proposes to increase bag limits for the 2016 September Canada goose hunt in several zones, combine area 2A and 2B into one zone (2), and shift dates in new area 2 to simplify season structure and address agricultural damage. Public lands closed to hunting during SW late season would be limited to National Wildlife Refuges and WDFW wildlife areas. WDFW proposes that dove and band-tailed pigeon seasons would be the same as last year. One minor change was proposed to the description of a marker for the lower Snake River closure.

b. WAG recommendations

Motion: Open any area to brant hunting that meets the objectives to be open to hunting. Passed 12-0.

7. Housekeeping items

a. Chair and Vice-chair

Welton's term as WAG chair will end on June 30, 2016. In 2015, Arrabito was elected vice-chair and will become chair on July 1, 2016. Drewry volunteered to become vice-chair starting July 1, 2016 and will become chair on July 1, 2017.

b. WAG appointment terms

Current members were appointed for three-year terms that will expire on June 30, 2016. WDFW will send out an announcement to recruit new members for three-year terms, which start on July 1. Kraege will recommend reappointment of current members who would like to continue on the group and attended at least half of the meetings during their terms. All members present indicated interest in reappointment.

8. Next meeting date and location

WDFW would like to convene the next WAG meeting in early March 2017, before the March 2017 Commission meeting. The group supported an early March 2017 timeframe, and would like to continue meeting in Ellensburg at the same venue.

9. Other topics

The WAG provided a plaque and other recognition to Kraege for his 36 years of service to Washington waterfowlers and the WAG, on the occasion of his retirement from WDFW in July 2016.