

**MINUTES**  
**Waterfowl Advisory Group Meeting**  
**June 28, 2014**  
**USFS North Bend Ranger Station**

1. Welcome and introductions – Scott Fink (Chair)

Members present: John Arrabito, Roy Christopherson, Michael Crowder, Chris Dorow, Dave Drewry, Scott Fink, Art Kendall, Mike Meseberg, Michael Miller, Daniel Morris, Dave Sievers, Fred Slyfield, Ben Welton, John Tierney (ex-officio). WDFW staff members present: Rich Finger, Sean Dougherty, Don Kraege.

2. WAG Mission and Purposes – Don Kraege, WDFW

Summary of mission, purposes, and advisor roles (see WAG web page).

3. Approval of 2013 minutes - Fink

**Motion (Crowder): Approve minutes (Crowder). Seconded, approved unanimously.**

Discussion: Arrabito would like greater public access to WAG minutes, similar to the Wolf Advisory Group. These are important to the public, based on inquiries. WDFW can post past minutes back to 2003. Kendall suggested posting approved minutes only. Rather than waiting a year to have current minutes posted, the group could have an email vote to approve minutes to get them posted soon after the meeting.

**Motion (Dorow): After draft minutes are prepared, send to members for approval via email. Seconded, passed unanimously.**

**Motion (Arrabito): Include minutes on website. Seconded, passed unanimously.**

4. Migratory bird habitat program update – Don Kraege, Rich Finger, Sean Dougherty (WDFW)

- a. Update on 2013-15 past approved projects

Grass Island acquisition: question if WDFW would be paying DNR for tidelands (no).

Samish/Leque Farming : question about lawsuit status (Arrabito provided update). Design alternatives currently under public review.

Whatcom Wood Duck Boxes: question about how additional boxes could be funded. There will be another call for proposals at end of year.

WWA has funds allocated to purchase satellite transmitters for small CAGO project. WDFW will work to get new transmitters ordered and send bill to WWA.

b. Project ranking

Question about why waterfowl and non-waterfowl projects are ranked together, even though there are separate budgets. Usually there are limited non-waterfowl projects submitted, but several were considered for FY15. WDFW will work toward separate ranking processes for the two groups.

c. Proposed FY15 projects

Snipes Culvert: Emergency repair was funded because the culvert failure threatened to dewater 300 wetland acres

Rainbow Pond: Replacement of this failing water control structure was also funded. WDFW should investigate plastic sleeve inserts and different pipe types to avoid future failures.

Bridgeport Dove Nests: Need pre and post surveys to evaluate effectiveness, concerns about whether removal of Siberian elms will actually improve nesting habitat, possibly should be funded by wildlife area funds, not DSP. Why do dove populations appear to be lower than historic levels, do we need research project to address best use of money?

Mansfield Dove Plots: Crowder indicated that he had experience with sunflower plots and advised WDFW to contact him for a site visit.

Columbia Basin Moist Soil Equipment: WAG would like WDFW to label equipment paid for with Duck Stamp funds.

Not recommended for funding: Lake Terrell milfoil control and Fir Island snow goose forage.

Corn Stubble Enhancement Project: Project proposal presented by Sean Dougherty. Proposed at \$60K, project ranked low so WDFW considered funding at \$20K. Concerns about hunting near livestock, should not allow disking (or try on 1-2 fields and evaluate). Is an access program ultimately, and 2013-14 was a bad season for the project. Should be promoted to get more public knowledge of program, e.g. notification in pamphlet, news release, weekender reports. Great potential, this is what WA hunters want.

**Motion (Dorow): Accept capital budget as proposed by WDFW. Seconded, passed unanimously.**

**Motion (Miller): Accept operating budget through the Columbia Basin Moist Soil Equipment project, as recommended by WDFW. Seconded, passed unanimously.**

**Motion (Slyfield): Fund Corn Stubble Project, with recommendations (i.e. no disking, get in pamphlet in future, promote) at \$45K, Seconded, passed unanimously.**

d. Project signs and publicity

Consideration of new project signs for all duck stamp projects. Comments to use no hyphenated words on sign, use only WDFW logo and drop picture? Use first of state mallard image rather than redheads.

e. Federal e-stamp proposal

WDFW applied to be part of federal "e-stamp" program, which would allow hunters to purchase a validation at state license dealers, indicating that they had purchased a federal duck stamp. The validation would be good for 45 days, during which time the hunter would receive a federal stamp in the mail. After that time, the physical federal stamp (signed) would need to be in possession.

5. Columbia Basin regulated access areas - Rich Finger (WDFW)

Kendall mentioned that Enforcement has concerns about implementing restricted parking access at Samish. Finger stated that this has not been a factor on the Columbia Basin RAAs.

6. Waterfowl status and regulations update - Kraege

a. 2014 breeding conditions and 2014-15 season proposals

Breeding habitat conditions are good in 2014. Breeding surveys were completed in May, but results will not be available until July. WDFW has plans to complete additional surveys on goldeneye on Puget Sound in February. September goose season was set in April, including increase in Pacific County bag from 5 to 15 per day to address resident dark geese. WDFW is proposing increase in dusky quotas and cackler bag in SW WA, pending survey results. Question about Pacific County restriction for 1 Aleutian, which is in place for Semidi Island Aleutians. WDFW will discuss with flyway subcommittee.

Question regarding Fir Island and Skagit County snow goose hunting restrictions, and concern that the regulation regarding road hunting applied to all of Skagit County, but not other counties. Snow goose distribution has changed and geese are found in new areas.

Meseberg commented that 7% of his clientele is from out of state, and they question Washington's battery operated decoy prohibition. Some members commented that the group shouldn't spend time and effort on this issue because it keeps coming up repeatedly. Discussion that individuals are welcome to comment to the Commission to change regulations without having a WAG action. It was last considered in 2012. Hunter opinion

surveys showed strong opinions but divided. This has been voted down by 3 separate commissions.

**Motion (Meseberg): WAG should push an effort to legalize battery operated decoys. Seconded, 4 in favor, 7 opposed, 1 abstention (defeated).**

**Motion: September season should be 2 days in E WA, focused on last weekend, and maintain the 6 day season in Western WA. Passed unanimously.**

Arrabito expressed concerns about proposed scoter limit of 2 per day, and wanted consideration of a 3 bag to allow a “scoter slam” (all 3 species in one day). Basically create interim step between Restrictive and Moderate to allow for a 3 bird limit. Need to look at how that would translate in harvest rate and evaluate data.

**Motion (Arrabito): Increase scoter limit from 2 to 3 birds. Seconded. 3 in favor, 7 opposed, (defeated).**

**Motion: Advise the Commission to set a midpoint trigger between red (restrictive) and yellow (moderate) line to establish 3 bird bag for scoters. Seconded. 7 in favor, 1 opposed.**

Discussion about past WAG recommendations for pintail, canvasback, and scaup in case there are restrictive seasons. Past recommendations were for pintail and canvasback season timing to include days in first week and rest of days late; scaup - all days late.

**Motion: Support the past season timing recommendations for restrictive pintail, canvasback and scaup seasons. Seconded, unanimously supported.**

**Amendment: Include scaup in species allowed during first week. Seconded, 2 in favor, 7 opposed (defeated).**

Species identification. State and federal regulations for identification in the field are inconsistent. WDFW requires the head attached to all game birds, federal – requires head OR wing. WAG would like the state adopt the federal regulation for waterfowl (upland game would still need head).

**Motion: WDFW regulations for ID of waterfowl in field should be consistent with federal regulations (head or wing). Seconded, 9 in favor, 2 opposed.**

**Motion (Dorow): Consider Clallam County for brant season. Motion withdrawn (WDFW will pursue).**

- b. Game reserves, waterfowl closures, shotgun shell restrictions

All maps to be posted on GoHunt web page, so WDFW is cleaning up descriptions for Commission action in 2015. Rich Finger provided a presentation on proposed changes to the N. Potholes and Winchester Reserves.

**Motion (Welton): Move the north boundary of N. Potholes Reserve south (red line on map) and establish a Regulated Access Area. Seconded, passed unanimously.**

**Motion (Sievers): Move the east boundary of the Winchester Reserve west (red line on map), opening the eastern part of the reserve. Seconded, passed unanimously.**

7. Brainstorming session: Ways to increase recruitment and retention of Washington waterfowl hunters – All
  - Access: Promote new opportunities to create access. Come up with unified landowner marking w/o FETH signs (e.g. red or white coffee can, private property gates painted certain colors, that signify unlimited public access or access with permission).
  - Create new program to certify hunters where hunter takes a pledge to hunt ethically, coordinate with a list of landowners accepting certified hunters. License revocation if unethical. Similar to Master Hunter program.
  - Management should treat consumptive users as valued customers. Fundamental shift needed in mentality to “how is this best for our hunters?” Find more ways to say yes to hunters’ best interests. In the governor’s committee to foster outdoor opportunities there are no hunter groups represented.
  - Need better publicity of opportunities, including newspaper stories and providing paper maps available to hunters.
  - Need to clarify regulations on WDFW access permit and discovery permit confusion.
  - Create more opportunities for new hunters (e.g. within three years of receiving hunter ed training or state WILDID), modeled after youth opportunities.
  
8. Housekeeping items – All
  - a. WAG website (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/>)

Minutes will be included once approved.
  
  - b. Meeting schedule (1 vs. 2 meetings)

Late July would be preferable when we have better information on season options. However, duck stamp projects need to be approved before July.
  
  - c. Reimbursement for expenses

Forms are available for mileage reimbursement.

d. Election of vice-chair for 2015

Ben Welton is the incoming Chair. Need vice-chair for 2015, who will become chair in 2016.

**Motion for Roy Christopherson to become 2015 vice-chair, and 2016 chair. Seconded, passed unanimously.**

9. Other topics (time permitting)

a. Eagle predation on waterfowl

Concern about bald eagles taking scoters. Limited management capabilities because of protected status of eagles.

b. Wounded Warrior access projects

In Kitsap and North Mason counties there is a strong military presence and new acquisition of properties on Lynch Cove, potential new opportunity for wounded warrior access projects, interest in adding more. Discussion of having dedicated days for disabled sites, and most landowners in hunter access program are amenable.

c. Past WAG topics (see attached)

Merganser season: Continued interest in separate bag limits for mergansers. Issue went to two Pacific Flyway meetings and was denied.

State stamp fee: Past WAG recommendation to tie cost of state duck stamp to cost of federal duck stamp. Audit issue may be brought up again in 2015 session, which would be a good time to include new language in legislation.

e. Question from Refuge Forum about potential for separating light and dark goose limits and seasons. New snow goose population in Tri-Cities is composed of Wrangel Island birds. Changes would have to go through flyway committees and could be presented in winter meeting. WDFW will look at data and see what the potential is.

## **Past Topics Discussed by WAG Proposed for Discussion in 2014**

### **Swan season**

#### Background

Discussed during 2011-13 WAG meetings. In 2013, WAG recommended that WDFW pursue establishment of a limited hunting season for swans in Washington.

#### Result

The proposal was discussed with the WDFW Director's Office and Fish and Wildlife Commission Wildlife Subcommittee in July 2013. WDFW did not support further action on the proposal (see August 2013 letter from Wildlife AD Nate Pamplin).

### **Waterfowl guides**

#### Background

Past discussions in 2005, 2009, and 2012 involved recommendations for establishment of a statewide waterfowl guide license, similar to the existing WDFW fishing guide license. Subcommittees were formed within WAG to develop proposals. In 2012, WAG recommended that all waterfowl guides in Washington be licensed, pay a fee, be insured, have proof of citizenship, and have no criminal history.

#### Result

Subcommittees formed in 2005 and 2009 to explore the issue did not meet. The above recommendation from 2012 is not within the legislative authority of WDFW to implement.

### **Merganser limit**

#### Background

Eastern flyways have a separate bag limit for mergansers (5 mergansers, including no more than 2 hooded). In 2006, WAG voted to ask WDFW to pursue a separate merganser limit for 2007.

#### Result

A proposal was developed and presented to the Pacific Flyway committees in 2006 and 2007. Flyway committees did not support this change because of concerns about the amount of recreation

provided for the additional regulation complexity, potential for wastage, and recent declines in winter survey merganser indexes.

### **State migratory stamp / permit cost**

#### Background

In 2005, WAG voted to increase the cost of a state migratory bird stamp to \$15, or equal to the price of the federal stamp, whichever is higher.

#### Result

The price of the state migratory bird stamp and permit was increased to \$15 by the Legislature in 2011. Although an increase in the federal stamp price from \$15 has been discussed at the national level for several years, no action is anticipated in the near future.

### **Electronic Decoys**

#### Background

A prohibition on the use of battery powered and other electronic decoys was passed by the Commission in 2002. This has been one of the most contentious discussion topics for the WAG and has been discussed several times. Hunter opinion surveys have shown that the waterfowl hunting community is also split on this issue, with strong opinions on both sides. Past WAG actions:

July 2004: Voted to continue prohibition of electronic waterfowl decoys (6-2)

March 2007: Voted to continue prohibition of electronic waterfowl decoys (10-6)

August 2008: Voted to allow electronic decoys from Dec. 1 on (7-5)

July 2011: Voted to eliminate prohibition of electronic waterfowl decoys (8-5)

#### Result

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission reconsidered the regulation in 2007 and 2012, voting both times to continue the prohibition on the use of battery powered and other electronic decoys.