

APPENDIX H. Public Response Summary

Includes the following:

- SEPA comment response
- Wildlife Area Advisory Committee meeting materials
- Public meeting materials

WDFW responses to public comments received during the public review of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan draft under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) from April 11, 2017 until May 11, 2017.

#	Comment	WDFW Response
1.	<p>I read on one of the documents, that there was a plan (or to develop a plan) "to reduce dispersed camping along riparian areas"</p> <p>I am NOT in favor of this. I am a hunter. It is one of the enjoyable things about going hunting in the 1st place (to be able to camp in smaller individual camp sites). Most of the camp sites have been used for MANY YEARS. Camping in large campgrounds with nearby neighbors is not my idea of going hunting.</p> <p>The hunting in this state is not what it once was, so many people have quit doing it, and kids are not being exposed to it... making everyone herd into organized camp grounds will only make that trend happen faster!</p> <p>That said - doing a little more large rock/cable boundaries might be fine, so that these smaller camping areas don't become larger and larger over the years. This does not mean that you should take away the larger "group" sites that Elk hunters use, where they can fit several camp trailers near each other (their friends).</p> <p>Summary - getting out in nature, needs to feel like nature - not like we went from one urban jungle to another paved urban jungle, on a smaller scale.</p> <p>Richard Worley</p>	<p>There are no plans to reduce dispersed camping in the plan. The plan does include a recommendation to incorporate barrier rock along banks of creeks in the implementation of future aquatic restoration projects. This will help prevent vehicles from driving right to the bank of the creek, protecting water quality and reducing other natural resource impacts.</p>
2.	<p>I find it appalling that we encounter "FEE AREAS" out in the wilderness, IE; I saw a sign like that at Raven's Roost, when I was up there for Elk season last year. We (the people of the state in general, and especially the hunter's/fisherman) have paid through taxes, licenses, and fees already! Quit trying to</p>	<p>The fee areas referenced in the comment are on National Forest land. Access to WDFW wildlife areas and water access sites require either a Vehicle Access Pass (VAP), which is complimentary with your hunting/fishing license, or a Discover Pass. Recreationists who don't</p>

	<p>add a fee for every little thing or place people want to use! It's just not right...</p> <p>Richard Worley</p>	<p>buy fishing or hunting licenses need the Discover Pass to use WDFW lands.</p>
3.	<p>I am concerned that WDFW's Oak Creek Management Plan provides no stated accommodation for the William O Douglas Heritage Trail which runs from Cowiche Mill Road westward toward Rimrock Lake. I urge you to revise the plan so that safe, muscle-powered, recreational access along this important trail is assured.</p> <p>(The trail through this area crosses Sections 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36 in T14N, R16 E.)</p> <p>David Huycke</p>	<p>If the William O Douglas Trail Foundation (WOD) is interested in partnering with WDFW we would be happy to meet and talk about ideas. There has been no communication between the WOD Foundation and WDFW in recent years. The Box Canyon Trail was developed on the Cowiche Unit north of Cowiche Mill Road as a segment of the WOD. No trail has been approved south of Cowiche Mill Road as that area has the winter feed site and seasonal closures. Currently the WOD Trail website lists a section of trail on WDFW land following an old wagon road, WDFW asked that information to be removed from the website several years ago and reference to be changed to the Box Canyon Trail. The map showing the complete WOD Trail on the WOD website follows the correct route across the wildlife area.</p>
4.	<p>The SEPA DNS for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan, and the Management Plan itself, both failed to include any information about significant historic, recreational, and cultural resources existing in Range 16 East, Township 14 North, Sections 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36.</p> <p>The William O. Douglas Heritage Trail follows the route of the historic Cowiche Valley Wagon Road and the ancient Native American primary travel corridor across the Cowiche Wildlife Area in Range 16, Township 14, located NORTH of Cowiche Mill Road. These historic and cultural resources are documented by state and federal agencies, and the trail sections physically exist on the ground and can also be seen on Google Earth imagery. See also information on the historic Cowiche Valley Wagon Road at http://www.williamodouglastrail.org/wagonroad.htm, which is derived from General Land Office surveys done in the 1880s.</p>	<p>WDFW will not list specific cultural and historic sites in the WLA management plan, this information is provided in the WLA Cultural Resource Management Plans (under development) and will be released to the tribes and the Dept of Archaeology and Historic Preservation for review and comment.</p> <p>Additionally, specific project locations have not yet been developed, when these are developed, WDFW will conduct reviews to identify the impacts to cultural resources (if any) and consult with the tribes, DAHP and other interested parties as provided for under state and federal law and WDFW policy.</p> <p>If the William O Douglas Trail Foundation (WOD) is interested in partnering with WDFW we would be happy to meet and talk about ideas. There has been no communication between the WOD Foundation and WDFW in recent years. The current trail approved by WDFW as a segment of the WOD is the Box Canyon trail which starts at the main Cowiche Unit parking lot. WDFW asked several years ago</p>

	<p>Also, there is a trailhead off Sunset Road at the Southeast corner of Section 25 that has been in public use for years to access the William O. Douglas Heritage Trail. This existing trail segment heads west from Sunset Road and exits the Cowiche Unit approximately 3.5 miles later at the West boundary line of Section 27. WDFW has previously written letters of support for the William O. Douglas Trail and acknowledged the Heritage Trail in previous planning documents and funding requests.</p> <p>The SEPA DNS should be withdrawn and a SEPA Mitigated DNS should be issued instead with specific mitigation measures to disclose and protect the documented historic, recreational, and cultural resources located north of Cowiche Mill Road. The Oak Creek Management Plan should be revised accordingly.</p> <p>William O. Douglas Trail Foundation</p>	<p>that the trail following the old wagon route be removed from the WOD trail website and reference be changed to the Box Canyon Trail.</p>
5.	<p>On behalf of the Washington Climbers Coalition (WCC) and the Access Fund, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft update of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan. The WCC (www.washingtonclimbers.org) is a Washington non-profit organization whose mission is to make Washington a better place to climb through advocacy, stewardship, and education. The Access Fund (www.accessfund.org) is a national advocacy organization that keeps climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment.</p> <p>As the draft plan identifies, there are a number of established and popular rock climbing areas within the Tieton River Canyon (Oak Creek Unit of the Wildlife Area). These include the Royal Columns, the Bend, Moon Rocks, the Chunkyard, the Oasis, and Rainbow Rocks, among other locations.</p>	<p>Thanks!</p>

Appendix A to the plan (Goals, Objectives, Performance Measures) addresses climbing twice under Goal 11, which is to “Support and maintain appropriate recreation opportunities.” First, the plan identifies an objective to “Maintain access [to] Tieton River rock climbing” with three tasks: 1) coordinate with the WCC to implement a 2017 REI grant for trail maintenance; 2) meet with user groups to develop trail maintenance projects; and 3) perform trail maintenance as needed. Second, the plan identifies an objective to “Include climbing group representation on [Wildlife Area Advisory Committee] and partner on stewardship opportunities,” with one task: “Work with local users and Washington Climbers Coalition to identify potential members.”

The WCC supports both of these objectives. As identified, the WCC has already secured grant funding for trail maintenance projects in 2017. This work is intended to mitigate erosion and concentrate climber impacts so that rock climbing remains a compatible use within the Wildlife Area. We also support adding a climbing representative to the Wildlife Area Advisory Committee. Climbers have been exploring the Tieton River area since at least the 1950s and are a major recreational user group within the Wildlife Area. We would appreciate adding our voice to the committee.

Beyond the strictly climbing-related objectives, we also want to voice our support for the other principal goals of the plan, which focus primarily on maintaining, and ideally improving, the natural function of the area. For many climbers, the landscape and unique habitats of the Tieton River (including its Oregon white oak woodlands and ponderosa pine transition zones) are as much a draw to the area as the climbing. We want to continue enjoying a special place.

	<p>Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan. Andy Fitz, Washington Climbers Coalition</p>	
6.	<p>I have read closely the non-project SEPA checklist and the attendant document "Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan" (draft 2017), and I respectfully offer the following comments directed to SEPA Checklist Question 13 Historic and cultural preservation:</p> <p>Questions 13A and 13B asks simple presence/absence questions; to paraphrase: are there any significant archaeological or historical sites recorded in the geographic boundaries of the document, and what is the relevant literature. Neither question was answered and the SEPA checklist is incomplete until revised.</p> <p>A basic literature review should have been conducted for the planning area in order to answer Questions 13A & 13B. Presumably, the SEPA checklist is unanswered because the associated Oak Creek plan is silent regarding historic and cultural resources. The plan, however, is not totally silent about cultural resources albeit addressed elsewhere in the SEPA checklist Question 8c (Land and Shoreline Use) where a "hay barn and historic grain silo" is identified in the Cowiche Unit.</p> <p>Question 13C similarly remains unanswered, therefore SEPA No. 17015 is incomplete. Question 13C addresses a significant resource concern bearing on potential impacts to cultural resources. The Oak Creek Plan provides a framework for a range of on-the-ground actions, which, though individually small scale, nevertheless covers an implementation period of ten years where the potential to effect a sizable proportion of the planning area may be severe. Impacts must be identified</p>	<p>SEPA Q13A and 13B refer to identification of specific resources "at or near the [project] site". At this time, the management plan does not identify any specific projects or project sites as it is a planning document. WDFW will not list specific cultural and historic sites in the WLA management plan, this information will be provided in the WLA Cultural Resource Management Plans (under development) and will be released to the tribes and the Dept of Archaeology and Historic Preservation for review and comment.</p> <p>Additionally, specific project locations have not yet been developed, when these are developed, WDFW will conduct reviews to identify the impacts to cultural resources (if any) and consult with the tribes, DAHP and other interested parties as provided for under state and federal law and WDFW policy.</p>

as such in the plan, no matter how small-scale or insignificant they may appear to the analyst, and assessed as to effects or impacts to cultural resources.

For example, the Yakima Herald Republic newspaper on May 1, 2017 featured the elk antler harvest where 150-200 people literally swarm the management area yearly seeking shed antlers. People hunting for shed antlers presents a concentrated risk to inadvertent damage to archaeological sites, especially artifacts and cultural features. Another example of unevaluated impacts to archaeological sites are the unnatural, concentrated herding of elk at and along supplemental feeding developments.

Revising SEPA No. 17015 to address Question 13 should not involve a major investment of time and resources. There is a body of cultural resource studies bearing on the Oak Creek planning area undertaken over the past couple of decades by WDFW itself, among other neighbors such as the Forest Service, Nature Conservancy, WashDOT, Bureau of Reclamation and BPA, to name a few. Most notably, the Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group prepared SEPA 17-018 for Oak Creek Habitat, an area otherwise covered by the planning document, which appears to competently address the SEPA checklist in a thorough manner, including a professionally prepared cultural resource report. The background information in that report, authored by Christopher Landreau, could well stand for much of the Oak Creek Plan SEPA 17-015.

In summary, SEPA 17015 is incomplete because the associated Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan does not provide the information needed to satisfy the SEPA process.

Mark DeLeon

7.	<p>The Yakima Valley Audubon Society (YVAS) disagrees with the Determination on Non-Significance (DNS17-015) issued in regards to the 10-year Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan. We believe the SEPA is inadequate because of a lack of "carrying capacity" analysis and the impacts from concentrating many elk at small feeding sites on the Oak Creek and Cowiche Units of the wildlife area. Study by your own agencies biologists and those of the US Forest Service on adjacent lands reveals both agencies concern with the obvious and measurable detrimental impacts to the environment of elk in the Yakima River Basin.</p> <p>YVAS strongly suggests WDFW issue a mitigated DNS after your agency completes a study of the detrimental effects of elk in the Oak Creek and Cowiche units. YVAS awaits the suggested mitigation actions your agency proposes to restore the ever-increasing areal extent of damaged and degraded habitats WDFW is entrusted to preserving in the Oak Creek Wildlife Area.</p> <p>Andy Stepniewski Yakima Valley Audubon Society Conservation Committee</p>	<p>Management of the Yakima Elk herd including herd size objectives are covered in the Yakima Elk Herd Plan (link). Winter feed sites are an important management tool for the Yakima elk herd and have been used for decades, and are not considered a new management action to evaluate. The OCWA Management plan includes objectives for habitat management of the feed sites including weed control. Carrying capacity is a complicated concept that is seasonally and annually dynamic across the landscape. Generally, small-scale seasonal concentrations of wildlife do not fit a carrying capacity model. We presume the reference to "study by your own agencies biologists" refers to the Yakima Elk Study (2003-2006). Data collected in that study showed pregnancy rates, body condition, and survival of elk in the Yakima herd to be indicative of a population that is not above carrying capacity. The USFS work referenced presumably includes the recent Northwest Science article that was largely a floristics study of non-wilderness habitats within the Naches Ranger District. Utilization rates were also measured in that work and were pretty consistent with data collected elsewhere in the west. These utilization rates were also the collective utilization of all herbivores at the sampled sites, not just elk. Other USFS work in the area published as a USFS Technical report by Beebe at el. using herbivory exclosures suggested negative impacts to soil from combined grazing by elk and cattle, but positive impacts where elk grazed, but cattle were excluded. The suggestion that elk in the Yakima basin have broad negative impacts to the environment are poorly supported by data.</p>
8.	<p>Excellent document</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the plan you mention commercial opportunities what is that, logging? When adding acreage, how does that impact staffing? Under staffed law enforcement, why is there no added enforcement as acreage is added? - Signage and kiosk – why are public rules for conduct not also posted? 	<p>Relative to commercial opportunities noted in the Forest Management section of the plan, commercial opportunities would be the harvest of merchantable timber.</p> <p>When WDFW acquires new lands that are added to the wildlife area, it is usually absorbed into the current budget and staffing. As budgets are developed each biennium staffing needs are reviewed and adjusted based on priorities and available funding. Enforcement</p>

	<p>- Mapping – would it not make sense to add location where people may encounter shooting – to enable them to stay safe? Reduce – eliminate conflicts.</p> <p>Jim Lydigsen, National Rifle Association</p>	<p>follows a similar pattern of reviewing staffing needs and available funding.</p> <p>Wildlife area staff maintain signs and information across the wildlife area and post signs as needed including rules of conduct (litter, campfires, etc). Maintaining signs and other public information is a key priority and cost to operate and maintain recreation opportunities for the public.</p> <p>Unless posted otherwise, target shooting and hunting is not restricted across the wildlife area. WDFW supports a robust hunter education program, and expects those using firearms to be well trained and educated about safe practices, including being aware of their surroundings and hunting seasons.</p>
9.	<p>Add solar panels on the center, this should reduce the cost of electricity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If possible add a camera, weather station, so the public can view the elk and get weather conditions. This would bring us into the 21st century and promote the area. - LED lighting inside - ADA upgrades - Work with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) for signage, “wildlife area ahead”. Perhaps slow to 40 MPH at entrance and river trail parking area. Important!! <p>Jim Andrews, Oak Creek Center volunteer</p>	<p>A capital project request was submitted in 2014 for upgrades to the Visitor’s Center, this included ADA and safety upgrades. Cameras and weather station could be added using grant funding.</p> <p>WDFW has been in communication with WSDOT about signs and safety near the wildlife area entrance. It has been several years since the last conversation. Touching base with them again would be a good idea.</p>
10.	<p>Utilize timber value to help pay for non-commercial and prescribed burning treatments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore expanding turkey population as an opportunity to provide more hunting. Turkey hunting is an excellent introductory experience for new hunters. Winter habitat forage will be important to achieve this goal. - Oregon white oaks goals and tasks seem more focused on protection than enhancement. How can you improve oak habitat? What treatments will enhance oak vigor, acorn production? Oak science day? Bring in experts to look at oak stands if you have knowledge gaps. 	<p>It is indeed the goal of any commercial timber harvest to utilize revenue to treat other areas that need restoration treatment but have no commercial value.</p> <p>Supplemental turkey releases are listed as an option in the current plan, and are included in the statewide Turkey Management Plan. The new wildlife area management plan incorporates management recommendations from other WDFW planning efforts (e.g. game management, etc.).</p>

	<p>- Utilize harvested timber as fish logs? Leave opportunity open in plan to push over whole trees</p> <p>Mikal Moore, National Wild Turkey Federation</p>	<p>Recently, Oak Creek Wildlife Area staff and other WDFW staff have been invited to participate in the newly created East Cascades Oak Partnership that consists of many agencies and private land managers to facilitate collaboration on restoring and enhancing oak habitats. It is the intent of the Oak Creek WLA to participate in this partnership to learn about best available science and seek grant funding for oak restoration work.</p> <p>The OCWA has already been utilizing timber from restoration projects to do stream restoration work. This will continue where opportunities arise.</p>
11.	<p>- The 1400 Road is an amazing location for mountain biking trails. What Yakima lacks, is a decent shaded biking trail system. The terrain and vegetation are ideal for trails catering to all skill levels. It would also double as great hiking trails. There are great opportunities for scenic view "loops".</p> <p>- The 1400 road grants easy access to build and maintain these types of recreational opportunities. These trails are typically low on environmental impact due to the use being human powered, and not motorized. These would create great wildlife viewing.</p> <p>Andy Mahre, local landowner</p>	<p>Oak Creek Wildlife Area has begun collaborative discussions with the mountain bike community and the USFS, and are open to working with this user group to potentially identify and develop a trail. A viable proposal will have strong support by users and include a volunteer component for development and maintenance, and be consistent with agency dual mission of conservation and recreation.</p>
12.	<p>If this unit was purchased in 1942, Section 6 funds could not have been used as the ESA had not been established. Also, after an admittedly brief search, I could find no records for Oak Creek in the RO's Section 6 files. (Page 16, general wildlife area information, acquisition date).</p> <p>David Leonard, USFWS</p>	<p>Additional acquisition dates will be added to this section. The Tieton Township was acquired using Section 6 funds and added to the existing Oak Creek Unit.</p>
13.	<p>These are activities that are generally prohibited on land purchased with Section 6 funds (Page 23-24, general wildlife area information, recreational).</p> <p>David Leonard, USFWS</p>	<p>Wording changed to motorized recreation.</p>

14.	<p>Wouldn't it be straightforward to simply state here that these lands were purchased to benefit listed species and that is the primary goal of the land (as opposed to human recreation)? (Page 23-24, general wildlife area information, access.) David Leonard, USFWS</p>	<p>WDFW manages lands for multiple uses compatible with providing habitat for and management of listed species.</p>
15.	<p>See above. It appears that there is more human use of this Unit than the others. I understand that the checker-board nature of the parcel is likely a reason (in a perfect world WDFW and USFS could exchange sections to block up land to facilitate management). Never-the-less, ATV, Jeep, Motorcycle, and snowmobile use is inappropriate on this land given the understood objectives of the original project proposal. There is a growing body of literature that indicates that even passive recreation affects the behavior and demography of wildlife. The only mentions of human use from the original proposals is "The area supports Northern Spotted Owl, prime big game range, and substantial public recreational benefits." So this level of use comes as a surprise. Camping and vehicle traffic increases the risk of wildfire, which is specifically mentioned in the proposal – "This project accomplishes both threat reduction strategies [for NSO].....reducing the incidence of human-caused ignitions,". (Page 24, first paragraph.) David Leonard, USFWS</p>	<p>Language updated in the plan. The unit and adjacent USFS lands contain motorized trails that are part of the USFS system. While a majority of the trails are on USFS land. In addition, the motorized trails have seasonal closures in the spring to reduce trail damage and erosion. In the winter the area is part of a groomed snowmobile trail system managed by WA State Parks.</p> <p>Additionally, as part of a public process, WDFW closed and abandoned 14 miles of roads in this unit and many miles of user built motorized trails after acquisition.</p>
16.	<p>Proposal states that the project would "enable agencies to better control road density". (Page 45 last paragraph). David Leonard, USFWS</p>	<p>Text has been updated. Since acquisition WDFW has implemented a road management plan on the Rock Creek Unit, where 14 miles of road and numerous miles of user built motorized trails were closed and abandoned.</p>
17.	<p>Compatible with snow mobiles? David Leonard, USFWS</p>	<p>Text updated. Important winter range for this species occurs on south facing slopes, mostly at elevations lower than on the Rock Creek unit.</p>
18.	<p>Perhaps they can shift (over time) the motorized (ATV, motorcycle, snowmobile) use of the area to mountain bike in the summer and cross country skiing in the winter. Still</p>	<p>WDFW manages lands for multiple uses compatible with providing habitat for and management of listed species.</p>

	<p>provides that public access, but in a less impactful way to the local wildlife. (Page 62 first paragraph). Sarah Hall, USFWS</p>	
19.	<p>Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed draft for the Oak Creek and Cowiche Units. I would like to make my comments in regards to recreation, specifically mountain biking. As a founding member of Single Track Alliance of Yakima, I have invested countless hours of my time in advocating for trail access. We have been fortunate enough to establish a trail head at Rocky Top, on the north side of Cowiche Mountain. Mostly we build and maintain mountain bike trails. We have come to learn that our mountain bike trails are loved by hikers and trail runners also. Our trails improve with use and require little maintenance. Because they are laid out sensibly they erode minimally. We've found that trails which erode or damage the landscape significantly have nothing to do with the user and has everything to do with the layout.</p> <p>Since mountain bikes do not destroy trails and erode terrain, the only reason I can see for restricting access to mountain bikers in the Cowiche Unit is for wildlife movement. I would argue for seasonal closures over blanket restrictions. Seasonal closures seem like the community minded and sensible path to take over restricting access. It is not hard to look at other areas around the west where mountain bikes and conservation co-exist. Seasonal closures are a realistic and inclusive approach.</p> <p>The Cowiche Unit is essential to the idea of connecting the Cowiche Canyon trail, Rocky Top, and Snow Mountain Ranch with the Oak Creek Unit and also the Ahtanum State Forest, not to mention the National</p>	<p>There are currently no restrictions to mountain bike use on established roads within the Cowiche Unit except for a seasonal closure to protect wintering wildlife. However, the construction of new trails would require agency approval to ensure that they harmonize with the agency mission, policy, and procedures. Unauthorized trail construction is prohibited. Furthermore, to gain proper authorization, organized user groups should demonstrate their ability to conduct trail maintenance activities.</p>

Forest. A trail system of this caliber would not be a spiderweb of trails in tight proximity. It would be in essence an isolated, well traveled animal trail which humans used occasionally.

Please consider an inclusive approach which takes into consideration the community of mountain bikers who feel at home in nature and don't leave a trace on the landscape.

Thanks,

Will Hollingbery
Single Track Alliance of Yakima

From: Andy Stepniewski [<mailto:steppie@nwinfo.net>]
Sent: Thursday, May 11, 2017 3:53 PM
To: SEPADesk2 (DFW) <SEPAdesk2@dfw.wa.gov>
Subject: Oak Creek DNS17-015

Re: Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan

The Yakima Valley Audubon Society (YVAS) disagrees with the Determination on Non-Significance (DNS17-015) issued in regards to the 10-year Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan . We believe the SEPA is inadequate because of a lack of "carrying capacity" analysis and the impacts from concentrating many elk at small feeding sites on the Oak Creek and Cowiche Units of the wildlife area. Study by your own agencies biologists and those of the US Forest Service on adjacent lands reveals both agencies concern with the obvious and measurable detrimental impacts to the environment of elk in the Yakima River Basin.

YVAS strongly suggests WDFW issue a mitigated DNS after your agency completes a study of the detrimental effects of elk in the Oak Creek and Cowiche units. YVAS awaits the suggested mitigation actions your agency proposes to restore the ever-increasing areal extent of damaged and degraded habitats WDFW is entrusted to preserving in the Oak Creek Wildlife Area.

Sincerely,

Andy Stepniewski
Yakima Valley Audubon Society Conservation Committee

From: Mark DeLeon [mailto:markfdeleon@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, May 11, 2017 3:35 PM
To: SEPADesk2 (DFW) <SEPADesk2@dfw.wa.gov>
Subject: Comment on SEPA No. 17015

I have read closely the non-project SEPA checklist and the attendant document "Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan" (draft 2017), and I respectfully offer the following comments directed to SEPA Checklist Question 13 Historic and cultural preservation:

Questions 13A and 13B asks simple presence/absence questions; to paraphrase: are there any significant archaeological or historical sites recorded in the geographic boundaries of the document, and what is the relevant literature. Neither question was answered and the SEPA checklist is incomplete until revised.

A basic literature review should have been conducted for the planning area in order to answer Questions 13A & 13B. Presumably, the SEPA checklist is unanswered because the associated Oak Creek plan is silent regarding historic and cultural resources. The plan, however, is not totally silent about cultural resources albeit addressed elsewhere in the SEPA checklist Question 8c (Land and Shoreline Use) where a "hay barn and historic grain silo" is identified in the Cowiche Unit.

Question 13C similarly remains unanswered, therefore SEPA No. 17015 is incomplete. Question 13C addresses a significant resource concern bearing on potential impacts to cultural resources. The Oak Creek Plan provides a framework for a range of on-the-ground actions, which, though individually small scale, nevertheless covers an implementation period of ten years where the potential to effect a sizable proportion of the planning area may be severe. Impacts must be identified as such in the plan, no matter how small-scale or insignificant they may appear to the analyst, and assessed as to effects or impacts to cultural resources.

For example, the Yakima Herald Republic newspaper on May 1, 2017 featured the elk antler harvest where 150-200 people literally swarm the management area yearly seeking shed antlers. People hunting for shed antlers presents a concentrated risk to inadvertent damage to archaeological sites, especially artifacts and cultural features. Another example of unevaluated impacts to archaeological sites are the unnatural, concentrated herding of elk at and along supplemental feeding developments.

Revising SEPA No. 17015 to address Question 13 should not involve a major investment of time and resources. There is a body of cultural resource studies bearing on the Oak Creek planning area undertaken over the past couple of decades by WDFW itself, among other neighbors such as the Forest Service, Nature Conservancy, WashDOT, Bureau of Reclamation and BPA, to name a few. Most notably, the Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group prepared SEPA 17-018 for Oak Creek Habitat, an area otherwise covered by the planning document, which appears to competently address the SEPA checklist in a thorough manner, including a professionally prepared cultural resource report. The background information in that report, authored by Christopher Landreau, could well stand for much of the Oak Creek Plan SEPA 17-015.

In summary, SEPA 17015 is incomplete because the associated Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan does not provide the information needed to satisfy the SEPA process.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Mark DeLeon

From: Martha Lantz and Andy Fitz [<mailto:fitlan@comcast.net>]
Sent: Wednesday, May 10, 2017 7:00 PM
To: SEPADesk2 (DFW) <SEPADesk2@dfw.wa.gov>
Cc: fitlan@comcast.net; Joe Sambataro <joe@accessfund.org>
Subject: Comment on SEPA No. 17015

To Whom it May Concern:

On behalf of the Washington Climbers Coalition (WCC) and the Access Fund, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft update of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan. The WCC (www.washingtonclimbers.org) is a Washington non-profit organization whose mission is to make Washington a better place to climb through advocacy, stewardship, and education. The Access Fund (www.accessfund.org) is a national advocacy organization that keeps climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment.

As the draft plan identifies, there are a number of established and popular rock climbing areas within the Tieton River Canyon (Oak Creek Unit of the Wildlife Area). These include the Royal Columns, the Bend, Moon Rocks, the Chunkyard, the Oasis, and Rainbow Rocks, among other locations.

Appendix A to the plan (Goals, Objectives, Performance Measures) addresses climbing twice under Goal 11, which is to "Support and maintain appropriate recreation opportunities." First, the plan identifies an objective to "Maintain access [to] Tieton River rock climbing" with three tasks: 1) coordinate with the WCC to implement a 2017 REI grant for trail maintenance; 2) meet with user groups to develop trail maintenance projects; and 3) perform trail maintenance as needed. Second, the plan identifies an objective to "Include climbing group representation on [Wildlife Area Advisory Committee] and partner on stewardship opportunities," with one task: "Work with local users and Washington Climbers Coalition to identify potential members."

The WCC supports both of these objectives. As identified, the WCC has already secured grant funding for trail maintenance projects in 2017. This work is intended to mitigate erosion and concentrate climber impacts so that rock climbing remains a compatible use within the Wildlife Area. We also support adding a climbing representative to the Wildlife Area Advisory Committee. Climbers have been exploring the Tieton River area since at least the 1950s and are a major recreational user group within the Wildlife Area. We would appreciate adding our voice to the committee.

Beyond the strictly climbing-related objectives, we also want to voice our support for the other principal goals of the plan, which focus primarily on maintaining, and ideally improving, the natural function of the area. For many climbers, the landscape and unique habitats of the Tieton River (including its Oregon white oak woodlands and ponderosa pine transition zones) are as much a draw to the area as the climbing. We want to continue enjoying a special place.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan.

Sincerely,

Andy Fitz
Member, Board of Directors
Washington Climbers Coalition

Joe Sambataro
National Access Directory & Northwest Regional Director
The Access Fund

From: William O. Douglas Trail [<mailto:williamodouglastrail@gmail.com>]
Sent: Thursday, May 11, 2017 10:17 AM
To: SEPADesk2 (DFW) <SEPAdesk2@dfw.wa.gov>
Subject: SEPA Comment -- Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan

Please accept the following comments on the SEPA DNS for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan:

The SEPA DNS for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan, and the Management Plan itself, both failed to include any information about significant historic, recreational, and cultural resources existing in Range 16 East, Township 14 North, Sections 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36.

The William O. Douglas Heritage Trail follows the route of the historic Cowiche Valley Wagon Road and the ancient Native American primary travel corridor across the Cowiche Wildlife Area in Range 16, Township 14, located NORTH of Cowiche Mill Road. These historic and cultural resources are documented by state and federal agencies, and the trail sections physically exist on the ground and can also be seen on Google Earth imagery. See also information on the historic Cowiche Valley Wagon Road at <http://www.williamodouglastrail.org/wagonroad.htm>, which is derived from General Land Office surveys done in the 1880s.

Also, there is a trailhead off Sunset Road at the Southeast corner of Section 25 that has been in public use for years to access the William O. Douglas Heritage Trail. This existing trail segment heads west from Sunset Road and exits the Cowiche Unit approximately 3.5 miles later at the West boundary line of Section 27. WDFW has previously written letters of support for the William O. Douglas Trail and acknowledged the Heritage Trail in previous planning documents and funding requests.

The SEPA DNS should be withdrawn and a SEPA Mitigated DNS should be issued instead with specific mitigation measures to disclose and protect the documented historic, recreational, and cultural resources located north of Cowiche Mill Road. The Oak Creek Management Plan should be revised accordingly.

Thank you,

William O. Douglas Trail Foundation
email: williamodouglastrail@gmail.com

From: David Huycke [<mailto:dhuycke1@gmail.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, April 25, 2017 5:45 PM

To: SEPADesk2 (DFW)

Subject: Oak Creek Management Plan

Dear WDFW Planners:

I am concerned that WDFW's Oak Creek Management Plan provides no stated accommodation for the William O Douglas Heritage Trail which runs from Cowiche Mill Road westward toward Rimrock Lake. I urge you to revise the plan so that safe, muscle-powered, recreational access along this important trail is assured.

(The trail through this area crosses Sections 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36 in T14N, R16 E.)

Sincerely,

David Huycke, Yakima
509-901-1413

From: Richard Worley [mailto:rwraces@gmail.com]

Sent: Wednesday, April 12, 2017 11:32 AM

To: SEPADesk2 (DFW)

Subject: Comment on SEPA No. 17015

I read on one of the documents, that there was a plan (or to develop a plan) "to reduce dispersed camping along riparian areas"

I am NOT in favor of this. I am a hunter. It is one of the enjoyable things about going hunting in the 1st place (to be able to camp in smaller individual camp sites). Most of the camp sites have been used for MANY YEARS. Camping in large campgrounds with nearby neighbors is not my idea of going hunting.

The hunting in this state is not what it once was, so many people have quit doing it, and kids are not being exposed to it... making everyone herd into organized camp grounds will only make that trend happen faster!

That said - doing a little more large rock/cable boundaries might be fine, so that these smaller camping areas don't become larger and larger over the years. This does not mean that you should take away the larger "group" sites that Elk hunters use, where they can fit several camp trailers near each other (their friends).

Summary - getting out in nature, needs to feel like nature - not like we went from one urban jungle to another paved urban jungle, on a smaller scale.

.

I would also like to add on another subject:

I find it appalling that we encounter "FEE AREAS" out in the wilderness, IE; I saw a sign like that at Raven's Roost, when I was up there for Elk season last year. We (the people of the state in general, and especially the hunter's/fisherman) have paid through taxes, licenses, and fees already! Quit trying to add a fee for every little thing or place people want to use! It's just not right...

Richard Worley

From: Single Track Alliance Of Yakima <stay.org@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 16, 2017 11:12 PM
To: SEPADesk2 (DFW)
Subject: Comment on SEPA No. 17015

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

To the Department of Fish and Wildlife,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed draft for the Oak Creek and Cowiche Units. I would like to make my comments in regards to recreation, specifically mountain biking. As a founding member of Single Track Alliance of Yakima, I have invested countless hours of my time in advocating for trail access. We have been fortunate enough to establish a trail head at Rocky Top, on the north side of Cowiche Mountain. Mostly we build and maintain mountain bike trails. We have come to learn that our mountain bike trails are loved by hikers and trail runners also. Our trails improve with use and require little maintenance. Because they are laid out sensibly they erode minimally. We've found that trails which erode or damage the landscape significantly have nothing to do with the user and has everything to do with the layout.

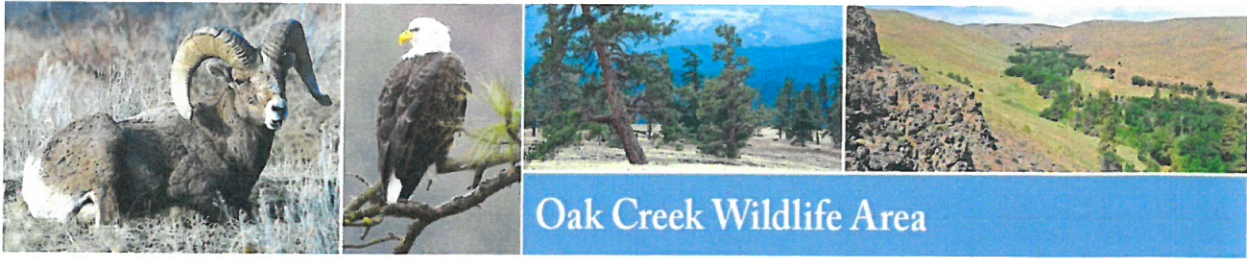
Since mountain bikes do not destroy trails and erode terrain, the only reason I can see for restricting access to mountain bikers in the Cowiche Unit is for wildlife movement. I would argue for seasonal closures over blanket restrictions. Seasonal closures seem like the community minded and sensible path to take over restricting access. It is not hard to look at other areas around the west where mountain bikes and conservation co-exist. Seasonal closures are a realistic and inclusive approach.

The Cowiche Unit is essential to the idea of connecting the Cowiche Canyon trail, Rocky Top, and Snow Mountain Ranch with the Oak Creek Unit and also the Ahtanum State Forest, not to mention the National Forest. A trail system of this caliber would not be a spiderweb of trails in tight proximity. It would be in essence an isolated, well traveled animal trail which humans used occasionally.

Please consider an inclusive approach which takes into consideration the community of mountain bikers who feel at home in nature and don't leave a trace on the landscape.

Thanks,

Will Hollingbery
Single Track Alliance of Yakima



**Oak Creek Wildlife Area
Management Plan
April 11, 2017 Public Meeting**

Comment Sheet

EXCELLENT DOCUMENT

IN THE PLAN YOU MENTION COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES - WHAT IS THAT - LOGGING?

When adding garbage - how does that impact staffing? Under staffed law enforcement how why is there no added enforcement if garbage is added?

Signage & Kiosk - Why are Public Rules for conduct NOT ALSO posted?

Mapping - would it not make sense to add locations where people may encounter shooting - to enable them to stay safe. Reduce - eliminate conflicts.

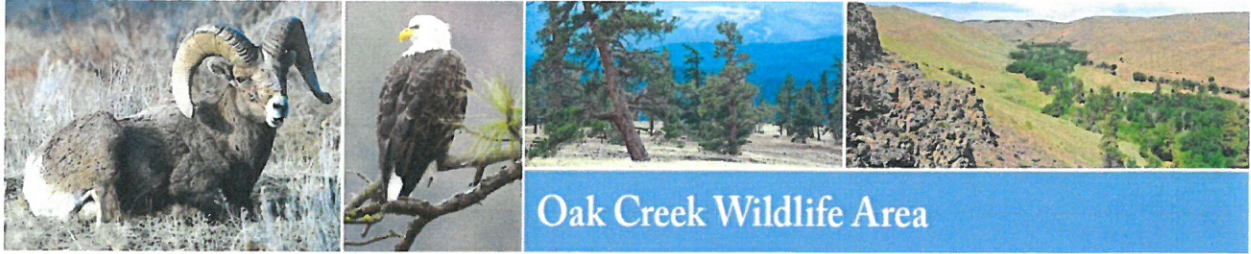
Name Jim Lydigson NRA

Email Address: JimLydig@gmail.com

Or Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 990 Selah (cell 509-901-7310)

City: _____ Zip Code: 98942



**Oak Creek Wildlife Area
Management Plan
April 11, 2017 Public Meeting**

Comment Sheet

OAK CREEK CENTER

1. ADD SOLAR PANELS ON THE CENTER. THIS SHOULD REDUCE COST OF ELECTRICITY

2. IF POSSIBLE ADD A CAMERA, WEATHER STATION. SO THE PUBLIC CAN VIEW THE ELK, AND GET WEATHER CONDITIONS. THIS WOULD BRING US INTO THE 21ST CENTURY, AND PROMOTE THE AREA.

3. LED LIGHTING INSIDE.

4. REVIEW THE HANDICAP ENTRY IN THE CENTER.

5. WORK WITH DOT FOR SIGNAGE - WILDLIFE AHEAD, SUGGESTION TURNING TRAFFIC - PER HANS SLOW TO 40 MPH AT O.C. ENTRANCE, AND RIVER TRAIL PKAY AREA. IMPORTANT !!

Name JIM ANDREWS

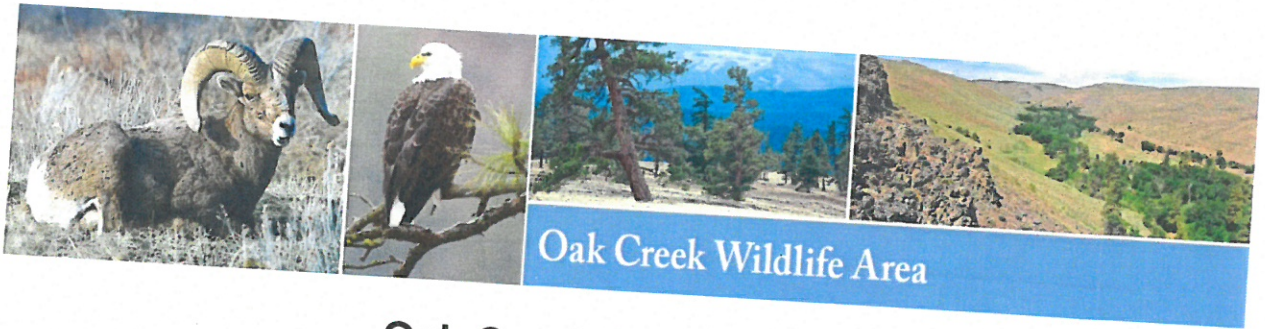
Email Address: _____

Or Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 826

City: Zillah, WA

Zip Code: 98953



**Oak Creek Wildlife Area
Management Plan
April 11, 2017 Public Meeting**

Comment Sheet

- Utilize timber value to ^{help} pay for non-commercial and prescribed burn treatments.
- Explore expanding turkey populations as an opportunity to provide more hunting. Turkey hunting is an excellent introductory experience for new hunters. Winter habitat ^(forage) will be important to achieve this goal.
- Oregon white oaks goals ^{& tasks} seem more focused on protection than enhancement. How can you improve oak habitat? What treatments will enhance oak vigor, acorn production? - oak science day? Bring in experts to look at oak stands if you have knowledge gaps.
- Utilize harvested timber as fish logs? Leave opportunity open in plan to push over whole trees.

Name Mikal Moore
 Email Address: mmoore@nwtf.net

Or Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ Zip Code: _____



**Oak Creek Wildlife Area
Management Plan
April 11, 2017 Public Meeting**

Comment Sheet

THE 1400 RD IS AN AMAZING LOCATION FOR
MT. BIKING TRAILS. WHAT YAKIMA LACKS, IS A DECENT
SHADED BIKING TRAIL SYSTEM. THE TERRAIN AND
VEGETATION ARE IDEAL FOR TRAILS CATERING TO ALL
SKILL LEVELS. IT WOULD ALSO DOUBLE AS GREAT HIKING
TRAILS. THERE ARE GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCENIC VIEW "LOOPS"

THE 1400 RD GRANTS EASY ACCESS TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN THESE
TYPES OF RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. THESE TRAILS ARE TYPICALLY
LOW ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, DUE TO THE USE BEING HUMAN
POWERED, AND NOT MOTORIZED. THESE WOULD CREATE GREAT WILDLIFE
VIEWING.

I'M AWARE OF THE EVERGREEN BIKE ALLIANCE AND THE
UPCOMING MEETING. I WILL LIKELY BE THERE.

Name Andy mahre

Email Address: Andy.mahre@yahoo.com

Or Mailing Address:

12302 US Highway 12

City: Naches

Zip Code: 98937



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Mailing Address: 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia, WA 98501-1091 • (360) 902-2200 • TDD (360) 902-2207
Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

July 7, 2017

David Leonard, Ph.D.
Regional Coordinator-Section 6 Grants
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, OR 97232

SUBJECT: USFWS comments on the Draft Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan

Dear Dr. Leonard:

Thank you for submitting comments on the Draft Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has prepared this response to concerns raised by the USFWS.

WDFW is managing USFWS Section 6 purchased lands consistent with the grant language included in the Tieton River Project Phase 1 and Phase 2 (Oak Creek Unit) and the Heart of the Cascades Phase 1 (Rock Creek Unit) grant contract. This is just one of several wildlife areas with USFWS-funded Section 6 lands that are owned and managed by WDFW. Our management strategies are continually being refined and adapted to respond to regulatory and environmental conditions, to integrate new science and improved methods for assessing and improving ecological integrity, and to respond to the interests of recreation users. To implement our mission, we are consistently managing for multiple benefits, with the goal of improved and enhanced outcomes for habitats, species, and to support recreation opportunities.

In the case of the grant contracts specific to Oak Creek, these lands were previously private timber company lands and are still in checkerboard ownership with US Forest Service (USFS). These lands had little active management beyond timber harvest and associated road maintenance. We have taken actions to manage these areas consistent with the terms of the grant agreement, including closures of roads and/or user-built trails to concentrate use on existing roads and improving signage. We will continue to address management issues that arise through public use of these areas in order to benefit fish and wildlife species covered under these grants.

The purchase of the Tieton River Project, partially accomplished with Section 6 funds and located on the Oak Creek Unit, removed the threat of development from this area, which is a

David Leonard, Ph.D.
July 7, 2017
Page 2

direct benefit to covered species. In addition, the agency, in collaboration with the USFS and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) under the umbrella of the Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative, developed and implemented a dry forest restoration project to restore historic condition and natural processes. To date, 1,161 acres have been thinned to restore forest health, accelerate a return to large trees and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Three hundred acres are identified for prescribed burning in the fall of 2017. Over the last eight years, WDFW has implemented road management projects which included the removal of three fish passage barriers, abandonment of about three miles of road, installation of three gates and improvement of over five miles of road to reduce erosion and sediment delivery. In 2017, WDFW, USFS, and TNC in partnership with the Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group will implement an aquatic restoration project across all three ownerships along Oak Creek benefitting ESA listed steelhead.

The Rock Creek Unit was partially purchased with USFWS Section 6 funds. The direct benefit of acquisition by WDFW was to remove the threat of development. Since acquisition, WDFW has abandoned 14 miles of logging roads and closed numerous miles of user-built ORV trails. Several miles of roads have been maintained and six gates have been installed on closed roads to reduce ORV vehicle use. Currently, WDFW is working with the USFS and user groups on maintenance and improvements to USFS motorized trails on the unit which will reduce the ecological impacts on these trails. WDFW has also begun to develop forest restoration projects for this heavily managed landscape. In 2016, WDFW completed thinning of 363 acres of old clear cuts to accelerate the return to a more historic condition. Collaboration with user groups has resulted in improved awareness, shared understanding, and created a positive environment for continued dialogue to meet diverse needs and to ensure covered species protection and habitat restoration.

Management of our lands improves connectivity for gray wolves and provides habitat to support healthy ungulate populations as gray wolves recolonize the area. Implementing restoration accelerates the return of healthy forests to support recovery of northern spotted owl, while aquatic restoration projects improve habitat for bull trout, steelhead and other target aquatic species. Managing recreation through road management, signs and education also improves ecological condition of our lands.

WDFW is proud to be a steward of conservation and management activities on Section 6 lands. Covered species and their habitats are protected from further degradation, habitat conditions are restored, and recreation and public use is managed appropriately through goals, objectives and performance measures in the new Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan. The management plan includes a requirement for biannual review and updating as to accomplishments and emerging priorities.

David Leonard, Ph.D.
July 7, 2017
Page 3

We would be happy to host a field trip to the Oak Creek Wildlife Area this summer or fall to visit these Section 6 lands and to demonstrate how our management is benefiting the target species as well as community interests. Lauri Vigue will be in contact soon to gather interest and organize this trip.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cynthia Wilkerson', written over a horizontal line.

Cynthia Wilkerson
Lands Division Manager

cc: Marty Acker, USFWS
Wendy Connally
Scott McCorquodale
Ross Huffman
Greg Mackey
Lauri Vigue

Oak Creek Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

June 7, 2016

Selah Middle School

6:00-8:00 pm

Attendees

WAAC Members:

Rick Barlin
Kay Clark
Jerry Clark
Karen Zook
Dick Jacobson
Eric Monson
Gail Thornton
Joan St. Hilaire
Betsy Bloomfield
Jim Walkenhaur

WDFW Staff:

Ross Huffman
Scott McCorquodale
Greg Mackey
Lauri Vigue

Welcome and Introductions

Ross Huffman, Oak Creek Wildlife Area Manager welcomed everyone and introduced WAAC members and WDFW staff. Lauri Vigue, Planning Project Manager, explained the focus of the meeting is to provide an overview of the wildlife area planning process, timeline, WAAC roles and expectations and Ross would provide a draft list of wildlife area issues developed by internal scoping.

Oak Creek WLA Planning and Process

The primary purpose of this meeting is to introduce the wildlife area management planning process. This is wildlife area plan pilot number four. The goal is to develop a wildlife area management plan for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. The agency mission and strategic plan were introduced. An overview of Oak Creek WAAC roles and expectations, contributions and responsibilities were provided; as well as the planning team responsibilities. A summary of the purpose of the plan, Framework document, forest planning, recreation strategy were introduced.

The public meeting was held the night before and Ross provided a summary. Greg also gave the status of current forest restoration projects on the wildlife area.

The Oak Creek WLA planning process begun in November 2015; an internal scoping meeting was held in February, the public meeting was held on June 6, 2016; and the first planning meeting will be held on June 29th.

Planning Timeline:

Oak Creek WAAC	June - September 2016 (~2 meetings min)
2 nd Public meeting	September/October 2016
Planning meetings	June – August (~3-4 meetings)
Final Draft Plan	October 2016

The internal scoping process identified the following preliminary issues that will be addressed in the new plan:

- Define vision
- Road management
- Recreation planning
- Forest planning
- Salmon restoration
- Shrub-steppe restoration
- Climate change
- Elk management
- Weed control

Oak Creek WLA WAAC Comments

- Creating an official shooting range on the wildlife area. There are location challenges to be considered.
- Recreation planning: increase hiking expected. There is an untapped resource for non-consumptive recreation. Multi-use trails. A need for volunteers to organize for trail maintenance. Improve signage.
- Maps are needed!
- Promote recreation of all kinds
- Recreation planning balanced with conservation
- Concern with road closures. Roads should be closed strategically.
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program open lands statute (active grazing on Cowiche unit). Working lands concept is consistent with the current acquisition.
- Citizen science – there is an ongoing interest and value to the WLA.
- Funding for the wildlife area includes the following sources: PR 75%/Discovery Pass/license sales/capital grants/miscellaneous.

- Address the Cowiche roads impacts from winter floods in the new plan.
- The new plan will be within existing budget and grants??
- Forest restoration – Cowiche - loss of pine trees, a potential salvage logging opportunity for funding? Dead trees provide wildlife value (snags and topping of trees).
- Wise-use (conservation) welcomed/non-use not welcomed (preservation).
- Maintain camping sites, maintain dispersed camping.
- Acquisition for access
- Impacts to trails adjacent to fires
- Climate change – logging on snow reduces ground disturbance impacts. Impacts of fire suppression. Larger trees represent historic conditions. Forest planning adaptive strategy. Connectivity provides habitat for species ranges that are shifting due to climate change.
- Maintain water rights with Cowiche Trust
- There were objectives for bighorn herd in the 2006 plan, what will be the status in the new plan?
- Sheep goat interactions
- Monarch butterfly/milkweed enhancement. Citizen science on Cowiche Unit. Active butterfly surveys being conducted.
- Butterfly netting a new recreation activity
- Rare plant surveys
- Bear Creek Canyon butterfly conservation area
- Rattlesnake surveys ongoing in the Cowiche unit
- Shed antlers – ideas for catching thieves: placing tracking chips in antlers
- Birding mecca
- Increase in litter fires
- Increase enforcement
- Reducing impacts from elk feeding sites.
- USFS road management – MOU motorized trails shared maintenance agreement
- Status of wolves on the wildlife area?

Forest Restoration - Greg Mackey

Greg provided an overview of a planned forest thinning project on the Rock Creek unit. The plan is for a 1,200 acre non-commercial thin over the next 3-4 years. The prescription indicates 8-10 inch diameter trees will be the limit. WDFW applied for a Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) State Lands Restoration grant for this project. We also have a Forest Health Grant/Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation grant for Section 11 (1 acre targeted for funding at time). South Tieton is targeted for a commercial harvest treatment in 2017. Revenue will be generated for this project. Large legacy ponderosa pine trees will be protected. Prescribed fire projects will occur in 2016 and 2017, and will start with 90 acres.

Next Steps

- Planning team develops goals and objectives, draft plan expected in July – August.

- WAAC reviews draft plan (~August)
- Public review draft plan in Fall 2016

Oak Creek Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

January 25, 2017

Oak Creek Wildlife Area

6:00-8:00 pm

Attendees

WAAC Members:

Rick Barlin
Kay Clark
Jerry Clark
Karen Zook
Dick Jacobson
Gail Thornton
Jim Walkenhaur
Rick Beechcraft (for Eric Monson)
Jeff Barbee
Ron Rutherford

Non-WAAC:

Margaret Morris
Ken Tolonen

WDFW Staff:

Ross Huffman
Greg Mackey
Lauri Vigue

Welcome and Introductions

Ross Huffman, Oak Creek Wildlife Area Manager welcomed everyone and introduced WAAC members and WDFW staff. Lauri Vigue, Planning Project Manager, provided an overview of the wildlife area planning process and timeline; Ross provided an overview of the draft plan, goals and objectives. Greg Mackey, Oak Creek Forester, gave an overview of the draft Forest Plan. Lauri also mentioned the Wildlife Area Management Planning Framework is available online. The purpose of this document is to provide information to the public and WDFW staff on internal programs that inform the development of the plan, including an overview of statutory authority, policy and procedures.

Oak Creek WLA Planning and Process

The primary purpose of this meeting is to collect comments on the draft Oak Creek Wildlife Area Plan and the Draft Forest Plan. This is the second WAAC meeting for the development of the management plan, the first meeting was held in June 2016.

WLA Plan Overview

Ross provided a description of the draft plan including the success stories, resource management, recreation and public use, road management, acquisition history and management. Ross described the draft plan as user friendly, it will serve as a better planning document for future activities.

Forest Plan

The draft Forest Management Plan will guide forest management activities based on the Statewide Forest Management Strategy. The Forest Management Plan will include the following components: forest description (existing conditions and threat assessment), management approach (desired future conditions, suitable management areas and potential projects). Activities will include thinning, prescribed fire and planting. Existing conditions and threat assessment will include quantifying ecological integrity, priority species and risk management.

Planning Timeline:

Public Review Draft/SEPA review	February/March 2017
Public Meeting	March 2017
Final Plan	June 2017

Oak Creek WLA WAAC Comments

Forest Plan

- Page 2, clarified acreage on Cowiche Unit.
- Any specific snag creation intended for woodpeckers?
Answer: Commercial treatments will include snag creation. USFS is conducting a snag study; this information from this study will be used for future treatments. WDFW targets preferred tree species for snags.
- Have additional aspen groves been identified? Answer: No, objective 2.G. includes enhancement for aspen. Aspen is a priority habitat on the wildlife area.

WLA Plan

- Selling the Baugess Unit? Answer: Both Baugess and Niles Springs units are not a priority for active management on the wildlife area. There is no recreation and public access.
- Recognize that “working lands” are important to local economy (e.g. North Yakima Conservation District). We need to add more language for “working lands” in the plan. Add success story for Cowiche Canyon Conservancy/grazing partnership.
- The grazing section in the plan is well written.

- We should not be managing for wolves in the wildlife area. Potential conflict with elk feeding sites.
- How much staff is on the wildlife area? Answer: The wildlife area has three full-time staff members (manager, assistant manager, and forester), one three month seasonal natural resource worker; for winter feeding, three additional staff is hired. Currently we are understaffed for a wildlife area this size, unable to treat all of the weed control areas.
- Tansey ragwort is spreading along the lower Old Naches Road Campground and south side of Rimrock to Conrad. July – August it blooms, 2-3 ft tall.
- Consider hiring citizen scientists to assist with staff shortages.
- Is it helpful for Audubon to take photos/GPS locations of rare birds? Answer: Yes
- We continue to protect habitat for sage grouse even if they are not present. The wildlife area provided old travel corridors for the sage grouse. It is now fringe habitat in the recovery plan and is not considered a focus area for recovery. Historic presence helps us in acquiring funds.
- Burned treated forested areas (USFS areas burned out of control) are they beneficial for woodpeckers? Answer: Yes, they provide a feeding source for woodpeckers for only about 3-5 years.
- Will motorized recreation on the wildlife area change? Answer: No plans to change the current road system. We received an RCO grant for road improvements, and will continue to seek funding for additional work and seek volunteer work.
- Add an objective for increased enforcement on the wildlife area, to enforce game laws, off-road violations and increase signage, in coordination with Yakima County Sheriffs Office, similar to plan used in Klickitat County
- ORV use not allowed on USFS lands until the Travel Management Plan is completed. On the Rock Creek unit, quads are running everywhere. Not enough enforcement to cover these areas.

Wildlife Area Updates:

The Rock Climber Coalition received an REI grant for trail maintenance on the Tieton River Canyon Access site. This work will help with erosion issues; a cultural resource review will be necessary.

A grazing permit will be sought for 40 acres on the South Tieton River Canyon. This was part of the Land Exchange with DNR, it was an existing permit under DNR.

Prescribed fire is scheduled to occur on the Oak Creek project in the spring 2017 to complete the project. It was delayed due to a burn ban in the fall 2016.

Stream restoration activities continue on the wildlife area with partnerships from Washington Conservation Corps, Yakama Tribe, Regional Salmon Enhancement Group. 1,500 logs total have been placed near the Cowiche Mill Road; 800 on Oak Creek. We will continue the work as long as we have funding. This work helps reduce flooding, improves water storage and improves salmon habitat.

Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan

Public Scoping Workshop Summary – Final

June 6, 2016

Introduction

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) hosted a public scoping workshop on Monday, June 6th, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the West Valley Fire-Rescue, Yakima. The purpose of the workshop was to share information about the wildlife area planning process and to solicit public and stakeholder input.

The workshop begins the planning process for developing a new Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan, one of 33 plans the department will revise over the next six to eight years. The plans are updated every two years to reflect changes in landscape and management priorities; however, the larger plan efforts are more comprehensive and consider the status of wildlife species and their habitat, progress towards goals identified in earlier plans, and new wildlife area priorities. The plans will consider the interests and impacts of stakeholders and user groups; set goals for assessing and monitoring ecological integrity; outline forest management priorities; identify appropriate public use, recreation areas and facility improvements; as well as weed control practices and other operations and maintenance practices. Oak Creek's current plan as developed in 2006, with subsequent updates in 2007, 2010, 2012 and 2014. These are available on the department website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/.

Twenty-six people attended and signed in at the workshop including interested parties from Yakima/Kittitas County communities of Yakima, Naches, Selah, Zillah. Stakeholder groups included Tieton Rock Climbers, Washington Climbers Coalition, Cowiche Canyon Conservancy, Wild Turkey Foundation, as well as fishing and hunting enthusiasts and wildlife area volunteers. A representative from Department of Natural Resources (DNR) attended the meeting as well.

Workshop Format

The workshop was designed in a combination open house/presentation format. Individual maps of each of the three Oak Creek Wildlife Area's units were posted, and participants were encouraged to share specific and general feedback after the presentation and at the map locations.

Staff presentation

Scott McCorquodale, Regional Wildlife Program Manager, welcomed everyone and introduced WDFW employees. Melinda Posner, Lands Division planning/public outreach lead and facilitator for the meeting gave an overview of the process and reviewed the agenda topics. Other WDFW participants included:

- Ross Huffman, Oak Creek Wildlife Area Manager
- Scott McCorquodale, Regional Wildlife Program Manager
- Jeff Bernatowicz, Wildlife District Biologist
- Eric Anderson, Fish District Biologist
- Eric Bartrand, Habitat Program
- Greg Mackey, Forester
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager

- Melinda Posner, Lands Division Planning/Public Outreach

Meeting guidelines:

- Everyone has an opportunity to share input
- Refrain from side discussions during presentation
- Hold questions until stations
- Participate in respectful and courteous manner
- Recognize role of facilitator
- Start and end on time.

Melinda emphasized the early stage in the planning process and the desire to hear from the public and stakeholders about interests, issues, and potential priorities for this wildlife area. She noted multiple methods for providing comments including written comment sheets, flip charts notes, speaking with staff and sending email comments directly to Lauri Vigue.

Lauri Vigue, project manager, reviewed the department's overall process for updating all state wildlife area plans. She noted the following new topics the plan will consider including:

- Wildlife Area Ecological Integrity Monitoring
- Forest Management
- Recreation Management
- Expanded public outreach including public workshops, information materials and Wildlife Area Advisory Committee meetings

Lauri summarized timeline for the Oak Creek plan; staff expects a draft plan by August 2016, and potential final plan in Fall 2016. Lauri introduced Ross Huffman, wildlife area manager for Oak Creek Wildlife Area. Ross provided an overview of each of the three units describing the purpose, acquisition and funding requirements, and current and status of objectives for each of the three wildlife area units.

Oak Creek Unit

Overview: 42,200 acres of shrub-steppe, ponderosa pine, mixed conifer, Oregon white oak woodlands, riparian and aspen groves.

Purpose: Conservation of shrub steppe and forest dependent species, federally listed steelhead and bull trout, elk, mule deer, golden eagle.

Current objectives: Maintain and enhance habitat for priority fish and wildlife species, provide public hunting and fishing opportunities. Provide for other recreation.

Funding source: Federal Lands & Water Conservation Fund, National Park Service, Pittman Robertson, Wildlife Funds, Recreation Conservation Office, USFWS Section 6, Bonneville Power Administration, Department of Ecology

Cowiche Unit

Overview: 7,683 acres of excellent native shrub-steppe, open grassland, riparian and oak woodlands

Purpose: Conservation of shrub-steppe dependent species, elk and deer winter range.

Current objectives: Maintain and enhance habitat for priority fish and wildlife species, provide public hunting and fishing opportunities. Provide for other recreation.

Funding source: Recreation Conservation Office, Federal Land & Water Conservation Fund, Wildlife Fund, Federal Pittman Robertson

Rock Creek Unit

Overview: 10,386 acres of forest, riparian, stream, and aspen.

Current objectives: Maintain and enhance forest and riparian habitats for priority fish and wildlife species. Provide hunting and fishing opportunities. Provide for other recreation.

Funding Source: USFWS Section 6, Recreation Conservation Office

General Comments and Questions at Stations

Can you say more about what the wildlife area is about and why/how the public may be interested and involved?

What are your biggest challenges?

Answer: Refocus, develop realistic goals and objectives. Identify improvements necessary. Access and road issues. Conservation and recreation balance. How to secure funding. Private timber, forest health issues. Working relationship with USFS – previous large timber company lands.

Severe impacts from elk, how can they be managed differently?

Rock climber, climbed for 30 years at the wildlife area, there has not been a lot of interface with the Department in the past; wanted to make sure we were tied into the process.

Who has accountability for the plan? How do you deal with things that change? Answer: WAAC and plan updates.

Will information be posted on the website?

Will the plan identify funding and/or will it be secure or could change over time?

Tim's Pond funding to improve after six years, e.g. toilets, ADA access, campsite, paved trail 2017-18.

Fish and Wildlife

- What is the carrying capacity for elk in the Cowiche Unit (migration, grazing, crossing creek)
- What is the damage (e.g., erosion, salmon redds) to creek banks from elk herds (Cowiche Unit)?
- What can private landowners do regarding elk on private lands?
- Hunter trespassing
- Highlight private property on maps

Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan Public Scoping Workshop Summary

June 6, 2016

- What are the coyote estimates in the Cowiche Unit?

Habitat and Lands Management

- How to deal with habitat degradation due to concentrated use on the feed sites?
- Better enforcement and repair of fences and gate in portions adjacent to private properties
- Oregon white oak restoration and preservation
- Large woody debris for critters and water retention

Recreation and Public Access

- Shed hunters violating closure
- Tieton River trail maintenance
- Windy Point parking lot (rafting)
- Signs, kiosks, information at trailheads and climbing areas
- Develop Hwy 12 pullouts

Comment Sheets – Combined Responses (17 received)

Interests

- Wildlife habitat value
- Public access for hunters
- Rock climbing
- Hiking
- Hunting
- This is an area that offers so much rock climbing, hiking, hunting, bird watching, picnicking, etc
- Bountiful place with thousands of visitors per year
- Immersion in nature (love ponderosa oak transition zone)
- Trails
- Access to a beautiful natural area
- Rock climbing, fishing and hunting
- Mt biking and running on trails
- Climbing, hiking, whitewater, hunting

Affiliation

- National Wild Turkey Foundation

Recreation Pursued at Oak Creek

- Hunting (all)
- Rock climbing (Oak Creek/Cowiche)
- Hiking (all)
- Exercise (all)
- Motorized recreation (all)
- Wildlife viewing (all)
- Dog walking (all)
- Mt biking (Oak Creek/Cowiche)
- Fishing (Oak Creek/Rock Creek)
- Horseback riding (all)

- Photography (all)
- Highline/slackline (Oak Creek)
- Running
- Paddle boarding (Oak Creek)

Frequency of Use (number of visits per season)

Areas Visited	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Cowiche	116	110	70	49
Oak Creek	200	194	314	159
Rock Creek	2	6	11	2

Wildlife, fish or habitat Interests

- Forest (Oregon white oak)
- Riparian and aspen groves
- All wildlife (especially game: upland bird, wild turkey, elk, mule deer)
- Shrub-steppe - Cowiche
- River/Streams Cowiche
- Elk, deer, upland game bird (Oak Creek)
- More elk studies (genetic, condition of the herd)
- Work on the turkey population
- Ponderosa pine- white oak transition forest
- Rivers and streams, keep them clean and healthy
- Tieton rock climbing walls, trout

Recommended Changes or Improvements

- Reduce fuel loads on forested areas and manage for larger diameter trees
- Examine road densities to minimize wildlife disturbance while balancing public access
- Pursue acquisition and expansion of important wintering habitat for elk and mule deer
- Trail maintenance and access (Oak Creek)
- Forest health related to forest management
- Expand green dot system to Rock Creek unit
- Bring the visitor center up to ADA/solar system to help heating
- Open Mud Lake Road, important work with WSDOT and put in better signage (congested area)
- More access to areas of Oak Creek
- The areas known as the Royal Columns, bend and moon rocks – improve access.
- Maintenance of the Tieton River Trail, conservation of the N.F. Ahtanum and Cowiche Creek areas. Growing mountain biking and non-motorized recreation.
- A greater interest in the conservation of climbing trails, and the addition of mountain bike trails. I see the Oak Creek WLA as an avenue to grow a more engaged outdoor community in the Yakima Valley.
- Public access across Tieton River at Rimrock Retreat
- Better signage and information available to people not familiar with the area
- Recreational improvements and access to Tieton rock climbing areas
- Bridge improvements and trail maintenance at Tieton River
- Parking and service improvements in Discover Pass areas (climbing areas, trailheads, etc)
- Larger parking area at Windy Point for rafting

- Trail maintenance
- A bridge at Tim's pond
- A bridge at Rimrock Retreat

Land Management Activities

- Active management of timber (e.g. thinning, prescribed fire on Rock Creek and Oak Creek units)
- Weed control in riparian areas and roads on Oak Creek unit
- Watershed and riparian health (water quality, streambanks and forage)
- Promotion of aspen stands
- Promote hunting and fishing opportunities for underrepresented groups
- Land impact accessibilities for climbers and locals vs recreational visitors
- Maintaining wildlife habitat and expansion
- Forest health
- Climbing access
- Mt bike trail building
- Habitat restoration, conservation, outdoor education
- Continued access to rock climbing areas including new areas.
- Willingness to partner with climbing groups on stewardship efforts
- Shrub-steppe preservation
- Recreation and awareness of the value of the wildlife area for the public
- Oak Creek WLA – recreational activities and accessibility
- Trail maintenance
- Recreational usage and nature management balance

Additional Feedback

- Continue partnership work with Tapash Collaborative/Naches Ranger District
- Utilize non-profits to assist with habitat and access management
- Continue working to resolve checkerboard ownership
- Utilize timber values to pay for habitat work
- Utilize good neighbor authority for cross-boundary management
- The wild turkey paragraph in the existing plan could be improved. Reference Sara Evans-Peters, Pac NW wild turkey forage study (M.S. Oregon State) for more current information. Management for healthy forest stands, roost trees and adequate winter forage will promote wild turkey health and abundance, fruit and nut bearing trees and shrubs (oaks, chokecherry, service berry, etc).
- Public use is a big issue. Happy to provide ideas for improvement.
- Update maps to GPS
- I feel that outdoor access/activities are an important part of the Yakima Valley and living in Yakima. Access for climbing, fishing, biking, etc., all greatly impact how the community grows and develops and should be considered in planning.
- I am most interested in preserving and expanding access to rock climbing
- Please keep this process and plan development transparent to the public
- Improve transparency and open more doors for including the public in this process
- This is my favorite area to bike, exercise, and take my dog. I would be deeply saddened if it were to be shut down to any of these activities.

Meeting Materials

The following meeting materials are attached:

- Agenda
- Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan Fact Sheet
- Workshop Postcard
- Newsrelease
- Scanned comment sheets

Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan

Public Meeting Summary – Final

April 11, 2017

Introduction

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) hosted a public meeting on Tuesday, April 11th, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the West Valley Fire-Rescue, Yakima. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the draft management plan and collect public comments.

The meeting introduced the draft Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan, one of 33 plans the department is revising. This meeting kicks off the 30-day SEPA comment period, which started on April 10th and ends on May 11th. The plans are updated every two years to reflect changes in landscape and management priorities; however, the larger plan efforts are more comprehensive and consider the status of wildlife species and their habitat, progress towards goals identified in earlier plans, and new wildlife area priorities. The plans will consider the interests and impacts of stakeholders and user groups; set goals for assessing and monitoring ecological integrity; outline forest management priorities; identify appropriate public use, recreation areas and facility improvements; as well as weed control and other operations and maintenance practices. Oak Creek's draft plan, along with subsequent updates in 2007, 2010, 2012 and 2014 are available on the department website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/.

Nineteen people attended and signed in at the public meeting including interested parties from Yakima/Kittitas County communities of Yakima, Naches, Selah, Zillah. Stakeholder groups included rock climbers, National Wild Turkey Federation, as well as wildlife area volunteers. A reporter from the Yakima Herald attended as well.

Staff presentation

Lauri Vigue, Project Manager, welcomed everyone to the public meeting and provided the general logistic information. Scott McCorquodale, Regional Wildlife Program Manager, introduced WDFW employees and summarized the benefits of the new plan. Lauri gave an overview of the process and reviewed the agenda topics. Other WDFW participants included:

- Ross Huffman, Region 3 Lands Operations Manager
- Scott McCorquodale, Regional Wildlife Program Manager
- Greg Mackey, Wildlife Area Manager
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager

Lauri Vigue, project manager, reviewed the department's overall process for updating all state wildlife area plans. She reviewed the purpose of the plan, mission statement and gave an overview of the Framework document.

Lauri summarized the plan highlights including:

- Wildlife area vision
- Success stories

- Context for the unit descriptions
- Target species and habitats
- Recreation opportunities

Ross provided the highlights of the goals and objectives within the plan. Objectives included:

- Weed control
- Identifying acquisition priorities
- Ecological integrity monitoring
- Maintain and enhance Oregon white oak woodlands
- Coordinating the managing roads with other public agencies
- Non-game species surveys
- Maintain annual big-game feeding program
- Continue floodplain restoration projects
- Support and maintain appropriate recreation opportunities
- Continue advisory committee meetings and outreach to public

Greg provided an overview of the draft forest plan. The Oak Creek Wildlife Area has about 25,000 acres of forest. The need for management is due to over a century of fire suppression and other human influences that have created dense forest stands that are more susceptible to wildfire, insect outbreaks and disease. Forest Plan goals include:

- Restore the historic range of variability
- Improve habitat quality, especially for priority species
- Reduce wildfire risks to the forests and surrounding communities

In conclusion, comments are due on the draft plan by May 11th. The final plan will be approved by the director and placed on the website this summer.

General Comments and Questions

Forest Planning:

Question: Commercial thinning, where does revenue go?

Response: Revenue raised goes to the Pittman Robertson (PR) general account, depending on other statewide priorities; it may or may not be used again on the ground at Oak Creek Wildlife Area.

Question: Where will we be doing prescribed burning?

Response: In 2015 we had a commercial harvest at Oak Creek Wildlife Area. We focus prescribed burning on areas where commercial harvest occurred.

Question: How do we carry out timber sales?

Response: Harvest occurs in clusters of 20-90 acres. What determines the exact locations for forest actions to occur depend on what the ground will support, research on current conditions of habitat and wildlife features, and historic conditions and species composition. Areas that have departed from historic conditions will be a higher priority. Income maybe generated if commercial value is good, generally can be expensive to treat. The main purpose is to reduce disease/insect impacts to the forests

and be good neighbors. Not intended to be a money making operation, the primary goals are forest health and wildlife enhancement.

Recreation:

Comment: Promote hunting/fishing (traditional uses) consider recruiting youth to increase the user group in the future.

Comment: There is a great opportunity to expand recreation near the 1400 road (Oak Creek WLA), especially for mountain biking. The terrain is ideal and there are nice view points of the valley.

Response: We have flexibility to expand new recreation opportunities on the wildlife area, depending on the funding source. We have to be aware of the funding strings for land acquisitions; this will impact future recreation development. The WDFW Recreation Strategy process is starting up this summer.

Question: Cowiche Mill Rd target shooting, what are the impacts to habitat?

Response: Increased use within the past 7 years, observed by others and by debris present. More pull offs being used. Areas lack safety features. Enforcement spends a fair amount of time patrolling to increase safety measures. Contractors in the area are at risk since they are doing restoration activities in the stream. This area is now part of the winter range closure. Routinely cleaned up by the staff and volunteers including the Mule Deer Foundation.

Comment: Recreation conflicts, during hunting seasons and hunting near multi-use trails.

Response: Trails are being used by the public for biking and running used by the public are active during the hunting season. Users need to be aware of what seasons are in progress and wear highly visible clothing.

Add to Goal 11, improvements to Wildlife Area Education Center. Include funding source ALEA and add a success story for its 30-year anniversary.

Question: Regarding the recent legislature to form volunteer groups for public lands, is this affecting WDFW lands?

Response: Don't know. Aaron Garcia, is the volunteer coordinator for Region 3, located in the Yakima Regional office.

Wildlife:

Question: What is the status of western gray squirrel population on the wildlife area?

Response: Western gray squirrels were reintroduced to the wildlife area in the early 80's. Connectivity is important to their survival. There is currently limited habitat on the Oak Creek Wildlife Area, small stringers on the valley bottom. Are California ground squirrels competing? According to the Western Gray Squirrel Recovery Plan (WDFW, 2007) it is speculated that they may compete for food but typically prefer habitat that is not optimal for western gray squirrels. Also, it has been suggested that a mite causing deadly mange was introduced by California ground squirrels, but it has never been reported in ground squirrels, so it is unlikely. The main factors contributing to the decline of western gray squirrels are likely habitat degradation, population size and isolation, and disease.

Comment: Declining pheasant population, farming has reduced habitat for pheasants. Yakama Indian Nation lands has the best habitat, brushy/shrubby habitat. Chuckar population also has declined.

Comment: No future non-native species introductions (pheasants, etc) on the wildlife area.

Response: Supplemental populations have not been planted since the 1980's. WDFW no longer re-introduces non-native species to the wildlife area. The statewide turkey management plan is being reviewed.

Comment: Did the USFS vegetation study make recommendations on elk numbers?

Response: The USFS vegetation study did not address elk carrying capacity nor make recommendations for elk numbers. Elk body condition data from the WDFW portion of the study did not suggest Yakima herd elk were above carrying capacity.

Comment: USFS management recommendations for elk damage?

Response: The USFS has not made any recommendations about elk damage. Experimental enclosure work published as a USFS – General Technical Report found soil compaction impacts when cattle and elk both grazed the same sites, but these impacts were absent when elk grazed sites, but cattle did not.

Comment: With the high concentration of elk feeding sites, what are the impacts to human health?

Response: There are no known impacts to human health.

Question: Does the USFS manage for elk in the same manner as WDFW?

Response: Treated as a higher level if it is a listed species, currently elk are not a focal species by the USFS.

Comment: Tick information, Department of Health tracks Lyme disease in Washington.

Question: Do we have an estimate on the total acres of habitat for migrating elk on public lands?

Response: According to the Yakima Elk Herd Plan (WDFW, 2002), the Yakima Herd is located in Population Management Units (PMUs) 33, 35, and 36, which have a combined total area of 1,071,743 acres.

Comment: Are we doing thistle control?

Response: Primary patches include Chimney Peaks – USFS. Limited chemicals that can be used to treat. A federal consultation is required.

Land Acquisition:

Question: Is there any plan to purchase USFS lands to reduce checkerboard ownership?

Response: No, the Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative has helped with this issue.

Comment Sheets – Combined Responses (4 received)

Jim Lydigsen, National Rifle Association

- Excellent document

- In the plan you mention commercial opportunities what is that, logging? When adding acreage, how does that impact staffing? Under staffed law enforcement, why is there no added enforcement as acreage is added?

Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan Public Scoping Workshop Summary

April 11, 2017

- Signage and kiosk – why are public rules for conduct not also posted?
- Mapping – would it not make sense to add location where people may encounter shooting – to enable them to stay safe? Reduce – eliminate conflicts.

Jim Andrews, Oak Creek Center volunteer

- Add solar panels on the center, this should reduce the cost of electricity.
- If possible add a camera, weather station, so the public can view the elk and get weather conditions. This would bring us into the 21st century and promote the area.
- LED lighting inside
- ADA upgrades
- Work with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) for signage, “wildlife area ahead”. Perhaps slow to 40 MPH at entrance and river trail parking area. Important!!

Mikal Moore, National Wild Turkey Federation

- Utilize timber value to help pay for non-commercial and prescribed burning treatments.
- Explore expanding turkey population as an opportunity to provide more hunting. Turkey hunting is an excellent introductory experience for new hunters. Winter habitat forage will be important to achieve this goal.
- Oregon white oaks goals and tasks seem more focused on protection than enhancement. How can you improve oak habitat? What treatments will enhance oak vigor, acorn production? Oak science day? Bring in experts to look at oak stands if you have knowledge gaps.
- Utilize harvested timber as fish logs? Leave opportunity open in plan to push over whole trees.

Andy Mahre, local landowner

- The 1400 Road is an amazing location for mountain biking trails. What Yakima lacks, is a decent shaded biking trail system. The terrain and vegetation are ideal for trails catering to all skill levels. It would also double as great hiking trails. There are great opportunities for scenic view “loops”.
- The 1400 road grants easy access to build and maintain these types of recreational opportunities. These trails are typically low on environmental impact due to the use being human powered, and not motorized. These would create great wildlife viewing.
- I’m aware of the Evergreen Bike Alliance and the upcoming meeting. I will likely be there.

Meeting Materials

The following meeting materials are attached:

- Agenda
- Workshop Postcard
- News release



http://www.yakimaherald.com/news/restoration-collaboration-key-to-oak-creek-wildlife-area-plan/article_b365a698-2157-11e7-bb90-4bbeba158ce8.html

Restoration, collaboration key to Oak Creek Wildlife Area plan

By Luke Thompson

lthompson@yakimaherald.com Apr 14, 2017 Updated Apr 16, 2017



Hundreds of elk feed on hay at the Washington Department of Fish and Game Oak Creek Wildlife Area near Naches, Wash., Friday, Dec 23, 2016. (SHAWN GUST/Yakima Herald-Republic file)

NACHES, Wash. -- Many people know the Oak Creek Wildlife Area for its popular elk

feeding program and the rare opportunity it offers to see the big game animals up close.

But that success story represents only a small part of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife's recently released draft management plan for the area's more than 67,000 acres in Yakima and Kittitas counties. The plan recognizes the potential of diverse recreational activities while putting a priority on protecting the environment and animal habitat.

Returning the area to a more natural state remains an overarching goal across the three primary units of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area — Oak Creek, Rock Creek and Cowiche. Multiple floodplain restoration projects are underway, as well as thinnings and prescribed burnings to improve forest health, along with significant efforts to protect species such as golden eagles, salmon and steelhead trout.

Wildlife Department staff addressed questions about recreational activities such as mountain biking, hiking and hunting from an audience of about 20 people at a public meeting Tuesday night. Longtime Oak Creek manager and new Region 3 operations manager Ross Huffman anticipates additional meetings with interested citizens and more guidance could be offered in a statewide recreation management plan due in 2018.

"There's not a lot of user conflicts where people are upset because one activity is going on over another," Huffman said. "We've just seen an overall increase in recreation."

That opens up the potential for adverse effects on wildlife and the environment, something Andy Mahre understands well from building trails and fixing ruts created by himself and other mountain bikers or hikers. Still, the professional skier sees opportunities near his home in Naches for the shaded, mountain-bike specific trails he says the Yakima area lacks.

The management plan highlighted several opportunities for collaboration, such as its partnership with the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy and others to allow grazing on formerly private shrub-steppe lands in the North Fork Cowiche Creek area since 2014. The Conservancy's executive director, Betsy Bloomfield, said that land remains in good shape and has been a hot spot for citizen science, especially butterfly research.

Volunteers from the Conservancy, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Audubon Society, as well as Master Hunters, often take on projects proposed by the Wildlife Department or those organizations. Hoffman said citizens also can go through training to help monitor the ecological integrity of the wildlife area.

Comments on the draft management plan can be made online at [the wildlife department's website](#) through May 11, and approval of a final version is expected in July. Progress reports with updated strategies and reviews of objectives will be issued every two years.

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509-759-7689

View the full Oak Creek draft management plan

[🔗](#) Updated **Apr 14, 2017**



NEWS WATCH

Photos: Hundreds of elk feed at Naches wildlife area

Dec 25, 2016

Luke Thompson