

Methow Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

March 22, 2022

Teams Call

Attendees

WAAC Members

- Craig Boesel – Permittee
- James DeSalvo – Methow Valley Trails Collaborative
- Larry Hudson – Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board
- Terry Karro – Citizen/Great Old Broads for Wilderness
- Jasmine Minbashian – Methow Valley Citizens Council
- John Rohrer – Citizen/U.S. Forest Service Retired
- Vic Stokes – Permittee/Washington Cattlemen’s Association
- Andrew Townsend – Washington Dept of Natural Resources
- Carmen Vanbianchi – Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
- Keith Watson – Conservation Northwest
- Andy Wold – Okanogan County Conservation District
- Julie Grialou – Methow Conservancy
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Other: Rosemary Seifried – Recreation, U.S. Forest Service

Tribes:

Matt Young – Colville Confederated Tribes, Fisheries Biologist

Brandon Rogers – Yakama Nation, Upper Columbia Special Projects Lead

Shannon Adams - Yakama Nation, Habitat Coordinator

Maddie Eckmann - Yakama Nation, Habitat Biologist

WDFW

- Justin Haug, Okanogan Lands Operations Manager
- Brandon Troyer, Wildlife Area Manager
- Alex Repp, Assistant Wildlife Area Manager
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager
- Joel Sisolak, Planning, Recreation, and Outreach Section Manager
- Shane Belson, Access Area Manager

Welcome – Justin Haug

Thanks to each of you for your participation today.

The Methow Wildlife Area has been without a WAAC for some time. Starting today we will be developing a new relationship. These discussions and the understanding you'll each develop of the department's mission, processes, the WLA's goals and objectives will not only be extremely valuable for you, your organization or agency - but your role is for you to carry that knowledge into the community making each of you an ambassador for the Methow wildlife area.

The input provided on management issues – whether it be public access, resource concerns, recreation, or facility improvements will give our staff here additional confidence they are managing for the greatest benefit possible. WAAC meetings following the implementation of the plan will give the WAAC opportunities to check on progress being made.

Lastly - you all know the extent of the valley's diversity. Whether it be habitat, wildlife species, user groups or political ideology there are A LOT of voices here. Your interest in conservation and land stewardship coupled with individual, unique perspectives you each bring to the table, will be invaluable in the drafting of the management plan and subsequent recreation plan - and all your voices will ultimately lead to more well-rounded, inclusive final products.

Introductions, Planning overview – Lauri Vigue

The plans are consistent with the WDFW mission statement “to preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities” and the 25-year Strategic Plan. This is a 10-year management plan, during the planning process public and stakeholder input will be considered, values from the fish, habitat, and wildlife programs are integrated. The role of the advisory committee is to provide public and other stakeholders' perspectives in WDFW wildlife area planning and management activities.

The draft charter was provided in the Outlook appointment to the WAAC and comments are due April 5th. Lauri described the role of the committee, including sharing information and providing feedback from the groups that advisory committee members represent. WAAC members will participate in the implementation of the wildlife area management plan and may be used as a forum to discuss ongoing wildlife Decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the department, but the hope is that the committee can work together and come to consensus when possible. The Wildlife Area Management Planning Framework document was also provided, which summarizes agency priorities and programs that guide all wildlife areas.

Overview of the Methow Wildlife Area – Brandon Troyer

- 1930's - 1940's - dryland farming threatened by drought and crop damage due to increasing deer populations.
- 1940 – the State Game Commission established the Methow Land Acquisition Project.
- 1941 – 1959 - WDFW purchased approximately 30 homesteads totaling 9,000 acres to alleviate deer damage.
 - These purchases eventually triggered the Department's sharecropper lease program intended to provide wildlife forage, cover, and to reduce noxious weeds. A similar model is still implemented today, which also supports the local economy and community character of the valley.
- 1949 - 3,000 acres purchased via a cooperative agreement from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- 1972 - 2,000 acres acquired in the Beaver Creek area.
- 1975 – WDFW purchased the Big Buck Ranch.
- 1980's - Prewitt purchased 240 acres from Campbell along Pipestone Canyon and traded it to the Department for 118 acres, including the house, and outbuildings at the Big Buck Ranch.
- 1989 - 440 acres were acquired for mule deer winter range in the lower Ramsey Creek area.
- 1990 – Washington State Legislature appropriated funds to be used by the Washington Wildlife Recreation Program (WWRP) for land acquisitions and other wildlife recreation projects. This spurred many of the acquisitions that created the wildlife area you see today.

See PowerPoint for details

Comments/Discussion

- How will elk be considered in this plan? Historically they occurred at high elevations.
- The plan should include indigenous culture use, this information should overlap with shared goals and traditional knowledge.
- Enforcement capacity – is a huge issue especially with the boom in recreation. Alternative considerations include citizen volunteers, ranger program.
- Educate the users – change the mindset of recreationists. Engage the community on the right thing to do. Policing incentives - commitment to personal use accountability. Provide training on how to approach someone not respecting the land.
- There are variations in what level of recreation is acceptable, and it is mainly driven by funding source strings.

- There are two type of users – those that violate rules and end up damaging the land, those that do not care; and those that are out there and have no awareness of their impacts. Users may not be aware the harm they are doing. It is a very challenging issue for public lands.
- Wildlife area goals should be presented to the public on kiosks, maps, local outreach and volunteer opportunities.
- Inform the public - send out WDFW informative emails, alerts on seasonal closures, and other information. Start a Master Recreationist program.
- How can trail apps be appropriately used on public lands? Trail apps (e.g., Tread) – the concern is illegal trails show on apps.
- Prioritize and monitor recreation use – what are the priorities and how may it change over time?
- WDFW will schedule focus topic field trips with the WAAC starting this spring.
- Concerns were raised about the budget shortfall and long-term impacts to the wildlife area. Response: legislature provided funding for operations and maintenance and recreation. Also, WDFW received a bump in operations and funding for new acquisitions.

What would members consider a successful plan for the Methow WLA?

- Key elements of the plan should be condensed into talking points. Consider an WLA user app. Connections with people are important. Communication, education, and equity access should be the focus for all users.
- The emphasis of the plan should be “to preserve and protect...”
- Creation of an innovative model that will bring people together. Things have changed so much in 10 years. Consistency with ‘Methow values’. Methow Climate Action Plan: <https://www.resilientmethow.org/climateactionplan>
- Create a volunteer program, education and outreach program which provides incentives, e.g. provide access to closed units.
Response: some areas are closed seasonally to protect resources.
- Provide background information to the users on each unit, with key objectives. Build a connection with local landowners and engagement in stewardship activities. Organize volunteers to participate in weed control and planting events.
- A plan that the Methow Wildlife Area manager feels that they can implement. Whether with more money or not, more staff or not, more volunteers, clear objectives, better direction, community support, etc.

Wrap-up

- Draft charter comments due April 5th

- Public workshop May, will notify WAAC once scheduled.
- WAAC field trips will start in the spring
- Register on the agencies volunteer website <https://wdfw.wa.gov/get-involved/volunteer>