

“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: December 2-3, 2011

Agenda Item 7.: Private Lands Program Overview - Briefing

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Presented By: Joey McCanna, Upland Game Specialist, Don Larsen, Private Lands Coordinator and Greg Schirato, Wildlife Program Deputy Assistant Director

Background:

With over 50% of Washington in private ownership, private lands are critical to WDFW’s dual mandate to protect and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats and provide sustainable, fish- and wildlife-related recreation. This briefing will provide an overview of our Private Lands Program and new state and federal monies that help us work with landowners to significantly improve and expand public access and provide habitat.

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to enhance habitat and/or provide recreational access through negotiated agreements. In recent months we have been active in priority areas across the state (map attached), providing habitat technical services to landowners and hiring staff to complete landowner agreements to jump start the expansion of our access programs.

Access

In Washington, hunters must obtain landowner permission to hunt on private land; however WDFW is working with hundreds of landowners to help hunters acquire permission. Currently, WDFW private lands access programs have over 600 landowner cooperators and over one million acres of private land under agreement in eastern and western Washington. Landowners participating in WDFW cooperative agreements retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases monetary compensation.

New efforts this year in the Blue Mountains of southeastern Washington has resulted in 38 Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements opening over 10,000 acres of private land to Feel Free to Hunt and the first year without an elk damage claim in 31 years.

Efforts in north Puget Sound sparked increased opportunities in the Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program allowing biologists to work with private landowners and install parking areas and hunting blinds in high use areas which hunters can use 7 days a week on a first come basis during the hunting season. The program is becoming popular with landowners attracting an additional 37 landowners this year.

Habitat

Because quality habitat is the foundation for both successful hunting and sustainable wildlife populations, WDFW private lands staff place an emphasis on working with landowners to enhance habitat through voluntary, incentive-based approaches. We have recently expanded the number of formal partnership we have in place in ways that best allow leveraging of WDFW resources with others, including: the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Intermountain West Joint Venture, Foster Creek Conservation District and Pheasants Forever. Using the technical expertise of our staff to help deliver conservation programs provided by the federal Farm Bill is a particularly effective means of assisting landowners with providing meaningful habitat. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been a particularly important program for both habitat and recreational access and faces an uncertain future with the current federal Farm Bill set to expire in 2012.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Access

Several public advisory groups including the Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC), Upland Game Advisory Committee, and Waterfowl Advisory Group have discussed and supported greater public access to private lands. Expansion of the program has been one of the priorities identified in the Department's Game Management Plan. A special Hunter Access Task Force, made up of hunters and landowners, was created through the GMAC. The task force was asked to review Department policies and programs and provide recommendations for changes. These activities, in addition to public input received during the Fish and Wildlife Commission's rule making process helped the Department recommend private lands regulations and policies.

The Department has also conducted several surveys that asked landowners, hunters, and the general public about a variety of private lands access issues. Surveys indicated that all groups thought that private lands were important to wildlife and wildlife-related recreation. In addition, surveys of hunters have indicated that access to private lands for hunting is one of the most important factors for the future of hunting. Landowners who were surveyed indicated a willingness to allow public access, but have concerns over liability, protection of equipment, wild fire, and safety.

All of this public involvement has lead to the development of priorities and emphasis for expanding our hunter access programs.

Habitat

Public involvement involves direct staff contacts with private landowners to determine what types of habitat projects would be of interest and compatible with their farm, ranch or forest operations. Other federal, state and local partners are then collaborated with to determine funding sources available for habitat incentives. Habitat incentive programs are shaped by input received from landowners.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None, briefing only. This is a recurring Commission request for annual updates on the Private Lands Access Program.

Draft motion language:

Briefing only.

Justification for Commission action:

Briefing only.

Communications plan:

Agency Web Site
News Releases
Feature Articles for Magazines and local News Papers
Direct email to affected hunters

Private Lands Focus Areas

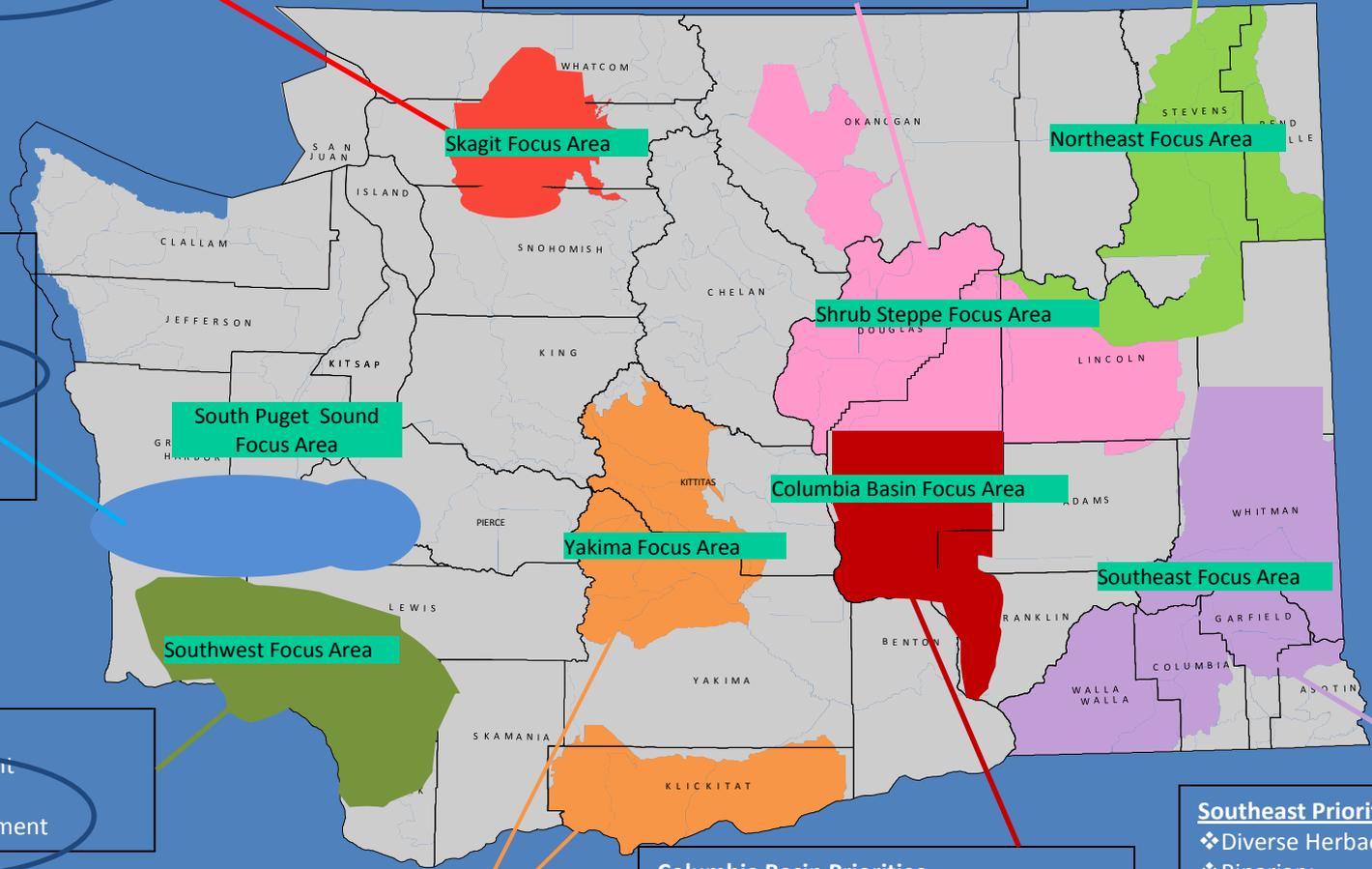
* 2009 - 2010 Priorities *

- Skagit Priorities**
- ❖ Wintering waterfowl Habitat
 - ❖ Waterfowl Hunting Access
 - ❖ Wetlands
 - ❖ Industrial Timber Access

- Shrub Steppe Priorities**
- ❖ Restoration, Protection, Improvement
 - ❖ HCP Development and Implementation
 - ❖ Connectivity
 - ❖ Riparian Habitat

- Northeast Priorities**
- ❖ Forest Management
 - Lodge pole/fire mgmt
 - Fens/Meadows
 - Riparian
 - ❖ Timberland Access

- South Puget Sound**
- ❖ Wintering Waterfowl
 - ❖ Waterfowl Hunting Access
 - ❖ Wetlands
 - ❖ Connectivity
 - ❖ Lower priority



- Yakima Priorities**
- ❖ Industrial Timberland Access
 - ❖ Oak Habitat

- Columbia Basin Priorities**
- ❖ Shrub Steppe
 - ❖ Wetlands
 - ❖ Riparian
 - ❖ Connectivity
 - ❖ Wildlife Action Plan Implementation
 - ❖ Waterfowl Quality Hunting Access

- Southeast Priorities**
- ❖ Diverse Herbaceous Habitat
 - ❖ Riparian:
 - Restoration/Improvement
 - Habitat Connectivity
 - ❖ Pheasant Hunting Access