Washington Department of
Fish and Wildlife
Wildlife Program
600 Capitol Way N, Olympia, WA 98501-1091

SHOOTING PRESERVE APPLICATION

Name: Russell Hunt Address: 1845 Rd 14 NE

City: Coulee City, WA County: Douglas Zip: 99115

Phone Number: (509) 632-5600

Number of acres to be used for shooting preserve: approx 950 acres

Legal description of land to be used as shooting preserve (attach map):

Township: 28 N Section: 3, 10, 11, 14 Range: 27 E

Are you a licensed game farmer? [X] Y [ ] N Game Farm License No.: 126137

Your right, title, or interest in said property: Leased for Hunting

Adjoining property landowners: Name: Allen Miller & Cass Gebbers Address:
* Allen Miller, 12052 Hwy 17 N, Mansfield WA 98830 P.O. Box 250, Brewster, WA 98812 - Cass Gebbers

Phone Number: (Allen Miller) (509) 632-5327 (Cass Gebbers) (509) 733-1283

(If additional room is needed please attach separate document to back of this application.)

Signature of Applicant: [signature]

Approved by Region: [signature] Comments:

Approval by Olympia: [signature] Comments: w/ mitigation recommended by region.

Signature of Reviewing Biologist: [signature]

Date approved: 9-12-2014

RECEIVED
JUN 24 2014
WILDLIFE PROGRAM

Hidden Ranch Outfitters Shooting Preserve Application

Assessment of potential impacts to Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse J. Gallie

Area Description: The proposed shooting preserve is located North of Leahy junction (St Hwy 17 and 174) (Fig.1), approximately 950 acres, and has a paved county road, power lines, interior fencing within in proposed boundaries and is mostly a dry draw with rugged slopes on either side and some upland habitat. There are also two gravel pits adjacent to this area. Grazing occurs throughout the proposed area and is seasonal in some areas and year-round in others (winter holding area at the southern end). The habitat looks heavily grazed at the southern and middle sections of this area, but most riparian vegetation has exclusion fencing. The habitat is comprised mostly of grazed shrubsteppe habitat with minimal understory, two wetland/springs/sloughs with annual/perennial vegetation mix (sweet clover, cattails, tall grasses), and two riparian areas (dogwood, willow, aspen, chokecherry). The best habitat is in the Northern section where it is more upland shrubsteppe habitat with intact understory.

Existing wildlife: Mule deer and Hungarian partridge are on site but wild pheasants and chukar are doubtful. Area is within range of sage and sharptailed grouse. Great horned owl nest in riparian area.

Proposed Activities: The area will primarily be used for year-round upland bird hunting (rooster or hen pheasant, and chukar) and bird-dog training. Birds will be purchased from Longtail Fliers, in Kimberly OR (http://longtailflyers.com) or another NPIP Certified Grower, and housed at Hidden Ranch Outfitters Game Farm (refurbished old Pitts Game Farm, about 8 miles to the SE) until needed by clients. All birds undergo disease testing upon importation to WA by the Dept. of Ag, out of the Ellensburg Office and onsite during summer months.

Clients will purchase birds (10-15) and they will be planted on the reserve shortly before clients will hunt/dog train. The vast majority of hunting trips are going to take place during the September-April time frame, and small number of dog training trips from May-September. The hopes will be for at least 1,200 birds to be released over the entire year on site, and with respect to pheasants, the plan is for at least ¾ of them to be roosters. This is approximately 2-4 hunting trips per week Sept-April.

Grazing is the primary activity use by the landowners, and will take priority over this hunting lease. The current agreement with the landowners will be no hunting when cattle are grazing on site. This will be primarily during late spring and summer for most of the area, and winter in the southern portions of the area. There could also be other grazing restriction during fall/winter, but difficult to predict.

Possible Impacts to Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse: As a whole, the area covered under this proposal is low quality grouse habitat. Consistent grazing on the middle and southern sections of this area has depleted much of the understory that is necessary for nesting and brood rearing. According to WDFW/WSU research, Stonehouse (2013) found that both grouse species avoided paved roads, powerlines, trees, and steep terrain, all of which are present within this proposed area. The Northern section of this preserve by Road 24 is probably the best grouse habitat (actually the only place where grouse have been observed) where it is away from most of the avoided structures and upland habitat is in better shape.

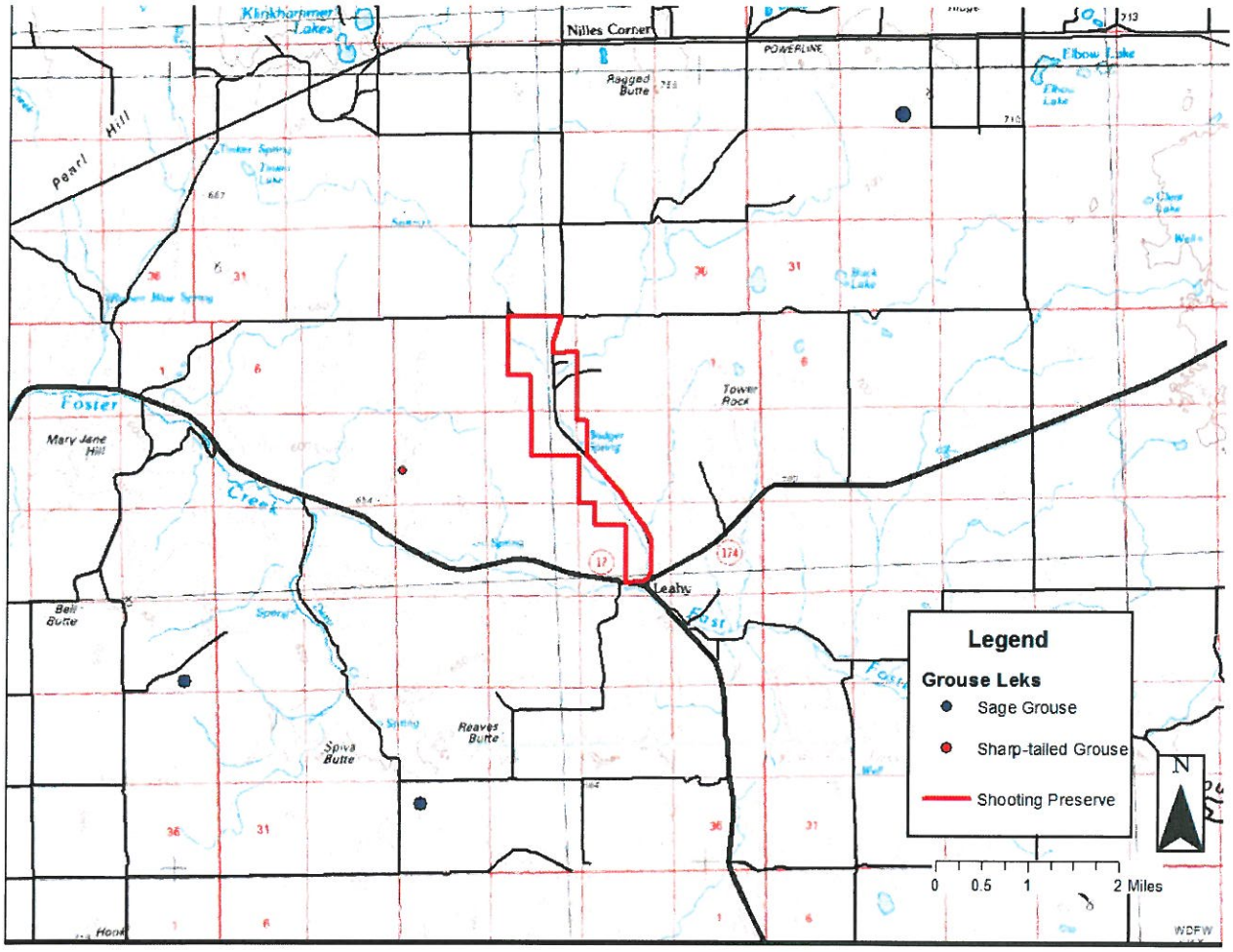
Leks: There are 4 active leks within 5 miles of this area. Three sage grouse leks that are 3:3, 4.3, and 4.4 miles away from the boundary of this preserves. The one sharp-tailed lek was actually inactive this past year or may have moved due to CRP field mowing, but either way it is 1.4 miles away from the preserve. WDFW's recovery plans recommend avoiding activities during spring breeding season (lekking, nesting, and early brood rearing) within 1.2 miles (2km) of active sharp-tailed leks and 4 miles of active sage grouse leks. This area is mostly outside of those buffers (the 3.3 mile distance includes 2 state Hwy's, cattle containment area, and a rock quarry) so there are likely to be limited impacts to grouse during the vulnerable breeding and nesting timeframe.

Winter habitat: Riparian vegetation is heavily used for winter habitat by sharp-tailed grouse. This dependency concentrates them in these areas and makes them more conspicuous as they are up in trees/shrubs where they can be seen easier by people and predators. Two such areas exist on this proposed preserve, however they are not the preferred riparian species, and there is a great horned owl nest in one of them. None the less, limited riparian cover in this county usually means that all of it is important. We have not observed sharp-tailed grouse in these riparian areas, but we have not dedicated any efforts specifically to do so. Grouse in these areas could be more vulnerable to disturbance from hunters and possibly make them vulnerable to being shot from mistaken identity. Other areas of winter concentrations in riparian vegetation such as those at West Foster Creek are also open to hunting up until mid-Jan and it is not known if public hunting impacts negatively them or if there is any incidental take.

Incidental Take: With open bird hunting seasons on our WLAs and throughout E. WA during Oct-Jan where both grouse species occur, incidental take from mistaken identity is always a possibility and probably happens. So most of the hunting on this preserve will be no different than what already occurs. However, two notable facts that are different are the potential to hunt hen pheasants, which resemble sharp-tailed grouse, and extra months of hunting from Feb-April. These factors increase the chance of incidental take over the regular hunting structure that exists for the general public.

Disease/Competition: Testing will be in place to detect and prevent introduction of avian diseases, but anything is possible. STG and SG recovery plans call for not establishing pheasant release sites in areas where grouse recovery efforts are ongoing. Beholding to this theoretically eliminates all of Douglas County. The prevailing thought process is that most if not all farm raised birds are dead within two weeks of release due to hunting and predation. The chance of spreading disease from pheasant to wild grouse should be low.

Mitigation: The applicant is well aware of grouse recovery efforts going on in the County and is committed to minimizing the impacts and potential take of grouse. Ideas talked about including having all clients go over a brochure and verbal warnings on site indicating the presence of and identification of prairie grouse with respect to target game birds. Posting signs that are currently used for Wildlife Areas would also be incorporated. The limited release of hen pheasants was discussed as this would be the most likely bird mistaken for a grouse and possible seasonal or area restrictions on release of hen pheasants could reduce this threat further. The entire proposed area is visible from a County Road and would provide easy monitoring for Enforcement patrol. The applicant was agreeable to extra patrolling

by Enforcement and surveys by WDFW to determine if there is winter use by sharp-tailed grouse in the riparian areas. The limits imposed by grazing allow for some built in protection. Areas that will be off-limits during the winter for cattle occur on some of the riparian areas where sharp-tails would likely be as well. Limited hunting from April-September would protect broods as they develop and disperse.

Douglas County