

Island Unit Advisory Group – Charter

I. Background

The Island Unit covers approximately 268 acres on two islands in a tidally-influenced reach of the South Fork Skagit River within the Skagit River delta. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) owns and manages the Island Unit as part of the 17,000-acre Skagit Wildlife Area. WDFW has actively farmed the area since the 1950s to provide enhanced winter forage for waterfowl. The site is sometimes referred to as the “farmed island” and is a productive and popular waterfowl hunting area.

WDFW needs to evaluate how to respond to a changing landscape on the Island Unit. Aging infrastructure, anticipated sea level rise, and changing habitat needs are factors the agency must consider as we plan for the future. Chinook salmon, which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, use tidal estuaries to rear before heading out to Puget Sound. The Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan identifies estuarine habitat as the highest priority for recovering salmon in the area.

WDFW is considering a habitat restoration project on the Island Unit and will assess several options that range from no restoration to restoring all 268 acres. WDFW will evaluate options based on state requirements and policies, as well as community values and input from the advisory group and the public.

II. Purpose

WDFW is convening the Island Unit Advisory Group to get input and feedback related to changing land management challenges and opportunities at the Island Unit from diverse interests. The Advisory Group will provide input as WDFW develops and assesses alternatives ranging from no restoration to full restoration to address failing infrastructure and balance WDFW’s obligations, objectives and community needs. The geographic focus area of the group will be on the Island Unit property; however, the group need not be limited to thinking of solutions within the Island Unit.

III. Membership

The Island Unit Advisory Group is intended to represent a range of interests including waterfowl hunters, recreational interests, agriculture, environmental conservation and salmon recovery interests. WDFW staff will participate in the Group as Ex Officio participants. Tribes and governments are also invited to participate as Ex Officio members.

IV. Expectations of Island Unit Advisory Group Members

Advisory Group members agree to reach out to their broader community of interest and strive to represent their community's perspective in Advisory Group discussions. Direct participation of all Advisory Group members is essential to success. For that reason, members are asked to make every effort to attend meetings. Advisory Group meetings will be in-person, in or near La Conner or Mount Vernon. There also may be a public feedback session for Advisory Group members to hear input from the broader community. If this meeting occurs, Advisory Group members are expected to attend those to hear others' concerns and ideas first-hand.

All Advisory Group members are expected to participate throughout the duration of the process. If a member must leave the process before it is finished, he or she is asked to provide in writing the reasons for leaving, and WDFW will work to replace his or her participation with another representative with similar interests and experience.

V. Advisory Group Ground Rules

Advisory Group members will work with the facilitator to develop ground rules for meeting conduct and participation. Draft ground rules will be provided by the Advisory Group facilitator as a starting place for discussion.

[The WDFW Advisory Group Handbook](#) provides the background and role of advisory groups for WDFW and provides information about two state laws that pertain to advisory groups, the Open Meetings Act and the Public Records Act.

Meetings will be open to the public. Meetings will be announced on the WDFW website. The Island Unit Advisory Group's recommendations will be made available for public comment.

VI. Advisory Group Input and WDFW Decision-making Authority

The Island Unit Advisory Group is advisory only. Ultimately, WDFW will decide which alternative to pursue for the Island Unit. However, WDFW is committed to hearing from affected stakeholders and addressing, to the degree possible, their input and concerns regarding the issues and considerations used to develop and select a preferred alternative. The Island Unit Advisory Group process will include facilitator-assisted collaborative discussions at a series of meetings, as well as between-meeting work.