

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.