

Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

November 15, 2018

West Thurston County Fire Protection District, 10828 Littlerock Road, Olympia

Attendees

WAAC Members

- Elizabeth Rodrick, Black Hills Audubon Society
- Sharron Coontz, Friends of Rocky Prairie
- Diana Holbrook, Neighbor
- Diane Snyder, Scatter Creek Stables, owner
- Bill Wamsley, Resident
- Laura Keepers, (substitute for Joan Fleming) horseback rider
- Bonnie Blessing, (substitute for Bill Brookreson) Native Plant Society
- Patrick Dunn, Center for Natural Lands Management
- Jackie Lovette, Neighbor
- Kurt Snyder, Washington Waterfowl Association, Grays Harbor Chapter
- Cal Palmer, Northwest Field Trial Council

Absent: Tim Wilson, Thurston County Weed Board; Thom Woodruff, Capital Land Trust; Mara Healy, Thurston Conservation District, Robert Scott, West Thurston Regional Fire Authority; Jim Knowles, Pheasants Forever.

Public: Stacy Brown, Bruce Holbrook

WDFW

- Brian Calkins, Wildlife Regional Program Manager
- Darric Lowery, Wildlife Area Manager - Scatter Creek, South Sound and Olympic wildlife areas
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager
- Melinda Posner, Planning, Recreation and Outreach Section Manager

Welcome & Introductions – Brian Calkins

Brian welcomed everyone to the meeting. He shared that he worked as a wildlife area manager and noted the importance of advisory committees in developing the plans. After self-introductions, he thanked all of the members for making the commitment to this effort. One of

the most important aspects of this effort is having a committee group to help guide this effort – which is all about writing a new and better wildlife area plan for this area.

Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Planning & Process – Lauri

Lauri shared copies of recently completed plans. She reviewed the agenda and provided an overview of the planning process, starting with the agency mission, strategic plan goals and the purpose of the wildlife area plan:

- Developing a new vision
- Robust public involvement
- Ensures lands are managed consistent with mission and funding obligations
- Identifies priority actions and integrates the work of all agency programs

Roles & Expectations - Lauri

The draft charter was provided at the meeting and will be sent out to the group for comments, which outlines roles and responsibilities. Lauri described the role of the committee, including sharing information and providing feedback from the groups that advisory committee members represent. Decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the department but the hope is that the committee can work together and come to consensus when possible. She outlined discussion guidelines and mentioned the Wildlife Area Management Planning Framework document, which summarizes agency priorities and programs that guide all wildlife areas.

Lauri will provide to the WAAC members, a link to the Framework document, a copy of the draft charter and the PowerPoint presentation along with the draft meeting notes.

The Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Advisory website up will be live soon. All materials from the meetings will be added to this website including notes, charter, agendas, and the list of meeting dates. The WAAC will receive the notice of the upcoming public meeting. The department encourages WAAC members to attend.

A draft forest plan has been developed, and copies were handed out.

Draft Schedule

The public meeting for the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area will occur in February. Planning teams will startup early in 2019 and a draft plan is estimated to be written by late fall 2019.

This plan will include South Puget Sound Wildlife Area, which has a separate planning team and public process. The public meeting for the South Puget Sound planning process is going to be held on December 19th. A new WAAC will be formed for that group as well.

Scatter Creek WLA Overview - Darric

There are six units within the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, totaling 3,300 acres.

See Power Point presentation for wildlife area unit details.

Comments:

Patrick: There has been some question about the funding and some concerns about whether bird dog training was the intended use. Good to see the list of funds. Is it the WDFW wildlife funds that support the hunt dog training?

Elizabeth: RCO bonds were the funding source for the first purchase in 1964. First purchase was made with RCO bonds; that was the funding for the recreational purposes of the bird dog training.

Note: funding was also provided by National Park Service, Land and Water Conservation Fund and RCO Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program; WDFW Wildlife Fund.

Water Access Sites: the plan will include an inventory of the water access areas associated with the wildlife area.

Key Species

- Taylor Checkerspot
- Mazama pocket gopher
- Oregon spotted frog
- Elk
- Steelhead and coho
- Olympic mudminnow
- Oregon vesper sparrow
- Mardon skipper
- Streaked horned lark

Key Issues (from Internal Scoping Meeting – August 2018)

- Weed control
- Oak/prairie restoration
- Skookumchuck Restoration
- Forest health
- Field trials
- Parking lot expansion
- Recreation demand
- Fire management

- Limited law enforcement
- Acquisitions
- Cultural resource preservation – multiple historic – Miller Brewhouse burned in 2017
- Capacity operations and maintenance
- Designated trails
- Dumping and vandalism
- Access and opportunity – limited access to some units; expand opportunity in other areas
- Potential for waterfowl enhancements – Duck Stamp funds
- Facilities and secure storage – lots of equipment stolen and damaged; ties in with dumping and vandalism

Comment: The barn was used for storage that was lost in the fire, so you don't have any place to store anymore? Yes. We currently store equipment at Davis Creek.

Recreation

- Fishing
- Hunting
- Hiking
- Horseback riding
- Dog training
- Dog walking
- Photography

Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck are pheasant release sites; a very popular hunting activity.

What is field trials? A dog training activity that is popular on a couple of the units.

Stakeholder database – Lauri asked for feedback about the database; if members know of other groups or individuals that should be on the mailing list, let Darric or Lauri know.

Additions include: Streamside Conservancy, Friends of Tenino, and Salmon Creek Neighborhood Association

Discussion and Comments

Recreation:

Comment: Elizabeth- it's important to acknowledge that all areas are different. Recreation and public access, including commercial and hunting, has to be based on what the land can handle in terms of ecosystems and access; some have expectation that riding horses at one area means you should be able to ride horses at all areas; in some units there are sensitive species that can't tolerate that level of activity.

Diana – Time of year makes a difference as to what activities are acceptable.

Cal – Agreed; the challenge is the judgment should be based on hard science, facts and supporting evidence.

Response: Camping and bike riding have come up in the past – not all activities are consistent with the objectives of the project; needs to be a balance with science and interests.

Comment: Jackie – Is it legal to do trapping? Yes, trapping does occur and is legal – West Rocky historically, trappers must get license and follow hunting guidelines; should I worry about stepping into a trap?

Response: Body gripping traps are not legal in Washington; except by special permit to alleviate problem on private property. It is required that they be marked.

Comment: Bonnie - Do groups hunt during wildlife nesting seasons? What are the impacts and timing of organized hunting? Also, concerned about the spread of noxious weeds through horse hooves; as well as human boots.

Kurt – The times that the Scatter Creek is closed for dogs running free is four months and it used to be two months, to protect the Taylor checkerspot butterfly. Does dogs running free occur on other units? Why was it extended to four months?

Response: April 1st to end of July is the season for ground nesting birds, this is consistent across the state; not sure why it was changed from 2 to 4 months.

Kurt – At Scatter Creek, dog training allowed off leash dogs since it's a year-round site; the north unit does not have the same restriction; the four month closure started four years ago. I was told it was for the checkerspot butterfly.

Response: The checkerspot butterfly habitat is protected on the unit to prevent people and dogs from entering. There was a trail closure on Scatter Creek south – that was a more recent shift to reduce impacts to the butterfly because the outer loop goes through the heart of the habitat area for that species. Over time, the hope is the species recover enough to allow access.

Comment: Kurt – Will you be mowing areas there? And will we have more access for off-leash dogs; mainly just to the west of the barn?

Response: We will continue to mow for invasive species control. Access for off lease dogs will not change on the south unit.

Skookumchuck Unit:

Comment: Bill – I am curious about Trans Alta and the lease, longevity and the future of that operation, the impending license and mitigation management agreement that would affect that unit.

Response: Darric – we have a mitigation agreement with Trans Alta which will be revisited in two years. We manage the unit with TransAlta.

Lauri – The Chehalis Basin Partnership is considering a major salmon restoration plan on the Skookumchuck River, including options for dam removal.

Comment: Elizabeth- The original purpose of the unit is mitigation for the dam and would have to continue for the life of the dam.

Laura – I'm alarmed. My daughter lives at the end of that road – will that affect those properties?

Response: Darric – the restoration options will have to consider all impacts; still to be determined. There will be a separate public process.

Tribes:

Comment: Bill – how will the department work with the tribes in development of this plan? Understand that interested parties include the tribes. Other tribes can hunt on these areas if they have those rights.

Response - Brian – we sent letters to 13 tribes inviting them participate in the planning process. Typically tribes do not become a part of the advisory committee. As far as hunting, some of the tribes have off-reservation rights on open and unclaimed lands. Chehalis is not a treaty tribe and at the current time does not have off-reservation rights. Yes, other tribes can hunt on the wildlife area.

Railroad impacts:

Comment - Bill – How does the rail line affect the movement of wildlife? Oakville line is being used more frequently. Sharron – could come into play at West Rocky too.

Response: No affect. It parallels the freeway. Bear and coyote use the corridor.

Vandalism and Illegal Dumping:

Comment: Jackie – say more about vandalism and illegal dumping. How does enforcement coordinate a response, and how is that connected to sheriff, have we considered cameras?

Response: Darric – sheriff will look for folks around the wildlife area but they don't play an active role in managing; our enforcement officers scan for hunting and fishing violators; game cameras can be used for identifying and tracking but it takes a lot of evidence to convict. Eyes in the Woods-like program, is finding funding and that something that we can support in the plan.

Western Gray Squirrel:

Comment: Reintroduction of the western gray squirrel – curious about that and the how invasive eastern gray squirrel – would impact those re-introduction efforts.

Response: Darric – Scatter Creek was an option for a western gray squirrel reintroduction; still feasible; eastern gray squirrel is on some of the units; planning team can provide some more feedback on this issue.

Protecting listed species:

Comment: Pat – In 2006 we knew the importance of dog training and purchased replacement lands. Since then the status of many rare species has increased. It would be beneficial for the agency to investigate and understand the benefits to other land owners. The species affecting the most landowners is the Mazama pocket gopher, it's a significant issue. The Scatter Creek Wildlife Area serves as the core population for Thurston County's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Economics support Joint Base Lewis McCord. Open space is important to the community. How will this be discussed in the plan? The Black River Unit, a whole reach of that river is protected by nonprofits, by the state, so that's a significant consideration. The plan should consider that and additional actions, e.g. checkerspot – this is the only population off of Joint Base that is functioning so it's critical to allowing the Joint Base operations to continue. Preserve these species and get them off the list so we don't have to worry about, result in property take and lost revenue.

Elizabeth – Second that – only 3% of the native prairie remains. As private lands are more developed, it puts more pressure on public lands to conserve. I recall in 2006 there was recognition of that and planning for the future to purchase additional lands for dog training and shift that activity to another location. Was Davis Unit part of that?

Response: Darric – Davis Creek and West Rocky Prairie, and Glacial Heritage were not in the plan. This wildlife area has doubled since 2006. New acquisitions could double it again in half the amount of time. Do we need to shift recreational uses?

Brian – Taking pressures off private landowners impacted by restrictions related to listed species was exactly the thinking we used in putting a recent land acquisition grant proposal together.

Comment: Pat – Identify the species that Thurston County has identified in their Habitat Conservation Plan. Oregon vesper sparrow is not listed but was recently petitioned for emergency listing. That is one example of a new challenge for us to meet. Scatter Creek is meeting that challenge through multiple use.

Elizabeth – There is a Thurston County Habitat Conservation Plan – what about the department's HCP?

Response: The department is not moving forward with the HCP for wildlife areas, however the conservation measures will be packaged at a later time and integrated into the management planning process.

Comment: Sharron – I think what Pat is getting at is a need for public outreach, to share the message and help people understand. Having Joint Base folks here helped people understand the importance and led to support for our efforts.

Diana – People have different reactions in the community about the pocket gopher. I learned from the fire about the concern for dry grass and whether it should be mowed – but isn't the butterfly constraining the mowing. It's more complicated than you think.

Response: Darric – the best way to address the tall grasses is prescribed fire. Historically, grasses and forbs were much lower growing. The community asked why don't we mow, some of that has to do with funding and the timing of mowing for sensitive species – for both wildlife and grasses.

Volunteer Opportunities:

Comment: Cal – the dog community has expressed a willingness to provide resources to do more mowing.

Response: Darric – Including fence work and trail work – providing volunteers for those will be helpful. Including fire breaks maintenance. The wildlife that swept through last year didn't obey any of those but we're working on plans to be more fire-safe. The fire chief is a member of this WAAC and is willing to work with us on a fire management plan. Vegetation and invasive species management is a challenge on these units. We appreciate the offers and would like to talk more about getting a group of volunteers to help.

Darric – As species get listed and/or new recreation activities come about, we need to have sound science and an approach to evaluate and document effects. Management decisions need to be made so we have something we can look back to and helps support consistent approach for how activities or actions are assessed.

Forest Management:

Response: Darric – Scatter Creek forest project which has been in the works for past 3-5 years includes removal of conifers impacting the oak woodland. The project ended up being too small of a project for timber bidding. The 2017 fire occurred and this year we combined north and south project to do salvage projects of burned timber and more oak release and conversion. The logging cleanup will be done on south after Thanksgiving, then we will move to the north and hoped to be done by mid-December. The remaining slash and debris will need to be burned, we don't have the funding until next winter to finish.

Comment: Elk was identified as issue in opening remarks – can you say more?

Response: Darric – Elk occur on Skookumchuck and West Rocky Prairie units. We want to provide forage and respite from other pressures. The Davis Creek Unit is site for hoof rot so that's a monitoring area.

Comment: Pat – Drone usage is coming up on our property. Consider addressing on the wildlife area. Consider other technologies that may be coming to these areas in the future. National refuges are not allowing them and there are impacts beyond wildlife harassment.

Diana – Is there jurisdiction over the air space? Is there ability for the department to regulate the air space?

Response: Darric – The agency adopted a policy on use of drones related to hunting. The recreation strategy process is considering the use of drones.

Brian – We dealt with this in Region 6; we have it covered because aircraft requires a permit by the director, and a drone is considered an aircraft. Does it interfere with hunting as well as species? We lack some of the data to make those decisions.

Comment: Kurt – Would really like to see a certain unit opened up for waterfowl hunting – within the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area.

Response: The South Puget Sound is going to have a separate WAAC. We will carry that comment over to that planning process.

Additional Written Comments received from William Wamsley – December 11, 2018

Issues concerns

Wildfire prevention, strategies to manage wildfires. Continue and enhance plans w/ local Fire Districts & others. Establish fire trails, other prevention efforts?

Monitor and continue enhancements post 2017 wildfire.

Riparian habitat appears to be “very open” along Scatter Creek and post 2017 wildfire. Consider habitat restoration for riparian vegetation?

Controlled burns implement as needed and when possible for management of habitat.

Field office central location for efficiency

Issues specific to Scatter Creek:

Pets on leash (enforcement), high recreation use & impact on habitat, horse riding use at north end- appears to be for use off WSDFW lands (private lands) compared to wildlife area, high impact to parking area, enforcement of Discover Pass.

Traffic safety related to road shoulder parking (183Rd St) of vehicles and management of firearms, hunting dogs during hunting season.

Reviewed issues from page 40-42 and concur with many of the items identified in the 2006 South Puget Sound Wildlife area plan as it relates to Year 2018-2019. How have some of the issues been resolved and or continue to be of concern and what new actions are needed for management. Issues including: Access/Recreation, Wildlife, Habitat, Enforcement, Wildlife Area Infrastructure, and monitor-survey-inventory sections.

Consider update of weed management plans

Other more information needed regarding issues related to Skookumchuck Plan (Page 6, SPS & NOWA 2017 Mgmt. Plan) “the last unresolved chapter of the elk forage mgmt....” ??

Also had some concerns of a short lease period (3 years?) for the Davis Creek unit.

Next Steps:

A WAAC field trip will be held next year, most likely during the spring.

Consider other times to meet during the day. Lauri had a request from one WAAC member to have the meeting earlier in the day. Overall it sounds like folks are flexible with time.

Consider having more communication as a meeting group – to share questions/comments and have other discussions to provide comments (e.g. Facebook).

The WAAC is interested in meeting more frequently – to review work of the planning team and to provide additional input about priorities.

The agency will provide more information about how the agency sets management priorities. The core team including Brian, Darric and Lauri, have the responsibility to take this group's interests back to the planning team and also to share the progress of the planning team with the committee for their response.

Schedule

- Public meeting timeline – January 2019
- Planning team develops goals and objectives, draft plan in winter/spring 2019
- WAAC review of plan mid 2020
- Public review draft in 2020