

Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

October 23, 2019

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
- Joan Fleming, Backcountry Horsemen
- Diane Snyder, Scatter Creek Stables, owner
- Bill Wamsley, Resident
- Robert Scott, West Thurston Regional Fire Authority
- Thom Woodruff, Capital Land Trust
- Chris Green (for Cal Palmer) Northwest Field Trial Council

Absent: Bill Brookreson, Native Plant Society; Patrick Dunn, Center for Natural Lands Management; Tim Wilson, Thurston County Weed Board; Mara Healy, Thurston Conservation District; Jim Knowles, Pheasants Forever; Kurt Snyder, Washington Waterfowl Association, Grays Harbor Chapter; Cal Palmer, Northwest Field Trial Council; Jackie Lovette, Neighbor.

Public: Deborah Green, Norman Green, Bruce Holbrook

WDFW

- Brian Calkins, Wildlife Regional Program Manager
- Darric Lowery, Wildlife Area Manager - Scatter Creek Wildlife Area
- Lauri Vigue, Lands Project Manager

Welcome & Introductions – Brian Calkins

Brian welcomed everyone to the meeting. 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 reviewed the agenda for the meeting, the purpose of today's meeting is to update the WAAC members on the planning process, and to collect comments from WAAC on the draft goals and objectives, and the vision statement. Lauri provided a PowerPoint presentation which reviews the roles and expectations of the WAAC, timeline for the planning process, draft goals, focal species, and next steps.

Mission of the agency: *to preserve, protect, perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.*

At the beginning of the wildlife area planning process the agency had planned to combine the South Puget Sound and the Scatter Creek wildlife areas into one management plan. Due to capacity issues it was decided each wildlife area would have their own plan.

Purpose of the wildlife area plan:

- Sets a 10-year vision
- Considers public and stakeholder input
- Ensures lands are managed consistent with mission and funding obligations
- Identifies priority actions and plans for implementation
- Integrates fish, habitat, and wildlife programs

Role and expectations – *the role of the advisory committee is to provide public and other stakeholders' perspective in the WDFW wildlife area planning and management activities.* The Final version Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Charter was emailed to members. Copies of the November 2018 WAAC meeting notes and the March 2019 public meeting were provided.

Timeline

The draft wildlife area management plan will be ready for WAAC review by early 2020, with a two-week comment period. The tribes review the draft plan at about the same time. After internal review, the plan will go into a 30-SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act) review in the early spring. We expect the plan to be finalized by summer 2020. Expect the next WAAC meeting to occur in January – with the main purpose of collecting comments on the draft plan.

Scatter Creek Vision Statement

The draft vision statement:

We envision resilient prairie, oak woodlands, and wetland habitats that support diverse native flora and fauna unique to the South Puget Sound Region, while providing quality recreation, education, and research opportunities.

- Add ag based activities – grasslands that benefit waterfowl, deer and elk
- Add Providing resources for the benefit of the local community

Scatter Creek Draft Goals

- Maintain or improve the ecological integrity of priority sites.
- Improve ecological integrity of South Puget Sound prairie, oak woodlands and forests by protecting, restoring and/or maintaining these critical habitats.
- Achieve species diversity at levels consistent with healthy ecosystems.
- Maintain and enhance game bird habitat.
- Maintain and enhance waterfowl habitat.
- Maintain and enhance elk habitat and provide recreation opportunities.
- Support and maintain appropriate recreation opportunities.
- Offer multiple and varied opportunities for stakeholder participation and engagement.
- Maintain productive and positive working relationships with neighbors, partners, and permittees.
- Properly train, equip, and license wildlife area staff to meet operation and management needs of the wildlife area.

Scatter Creek Focal Species

Focal species are defined as species that will receive the focus of management in the new wildlife area management plan. Focal species are often identified in grants received for acquisitions. The list of focal species was determined at the planning team.

Focal species for the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area include:

- Elk, waterfowl, pheasant
- Pocket gopher, western gray squirrel, Taylor's checkerspot, Puget blue, Mardon skipper, Sonora skipper, Oregon spotted frog
- Olympic mudminnow
- Rose checkermallow

Comment: we need to add more rare plants to this list. Add water howellia

Comment: Why aren't all T&E species listed as focal species for the plan.

Response: All state and federal listed species, priority habitats and species, and species of greatest conservation need will be included in a table in the main body of the plan. The agency does not have the capacity to manage for every species listed in this table. Therefore we have to prioritize.

Restoration Planning - Darric

The unit specific habitat management plans will be organized in one document and will be included as an appendix in the wildlife area management plan. For prairie restoration, site plans for prairie restoration will be based on earlier work from Dave Hays.

The weed management plan will be included in the appendix of the management plan. Benefits from some of the noxious weeds will be identified, e.g. tansy ragwort is a beneficial nectar source for the listed and SGCN butterfly species. The weed management plan will be customized per each unit. Includes additional weed species beyond what is required. Scotch broom – benefits some species.

Comment: What is the focus of managing scotch broom?

Response: It provides structure or hiding and browse. Scotch broom is not managed for a species or habitat benefit. There is some evidence that species like Mazama Pocket Gopher to eat the roots Scotch Broom on occasion, but is not a preferred food resource for the species.

From the fire standpoint, scotch broom is very difficult to deal with, increases the threat to homes.

The forest management plan – is in the process of being reviewed internally. It will include the benefits and adverse effects on the landscape – including a broader view for all units and specific actions for individual focused units. We will table review for the next WAAC meeting.

Draft Objective Comments

Objective 1. Add climate resilience to the objective.

Objective 2A. What is meant by commercial treatment? It is the value of the product coming off the land. Sites that need treatment for oaks are free to grow – by removing conifers. We use ecological integrity standards.

Objective 2E. Violet prairie acquisition – provides high value rather than a sub-development. Many partners are working on this proposal. The property just relisted for sale. We are still talking to the owner. Thurston County is interested in mitigation for pocket gopher. We are open to working with Thurston County. Currently there are two grants for the acquisition funds (Washington Wildlife Recreation Program (WWRP)/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Section 6). Did the value of property of increased due to extension of city boundaries? We do not know that at this time, but there are some inherent property value benefits associated with having property in city jurisdiction.

There is a private timber company (Port Blakley) next to Scatter Creek Wildlife Area – is the property being sold? This impacts horseback riding. Regarding the neighboring new landowner - how would we work with them? Port Blakley – WAAC member urged WDFW to contact new landowner in order to influence their management adjacent to our lands. Response: We have heard that was well. I know that for DNR and Port Blakely it was not a reasonable investment for them and WDFW does not have resources pursue the property.

Do we still have funding for acquiring West Rocky Prairie? Yes. One of the grants expired. The money was moved to another phase of the project. The second round of grant funding still

remains, but the first round of grant funding for the project have expired and returned to RCO/USFWS to be reallocated to other projects.

Objective 4A. Where is the pressure on sensitive habitats (pheasant hunting)? At Scatter Creek the public comments included having more areas for upland bird hunting. This was also emphasized by the planning team. This activity is focused on Davis Creek Unit and it has an agricultural lease.

Goal 3. Why not include streaked horn lark? It is currently not a focus in this current plan. A population exists at the airport. This will be re-evaluated in the future.

Is Mardon skipper going to be reintroduced at West Rocky Prairie? It was a historically present on this unit. Yes, in the future. Currently we have no rearing plan for Mardon at this point.

Add objective 9C. Enlist volunteers to build and monitor nest and roost boxes for wildlife (bluebirds, purple martins, slender-billed nuthatch, white-breasted nuthatch, and bats).

Objective 3K. beaver management – is critical for the Oregon spotted frog management. Beaver occurs on Beaver and Allen's creeks – the goal of the agency is to focus on keeping beavers on the landscape – by monitoring and trapping.

Who can or cannot stop beavers? Beavers can now be relocated – people can still remove them. They are nature's engineers; we advocate to leave them on the landscape. WDFW can now certify people to relocate beavers, WDFW issues permits for this activity.

Objective 3E. Protect, restore and create habitat for the Oregon spotted frog - WDFW should make comments on the West Rocky Prairie Unit next door property sale. We have to wait until there is a permit in the county. There is an application now. Conversations are ongoing internally. Theresa Nation, Habitat Program Biologist, will be the lead on collecting WDFW comments.

Objective 4.B. Are turkeys being introduced into all three areas? They are present at Skookumchuck. No recent records at Scatter Creek and West Rocky Prairie units. Violet Prairie has two flocks of turkeys – for a total of 28 individuals. If not currently in Scatter Creek or West Rocky Prairie, they should not be introduced. Acorns (turkeys main food source) are essential food items for over 100 species of vertebrates (deer, squirrels, crows, jays, rabbits, raccoons, quail, wood ducks). Having turkeys re-introduced on the units would deprive other species of a food source.

Objective 3.C. Who will do the bat surveys? Our biologists. They are critical for pollinators and land management.

Objective 8.B. Will the duck blind consider ADA and vehicle access? Yes

What is the potential for trail extension on the Gate and Belmore trail systems? When the county comes up with a plan – stakeholders are interested. Black River is a key location for access off Mima-Gate Rd.

8. E./L/M. Regarding West Rocky Prairie Unit improving access. There is quite a challenge due to plant species and habitat concerns. Forested area and wetland are not accessible. Horseback riding feasibility needs to be assessed. Horse activity is limited to the Scatter Creek north, Skookumchuck, and Davis Creek units. Horseback riding should not occur on West Rocky Prairie Unit or a new wildlife area with sensitive species. This is not a wildlife-oriented recreation.

Concern over the new office footprint on Scatter Creek north. Is it possible to create a trail that connects to the north parking area along the road? Very possible. The office construction fence will shrink back. Will the parking lot be paved? Graveled, parking area will be re-graded. What is the cost for the new office? \$600,000.

What is the status of recreation planning? Will it help define what is appropriate fish and wildlife recreation? We just hired a new section manager, Joel Sisolak, and he will be re-starting the recreation planning process.

Is there any fishing recreation on the wildlife area? Skookumchuck Unit the primary. Scatter Creek Unit the next – for cutthroat, followed by Davis Creek.

Objective 10B. Fire management plan: Robert Scott, Fire Chief – there is the need to eliminate latter fuels, 15-30 feet surrounding structures. How will this impact the surrounding habitat? Conifers have microhabitat and they benefit pollinators. When dealing with latter fuels we need to think strategically – it is worse in the dry years. There is concern with prairies – a high fire risk with a group or single trees are a concern, with potential to spread. Access and maintaining fire breaks are the main concerns. One solution is to add fire access through gates every ¼ to ½ mile. There are pullouts - county right-of-way concerns.

Action item: Darric will directly work with Chief Scott to develop a list of concerns and recommendations and bring it back to the planning team for the fire management plan.

During dog trials there is a concern of dogs getting hit on 183rd road in the summer. Is there an option to mow the vegetation 50 yards from the road? It will slow down the fire. It hasn't been an issue. A good firebreak - helps. If we build roads and/or fire breaks we have to develop an Habitat Conservation Plan in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Will recreation trails and improved facilities be considered in the final plan? Yes, (objectives 8 E/L) include improved recreational facilities. It does not mean it is funded. Measures identified in the management plan will provide a good source of documentation for applying for grants applications – adds credibility with the Recreation Conservation Office.

10A. Easements on WRP – has to do with the Beaver Creek culvert issue. A large bridge is needed, and we do not have funding for the construction. Access should be on the east side.

Change wording in the objective to: Develop an approach to develop easements to access to WRP.

Wildlife Area Update

- Darric conducted WAAC wildlife area tours in the spring 2019.
- The new office is currently being constructed on the south unit.
- The Sheatsley parcel will be purchased soon. The acquisition was on hold due to a match issue.
- New acquisitions in progress include the Violet Prairie and the Mima Creek unit for the Oregon spotted frog protection. The Davis Creek unit expansion is in the agency acquisition approval process.
- Prescribed fire activities occurred in the fall on the Scatter Creek and West Rocky Prairie units.
- Timber harvest occurred on the Scatter Creek Unit and forest treatment scoping occurred on the West Rocky Prairie Unit.
- Pollinator surveys occurred on Scatter Creek and West Rocky Prairie units.
- Pheasant releases occurred on Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck units.
- Field trial and hunt tests occurred on Scatter Creek and Davis Creek units. Field improvements for hunting and trials occurred on the Davis Creek Unit.
- Agriculture activities occurred (mowing, planting, harvest) on the Davis Creek Unit.
- Habitat enhancements included: prairie enhancements on Scatter Creek Unit; oak protection on Davis Creek; willow removal, brush mowing occurred on West Rocky Prairie Unit; scotch broom removal on Glacial Heritage Unit; and mowing for Oregon spotted frog and brush clearing on Black River Unit.

Next steps

- The draft wildfire area management plan will be reviewed internally by the planning team in December/January.
- WAAC and Tribal review of the draft plan – January 2020.
- The next WAAC meeting will be January/February 2020.
- SEPA-30 day public review will occur in March/April.
- The final plan is expected in summer 2020.