

South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Management Plan

Public Scoping Workshop Summary – Final

December 19, 2018

Introduction

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) hosted a public scoping workshop on Wednesday, December 19th, from 6:00 to 8:30 PM at the North Mason High School Commons, Belfair. The purpose of the workshop was to share information about the wildlife area planning process and to solicit public and stakeholder input.

The workshop begins the planning process for developing a new South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Management Plan, one of 33 plans the department will revise every 10 years. This plan will be combined with the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, which has a separate planning team and public process. The plans are updated every two years to reflect changes in management priorities; however, the larger plan efforts are more comprehensive and consider the status of wildlife species and their habitat, progress towards goals identified in earlier plans, and new wildlife area priorities. The plans will consider the interests of stakeholders and user groups; outline forest management priorities; identify appropriate public use, recreation areas and facility improvements; as well as weed control practices and other operations and maintenance practices. South Puget Sound current plan as developed in 2006, with subsequent updates, are available on the department website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/.

Four individuals attended and signed in at the workshop including interested parties from Mason, Thurston, and Kitsap counties. One individual represented the Nisqually Reach Nature Center. The other participants represented recreation (waterfowl hunting, birding) and conservation values.

Workshop Format

The workshop was designed in a combination open house/presentation format. Individual maps of each of the 8 units were posted, and participants were encouraged to share specific and general feedback after the presentation. Stations included recreation, water access, habitat, wildlife and fish and wildlife area.

Staff presentation

Brian Calkins, Region 6 Wildlife Program Manager, welcomed everyone and introduced WDFW employees. Lauri Vigue, project lead planner, gave an overview of the workshop format and reviewed the agenda topics. Other WDFW participants included:

- Darric Lowery, South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Manager
- Brian Murphie, Wildlife District Biologist

- Emily Butler, Wildlife Program
- Richard Tveten, Lands Division
- Dave Hays, Diversity Division
- Chris Smith, Enforcement
- Darrin Masters, Habitat Program
- Brittany Gordon, Habitat Program
- Chris Waldbillig, Habitat Program
- Richard Eretz, Fish Program
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager
- Shane Belson, Water Access Coordinator

Public scoping will include SEPA, shared agency priorities, collecting input and reporting in the plan. Lauri noted multiple methods for providing comments at this workshop including flip charts notes, and comment cards.

Lauri Vigue reviewed the department's overall process for updating all state wildlife area plans. She noted the following new topics the plan will consider including:

- Ecological Integrity
- Forest Management
- Recreation Management
- Expanded public outreach
- Climate change

Lauri summarized the timeline for the South Puget Sound/Scatter Creek WLA plan; staff expects a draft plan by spring 2020.

Overview of South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Units

Darric provided an overview of each of the eight units describing the current objectives, recreation, original funding source and acquisition timeline.

Nisqually Unit

Overview: 650 acres of intertidal, estuarine, shoreline, and mixed conifer habitat; one facility leased and a water access site.

Purpose: Waterfowl

Current Objectives: Protect habitat, provide access for public hunting, fishing, and other recreation opportunities. Support partnerships providing nature education.

Recreation: Hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, kayaking, boating, and swimming

Funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office, and National Park Service

Purchase dates: 1966-1970

South Puget Sound Unit

Overview: 83 acres of oak-woodlands prairie, riparian, wetlands, springs, mixed conifer;

multiple WDFW facilities and one hatchery complex.

Purpose: Game Farm

Current Objectives: Maintain and restore habitat for priority wildlife species including western pond turtle. Provide open space in the urban environment for wildlife and public. Support hatchery operations.

Recreation: Walking and wildlife viewing

Funding Source: Wildlife Funds, county transfer

Purchase dates: 1929-1930, 1954, 1976

McNeil Island Unit

Overview: 3,181 acres of intertidal, estuarine, shoreline, wetland, and mixed conifer habitat; multiple abandoned houses and one water reservoir.

Purpose: Endangered Species

Current Objectives: Wildlife Preserve

Recreation: No Public Access

Funding Source: Federal Transfer - 1984

Pitt and Gertrude islands are part of McNeil ownership. Shoreline habitat managed by Department of Corrections and Department of Natural Resources. Not posted. No public entry and patrolled.

Skookomish Unit

Overview: 104 acres of intertidal, river delta, and shoreline habitat

Purpose: Waterfowl

Current Objectives: Protect habitat and provide waterfowl hunting opportunity.

Recreation: Hunting, wildlife viewing, and fishing

Funding Source: State transfer - 1947

Only accessed by boat.

Union River Unit

Overview: 458 acres of intertidal, estuarine, shoreline, and mixed conifer habitat; three water access sites. Theiler wetlands site.

Purpose: Waterfowl, water access, endangered species

Current Objectives: Protect habitat, provide access for public hunting, fishing, and other recreation activities. Support partnerships providing environmental education.

Recreation: Hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, kayaking, boating, walking, running

Funding Source: Donation, transfer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recreation Conservation Office, and Wildlife Funds

Purchase dates: 1962, 1987, 1998, 2006-2008, 2010-2014

Big Beef Unit

Overview: 1,071 acres of riparian, wetland, and mixed conifer habitat. Morgan Marsh site.

Purpose: Endangered species/riparian habitat protection

Current Objectives: Protect habitat, provide waterfowl hunting opportunity, support stream restoration efforts.

Recreation: Wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing

Funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office and donation

Purchase dates: 1997-2005, 2011

Forest management – pre-commercial thinning planned.

Stavis Creek Unit

Overview: 41 acres of riparian, wetland, and mixed conifer habitat

Purpose: Endangered species/riparian habitat protection

Current Objectives: Protect habitat, provide waterfowl hunting opportunity, support stream restoration efforts.

Funding Source: Recreation Conservation Office - 2000

North Kitsap Peninsula Unit

Overview: 0.22 acres of Shoreline habitat

Purpose: Endangered Species

Current Objectives: Mitigation property

Funding Source: State Jobs Bill - 2015

General Comments and Questions at Stations

Habitat and Restoration

- Beards Cove – invasive species scotch broom and knotweed
- Transient use
- Partnerships with DNR and aquatic reserve at McNeil Island

Wildlife Area Management

- Theler – keep hunting the same, don't increase hunting because it is not compatible with bird/wildlife watching.
- Create areas where bird watching and other passive recreation occurs.

Recreation

- Create strong partnerships with non-government organizations
- Improve access at education sites
- Opportunities to volunteer – engagement with citizen science
- Smelt Beach – what public benefit is there for such a high valued parcel?
- SR 3 Parcels at billboard – What is the long-range management strategy and public benefit of these parcels?
- HWY 106 – Consider moving access for hunting at the south end of the unit.

Additional Comments Received

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How did participants find out about this meeting? Mailing, public notice, and Tweeters.

Will the agency have information on this process available on the website? Yes, through the advisory website. https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/wildlife_areas.html

Comment sheet – Two received

1. What interests you about the wildlife area?

- Birding and photography
- Having a good way to connect the public to many values found in the marvelous habitats we have here and how important they are through outreach.

2. Visits:

- South Puget Sound – spring, summer, fall, winter
- Union - spring, summer, fall, winter
- Nisqually – spring, summer, fall, winter
- McNeil Island – spring, summer, fall, winter

3. What recreation activities do you pursue at this wildlife area?

Nisqually – boating, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking/walking, photography, education

McNeil Is – boating, fishing, wildlife viewing, photography, education

South Puget Sound – wildlife viewing, photography

Union – wildlife viewing, photography

4. Provide any additional feedback:

- Make sure people connect and have access to the valuable state owned habitats we have in Washington. Educate the public about this importance.

Meeting Materials

The following meeting materials are attached:

- Agenda
- South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Management Plan Fact Sheet
- Comment card
- Draft forest management plan