

South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

April 10, 2019

Nisqually Reach Nature Center, Olympia

Attendees

WAAC Members

- Alan Billingsley – Neighbor, Lakewood
- Wayne Chapin – Citizen, hunting and fishing
- Herb Gerhardt – Citizen, Mason County
- Mendy Harlow – Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group
- Daniel Hull – Nisqually Reach Nature Center
- Doug Lambe – Department of Corrections
- John Riegsecker – Citizen, bird watcher
- Elizabeth Rodrick – Black Hills Audubon
- Dana Rosenbach – North Mason School District

Absent: Mary Dodsworth, City of Lakewood; Glynnis Nakai – USFWS Nisqually Billy Frank Jr National Wildlife Refuge; Kurt Snyder, Washington Waterfowl Association

WDFW

- Brian Calkins, Wildlife Regional Program Manager
- Darric Lowery, Wildlife Area Manager - Scatter Creek, South Sound and Olympic wildlife areas
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager

Welcome to the Nisqually Reach Nature Center – Daniel Hull

Daniel welcomed the advisory committee to the Nisqually Reach Nature Center.

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.

South Puget Sound 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
- 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 draft meeting notes.

The South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Advisory website will be available soon. All materials from the meetings will be added to this website including notes, charter, agendas, and meeting dates. The WAAC will receive the notice of the upcoming public meeting. The department encourages WAAC members to attend.

Draft Schedule

The public meeting for the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area occurred in December. Planning team meetings will startup in May 2019 and a draft plan is estimated to be written in 2020. The timeline will be corrected and mailed out.

This wildlife area management plan will include Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, which has a separate planning team and public process.

South Puget Sound WLA Overview - Darric

There are seven units within the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area, totaling 5,560 acres. The units include Nisqually, South Puget Sound, McNeil Island, Skokomish, Union, Big Beef, and

Stavis Creek. The North Kitsap Peninsula Unit was removed from the planning process since it is only a mitigation property for an ongoing project.

Nisqually Unit:

Overview: 650 acres of intertidal, estuarine, shoreline, and mixed conifer habitat; it has one facility leased and one 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 (RCO), Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA), Boating Facilities Program and National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

WDFW has a cooperative agreement with the USFWS for hunting on this unit. Nature education an important component of this unit.

South Puget Sound Unit:

Overview: 83 acres of South Sound prairie, riparian, wetlands, springs, oak woodland, mixed conifer; multiple WDFW facilities (offices and storage) and one hatchery complex.

Purpose: Game Farm

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

Recreation: Walking and wildlife viewing.

Funding Source: WDFW Wildlife Fund (WLF), State transfer

This is a reintroduced site for western pond turtles. Head Start program still in place – turtle eggs go to the Woodland Park Zoo and are released back into the wild. Three other sites have a viable populations.

McNeil Island:

Overview: 3,181 acres of intertidal, estuarine, shoreline, wetland, and mixed conifer habitat; multiple abandoned houses and 1 reservoir.

Purpose: Endangered Species
Current Objectives: Wildlife Preserve

Recreation: No Public Access
Funding Source: Federal transfer

McNeil Island has a large population of black-tail deer. Coyotes also increasing.

The DNR Aquatic Reserve adjoins the southern portion of the island currently, but there is a proposal being considered for expanding the reserve around McNeil Island and connecting with the Key Peninsula. As part of salmon restoration projects, the shoreline is in the process of being cleaned up and some small estuaries restored.

There is no resources available to remove the derelict buildings currently.

Not open to the public

Skokomish 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

This unit is only accessible by boat.

Union River Unit:

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

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, RCO- ALEA/Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), and WDFW WLF.

Extensive trail system open to the public and is maintained through a cooperative agreement with the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group/The Salmon Center.

Big Beef Unit:

Overview: 1,071 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.

Recreation: Wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing.

Funding Source: RCO WWRP and a donation.

Morgans mash tract is the primary recreation area and the unit as a whole has very limited accessibility

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.

Recreation: no significant recreation activities.

Funding Source: RCO WWRP

No designated access point, disjointed small parcels, and is very difficult to traverse

Key Species

- Oregon spotted frog
- Western pond turtle
- Purple martin
- Band-tailed pigeon
- Waterfowl
- Salmon and Steelhead
- Forage fish

Key Issues (from Internal Scoping Meeting – August 2018)

- Weed control
- Western pond turtle management – there is potential to expand the site in South Puget Sound Unit. Public access would be impacted.
- Oregon spotted frog surveys and management
- Prairie, shoreline and estuary restoration

- Salmon recovery – Hood Canal summer chum reintroduction at Union and Big Beef
- Forest health
- Fire protection plan – McNeil Island
- DOC building removal and revegetation – McNeil Island
- Operations and maintenance
- Luhr’s Landing design and long-term lease
- Big Beef acquisition and weir – Intensively Monitored Watershed
- Shellfish parcels/easements
- Oak restoration/retention

Recreation

- Walking and hiking
- Hunting
- Dog walking
- Deer hunting (Big Beef Creek)
- Boating
- Fishing
- Wildlife viewing

Discussion and Comments

- Since WDFW and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have similar recreation goals, why not consolidate the rules? The concern expressed was with NO public access to DNR lands which are surrounded by timber company lands. Timber companies do not access to their land without purchasing their hunting access permit. This in affect means that you have to purchase a timber company permit to hunt public DNR lands. (This refers to two huge blocks of DNR lands surrounded by Wehyerhaeser land in Hunting Unit 667).

Response: Both agencies have different mission statements and mandates.

- Is the Goat Ranch Pond in Mason County still used for western pond turtles?

Response: Goat Ranch Pond not used because of shell wasting disease. Turtles were not able to reproduce successfully. However, the turtles that were there for the study were not removed.

- How much capital budget goes to McNeil?

Response: Funding comes from Department of Social and Health Services and Department of Corrections. DOC received \$7 million in the last budget.

Conservation is a public benefit.

- Every unit should have an environmental education component.
- Why aren't conservation easements in the management plans?

Response: management plans are developed separately with the landowner for USFWS funded lands.

- Stavis Creek Unit –transferring to DNR? The NRCA is adjacent.
- Western pond turtle – is McNeil Island suitable for re-introduction?

Response: depends on the soil type, exposure and presence of bull frogs (predators). Department of Corrections supports. South Puget Sound Unit is the best current site based on modeling.

- McNeil Island – what is the opportunity for access?

Response: no access except possibly for citizen science monitoring for forage fish presence demonstrating the benefits from the restoration project.

- What are the cultural resources on McNeil Island?

Response: Most Native American sites are inaccessible, overgrown by vegetation. A couple of sites could be recognized and protected.

- What is the appropriate recreation for the Theler acquisition on the Union River Unit and the other units?

Response: this will be discussed with the planning team for the new wildlife area management plan.

What is the best way to highlight to increase public appreciation for the McNeil Unit? Can access be improved? Encouraged a video on WDFW website for public education.

Response: The focus for the plan would be Nisqually, Union, and South Puget Sound units. The Lost Prison NPR Podcast, Tacoma Museum exhibit until the end of May.

- Public access – concerns with the lack of enforcement. DNR ends up closing lands due to the lack of enforcement patrol.
- Consider a one day hunting raffle at McNeil Island to raise money.

Response: Very challenging since background checks are mandatory for access, no weapons allowed, and the island is closed to hunting.

- Handicapped access – make sure it is current information is on the website in regards to the Nisqually Pier. Maintain accessibility.

- Goals and objectives need to include non-game, amphibians, invertebrates, pollinators.

Response: the planning team will discuss the goals and objectives over the next several months.

- Private lands gate concerns, we need to strategize with partners – identify appropriate sites.

- Geocaching – need rules and guidance. Rules do exist from the geocaching stakeholders.

- Geocaching should not occur on WDFW lands. Do we have rules for this?

Response: Rules will be developed as part of the Recreation Strategy process.

- Target shooting – Big Beef is the priority – and should be considered on other units as well.

- Enforcement issues – capacity, environmental education – Union River has a special hunt – refers to the bird hunting areas on WDFW lands on the Union River as these create a conflict with the Theler Wetlands which are in the process of being acquired.

We need key locations identified and appropriate signage.

- Pollution – lead shot, do we have any WDFW regulations?

Response: not at this time, it is a politically charged issue.

- Fishing line entanglement – we need the science that backs up the concerns.

- South Puget Sound Unit – surplus site concern - it is a dumping ground for old WDFW vehicles. Does it qualify under the DNR Derelict Program? The program is not fully funded to accept additional materials. Partnership with Washington State Parks?

- Encourage citizens to participate. Citizens can be powerful.

Next Steps:

- Comments are due on the draft charter by April 25th.

- Lauri will send out the draft notes for review and comment.

- WAAC members please register on the WDFW Volunteer website (CERVIS)

<https://wd https://wdfw.wa.gov/get-involved/volunteerfw.wa.gov/get-involved/volunteer>

- The South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Advisory Committee website will be up and running soon. Lauri will send out the link once it is up and running.

Schedule

- Darric will schedule field trips. The will be scheduled over the next several months and likely to occur after July 2019.

- The planning team will meet and develop goals and objectives over the next few months.

- A draft plan will be available for WAAC review in 2020.