

Minutes
Waterfowl Advisory Group Meeting
August 1, 2015

Rodeo City BBQ
Ellensburg, WA

1. Welcome and introductions – Ben Welton (Chair)

Members Present: John Arrabito, Roy Christopherson, Michael Crowder, Chris Dorow, Ralph Engle, Scott Fink, Art Kendall, Dick Price, Dave Sievers, Fred Slyfield, Rodney Vandersypen, Ben Welton

WDFW Staff Present: Sean Dougherty, Joe Evenson, Rich Finger, Don Kraege

2. Approval of March 28, 2015 minutes – approved

3. Migratory bird stamp and print program update – Matt Wilson

Matt Wilson provided a summary of progress on approved duck stamp projects. Dick Price asked why Chimacum Creek was approved for the full purchase price rather than the lease cost recommended at the March 2015 WAG meeting. WDFW decided to pursue the acquisition if it became available to provide access and habitat enhancement capability in perpetuity. Rich Finger provided an update on the Artesian/Black Lake feasibility study with DU. Aquifer discharge is limiting the ability to implement the project and Dept. of Ecology is working on evaluating recharge potential.

Motion (Dorow): WDFW should make it easier for the public to see projects on the duck stamp website. Passed unanimously.

4. Columbia Basin waterfowl quality hunt areas – Sean Dougherty and Rich Finger

Sean Dougherty provided an update on the Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program. All sites require a reservation and also registration to track hunting effort and success. In 2013-14, the program paid \$25/acre for corn stubble, and was able to reduce payments to \$15/acre with no restrictions on cattle trespass – there were no problems with this arrangement last season. Sean is trying to lower the price/hunter/acre, as well as encouraging more use of the program. There were some problems with hunters using one card for the party, because each should have a card to legally hunt. Some WAG members wanted to see the areas open every day of the week. Sean explained that there are no restrictions on days per week, and ATV access is allowed for hunters with disabilities.

Rich Finger provided an update on WDFW Regulated Access Areas. At Frenchman Ponds, new ADA blinds were to be installed in September. Large blinds were built to accommodate four hunters and wheelchairs. Rich also explained the

Winchester Reserve boundary changes, which opened the east area for more upland access. The reservation system was eliminated, and the north part of the reserve is being investigated for excavation with duck stamp funds. At North Potholes Reserve, there was a large change in the historic boundary in 2015. Hunting locations correspond to parking spots, and locations are separated by 300-400 meters. Some WAG members recommended marking trails to ponds with GPS points or posts with markers. There was some concern about pass shooting, but area rules require hunting only at specific locations. Other concerns were for adequate water levels during the youth hunt, but this is not within WDFW control.

5. Update on WDFW sea duck and breeding surveys - Joe Evenson

Joe Evenson provided an overview of the 23rd year of Puget Sound sea duck surveys, methods, and long term results. The survey typically covers 16 to 18 days during December and January, and is frequently delayed by weather, wind, fog, etc. The survey has shown relatively stable populations of scoters during the past 5 years. The breeding population survey has been standardized since 2009, and WDFW has been working to have results combined with USFWS and state surveys. Mallard trends have been relatively stable since the survey was initiated.

6. 2015-16 regulations – Don Kraege

Summary of recent Commission actions to clarify reserve and closure boundaries and eliminate ineffective reserves and closures. No major changes were proposed for 2015-16 duck seasons and limits, although there were several goose season changes proposed. The Wrangel Island snow goose population increased to 240,000 in 2015, with a large number of goslings leaving the colony. Changes are possible after revision of the Wrangel Island snow goose harvest strategy through the Pacific Flyway Council. Due to potential changes in brant wintering distribution, WDFW proposed a restrictive 3-day brant season if the winter count was between 3,000 – 6,000.

Motion (Engle): Look into the possibility of a brant season in Whatcom County. Passed unanimously

Motion (Kendall): Explore the option for a brant season with a certain number of consecutive days and a certain season bag limit. Passed unanimously.

Regarding the SW goose season, major changes were proposed, including elimination of check stations and a closed season on dusky Canada geese. Objectives were to maintain dusky abundance and survival, reduce agency costs, and address agricultural crop depredation. Discussion about enforcement discretion in invalidating authorizations and ticketing if a dusky is harvested or there is another violation of closed season.

Motion (Vandersypen): Have the first dusky taken result in a warning, with authorization invalidated but no violation. Passed unanimously.

Motion (Crowder): Accept other seasons and regulations as presented. Passed unanimously.

Kraege described the new season setting process, with federal frameworks being set in September, and state seasons adopted in March and April.

7. Update on 2015 banding activities (Wilson)

Wilson summarized ongoing programs to band resident geese, ducks, and mourning doves. A new wood duck banding program is being planned for 2016.

8. Avian influenza 2015-16 (Kraege)

WDFW received additional funding from USDA for sampling live and hunter-killed ducks for avian influenza in 2015-16.

9. Vice-chair for 2016

John Arrabito volunteered to become vice-chair in 2016.

Motion (Crowder): Elect Welton as chair for 2016 and John Arrabito as vice-chair for 2016 (with Arrabito becoming chair in 2017). Passed unanimously.

10. Next meeting date and location

The group recommended that the next meeting occur on April 2nd in Ellensburg.