

## **Wenas Wildlife Area**

### **Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting – June 13, 2016**

#### **Meeting Notes**

**WAAC members present** included Jill Breeze and Walt Hyde, Backcountry Horsemen; Andy Stepniewski, Audubon; Dick Jacobson, Yakima County Noxious Weed Board; Clay Graham, Selah Adventures.

**WDFW staff present** included Wildlife Area Manager Cindi Confer Morris; Wildlife Program Manager Scott McCorquodale; Regional Director Mike Livingston; Planning, Recreation and Outreach Section Manager Melinda Posner; Outgoing Enforcement Captain Rich Mann; Incoming Enforcement Captain Bob Weaver; and Wildlife Biologist Nathan Longorian.

#### **Project Update**

After introductions, Manager Confer Morris provided a brief summary of the target shooting project, including input shared at two public meetings on April 26 and 27. She summarized additional feedback that has been received including comments from the National Rifle Association (NRA), neighbors, dog trainers and motorized users. Input includes those who are not supportive of a ban on dispersed/unregulated shooting on the wildlife area, those who do not support road closures associated with implementation of the project, and a petition from neighbors concerned about the proposed location at Bull Pasture. The agency has received inquiries from state legislators and will be hosting a meeting of interested elected officials later this month. In other updates, Confer Morris confirmed that Central Washington University will be working with wildlife area staff to measure the anticipated noise levels generated at the two proposed sites (Bull Pasture and Sheep Company Road) near Selah.

The question of “how reporting of violators of the dispersed shooting ban on WWA will be handled, when the regulation goes into effect” was posed to the two enforcement officers in attendance. Their response detailed that calling 911 was the best course of action, and that the operator would likely transfer you to Washington State Patrol, who dispatches agency officers.

A question was raised about the nature of dog training concerns at the Bull Pasture location. Bull Pasture is a popular site for dog trainers. What their needs are and whether there are other locations that might be suitable will be the focus of a meeting being organized with the dog trainers and staff.

Other comments and concerns were shared including the agency mandate to protect and conserve fish and wildlife species and their habitats. Fire is causing significant damage to shrub-steppe, which is an important and imperiled habitat that needs to be protected. In addition, lead contamination is becoming a larger environmental issue and one that tends to compound over time. One of the benefits to the proposal is that the earthen berms can be deconstructed and the lead reclaimed, which will help

mitigate lead contamination at the new range. Closure of the dispersed shooting locations will stop any new lead accumulation at those sites.

The group also discussed the input from some shooters about having longer distances. Staff has considered the idea of developing the 200-yard range as part of Phase I instead of Phase 2, but it may be too expensive to do so.

Staff member Aaron Garcia has organized volunteers to conduct informal surveys of target shooters at several target shooting locations. He is also working to line up hunter education volunteers and other community support for development of the shooting range. These donations could take the form of construction materials, development of range features such as benches and shade structures, and/or volunteer time at the range when it is operational.

### **Proposed Stakeholder Outreach**

Section Manager Melinda Posner and Confer Morris shared a proposal for reaching out to stakeholder groups, some of whom may have been reticent to share their comments at public meetings. Staff proposes to set meetings with them in July, including horseback riders, motorized users, bird watchers, dog trainers, hikers, hunters, and neighbors. The intent is to provide an overview of the project and the issues that have surfaced to date, and facilitate discussion about how best to meet the needs of multiple users on the wildlife area. Potentially, representatives the groups would be invited to participate with the WAAC at a later meeting, open to public comment, to discuss potential solutions for implementation.

The following was recommended to support the stakeholder outreach effort:

- Send the meeting summary in advance to communicate the concerns and issues raised so far;
- Provide information about the agency mission (sideboards) and latitude to make decisions and/or implement new projects;
- Ask advisory committee members to help agency staff communicate about the project – by sharing information with their respective groups, bringing that feedback to the larger group, and by letting staff know when/why information isn't being heard;
- Be prepared with the reasons for the project in the first place – fire, litter, user conflict (public safety) and habitat issues. These are real issues that need to be addressed, and the reason for considering the project in the first place.

### **Next Steps**

Staff will begin setting up and hosting the stakeholder meetings, and will include those advisory committee members who have expressed interest. Staff will update the advisory committee and potentially host another meeting later this summer.