MINUTES
Waterfowl Advisory Group Meeting
SATURDAY April 13, 2019
9:00 am – 3:30 pm
North Bend Ranger Station
902 SE North Bend Way, North Bend, WA 98045

1. Call to Order - Dave Drewry (Chair) – 9:00am

2. Recognition of the passing of Roy Christopherson (Dave Drewry/Mike Nilsen).
   a. Suggestion for the production of a gavel with representative waterfowl symbols to commemorate past members and to be passed among the Chairs. 9:10am

3. Welcome and introductions – Dave Drewry (Chair)
   Members present included: John Arrabito, Ted Blade, Abel Cortina, Michael Crowder, Chris Dorow, Dave Drewry, Ralph Engle, Scott Fink, Bob Jorgenson, Art Kendall, Michael Miller, Mike Nilsen, Dick Price, Dave Sievers, and Fred Slyfield. WDFW staff included Sean Dougherty (Region 2 – District 5 Biologist), Mike Rickel (Region 2 – Private Lands), Matt Wilson, and Kyle Spragens. Six members of the public present. 9:23am

4. Approval of minutes – (Chair)
   a. Adoption of minutes from the April 8, 2017 Waterfowl Advisory Group meeting. Vote unanimously approved. 9:24am

5. Migratory Gamebird Topics & Updates (Spragens)
   a. Housekeeping and logistics of meeting and lunch.
   b. Update on in-person meetings conducted by Spragens with individual members. Have completed 13 of 17 in-person conservation conversations and will complete final conversations within next year.
   d. Provided an overview of regulation process and frameworks, the role of Flyways and Joint Ventures in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, and the need for harvest tracking and informing harvest management.
   e. Provided PowerPoint overview of proposed regulation changes for 2019-2020 season presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission on April 5th (available: https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission/meetings/2019/april-4-2019-meeting-agenda; Item 7 on Friday, April 5, 2019 Agenda)
f. Update on the Flyway process and timing in relationship to informing State regulation process. There is a need for finding a better timing mechanism to seek public input under the new Federal regulations timeline. Discussed challenges in required monitoring and aligning priorities with capacity within the Waterfowl Section and across Flyway partnerships.

g. Provided an update on the current state of the Wrangel Island Snow Goose population and the difference between this population and management alternatives available related to the Mid-continent population. Developing changes in winter distribution and the balance of increasing harvest opportunity, while maintaining the objectives presented in the Pacific Flyway Management Plan for this population.

h. Discussion with members of the Waterfowl Advisory Group related to the need to get more information out to the waterfowling community through online tools, public outreach, and better communication in general to highlight research and monitoring and the work behind the numbers.

i. Discussed recent improvements in working with the Marketing department in promoting better accessibility of purchasing the Federal Duck Stamp, and strides in directing potential sales of the State Duck Stamp Artwork in collaboration with the Washington Waterfowl Association contract, and to explain the tie between this revenue and wetland habitat improvements on the landscape.

6. Migratory Waterfowl Seasons and Regulations (Spragens)

   a. Reviewed WAC proposals adopted by the Fish and Game Commission on April 5, 2019 including season, bag limits, goose zones, and adjustments needed to be made to accommodate implications of US S47

   b. Explanation provided towards the way the season constraint of 107-days allowed by Migratory Bird Treaty Act requires the Pacific Flyway states to remove days from the general season structure to accommodate special hunt days, like the Youth Hunt weekend (2-days). US S47 allows the opportunity of a special Veterans and Active Military date(s), but in the Pacific Flyway this would come at the cost of taking days out of the general season dates. This bill was not signed until March 12, 2019, after the Fish and Wildlife Commission briefing, but prior to the adoption meeting. It would have been inappropriate to adjust general season dates without broader public input, however, US S47 allowed the potential to overlap with the special Youth Hunt days. Given continued public comment about how early the special Youth Hunt weekend occurs, and the ability to split the Youth Hunt into a Saturday before and a Saturday following the season, the best option identified was to allow a Saturday Youth Hunt-only before the season (September 21 in western Washington, September 28 in eastern Washington) and a combined Youth, Veterans, and Active Military day on Saturday, February 1, 2020 which would allow an expanded allowable species list and larger number of
waterfowl and water availability distributed across Washington to accommodate
the larger number of waterfowl hunters this will represent.

- Concerns were expressed that the change will have some youth hunters out on
the Sunday in September. WDFW will work to inform waterfowl hunters and
groups that provide youth mentorship hunts of this change, but feel the benefit
provided by the February hunt date will be positively received.
- C. Dorow motined to support the idea of a Youth, Veterans and Active Military
hunt on the first Saturday in February, M. Crowder amended to state “the
Saturday following the last Sunday of January (not last day of January)”.
Discussion occurred regarding the increased involvement in youth sports and
other activities that makes it challenging to take advantage of one particular
weekend. C. Dorow suggested continued input from the public about how to
approach this opportunity and discussion of loss of days to the general season
needed. **Vote 11 For, 4 Against.**

c. Goose season proposals include a change to season structure in Goose
Management Area 4 (Columbia Basin), by delaying the opener of white geese to
October 26th, to allow moving days to February to take advantage of snow geese
moving back into GMA4 from regions near Boardman, Oregon. This February
period would be open 7-days per week. The other two geese (Canada and white-
fronted geese) would retain typical season structure and NOT be open during the
February dates. This maximized the ability of using 107-days per goose type
because of the split bag structure approved in April 2017.

- Question about why the Greater White-fronted Goose bag limit was set to 10
geese per day. Spragens explained that the Pacific population is different than the
white-fronted geese moving through the Canadian prairies (Mid-continent
Population), and that while few “white-fronts” winter in Washington, the entire
population of 600,000+ pass through Washington en route to winter areas in a
very short window of time. Due to the current above population objective status
of this population, any opportunity to harvest should be taken advantage of; the
Pacific Flyway upper bag limit is 10 white-fronted geese.

- Question about harvest monitoring of Snow Geese in the Tri-Cities area. Spragens
explained that no harvest report card is required in Goose Management Area 4
(GMA4) so equivalent data to GMA1 (Skagit) is not available. However, tail fans
are submitted to the Parts Collection Survey (‘Wingbee”) and a large number of
submissions were received from Washington during the February 2019 Pacific
Flyway Wingbee.

- Question about the harvest and season dates in Goose Management Area 1 for
Snow Geese. Spragens explained that through the use of the Mandatory Harvest
Report Cards, a consistent 12-day low in total harvest was identified following the
Thanksgiving holiday, and that taking days from the beginning of the season would potentially result in a lower overall harvest in comparison. Promoting harvest later in the season (after January), when geese are switching from grains to greens, was the next management action identified by the WDFW Game Management Plan 2015-2021 in addressing an above objective Snow Goose winter flock in the Skagit-Fraser Deltas.

- Concerns raised about the closure east of Interstate-5 in GMA 1 during the new late season period. Spragens explained that season structure must follow the specific Goose Management Area structure, and that no adjustments can be made below the level of a GMA without formal consultation through the Pacific Flyway process. The presence and distribution of Snow Geese in this area east of I-5 in Snohomish County needs to be better understood for decision of proper assignment of this area compared to the current GMA structure; which is a Federal Framework change. The creation of a “false season”, one where dates for one species is open for a period of time, but a very limited opportunity exists has the potential to create problems in this particular portion of the GMA given the distribution and relative abundance of Trumpeter Swans. This will be re-evaluated as information related to aerial photographic surveys and harvest reports become available.

- Question was posed regarding the closure of Public Land during this late season segment. Spragens explained this is consistent with management of this late season in SW Washington, and that WDFW has an obligation to keep geese in the region (typical winter distribution patterns) and to maintain opportunity, through the Pacific Flyway Management Plan for this population, which is an agreement with Canada and Russia via the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

- Members asked for updates with information regarding goose distribution and numbers during the extended season to evaluate support.

d. Brant Season will have a small adjustment to Padilla Bay days by guidance of the updated Pacific Flyway Management Plan (4 extra days to the beginning of the current season dates) because winter counts remain above identified management thresholds, and black brant dominate harvest in this particular bay with limited access and hunter numbers (low total harvest) allowing this ability. Additionally, brant will be an allowable species during the Youth, Veterans and Active Military hunt date on Saturday, February 1, 2020; there is a similar youth hunt in Humboldt Bay, CA that is wildly popular among youth hunters; excited for the potential of passing on this traditional hunting style.

e. Field identification of game birds; added the use of a feathered wing (not just head) to be more consistent with federal regulation and training of the agencies’ enforcement officers. The one exception is with Canada geese in Goose Management Area 2 due to identification requirements for Dusky Canada Geese.
f. Update provided on high incidence of swan lead poisoning and power line strikes. This was the worst seasons in several years (possibly ever), with approximately 400 swans picked up by WDFW and collaborating partners, with very few successful rehabilitation cases. The source of lead poisoning is from legacy lead from Judson Lake as well as numerous other unidentified locations in Northwest Washington given the timing and distribution of pickups; each case is validated through necropsies and examination of gizzards.

11:03am

7. Commission-directed Discussion Topic – baiting definitions and regulations related to “flooded, unharvested crops”

Spragens explained that during a September 2018 Fish and Wildlife Commission – Wildlife Committee meeting a discussion around the legality of what has been termed “corn ponds” was raised by Commissioner Baker. There was a directive to hold a discussion with the Waterfowl Advisory Group for input. Prior today’s Waterfowl Advisory Group meeting, Spragens supplied members with a document that had been submitted by a member of the public (S. Shanewise) to the Commission prior to that Wildlife Committee meeting. D. Price – if WAG says to Commission to limit Corn Ponds than WAG must pull moist soil management and food plots and discussion is over. M. Miller – Feds say can hunt over flooded crop and harvested crops. C. Dorow – without data and information on impact (which is missing) there is no reason to regulate. A. Cortina – lots of data for robo-duck discussion, none for the corn pond discussion. D. Price motioned to stay with status quo, seconded by B. Jorgensen.

Call for discussion from M. Crowder – M. Crowder read first paragraph of Federal guidelines on hunting over standing and harvested crops and that they may be dry or flooded, including aquatic vegetation. M. Crowder – the Shanewise document not based in fact or reality and should not be considered for limiting corn pond hunting. M. Miller – no data to support distribution of waterfowl between hunting clubs and public lands, only questioning if that is necessary to gather the evidence and to what purpose, also Washington can choose to limit outside of Federal baiting regulations. C. Dorow – very concerned about the Commission’s lack of science based concern for the direction to look into corn ponds. M. Crowder – more information on practice of flooding corn ponds multiple times to irrigate, and not just for hunting purposes; pointed out the differences of private land and how it’s managed in comparison to some of the public lands. B. Jorgensen – the Shanewise document not related to reality on the ground. D. Price – restated motion to disregard the Shanewise document and to regard Federal law as stated and no reason to continue discussion. B. Jorgensen seconded. **Vote 14 For 0 Against.**

11:22am
C. Dorow – Asked if the WAG could submit to Commission to ask for what clarification the Commission wants. Spragens explained there is a requested Policy Briefing for the September Commission meeting in eastern Washington. The request from the September 2018 Wildlife Committee was to hold a discussion at this meeting of the Waterfowl Advisory Group to help gather information.

Further discussion asked if there is more for the WAG to do in process and consideration, and of opinion for management. WAG has just supported corn ponds as a non-baiting issue that should not be impeded. C. Dorow – management is a mosaic of management and not just one technique. A. Cortina – public land managers should take more active role to mimic private land management and methods. M. Crowder – motioned to “support a variety of food resources for habitat management, and that best management practices should include food crops and moist soil management”, seconded by C. Dorow, Vote 13 For 1 Against.

Discussion: S. Fink – the Duck Stamp revenue has evolved from habitat [long-term investments] to moist soil management and crop production [short-term and annual operating uses], with more money spent every year on non-habitat actions, and this is not what state Duck Stamp revenue was meant for originally. D. Price – disagrees about actions and Duck Stamp revenue uses on east side. C. Dorow – any chance to acquire land and increase production and recruitment being prioritized? Spragens explained while acquisitions were the primary focus of the original Duck Stamp expenditure guidance, acquisitions have become increasingly more difficult and expensive, pointing to the Federal Duck Stamp recent modifications as to acceptable expenditures as an example, but is not impossible believing creative leverage of these funds is still possible in building partnerships for larger actions. S. Fink – still need to restore wetlands and seek the best investment of the fund; cheapest ducks for bucks. D. Price – wetland areas have become salmon habitat.

11:45am
8. Migratory Bird Stamp & Artwork Program – WORKING LUNCH
   a. Wilson reviewed 2017-19 Duck Stamp Project (DSP) highlights; what was completed, projects in progress and timelines for completion.
12:35pm
   b. - Spragens reviewed Duck Stamp Project carryover from FY2017-19 into available revenue for the FY2019-21 budget. 6 projects with carryover to new biennium. A. Kendall asked for an explanation of Federal Duck Stamp funds and expenditures; Spragens gave examples of refuges in Washington that have ties to Federal Duck Stamp ties, but not all refuges do, and the process is more elaborate due to nationwide breadth. Spragens provided updates on budget and account balance of the dedicated fund, including legislative authority to spend in the next biennium.
12:48pm

c. Spragens provided a handout on Capital and Operating Projects ranked by the Internal Duck Stamp Review Panel, that was comprised of 9 individuals from a cross-section of department programs and divisions. C. Dorow asked if any projects below cut line should be above. M. Crowder motioned to accept entire list as written, seconded by C. Dorow, discussion ensued: C. Dorow asked about Capital purchase of equipment and if it needs to be in the operational side of budget. Spragens explained it could be in either, but felt was most appropriate included in the Capital list due to the long-term nature of the acquisition, but it will depend upon spending authorities passed down by the Legislature. **Vote 7 for, 5 against. Motion carries. No further discussion.**

1:08pm

9. Wrap-up:

a. Miscellaneous Waterfowl Topics – A. Kendall began to ask questions related to brant objectives in Padilla and Samish bays. Spragens started to explain a discrepancy between the objective and implementation of the Skagit brant season structure that needed further consideration. However, as a Sean Dougherty and Mike Rickel began to pack up, a question was posed to S. Dougherty regarding the proposal for LiDAR imagery of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and surroundings, and the proposal for prescribed fire and Russian Olive removal. C. Dorow proposed to review the previous decision and need for further discussion related to Duck Stamp project proposals. **Vote 14 for, 0 Against. Motion carried to remove previous motion and reopen discussion related to Duck Stamp project proposals and ranking.**

Migratory Bird Stamp & Artwork Project Proposal Review – continued [see tables at end]:

d. CAPITAL PROJECT REVIEW

Spragens reviewed full list of Capital Project proposals. Through discussion:

Colville project questions about partnerships and 3-year funding totals. Multiple concerns about funding BPA tractor at Shillapoo WA related to concerns over potential restoration on the Wildlife Area. Support for No-Till Drill in R6. Chehalis Elma Floodplain discussion with intent to provide identified funds availability for purchase when an opportunity arises and already through WDFW’s Lands 20/20 process.

- D. Price motioned to move Washburn Pivot to just below the cut-line. Seconded. No discussion. **Vote 12 For, 2 Against.**

- M. Crowder motioned to move Union Gap to bottom, Seconded. No discussion. **Vote 14 For, 0 Against.**

- M. Crowder motion to accept the proposed Capital Projects list as amended. Seconded. **Vote 14 For, 0 Against.**
e. OPERATING PROJECT REVIEW
Mike Rickel (WDFW) provided a review of the Cropland Hunting Access Initiative and landowner relationships. Spragens reviewed remaining list by region and rank. A few questions, but no comments.
- Spragens reviewed specified projects but forward from the Waterfowl Section Projects. Question was raised in regard to goose nest surveys in relation to changing sampling of nesting and broods and the possibility of incorporating Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS; project #2). Spragens explained the broader Breeding Population surveys are picking up a strong trend for Western Canada Geese, and the Waterfowl Section is exploring using this data to inform September Canada Goose hunt decisions rather than specific nest counts in concentrated areas that do not account for non-breeding geese.

M. Crowder motioned, Seconded by D. Price. Discussion – D. Price would like to move Washburn Island Farming to just below the cut-line. Seconded. **Vote 11 For, 2 Against.** Call for original motion to accept the Operating Projects list as amended. **Vote 13 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstain** (out of room).

10. Wrap-up (continued):
   a. Recruiting next Advisory Group Roster, and Chair Drewry – any questions? Spragens asked for a discussion about additional meetings for specific East/West discussions, perhaps in the form of a Committee that allows an out of quorum situation to discuss certain topics like brant season questions (that did not have time to be addressed in this meeting; see#9a).
   b. D. Price and A. Kendall asked for more information regarding the Duck Stamp proposals, don’t want the short page summary but want the entire project package with a one page summary.
   c. Spragens encouraging input into the process at the right time of the cycle to invoke more input into the regulatory cycle. Chair and C. Dorow encourage smaller or short meetings to try out West/East meetings.
   d. Spragens waterfowl questions – M. Crowder prefers 2-day closure where it was on the first Thursday & Friday of the first full week as do others. Spragens explained this change was made to align with Game Management Plan specifying for nine straight days of open season before closure – so finally in line with policy of plan. Also, with potential closure days being adjusted in light of the Veterans and Active Military Personnel Day(s), there will need to be input about how to structure the within season closure going forward.
   - M. Crowder motioned to move closure to first Thursday/Friday of season, Seconded by C. Dorow. Discussion – D. Price asked if it is a law or not? **Vote For 9, Against 1, Abstain 4.**
e. Questions from B. Jorgenson - Has there been any change in waterfowl policy or management in the state due to individual meetings? Spragens explained that it has been helpful to travel to other places in the state and get insight on member’s perspectives and management nuances that occur around Washington and direction of the WAG and its input to management. Spragens mentioned the change in the identification to include the feathered wing was an issue brought forth by the WAG. Spragens will look into how to update the guidance document for duck stamp expenditures. M. Crowder – asked for Spragens to report back next meeting about how to change/update the guidance.

f. J. Arrabito – Asked about a separate merganser bag limit. Spragens explained this is a more complicated request than may be realized as it would be a change to the Pacific Flyway’s federal framework, which would require the 11 states to push forward (pass out of Study Committee and be approved by the Pacific Flyway Council) and then receive consideration (and approval) from the USFWS Service Regulations Committee. Chair asked about as a tool for depredation removal, Spragens specified that only USDA has authority to conduct lethal removals in Washington and this argument would not be viewed highly by the Flyway or SRC as waterfowl hunters are already allowed to harvest up to 7 per day, and Washington registers minimal harvest without requiring the Sea Duck Hunt Authorization, even though mergansers are a sea duck.

g. Next meeting(s) – Chair responsibility will be passed on to A. Cortina and recruitment will proceed to get WAG membership back up to a full 20 person roster. Several members offered to send in names and nominations. Chair – need to vote on Vice Chair. Volunteer B. Jorgenson.

3:59pm
11. Adjourn – (Chair)
These draft budget tables were presented to the Waterfowl Advisory Group members to inform where the fiscal cut-line (green to orange) was estimated to be at the time of this meeting.

**TABLE 1: 2019-21 MIGRATORY BIRD STAMP / PRINT PROJECTS - CAPITAL BUDGET COMMITTED PROJECTS (CARRY-OVER FROM 2017-19 BIENNIAL CYCLE) AND RFP PROPOSED PROJECTS**

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*Currently under contract

**TOTAL**=CUMULATIVE TOTAL; LEV=PROGRAM FUNDS LEVERAGE; CONTR=CONTRACT; C, WDFW=W; OWNSHIP=A=ACQUISITION, O=OTHER, W=WDFW; FOCUS=P=PRODUCTION, W=WINTERING; CBSCORE=COST BENEFIT SCORE=COST/YEAR/A; AC=PROD+NEST+1/2FOOD+1/2HUNT
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**NEW OPERATING PROPOSED**

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**TOTAL OPERATING**

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