

“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: June 1, 2012 Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 6: Stewardship of WDFW Lands - Briefing
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Presented By: Jennifer Quan, Lands Division Manager, Wildlife Program

Background:

The department is the steward of approximately 900,000 acres of Washington State’s wildlife habitat, including 32 wildlife areas and over 700 water access sites. These lands provide conservation benefits to hundreds of species and their habitats, and provide millions of recreation-days annually, which are integral to both local and statewide economies. The department’s lands are tangible evidence of where the department meets its mission to preserve, protect, and perpetuate fish, wildlife, and ecosystems, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.

The funds for the operation and maintenance (O&M) of the department’s lands are made up of a complex combination of federal and state dollars that amount to over \$20 million biennially. The department’s funding commitments to O&M activities are significant, and - as with all public infrastructure - are impacted both positively and negatively by the greater economic conditions.

Recent increases in federal Pittman Robertson (PR) funds and the influx of new funding from the implementation of the Discover Pass have helped to bridge the recent gap created by the economic downturn. Furthermore, department staff use all O&M tools and revenue-generating opportunities, through lease and permit revenues, as well as grants. These current strategies have helped maintain the base funding for O&M, even with ongoing acquisitions.

Lands stewardship and management activities include:

- **Maintenance**: Buildings, roads, bridges, dikes, fences, signs, weed control, and garbage cleanup.
- **Enhancements/Restoration**: Riparian plantings, in-stream structures, range rehabilitation, and food plots/agriculture.
- **Public Relations**: Education, information, volunteer projects, and watchable wildlife projects.
- **Planning**: Citizens Advisory Groups and management plan development and updates.
- **Partnering**: Coordinated Resource Management and agriculture and grazing agreements.

Further work is needed to inform the public and legislators on the level of service that is provided with current funding sources – and what can be gained with more funds. Support is needed at all levels to ensure that current grant programs which are now vital to Lands O&M also remain funded.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

This briefing will provide information on the current state of operation and maintenance of the department’s lands.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The department's land acquisition and stewardship activities are constantly under review in multiple venues. In all venues there are consistent values and issues that are expressed.

For instance, a recent public forum, held by the legislatively-mandated Habitat and Recreation Land Coordination group, revealed both extensive support for continued land acquisition, as well as concerns about the potential impact of acquisition in light of limited state operating budgets.

Land acquisition by WDFW is strongly supported by a number of stakeholders, partners, and user groups, including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and Ducks Unlimited. State legislative and congressional support of public land acquisition is also evident in the continued funding of acquisition grant programs like the state's Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, and national programs that include Land and Water Conservation Fund, the National Coastal Wetland Act, and the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund.

Other concerns that are consistently raised include, weed control, fencing, impacts to the county tax base, impacts to working landscapes, and water right protection.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None, briefing only.

Draft motion language:

Briefing only.

Justification for Commission action:

Briefing only.

Communications plan:

Website
