

WILDLIFE AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE INPUT

The WAAC meeting was held on April 4, 2017, and was attended by the following members: Bill Essman, Clay Graham, Craig Schnebly, Marc Eylar, Jason Ridlon, Jason Scribner, Joe Smith, Sam Kayser, and Scott Nicolai. WDFW staff included Wildlife Area Manager Melissa Babik, Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Noel Winegeart, Forester Rod Pfeifle, and Greg Mackey acting as Facilitator.

Lana Cruse attended as additional guest.

Meeting Summary:

Forest Health:

Rod Pfeifle: WDFW statewide forester.

Pfeifle led a discussion on forest health and presented 3 upcoming forest thinning projects in Hutchins, Taneum, and Robinson. Pfeifle explained historic fire suppression altered the composition of our forest from an open pine dominated system to an over-stocked shade tolerant Douglas and Grand Fir forest. Pfeifle described the upcoming thinning prescription that will include elements of the individual, clumps, and openings techniques and stocking/spacing strategies. Work will include “thinning from below” to remove smaller diameter (4-8 inch) suppressed trees and promote larger tree growth. He described polygon marking, snag creation methods, and the removal of trees with pathogens and/or insect attack. Pfeifle explained the constraints of thinning projects and showed units that may be slated for pre-commercial work. The proposed thinning work will restore the forest to a more historic condition and improve ecological integrity. The LT Murray will create a 10 year management plan followed by a 10 year action plan. Bill Essman asked if WDFW has acquired funding for the three upcoming thinning projects. Pfeifle confirmed funding is in place. Marc Eylar asked if there were plans for post thinning restoration of disturbed sites. Pfeifle answered that slash will be used wherever possible to reduce bare soils, and that disturbance sites will be reseeded with native grasses and treated for weeds by LT Murray staff.

Clay Graham: Recreation (motorized and non-motorized)

Graham asked if the proposed thinning projects could permit the public to remove poles. Jason Scribner wondered if the Moonlight project site has an opportunity for poles permits. Pfeifle responded that the units proposed for thinning in 2017 do not have much opportunity for pole permits. Scott Nicolai mentioned that DNR has areas in Taneum that would be suitable for pole permitting.

Craig Schnebly: Mule Deer Foundation.

Schnebly asked if there has there been consideration for wintering elk thermal cover adjacent to elk feeding sites. He pointed out that there will be no regeneration of trees near feeding sites because of the abundance of elk and the tendency of bulls to rub their antlers killing young trees. Pfeifle will incorporate Schnebly’s suggestion of leaving more thermal cover adjacent to feed lots and encouraged WAAC members to come forth with such concerns. Pfeifle suggested that LT Murray staff host a tour of project sites for WAAC members in late May. Sam Kayser spoke up in favor of field tours. Melissa Babik agreed to organize the tour.

Scott Nicolai: Hunter, non-motorized recreation, conservationist.

Nicolai stated that there are areas in the LT Murray that are very thick with small diameter trees and that the risk of catastrophic fire is great without more thinning projects. He wanted to see more funding for reducing fuel loads. Nicolai asked for the WAAC to unanimously support forest health projects and request funding from the legislature to continue thinning work. Nicolai solicited community support for WDFW's thinning work to get ahead of the large fires that are likely to happen.

Sam Kayser: Landowner, Kittitas County Cattleman's Association
Kayser agreed that more money needs to be spent on fire prevention.

Joe Smith: DNR Acting Forest Operations District Manager

Smith agreed with implementing forest health projects and stated that funding fire prevention projects are less costly than firefighting. He mentioned that outreach was important so that when funding becomes available community members will be supportive of fire prevention projects. Smith explained the TAPASH initiative to implement a collaborative approach to ecosystem health across land ownership.

Bill Essman: Kittitas County Field and Stream Club

Essman stated that it is too late to request funding from the legislature this year.

Marc Eylar: Kittitas County Weed Board

Eylar suggested a proposal be drafted defining forest health projects so that the WAAC had a better understanding on what was proposed on the landscape. He agreed forest thinning is important but perhaps not the best management strategy for all sites. The committee agreed that more money is needed for forest health projects but needs more specifics before requesting funding from the legislature.

Jason Ridlon: Back Country Horseman

Ridlon would like to see more merchantable timber projects.

Jason Scribner: Kittitas Audubon

Scribner asked if thinning projects could allow the public to harvest firewood. Pfeifle mentioned that there is opportunity for firewood cutting projects but there is a liability concern. WDFW will look for small thinning projects in appropriate locations to provide the public with permits for fire wood removal. Nicolai commented that permitting firewood removal will help improve trust in government.

Land Acquisition

Melissa Babik presented the recent land purchase at Gnat flats and the upcoming purchases of the "Legoman" parcels. Ridlon asked why WDFW purchased the old Plum Creek sections in Manastash that are surrounded by forest in poor ecological condition. Babik explained the need to put those properties into public ownership for habitat protection as migration corridors and to

protect against the risk of development. Nicolai added that if those parcels were developed forest health projects would be unlikely and an increased effort for fire suppression would occur.

Naneum Rec Plan

Melissa Babik presented the strategies that LT Murray staff is responsible for implementing with the Naneum Recreation Plan. Babik hoped to have plans to the WAAC by the fall for Objective F, reducing open road densities from 24 miles of road to 12 miles. Essman commented that the Field and Stream Club (KCFS) was not notified of this mileage reduction prior to the final plan. He stated that the KCFS submitted a map of road density totaling over 24 miles that they felt should be adopted into the Green Dot system. Babik has heard this concern before and promised to work with senior staff members that were present at those meetings to search for drafts of the Naneum Rec Plan that could demonstrate the Naneum Rec Planning process was sound.

Elk

Melissa Babik presented a project to reduce elk escapement via Taneum Creek. Babik showed photos of a solar charged electric elk fence that was installed across Taneum Creek that has successfully reduced elk presence on private land and the freeway. Kayser asked for the cost of the electric fence and wondered if it could be used to surround private property in Parke Creek. Babik will ask the Bureau of Reclamation, who purchased and installed the fence, for a breakdown of costs and get that to WAAC members. She commented that the structure is only intended for small sections like that of a creek crossing. Schnebly added that a full elk fence surrounding the private property would be cheaper.

Other topics

Scribner asked if WDFW deems Shell Rock Road safe for public travel as it crosses through a creek and is winding. Essman and Schnebly confirmed it is drivable. Babik acknowledged many of the WLA roads are in primitive condition for passenger cars, but that funding is not available for repairs. Essman wondered if WDFW is purchasing private property off Manastash Road that could provide connectivity to the Green Dot system. Babik responded that it was taken off the priority acquisition list. Essman suggested adding a Green Dot road connecting through DNR that could tie into Shell Rock. Babik replied that it was not WDFW ownership so she couldn't speak to that.

Lana Kruse asked if WAAC members vote on projects. Mackey responded that it is not the policy for WAAC members to vote. Kruse and Scribner would like updates on projects. Babik responded that she would like the WAAC to meet once or twice a year for updates.