

Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Final Meeting Notes

March 23, 2020

Skype Call

Attendees

WAAC Members

- Cal Palmer, Northwest Field Trial Council
- Elizabeth Rodrick, Black Hills Audubon Society
- Diana Holbrook, Neighbor
- Joan Fleming, Backcountry Horsemen
- Diane Snyder, Scatter Creek Stables, owner
- Bill Wamsley, Resident

Absent: Bill Brookreson, Native Plant Society; Patrick Dunn, Center for Natural Lands Management; Sharon Coontz, Friends of Rocky Prairie; Tim Wilson, Thurston County Weed Board; Mara Healy, Thurston Conservation District; Jim Knowles, Pheasants Forever; Robert Scott, West Thurston Regional Fire Authority; Kurt Snyder, Washington Waterfowl Association, Grays Harbor Chapter; Thom Woodruff, Capital Land Trust; Jackie Lovette, Neighbor.

WDFW

- Joel Sisolak, Lands Division Planning, Recreation and Outreach Section Manager
- Darric Lowery, Wildlife Area Manager - Scatter Creek Wildlife Area
- Lauri Vigue, Lands Project Manager

Welcome & Introductions – Lauri Vigue

Lauri welcomed everyone to the meeting. We recognize the challenging times we are facing with the coronavirus and appreciate everyone's commitment in this process. Wishing everyone and their families well. This is the first WAAC Skype call.

Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Draft Plan Overview – Darric

Darric provided a high-level overview of the draft plan. He described the goals and objectives as the backbone of the plan.

Comments received:

Cal: commented on the quality of the plan and it makes a lot of sense. Recognizes the multiple users on the wildlife area and existing tension between users. Considering the unique recreation use – we should assume recreation compatibility except when data is shown otherwise – this will determine allowable use.

Elizabeth: use tends to get established whether it is compatible or not and it is currently difficult to enforce. Considering ESA listed species, a conservative approach should be taken.

Joan: the horseback riders appreciate the science behind the decision. Most of the horseback riding was eliminated and would like the chance to bring it back.

Elizabeth: How is recreation being addressed on DFW lands with the new strategy? Are we taking into consideration compatible activities?

Joel: agrees with Cal, we need to have good data in the decision-making process. To date the agency has erred in prohibiting recreation activities. It is open until damage is observed. There is variability across the state on what is considered compatible recreation with wildlife protection. The goal of the recreation strategy is to provide a greater level of consistency across the state. The challenge is capacity, funding is needed to fully measure the impacts over time. A transparent process is needed.

Elizabeth: there is a fair amount of research data available. How will the recreation strategy impact the current Scatter Creek Wildlife Area plan?

Lauri: since the wildlife area plan will be complete before the recreation strategy is complete, we anticipate a separate recreation plan (appendix) being developed for the wildlife area.

Joel: we are also developing new rules and policies that will impact the wildlife area. For example, a statewide trails policy is anticipated.

Darric: Did the wildlife area planning process unveil any surprises? Feedback is appreciated.

Elizabeth: is pleased to see the emphasis on ecological integrity on the lands including monitoring. Healthy ecosystems are essential to long-term viability.

Joan: The plan is very comprehensive; it covers everything completely.

Bill: at the tour of the wildlife area last year, was surprised by the varied users on site, e.g. dog walking, and clearly understands the issues we are dealing with.

Elizabeth: include the impacts to birds in the climate change section. Audubon has a useful resource – Survival by Degrees - she will forward information in her written comments. The land use table (table 4) why not include open space? Doesn't it have a land use restrictions?

Joan: regarding the Rails-to-Trails project referenced in the goals and objectives, where on Black River Unit is it located? My Rails-to-trails comment was about another old rail line along Littlerock Road. It was determined in the discussion that it is not the same one on the Black River unit, regarding about another old rail line along Littlerock Road (Joan).

Darric: recent county discussions have occurred regarding this project. Capacity and support are still needed to fully fund and construct the project.

Joan: dogs are not allowed off leash from April 1 – July 31st. This is not consistent in the plan. My dogs off leash comment about the signage - Darric agreed that the signage could be improved to make it more clear about the restrictions (Joan).

Darric: Scatter Creek North tract is the exception; dog trainers are allowed off leash year-round. The rule is a statewide rule and applies to the remainder of the wildlife area. Recognizes the management challenge – this will be a big part of the recreation strategy.

Bill: regarding fire management plan, goal #9, what is the status?

Darric: DNR supports based on initial feedback and recognizes fire response on a broad level.

Bill: how are new properties being handled under this plan?

Lauri: for the larger units, a new appendix to the plan maybe developed. For smaller parcels or lands with similar habitat, they would be covered under the wildlife area plan implementation.

Diana: as a recreation user, agrees with the use of the land unless proven otherwise. More trails should be allowed if there is a demand. Also recognizes the user conflicts between the hunting dog trainers and the dog walkers. Public lands should provide access.

Darric: How does this plan benefit the local community, fish and wildlife, etc?

Diana: Scatter Creek is a great asset to the county. Local community members, especially people new to the area, do not recognize the purpose of the wildlife area. There is the need to have more public outreach.

Joan: provides an agriculture and equestrian lifestyle – in an urban area. As the population increases newcomers expect changes and it causes misunderstandings. My comment about the SC wildlife area was about urban folks moving into our rural area and not understanding the signs and smells, etc. in rural areas (Joan).

Elizabeth: improved signing would help – place it closer to the right of ways.

Darric: more signage visibility would help.

Lauri: there are at least two objectives in the plan developed to improve community outreach to the local area including social media.

Bill: suggested we look at wildlife areas that are close to urban areas for some ideas.

Joel: funding for signs in the current budget. New sign guidelines and standards are being developed. The Lands Showcase initiative provided guidance on what the actual use is on the land – statewide standards apply locally. Fish and wildlife lands are for hunting and recreation they always do not mix well.

Elizabeth: the proposed statewide rule changes for target shooting are vague. They seem to be allowing target shooting if there is a backstop. There is concern where shooting ranges exist or are planned near residential areas.

Darric: target shooting is allowed shot gun only on the Scatter Creek Unit. There are plenty of other resources nearby, e.g. Capital Forest. There are no designated areas for target shooting on the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area. The rules are being updated currently. Technically in dispersed areas only.

Diane: is willing to provide drone footage of the wildlife area.

Also, note the draft management plan was delivered to 11 tribes and the USFWS the same time as the WAAC for review.

Next steps

- The draft Scatter Creek Wildlife Area plan will go through State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) 30-day public review in April.
- Due to the Covid -19 threat, the public meeting will not occur. Alternative options are being explored, some may include developing a Survey Monkey for stakeholders input, and a PowerPoint presentation providing overview of the draft plan for the public.
- The final draft plan is expected to be delivered to the WDFW director in May 2020 for his approval, after internal review post SEPA.
- Once the plan is final, it will be placed on the agency website and limited hard copies will be printed and sent to the WAAC members.
- The final phase is plan implementation, the goals and objectives will be converted into an implementation spreadsheet where activities will be tracked by the wildlife area manager and regional District Team and reported out to the WAAC annually.