

Washington's Wild Future

A Partnership for Fish and Wildlife

Selah Regional Forum

September 10, 2015

The following public comments were offered by participants at an open forum on fish and wildlife issues sponsored by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) at the Selah Civic Center. Approximately 70 participants attended the event, one of six regional forums conducted around the state.

Agency management

- Increase the use of volunteers, and provide more recognition of their efforts.
- More involvement and recognition of efforts of Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups (RFEGs) and their members.
- When evaluating policy and funding alternatives, use economic analysis to identify potential costs and benefits to the state economy.
- More enforcement officers
- Increase opportunities for WDFW Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT) and Eyes in the Woods training.
- Transparency: Increase stakeholder input for hunting seasons setting process, similar to the North of Falcon process.
- Simplify and clarify regulations and pamphlets. Better distribution of emergency regulations, social media, radio, TV, etc.
- Better dispersion of the permit/point process.
- Increase partnerships with land trust organizations.
 - Find ways to use mitigation funds to support land trusts and other NGOs.
 - Please review use of pheasant stamp funds. Currently most funds used for bird planting and would prefer greater emphasis on habitat enhancement.
- Work with the Legislature to raise fines for dumping trash on public lands
- Work with Washington's Tribes to prevent fish and wildlife wastage.
- No net loss of green dot roads, just like the DNR policy.
- Dual language signage for Discover Pass pricing.
- Increase # of enforcement officers in the field.
- Establish a coalition to inform Legislature to fully fund payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILT).
 - Develop a grassroots coalition of public, fish and wildlife clubs, county commissions, resource agencies and natural resource related organizations.

- Counties are beginning to deny support for habitat acquisitions due to no or reduced PILT payments and the impacts to their economy and operating budgets.
- State will lose valuable habitat due to these denials/opposition.
- US v OR process: Need public input into the re-negotiation
- Wants to see more attention to hiring Spanish speakers, and specifically Hispanics at WDFW, to better serve our public.
- Question about Joint Base Lewis-McChord issues & use (Rocky Mtn Goat Alliance).
- PILT – Restore full funding.
- Take out politics from game mgmt. Science should rule!
- Provide more vehicle access.
- Need to give more consideration to biodiversity & habitat vs. single species mgmt.
- Need to be more service oriented (e.g., if close one area then open another area).
- For online hunt applications, generate revenue by requiring license to apply.
- Explore special permit point odds.
- Reduce size of Rattlesnake Elk herd.

Land management

- Improve and sustain public access to public lands.
- Get all wildlife area advisory committees up and running.
- Close redundant roads on WDFW lands to improve habitat connectivity. Close unauthorized roads constructed by “volunteers.”
- Improve maintenance of WDFW lands and facilities.
- Structured Red Card should be set up for a volunteer force for wildland fire fighting program. This would provide a local, ready force for a faster response time to better protect natural resources
- Need to increase capacity for pro-active prescribed fire treatments
 - More could be done with the help of volunteer collaborators (Mule Deer Foundation, RFEGs, etc.)
 - To accomplish this must establish a formal approach for training and red carding – perhaps through fire districts, the Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR), etc)
 - Recent wildfires highlight the need for fuels reduction and forest health treatments, but at the rate of active management we are not getting ahead, rather just falling further behind
- Manage the Sunnyside Wildlife Area for better waterfowl values by improving duck foods, refuge, and water quality. Use volunteers to help with the habitat work; WA Waterfowl Association wants to help.
- Build a public access site between Crow’s Butte and Biggs

- What is the future of the Vernita Access? I heard that WDFW may be considering “day use only” next year. I am a fishing guide and this would hurt my business and kill this important terminal fishery. I understand the complexity and challenges of managing this Dept. of Energy-owned site, but please figure out how to continue to allow camping.
- Strive for “no net loss” of Green Dot roads
- Manage motorize vehicle access better (i.e. limit to “sanctioned” roads – Green Dot)
- Close superfluous roads
- Eliminate motorized vehicle use on the Columbia River “Breaks” in Kittitas County
- Streamline [consolidate] public access passes across multiple agency jurisdictions. Confusing with WDFW/DNR Discovery Pass, U.S. Forest Service NW Forest Pass, Federal Interagency Pass, etc.
- Desire improved hunter access on private timber lands
- Green Dot Maps need to be correct. Example: The Colockum Green Dot Map in the Stray Gulch Area under the power lines two roads are mismarked.
- More staff is needed to manage Wildlife Areas.
- Signs: Lack of accurate signage on Sunnyside Wildlife Area , much illegible, out of date, website inaccurate and/or out of date. Examples:
 - Hunting season now open, but access is closed. Website states the gate should be open.
 - Byron Ponds, access off SR 22: Sign at railroad crossing says no trespassing, no signage saying it’s open to public access.
 - Bus Road currently has a locked gate. Should have been open by Sept. 1 for dove season.
 - Ferry Road (Bus to Euclid to Ferry) access: Safety zone signs rusted out, not clear where to hunt (no legible map on website or at access site; appears there is no place to hunt or park, yet lands were purchased with Snake River mitigation funds.
- Prioritize the use of habitat restoration funding so that RFEGs have the resources to undertake and complete specific projects in their regions. Often, RFEGs have the capacity to do restoration work more cost-effectively than the department.
- The habitat program staff capacity needs to be increased /rebuilt for restoration projects. Get input from Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board.
- Need better management of our Wildlife Area springs, and better fire control. Manage bug-killed timber & need to find more funds for fire/timber mgmt. Working lands: Prioritize and work with local community.
- No shooting ranges on Wildlife Areas. Need to have more focus on preserving the nature of things on these lands – no shooting ranges.
- Need increased enforcement on WDFW Wildlife Areas.
- In Master Hunter Program, allow time visiting with public at Oak Creek towards MH requirements.

- Eliminate vehicle access on winter elk range.

Fishing

- Would like more data and information available to the public about fishing guides and their impacts.
 - Comments were specific to the Yakima River and were mostly centered around the heavy guide use coupled with the heavy weekend sportsmen. Because of the way the river is managed, most of the fish caught are along the margins and they're concerned with the cumulative effects of catching these fish over and over again.
 - Suggest limiting the number of guides or restricting the days/times they could operate
- Positive feedback about the hoot owl restrictions. Thought they were a good idea and helped work to reduce impacts to fish.
- A positive comment about fishing regulations:
 - Fish management is complex and thus complex regulations are necessary to sustain a good fishery.
 - Alaska has very complex regulations and has an excellent fishery
- Request for more clarification on what defines "barbless" hooks.
 - Don't always feel confident that pinching the barbs is effective enough. Want some sort of clarification on how good is "good enough" for pinched barbs.
- Increase collaborative efforts with entities such as Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups (RFEGs):
 - Collaborative funding and prioritization
 - Avoid duplicative efforts to increase efficiency and impact
- Fishing pamphlet too complex and confusing. Simplify, but maintain diversity and amount of fishing opportunity.
- Set fishing regulations based on good science and recommendations of professional fishery managers. Do not let politics trump science.
- Clear Lake (Yakima Co.): Heard rumor that it may be changing to selective gear rules.
 - WDFW is not proposing SGR for Clear Lake. It is the most heavily stocked lake in Region 3 with hatchery catchable and jumbo trout.
- Limit Columbia River commercial fishing.
- Simplify the fishing regulations.
 - The 6-fish salmon limit regulations are confusing and need to be spelled out clearly what is allowed (i.e. 6-fish limit unless adult portion retained).
 - Area listings should return to a Westside-Eastside format put into an alphabetical listing. It's much easier to locate the particular water a fisher is looking for.

- McNary Dam escapement goal for fall Chinook: Protect Hanford wild fall Chinook.
- Coordinated Columbia Basin fishery management needed.
- Comments from local sporting goods store owner: There are lots of small groups interested in their own local issues, which don't work together to see big picture. Need education and focused direction to increase fishing opportunities for all through the legislative process. Many want increased protection for wild fish and provide more opportunity, but don't know how to achieve this.
 - Develop proactive strategy to support this.
 - Identify all groups who have a stake.
 - Understand their interests.
 - Identify common ground among interest groups and effective outreach/education strategies.
 - All must understand the problem statement: What constrains the development of more fishing opportunities on a regional or statewide level.
 - There is great strength in numbers and focused effort can make a difference
 - Mike Hammond, sporting goods store owner interested in helping agency do this
- WDFW can play a role in education/outreach – communicate the cost of doing business, and what it means to collect \$1.5 million in license fees – sounds like a big number, how comes it doesn't go very far-
- Let public know what are the things they can do to make a difference. Input is provided but not always fed back with information about how to engage.
- Lessons from CCA: The bigger the groundswell, the more likely to get things done, including legislative changes
- Why don't we have a mobile application for catch record cards for sturgeon, halibut, salmon and steelhead that connect with WILD dealers/sales?
- Sustainable funding for Regional Fishery Enhancement Group (RFEG) program. Include RFEGs in any sport license fee increase proposals. Help them engage collaboratively with conservation groups to inform the public what they do.
- Want to establish a budget baseline for RFEGS. Build habitat and recreational/conservation values via these groups.
- Comments from Trout Unlimited representative:
 - A synopsis of enforcement activity including charges and dispositions from courts by county.
 - Any information on water stargrass issue that resulted from this year's higher-than-normal water temperatures and if there were impacts to fish movement.
 - Hoot owl drought regulations. TU members were in favor of the process, but wondered if the timing of implementation and ending could be improved.
 - Believe Yakima River upstream from Roza Dam should be returned to a seasonal fishery, not year round as it is currently.

- Additional recommendations from representatives of Trout Unlimited and the Yakima Fly Fishers Association:
 - Expand gene banks
 - Regulate suction dredging
 - Identify threats from abandoned mines, and support clean-up.
 - Supportive of law enforcement, but believe there is room to improve on courts' enforcing actions with penalties.
 - Restrict/eliminate invasive species.

Wildlife management

- Stop spending money recovering/supporting predator bird species that prey on threatened/endangered salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon species.
- Concerned about "Species of Concern," such a Black Backed Woodpecker & Vaux Swift).
- Begin planning now for how we will manage wolves after the gray wolf is delisted.
- Elk hunting: Consider revising/eliminating the "true spike" bull restrictions (see page 49 of 2015-16 big game pamphlet). The current rule definition is too confusing and easily misunderstood, and it requires hunters to scope an elk "from every direction" before they can be sure the animal meets our definition. Very easy for well-intentioned hunters to violate the current rule.
- Complete white pelican recovery plan and delist this species.
- Require hunter education for archery hunters. (This proposal came from an archery hunter.)
- More weekend days for muzzleloader season
- Separate antlerless opportunities from general seasons
- Concerned that WDFW is increasing grouse bag limits when populations seem to be decreasing. Proposes opening seasons in Oct. rather than Sept. (when family groups are still together) to help protect juveniles and perhaps increase their survival
- Work with USFWS to open Hanford ALE to hunting.
- Allow general season tag to apply for damage hunts & allow harvest of 2 elk or allow 2 damage tags to be purchased.
- Would like to see us do more to increase pheasant populations and opportunities for harvest
 - Would like to see more habitat enhancement for pheasants done on our lands
 - Would like to see the pheasant releases continue and/or increase as they provide a good harvest opportunity for beginning, young, elderly, and disabled hunters.

- Overhead irrigation (sprinklers) that help to conserve water and make agriculture more efficient are probably limiting insect production, which is negatively impacting pheasant populations.
- GMU 278: Why did the deer harvest change to 3 point only?
 - Is this change justified by data?
 - Are legal hunters (with low harvest) being punished by supposed poaching impacts?
- GMU 328 & 329: These have seen a significant increase in cougar populations and deer populations have really decreased.
 - Bring back regulated hound hunting as a management tool (work with legislators)
 - Increase cougar quota based on specific site data and not just on what is modeled.
- Need higher-quality ADA hunter access
 - Some areas chosen to provide ADA access seem to be very poor choices to provide quality hunting or even safe hunting for the disabled
 - It appears that areas chosen seem often to be based more on agency convenience (e.g., there is a gated road already at the site) than on providing a good ADA opportunity.
- Need to consider the system implications of a very large elk population in Region 3
 - Grazing/browsing impacts on sensitive habitats and other species, such as shrub-steppe birds
 - Would like to see lower elk herd objectives in the region
- Establish better waterfowl hunting opportunities in upper Kittitas County
- Hunting pamphlet also too complex and confusing. Simplify.
- Set hunting regulations based on good science and recommendations of professional game managers. Do not let politics trump science.
- Do something to improve hunter retention and recruitment. Don't just talk about it.
- 3911 Master Hunter Unit: Update the Boundary Map and Description. It is difficult to understand.
- Professional wildlife biologists need to make the rules (seasons etc.) not the I-5 corridor (politicians). Science not politics needs to set the rules.
- Clean up the Master Hunter Program – ethics and oversight.
- GMU Area descriptions should match up to the map and/or provide more detailed maps that show the boundary features. Check the descriptions for errors.
- Moose, goat and sheep drawings have an age component. Use points and age.
- Provide ADA access areas that provide a better opportunity for harvest vs just a road that is conducive to regulating traffic in/out.
- Improve permit access/numbers for ADA hunters. Perhaps shift some Master Hunter opportunities to ADA.
- Increase ADA hunter opportunity when additional tags are allotted in GMUs.

- Explore Master Hunters assisting or teaming up with ADA hunters, perhaps in conjunction with MH seasons.
- Pronghorn introduction: Need to partner with SCI & reinvigorate our working group. (Input from Yakama Nation)
- Effectiveness of antler point restrictions & no APR for whitetail deer.
- Need better coordination with US Forest Service for bighorn & domestic sheep management.
- Audobon Society concerns about elk impacts. Yakima herds spreading invasive weeds.
- Provide more late hunts for all user groups, (more early & late seasons for all groups).
- Have special draw hunts for all hunting groups, not just Master Hunters, for damage hunts.
- Would like to see tribes respect hunting boundaries, especially regarding weeds, excess carrying capacity, impacts on sub-alpine vegetation & riparian areas.
- Comments from National Wild Turkey Federation:
 - Improve the process to solicit and use of volunteers/conservation organization members on projects that benefit wildlife. Improve the process of communicating agency opportunities for volunteers to assist with conservation related projects. Also need more commitment from staff to utilize volunteers.
 - WDFW needs to improve outreach and communication with NWTF and other conservation organizations, and staff should be more willing/available to attend statewide meetings to brief organizations on the status of projects that affect their species of interest.
 - Nuisance turkeys: First consideration should be to relocate (with volunteer assistance from NWTF) to supplement existing populations in depressed population areas around the state (per statewide Turkey Management Plan) or provide additional hunting opportunity, when compatible, before issuance of kill permits.
 - Department should educate local landowners in areas with problem as to the causes (attractants, feeding, animal husbandry practices, etc.) that result in excessive resident turkey populations to help reduce conflicts.
 - Pursue returning to use of hounds as a valid management tool to manage cougar and bear populations.
- Consider eligibility of other volunteer hours for Master Hunter credits; all related to educating the public about hunting.
 - Work with public at Oak Creek Elk feeding facility
 - Muzzle loaders opening day
 - Shed hunting
 - Recognize that will have to be reconciled with complimentary Discover Pass

- Consider different requirements for seniors/disabled to achieve Master Hunter Certification. Some of the categories for eligible hours are not realistic for these groups (e.g. fence construction/repair).

Communication/Public Outreach

- Provide more opportunity for public input and outreach.
- Provide better [more diverse] demographic representation on Wildlife Area Advisory Committees.
- More lanyards with nail clippers for kids and anglers. They were a big hit – why are no more available?
- Educational fish I.D. key rings for kids.
- Need accurate online maps and other information showing areas open or closed.
- Get Sunnyside Wildlife Area Advisory Group started now! (Need to address access conflicts between anglers and waterfowl hunters at Windmill Ranch).
- There is perception that WDFW recruits candidates for Wildlife Area Advisory Groups to get the outcome the department wants. No transparent criteria for recruitment. Need good cross section of candidates.
- Deal with Windmill Ranch issue: Need to work on seasons, and conflicts between hunters and fishers.