

Chelan Wildlife Area Management Plan

Public Scoping Workshop Summary – Final

April 12, 2018

Introduction

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) hosted a public meeting on Thursday April 12th, from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. at the Chelan County Fire District 7 office, Chelan. The purpose of the workshop was to provide an overview of the draft management plan and collect public comments.

The meeting introduced the draft Chelan Wildlife Area Management Plan, one of 33 plans the department is revising. The 30-day SEPA comment period began on March 30th and ends on April 30th. The plans are updated every two years to reflect changes in landscape and management priorities; however, the larger plan efforts are more comprehensive and consider the status of wildlife species and their habitat, progress towards goals identified in earlier plans, and new wildlife area priorities. The plans will consider the interests and impacts of stakeholders and user groups; set goals for assessing and monitoring ecological integrity; outline forest management priorities; identify appropriate public use, recreation areas and facility improvements; as well as weed control and other operations and maintenance practices.

Eighteen individuals attended and signed in at the workshop including interested parties from Chelan County communities of Wenatchee, Chelan, and Mason. One individual was from Ferndale, WA. Stakeholder groups included Audubon, Wild Sheep Foundation, Lake Chelan Trails/Evergreen Bike Alliance, Chelan County Weed Board, Bureau of Land Management, Chelan County PUD, and Department of Natural Resources. Tim Hollingsworth, City of Chelan council member attended as well.

Staff presentation

Rich Finger, Regional Lands Operations Manager, welcomed everyone and introduced WDFW employees. Other WDFW participants included:

- Ron Fox, Chelan Wildlife Area Manager
- Devon Comstock, Wildlife Biologist
- Graham Simon, Habitat Program
- Dan Klump, Enforcement
- Lauri Vigue, Project Manager

Lauri Vigue, project manager, reviewed the agenda and the department's overall process for updating all state wildlife area plans. The plans set management activities for the next 10 years and ensures lands are managed consistent with the agency's mission and funding obligations. This plan has taken about one year to develop. Most of the previous plans have taken several years to complete, a good sign that we are becoming more efficient in our update process. Lauri also pointed out the Wildlife Area Management Planning Framework document, which is the umbrella document for all wildlife area planning, and serves as a good reference for describing agency initiatives, rules and regulations that guide wildlife area management planning. The document is located at this link:

https://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/

The final Chelan Wildlife Area Management plan should be finalized by July, 2018.

Wildlife Area Plan Highlights

Ron Fox, Chelan Wildlife Area Manager provided an overview of the draft management plan.

The new vision for the wildlife area plan:

“To maintain and enhance native habitats, to support and recover fish and wildlife species on the wildlife area now and in the future; and provide opportunities for appropriate recreational experiences”.

Success stories listed in the first section of the wildlife area plan include:

- Bighorn sheep recovery
- Wildlife viewing
- Frank’s Pond
- Swakane Canyon Restoration
- Chelan Butte Ag Field Restoration
- White River Salmon Restoration
- Wenatchee Sportsmen’s Association Volunteers

The target species:

- Rocky Mountain Mule Deer
- Bighorn Sheep
- Upland Game Birds
- Golden Eagle
- Western Gray Squirrel
- Pygmy Nuthatch
- Tiger Salamander
- Giant Palouse Earthworm
- Bull trout
- Chinook Salmon
- Steelhead

Evaluation Process for Recreation Development

Rich Finger described the draft proposal to evaluate recreation developments on the Chelan Wildlife Area. The agency determined it needs to develop a public outreach process to evaluate recreation development proposals. The guidance came to life after the Elephant Head Trail proposal was initially evaluated by WDFW region 2 office.

The draft process would involve three phases once a proposal is delivered to the agency:

Communication

- WDFW would conduct an internal assessment on proposals brought forward by the public/agencies
- WDFW makes recommendations to the project sponsor

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Public Input

- Wildlife Area Advisory Committee reviews initial proposal/ proposal revised
- Public meeting will be held to gather public input on each proposal

Internal Review

- Regional program reviews public comments
- Makes final recommendation

Examples of recreational activities that will be included in this process: trails for hiking and biking, and target shooting. Any stakeholder can bring a project forward to the regional office for review.

This process will help determine non-compatible use on WDFW lands.

Public Comments:

- It is a good idea to develop this process. The agency has limited resources, and currently there is no restrictions from proposals coming from the outside. The agency should have the authority to say recreation is “incompatible” from the beginning of a proposal.
- The USFS has the Resource Advisory Council process to determine if proposals are compatible, and makes the determination if the proposal will benefit the agency and/or public.
- If a proposal goes against agency mission or objectives, we should have the ability to say no.
- The criteria developed to evaluate recreation proposals needs to be made public.
- Would the Wildlife Commission make the ultimate decision? Answer: the regional director would make the initial decision in most cases. There are some instances where the decision could be made by the Director.

General Public Comments

- The Chelan PUD had purchased fishing easements along the Wenatchee river for public access as part of the FERC licensing agreement. Currently there is limited public access. There is pressure for increased residential housing along the river.
WDFW Response: This is a statewide issue; the Region does not have the capacity to address it adequately. Some cases would need the Attorney General’s Office involvement, since there will be lawsuits. PUD response: The PUD purchased fee title and easements for river access. There is a summary list available, sites are not specifically identified.
- The Lake Chelan area is having issues with public access sites being overtaken by neighbors, and private property rights being thought to be violated.
- WDFW should identify high value easements, add signage and make available to the public.
WDFW wants to be good neighbors to adjacent lands and must pursue the issue fairly, rather than targeting specific easements of high value.
- We need to get the public outside so they support public lands.
- Currently we cannot park along Hwy 97A to view sheep. Response: This objective is in the new management plan.
- We should all have access to easement whether it is hunting or fishing
- Beebe Springs has done very well with ADA access.
- Weed management plan, unattainable process. Partners (county weed board) are available to help assist with control efforts. Include line item budget for operations and maintenance.

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Concern from the public on the lack of full and reliable funding sources. Increase habitat management. Adapt schedule by species and early response. Use insects.

- Use the public to help control weeds, provide information at kiosks.
- The county has education materials to provide.
- Access sites most vulnerable to noxious weeds.
- Recruit retirees (develop *Friends of Chelan Wildlife Area*)
- Thank you for your transparency
- The Entiat Unit has the potential for big horn sheep in the future.
- Oppose any infringement – negative development on lands with low elevation forest fire concerns, under extreme fire conditions the wildlife area should be closed to the public, especially with climate change.
- Trail development – great fire breaks partners DNR and USFS.
- Big horn sheep were extirpated from the state due to over hunting. Concern over the loss of sheep pre-dates ESA. They are sensitive to recreation, cortisol increases as a stress response and pre-disposes them to disease. It is critical to exclude domestic sheep contact from big horns. They face connectivity challenges, Chelan Butte. Vulnerable to further decline. Big Horn Sheep Foundation has contributed \$3 million for habitat improvements for big horns.

Meeting Materials

The following meeting materials are attached:

- Agenda
- Draft Chelan Wildlife Area Management Plan
- Draft Forest Plan
- Chelan Wildlife Area Management Plan Fact Sheet