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Appendix K. Public Involvement

Public involvement was sought throughout the development of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) comprehensive conservation plan (CCP), starting in November 2010. Public involvement strategies included communication with federally elected officials (or their aides), Tribal governments, key agencies, local refuge users, and the general public.

Three planning updates were mailed to a mailing list that included over 800 recipients representing Federal, local, and state agencies; congressional representatives; state and local elected officials; Tribal representatives; nongovernment organizations; businesses; learning institutions; media; private landowners; and individual citizens. The refuge also maintained a website where CCP information could be found and where the public could provide comments during the scoping phase.

Two public meetings and one agency meeting were held inviting discussion and soliciting feedback. Below is a brief summary of the events, meetings, and outreach tools that were used in our public involvement efforts.

K.1 Summary of Public Involvement Process

Federal Register Notice

- November 3, 2010. Federal Register published the Notice of Intent to Prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment; and the Request for Comments.

Coordination with Congressional Representatives and/or Their Aides

- November 1, 2010. Letter sent to Oregon's two U.S. Senators and five U.S. Representatives. Letter described the start of the CCP process; invited coordination during initial public scoping; and provided public meeting dates and times.
- November 30, 2010. John Valley, aide to U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley, attended public open house.

Coordination with Tribes

- November 1, 2010. Letter to Tribal Chairwoman, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Letter described the start of the CCP process, invited coordination during initial public scoping through attendance at public meetings, and/or supplemental meetings directly with the Tribe.
- March 16, 2011. Letter to Tribal Chairwoman, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Letter invited Tribe to a face-to-face meeting with refuge staff to discuss tribal input to the CCP.
- April 13, 2011. Letter to Tribal Chairwoman, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Letter invited Tribe to a face-to-face meeting with refuge staff to discuss tribal input to the CCP.

Coordination with State, Regional, and Local Agencies

- November 1, 2010. Letter to state, regional, and local agency stakeholders, including Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) representatives. Letter described the start of the CCP process; invited coordination during initial public scoping; invited participation in an agency scoping meeting; and provided public meeting dates and times.
- November 16, 2010. Meeting with agency representatives. Refuge hosted a round-table discussion to solicit input and feedback on identified issues, opportunities, and concerns.

Planning Updates

- November 2010. *Planning Update Number 1* described planning process, preliminary issues to be considered, and announcement of public meetings.
- April 2011. *Planning Update Number 2* summarized public scoping results, presented draft refuge vision statement, and presented draft refuge goals.
- October 2011. *Planning Update Number 3* summarized preliminary alternatives.

Public Open Houses/Scoping Sessions

- November 30, 2010 (evening). Public open house for CCP scoping. Sherwood, Oregon.
- December 2, 2010 (evening). Public open house for CCP scoping. Forest Grove, Oregon.

Meetings with Local Community Organizations on CCP Issues

- March 21, 2011. Presentation about the CCP process to the Friends of Tualatin River NWR.

Outreach and Media

- October 8, 2010. Press release sent to media. Announcement of upcoming public meetings published in several regional and community newspapers and newsletters, including *The Oregonian*.
- October 2010 to present. Website (<http://www.fws.gov/tualatinriver/refugeplanning.htm>) featuring CCP information, public involvement opportunities, reports, and progress.

K.2 Summary of Comments Received on Draft CCP/EA

The draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for the Tualatin River NWR was issued October 22, 2012, and was made available for review during a 30-day public comment period that extended from October 22 to November 22. Copies of the planning document were available at local libraries, refuge headquarters, and online. A planning update announcing the availability of the CCP/EA was distributed to everyone on the CCP mailing list, which totaled approximately 838 individuals and organizations.

A total of 102 comments were received from individuals and organizations, either in the mail or on the Public Comment Form that was contained within the mailing update. Some letters contained just one comment, while others contained multiple comments on various topics. The majority of the comments received were from the general public, while some were received from non-profit organizations, and Federal and state agencies. Some commenters indicated the alternative that they preferred, while others expressed their comments across the variety of alternatives.

All of the comments received were considered and are organized below by subject matter with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS's; Service's) response. Similar comments on a topic were grouped together and the Service response applies to the comments as a group.

Land Acquisition

Comment: The Service should not purchase any more lands for conservation.

Response: The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. The Service purchases lands for conservation that have been designated inside an approved acquisition boundary. Lands are only purchased from willing sellers and at fair market value. Currently, consistent with the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, the Service is exploring the feasibility of revising the refuge's acquisition boundary.

Acquisition funds come from several sources: the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, which receives revenue from the sale of duck stamps, Land and Water Conservation Funds, which are funds from offshore oil and gas leases, and import taxes on weapons. When lands are acquired by the Service, they are removed from the tax rolls. However, the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (1995 [16 U.S.C. 715s]) allows the Service to offset the tax losses by annually paying the county or other local government unit an amount that often equals or exceeds that which would have been collected from taxes if in private ownership. Funds to pay for this comes from the net income the Service receives from products or privileges like timber sales, grazing fees, and such that are deposited in the fund for revenue sharing payment. If there is a shortage, then Congress has the authority to appropriate money to make up the difference.

Various Management Plans

Comment - State Plans: The ODFW requested various state management plans be included in the draft CCP under Chapter 1, Section 1.7.2, State Plans.

Response: While the Service recognizes the various state plans that are available to land managers for guidance on habitat management and restoration, and on various species, the list was not meant to be comprehensive and instead focused on those plans that were most relevant to the process of developing the draft CCP. Language was added in Chapter 1 to reflect this process.

Comment: Comments were received on the importance of developing a habitat management plan and a land protection plan to assist and guide management direction in the next 15 years. Comments were also received asking for clarification on the priority system for acquisition.

Response: Appendix C: Implementation Plan, Table C-1, outlines some of the step-down plans that will be developed over the life of the CCP. The Service has added habitat management and restoration step-down plans, and a land protection plan to this table.

The refuge currently has a land acquisition priority plan that was developed and outlines the five priority areas for land acquisition at the Sherwood Units. There is a focus on the top three areas for acquisition, and the plan includes maps and descriptions of each area. This plan is used extensively by refuge management to develop annual funding requests and work plans in cooperation with the realty program in our Regional Office. Most importantly, this plan provides a long-term guide for future planning. The Service has added language on this plan in Chapter 2, Description of Management Direction, Land Acquisition and Habitat Protection.

Comment: Support for the refuge developing an elk management plan.

Response: Appendix C, Implementation Plan, Table C-1 lists the elk management plan as a step-down management plan that will be prepared in coordination with the Willamette Valley NWR Complex.

Key Issues

Comment: Comments were received asking why issues such as climate change and inventory and monitoring were not addressed under the Key Issues section.

Response: We do feel these issues are important and addressed them in other sections of the CCP. Climate change is addressed in the Description of Management Direction section in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), and again in Chapter 3, Physical Environment, in Section 3.1.2. We do have a goal for inventory and monitoring and our objectives and strategies are covered in Chapter 2 under Goal 8.

Refuge Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Comment: The refuge received several comments relating to the refuge IPM program, ranging from concerns over herbicide use, the refuge's role in mosquito control, and invasive and nuisance species control.

Response: The refuge follows IPM policy guidelines when planning and implementing the use of herbicides, which recommend using the minimum amount of approved chemicals to achieve desirable goals. The refuge will continue to work closely with local county partners to establish guidelines in our IPM and mosquito control contingency plan regarding mosquito control action on the refuge. Nuisance species removal will be carried out under the guidelines of IPM policy.

Maps

Comment: Clarification of what the maps were conveying among the alternatives and what habitat was changing among the alternatives was requested.

Response: The Final CCP will include only two maps showing habitat types. The first one will be *current management*, depicting the habitats that currently exist or the restoration direction originally planned. The second map will be for the *preferred alternative – future management direction*, and

will depict the habitats that the refuge will work to restore and manage over the next 15 years. Table 2.1 of Chapter 2 also shows the changes through acreages.

Fire

Comment: Support was expressed for prescribed fire as a habitat management strategy as were concerns about the potential off-refuge effects to visibility and overall air quality. “Would machines be used to reduce the smoke?”

Response: Prescribed fire is listed as a strategy to reduce hazardous fuels and enhance and maintain wildlife habitat, particularly prairie, wetland, and savanna habitats. All prescribed fire activity will comply with applicable Federal, state, and local air quality laws and regulations. Visibility is a major consideration in smoke management. The planning for a prescribed fire must include the potential for hazardous situations, including impaired visibility created by smoke both on and off our lands. All prescribed burns must meet the provisions of the Clean Air Act and the State Implementation Plan. Burning machines will not be used due to their high cost and terrain constraints.

Species Management

Comment: We received comments regarding management actions specifically directed at certain species.

Response: Service policy supports biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health (BIDEH) of the landscape. To this end we maintain diverse habitat types to support a myriad of species across many guilds. In addition we focus on state and federally listed threatened and endangered species, and species of concern. We often include management activities for certain species or guilds providing it does not detract from the overall BIDEH mandate. For example, wetlands are primarily managed for waterfowl and other waterbirds, but early spring drawdowns are conducted to provide habitat for shorebirds. Additionally, managing for increased wet prairie acreage should provide benefits to species such as streaked horned larks and western meadowlarks.

Comment: We received comments from ODFW recommending management of specific fish and wildlife species and guilds, as well as habitat management suggestions.

Response: The Service mission and BIDEH policy both support the conservation of a diversity of habitats in support of fish, wildlife, and plants. We agree with ODFW that we should continue to look for opportunities to enhance habitats in support of an appropriate diversity of habitats and will continue to work in close partnership with ODFW on habitat, fish, and wildlife issues.

Grazing

Comment: We received comments regarding grazing as a habitat management tool.

Response: The refuge currently does not use grazing as a management tool. However, grazing may be a useful management tool in the future. Grazing could be used to remove non-native invasive species such as Himalayan blackberry (with goats) or reed canarygrass (cattle) for management purposes to improve habitat. Any grazing program implemented in the future will be for management purposes only and not as a commercial economic program.

Habitat

Comment: Some comments suggested restoring all areas to historic habitat conditions (e.g., convert managed wetlands to other habitat types).

Response: As noted above, the refuge maintains a variety of habitat types to support BIDEH. These habitat types sometimes include intensively managed tracts to support a diversity of species. Historic conditions such as frequent fire and flooding no longer exist as they did in pre-European settlement times. Therefore the refuge must manage habitats to mimic historic conditions to the best of our ability. Historic conditions did play a large role in determining current and future restoration opportunities, and using this information, the refuge is planning on significant historic vegetation restoration projects on the refuge. Not all areas will be converted to historic conditions though, either because it is no longer feasible due to the extent of the alternations or because focus will be on converting habitat to an imperiled valley habitat, such as oak.

Comment: We received comments concerning habitat corridors and connectivity.

Response: During the planning process much of our focus was to provide larger contiguous blocks of habitat while still supporting appropriate diverse habitats that support wildlife corridors and connectivity to habitats off of the refuge. Many of the habitat changes proposed will provide better corridors and connectivity for fish and wildlife as a result of these changes. The refuge will continue to pursue acquisition and restoration projects that increase connectivity.

Comment: Comments were received about the proposed change of habitat restoration from wet prairie to riparian forest on the northern portion of the Atfálat'i Unit, managed by the Service and owned by Metro. Comments were also received suggesting an increase of wet prairie habitats at other units on the refuge.

Response: The preferred alternative in the draft CCP identified the northern portion of the Atfálat'i Unit to be restored to riparian forest. After discussions with natural resource managers and biologists, the Service determined that this area would be better restored to wet prairie habitat based on hydrology, soils, and historic conditions. This change has been reflected throughout the final document as appropriate. Additionally, the Service recognizes the importance of wet prairie and as indicated in Chapter 2, Table 2.1, wet prairie habitat will increase from the current 27 acres to 138 acres on the refuge.

Comment: Concern was expressed over the loss of prairie and encroachment of other habitat types on small endemic plant populations located on the refuge. Some of these plants are rare and significant, and the encroachment of other species will cause the loss of those rare species on the refuge.

Response: The Service recognizes the importance of these rare plants and will maintain and restore wet prairie as identified in the management direction. The plants of concern will be protected from encroachment to the best of the refuge's ability. If the plants are growing in a location suited for restoration other than wet prairie, then, if appropriate and necessary, they will be moved to a more suitable location.

Comment: Commenters were concerned about converting oak to other habitat types and loss of wet prairie habitat.

Response: After further consideration, the final CCP will include maintaining oak habitat (savanna and woodland) and conversion of some areas that were planned for oak habitat to other habitat types in order to meet several habitat goals. In addition, existing wet prairie habitats will remain, and additional areas will be restored to wet prairie. Chapter 2 outlines in detail the changes to be made in regard to habitat, both in Table 2.1 and in the various habitat goals and objectives.

Comment: Comments were received suggesting alternative dates for mowing due to impacts to grassland birds.

Response: We agree that the timing of mowing is very important so as to not disturb grassland nesting birds. We have changed our strategies to reflect that mowing will be conducted after August 1 to protect ground-nesting birds. This date is a guideline, and we recognize that weather patterns may alter the timing. This will be evaluated on a seasonal basis.

Water (Quality and Management)

Comment: Comments were received related to refuge management and the potential impact on water quality, and on the importance of working with partners to facilitate high water quality, ensure total daily maximum load (TDML) amounts are not exceeded, and prevent future algal blooms at the Wapato Lake Unit. There were also comments received regarding the drinking water provided at the public facilities.

Response: The Service recognizes the need to develop and maintain good working partnerships for water quality with the local watershed council, Joint Water Commission, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and others. The Service is committed to working with these partners to maintain high standards of water quality as consistent with the Service's mission. The refuge will work with partners to write a TDML plan for discharging water from Wapato Lake and will follow recommended pump deadlines in DEQ's water management plan. The refuge will work closely in coordination with the Joint Water Commission on Wapato Lake discharging timelines and any issues that may arise that could impact their operations downstream on the Tualatin River. Additionally, coordination will take place for future restoration plans on the Sherwood Unit that may affect water quality through creek restoration or other actions.

The Service also recognizes the need for and is required to follow health regulations in providing safe drinking water to the public. This is achieved through regular water testing and maintenance of the water systems in place.

Comment: The Service received comments supporting a more natural hydrology approach to habitat management using limited water manipulations with water control structures. Comments favored using historic hydrology instead of the managed wetlands currently found on the refuge.

Response: While exploring the various options for habitat restoration opportunities for the refuge, the Service researched historic conditions and examined habitats that are imperiled in the Willamette Valley. Using this information and other physical environment characteristics such as soils and elevations, the refuge identified the best possible habitat to promote while ensuring compliance with the BIDEH policy. This policy promotes a mixture of healthy habitats to maintain diversity and biological health. Currently, the refuge manages 294 acres of herbaceous wetlands using various water control structures and levees. These wetlands are managed to mimic seasonal flooding and to maximize foraging and stopover habitat for migratory waterfowl and other waterbirds. However, the

Service, through the process of developing the draft CCP/EA, recognized a need to have a more natural hydrologic system in some floodplain areas, and the management direction will show a decrease of managed wetlands by 100 acres. These 100 acres are now designated to be more historic habitats such as wet prairie and riparian forest.

Comment: The water control structures that would be removed during implementation of the CCP should be identified.

Response: The Service plans on developing restoration plans for the changes to be implemented on the refuge over the next 15 years. Appendix C: Implementation, Table C-1, identifies the various step-downs plans to be developed. Prior to any restoration project, a plan will be developed that details the objectives and strategies outlined in Chapter 2. While the maps found in Appendix P show the habitat change from herbaceous wetland to another type, the identification of specific water control structures to be removed are unknown until a restoration plan is completed.

Comment: There were comments on water management on the Wapato Lake Unit. Comments received emphasized the importance of making water quality and research a high priority; wanted to see the Service maintain the current irrigation system in place; stated the need to balance irrigation capabilities, in partnership with Tualatin Valley Irrigation District (TVID), with habitat and wildlife goals; and requested a detailed water management plan.

Response: The Service has a contract with the United States Geological Survey to gather data on water hydrology characteristics of the lakebed and surrounding area. The Service is waiting to develop a water management plan and restoration plan for Wapato Lake until these data are reviewed and a better understanding of the infrastructure is achieved. The Service recognizes the need for collaboration and partnerships for water quality and future restoration planning as they fit with the Service's mission. Currently, infrastructure owned by the Service is used by TVID for water distribution to their customers within the Bureau of Reclamation's project area, which includes the Wapato Lakebed and surrounding landowners. Interim management of Wapato Lake will include working with the TVID to provide access to the infrastructure for their delivery needs as long as the infrastructure remains intact. Restoration of the lakebed will most likely require removal of some irrigation infrastructure. However, at both the Wapato Lake Unit and the Sherwood Units, there needs to be more information gathered and engineering design acquired prior to any construction.

Artificial Structures

Comment: The refuge received comments concerning use of artificial structures, such as water control structures, as habitat management tools that may favor some species over others.

Response: The refuge's CCP management direction moves toward addressing these concerns by managing toward more native historic habitats and natural water flow regimes that could benefit a wider variety of species.

Cooperative Farming

Comment: The refuge received comments requesting clarification on the continued use of farming as a management tool.

Response: Cooperative farming has long been a traditional tool used by refuges to meet wildlife management goals. Cooperative farming provides a mechanism for the refuge to maintain a “clean” landscape free of weeds, until restoration can be implemented. Meanwhile, cooperative farmers are able to grow their crop in exchange for 30 percent of the harvest set aside for the refuge as wildlife food. The refuge will continue to evaluate the potential to continue cooperative farming as a management tool as we move forward in our restoration planning efforts. Cooperative farming is a valuable tool and will continue to be used as long as it is feasible and consistent with the goals of the refuge.

Impacts to Agriculture and Farmers

Comment: The refuge received comments with concern to our future commitments to farming and how it might impact area farmers. Commenters stated the importance of working with the agricultural community, both farmers and organizations/agencies, and assessing whether the Wapato Lake Unit is considered part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as identified under the 1985 Farm Bill.

Response: The refuge continues to work closely with our farming community as it relates to our farming program and will keep them involved during the process of implementing our management plan. Agreements are entered into annually with farmers from the local agricultural community. Communications will ensure the best opportunities are available for farmers as well as for the refuge. The refuge recognizes the need to continue communications and to partner with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other agricultural organizations.

The CRP is a program that encourages farmers to convert cropland or other sensitive acreage to resource-conserving vegetative cover. This program enhances landscape-level conservation of habitat on farmland while offering incentives and a source of income for farmers. The CRP program is implemented on private lands by willing farmers. Lands already owned in fee title by the Service utilize a cooperative farming program as described above. Lands not owned by the Service have the potential to be part of the CRP, and farmers are encouraged to contact their local farm agency for further information.

Inventorying and Monitoring

Comment: We received comments supporting the inventory and monitoring of wildlife species.

Response: We agree that inventorying and monitoring wildlife species and habitats is essential to understanding their needs and providing appropriate management. We currently survey for a wide variety of species and will continue to expand these efforts as we are able. Inventory and monitoring are conducted using approved protocols and support refuge management and/or regional and national monitoring programs.

Fees

Comment: User fees were supported for a variety of public uses including hunting, wildlife photography blinds, and special events. Others suggested that reduced fees be available for low-income visitors.

Response: In 2009, the refuge received approval to establish an entrance fee program (USFWS 2009) but has not implemented one to date. As identified in Description of Management Direction section in Chapter 2, the refuge will continue to evaluate the desirability of establishing entrance fees to supplement Federal appropriations, grants and other less reliable funding, and volunteer support. When planning for new uses such as hunting, fishing, and new photography blinds, the refuge will assess the need for user fees based on the circumstances at that time. If a user and/or entrance fee is implemented, the refuge will consider strategies to accommodate low-income users.

Public Access and Facilities

Comment: Commenters provided feedback on a wide range of access and facility issues, including: providing for disabled access; expanding new facilities slowly and conservatively; improving the safety of the Highway 99W entrance to the refuge; providing new pedestrian and wildlife observation access points; the use and placement of new wildlife photography and hunting blinds; the use of refuge meeting facilities for community activities; and developing connections with regional multimodal trail systems. Several commenters were concerned about the negative impact to wildlife and habitat should additional public access be provided.

Response: All public uses of the refuge must be found appropriate and compatible; there must be documentation that the uses will not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the refuge and the mission of the Refuge System. For a full discussion, see Appendix B.

As an urban refuge, we are committed to providing high-quality opportunities for visitors to connect with nature and understand the natural resource conservation work of the National Wildlife Refuge System. In support of those opportunities, we are committed to providing thoughtful, well-planned, accessible, and sustainably built facilities that meet the needs of our visitors while still meeting the needs of the refuge and its operations. However, facilities such as refuge meeting rooms are reserved for Service staff hosting and/or directly participating in a mission-based activity and are not available for private use

The refuge is aware of the safety concerns regarding the Highway 99W access and is actively seeking opportunities with Oregon Department of Transportation and Federal transportation agencies to address the issue.

The refuge supports connections to regional trails at existing entrance points to the refuge. At this time, no new access points or open areas are being proposed. Objective 10.4 has been clarified to reflect this.

The placement of new wildlife photography blinds will take into account minimizing disturbance to wildlife and habitat and providing high-quality opportunities. The shared use of potential hunt blinds with wildlife photographers and observers will be assessed as hunting and other public uses are considered at the Wapato Lake Unit. This will occur as habitat restoration planning and implementation progresses.

Environmental Education

Comment: Support was expressed for continuing to provide environmental education and some new ideas were proposed. Additional access into current sanctuary areas was suggested in order to facilitate education activities. A suggestion was made to include more landscape conservation

concepts into the existing curriculum. One commenter expressed concern that there may be too many students on the refuge in the future.

Response: Additional access for education will be provided by way of a defined “free roam” study area along the forest trail and a nature play area near the beginning of the year-round trail. Otherwise, all seasonal closures and sanctuary areas will remain in effect to reduce wildlife disturbance and minimize conflict with other wildlife-dependent public uses. Additional strategies will be added to the environmental education objectives to place more emphasis on holistic teaching related to landscape conservation issues. The refuge will continue to ensure that the level of refuge visitors is compatible with managing wildlife and habitat resources and/or does not affect the quality of the education program. In some cases, education programs will be provided off-site and thus will not have a direct impact on refuge habitats. Refer to Compatibility Determination (CD) B7 for a full discussion.

Fishing

Comment: Comments reflected support for establishing a fishing program. However, some commenters were concerned about a low-quality fishing experience due to the height of the river overlook above the surface of the water and due to the distance disabled visitors would have to travel to reach the fishing location.

Response: Fishing is one the Refuge System’s priority wildlife-dependent public uses and, if implemented, the refuge will strive to provide a high-quality fishing experience. The intention of the program is to expose first-time anglers and youth to fishing, rather than providing a high-use fishery for experienced anglers. The fishing program will emphasize the experience of fishing and will accompany quality educational programs that enhance the experience, such as programs led by the refuge.

The river overlook, where fishing may occur, is located 0.5 mile from the parking lot via a trail designed to be fully accessible to disabled users. If an individual were unable to access the overlook via the trail, the refuge would endeavor to make appropriate accommodations.

Hunting—Youth Hunt

Comment: Comments were received both in support of and opposed to the proposed youth waterfowl hunt on the Riverboat Unit of the refuge.

Comments opposed to the youth hunt expressed concern at the quality of the hunt, disturbance to wildlife on and adjacent to the refuge, and disturbance to other people using the Tualatin River and other trails for wildlife observation. There were also concerns about details found in the CD for the youth waterfowl hunt.

Response: Congress included hunting as one of the six priority wildlife-dependent uses of refuges. When managed appropriately through careful planning and coordination with the ODFW, youth waterfowl hunting will allow youth the opportunity to learn to hunt in an ethical and safe manner. To minimize disturbance to people and wildlife near and adjacent to the refuge, the Service will carefully consider timing and placement of the hunt blinds to be used during the hunt.

The draft CD for the youth waterfowl hunt specified details such as the number of blinds and hunting dates. After further consideration, these details were eliminated from the CD. The refuge must go through a formal process to develop a hunt plan and prepare an opening package for publishing in the Code of Federal Regulations. At such time, details on timing, number of blinds, and other factors will be considered and agreed upon.

Comment: Comments were received supporting a youth waterfowl hunt as it would provide a public place for waterfowl hunting and also be a way to teach youths about hunting and hunting ethics.

Response: The Service believes that with careful planning and coordination with the ODFW, a high-quality youth hunt can be offered at the Riverboat Unit of the refuge. The refuge will evaluate the hunt on an annual basis and make adjustment to the program based on participant feedback. The Service recognizes that conditions of the habitat and fluctuations in weather patterns and wildlife populations may also alter the quality of the hunt program. These will also be evaluated and responded to appropriately on a yearly basis.

Hunting—Waterfowl

Comment: Comments were received both supporting and opposed to hunting on the refuge. Concern was expressed about noise related to hunting, accounting for unretrieved or wounded birds, and too much acreage being included in the hunt area at the Wapato Lake Unit.

Response: The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act recognizes hunting as a priority public use on refuges. Noise from hunting on the refuge should not be greater than noise that is currently occurring from hunting on neighboring lands. All hunts will be conducted in accordance with state and Federal regulations with respect to bag limits for birds. These bag limits take into consideration overall waterfowl population goals and are carefully monitored throughout the continent. The refuge intends to continue with plans to have a youth waterfowl hunt on the Riverboat Unit, and eventually have general waterfowl hunting at the Wapato Lake Unit. However, the details related to Wapato Lake hunting opportunities have been removed from the CD (see Appendix B) until pending restoration plans and implementation are sufficient enough to provide a compatible hunt. At that time, working with the ODFW, specific details on the waterfowl hunt will be examined and implemented to ensure a high-quality hunt.

Boating

Comment: The refuge received comments expressing interest in boat access to the Tualatin River and kayaking opportunities on the refuge.

Response: Boating and kayaking are not priority public uses on refuges and currently boating and kayaking are not allowed in refuge ponds, which serve as sanctuary for migratory birds. There are currently no refuge-owned lands that could accommodate safe boat access. The refuge will continue to follow policy guidelines when evaluating these uses as we move forward in the management planning and land acquisition process. This does not eliminate the potential to explore further options to boat access if new opportunities become available.

Outreach and Diversity

Comment: Comments were received emphasizing the need to provide opportunities for our diverse community to connect with nature.

Response: As an urban refuge, Tualatin River NWR is committed to continuing our current programming and outreach for our diverse community and we intend to expand our offerings in the future. We will continue to work with diverse partners and community members. We support inclusiveness and outreach within and outside boundaries of the refuge with programs covering a wide range of conservation-related topics relevant to the public. Refer to Goal 13 Objectives 2 and 3 for a range of strategies.

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