

# **Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Interagency Scoping Meeting for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan**

Prepared for

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Prepared by



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### A. Interagency Scoping Meeting Agenda

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge hosted a half-day interagency scoping meeting at the Wildlife Center on November 16, 2010. The purpose of the interagency scoping meeting was to invite interested and affected government agencies and organizations to review the issues identified through internal scoping, to provide input on these issues, and to identify other issues that should be considered in development of the refuge's comprehensive conservation plan (CCP).

This document records the issues, opportunities, and concerns identified by the participating agency representatives, which will aid in developing and evaluating alternatives for the CCP. It attempts to accurately summarize significant comments made during the meeting. No attempt has been made to verify the accuracy of the comments or to respond to them.

*Planning Update* Number 1 and two standard U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fact sheets—*National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997* and *Three Policies Implementing the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997*—were provided to the participating agency representatives to provide background information.<sup>1</sup> The interagency scoping meeting agenda and the participant sign-in sheets are attached to this report as Appendices.

## PARTICIPANTS

Ralph Webber, Project Leader, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge  
Chris Lapp, Deputy Project Leader, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge  
Kim Strassburg, Visitor Services Manager, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge  
Pete Schmidt, Wildlife Biologist, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge  
Scott McCarthy, Branch Chief, Refuge Planning, Pacific Region  
Maren Murphy, Refuge Planner (AmeriCorps), Pacific Region  
Lacey Wall, Refuge Planner (AmeriCorps), Pacific Region  
Jim Turner, NOAA Fisheries  
Avis Newell, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality  
Brad Bales, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Susan Barnes, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Mark Nebeker, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Tom Murtagh, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Mary Anne Cassin, Metro  
Curt Zonich, Metro  
Tom Gambu, City of Forest Grove  
Niki Iverson, City of Hillsboro/Joint Water Commission  
Kristel Fesler, Joint Water Commission  
Mark Jockers, Clean Water Services  
Bruce Rell, Clean Water Services  
Tom Vander Plaut, Clean Water Services  
Joe Rutledge, Tualatin Valley Irrigation District  
Esther Lev, The Wetlands Conservancy

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<sup>1</sup> Due to their large electronic file sizes, *Planning Update* Number 1 and these fact sheets are not included in this report.

Staci MacCorkle, Natural Resources Scientist, SWCA Environmental Consultants  
Steve Moore, Principal, Bigfoot Consulting  
Susan Saul, Principal, Cusy Coyllur Communications

## MEETING INTRODUCTION

The agency scoping meeting was held from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 16, 2010. Project Leader Ralph Webber welcomed the participants and introduced the core refuge staff (Chris Lapp, Pete Schmidt, and Kim Strassburg), Scott McCarthy, and the three SWCA Environmental Consultants contractors (Staci MacCorkle, Steve Moore, and Susan Saul).

Ralph Webber reviewed the meeting purpose, the meeting agenda, and where the refuge was in the CCP process. He stated that he wanted the agencies to validate the issues, comment on the issue perspectives, and identify other issues that should be considered.

Ralph Webber and Chris Lapp presented a slide show to provide background information to the meeting participants.

Ralph Webber reviewed:

- the refuge purposes
- an overview of the National Wildlife Refuge System
- the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997
- the National Wildlife Refuge System mission
- the purpose and goals of comprehensive conservation planning
- the wildlife first philosophy
- ecosystem approach
- the CCP schedule
- overview of Big Six priority uses
- appropriate uses
- compatibility determinations

Chris Lapp presented:

- an overview of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge
- Urban Refuge Policy of 1991
- geographic orientation to the refuge units
- refuge purposes
- priority resources and habitats
- issues identified through internal scoping
- refuge programs
- refuge contact information

## ISSUES

Ralph Webber and Chris Lapp led discussions of the currently identified issues. Initially, there was some confusion among the meeting participants about the type of input the refuge wanted from them. Ralph reiterated the meeting purpose several times during the course of the meeting.

### Habitat Restoration and Management

Ralph Webber introduced the issue and described the current hydrological modeling underway for the Sherwood Units. He described potential wetland types on the refuge. He asked the participants:

- What plant communities and wetland types should the refuge be trying to restore?
- How should the refuge partner with adjacent agencies?
- How much should the refuge continue its current management versus re-establishing natural hydrology?

Several of the meeting participants had also participated in the Wildlife and Habitat Review. They asked about the outcome of the recommendations from that review and referred back to discussions that had occurred then regarding deep water versus shallow water habitats at Wapato Lake and the types of plant communities that likely would become established.

### Comments

- Get the hydrology back to its natural state.
- Wapato Lake could be the largest backwater on the Tualatin River. It would provide indirect benefits to water quality for fish. Connectivity of water systems is the highest priority for fish.
- Concerns about dike conditions at Wapato Lake and the availability of resources for long-term maintenance. A cost-benefit analysis should be used to determine whether to maintain the dikes.
- Increasing urbanization around the Sherwood Units may affect hydrological models over the next 10 years.
- The refuge lacks basic technical information for decision-making, particularly at Wapato Lake where hydrological models will not be available for the CCP.
- Use the General Land Office<sup>2</sup> (GLO) survey of the Willamette Valley as a blueprint for historic conditions. How can we get back to that?
- Need soils map; soils will tell you what plants will grow there.
- It is easier to manage dike systems but that may not be the highest value for wildlife.
- Looking at “as-is” hydrology is a practical approach. The refuge needs to look at off-refuge opportunities to reestablish more natural hydrology.
- Look at future hydrology changes due to climate change.

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<sup>2</sup> The General Land Office was an independent agency of the U.S. government responsible for the public domain lands. The GLO oversaw the surveying, platting, and sale of public lands. Surveyors produced both township maps and field notes that briefly described the land and its natural resources (vegetation, water, soil, landform, etc.) at the time of survey. These maps and survey notes, dating back to 1855 in Oregon, are some of the earliest data sources about the landscape at the time of Euro-American settlement.

## Wildlife and Habitat Management

Chris Lapp led this discussion.

- What can the refuge be doing more effectively?
- What other management tools should the refuge use?
- Savanna and prairie get limited management now—mechanical and herbicide— due to challenges of using fire as a management tool in an urban area; what else can the refuge do?
- Water management is expensive and time-consuming on the Sherwood Units; is there a better way?

Meeting participants asked some questions about current water management on the Atfalat'i Unit, including pumping impacts on water quality in the Tualatin River and the quality of in-flows and return flows.

### **Comments**

- Step up from mowing to cutting and baling hay. This removes thatch and mimics the effects of grazing. It also removes fuels prior to burning.
- Don't establish grass first; it inhibits the establishment of forbs.
- How you manage habitats depends on your priority species objectives.
- If you don't own the entire floodplain, your water management options are limited.
- How will land inside the acquisition boundary but not in refuge ownership be addressed in the plan? What are land acquisition plans? What are funding sources?
- Concerns about adequacy of the refuge's operations and maintenance funding and ability to do long-term maintenance, particularly at Wapato Lake.
- Soils and hydrology will determine what plants will grow regardless of what we want. The refuge needs to use historic information in decision-making.
- How can the refuge increase flooding and riparian connectivity? How can the refuge lower certain land areas to increase flood levels and frequency if it can't increase water flows?
- Water management, such as drawdown, should be different for red-legged frogs, pond turtles, shorebirds, etc. The refuge needs to identify its priorities.
- Wet prairie is a limited habitat across the landscape and it should be a habitat priority for the refuge where appropriate, based on soils, historic habitats.
- Fish would benefit if the majority of flow from Chicken Creek was not diverted for wetland management and instead flowed through the natural channel to the Tualatin River.

## Canada Goose Management

Ralph Webber introduced the issue by describing the current Canada goose situation in the Willamette Valley. There are seven subspecies of Canada geese, and all are increasing their populations except the dusky Canada goose.

- What kinds of habitat should the refuge provide?
- What are the potential health issues of increasing goose populations in an urban environment?
- What are the depredation issues and how should they be addressed?
- The refuge has 300 to 500 acres that can be put into cooperative farming to provide goose habitat; is it worth it?

Brad Bales, Migratory Game Bird Coordinator, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), described the issue in more depth. The biggest challenge is the limited public lands available for goose management in the Willamette Valley. The Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuges were established to hold 30,000 geese. These refuges cannot provide habitat for the growing number of geese (currently around 400,000 birds). No single refuge can handle all the geese. Habitat conversion on private lands is squeezing the geese into smaller areas and into places they did not used to go.

Meanwhile, the dusky Canada goose population has dropped below 10,000 birds, which impacts goose management options since this subspecies could become a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The cackling Canada goose population is approaching 300,000 birds, and it is the only subspecies used for subsistence by native Alaskans, which contributes to restricted harvest goals in the Willamette Valley.

Brad Bales also spoke about the potential growth of wintering snow geese populations. They have traditionally wintered on the Skagit River delta in northwest Washington but have recently spun off a group that now winters on the lower Columbia River. There is potential for snow geese to expand into the Willamette Valley.

White-fronted geese, which traditionally winter in the Central Valley of California, have started returning early to the Klamath Basin due to changes in Central Valley rice growing practices that have reduced or eliminated traditional goose food. These birds could begin showing up in the Willamette Valley because there is nothing for them to eat when they return to the Klamath Basin too early in the spring.

Increased wetlands in the Willamette Valley, due to habitat restoration, have increased goose depredations by providing night roosts adjacent to agricultural lands.

Brad Bales predicts that goose management problems will escalate. Current public lands will not solve the problem. The long-term solution is easements on private land to get farmers to provide habitat, but farmers resist that approach. Hunting is not an effective tool for population control.

## **Other Wildlife Management**

### ***Comments***

- Snapping turtles and red-eared sliders are problem species.
- How much human use on the refuge is acceptable?
- Need regular water quality monitoring and simultaneous sampling for human-transported species like the chytrid fungus, which is possibly harming native amphibian populations.
- How do refuge habitats fit into the larger landscape?
- What about good target species: how is the refuge managing for species in the Oregon Conservation Strategy, such as the streaked horned lark?
- Does the refuge sample for mosquitoes? Is Washington County Vector Control involved?
- Does the refuge actively manage bullfrogs, nutria, and carp? Should the refuge embark on intensive control of species like nutria when they will just spill back in from the outside?

## **Public Use**

Ralph Webber reviewed the current public use program. The refuge currently provides four of the “Big Six” uses: wildlife observation, wildlife photography, interpretation and environmental

education. Hunting was determined to not be compatible on the Sherwood Units. Fishing was found to be compatible on the Sherwood Units, but a fishing program has not been implemented.

### **Comments**

- ODFW is very interested in safe public recreation, including waterfowl hunting. There are inadequate hunting opportunities on public lands in western Oregon.
- ODFW is interested in looking for special opportunities for hunting, such as youth hunts, September goose hunts, and archery hunting for deer and elk.
- Wapato Lake Unit has public expectations that it will offer hunting and fishing opportunities. Waterfowl hunting would be the highest priority but also big game and upland birds.
- Wapato Lake public use should complement Chehalem Ridge public use. The refuge and Metro need to plan for public use together.
- The refuge needs to consider the Tonquin Trail in providing public access to the Sherwood Units. Metro does not yet have a preferred alignment but would like to use the trail for pedestrian and bicycle access route to the Wildlife Center.
- Support more fishing opportunities in the Tualatin River. The public focus on catching warm-water fish species takes invasives out of the system, which is good.
- More access points for canoes for fishing and boating. Even if there cannot be public access to the Tualatin River from the refuge, the refuge has educational opportunities with river trail users. Tell boaters when they are going through the refuge.

## **Community Partnerships**

### **Comments**

- Better communication. Provide information for adjacent private land owners and public land owners, such as Metro, about how their management could better complement the refuge.
- Align refuge and Metro planning to shared goals and audiences.

## **ISSUES NOT PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED**

### **Wapato Lakebed Management**

Ralph Webber and Chris Lapp explained that the refuge will assume responsibility to draw down Wapato Lake this winter. The refuge is paying to repair the pump and will operate it. Meanwhile, the Wapato Irrigation District (WID) must begin the process of dissolution so that the refuge can assume ownership of its assets. Currently, the refuge pays an assessment to the WID, which in turn pays for infrastructure repair and maintenance.

### **Comments**

- What are the plans for Wapato Lake that could affect surrounding farmlands and irrigators? What happens in the interim until the CCP is completed?
- What happens with the WID water in 2011? What are the impacts on Tualatin Valley Irrigation District (TVID) customers? Who is in charge? Who is on the WID board? Who do we talk to?
- Clean Water Services (CWS) and TVID are nervous about the outcome of the CCP and how public assets (i.e., WID infrastructure) will be affected. Discharges from Wapato Lake impact

- Joint Water Commission wants the refuge to take over the role of the WID prior to dissolution to ensure water delivery, water quality, and protection of water rights.
- WID has contractual responsibilities for water deliveries. Who will ensure contracts continue and are honored?
- Consider keeping the WID in place so there is an option for special assessments to pay for operations and maintenance. Consider only transferring certain assets to the refuge.
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality wants to avoid a water quality issue.
- The refuge needs to commit to better communication with all parties and let them know what is happening in this interim period concerning pumps, dikes, dewatering, water deliveries, etc.

## **Other Issues**

### ***Comments***

- Wildlife connectivity should be a priority. Roads are barriers to species movement.
- The refuge needs to be involved in the Regional Land Conservation Strategy. The goal of this effort is to synthesize all plans for the larger metropolitan region from Clark County to Washington County. Landscape-level evaluation is important. Contacts are Esther Lev (The Wetlands Conservancy), Jonathan Saul (Metro), and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. The Intertwine is part of the Regional Land Conservation Strategy and includes Clark County, Washington.
- Consider participating in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's land protection efforts for the lower Columbia River and the Willamette Valley.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interagency Scoping Meeting Agenda**

**AGENDA**

Agency Scoping Meeting  
Comprehensive Conservation Plan  
Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge  
Tuesday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 1:00pm-4:00pm

1:00-1:20 Introduction and PowerPoint Presentation (Ralph and Chris)

1:20-3:55 Roundtable discussion of each issue and opportunity to give oral feedback

*Notes on roundtable format:*

- ◇ *Ralph and Chris to introduce issue and spur input and feedback, allowing for open conversation while acknowledging that agencies will likely follow up with formal input through a letter.*
- ◇ *Planning updates will be made available as reference to the issues. Staff will briefly expand on (not repeat) the issues listed in update.*
- ◇ *SWCA to capture discussions and facilitate agenda times.*
- ◇ *Additional 30 minutes time has been included for a break and any topics that build up steam and exceed their limits.*

- Habitat restoration and management (15 minutes) **Ralph**
- Wildlife and habitat management (10 minutes) **Chris**
- Research and monitoring (20 minutes) **Chris**
- Canada goose management (15 minutes) **Ralph**
- Salmon and steelhead habitat management (15 minutes) **Ralph**
- Elk Management (10 minutes) **Chris**
- Invasive species and non-native species mgmt (10 minutes) **Chris**
- Public use (15 minutes) **Ralph**
- Community partnerships (5 minutes) **Chris**
- Mosquito-borne disease concerns (5 minutes) **Ralph**
- Other discussions or topics not covered? (10 minutes) **Ralph**

3:55-4:00 Closing

*Thank participants and encourage formal and continuing feedback.*