

Staff Summary

Background

The department has initiated a review and update of its 12 wildlife area long range management plans originally developed in 1993. To date, the goals and objectives of ten wildlife area management plans have been adopted by Commission action. Four new plans have also been written and adopted by Commission action. The revision of the 1993 Fern Ridge wildlife area management plan has been completed

Changes from previous review process

While the previous 1993 plan review process was aided by a wildlife area review committee, the current process relies heavily on local wildlife area and regional staff. Using the 1993 plan as a foundation, department staff developed a draft management plan for the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area which was presented to the Commission in January 2009.

Local stakeholder groups (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Willamette Valley Refuge Complex, Izaak Walton League, Oregon Duck Hunters Association and local OHA chapter) were informed of the planning process and were invited to help develop or review the draft plan.

Final Draft Goals and Objectives

Wildlife area goals are broad, open-ended statements of desired future conditions that convey a purpose but do not define measurable units. In contrast, objectives are more concise statements of what, how and where the department wants to achieve, and who will be responsible for the work. Objectives are derived from goals and provide the basis for determining strategies, evaluating the success of strategies, and monitoring wildlife area accomplishments.

Using input from a formal public review process and internal review by staff, the department has finalized the goals and objectives of the draft plan. These are listed below.

The final draft goals and objectives for the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area are:

Goal 1: Manage habitats to attract and support waterfowl in the southern Willamette Valley.

Objective 1.1: Manage 900 acres of wetland impoundments to create habitats needed by migratory waterfowl during the non-breeding season. A balance of habitats includes early successional seasonal wetlands (40-80%), semi-permanent and permanent wetlands (10-40%) and planted agricultural crops (5-20%).

Objective 1.2: Designate 15-30% of managed wetlands as sanctuary for waterfowl.

Objective 1.3: Maintain approximately 1,000 acres of upland prairie, within 0.5 miles of wetland habitats, for dabbling ducks to provide suitable nesting habitat in association with brood rearing habitat (semi-permanent and permanent wetlands).

Objective 1.4: In cooperation with USACE, maintain approximately 1,000 acres of lakebed area that alternates between summer “full pool” condition of open water, submergent, and emergent vegetation zone and winter drawdown mudflat zone.

Goal 2: Protect, enhance, and restore habitat diversity for other wildlife present on the area, compatible with Goal 1.

Objective 2.1: Protect and enhance 414 acres of wet prairie.

Objective 2.2: Protect and enhance 945 acres of oak woodlands.

Objective 2.3: Protect and enhance 764 acres of upland prairie.

Goal 3: Provide a variety of recreational and educational opportunities to the public which are compatible with Goals 1 and 2.

Objective 3.1: Provide hunting, trapping, and angling opportunities in a manner compatible with habitat management objectives.

Objective 3.2: Provide wildlife viewing and education/interpretation opportunities compatible with Objective 3.1 and habitat management objectives.

Objective 3.3: Maintain and enhance wildlife area facilities, structures, and equipment used to conduct habitat management and public use projects on the wildlife area.

Public Review Process

In January 2009, the department presented the draft management plan at one public review meeting in Eugene. The meeting was announced via local radio, the department’s website and through informational flyers. The Eugene Register-Guard newspaper wrote an article about the plan and the meeting information. Below is a summary of the meeting.

Fern Ridge Wildlife Area

The Fern Ridge Wildlife Area draft plan was presented and discussed at one public meeting on January 23rd in Eugene. Thirty-seven members of the public attended the meeting.

Key issues and concerns raised at the meeting included: maintaining the current waterfowl hunting program; concern about public safety with birders out during hunting season; concern about FRWA budget needs and support for charging user fees to non-hunters and non-anglers; vandalism of cars, nest boxes, signs and potential impacts of personal watercraft to shorebirds.

Since the January 23rd public meeting, approximately 15 hard copies of the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area draft plan have been handed out to area visitors, neighbors, and local interest groups. The draft plan was also posted on the department's home page and as a link within the Northwest Zone recreation report. The wildlife area staff met with USFWS Willamette Valley Refuge Complex staff on March 23rd and staff gave an informational briefing to the Long Tom Watershed Council on March 31st. The USFWS Willamette Valley Refuge Complex staff informed the department that they would be sending official extensive comments regarding the draft plan. These comments were received, via email, on May 6, 2009.

As of the department's May 8th internal deadline, three comment sheets, three emails to ODFW.comments and two written correspondence have been received. Public correspondence received after May 8th will be presented to the Commission at the June 5, 2009 hearing, as an addendum. An opportunity for public testimony will also be provided at this Commission hearing.