

### Fern Ridge Wildlife Area Draft Management Plan Public Comments

Issue or Comment	Count	Department Response
What is the funding source for FRWA? Are there any General Fund dollars?	2	Wildlife area (WA) manager explained that federal Pittman-Robertson Act funds (75%) and state license dollars (25%) are the funding sources; no general funds. Also USACE funds the Fern Ridge project and water management control from federal taxes.
How is the new plan different from the previous draft, hunting changes and other use changes?	1	Primary differences are to accommodate boundary adjustments that resulted from renewal of the USACE license agreement. No changes were made to hunt programs or other area uses.
Are there any proposals to change the hunting or viewing time frames (access)?	1	WA manager explained that access and timing is based on feedback through the user surveys, and based on the technical and management needs of the wildlife area.
Participant expressed a concern for birder safety with hunters concurrently using the area. Can birders walk the dikes during waterfowl season?	1	WA manager stated that there is generally little overlap between users so conflicts and safety issues are minimized. Birders are welcome to use dikes.
Will the proposed change to habitat goals, instead of numbers of bird use, bring more wildlife to the area?	1	Changing the goals from numerical reference to a habitat based measure will not in itself result in increased wildlife populations. We will continue to work towards improving quantity and quality of productive habitats to bring more wildlife to the area.
What is the rationale behind creating cormorant nesting areas?	1	USACE staff responded that the purpose is to test new techniques to re-distribute birds away from the Lower Columbia River.
What happens when Caspian terns overpopulate the management area? (Question related to nesting island and potential impacts to T&E salmon and steelhead in the Willamette and McKenzie river systems)	1	USACE staff responded that effects from attracting birds to new habitat on the island are reversible by removing the island or allowing the island to vegetate.

<p>Individual expressed concern for species (stilt and phalaropes) impacted by flooding in the Fisher Butte and Coyote Units over the past couple of years. Wanted to know if there is a discussion in the plan addressing increasing waterbird nesting.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Documented increases in nesting by waterbirds including stilts and phalaropes is a direct result of ongoing improvements in wetland management techniques. The draft plan supports management of a diversity of wetland habitats that in turn support a diversity of wetland dependent wildlife species. Management emphasis is adaptable to accommodate newly arriving species and changing wetland dynamics.</p>
<p>Concern expressed over continuing vehicle break-ins.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Oregon State Police member in attendance addressed the question with advice on how to minimize personal property loss. We will continue to partner with local law enforcement agencies to reduce the unfortunate occurrences of vehicle break-ins. Other courses of action proposed are to cut back brush at parking areas to provide improved visibility and to on occasion provide monitors at parking lots to discourage criminal activity.</p>
<p>Does the new plan continue to support hunters and youth hunting opportunity, especially for future generations?</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>The department strongly supports youth hunting, has a hunter education program and provides youth only hunts; the department recently started a youth mentoring program.</p>
<p>Is there an opportunity for birders to contribute management dollars through a birding or other use license?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The only way presently for birders to contribute to management dollars is to purchase hunting licenses and bird stamps. The department is exploring the feasibility of non-hunting/non-angling user permits.</p>
<p>Is there any place in the nation that has a birder's access fee?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Not sure, however birders are welcome to contribute by purchasing hunting licenses, waterfowl and upland bird stamps, or by volunteering to improve facilities, develop interpretive materials, or apply whatever skills they have.</p>
<p>Attendee commented that Oregon had a wildlife tax check-off that has been cancelled</p>	<p>1</p>	

Hunter stated that he has generally had good hunting over the past 30 years, however, success has dropped off the past 2 years, specifically the Royal Avenue area and believes that the sanctuary is the reason.	1	Hunter harvest numbers at FRWA for the 2008-09 season were the highest on record in the 25 years of keeping records. Hunting quality and success rates have been on an upward trend for several years. Limited sanctuary areas are bringing concentrations of ducks closer to hunt areas rather than birds relying on open water lake areas several miles from hunt areas. In the long run, the sanctuary areas will improve overall hunting quality.
Is the West Coyote refuge area pulling birds away from areas open to hunting?	1	Waterfowl use of the West Coyote sanctuary area (~150 ac) has increased dramatically since levee construction in 2003. Hunter harvest numbers in the adjacent hunt units were at historic high during the 2008-09 season, due in part to close proximity of the sanctuary areas.
Public comment/response – attempts to tax binoculars and other equipment (similar approach to PR) has failed 3 times in the past. Since hunters are the primary source of revenue for FRWA they should have the biggest say in management.	1	
Clarification - 800K user day figure includes all users, project wide (boaters, parks, hunting, viewing, etc)	1	
Public comment (OHA) – Hunters are also bird watchers and enjoy other experiences and values when afield. They also contribute significant volunteer time and resources to implement habitat projects.	1	
An attendee commented that the car counter on Royal Ave isn't counting vehicles.	1	The sensor cord across the roadway was damaged. USACE staff were alerted.
What percent of the area is managed as sanctuary?	1	WA manager explained that 15-35% of the area would be managed as sanctuary and will vary by season. Percent and location can vary according to management goals.
An attendee found the on-line services were very useful but wanted to see maps showing water levels and maybe putting stats from area permits online as well.	1	

How much hunting occurs on the Kirk Park Unit?	1	The WA manager described the hunting activities that occur in this unit.
Will there be better delineation of wildlife area boundaries? Attendee made specific reference to fencing, signing, etc at Kirk Park.	1	The WA manager took note that boundary signage needed to be improved within this unit.
An attendee suggested that birders volunteer to help clean nest boxes and generally provide additional help/contribution to the management area.	1	The department would be extremely supportive of such volunteer activity and will be glad to supply nest boxes and other supplies.
An attendee commented on proactive vs. reactive management. ODFW should be more proactive at modifying habitats to benefit and attract specific or protect sensitive nesting areas. What species are present vs. new opportunities to attract new or additional species, for example, create heron rookeries?	1	Hérons select rookery sites based on habitat composition and proximity to suitable support habitat. Establishment of a nest site for herons would be a challenge, however we are open to the evolving science of wildlife management to accommodate new opportunities as feasible.
Are you managing for oak savanna habitats?	1	Yes, the department considers oak savanna a Strategy Habitat and is working with TNC, the Native Plant Society and others to restore this habitat on the wildlife area. The wildlife area's oak woodlands are of generally mixed composition with no blocks of true oak savanna. Legacy oaks are recognized as structurally important and efforts are underway to release prominent oaks where possible.
What's the policy on dealing with "invasive" native species for example, Tar weed?	1	The WA manager explained the policy to the attendee.
An attendee commented that the oak area (Cecil site in West Eugene Wetlands) is managed for California black oaks.	1	
An attendee commented on birder contributions: that they do maintain bird houses, look for invasive plants, etc. Also noted the amount of vandalism to bird boxes.	1	
How many terns have been observed on the nesting island?	1	USACE responded that cameras have shown terns interacting with decoys but no nesting observed.

<p>Have there been attempts to aerial seed mudflat areas to create feed/habitat?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>No, however in past years when Fern Ridge lake did not reach "full pool" level, exposed mud flats turned into a carpet of wetland vegetation dominated by native plant species highly beneficial to wildlife. Under normal lake flood / drawdown schedules, there is not a sufficient growing season to produce seed bearing plants during the window of time the mud flats are exposed.</p>
<p>Individual expressed concern for personal water craft (jet skis) use in the Gibson Island area and potential wildlife displacement. There is little awareness by water craft operators of wildlife values.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Attempts have been made to limit use by season – i.e. avoid nesting period. A former Marine Board patroller in attendance stated that this is a constant issue and the public's concerns should be sent to the Oregon Marine Board.</p>
<p>Question on vehicle security and break-ins, what to do? Can cameras be used?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Recommendation by an OSP officer, who was at the meeting, to lock vehicles, keep valuables out of site. OHA member gave out the 'Turn in Poachers' phone number. Also OSP noted the difficulty in setting up and protecting cameras from vandalism.</p>
<p>An attendee felt there was a conflict of interest in that USACE was creating new habitat while we had problems on the Columbia River with terns eating smolts.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>USACE staff noted that the goal was replacement of birds, not an attempt to increase the total number of birds.</p>
<p>An attendee who boats on the reservoir stated that the levees have restricted boater access. How do boaters get information regarding access and the purpose for and results of levee construction projects?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department will work with USACE to develop informational material and signage that would explain such activities on Fern Ridge lake proper.</p>
<p>A comment sheet was submitted at the meeting: thanking the department for the commitment to protecting and providing habitat for waterfowl hunters. Also appreciated the organized plan to establish a future for kids and grandchildren to hunt. Commenter also suggested that birders should sleep in order to keep away from fire arms incident.</p>	<p>1</p>	

<p>A comment sheet was submitted that stated: enjoyed the way the wildlife area currently functions and appreciated the opportunity to hunt waterfowl close to the city; wants to maintain current hunting opportunities and have more blind-hunting areas on specific days as the blinds are becoming crowded; wants the department to provide paper maps of the Royal/Fisher Butte area as they do Coyote; wants online stats cards at some point during the season; suggests using UO and OSU to do outdoor/environmental related projects; willing to volunteer or help out with future planning.</p>	<p>1</p>	
<p>A comment sheet was submitted that stated: great job of all affiliated agencies in managing this wildlife area; suggested adding more hiking/nature trails and expanding habitat for rare/endangered species wherever possible.</p>	<p>1</p>	
<p>A correspondent sent an email with an internet link to the Portland Audubon that shows a map of the Important Bird Areas (IBA). She also thanked the department for putting together an informative meeting.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>WA manager appreciated seeing that Fern Ridge WA is on the map and considered an important resource.</p>
<p>A correspondent sent an email expressing the importance of the area for him for waterfowl hunting over the past 20 years and with his two sons. He thanked the wildlife area staff for everything we do.</p>	<p>1</p>	
<p>A correspondent sent a comment stating that the draft plan looked pretty good. He greatly appreciated the privilege of waterfowl hunting at Fern Ridge and is happy to see hunting dollars as the main monetary provider for wildlife management.</p>	<p>1</p>	

<p>The Native Plant Society of Oregon strongly supports the Draft Plan's Goal 2, Objective 2.1 that encourages protection and enhancement of native wet prairie. Also support Objective 2.2 and 2.3 under this same goal. Also acknowledged the presence of several important plant species in many of the managed units as well as the Research Natural Area (pg. 16 of draft plan) and urged continued cooperation with the ACOE to assure protection. The Society also fully supports the control and reduction of noxious weeds and introduced plants as described on pgs. 24 and 25. The Society also would be pleased to partner for exchange of technical expertise on native plant related issues as outlined in Strategy 5, Objective 2.1 on page 40 of the Draft plan.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department will continue its strong working relationship with the USACE and will continue the protective measures of three federally listed plants and enhancement of OCS strategy habitats. The department is appreciative of the Native Plant Society's support of its ongoing weed control efforts and will follow up on collaborating with the Society as a partner on plant related issues.</p>
<p>USFWS National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Willamette Valley Complex staff recommended including strategies to increase wintering goose attraction and holding areas on FRWA to reduce crop depredation on agriculture lands in the south Willamette Valley.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department added text to the Final Draft plan outlining current management actions that benefit geese utilization of the reservoir and wildlife area, including attraction and holding benefits of moist soil management and crop planting program. Several strategies (5, 8-10) were added to Objective 1.1 to address these issues. The department and USFWS staff will be meeting at the end of May to discuss goose management issues statewide and as they pertain to wildlife areas. Washington state staff will also be part of this coordination.</p>

<p>NWR staff suggest more detail about biological goals and life history stages of targeted wildlife; for example, Goal 1 states “attract and support waterfowl”. Likewise, Goal 2 is to “protect, enhance, and restore habitat diversity for other wildlife” but in the step-down objectives identify protecting “wet prairies, oak woodlands, and grasslands” without specifying restoring with native plants/animals or enhancing existing conditions.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The rationale of Objective 2.1 references native ecosystems and is an example of how they are addressed in the plan.</p>
<p>It appears as though the three goals are listed in priority order due to statements about how Goals 2 and 3 should be compatible with the other goals. If this is the case then the Plan should specify that the goals are listed in priority order. A definition of compatible and an explanation how ODFW will determine whether or not an action would be allowed should be included within the Plan.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Yes, the goals are listed in priority order. Goals 2 and 3 are written to be compatible with Goal 1 which also suggests a priority order. The term 'compatible' is defined in the Final Draft plan.</p>
<p>NWR staff state that the draft plan lacks sufficient information regarding fisheries resources on the FRWA and suggests there should be some discussion regarding how fisheries resources may be affected from water management activities within the waterfowl impoundment areas where fish entrapment/passage could be a concern.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>New text has been added to existing Fish resource section in the Final Draft and a comprehensive list of fish species present on FRWA is included.</p>
<p>NWR suggests that the draft plan identify both funding and staffing needs associated with implementing the various goals, objectives and strategies. Also, some type of implementation plan/schedule would also be beneficial.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Each wetland-focused wildlife area either has developed or will develop a five-year habitat management implementation plan which will describe in detail desired habitat improvement activities, the equipment, staffing and funding needs, and a schedule or timeline.</p>
<p>NWR staff recommend more specific linkages on goals, objectives between this Plan and the Oregon Conservation Strategy (OCS), the 4 major bird initiatives being implemented by the Pacific Coast Joint Venture and any other regional or national conservation planning effort.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The OCS is referenced more than 20 times throughout the draft plan already and Pacific Coast Joint Venture is discussed in Goal 1, in the rationale of Objective 1.1 and in Appendix C.</p>

<p>The wetland acreage figures listed under Goal 1 do not appear to relate to any waterfowl (or other wildlife) population numbers. In other words, the amount of wetland habitat should be based somewhat on the number of ducks and geese or other wetland related wildlife species that the FRWA is attempting to support.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department has moved away from using wildlife population numbers to a habitat-based approach for all of its wildlife area management plans. The department can manage habitat to benefit fish and wildlife through numerous on the ground activities which can be measured. Subsequent wildlife use can then be monitored to determine success. Wildlife population numbers can fluctuate due to environmental conditions beyond the department's control.</p>
<p>NWR staff stated that it is not clear if the wetland acreage figures listed under the objectives are the present acreages on the FRWA or target acreages and encourages ODFW to evaluate the potential to increase the amount of wetland habitats on the FRWA through restoration activities and suggests this effort be continued and that objectives under this goal should represent acreage levels beyond the current levels.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Because FRWA has a limited land base, the department's focus is to improve its infrastructure and capability to enhance the quality of its existing wetlands. Acreage amounts in the objectives reflect current amounts. Conversion of other habitat types to increase wetlands would probably not be supported by the USACE and is counter to Goal 2, providing a diversity of habitats to benefit other fish and wildlife, especially key species described in the OCS.</p>
<p>Objective 1.1, Strategy 6 addresses invasive plant species such as reed canary grass. We suggest that it would be valuable to promote exchange of management information between our land management experts since we have many of the same issues and have had successes with some control methods. We suggest adding invasive animal control strategies.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>FRWA has also had control successes. Hundreds of acres of reed canarygrass at FRWA have been effectively controlled and converted to restored wetlands. There are already references in the existing draft to work with other resources management agencies and to exchange ideas and technologies. Invasive animal control strategies are included in the existing draft (primarily nutria).</p>
<p>The various types of wetlands should have specified desired conditions or attributes in addition to the acreage targets. The preliminary text of the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the WVNWRC contains this type of information and we could make this information available to ODFW upon request.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Because the CCP is still in draft stage, the department can't at this time adopt its guidelines. The level of specificity is also beyond the scope of the 10 year management plan but this suggested information is given in the five-year habitat management implementation plans mentioned previously.</p>

<p>Goose use of the FRWA has increased significantly in recent years and with increasing agricultural crop depredation on nearby private lands. The proximity of the Eugene Airport creates concern about the possibility of bird strikes with aircraft. NWR encourages ODFW to include more strategies with respect to how FRWA could provide improved/additional habitat for geese and thereby possibly reduce the use on nearby private lands. NWR suggests that ODFW consider increasing goose use on the FRWA by managing for green browse and evaluating whether disturbance from public use programs limits goose use of the FRWA.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department has added text in several sections of the Final Draft to address increasing goose numbers, depredation on agriculture crops and public safety. A new strategy has been added to Objective 1.1. Also the field characteristics at FRWA are not well suited to manage for green browse. Under the existing management program, geese heavily utilize the cropland and moist soil fields, particularly in the early spring. The geese utilize these areas in preference to the hundreds of acres of green browse (ryegrass fields) that border the wildlife area on the south. Converting managed impoundment areas to green browse would reduce forage for wintering ducks and would impact area hunting programs.</p>
<p>Regarding Objective 1.1, it would be helpful if there was an explanation regarding the variability in seasonal (40-80%) and semi-permanent/permanent wetlands (10-40%). When and how would decisions be made to alter the management of these areas? We agree a diversity of the various types of wetlands is desirable; however, the primary emphasis should be placed on seasonal wetland habitat as that type of habitat is generally more productive within the Willamette Valley with respect to providing food for wintering waterfowl populations.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The acreage percentage ranges are consistent with the department's planning direction applicable to other wildlife areas. The range of acreages allows flexibility in management to accommodate the wide variety of factors that influence wildlife area and habitat management activities. The intent in development of the plan was to allow for a degree of flexibility so the management is not unduly restricted in context of a 10 year management plan. Specific % of seasonal wetlands will be detailed in the five-year habitat management implementation plan and is based on infrastructure capabilities.</p>
<p>The background paragraphs for wet prairie and grasslands provide no real distinction between each other because the grasslands are generally described as wet prairie with associated listed species. We suggest a division of wet prairie, upland prairie (with at least some native component), and something like "non-agricultural grasslands" for those areas with little or no prairie component.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>New text, provided by USACE botanist, was added to the Final Draft plan which describes grasslands (wet prairie and upland prairie) in greater detail. The department uses these habitat terms in the plan, to be consistent with the USACE naming conventions.</p>

<p>The Plan mentions that the Corps of Engineers has the lead on endangered species management, as well as management of the Research Natural Area (RNA). If this is the case it needs to be clearly stated and that ODFW has a cooperative role. In either event, the Plan needs to include the strategies for endangered species management on the FRWA. We would encourage ODFW to include specific strategies on the management actions that will be employed on the FRWA to benefit federally listed threatened and endangered species such as Fender’s blue butterfly, Kincaid’s lupine, Bradshaw’s lomatium, and Willamette daisy, as well as state listed species. We recommend that specific management strategies for the RNA should also be included in the Plan.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The USACE botanist has provided additional detail to the department which has been incorporated into the Final Draft plan. The UCACE has a Rare Species Plan based on a Biological Opinion which guides activities in the RNA.</p>
<p>Objective 2.2, the oak woodland description alludes that Himalayan/evergreen blackberries, rose, and hawthorn occupy open meadow areas in the transition zone, and although invasive, have some benefits. In general, all of these species, including the native rose and hawthorn, are known to degrade the value of oak habitats to oak dependent species. Douglas fir trees are also a threat to oak woodlands, and all these species are there because of the exclusion of fire.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The Final Draft plan has additional text describing the department’s method to control invasive plants. The FRWA five year implementation plan will describe in further detail the specific invasive species control actions and a timeline.</p>
<p>In Objective 2.3, the Plan specifies that 764 acres of grassland habitat would be protected and enhanced. However, the rationale discusses wet prairie attributes and the RNA. How is this different than the 1,000 acres for nesting waterfowl and 414 acres of wet prairie? There seems to be some overlap as to the designation of grassland and wet prairie habitats.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>New text per USACE botanist was already added to the Final Draft plan and addresses this comment.</p>

<p>Strategy 3, it should include active control of noxious weeds, not just monitoring</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Monitoring was already included in this Strategy.</p>
<p>The Plan makes a reference to non-firearm recreation. What types of recreation is this referring to? We suggest using non-consumptive use when referring to recreation uses that do not involve firearms or other types of weapons.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The term 'non-consumptive' is not used in the Final Draft plan rather, other compatible public uses are described.</p>
<p>NWR is concerned about the Fee Pheasant hunt and identified a conflict between the fee pheasant hunt and early season waterfowl management. NWR staff made a specific recommendation to reduce or relocate pheasant hunting opportunities to allow more aggressive early fall flooding of impoundments to attract waterfowl.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department supports continuation of the Fee Pheasant hunt program. Early season fall flooding is not recommended by department staff and its outside consultant, based on habitat conditions. Text was added in Appendix C, East and West Coyote Management Unit descriptions, to explain the department's position on this issue.</p>
<p>Is there an evaluation of how the recent hunting changes have affected hunter success or the number of hunter use-days? It appears as though the overall waterfowl hunter success is not as high as on many of the other state managed wildlife areas within the state. We are aware that the FRWA has been working to improve the waterfowl hunting program in recent years and would encourage ODFW to continue to implement measures that would improve this program.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Comparative hunt statistics at FRWA for the past 25 years show a steady increase in hunter success.</p>
<p>Objective 3.1, Strategy 4 on exploring options to improve angling on Fern Ridge Lake sounds more like a task for the Corps of Engineers than for ODFW as the Corps manages the various boating access areas to the Lake. How will this affect winter use and the “defacto” sanctuary provided by the Lake?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Angling access is available on many portions of the wildlife area. The department supports providing angling access. Angling activity in the winter is very low and does not affect the winter sanctuary provided by Fern Ridge Lake.</p>

<p>NWR suggests implementing angling closure or other strategies to minimize angling impacts to western pond turtles.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department recognizes the potential exists for incidental hooking of turtles, however, no cases have been documented. USACE is working on signs identifying handling and release should hooking occur. Angling regulations and access restrictions may be put in place if such a impact is occurring.</p>
<p>Under Goal 3, Objective 3.1, Strategy 9, do you have disabled hunter access now and will this expand or remain status quo? If yes, do you advertise the availability?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>All wildlife area access points are accessible for disabled hunters . There are no physical barriers to prevent access at any access point beyond the marsh type terrain encountered as hunters enter the fields. One hunt blind for the reservation waterfowl hunt is accessible for disabled hunters and all roadways and levees provide some degree of easy access with solid level travel surfaces. The department also provides Access Oregon brochures and information on its website to describe accessibility conditions to visitors.</p>
<p>Objective 3.2 Strategy 7, suggests that the department partner with the USACE and universities to develop the wildlife viewing structures and a process of monitoring, then FRWA staff can help with the monitoring protocol as developed.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>This is addressed in the Final Draft plan.</p>
<p>Objective 3.2, Strategy 8. states that access will be provided for wildlife viewing that is not in conflict with biological needs of wildlife and area's hunting program, which appears to establish a public use priority of hunting. If this is the case, clearly state it in the Plan. Otherwise, the Plan should state that it seeks a balance for all users. Hunting is &lt;1% of all</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The department supports hunting as a priority use of FRWA, which is funded by USFWS PR funds and hunting licenses. Additional text has been added to the Final Draft to describe the wildlife viewing and other non-hunting activities the department supports, as funding is available, on FRWA.</p>