

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) owns or manages by agreement nearly 200,000 acres of land in more than 20 wildlife areas set aside for wildlife use and public recreation. Securing these places for wildlife began in Oregon with the purchase of the Summer Lake Wildlife Area in 1944. Establishment and maintenance of wildlife areas and other resource properties is an integral part of the Department's Mission to "protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations."

The Coquille Valley Wildlife Area was established in 2013 as a result of a voluntary land exchange with the acquisition of the Beaver Slough and Winter Lake parcels. Additional lands were obtained through purchase from willing landowners in September 2014 and December 2015. Today, the approximately 588-acre wildlife area provides crucial habitat for migrating and nesting waterfowl and Oregon's native fish. The area features good access to walk-in waterfowl hunting, fishing, non-motorized boating, and excellent wildlife viewing opportunities.

Initial rule making for CVWA was completed in August 2015 as a regulations component for providing public access. A second rule making process was completed in April 2016 to adopt the CVWA management plan. Management activities will restore high-quality habitats where tidal connectivity is possible.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has secured funds, through private donations, to purchase approximately 95 acres from Ray Wheeler. The property, referred to as Wheeler II (Attachment 2), consists of adjacent valley bottom, and altered wetlands along with reciprocal access easements. TNC also facilitated and funded all due-diligence requirements such as appraisal, environmental site assessment, surveying, property line adjustments, and land use planning permits. TNC will deposit the required funds to complete the land acquisition, and simultaneously assign its interest in the agreement to the Department. Fee title will transfer direct from Wheeler to the Department. The Wheeler II property will consolidate ownership of CVWA to improve access for a wide variety of wildlife-oriented recreation and educational opportunities. It will also protect, enhance, and restore fish and wildlife habitats pursuant to the CVWA Management Plan. The value of the Wheeler II property, together with all the due-diligence expenses, will be received as a generous donation from TNC.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Since initiating efforts to establish CVWA, the Department and partners held over 300 meetings, tours, radio talk shows, and presentations regarding establishment of the wildlife area and associated projects. The CVWA management plan, which also received extensive public involvement, provides in part that “Land adjustments would allow for the sale, trade, or exchange of land with willing landowners to enable ODFW to consolidate CVWA boundaries.”

Members of the public are provided the opportunity to:

- view the Commission Exhibit documents approximately 2 weeks prior to the Commission meeting
- provide written and/or verbal testimony at the Commission meeting
- provide written and/or verbal testimony at the public meeting of the Public Lands Advisory Committee conducted by the Chief Financial Officer of the Department of Administrative Services (DAS).

ISSUE 1

SHOULD THE FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION APPROVE THE LAND ACQUISITION, BY DONATION FROM THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, OF APPROXIMATELY 95 ACRES ADJACENT TO THE COQUILLE VALLEY WILDLIFE AREA?

ANALYSIS

The Department seeks approval from the Commission by agency policy for all land transactions valued over \$100,000 (fair market value).

Incorporating the Wheeler II property into the CVWA serves many needs:

- direct, positive impact on outdoor recreation opportunity
- ability to increase breeding waterfowl production and fish rearing, resulting in increased fishing and hunting opportunities, as well as other wildlife related recreation
- educational opportunities
- enhance public access
- potential cost savings to the scheduled Winter Lake restoration and China Camp Creek tidegate replacement projects

Pursuant to statute ODFW will pay “in lieu of taxes” for the properties involved (ORS 496.340). In lieu of tax equals the tax paid by private landowners. Coos County will receive the same amount of tax revenue it currently receives. ODFW will pay drainage district assessments at the same rate as private landowners (ORS 547.045).

OPTIONS

1. Approve staff recommendation.
2. Modify staff recommendation.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Option 1.

DRAFT MOTION

I move to approve the land acquisition, by donation from The Nature Conservancy, of approximately 95 acres adjacent to the Coquille Valley Wildlife Area; and direct staff to complete the acquisition pursuant to the processes required by Oregon Administrative Rule.

EFFECTIVE DATE

February 13, 2017