

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) owns or manages by agreement, 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".

Ruby Pipeline Project Mitigation Agreement

The Ruby Pipeline Project is a natural gas pipeline that extends from Wyoming to Oregon. A number of wildlife and riparian habitats were impacted within the Oregon project area. Ruby committed to mitigate for the impacts to wildlife and riparian habitats classified under the Department's Habitat Mitigation Policy (OAR 635-415-0000 through 635-415-0025). To fulfill a portion of its compensatory mitigation requirement, Ruby agreed to establish an Environmental Project Fund which directed the Department to purchase property that would benefit wildlife, restore priority habitats, and provide public hunting and angling opportunities.

In compliance with the terms set forth in the Ruby Pipeline Mitigation Agreement, the Department proposes to purchase approximately 564 acres, known as the Edmunds Well Wildlife Sanctuary, near the town of Summer Lake. The property will become part of and managed in conjunction with the Summer Lake Wildlife Area (SLWA), which is located approximately 3 miles SW of the Edmunds Well property. Acquisition of the Edmunds Well property will complete the requirements in the Ruby Pipeline Mitigation Agreement.

Summer Lake Wildlife Area

The Summer Lake Wildlife Area encompasses roughly 18,900 acres owned or administered by the Department in Lake county. SLWA was established with the primary objectives of protecting and improving waterfowl habitat and providing a public hunting area. SLWA provides essential habitat for more than 280 species of birds, 40 species of mammals and other fish, reptiles and amphibians. Native habitats include Lacustrine wetlands (lakebed and alkali playas), Palustrine wetlands (semi-permanent and seasonally flooded), sagebrush steppe uplands and salt desert scrub uplands.

Wetland losses, degradations and changes in function resulted in increased need for intensive management actions on SLWA. Many wildlife species, both migratory and resident, are dependent on wetland habitats to meet their life-cycle needs and to sustain populations at levels providing diverse opportunities for public enjoyment and utilization. SLWA provides wildlife-oriented recreational activities including hunting, viewing, photography, bird watching, environmental education, camping, and fishing.

Relevance to Plans and Strategies

The 10-year long-range plan for SLWA (2007) includes evaluating opportunities for acquisition of inholdings and adjacent acres to achieve goals and objectives outlined in the plan.

The Oregon Conservation Strategy (OCS) is an overarching state strategy for conserving fish and wildlife, designed to use the best available science to create a broad vision and conceptual framework for long-term conservation of Oregon's native fish and wildlife. Management of SLWA is consistent with the goals and strategies outlined within the OCS for the species and habitats of greatest conservation need. The Edmunds Well property is located within the Summer Lake Conservation Opportunity Area (COA 189), of the Northern Basin and Range ecoregion, identified in the OCS. Acquisition of the Edmunds property will provide enhanced management opportunities to restore and increase protection for a variety of key species and habitats identified in the OCS. Key habitats located on the property include Flowing Water and Riparian, Sagebrush, and Wetland.

Edmunds Well Wildlife Sanctuary

The Edmunds Well Wildlife Sanctuary, located in Summer Lake, Lake County, consists of approximately 564 acres of a limited habitat type that is usually found only on private lands. The property was previously managed by the Edmunds Well Wildlife Sanctuary Trust (a charitable non-profit) to provide a sanctuary for kids, wildlife and nature lovers. In the late winter of 2014, Carol Edmunds, the landowner, approached the Department to acquire the property with interest in the Department maintaining the habitat and public use values that the Sanctuary was founded on. This proposed purchase does provide opportunities to continue the Edmunds vision for the property in alignment with the Objectives and Strategies in the SLWA Management Plan.

Four artesian wells supply all of the water, which circulates by gravity flow. The total water rights for the property exceed 1,750 gpm. The wetland areas consist of approximately 20 ponds, each ranging from two to four acres in size, plus Opal Pond which is about 20 acres. The property has three buildings; the Palmer Residence (2-story, 3-bedroom home); the Fin & Feather Lodge (12-bed bunkhouse/activity center) and an associated garage. The activity center is suitable for meetings and educational workshops.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

It is the policy of ODFW to conduct public meetings, inform local civic clubs, angler/hunter groups, resource industry groups, local private landowners, and contact local governments and legislators to provide information and garner public input on land acquisitions prior to seeking approval from the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The acquisition of the Edmunds Well property has been presented on various occasions to the following interested parties:

- public/informational meetings held at Summer Lake Lodge;
- Lake County Commission;
- Oregon Hunters Association, Lake County Chapter;
- Eastern Oregon Audubon Society.

ISSUE 1

Purchase the Edmunds Well property, 563.72 acres, as an addition to the Summer Lake Wildlife Area.

ANALYSIS

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

Policy Number ASD-19, November 17, 2000.

Incorporating the Edmunds Well property into the Summer Lake Wildlife Area serves many needs:

- Compliance with Ruby Pipeline Mitigation Agreement
- Direct, positive impact on outdoor recreation opportunities
- Educational opportunities
- Enhances the ability to manage species and habitats in the Summer Lake Basin
- Restore and increase protections for a variety of key species and habitats as identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy
- Maintain the existing investments of habitat management programs such as Department's Access & Habitat and USFWS Partners for Wildlife
- Positive economic benefits to the Summer Lake community and Lake County

ISSUE 2

Funding – Acquisition and Maintenance

ANALYSIS

The acquisition funding for this project will come from the remainder of the Ruby Pipeline Mitigation fund to use as required match for the balance of purchase costs from USFWS under an approved Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration grant. No Department license funds will be used towards the purchase of this property.

The late Don Edmunds spent a considerable amount of time and energy to design and construct the infrastructure associated with the artesian wells, including the dikes, ponds, and water control structures that make this property so unique and valuable to wildlife and their habitats. As a result of Don's amazing engineering efforts, the property affords the opportunity to manage the wetlands in a highly efficient manner. The Department has no immediate plans to conduct any major improvements to the property.

Lake County will receive the same amount of tax revenue from ODFW as it currently receives from the private landowner. Pursuant to statute, ODFW will pay "in lieu of taxes" on all applicable properties (ORS 496.340).

Maintenance funding and management of the property will be provided by the existing SLWA budget and personnel.

ANALYSIS

Administrative and public access is an important consideration with all lands to be purchased by the Department. Current landowner access to the Edmunds Well property is from Shuffield Rd. (County Road 4-16A) down a 1.4 mile long gravel road with no recorded, legal access across five landowners, including BLM. The proposed purchase of the Edmunds Well property is subject to Department acquiring legal access from Shuffield Rd., down the long gravel road. The Department is in the process of acquiring easements for access with the option to purchase fee title to the road and some adjoining property to straighten up public property boundaries.

As with the rest of the SLWA, the Edmunds Well property will be open for public use. The facilities on the property will be ideal for small wildlife related clinics for outdoor skills and a meeting facility for wildlife related activities.

OPTIONS

1. Approve the purchase of the Edmunds Well property
2. Take no action.

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

Approve the acquisition of the Edmunds Well property, approximately 564 acres in Lake County and direct staff to proceed to escrow closing upon completion of all processes required under Oregon law for land acquisition.

DRAFT MOTION

I move to approve the acquisition of the Edmunds Well property, including the required access easements, and direct staff to proceed to escrow closing upon completion of all processes required under Oregon law for land acquisition.

EFFECTIVE DATE

October 12, 2018