

# **Oregon Geese Control Task Force**

## **March 18, 2010**

### **Meeting Notes**

#### **Task Force Members Present:**

Representative Mike Schaufler (D, Happy Valley)  
Bob Flowers, farmer, Klamath Falls  
Marie Gadotti, farmer, Scappoose  
Ron Dobbins, farmer, Hillsboro  
Donald Coon, farmer, Shedd  
Dave Smith, goose hunter, North Plains  
Mike Borman, OSU Dept of Rangeland Ecology and Management  
Bob Trost, Pacific Flyway Representative, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Mark Knaupp, goose hunter/landowner, Rickreall  
Ronald Anglin, Wildlife Division Administrator, ODFW

Not present:

Senator Betsy Johnson (D, Scappoose)

Others Present

Kevin Christianson, USDA WS  
Katie Fast, Farm Bureau  
Rose Kachadoorian, ODA  
Bob Wiley via conference call - public  
Brad Bortner, USFWS  
Brad Bales, ODFW  
Brandon Reishus, ODFW  
Colin Gillin, ODFW

**Anglin:** Provides summary of the previous meeting and describes the tasks which were completed and the webpage which the Department has created as a clearinghouse for documents requested and used by the task force.

#### **Health Hazards**

**Dr. Colin Gillin, ODFW Veterinarian:** Many pathogens are present in goose feces such as salmonella, E coli, avian influenza, however, there is little if any evidence substantiating goose use of livestock pastures causes sickness in livestock. Cause and effect is very difficult to determine and feces from the geese and the sick livestock need to have the organism (i.e. salmonella bacteria) typed to determine if it is the same strain in both species. The pathogens could also be expressing themselves seasonally and may not be related to goose presence. The USDA's wildlife research lab in Fort Collins has looked into this issue extensively and continues to do so. In regard to human health concerns, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has conducted extensive long term surveillance and research as has the National Wildlife Health Center. According to the

CDC there has never been a documented case of the transmission of an oral/fecal goose pathogen to a human. There is extensive peer reviewed literature looking at wildlife/human disease interactions and specifically goose/human interactions.

### **Tasks**

- ODFW will develop a web page to address human and livestock health concerns related to goose feces as well as clean-up tips.
- The USFWS has had this in the past and will get it back up and updated on their site.

### **Fight Control and other repellants/pesticides**

**Rose Kachadoorian, Oregon Department of Agriculture:** Flight Control was registered for use on clover grown for seed in Oregon by ODA under a state registration allowed by EPA rules; however, the EPA withdrew that authorization due to cancer concerns with the product. The letter they sent to ODA informing them of the withdrawal of the label was one of the most strongly worded letters of this type ever received by ODA. Rose feels the EPA felt it had been strung along by Flight Control's repeated failure to submit requested data to the EPA regarding its use on agricultural applications and she has little hope the product will ever be approved again for clover grown for seed. However, the product is still registered for use on nurseries, golf courses and some other in Oregon. There is another product on the market which is derived from grapes and is known as Methyl Anthranilate which is fairly safe. Some users claim it is very good at repelling geese, however; it needs multiple applications during a season because it washes off. It would be worth while to test.

**Ron Dobbins:** It is currently labeled to use on blueberries, grapes, etc., however, it isn't currently labeled for wheat or clover. When testing new products there is a 10 acre maximum plot size so it's difficult to test on a large field, which the geese prefer.

**Katie Fast, Oregon Farm Bureau:** A major hang up with new pesticide products for crops grown in Oregon is Oregon grows several crops that aren't widely grown in other areas. Therefore the cost to bring out a new product doesn't necessarily justify its need for the company developing the product.

**Rose:** The EPA can grant exceptions to the 10 acre max although they don't grant very many of these. We can approve multiple 10 acres studies using different products. Also, university studies would be except from these experimental use requirements if they were conducting a study.

### **Tasks**

- Get a copy the letter from EPA to ODA regarding the withdrawal of the clover label for Flight Control.
- What are they types of permits available through ODA for these types of products. What is the process to get them? What is the contact for Rose's counter part at ODA? Have that person attended the next meeting.
- Farming community should put down in writing what are the constraints and problems in working with permitting process. What are the impediments' from your perspective and then from ODA, list what hoops you need to jump through in the EPA process and what you have to do in your part in the permitting process. Then we can look at all that and see how we can meld all that together.

## **Kill Permits**

### **Brad Bortner USFWS:**

Airport depredation permits – Federal permits are available to airports to take migratory birds which constitute a human safety threat. Most airports with some kind of staff have this permit and he is not aware of any which have ever been denied.

Individual take permits – Federal permits are available to individuals wishing to take geese for depredation purposes. The USFWS consults with Wildlife Services to determine if the applicant has used available non-lethal deterrents to try and resolve the problem and if Wildlife Services recommends a permit may be issued. Because of the management concerns with dusky and cackling geese permits are not issued for these populations. Permit applications are available through the USFWS's permit website. One of the recommendations which could come out of this task force is that the USFWS consider allowing the take of cacklers under individual take permits.

Resident geese, which are known as westerns, are managed differently than migrant geese. Nationally there was an Environmental Impact Statement published in 2006 which outlined what management options were now available. There is a fact sheet online with the USFWS and on the task force webpage.

Resident Canada Goose Nest and Egg take registration – Allows landowners and managers to register on a federal website and then take the nests and/or eggs of resident Canada geese on property under their jurisdiction. Online reports must be filed later in the year with the USFWS or subsequent registrations will not be allowed. Oregon only allows nest and egg take within city limits or urban growth boundaries or on golf courses, parks or other highly developed recreational areas which are outside of city boundaries. The Pacific Flyway Council feels in most cases resident Canada geese do not cause large scale agricultural depredation problems so blanket nest and egg take authorization has not been recommended. The Council also feels take of resident goose nests and eggs in agricultural areas has the potential to reduce recreational sport hunting opportunity. However, there are permits (individual take) and hunting seasons (September Canada goose season) available to deal with acute depredation problems caused by resident geese in these areas. Wildlife Services also has a depredation permit which they can use to take geese causing problems for landowners.

Special Resident Canada Goose Management Permit – This is a permit a state wildlife agency can request from the Service which allows the state to take birds/nests. The state needs to have a resident goose management plan in place and the ability to monitor population levels and activity under the permit. Very few states hold these permits and no state in the Pacific Flyway does.

### **Tasks**

- Put together a matrix on which permits are available and their applicability.

General discussion about resident geese – There is some feeling within the group that development of golf courses, parks, business parks, etc., has expanded issues with resident geese. Basically, anywhere there are expanses of manicured grass and ponds you have resident Canada geese. There is frustration among some members as to why the

EIS allows blanket registration for nest and egg take to manage these geese but that same process doesn't apply to geese on agricultural areas.

ODFW does conduct breeding waterfowl surveys within the major waterfowl breeding areas of Oregon. Currently the population index is about 50,000 geese. In recent years the population index in eastern Oregon has approached the harvest restriction level in the Flyway's management plan and the September season bag limit has been reduced accordingly; and due in part to low populations of resident geese in Klamath County the September season there was closed. The population index in western Oregon has trended down in recent years but did show an increase last spring but last spring's increase was likely do to sampling design and it is expected to return to its normal trajectory this spring. The combination of the September season and February hunting during the Permit Goose Season has likely contributed to a reduction in the resident Canada goose population in Northwest Oregon. In areas like Klamath County resident Canada goose numbers have been reduced to a point where landowners are tolerant of the remaining geese or would even population increases. Some landowners in the Willamette Valley also feel resident Canada goose numbers have declined to a point where they are not a depredation issue anymore, at least on a wide spread basis.

**NW Oregon/SW Washington Canada Goose Agricultural Depredation Control Plan  
Brad Bales-ODFW and Bob Trost-USFWS:**

The plan was adopted by the Pacific Flyway Council in 1998. The primary goal of the plan is to establish a systematic and comprehensive approach for minimizing depredation losses caused by Canada geese in the Willamette Valley and Lower Columbia River Region. Some of the primary objectives outlined to meet this goal are setting population objectives to limit the number Canada geese wintering in the area, developing landowner assistance programs, developing public outreach and hunting programs, and securing funding for the plans objectives. The shift in wintering areas for the lesser, Taverner's and cackling goose populations from California to Oregon, beginning in the 1970's and continuing through the mid 1990's, is responsible for the substantial increase in the number of Canada geese wintering in the region. This can be tracked by increases in the mid-winter survey (MWS) index for the region. There is confusion among estimates used to monitor populations. The MWS index is not a total population count. It is an index generated from a survey which is conducted annually in the same areas and with the same protocols and it is the only long-term monitoring data set available to track wintering populations in the region. It makes no adjustment for visibility and is not intended to be a total population count. If you want to try and estimate the number of Canada geese in the region it equates to multiplying the MWS by about 2. This has been substantiated by other types of monitoring including mark-resight using neck collars. So there may be about 250,000 to 300,000 Canada geese wintering in the region, with two thirds of those being cackling geese.

Since the implementation of the depredation plan we have seen a minor decrease in the number of geese wintering in the region; however the MWS currently stands at about 133,000 so the plan has not been successful at reducing the number of geese to 107,000 as outlined. Washington's numbers have decreased at a greater rate than in Oregon and

depredation seems to have been reduced there accordingly. Oregon's numbers have been stable for about the last 10 years. There are some major hurdles to decrease the MWS in the Willamette Valley, which are some of the major focuses of this group. Specifically, the confounding factors of trying to increase the numbers of cackling and geese to achieve the population objective while reducing the overall MWS index for all geese when cackling geese represent two thirds of the total.

The cackling goose population objective was established in 1984 at 250,000 birds prior to the wintering area switch to this region. Historically, their population is thought to have exceeded 400,000 geese. The objective was agreed to by the states, federal agencies, and native Alaskans.

General Discussion about subsistence harvest: Some members of the group feel that the subsistence use of geese should not take precedence over the damage and regulation complications they cause on the wintering grounds. The 40,000 Alaskan natives living on the YK Delta do not need these geese for their survival. They won't starve without them and they need to be able to give up traditions just as people in the lower 48 have had to change to due to populations changes down here.

The YK Delta goose management plan set specific goals for all of the goose populations nesting on the delta and in most cases the plan was successful at increasing goose numbers from low levels in the mid-1980s. The Alaskan natives have a voice in the management of these birds just as the people on the wintering grounds do. They also have a strong legal backing to their subsistence rights.

ODFW has talked about management objectives more than once with the USFWS, the Flyway Council, and the Alaskan natives but has been unsuccessful in getting the type of attention needed to make any changes. If the Alaskan natives are not agreeable to changes it probably isn't going to change.

No one from the Federal Government is interested in going to court and developing a preference system for different user groups. Canada does have a system in place where native peoples do have rights which trump others.

Discussion about Wildlife Services and future funding for them: One of the key components to the goose depredation plan is activities conducted by Wildlife Services. However, they are facing a funding crisis as county payments have been reduced and are likely to be further curtailed in the future. Additionally, ODFW and ODA funds to Wildlife Services took hits during the last budget session and are likely to take further downturns with the economic forecast. The cost to the counties has gone up an about \$30,000 for an average county due to cuts at the federal and state level. Counties are looking at dropping out due to increased costs. It's Wildlife Services who takes the lead on working with produces and wildlife issues but if they aren't funded in a county a major player in depredation assistance is gone.

## **Public Comments**

### Don Anderson - farmer from Sauvie Island

We have too many geese. 100,000 geese need 36,000 acres to feed. It costs the producer thousands of dollars out of their pocket to try and save their crop. We need to get the number of geese down. The USFWS and ODFW cannot feed all these wildlife without public support. You are making progress but we need fewer geese and that's the bottom line.

### Hubert Christianson – farmer from Harrisburg

Farming 5500 acres and have one employee, some times 2, which are dedicated solely to goose hazing during the winter. The farm sits between Finley NWR and Fern Ridge wildlife area and it is mainly the cacklers which they have problems with. Five to eight thousand cacklers can take 70 acres of grass in one weekend. Back in the 1970s through the mid-1990s farmers between Monroe and Corvallis used to plant food plots for the birds but they don't do that any more. The refuges don't plant food plots anymore. Refuges should be made to feed these birds. Our farm has had a depredation permit since the early 1990s. Originally it was for the whole year and then it was reduced to 6 months and then March 1 – October 1. Still waiting to hear back on this year's permit application and it may not be granted this year according to the permit office.

The refuges need to get back to planting food plots and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) needs to put in food plots when they develop Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) easement agreements with private landowners. The NRCS put in a 600 acre easement one mile east of me with ponds but no food plots. Once the grass dries up the geese just roost in the ponds and eat grass in the surrounding landowner's fields. When WRP easements are developed they need to have food plots put in with them.

### Kelly Warren – hunter from Philomath.

I have been a hunter since 9 yrs old, have done school projects on geese in NW Oregon and am currently working on a graduate thesis on geese in NW Oregon. I've noticed a trend on the federal NWRs in the valley where fields that used to be farmed and used heavily by geese are no longer farmed and haven't been for 7 years. The older some of these perennial rye grass fields become the less attractive they are to geese and the geese subsequently leave the refuge to find more desirable food somewhere else. I propose the refuges implement crops on the refuges which will hold geese on the refuges more than they currently do.

I've also noticed that in recent years hazing geese has become less and less effective. If geese are hazed off a field they come back within hours. However, hunting these same geese causes them to leave the fields for days if not for the season. I propose producers in the valley have access to a list of hunters who have been doing this in the valley for along time and are successful at hunting geese. If hazing isn't working the farmer should be able to see if hunting will work.

I'm also interested in how harvest estimates are generated for the substance harvest in Alaska.

- Bob Trost explains that house holds are surveyed on the YK Delta about their subsistence activity. Reward banding of cackling geese supports harvest distribution patterns observed from subsistence surveys and sport harvest surveys on the wintering grounds.

### **Federal Refuge and State Wildlife Areas – General discussion among group.**

Crops grown on the refuges are farmed by local farmers under contract. Agreements differ between refuges but in many cases the farmer gets to harvest x amount of crop while the remainder is left for wildlife or the farmer is allowed to take what is left after the wildlife use it and no longer need it. Basket Slough used to leave barley and such for the birds but they don't do this any more and now only plant grass.

Basket Slough, Ankeny, and Finely NWRs were acquired by the Service in to provide habitat and sanctuary for the dusky Canada goose. There are portions of the refuges that are not conducive to goose management and management goals on these areas will reflect that. Tualatin River NWR does have some goose use but it is small and only a minor component of goose management in the Valley. Wapato Lake NWR is just getting started and one of its objectives is to provide additional goose habitat.

There is some thought from the group the NWRs should have funding dedicated solely to farming programs for the geese and not have to rely on contract farming with local farmers and as much as each refuge as is possible should be farmed for geese.

### **Tasks**

- Gather information on the number of acres or % of each area being managed for goose forage or other goose use areas, compared to other land uses.
- Gather information on ways/deadlines for the task force or the public to provide comments to NWR Comprehensive Conservation Planning processes or State Wildlife Area management plan reviews.
- Ask refuge/wildlife area managers to attend and present to the group how the areas operate to manage for geese.

### **General Discussion about the Cackler population objective.**

#### **Brad Bales – ODFW**

Many of the goose population objectives were developed when agricultural depredation wasn't an issue but they were put in place as levels that would support sport harvest. In recent years, the Flyway Council has become much more sensitive to the depredation issue and recent population objectives have reflected this. For example, the Aleutian Canada goose objective was purposely set low because of potential depredation concerns as that population grew. There were many partners involved with the recovery of that population who didn't agree with setting the goal low but it was done to hopefully keep depredation by that population at a minimum.

In regard to the cackler objective, I went to the Flyway Study Committee and announced Oregon would be pushing for an increase in the cackling goose bag limit during the fall

seasons and we have begun discussions with all parties about trying to take a “time-out” from achieving the cackler objective and try to hold it at its current level until some solutions to the depredation issue are developed on the wintering grounds. At this time we are unsure about how this will be received by all parties, especially the Native Alaskans and I’ve already heard some reluctance from other Flyway Council members.

### **Ron Anglin - ODFW**

As a member of the Flyway Council I have continued to raise the issue of the cackler population objective at every meeting because the current objective isn’t really compatible with Oregon’s needs.

### Group Discussion

Some of the taskforce members would like to know what would happen if the state refused to sign on to the current agreements. The agreements would still continue to move forward and the state would still have to abide by them. The agency representatives feel it is better to continue to work with the other partners toward agreements which benefit all users. Working together will benefit everyone in the long run. One of ODFW’s expectations is this group will come up with some recommendations and they will bring them to the Flyway Council for consideration.

### **General Discussion on Dusky Geese.**

There are feelings from the members the dusky goose population will never be viable yet their management drives management of all of the other populations of geese in the region. Is there anyway to exempt ourselves from dusky harvest restrictions and let the dusky population fend for itself? What would happen if we did?

None of the agencies know what will happen if the dusky populations continues to decline. One way to test would be to submit a petition to list the dusky under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to force a decision. However, listing the dusky would further complicate the management of all of the populations we are dealing with and the group feels this is not the way we want to go. The current dusky management plan is really to prevent the ESA listing of the dusky. If the dusky were to be listed the group can’t anticipate what would be the worst case scenario but we can look at what happened when the Aleutian Canada goose was listed. Under that listing, Canada goose hunting was eliminated every place Aleutian geese were thought to be. The Service would anticipate at least the same response in the dusky case. Hazing and other management actions would also become more difficult.

There is nothing in the ESA that requires the Service to list a species that is declining due to a natural event. However, we would still have to do everything possible to reduce human caused mortality in addition to that natural decline. Also, as soon as the dusky issue comes before the general public there will be other groups who will come forward who will want to save the dusky goose at all costs.

### **Discussion about who is responsible for the geese and feeding the geese?**

The USFWS has overall management authority for migratory birds, including geese. Wildlife in this country is a public resource and is held in trust for the people.

### **Discussion about goose identification at check stations**

There is concern from some of the members that dusky geese cannot be accurately identified from lesser Canada geese at goose check stations in the Permit Goose Zone. Prior genetic analysis has shown the check stations catch almost all dusky geese which are presented and the agencies are always trying to improve identification. There is an appeal process set up for a hunter to use if they believe a decision was incorrect.

There is also a suggestion check stations could be improved if measurements were not taken on cackling geese to speed up operation and ODFW is currently having this discussion with the Service.

### **Suggestions for information to get out to producers**

Sometimes geese don't have an impact, or may even benefit crops at certain growth stages. It would be beneficial to produce something for the agricultural community outlining when goose grazing may not cause issues or even be beneficial. Also, some farmers don't have knowledge of all of the techniques available to them to try and alleviate goose damage. A brochure available on how to use what is available would be beneficial. It would be good to have some basic information about the life history of the birds included too. Also, provide a disclaimer that hazing only pushes the problem somewhere else.

### **Tasks**

- Please bring any ideas which would be beneficial for a brochure to the next meeting.

### **Wrap-up**

#### **Additional Tasks**

- Possibly invite the NRCS to talk about WRP and other easement opportunities and the food plots on WRP easements issue.
- Have a discussion at the next meeting about the possibility of closing check stations or allowing OSP to check hunters so they don't have to go to stations.
- Next Meeting – May 12<sup>th</sup>