**Stemilt –Squilchuck Recreation Plan**

**Recreation Committee**

**1/29 Meeting Notes**

**Participants:**

James W. Wiggs, Wenatchee Heights Reclamation District

Jerry Gutzwiler

Pete Lopushinsky, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

David Volsen, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Doug Haven, Forest Ridge Resident

Chester Marler, El Sendero Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club

Ben Alworth, Stemilt Growers

Andy Dappen, Wenatchee Outdoors

Mike Kaputa, Chelan County Natural Resource Department

Susan Rosebrough, NPS

Erin McKay, Chelan County Natural Resource Department

**Welcome and Planning Background**

Erin welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the group’s vision, decision process, where we are at in the planning process, and what has happened since the last meeting.

**WDFW Modeling of Effects on Wildlife**

Dave and Pete gave a presentation on the WDFW elk data they have and their anticipated approach to quantifying impacts of the recreation proposals. Based on the data available, zone 3 in our planning area is very important to elk and they use it more heavily in the summer than other areas in the basin. However, the elk habitat is moderate or high quality throughout the entire Stemilt Basin. WDFW will be using the data they have on collared elk, elk habitat, and typical impacts from various types of recreation use to evaluate the impacts of the concept/recommendations. This will be compared to the baseline conditions, and a range of feedback from specific actions on WDFW lands to suggested approaches for general concepts will be provided in a letter from regional manager Jim Brown.

**Addressing Concerns from Feedback**

A survey was sent out to the Stemilt Partnership members to gather input on the draft recommendations. The survey was shared outside this group and input represents input from the Partnership, as well as local Stemilt residents and the Wenatchee Sportsman Association. A number of concerns were raised during this review process. These concerns are highlighted in the attached document. The group reviewed the feedback and provided suggestions on how to address them.

**General Concerns:**

* The survey expressed a range of general concerns and many conflicted with each other. These concerns include try a do nothing alternative/ less managed access approach, concern over increased access, focusing more on wildlife, and concerns over denying motorized access.
* The group discussed these concerns and the following input was captured.
	+ Concerns ranged from not wanting access/motorized use restricted, to wanting more priority on wildlife protection. These concerns highlight different mentalities toward recreation, and can be addressed in a discussion of alternatives, including a “do nothing” alternative in the draft plan
	+ Concern regarding the level of impacts mountain bikes have an elk and is it similar to motorbikes and e-bikes? WDFW previous presentation contained impact buffer based on recreation type and the modeling work will address this.
	+ All human use can cause impacts.
	+ Designated routes may concentrate use and cause more impacts than dispersed use.
	+ There has been a large growth in non-motorized recreational use and this should be considered in the plan.
	+ Seasonal closures for wildlife should be considered in all alternatives for calving, migratory animals. WDFW will provide more detail on seasonal closure recommendations

**Trails**

* WDFW was directed to be consistent with the Naneum plan and include the North–South trail and non-motorized winter area
* Survey input identified a desire for additional non-motorized and motorized trails:
	+ The plan will show the extent of green dot roads in the system and the opportunities for vehicles, motorcycles, and ATVs to use these roads.
	+ For non-motorized trails, the group wanted to get more specifics from WDFW on impacts of non-motorized trails on wildlife.
	+ Designating non-motorized trails in Zone 3 may result in higher use in that area, which is currently used heavily by elk. Dispersed non-motorized use may be better in this area than designating trails.
	+ Trails within road buffers could provide solutions to the concern above and provide a possibility for the north/south trail. Already in the recommendations, but perhaps should be emphasized over designating trails in Zone 3.
	+ Recreation groups need to help maintain trails to help reduce the burden.

**Enforcement**

* Survey input expressed concern over the lack of and need for enforcement.
* Chelan County is currently working with WDFW and the Sherriff on this issue.
* Need to be consistent on messaging about green-dot roads. Currently only green dot roads are signed and this system is not effective. Consistent messaging could help. When the green dot road system was put in place, WDFW had more enforcement capabilities.
* Federal lands are currently approaching their road system in a similar manner of only signing open roads. It may take a generation to learn and follow this.

**Zone 1**

**Roads**

* Group comfortable with opening connector road between Orr Creek and Upper Wheeler in exchange for closures of the road leading to the Upper Wheeler Reservoir.
* Other option that had support from the group is to close Pole flats road during the summer, at the Upper Basin Loop road, and open only during hunting season.

**Upper Wheeler**

* Survey input identified a concern for toilet facilities at Upper Wheeler.
* If increase parking facilities, toilets should go with it.
* Currently there is not a lot of use.
* Wenatchee Sportsmen clean up the area.
* Change the plan, to say in phase II will *assess* the need for toilet facilities.

**Lily Lake**

* Survey input requested a toilet, WDFW will review this during their input.
* Survey input identified a concern with closing Lily Lake sno-park because Clear Lake is on private lands, and is lower elevation than Lily Lake.
	+ Plan could recommend that if Lily Lake needs to be closed, the County will assess opportunities to move/create a replacement sno-park on County lands.
* Survey input on concerns about “wheeled vehicles” on snowmobile trails.
	+ There is an existing snow berm meant to block vehicles from driving on the trails.
	+ The plan will recommend putting up signs to not drive on snowmobile trails and consider putting up gates during the spring melt out period. These gates could just be closed during the spring melt out and muddy season. The rationale behind this seasonal closure is road maintenance. Due to limited funding and level of damage that occur during the melt out, roads would be closed during this season.
	+ USFS is currently enacting similar seasonal closures for similar reason, check what they are doing.

**Non-Motorized Winter Area**

* Survey input revealed a number of concerns with the non-motorized winter area.
* The group discussed:
	+ Orr Creek road could be a good beginner area for non-motorized winter use
	+ Change the boundary of the current proposed area to reduce the size and not land lock the privately owned Section 21.
	+ Erin to talk to Gus about the concerns and a modified proposal for the non-motorized winter use area.

**Target Shooting**:

* Some members of the group were concerned with making a proposal for target shooting due to the trash and maintenance needs. Plan to address these concerns. Since the recommendation is uncertain, it may be best to remove from the map, or characterize it in the legend.

**Zone 3:**

* Survey input recommended closing a section of Pole Flat road. The group agreed with this recommendation and recommended closing the road seasonally at its confluence with the Upper Basin Road. The road would remain open during hunting season and winter snowmobile use, but closed to vehicle access the rest of the year. Zone 3 is very important to elk and this would help protect their habitat.
* Survey input included a desire for more trails, but the group felt it was less important to have additional trail recommendations in zone 3 to protect elk.

**Winter Non-Motorized use**

* Survey input expressed interest in snowmobilers and skiers using this area, especially Sections 29, 31, & 32.
	+ The group felt this steep untracked terrain was desired by skiers and they could be in danger from snowmobilers.
	+ The connectivity to Mission Ridge makes this much more accessible and desirable for non-motorized users.
	+ Snowmobilers may be able to find other similar experiences/areas because of the amount of miles they can travel.

**Implementation**

Erin explained that she has a Community Foundation grant that will allow her to continue to work with the group on implementing the plan. There is not set funding for the plan. Funding and implementation will come from grants, volunteers, and partnerships. Everyone is needed to actually implement the plan.

Participants identified things they would be interested in helping implement or others they thought would be a good partner. Below is a list of the partnership opportunities captured:

WSA: help with installation of gates/closures for non green-dot roads

WDFW: has $5,000 grant for litter pick-up in the Stemilt Basin in 2018. Can also provide gates/closures for non green-dot roads

WHRD: interested in partnering on improving parking at Upper Wheeler Reservoir Access. May be able to supply machinery in conjunction with other work on the reservoir

Wheeler Ridge LLC: help with winter non-motorized snowpark at base of Upper Wheeler Road, and closing non green-dot roads in Section 17

El Sendero: signage and outreach for winter non-motorized area, including Clara Lake

**Other Comments:**

* Clara Lake non-motorized area is part of the Naneum Plan but just outside of the current planning boundary. Is it possible to add this to our plan?
* Need to reach out to DNR and private land owners.
* Make sure plan is clear that recommendations are for public lands and willing private land owners only.

**Next Steps and Wrap-up**

* Reach out to Gus, DNR, and private landowners on the recommendations.
* Work on incorporating survey input and the group’s responses into the recommendations and draft plan and share this with the group.
* Work with WDFW to get input on the draft recommendations
* Community Open House – March
* Stemilt Partnership Approval - April
* Draft Plan - May