

WDFW Review and Comments
Preferred Recreation Concept Alternative
Stemilt-Squilchuck Recreation Plan
February, 2018

Below is the preferred recreation alternative that connects the various recreation concepts compiled through Recreation Committee meetings and from previous planning documents. This preferred alternative incorporates feedback from the Recreation Committee and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in response to the alternatives initially created to show the variety of opportunities that could be incorporated into the Recreation Plan. The considered alternatives ranged from a low to high level of development and change. The preferred alternative seeks to balance enhancing recreation opportunities while avoiding, reducing, and mitigating unavoidable impacts to the natural environment and ecological processes for water, fish, and wildlife within the basin. This alternative is open for discussion and input from the Recreation Committee, land managers or owners, and the Stemilt Partnership. Any final recommendations are subject to approval by both the Stemilt Partnership and the land manager, or the owner of the property.

Recommendations Common to All Zones

Roads:

- Green Dot roads:
 - Public access is provided on green-dot roads. The Upper Basin Loop Road serves as the primary access to zone 1. Maintain public access by addressing maintenance needs on green dot road system.
Comment: WDFW recommends completion of a Stemilt Basin road inventory and assessment to evaluate roads for long-term use. Evaluation criteria should include: resource protection; protection of water user easements; public safety; and importance for recreational and management access, per 2015 Naneum Ridge to Columbia River Recreation and Access Plan (NR2CR), pg. 19. WDFW also recommends adopting seasonal closures for green dot roads as needed for critical wildlife periods and road surface protection.
 - There should be no net gain in green dot road mileage resulting from any proposed changes to the green dot road system. Green dot road proposals will be brought before the state agencies at the green dot road annual meeting.
Comment: Research suggests that habitat use by ungulates (deer and elk) is negatively influenced by vehicle use of roads. WDFW supports limiting green dot road mileage to current levels in the Stemilt Basin.
- Non-green dot roads:
 - Non-green dot roads should be permanently closed to public motor vehicle access. The Stemilt Partnership Roads Committee provides a stakeholder panel to review proposals for closing and placing barriers along other non-green dot roads. The Roads Committee also reviews green dot road proposals such as seasonal closures and re-routes.
Comment: Research suggests that habitat use by ungulates is negatively influenced by vehicle use of roads. WDFW supports implementation of effective motor vehicle access

restrictions on non-green dot roads. Gates, ditches, logs, boulders, or other physical barriers are suggested.

- Create signs at strategic access points, trailheads, campgrounds, gates, and barriers that describe the green dot road system and allowed uses.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

Camping, Day-Use, Trails:

- All improved campsites would include a buffer zone to protect critical areas consistent with Chelan County Code Chapters 11.78 and 11.80.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Dispersed camping opportunities that are in compliance with the green dot road regulations will remain available along the Upper Basin Loop Road.

Comment: Dispersed camping should remain available along green dot roads.

- Consider seasonal closures of new and existing trails/routes to protect wildlife use and access to critical habitat, particularly during elk calving season.

Comment: WDFW supports seasonal closures of new and existing roads, trails and routes to protect wildlife during critical periods.

Education and Enforcement:

- Promote a more active education and enforcement presence, especially along the Upper Basin Loop Road in Zone 1. Coordinate across agencies to provide consistent enforcement of green dot road regulations and to share the burden of law enforcement presence.

Comment: WDFW's Enforcement Program is limited in staff and resources. WDFW supports a collaborative effort between agencies to seek additional funding for increased enforcement and education focused on the Stemilt Basin. We believe that the Chelan County Sheriff should be engaged in discussions relative to this topic, since the county has primary general criminal authority and as the county is now a landowner in the basin.

Zone 1

Use in Zone 1 is concentrated along the green dot road system comprising the Upper Basin Loop Road and Upper Wheeler Road and is primarily motorized.

Zone 1: Summer Preferred Alternative

Roads:

Phase I:

- Grade, gravel, and maintain the green dot roads to high use recreation sites such as Clear Lake in good condition so passenger vehicles can access these sites.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Grade and gravel sections of the rest of the Upper Basin Loop Road and other green dot roads most needing improvements. The goal for these roads will be to at a minimum maintain access for vehicles with four-wheel drive.

Comment: WDFW recommends completion of a Stemilt Basin road inventory and assessment to evaluate roads for long-term use. Evaluation criteria should include: resource protection; protection of water user easements; public safety; and importance for recreational and management access, per 2015 NR2CR Recreation and Access Plan, pg. 19.

- Open a 'connector' road between Upper Wheeler Road and Orr Creek Road in Section 20, to complete a legal motorized access route from Forest Ridge to the green dot road system. This connector could be limited to ATVs to reduce road impacts and be subject to seasonal closures for wildlife and road surface protection. Reduction of green dot road mileage elsewhere in the basin would be needed to stay within the 'no net gain' in green dot roads, objective.

Comment: Comment: Research suggests that habitat use by ungulates is negatively influenced by vehicle use of roads. WDFW conditionally supports this concept if it can be mitigated by reducing green dot road mileage elsewhere in the basin. WDFW would require that the "connector" road between the Upper Wheeler Road and the Orr Creek Road be open to the general public for motor vehicle use.

Phase II:

- Grade, gravel, and maintain the Upper Basin Loop Road in good condition so passenger vehicles can access these sites.

Comment: WDFW recommends completion of a road inventory and assessment to determine if this level of improvement is appropriate.

Camping, Day-Use, and Trails:

- For camping and day-use improvements, existing impacted areas will be used; the focus will be on accommodating existing use at peak to average times and reducing spread of impacts.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

Lily Lake (Section 22):

- Upon transfer of Sections 22 and 16 from DNR to WDFW, critical wildlife habitat conservation will take management priority. While interest in improvements to recreational facilities at Lily Lake has been expressed in prior planning efforts, no development is proposed for Lily Lake through this planning effort.

Comment: WDFW concurs. WDFW recommends exploring an alternative public access route to Lily Lake to allow WDFW to restore the damage caused by vehicle mudding and off-road driving along the Lily Lake green dot Road.

- While acceptable levels and types of use under USFWS habitat protection guidelines are unknown at the time of this document, *increased use and development is not proposed* for these lands.

Comment: WDFW concurs. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) grant funding used to purchase Sections 16 and 22 generally prohibits the development of new roads, trails, parking areas or toilets on these lands.

- Agencies will continue to work collaboratively to find alternatives for any displaced recreational opportunity in other parts of the basin. Options for addressing current recreational impacts in a restorative manner will be assessed.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Assess for feasibility of designating non-motorized trails near Lily Lake, if this is deemed appropriate under USFWS guidelines. Some of these trails could be conversion of non-green dot roads to trails. Formalize the existing trail around Lily Lake for walking and hiking use.

Comment: WDFW concurs. Reduced motorized access within the section could also be used to “self-mitigate” for added, or more directed non-motorized access.

Clear Lake (Section 23):

- Formalize camping sites within the currently used area for recreation use. Delineate sites by placing natural edges around the sites. Ensure all campsites have an appropriate fire ring to contain existing campfires and a picnic table. 5-8 walk-in campsites are possible within the current footprint. Allow room to create additional sites in the future if needed.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Formalize and improve a parking area and trailhead for day-use including fishing, hunting, hiking, biking, and ATV use on designated routes. The trailhead should include a vault toilet, trash container, and interpretive and regulatory signs sharing information on rules, expected behaviors, natural and cultural resource information. 15-20 parking spots.

Comment: All green dot roads are currently available for ATV use. Development of designated motorized trails in the Stemilt Basin is inconsistent with the NR2CR Recreation and Access Plan. WDFW’s Lands Division is limited in staff, time, and resources for maintenance of vault toilets. WDFW supports a collaborative effort between agencies to seek additional funding for long-term maintenance of these facilities before they are installed. WDFW cautions against unintended consequences of new trails and routes at Clear Lake impacting habitats in Section 22.

- Formalize and designate non-motorized trails near Clear Lake. Some of these trails could be conversion of non-green dot roads to trails. Maintain and formalize the existing trail around Clear Lake for non-motorized walking and hiking use.

Comment: See cautionary comment above.

Upper Wheeler Reservoir Access (Section 29):

Phase I:

- Formalize a parking area and trailhead near the existing gate for day-use including fly-fishing, hunting, hiking, and wildlife viewing. The trailhead should include a sign identifying rules and regulations. 5-7 parking spots. Mountain biking on Wenatchee Heights Reclamation District property would not be allowed.

Comment: WDFW concurs that an improved parking area is needed near the existing gate. WDFW recommends limiting new non-motorized trails to Zone 1, with seasonal trail closures during critical wildlife periods.

- Provide additional parking at road junction Orr Creek/Upper Basin Loop Road. 5-7 parking spots.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Continue to allow dispersed camping at the road junction of Orr Creek/Upper Basin Loop Road, within green dot regulations.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Designate non-motorized trails near Upper Wheeler Reservoir. These trails could be conversion of non-green dot roads to trails.

Comment: WDFW recommends completion of a habitat and road inventory and assessment to determine appropriate trail locations to minimize impacts to natural resources. WDFW recommends limiting new non-motorized trails to Zone 1, with seasonal trail closures during critical wildlife periods.

Phase II:

- Develop a vault toilet for day and camping use at the Orr Creek/Upper Basin Loop Road junction. This will be phased-in to align with the improvements to the road.

Comment: WDFW's Lands Division is limited in staff, time, and resources for maintenance of vault toilets. WDFW supports a collaborative effort between agencies to seek additional funding for long-term maintenance of these facilities before they are installed.

Steffen's Meadow (Section 28):

Phase I:

- Formalize camping at Steffen's. Delineate some of the high-use sites by placing natural edges around the sites. The campsites will include fire rings to contain existing campfires. 2-3 campsites.

Comment: WDFW supports delineating primitive campsites and parking areas at Steffen's Meadow and Pond to control and contain off-road motor vehicle use.

- Formalize a parking area and trailhead for day-use including fishing, hunting, hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing. The trailhead should include a sign identifying rules and regulations. 5-8 parking spots.

Comment: WDFW supports a parking area and trailhead at Steffen's Meadow and Pond. WDFW recommends installation of educational and interpretive signage to inform the public of the importance of natural resource conservation.

- Formalize and designate non-motorized trails near Steffen's Meadow. Some of these trails could be conversion of non-green dot roads to trails or formalizing user-created trails.

Comment: WDFW recommends completion of a habitat and road inventory and assessment to determine appropriate trail locations to minimize impacts to natural resources. WDFW recommends limiting new non-motorized trails to zone 1, with seasonal trail closures during critical wildlife periods.

Phase II:

- Develop a vault toilet for day and camping use. This will be phased-in to align with the improvements to the road.

Comment: WDFW's Lands Division is limited in staff, time, and resources for maintenance of vault toilets. WDFW supports a collaborative effort between agencies to seek additional funding for long-term maintenance of these facilities before they are installed.

All Other Dispersed Sites along Orr Creek/Stemilt Road Loop:

Phase I:

- Maintain all existing dispersed sites that are off the primary Stemilt/Orr loop road that are in compliance with the green dot motorized use rule (within 100' of green dot road). Close or convert to walk-in only all other dispersed sites that are more than a 100' off the road.

Comment: WDFW concurs. WDFW recommends site restoration to repair impacts if campsites are closed.

- Monitor use and impacts at these sites and evaluate use levels to see if additional facilities and vault toilets are needed.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

Phase II:

- Provide facilities at the dispersed campsites including delineating sites, picnic tables, fire rings, and vault toilets as needed based on monitoring results.

Comment: WDFW's Lands Division is limited in staff, time, and resources for maintenance of improved campsites and vault toilets. WDFW supports a collaborative effort between agencies to seek additional funding for long-term maintenance of these facilities before they are installed.

Other Trails:

- Create a trailhead/ parking area at base of Upper Wheeler Road (Section 10); 5 parking spots. Trailhead should include a sign identifying rules and regulations.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Continue to assess non green dot roads for conversion to non-motorized trails.

Comment: WDFW recommends completion of a habitat and road inventory and assessment to determine appropriate trail locations to minimize impacts to natural resources. WDFW recommends limiting new trails to Zone 1, with seasonal trail closures during critical wildlife periods.

- Look for opportunities to create sustainable new trails along the existing green dot road corridors with a buffer of 50 -100 feet. Evaluate trail opportunities for potential impacts to water and wildlife.

Comment: WDFW recommends completion of a habitat and road inventory and assessment to determine appropriate trail locations to minimize impacts to natural resources. WDFW recommends limiting new trails to Zone 1, with seasonal trail closures during critical wildlife periods.

Target Shooting

Phase I:

- Designate no target shooting zones around high areas for day-use and camping.

Comment: WDFW follows Public Conduct Rules for WDFW Lands which regulate target shooting on WDFW lands. Posting signs will assist in achieving compliance with this rule.

Phase II:

- Designate area(s) for target shooting if appropriate sites are found. Evaluate the potential to create a target shooting area near old quarry (Section 27). This site contains steep sides and steep back hill for bullet containment.

Comment: WDFW concurs. However, these sites can become a source of debris left behind from homemade target materials. Though covered by agency rule, the cleanup required may require time and resources to accomplish and should be a consideration when intentionally attracting this activity.

Zone 1- Winter

Sno-Park:

Phase I:

- Create a sno-park at the base of Upper Wheeler Road with a seasonal toilet and 5 parking spaces for non-motorized winter snow sports (snowshoe, backcountry ski, cross-country ski). Alternate non-motorized parking could be located at Orr Creek Road.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Maintain the existing two Sno-parks in Sections 22 and 23 for snowmobile use. If the Sno-park and associated groomed snowmobile trail segment in Section 22 need to be closed based on USFWS habitat restrictions, then consider enlarging the Sno-park in Section 23 to accommodate all winter motorized access to the groomed snowmobile trail system. If the existing Sno-park in 23 is not adequate, assess feasibility of creating another Sno-park in Section 23 on County land.

Comment: WDFW recommends re-locating the existing motorized Sno-park in section 22 to section 23, and ceasing snowmobile trail grooming in section 22 based upon USFWS use restrictions attached to the land acquisition grant. WDFW also recommends against establishing new non-motorized groomed trails in Section 22 based upon USFWS habitat restrictions.

Phase II:

- Evaluate the feasibility of creating a **Non-Motorized** Sno-park in Section 16. Plow the beginning/steep section of the Upper Wheeler Road to provide easier access for non-motorized snow sports.

Comment: WDFW recommends against additional recreational developments (i.e. sno-parks or non-motorized groomed trails) in Section 16 based upon USFWS use restriction attached to the land acquisition grant.

Trails:

- Maintain existing snowmobile trail system (Sections 22, 23, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34). Discontinue use of groomed trail segment in Section 22 if USFWS restrictions disallow motorized use in this area.

Comment: WDFW recommends ceasing snowmobile trail grooming in section 22 based on USFWS land use restrictions.

- Designate a non-motorized winter use area per the Naneum plan, bordered by the groomed snowmobile trail system to the east. The boundary of this area is agreed upon between Apple Country Snowmobile Club and representatives of winter non-motorized users.

Comment: WDFW concurs. WDFW suggest incorporating Sections 16 and 22 into the non-motorized winter use area as per USFWS land use restrictions. WDFW suggests investigating the possibility of accessing the non-motorized winter use area from the Squilchuck State Park, where a plowed parking area with toilets already exist.

- Designate a snowmobile route link on the road from Noyd Easement through winter non-motorized area to link to groomed snowmobile system in Section 28. Create an annual permit system for residents of Forest Ridge that includes an educational component on the routes available for motorized use and stewardship of the area.

Comment: WDFW supports providing a snowmobile route link from the Noyd Easement to the groomed snowmobile system in Section 28. WDFW recommends that this link be open to the general public for snowmobile use.

Zone 2

Use in Zone 2 is concentrated around Squilchuck State Park and Mission Ridge expansion area, and is primarily non-motorized.

Zone 2- Summer

Trails

- Create non-motorized multi-use trails linking Mission Ridge expansion area with Squilchuck State Park. Trail connectors will be primarily located in the NW corner of Section 19, and include connections with Scout-A-Vista property and Squilchuck State Park.
- Consider strategic fuel breaks and wildfire/fuels reduction planning with trail development.
- Consider a seasonal closure of trails in this area to protect wildlife, particularly during elk calving season.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Noyd Road Easement currently does and will continue to provide designated motorized vehicle access route for Forest Ridge residents to access the green dot road system. Consider an annual permit issued for residents that includes educational material and acknowledgment of the rules and regulations of the area. A seasonal closure may also be implemented as needed to protect road conditions, wildlife, and water.

Comment: The Noyd Easement currently only provides motorized vehicle access to the Upper Wheeler Road. Research suggests that habitat use by ungulates is negatively influenced by vehicle use of roads. WDFW conditionally supports opening an additional “connector” road in Section 20 to allow motorized vehicle access to the Orr Creek Road only if it can be mitigated by reducing green dot road mileage elsewhere in the basin. WDFW as landowner of the new road would require that this “connector” road between the Upper Wheeler Road and the Orr Creek Road be open to the general public for motor vehicle use.

Trailheads and Signage

- Create a trailhead at the main Mission Ridge parking lot with signage, vault toilet, and garbage collection for hikers going into Stemilt and to Lake Clara.

Comment: WDFW concurs. WDFW recommends continuing to restrict trails from the Mission Ridge Parking lot into the Stemilt and Lake Clara areas to non-motorized uses only.

- Develop educational signage for fire precaution and seasonal closures at Squilchuck State Park and nearby trails.

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Create signage for clarification of trail use types. Use signage to delineate uses for different trails (hiker, equestrian, mountain bike).

Comment: WDFW Concurs.

Camping

- Provide additional signage on boundaries of Squilchuck State Park to alleviate private property issues (people camping on private property).

Comment: WDFW concurs.

- Expand camping opportunities in Squilchuck State Park (and possibly Mission Ridge property) according to recreation development planning by Washington State Parks and private landowners.

Comment: WDFW concurs with expanded camping opportunities on Squilchuck State Park. An assessment of impacts to habitat and fish and wildlife resources should be conducted during environmental review associated with the Mission Ridge village development. At that time, WDFW would provide input on the impact of expanded camping opportunities associated with Mission Ridge area development proposal

Wildlife Conservation Area

- Set aside Eastern section of 19 for a Wildlife Conservation Area. This area has been identified between Mission Ridge and Wenatchee Sportsmens Association, and will help buffer impacts from development in Section 19. Recreational use in this area will likely be subject to seasonal closures to protect elk calving.

Comment: WDFW is not in concurrence that establishing a Wildlife Conservation Area at the proposed location would avoid, minimize, and mitigate for potential impacts of further development at Mission Ridge, especially given the extent of human uses likely to occur in the conservation area with it being adjacent to the development. WDFW recommends a landscape-level assessment of elk use in the Stemilt Basin (e.g. a habitat-based model of elk use) to gain a more informed understanding of management and conservation actions that would have the greatest potential for mitigating effects of proposed development in the basin. .

Zone 2 Winter

Trails

- Create a snowshoe/backcountry ski trail from Squilchuck State Park to Mission Ridge/Section 30 non-motorized winter use area (likely utilizing a summer trail platform).
 - Create groomed cross country ski trails in Section 19 and NE ¼ Section of 30. Evaluate feasibility of connecting to cross country ski trails in Section 17.
 - Noyd Road Easement provides a designated snowmobile access route for Forest Ridge residents to access groomed snowmobile system. An annual permit will be issued for residents and will include educational material and acknowledgment of the rules and regulations of the area.
- Comment: WDFW supports providing a snowmobile route link from the Noyd Easement to the groomed snowmobile system in Section 28. WDFW recommends that this link be open to the general public for snowmobile use.

Zone 3

Zone 3 – Summer

Trails

- Assess feasibility of creating a north-south trail per the Naneum Ridge Plan. This may mostly be in zones 2 and 3.
- Comment: WDFW supports creation of a north-south, non-motorized trail as per the NR2CR Plan. WDFW recommends completion of a habitat and road inventory and assessment to determine an appropriate trail location to minimize impacts to natural resources. WDFW supports seasonal trail closures during critical wildlife periods.

- Create non-motorized trails and other small trails near the site currently used for dispersed camping just below section #33, by converting existing non-green dot road corridors to non-motorized trails.

Comment: WDFW recommends no additional trails be added in Zone 3 (other than the north-south trail), given its high value as core summer elk habitat. A permanent or a spring-summer seasonal closure of the existing green dot road (Pole Flats Road) should be considered to off-set development of additional green dot roads elsewhere in the planning area.

- Explore potential for higher elevation non-motorized trails, potentially off of the Naneum Ridge Road access points.

Comment: WDFW recommends no additional trails be added in Zone 3 (other than the north-south trail), given its high value as core summer elk habitat.

- Develop designated non-motorized multi-use trails (out and back or loop trails) using existing primitive roads in the eastern part of zone 3/Upper Stemilt Basin (Sections 27, 28, 33, 34).

Comment: WDFW recommends no additional trails be added in Zone 3 (other than the north-south trail), given its high value as core summer elk habitat.

- Maintain "wilderness feel" of area between the backside of Mission Ridge and Naneum Ridge (west of groomed snowmobile trails) by leaving the area primitive and used by non-motorized users (this concept applies for both summer and winter).

Comment: This area appears to be outside the Stemilt Basin planning area and is already covered under the N2CR Recreation Plan.

Zone 3 – Winter

- Create a warming hut at Four Corners on the groomed snowmobile trail system with a permanent CXT bathroom for snowmobile use.

Comment: WDFW does not support installation of a permanent recreational hut and toilet at Four Corners. WDFW recommends use of a winter-only portable hut and toilet at Four Corners that would be removed during the summer months. A recreational facility at Four Corners is not consistent with the NR2CR Plan (pgs. 25, 26) in the Western Forest Sub Area. This location is directly adjacent to the Arthur Coffin Game Reserve. A recreational facility in this location would cause increased vehicle traffic and human disturbance in critical summer range for the Colockum elk herd and may cause unacceptable wildlife impacts.

- Create a back-country hut or yurt on Naneum Ridge in Section 36 for non-motorized snow sport use with a vault toilet.

Comment: WDFW does not support installation of a permanent recreational hut and toilet in Section 36 on Naneum Ridge. WDFW recommends use of a winter-only portable hut and toilet in this location that would be removed during the summer months. A recreational facility in Section 36 is not consistent with the NR2CR Plan (pgs. 25, 26) in the Western Forest Sub-Area. A recreational facility in this location would cause increased vehicle traffic and human disturbance in critical summer elk habitat.

- Maintain "wilderness feel" of area between the backside of Mission Ridge and Nanuem Ridge (west of groomed snowmobile trails) by leaving the area primitive and used by non-motorized users.

Comment: This area appears to be outside the Stemilt Basin planning area and is already covered under the N2CR Recreation Plan.

- Voluntary motorized vehicle closure in Section 30 to maintain quality backcountry skiing opportunity.