

WILDLIFE OPEN HOUSE Q&A SUMMARY - APRIL 29, 2021

Questions answered during the open house event (please note that some questions were edited for clarity):

In the Lower Bridge area, there are areas that are currently identified as part of wildlife inventories, but also some areas that are not included. There's a recognition of the importance of population counts, in relationship to acreage, and how to reconcile the two of those.

These observations are spot-on: the Lower Bridge area is crucial to wildlife, and particularly mule deer, which is why the ODFW team used different forms of data (helicopter surveys, habitat model, collar data) to inform that recommendation to increase those critical protection areas that aren't currently protected. This was the task of the group to come with data to inform the County of these potential additional areas.

What about the impacts that wildlife have on private property, such as commercial farmers? Is ODFW aware of programs that help offset those impacts? What type of resources are available?

ODFW is mandated in statute to address wildlife damage and this is a large part of what they do. It's also important to note that the majority of habitat is on private lands. ODFW has a budget to supply fencing and other protective measures, including damage tags and special hunting opportunities to keep the animals moving around a bit more. ODFW has a lot of tools to help private landowners manage that relationship between private landowners and wildlife.

How did the TAC select these three inventories?

The Technical Advisory Committee reviewed the existing significant Goal 5 inventories (approximately 12 of them) and considered things like how outdated the data are—for instance, are there more scientific resources available today?—which inventories are known to have lots of conflicts, and species that are known to be not doing so well, such as mule deer. The TAC also selected two alternates—the mule deer migration corridor, and threatened and endangered species, specifically the Oregon spotted frog. This pilot program ultimately chose the three top-tier inventories that would most benefit from an update.

General comments from members of the IWG team:

Sara Gregory: We all keep saying that these inventories are old but the landscape is ultimately the same. The technology to track movements and interact with the species has improved, which has given us fine-scale data sets. These animals need these landscapes to move around; there are so many obstacles to the migration and movement, particularly of mule deer; data show that those

mule deer that can migrate have a higher survival rate. This is likely similar with elk, but we do not have that same fine-scale data.

Andrew Walch: An additional note is the general state of the mule deer population in Central Oregon: In the last decade, mule deer across the West have been having a particularly difficult time; in Central Oregon we are averaging about a ten percent decline per year. The ODFW units in Central Oregon that make up portions of Deschutes County average from a quarter to half of what their population management objectives should be. We aren't close to those targets anymore, and that gap is getting wider. This is due to a myriad of factors, and therefore this is a good conversation to have right now and to bring this data forward to the public and to the County.

Wendy Wente: It's very encouraging to see the County reconsidering these data sets, understanding that the data were old and that things are changing on the landscape. The County is responding to where they see areas of conflict. I was happy to be involved in a project that pays attention to the best available science for these inventories.

Would Deschutes County be interested in applying to the Department of Land Conservation and Development for more grant money to expand the scope of the inventory updates for more species or habitats?

While the prospect of additional funding is always appealing, in this case it may be better to see this pilot project through first to refine our processes and public input. Since this is a pilot project, this is new territory for the County, which is not technically required to update these inventories. Because of this, we are determining the ideal process as we go; as such, it might be a better use of resources to hone in on the best practices for performing this update and then consider additional species/inventories/habitats.

Mule deer populations in the Metolius unit have been on the decline since 2016; in 2015 the populations were 129% of the management objective, and in 2016 it dropped to 93 percent. Is it true that the mule deer populations are now at 55 percent? What's the basis for that decline, especially in a rural county with statewide planning objectives and rules pertaining to farm and forest lands?

Those numbers are indeed correct and reflective of the rapid decline throughout Central Oregon. It's not just land use that drives down mule deer population; it's development dividing up habitats with fences and roads, it's dogs, it's the constant use of summer and winter range for recreation; it's disease outbreaks; it's bad winters (such as the late snow at the end of February a couple of years ago). There's only so many things wildlife managers can do—fight for habitat, improve habitat, or create more hunting tags. Lastly, they continue to work with local partners—federal, local, and private landowners.

Please discuss this project's timeline with respect to the grant and afterwards.

In terms of the grant and its deliverables, the goals of the current phase of this project are to provide the education about the biological inventories, and obtain public—and Planning Commission—input to hear opinions and perspectives on a possible update, which will then be relayed to the Board of County Commissioners. Once the survey closes on May 6, staff will gather all public input, compile that input into a report for the Board of County Commissioners, and present potential options to move forward (for instance, would an inventory update be a process of its own, or integrated into the larger Comprehensive Plan update?). We hope to have a direction later this summer. In the next phase of the process, if directed by the Board, there will be a robust public process to propose and evaluate potential actions to the development code, combining zones, and the Comprehensive Plan, aiming to achieve a balance between conservation goals and development expectations, and following a very detailed process prescribed by state statute for a potential inventory update.

That state process is outlined here:

<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/displayDivisionRules.action?selectedDivision=3073>

In Tumalo and throughout the less dense areas of the county, I see problematic fencing - nonporous to wildlife - being installed through large property areas confining wildlife (especially young elk and deer) often into roadways along long stretches of county roads. Are County planners able to address and perhaps impose limitations on the types of fencing homeowners can utilize?

We have numerous inventories that are identified in the County's Wildlife Area Combining Zone. For any development that is proposed in those areas, there are siting standards that come into play for fencing. To the extent that someone is building a dwelling or accessory structure, fencing is required to accommodate wildlife passage.

These new inventories extend into areas where existing zones do not. As this update process matures, siting standards for fencing (among other elements) will likely be recommended to continue into those new areas, if we have public support, Planning Commission support, and Board support.

Wolves are now dispersing through Central Oregon - from the Blue Mountains, through the Ochocos, to the Cascades. In addition to direct population management asserted by federal and state wildlife management agencies, does the County [or State] have any plans for protective designations/overlays for broader corridors accommodating landscape-scale wildlife dispersal of this type?

This issue has not elevated in the county as have the three habitats this project addresses. Wolf populations are indeed increasing statewide and do disperse through Central Oregon. Currently there is no resident wolf pack that has been identified in Deschutes County, only those who migrate to the south. Wolves are protected by the Oregon Wolf Plan, which was updated a year ago and ratified by the ODFW Commission. As far as habitat protections, while this project might

not be studying wolves specifically, it is important to note that updating protections and corridors for one species often helps those for other species as well.

Was the initial inventory compiled as part of the Comprehensive Plan?

Yes, and it becomes a part of the Goal 5 section of the Plan. An update could be a stand-alone amendment, or it could be rolled into the larger Comprehensive Plan update process.