

Warmwater Working Group Minutes

November 9, 2007 20th meeting of the WWG
ODFW Headquarters Office, Salem, Oregon

Note: WWG minutes are developed to maintain a record of key issues and discussion on major agenda items and other issues brought up during the course of the WWG meeting.

Members present: Ron Buchwald, Dave Dailey, Don Davis, Bill Egan, Bud Hartman, Marcia Hartman, Don Hibdon, Lonnie Johnson, Bob Judkins, Chuck Lang, Det Mason, Richard Schradle.

Others Present: Randy Henry, Oregon State Marine Board.

Staff present: Charlie Bruce, ODFW Wildlife Division, Gary Galovich, Mike Gray, David Haight, Mary Hanson, Rhine Messmer, Shelley Miller, Tom Murtagh, Terry Shrader.

Agenda Item 1: Introductions/Agenda Development/Minutes.

Attendees introduced themselves. Rhine Messmer provided an overview of the agenda noting the theme of this meeting would be the issue of invasive species. He told the WWG Randy Henry of the OSMB would be giving a presentation and encouraged members to take the information back to their respective organizations and groups. Rhine said this issue has become prominent in the minds of ODFW staff and cited as a recent example a situation involving Freshwater Program Manager Steve Williams. Steve was driving through the Portland area and observed a commercial vehicle with out-of-state license plates transporting a large boat, the plates being from a state considered as "high risk" for zebra mussels. Steve notified authorities, the vehicle was pulled over, and the vessel was indeed found to be harboring zebra mussels.

Members were asked for edits to the August 2007 meeting minutes and for any additions to the meeting agenda, but none were offered. Rhine then commented on Chuck Lang's BASS shirt. Unfortunately, Chuck did not have any extra shirts available but did have BASS conservation patches he graciously passed out to several members. Rhine concluded the introductions by giving a brief overview of the ODFW Headquarters building layout.

Agenda Item 2: 2009 Angling Regulation Development.

Rhine Messmer began with an overview of the 2009 Sport Fishing Regulations development process. Staff proposals have been submitted and the public will be able to submit proposals during a three-month period from December 1 through February 29. Proposal forms will be available at ODFW field offices and on the ODFW web site. Public may also contact Rhine and request a form be sent to them.

Public and staff proposals will be reviewed in March by a ten-member review board. The review board has broad representation from a variety of stakeholders and includes WWG members Lonnie Johnson and Bud Judkins. The board will be asked to review proposals based on several criteria including:

- Is the proposal based on sound principals and practices of fishery biology?

- Is the language in the proposal clear?
- Can the proposed regulation be enforced?
- Will the proposed regulation be acceptable to the public?

If a majority of the board members feels a proposal meets the criteria, the proposal can then be forwarded to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for consideration.

ODFW will also host ten public meetings in May at different locations across the state during which proposals will be presented to the public and public comment received. At each meeting, the focus will be on statewide regulations and those that will have the greatest impact in that area. If a proposal does not receive public support at a meeting, it won't necessarily be rejected but may receive a lower priority ranking. Rhine encouraged WWG members to attend those meetings during which specific or local fisheries may be discussed and particularly if they are a proposal sponsor, even if those meetings may require travel from their area of residence. Some members expressed concern if they were to travel to meetings held in other areas they might be perceived as "outsiders". Rhine said the meetings will be facilitated and it is important the public be aware of and share differing perspectives. It is also important to demonstrate many fisheries attract anglers from beyond a local area. Comment can be submitted at these meetings either verbally or by using public comment forms.

Staff will ultimately place proposals into three general categories of "high", "medium", and "low" priority for consideration by the Commission. Proposals will be reviewed by the Commission during its August and September 2008 meetings, and adopted or rejected at the September meeting. The Commission will consider any testimony given at these meetings so the public is encouraged to attend. Although testimony can be submitted in writing, Rhine suggested it may have greater value if presented verbally. He also suggested those testifying relate their personal experiences and particularly any specific to the fishery.

Terry Shrader asked why a relatively small percentage of proposals submitted by the public typically get approved by the Commission. Rhine said many often propose to change what have been long-standing and effective regulations. Others may be biologically inappropriate, are not needed, or have objectives that can be better achieved through alternative approaches. The Commission will look for regulations that will provide or enhance angling opportunity while meeting conservation objectives. Staff recommends the public avoid submitting proposals strictly social in nature.

The WWG asked if staff attempts to contact those who had proposed an existing regulation if there is a new proposal to change the regulation. Rhine said staff would try to do so if it has record of who the person or group was and believes there is continued interest.

The WWG asked if warmwater program staff were intending to submit any proposals. Rhine responded it would be inappropriate for the warmwater biologists to do so as the terms of the federal grant funding the positions prohibit their direct involvement with regulation development.

Terry informed the WWG of regulations that have been proposed by staff for Prineville and Willow Valley Reservoirs that would build upon recent habitat and fish stocking efforts.

Rhine provided an overview of a proposal being considered by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to replace the current general statewide bass regulation in Washington with separate rules for smallmouth and largemouth bass. WDFW staff feels the current regulation unnecessarily protects smallmouth and gives them a competitive advantage over largemouth in many areas. The proposal could ultimately affect Oregon rules for smallmouth in a portion of the Columbia River if Oregon decides to change its regulations to ensure consistency in the boundary water. In the Columbia, the proposed regulation would apply to the river upstream of McNary Dam. Bass regulations for the river below McNary to the mouth would remain unchanged. The proposal has broad support in Washington. ODFW staff believes for such a regulation to be effective anglers will need to harvest the available smallmouth, but is concerned they will instead continue to fish catch-and-release.

To conclude the agenda item, Rhine said staff will present at the February WWG meeting the proposals affecting warmwater fisheries that have been received by that time.

Rhine then noted the next presenter, Randy Henry, had not yet arrived so he asked whether any members wanted to provide updates.

Bill Egan informed the WWG that Oregon Bass & Panfish Club volunteers had assisted consultants to the Lower Willamette Group, a consortium of local, state, and federal entities, with the collection of smallmouth bass samples from the lower Willamette River. The consultants had let expire a federal permit authorizing their use of electrofishing to obtain fish samples and instead needed to rely upon alternative collection methods. Bill said the sampling protocol was fairly rigid and required specific numbers and sizes of fish be obtained from designated locations, but the volunteer effort was successful. The fish are being used to monitor environmental clean-up efforts in the lower river.

Bill then recounted a recent crappie fishing trip to Silver Lake in Washington. Bill said angling regulations have significantly improved the quality of the crappie fishery in Silver Lake and recommended WDFW be asked to provide an overview of the management program at an upcoming WWG meeting.

Randy Henry then arrived and the meeting proceeded to the next scheduled agenda item.

Agenda Item 3: Randy Henry, Policy and Planning Coordinator, Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB). Boat Check Stations' Preventing Spread of Invasive Species.

Randy Henry began by stressing the need to “get the word out” to the public about invasive species. He said he and Jim Gores, ODFW Invasive Species & Wildlife Integrity Coordinator, have been traveling throughout the state talking to the public and other federal, state, and local agencies about this issue, and have been providing training so others know how and what to look for. Randy said we all need to be vigilant because the cost of a potential infestation to the state’s infrastructure, fisheries, and associated economies would be significant.

Randy feels it is particularly important Oregon reach visitors as they enter the state at the major ports of entry. He told the group about the substantial investment recently made by the State of Utah to establish programs, facilities, and staff positions that focus on contacting boaters moving into and out of the state. To provide a local example, he presented the results of a recent survey of boaters using Oregon's Diamond Lake that shows how even a single and relatively small waterbody can receive visitors from a broad area and many different locations. A summary of the survey was made available to WWG members as a handout. Randy noted none of the inspections conducted during this survey indicated the presence of aquatic species or need to clean a boat, and most of the public encountered were cooperative.

Randy then displayed a map showing the current distribution of zebra and quagga mussels in the United States and pointed out which states may present the greatest risk for introduction into Oregon. He told the WWG about a recent situation where rainbow trout from a hatchery on Lake Mead where quagga mussels are now present were stocked by the State of Nevada into Wildhorse Reservoir. Wildhorse is located in northeastern Nevada and drains into the Owyhee, and then Snake and Columbia Rivers. Staff from Portland State University has been sampling the reservoir for quagga mussels, but fortunately none have been found. Their efforts include looking at water samples that could hold microscopic larvae or "veligers" and using divers to survey for adults. He noted quagga mussels are already present in California and are spreading rapidly in some areas due to the warmer water environments.

In regards to how they might spread if they arrive in Oregon, Randy discussed some of the research conducted by staff at Oregon State University (OSU) that has determined the physiology of both quagga and zebra mussels apparently requires high aqueous concentrations of calcium. Their work includes a map of Oregon showing the waters that would provide a suitable environment and be of greater risk including Paulina and East Lakes, and Ochoco and Prineville Reservoirs.

To help prevent an introduction, Oregon has produced a number of publications, some of which have been available to the public since 1999. Randy also discussed the national "100th Meridian" effort that had proposed to stop the spread of the mussels at the 100th meridian, a geographic line running north-south through the mid-section of the country. He also detailed the watercraft inspection training currently offered in Oregon that many public law enforcement, boating, and transportation officials have taken, as well as a number of ODFW staff.

WWG members asked if officials in Oregon have the ability pull-over vehicles they suspect may be transporting invasive species. Randy said to do so presents some legal challenges as those officials would need "probable cause" that in this case currently means the plants or animals would need to be externally visible. Instead, the OSMB has gone to the Governor and asked for emergency funding to allow Oregon to conduct inspections and operate wash stations at ports of entry into the state, particularly at southern and eastern locations where such an entry is most likely. The inspection effort would not be punitive and would focus on vehicles, boats, and cargo that meet defined high risk criteria. Longer-term funding for such a program will be sought after during the 2008 legislative session.

Agenda Item 4: Working Lunch - continued discussion of Invasive Species Issues

Randy emphasized the spread of zebra and quagga mussels has been primarily due to the transport of boats. He discussed what to look for and where to look when inspecting a boat, and who to contact if a boat or trailer is suspected of carrying exotic mussels. Contacts include the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division, federal, state, and county marine patrols, and ODFW staff. Randy then briefly described the steps that could be taken to clean a boat and trailer including pressure washing using hot, soapy water, flushing the motor, livewell, and bilge, or allowing a vessel and equipment to dry completely for a minimum of five days. He noted a group in Lake Mead has produced boat cleaning “kits” of which Oregon has currently purchased ten. Randy emphasized the potential risk pertains not only to motor boats, but also rubber rafts, canoes, kayaks, float tubes, and other watercraft.

Given this risk and the measures that might be needed to prevent the spread of these invasive species into Oregon, Randy asked WWG members what efforts they felt were reasonable. Answers included inspections at points of entry, having wash stations available to clean boats and trailers being transported from high risk areas but not as a general precaution applied to all vehicles/vessels entering the state, and posting highly visible signs at boat ramps and other locations to ensure the public is aware of the issue.

The WWG asked if the mussels can be transported live through salt water and, if so, what is the risk of introduction via commercial traffic into the Columbia River. Randy said the mussels cannot survive in salt water, but could be transported in fresh water obtained from a waterbody where the mussels are present and then stored in a vessel’s bilge.

WWG members then asked Randy several questions regarding other OSMB issues. Ron Buchwald noted the Tenmile Bass Club would be assisting with the identification and marking of boating hazards in Tenmile Lakes. He asked if the OSMB had standard water hazard markers the group should be using. Randy responded the state does have standard hazard and navigation markers, but it is difficult to mark all potential hazards and particularly in a lake like Tenmile where many are seasonal or transient. The discussion then expanded to whether a group undertaking such a voluntary effort might be incurring any liability for any hazards not marked. Randy concluded his visit by saying he would need to look into this issue in greater detail before providing a recommendation.

Agenda Item 5: Updates on Eastern and Western Oregon Fish Biologist Activities, District Updates, and WWG Updates.

Lonnie Johnson provided the WWG with a summary of the Oregon Black Bass Action Committee project that collected largemouth bass from Hyatt Lake near Medford for transplant to Lost Creek Reservoir on the Rogue and Garrison Lake on the south coast. Despite snow on the ground and sub-freezing temperatures, more than 30 volunteer anglers participated in the September event. Also assisting were ODFW’s Upper Rogue District Fish Biologist Dan Vandyke and South Coast District Fish Biologist Todd Confer. More than 250 bass were transferred to Garrison Lake and nearly 550 moved to Lost Creek Reservoir. The majority of fish ranged in size from 6-12 inches, but anglers caught some larger bass weighing up to 4 pounds. In addition to providing fish for Garrison and Lost Creek, the effort served to reduce an overabundance of small and mid-size bass in Hyatt. Participants included the Rogue Valley

Bassmasters, Crater Bass Club, Southern Oregon Bass Club, and a number of unaffiliated individuals.

Terry Shrader issued a “final call” for any groups wanting to host a pay-it-forward angling tournament using the approximately \$1,700 that had been generated by the initial effort hosted by the Central Oregon Bass Club at Prineville Reservoir. Funds generated by the tournament entry fee are used for fishery enhancement projects with a surplus going toward holding a subsequent event. Terry asked the WWG why clubs are seemingly reluctant to take on this effort. Most agreed time constraints and concern for the level of commitment probably dissuades many. Several members also expressed uncertainty as to which waters ODFW would allow warmwater enhancement project to take place on. It was noted the funds raised would not necessarily need to go toward enhancement of the waterbody where the tournament was held, but it might be an expectation of participating anglers. Also, funds are not required to be used for fish stocking as was done at Prineville Reservoir and could instead go toward other types of projects. Chuck Lang said BASS might offer to match funds generated by a pay-it-forward tournament. Staff committed to providing the WWG members with a list of waters that would be good candidates for this type of tournament.

Terry discussed results of surveys conducted in 2007 on Crane Prairie Reservoir and presented graphs showing the length distribution of largemouth bass sampled. Staff had requested bass anglers voluntarily refrain from holding spring tournaments on Crane Prairie in 2007 due to concern for angling impacts on spawning fish. Most all groups complied and good numbers of yearling fish were observed in subsequent surveys. The WWG expressed support for a voluntary moratorium on June tournaments in Crane Prairie again in 2008.

Terry concluded his updates by providing a brief update on the Bend Pine Nursery project that is developing a City of Bend park pond to provide fisheries for warmwater fish and hatchery trout.

Rhine Messmer cited the Bend project as an example of ODFW efforts to improve angling opportunities for urban and youth anglers. However, several WWG members expressed concern it may be difficult to maintain a quality warmwater fishery under the expected angling pressure. They cited this is an example where a more restrictive angling regulation may be needed to manage a fishery primarily dependent on natural production. Rhine said it would be important to structure any proposal so it could be applied consistently across the state and to provide a strong argument for the benefit. Rhine suggested any proposals to restrict warmwater harvest should work to expand warmwater angling opportunity, perhaps by improving sustainability of the fishery under increasing pressure as more anglers target or consider warmwater fishing.

Terry Shrader stressed the importance of demonstrating a regulation accomplishes its biological objectives. He recommended the group identify one or two waters where the impacts of a more restrictive harvest regulation if imposed could be monitored.

Gary Galovich provided an update on warmwater program activities in Western Oregon. He noted several Willamette Valley ponds were sampled in late summer and early fall yielding some surprising and encouraging results. These included good numbers of largemouth bass in Woodburn Pond which many felt had “dried up” only a few years earlier, a large number of

white and black crappie in Junction City Pond, and an abundance of warmwater fish in Delta Ponds that included some sizeable crappie, bluegill, and largemouth bass. The information will be used in-part to promote the angling opportunities available. Fall sampling was also conducted at Devils Lake.

Gary provided a brief update on the recent effort to transfer smaller bass from Davis Lake to Garrison Lake. Although a few hundred fish were transplanted, the number was far less than had been anticipated hence the greater reliance on bass for Garrison from Hyatt Lake. Garrison also received a few thousand juvenile bluegill collected from St. Louis Ponds.

Recent outreach efforts included set-up and maintenance of a warmwater display tank at the ODFW Oregon State Fair site and development of the "Guide to Hosting Bass Fishing Tournaments in Oregon". Gary passed out copies of the guide to WWG members and asked for comments and recommended edits. Staff was planning to have the guide available for the 2008 tournament planning workshop held at the annual Oregon BASS Jamboree.

Gary concluded his updates by noting the presence of spotted bass in Lost Creek Reservoir had likely been documented. A fish caught in the reservoir this fall was dropped-off at the ODFW office in Central Point and kept live until it was delivered to Dr. Doug Markle, a fish taxonomist at OSU. Doug had not yet confirmed the identification, but he and staff were fairly certain it was a spotted bass. Gary displayed several pictures of the fish and discussed the identifying characteristics, and the WWG group discussed some of the actions that could be taken.

Charlie Bruce, ODFW Threatened and Endangered Species Coordinator, then arrived at the meeting so the WWG proceeded to the next agenda item and planned to return later to staff and WWG member updates.

Agenda Item 6: Charlie Bruce, ODFW Threatened and Endangered Species Coordinator. Cormorants in Oregon.

Charlie began by providing members with a handout listing a numbers of facts about the various species of cormorants found in Oregon, the populations and trends, and past and current management actions. Although three species are found in Oregon, he noted concern is primarily for double-crested cormorants, the most common and widely distributed species in North America. He pointed out their ability to adapt and nest in variety of environments, and effectively prey on fish at depths up to 75 feet. Cormorant populations typically cycle up and down from year to year and most west coast populations have declined during the past decade, but the Columbia River colony at East Sand Island has for unknown reasons grown exponentially. Experts believe East Sand Island may be attracting birds from other colonies.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is the lead federal agency responsible for managing cormorants which have been protected by federal law and international treaties since 1972. Cormorants are migratory and large populations exist in many interior states where depredation is also an issue, particularly for aquaculture. Efforts to harass or control cormorants require a special permit. One such permit was issued to ODFW in 1988 authorizing hazing on Nehalem and Tillamook Bays, but that effort was mostly discontinued in the 1990's and effort has since focused instead on Caspian terns in the Columbia River. Significant resources are needed for

migratory bird research and management projects, which in the case of the Caspian tern have included federal funding for the development of the Biological Opinion on the Army Corps of Engineers operation of the Columbia River dams. As a result, a national management plan is now in place for Caspian terns that includes the construction of artificial islands in other waters in Oregon and along the west coast to encourage the terns to relocate from the Columbia River. Although the recent focus has been upon the terns, the status of double-crested cormorants in the west is currently under review and, much like for the tern, may result in experiments to attract the birds to alternate nesting areas. Authorization for alternative methods of control may take considerably more time to get authorized.

Charlie was asked why it was not possible to simply eliminate problem cormorants. He responded that gaining approval to do so for a federally protected animal can be a very long and detailed process that is frequently challenged in courts and alternative methods must first be thoroughly vetted. Plans to manage the Caspian terns have been court driven and if the federal government was to concurrently pursue more active management of cormorants it would again find itself facing legal challenges. States can petition the USFWS for a depredation permit, but this could have little effect on a colony like that at East Sand Island that may be driven more by the location. A question was asked about the effectiveness of hazing. Charlie said cormorants are very adaptable and can take advantage of other habitats if forced to relocate. He concluded by saying although ODFW has tried hazing on the North Coast, this approach has met with some success in some other areas of the country.

Return to Agenda Item 5: Updates on Eastern and Western Oregon Fish Biologist Activities, District Updates, and WWG Updates.

Mike Gray provided several updates for the Tenmile, Coos, and Coquille area. He began by thanking WWG member Dick Schradle and the Tenmile Bass Cub for collecting warmwater fish used this past year in the district's display tanks maintained at several area events. He said recent turnover of staff had left the district short-handed for a period of time, but Gary Vonderohe has been hired to fill one of the Assistant District Fish Biologist positions. Mike noted Alan Ritchey conducted the annual fall gillnetting survey on Tenmile Lakes which produced good numbers of small largemouth bass, bluegill, and crappie.

Mike then provided an update on Tenmile Lakes. Low water levels in Tenmile were seen earlier this year than in the past and also seem to be occurring more frequently. An event held by the community to highlight the issue drew the attention of a number of area political representatives and there is now a Tenmile "low water committee" on which Mike represents the ODFW. The group recognizes the challenge given there is no water control structure at the lake outlet other than the bottom elevation and water levels are highly dependent on rainfall. Some committee members have suggested a control structure be built, but this could affect downstream water users. Mike then responded to questions asked by WWG members about the effects the water fluctuation has on fish and aquatic vegetation by citing a number of studies ODFW and others have conducted.

Tom Murtagh provided an update on Hagg Lake. Tom has been working closely with the lake managers to ensure fishery impacts are considered and mitigated for under plans to raise the dam height and lake elevation by the year 2016. Enhancements could include the protection of

existing vegetation and/or addition of habitat structure in the areas that will become inundated. Tom also provided an update on a meeting recently held to discuss potential uses of the St. Paul Warmwater Fish Hatchery site. These include using one or more of the ponds for rearing Oregon chub, and using other ponds to temporarily rear warmwater fish or hold fish during transfers. Tom concluded his updates by informing the WWG staff is looking at potential sites in the Portland area for establishing “youth only” angling opportunities, but noted although this type of fishery has merits, it can also present challenges.

Dave Haight gave the WWG an update on efforts to improve warmwater habitat in several abandoned gravel ponds located at the Jackson County Fairgrounds in Medford. Like most remnant quarries, the ponds have fairly steep sides so the project includes bank sloping to create broader shallow areas and the addition of angling access.

Agenda Item 7: Meeting Wrap-Up, Next Meeting Date and Agenda

The next WWG meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday, February 15th at ODFW Salem Headquarters (Commission Room). However, this date may change to accommodate the schedule of ODFW Director Roy Elicker who plans to attend the meeting. Potential agenda items include:

- Update on the 2007 Oregon BASS Jamboree held in December.
- Warmwater angling regulation proposals for 2009.
- Nongame fish netting permits.
- Candidate waters for holding a “pay it forward” angling tournament.
- Update on Devils Lake.

The meeting was then adjourned.