



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Establishment of the Minam River Wildlife Area (MRWA) began when ODFW purchased 441 acres along the Minam River in 1967. In 2019, ODFW in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) negotiated an additional two-phase purchase totaling 15,573 acres with Hancock Natural Resource Group (later Manulife Investment Management Timber and Agriculture Inc., or Manulife). The first phase was completed in 2021, adding 4,609 acres, and the second phase was secured in 2023, adding another 10,964 acres. A third phase acquired another 1,073 acres from Manulife in 2024. The total acreage of the wildlife area is now 17,087 acres.

The primary purpose of the MRWA is to maintain and protect landscape level connectivity, conserve key habitats, and sustain ecological functions that support numerous endemic and native species. ODFW plans to accomplish this with the application of active management principles with an ecosystem-based management philosophy. Of primary importance, enhancing historic winter range for Rocky Mountain elk and other iconic species native to Oregon.

The draft MRWA management plan (Attachment 4) was developed following acquisition of the third parcel in 2024. This management plan will be reviewed in five years to gauge the progress of implementation and make necessary revisions, and it may be revised in its entirety in ten years. The MRWA management plan documents the management goals and objectives to guide ODFW's management actions. The goals and objectives of the plan are intended to:

- Provide ODFW staff with clear direction for management of MRWA.
- Communicate management priorities for MRWA to its neighbors, visitors, and the public.
- Ensure management programs on MRWA are consistent with the original intent and purpose of the area as first established.
- Ensure management of MRWA is consistent with federal and state laws, in addition to state and local natural resource plans.
- Provide a basis for budget planning to support the management of MRWA including staffing, operations, maintenance, and capital improvements.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Since initiating efforts to acquire the property in 2019, ODFW East Region leadership, staff and partners held over forty meetings, tours, talks and presentations regarding the MRWA purchase and proposed future management. Acquisition of Phase 1 include financial contribution from numerous partners including Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Hunters Association, Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Oregon Wildlife Foundation and generous private donors.

Between 2019 and 2024, Department staff provided regular meetings and updates to federal and state legislators, the Governor's office, local county commissioners in both Union and Wallowa Counties, along with periodic updates to local county resource committees. In addition, the department received numerous letters of support for this acquisition from federal, state, county, local business and NGO groups. A consistent message for management of the property included a desire to protect key winter range for Rocky Mountain elk and other ungulates, protect and enhance critical habitat for anadromous fish while also protecting habitat for other endemic and valuable fish and wildlife species. These management objectives would be achieved through several actions including:

- Managing the property on a landscape scale
- Protecting and enhancing natural and historic local ecosystems
- Actively managing the property as a working land, including
 - Active livestock grazing
 - Continued forest management
 - Protection from catastrophic wildfire
 - Use of prescribed fire
 - Continued control of noxious weeds
- Maintain continued public access to the historic Minam River Trail for access to the property and adjacent Eagle Cap Wilderness.
- Provide continued recreational access for traditional fish and wildlife-based activities

On September 17, 2025, ODFW staff hosted a public webinar to present the draft management plan and solicit public comment. The meeting was announced through an agency news release on MyODFW.com listing the contact information for ODFW staff along with links to the meeting, the wildlife area visitors guide and draft plan. The one-hour meeting was attended by five ODFW staff and nineteen members of the public. Three individuals asked questions or provided comments during the meeting.

A total of seventeen written comments were received from stakeholders and other members of the public covering a range of issues that included:

- ADA access
- Treaty Rights
- Winter closure dates
- Wildlife area camping
- Access to the Minam River Trail
- Bighorn sheep
- Resource protection/management
- Grazing
- Forest management/harvest

Copies of verbal and written comments received during the webinar or public comment period are provided in Attachment 6.

ISSUE 1

ADOPT THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MINAM RIVER WILDLIFE AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN AND THE AMENDMENT TO 635-008-0126.

ANALYSIS

Based on input from the public review process and internal review by staff, the Department developed the goals and objectives for the MRWA in the draft plan. These, along with the implementation strategies, are outlined in Attachment 4 (pp. 12-30).

Consistent with other wildlife area plans the MRWA Management goals are broad, open-ended statements of desired future conditions that convey a purpose but do not define measurable units. In support of achieving the wildlife area goals, the objectives are more concise statements of what the Department wants to achieve, how much the Department wants to achieve, when and where to achieve it, and who will be responsible for the work.

The remainder of the plan contains background and historical context. Appendices A through D contain biological information and convey pertinent legal information, rules and regulations associated with management of the property.

Staff propose that the Commission adopt the Goals and Objectives as described in the December 2025 final draft Minam River Wildlife Area Management Plan and amend OAR 635-008-0126 as described in Attachment 3.

OPTIONS

1. Approve staff recommendations
2. Modify staff recommendations

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to adopt the Goals and Objectives of the 2025 Minam River Wildlife Area Management Plan and amend OAR Chapter 635-008-0126 as proposed by staff in Attachment 3.

Effective Date: Upon Filing