

Wildlife Program

Week of December 26, 2011

LANDS DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Private Lands/Access

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) has come to an end. In LIP's nine years, WDFW received over \$4 million to protect and restore habitats for species at risk on privately owned lands throughout the state. LIP projects benefitted *species of greatest conservation need*, ranging from chinook salmon to Taylor's checkerspot butterflies. Two important agency strategic goals/objectives were addressed: 1) protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats, and 2) reconnect with those interested in Washington's fish and wildlife. In its short existence, LIP accomplished the following:

Habitats Restored/Protected with LIP Funds

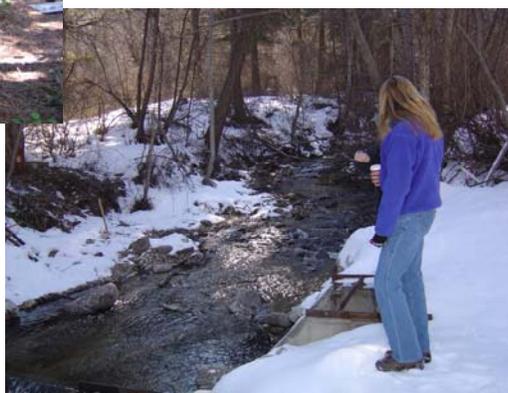
Habitats Targeted	Acres/Miles Restored/Protected	Number of LIP Species to Benefit
Riparian	1,104 acres	28
Wetlands	886 acres	16
Estuary/Nearshore	4,498 acres	21
Instream Habitat	7.6 miles	9
Prairies	284 acres	16
Oak Woodland	207 acres	9
Fish Passage/Habitat Accessible	64.3 miles	12
Snags Created	103 snags	26
Shrub Steppe	4,653 acres	15

Examples of LIP successes are plentiful. Here are a few:



Black Canyon Fish Passage
Okanogan Conservation District
Okanogan County

- Irrigation diversion replaced.
- Two miles of spawning and rearing habitat now available to steelhead.



LIP Contribution: \$ 9,640
Total Project Cost: \$15,684

Baird Springs Livestock Exclusion Fencing

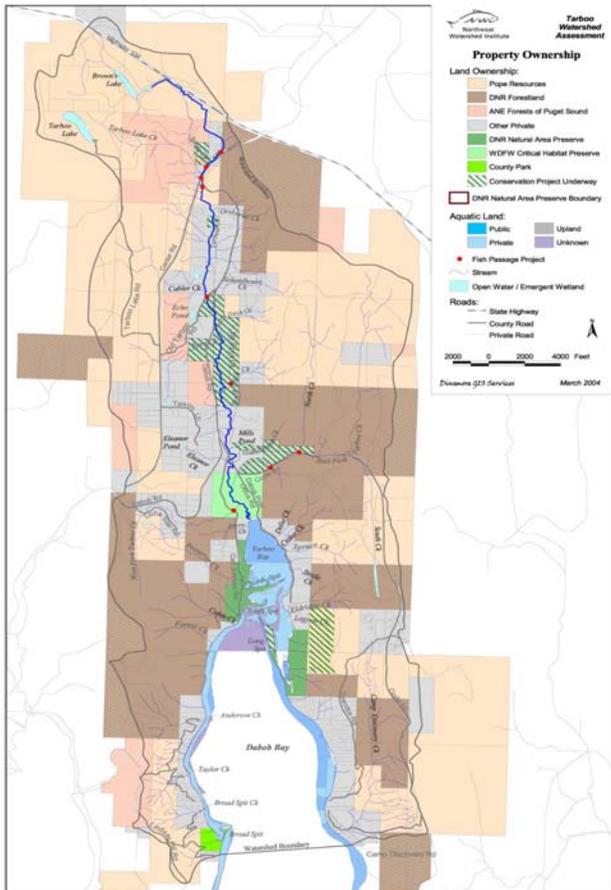


The Nature Conservancy
Grant County



- Livestock excluded.
- 2,240 acres shrub steppe habitat protected for pygmy rabbits.

LIP Contribution: \$44,178
Total Project Cost: \$64,099



Tarboo Watershed Wetland Protection/Restoration

Northwest Watershed Institute
Jefferson County

Protected/restored over 120 acres quality riparian and wetland habitat

LIP Contribution: \$ 50,000
Total Project Costs: \$154,500





Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) cooperating landowners with signs that are posted at LIP sites.

OUTREACH

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

WildWatchcams-Sealcam: If at first you don't succeed try, try again – and we are, as WDFW Dyanna Lambourn remotely controls, shoots and sends new iPhone images of harbor seals located on a seal haul-out (resting outside of the water) and under the eye of the new Sealcam. Reading body brands and colored flipper tag numbers will assist WDFW and other biologists in an upcoming harbor seal study. This Sealcam is currently off-line to general access, as bugs are being worked out. Stay tuned for more beach action, meanwhile, for additional information see:

http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildwatch/sealcam/seal_info.html .



Seal haul-out



Bluebirdcam: End of the year discussions with Wolf Haven staff and other partners continue for a New Year expansion of the Western Bluebirdcam. An increased South Sound prairie focus will be present for public viewing; a special camera will focus on South Sound prairie wildflowers and associated pollinators. A citizen science aspect is planned, as are new project partners and website resources related to South Sound prairies. A possible Wolfcam has also been discussed, for the large natural enclosure housing two wolves at the Wolf Haven facility. A pan/tilt/zoom camera has recently been donated to Wolf Haven for education and outreach purposes.

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Gray Wolf Management: District Wildlife Biologists Dana Base and Jay Shepherd attended a meeting of the Stevens County Cattlemen’s Association as invited by former Stevens County Commissioner Tony Delgado pertaining to issues and concerns about possible and expected wolf depredations on livestock, including retarded weight gain while on the range, and excessive predation of native ungulate populations. This meeting was held at the Ag/Trade Center in Colville on Tuesday morning, December 27th. About 40-50 people attended including all three Stevens County Commissioners (Don Dashielle, Malcom Friedman, and Larry Guenther), State House Representative Shelly Short, State Senator Bob Morton, Stevens County Sheriff Kendal Allen, and Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Gary Douvia.

Incidental Wildlife Sighting Picture

During deer surveys, a group of four otters were observed fishing in Southeast Washington.



Wildlife Areas

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area – WSDA Weed Grant: Bio Woodall has been coordinating with Asotin County Weed Coordinator Nelle Murray and writing up a grant proposal applying for a WSDA Noxious Weed Control grant. They will partner and jointly apply for an Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) grant asking for \$10,000; \$7500 for labor and \$2500 for herbicide.

They plan to use the funding to spray and expand out on our known Rush Skeletonweed sites on WDFW and neighboring private property, look for new infestations, record and spray those sites. They would also scout for additional noxious weed threats; Med Sage, Orange Hawkweed, Sulfur Cinquefoil, and others. The labor budget would pay for a local contractor who specializes in weed control from the backs of horses. Using herbicide spray units that are mounted to the backs of horses, he can access remote and rugged locales of the wildlife area that are not accessible by ATV or truck mounted spray units.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Private Lands/Access

Forest Capital Partners (FCP) Agreement: Baarstad and Bendixen finalized the Cooperative Road Management contract for hunting access with Forest Capital Partners and submitted it in CAPS; representing 62,225 acres of FCP lands under hunting access agreements in District 1, largely due to Bendixen's presence and efforts in Northeast Washington.

Winter Conditions

District 1: A system of "pineapple express" type rainstorms hit Washington this week including the northeast corner of the state (District One). The rain and warm air mass that came with this system raised temperatures considerably to 40's and 50's in degrees Fahrenheit. These unseasonably warm conditions coupled with rain on snow melted much of the snow on the ground, especially below about 3,000 feet elevation as well as on south and west aspect slopes.

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area: No snow or frost is left on the ground, with daily highs into the 40's as of December 28 and 29, and lows only into the 30's. Some rain fell on the evening of December 28.

District 3: Experienced near-record high temperatures and continued mild conditions with no new snow accumulation. Some rain fell the last few days, and snow is expected at the higher elevations this weekend as colder temperatures are predicted.

Blue Mountains Wildlife Areas: Significant moisture in the form of rain. High temps have been unseasonably warm in the high 40's to low 50's. Hard to believe it is the end of December, it feels like spring.

Wildlife Recreation Notes

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area: About 3:30 in the afternoon on December 28, Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area staff spied an immature snowy owl perched on a power pole cross beam, just north of the intersection between the county road and the roadway to the Wildlife Area Headquarters. Unfortunately, the bird flew off and down to the west side of the Swanson Lakes, before a photo could be snapped. Side notes from Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area grouse tracker Dr. Kim Thorburn, from her survey report of December 24: "...Most of the other bird activity of the day was raptors. I saw jackrabbit tracks at the entrance gate to the Windmill hill road. When I was driving back to headquarters after dark, I also saw a white-tailed jackrabbit on 7 Springs Dairy Rd. where it swings north below the wheat hills. It turned off the road into the wildlife area."

Blue Mountains Wildlife Area: Good numbers of Bald Eagles can be seen wintering on the river. Not many anglers to report on the river. Many of the best holes for a bank fisherman were found to be open and free for the taking.

REGION 2

None

REGION 3

Winter Conditions: Winter weather has been exceptionally mild so far. The temperature range last week was from the mid-20s to nearly 50 degrees and more of the same is forecast for this week. Big game winter ranges are still mostly free of snow and we have yet to start the elk feeding operations in Kittitas and Yakima Counties.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Snoqualmie Valley Elk Habitat and Corridor Maps: Biologist Kertson assisted Westside GIS Analyst Duff with updating elk habitat suitability and connectivity maps for the Upper Snoqualmie Valley Elk Management Group (USVEMG). Members of the USVEMG research team will be presenting the updated maps and their preliminary research findings to the North Bend city council. The council will be discussing residential development and habitat conservation issues in the upper Snoqualmie Valley. The city council has a particular interest in areas within the vicinity of the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River, so the updated maps provide some of the critical information needed to ensure the long-term preservation of valuable wildlife habitat in the upper Snoqualmie Valley.

Annual Winter Waterfowl Survey: Biologist Anderson surveyed Lake Sammamish – North, Star, and Steel Lakes. Highlights were a drake Eurasian Wigeon and American Wigeon hybrid on North and two drake Eurasian Wigeons on Steel Lake.

Priority Species and Habitat Mapping: District Biologist Milner continued mapping updates for the Priority Species and Habitats program.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study: Biologist DeBruyn and Technician Lapsansky hazed swans off Judson and Wiser Lakes and captured sick swans. Mike Smith (University of Washington) was out of town and some swans had infiltrated the exclusion area Mike has set up to prevent swans from ingesting lead. Lapsansky also responded to reports of sick and dead swans throughout Skagit and Whatcom Counties and took biological samples from the carcasses. He recovered 11 dead swans from a single flooded field in Skagit County on two visits. Wildlife program staff and others will be investigating the cause of these deaths.

Private Lands/Access

Hunter Surveys: Biologist DeBruyn surveyed hunter use of private lands Quality Waterfowl sites in Whatcom County on New Year's Eve. Hunter use was high, but hunting was slow due to mild conditions.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Wildlife Management

Elk Management: Biologist Danilson initiated further internal review of the draft Nooksack Elk Herd Management Plan and is developing an outreach process for external review by the Point Elliott Treaty Tribes.

Brant Age and Race Survey: Biologist DeBruyn surveyed brant in the Swinomish Reserve on December 29 and 30. The juvenile:adult ratio of roughly 50:50 is indicative of a good year for reproduction and 90 percent of the birds surveyed were from the Western High Arctic population (gray-bellies) which are the birds of concern for season setting in the Padilla Bay area.

Private Lands/Access

Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program: Biologist Roozen and technicians Otto and Deyo continued repair and maintenance of Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program parking and blinds. Biologist Roozen and Technicians Otto and Deyo continued public use surveys for Waterfowl Quality Hunt Units. Roozen, Otto, and Deyo also continued scouting potential new hunt sites for next season.

Game Management Unit 418 (Sierra Pacific) Elk Hunts: Biologist Roozen and technician Deyo monitored access and toured Sierra Pacific property in Game Management Unit 418. Elk hunting season is wrapping up and few tags went unfilled.

Wildlife Areas

Skagit Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Schuster met with Habitat Biologist Brian Williams and Pacific Coast Joint Venture Representative Lora Leschner to discuss North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) land management requirements and options for the Fir Island Farms Unit. NAWCA funding was used to purchase the property and any changes from the agreed initial purpose of acquisition must be approved by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. NAWCA has agreed to allow the replacement of snow goose forage habitat on properties.

Weather Conditions

Skagit Wildlife Area hunter numbers were up over the holiday week but hunting conditions are still slow due to dry and warm weather conditions.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Western Pond Turtles: Biologist Holman continued work on the annual report to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), summarizing work done related to western pond turtle management in the Columbia River Gorge area. This year various tasks were undertaken, including continuation of the head-start program which resulted in collection of 74 juvenile turtles. Other activities included significant habitat improvements at all four pond turtle sites, mark/re-capture population investigations, environmental education, turtle releases, increased predator control efforts, etc. Thanks to BPA for their 2011 funding of the Western pond turtle work.

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area:

Water Control Structure Repair: Staff installed a headwall on one of the South Unit water control structures to address a leak which had progressively been getting worse over the course of several years. Part of the project, which involved digging a trench for the steel wall, was monitored by an archaeologist from BPA. All of the work was done by hand in this case as there was very little digging involved and we wanted to make certain that the material was well compacted beneath and around the pipe as it was replaced. This work was planned for earlier in the year but was deferred because of other workload. The unusually dry conditions in early December allowed us to complete the repair at a time when the pond is ordinarily holding water. With the recent weather change and rise in the Columbia River, we should be able to begin delivering water to this and other ponds on the South Unit within the next week.

Floodplain Lakes Literature Review: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins reviewed a draft literature review document addressing floodplain lakes that had been prepared by Estuary MOA staff in the region. One interesting point seems to be how little is known about juvenile salmon use of lakes, but there is a significant amount of knowledge relating to sloughs and other intertidal channels. Calkins spent time reviewing literature available on line and will be recommending some additional documents to be included in the document. One document of particular interest was work by the USFWS studying predation on juvenile Chinook in Lake Washington by both native and non native predatory fish. This research found lower levels of predation in the lake than may have been expected but higher levels in its' outlet canal.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Wildlife Management

Post Season Deer Surveys: Biologist Anderson conducted a post-season deer survey in the western region of GMU 578 (West Klickitat). This area is a mix of agricultural and forest land dominated by mix conifer and oak. This area is generally considered to be an important wintering area for black-tailed deer especially in the Rattlesnake Creek drainage. December weather has been especially mild and few deer concentrations have been noted so far in preliminary survey efforts. Additional surveys will continue into first week of January. In addition, Technician White contacted Hancock Forest Management to obtain permission to conduct post-season deer surveys on their property.

SW Washington Goose season: Harvest rates were slightly lower for hunters over the past couple of weeks based on the three check stations checking in an average of 1.7 geese per hunter. In spite of this and the holiday season, attendance was still steady at all three stations.

Two duskies were harvested out of management area 2A since the 21st of December. One was harvested out of zone 3 and the other from Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. The goose harvested from Ridgefield was the final dusky remaining in their quota. As a result, zone 1 has closed to goose hunting for the remainder of the 2011-2012 season. Zones 2-5 will continue to remain open to goose hunting with many opportunities still available to go hunting.

Canada goose population surveys: In cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Region 5 Wildlife Biologists conducted surveys for Canada geese in selected areas of southwest Washington. The survey is focused on dusky Canada geese and involves locating flocks of duskies and examining the birds for neck collars. Population information generated via wintering observations in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon are compiled with data generated from aerial surveys of the geese on their breeding grounds in the Copper River delta of Alaska to develop a robust population estimate. Biologist Holman conducted the survey in the Woodland Bottoms and Kalama River areas of Cowlitz County. Few geese were observed, and no duskies were located.

Private Lands/Access

Special Permit Hunts: Biologist Stephens fielded many calls from permit hunters regarding access to the Coweeman and Winston antlerless elk hunts that take place Jan. 1-16. Technician White provided master hunters with a permit for Special Elk Hunt 2719 in the Trout Lake Valley with landowner contact information for planning this hunt.

GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area:

South Unit Pump Water Meter: Electricians from the Lacey Construction Shop installed a new flow meter on the pump station used to fill seasonal wetlands on the South Unit of the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. This meter is needed for compliance with our water rights permit from the Department of Ecology. Wildlife Area staff have been waiting for the installation of the flow meter ever since the old meter broke three winters ago. Unfortunately, the meter installed did not work well for this particular system. The meter seems to be accurate with reading the gallons per minute on the larger of the two pumps, but we believe that the meter is not accurate in monitoring the output of our smaller pump. The installers indicate that this is probably a result of turbulence in the pipe due to the joint configuration that they had not accounted for. We were also informed that the new meter is not waterproof and since it is mounted below the flood level, it will probably need to be replaced every time we have a significant high water event. At this point no suggestions for other alternatives were made other than to repair the original meter. We had been pursuing a new meter because the original one had broken twice.

Fence Repair Due to Metal Theft: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald repaired a fence along one side of the North Parking Lot on the South Unit. He discovered that almost all of the metal T posts were missing and the wire was in disarray. After checking with others within the Department that may have been working on repairing the fence, we have surmised that the posts were stolen for their scrap metal value.

Storage Reorganization: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald cleaned and reorganized a portion of our storage space at the regional office. In addition to general efficiencies, a main

objective was to relocate the parking for his vehicle. This should save him a significant amount of time and inconvenience that has occurred in the past when objects or vehicles left by others were blocking the path that he needed to get into or out of the secured area. During the cleanup, a number of items were located and positioned to be surplus or otherwise disposed of. In addition, Hauswald began the preparations for surplus disposal of two vehicles.

Reader Board Repair: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald and Technician Boylan installed a new roof on the Vancouver Lake Unit reader board and replaced the main sign backing board which had holes from several shotgun blasts. This reader board had been partially repaired last year following its' complete destruction by vandals. Additional painting will be necessary at the next opportunity when we have reasonably warm and dry weather.

Winter Conditions:

D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:

Past Weather: November temperatures were below normal and precipitation was slightly above average. Snow accumulated in mid and low elevations early in the month but was later melted off by a major warm rainstorm. Most of the month of December was unusually dry with below normal temperatures except the last week, which was warm and wet.

Short-Term Forecast: Temperatures are expected to be mild over the next week with substantial amounts of precipitation. We may see some lower elevation snow, but generally snow levels will be above 3000 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks both suggest temperatures and precipitation in the normal range.

Long-Term Forecast: *No Change.* The longer term outlook maps suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter but it appears now that spring may be more moderate than previously forecast.

Habitat: Lower elevation areas currently have little snow cover making for reasonable forage availability and the recent rains have melted much of the snow in the higher elevations. We will attempt to assess conditions on the Wildlife Area again next week if schedule permits. The recent rains and resulting runoff create some concern of habitat losses due to erosion.

Snow Depths: Areas below 3000 feet remain mostly snow free, but this is likely to change over the next week. Snowpack is well below average. See attached spreadsheet for detailed information (01Jan2012-MSH_Sno-Depth.pdf).

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. On December 5, 2011 a total of 116 elk were present in the Mudflow Unit monitoring area, which is below levels that would raise concerns. Another count will occur in the first part of January when weather conditions are suitable.

Animal Condition: No reports of animals in poor condition that can be attributed to winter conditions. Animals observed to date appear to be in good condition.

Mortality: None to report.

Public Contacts: None to report related to winter conditions.

The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area lying East of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30 to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

District 9: Winter Conditions

Past Weather: Heavy rainfall came into the South Cascades this week, but snow levels remain high. Snowpack is well below normal for this time of year. Average temperatures have increased and conditions are more typical of early fall.

Winter Severity: The Klickitat Wildlife Area is snow-free and forage habitat available. There is no concern for the current severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. The eastern portions of Klickitat County are snow-free and deer are reported to be in good condition.

Habitat: Habitat is open and forage habitat continues to be available throughout District 9.

Animal Concentrations: Biologists continued with deer surveys in Klickitat County this week and deer were not seen in concentrations suggesting any winter stress.

Animal Condition: Deer and elk appear to be in good condition and no winter stress/mortality has been reported except for a few road kills.

Mortality: None documented this week.

Public Contacts: No concerns raised by the public this week.

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Taylor's Checkerspot Rearing and Reintroduction: Biologist Linders coordinated with Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) staff for Artillery Impact Area access in February and March to insure adequate time and opportunity to complete preparation and release work for Taylor's checkerspot reintroductions. Linders also completed a contract amendment for captive rearing at the Oregon Zoo in 2012 and is working on an amendment to the contract with The Evergreen State College for captive rearing at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in 2012. Linders also completed most edits to the Reintroduction Framework requested by the Scientific Review Committee and is now using this framework to organize the five-year review document.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Waterfowl Quality Hunting Program: Due to recent rains, the Waterfowl Quality Hunting Program blinds have been available to use for hunting. Duck hunters are reporting good success.