

LANDLINE

A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife land management newsletter

Spring 2009

Planning to play on WDFW lands? Remember to follow the rules!

Another warm weather outdoor recreation season is upon us and millions of fishers, hikers, wildlife watchers and others are using Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) lands.

To stay safe, provide equal opportunity, and protect fish and wildlife habitat, Public Conduct Rules need to be followed.

These rules were adopted in December 2007 by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission after years of discussion and extensive public review to address increases in users and types of use on WDFW lands. They only apply on the 900,000 acres of wildlife areas and 150 water access sites under WDFW ownership or management.

Public safety is a top priority. The rules include no discharge of firearms within 500 feet of designated campgrounds.

Some of the rules are not new, but for easy reference, all are now compiled in one new chapter ([Washington Administrative Code 232-13](#)). They

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Livestock grazing on WDFW lands scrutinized

Livestock grazing on Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) lands has been under several forms of scrutiny over the past year, most which promise to strengthen projects under the agency's grazing policy.

WDFW Lands Division Manager Jennifer Quan explains that the completion of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) review, a legal challenge and court ruling, and a new contract for university monitoring are all helping improve the way grazing is managed on specific wildlife areas.

One other form of scrutiny – a state budget cut – is challenging WDFW to find ways to maintain partnership commitments to Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) with other land managers, both private and public.

"It's been a year of growth," Quan said, "updating our grazing efforts with the newest range science. Scrutiny is good. When all is said and done, I think we'll have a better program in keeping with our policy on grazing."

Adopted in 2002 by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, the policy (C-6003) permits domestic livestock grazing on WDFW owned or controlled lands if it's determined to be consistent with desired ecological conditions for those lands. (Rules for livestock grazing on WDFW lands are set forth in Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 232-12-181.)

By policy, livestock grazing is considered a practice that can be used to manipulate vegetation for fish and wildlife, accomplish a specific habitat objective, or facilitate coordinated resource management.

"Livestock grazing on our lands dates back to 1940," Quan said. "We have a long history of partnerships with local ranchers because habitat critical to protect fish and wildlife exists on both public and private lands. Our partnerships with agricultural communities are vital to ensuring connected habitat for endangered and threatened species, recreational access

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Planning to play on WDFW lands? Remember to follow the rules! *cont. from page 1*

include long-standing prohibitions on dumping, littering, and discharging fireworks; and regulation of access to protect vulnerable wildlife. Others include:

Behavior and conduct – no disorderly conduct, including abusive language, disruptions, obstructions; no possession of beer or malt liquor in quantities subject to keg registration laws under RCW 66.28.210 without a permit.

Building blinds, tree stands, camps – no digging pits to create waterfowl blinds; no cutting trees or attaching wire, staples or nails to trees to build blinds, stands, camps; all non-natural materials used must be removed at end of hunting season; unattended blinds are available to public on “first-come-first-serve” basis; camp structures must be removed at end of trip.

Camping – 21-day camping limit within a 30-day period.

Campfires – campfires only up to three feet in diameter and three feet high.

Commerical use – permit required for any activity where a fee is charged or where the purpose is the sale or barter of a good or service, regardless of whether

profit is intended, including guides for hunting, fishing and boating/rafting; a fishing guide license qualifies as a permit to use WDFW water access sites.

Groups – permit required for any private or public event involving more than 30 people.

Parking – vehicles cannot be left unattended for more than 21 days; no mooring a houseboat, dock, or other floating occupancy structure (except floating waterfowl hunting blinds) without a permit.

Pets – hunters can use hunting dogs under their control, but cannot let them or other pets roam unattended; from April through July, all dogs and other pets must be leashed on WDFW lands to protect nesting wildlife.

Target shooting – no use of glass, signs, appliances, mattresses, televisions, furniture and exploding items as targets; debris from targets, except clay pigeons, must be removed; no discharge of firearms within 500 feet of designated campgrounds; no discharge of tracer or incendiary ammunition.

Removal of minerals, wood and artifacts from department lands – it

is unlawful to remove petrified wood, minerals, fossils, wood products or artifacts from department lands unless such removal is authorized by a permit issued by the director.

Domestic animals on department lands – it is unlawful for any person to allow domesticated animals to be unattended on, or to permit livestock to graze upon land under the control of the department without a written permit from the director.

Vehicles using department lands – it is unlawful to operate a motor driven vehicle on a road controlled or managed by the department pursuant to road management agreement in a manner or for a purpose contrary to posted signs or notices except as authorized by the director.

Field Trial Permit – an individual or organization wishing to conduct a field trial must obtain a permit from the department.

For all details, including specific locations of designated campgrounds, see http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/public_conduct.html.

Governor’s order disbands Land Management Advisory Council

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Land Management Advisory Council (LMAC) has been disbanded as part of a cost-saving executive order from the governor’s office.

WDFW Lands Division Manager Jennifer Quan contacted all current LMAC members when the Feb. 9 executive order was issued.

“These advisors have provided valuable guidance and input on our lands acquisition process, land exchanges with the Department of Natural Resources, and many other important issues,” Quan said. “I appreciate their role as an outside sounding board that has helped us incorporate the values of the communities and groups they represent into our decisions.”

With Washington state government facing unprecedented budget deficits,

Quan explained, every expenditure for travel and per diem of both state employees and volunteers like advisors is under scrutiny.

The governor’s executive order (09-02) that eliminates LMAC and 48 other advisory bodies in state government notes: “... most of the advisory functions of boards and commissions can be performed without the administrative costs of maintaining formal organizations, and executive agencies are being strongly encouraged to enhance public input using modern communication technology, and identify new, less costly, and more effective opportunities to ensure citizen participation and government openness...”

WDFW interim director Phil Anderson notes that although WDFW did not specifically recommend the dissolution of LMAC, the agency supports the

Governor’s efforts to curtail all non-essential spending.

“We value our citizen partners in the work we do and the decisions we make,” Anderson said. “We don’t intend to abandon the citizens we serve nor do we intend to stop providing opportunities to receive the valuable counsel and advice we get from the public.”

LMAC was created in 2004 with 20 members -- including farmers, ranchers, fishers, hunters, wildlife viewers, environmentalists, and others -- who met quarterly with WDFW Lands staff.

Quan noted that all Wildlife Area Citizen Advisory Groups (CAGs) remain intact and WDFW staff will continue to rely on those volunteers for input on management.

“Our CAGs are significant drivers in our efforts to periodically update specific wildlife area management plans,” she said.

Livestock grazing on WDFW lands scrutinized, *cont. from page 1*

for hunting and fishing opportunities, and support for continued WDFW land acquisition.”

Quan also noted that lands acquired by the former Department of Game (now WDFW), and even now, were often private farms or ranches where livestock grazing occurred alongside healthy populations of fish and wildlife. When appropriate, and sometimes as a condition of sale, limited grazing continues after WDFW assumes ownership or management of these lands.

Currently there is grazing on about nine percent of WDFW owned and managed lands.

WDFW recently completed a 30-day public review period for the DEIS for livestock grazing management on the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas in Kittitas County as part of the Greater Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) planning process, which began in 2006. After substantial input, best management practices and mitigation measures developed include:

- keeping livestock off until soil is firm enough to prevent compaction;
- grazing during wet seasons to allow re-growth before droughts;
- using rest-rotation grazing schedules to allow vegetation recovery;
- dispersing livestock to limit localized heavy disturbance;
- protecting streams, springs and riparian areas with fencing and buffers;
- timing grazing to remove grass biomass and improve forb diversity;
- incorporating sage grouse recovery needs with grazing plans; and
- monitoring livestock and wildlife use and vegetation regrowth.

Department staff is currently reviewing over 200 comments received on the DEIS, both in support and opposition. After reviewing and responding to comments the Department will apply amendments as needed, based on comments, and issue a final EIS.

In October 2008, during a budget reduction exercise, the Office of Financial



Management removed \$128,000 from the Wild Horse CRM funding, leaving only enough for finalizing the environmental review process under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

“Despite this funding challenge,” Quan said, “we are committed to continue working with the Wild Horse CRM, at least to meet regulatory and legal requirements like the EIS, and at best to maintain rapport with our neighbors in southcentral Washington. We can’t manage the state’s wildlife just on our lands alone.”

About a year ago, WDFW was legally challenged by the Western Watershed Projects, a non-profit conservation group based in Idaho that works to influence and improve public lands management in western states with a primary focus on the negative impacts of livestock grazing.

The group filed a complaint contending that WDFW’s Memorandum of Understanding with the Washington Cattlemen’s Association for experimental grazing on WDFW lands in southeast Washington required review under SEPA. This complaint has yet to be heard in court.

The legal complaint was later

amended to include allegations that a temporary three-month grazing permit for Park Creek Pastures (within the Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management Plan boundaries) also required SEPA analysis.

“We asserted that the Park Creek pastures, which were acquired as part of our Skookumchuck acquisition in October 2007, met the requirement for a SEPA exemption because under an oral lease agreement the previous owner had grazing by a local operator in the last ten years,” Quan explained.

The temporary Park Creek Pasture permit expired on June 30, 2008. The case was heard in December 2008. In February 2009 a Thurston County Superior Court judge ruled that WDFW needed written documentation of the previous lease in the record of decision.

“We felt this was a technicality,” Quan said, “but of course we re-visited the EIS and we are addressing all concerns about soil erosion, native vegetation sustainability, water quality, and even air quality.”

Last year WDFW contracted with Washington State University (WSU) to assist in the research and application

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Federal funding available for private and public wildlife habitat projects

Cost-share assistance and funding grants are available this spring from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for wildlife habitat projects on both private and public lands.

Deadlines for funding applications are April 15 for Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) cost-share assistance and May 8 for Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG).

WHIP is a national program administered by the NRCS that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners and tribes for developing, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat. Landowners receive technical and financial assistance through five- to ten-year contracts. About \$1 million in financial assistance is available through the program this year in Washington state alone.

According to NRCS Assistant State Conservationist, Dave Brown, WHIP program funds in Washington will be used on agricultural land and forest land where fish and wildlife habitat has been affected by past activities or management.

"The objectives of the program include providing technical assistance and payments to eligible participants to implement practices that improve wildlife habitat and educating landowners on wildlife species and their habitat needs," Brown said. "There is also an increasing interest in providing

habitat for native pollinator species," he said.

Previous WHIP habitat improvement activities in Washington have included shrub-steppe restoration, native prairie restoration, riparian restoration and wetland wildlife habitat improvement.

Brown encourages landowners who are interested in the program to contact their local NRCS office. Applications received by April 15 will be ranked and prioritized and considered for 2009 funding. For the location of your local NRCS office, visit the NRCS website at www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov or call 509-323-2900.

The CIG program is designed to foster innovative natural resource conservation approaches and investments in conjunction with agricultural production in Washington.

Through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the NRCS may pay the cost of competitive grants up to \$150,000 during fiscal year 2009 for the state of Washington. Grants to eligible entities and individuals may not exceed a maximum of \$50,000 each.

"These state-specific funds are in addition to up to \$20 million of funding that may be available for application from the national CIG program," Brown said. Grant projects must be within the state of Washington.

"We're requesting applications from eligible government or non-

government organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of grant awards for single or multi-year projects," Brown said. To be eligible, applicants must directly involve farmers or ranchers who would normally be eligible to participate in EQIP.

Grant funding is considered for projects up to three years duration that address resource issues such as soil, water, atmospheric, range, forest and wildlife conservation, as well as technology issues such as energy, irrigation, nutrient management and technology transfer.

CIG applications must be received in the NRCS Washington State Office by 4 p.m. on May 8, 2009 to be eligible for consideration. The application announcement is available at www.grants.gov, the official posting site for all US Government grant opportunities, by searching under the Funding Opportunity Number USDA-NRCS-WA-09-01.

For further information, potential applicants can visit the Washington NRCS web site at <http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/>. For information about the national CIG grants program, applicants are urged to visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/>.

Interested parties can also contact WDFW's Private Lands Coordinator Don Larsen in Spokane at 509-323-2967 or at larsedt@dfw.wa.gov.

Livestock grazing on WDFW lands scrutinized, *cont. from page 3*

of the most current land management practices for the Asotin pilot grazing project, which will continue until 2012.

"WSU research will provide a scientific basis for monitoring the conditions of the grazed lands to ensure that our desired ecological conditions are met and ecological integrity is maintained, consistent with department mandates, policies and land management goals," Quan said.

The monitoring includes vegetation sampling by students under Dr. Linda

Hardesty, associate professor of forest and range management in WSU's Department of Natural Resource Sciences, and tracking vegetation use by captive deer by students under Dr. Lisa Shipley, a wildlife ecologist in the Department of Natural Resource Sciences.

In addition, the department recently established a grazing advisory committee of four scientists outside the agency who provide third-party, scientific review of WDFW's grazing

management. John Pierce, WDFW Wildlife Program Science Division manager, chairs the committee and coordinates meetings with members Rex Crawford, Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Natural Heritage Program; Matthew Loeser, Yakima Valley Community College professor; Jon Bakker, University of Washington professor; and Steven Herman, Evergreen State College emeritus professor.

Update: Habitat Conservation Plan for wildlife areas

Development of the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for state wildlife areas, covering over 900,000 acres throughout Washington, is now in the fourth year of an anticipated six-year project.

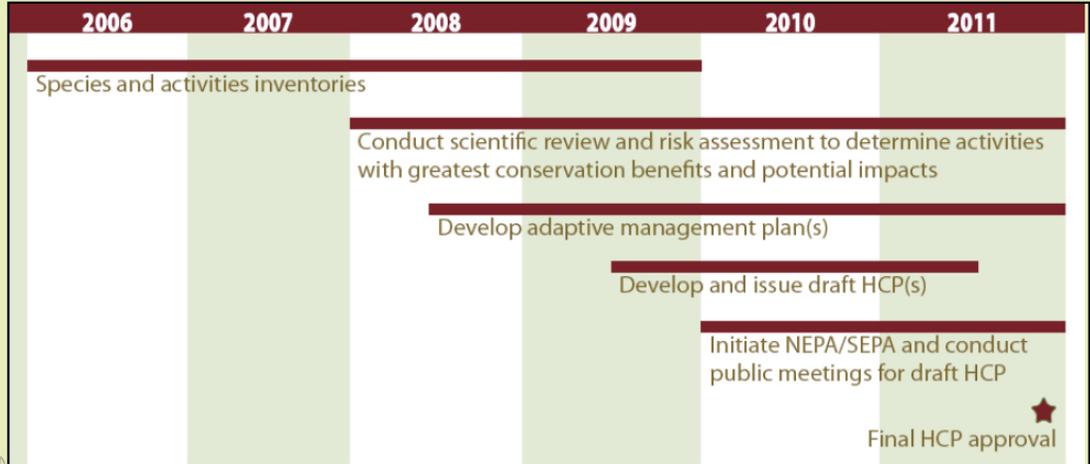
An HCP is a long-term plan designed to provide certainty that approved activities meet federal species protection requirements. For more than a decade, HCPs have been developed by both private and public landowners across the country to both ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and allow use of lands without legal problems.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) HCP will be a 30-year plan addressing both federal and state ESA-listed species that could be affected by recreation and land management activities that occur on wildlife areas.

Initial HCP exploration was funded in 2006 in part with a \$544,000 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Most work to date has focused on inventories of at-risk species and wildlife area activities, from operations and maintenance to public recreation, along with mapping data collection and database development. A USFWS grant of \$666,900 (with a 25 percent state match) was awarded this year to help cover costs of inventorying wildlife areas in the Eastern and Southwest regions of the state as well as developing the model to analyze the data.

“Our HCP team completed the statewide inventory of at-risk species on wildlife areas this spring,” reports WDFW Wildlife Area HCP Project Manager

Project Timelines



Wildlife Areas
Habitat Conservation Plan



Richard Tveten. “Our goal is to complete the inventory of wildlife area activities including operations, maintenance, and public recreation this fall. We will soon be able to say where, when and how often wildlife area activities overlap with at-risk species.”

Tveten explained that once the inventory is complete, the HCP team will evaluate the impacts of activities on at-risk species.

“This information will help determine where, when and how to focus our conservation efforts,” he said.

In 2008, a pilot level assessment of data collected in the Northcentral region’s Sinlahekin Wildlife was initiated to determine what species and activities should be forwarded on for further analysis. Among other things, this analysis indicated the degree of overlap between grazing and agriculture with sharptail grouse habitat.

WDFW is requesting \$741,034 in a federal grant for 2010 to analyze the collected data, develop conservation

measures, assess impacts, develop adaptive management provisions, start the National Environmental Policy Act process, and write a draft HCP.

As promised, the HCP process to date has involved the general public. WDFW conducted informational public meetings across the state in 2007 to educate people about HCPs. In 2009 and 2010 WDFW will expand public outreach efforts as data is analyzed and conservation needs are identified. The team will seek input from individual Wildlife Area Citizen Advisory Groups and Game and Wildlife Diversity Advisory Councils to identify conservation strategies that are effective, feasible and balanced.

WDFW is also coordinating the HCP development with tribes, conducting government-to-government meetings with five responding tribes to date.

More information on the HCP development process is available on the WDFW website at <http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/hcp/index.html>.

Washington Wildlife Areas: Columbia Basin

Sprawling across two counties in 13 units totaling over 192,000 acres in the “breadbasket” of the Columbia River watershed, the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area may be one of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) most unique management properties.

Most of the acreage is owned by other entities, so much of WDFW’s role is truly “property management.” The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) owns about 71% of the land, WDFW owns about 20%, and the remainder is owned by other state and federal agencies.

The history of this arrangement began in the 1930’s, when Grand Coulee Dam was built on the Columbia River, and continued into the 1950’s with development of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. Columbia River water, pumped up into the Banks Lake reservoir, supplies irrigation to some 670,000 acres of agriculture through a series of reservoirs, canals, and wasteways.

BOR retained ownership of large parcels of land critical to irrigation project operation. In 1952, management of most of these lands and their fish and wildlife for recreation was turned over to the Washington Department of Game (a WDFW predecessor) under a 50-year Memorandum of Understanding with BOR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In 2002, a new 25-year agreement was finalized.

In the 1960’s, the Wanapum and Priest Rapids dams were built downstream on the Columbia River. As mitigation for the habitat inundation from those



Columbia Basin: Goose Lakes Unit

dams, lands along Crab Creek and the Priest Rapids pool were purchased by WDFW with funds from the Grant County Public Utility District (Grant PUD). Adjacent USFWS, BOR, and Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands were added to form the Lower Crab Creek Unit of the wildlife area.

The Banks Lake unit of the wildlife area is the largest at 44,741 acres – all but WDFW’s 41 acres owned by BOR. The reservoir, formed by the North Dam near Grand Coulee and the Dry Falls Dam near Coulee City, is filled with water from Franklin D. Roosevelt Reservoir pumped up at Grand Coulee Dam. At full pool, 27-mile-long Banks Lake has about 27,800 surface acres, from one to three miles in width. Most of the 91 miles of shoreline are ringed with basalt cliffs and talus slopes. Shallow soils and rocky outcrops with shrub-steppe vegetation characterize the dry uplands. Willows and Russian olives grow on the fringes of some cattail and bulrush wetland areas. There are about 23 islands in the reservoir, from one to several acres in size. Steamboat Rock, in the northern part of the lake, is the largest of several peninsulas and includes a Research Natural Area under a federal-state cooperative agreement. Across the lake to the east is the Castle Rock Natural Area that also includes some uniquely undisturbed northern Columbia Basin vegetation. Unique wildlife use can

include common loons, wintering bald eagles, mule deer and peregrine falcons.

The 9,140 acres of the Sun Lakes unit lie within the lower Grand Coulee where glacial floods scoured and carved away millions of cubic feet of lava, leaving behind a deep and long coulee rimmed by basalt cliffs. WDFW-controlled land abuts Sun Lakes State Park and parts of the popular trout fishing lakes Park, Blue, Alkali, and Lenore. USFWS licensed the Lenore Lake National Wildlife Refuge to the state in 1955 for management as the Lenore Game Range; Lenore Lake itself is owned by DNR. Peregrine falcons and other wildlife are found among the many spectacular geological features.

The 4,000-acre Billy Clapp Lake unit, including a water storage reservoir, is named for one of the originators of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. The natural coulee was dammed on the lower south end (Pinto Dam) to create the reservoir. Water cascades into the upper end from the Main Canal creating Summer Falls. Basalt cliffs encompass the lake and most of the shoreline is too steep and rocky to support wetland or riparian vegetation. BOR maintains a public parking area and boat launch on the south end of the lake. Most of the unit is in the Stratford Game Reserve, originally designated to provide a resting area for fall migrating waterfowl, but public use and changing migration



Northern leopard frog
Photo by Kelly McAllister

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Washington Wildlife Areas: Columbia Basin, cont. from page 5

patterns have made it less effective. WDFW owns 290 acres purchased in 1972; the rest is managed for BOR.

Most of the 7,320 acres of the Gloyd Seeps unit are along Crab Creek, midway between Moses Lake and the town of Stratford to the north. Along with trout-fishing waters of Rocky Ford Creek (northeast of Moses Lake), it is within the historic flood channels of Crab Creek. Numerous wetlands, ponds and seeps are surrounded by the older shrub-steppe uplands and basalt scablands. Fires have created grasslands along most of the area on the west side of Crab Creek. WDFW manages 172 acres of farmland within this unit. Acquisition was piece-meal since 1955, with most in the early 1970's, except for Rocky Ford, which was purchased in 1987 and 1989.

The most striking feature of the 15,266-acre Quincy Lakes unit, west of the town of George, is the geology -- a product of erosion of lava flows by glacial floodwaters. The many layers of basalt are exposed in towering 800-foot cliffs, isolated mesas, stair-stepped benches, box canyons and potholes. Several of the potholes are filled with water that has seeped from the irrigation of the Quincy Basin farmlands upslope. These wetlands, ponds and lakes add important diversity to the habitat. The site of a state threatened plant -- White eatonella (*Eatonella nivea*) -- near Frenchman Coulee is a DNR-designated Natural Area. Striped whipsnakes have been observed on this unit. Several of the lakes are managed for seasonal trout fishing.

The Winchester Reservoir unit is 930 acres of land and 1,020 acres of water -- actually a wide spot in the Winchester Wasteway. The lake has an average depth of about six feet and is surrounded by cattail and bulrush marsh. The uplands are a mix of wheatgrasses and sage and the entire area is underlain with basaltic black sand. Agricultural lands border the east and west sides of the unit. County roads provide public access to the parking areas and gravel boat launches on the south and upper east sides of the lake.

The 34,920-acre Desert Unit was wholly a desert prior to the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. The area is the lowest part of a very large basin (the Quincy Basin) that once was filled with glacial floodwater. The natural basin now serves as a collector for irrigation water from upslope farmlands through meandering wasteways. The vegetation in this mosaic of wetlands and desert uplands is very diverse, from naturally occurring shrub-steppe to seeded and invasive non-native plants. While county roads provide access to much of the perimeter, access to the interior is very limited. Large numbers of waterfowl, including white pelicans, find a perfect haven in the remote wetlands. Many ponds have been isolated from the wasteways with low sand dikes to exclude carp and improve waterfowl habitat. This unit was built around BOR's original 3,280 acres, transferred to the state in 1960, with other state and federal purchases in the 1970's and later.

For more information, maps, and directions on how to get to this and other Wildlife Areas and water access sites, see the Wildlife Lands webpage at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/>

The 32,500-acre Potholes Reservoir unit is co-managed by WDFW and State Parks. The reservoir, just south of Moses Lake in Grant County, was created by O'Sullivan Dam to gather waste and return flow waters from the irrigation project lands upstream and store the water for re-use on the farmland downstream -- all which makes for wide fluctuations in water levels. There are 20,000 acres of surface water in the spring when the reservoir is at full pool. When initially filled, the reservoir inundated Crab Creek and about 800 small ponds scattered among the sand dunes of the area, forming about a thousand islands. These seasonally flooded areas currently support a small forest of willow trees. The higher elevation wetlands on the northern and western fringes of the reservoir have cattail and bulrush communities. The western part of the unit, bordering the Desert unit, still has many active sand dunes with mostly shrub-steppe vegetation. The east side is bordered by

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Columbia Basin: Lower Crab Creek

Washington Wildlife Areas: Columbia Basin, *cont. from page 7*

irrigated farmland and the south side, adjacent to the dam, is mostly basalt outcroppings. Wildlife use includes waterfowl, wintering bald eagles, mule deer and populations of northern leopard frogs.

The Seep Lakes Unit's 4,537 acres are part of the channeled scablands created by glacial floodwaters of the Pleistocene Epoch. It is mostly rolling countryside with basalt outcroppings forming cliffs, mesas, box canyons and potholes. Many of the canyons and potholes are filled with water that has seeped from Potholes Reservoir to the north. A few lakes are actually wide spots in the Potholes Canal, which borders the west side. A long history of range fire has turned almost all of this area into grassland, with a few protected pockets of big sage. Most of the lakes have steep and rocky shorelines with very little wetland habitat. Washington ground squirrels are found here. WDFW maintains many miles of graveled access roads as well as several boat launches and parking areas primarily for public fishing.

The 3,546-acre Goose Lakes Unit is also part of the channeled scablands and is mostly grassland. One major canyon is filled with water from Potholes Reservoir to the north. Two low rock dams were built in the 1950's to create Upper and Lower Goose lakes. Both lakes have rocky shorelines with very little wetland habitat. WDFW maintains graveled access roads as well as two boat launches and parking areas primarily for public fishing. A small stream flows southward from Lower Goose Lake, feeding Black Lake, which flows into Crab Creek on Columbia National Wildlife Refuge lands. Another small lake, Shoofly Lake, is just west of Black Lake and is fed by seepage from the western part of this unit. A long narrow wetland and some pretty good big sage/bluebunch wheatgrass exist on the west side.

The Lower Crab Creek Unit is 24,958 acres along the north side of the Saddle Mountains, east of the Columbia River and southwest of Royal City. The

wetlands and riparian areas along the creek and the seep ponds and uplands above the creek valley provide habitat for many species of wildlife. A native black greasewood and saltgrass community near Smyrna has been designated a Natural Area Preserve. Large flocks of migrating sandhill cranes, a state endangered species, use this area and ferruginous hawks, a state threatened species, historically



Mallard hen
Photo by Rich Finger

nested here. Lenice and Nunnally lakes are quality trout fishing lakes. The abandoned Milwaukee Railroad right-of-way (part of the John Wayne Trail) traverses the length of this valley. About 110 acres of WDFW land on the east end is leased for farming.

The 3,202 acres of the Priest Rapids unit are along the east bank of the Columbia River south of Sentinel Gap. The land is relatively flat and during ancient glacial floods was intermittently under water, resulting in a thin layer of soil covering a mostly river cobble substrate. This unit has three large peninsulas that create sheltered backwater pools. The water level in the Priest Rapids Pool is subject to frequent and dramatic fluctuations, but the riverbanks are slowly developing riparian habitat. The shallow back water sloughs and the ponds of the WB-48A Wasteway are fringed with willows, Russian olives and other trees. In the 1960's, many woody shrubs were planted in the moist areas around the middle and lower peninsulas. An irrigated field was also developed at that time for a goose brooding pasture. The uplands here are

mostly a poor quality mix of rabbitbrush and cheatgrass. A few scattered occurrences of big sage or bitterbrush and needle and thread grass can be found on the upper peninsula. A WDFW public parking area and boat launch is near the middle of this unit.

The Upland Wildlife Restoration unit is distinct because it encompasses a total of 1,445 acres in 18 sites scattered throughout the Columbia Basin, mainly in the Warden area of Grant County. The 327 acres of DNR lands and 1,118 acres of WDFW acquisitions in the early 1990's are managed as small blocks of winter cover for upland birds. Enhancements included plantings of native grasses and shelterbelt shrub rows to provide a core area of permanent habitat, primarily for pheasants.

The Sprague Lake unit is also distinct in terms of its location in northeastern Adams County and its much more recent acquisition.

The 675 acres of mainly wetlands and riparian habitat along the lake's southwest shore were purchased from Rex Harder's Hercules Ranch in 2003 with Washington DNR Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account grant funds. The wetlands are protected under the federal Wetlands Reserve Program and the uplands are protected under a WDFW conservation easement with neighboring Hercules Ranch. Uplands have historically been grazed by cattle, but are in fair condition, with shrub-steppe vegetation and shallow soil rock outcroppings. Cow Creek flows through the western portion of the unit. Wildlife use is diverse, from songbirds to mule deer. WDFW maintains a boat launch, parking area, and wildlife viewing interpretive kiosk and trail, 1,000 feet of which are ADA-accessible.

WDFW Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Manager Greg Fitzgerald and a staff of just three juggle the demands of maintaining all of these units for both wildlife habitat and recreational use.

Weed control is a primary workload since invasive vegetation is one of the

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Washington Wildlife Areas: Columbia Basin, *cont. from page 8*

greatest threats to fish and wildlife habitat and the majority of adjacent property is in private agricultural land.

“We need to stay on top of it both for our own fish and wildlife objectives and to be a good neighbor,” Fitzgerald said. “We’re constantly battling invasive species that were either intentionally introduced long ago like Russian olive or accidentally brought in like knapweed, purple loosestrife, and common reed or Phragmites. We use integrated pest management strategies, including mechanical, chemical, and biological controls. For example, so far we’ve released seven different species of insects to eat their way through weeds.”

County weed board members are among Fitzgerald’s advisors on the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Citizens Advisory Group. So, too, are staff from some of the area’s “parent” agencies, like BOR, USFWS and districts within the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. That especially helps, Fitzgerald notes, when ownership of the land is largely outside WDFW.

“It’s not exactly like having several bosses,” Fitzgerald said, “because we do operate under long-term MOUs with these agencies. But it is different from managing one contiguous, solely-owned piece of land.”

One of the newest challenges is the changing use of both adjacent lands and the wildlife area itself.

Fitzgerald explains that more rural homes have been built on surrounding farmland, producing more human-wildlife interactions and increased nuisance wildlife complaints, more conflicts with traditional fishing and hunting users of the wildlife area, and even some loss of wildlife habitat value.

Traditional wildlife recreation on the area has been upland game bird, waterfowl and mule deer hunting and fishing for trout and warmwater fish species. But as overall human population grows, Fitzgerald also sees increasing use and abuse of the wildlife area, both by traditional and non-traditional recreationists.

Litter and vandalism are on the rise. Illegal campfires and fireworks start wildfires on the Seep Lakes and Quincy units just about every summer. Roads that transect some of the units have become the source of other wildfires from cigarettes carelessly discarded from vehicles.

“We need everyone’s help to balance use of this area with protection of the fish and wildlife habitat,” Fitzgerald said, “or there won’t be anything of value left.”

The significant value and management focus of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area is in four priority habitat types – ponds, wetlands, shrub-steppe, and cliffs and talus – and their associated wildlife and recreation.



Canada goose

The several thousand acres of ponds provide critical links in the migration routes and life cycles of many species of waterfowl and shore birds, including state endangered American white pelicans. The warm waters are nutrient rich and highly attractive wildlife food sources. Shallow ponds and open shorelines have been created and managed primarily for dabbling duck production, but have also proved to provide essential habitat benefits for many other wildlife species. Invasion by non-native carp reduce the value of these ponds, so carp exclusion is an essential part of management. Ponds, along with the area’s larger lakes and reservoirs, contribute significantly to duck and goose production in the Pacific

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Columbia Basin: Quincy shrub steppe



Washington Wildlife Areas: Columbia Basin, *cont. from page 9*

flyway. Game reserves and waterfowl hunting closure sites on some larger ponds and reservoirs are managed to provide resting areas for migrating waterfowl.

The developing and evolving Columbia Basin wetlands are important for a large number of wetland dependent wildlife species. Hydrology of these wetlands is somewhat abnormal because they are heavily influenced by irrigation practices, but these habitats attract and support typical year-round residents such as reptiles and amphibians, as well as many seasonal breeding and nesting bird species. Wetland habitat is likely key to state endangered northern leopard frogs, whose last known populations are on the Potholes and Gloyd Seeps units.

The amount of shrub-steppe habitat throughout eastern Washington has been drastically reduced by agriculture, development and other human activities. All of the wildlife area has some shrub-steppe habitat and associated wildlife, including state threatened ferruginous hawks nesting on the Lower Crab Creek unit and state

threatened sage grouse wintering on the Gloyd Seeps unit. Shrub-steppe state candidate species found on the wildlife area include sagebrush lizards, Columbia River tiger beetles, burrowing owls, golden eagles, loggerhead shrikes, sage



Peregrine falcon

sparrows, sage thrashers, black-tailed jack rabbits, striped whipsnakes, and Washington ground squirrels.

Common on much of the wildlife area are cliffs and talus habitats, important for the Peregrine falcon, a state sensitive species whose aeries have been found on the Sun Lakes and Banks Lake units. Cliff swallows, white-throated swifts, golden eagles, several bat species including Spotted bats, bushy-tailed woodrats, rattlesnakes, and a species of mountain snail also use this habitat type. Rock climbing and mining are some of the challenges to management of cliffs and talus habitats.

Fitzgerald, a 23-year WDFW staffer, says the toughest part of his job is staying on top of the wide spectrum of management challenges that such a diverse landscape presents with limited staff and budgets.

The best part, he also notes, is knowing that in a part of the state that has undergone major conversions and change over the past century, some pieces of native fish and wildlife habitat are being kept intact.

WDFW land use requires permit

Vehicle Use Permits are required at about 200 land and water access sites managed by WDFW. Hunters, fishers, and trappers get a Vehicle Use Permit as part of their first annual license purchase. Vehicle Use Permits purchased separately cost \$10.95 and each additional permit is \$5.45.

Permit revenue is used to cover some of the costs of routine maintenance of these access sites, many which are under increasing use and abuse with illegal dumping and vandalism.

Permits may be purchased online at fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov, telephone (toll free) 1-866-246-9453, and local license dealers.

Vehicle Use Permits may designate up to two vehicles for use. Permits must be placed in full view from outside the vehicle and have the license plate number of the vehicle written on the permit.

Failure to display a Vehicle Use Permit is an infraction, like a parking ticket, with a fine of \$66. This penalty can be reduced to \$30 if the registered vehicle owner provides proof to the court of Vehicle Use Permit purchase within 15 days.

VEHICLE USE PERMIT



Buy Access to WDFW Areas

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