OLYMPIC – WILLAPA HILLS WILDLIFE AREA
2010 MANAGEMENT PLAN UDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

The Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area encompasses a total of 24 satellite units comprising of approximately 10,430 acres. Individual units were acquired, dating back to the early 1950's, for their specific benefit for fish and wildlife diversity and recreational significance. These lands include a wide range of important fish and wildlife habitats including riparian, estuarine, freshwater wetland, old-growth/mature forest, upland meadow, and coastal dune systems. Focus units include Olympic, Wynoochee, John's River, Chinook, and Chehalis/Hoxit.

This is an update to the 2006 Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Management Plan. The plan identifies needs and guides activities on the area based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Mission of *"Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife"* and its underlying statewide goals and objectives as they apply to local conditions.

Plans are updated annually as habitat and species conditions change, as new regulations and scientific knowledge develop, as public issues and concerns evolve, and as administration of wildlife areas change. This management plan update also includes 2009 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2010. To view the entire South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Management Plan and past updates please visit: http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/

Updates/Changes

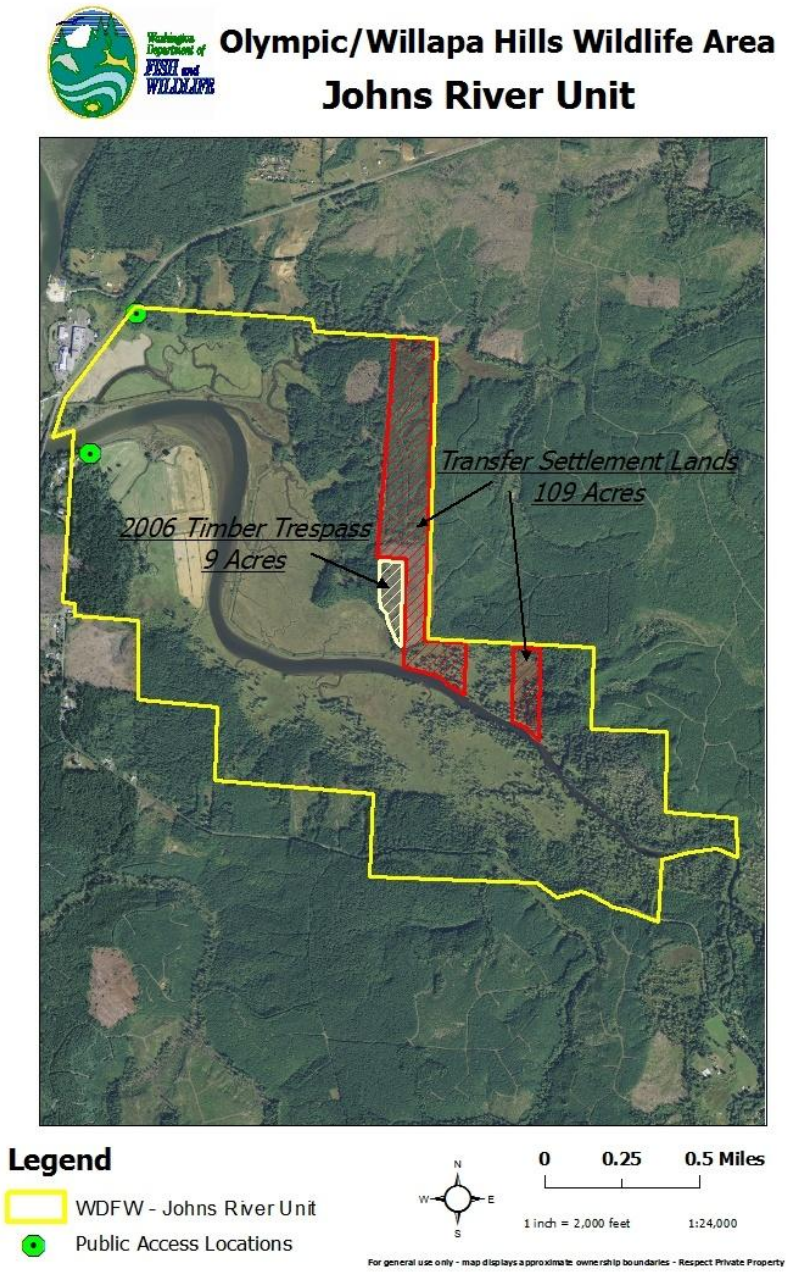
During this past year numerous positions were eliminated throughout the state due to budget shortfalls. In Region 6 one of the two Wildlife Area Manager positions was eliminated. This position covered the northern and eastern portion of the region including lands scattered throughout the North Olympic, the Kitsap

Inside

Land Management Summary	**1**
Updates/Changes	**1**
New Issues	**4**
Major Stewardship Accomplishments	**5**
Status Report of 2006 Performance Measures	**7**
New Strategies	**9**
2010 Performance Measures	**9**
Citizens Advisory Group Input	**10**
Appendix	**12**

Peninsula and the South Puget Sound. The South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Complex is now being managed by the Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Complex. Effectively this has doubled the size and range of coverage adding an additional 10,000 acres and 20 new units from Port Angeles to Lakewood to Centralia. The new super complex is now referred to as the Olympic-Willapa Hills-South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Complex (Appendix A – Complex Structure). This creates numerous challenges from a management standpoint; however existing staff is posed for the future and looks forward to working with numerous user groups and other government entities to ensure that management objectives are still achieved.

The Johns River Wildlife Area will be expanding in light of the timber trespass that was discovered shortly after the severe December 2007 winter storm. WDFW will be transferred an additional 100 acres on the eastern boundary of the wildlife area. This settlement was negotiated between the large timber company and WDFW over the past two years based on the double stumpage value of the 9 acres of timber that were illegally removed on the wildlife area. A portion of this new area will be utilized for elk forage mitigation in light of the Beaver Creek/Johns River estuary restoration project that may occur in the future. The private timber company made an honest mistake when they trespassed on WDFW property and has worked graciously to find settlement to this issue with wildlife area and real estate staff.



Wildlife area staff continues to work closely with neighboring landowners and other concerned parties in regards to the management of the recently installed tide-gates on the Chinook River. Extensive habitat benefits have already been noted by the current management regime and WDFW continues to pursue additional restoration funding to maximize these benefits. The Chinook River estuary lacked tidal fluctuation for approximately 80 years until the mechanical gates were installed in 2007.

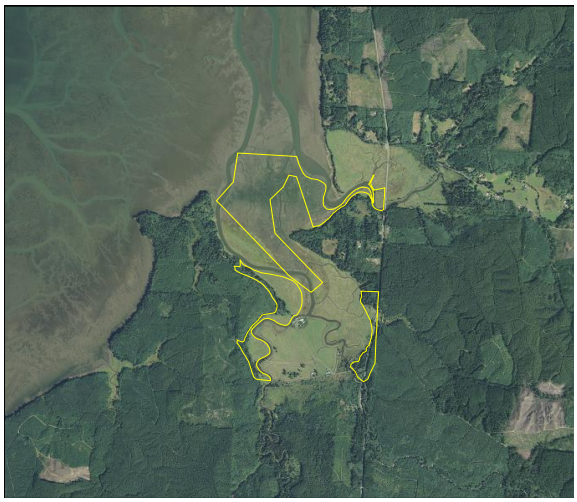
Chinook Unit 2006 – *Before* Tidegate Replacement

Chinook Unit *After* Tidegate Replacement

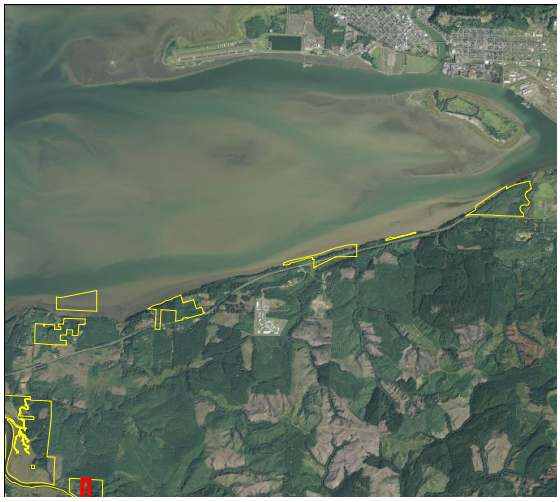
As mentioned in the 2009 update, there has been a recent wave of landowner trespass along the western boundary of Ocean Shores Airport Unit. This includes extensive cutting of vegetation on WDFW property to enhance views and filling of wetlands to increase the property footprints. WDFW worked with the City to identify the greatest infractions on the property and each of those private landowners were contacted. In one particular instance a landowner removed 38 red alder trees that had been high-topped and also filled a portion of the wetland on WDFW property. This landowner settled out of court with WDFW and the site was recently re-vegetated.

A settlement regarding the road easement dispute which currently blocks administrative and public access into the "Lynn" fields at the Olympic Unit has been reached and is in its final stages of negotiation through the Attorney General's office. WDFW will be purchasing a new easement and bringing that roadway to Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP) standards. This will be funded through the salvage and thinning project that will occur this summer once this settlement is finalized.

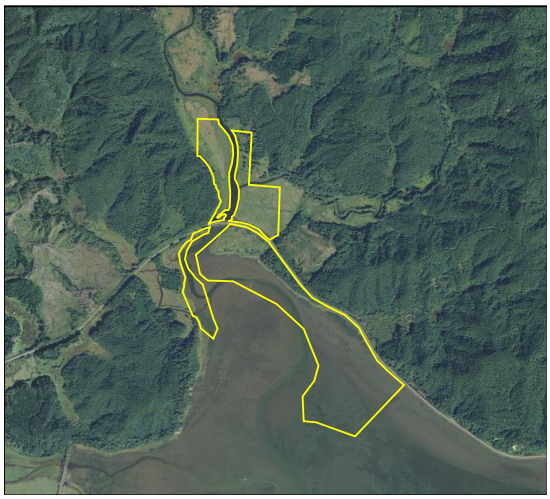
Each of the land transfers for the Nemah River, Cedar River and South Shore Grays Harbor have been finalized from the Cascade Land Conservancy. These additions each add greatly to the lands portfolio currently held by WDFW on Willapa and Grays Harbor Bays. WDFW will continue to work closely with the Cascade Land Conservancy on future transfers that benefit fish and wildlife habitats and provide recreational opportunities for the public.



Nemah Unit



South Shore Grays Harbor Unit



Cedar River Unit

New Issues

WDFW Enforcement and Wildlife Programs continue working with the Green Diamond Resources Company to resolve the ongoing vandalism issues that are present at the Cedar River Unit. There is a long-standing dispute that involves land use agreements between a private landowner and the Weyerhaeuser Corporation that have been altered by the recent WDFW acquisition at the mouth of the Cedar River. The Green Diamond legal department is currently looking into their legal responsibilities in regards to posting gates located on WDFW property with "No Trespassing" signs. Enforcement staff has met with the private landowners in question on several occasions in hopes of finding a peaceful solution to this ongoing problem. The kiosk that was installed and featured in the 2009 Update has since been illegally cut into pieces and thrown into Willapa Bay.

Kiosk at Cedar River which was vandalized/removed

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) continues its greatly appreciated support of elk forage enhancement projects in Region 6. Recently, RMEF awarded a 2010 grant that will improve the forage quality and quantity on over 100 acres at the Chinook Wildlife Area Unit. This will be further complimented by the Duck Stamp funds that were also awarded for wetland enhancement activities that will take place at the Chinook Unit.

RMEF Elk Forage Seeding - Anderson Homestead Unit

WDFW Wildlife Area and Real Estate divisions are working toward a new acquisition along the Chehalis River. These parcels are adjacent to the Chehalis Wildlife Area Unit to the south and would provide an important new access location to this unit. The potential new acquisition has progressed through the Lands 20/20 process {more information about department guidelines for acquiring land please visit - http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/lands2020/index.htm} with flying colors and staff is currently working

on funding options while they await the appraisal. The majority of these parcels are currently enrolled in a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) conservation easement. This provides two critical elements for WDFW. First, it reduces the overall cost of the property and secondly it allows for NRCS to pay 100% of the costs associated with restoring the health of the wetlands on these parcels. WDFW will be assisting in the restoration effort through a technical assistance contract with NRCS.

Wildlife Program staff is working with Habitat Program (TAPPS) and local legislators to determine the most appropriate crossing on the Eastside Road over Beaver Creek at the Johns River Wildlife Area Unit. TAPPS did not receive Economic Stimulus "shovel ready" funding from the federal government as originally planned to construct the multi-million dollar bridge that would span nearly 120 feet. The restoration project has currently been scaled back to involve installing one or two box or squished culverts. Wildlife area staff looked into the possibility of gaining an easement from Weyerhaeuser Corporation for an additional public access route to the south side of this wildlife area unit; however Weyerhaeuser was not interested at this time.

Recent storm and flood events have shifted the Wynoochee River resulting in the loss of > 2 acres of forage mitigation fields. This occurred in Units 4B and 2C. The river also consumed a portion of the service road that accesses Unit 2C. A new road will need to be established to this site this summer in order to continue fulfilling the Wynoochee Dam Mitigation Agreement with Tacoma Power.

Wynoochee River Field Loss

WDFW has been contacted from several local farmers in the Wishkah valley who are interested in leasing WDFW ground for hay cutting. In particular, a number of fields currently managed for elk forage on the Olympic Unit will be potentially leased in 2010. Prior to any agricultural lease agreement being created, WDFW will go through the HB 1309 Ecosystem Standards Assessment to ensure that the management action does not result in negative effects to the wildlife area unit. Furthermore, the potential lessee will be held to a strict set of rules that will not allow the quality and quantity of the late winter forage to be harmed.

There has been a recent push from several individuals and local organizations to increase the amount of Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessible hunting facilities throughout the wildlife area complex. WDFW currently does not have additional funding resources for this type of improvement, however wildlife area staff did install an additional ADA hunting blind at the Johns River Unit prior to the 2009/10 waterfowl season.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Wildlife Area staff successfully managed five water control structures that continue to provide high quality emergent freshwater wetland habitats. Each structure was installed during a wetland restoration project in the past at a location where the habitat had been severely degraded by invasive species, such as reed canary grass. Proper management of these wetland units has reclaimed the wetland habitat, provided emergent vegetative forage, and increased fish habitat.

Also, approximately 250 acres received a fall clipping that will provide enhanced sheet water habitat. These activities occurred at the John's River, Chehalis, Hoxit, Willapa Wetlands (Potter Slough) and Chinook units.

In 2009, WDFW continued its effort to provide quality winter forage for elk. This included mowing approximately 485 acres, fertilizing 400 acres and re-seeding 110 acres. These activities occurred at the Olympic, Wynoochee, Anderson Homestead and Chinook Unit.

The Olympic-Johns River Salvage and Thinning Project that took place in late 2008 was finalized throughout the course of 2009. This including re-vegetating at units where necessary, based on permits and future desired plant community. Approximately 10,000 trees and shrubs were planted on the logging units, mostly at Johns River, where the most violent wind damage occurred on the young western hemlock stand. All temporary logging roads and approaches were decommissioned during the summer of 2009. This included ground fluffing, stump and woody debris placement, seeding, and planting. All elk forage fields that were impacted by the logging activity were completely re-farmed during the summer of 2009. This included cultivation, lime and fertilizer application, and re-seeding. There are a few minor activities that still need to be completed, but overall this thinning project proved to be a successful venture both monetarily and ecologically for the wildlife area.

Willapa Wetlands (Potters Slough) Restoration – This restoration project took nearly a decade to complete, and was finished during 2008-09. The highway was raised in 2006 along with the construction of the cross dike at the north end of the WDFW ownership. Approximately 70% of the ring dike was removed in 2008 opening 300 acres to natural tidal fluctuation. The historic slough channels are quickly developing and some salt marsh vegetation is beginning to appear throughout the site. This project will have significant benefits for salmon, shorebirds, waterfowl, and marine invertebrates.

Willapa Wetlands 2006 –Before Restoration **Willapa Wetlands 2009 – After Restoration**

Wildlife Area staff worked with WDFW engineers to complete the RMAP improvements to forest roads at the Johns River and Olympic Units. RMAP improvements were completed at Johns River, including the installation of three new culverts which removed three barriers from the RMAP list of needed improvements. The Johns River eastside road was completely re-surfaced, partially ditched, and cross drains were installed. The RMAP budget that was established for road improvements for the entire wildlife area was largely spent on the eastside road at Johns River due to installation of a 10' "squashed" culvert that was not originally identified in the RMAP plan. Future RMAP funding will be necessary to complete road improvements that are required at the Olympic Unit.

<u>Status Report of 2009 Performance Measures</u>

Key performance measures are identified each year to monitor progress and identify any issues that might interfere with planned priority activities. This information will be used to delete, add or alter priority strategies for 2010.

2009 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2010 Related Activity/ Comments
Complete Olympic-Johns River Salvage and Thinning Project	All re-veg needs were met including tree and shrub plantings and re-farming of affected fields. Temporary road abandonment was also completed.	Per logging management plan and subject to multiple permits
Complete performance measures per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan	All activities completed	Documentation of activities described in the annual Wynoochee Report
Reseed 30-50 acres of elk forage	Accomplished 45 acres at Wynoochee Unit and 60 acres at the Olympic Unit	Per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan and Olympic-Johns River Salvage and Thinning Plan

Mow and fertilize 400 acres of elk forage	Mowed 530 acres for elk forage and fertilized 435 acres	Wynoochee – 200 acres mowed, 200 acres fertilized Olympic – 200 acres mowed, 200 acres fertilized Chinook – 90 acres mowed Anderson Homestead – 35 acres mowed, 35 acres fertilized
Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage	55 acres Wynoochee, Unit 4-B	Location of re-seeding
Test 10-20 soil samples	10 soil samples taken	For development of fertilizer blend specific for each forage management area
Develop 40+ new acres of elk forage (John's River Mitigation)	Not completed – Land transfer in progress	Awaiting grant funding for mitigation of estuary restoration or separate grant funding for elk forage creation
Release pheasants at the Furbache Unit	Completed throughout pheasant season	Will occur throughout the 2010 season as planned
Maintain six water control structures for waterfowl habitat	Three stuructures at Willapa Wetlands (Potters Slough) were managed effectively. One structure at the Hoxit Unit was successfully managed. One structure at the Johns River Unit was successfully managed. One structure at John's River is failing and is scheduled for emergency repair. One structure at Johns River currently needs repairs on the catwalk so that it can be safely maintained and managed in the future. Currently boards are not staying in place	Johns River structure is still failing and needs to be addressed immediately with the installation of a fish friendly device post estuary restoration. Not in this biennium's capital project budget.
Maintain riparian plantings along the Chehalis River and the Chehalis and Hoxit Units	Both areas were mowed throughout the season. Survival at both sites is very positive	Plants maintained throughout the summer of 2009
Continue efforts to remove fish passage barriers per RMAP on John's River and Olympic Units.	All barriers and RMAP work has been completed at the Johns River Unit.	More funding is needed for completion of RMAP improvements for the Olympic Unit
Initiate emphasis enforcement patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit	Not completed	Staffing and priorities

New Strategies

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies or activities to address the agencies strategic plan goals and objectives, why the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species present, and public issues and concerns. The following updated strategies have been added to respond to previously unaddressed or new issues or changes on the wildlife area. New strategies may also be in response to adaptive management as staff evaluate the impacts of past management activities.

Issues identified in italics were provided by the Citizens Advisory Group. These public comments are captured at the end of this document. Although underlined strategies have no current funding source, identifying these needs is the first step to securing additional funds.

Agency Objective: Protect, Restore and Enhance Fish and Wildlife and their Habitats

1. **Improve and Maintain Fish Populations**
   A. Strategy: Work with Habitat Program and state legislators to determine suitable options for Beaver Creek crossing at the Johns River Unit.
2. **Manage for waterfowl/wetlands**
   A. Strategy: Wet-soil management on 90 acres at the Chinook Unit (three year rotation involving cultivation and mowing for enhanced emergent wetland plant response {2009}) 2010 – disc approximately 30 acres to encourage smart weed generation
   B. Strategy: Maintain freshwater wetland units and water control structures at the Willapa Wetlands (Potter Slough) Unit. Control spread of canary reed grass and thistle throughout the unit.
3. **Maintain big game populations**
   A. Strategy: Re-seed approximately 20 acres of elk forage at the Chinook Unit. Mow an additional 170 acres for elk forage. Fertilize 20 acres to improve early spring/late winter green up. – Per RMEF Habitat Enhancement awarded proposal.
   B. Strategy: Create agricultural lease opportunities on approximately 50 acres to conduct elk forage enhancement activities on the Olympic Unit.
4. **Protect and Restore Riparian Habitat**
   A. Strategy: Maintain riparian/wetland native planting at the Ocean Shores Airport Unit.
5. **Protect and Manage Other Species**
   A. Strategy: Conduct thinning project on the Olympic Unit on approximately 60 acres adjacent to the "Lynn" forage fields.
6. **Protect and restore estuary habitat**
   A. Strategy: Restore estuarine habitats on units located throughout Grays Harbor, Willapa Bay, and Lower Columbia River where applicable
   B. Strategy: Locate and seek funding for additional acquisitions throughout Willapa Bay.
   C. Strategy: Acquire and restore additional estuarine habitats along the North River in the northern Willapa Bay.

2010 Performance Measures

1. Complete performance measures per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan
2. Reseed 30-50 acres with elk forage

3. Fulfill all RMEF Grant Guidelines for forage enhancement activities at the Chinook Unit including re-seeding 20 acres
4. Mow 400 acres of elk forage
5. Fertilize 400 acres of elk forage
6. Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage
7. Conduct soil samples for proposed forage locations
8. Develop 40+ new acres of elk forage (John's River Estuary Restoration {TAPPS} Mitigation)
9. Fall clipping on 100-250 acres for waterfowl habitat
10. Spray and disc approximately 30 acres at the Chinook Unit to encourage "smart weed" generation
11. Spray, cultivate, and seed barley on approximately 10 acres of the moist soil management area of Johns River
12. Manage tidegates at the Chinook Unit, working with neighboring landowners to maximize estuarine benefits through increased tidal fluctuation
13. Find settlement to the "Lynn" easement access dispute – purchase new road easement and maintain existing easement as a trail.
14. Utilize existing permits (FPA, SEPA, Section 106 & 7, etc.) to conduct additional forest thinning on the Olympic Unit (Variable Density Thinning (VDT) Prescription)
15. Conduct wet soil management activities (John's River, Hoxit, Chinook, Willapa Wetlands and Chehalis Units)
16. Convert permanent duck blinds to a temporary structure aligned with the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) Conservation Easement at the Willapa Wetlands (Potters Slough) Unit
17. Develop grant proposals and funding package for acquisition of targeted parcels adjacent to the Chehalis Unit.
18. Release pheasants at Furbrache and Chinook Units
19. Maintain six water control structures for waterfowl habitat - two at John's River, one at Hoxit, and three at Willapa Wetlands (Potters Slough)
20. Maintain riparian plantings along the Chehalis River at the Chehalis and Hoxit Units.
21. Maintain 48 acres of riparian forested buffer along the Chinook River and its tributaries
22. Complete RMAP requirements resolving fish barriers and upgrading forest roads at the Olympic Unit
23. Where applicable maintain all informational kiosks at wildlife area units
24. Continue efforts for Snowy Plover Recovery Plan at Oyhut Unit
25. Initiate Emphasis Enforcement Patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit.
26. Provide management guidance for the North Olympic and South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Complexes

Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) Input

A CAG meeting was held on February 23, 2010 to review this update and provide feedback on any major issues or concerns. Two local landowners attended the CAG. There were no major issues brought forth by CAG members, except for the concern of recent budget shortfalls and the addition of the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area to an already expansive land management complex.

Contacts:
Jim Gerchak
Wildlife Area Manager
(360) 533-5676
WDFW Montesano Office
(360) 249-4628

Want to see the full plan?

http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/

APPENDIX A

Olympic-Willapa Hills-South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Complex