

## LAKE MANAGEMENT PLANS

*updated July, 2007 - J.W. Korth*

### **Water(s): Corral, Blythe, Chukar, and Scaup lakes**

**Location:** Seep Lakes Wildlife Area and Columbia National Wildlife Refuge, Sec 14, 15 and 16, T17N R28E; approximately 15 miles northwest of Othello and 0.5 miles south of the southwest corner of Potholes Reservoir, Grant County, WA

	<b>Size:</b>	<b>Max Depth:</b>	<b>Volume:</b>
<b>Corral</b>	78 acres	65 feet	2,570 acre-feet; 6,985,630,080 lbs. H2O
<b>Blythe</b>	32 acres	35 feet	588 acre-feet; 1,598,268,672 lbs. H2O
<b>Chukar</b>	13 acres	24 feet	192 acre-feet; 521,856,000 lbs. H2O
<b>Scaup</b>	9 acres	14 feet	64 acre-feet; 173,950,000 lbs. H2O

**Water Source:** Subsurface seepage springs from Potholes Reservoir; outlet from Corral is a permanent, small creek (~1,600 ft., 2-3 cfs, includes a natural barrier (falls) to upstream fish migration) which drains to Blythe Lake; outlet from Blythe is a permanent, small creek (300 ft., 2-3 cfs) which drains to Chukar Lake; Chukar is intermittently connected to Scaup Lake.

**Outflow:** Intermittent to Marsh Unit I (lower Crab Creek) from Scaup Lake.

### **Management History:**

The Corral, Blythe, Chukar, and Scaup chain of lakes lie just south of O'Sullivan Dam and Potholes Reservoir and are a tributary to lower Crab Creek. Much of Corral, and all of Blythe, Chukar, and Scaup lakes, are on the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. These waters have been popular trout fisheries since the 1960s when opening day-type seasons were in effect. Blythe, Chukar, and Scaup lakes once provided the quality of angling sufficient to justify selective fishery regulations.

Corral, Blythe, Chukar, and Scaup lakes are currently open to angling year-round reducing the opening day crowds in favor of prolonged and steady angling pressure. The catch limit is five fish, and bait is allowed. Boating access is available at Corral and Blythe lakes, while anglers must walk into Chukar Lake. Stocking levels for Corral, Blythe, Chukar, and Scaup lakes have hovered around 50,000 rainbow trout. In early years these waters yielded 3-8 trout per trip and yearling trout grew to about 12 inches by opening day. Since the season switch to year around angling in the mid-1970s, fewer but larger fish per angler has been the norm.

The presence of undesirable species of fish is the greatest impediment to maintaining trout fisheries in these waters. Pumpkinseed sunfish were introduced, probably illegally, into the system during the early 1960s, and six rehabilitations (1965, 1971, 1976, 1983, 1988, 1997) have

failed to eradicate this species. Carp, yellow perch, and bass have been eradicated from the system at various times. Crappie were found during the 1997 treatment and continue to persist. Carp entering from Crab Creek were a problem in Blythe, Chukar, and Scaup lakes until the USFWS constructed an adequate barrier to the upstream migration of fish in 1976 on the outlet from Scaup Lake. Corral Lake is isolated by a natural barrier. Lake rehabilitation has provided 4-5 years of very good trout fishing in these waters after each treatment. Fair angling for large trout continues another 3-4 years before treatment is again required.

Compromise with the management priorities of the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge has been an ongoing issue in managing these lakes. The Refuge's primary responsibility is waterfowl management, and the Refuge frequently sees providing angling recreation as a conflicting activity. The Refuge would generally prefer that activity be minimized during the spring so as not to interfere with waterfowl nesting and rearing. Quality outdoor experiences are also promoted.

Replacing the April opener with the year around season was a direct response to Refuge concerns. Stocking catchable-sized fish is not allowed in Refuge waters per national policy, even though the currently allowed fry plants amount to the same type of put-and-take fishery as stocking catchable fish does. Rehabilitation proposals are usually acceptable since the elimination of over-populated species favors waterfowl as well as fish production. Fall rehabilitations are encouraged to avoid nesting and rearing waterfowl. In addition, outlet flows are usually at a minimum during this time of year.

Like WDFW, the Refuge has become more sensitive to the management non-game species during the last decade. At the Refuge's request, Scaup Lake has been removed from fisheries management to create a small haven for other species, particularly amphibians. As Scaup had become prone to low water levels and less than optimal conditions for trout survival, the loss of this portion of the fishery had relatively little impact to the system overall.

A relatively recent (since the late 1980s) management issue for this water has been the increasing number of piscivorous birds frequenting the area. Cormorants and mergansers have become spring breeders and summertime residents. While no uncontested proof of damage to the fishery exists, these species are primarily fish eaters. It is suspected that many of the unpredictable and unexplainable failures of the fisheries, which occur periodically in most of the smaller lakes in the area, could be attributable to these avian species.

*T&E Flora and Fauna:* Professionals from many resource agencies have visited this site countless times during the last 40 years. No known report exists of any threatened or endangered species habitually found in or near these lakes. Occasional visits from both bald and golden eagles occur, although no nests of these two species are known in the area. Protected species of waterfowl and other birds frequently are found here at times, as well.

**Current Management Objectives:**

Year around, low-key, production type trout fishery. Five fish limit, no size or gear restrictions. Provide 3 yearling rainbow trout per angler trip for 5-10,000 angler-trips per season.

**1. Fishery Objectives:**

<u>Species</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Number of Fish</u>		<u>Avg.Size</u>	<u>Exploit.</u>
			<u>/hour</u>	<u>/Angler</u>		<u>Rate</u>
Rainbow	Prod	Year Around	2	3	12 inches	90% 1-yr-olds

**2. Angler use objective** (# angler days): Season - 5,000 - 10,000

**3. Stocking Objectives:**

<u>Lake</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Number of Fish Stocked</u>			<u>Planting Month</u>
		<u>Total</u>	<u>/Acre</u>	<u>/pound</u>	
<b>Corral</b>	Rainbow	30,000	385	<80	April-May
	Rainbow	21,000	270	≤ 3	March-April, <i>first year post rehabilitation</i>
<b>Blythe</b>	Rainbow	10,000	300	<80	April-May
<b>Chukar</b>	Rainbow	4,000	300	<80	April-May
<b>Scaup</b>	no longer stocked at Refuge request				

**Management Strategy:**

- Plant rainbow fry in spring.
- Check yearling growth; should be about 12 inches, adjust stocking rate as necessary.
- Harvest 90% of yearling fish by end of season.
- Monitor all fish species periodically by electrofishing or netting.
- Substitute fall fingerlings for at least a portion of the spring fry when competing species begin to impact trout fry survival.
- Control spiny-ray species with rotenone when trout survival is inadequate to produce an acceptable fishery.