



BLUE MOUNTAINS WILDLIFE AREA COMPLEX 2014 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex Wildlife Area Management Plan http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_area/s/management_plans/ that provides management direction for Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex including the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area, Asotin Creek Wildlife Area, 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area, Grouse Flats Wildlife Area, and WT Wooten Wildlife Area. Total size of the complex is 71,880 acres located in



Asotin, Garfield, and Columbia Counties. Several land acquisitions have taken place since the 2012 update. An additional 8,296 acres has been added to the Wildlife Area Complex primarily through four major land acquisitions and a transfer of management responsibility from WDFW Region 3. This 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 every two years 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 includes 2012-13 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2014-15.

UPDATES/CHANGES:

4-O Ranch Acquisition: Phases II and Phase III of the 4-O Ranch acquisition closed in June 2013 and March, 2014, respectively. Phase II is approximately 1,613 acres and Phase III is 2,637 acres, both located within and to the west of the Cougar Creek drainage. There are six phases involved in the 4-O acquisition that total approximately 12,000 acres. It is expected it will take up to three more

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years to complete the three remaining acquisitions. The new wildlife area is called the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area and is being managed as a unit of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area.

Thornton Acquisition: In June of 2014, the agency acquired the 1,255 acre Thornton Acquisition located in the Asotin and Charley Creek drainages. A 203 acre Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lease accompanied the acquisition bringing the acreage total to 1,458 acres. The acquisition contains critical habitat for threatened salmonid species and upland habitat used frequently by bighorn sheep. It is being managed as a unit of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area

Koch Acquisition: In May of 2012, the agency acquired the 1,145 acre Koch Acquisition located in the Charley Creek and Asotin Creek drainages. A 1,406 acre DNR lease accompanied the acquisition bringing the acreage total up to 2,550 acres. As in Thornton, the acquisition contains critical habitat for threatened salmonid species and upland habitat used frequently by bighorn sheep, elk, and mule deer. The Koch acquisition is being managed as a unit of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area.

Walla Walla County sites: In late 2013, management of three WDFW sites in Walla Walla County were transferred to the Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex. The sites are Swegle, McDonald, and Dodd and were originally acquired under the Snake River mitigation program and managed by staff from the Sunnyside Wildlife Area in Region 3. One of the sites has an active agricultural agreement in place. Kari Dingman has primary management responsibility for the sites since they are closest to the Wooten Wildlife Area where she is stationed. Total acreage for the sites is approximately 241.

NEW ISSUES:

Wildland Fires

In 2012 we had six wildfires with four of them being less than an acre. A fire at Pine Bar was started by target shooting tannerite. The combination of the county road and the river kept this fire from spreading beyond 50 acres and it burned itself out. The large fire event of the year was the Cache Creek Fire. This lightning caused fire started in Oregon and burned north into Washington and continued to burn southeast into Oregon. The U.S forest Service was the primary firefighting agency. There were also Bureau of Land Management (BLM), DNR, Tribal, and contract fire crews as well. Firefighters used back burns off the Rogersburg and Joseph Creek roads to prevent it from spreading further north. Fire fighters performed a back-burn off the Headquarters entry road in order to prevent the Wildlife Area bunkhouse and shops from burning as well. The fire burned virtually all of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area lands between the Snake River and Joseph Creek. Of special significance was the loss of the boundary stock fence in this fire. Even though the fence does not follow property lines, it served an important purpose by preventing wandering livestock from entering the wildlife area from adjacent private property. The wildlife area suffered a quite a bit of trespass grazing from the neighbor until summer of 2014 when a contractor hired by the agency finally completed installation of a new fence. The fence is constructed of all steel and is an extremely well built fence that will be in place for a very long time.

Another aspect of the Cache Creek fire was the restoration effort. To prevent erosion in Green Gulch, Wildlife Area staff members installed straw waddles across steep areas to slow water and prevent soil from washing down the canyon. WDFW funded (\$45,000) a massive weed control operation to stop yellowstar thistle and other noxious weeds from germinating. Approximately 1,500 acres were sprayed by helicopter with Tordon and Escort herbicide. The result was astounding. Whole hillsides that were infested with yellow starthistle pre-fire are weed free and exhibiting excellent growth by bunch grasses. Flat bench areas that was hot



New boundary stock fence installed at Chief Joseph Wildlife Area

spots for tumble mustard and other broadleaf weeds are now weed free. Old agricultural fields in upper Green Gulch that were infested with star thistle are now weed free. The combination of a hot August fire followed up by an aggressive weed control program did wonders for bunch grass stands on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area.

The first wildfire of the 2013 season started mid-June, a few weeks earlier than past years, with the Mail Trail Fire. The fire started on private ground but quickly spread to the Chief Joseph WLA, BLM, and other private grounds. The local Blue Mountain Fire District was the first agency to respond and later DNR firefighting crews took over as the lead agency, with Blue Mountain Fire District still remaining on the scene and active. There was 1,524 acres of WDFW ground burned, 129 acres of BLM lands and 797 acres of private lands for a total of 2,450 acres. Later in the summer, the last week of August, a lightning storm set off the Grand Ronde Fire in the remote Black Butte Area on the south side of the Grande Ronde River of the Shumaker Unit. This fire was fought solely by aerial means and was approximately 600 acres in size of WDFW, BLM, and Private Land ownership. At final tally less than 200 acres of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area ended up burning.

In July of 2014 a fire burned a small portion of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area at upper Smoothing Iron Ridge. The majority of the fire was on USFS land and was fought by USFS crews with Wildlife Area staff serving in a support capacity when needed. The fire was named the Asotin Fire and mainly burned in the North Fork of Asotin Creek drainage.

Halsey CRP: The Halsey Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract expired and was re-enrolled. The operator is currently spraying out the existing vegetation, performing ground tillage and will be re-seeding the 1,000 acre field in 2014.

2014 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) Grant: Through no fault of our own an important weed control grant we submitted got misplaced at a higher approvers vetting and never made it to the final approving committee by the deadline. The wildlife area typically relies on this grant for major weed control operations, mainly aerial application of Tordon herbicide to control yellow starthistle. We are resubmitting for the grant again in the fall of 2014 for 2015 funding.

Personnel Changes: Longtime employee Cuevas Winegeart retired at the end of March 2014. His position was eliminated due to budget constraints. Career Seasonal Natural Resource Technician Dave Meisner was moved over to Clarkston from the Wooten following Cuevas's retirement. The void on the Wooten was filled by a new hire. Ken Christian was hired as a Natural Resource Worker on the Wooten. His season of work is currently 8 months per year. Robert Grijalva is serving the wildlife area complex as a substitute utility worker 2 covering Terry Folkin's extended absence.

Most recently, Nick Steveson was hired as a career seasonal Natural Resource Worker on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. Nick's season will run March – November of each year.

Tucannon Lakes: The eight lakes on the WT Wooten Wildlife Area are in need of serious repair. The dams have needed repair for a number of years, but no funding has been provided to complete the work. A subcommittee of the District Team put together the W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan. The subcommittee also submitted a package of projects to the Capital Request process for funding to begin repairing the issues with the lakes. Funding was given to relocate two campgrounds out of the floodplain, and the money remaining from that project will be used to begin the feasibility study for the lake reconstruction projects.

Tucannon Power Line: WDFW is still looking for funding options to bury the power line from the Hatchery to Camp Wooten. The project is also still included in the W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan.

Beetle Kill: A beetle infestation is causing a majority of the mature ponderosa pine trees on the wildlife area to die. The hazard trees in and around the campgrounds have been removed as they die to reduce the chance of anyone being injured. The remaining dead and dying trees will be left on the landscape for wildlife habitat trees. WDFW will assess Camp Wooten and the surrounding area and remove the hazard trees as necessary.

Campground Relocation: There are still two campgrounds that are located in the floodplain next to the Tucannon River. Those campgrounds will be relocated in spring/summer 2014. Campground 6 is being moved across the road and up on the hill from where it currently is located. The old Campground 6 will be decommissioned and rehabilitated into native vegetation and riparian area. Campground 9 is being moved and split into two new campgrounds. One will be in the old log landing north of the mouth of the Little Tucannon, near where WDFW previously had a campground. The second campground will be located just south of the current Campground 9. The old Campground 9 will be decommissioned and rehabilitated into native vegetation and riparian area. The end result will be 11 campgrounds on the wildlife area.

Tucannon River Large Wood Projects: The Habitat Program has received Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) funding for summer 2014 to place engineered log jams in the Tucannon River from the Hatchery Bridge to Spring Lake. Wildlife area staff is working with the Columbia County Conservation District to place engineered log jams in the Tucannon River from the O'Shaughnessy property through the Russell Unit of the Wooten Wildlife Area. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation received funding for summer 2014 to use a helicopter to place Large Woody Debris (LWD) in the Tucannon River from the mouth of the Little Tucannon River to Camp Wooten.

MAJOR STEWARDSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreages: Two CRP contracts expired and were re-enrolled into CRP on BPA acquisition lands. The first contract is 431 acres in size and is located on Smoothing Iron Ridge. The second contract is 171 acres and located near George Creek on Boozier Ridge. The Smoothing Iron Field was seeded and trees planted in 2013. The Boozier Ridge Field was seeded to grass in early 2014.

Cook Ridge RMEF Project: The wildlife area received a grant to plant red clover on Cook Ridge for the areas elk herd. Vegetation management included mowing and ground tillage, spraying glyphosate herbicide and burning in order to remove decadent grasses and clear a 25 acre site for the clover planting. This work was done in the fall of 2013.

Weed Control: The previous year's efforts to control noxious weeds on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area and Chief Joseph Wildlife Area have been a challenging one. Due to budgetary constraints we were not able to hire two additional seasonal employees and with an increase in land ownership we have had to do more with less. Because of this we have had to prioritize our efforts and target only those weed species with the higher priorities, according to Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) noxious weed laws. Also, seasonal weather patterns and conditions this past year were ideal for rush skeleton weed growth. New skeleton weed sightings were appearing on the wildlife area, as well as all across the county, in places where it had never been seen before. Our existing treatment sites seemed to explode into high density areas of weed growth at a time when we thought our past control efforts were finally working towards the elimination of the weed. With reduced resources, working partnerships with the Asotin County Weed Board and neighboring landowners have proved valuable. Because of a WSDA grant awarded to Asotin County to provide cost share weed control for private lands we were able to capitalize on a contracted helicopter already being in the area and spray a small 10 acre area of rush skeletonweed in a remote rugged location of the George Creek Unit. This would have been difficult for us to access by ground and treat with backpack sprayers but since the helicopter was spraying the same weed species on the neighboring land it was an easy solution. In another case of working partnerships we have held steady ground keeping skeletonweed suppressed on neighboring private property. Looking across the fence onto private property the skeletonweed was flourishing and was attempting to spread across the boundary fence onto the wildlife area. The landowner was called, the urgency of the situation was explained, and that we were in the area and could spray if permission was granted. The neighbors granted permission to treat the weed. Cooperative projects with the Asotin County Noxious Weed Control Board are also producing noticeable results. Weed Board work on controlling Mediterranean sage in Pintler Creek and Meyer's Ridge has been excellent. Cooperative projects with the Weed Board utilizing a contractor applying herbicide by horseback have been effective at controlling Mediterranean sage and rush skeleton weed. WDFW and Asotin County Weed Board thought another aerial application of herbicide was needed over the Med Sage core area on the George Creek side of Meyers Ridge. In the spring of 2013 one-time funding was received (\$45,000) for post wildlife rehabilitation needs due to the 2012 Cache Creek Fire. We put the funding to use with an aerial application of herbicide during the spring when post fire conditions would be ideal for a major explosion of noxious weeds, the target weed being yellow starthistle. We identified areas on the ground that have always been problem weed

areas as the highest priority sites to be sprayed first and identified additional areas that have had no recent treatments.

2012 Weed Control Summary

Wildlife Area	Acres
Asotin Creek	930
Chief Joseph	1,576
WT Wooten	1,110
Total:	3,616

2013 Weed Control Summary

Wildlife Area	Ground Application Acres	Aerial Application Acres	Total
Asotin Creek	248	145	393
Chief Joseph	117	1,545	1,662
WT Wooten	37	700	737
Total:	365	1,690	2,792

Green Gulch Ponds RMEF Project: Water collection ponds that were created for livestock watering when the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area was in private ownership have since become an important resource for the areas elk and other wildlife in this relatively dry environment. Over the years these ponds have become filled with silt and their holding capacity has greatly diminished. We predicted that these ponds would continue filling at an accelerated rate due to 2012’s Cache Creek Fire. In 2012 we applied for a grant with the RMEF to conduct some habitat improvements for these ponds. These dozen ponds are scattered from the HQ Bunkhouse, up through Green Gulch, and go all the way to Shovel Creek. We proposed digging silt out of these ponds so that they would be deeper, cooler, and retain more water throughout the hot, dry summer months. In early 2013 we were informed that we were awarded the grant so we conducted some preplanning that spring and decided to commence groundwork late fall 2013 after the big-game hunting seasons had closed. We completed major groundwork for the year in December with grass seeding. We plan to monitor for weeds and conduct weed control this spring as well as setup a remote camera for wildlife usage monitoring.



Pond cleaned by excavator in November 2013 on Chief Joseph Wildlife Area

George Creek Stream Restoration Project: Funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, this project focuses on stabilizing and improving the George Creek stream channel on WDFW property west of George Creek County Road. Tri-State Steel-headers accepted the project as the sponsor and worked closely with WDFW Engineers and Habitat Biologists to design the project. Grant money was used this past year for project design, placement LWD, engineered log jams, and stream channel re-construction for salmonids. This was followed up with native grass seed distribution over the footprint of



Large Woody debris structures in George Creek during high water event in early 2014

the construction area. Weed control and tree and shrub plantings to enhance the stream channel and stabilize the banks are planned for the future.

Wooten Wildlife Area Food Plots: The food plot that was created in 2011 was replanted in 2013 using seed donated by the Walla Walla Chapter of Pheasants Forever. Several white-tailed deer were seen using the food plot throughout the year, and pheasants could be found in the food plot in the fall.

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area big game forage plots: Cultivation and seeding of annual big game forage plantings continued in 2013 and 2014. Winter wheat has been a powerful draw for elk and recently, winter canola has been working well at Smoothing Iron. The combination of a plentiful food supply, clean water from several stock tanks, and placement of mineral enhancement blocks has enabled us to hold elk on the wildlife area year-round. The food plots have been extremely popular with neighboring landowners who have historically experienced crop damage from elk wandering onto their fields from state lands. There is approximately 155 acres under cultivation at Smoothing Iron used for the forage plots.



Elk utilizing planted forage crops in the middle of a warm day in mid-July at Smoothing Iron Ridge.

STATUS REPORT OF 2012-2013 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2012-13 Performance Measures	Status of Performance Measures	Explanation of Progress 2014-15 Related Activities/Comments
Assess and maintain 150 miles of boundary stock fence on the Wildlife Area Complex.	Completed	Ongoing
Irrigate foodplots and shrubs at Chief Joseph and Wooten Wildlife Areas at least twice annually.	Completed with the exception of Chief Joseph in 2014. No irrigation took place on the Chief Joseph WLA in 2014 due to budget constraints	Ongoing
Assess and maintain 23.5 miles of elk fence on and off the Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex twice annually or as conditions require.	Completed	Ongoing, and we will monitor this fence more intensively to prevent elk escapement to private land.
Look into methods of controlling vegetation against newly constructed elk fence on the Wooten Wildlife Area.	Not completed	Ongoing
Maintain and monitor seven agricultural leases on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area annually.	Completed with some being re-written	Ongoing
Initiate at least 1 habitat enhancement project annually with RMEF, Blue Mountains Elk Initiative, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), etc.	Completed	Pursue additional funding for 2014-15
Control noxious weeds along Tucannon River and in 10 campgrounds using RMEF funds.	Completed	Ongoing
Plant and maintain at least two annual foodplots on Chief Joseph Wildlife Area annually.	Completed	Ongoing
Establish and maintain four big-game foodplots on Asotin Creek and Wooten Wildlife Areas (15 acres minimum each). Plant/replant/maintain	Cook ridge re-planted on the Asotin Creek WLA in 2013. Able's Ridge will be planted to clover in early 2015	Evaluate sites in 2014-15

one out of four of the foodplots annually.		
Plant/maintain 155 acres of annual foodplots on Smoothing Iron Ridge.	Completed	Ongoing
Treat weed outbreaks on a minimum of 500 acres annually on the four wildlife areas.	Completed and exceeded	Ongoing
Participate in at least two cooperative weed control project with local weed boards, Wallowa Resources, TNC, etc.	Completed	Ongoing
Continue to support and assist with Mountain Quail reintroduction project on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area.	Completed. Staff report sightings to District Wildlife Biologist	Ongoing
Maintain and install bluebird nest boxes.	Completed in 2012. None completed in 2013 and 2014	Ongoing
Complete federally and state listed plant surveys (Spaulding's catchfly) on BPA funded portions on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. Survey other non-BPA funded lands as funding opportunities allow.	The only work completed here was for Silene on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. Washington State University (WSU) was contracted to provide this service.	WSU completed in 2012 and 2013. No monitoring work took place in 2014.
Maintain six "plant and take" lakes stocked with rainbow trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon on the Wooten Wildlife Area.	Completed	Ongoing
Evaluate existing guzzlers and either repair or discard as necessary. Five evaluations annually.	Completed	Ongoing
Evaluate old agricultural fields for restoration into native grass habitat. Evaluate two fields per year on the Blue Mountain Wildlife Area	Completed	Ongoing

Complex.		
Continue to limit trail access to non-motorized vehicles only on the four wildlife areas except for green gulch on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area which is open Oct. 1 – Nov 30.	Completed	Ongoing
Continue to implement and monitor big-game winter range closure gates on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area.	Completed	Ongoing
Maintain mineral enhancement sites for big game on the four wildlife areas. Asotin Creek – 9, Wooten – 4, Chief Joseph – 4, Grouse Flats – 1	Completed	Ongoing
Evaluate wildlife area campgrounds and consider establishment of designated campsites with fire rings as funding allows.	We started this in 2011 on the Wooten Wildlife Area. Next step is to identify individual campsites with Carsonite sign posts.	No Carsonite posts installed. Continue in 2015
Monitor and utilize where possible, water rights on the four wildlife areas. Install flow meters on irrigation pumps to accurately monitor water usage. Document usage.	Not completed. No funding for flow meters.	Seek funding in 2015 for flow meters.
Install one informational kiosk displaying Wildlife Area maps, noxious weed information and federal and state listed plant and animal species on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. Maintain kiosks installed on the Wooten and Asotin Creek Wildlife Areas.	Completed	Ongoing
Seek funding for maintenance of Tucannon Dams and Lakes.	We are working towards this goal with the Tucannon Floodplain Management Plan	Ongoing

Maintain native grass/forb planting on Campbell Field and Smoothing Iron Ridge.	Completed	Ongoing
Seek funding and support to bury Columbia Rural Electric Association power line between Tucannon Hatchery and Camp Wooten State Park.	A Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) grant request was submitted for this project and did not receive funding.	Consider alternative funding
Revisit 33 post-fire monitoring photopoints in May.	Completed	Ongoing
Identify and prioritize fish passage barriers on the wildlife area complex. Address at least one barrier annually.	We are currently looking at a barrier issue in Lick Creek on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan funding may be available to fix the problem	Ongoing

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. Underlined strategies have no current funding source.

Objective: Improve or Maintain Big Game Populations by managing rangelands.

1. Explore possibility of grazing on Chief Joseph Wildlife Area by dividing a large area into three pastures and grazing once every 3rd year.
2. Explore possibility of grazing on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area with the goal of re-invigorating native stands of grass.

Objective: Improve or Maintain Big Game Populations by increasing Agricultural Agreements with private operators.

1. Establish agricultural agreement on Grouse Flats Wildlife Area that consists of tearing up and re-seeding the field. Main crop would be hay.
2. Look into agricultural agreement possibility's along Joseph Creek and the Grande Ronde River on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area.

Objective: Improve and/or maintain wildlife habitat in forest environments by managing forests for sustainability by reducing fuel loads and maximizing growth potential for selected trees.

1. Set up prescribed timber harvest operations on Grouse Flats Wildlife Area and the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area that reduces fuel loads and maximizes wildlife habitat potential.
2. Set up prescribed timber harvest operations on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area that reduces fuel loads and maximizes wildlife habitat potential.

Objective: Protect, Enhance and Restore Function and Structure of Native Habitats

1. Seek funding for projects designed to enhance riparian areas for fish and wildlife species.
2. Seek funding to bury the overhead powerline from Tucannon Hatchery to Camp Wooten.

Objective: Improve and Maintain Fish Populations

1. Look for options to add large woody debris to streams, and do so as time and funds allow.
2. Identify ways to decrease or minimize soil erosion and/or soil delivery to streams. Close roads, reseed roads, or rock roads as necessary to achieve goal.

2014-15 Performance Measures

- Assess and maintain 150 miles of boundary stock fence on the Wildlife Area Complex.
- Irrigate foodplots and shrubs at Chief Joseph and Wooten Wildlife Areas at least twice annually.
- Assess and maintain 24 miles of elk fence on and off the Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex twice annually or as conditions require.
- Maintain and monitor seven agricultural leases on Asotin creek Wildlife Area annually.
- Maintain and monitor grazing and agricultural leases on the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area.
- Initiate at least one habitat enhancement project annually with RMEF, Blue Mountains Elk Initiative, TNC, etc
- Control noxious weeds along Tucannon River and in 11 campgrounds on the WT Wooten Wildlife Area.
- Plant and maintain at least two annual foodplots on Chief Joseph Wildlife Area annually.

- Establish and maintain four big-game foodplots on Asotin Creek and Wooten Wildlife Areas (15 acres minimum each). Plant/replant/maintain one out of four of the foodplots annually.
- Plant/maintain 155 acres of annual foodplots on Smoothing Iron Ridge.
- Treat weed outbreaks on a minimum of 500 acres annually on the four wildlife areas.
- Participate in at least two cooperative weed control project with local weed boards, Wallowa Resources, TNC, etc.
- Maintain and install bluebird nest boxes as time allows.
- Maintain 6 “plant and take” lakes stocked with rainbow trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon on the Wooten Wildlife Area.
- Evaluate existing guzzlers and either repair or discard as necessary. Five evaluations annually.
- Evaluate old agricultural fields for restoration into native grass habitat. Evaluate one field per year on the Blue Mountain Wildlife Area Complex.
- Continue to limit trail access to non-motorized vehicles only on the four wildlife areas except for green gulch on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area which is open Oct. 1 – Nov. 30.
- Continue to implement and monitor big-game winter range closure gates on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area.
- Maintain mineral enhancement sites for big game on the four wildlife areas. Asotin Creek – 9, Wooten – 4, Chief Joseph – 4, Grouse Flats – 1
- Evaluate wildlife area campgrounds and consider establishment of designated campsites with fire rings as funding allows.
- Continue to monitor and maintain established campgrounds on the four wildlife areas.
- Install one informational kiosk displaying wildlife area maps, noxious weed information and federal and state listed plant and animal species on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. Maintain Kiosks installed on the Wooten and Asotin Creek Wildlife Areas.
- Seek funding for maintenance of Tucannon Dams and Lakes
- Maintain native grass/forb planting on Campbell Field and Smoothing Iron Ridge.
- Seek funding and support to bury Columbia Rural Electric Association power line between Tucannon Hatchery and Camp Wooten State Park.
- Revisit 33 post-fire monitoring photopoints in May.
- Identify and prioritize fish passage barriers on the wildlife area complex. Address at least one barrier annually.
- Continue inventory and monitoring of Spaulding’s Catchfly on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area.
- Seek funding for riparian area enhancement projects.

Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Input

The Wooten WAAC meeting was held on March 13, 2014.

Attendees included:

Jim Kirkpatrick, Landowner
Joanne Kirkpatrick, Landowner
Wilbur Eaton, Landowner
Don Howard, Landowner
Jason Towery, Last Resort KOA
Mike Talbott, Columbia County Commissioner
Gary Vierra, State Parks Manager
Jennifer Bristol, Camp Wooten
Tom Schoenfelder, Department of Natural Resources
Dana Sheedy, Tri-State Steelheaders
Bob Dice, Wildlife Area Manager

Issue: How long will the feasibility study on the lakes take?

Response: The study will hopefully be done on each lake as the funding becomes available and will be part of the design and planning process. There is not a definite timeline at this time.

Issue: Why can't the Department pay for weed control work without depending on grant funds?

Response: There is not enough money in the current operating budgets to fund weed control efforts without cutting funding for some other task or project. The grant funds are used to purchase the herbicide and when possible to pay for the helicopter time to spray the larger infestations.

Issue: What kind of the feedback does the Department get from the public on Large Wood projects?

Response: The Department gets both positive and negative feedback from the public on the Large Wood projects. Some people are very supportive of the efforts to improve salmon habitat and other people are very against it and feel it is a waste of money.

Issue: How close will the Tucannon River come to the spring branch on the Russell Unit? I am bothered by the potential of the river to migrate and disturb the spring branches on WDFW lands.

Response: There is the potential for the Tucannon River to overtake the spring branch on the Russell Unit. Historically the river moved around on the floodplain and captured and released spring branches as it moved.

Issue: Why does the old road bridge by Spring Lake have to be removed? Why can't it just be left where it is?

Response: The old road bridge at Spring Lake is no longer used and the structure is constricting the Tucannon River at that point. Removing the old bridge will remove part of the pinch point and allow for high flows to expand out across the floodplain after passing under the existing bridge.

Issue: What species of trees will be used for the Large Wood projects? Why pine? It will rot in a few years.

Response: Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir will be the primary trees used for the Large Wood projects. These trees are available in the large sizes needed to create the engineered log jams in order to make them stable enough to withstand high flows. The trees will rot over time, but being submerged in the river will slow down the rotting process.

Issue: WAAC agreed a quarterly newsletter mailed out would be the best way to keep the group informed of what is occurring on the wildlife area.

Response: A quarterly newsletter will be tried out during the coming year and will be revisited at the next WAAC meeting.

Bonneville Power Administration

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) funds a portion of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. BPA funded areas are the Schlee acquisitions on Smoothing Iron Ridge and George Creek. The Bickford acquisition in George Creek is also funded by BPA. Altogether, approximately 10,000 acres out of 33,000 acre Asotin Creek Wildlife Area is BPA funded. Funding the wildlife area mitigates habitat losses through construction of hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River. By funding habitat enhancement and maintenance activities, BPA receives credit towards its mitigation obligation.

Progress towards this obligation is assessed through the use of periodic surveys based on standardized Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP). Habitat Evaluation Procedures were developed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to quantify the quality and abundance of available habitat for selected wildlife species. HEP is based on ecological principles and the assumption that habitat for selected wildlife species can be described as a numerical value based on a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI). This value is derived from an evaluation of the ability of key habitat components to supply the resource needs of focal species of fish and wildlife. The HSI values (ranging from 0.0 for no value to a maximum of 1.0) are multiplied by the area of available habitat to obtain Habitat Units (HUs), which are for mitigation purposes, the 'currency' used to measure/compare habitat losses and gains. Completion of baseline and periodic (preferably at 5-year intervals) HEP is a fundamental requirement for management of mitigation areas.

Several wildlife species on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area have been identified as the focus for management planning through the HEP process, because their needs define healthy habitat for many species in the riparian wetlands habitat; beaver, great blue heron, and yellow warbler have been selected. In Ponderosa pine habitat; elk, flammulated owl, and white-headed woodpecker have been selected. In the grasslands; bighorn sheep, sharp-tailed grouse, mule deer, and

grasshopper sparrow have been selected. Additional wildlife species are also targeted to evaluate habitat acquired with BPA mitigation funding. This HEP is applied to the Smoothing Iron and George Creek units and includes western meadowlark, black-capped chickadee, downy woodpecker, and Lewis woodpecker.

Reports/Proposals/Plans

BPA provided has been providing funding for the Schlee and Bickford acquisitions since 2003. Since that time, numerous reports, funding proposals and work plans have been produced. By following the below links, additional information on these activities can be found.

General information on the Mitigation Project

<https://www.cbfish.org/Project.mvc/Display/2006-005-00>

**Bob Dice, Wildlife Area
Complex Manager**
Phone (509) 758-3151
WDFW Spokane Office
(509) 892-1001

Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife
_areas/management_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/)