



# OAK CREEK WILDLIFE AREA 2014 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

## Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan ([http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/)). This plan provides management direction for the 64,200 acre Oak Creek State Wildlife Area in Yakima and Kittitas Counties. 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.



**Wildflowers on Rock Creek Unit**  
*By David Hagen*

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 2012-2013 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies, and performance measures for 2014-2015.

## Updates/Changes

### **New Advisory Group Composition**

The Oak Creek Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) has been modified into a smaller, more user-based group called a Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC). The role of the WAAC will be very similar to that of the CAG – to review information, provide comments, serve as spokespersons for stakeholder groups, learn about WDFW’s mission and goals, and share priorities for land planning and management.

The 13 members representing stakeholder groups on the Oak Creek WAAC include:

Ron Rutherford	Motorized Recreation
Jerry Clark	Back Country Horsemen of Central

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Ken McNamee	Department of Natural Resources
Joan St. Hilaire	U.S. Forest Service
Leroy Adams Jr	Yakama Nation
Gail Thornton	Grazing Interests/North Yakima Conservation District
Jim Walkenhaur	Hunting Interests
Larry Robinson	Watchable wildlife/Audubon
Jeff Barbee	Fishing Interests
Rick Barlin	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Reese Lolley	The Nature Conservancy
Betsy Bloomfield	Cowiche Canyon Conservancy
Dick Jacobson	Yakima County Noxious Weed Board

### **Land Exchange**

Phase II of the land exchange between WDFW and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was completed in 2012. Eleven sections in the Rattlesnake drainage were transferred to DNR, while WDFW gained property in Garrett Canyon, the Cowiche Unit, and a small parcel near the Tieton River. As part of the land exchange WDFW acquired two grazing allotments.

### **Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plans (RMAP)**

In 2012, Oak Creek Staff inventoried all the forest roads on the newly acquired lands in the Rock Creek Unit. Roads were incorporated in the wildlife area RMAP plan bringing the total forest roads on the wildlife area up to 140.6 miles. While inventorying roads, an additional 8 miles of user built ORV trails were documented. In the Rock Creek Unit about 14 miles of roads were identified for abandonment. In 2013, a significant outreach plan for road closures on the wildlife area was developed. Outreach with user groups was conducted and approval was obtained in 2014 for the road and trail abandonment. Across the wildlife area, RMAP work is ongoing; a lot of the work on the Rock Creek Unit has been postponed due to limited access from closures on Forest Service roads that are used to access WDFW land. To address long term maintenance and costs associated with upcoming forest management, we are working with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to enter into a Cooperative Road Maintenance Agreement for the Forest Service roads where WDFW has an easement.

In 2012, WDFW crews completed 4.3 miles of road improvements. In addition, one fish passage barrier culvert was removed, and ½ mile of road was abandoned. The removal of the culvert opened up about 3.5 miles of the creek to fish. In 2013, WDFW crews completed 5.8 miles of road improvements and abandoned 1.8 miles of road. In addition, a washed-out culvert on the South Fork of Oak Creek was replaced with a bridge, opening up 1 mile of creek for fish passage and restoring vehicle access to numerous acres of Forest Service and WDFW land.

In the fall of 2013 a flash flood from heavy rains on Cleman's Mountain sent a wall of mud and water down the mountain into Garrett Canyon crossing SR 410, blocking the highway and partially blocking the Naches River. Several miles of forest roads were damaged, some beyond repair. WDFW and DNR worked to quickly repair the roads prior to hunting season. Over 4 miles of roads were repaired, and about 1.5 miles of the lower end of Garrett Canyon Road was closed permanently. This event further reduced public access into the area.

## **Oak Creek Forest Restoration Project**

Oak Creek Staff continues to work with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and other partners to implement the forest management project in the Oak Creek Watershed. The project has not moved forward as quickly as was anticipated in the last update. There were several highlights for the project in 2012. WDFW applied for a Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) State Lands Restoration Grant; the Oak Creek project ranked first in the state and was awarded \$380,000. The legislature approved Engrossed Senate Bill 5127 (Jobs Now!) which provided \$75,000 for the Oak Creek Project. WDFW was also awarded a \$20,100 grant from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) to complete thinning work on the project.

Field work continued in 2012, focusing on additional unit layout and compiling cruise data for the timber sale, as well as spotted owl surveys. The prescription for non-commercial thinning was developed, and the Biological Assessment (BA) was completed. Informal consultation as required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was initiated in late 2012. Concurrence was received from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service in January 2013, with a determination of “may affect, not likely to adversely affect.”

In 2013, non-commercial thinning started, with over 300 acres thinned and hand-piled. In the fall WDFW obtained a burn permit from DNR and burned all cured piles. Funding from an existing National Fire Plan Grant, Jobs Now, and RMEF paid for all the thinning work. All roads in the project area were also inventoried using a Forest Service developed process called Geomorphic Road



**Oak Creek Forest Restoration Project Area**  
*By The Nature Conservancy*

Analysis Inventory Program (GRAIP) to look at sediment delivery from the road system. This process was used in the development of the BA for the commercial timber sale and prescribed fire. Several potential projects were identified in the watershed to reduce sediment delivery and are being developed across ownerships. Other field work in 2013 included continued layout of the commercial timber sale, development of prescribed burn units, and additional spotted owl surveys. In August 2013 volunteers from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) spent a day thinning trees and piling brush on the project. Several field trips and site visits occurred in 2013 involving WDFW staff and other agencies and interest groups. At the request of the Oak Creek WAAC the project area was toured with WDFW Deer and Elk Specialist Scott McCorquodale, focusing on the potential impacts or benefits to elk habitat. The project design and considerations taken should have a net benefit to elk in the project area. In late 2013, WDFW sought bids and awarded the non-commercial thinning contract for 2014 work to a local contractor.

Plans for 2014-2015 include completion of non-commercial thinning, implementation of the commercial timber sale, and prescribed burning on units. WDFW will continue to work with The Nature Conservancy and other partners on project implementation.

### **Green Dot Roads**

The region received capital funding to improve the green dot travel management system on wildlife areas. New metal green dot reader boards were designed, and green dot maps were updated and printed on metal. New gates were designed by wildlife area staff and constructed by the Yakima Construction Shop. On Oak Creek, a total of eight gates were installed on closed roads to reduce illegal use. Wildlife area staff designed, built, and installed new reader boards and sign kiosks for all entrances to the Oak Creek Green Dot Travel Management Area. The kiosks have maps, Discover Pass signs, and other information signs posted on them.

### **Tieton Bighorn Sheep Herd**

Beginning in late winter 2013 WDFW began documenting an unusual number of road-killed animals along US Highway 12. By late March, it was clear that a major die-off had been underway for some weeks. Using a helicopter, the herd was surveyed, and only 35 live animals were located of an estimated herd size of 150 in late 2011. Veterinary pathology confirmed that all animals had gross lesions consistent with pneumonia, and molecular testing confirmed the presence of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* in all animals. Because of the virulence of the disease (indicated by the rapid on-set and incidence of mortality), and the proximity to the uninfected Cleman's Mountain herd, WDFW decided to remove all remaining animals in the Tieton Herd. As of mid-September 2013, a combination of agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, and independent contractors had removed all but three animals and indications were that these had either died or dispersed far from the Tieton area. Plans to re-introduce bighorn sheep into the Tieton area are outlined in the draft WDFW 2015-2021 Game Management Plan.

### **Wildfires**

There were several small wildfires that occurred on the wildlife area in 2012-2013. During the 2012 fire season a total of four fires occurred on the wildlife area and adjacent lands. The Sunset Fire on the Cowiche Unit burned 30 acres and damaged a section of elk fence; the fire started on adjacent private property. The Wild Rose Fire burned primarily on adjacent USFS land, but crews constructed several miles of contingency fire lines on the wildlife area. All fire lines were rehabilitated, and a closed road that was opened as fire line was abandoned to RMAP specifications. In 2013, two fires occurred on the wildlife area. The Bear Canyon fire burned about 22 acres. None of the fires required extensive rehabilitation.

### **Cowychee Mountain CWPP**

In 2012, Oak Creek staff assisted in the development of the Cowychee Mountain Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Development of the shrub steppe-focused CWPP was prompted by the 2010 Cowiche Mill Fire that threatened several homes in the area. With the completed and approved plan, communities in the area served by the CWPP became eligible to seek community assistance grants to implement priority projects.

## **Livestock Grazing**

In 2012, the grazing permit on the Worrell Ranch property which is part of the Cowiche Unit expired. The permittee was interested in renewing the permit. WDFW staff completed all analysis and developed a new grazing plan and permit. In 2013, a new three year grazing permit was issued, allowing a maximum of 250 AUM's (animal units per area or total animal unit months) per season, 35% utilization of key bunchgrasses, and requiring the pastures to be rested during the third year. Permanent monitoring sites were established to track utilization and for Ecological Integrity Monitoring (EIM). The Oak Creek WAAC reviewed and approved the grazing plan; notes from the meeting are located at the end of the update.

## **Administration**

### Wildlife Area Staff

With passage of Discover Pass legislation in 2011, Oak Creek received funding for a 3 month seasonal Natural Resource Worker 2 position. The position assists with stewardship activities on the wildlife area, primarily noxious weed control.

In 2012, Assistant Manager Bruce Berry's position was reclassified to a Natural Resource Specialist 2. The position was formerly a Maintenance Mechanic 1. This reclassification assigned Bruce to the same job class and salary range as assistant managers on other wildlife areas.

### Discover Pass

A Discover Pass or a WDFW access pass (included when buying either a hunting or fishing license) is now required to use WDFW lands. This was a major change for the public who come to the visitor's center to view the elk during winter feeding. In the past WDFW did not require an Access Pass during winter feeding. To address the need for onsite sales of Discover Passes and for enforcement of the requirement, WDFW has contracted with Washington State Parks to provide Discover Pass sales, education, and enforcement during winter feeding operations. The partnership with Parks has worked well, and it allows for contact with each vehicle as it enters the parking lot. The pass requirement has led to a decrease in donations that support the winter feeding program. While weekend visitation remains high, many vehicles turn around and leave when they learn of the pass requirement.

### Sageworks Partnership Agreement

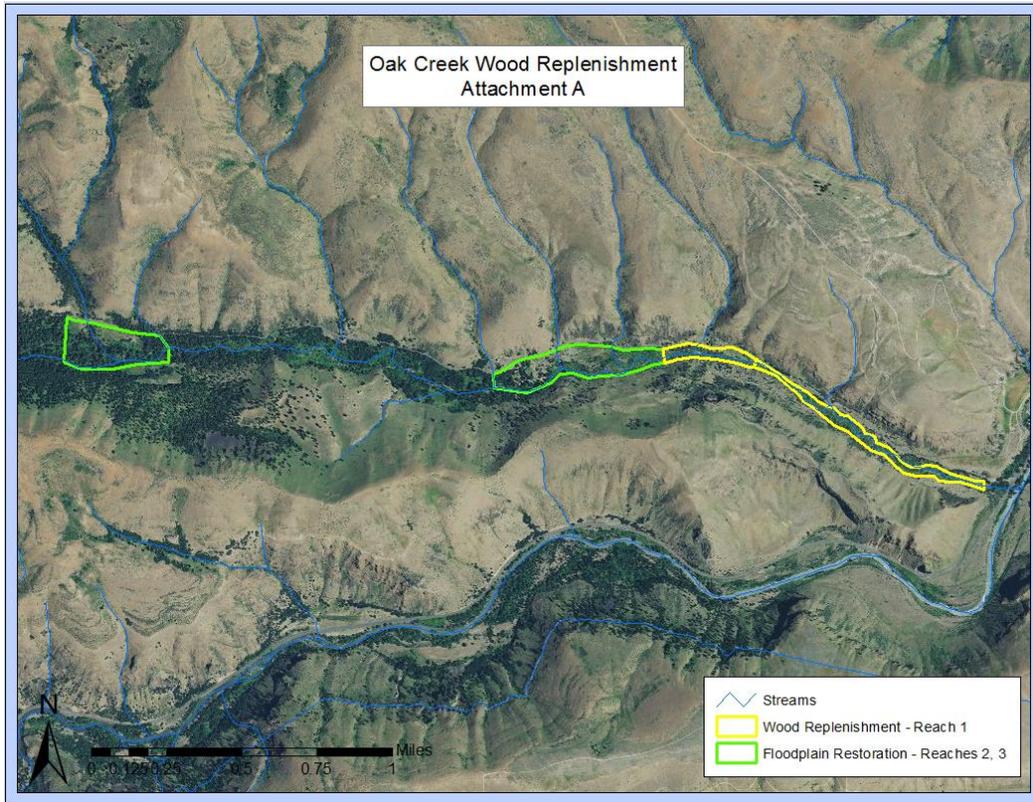
In 2013, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by WDFW, Cowiche Canyon Conservancy, USFS, Bureau of Land Management, and the RMEF. The MOU documents the collaborative relationship to coordinate landscape management investments in the Cowiche area. The Sageworks Partnership will focus on: acquisition of real estate interests in priority inholdings, fire regime and ecosystem restoration, special resource values, cultural resources, Priority Habitats and Species, and recreation management.

## **New Issues**

### **Oak Creek Large Wood Replenishment Project**

Beginning in 2013, WDFW began working with the biologists from the Yakama Nation on an in-stream restoration project on the lower reaches of Oak Creek (Figure 1). The project will focus on placing 1,500-2,000 full length trees in the stream on approximately 3 miles of creek.

Sources of wood have been identified and will be part of a larger forest health component in the Oak Creek Forest Restoration Project. Work will be accomplished by a Washington Conservation Crew (WCC) using low impact harvest and placement methods. This project has been reviewed by the Oak Creek WAAC and the District 8 Team. Work is expected to begin in the fall of 2014 and will continue for 2-3 years.



**Figure 1: Map of Oak Creek Large Wood Replenishment Project Area.**

### **Acquisitions**

Since the last update, there have been no new acquisitions on the wildlife area. In 2013, a 20/20 application was submitted for the Cowiche Watershed 2014 Project, and we were approved to move forward. The application included seeking funding from the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Critical Habitat category for parcels from multiple owners and funding from the Department of Ecology Mitigation Account to purchase property from another landowner. Oak Creek staff and our partners with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) and the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy (CCC) are currently working with willing sellers to purchase land adjacent to the Oak Creek Unit in the North Fork of Cowiche Creek with Department of Ecology Mitigation Funding. This acquisition is scheduled to close in August, 2014 and will add 2,893 acres to the wildlife area. WDFW, with help from RMEF and CCC, is in the process of applying for RCO Critical Habitat funding for an additional 3,200 acres of uplands in the Cowiche watershed. If funding is secured and all acquisitions are completed, the Oak Creek and Cowiche Units will be connected, ensuring habitat protection and migration routes for many wildlife species, including elk.

## **Management Plan**

Oak Creek was selected as one of four pilot wildlife areas for a new wildlife area planning process and plan development. Currently the wildlife area is scheduled to begin outreach and development in June 2015.

## **Major Stewardship Accomplishments**

### **Weed management**

Wildlife area staff continues to work in close coordination with the Yakima County Noxious Weed Board (YCNWB) to address the recent rapid spread of Dalmatian toadflax, particularly along the Naches River and the Highway 410 corridor. Biological control agents, (*Mecinus janthinus*), were released by wildlife area staff at five locations in the Sanford Pasture area in 2013 and 2014. Biological control agents are present at almost all sites already but do not appear to be at high enough population levels to impact plant growth and spread. Based on monitoring of old release sites, biological control of diffuse knapweed appears to still be limited.

Grants from RMEF and National Wild Turkey Federation were used to hire a local contractor to complete herbicide control, focusing primarily on diffuse knapweed. During the first two years, the project was implemented in the Oak Creek and Bethel Ridge areas. Good control was established, and weed presence was down the second year.

Densities of diffuse knapweed continue to be unacceptably high and are being controlled by wildlife area staff. In 2014, the contractor worked in the Mud Lake area to control a recent expansion of diffuse knapweed. Staff time focuses on



**Contractor spraying diffuse knapweed on the wildlife area.**  
*By Oak Creek Staff*

control of scotch thistle as a priority weed. Additional work is focused on diffuse knapweed, puncture vine, white top, kochia, and Russian thistle as time allows.

In 2012, the South Central Washington Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) was awarded a grant for the control of multiple priority weed species in the region. Oak Creek contracted with the CWMA in 2013 to assist in survey and control of rush skeletonweed and tansy ragwort near the wildlife area. Staff assisted YCNWD with surveys of rush skeletonweed and did not locate any new patches. Staff also helped locate and control tansy in the Little Naches and White Pass areas on USFS land. The CWMA is no longer active, but staff continues to coordinate with former members as needed.

In 2012 funding from the acquisition of parcels in the Rock Creek Unit was used to hire a contractor to control weeds in the Rock Creek Unit. Weed locations were identified during

surveys of RMAP roads and included diffuse knapweed, Dalmatian toadflax, Canada thistle, and bull thistle. The contractor completed weed control at all known locations and at several new sites.

**Infrastructure**

Using funding from the original acquisition of the Rock Creek Unit, we worked with the Yakima Construction Shop to build and install five gates on previously closed roads on the Rock Creek Unit. These gates will allow for administrative access, but will restrict public motorized use on these already closed roads. Other funding from the acquisition was used to build and install new kiosks at all entrances to the Rock Creek Unit. New maps showing open and closed roads and ownership were created and new signs explaining where a Discover Pass or Vehicle Access Pass were required on mixed state and federal ownership were installed on the kiosks.

Numerous sections of elk fence were repaired, primarily on the Cowiche Unit. A new elk re-entry gate was installed in the elk fence along Highway 410. In this area, elk commonly got trapped between the fence section and the highway. Following the 2010 Cowiche Mill Fire a section of fence on Cowiche Mountain was repaired, with a long term goal of relocating the fence section in the near future.

**Status Report of 2012-2013 Performance Measures**

Key performance measures are identified 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 2014-2015.

<b>2012-13 Performance Measure</b>	<b>Status of Performance Measure</b>	<b>Explanation of Progress 2014-15 Related Activity/ Comments</b>
Meet with WAAC to discuss management activities and address emerging issues	Met with WAAC once in 2012 and twice in 2013.	Held productive WAAC meetings; some change in membership due to vacancies and restructuring.
Maintain five elk and bighorn sheep feed sites to control wintering populations.	Fed approx. 4,000+ animals per day through the winter. Used up all of old stored hay in 2012.	Moderate winter in 2012; fed late into March; mild winter in 2013 and only fed for 1 month. Currently there is a large surplus of hay.
Maintain 32 miles of elk fence on wildlife area.	Staff inspected and repaired fence annually. Completed repair on several failing sections on Cowiche Unit.	Large portions of fence in poor condition and in need of replacement. Seeking capital funding for replacement.
Maintain winter range vehicle and early spring area closures.	Closures reduce disturbance to wintering wildlife when animal energy levels are low. Eyes in the Woods (EITW) remote camera system	Continued coordination with enforcement and efforts with EITW to use cameras and patrols will maintain effectiveness of closure.

	installed and EITW emphasis with enforcement have reduced elk disturbance.	Working within region to standardize closures.
Perform mandatory weed control on wildlife area and coordinate with YCNWB.	Staff controlled Scotch thistle, knapweed, and numerous other weeds species on 5000+ acres annually.	Increased land ownership continues to be a challenge despite additional staffing and grants. Diffuse knapweed and Dalmatian toadflax continue to expand.
Maintain golden eagle nest closures as needed.	Eagle activity was monitored annually and a closure installed around active nests.	In 2012-13 nest was not located in main climbing area. Closure area was clearly marked and avoided.
Inventory road system under RMAP for 12 new sections in Rock Creek Unit to determine priority of <u>maintenance needs relating to fish passage issues.</u>	Inventory completed in 2012. Two fish passage barriers removed and road maintenance and abandonment completed as funding allows	Work is continuing as funding allows. Work on Rock Creek will be a challenge due to access issues from Forest Service Roads.
Coordinate with TNC to complete treatments for the Oak Creek Forest Restoration Project using grant funding.	Completed BA for non-commercial thinning in 2013. Thinned over 300 acres using contract crew. BA for commercial thinning and prescribed fire will be completed in 2014.	Continuing with project implementation. All past grant funds have been exhausted. On schedule for commercial timber sale in 2015, followed by prescribed burning.
Seek additional funding to complete Oak Creek Forest Restoration Project.	Oak Creek Project Ranked #1 in state and received a \$380,000 RCO State Lands Restoration Grant in 2012.	Currently implementing grant. Delays in completing work may mean we need to request and extension.
Maintain active partnership in Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative	Active member; attend meetings as needed.	Continue to work with Tapash to implement additional projects.
Draft new Oak Creek Management Plan; add management of newly acquired properties	Process has not started yet.	Oak Creek scheduled to begin planning process in June 2015.
Work with Cowiche Canyon Conservancy to manage inholdings on Snow Mt. Ranch.	Continue to coordinate on management needs. Signed Sageworks Partnership Agreement in 2013.	Continue to coordinate under Sageworks Partnership Agreement.
Monitor grazing permit on Worrell Ranch. Complete invoices and range evaluation.	Completed annual monitoring in 2012. New permit issued in 2013 for 3 years; completed all monitoring in 2013 and 2014.	Grazing utilization continues to be low. Permit expires in 2015, calls for no grazing in 2015. Work with permittee on new permit; modify if needed.
Continue restoration efforts	No new seeding completed.	Grasses and shrubs continue to

following Cowiche Mill Fire and continue with annual photo monitoring.	Continued with annual weed control. Photo points completed in 2012 and 2013.	recover. Area still dominated by annual grasses. Photo points will be monitored every 2 years.
Develop new use of kiosk boards at Oak Creek, working with TNC and CCC.	Not completed. No information on what the design or plan was for kiosks.	Re-evaluate.
Continue to work with WDFW staff and landowner to resolve access issues to Mud Lake/Sanford Pasture	Project moving forward. Signed agreement with landowner for land exchange. Currently working appraisals, etc.	Continue to work with landowner and negotiate on the land exchange.
Provide guidance and liaison with WEC volunteer group to staff visitor center.	WEC continued to staff visitor center and provide education to thousands of public each year. Another 2-year Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grant successfully awarded in 2013.	Continue working with WEC and assist in applying for ALEA grant in 2015.
Utilize existing funding to install gates on non-green dot roads and update reader boards	Gate and reader board installation completed in 2014	Continue with additional gate installations as funding allows.
Pursue additional funding for restoration projects through grants.	Awarded RMEF grants in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Awarded NWTF grant in 2014	All grants completed on time. Continue to apply for grants annually.

## **New Strategies**

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies and activities to address agency strategic plan goals and objectives, considering reasons the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species presence, and public issues and concerns. New strategies have not been identified during this reporting period.

## 2014-15 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area are listed below.

Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Meet with WAAC to discuss management activities and address emerging issues.
- 2) Maintain five elk and bighorn sheep winter feeding sites to control wintering populations.
- 3) Maintain 32 miles of elk fence on the Oak Creek Wildlife Area.
- 4) Maintain winter range vehicle closure and early spring area closure.
- 5) Perform mandatory weed control on Oak Creek Wildlife Area and coordinate with YCNWB.
- 6) Maintain seasonal golden eagle closures along Tieton River as needed.
- 7) Continue implementation of Oak Creek RMAP work. Coordinate with Engineering and the Yakima Construction Shop to complete all needed work.
- 8) Coordinate the completion of forest restoration treatments for the Oak Creek Forest Restoration Project. Utilize RCO WWRP State Lands Restoration Grant.
- 9) Coordinate with Yakama Nation on implementation of the Oak Creek Large Wood Replenishment Project. Develop similar project on SF Cowiche Creek.
- 10) Recruit and fill Oak Creek Forester position for the wildlife area. Assist with development of forest restoration projects. Seek funding to implement priority projects.
- 11) Maintain active participation in Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative.
- 12) Actively participate in the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan development.
- 13) Actively participate in the Sageworks Partnership Agreement. Coordinate with partners in project development and implementation.
- 14) Monitor grazing permit on Worrell Ranch; complete invoices and bi-annual range evaluation. Renew grazing permit in 2015.
- 15) Work with volunteer groups (RMEF, SCI, WEC, etc.) on volunteer projects across the wildlife area, including motorized trail improvements in the Rock Creek Unit.
- 16) Work with regional and Olympia staff to explore options for developing a shooting range on the wildlife area.
- 17) Develop kiosks discussing forest health and Oak Creek project, working with The Nature Conservancy.
- 18) Continue to work with WDFW staff and landowner to resolve access issues to Mud Lake/Sanford Pasture.
- 19) Liaison with the Oak Creek Wildlife Education Corp (WEC) to submit a new 2-year ALEA grant to support volunteer operations in 2015.
- 20) Utilize existing funding to install gates on non-green dot roads and
- 21) Update green dot reader boards.



Cowiche Elk  
*By Oak Creek Staff*

- 22) Pursue additional funding for restoration projects through grants (RMEF, NWTF, RCO, etc.). Implement awarded grants in a timely manner.



### **Wildlife Area Advisory Group (WAAC) Input**

Oak Creek Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) meetings were held on March 19, 2013 and September 24, 2013; and a WAAC meeting was held on September 4, 2014.

**The following issues and inputs were addressed at the March 19, 2013 meeting.** Member comments are in italics.

#### Attendee's

Don Witke-WEC  
Mike Tobin-North Yakima CD-visitor  
Dick Jacobson- YCNWB  
Betsy Bloomfield-CCC  
Mike Hale-RMEF  
Sue Ranger-visitor  
Joan St Hilaire-USFS  
Gail Thornton-grazing interests  
Tim Kopf-DNR-in place of Ken McNamee  
Jim Walkenhauer-hunting interests

WDFW staff in attendance: Ross Huffman

Issue: Renewal of Worrel Ranch Grazing Permit. The one page summary of the grazing plan was distributed and changes in timing, duration, and AUM's were discussed. CAG members present discussed the permittee's background (quality operators), options for fencing, and coordination on improving monitoring in the area.

Response: Based on input from the CAG and a District Team meeting WDFW renewed the grazing permit for 3 years.

The remainder of the meeting updates on current projects. There were no comments or input from the CAG.

**The following issues and inputs were addressed at the September 24, 2013 meeting.**

Attendee's:

Rick Barlin-RMEF

Jerry and Kay Clark-Back Country Horseman of Central Washington

Jim Walkenhauer-Hunting Interests

Ron Rutherford-Motorized Recreation

Joan St.Hilaire-USFS

Dick Jacobson-Yakima County Noxious Weed Board

Ken McNamee- DNR

Matt Dahlgreen (for Reese Lolley)-The Nature Conservancy

WDFW Staff in attendance: Ross Huffman-Oak Creek Wildlife Area Manager, Cindi Confer-Morris- Wenas Wildlife Area Manager

Issue: Rock Creek Unit road management plan. Ross presented the plan to abandon 14 miles of forest roads and maintain about 67 miles. The plan would also close unauthorized ORV trails and maintain access to the USFS motorized trail system. CAG members discussed the need for closing road correctly to actually block access and issues with weeds. There was also interest in making roads passable for non-motorized use after being abandoned.

Response: WDFW will implement the road management plan on the Rock Creek Unit.

Issue: Oak Creek Road Management. Three road segments are being proposed for closures on the Oak Creek Unit. Windy Point road would be turned into an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) hunter road. Upper end of Bear Canyon would be abandoned and a road in Teepee Springs would be closed seasonally during hunting season. The CAG members discussed using seasonal closures and adding ADA hunter access in the Rock Creek Unit.

Response: WDFW will implement the road management proposal on the Oak Creek Unit.

Issue: Yakama Nation stream restoration project on Oak Creek. The tribe would like to put more wood in the lower 4 miles of Oak Creek. Most of the wood would come from the Oak Creek Project. The project is in preliminary stages of design. There was general discussion from the CAG about the lack of wood and how this is more of a rehabilitation project than a restoration project.

Response: WDFW is working with the Yakama Nation to implement this project over the next few years.

Issues: Update on winter closure, Oak Creek Forest Restoration Project, and the Mud Lake Road access and flood damage to Garrett Canyon roads. WDFW and DNR worked to quickly open the Mud Lake Road from the top of Cleman's Mt. WDFW is going to try to repair some of the upper roads in Garrett Canyon; however, the Garrett Canyon road is completely destroyed and

cannot be repaired. The CAG discussed the Garrett Canyon road and the need to close it. There was also a general discussion on the winter closures.

Response: WDFW is abandoning the roads in the Garrett Canyon Area and is currently working to identify the best timing for the winter closures.

**The following issues were addressed at the September 4, 2014 meeting.**

Attendee's:

Jerry and Kay Clark- Back Country Horsemen of Central Washington  
Gabe Swan (Alternate)-Yakama Nation  
Jeff Barbee-Yakima Fly Fishers  
Reese Lolley-The Nature Conservancy  
Ken McNamee- DNR  
Ron Rutherford-Motorized Recreation  
Joan St. Hilaire-USFS  
Gail Thronton-Grazing Interests  
Larry Robinson-Audubon

WDFW staff in attendance: Ross Huffman and Bruce Berry

Issue: Review of the 2014 Management Plan Update. There were a lot of general comments and requests for clarification from WAAC members. The group discussed grazing, land acquisition, grants, winter range closures and ORV damage.

Response: The management plan update was finalized with no changes.

Issue: Modification to the Emerick Grazing Permit on the Worrell Ranch property of Cowiche Unit; the current grazing permit requires a rest period in 2015. Ross shared information on utilization the past two grazing seasons and issues with elk use on the Emerick's private property. Ross made recommendation to modify the permit to graze the western pasture only in 2015 (defer grazing east pasture), in order to not overgraze adjacent private property that is heavily used by the elk. WAAC members discussed what high quality livestock operators the Emmericks are and options for the permit modifications.

Response: WDFW is planning to modify the final year of the permit to allow for some livestock grazing in the western pasture.

**Contacts:**

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**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/)