



SINLAHEKIN WILDLIFE AREA 2007 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Photo: D. Swedberg

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm that provides management direction for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area in Okanogan County Washington. 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 2006 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2007.

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Forde Lake washout

Updates/Changes

In 2006 during a very warm period with rain and a large snow pack in May, caused flooding resulting in: 1) overflow at the Forde Lake dam resulting in damage to the “Emergency overflow” channels at Forde Lake and Conner Lake; 2) the county owned Sinlahekin Road next to Forde Lake was washed out resulting in closure of the Sinlahekin Road to through traffic for nearly 2 months; 3) portions of Sinlahekin Creek campground had new channels created by the flood waters running through; 4) culverts on Sinlahekin Road were washed out where the road crosses Sinlahekin Creek near Sinlahekin Creek campground north of Blue Lake.

A grant was developed, presented and approved for funded for a constructing a trail, about 7 miles in length, from Forde Lake south around the west side of Blue Lake, crossing the Sinlahekin Valley Road and continuing southward along the east side of the valley and ending about a mile north of Fish Lake. The Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) – Nonmotorized Category Program grant provides \$100,000 for this project. The volunteers from the Okanogan Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen worked 3 days contributing 157 work hours, 52 travel hours, 808 miles driven plus oil and gas for chainsaws. They covered nearly 4 miles of trail clearing brush and trees including about a mile of extremely heavy brush, trees and downed logs.



Okanogan Backcountry Horsemen

A Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project (WHIP) from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) approved in 2005 for installing about a mile of fence to keep cattle out of a wetland area and planting water birch, was given the OK to proceed in late June 2006 after a cultural resources survey was completed.



Silver-bordered fritillary

A volunteer spent 2 months (July & August) living and working at the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area conducting butterfly transects documenting 1400 observations on 62 species including an ID number, species, sex, UTM coordinates, date, route, route number, and weather. From this work 6 new butterfly species were recorded for the Sinlahekin. Additionally the volunteer performed detailed searches at a number of sites for the larval plant host, marsh violet (*Viola palustris*), of a state candidate species, the silver-bordered fritillary butterfly (*Boloria selene*) on the

Sinlahekin. Maps of the violet populations were developed. A report of all the volunteer's work was completed along with the entry of all the transect data into a spreadsheet. Some of the butterflies, collected as voucher specimens, were pinned, labeled and added to the Sinlahekin Butterfly collection.

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area manager partnered with the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area manager in developing a proposal and presentation to acquire about 525 acres of private land bordering and between the 2 wildlife areas. The proposal was presented to the IAC WWRP Review Panel and ranked number 2 for funding.

Two Central Washington University Geography students spent 6 weeks on an internship at the Sinlahekin. They continued to collect data, add to and refine the Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island and Chiliwist GIS projects.



CWU Geography Interns

The Tripod Complex Fire took time for planning and coordinating with USFS and DNR concerning use of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area for staging, use of access sites for water for dust abatement, use of two sites for equipment storage and parking.

Also due to the impacts of the Tripod Complex Fire, cattlemen lost part or all of their summer range. The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area provided emergency grazing for a neighboring cattleman/landowner, who is also a sharecropper on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

New Issues

From the silver-bordered fritillary and marsh violet mapping work it was discovered that the aforementioned WHIP grant, if implemented, could negatively impact the violets and the silver-bordered fritillary butterflies that depend on them at one of the sites. Further this site has the largest population of the state candidate butterflies on the Sinlahekin. The concern lies in the fact that cattle were fenced out of an area in Yakima County where silver-bordered fritillaries occurred by the hundreds along with their larval plant host violets. The result of excluding cattle was a precipitous decline of the violets and the butterflies due to plant succession. In the absence to cattle the other vegetation crowded out the violets resulting in very few butterflies remaining.

A process to develop a Habitat Conservation Plan for all WDFW wildlife areas, including the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area was initiated. The Sinlahekin, Chiliwist, and Driscoll Island Wildlife Areas in addition to the other wildlife areas in Okanogan County were selected to be the first in for inventory and analysis in the HCP process.

The 9-month FTE for weed control efforts on the Sinlahekin was reduced to a 6-month FTE with the other 3 months going to the Methow Wildlife Area. This has reduced the capacity for weed control on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Over 10 miles of fence were repaired, thus contributing to a reduction of a large backlog of fences needing repair.

A significant impact in weed control was made on over 100 acres that were searched for houndstongue. Residual houndstongue plants were bagged and young-of-the-year plants dug up as a result of the efforts of an employee through the Senior Employment Program.

Status Report of 2006 Performance Measures

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 2007.

The SWA performance measures for 2006 included:

2006 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2007 Related Activity/ Comments
Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract	Completed	
Renew grazing leases and agricultural leases expiring on or before December 31, 2006	Completed - One grazing permit was overlooked that expired in 2005	The permit paperwork was completed and submitted for signatures.
Complete Fire Regime Condition Classification (FRCC) mapping	Not done	Will continue to work on this as time permits
In coordination with Lands program staff, negotiate new agreement with DNR for use of the Highlands Fire Camp Site.	Not done	WDFW & DNR are in the process of negotiating a land trade. The Highlands Camp site is on the list for potential trade.
Prepare and implement a fuels treatment project in area logged winter of 2003-04 in preparation for coordinated fuels treatment and Rx burn with USFS	Discussions were held with USFS regarding use of portions of the SWA as part of their fuels treatment and logging which needs to be completed before an Rx burn can happen	Continue to work with USFS to facilitate getting their fuels treatment completed so Rx burn can take place ASAP
Survey and/or mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary.	Not done	No funds available to survey boundary

Build, rebuild or repair a minimum of 10 miles of fence.	Completed	
Initiate and complete as much as possible the Connors Lake to Forde Lake and Forde Lake to Blue Lake trails development projects.	Okanogan Chapter of The Backcountry Horsemen (BCH) spent 2 weekends clearing trail on approximately 4 miles of trail. Worked with Engineering Section on kiosk and viewing blind designs.	Continue to work with BCH to finish trail clearing. Continue to work with Engineering Section to complete trail projects.
Develop protocol and procedures to facilitate implementation of prescribed burns.	Completed	
Apply for at least one grant through FNAWS, Mule Deer Foundation for habitat assessment and enhancement work.	Completed	Assisted Jim Olson with WWRP grant application development and I presented the proposal to IAC Review Board. Proposal ranked #2
Complete installation of reader boards at all 7 entrances to the SWA.	Completed	
Map with GPS and GIS all weed infestations on the SWA, such that a layer depicting a map of each weed species is included in the SWA GIS project.	Many weed infestations were GPSed with data entered into GIS project to create maps	This effort will be an ongoing from year to year as new weed infestations are found.
Grid, GPS and map Dalmatian Toadflax, Russian knapweed, and other weeds	Ellensburg WCC crew that was used to grid for weeds was unavailable when gridding was optimal	Efforts will continue in 2007
Initiate and complete WHIP grant project for Doheny Basin riparian protection and Water birch planting to provide Sharp-tailed grouse winter forage	The project was not completed due to a thriving population of a state candidate butterfly species, Silver-bordered fritillary, was discovered at the site and the larval plant host, marsh violet, was found to be benefiting from grazing which reduced competition from Reed Canary grass.	The project will be modified to accommodate concerns for the butterfly and larval host plants and completed.
Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan	Plans reviewed and updated, but not complete	Completion of plans will occur as time permits, e.g., species lists, weed mgmt plan
Complete performance	Completed	

evaluations		
Complete layers on SWA GIS project including Fence, Fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts, campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards, power poles.	New layers were created by and many layers refined by 2 CWU interns during the summer of 2006	This effort will continue again during the summer of 2007. Interns have been interviewed.
Visit all known Dalmatian Toadflax and Russian knapweed sites at least twice and initiate appropriate treatment.	Completed	
Do Stewardship inspection of Greg and Carol James' Conservation Easement	Undone – Inadequate time	Rescheduled to be completed in 2007
Initiate and complete Mule Deer Foundation grant for mule deer habitat enhancement	Undone – Inadequate funding	Grant requires a 1:1 dollar match and have not had any luck in finding another \$8,000 to match the grant
Complete National Fire Management Plan grant from USFWS for Sinlahekin Fuels Management and Planning	Completed Fuels mgmt and treatment plan	
Initiate and complete self guided tour project	A large part of the self guided tour has been completed but there is a lot left to do	Complete the project in 2007
Complete projects for which grants were awarded	WHIP, Mule Deer Foundation grants were not completed. The National Fire Plan grant was completed.	Complete the WHIP grant and continue to search for matching funds for the Mule Deer Foundation grant
Work with the WDFW Contracts Office to obtain a contract with Okanogan County jail to allow use of trustee work crews to cut and pull weeds and do other projects	Completed	
Use Okanogan County Jail Trustees for weed control and fence maintenance efforts	They were used throughout the summer	They will continue to be used throughout 2007
Work with private, county, state and federal land managers to promote use of prescribed fire, in a coordinated effort on all lands, to improve wildlife habitat,	A North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Workshop was organized and facilitated in Sept 2006 with over 50 people representing 28 organizations attending and participating.	Work in this area will be continued.

i.e., North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council	The North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council was formed and a Steering Committee was formed.	
Apply for grants and other funding opportunities consistent with planned priorities to supplement funding	A new employee was hired under the Senior Community Service Employment Program. This person searched for specific weeds, cut growing plants and cut and bagged plants gone to seed and mapped areas searched and houndstongue infestations found	The senior employee's efforts contributed significantly towards reducing the houndstongue infestation on the SWA

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.

No New Strategies were or have been identified

2007 Performance Measures

2007 performance measures for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Complete Connor to Forde Lake trail
- 2) Complete Forde Lake to south Blue Lake trail
- 3) Complete Doheny WHIP project
- 4) Complete Mule Deer Foundation Rx burn project
- 5) Rebuild and repair a minimum of 5 miles of fence
- 6) Grid for weeds on 640 acres minimum
- 7) Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract
- 8) Renew grazing leases and agricultural leases expiring on or before December 31, 2007
- 9) Prepare and implement a fuels treatment project in area logged winter of 2003-04 in preparation for coordinated fuels treatment and Rx burn with USFS
- 10) Complete Fire Regime Condition Classification (FRCC) mapping

- 11) Survey and/or mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary
- 12) Locate by gridding (see #6) and map, with GPS and GIS, all class B designate weed, e.g., Dalmatian toadflax, Russian knapweed and other weed infestations on the SWA, such that a layer depicting a map of each weed species is included in the SWA GIS project
- 13) Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan
- 14) Complete performance evaluations
- 15) Complete layers on SWA GIS project including Fence, Fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts, campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards, power poles.
- 16) Visit all known Dalmatian Toadflax and Russian knapweed sites at least twice to monitor and initiate appropriate treatment.
- 17) Do Stewardship inspection of Greg and Carol James' Conservation Easement
- 18) Complete self-guided tour project
- 19) Use Okanogan County Jail Trustees for weed control and fence maintenance efforts
- 20) Work with private, county, state and federal land managers to promote use of prescribed fire, in a coordinated effort on all lands, to improve wildlife habitat, i.e., North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council
- 21) Apply for at least one grant or other funding opportunities consistent with planned priorities to supplement funding

Citizens Advisory Group Input

An East Okanogan County Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on January 18, 2007 to review Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island and Chiliwist Management Plans and management progress and address any new issues or input on existing issues. Those in attendance included representatives from The Back Country Horsemen, Okanogan Wildlife Council, Okanogan Valley Land Council, 2 neighbors of the Sinlahekin – 1 sharecropper & 1 grazing permittee, Conservation Northwest, 2 Forest Contractors, Wenatchee Valley College – Omak, Okanogan Cattlemen's Association, Okanogan County Noxious Weed Office, USFS and a private citizen interested in the management of the Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island and Chiliwist Wildlife Areas.

The following new input/issues were addressed at the meeting.

Issue: Weed management plan implementation is not realistic to try to get all vehicles coming on to the wildlife areas washed and other weed control techniques implemented.

Response: This concern is valid and recognized. However, by having these techniques listed as a means to try to minimize spread of weeds, it is hoped that awareness is elevated regarding the seriousness of weeds and the need for weed control.

Issue: Management plans need a stronger commitment to grazing and goals and objectives of grazing.

Response: Commitment to grazing is as strong as can be. Grazing has inadvertently helped protect a population of state candidate butterflies – the silver-bordered fritillary butterfly by keeping down the reed canary grass that will crowd out the butterfly larval plant host – the marsh violet. A grant proposal is being developed to try to do some research on benefits of grazing for the violets and the silver-bordered butterflies that depend on them.

Issue: Great weed management plan.

Response: Thank you.

Issue: Weed wash is available 1 day of hunting season and 1 day of fishing season.

Response: This will definitely help increase awareness about weeds and weed control of people out for opening day of fishing season.

Issue: Controlled burning efforts are good.

Response: Efforts will continue to try to accomplish more. The North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council was formed recently to help increase public awareness of the need and benefits of prescribed burning.

Issue: Take adaptive management approach in treating riparian areas with fire.

Response: An adaptive management approach is being taken with all management activities to maximize opportunities to learn the affects of management techniques and how to adjust techniques to better achieve desired outcomes.

Issue: Do aspen restoration.

Response: Aspen restoration will occur as part of the planned fuels management and fire regime restoration efforts.

At the conclusion of the meeting those present were advised that another meeting would be scheduled in February to review the Scotch Creek Management Plan and for a presentation on the wildlife area Habitat Conservation Plan.

Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

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

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