



SINLAHEKIN WILDLIFE AREA 2012 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management

Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/

that provides management direction for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area (SWA). The original Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan provides management direction for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area (SWA) 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 biannually 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.

Updates/Changes

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project – Phase 1

Implementation of the mechanical fuels treatment component of the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project – Phase 1 (SERP-1) began in late December of 2010. This \$750,000 grant awarded in 2009 through the State Lands Restoration (SLR) category of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) and administered by the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), provides funding for fuels reduction and reconfiguration via mechanical thinning, e.g., commercial logging and hand thinning and prescribed burning on approximately 2,000 acres



Photo by Justin Haug

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north of Blue Lake. An additional \$75,000 grant was awarded through the Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS), Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) for timber stand improvement and slash treatment, i.e., fuels reconfiguration on 220 acres west of Sinlahekin Road from near headquarters to near Sinlahekin Creek Road. This grant was a match for the SERP-1 grant. Implementation of the NRCS WHIP project began in November 2010 with hand thinning dense stands of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir saplings.

Since initiation of the mechanical thinning, approximately 180 acres were mechanically thinned using a cut-to-length processor and self-loading forwarder removing 3,408 mbf. Also, approximately 125 acres have been thinned using contracted and agency crews. Prescribed burning was also initiated in the spring of 2011 with over 530 acres prescribed burned in the spring, and 350 acres burned in the fall. Burn units have been laid out and plans written to prescribe burn an additional 500 acres. Additionally this grant provided funding to hire a 5-person burn crew that not prepared for and conducted prescribed burns and also completed hand thinning projects.

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project – Phase 2

A second grant of \$245,000 was received from the Recreation and Conservation Office under the State Lands Restoration category for Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration – Phase 2 (SERP-2) for the continuation of SERP-1.

Geographically SERP-2 extends southward from SERP-1 and targets about 700 acres. Central Washington University's Archaeological Services conducted the Cultural Resources Survey for SERP-2. The final cultural resources report was



submitted to Washington Department of Archaeology and Historical Preservation (DAHP) and Colville Confederated Tribal Office of Historical Preservation (TOHP) for review. The thinning prescription developed for SERP-1 was used for marking trees. SERP-2 is scheduled to be completed by June of 2014.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area continues to collaborate with the Tonasket School District, specifically with Scott Olson, 4th Grade Elementary School Teacher, in his educational efforts involving photo monitoring (see picture next pg). This educational experience is extremely valuable from many aspects by involving students in activities that contribute to development of critical thinking, photo interpretation, comparative analysis, paying attention to detail, development of interests in local history, seasonal plant phenology, botany, seasonal landscape changes, plant and animal community associations, plant and animal identification, animal identification by sign and sound, teamwork, communication, problem solving, computer skills, GPS skills, compass skills,

photographic skills, outdoor oriented experience/exercise and public/peer presentations. This multi-faceted environmental learning begins from the moment students receive 100+ year old photos in the class room and studying the photos for information and clues. The students then take a field trip to the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area to locate the photo-points in the field, retake the photos, document GPS coordinates of the photo-points, and note the azimuth of the direction of the photos. At each photo point, while on the field trip they briefly discuss, identify and note the plants and plant communities at the photo point site and the surrounding landscape and compare these apparent changes relative to what they observe in the historic photos. These observations are the basis for more detailed classroom discussions concerning the observed landscape changes and what happened that caused the changes.

Additionally animal species seen or heard, and sign observed are identified and noted with further classroom discussion regarding relationships of plant communities, habitat and wildlife.

Ultimately students develop papers and presentations based on discussions and observations from their experiences.

These papers and presentations are presented to peer groups and the public.

Thus the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area is providing opportunities as an outdoor classroom where students get hands-on

real world experience. For his work Mr. Olson was recognized as one of two Teachers of the Year for 2009 by the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, and also as Teacher of the Year for 2009 by the Washington Association of Conservation Districts. Additional information can be found at these websites:

<http://www.classroomearth.org/node/945> <http://sites.google.com/site/sinlahekinheadquarters/home>

http://www.nickjr.com/teachers/assets/Teacher_Grant.doc

<http://www.wenatcheeworld.com/news/2010/jan/11/teacher-honored-for-conservation-efforts/>



The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area partnered with **Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship (IRIS)** in a program called “**Witnessing Change**”. The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area is one of 3 sites in North Central Washington participating in this photo-monitoring project, where the public is invited to visit designated sites on the Sinlahekin where photo-points have been established with initial photos taken and placed on a website <http://www.witnessingchange.org/> Interested individuals can get the information about the location of these sites and visit them to take photos, upload them to the website and be a part of “witness” change taking place by comparing changes evident in photos over time.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area staff continues to collaborate with the **Okanogan County Noxious Weed Office** through participation in the **Okanogan County Coordinated Weed Management Area** collaborative as well as annual and biennial “**Weeds Cross Borders**” tours. SWA staff has assisted the Okanogan County Noxious Weed Office with field searches in areas where a newly identified Class A weed was identified and search assistance was needed.

The **Okanogan Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen** has continued to take on maintenance of about eight miles of hiking and horseback trails on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

Management

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area GIS project continues to be developed and expanded with data collection, e.g. fence location and maintenance, weed location and control efforts, native flora and fauna, roads, trails, fire scars, water control structures, cultural resource sites, etc., for incorporation into the Sinlahekin GIS database. This effort began in 2003 with contributions from WDFW staff, interns and volunteers resulting in a substantial amount of information gathered. Data from this effort continue to be invaluable in planning and management of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

Renewal of the Ayers and Allemandi grazing permits was completed. A new grazing permit was completed for Buzzard Lake.

A conference call was held with a number of agencies involved to begin the process of addressing the issue of Sinlahekin Creek movement in the alluvial fan. The Sinlahekin County Road washes out annually, affecting fish passage, water rights and the Sinlahekin Creek Campground. Personnel representing Okanogan County Public Works, Department of Ecology, Department of Fish & Wildlife Habitat Program, Fish Program, and Wildlife Program plus Sinlahekin staff were on the call. This issue is impacting the county road, Sinlahekin Creek Campground, fish passage, flood plain function and riparian function.

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration – Phase 1 Small Mammal Survey

In the fall of 2010, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) funded a Small Mammal Survey to collect small mammal data on pre-treatment, i.e., pre-thinned logged and burned areas on the wildlife area. A total of 52 - 100 meter transects were randomly assigned to treatment, i.e., to be thinned and burned and control units. Each of the 52 transects had 6 points each 20 meters apart. At each point a Tomahawk trap and a Sherman trap were set. Traps were monitored daily for four consecutive trap-nights and data collected regarding species caught and trap conditions with traps reset. Additionally vegetation plots were completed at each point on all transects. At each of the six points on each transect, a circular vegetation plot 10 meters in diameter was established. Within each of these plots data were collected regarding the overstory and understory and related vegetation composition and structure.

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration – Sinlahekin and Saraspkin Creek Riparian Surveys

In the spring of 2010, TNC funded a Riparian Survey on Sinlahekin and Saraspkin Creek to determine relationship of aquatic insect species, their distribution and abundance relative to vegetative communities adjacent to the stream. Dr. Karl Polivka, Research Fisheries Biologist at the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station in Wenatchee.

New Issues

Discover Pass signs were posted on all entrances, campground, and access areas throughout the Sinlahekin, Carter Mountain and Horse Spring Coulee Wildlife Areas. These signs are highly vulnerable targets for vandals and need to be checked frequently for damage. The Discover Pass

is required for vehicle access or parking on Washington State Parks and Department of Natural Resources recreation lands.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Weed Control

Several weed control techniques were employed including clipping and bagging seed heads from hounds-tongue and puncture vine, using a shovel to sever the tap root of hounds-tongue and puncture vine, and pulling the out of the ground before seeds are set. Weeds with seeds that are pulled and bagged are later incinerated.

Sprayed (using mostly truck mounted boom spraying) nearly 25 acres of weeds throughout the SWA covering nearly 100 acres of WDFW land. Major target weeds this year were sweet clover, Russian knapweed, hounds-tongue, St. John's wort, puncturevine, Dalmatian toadflax and bladder senna.

Cultivation using a tractor and disk plus herbicides were used on food plots to control weeds.

Biological weed control is an integral component to Sinlahekin weed control effort. During routine field work; the presence, abundance and effectiveness of bio-control agents are noted. In cases where bio-agents are abundant at one site they may be collected and moved to a site needing supplementation. Generally bio-agents are doing an excellent job of controlling diffuse knapweed, with less effectiveness shown on St. John's wort (goatweed), and Russian thistle. In the fall of 2010 WSU Extension bio-control program provided bio-control agents for field bindweed aka morning glory.

Two new weed species; wild four o'clock (A Class A Noxious weed) and Scotch thistle, were found on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area in 2010-11. Currently the wild four o'clock is only found in an isolated patch near Cecile Creek Road, and was treated in 2010 by clipping and collecting seed heads, then cutting and chemically treating the stems. In 2011 the site was checked several times and spot sprayed as needed. A single Scotch thistle plant was located along Sinlahekin Road near the Sinlahekin Creek Campground. The plant was pulled and bagged before it set seed.

In the fall of 2010, both Fish Lake and Schalow Pond were treated by the Fish Management Program with Rotenone to remove undesirable, warm-water fishes which compete with trout for food. The lake was be replanted with catchable rainbow trout in the spring.

Status Report of 2010-11 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 2012-13.

2010- 2011 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2012-13 Related Activity/ Comments
Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract	Completed	
Complete the displays for the trails overlooking Blue Lake	Not done	Will continue to work on this as time permits
Continue to implement the WWRP and WHIP grants regarding fuels reduction and prescribed burning	In progress	Phase 1 is nearly complete and the WHIP grant will be completed by June 30, 2012. Phase 2 of the SERP has begun.
Renew grazing permits and agricultural leases expiring on or before December 31, 2012	Completed	All permits and leases have been renewed
Survey and/or mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary.	Not done	No funds available to survey boundary
Seek funding for a complete fire history analysis of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area	Partially completed	An analysis has been completed on portions of the SWA related to the SERP-1 and SERP-2 project
Look for funding to produce new Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Maps	Need funding	
Organize fencing supplies and build structures to better house various equipment/supplies	Partially complete	Organization has been mostly completed but additional structures need to be made to secure equipment/supplies.
Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan	Plans reviewed and updated, but not complete (fire management, weed control)	Completion of plans will occur as time permits, e.g., species lists, weed mgmt plan
Complete performance evaluations	Completed	
Complete layers on SWA GIS project including fence, fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts,	Ongoing new layers were created and refined throughout 2010-11.	This effort will continue thru 2012-13 with GIS project being updated as information become available and desired.

campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards, power poles.		Metadata needs to be updated on SWA data catalog.
Visit all known Dalmatian toadflax and Russian knapweed sites at least twice and initiate appropriate treatment.	Partially completed	Various smaller sites were not checked in 2011. A more thorough application is planned for 2012. This needs much more attention that it received.
Stewardship inspection of Greg and Carol James' Conservation Easement	Completed by Okanogan Land Trust	Inspections of easements henceforth will be performed by the Okanogan Land Trust.
Complete the self-guided tour of the Sinlahekin.	Partially completed. Additional photo-points need locating and contemporary photos taken. Additionally final authorization from WSU and Okanogan County Historical Society to use their photos	Complete locating of photo-points, taking contemporary photos and placement of old and contemporary photos on WDFW Website.
Identify a minimum of 5 miles of fence to rebuild and repair	Incomplete – rebuilt or repaired just over 1 miles of fence.	Continue to rebuild/replace fence throughout 2012-13
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	Ongoing - The Washington State Prescribed Fire Council (WSPFC) was initiated in 2011 to pursue efforts toward facilitating the use of prescribed fire statewide.	Work with the WSPFC will continue in 2012-13. A conference attended by over 110 individuals was scheduled and held in Wenatchee in early March 2012.

New Strategies

The prescribed burn team on the Sinlahekin has been working with the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area near Kettle Falls to assist in implementing prescribed burns on recently logged areas, to reduce fuel loading, restore fire effects and fire by-products to the fire dependent ecosystem.

2012-13 Performance Measures

The 2012-13 performance measures for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Complete the displays for the trails overlooking Blue Lake
- 2) Continue to implement and/or wrap-up WWRP and WHIP grants regarding fuels reduction and prescribed burning
- 3) Identify a minimum of 5 miles of fence and rebuild and repair
- 4) Renew grazing leases and agricultural leases expiring on or before January 2012 and December 2013.
- 5) Continue to seek funding to better store and organize equipment and supplies.
- 6) Grid for weeds on 640 acres minimum
- 7) Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract
- 8) Look for funding to produce new Sinlahekin Wildlife Area maps
- 9) Continue to seek funding for a complete fire history analysis of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area
- 10) Survey/ mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary
- 11) 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
- 12) Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan
- 13) Complete performance evaluations
- 14) Complete and or update layers on SWA GIS project including fence, fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts, campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards and power poles.
- 15) Visit all known wild 4'o'clock, Dalmatian toadflax, puncture vine and Russian knapweed sites at least twice to monitor and initiate appropriate treatment.
- 16) Install trail markers on Conner Lake to Hunters Camp Trail with Coulee Creek Trail and install more frequent trail markers to increase frequency of markers to 1 every 1/8th mile.
- 17) Complete self-guided tour project by acquiring permission to use photos from WSU and Okanogan County Historical Society and putting tour documents on the agency website
- 18) Use Okanogan County Jail Trustees for weed control and fence maintenance efforts as well as volunteers, e.g., master hunter candidates, Americorp groups, and others willing to help on the wildlife area.



Northern Pygmy Owl: Photo by Justin Haug

- 19) 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., Washington State Prescribed Fire Council
- 20) Apply for at least one grant or other funding opportunities consistent with planned priorities to supplement funding
- 21) Develop management plans for Carter Mountain, Buzzard Lake and Horse Spring Coulee Wildlife Areas.
- 22) Work with surrounding wildlife areas to implement prescribed burning as a tool for ecosystem management.

Citizens Advisory Group Input

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on January 25, 2012 to review Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island and Chiliwist Management Plans, management progress and address any new issues or input on existing issues. The following participants attended this CAG meeting:

Name	Affiliation
Dale Swedberg	WDFW
Larry Hudson	OCNWCB
Greg Bennett	Okanogan County Fly Club
Russell Reed	Okanogan County Fly Club
Nathan Wehmeyer	BLM
Garry Schalla	Okanogan Land Trust
John Williams	Loomis Community Club
Kirsten Williams	Loomis Community Club
Trygve Culp	OVCBCH
Peggy Swanberg	OVCBCH
Dave Swanberg	OVCBCH
Rick Lind	Citizen
Matt Marsh	USFS
Dan Whitley	Gebbers Cattle Company
Clay Gebbers	Gebbers Cattle Company
Jerry Barnes	Citizen
Troy McCormick	WDFW
Jen Croft	Republic
Hugh Jensen	Tonasket
Justin Haug	WDFW



Trumpeter swan pair with juveniles on Forde Lake.

WDFW – Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
OCNWCB – Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board
BLM – Bureau of Land Management
OVCBCH – Okanogan Valley Chapter – Backcountry Horsemen
USFS – United States Forest Service

Issues Raised

Issue 1: The road to the Sinlahekin Creek Campground.

Due to continuous high-flow events in the spring, the access road to the campground washes out periodically. The last event caused major damage to the north access into the campground and forced WDFW to close that route. We are currently working with Okanogan County to come up with a long term solution that



addresses the problems associated with the dynamic system in the location of the campground. In the interim, the campground will remain open with reduced access.

Issue 2: The Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project. Positive comments regarding the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project were received. The group liked the result of the fuels reduction using commercial harvest and habitat improvement thinning. It was suggested that even more trees could be removed. There was concern about bitterbrush recruitment and certain weed responses following prescribed burning. Both issues are highly variable depending on their location on the landscape, growing conditions/growth stage during the fire and timing of the burn. No complaints were received regarding smoke in the valley or disturbance from machinery. We can expect continued support down the road for Phase 2 of the project and potentially Phase 3.

Issue 3: Grazing on the Sinlahekin and other wildlife areas. Positive comments were received concerning continued use of grazing on wildlife areas to benefit bunchgrass habitats, mule deer populations and local working ranches. Plans are to continue working with local ranchers in providing a sustainable program that will be mutually beneficial.

Issue 4: Increased white-tail season within the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. Some CAG members want to see more white-tail deer harvested from the wildlife area. This will be addressed with the appropriate WDFW personnel, when opportunities to comment on this year's hunting season takes place.

Contacts:

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Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

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