



SUNNYSIDE/SNAKE RIVER WILDLIFE AREA 2007 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area (SSWA) Management Plan (http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm) that provides management direction for the Wildlife Area complex. The SSWA includes 21 sub-units, comprising 20,836 acres, which are scattered throughout Walla Walla, Franklin, Benton and Yakima counties. The majority of the sites lie along a 118-mile highway corridor between Lowden in Walla Walla County

and Union Gap in Yakima County. The Franklin County sites lie approximately 35-40 miles north of this corridor.

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.

Updates/Changes

In 2006 a few changes occurred on the wildlife area. A new Natural Resources Tech 2 was hired in April. Luis “Oscar” Medina was hired to replace the outgoing Jake Vowels who moved to Spokane

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with his family. Oscar previously led a WCC crew and comes to the project with many of the skills needed for the job.

The operating budget remained the same in 2006 as it has in recent years but the Northwest Power Planning Council recommended severe budget cuts for future years under annual contracts. Those recommendations would have cut the annual Sunnyside O&M budget by 62%, but they were only recommendations. As of this writing, the budget for the next funding cycle will still be cut, but only by 15%. Even those figures may not be final. Any budget cut will first be realized beginning on October 1, 2007.

New Issues

A partnership NAWCA grant (North American Wetlands Conservation Act) was awarded, which will provide approximately \$333,000 to the SSWA for wetland enhancement on the Byron and HQ units. The Yakama Nation will use the remainder of this million-dollar grant to perform similar work on their lands, which lie across the Yakima River from the HQ and I-82 units of the SSWA. Formal partners in this grant include the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, City of Grandview, the Yakama Nation and the Yakima Chapter of Pheasants Forever.

Coordination with Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District (SVID) has been stepped up to incorporate a water diversion into a proposed fish barrier that will be installed in Sulphur Creek Irrigation Wasteway. The diversion structure will complement the NAWCA construction project by supplying additional water to the new wetland system.

To date, there have been minimal new issues identified by the CAG Team, District Team or the public as a result of the Wildlife Area planning process.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Late this year, we were informed that a 5-year old capital budget request had finally gained approval; this capital project will fund the construction of a badly needed shop facility on the HQ unit. Work is to be completed in the spring of 2007.

Weed control was performed on 730 acres on the Sunnyside units and 127 acres on the Snake River units. Approximately 20 acres of Russian Olive trees were removed on the Byron Unit to reduce the monoculture and make way for more native herbaceous and woody plant species.

Three new center pivots were installed on the HQ unit; one replacement and two new systems that will allow more field corn to be grown for wintering waterfowl.

Cultural Resource reviews were performed for all BPA-funded activities, and for a state-funded project to improve public access to pond #1 on the I-82 Unit.

The spring and pond development projects were all completed on the Thornton Unit in the fall of 2006, but were all severely damaged by 4-wheel drive vehicles during an illegal trespass/mud bog

event. An investigation is pending. Members of the Richland Rod & Gun Club replaced two guzzlers on the Rattlesnake Slope Unit. These replaced guzzlers that were burned in a range fire. The new structures are made out of steel to resist future fires.

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.

2006 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2007 Related Activity/ Comments
Review and renew 3 ag leases and 2 grazing leases. Change 2 long-standing sharecrop agreements over to cash rental agreements.	Done. One ag lease complete; 2 are in final signature stage. One grazing permit completed and one season of grazing has occurred. One grazing permit is in the final signature stage.	Cash rental agreements provide more flexibility to use program income to upgrade facilities, irrigation systems, etc. when other fund sources are lacking. Grazing is mostly for cornstalk residue with one agreement for cheatgrass control under powerlines where fires are prevalent.
Reseed 16 acres of shrub steppe habitat on Rattlesnake Slope. Monitor and control weeds.	Done in early spring.	Success is slow in this area, which was a test plot for Plateau herbicide. Level of success outside of the Plateau treatment was significantly more successful.
Reseed 20 acres of historic, weedy farmland on the Johnson segment of the HQ unit.	Done	Initial seeding partially unsuccessful due to low moisture and high alkalinity. Changed seed varieties for greater success
Remove 10-15 acres of Russian Olives on Byron. Clean up debris and treat weeds in disturbed areas.	Actually removed about 20 acres. Pulled trees were stacked in windrows and will be left for wildlife cover.	Existing tall wheatgrass was released by this activity.
Perform weed control on minimum of 500 combined acres on all units. Train new weed tech for Franklin Co.	Actually treated 857 acres. Did not hire a new weed tech	Hired retired WDFW employee to spray early weeds. Did not have time to hire another tech after he left for another job.

Maintain 140 acres of moist soil management areas	Ongoing	Challenges to this activity are water availability, controlled beaver activity at water control structures and problem-free pumps
Maintain shop, office, storage buildings	No major issues this reporting period. Worked with Engineers on planning details for new shop. Cleared area for new shop footprint. Dug test holes for soil samples.	Will continue working with Engineers and contractor to see the shop construction through to fruition
Maintain signs, kiosks, boundary fences, etc.	Replace signs as needed due to weathering or vandalism. Removed old fence on Byron that was exposed during R. olive removal.	Kiosks and parking lot signs are vandalized weekly. Without additional enforcement, it is time and cost prohibitive to stay ahead of the vandals. Many boundary fences are in need of repair or replacement, but this work continues to be put off due to lack of staff, funding and the fact that cattle trespass is minimal on most areas.
Outreach, education, coordination.	Continued working with Yakama Nation on details of implementing NAWCA grant. Continued coordination with SVID on options to divert Sulphur Creek water & manipulation of Byron water for wetland enhancement. Continued working with local schools on field trip studies involving wetlands, bird nest boxes and riparian plantings.	The wetland enhancement activities will become a top priority in 2007 as we begin to implement these projects.

<p>Develop alternative water sources where needed: 2 rock checks + one spring development on Thornton. Replace 2 guzzlers on Rattlesnake Slope that burned in a fire.</p>	<p>Installed 4 rock checks and developed 2 areas to collect seasonal groundwater. Also constructed a dike on a historic road crossing to trap spring runoff and create a pond for wildlife watering. With the help of the Richland Rod & Gun Club, replaced 2 guzzlers with frames made of steel, to withstand future range fires.</p>	<p>Spring and pond developments were completed in the Fall. Illegal off road traffic (mud bogging) severely damaged both spring developments and the new dike. An investigation is pending and we will attempt to seek restitution. Much of the work will have to be redone.</p>
<p>Coordinate with research staff to collect HEP and species population data.</p>	<p>Did not perform this support work.</p>	<p>Research staff did not begin this work.</p>
<p>Monitor for presence of sage grouse on Rattlesnake Slope and Thornton.</p>	<p>Did not perform this work.</p>	<p>BPA advised us that they would no longer pay for species monitoring and this task was dropped from our statement of work.</p>
<p>Monitor public use and Register to Hunt programs where they have been implemented.</p>	<p>Some work performed, mostly during hunting season, but coverage was marginal.</p>	<p>There is not enough staff time available to adequately monitor public use. Register to Hunt booths in Franklin County help collect user data. BPA will not fund this type of data collection on Sunnyside units.</p>
<p>Monitor for trespass.</p>	<p>Minimal amount of work was performed. Cattle continue to trespass on the I-82 Unit near Zillah. Enforcement takes the lead on owner contacts. Trespass behind closed road sign on Thornton continues to be a problem. Spot checks by Enforcement is helping.</p>	<p>Limited staff time to monitor these areas adequately.</p>

Monitor and maintain assigned access areas.	Ongoing, although littering and dumping is rampant at Yakima County sites.	This activity takes a lot of time away from habitat enhancement projects. Hopefully the new enforcement officer stationed in Prosser will relieve some of the pressure.
Monitor grazing permits.	Grazing on cornstalk residue on the Windmill Ranch and HQ Units requires minimal effort. Close monitoring of the experimental cheatgrass grazing project on Windmill was performed by the manager and Mel Asher.	This is a 3 year agreement to see if grazing cheatgrass to reduce annual seed production can reduce the plant population and release native bunchgrasses for habitat enhancement and fire control under BPA powerlines.
Plant and/or maintain 6 food plots.	Done, although weeds were not adequately controlled	Lack of time, due to excessive administrative duties.
Work out logistics to fund a shared weed control person with the Columbia Basin WA..	We determined this was not the most feasible option for the SSWA..	Drafted and submitted a proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation to fund ½ of an FTE, presuming WDFW would fund the other half, to hire a full time biologist for BOR and Snake River lands.
Coordinate with ADA reps to discuss options for additional disabled use on the SSWA.	Led tour of management sites with ADA reps and gathered input. Did not implement ADA access on Rattlesnake Slope.	Still hope to develop ADA access from Rothrock Road into the Thornton Unit for elk hunting if time permits.
Monitor closed roads monthly on all units. More often if time permits.	Generally, this schedule is maintained, but it's inadequate.	Not enough time to get around to all the sites on a more frequent basis.
Coordinate with Benton and Franklin Mosquito Control Districts.	Coordination is generally passive unless issues arise. Summarized control efforts for 2006 by Benton Co. MCD and sent as fyi to WDFW staff.	We still do not know the effects of control efforts on wildlife but the threat of West Nile Virus almost makes it a moot point.
Produce quarterly and annual BPA reports. Submit work plan and associated budget for 2007.	Done and accepted.	Current budget is intact. Expect budget may be cut in 2008.

Coordinate with local fire districts.	Ongoing. Benton Co. continues to disc fireline on Rattlesnake Slope.	This augments our weed-free access road/fire line.
Continue to coordinate for cultural resource surveys.	Worked with BPA archaeologists for BPA-funded projects. WDFW funded Mellis Road extension survey.	
Attend training to maintain licenses.	Red card, first aid and pesticide classes were attended by appropriate staff.	

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.

Only two members of the CAG Team responded to a solicitation for comments on the final draft of the Wildlife Area Plan. One had no comments and the other provided several comments but many were requesting clarity on existing issues. No new strategies will be implemented in 2007 that resulted from the CAG Team, District Team, or public comments received. One strategy will be added due to proposals submitted for Duck Stamp funding.

Agency Objective: Protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.

1. Implement up to 4 projects, if funded by the Duck Stamp program (proposals are currently being prioritized for funding in the next biennium).

- A. *Strategy:* Prepare specs for advertisement and purchase of tracked vehicle for use in wetland management on I-82, HQ and Byron units.
- B. *Strategy:* Coordinate with City of Grandview to resurrect their historic spray fields to provide high quality nesting cover for waterfowl and upland birds, adjacent to their treatment ponds and our Byron Ponds Unit.
- C. *Strategy:* Hire a contractor to evaluate geotechnical attributes of the Johnson segment (HQ unit) prior to wetland enhancement work.
- D. *Strategy:* Plan and implement a pond excavation project on the Windmill Ranch for waterfowl nesting, brood rearing, resting and hunting opportunities.

2007 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Maintain 20 acres of new grass seeding on Byron. Maintain 20 acres of new grass seeding on Johnson.
- 2) Prepare 70 acres of seedbed on Rupley, Satus Point, Johnson, Big Pivot and West Giffen fields for fall seeding.
- 3) Coordinate with multiple partners to start implementation of wetland enhancement work on Byron and Johnson. This includes improvements & additions to water control infrastructure and plans for carp control project, all part of a 2-year project.
- 4) Oversee completion of new shop.
- 5) Control a minimum of 500 acres of noxious weeds across all segments of the SSWA.
- 6) Follow through with an additional ADA access program on the Thornton unit.
- 7) If funded through ALEA, assist with a volunteer's survey of reclusive wetland species on Byron & Windmill wetlands.
- 8) Make repairs to damaged water collection facilities on Thornton. Prepare cost estimate for restitution if Enforcement Division completes a successful case against responsible vandals.

Citizens Advisory Group Input

The CAG was asked to provide comments on the most recent draft of the Wildlife Area Plan. Two members responded, one with no comments and one with several comments. The latter are addressed in Appendix 1.

This update was e-mailed to the CAG during 2007 with a request for review and comments. No comments were received. A future CAG meeting has not been scheduled at this time.

Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

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

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