



## SUNNYSIDE/SNAKE RIVER WILDLIFE AREA 2010 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\\_area/s/management\\_plans/index.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_area/s/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 generally 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 captures details of 2010 accomplishments, new issues and land management strategies, as well as performance measures for 2011.

### **Updates/Changes**

Wildlife Area Manager, Rocky Ross, retired in July of 2009 and a new Wildlife Area Manager, Mike Keller, was hired in December 2009. During the absence of an official Wildlife Area Manager, an acting Manager was appointed to temporarily fill the position.

A temporary on-call position was created and filled to assist with weed control and other habitat enhancement/maintenance projects on

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the Wildlife Area. Other Wildlife Area staff has remained stable during this reporting period.

The operating budget for 2010 remained stable. The BPA portion of the operating budget was increased by 1.02% for the 2010 contract year. This increase partially funded the new temporary on-call position and allowed replacement of a project pickup. The new pickup was purchased with State Wildlife Area funds, BPA agreed to pay an annual mileage fee.

Operation and maintenance costs on the project continue to increase due to the need to replace and repair antiquated equipment and infrastructure.

### **New Issues**

In 2009 an agreement was reached with the Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District (SVID) to remove up to 80,000 cubic yards of soil from the Johnson Wetland site (NAWCA grant project) to enhance the original design of this project. SVID did not have the funds to accomplish the entire project at once. Rather than delay our wetland development, it was decided that SVID would remove the soil in 2010 and stockpile it on site for later removal. The removal process could extend as long as 2013.

Five acres of mature Russian olive trees were removed along the shoreline of Bridgeman Pond on the HQ unit. This was a small portion of an otherwise monoculture of olives, which were removed to create an access road/fireline around the pond for future wetland management. The entire upper half of the pond is dense emergent vegetation, which requires periodic controlled burning to maximize habitat benefits.

An existing swale was expanded within the 90-acre field (HQ unit) to allow the enhancement of both moist soil management and upland habitat within this sub-unit.

A 25 acres grass restoration projects on the Byron Unit began this year. This will be a multi-year project, beginning with initial control of Russian knapweed, a fallow period, seeding and follow up weed control.

### **Major Stewardship Accomplishments**

Due to flood damage on the HQ Unit, repairs were made to several sections of access road, along with the replacement of two culverts. In addition, all components of the electrical panel and irrigation pump for the Lodge Field were replaced. The Federal Emergency Management Agency reimbursed the project for part of the repairs.

We replaced a collapsed culvert in the access road into the Fitzsimonds parcel (I-82 Unit). This was causing a flooding issue to an adjacent landowner. A Hydraulic Project Approval was received for this work.

Five duck stamp grant proposals were submitted for funding to: 1) add an overflow pipe to new pond construction in circle #8 on the Windmill Ranch; 2) move an irrigation pump & suction pipe out of the Irrigation District's right-of-way on the Windmill Ranch, to maintain the canal; 3) to secure an additional \$200,000 to help buy critical wetland habitat in Franklin County; 4) repair the lift pump intake on the Giffin Lake pump on the HQ Unit, which delivers water to the moist soil management cells; 5) build water control structures on the Bailie Youth Ranch to create and enhance wetland habitat.

Five of the Duck Stamp grant proposals received funding, and four were completed. The Bailie Ranch project was postponed for one year.

A Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) grant (\$123,000) was received for shoreline and floodplain restoration on the I-82 Unit. This project included riparian plantings and concrete removal from the floodplain. Only the riparian plantings have been completed to date.

A partnership North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant, awarded



**The Johnson Wetland filled to capacity**

previously, provided approximately \$333,000 to the SSWA for wetland enhancement on the Byron and HQ units. The work was done in phases, beginning in 2008. Currently, all work has been nearly completed; the exception being the soil removal on the Johnson Wetland (see New Issues Section). The Yakama Nation will use their share of the grant to perform similar work on their lands, which lies 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. The Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District, although not a formal partner listed in the grant, has turned out to

be a significant player in this wetland project.

Temporary infrastructure was installed within circle #8 on the Windmill Ranch to allow a portion of a cornfield to be flooded for waterfowl hunting. This project may be enhanced at a later time with permanent water control and grade control within the field.

Weed control was performed on 620 acres on the Sunnyside units and 125 acres on the Snake River units over this reporting period.

No large scale Russian olive removal projects took place in 2010. However, due to the large amount of biomass from the olives removed at the Johnson Wetland site, multiple controlled burns were necessary to distill the trees into manageable piles. In addition, follow-up herbicide control continues to be an annual task.

A second Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grant was awarded for a volunteer study to determine marsh bird responses to wetland habitat manipulation. Four seasons of data will be collected when this study concludes.



**Native Greasewood and Basin Wild Rye (Sunnyside HQ unit)**

### **Status Report of 2010 Performance Measures**

Key performance measures are generally 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 2011.

<b>2010 Performance Measure</b>	<b>Status of Performance Measure</b>	<b>Explanation of Progress/ Related Activity/ Comments</b>
Maintain 50 acres of new grass seeding on Byron.	Ongoing	Russian knapweed control needs several years of follow up to eradicate the weed
Maintain 30 acres of new grass seeding on the HQ unit.	Ongoing	Kochia is the primary weed in these areas, which needs periodic herbicide treatment
Maintain 16 acres of new, warm season grasses on the Windmill Ranch, which were planted to provide competition for the noxious bristly foxtail.	Wide range of success, from poor to excellent	Areas under overhead irrigation develop heavy weed competition, which requires multiple herbicide treatment & mowing. Final results of this treatment are still pending.
Continue coordination with multiple partners to complete the final stages of the NAWCA grant.	On track	Final coordination will occur between 2011 & 2013 when the last of the soil is removed from the Johnson segment by SVID. Final details & cost share will be provided to Yakima Nation for final NAWCA report.
Assist with the completion of a Columbia Basin NAWCA grant and other grant options to purchase the Mesa Lake property.	First phase of Mesa Lake acquisition complete. Phase 2 & 3 are pending and potential funding sources may negate the need for a NAWCA grant.	Funding has been identified for the last two phases of the Mesa Lake acquisition. Final details are being worked out.
Control a minimum of 300 acres of noxious weeds across all segments of the SSWA.	Exceeded target acreage by 445 acres	Part of the reason for the acreage increase is the new on-call position which allowed increased focus on weed control.
Implement Duck Stamp grant, relocate pump station on circle #9 on Windmill	Complete	WDFW's Screen Shop staff completed this work. The South Columbia Basin Irrigation District donated the concrete casing sections for the sump.
Implement Duck Stamp grant, install an overflow pipe in the circle #8 ponds on Windmill	Complete	Ponds can be filled without incidental flooding of lessee's corn field

Implement Duck Stamp grant, repair the Giffen Lake lift pump intake.	Complete	Invert elevation is lower than the previous intake so water can be pumped during low water periods.
Continue coordinating with a volunteer's survey of reclusive wetland species on Byron, HQ & Windmill wetlands.	Ongoing	This study was extended for 2 more years with a second ALEA grant.
Make repairs to damaged water collection facilities on Thornton.	Complete	Contractor was on site to demolish old house and was used to rebuild containment dike for pond.
Control Russian knapweed on 50 acres of moist swales on Byron and reseed to native grasses	A 3-year process. Grasses will reach maturity in 2009	For this particular application of habitat restoration, we have developed a successful technique that is cost-effective. It will be expanded to additional areas.
Remove Russian olive trees on Byron and the HQ units to prepare for habitat enhancement projects	Actually removed about 20 acres on Byron and 30 acres on the HQ unit. On Byron, the trees were stacked in windrows and will be left for wildlife cover. On the HQ, they are in the floodplain and will be burned to make room for wetland development.	Existing tall wheatgrass was released by this activity on Byron. The site on the HQ unit will be managed as a moist soil area.
Perform weed control on a minimum of 500 combined acres on all units.	Actually treated 730 acres in 2007, and 340 in 2008.	Gave up trying to hire a temporary weed tech for Franklin Co. after 2 failed attempts.
Maintain shop, office, storage buildings	Coordinated with Engineers & contractor on the construction of a new 24' X 60' shop	Moved some shop equipment & tools to the new shop. Will use the old shop for storage.

Maintain signs, kiosks, boundary fences, etc.	Replace signs as needed due to weathering or vandalism.	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 Continued working with local schools on field trip studies involving wetlands, bird nest boxes and riparian plantings.	Substantial coordination began on a project to remove fill material from the new NAWCA wetland before water is diverted into it. SVID removed all soil from the wetland footprint and stockpiled all material on site for future use. Local school projects added additional shrub cover to the HQ unit.
HCP Process	Worked with Olympia staff to develop HCP database for the entire wildlife area	
Coordinate with research staff to collect HEP and species population data.	Did not perform this support work, but expect to in the future.	Continued coordinating with Science staff so we can develop a program to adequately track mitigation progress on BPA-funded wildlife areas.

Monitor public use and Register to Hunt programs where they have been implemented	Some work performed, mostly during hunting season, but coverage was site-specific	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.
Monitor for trespass	The primary cattle trespass issue on the I-82 Unit has ended. Periodic vehicle trespass on Thorton seems to be diminishing with increased monitoring by Enforcement.	Limited staff time to monitor these areas adequately, and no authority to deal with the issues as they occur.
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. The new enforcement officer stationed in Prosser seems to have relieved some of the pressure.
Monitor grazing permits	Grazing on cornstalk residue on the Windmill Ranch and HQ Units requires minimal effort.  The experimental grazing permit for cheatgrass control under the powerlines on Windmill ran its 3-year course with a noticeable improvement in range condition.	This was 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. After two years of monitoring, it was determined a third year was not necessary due to the decreased incidence in cheatgrass.
Plant and/or maintain 3 food plots	Completed	

Pursue 50% funding from the Bureau of Reclamation for a new staff person to help manage BOR lands within Franklin Co.	Did not pursue during this reporting period.	A proposal, submitted to the Bureau of Reclamation to fund ½ of an FTE, came at the beginning of their 3-year funding cycle. The soonest this proposal can be considered is 2010.
Coordinate with ADA reps to discuss options for additional disabled use on the SSWA	Ongoing	
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.	Several positive West Nile Virus hits in 2009 resulted in more extensive control efforts involving the use of adulticides. Discussed earlier control efforts for 2010, using larvacides.
Produce quarterly and annual BPA reports. Submit work plans and associated budgets	Done and accepted for the 2009 contract period.	
Coordinate with local fire districts	Ongoing. Benton Co. continues to disc fire line on Rattlesnake Slope.	This augments our weed-free access road/fire line. However, the fire district has not been performing this work at the right time of year, which is counter-productive for fire abatement and control. Met with them to discuss the issue and their timing improved.
Continue to coordinate cultural resource surveys	As needed for ground disturbing activities.	BPA staff checked out Russian olive removal sites. The Yakama Nation archaeologist surveyed the Johnson Wetland project prior to soil removal.
Attend training to maintain licenses	Red card, first aid and pesticide classes were attended by appropriate staff	
Replace collapsed culvert on Fitzsimonds public access area	Complete	Obtained HPA for this work and performed with project equipment and staff



**Ducks leaving the newly constructed Johnson wetland at the Sunnyside HQ unit.**

### **New Strategies**

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies or activities to address the agency's 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.

The CAG Team was largely unresponsive to solicitation for comments on the final draft of the Wildlife Area Plan. One member had no comments and the other provided several comments but many were requesting clarity on existing issues. Since that time, the W.A. Manager has conducted business with only District Team oversight. No new strategies will be implemented in 2011 that resulted from the CAG Team, District Team, or public comments received.

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

#### **1. Implement the last of 5 projects, funded in the last round of Duck Stamp grant requests**

- A. *Strategy:* Work with Ducks Unlimited to design and install water control structures for wetland development & enhancement on the Bailie Youth Ranch.
- B. *Strategy:* Continue pursuing the acquisition of the Mesa Lake property with any and all funds that may be available, including a NAWCA grant, the Wetland Reserve Program, RCO grants and use of funds from a property sale.

### **Agency Objective: Provide sound operational management of WDFW lands, facilities & access sites.**

#### **1. Perform O&M on all facilities in the face of unexpected circumstances**

- A. *Strategy:* Replace main sliding door on the barn at the Windmill Ranch to improve security for stored equipment.
- B. *Strategy:* Rebuild leaking intake pipes on both pumps at the north irrigation station on the Windmill Ranch.

- C. *Strategy*: Replace the vandalized Register to Hunt boxes on the Bailie and Windmill Ranch (4 boxes total).

**2011 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) Complete cooperative wetland/wasteway enhancement project with the South Columbia Basin Irrigation District.
- 2) Apply for State Duck Stamp funding for funding improved water control structures and other wetland enhancement projects.
- 3) Remove approximately 5 acres of mature Russian Olive trees from the shoreline of Bridgeman Pond.
- 4) Continue weed control efforts across the Wildlife Area, treating a minimum of 350-400 acres.
- 5) Expand the existing swale within the 90-acre field on the HQ Unit.
- 6) Begin restoration on approximately 3.5 acres of native grasses on Hope Valley.
- 7) Begin weed control/ habitat restoration on the Reser segment of the Swegle Unit in Walla Walla County.
- 8) Begin flooded corn experiment in circle 8 on Windmill.
- 9) Enhance two existing habitat plots and develop a third habitat plot on Windmill.
- 10) Begin restoration on a 10-acre sub-irrigated weedy area to native grasses near Windmill Lake.
- 11) Fulfill the cost share commitments agreed upon by Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District as the trade off for topsoil from the Johnson Wetland project (new highway entrance ramp, improved access road, new gates, surveyed pond bottom, etc.)

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**Want to see the full plan?**  
Go to -  
[http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/index.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm)

## **Information for BPA's Wildlife Mitigation Program**

The Sunnyside Wildlife Area became a Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) mitigation project in 1997. The wildlife area encompasses approximately 10,538 acres along the floodplain of the Yakima River and the upland area along Rattlesnake Ridge. The BPA has received mitigation credits for funding habitat enhancement and ongoing management of habitat on the Sunnyside Wildlife Area. The project provides habitat units (HUs) towards BPA's overall Wildlife Mitigation Debt for the Columbia River hydroelectric system. Habitat Units for this project are related to a portion of mitigation for impacts from the Grand Coulee, McNary and John Day Dams. The number of habitat units achieved are based on the sampling of a number of habitat characteristics that are components of mathematical models for individual species that generate a numeric value of habitat quality from zero to one, known as a Habitat Suitability Index. The suitability index is then multiplied by the number of acres being evaluated to generate the number of HUs. This process is commonly referred to as a Habitat Evaluation Procedure or HEP. Species models being applied to mitigation activities on the Sunnyside Wildlife Area include: mallard, western meadowlark, Canada goose, yellow warbler, downy woodpecker, California quail, black-capped chickadee, great blue heron, mule deer and sage grouse.

Most of the management strategies relating to habitat management identified in the Sunnyside Wildlife Area Management Plan are funded through BPA's mitigation program. A summary of these activities can be found in our most recent project review and funding proposal to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council who provides oversight of BPA's mitigation programs. The Sunnyside Wildlife Area Proposal (Project #200201400) is located at: <http://www.nwcouncil.org/Fw/budget/2010/proposal.asp?id=1007#3> . This document includes a summary of activities (work elements), a link to the project narrative, an itemized budget request for 2010-2012, and estimated budgets through 2018.

A number of activities are included in the mitigation work plan that are designed to monitor the effectiveness of the project including habitat/plant community monitoring, wildlife population response, and periodic HEP surveys to track progress toward mitigation goals. Wildlife response surveys have been suspended for two years due to a decision by BPA to not fund wildlife monitoring. Hopefully this decision will be reevaluated.

The Sunnyside Wildlife Area project compliments the Yakima Tribe's "Yakima Nation Riparian and Wetland Restoration Project", and the "Yakima River Side Channels Project". Like the Sunnyside Wildlife Area, both Yakima Nation projects are BPA funded mitigation projects.

While BPA funds most of the habitat management activity on the wildlife area, other contributions have come from outside sources including grants obtained in cooperation with Ducks Unlimited, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Salmon Recovery Funding Board, City of Grandview, the Yakama Nation, the Yakima Chapter of Pheasants Forever, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District and others. These grants have helped to fund many of the wetland, shoreline and shrub-steppe enhancement projects on the wildlife area.

This BPA funded mitigation project provides habitat for both threatened and endangered, Priority Habitat Species (PHS) and is an important link in WDFW's ongoing efforts to protect, enhance, and increase wetland and shrub-steppe habitats for associated wildlife species and to improve water quality for both anadromous and resident fish alike.