



SUNNYSIDE/SNAKE RIVER WILDLIFE AREA 2014 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 20 sub-units, comprising 21,154 acres, which are scattered throughout Franklin, Benton, Grant and Yakima counties. The majority of the sites lie along a 110-mile highway corridor starting in southern Grant and northern Franklin Counties south to I-82 and west to Union Gap in Yakima County.



Sandhill Cranes on the Mesa Lake Unit

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 biennially 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 accomplishments from 2012 and 2013, and new issues and land management strategies for the period 2014 through 2015.

Updates/Changes

In August of 2012 a new Wildlife Area Manager, Greg Bjornstrom, was hired. This is the first time since Rocky Ross retired in July of 2009 that the Wildlife Area Manager position has been permanently filled. During the interim period Robby Sak, Assistant Wildlife Area Manager, was assigned additional administrative duties to assure that key operations were maintained. Because of reduced staffing during 2009 – 2012 many routine wildlife area activities were limited to a maintenance level only.

Inside	
Land Management Summary	1
Updates/Changes	1
New Issues	2
Major Stewardship Accomplishments	3
Status Report of 2012-13 Performance	
Measures	5
New Strategies	9
2014-15 Performance Measures	10
WAAC Update	12
BPA Information	12

The part time, on-call position that was created and filled by Rocky Ross to assist with weed control and other habitat enhancement/maintenance projects on the wildlife area was vacated in August 2013. The primary focus for this position was Franklin and Walla Walla counties. This additional staffing is being reevaluated and contract work with Benton and Franklin County Weed Boards is being considered. Another Assistant Manager, Phillip Buser, was hired in November 2012 to help cover Snake River mitigation properties on the east side of the wildlife area complex. The Natural Resource Technician 2, Oscar Medina, was kept on staff through the winter of 2013-14. Oscar was, in the past, funded only nine months through Sunnyside BPA funding.

The management of two wildlife area units, Swegle Road and McDonald Bridge, was transferred to Chief Joseph Wildlife Area in 2013. These specific units, located in Region 1, were deemed to be more efficiently managed by Region 1, where they are both located.

The operating budget for the past two years has remained stable. Operation and maintenance costs on the project continue to increase due to the need to replace and repair antiquated equipment and infrastructure. A significant effort has been placed on refurbishing existing structures, cleaning up facilities, and developing a more hospitable working environment at Windmill Ranch.

New Issues

Finalize cooperative agreement, Exhibit A, with Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Region 3 properties currently managed under this agreement need to be reevaluated and additional BOR properties need to be assessed for inclusion in Exhibit A. This has been an ongoing process that began approximately ten years ago. This is not a new, but a continuing project. Coordination with corresponding irrigation districts will also take place during this process.

Planning and implementation of wetland enhancements at Smith Canyon, a BOR property, hinge on Smith Canyon being included in Exhibit A and funding being acquired for a feasibility study through State Duck Stamp funding.

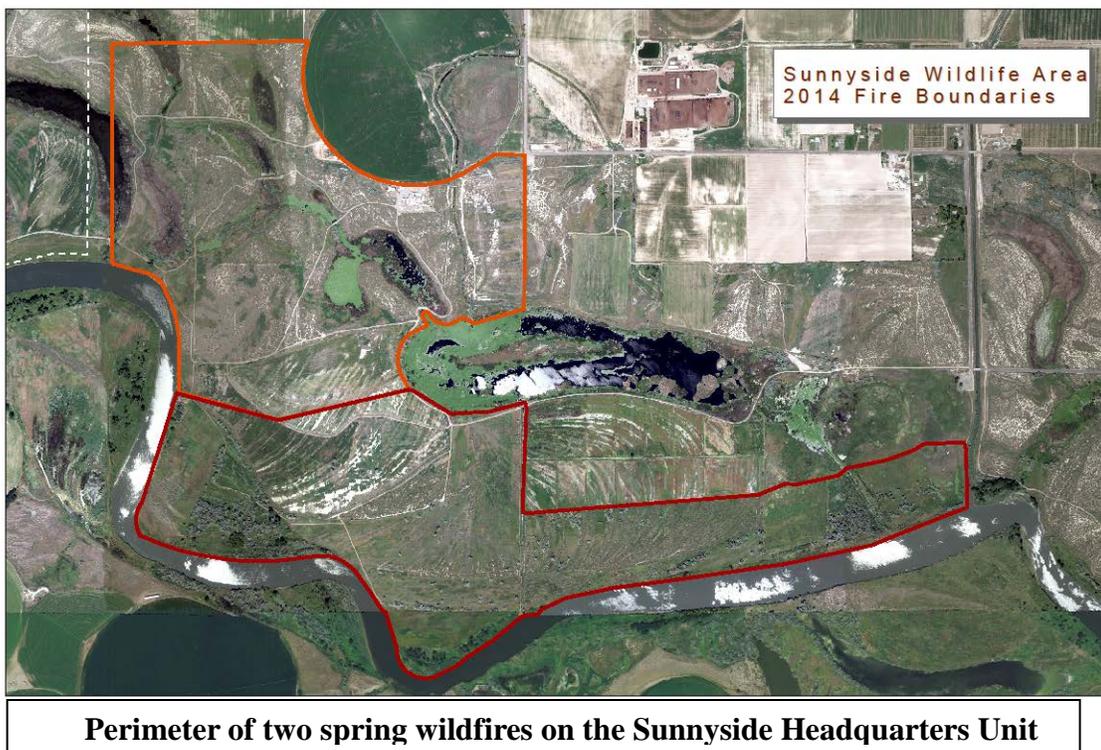
Other issues include:

1. Consider replacing one or more center pivot irrigation systems on the Windmill Ranch, if capital funding is available.
2. Continued working with Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District on the Johnson wetland project.
3. Continued installation of beaver deceivers at all problem areas.

Proposed Smith Canyon Unit –
BOR Property



4. Continue Russian olive removal on the Bottom Rupley segment of the Headquarters Unit as part of long range goal of wetland and upland habitat enhancement.
5. Begin implementation of habitat enhancement projects funded by State Duck Stamp funding on the Mesa Lake property including developing an impoundment and installing a water control structure.
6. Pursue acquisition of private inholdings around the Mesa Lake shoreline.
7. Surplus small parcels that provide little manageable habitat and/or public access.
8. Dedicate time to maintenance of neglected wetlands on the Bailie Youth Ranch.
9. Implementation of I-82 habitat improvement project.
10. Rehabilitation of 575 acres of habitat lost by spring wildfires and the cleanup and reconstruction of a shop that also was lost in the fires.



Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Pulled and piled approximately 40 acres of mature Russian olive trees in the Lower Rupley unit. This area encompasses a series of natural depressions and swales. Future plans are to improve the wetland areas and restore riparian habitat to native vegetation.



New Two-Way Diversion at the Pigeon Pond Complex – Mesa Lake Unit

Restoration efforts concluded within the 90-Acre field (HQ unit) to native grasses and upland habitat.

Duck stamp grant proposals were submitted for funding to perform the following tasks:

- Developed the Serpent Wetland located on the Mesa Lake Unit by replacing a deteriorating irrigation mainline and incorporating a feeder valve within the repaired mainline that is utilized to fill a swale with irrigation water.
- Installed a two-way diversion at the Pigeon Pond Complex on the Mesa Lake Unit that allows a diversion of irrigation water to fill an existing wetland and a newly constructed wetland.
- Developed a new wetland at East Pigeon Pond by using a two-way diversion at the Pigeon Pond Complex.

Installed beaver deceivers at several water control structures throughout the wildlife area.

Weed control was performed on 500 acres on the Sunnyside units; and 300 acres on the Snake River units over this reporting period.

Twenty-seven burrowing owl nest boxes were installed in several locations, typically in clusters of three.

A detailed mapping project was initiated to map infrastructure and land attributes on all management units on the entire wildlife area. This will be a multi-year project.



Status Report of 2013-2014 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 2014.

2012-13 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2014-15 Related Activity/ Comments
Maintain 50 acres of new grass seeding on Byron.	Ongoing	Russian knapweed control needs several years of follow up to eradicate the weed.
Maintain 170 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.	Ongoing	Areas under overhead irrigation develop heavy weed competition, which requires multiple herbicide treatment & mowing.
Continue coordination with multiple partners to complete North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant application process.	On track	Coordination with Ducks Unlimited, Bureau of Reclamation, and South Columbia Basin Irrigation District continues.
Contact landowners that own private inholdings around Mesa Lake to discuss purchase opportunities.	Ongoing	Two land owners were contacted in 2013 and declined to sell at this time but may be interested in the future.
Control a minimum of 300 acres of noxious weeds annually across all segments of the SSWA.	Actual area treated during 2012 was 535 acres. For 2013, 985 acres across the wildlife area were treated for noxious weeds.	Additional acreage was treated with biological controls that are not included in the total acreage.
Implement Duck Stamp grant to rework irrigation main and develop the Serpent Wetland.	Complete	WDFW staff completed this work.
Implement Duck Stamp grant to install a two-way diversion at the Pigeon Pond Complex.	Complete	A new impoundment was developed and the diversion allows for independent water

		manipulation of specific wetlands.
Implement Duck Stamp grant to develop a new wetland called the East Pigeon Pond.	Complete	This new impoundment was home to black-necked stilts during their migratory stopover.
Continue coordinating a survey of impacts on nesting upland and waterfowl species caused by agriculture harvest.	Ongoing	Different crops have different harvest times so impacts on nesting season are being evaluated.
Control of Russian olive trees on the Byron and HQ units.	Ongoing. As new areas are being eradicated, older sites have to be monitored so that restoration efforts continue to be successful.	Controlling Russian olive is on going for many years. Even though large areas on the Byron and HQ units have been eradicated for many years periodically new sprouts pop up so continued control by herbicide and or mechanical methods are needed year to year.
Maintain 187 acres of moist soil management areas	Ongoing	Another 30 acres of moist soil habitat could come on line in the next two years on the Mesa Lake Unit. Challenges to this activity are water availability, controlled beaver activity at water control structures and problem-free pumps. Staffing and funding are also directly tied to new development.
Maintain shop, office, storage buildings	Ongoing	Cleaned out and organized several out buildings, storage rooms, and pole barns at Windmill Ranch. Sunnyside HQ will follow.
Remove obsolete fencing including all cross fencing and hog wire.	Ongoing	As time allows, volunteers are being used to remove any fencing deemed obsolete.

Maintain signs, kiosks, boundary fences, etc.	<p>Replace signs as needed due to weathering or vandalism.</p> <p>The Register to Hunt boxes for the Bailie Ranch, Mesa Lake, and Windmill Ranch continue to be removed at the end of the general hunting season to avoid off-season damage.</p>	<p>Kiosks and parking lot signs are vandalized weekly.</p> <p>Wildlife area staff works with enforcement on this issue.</p> <p>Many boundary fences are in need of repair or replacement and will be addressed through volunteer opportunities.</p>
Outreach, education, coordination	<p>Continue coordination with Yakama Nation on habitat improvements on the I-82 Ponds Units. Continue working with local schools on field trip studies involving wetlands, bird nest boxes and riparian plantings.</p>	<p>The habitat improvements on the I-82 Ponds Unit are a multi-phase project designed to improve turkey habitat.</p> <p>The Yakama Tribes are in support of this project as it ties in nicely with work they continue with on the Reservation.</p>
Wildlife Area Mapping Project	Ongoing	<p>Mapping of all infrastructure and habitat features, utilizing GIS, will allow for better management, data collection, and data sharing.</p>
Coordinate with District staff to collect Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) and species population data.	<p>Initial conversations have taken place but an established protocol has yet to be developed.</p>	<p>Continued coordinating with District staff so we can develop a program to adequately track mitigation progress on BPA-funded wildlife areas.</p>
Monitor public use and Register to Hunt programs where they have been implemented.	<p>Some work performed, mostly during hunting season, but coverage was site-specific.</p>	<p>Monitor public use and Register to Hunt programs where they have been implemented.</p>

Monitor for trespass	The Whitstran Unit has been a chronic problem to enforce. It is still very difficult keeping signs in place due to vandalism.	The parking area at Whitstran is scheduled to be relocated and fence line relocated to minimize dumping and unauthorized vehicle use of the unit.
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.
Monitor grazing permits.	Grazing on cornstalk residue on the Windmill Ranch and HQ Units requires minimal effort.	Continued work with the operator's grazing practices will continue.
Continue to develop habitat projects as time allows.	Ongoing	Development of habitat projects is a year-round activity. The projects are developed by staff as time allows and filed for future consideration as funding opportunities arise.
Coordinate with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reps to discuss options for additional disabled use on the SSWA	Ongoing, but limited by available staff time.	These programs require sustained attention, which is not always possible with existing workload and available staff.
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	Mosquito control limitations on the wildlife area have been provided to the mosquito control districts. Coordination is generally passive unless issues arise.	Generally, mosquito control measures are limited to the use of larvicides, but substantial outbreaks of adults or West Nile Virus hits require adulticides. The latter have a broader spectrum of insect control, which have higher impacts on wildlife.

Produce quarterly and annual BPA reports. Submit work plans and associated budgets	Done and accepted for each subsequent contract period.	
Coordinate with local fire districts	Ongoing. Benton County continues to disc fire line on Rattlesnake Slope.	This augments our weed-free access road/fire line. Attended Franklin County Fire District meetings and will develop GIS layers that show infrastructure, roads, gates, critical habitat, etc. to provide to fire districts.
Continue to coordinate for cultural resource surveys	As needed for ground disturbing activities.	BPA has their own staff to complete the surveys. WDFW recently hired an archaeologist.
Attend trainings to maintain licenses	Red card, first aid and pesticide classes were attended by appropriate staff.	Assistant Manager Phillip Buser is slated for commercial driver's license training this winter.
Attend duty related workshops and continuing education classes.	Ongoing	Wetland workshop, shrub-steppe workshop, and Wildlife Society Conference were attended.

New Strategies for 2014 and 2015

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 Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) dissolved by the time the new manager took over the responsibilities of the wildlife area. Since that time, the W.A. Manager has conducted business with only District Team oversight. Wildlife area staff received a new directive, the Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC) in February 2014. No new strategies will be implemented in 2014 that resulted from the WAAC, District Team, or public comments received. A WAAC will be developed to fit the dynamic of the wildlife area.

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

- 1. Continue implementation of habitat improvement projects on the Mesa Lake Unit in Franklin County**
 - A. *Strategy:* Pursue all sources of available funds to pay for enhancement projects.
 - B. *Strategy:* Identify, evaluate, and develop areas where artesian style impoundments can be implemented and maintained.
 - C. *Strategy:* Coordinate with the South Columbia Basin Irrigation District on drain water management. Install water control structures for moist soil management.
 - D. *Strategy:* Repair breached dike and install water control structure to create new wetland opportunities.

- 2. Continue negotiations with Bureau of Reclamation to add Smith Canyon to Exhibit A, allowing WDFW to claim management responsibilities for the area.**
 - A. *Strategy:* Continue building support through BOR, irrigation districts, Ducks Unlimited, and the District Team.
 - B. *Strategy:* Pursue all available sources of funding to help meet the obligations that wetland management entails.
 - C. *Strategy:* Begin preliminary management planning if management responsibilities are transferred to WDFW.

- 3. Continue with development of habitat improvement projects on the I-82 Ponds Unit.**
 - A. *Strategy:* Mow and fallow areas marked for habitat improvements.
 - B. *Strategy:* Plant areas with the desired grass/forbs mix, plant desired tree species, develop site appropriate shrub component, and control noxious weeds.

 - A. *Strategy:* Continue with cleanup of facilities at Sunnyside Headquarters.
 - B. *Strategy:* Rebuild shop at Sunnyside Headquarters that was destroyed by wildfire.
 - C. *Strategy:* Evaluate feasibility of partnering with regional universities to establish a research facility at Sunnyside Headquarters utilizing the existing house.

2014 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 every two years.

-Complete cooperative agreement (Exhibit A) with BOR to finalize management responsibilities in Franklin and Benton Counties.

-Apply for State Duck Stamp funding to improve water control structures and other wetland/upland enhancement projects.

- Conduct a controlled burn on two wetland segments on the Windmill Ranch Unit, one on the Mesa Lake Unit, and 2 on the Bailie Unit to remove decadent emergent vegetation. This will reset the clock on plant succession and allow more precise wetland enhancement planning.
- Coordinate with Ducks Unlimited, BOR, South Columbia Basin Irrigation District and other partners to develop topographic maps and plans for wetland enhancement projects at Smith Canyon.
- Replace and/or rework old center pivot irrigation systems on the Windmill Ranch Unit to better maintain winter food production for waterfowl and migrating Sandhill cranes.
- Continue with installation of beaver deceivers at all problem water control structures.
- Continue with the Russian olive removal project in the Lower Rupley segment of the Sunnyside Headquarters Unit.
- Continue with enhancing and restoring wetland areas on the Sunnyside Headquarters and Byron Units to provide more waterfowl and shore bird habitat.
- Perform weed control, reseed and replant 575 acres of upland habitat destroyed by spring wildfires.
- Continue restoration on approximately 3.5 acres of native grasses on Hope Valley, where annual weeds and extremely dry conditions have hampered success.
- Replace wheel line irrigation at Hope Valley with two small pivots to better maintain winter food production for waterfowl and migrating sandhill cranes.
- Develop Pie-Wedge Wetland at Mesa Lake Unit.
- Repair dike at the Mesa Lake Unit and incorporate water control structures where needed, so moist soil management can be established.
- Begin restoration on a 10-acre sub-irrigated weedy area to native grasses near Windmill Lake.
- Continue with development of a 24-acre upland habitat project on the I-82 Ponds Unit. This is phase one of a multi-phase project.
- Cost share commitments have been fulfilled 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.), with the exception of hauling out the refuse dirt in order to rehabilitate the stockpile site. This action will be completed by the spring of 2015.

Wildlife Area Advisory Committee

Establishing a Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC) is a priority for staff. Selection and maintenance of a WAAC is made effective only with complete involvement by the members. The dynamic of the Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area is complex, units spread out along a 100 mile corridor east to west and 50 miles north to south. The need for a dynamic WAAC process exists; therefore recruitment of committee members will be developed to form two separate WAAC's. Updates on wildlife area activities will be emailed to committee members on a quarterly basis allowing committee members to comment more readily as suits their schedules. Coordination of face-to face meetings will occur annually or as topic dictates.

BPA Information

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. 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.cbfish.org/Project.mvc/Display/2002-014-00>. This website includes a summary of activities, a link to the project narrative, and estimated budgets through 2016.

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 Habitat Evaluation Project 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. 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.

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.

Contacts:

Greg Bjornstrom
Wildlife Area Manager
(509) 837-7644
WDFW Yakima Office
(509) 457-9313

Want to see the full plan?

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

Photo Gallery: Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area

