



SWANSON LAKES WILDLIFE AREA 2008 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2007 Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Management Plan (http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/) that provides management direction for the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, totaling about 21,000 acres in central Lincoln County. 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 2007 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2008.

Updates/Changes

BPA no longer funds any habitat restoration at Swanson Lakes. This includes enhancement of degraded shrub/steppe, conversion of agricultural fields back to shrub/steppe, and planting of shrubs and trees. Any future work of this type planned at Swanson Lakes will require other funding sources. BPA funding for continued operation and maintenance (O&M) of Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is expected to continue, although the level of annual funding is expected to fall, over time. BPA is currently examining the issue of cost for long-term O&M on wildlife projects, on a regional basis.

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New Issues

The BPA-mandated/funded habitat restoration is complete at Swanson Lakes. This completion of restoration work on Swanson Lakes has freed up the wildlife area manager and assistant manager to now become involved with planning and execution of additional, off-site habitat restoration projects. Work is planned for 2008 at WDFW's Audubon Lake parcel at Reardan, to kill off existing non-native vegetation in old farm fields, and in either fall 2008 or fall 2009 restore to native-like grasslands with forbs.

Swanson Lakes has also submitted an application to the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for grant money, for grasslands restoration work in the Phantom Butte area, over approximately 300 acres of old CRP grounds. If grant is approved, work could start as early as fall 2008.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Rainbow trout were planted in Swanson Lakes' "Z-Lake" annually between 2004 and 2007. These fish are thriving, with the largest approximately two feet in length in summer 2007. Although access is walk-in only, the lake has attracted several fishermen in the last two years. However, there was some concern about the adequacy of winter aeration, in this fairly shallow rim rock lake. Trout were planted in the lake many years before, when it was in private ownership, but those fish eventually died out. Staff at Swanson Lakes researched options for aerating the lake, and has had both solar- and wind-powered aerators installed there in 2007. Funding for these aerators was provided through WDFW's sustainability program. The aerators worked well during the cold winter of 2007/2008, keeping open two holes in the lake, at all times.

Approximately 160 riparian shrubs and trees were planted at Swanson Lakes in spring 2008, to replace mortalities, in existing shrub/tree plots.

Status Report of 2007 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 2008.

2007 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2008 Related Activity/ Comments
<p>Appropriate weed control on the wildlife area, with focus on areas adjacent to road in the small drainages surrounding Lake Creek. Review the current year's weed control activities, using generated reports and compare the efforts and success to the previous year's weed control activities.</p>	<p>Appropriate weed control measures were generally completed. This is an ongoing annual activity. Accomplishments include: continued control of approximately 25 acres of whitetop, 70 acres of general weeds, and less than two acres of St. John's wort (infestation is light, and spread out). We were also able to catch up with routine herbicide control of Canada thistle.</p>	<p>We will continue weed control efforts in 2008. The seasonal weed control laborer will be rehired in 2007, for at least six, and possibly up to nine, months.</p>
<p>70 - 90 acres of old agricultural fields restored to native or native-like habitats, each year, barring unforeseen problems such as drought, major equipment breakdowns, etc.</p>	<p>Planted approximately 113 acres, in three former wheat fields, to native-like grass/forb habitat, in fall 2007. Left approximately 3 acres fallow, to be planted to food plots on regular basis.</p>	<p>Staff has submitted grant request for funding of restoration of approximately 300 acres of old CRP, to native-like grassland habitat in Phantom Butte area of Welch-Anderson unit.</p>

Continue augmentation of sharp-tailed grouse for the wildlife area's current population, and continue to monitor.	Augmented the sharp-tailed grouse population with ten birds from northern Utah and southeast Idaho, in April 2007. Tracked these new birds, from the ground and aurally, throughout the year.	Augmentation of grouse occurred in April 2008, with birds from southeast Idaho/northern Utah. The new birds were fitted with radio collars and will be tracked throughout the year.
As habitat surveys are conducted and analyzed, determine general trend of habitat quality. If quality is declining, attempt to determine cause of decline and develop plan to improve the habitat.	No Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) surveys were performed at Swanson Lakes in 2007. These are often completed on five-year intervals.	No Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) surveys are scheduled at Swanson Lakes in 2008.
Maintain approximately 40 bluebird and kestrel boxes on the wildlife area.	Local volunteer has maintained, repaired and replaced boxes as needed, in spring 2007. Minimal maintenance was performed in 2007.	Ongoing activity.
Compare most recent population numbers of sharp-tailed grouse, to the previous years. If numbers continue to decline, consider additional future emphasis on habitat improvement and population augmentation, and pursue land purchase opportunities.	Total number of sharp-tailed grouse on Swanson Lakes WLA has generally held steady, due to augmentation efforts. Population growth due to augmentation is expected to begin within 2-3 years.	Continue to survey leks and total up numbers of sharp-tailed grouse on/around Swanson Lakes in spring 2008.
In 2006, plant a total of approximately 1,200 riparian trees and shrubs, in three irrigated fenced plots.	These trees and shrubs were planted in three plots. One plot is irrigated with existing windmill; two are irrigated using solar powered pumps, with the solar arrays mounted on windmill towers.	BPA has received the agreed-upon Habitat Unit (HU) credits from restoration activities at Swanson Lakes, as of September 30, 2006. BPA will no longer fund any habitat restoration at Swanson Lakes. Any future work of this type at Swanson Lakes will need other funding sources.

New Strategies, Deleted Strategies, and/or Changes to 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.

Change to Strategy:

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

1. Manage for upland birds

b. Strategy: Convert approximately 70 to 90 acres annually from old soil bank and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) single-species fields, and other former agricultural fields, back to native-like grasslands. Timeframe: spring to fall.

(Although not technically changed, this strategy will not be funded in the future by BPA. These habitat conversions/restorations will depend on acquiring other funding sources, such as grant request currently in process, in the future.)

2008 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

1. Appropriate weed control on the wildlife area, with focus on areas adjacent to roads and in the small drainages surrounding Lake Creek. Review the year's weed control work, using reports generated, and compare effort and success to previous years' weed control activities.

Weeds to be controlled, by species and acres treated:

Yellow toadflax – less than one acre

Diffuse knapweed – 5 to 10 acres

Whitetop – 20 to 100 acres

Canada thistle – 50 to 150 acres

St. John's wort – fewer than two acres

General weeds – 60 to 140 acres

2. Continue augmentation of sharp-tailed grouse to the wildlife area's current population, and continue program of monitoring these animals. Monitoring will include tracking all grouse with operating radio collars, spring lek surveys, and spring searches for new leks.
3. Maintain existing habitat restoration sites, including approximately 900 acres of restored grasslands, two food plots, and four tree/shrub plots.
4. Evaluate, and maintain as appropriate, fire protection contracts with Lincoln County

FPD's # 5, 6, and 7; and agricultural leases on Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area.

5. Maintain and fill nine upland bird feeders on the wildlife area.
6. Maintain approximately 40 bluebird and kestrel boxes on the wildlife area.
7. Monitor annual use of the wildlife area, by members of the public. This includes hunters, birders, and other visitors. Work with Lake Roosevelt Forum (LRF) to put on annual spring field trip for regional schoolchildren, at the wildlife area.
8. Maintain infrastructure, including buildings, fences, roads, parking areas, kiosk, etc.
Buildings: Office complex – office, shops, barn.
Fence: 60 miles.
Roads: 10 miles, both dirt and gravel.
Six parking areas.
One kiosk with vault toilet.
9. As appropriate, consider additional future emphasis on sharp-tailed grouse habitat improvement and population augmentation, and pursue land purchases.
10. Administrative duties: Complete all BPA- and WDFW-required documentation, develop budget and manage expenditures, supervise assistant manager and seasonal weed control employee, manage inventory of expendable items and durable goods, meet safety requirements for all activities, ensure staff meets training and licensing requirements.

Citizens Advisory Group Input

Citizens Advisory Group members were sent a copy of the draft 2008 plan update, for review and comments. No comments were received. A CAG meeting will be held in fall 2008.

Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

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

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