



SWANSON LAKES WILDLIFE AREA 2010 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Land Management Summary

This is an annual update to the 2006 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 (SLWA), totaling nearly 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’s (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 changes. This management plan update also includes 2009 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2010. This update also includes background describing Bonneville Power Administration’s (BPA) involvement and funding of the wildlife area.

Updates/Changes

SLWA staff did not conduct any restoration work at the Huck/Phantom Butte Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields in 2009. SLWA staff has been busy with planning and executing farm field restoration work off-site; at Reardan Audubon Ponds Wildlife Area, Revere Wildlife Area and under contract on adjacent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands.

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Swanson Lakes submitted an application to the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) in April 2010, for State Lands Restoration grant, for a 250-acre grasslands restoration project in

the Phantom Butte area. As of June 30, 2010, this application is in the review process. If the application is selected for funding, field work will begin in 2011, with culminating seed planting to be completed in late 2012.

New Issues

Sage grouse were first reintroduced to SLWA in 2008, and more were brought in during 2009 and 2010. This species was extirpated in Lincoln County sometime in 1988, or shortly thereafter. WDFW and BLM employees, a graduate student, a technician, and volunteers have been closely monitoring these birds. As of late spring 2010, there has been evidence of a new sage grouse mating ground (lek), and at least one successful brood hatch. At some point in the future, WDFW will determine whether the reintroduction has been successful enough to continue with further augmentation.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Rainbow trout have been planted in Swanson Lakes “Z-Lake” annually between 2004 and 2010. This lake has become a regular fishing site for several Spokane-area fly fishermen. We replaced the damaged aeration windmill at Z-lake with a small commercial-type turbine in 2009, with funds from the Spokane Fly Fisher’s Club. We also continue to have a backup solar array to power a second aeration line

Both sharp-tailed and sage grouse were brought in to SLWA in 2009 and 2010. Sharp-tailed grouse are also being tracked by those who are tracking the sage grouse. In 2009, SLWA staff discovered a new sharp-tailed grouse lek, with mostly introduced males on the mating grounds. This year, there have also been successful hatches of sharp-tailed grouse broods from introduced hens.

Status Report of 2010 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 2010.



2010 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2011 Related Activity/ Comments
Accomplishments for 2009 should be used as this year's goals and they include: control of 15 acres of white top, 140 acres of general weeds, less than one acre of St. John's wort, and less than 1 acre of yellow toadflax.	Appropriate weed control completed. Accomplishments include spraying 50 acres of general weeds, 10 cumulative acres of spotted knapweed, and less than one acre total of both yellow and Dalmatian toadflax.	We will continue weed control efforts in 2010. The seasonal weed control laborer will be employed for a total of six months in 2010. Bio-control insects for knapweed and toadflax were to be donated by BLM and placed on infested sites at SLWA, spring/summer 2010.
Continue augmentation of sharp-tailed grouse for the wildlife area's current population, and continue to monitor.	Augmented the sharp-tailed grouse population with birds from northern Utah, in April 2009. WDFW staff tracked these new birds, from the ground and aerially, throughout the year.	For 2010, large augmentation of grouse from SE Idaho was completed in April. Again, these 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 2010. Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority sets the schedule for HEP surveys, and CBFWA staff performs them. These are often completed on five-year intervals. However, CBFWA has not scheduled any HEP surveys for SLWA, at this time.	No HEP surveys are scheduled at Swanson Lakes in 2010. However, a graduate student and her assistant, doing research on our sharp-tailed grouse, have been performing a variety of vegetation surveys in spring and summer of 2010. It is unknown at this time whether that data will be enough to plug into the HEP models used for SLWA.
Maintain approximately 40 bluebird and kestrel boxes on the wildlife area.	Local volunteer has maintained, repaired and replaced all 40 boxes as needed, in spring 2010.	Local volunteer again maintained, repaired and replaced boxes as needed in March/April, 2011.
<u>Habitat improvement.</u> Start planning for restoration of approximately 250 acres of shrub-steppe on the east side of Telford Road. Apply for funding under RCO grant process.	Started planning for RCO grant application, for shrubsteppe/grassland restoration off Telford Road.	Submitted application in May 2010. Also applied for, and received, \$27,000 Challenge Cost Share (CCS) grant from BLM, to be used on the Telford Road project, regardless of whether the RCO grant application is funded.

Survey grouse populations each spring, on/around SLWA, to obtain rough estimate of numbers of birds on the mating grounds.	One site was located with three strutting sage grouse, but this cannot yet be considered a “lek” or mating ground. On nine active and historic sharp-tailed grouse leks, staff found approximately 50 grouse in spring 2010. This is a slight increase from the approximately 40 birds seen in 2009.	Continue to survey leks and total up numbers of grouse on/around Swanson Lakes annually. Any drops in numbers will be addressed by WDFW prairie grouse specialist and SLWA staff, in coordination with BLM staff. Remedial actions could include stepping up pace of habitat restoration, resuming augmentation of sharp-tailed grouse from other states, and/or increasing predator control activities.
Maintain/renew hay flat lease and fire protection contracts.	Leases maintained/renewed. Worked with ag lessee re: making payment to WDFW as agreed.	Routine annual monitoring of site, will work with lessee at end of year, concerning payment to WDFW.
Grouse predator control. Although predation is not believed to be the primary reason for the 100-year decline of prairie grouse, controlling predators may help cut down the number of grouse killed by birds of prey and coyotes. Volunteers to obtain Master Hunter hours for coyote hunting, and for assisting with federally-permitted trap-move-release for great horned owls.	Ran a Master Hunter coyote hunting opportunity over winter of 2009-10. Several hunters participated, but few coyotes were taken. With federal permit, staff and volunteers trapped and moved three great horned owls off the WLA over the fall/winter of 2009-10.	Expect to run similar operations over the winter of 2010-11. Coyote hunting program may be modified, to allow hours toward Master Hunter certification/ continuation for successful hunts only.
Maintain four food plots.	Tilled and replanted four food plots.	Plots are good for two years. Repeat process in 2011.

Updated 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.

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

Add strategy:

1. Manage for upland birds

a. Strategy: Convert approximately 250 acres in 2011-2012, from Conservation Reserve Program's single-species fields, back to native-like grasslands. Timeframe: spring to fall, 2011 through 2012. (This will only be done if RCO grant for this work is awarded. Decision on which State Lands Restoration grants RCO will fund will be made in late 2010.)

2011 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 recently restored grass fields. Review 2010 weed control work, using reports generated, and compare effort and success to 2009 weed control activities.

Weeds to be controlled, by species and acres treated:

Yellow toadflax – less than one acre

Dalmatian toadflax (uncommon) – hand pull individual plants - less than one acre

Diffuse knapweed – 5 acres

White top – 5 acres

Canada thistle – 10 acres

St. John's wort – fewer than two acres

General weeds – 50 to 150 acres (includes roadside and parking lot weed control)

2. Large-scale augmentation of sharp-tailed grouse to the wildlife area's current population was scheduled for 2010. Approximately 50 birds of each species were released at SLWA in spring 2010. Monitoring will include tracking all sharp-tailed and sage grouse with operating radio collars, spring lek surveys, and spring searches for new leks. Predator control will be addressed, with special coyote hunting opportunities for WDFW Master Hunters, and with federally authorized raptor trapping and translocation to non-prairie grouse areas.
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 Fire Protection District's; maintain the one agricultural lease on Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area.
5. Maintain approximately 40 bluebird and kestrel boxes on the wildlife area.

6. Monitor annual use of the wildlife area, by members of the public, including hunters, birders, and other visitors.
7. Work with Lake Roosevelt Forum to put on annual wildlife area spring field trips for regional schoolchildren.
8. Maintain existing 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 for protection of sharp-tailed grouse.
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

Citizen Advisory Group Membership includes: Brian Miller, Spokane Audubon; Dave Hubbard, rancher; Gary Maurer, agriculture lessee; Ed Ladwig, rancher ; Kevin Hupp, County Weed Board; Jason Lowe, U.S. Bureau of Land Management ; Charlie Berg, big game hunter/businessman; John Phillips, Pheasants Forever/INWC; Dennis Bly, County Commissioner, Harrington; BJ Kieffer, Spokane Tribal biologist.

The Citizens Advisory Group members were sent a copy of the draft 2010 plan update, for review and comment. As of July 22, 2010, comments include the following:

1. Again this year, local ranchers would like grazing on the WLA. Essentially stalled – until the pilot grazing program/results sorted out and decisions made in Olympia regarding the future of grazing on the wildlife areas, grazing will not be allowed on SLWA.
2. Fire – there are two opposing views regarding fires on the wildlife area. Fire districts are tasked with fighting fires that originate or pass through the WLA. BLM fire management staff would like to see SLWA as part of a long-term roadside fire danger reduction program they want to implement. This would involve burning out a certain

distance from county road edges, and replanting these edges to more fire-resistant species. Both these types of actions can have a place in management of fires on SLWA.

3. Prairie grouse – some neighbors question the value of reintroducing sage grouse to the area, and augmenting the sharp-tailed grouse we already present on the wildlife area.

Information for BPA's Wildlife Mitigation Program

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration to mitigate for wildlife losses from the construction Grand Coulee Dam. By funding habitat enhancement for a set period of time, and maintenance and operation costs for the life of the project, BPA receives credit towards its mitigation obligation.

Progress towards this obligation is assessed through the use of periodic surveys based on standardized Habitat Evaluation Procedures (HEP) for three focal species: sharp-tailed grouse, sage grouse, and mule deer. By measuring a variety of habitat features, HEP surveyors apply habitat models for each of the focal species to arrive at a numerical figure between 0 and 1 that quantifies the habitat quality for a particular focal species. This figure is known as a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI). This figure is then multiplied by the area habitat being evaluated (acres of shrub steppe, riparian, woodland, etc.) The result is expressed as a Habitat Unit (HU), which is the basic currency of HEP.

Reports/Proposals/Plans

Since 1993, the BPA has provided funding for Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. Consequently, numerous reports, funding proposals and annual work plans have been produced, most recently in January of 2009. By following the links below, the interested reader can find detailed information on a variety of topics that the wildlife area is engaged in.

General information on the Mitigation Project

The 2010-2012 Funding Proposal Narrative was submitted to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council in January of 2009).

<http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2010/proposal.asp?id=983>

This document contains detailed descriptions of the wildlife area's history, land purchases and rationale for mitigation and focal species.

Additional information describing BPA's role in mitigation and crediting can be found on the BPA web site: <http://www.efw.bpa.gov/IntegratedFWP/Wildlife.aspx>
<http://www.efw.bpa.gov/IntegratedFWP/wildlifecredit.aspx>

Management Activities

Funding Proposal 2010-2012 Narrative submitted to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council in January of 2009

<http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2010/proposal.asp?id=983>

Funding Proposal 2010-2012 submitted to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council in January of 2009. <http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2010/proposal.asp?id=983>

Both documents contain detailed descriptions of proposed management activities for the 2010-2012 time period including proposed budgets plus projected needs through 2018.

Monitoring and Evaluation

2010-2012 Funding Proposal Narrative submitted to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council in January of 2009. <http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2010/proposal.asp?id=983>
This link contains detailed descriptions and summation of wildlife surveys conducted on the area since 1994.

Acquisition Strategy

WDFW pursues an active acquisition program based on criteria described in management plans for sage and sharp-tailed grouse, and the internal Lands 20/20 review process. At this time, however, Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area has no parcels targeted for acquisition.

Funding Strategy

2010-2012 Funding Proposal submitted to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council in January of 2009. See link above for details. This document contains detailed descriptions of proposed management activities for the 2010-2012 time period including proposed budgets plus projected needs through 2018. Also contains detailed descriptions of work elements, capitol projects and cost-share opportunities and all projected budgets.

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Want to see the full plan?

Go to –
http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/