



SWANSON LAKES WILDLIFE AREA 2012 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

This is a biennial update to the 2006 Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Management Plan http://www.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 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 includes 2010 and 2011 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2012-13. This update also includes background describing Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) involvement and funding of the wildlife area.

Updates/Changes

Grassland restoration at Revere Wildlife Area was scheduled for completion in the fall of 2012. SLWA staff did not conduct any restoration work at the Huck/Phantom Butte Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields in 2010 or 2011, but is preparing soil on the Huck fields for restoration seeding in fall 2012, with help from a grant from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). SLWA also restored about 200 acres of shrub steppe/grassland habitat on adjacent BLM grounds in 2010 and 2011.

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New Issues

Sage grouse update - birds were first reintroduced to SLWA in 2008 and more have been imported annually; including birds brought in during 2010 and 2011. This species had previously been extirpated in Lincoln County (~ 1988). WDFW staff, volunteers, and a graduate student and her assistants have all been involved in the reintroduction; including lek surveys and radio-collar monitoring. As of late summer 2012, the sage grouse have one definite lek established, and another possible lek further east. There have been several successful hatches, and trackers regularly reporting non-radio collared sage grouse. At some point in the future, WDFW will determine whether the reintroduction has been successful enough to continue with further augmentation.

Fire management – Several actions were taken to help prevent large, catastrophic wildfires on the SWLA. In June 2012, WDFW entered into an agreement with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide wildfire suppression services on the SWLA. WDFW biologist Richard Tveten also prepared a fire suppression plan for integration into the wildlife area management plan. The purpose of the wildfire suppression plan is to identify fire management priorities and strategies for the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. It is intended to serve as a resource to the Wildlife Area staff as well as fire fighters should they need to suppress wildfires or plan prescribed fires. Maps are included in the plan showing ownership, fire department jurisdictions, structures, fire breaks and water sources. BLM assisted SLWA staff in developing control activities to help prevent large, catastrophic wildfires on the SLWA/Twin Lakes public lands in Lincoln County. With several large fires in the Intermountain West in recent years, this issue will continue to be important.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Z-Lake: planted rainbow trout have now attracted river otters to the lake. The compressor for the aeration system was replaced with a sturdier model in 2011, with funding provided by the Spokane Fly Fisher's Club.

Additional sharp-tailed and sage grouse introduced to the wildlife area from out of state in 2010 and 2011, but only sage grouse were planned for importation in 2012. Sharp-tailed grouse are being tracked by sage grouse researchers.

Status Report of 2010/2011 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 2012-13.

2010/2011 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2012-2013 Related Activity/ Comments
Weed control on the wildlife area: control of 15 acres of white top, 140 acres of general	Weed control completed. Accomplishments include annual spraying of 30-75 acres	We have continued weed control efforts in 2010 and 2011. The seasonal weed

weeds, less than one acre of St. John's wort, and less than 1 acre of yellow toadflax.	of general weeds, and spot-spraying of weeds including mullein, yellow toadflax, diffuse knapweed, Scotch thistle and St. John's wort.	control laborer was employed for a total of five months in each year 2010 and 2011. For 2012 and 2013 activities/seasonal labor work is expected to mirror that of the previous years.
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 2010 and 2011. WDFW staff tracked the new birds, both by ground and aerial surveys throughout the year.	No sharp-tailed grouse were planned to be introduced to SLWA in spring 2012. Biologists determined that other areas within the state are in higher need than the SLWA. Plans for 2013 are unknown at this time.
Determine general trend of habitat quality on the wildlife area. 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 or 2011. Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority (CBFWA) determines 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.	Graduate student Kourtney Stonehouse has conducted a variety of vegetation surveys in spring and summer of between 2010 and 2012. However, it is unlikely that her data will be enough to plug into the HEP models used for SLWA. Discussion with BPA contract representatives are needed, to determine whether BPA will fund an extensive survey. Otherwise, WDFW's Citizen Science program may help provide data on long-term change, in the future.
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 and 2011.	Local volunteer was again scheduled to maintain, repair and replace boxes as needed in March/April, for both 2012 and 2013.
Begin planning for restoration of approximately 250 acres of shrub steppe on the east side of Telford Road. Apply for funding under Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grant process.	Worked in 2011 on WWRP grant application, for submission in spring 2012, for shrub steppe/grassland restoration in the Phantom Butte area.	With grant funding from BLM, staff prepared 120 acres of old farmland in 2011, with work scheduled to continue into 2012. Planting to shrub steppe/grassland habitat will continue into fall 2012.

Survey grouse populations each spring, in the vicinity of SLWA, to obtain rough estimate of numbers of birds on the mating grounds.	Surveys were completed in both 2010 and 2011.	Surveys are planned for spring 2012 and 2013. Sage grouse numbers are holding their own. Sharp-tailed grouse leks show slightly reduced numbers; one lek has either been extirpated, or moved and not found yet.
Maintain/renew hay flat lease and fire protection contracts.	Leases maintained/renewed. The lessee at Revere dropped out in 2010; land will be fallowed until new lessee is chosen.	Routine annual monitoring of site was conducted. Worked with lessee at end of 2010, concerning payment to WDFW. In 2012, will develop a bid package for a new lessee. New lessee scheduled to pick up the agricultural property in 2012 or 2013.
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 winters of 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. Several hunters participated, but few coyotes were taken. With federal permit, staff and volunteers trapped and moved one great horned owl off the WLA over the fall/winter of 2011/2012.	Expect to run similar operations over the winter of 2012/2013. Coyote hunting program may be modified, to allow hours toward Master Hunter certification/continuation for successful hunts only. WDFW is also considering a complete overhaul of the Master Hunter program.
Maintain four food plots.	Tilled and replanted four food plots in 2011.	Plots are good for two years. Repeat process in 2013.

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.

Updated strategy:

1. Manage for upland birds

a. Strategy: Convert approximately 120 acres in 2012-2013, from old single-species small-grain fields or non-native wheatgrass, back to native-like grasslands.

Timeframe: spring to fall 2012 through 2013.

2012-2013 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; focusing on areas adjacent to roads and recently restored grassfields. Determine success by reviewing and comparing with previous year's weed control work.

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

Canada thistle – 5 acres

St. John's wort – 15 acres

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

2. Maintain existing habitat restoration sites; including approximately 900 acres of restored grasslands, two food plots, and four tree/shrub plots.
3. 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.
4. Maintain approximately 40 bluebird and kestrel boxes on the wildlife area.
5. As appropriate, consider additional future emphasis on sharp-tailed grouse habitat improvement and population augmentation, and pursue land purchases.

Citizens Advisory Group Input

Citizen Advisory Group Membership includes: Brian Miller, Spokane Audubon; Dave Hubbard, rancher; Gary Maurer, agriculture lessee; Kevin Hupp, Lincoln County Weed Board; Jason Lowe, U.S. Bureau of Land Management ; Charlie Berg, big game hunter/businessman.

The Citizens Advisory Group members were sent a copy of the draft 2012 plan update, for

review and comment. As of August 31, 2012, comments include the following:

1. Again this year, local ranchers would like grazing on the WLA. At this time, grazing is not an option, as WDFW prairie grouse biologists generally agree that grazing could be detrimental to population numbers of sage and sharp-tailed grouse.
2. Prairie grouse – again, some neighbors question the value of reintroducing sage grouse to the area. There is concern among farmers and ranchers that the Endangered Species Act could limit what they can and can't do on their lands.

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 Procedure (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 Bonneville Power Administration has provided funding for Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. Consequently, numerous reports, funding proposals and annual work plans have been produced, most recently in August of 2012. 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

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 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

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>

2010-2012 Funding Proposal 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 was 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/index.htm