

Cowlitz Wildlife Area

2017-18 Wildlife Area Management Plan Update



Figure 1: Peterman Ridge Unit.

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the 2006 [Cowlitz Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities at the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. Every 10 years, WDFW revises management plans for each Wildlife Area to identify new management priorities and actions. In between plan revisions, the update focuses on recent accomplishments over the last two years.

Cowlitz Wildlife Area Management Highlights

Peterman Ridge Silviculture Projects (Objective: Protect, Restore, and Enhance Fish and Wildlife and Their Habitats, Goal #1, Strategy C)

Twenty units totaling 1,055 acres were pre-commercially thinned to promote forest health and long-term wildlife habitat benefits. To increase diversity, retention preference was given to conifer species, brush species, and low growing hardwoods. Trees greater than 12-inch diameter were retained. In addition, a 180-acre commercial thin was completed. A road closure ditch was constructed to control vehicular traffic and prevent road degradation from vehicular use on muddy roads. A non-essential culvert was removed and the road subsequently abandoned.



Figure 2: Operator loading logs onto a truck.

Peterman Ridge Trail Construction (Objective: Provide Sustainable Fish and Wildlife-Related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible with Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats Goal #2, Strategy C)

Phase Two of the Peterman Ridge non-motorized trail (about 10 miles) was completed. This portion of the trail begins at the 1000 Road / 1500 Road bridge and meanders through mature timber before ascending approximately two miles. The trail then loops down through the 1600 Road area and back. There is also a small loop (about 1.5 miles) behind the 1500 Road gate that uses new trail and roads to utilize a portion of the trail (built in Phase One). This trail meanders for about a half mile through mature timber above Shelton Creek and returns via logging roads.



Figure 3: Peterman Ridge Trail.

Vegetation Management (Objective: Ensure WDFW activities, programs, facilities and lands are consistent with local, state and federal regulations that protect and recover fish, wildlife and their habitats Goal #1, Strategy A, B and D)

Wildlife area staff members regularly monitor the Cowlitz Wildlife Area assessing weed populations. Due to concerns about the stability of the Mossyrock Dam spillways in the event of a large earthquake, Tacoma Power reduced lake levels by approximately 30 feet, exposing 52 miles of shoreline. This new exposed bare ground was the focus of Tacoma Power and the wildlife area as new weed populations emerged. Scotch broom occurs on all units of the wildlife area but became very prolific in the drawdown areas. Control methods varied by location but consisted of hand pulling and chemical methods. Other accomplishments include:

- Conducted control activities on yellow archangel at the Swofford Pond Trailhead.
- Conducted control activities on Bohemian knotweed on the Kosmos Unit.

Kosmos / Dogpatch Access Barrier Construction (Objective: Ensure WDFW activities, programs, facilities and lands are consistent with local, state and federal regulations that protect and recover fish, wildlife and their habitats Goal #3 and Goal #4)

In response to the new water level regime on Riffe Lake, it was necessary to protect cultural resources from disturbance and emergent vegetation from wildfire. This was accomplished by installing approximately 1,400 feet of ecology blocks to create a physical barrier and prevent vehicular traffic from entering the wildlife area outside of the authorized area. A cultural resource survey was completed on the six acres of land within the area of potential effect. Initially the southern terminus of the block barrier was placed at the point where the lakebed drop-off began. Within a few weeks, an individual proceeded to drive around the blocks by driving down the bank. No suspects were identified and no evidence of destructive activity was observed. In response, the wildlife area staff extended the southern terminus by 30 feet.



Figure 4: An ecology block barrier used to protect resources.

Hunter Education (Objective: Minimize Adverse Interactions between Humans and Wildlife Goal #1, Strategy C)

Wildlife area staff members conducted seven hunter education classes between 2017-2018. The classes are integral to the wildlife area's public outreach activities. The classes provide information on safety, as well as legal and ethical information. In addition, the wildlife area staff assisted people on regulation-related issues, wildlife problems or concerns, general questions, and informational inquiries.



Figure 5: Officer Sympson instructing a class on the roles of the Fish and Wildlife officer.

New Issues

Kosmos Dogpatch Trespass and Camping

Due to concerns about the stability of the Mossyrock Dam spillways, and the reduced lake level draw down, the Kosmos Dogpatch peninsula is no longer seasonally inundated. This has created emergent issues, such as an increase in vehicular trespass onto culturally sensitive resource lands, the emergence of invasive plant communities, and an increase in residential camping year-round. Under the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license, Tacoma Power is tasked with protecting cultural resources within the project area. Under a settlement agreement, WDFW is responsible for managing those lands within the project designated as wildlife area lands. In addition to preserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, and their habitats, WDFW must ensure that management and recreational activities are consistent with federal, state, and local laws as well as the requirements of the FERC license. Under the management plan, access and camping is considered seasonal. Normal lake levels helped control and manage that access. With the drawdown, changes in the management of vehicle access and the stay limits for campers is being discussed. In addition, a gate will be installed to manage access.

Trespass & Encroachment Management

Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff members monitor property lines through a variety of means that include checking aerial photos through Lewis County's online parcel mapping software, and on the ground observations while conducting activities in the field. Encroachments or property line issues are documented and the information shared with Tacoma Power in the event civil actions are required to resolve the issue. During the period covered by this update, wildlife area staff members investigated and documented eight encroachments. As a result, staff members signed five trails and roads entering the wildlife area from private property with signs stating "no motorized vehicles."

WDFW and Tacoma Power, in order to facilitate managing encroachment issues, met to determine responsibilities and define a process. The responsibilities and processes are now contained within a Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Cowlitz Wildlife Area Management - regarding land use violations (encroachments / trespasses). WDFW will report all violations to Tacoma Power.