

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area

2017-18 Wildlife Area Management Plan Update



Figure 1: Prescribed fire on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the 2017 [Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts and public recreation opportunities at the Sinlahekin 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.

Management Highlights

Noxious Weed Management (Goal #1, Objective B)

Sinlahekin staff members have been busy with the constant emergence of new and old weed species across all eight units of the wildlife area. They've inspected approximately 15,000 acres, and in 2018 they completed treating approximately 600 acres. Scotch thistle is a significant problem on the Chiliwist Unit. This 5,000-acre unit requires constant vigilance throughout the spring, summer, and fall months. Other accomplishments include:

- Increased control of St. John's wort and Dalmatian toadflax through treatment
- Released thousands of biocontrol agents to control diffuse knapweed and toadflax
- Conducted spurge flax treatments in cooperation with Okanogan County



Figure 2: Scotch thistle rosette.



Figure 3: Biocontrol agents on St. John's wort.

Maintain Fences and Gates (Goal #1, Objective C)

The Okanogan Valley Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen secured funding to replace a wire stretch gate with a new pipe gate. They installed new pipe anchor points on each side of the gate along with a latch that will make it easier for trail users to open and close the

gate on this section of trail. The chapter also laid the finishing touches on fence at one of the Carter Mountain parking areas by installing a third and final rail, creating a uniform, finished product. Thank you to the Okanogan Valley Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen for their continued support, enthusiasm, and perpetual willingness to help with projects on the many units of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.



Figure 4: Gate with new pipe anchor points on either side.



Figure 5: Installing fencing.



Figure 6: Crew in front of the completed gate.

Habitat Restoration Projects (Goal #1, Objective C)

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration – At the completion of phase three of the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project, a total of 179 acres of primarily high-density ponderosa pine was commercially harvested. In areas where machinery disturbed the substrate,

crews followed the operation in the fall with broadcast seeding of native bunchgrass. Grass seed used in these areas was collected from local populations and grown out in the Columbia Basin. We have found that seeding during the late fall or early winter followed by a spring herbicide application to reduce competition from invasive species has produced the most successful native establishment. In addition to commercially harvesting these stands, approximately 80 acres of overstocked ponderosa pine savanna were thinned by hand in areas where the topography was challenging and access was difficult or impossible for heavy equipment. Following fuels reduction (i.e. harvest and thinning), crews began to prepare the area for broadcast prescribed burning. In total, 652 acres were burned by the completion of this project.

Carter Mountain Prescribed Fire – A total of approximately 150 acres on the Carter Mountain Unit was treated with prescribed fire to remove a monoculture of sagebrush and create more heterogeneity throughout the sagebrush steppe community. This removal was necessary to encourage the growth of understory vegetation such as native bunchgrasses and forbs in order to benefit shrubsteppe species such as mule deer and the sage thrasher. A mix of native species was seeded over areas that were more severely burned during the fall.



Figure 7: March 2018, post prescribed burn. An area that burned under moderate intensity showing good consumption, which creates favorable conditions for native shrubs and perennial grasses to re-sprout from root crowns.



Figure 8: October 2018, post fire re-growth of native shrubs, forbs, and grasses.

Pollinator Project (Goal 2, Objective C)

District staff members planted forb and shrub plugs as well as scattered native forb seed throughout one of the prescribed burn units near Sarsapkin Creek on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. This effort was part of a joint project between WDFW, Idaho Fish and Game, and the Xerces Society. The following citation from the project summary details the objectives of the effort: “This project will improve habitat, address knowledge gaps, and reduce impacts of identified threats for the five bumble bee Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in Idaho and Washington. New information will assist the States of Idaho and Washington in implementing a strategic vision for bumble bee conservation identified in their respective State Wildlife Action Plans, benefitting these species and additional pollinator SGCN.”



Figure 9: WDFW district staff members and volunteers who assisted with the pollinator planting effort on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

Community Outreach (Goal #8, Objective E)

Staff members participated in the annual Tonasket fourth grade field trip to the Sinlahekin. They spoke to the students about the different plants and animals that are found on the wildlife area. Staff members also spoke about the different management methods that are used to promote various habitat types for different species. This was the first time out to the wildlife area for many of the students. Hopefully, we will see some of them out here in the future with their families.

Staff members also led the Brewster sixth grade class on their annual hike from Forde Lake to Conners Lake, where wildlife area activities and what visitors might see were discussed and highlighted. Many of the students had not been on a nature hike before and were quite excited to see the turtles around Forde Lake.

Additionally, staff members took the Tonasket School District Outreach Class (which ranges from kindergarten to middle school students) on a tour of the Sinlahekin prescribed burn units. They discussed the many reasons for conducting prescribed burns and thinning on the wildlife area. They were able to show the students some of the different plants that benefit from landscape burning and in turn explain how those plants then benefit the wildlife in the area. The students had a fun time exploring the wildlife area and had a variety of questions about it. Many of the students want to come back to the area to camp this summer.



Figure 10: Tonasket outreach class.



Figure 11: Tonasket outreach class.



Figure 12: Tonasket fourth grade students.



Figure 13: Brewster sixth grade students.

New Issues

Campground Renovations Project

Funding was awarded through the Recreation and Conservation Office to implement renovations to the campgrounds on the Sinlahekin Unit. The renovations include installing Department of Natural Resources approved fire rings and gravel camping pads.

Blue Lake Trail Pedestrian Bridge

The bridge spanning Sinlahekin Creek near Blue Lake washed out during the spring of 2018. Staff members are working on securing funding to reset the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) approved bridge to continue to provide recreational access to the west side of Blue Lake.