

Scotch Creek Wildlife Area

2018-19 Wildlife Area Management Plan Update

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

Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Management Highlights

Noxious Weed Management (Goal #1, Objective B)

The staff at Scotch Creek have been busy with the constant emergence of new and old weed species across all seven units at Scotch Creek. They inspected approximately 11,000 acres and treated approximately 240 acres in 2018. Musk thistle is a significant problem in the Okanogan Highlands, which includes the Chesaw Unit. This 6,000-acre unit requires constant vigilance in summer months to spot new plants emerging. Other accomplishments include:

- Emphasis control on St. John's wort, Dalmatian toadflax, and hoary alyssum
- Release of thousands biocontrol agents to control diffuse knapweed and toadflax
- Leafy spurge treatments in cooperation with Okanogan County

Scotch Creek and Tunk Valley Unit Vegetation Inventory (Goal #1, Objective D)

A successful inventory of plant species was completed on the Scotch Creek and Tunk Valley units. A contracted botanist inventoried all species, mapped plant communities, determined species and abundance in each community, identified and mapped noxious weeds, and documented the location of rare, threatened, and endangered plants. Results from these studies will help aid management on these units by identifying areas needing restoration, noxious weed locations for treatment, and rare plants needing special protection.

Habitat Restoration Projects (Goal #1, Objective F and G)

Staff members completed the full restoration on the feedlot on the Eder Unit in 2017. This included 27 acres of summer fallow, seedbed preparation, and dormant seeding of a native grass/forb seed mix designed specifically for the site. In 2018, staff members also completed the project on the Scotch Creek Unit, below the corals, to improve a degraded site adjacent to Scotch Creek. This native grass/forb seeding is greatly enhancing the nesting and brood rearing habitat for sharp-tailed grouse. In addition, staff members planted 80 Rocky Mountain juniper shrubs within the irrigation shrub planting areas near headquarters. The species will provide diversity and berries beneficial to songbirds and upland game birds. On the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit, staff members, with the assistance of volunteer Bob Fischer, planted 500 black cottonwood trees within various riparian

areas. These native trees will provide valuable habitat, food, and cover for a variety of wildlife species.



Figure 1: Botanist Visalli surveying the Scotch Creek Unit.

Native Seed Collection and Grow Out (Goal #3, Objective D)

Scotch Creek contracted with a proven vendor to collect native grass species on the Scotch Creek Unit. Bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue seed was harvested and is currently being grown at a facility in Columbia Basin. The new crop of source-identified seed was available for restoration projects on Scotch Creek in the fall of 2019. In addition, staff members harvested two pounds of native water birch seed in 2018 along Scotch Creek and delivered to another vendor near Wenatchee. The nursery is well known for their excellent quality of native trees and shrubs. Plants will be ready for a spring/fall 2020 riparian enhancement project.

Sharp-tailed Grouse Capture and Relocation (Goal #4, Objective A)

The grouse population on the Scotch Creek Unit hit an all-time high in 2015 with an estimate of 116 birds. Unfortunately, later that summer, we experienced the largest wildfire in Okanogan history, which burned over most of Scotch Creek. As a result, we temporarily lost most of the habitat for sharp-tailed grouse. The following spring, 22 birds were estimated to be on the unit. They recovered slightly in 2018, with an estimate of 60 birds. To help boost numbers, WDFW and other volunteers translocated 71 sharp-tailed grouse in 2018 and 2019. Grouse were captured near the 70 Mile House area in British Columbia, Canada, and released on the Tunk Valley and Scotch Creek units in 2018 and 2019.

Stock Fence Markers for Sharp-tailed Grouse (Goal #4, Objective C)

Staff received 10,900 feet of vinyl under sill and cut these into 43,600 pieces, each 3" long. By marking the top two strands of barbed wire, the fence becomes more visible to hard, low flying birds like sharp-tailed grouse and other upland game birds, and thus prevents collisions that lead to mortality. All of the new fence built on Tunk Valley, Pogue Mountain, and Scotch Creek units have been marked with these vinyl tags in 2017 and 2018.

Community Outreach (Goal #8, Objective E)

Wildlife Area Manager Olson gave a presentation to the advanced biology class at Okanogan High School as part of their continuing series on “The Ecology of the Okanogan.” He also participated in the Oden Road Fire Study involving the high school, which studies the post-wildfire effects on local habitats. He guided students during the vegetation monitoring portion as well as the breeding bird survey.



Figure 2: Sharp-tailed grouse being released on the Scotch Creek Unit.



Figure 3: Released sharp-tailed grouse with transmitter in flight on the Scotch Creek Unit.



Figure 4: Stock fence markers for sharp-tailed grouse.

Happy Hill Temporary Grazing (Goal #9, Objective C)

A neighboring ranch adjacent to the Scotch Creek Unit requested a critical need for grazing opportunities due to the 2018 McCloud Fire impacting their U.S. Forest Service grazing allotment, north of Winthrop. Scotch Creek provided 1,500 acres of grazing on Happy Hill, where fences were recently repaired following the 2015 Okanogan Complex fires. Livestock were given pasture from early September until mid-October. The assistance was greatly appreciated.



Figure 5: Cattle lightly scattered across temporary permit.

New Shrub Plot and Facility Repairs (Goal #11, Objective B)

Staff members completed the construction of a new shrub plot surrounding a wet spring on Silver Hill, which is west of headquarters on the Scotch Creek Unit. The plot, constructed of deer fencing, will protect 80 new water birch, quaking aspen, and numerous other deciduous shrubs.

Reconstruction of several facilities on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area were completed following the 2015 Okanogan Complex fires using Federal Emergency Management Agency funding. Equipment storage sheds and a hay storage facility were completed on the Scotch Creek Unit, and boundary fencing was completed on the Scotch Creek, Pogue Mountain, and Tunk Valley units.



Figure 6: New tree and shrub enclosure on Silver Hill.

New Issues

Scotch Creek Unit Land Exchange

Staff members are currently working with an adjacent landowner to exchange approximately 80 acres of agricultural acreage for 180 acres of sagebrush steppe habitat. The acres gained by WDFW are valuable habitat for sharp-tailed grouse, mule deer, and numerous other species.



Figure 7: Area WDFW would gain in land exchange.

Eder Life Estate Modification

Talks are ongoing regarding WDFW receiving approximately 750 acres currently under a life estate agreement with the Eder family.

Riparian Restoration Project

Funding was awarded through the Recreation and Conservation Office to implement a riparian restoration project on the Scotch Creek Unit. The project is projected to start in late 2019/2020.

Beaver Analog Project

Scotch Creek staff members, in partnership with the Colville Confederated Tribe, are working to implement a beaver analog project within Ninemile Creek on the Charles and Mary Eder Unit.