

Wenas Wildlife Area

2017-18 Management Plan Update

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

Target Shooting

Recreational target shooting is a popular activity on the Wenas Wildlife Area. WDFW has been working with the public and most recently the Wenas Target Shooting Advisory Committee (WTSAC) to address target shooting activities on the wildlife area (Wenas Wildlife Area Management Plan 2006 - Goal 1 - Provide public Access compatible with fish, wildlife and habitat protection, Strategy I). Recommendations of the WTSAC include improving signage and education, bringing WDFW target shooting rules into line with Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) rules, improving the Sheep Company and Durr Road shooting areas, and addressing user conflicts in the Buffalo Road area.



Figure 1: Wenas Target Shooting Advisory Committee meeting - June 22, 2017

WDFW worked with the WTSAC to develop plans for improvements at the two shooting areas. Implementation, using State Capital Funds, will include development of parking areas and installation of backstops for rifle and pistol areas, and is anticipated to begin in 2020, once State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and county permitting requirements are complete. The SEPA application will also include proposals to close the Buffalo Road area to all target shooting (rifle, pistol, shotgun), except for a designated trap shooting site, and

make the target shooting fire season timing restriction (*sunrise to 10:00 a.m. only*) a permanent rule on the Wenas Wildlife Area.

In 2017 and 2018, the target shooting fire season timing restriction continued to be implemented on the wildlife area under a temporary rule. A statewide emergency rule closed WDFW lands to all target shooting in 2018, from Aug. 4 to Sep. 15, due to the high fire danger.

Wildfires

Wildfires continue to occur on the wildlife area each year, the majority of which are human-caused. These wildfires result in a loss of habitat, can destroy capital investments such as elk control and boundary fencing on the wildlife area, and can be a threat to recreationists and private landowners. The cost of suppressing these fires is often high, as is the cost of restoring fragile shrubsteppe habitat and replacing elk control fence.

The Wenas Wildlife Area had three wildfires in 2017 and four in 2018, all of which were human caused. The 2017 fires, which were all considered “suspicious,” burned a total of 2,865 acres and threatened 16 homes, 12 outbuildings, and 1.5 miles of elk fence.



Figure 2: 2017 Wenas Lake fire



Figure 3: Landscape after the 2017 Sheep fire

The 2018 fires burned over 2,600 acres on the wildlife area. The first fire of 2018 occurred on June 2 in the Buffalo Road area. It burned 1,780 acres and resulted in a public use closure until October when it was opened to walk-in access, which stayed in place through spring green up. The largest overall fire was the Conrad fire, which started on private land and burned almost 4,600 acres, just over 700 acres on wildlife area land. This fire threatened the Conrad Ranches development and burned 2.5 miles of elk fence.



Figure 4: Burned landscape after the 2018 Buffalo fire



Figure 5: The 2018 Conrad fire burns

Shrubsteppe Restoration

Funding from Bonneville Power Administration and state appropriations for fire restoration allowed for the purchase of native seed mix for restoring 190 acres of shrubsteppe burned in 2017 and 160 acres burned in 2018 (Wenas Wildlife Area Management Plan 2006 – Goal 6 – Protect and restore shrubsteppe habitat). Spring moisture in both years was above average, resulting in good first year seedling establishment in the majority of the seeded areas. Weed control using herbicides as well as mechanical and biological methods occurred on over 750 acres of lands that have shrubsteppe restoration activities.



Figure 6: Buffalo fire seeding in fall 2018

Umtanum Creek Enhancement – Large Wood Placement

In 2018, WDFW, Yakama Nation Fisheries Program, and Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group harvested trees from overstocked stands on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area and placed 1,000 pieces of large wood, via helicopter, in 4.5-miles of Umtanum Creek, starting approximately one mile above its confluence with the Yakima River. The project goal was to restore and protect the integrity of priority ecological systems and sites (Wenas Wildlife Area Management Plan 2006 – Goal 2 – Restore and maintain fish populations) by aggrading the channel, reconnecting it to its floodplain, and returning it to its historic condition. Log structures can reduce stream velocities at high flows, trap sediment, and correct channel incision.



Figure 7: Helicopter picking up large wood pile



Figure 8: Crews placing large wood in Umtanum Creek

New Issues

Wenas Watershed Enhancement

WDFW received a restoration grant from the Recreation Conservation Office to improve fish and wildlife habitat by enhancing the function and resiliency of the upper Wenas Watershed on department lands (Statewide Planning Goal 1). The project will restore floodplain function along North Fork Wenas Creek in the vicinity of the Mellotte crossing by moving the road access to a location downstream where the channel is naturally confined, removing the current bridge and abandoning the floodplain road. In addition, 200 acres of overstocked timber stands will be thinned on the adjacent slopes of Cleman Mountain to improve habitat within the stands and create more fire resilient stands. Up to 300 of the thinned trees will be placed in North Fork Wenas Creek to provide habitat and structure for fish, including juvenile threatened steelhead. Work on this project is anticipated to begin in the spring of 2020.



Figure 9: Spring flows utilizing floodplain and overtopping Mellotte Road

NJK land acquisition

WDFW expects to complete acquisition of approximately 1,500 acres of small, private timber land in the South Fork Manastash drainage in 2019. The acquisition will protect north-south connectivity in the area. The Manastash watershed has been designated by DNR as a high priority watershed under the Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework, meaning that it is at high risk for catastrophic fire and/or insects and disease. These watersheds are prioritized for forest management funding. Because of this, assessing the forest habitat on the property will be a high priority. A Road Management and Abandonment Plan will be required for the property. This information will be incorporated into the larger Wenas Wildlife Area Management Plan and will be used to help determine restoration and enhancement priorities for the area.