

Whatcom Wildlife Area

2017-18 Wildlife Area Management Plan Update



Figure 1: Lake Terrell Unit

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

Management Highlights

Noxious Weed Management

The staff at the Whatcom Wildlife Area have been busy with the constant emergence of weed species across all seven units of the wildlife area (2006 Whatcom Wildlife Area Management Plan – Goal 2 – Manage weeds consistent with state and county rules). Staff annually inspect approximately 5,000 acres for noxious weeds and perform control work to keep infestations from spreading. Purple loosestrife, poison hemlock, tansy ragwort, and Scotch broom are controlled each year on the Lake Terrell, Intalco, Tennant Lake, and Nooksack units.

Eurasian Milfoil Control in Lake Terrell

Six years ago WDFW identified Eurasian milfoil in the north end of Lake Terrell. This aggressive invasive aquatic weed quickly spread throughout the lake, affecting fish species and recreation. In 2016 a grant from the Department of Ecology funded the chemical control of the milfoil, which started in 2017. This control work was continued in 2018 and 2019. In 2018, approximately 10 water acres were treated with very good success. Surveys in 2019 found considerably less Eurasian milfoil in the main body of the lake, which resulted in increased recreational boating use in the summer months.



Figure 2: Eurasian milfoil in Lake Terrell

Other weed control accomplishments include:

- Chemical and mechanical control of Himalayan blackberry on most units.
- Release and monitoring of cinnabar moth larvae biocontrol agents to control Tansy Ragwort on the Intalco Unit.
- Moist soil management using chemical and mechanical means to control Reed canary grass on several units.



Figure 3: Cinnabar moth biocontrol insects on the Intalco Unit

Nooksack Unit Dike Repair Project

Recent flood events on the Nooksack River scoured out many large holes in the riverfront dike which allowed flooding to occur in the area south of the Nooksack Unit. In 2018, working with the Whatcom County River and Flood Division, a large-scale dike repair project was completed to prevent further flooding. Soil materials were brought in to fill the scours, then a woven erosion control mat was installed over the top. Native grass seed was planted on the mat. The heavily used dike top trail in the construction area was closed for one year to allow the repairs to solidify. The trail was reopened in 2019 and has held up very well (Statewide Planning Goal 3).



Figure 4: Nooksack Unit dike repair work

Lower Nooksack River Salmon Enhancement Project

In 2018, WDFW acquired a degraded 5-acre riverfront property on the right side of the Nooksack River (2006 Whatcom Wildlife Area Management Plan – Goal 4 – Maintain and improve fish populations). This property was purchased using a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant. The property consists of 5 acres of invasive Reed canary grass bordering the Kwina Slough and the Nooksack River. Habitat enhancement began in 2019 with initial mechanical and chemical control of the Reed canary grass. In October, the site will be disked and tilled in preparation for a native grass seeding. A planting of native trees and shrubs will be done by Whatcom Conservation District and Bellingham Technical College volunteers.

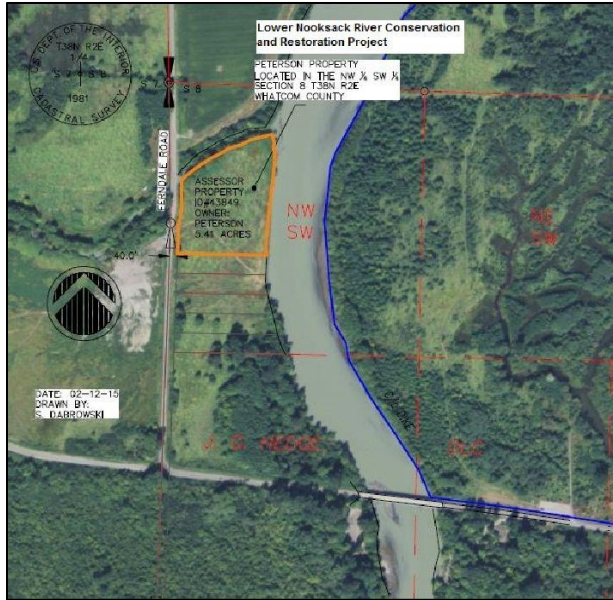


Figure 5: Lower Nooksack River Salmon Enhancement Project map

Farming for Wildlife

In 2018 and 2019, farming activities to benefit wildlife continued with great success. At the Lake Terrell Unit, each year wildlife area staff planted over 60 acres of barley and five acres of alfalfa (2006 Whatcom Wildlife Area Management Plan – Goal 3 – Maintain and improve nesting and wintering habitat for waterfowl). These crops are left standing in the field and provide cover for pheasants during the pheasant hunting season. They are also a very important food source for ducks, geese, and swans in the winter. In 2018, we renewed a three-year agricultural lease on the Nooksack Unit. On the site, WDFW staff farmed 120 acres with silage corn and potatoes planted in a three-year rotation. After harvest, the farmer leaves at least 10 percent of the corn standing, and plants a cover crop of wheat on the potato acres all to feed waterfowl in the winter.

Recreation

Hunting Access

In 2018 and 2019, WDFW staff cleaned and repaired the waterfowl blinds on the BP and Tennant Lake units. One new walk in blind was built on the Lake Terrell Unit in 2018 and has received a lot of use by hunters. In 2019, four new temporary blinds will be set up on the Nooksack Unit in the newly planted barley (2006 Whatcom Wildlife Area Management Plan – Goal 2 – Develop and maintain recreational access sites for public use).

In 2018 and 2019, the Whatcom County Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association worked to clean and repair over a dozen waterfowl hunting blinds on the Lake Terrell and Nooksack units of the wildlife area. This important volunteer work helped prepare the blinds for the hunting season.



Figure 6: Washington Waterfowl Association repairing Lake Terrell blinds

Pheasant Release Hunting Program

In 2018, over 6,000 pheasants were released on three units of the wildlife area. The birds were released on the Lake Terrell, Intalco, and BP units three times a week, with all releases performed by volunteers. Before the season began, WDFW mowed paths in fields of Reed canary grass on the Lake Terrell and Intalco units to improve walking access for the pheasant hunting (2006 Whatcom Wildlife Area Management Plan – goal 1 – Provide and manage resource compatible hunting and fishing opportunities).

New WWRP Trails Grant

In 2018, the wildlife area was awarded a Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) trails grant for a new recreational trail on the Tennant Lake Unit (2006 Whatcom Wildlife Area Management Plan – Goal 5 – Provide and increase watchable fish and wildlife recreational opportunities). This new trail will connect three separate access points to make a 2.5-mile Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible trail along Tennant Creek. The ADA trail will go through several wetland habitats with sections of packed gravel and raised wood boardwalk. It will allow users to experience new hiking and bird watching in an otherwise inaccessible part of the Tennant Lake Unit. Construction is set for late spring 2020.

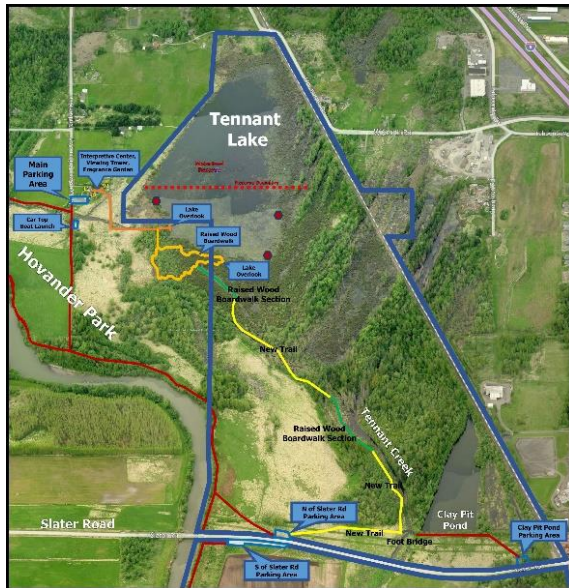


Figure 7: New south Tennant Lake ADA trail

Community Outreach

Wildlife Area Manager Kessler worked with the nonprofit group, the Friends of Tennant Lake and Hovander Park, and the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association to put on and attend several public events on the Tennant Lake and BP units (Statewide Planning Goal 5).

Swan Watch

In February of each year, the annual Swan Watch was held. The public was invited to come before dawn to view the Trumpeter and Tundra swans roosting on Tennant Lake and at first light take off to feed in the surrounding farm fields. WDFW staff gave a status update on the local swan populations. Rehabilitated swans were also banded and released into the wild.

Wildlife Skins and Skulls

In July of each year, the annual Skins and Skulls exhibit was held at Tennant Lake. The public was invited to come see, feel, and touch skins and skulls of native wildlife species. This event was very well attended each time and was extremely popular with children.



Figure 8: Skins and Skulls event

Run with The Chums

In September of each year, the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association's annual Run with the Chums fun run was held on the BP Unit. Each time, over 300 participants ran the 5k course and learned about local environmental organizations.

New Issues

Dog Walking on the Lummi Island Unit

The Lummi Island Unit was purchased to protect the first Peregrine falcon eyrie in the San Juan Islands. This eyrie is one of the most productive Peregrine nest sites in Washington. The birds successfully fledged four young in 2018. The Lummi Island Unit is designated as a Natural Area Preserve and due to this status, no dogs are allowed on the trails within the unit. In 2018, due to questions about the no dog policy, it was further clarified on the WDFW website, and new signs were posted. Enforcement of this policy will be a priority to protect the Peregrine eyrie and surrounding habitat (Statewide Planning Goal 1).



Figure 9: Peregrine falcon in flight

Increased Horseback Riding Recreation

A noticeable increase in horseback riding on the Lake Terrell and Intalco units of the wildlife area have occurred since 2018. For safety, new signage to prohibit horseback riding during the pheasant hunting season was posted on the Intalco Unit (Statewide Planning Goal 3).