

# Methow Wildlife Area

## 2018-19 Wildlife Area Management Plan Update



Figure 1: Mule deer on the Methow Unit

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

### ***Methow Wildlife Area Management Highlights***

#### **Methow Forest Restoration Project – Phase 2. Maintaining Mule Deer Habitat and Improving Forest Resiliency (*Objective: Protect, Restore & Enhance Fish and Wildlife and Their Habitats, Part 1, Strategies G & H*)**

The WDFW Prescribed Burn Team and contracted crews implemented the Bear Creek prescribed burn in the spring of 2019. Funded by the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), the 250-acre Bear Creek burn unit was commercially thinned in the winter of 2016. Prior to the thinning operation, this unit was grossly overstocked and averaged anywhere from 200-1,200 stems per acre. In its pre-wildfire suppression state, the historic composition of this area was 16-25 trees per acre. Following the prescribed burn, this pine forest should average 20-40 trees per acre, which is more in line with its historic density and composition. The result will be a more diverse, nutrient rich, fire-adapted, and resilient

forest ecosystem. Hard work put forth by the WDFW Burn Team and contract crews has been a huge asset to the health and resiliency of many of our forests on department lands, including the Methow Wildlife Area.

Additionally, approximately 247 acres in the Ramsey Creek drainage have been commercially harvested and prepared for prescribed burning. The post-harvest results will also closely reflect the forest's historic range of variability seen in the Bear Creek Unit, utilizing the individual, clumps, and openings technique.

Pile burning was implemented in the winter of 2019-20 and the unit will be ready for prescribed fire in the spring of 2020.



*Figure 2: Prescribed burn on the Bear Creek Unit*

### **Salmon Habitat Enhancement Projects (Objective: Protect, Restore & Enhance Fish and Wildlife and Their Habitats, Part 3, Strategy B)**

Methow Wildlife Area staff, as well as the Region 2 Habitat Program Manager, District Fish Biologist, and District Habitat Biologist, met on numerous occasions with the Yakama Tribe, non-governmental organizations, and local salmon recovery professionals as part of the Joint Technical Team that reviews salmon habitat improvement projects on WDFW property in the Methow watershed. The technical team discussed several projects located in areas throughout the Methow Wildlife Area: Beaver Creek, Alder Creek, Fawn Creek, Chewuch River, and the mainstem of the Methow. Projects include side-channel habitat creation or enhancement, large woody debris placement, water efficiency projects, and riparian vegetation enhancement.

### **Shrubsteppe Restoration (Objective: Protect, Restore & Enhance Fish and Wildlife and Their Habitats, Part 6, Strategy C & D)**

With approximately \$3,300 donated by Hunting Washington Forum, and with volunteers from Okanogan Trails Mule Deer Foundation Chapter, staff planted 1,000 bitterbrush plugs over approximately 100 acres of shrubsteppe habitat burned by the Carlton Complex Fire. The area near Frasier Creek had significant bitterbrush populations before the fire but

burned severe enough that repopulation of the shrub is absent in many areas. Replacing bitterbrush is a high priority to improve wintering habitat for mule deer. In addition, over 125 wildlife friendly shrubs (e.g., serviceberry, chokecherry, and blue elderberry) were planted on the Golden Doe Unit. The funds also purchased native bunchgrass seed which will be planted this fall in an abandoned dryland field.

Noxious weed control is a top priority as well throughout the shrubsteppe. Populations of whitetop were mapped using GIS and thousands of bio-control agents were released throughout the Methow to control diffuse knapweed and Dalmatian toadflax. Staff and contractors also treated several weed infestations over hundreds of acres with the aid of herbicides.



*Figure 3: Planting bitterbrush post-wildfire*

**Lewis Butte Trail Improvements (Objective: Provide Sustainable Fish and Wildlife-Related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible with Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats. Improve the Economic Well-Being of Washington by Providing Diverse, High Quality Recreational and Commercial Opportunities. Part 1, Strategy A and Part 2, Strategy A)**

Extensive planning, trail designing, cultural surveys, and permitting led to the construction of the Lewis Butte trail system. This trail project was made possible through a collaborative agreement between WDFW and the Methow Valley Trails Collaborative focused on protection via the concentration of recreation on a sustainable, multi-use trail system while simultaneously decommissioning painfully steep, erodible segments of trails. The Backcountry Horsemen spearheaded efforts at the Haase parking lot, where they constructed a beautiful buck and rail fence to define the parking area that specifically meets the needs for trailer parking. From there, the Methow Wildlife Area (WDFW), Methow Trails, and the Methow Conservancy, all of which are members of the Methow Trails Collaborative, led the charge on trail construction for two segments of trail at Lewis Butte. Keep it Public, a public lands advocacy group from all over the west, also joined the

fun with 12 of their members who travelled from as far away as California and Montana; approximately 70 volunteers in total participated in a single day.

In total, over two miles of trail have been re-routed/built with the help of over 211 total volunteer days. There has been a massive amount of community support for this project, evident by the sheer number of volunteers who have donated their time to seeing this through over the year.



Figure 4: Lewis Butte Trail volunteers - photo courtesy of Methow

**Methow Shooting Range and Education (Objective: Provide Sustainable Fish and Wildlife-Related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible with Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats. Improve the Economic Well-Being of Washington by Providing Diverse, High Quality Recreational and Commercial Opportunities. Part 1, Strategy A)**

The shooting range near the intersection of FS Road 100 and Bear Creek Road continues to be well-used and popular with locals and visitors to the Methow Valley. Methow staff performed various improvements to the range and kept up with fire prevention efforts. The range hosted the first annual Youth Firearms Safety and Skills Day at the wildlife area shooting range which was geared towards age 17 and under. WDFW provided .22 and .223 rifles, shotguns, ammunition, and personal protective equipment, and participants had a phenomenal time shooting one-on-one with Hunter Education instructor Aaron Garcia. The wildlife area plans to host this event annually one to two weeks in front of the general rifle season. This provides local youth with an opportunity to refresh their safety and shooting skills with trained instructors right before hunting season.



*Figure 5: Young shooter at the Methow Range*

**Lloyd Ranch Winter Recreation (Objective: Provide Sustainable Fish and Wildlife-Related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible with Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats. Improve the Economic Well-Being of Washington by Providing Diverse, High Quality Recreational and Commercial Opportunities. Part 1, Strategy A)**

The trails at the Lloyd Ranch were busy these past two years with a wide array of winter recreationist. There were skiers, fat-tire bikers, snowshoers, and a few people scouting the area on foot with guidebooks and binoculars in hand. Everyone encountered seemed to be thoroughly enjoying one of the only free winter recreation trails in the Methow Valley. The wildlife area greatly appreciates the efforts put forth by Methow Trails for grooming and maintaining these free trails that transect the Big Valley Unit. This collaborative agreement between the wildlife area and local volunteers has proved successful and provides a unique winter recreation opportunity for any and all residents and visitors of the Methow without breaking the bank.



*Figure 6: Groomed winter trails on Lloyd*

**Methow Wildlife Area Noxious Weed Control (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 Part 1, Strategies B, C, D & E)**

Noxious weed control efforts ramped up with the hiring of an assistant manager with a background in treating invasive species in the west. Various weed species such as diffuse knapweed, Russian knapweed, Dalmatian toadflax, whitetop, houndstounge, and Scotch thistle were targeted in in 2018-19. Contract crews were also hired to treat large areas in the Bear Creek area and Big Valley Unit. Biological controls were released extensively to treat diffuse knapweed, Dalmatian toadflax, and Canada thistle. These efforts will be built upon in the coming years to significantly reduce weed infestations on the wildlife area.

**Infrastructure Improvements (Objective: Provide Sound Operational Management of WDFW Lands Facilities and Access Sites. Part 1, Strategies A, D & F)**

A number of infrastructure projects were completed in 2018-19. Miles of new fence were constructed or rebuilt on the Big Buck Unit and pastures on Balky Hill. Efforts were also made on fences around Ramsey Creek to reduce the potential for trespass cattle from adjacent federal property.

**Backcountry Hunters and Anglers Volunteer Events (Objective: Protect, Restore & Enhance Fish and Wildlife and Their Habitats, Part 6, Strategy C & D)**

The Methow Wildlife Area has started planning the third annual Golden Doe Fence Removal Volunteer Day with local chapter members of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA). During the previous two years, with the help of BHA members from all around the west, as well as WDFW Master Hunters, volunteers, and wildlife area staff, the wildlife area has been able to remove over three miles of dilapidated woven wire fencing in a combined two days of work totaling over 200 volunteer hours. In 2019, nearly 30 volunteers participated in this event on a beautiful Saturday afternoon in June. Following the volunteer workday, most volunteers met in Winthrop for pizza followed by a group campout along the Chewuch River at the Lower Bobcat campground. BHA coordinators stated this event is quickly becoming one of BHA's biggest events in Washington. This fence removal project is beneficial to a wide array of wildlife that inhabit or cross through the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area. This project is particularly beneficial to our migratory mule deer herds, as the Golden Doe Unit provides prime winter and spring mule deer habitat.



*Figure 7: Volunteers who helped improve migratory wildlife corridors by removing dilapidated woven wire fencing on the Methow Wildlife Area in June 2019*

## **New Issues**

### **New Office Building**

Funding has been appropriated to replace the existing office building with a new facility. Construction may start in the summer of 2020.

### **Property Additions**

Funding is being sought to acquire inholdings in the Rendezvous and Golden Doe, plus new property near the town of Methow. Funding would be known no later than early 2021.

### **Salmon Habitat Restoration Projects**

Projects have been identified by the Yakama Nation on Methow Wildlife Area along the Chewuch River and Alder Creek on the Golden Doe Unit. Projects would initiate sometime in mid-2020.

### **Methow Wildlife Area 10-year Plan**

Methow Wildlife Area staff and the agency planner will begin the process of drafting the new management plan starting in fall 2020. A new wildlife area advisory committee (WAAC) will also be formed as part of the process.



*Figure 8: Ride to Rendezvous on Bear Creek Road*