

# Klickitat Wildlife Area

## Management Plan Update 2017-2018

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [2016 Klickitat Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities at the Klickitat 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.

The Klickitat Wildlife Area has seen important changes since the management plan was adopted in late summer 2016. Many of these changes required years or even decades of work. Agency staff have implemented new developments in a way that adheres to Washington Department of Wildlife's mission and statewide planning goals as well as being sensitive to local conditions and community and honoring the 70-year tradition of habitat and recreation management efforts on the Klickitat Wildlife Area. It is important to recognize our place in time by understanding how we arrived where we are and how our actions will shape the future of the wildlife area. By building on the good work of the past, absorbing the lessons learned, and receiving input from the public, we hope to manage the property in a way that provides maximum value to future generations of state and county residents.

### ***Management Highlights***

#### **Simcoe Mountains Unit Acquisition (Goal 1, Objective B)**

In 2016 the agency purchased the Simcoe Mountains located in eastern Klickitat County. The property became known as the Simcoe Mountains Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area, and permanently conserves high quality wildlife habitat at the headwaters of Rock Creek and its tributaries. It also offers recreation access for the public in a part of the county that has very limited opportunities for public use. The land was acquired in several phases between 2016 and 2019, and now totals 10,294 acres. This large acreage will have its own management plan, which is being developed through a Coordinated Resources Management process with assistance from many participants representing different interest groups. WDFW and the Central and East Klickitat Conservation Districts developed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016 and have been engaged in coordinating the planning effort. Both conservation districts are presently working to purchase property to add to the Simcoe Mountains block. The property has a history of active forest management as well as summer pasture for cattle, and WDFW has committed to continue those land management practices. Two cattle producers lease parts of the property for summer grazing. The Simcoe Mountains Unit contains a variety of habitats including pine-oak forest, oak woodlands, sparsely vegetated steppe habitat, snag patches left from a 2013 wildfire, streamside corridors of cottonwoods, alders, and other deciduous species, and small patches of grand firs in a few locations where water is available for much of the year. With the most recent land purchase, the unit now has two public access points: one at the east end on Box Spring Road and one on the south edge on Box Canyon Road.



*The Simcoe Mountains Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area*

### **Soda Springs Unit Forest Management (Goal 3, Objectives A and B)**

On the Soda Springs Unit, after an extended planning effort, a forest thinning project was undertaken in fall 2018. This project was designed to restore the conifer forest to a density more typical of a natural stand that is subject to periodic wildfires, thereby improving forest health by reducing competition for resources among the retained trees. This treatment was also expected to make the forest more resistant to catastrophic wildfire by removing excess woody fuel and promote conservation of critical habitat for western gray squirrels. The areas subject to treatment were surveyed three times for western gray squirrel nests, and adjustments were made to the boundaries of the project areas based on some unusually dense concentrations of nests. All nest trees were protected by a 25-foot radius within which no disturbance was allowed. Other concerns that were addressed included minimizing slash left on the forest floor (to limit wildfire fuel) and avoiding disturbance of cultural resources. The three treatment areas, which totaled 161 acres, were challenging for agency foresters to work with due to the large number of squirrel nests present and other limiting factors, but in general the work turned out well. The proceeds from the sale of saw logs were applied to thinning overly dense stands of small, low-value trees in the project areas. The work was partially supported by funds allocated directly to WDFW by the state legislature for improvement of forest health. This project was a test case that will be checked for success in retaining western gray squirrel presence, and new forest restoration project plans on the Soda Springs Unit will be informed by the trial experience.



*Observing forest thinning on the Soda Springs Unit*

### **Fuel Break Maintenance (Goal 3, Objective A)**

Other work conducted on the Soda Springs Unit included maintenance of fuel breaks that were developed in strategic locations beginning in 2012. These fuel breaks were developed to improve prospects for control of wildfires that could potentially cause heavy losses of important forest habitat and threaten private properties nearby. Over time the limbs of trees drooped lower to the ground and shrubs grew up within the cleared corridors, compromising the effectiveness of the fuel breaks. Periodic maintenance of these fuel breaks will be necessary, and to that end wildlife area staff members worked with labor crews to prune tree limbs and arrange the cut material to be disposed of by a mulching machine. The work was hampered by difficult access due to snow, nonperformance by a contractor who abandoned the job, and numerous equipment breakdowns. All of the hand work was completed, but slash and shrub mulching was only done on a little over half the project corridor. The wildlife area manager is considering other ways to accomplish the work, preferably at lower cost.



*A shaded fuel break on the Soda Springs Unit*

**Grazing Permits (Goal 9, Objective A and Goal 10, Objective A)**

The Klickitat Wildlife Area now administers five grazing permits distributed over four units. The Soda Springs, Fisher Hill, Dillacort Canyon, and Simcoe Mountains units have managed grazing under permit. Grazing permits are good for a maximum of five years, after which they may be renewed. Most grazing permits are renewed and the permits on the Klickitat are expected to be renewed barring events that negatively impact land or wildlife management objectives. With the recolonization of Washington by wolves, WDFW has had to consider how to address any conflicts that might arise between wolves and livestock on state land. Part of WDFW's conservation mission is to support populations of rare animals, yet WDFW understands the issue of wolves potentially preying upon livestock. As grazing permits are renewed, the new permits will include language regarding deterrence of wolf predation on cattle.



*Rancher driving cattle on the Klickitat Wildlife Area*

## ***New Issues***

### **Campfires on the Wildlife Area**

Since 2010, the Klickitat Wildlife Area has had a year-round ban on open campfires (aside from the campgrounds along the Klickitat River). This was instituted with support from the Klickitat Wildlife Area Advisory Committee after numerous campfire-related issues during hunting seasons in 2007, 2008, and 2009. The primary issue was campfires left unattended, but other problems were trash burning and cutting of standing snags for firewood. Over the years members of the public have expressed a desire to have campfires, particularly during the cold months of the year. In order to accommodate the public, a policy that also addresses the primary concern of fire escapement has been adopted. Starting fall 2019, campfires are allowed from Nov. 1 through May 14, except on the Simcoe Mountains Unit where county restrictions curtail open fires in east Klickitat County beginning May 1. Burning of trash in campfires remains unlawful, as is cutting down standing snags on the wildlife area. This campfire policy is the same as the one in place on the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, which has a dry season of similar duration. The Klickitat Wildlife Area has approximately 40 permanently mounted signs that need to be replaced or somehow modified to indicate that campfires are permitted during part of the year.