

Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area

2019-2020 Management Plan Update



Windmill Phase 3 wetland prior to fall flooding

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The purpose of this management plan is to guide all management activities, including conservation and recreation, occurring on the Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area. Every 10 years, WDFW develops a process for revising the 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

Sunnyside Unit – Improve Waterfowl Hunting (Goal/Objective 3.G)

WDFW staff members continue to improve waterfowl hunting by increasing food resources and water supplies in Johnson Wetland. Obstructions within the irrigation structures were removed, and equipment was used to clean the supply channel to the wetland resulting in improved irrigation flows. Vegetation was mowed to create more open water for waterfowl prior to the fall hunting season. Johnson Wetland was full by late November of 2020, providing habitat for migratory waterfowl and recreational opportunities for public hunting and bird watching. WDFW staff members worked with the local Sunnyside Irrigation District on a plan for ensuring adequate water. Upcoming work on these sites includes weed control and cultivation of moist soil management.



Johnson Wetland – Sunnyside Unit

**Windmill Ranch, Sunnyside Unit and Mesa Lake – Enhanced Pollinator Habitat
(Goal/Objective 2.C)**

Wildlife area staff members identified and implemented opportunities to enhance monarch butterfly, bumble bee, and other pollinator habitats. Through vegetation management (mowing and prescribed burning), milkweed was enhanced, which provides critical forage for the monarch butterfly and other pollinator species. Pollinator habitat plots were planted on 20 acres, using a native wildflower mix containing 18 pollinator plant species at the Windmill Ranch and Sunnyside units. Upcoming work at these sites includes milkweed seed harvest with the hopes of future planting and cultivating.



Left to right: Milkweed post-prescribed burn, Monarch on milkweed, and a pollinator plot

Windmill Ranch, Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch, Mesa Lake, Byron, and Sunnyside Units – Improving Fishing and Hunting Opportunities (*Goal/Objective 1.C, 4.C, and 4.D*)

WDFW staff members undertook vegetative management best practices to reduce emergent aquatic vegetation (cattails and bullrush) to provide 50 percent cover and 50 percent open water on wetlands. Approximately 500 acres are treated annually to enhance wetland habitat and recreational opportunities in the forms of hunting and bird watching. Water levels were manipulated to provide optimum recreational opportunities. Upcoming work includes working with fisheries staff members to identify stocking opportunities throughout the wildlife area ponds.



The rewards of improved wetland hunting opportunities

New Issues

Maintain or improve the ecological integrity of priority systems and sites (*Goal 1.C & 1.J*)

State Duck Stamp funds will support the expansion of wetlands at the Mesa Lake, Windmill Ranch, and Sunnyside units. This is a collaborative effort with Ducks Unlimited, creating up to 200 additional acres of wetland habitat.

Shrubsteppe Restoration – Response to fires at the Esquatzel and Rattlesnake Slope units

In 2019, major fires destroyed critical shrubsteppe habitat. WDFW staff members have been spraying and controlling invasive weeds in preparation for fall sagebrush plantings.

Volunteers will assist WDFW in planting over 6,000 sagebrush plugs in the fall of 2021. The Thorton Unit will also receive about 500 additional plants.



Yellow star thistle on the Esquatzel Unit