

# Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area

2019-2020 Management Plan Update



This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [2006 Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts and public recreation opportunities at the 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

### **Land Acquisitions (Goal #1)**

Two land acquisitions highlight wildlife area activities during this update cycle. The first is an 88-acre area situated along Vance Creek that is now a part of the Chehalis Unit. The area is comprised of a small riparian gallery forest and a former red alder plantation, and is also currently enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program. The second acquisition is a roughly 1,750-acre area near Westport, now known as the Elk River Unit. This project would not have come to

fruition without a close partnership between Ducks Unlimited and WDFW. Ducks Unlimited initiated the project and provided grant funding and critical assistance in negotiations. The area contains a diversity of ecosystems, including estuarine and freshwater wetlands as well as both young and old Douglas fir and cedar forests. Initial management of this property has included the creation of a parking area for public access, as well as extensive invasive species work mowing and spraying Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry.



*Mowing old-growth Scotch broom at Elk River*

### **Elk Forage Management (Goal #2)**

The wildlife area has continued to maintain early successional grasslands on several units specifically for use by elk, these areas are typically situated within or adjacent to forested ecosystems. These activities occur annually at the Wynoochee mitigation sites, but also regularly on the Olympic, Chinook, and other units as time and funding allows. Each year, approximately 450 acres are mowed, 250 are fertilized, and 50 are cultivated and reseeded to provide quality winter elk forage. Cultivation and reseeded are limited to certain units, generally occurring on a 5-year rotation at the Wynoochee mitigation sites but less regularly on the Olympic Unit. Aside from the mowing, disking, and seeding, this work also entails periodic herbicide application, brushing back trees and shrubs, soil testing, and vegetation monitoring.



*Preparing one of the Wynoochee Mitigation fields for seeding*

### **Waterfowl Habitat Management (Goal #3)**

Funded through a combination of the Migratory Bird Stamps, Bonneville Power Administration, Pittman-Robertson, and State Wildlife funds, the wildlife area continues to provide and manage waterfowl habitat. Working with Ducks Unlimited, WDFW replaced one water control structure and temporarily repaired another at the John's River Unit. Staff members also continued the mowing of seasonally flooded meadows at the Chehalis, Chinook, and John's River Units. When combined with seasonal flooding, the mowing effort creates shallow water wetlands designed to attract and hold waterfowl and provide hunting opportunities. Wildlife area staff members mow roughly 300 acres per year for this particular purpose.

### **Staff Turnover (Goal #6)**

The long-time manager of the Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area, Jim Gerchak, retired in the fall of 2020. Hired in 1969, Jim was one of WDFW's longest tenured employees and had many varied responsibilities throughout his career, including serving as a game officer, organizing and conducting field trials, and managing portions of what is now known as the North Olympic and South Puget Sound wildlife areas (in addition to managing Olympic-Willapa Hills). Jim was also instrumental in negotiating the original Wynoochee Mitigation Agreement for the construction of the Wynoochee Dam with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



*Shallow pond on the Chehalis Unit*

## **New Issues**

### **New Funding (Goals 1, 3, 7)**

WDFW has received funding for a variety of projects on or affecting wildlife area lands for the upcoming biennium. First and foremost, the agency received a Recreation Conservation Office State Lands Restoration grant for the initial management of the Elk River Unit. The funding will be used to continue treatments of Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry, thin overstocked forested areas, and begin the revegetation of treatment areas with native species. The Migratory Bird Stamp program has provided funding for the replacement of the water control structure at the Hoxit Unit, the maintenance/repairment of a tide gate structure on the John's River Unit, and the continuation of mowing activities at the Chehalis and Chinook units. A request for a new building at the wildlife area headquarters is also funded. The building will primarily be used for equipment storage.

### **Wildlife Area Planning (Goal 4)**

The Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area is among the next group of wildlife areas to update their long-term management plan. This is an extensive planning effort that will last roughly 18 months and include several internal and public meetings. The plan writing process is not anticipated to significantly affect field activities and is designed to allow for public engagement and comment at multiple points in the process.