

Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area

2019-2020 Management Plan Update



Kalama River Falls on the Merrill Lake Unit

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the 2019 [Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities at the Mount St. Helens 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

Forest Health Projects (Goal #2, Objective A)

Over the past two years forest health projects have occurred on the Hoffstadt and Merrill Lake units, consisting of ~200 acres being commercially thinned, and over 300 acres pre-commercially thinned. These projects were implemented to improve habitat diversity and forest health, and the forest structure closely resembles historical habitat on the landscape. The commercially thinned areas created a small amount of profit, which allowed WDFW to hire contractors to thin trees in the pre-commercial areas where trees were too small to take to the market or the areas were inaccessible for logging equipment.



Industrial forest stand density on left side of road, WDFW pre-commercially thinned unit on right side of road



Commercial thinning operation in the Hoffstadt Unit

Eagle Island Upland Habitat Restoration (Goal #4, Objective H)

Wildlife area staff members continue to enhance upland and riparian habitats on the Eagle Island Unit by controlling invasive weeds. Two of the main weed species are Scotch broom and Japanese knotweed. Both species can quickly outcompete native and beneficial plants, resulting in degraded habitats that fish and wildlife rely on to flourish. Approximately 50 acres of Scotch broom was treated in both 2019 and 2020, along with all known stands of knotweed along Eagle Island. Controlling and greatly reducing infestations of both weed species are multi-year efforts, but after only a few years of work staff members and visitors can see the difference, with increased abundance of beneficial plants. WDFW has also partnered with PacifiCorps, who has provided funding for much of the restoration work on the unit.



Preparing for the day's work of controlling weeds on Eagle Island



Before and after pictures of controlling scotch broom in the open areas of Eagle Island

Maintain and Enhance Habitats for Band-tailed Pigeons (Goal #4, Objective Fand G)

Over the past several years, wildlife area staff members have maintained and enhanced habitat for band-tailed pigeons on several of the Mount St. Helens units in Clark and Cowlitz counties. These activities have included clearing brush around mineral sites, planting native fruit trees, and controlling invasive non-native vegetation. During the Covid-19 pandemic stay at home order, Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald was able to trap and band pigeons from his backyard, marking 85 birds.



Wildlife area manager Hauswald marking band-tailed pigeons

New Issues

Merrill Lake Camping (Goal #6, Objective D)

Camping has been allowed in designated areas on the Merrill Lake Unit since WDFW acquired the property. Over the years there have been some minor incidents of garbage being left behind, vandalism, and use of off-road vehicles on the unit that was associated with campers in the area. These incidents increased dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic, as more people stayed close to home and used public lands for recreation. Vandalism, trash, and human waste became so bad during the summer of 2020 that all camping was prohibited from mid-summer to late fall, due to the unhealthy conditions in the camping sites. This increased use and abuse of the land made WDFW re-evaluate whether to allow camping on the area, or what other measures could be done to curtail the illegal and unwanted activities. One of the considerations was to only allow camping during the fall hunting seasons, which was when some of the only camping took place historically (and without incident). Another idea was to build vault toilet facilities by the campsites. However, the cost to build the facilities would likely be more than \$200,000, not including annual maintenance, and unfortunately funding is not available for these improvements. The solution was to have increased enforcement and wildlife staff members onsite during the summer camping season to educate visitors on proper camping etiquette and catch violators breaking the rules.