

Columbia Basin Wildlife Area

2021-2022 Management Plan Update



This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives, identified within the 2022 [Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities at the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. Every 10 years, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (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

Acquisition of Marsh Master (Goal 2)

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area has been interested in expanding the ability to mechanically manage vegetation further into wetland habitats. Currently a combination of a skid steer and wheeled tractor are responsible for the mowing activity in the wildlife area. A Marsh Master

from Coast Machinery has long been on the wildlife area's wish list, but funding was a challenge. In 2022, with funding support from the WDFW's Lands Division and the federal Duck Stamp, the wildlife area was able to place an order for a Marsh Master that was delivered in June 2023. The machine came equipped with a vegetation blade, mower, roller chopper, backhoe, and 110-gallon hydraulic spray setup. The Marsh Master will greatly expand the ability to work in wetland terrain previously inaccessible by traditional equipment, control tall emergent vegetation, and spray undesirable vegetation. With funding from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR), and working with WDFW cultural resources staff, the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area has also completed permitting needs to operate the Marsh Master on the wildlife area.



Marsh Master at Frenchman Regulated Access Area.

Drone (Objective 3K)

In 2022 Columbia Basin Wildlife Area received funding for an Autel Evo 640T drone with 8K camera and thermal imagery. The drone was procured in early 2023. Wildlife area staff went through proper training and received a part 107 FAA certified Remote Pilot license. The ability to obtain real-time aerial imagery view of landscape and capture photos and video while allowing staff to be on the ground provides safer working conditions than fixed-wing or helicopter surveys. Wildlife area staff will primarily use drone flights to monitor, evaluate, and map vegetation types and habitats. This work will help inform staff about noxious weed treatments, habitat enhancements, and successes of habitat manipulation. Other surveys that a drone will benefit will be wildlife surveys (brood counts, nest surveys, and waterfowl abundance counts), fence inventory, and grazing evaluation imagery.



Frenchman Regulated Access Area wetland basins.

Moist Soil Management Enhancement (Goal 2A)

The Columbia Basin Wildlife area continues to expand our ability to promote desirable waterfowl habitat and forage through moist soil management efforts. At both Frenchman and Winchester Regulated access areas we have expanded our footprint where moist soil manipulations occur and are improving our overall availability to produce desirable seed biomass. We continue to work with the USBOR to secure the ability to use water during the growing season for vegetation management. Having the ability to fill wetland basins during the summer months allows us to simultaneously stimulate plant growth for desirable vegetation and non-desirable vegetation such as cocklebur. Through years of biomass studies, we have found that soil disturbance and supplemental planting is required to promote desirable seed production and we have incorporated this into our management strategies to increase waterfowl food yields.



Millet sample from Frenchman Regulated Access Area.

Washington Conservation Corps Crew (Goal 4)

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area has been able to arrange funding for a full-time Washington Conservation Corps crew on the wildlife area for the last three years. The crew has done fantastic work in projects ranging from habitat restoration/enhancement, noxious weed control, fence removal, wildlife-friendly fences, irrigation, litter cleanup, facility maintenance, signage, wildlife work, recreational opportunity enhancements, and disaster relief. The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area greatly appreciates their work, and the public notices the difference since their arrival.



WCC crew sawing Russian olive trees.

New Emerging Issues

Lake Lenore Shooting Range Development (Goal 4C)

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area has long desired a formal target shooting range to help offset the impacts from dispersed target shooting and to create a location where the public can safely enjoy target shooting. WDFW worked to acquire a parcel from Washington State Parks that was already in use as an informal shooting range. The transfer was completed in early 2022. The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area utilized an internal budget to pay for a cultural resource survey to facilitate activities. WDFW applied for a Recreation and Conservation Firearms and Archery Range Recreation Program grant in early 2023. The grant application was successful and the necessary match funds from WDFW were identified. WDFW's Capital Assess Management Program will now scope, design, and build a range during the FY 23- 25 biennium.

Campground Development Frenchman Coulee (Goal 4E)

WDFW identified the need for expanded camping opportunities at the Frenchman Coulee during the 2022 wildlife area plan development process. In early 2022 an inholding near the current camping area went on the market. Utilizing Lands Division funding and having a willing seller, WDFW was able to purchase the 158-acre parcel in the spring of 2023. The purchase paves the way for future design and construction of a campground, opens new recreational opportunities, and alleviates management concerns from an inholding.