



MARCH 25, 2021

February 2020 Flood Event Update

As you are all aware, the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area, Camp Wooten ELC, and the Umatilla National Forest sustained significant damage in the February 2020 flood event. The Tucannon River was running down the Tucannon Road between the Watson Lake Parking Area and Campground 4 which resulted in the asphalt being undermined and large chunks being floated away. The farther south you traveled the worse the damage was, and not necessarily from the Tucannon River. There were several rock and mudslides over the road where the draws blew out from the rain on snow event, and several culverts under the Tucannon Road were plugged.

Cleanup and repair after the flood is continuing

and is going to be a long process.

The Beaver Lake inlet channel was repaired last summer so we were able to fill Beaver and Watson Lakes this spring and Watson Lake has been stocked with fish.

WDFW is working on getting a replacement foot bridge to access Watson Lake. In the meantime, Watson Lake is accessed by walking (or riding a bicycle) up the road past Deer Lake or wading the Tucannon River.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) is still waiting on the Federal Highway funding process to get the funds needed to complete the repairs to the Tucannon Road and the USFS roads. The roads to Sheep Creek and Meadow Creek were made passable last fall, but were not actually repaired.

Wooten Floodplain Management Plan

During the February 2020 flood event the Tucannon River was flowing into Deer Lake, causing the lake to overflow and water to run over the dam around the north and west sides of the lake. This caused spots in the dam to weaken and water to continue to run through the dam at high lake levels. The damage to Deer Lake during the flood elevated Deer Lake to the Number 1 priority for the Wooten Floodplain Management Plan Team.

WDFW hired GeoEngineers as the environmental consulting firm to design the work for Deer Lake. During discussions the Team decided to explore the option of constructing a new lake just south of the existing Deer Lake to be the new Fly-Fishing Only lake. This will replace Big 4 Lake which we can no longer get water into after the Tucannon River moved away from the lake during the 2020 flood event.

GeoEngineers is working on completing the 30-percent designs needed to begin the permitting process. Once the 30-percent designs are completed they will be shared with the Wooten Wildlife Area Advisory Committee for comments and feedback. The current plan is for construction on Deer Lake and the New Lake to occur in summer 2022.

After the completion of the New Lake, Big 4 Lake will eventually be decommissioned and the associated infrastructure removed.

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TO PRESERVE,
PROTECT AND
PERPETUATE FISH,
WILDLIFE AND
ECOSYSTEMS WHILE
PROVIDING
SUSTAINABLE FISH
AND WILDLIFE
RECREATIONAL AND
COMMERCIAL
OPPORTUNITIES.

Large Wood Projects

Phase 1 of the large wood project planned for the section of Tucannon River from the Hatchery bridge to the fish trap is scheduled for construction this summer. Materials for the project will begin arriving on site in the next couple months.

Phase 2 is planned for summer 2022.

Weed Spraying

WDFW is hoping to receive the RMEF grant again this year to continue treating noxious weeds with the helicopter. The funds will be used to spray 370 acres on the Wooten Wildlife Area this spring to continue to try to control the yellow starthistle infestation.

Elk Calf Mortality Study

WDFW will be starting a study this spring/summer to look at elk calf survival. A total of 125 elk calves will be captured and fitted with radio-telemetry collars. The collars will be tracked daily by technicians and mortalities will be investigated to attempt to determine the cause of death.

Bear Hair Snare Study

Barbed-wire corrals will be constructed and lure consisting of cow blood and fish oil will be placed inside the corrals. The corrals will be checked every 10 days and all bear hair on the barbed wire will be collected. Hair snares are a form of mark-recapture study and will be used to estimate the black bear population.

Bighorn Sheep Update

Current population size is 19 sheep, with 4 lambs surviving out of the 7 born last spring. The sheep are still outside the elk fence and have spent the past year on Don Howard's property.

Wolf Update

There are currently 4 wolf packs in SE Washington. The Touchet (9 members), Tucannon (3 members), Grouse Flats (3 members), and Butte Creek (4 members). Captures were attempted this winter to try to get collars on additional wolves in the Touchet and Grouse Flats pack but were unsuccessful.

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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The W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area consists of 16,481 acres in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. The main valley contains the Tucannon River, along which are located 8 man-made lakes which were constructed in the 1950s. The lakes are stocked with hatchery raised rainbow trout for a put-and-take fishery. There are 11 campgrounds located on the Wildlife Area.

The area was historically a major big game wintering location and lies adjacent to National Forest lands. The bulk of the land purchases occurred from 1941-1944. The elk fence was constructed in the 1960s.

Current management objectives and problems are similar to past goals and problems which include providing maximum winter-range forage conditions while meeting recreational use demands. At the present time there is a harvest season of some type taking place 12 months of the year within the boundaries of the wildlife area.



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