



# COLUMBIA BASIN WILDLIFE AREA 2009 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



*Pediocactus* on the Quincy Unit

## Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Management Plan [http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/) that provides management direction for the 14 Units of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. The plan describes needs identified by internal and external working groups, and guides activities on the Wildlife Area based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Mission of “*Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife*” and its underlying statewide goals and objectives as they apply to local conditions.

Plans are updated annually as habitat and species conditions change, as new regulations and scientific knowledge develop, as public issues and concerns evolve, and as administration of wildlife areas change. This management plan update also includes 2008 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2009.

## Updates/Changes

Staff shortage left several tasks unfinished. Assisting with translocation of Washington ground squirrels and surveying for northern leopard frogs, completion of the interpretive signs along the Sprague Lake wildlife viewing trail, and posting signs on select islands in the Potholes Reservoir were not accomplished. Wildlife Area participation in several public events suffered as well.

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Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) provided approximately \$166,000 for operation and maintenance of the Frenchman Ponds project (TD-01) and the wetland enhancement project near Desert Lake (TD-02), under contract number 200600300. Funding provided for these projects was approved by BPA for mitigation from impacts caused by

construction and pool inundation of Chief Joseph Dam. 1,000 acres of wetland mitigation credits were received for these enhancements for breeding ducks, sandhill cranes, rails, black-necked stilts, American avocets, sandpipers, dowitchers, Wilson's snipes, Wilson's phalaropes, and black terns. Administration of this funding has added greatly to wildlife area staff workloads.

A new restricted access area was established in the Gloyd Seeps Unit on an area locally referred to as the Spud Field, a flood plain within the Crab Creek channel. A sharecrop agreement was negotiated for a grain crop to be grown on the Spud Field, with the wildlife area share taken as standing crop. A water control structure on the downstream side of the Crab Creek channel has been operated for several years to create shallow water inundation of the Spud Field to enhance waterfowl hunting. With the addition of the standing grain, the waterfowl hunting has been enhanced to the point that the WDFW Region recommendation was to establish a restricted access area. The area is described in the WDFW Waterfowl Hunting Pamphlet, and wildlife area staff posted appropriate regulatory signs.

As an inevitable response to the population growth in the Crescent Bar area of the Columbia River, the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area received a request to locate a cellular phone tower on WDFW-owned lands on Babcock Bench, on the Quincy Lakes Unit. An old borrow pit site was located near the U.S. Cellular preferred location on Babcock Bench, a land use agreement was negotiated and the cell tower was erected on a site locally referred to as Suicide Cliff.

The WDFW construction crew erected a new storage building at the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Headquarters equipment compound.

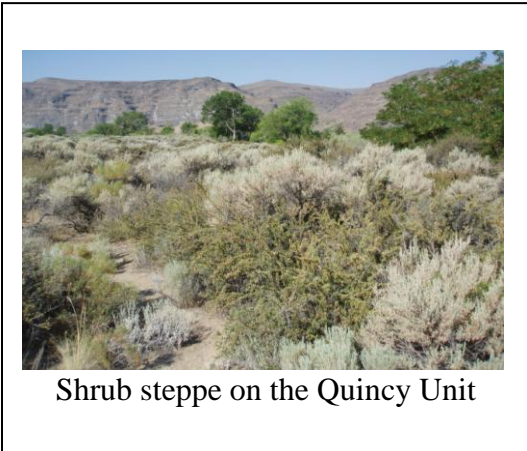
The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has identified the most favorable alternative route to feed irrigation water from Billy Clapp Reservoir to the Potholes Reservoir as the Crab Creek channel, which includes major portions of the Gloyd Seeps Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. This **Potholes Supplemental Feed Route** (PSFR) is a part of the larger Columbia River Water Management Program that seeks to better manage water for late summer downstream water users. Wildlife Area and District Wildlife Management staff has devoted a considerable amount of time this past year assisting in the development of a plan on how best to manage the water. Because the PSFR is a part of the Columbia River Water Management Program and involves the Bureau of Reclamation and the Washington Department of Ecology, the Department of Fish and Wildlife Intergovernmental Resource Management Division has taken the lead in developing the plan. The PSFR plan will provide perennial water to the Middle Crab Creek, an area that has historically been ephemeral at best. Naturally occurring flows within this reach is normally flash floods, early in the spring, with slow dry down. The supplemental irrigation water feed will turn the reach into perennial flows, with flows of up to 500 cubic feet per second (cfs) for the March 15 through June 15 period, and approximately 40 cfs for the remainder of the year. Obviously, these new flow regimes will drastically change the management of the Gloyd Seeps Unit. The management plan is expected to be completed in late 2009 to early 2010.

**Major Stewardship Accomplishments**

Moist soil management projects within the Frenchman Ponds and Winchester wetland enhancement projects produced desirable early-successional stage wetland vegetation. Invasive weedy vegetation was controlled with herbicides and mowing. Water control structures were operated to flood the wetland cells just prior to the fall waterfowl hunting season.



*Phragmites* control on Winchester Wasteway



Shrub steppe on the Quincy Unit

Rotenone was applied to ponds in the Westland ponds area of the Potholes Reservoir Unit in an attempt to improve the ponds for northern leopard frogs, and in the Desert Lakes wetland enhancement project to improve habitat values for waterfowl and shorebirds.

It was another active fire season in 2008 on the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, with fires ranging from approximately 5 acres on Manly sub-unit of the Upland Wildlife Restoration Units, to over 5,000 acres adjacent to and within the Gloyd Seeps Unit. Fires also occurred adjacent to and within the Lower Crab Creek Unit, Seep Lakes Unit, Goose Lakes Unit and the Desert Unit. The most damage to WDFW managed lands occurred on the 262 fire, destroying approximately 650 acres of shrub/steppe habitat; and the Harris Road fire which destroyed approximately 450 acres of shrub/steppe and riparian habitat at the Frenchman Ponds Project. As is normally the case, almost all were human-caused.

A contractor re-planted 92 acres of native grasses on the Goose Lakes Unit in cooperation with the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge from the Morgan Road fire of 2007. Wildlife Area staff planted native grasses on the dozer and disk lines at the Harris Road fire, totaling approximately 12 acres. In November, the Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District drained Billy Clapp Lake and the West Canal via the Winchester Wasteway, an impressive amount of water. The resultant flood completely inundated the Winchester

Restricted Access Area and breaching a water control berm constructed to keep water out of the adjacent farm ground. While the inundation attracted huge flocks of ducks, vehicle access to the restricted access area had to be restricted. The road into the parking area was temporarily closed, flooding was monitored and outstanding waterfowl hunting was experienced by the public. As flood waters receded, vehicle access was restored.

**Status Report of 2008 Performance Measures**

| <b>2008 Performance Measure</b>   | <b>Status of Performance Measure</b>   | <b>Explanation of Progress, 2009 Related Activity, and/or Comments</b> |
|---|--|--|
| Exclude cattle and vehicles from Section 17, Seep Lakes   | Requested Bureau of Reclamation to conduct environmental and cultural resource surveys for fencing.          | Continue to urge BOR to conduct reviews.                               |
| CBWA staff will assist in translocation of Washington ground squirrels to the Goose Lakes Unit. | Staff shortage prevented completion.   | Discontinued   |
| Remove unwanted fish from the Westlake ponds, Potholes Reservoir Unit                           | Completed rehab in October 2008. District Biologist completed isolation berms to prevent re-infestation.     |  |
| Control vegetation on the shoreline of Westlake Ponds   | Completed  | On-going, continue in 2009   |
| Maintain, relocate, or remove winter upland bird feeders as appropriate                         | Completed through winter 2008  | On-going, continue in 2009   |
| Maintain irrigated tree and shrub plots   | Completed through summer 2008  | On-going, continue in 2009   |
| Operate water control structures at Frenchman Ponds (TD-01) wetlands improvement project.       | Completed with filling in the fall of 2008, maintained water level through winter and drained February 2009. | On-going, continue in 2009.  |
| Conduct moist soil management activities on 60 acres at Frenchman Ponds (TD-01) project.        | Completed 40 acres of moist soil management. Naturally-occurring desirable vegetation abundant.              | On-going, continue in 2009.  |

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| Desert Lake (TD-02) wetlands improvement project.  | Completed. Control of fish completed in October 2008. Berms were armored and re-seeded; herbicides and mowing were used to control undesirable vegetation. | On-going, continue to maintain berms, control undesirable vegetation in 2009.  |
| Complete excavation at the Frenchman Ponds (TD-01) project.                              | Staff shortage prevented completion.   | Will strive to complete excavation of wetland cell 1 in 2009.  |
| Construct 3 miles of fence in the Seep Lakes Unit  | Not completed  | Requested BOR conduct environmental and cultural resource survey for fencing.  |
| Mow tall emergent vegetation in the Gloyd Seeps Unit.                                    | Mowing and flooding in years past made mowing unnecessary in 2008.   | Continue as needed   |
| Mow tall emergent vegetation on the Winchester Restricted Access Area (WRAA).            | Completed  | Continue as needed annually  |
| Burn Russian olive piles excavated from WRAA.  | Completed  |  |
| Weed control, with emphasis on Phragmites.   | Completed  | On-going, will expand the Phragmites control to include control test plots near the W20 Wasteway.  |
| Establish grass plots to reduce weed infestation.  | Completed, rehabilitated 11 acres from annual weeds to native bunch grasses on the Upland Wildlife Restoration Unit.                                       |  |
| Fire control and training  | Maintained fire breaks, applied herbicides to access roads and parking areas to reduce fuel load. Manager and Assistant attended Red Card recertification. | On-going, WA staff will continue to maintain firebreaks, road shoulders and parking areas. Manager and Assistant will attend Red Card recertification. |
| Post islands within Potholes Reservoir to reduce disturbances to colonial nesting birds. | Staff shortage prevented completion.   | Will strive to accomplish annually.  |
| Establish east side parking lot at the Winchester Restricted Access Area.                | Parking area site and access road were mowed. Requested BOR conduct review to proceed.   | Assistant District Wildlife Biologist applied for funds to provide rock and gravel, we will continue to urge BOR to provide permission.                |

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| Develop interpretive signs for the wildlife-viewing trail on the Sprague Lake Unit. | Progress was made, however staff shortage prevented completion.                       | Will strive to accomplish                                    |
| Post signs restricting access to the North Potholes Reserve.                        | Completed, access restrictions were implemented.                                      | On-going, will post signs as part of normal signing duties.  |
| Maintain shop, office, and equipment for safe and effective workplace.              | Completed through 2008  | On-going, continue for 2009                                  |
| Complete equipment storage building and herbicide storage room.                     | Completed   |  |
| Exhibit A to the BOR 25-year agreement.   | Had meetings with BOR to urge development of the legal descriptions of managed lands. | On-going negotiations regarding which properties to include. |
| Water service contract with BOR   | Information was provided to the BOR.  | Continue to work toward completion.                          |
| Grazing and agricultural lease administration.                                      | On-going  |  |

### **New Strategies**

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies or activities to address the agencies strategic plan goals and objectives, why the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species presence, and public issues and concerns. The following updated strategies have been added to respond to previously unaddressed or new issues or changes on the wildlife area. New strategies may also be in response to adaptive management as staff evaluate the impacts of past management activities.

#### **Agency Objective: Protect, Restore and Enhance Fish and Wildlife and Their Habitats**

##### **1. Manage wetland habitats**

- A. Strategy: Finalize management plan for the Potholes Supplemental Feed Route.

#### **Agency Objective: Provide Sound Operational Management of WDFW Lands, Facilities and Access Sites.**

##### **1. Maintain equipment, signs and other materials important for management and protection of the wildlife areas.**

A. Strategy: Work with Grant County Public Utility District 1 to improve public access on the Priest Rapids Unit.

### **2009 Performance Measures**

Manage to increase upland game bird populations:

- Maintain 20 populations of California valley quail with supplemental winter feeding.
- Maintain approximately 115 acres of irrigated tree and shrub plots.

Manage to attract migrating waterfowl:

- Operate water control structures to develop approximately 130 acres of attractive waterfowl habitat at the Frenchman Ponds (TD-01) wetlands improvement project.
- Conduct moist soil management activities on approximately 40 acres in the Frenchman Ponds project to improve waterfowl habitat.
- Conduct moist soil management activities on approximately 20 acres in the Winchester Restricted Access Area to improve waterfowl habitat.
- Maintain the 80 acres of waterfowl habitat at the Desert Lake (TD-02) wetlands improvement project by maintaining berms, and controlling undesirable vegetation and fish.
- Operate water control structures on the Winchester Restricted Access Area (4), Frenchman Ponds (8), Gloyd Farm Unit, and Spud Field to create shallow, open water.

Manage shallow ponds:

- Mow 5 acres of tall emergent and shoreline vegetation on the Winchester Restricted Access Area of the Desert Unit and flood to create shallow open water.

Manage weeds:

- Continue with aggressive weed control program on all units of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area with an emphasis on Phragmites and flag leaf iris control.

Provide fire control on agency lands:

- Maintain 3 miles of fire-breaks on the Potholes Reservoir and Banks Lake Units.
- Reduce/eliminate fuel load along access roads and parking areas on all units with herbicides.

Provide recreation compatible with fish, wildlife, and habitat protection:

- Check and repost 4 islands within the Potholes Reservoir with signs to reduce human disturbances during the nesting season.
- Develop interpretive signs for the wildlife-viewing trail on the Sprague Lake Unit.
- Restrict camping and vehicle travel on the Quincy Lakes Unit.

Maintain facilities to achieve safe, efficient, and effective management and use of the wildlife area:

- Maintain shop, office, and all equipment to provide a safe and effective workplace.
- Finalize Exhibit A of the 25-year management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation
- Finalize the water service contract with the Bureau of Reclamation to document the WDFW use of water for wildlife habitat.

**Citizen Advisory Group Input**

None

**Want to see the full plan?**

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/)

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