



COLUMBIA BASIN WILDLIFE AREA 2017 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Wildlife Area Management Plan. This plan provides management direction for the 192,000 acre Columbia Basin Wildlife Area in Grant and Adams counties. The plan identifies needs and guides activities on the area based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Mission: to “*preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities*” and its underlying statewide goals and objectives as they apply to local conditions.

Plans are updated every 2-3 years 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 includes 2014 - 2016 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies, and performance measures for 2017-2018. (http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/).



Waterfowl on the Frenchman Ponds

Updates/Changes

Frenchman Ponds Expansion Completion - Duck Stamp and Pittman Robertson Funding were utilized to complete the expansion of the Frenchman Ponds (TD-1) in the summer of 2017. By utilizing Ducks Unlimited and wildlife area staff, multiple islands, and several new wetland cells were completed with water control structures. The islands create prime loafing and roosting areas for waterfowl and sandhill cranes. The pond contouring created better hunting opportunity and the expanded footprint of the project created new waterfowl habitat and future hunting opportunities.

Winchester Boat Launch - Access managers Harmon and Graves completed the construction of a new boat launch at the Winchester Dodson Access Site. The new boat launch addresses the issue of sedimentation that has rendered the old boat launch mostly unusable for public access. The project was funded with federal dollars associated with the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area’s contract with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR).

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Potholes Game Reserve Boundary Change and New Potholes Regulated Access Area (RAA) - In 2015 WDFW proposed shrinking the North Potholes Game reserve, which would allow for another RAA without having a negative effect on the reserves ability to hold large numbers of waterfowl. Columbia Basin Wildlife Area began the process of changing signage to reflect the new boundaries. The North Potholes RAA opened for hunting in the fall of 2015 as a hunting by reservation property. To create more opportunity for use the RAA was changed to first come first served in 2016 and continues to operate on this system today.



Access manager Josh Harmon constructing new boat launch at Winchester Wasteway.

New Issues

Feral Swine - In 2015, feral swine was reported on the wildlife area. On the ground surveying and camera traps confirmed their presence. Efforts by WDFW and U. S. Department of Agriculture – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service resulted in the removal of over a dozen feral swine in 2015 and 2016. The eradication effort required the emergency closure of a portion of the Desert Unit for public safety. Monitoring continues in 2017 with no confirmed sightings in the last six months.

Herman Lake Culvert - In January 2016, wildlife area staff was alerted to a sinkhole that had formed in Seep Lakes Road around the culvert draining Herman Lake. Further investigation revealed that the ancient culvert was rusted through and no longer functioning. Replacement of the culvert was eventually handled by WDFW Capital Asset Management Program (CAMP) after receiving funding from the BOR. The project was completed late summer of 2017 and the road is now open to public travel.



Supplemental Feed Route Shrub Watering - Due to an unforeseeable delay in Potholes Supplemental Feed Route (PSFR) operations, which will provide regular water flows to Crab Creek in the Gloyd Unit, WDFW built a temporary irrigation system to keep the plants watered throughout the dry, summer as a stopgap measure to increase survival of the more than 12,000 shrubs planted the previous year. However, since BOR does not anticipate operating PSFR until 2020 or later, the watering project will not continue in 2018 and shrubs will likely be replaced after PSFR is fully operational.

Goose Lakes Fire - On July 9th 2017, Columbia Basin Wildlife Area staff responded to a large wildlife fire that started in the Goose Lakes area in the Seep Lakes Unit of the wildlife area. The fire was started by illegal fireworks at the Upper Goose Lake access. Fire crews from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and local districts worked hard to contain the fast moving fire. With the help of air support in the form of two helicopters the fire was contained at just under 1,000 acres; a good portion of which was on WDFW managed lands. Unfortunately, the goose lakes have been the site of several fires in recent time including a fire in 2015 that burned much of the same footprint.



Beda Lake Fire - On July 26th 2017 a human caused fire started at the Beda Lake access on the Desert Unit. The fire burned under 300 acres of mostly intact bitterbrush/sage and a few wetland basins. Wildlife area staff developed a trial rehab plan consisting of multiple options for herbicide treatment of the burned area. The dozer lines and heavy vehicles impacted areas were seeded in the fall of 2017, and the entire footprint will be seeded in the fall of 2018. Bitterbrush plugs (2,000) were planted in fall of 2017. The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area hopes that the trial will

result in a better understanding of fire rehab requirements in the Columbia Basin.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Dense Nesting Cover Gloyd Seeps – Columbia Basin Wildlife Area staff completed the seeding on the Gloyd Seeps Unit **dense nesting cover** upland game birds and waterfowl plots in the fall of 2014. This activity occurred on abandoned agricultural and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields on the unit. Extensive weed control efforts supporting the plants have occurred from 2015-17. 150 acres in the largest fields have also been inter-seeded in 2015 and again in 2017. Ongoing weed control will continue to help with native grass establishment.



Potholes Supplemental Feed Route Project - Wildlife area staff have completed implementation of the Potholes Supplemental Feed Route Project (PSFR) over the past several years. The wildlife area now has the ability to manage water levels on 60 acres at the North Flood Flat of the Gloyd Seeps Unit through the construction and installation of berms, swales and three water control structures. The former water control structure at the Spud Field was also replaced, allowing WDFW to manage water levels on a 70- acre wetland. Woven geotextiles and re-contouring were used to reinforce and prevent bank erosion along a one-quarter mile portion of the Crab Creek Channel. The project included weed management activities that included, but were not limited to, felling and clearing Russian olive from 8 acres, treating over 200 acres for perennial pepperweed, and 42 acres for Russian knapweed. WDFW staff also planted and maintained approximately 7,000 shrubs on over 15 acres in the Flood Flat.

Status Report of 2014-2016 Performance Measures

Key performance measures are identified to monitor progress and identify any issues that might interfere with planned priority activities. This information will be used to delete, add or alter priority strategies for 2017-2018.

2014-16 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/Related Activity/ Comments
Maintain 20 populations of California valley quail with supplemental winter feeding.	Completed through winter 2016, maintained 40 + bird feeders.	Ongoing continue in 2018-19.
Maintain approximately 115 acres of irrigated tree and shrub plots.	Completed through summer 2017.	Ongoing continue in 2018-19.
Operate water control structures to develop approximately 130 acres of attractive waterfowl habitat at the Frenchman Ponds (TD-01) wetlands improvement project.	Completed through winter 2017.	Ongoing continue in 2019. New expansion completed summer of 2017.
Conduct moist soil management activities on approximately 20 acres in the Frenchman Ponds project to improve waterfowl habitat.	Completed tillage on 48 acres and seeding on 36 acres.	Ongoing continue as necessary.
Conduct moist soil management activities on approximately 20 acres in the Winchester Restricted Access.	Not completed	Change in water availability has curtailed moist soil management until alternate water delivery is available.
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.	Completed	Ongoing continue in 2018-19.
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.	Completed	Ongoing continue in 2018-19.
Fallow and plant approximately 200 acres into native grasses and forbs. Target areas are abandoned agricultural fields or cheatgrass patches. Funding sources include Pheasants	Planting completed fall 2014, inter-seeded 2015 and 2017.	Ongoing weed control continue in 2018-19.

Forever, Columbia Basin Chapter.		
Plant upland cover trees and shrubs parallel to Crab Creek on the Spud Field.	Completed fall of 2013 and supplemented fall 2016.	Ongoing maintenance 2018-19.
Plant riparian cover along Crab Creek on the Spud Field.	Completed Fall of 2013.	Ongoing maintenance 2018-19.
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.	Completed 12 acres of mowing.	Change in water availability restricts open water.
Continue with an aggressive weed control program on all units of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area with an emphasis on Phragmites. Utilize funds provided by the Migratory Bird Stamp program for additional Phragmites control.	Completed	Ongoing 2018-19.
Maintain 3 miles of fire-breaks on the Potholes Reservoir and Banks Lake Units.	Completed	Ongoing 2018-19.
Reduce/eliminate fuel load along access roads and parking areas on all units with herbicides.	Completed, 250+ acres treated.	Ongoing continue in 2018-19.
Release pen-raised pheasants for hunting opportunities on the Gloyd Seeps, Lower Crab Creek, Priest Rapids and Upland Wildlife Restoration units.	Completed	Ongoing continue in 2018-19. Upland Wildlife Restoration Unit removed from pheasant release program.
Maintain shop, office and all equipment to provide a safe and effective workplace.	Completed	Ongoing continue in 2018-19.
Finalize Exhibit A of the 25-year management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation.	Not completed	Exhibit A nearing completion, expect completion early 2018.
Finalize the water service contract with the Bureau of Reclamation to document the WDFW use of water for wildlife habitat.	Not completed	

2017-18 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

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 20 acres in the Frenchman Ponds project 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 upland habitats:

- Continue maintaining approximately 200 acres in the Gloyd Seeps planted to native grasses.
- Maintain upland cover trees and shrubs parallel to Crab Creek on the Spud Field.

Manage riparian habitats:

- Maintain planted riparian cover along Crab Creek on the Spud Field.

Manage shallow ponds:

- Mow 5 to 10 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 an aggressive weed control program on all units of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area with an emphasis on Phragmites. Evaluate ways to being controlling newly listed Russian Olive on the wildlife area.

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.
- Continue to have red card certified staff to respond to fires in a resource advisor capacity on the wildlife area.

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

- Release pen-raised pheasants for hunting opportunities on the Gloyd Seeps, Lower Crab Creek, Priest Rapids units.

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.

BPA Wildlife Mitigation Program

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) provides funding for the development and maintenance of wetland habitat at the Frenchman Ponds project (TD-01) and the wetland enhancement project near Desert Lake (TD-02), within the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. For these wetland habitat enhancements, BPA received mitigation Habitat Unit (HU) credits towards their overall Wildlife Mitigation for the Columbia River hydroelectric system. Progress towards the obligation is assessed through the use of periodic surveys based on standardized Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) for the focal species: breeding and migrating ducks, sandhill cranes, rails, black-necked stilts, American avocets, sandpipers, dowitchers, Wilson's snipes, Wilson's phalaropes, and black terns. By measuring a variety of habitat features, HEP surveyors apply habitat models for the focal species to arrive at a numerical figure between 0 and 1 that quantifies the habitat quality for a particular focal species. This figure is known as a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI). The figure is then multiplied by the area habitat being evaluated and expressed as a Habitat Unit, the basic currency of HEP.

General Information on the Mitigation Project

The 2010 – 2012 Funding Proposal submitted to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council in January 2009 details the Desert Wildlife Area's history, land purchases, and rationale for mitigation and focal species: <http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2010/proposal.asp?id=1010> This document includes a summary of activities (work elements), a link to the project narrative, an itemized budget request, and estimated budgets through 2018. The majority of the activities relate to protection and enhancement of shrub-steppe habitat, along with measures designed to monitor the effectiveness of the activities, including habitat/plant community monitoring, wildlife population response, and periodic Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) surveys to track progress toward mitigation goals.

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Want to see the full plan?

Go to –
http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/