



**COWLITZ WILDLIFE AREA
2008 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Cowlitz Wildlife Area Management Plan

(http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/) that provides management direction for the 14,155 acres of wildlife area lands located in Lewis County. The plan identifies management objectives and guides the implementation of strategies based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Mission of “Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife Resources” and its

underlying statewide goals and objectives as they apply to local conditions. Additionally, the plan guides activities to fulfill Tacoma Power’s FERC requirements to mitigate for the habitat loss due to inundation by Riffe and Mayfield Lakes.

The Management Plan is updated annually as habitat conditions and species needs change, as new regulations and scientific knowledge are developed, as public issues and concerns evolve, and as administrative policy regarding wildlife areas change.

UPDATE/CHANGES

In 2007, the Region 5 WDFW lands agent and the WDFW Real Estate Services were successful in acquiring two new additions to the Cowlitz Wildlife Area (CWA). These new additions (55 acres) lie adjacent to the Davis Lake Unit and will be managed for wintering waterfowl and as forage fields for elk.

On December 13, 2005, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approved Tacoma Power’s request to reconfigure some of the boundaries of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. WDFW and the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission supported this action. It resulted in removing 96.4 acres from the wildlife area and adding 110.1 acres to the wildlife area for a net gain of 13.7 acres. The action had several objectives: a) to consolidate CWA lands to facilitate management and lessen encroachments by adjacent owners b) to make land available for the

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construction of the Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project license mandated low-water boat launch on the east end of Riffe Lake and c) to make lands available for the enlargement of Ike Kinswa State Park.

Lands removed from the wildlife area for state park use consisted of 20.4 acres abutting the boundary of Ike Kinswa State Park. In exchange, 26.3 acres were removed from Ike Kinswa State Park and placed in the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. The land added to the wildlife area is Tacoma Power property that was permitted to the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. Lands removed from the Cowlitz Wildlife Area for use by Tacoma Power for construction of a low water boat launch consisted of 37 acres abutting Taidnapam Park on Riffe Lake. In exchange, Tacoma Power placed 52.1 acres of land adjacent to the Cowlitz Wildlife Area on the west end of Riffe Lake in the wildlife area boundary. The remaining lands consisted of isolated parcels that presented management challenges for the wildlife area. These acres were exchanged for higher quality lands with fewer management problems. Lands removed from the wildlife area totaled 39 acres. Lands added to the wildlife area totaled 31.7 acres. Management on these new additions began in 2007.

NEW ISSUES

Low lake levels on Riffe Lake have made it difficult for people to easily access the lakeshore for lawful activities such as fishing. Due to this, vehicular trespass onto areas where foot traffic only is allowed is occurring more often. Also, Tacoma Power has a cultural resource plan in place and they monitor known sites for disturbances -- both natural and man-made. Observations would suggest that the unlawful removal of cultural artifacts is escalating due to the low lake levels. Most of these cultural sites are underwater or inaccessible when lake levels are at full pool.

MAJOR STEWARDSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

CWA staff developed a 5-year plan to repair channel breaches and restore existing drainage on the Davis Lake Unit. A Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application (JARPA) was applied for and all necessary permits were secured. Work was conducted during the summer when fields were dry and water levels in the creeks were at low to no flows. Work was conducted on approximately 3,500 linear feet of channel and less than 50 yards of material was removed from the channels in designated wetlands. The removed material was dumped in an approved onsite location. Chemical treatments were applied where necessary using Roundup Pro™ to remove the reed canarygrass and to prepare the fields for seeding. Approximately 40 acres of forage field were plowed, harrowed, and then seeded with a pasture mix. Heavy counts of migrating waterfowl were observed during the mid-winter waterfowl surveys on these forage fields, validating the decision to manage these fields as moist soil units.

In May of 2007, 1,500 Pacific willow (*Salix lasiandra*) stakes, 1,500 red alder (*Alnus rubra*), and 1,500 Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*) were planted in approximately 11 acres along Squaw Creek on the Kiona Unit providing a 100 foot buffer on either side of the creek in the planted area. The site was prepared by spraying the planting site with Roundup Pro™ to chemically scalp the area. This planting will provide cover to the creek to help control water temperatures as well as provide shade to control reed canarygrass. In addition, plant diversity should improve providing a better riparian habitat.

STATUS REPORT OF 2007 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Key performance measures are identified each year 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 2008.

2007 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress 2008 Related Activity Comments
Complete 10 acres of riparian buffer plantings along Squaw Creek (Kiona Unit).	The 10 acres have been planted.	The plantings will be monitored and maintained if necessary (i.e., competition suppressed).
Complete the Kosmos Access Area (Dogpatch) road-resurfacing project.	The project was completed.	Some additional maintenance will be needed in 2008.
Continue improving the wintering waterfowl habitat on the Mossyrock Ponds through moist soil management techniques.	In 2007 the inflow ditch was cleared and a culvert installed to facilitate field maintenance activities. Chemical was sprayed to control reed canarygrass around the “large” pond.	This is an ongoing project with no planned completion date. 2008 activities include ditch clearing, riser maintenance, and repair of the riser walkway structure.
Conduct forage field enhancements by seeding approximately 20 acres of forage fields.	The project was expanded and approximately 40 acres were seeded.	The 40 acres will be monitored and further agricultural treatments applied as necessary (i.e., fertilizing and top dressing with additional seed).
Clear / brush out approximately 11 miles of roads identified as necessary for management activities on the Peterman Ridge Unit.	This project was completed.	The roads need to be monitored and sprayed for sapling control.
Continue with year 3 of the 5-year project to enhance the wintering waterfowl habitat on the Davis Lake Unit by restoring the existing drainage to a functioning state.	Ongoing, but work appears to be ahead of schedule.	Continuing with ditch clean out and forage field enhancements.
Perform a stem survival count survey of the 2004 riparian plantings along Sulphur Creek on the Swofford Pond Unit.	A qualitative assessment was conducted.	Continue monitoring plantings. Additional plantings will be conducted if determined to be necessary.

Perform a stem survival count survey of the 2006 habitat improvement plantings on the Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Unit.	A qualitative assessment was conducted.	Continue monitoring plantings. Additional plantings will be conducted if determined to be necessary.
Continue to seek reliable funding through grants and partnerships to complete the Spears and Kiona Wetland Restoration and Enhancement projects.	Ongoing – no additional funding has been secured.	Attempts to secure grants and partnerships in 2007 were unsuccessful. Monies to begin moving forward on these projects have become available through the Cowlitz Wildlife O&M budget.
Evaluate existing road density on Peterman Ridge and determine need for additional road closures by 2008.	Road density objectives are nearly met.	Further closures will be conducted as RMAP planned projects are completed. Maintaining breaches and existing “tank traps” will be a priority in 2008.
Conduct annual weed control activities on approximately 20 acres of Canada thistle, 30 acres of reed canarygrass, and eradication of known Japanese knotweed sites.	Weed control is ongoing. Project benchmarks were met except there is one known location where Japanese knotweed is still active.	Knotweed is known to be aggressive and tough to control. The goal to eradicate this weed is still an expectation.
Conduct annual field maintenance activities on approximately 200 acres of forage fields using common agricultural practices.	This project was completed	Annual activity
Conduct the annual artificial nest box maintenance and use survey.	This project was completed	Annual activity
Write the annual performance report for Tacoma Power as per the Wildlife Settlement Agreement.	The plan was written and submitted for 2007	Annual activity

NEW STRATEGIES

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies or activities to address the agency’s strategic plan goals and objectives, why the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species present 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. Strategies identified in italics are a response to issues provide through the Citizen Advisory Group meetings.

Note to the reader/reviewer: No new or updated strategies are being proposed at this time. However, any ideas that you may have to offer that are not already included in the plan would be welcome and strongly considered.

2008 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

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

1. Spray 6 miles of forest road on Peterman Hill to control hardwood saplings.
2. Continue improving the wintering waterfowl habitat on the Mossyrock Ponds through moist soil management techniques. 2008 projects include riser / culvert replacement, continuing to improve hydrology by controlling vegetation, and continuing to improve vegetation diversity through cultural practices such as tillage.
3. Continue with year 3 of the 5-year project to enhance the wintering waterfowl habitat on the Davis Lake Unit by restoring the existing drainage to a functioning state.
4. Continue timber-clearing enhancements on the Mossyrock Unit's lower timber clearings (6 acres). Spray blackberries and conduct forage seeding if needed.
5. Conduct forage field enhancements on approximately 3 acres of forage fields on the Mossyrock Unit. The site was chemically scalped to control blackberry and thistle in 2007. Additional vegetation control is planned if needed and the site will be seeded in 2008.
6. The riser / catwalk on the Mossyrock large pond is in need of repair. Maintenance will be conducted to ensure the catwalk's integrity and a gate will be installed to control access.
7. Continue with forage field enhancements on approximately 20 acres of forage fields on the Davis Lake Unit. Plans are to evaluate the 2007 fall seeding and reseed if necessary. An application of fertilizer will be distributed if determined to be necessary.
8. Conduct annual weed control activities in accordance with legal requirements and guided by the weed management plan. Activities will focus on a persistent community of Japanese knotweed on the Mossyrock Unit and approximately 8 acres of forage field on the Kosmos Unit with a relatively high density of Canada thistle.
9. Conduct the annual artificial nest box maintenance and use survey.
10. Prepare the annual report for Tacoma Power to meet their FERC requirement.
11. Work with Tacoma Power to develop a forest thinning prescription plan for Peterman Hill.
12. Conduct annual field maintenance activities in accordance with the field maintenance plan. There are approximately 200 acres of forage fields that are annually maintained using common agricultural practices.
13. Conduct maintenance activities on the Kosmos and Swofford access points. Road surfaces and parking areas will be leveled and potholes fixed.
14. Meet with area habitat biologist to determine suitability of the Kiona Dike project and involve habitat engineers with planning to ensure the project is fish friendly. Complete and submit JARPA for Kiona Creek channel modifications.
15. Complete and submit JARPA for Spears Unit ditch maintenance.

CITIZENS ADVISORY GROUP INPUT

A Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on April 24, 2008 to review management's progress and address any new issues or receive input on existing issues. Representatives of the Lewis County Weed Control Board were in attendance and input was heard from a representative of the East Lewis County Windsurfer's.

The following new input/issues were addressed at the meeting.

Issue: Low water levels on Riffe Lake pose a risk of annual noxious weeds flushing along the exposed bank.

Response: The responsibility for terrestrial weed control on the Cowlitz Wildlife Area remains the responsibility of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff. The buffer on Riffe Lake is not easy to monitor due to the remoteness of the area but staff will, as time constraints allow, make periodic checks for such invaders as loosestrife, knotweeds, and knapweeds.

Issue: Low water levels on Riffe Lake pose a risk of disturbance to sensitive resource sites.

Response: Enforcement is aware of the issue as well as wildlife area staff. Whenever possible, contact is made with the recreating public to educate them about the rules regarding disturbing cultural resource sites and the associated penalties. In addition, regulatory signs have been posted at locations of entry also serve to educate the public.

Issue: Elk damage to private property is becoming increasingly wide spread as populations of resident elk expand.

Response: Proposals have been submitted that would help to reduce population sizes as well as haze animals off private property. Enforcement is working with individuals who have filed complaints with the agency.

Issue: Japanese knotweed on Siler Creek – Spears Unit

Response: This is a previously unknown population. The Agency has mandated eradication on all owned and managed properties. Efforts will be focused towards eradicating this population and others located on wildlife area property along this drainage.

Issue: The windsurfing and hang gliding community have concerns regarding historic “access” into the Kosmos Flats. They have enjoyed access for some time and think that their activities could be threatened if restrictions are imposed to protect resources.

Resource: The Cowlitz Wildlife Area is charged with maximizing recreational opportunities that are compatible with resource protection. No new closures are planned at this point in time. However, Tacoma Power is responsible for resource protection under their FERC license, and if it is deemed necessary, restrictions could be imposed to provide additional protection.

Want to see the full plan?

Go to –

http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/

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