



COWLITZ WILDLIFE AREA 2009 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary



This is an update to the 2006 Cowlitz Wildlife Area Management Plan that provides management direction for the 14,140 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, new regulations and scientific knowledge are developed, public issues and concerns evolve, and administrative policy regarding wildlife areas change.

UPDATE/CHANGES

Pursuant to Article 12 of the Settlement Agreement, the Wildlife Management Coordinating Committee (WMCC) met in 2005 to approve wetland acquisition target zones to guide possible purchases. It is the intent to pursue those properties adjacent to the existing wildlife area boundaries before new tracts of property are purchased outside the target zones. No acquisitions occurred in 2008, but efforts to acquire additional target properties will occur in 2009.

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Due to increasing complaints from landowners that elk are damaging their hay fields and adversely affecting their hay production in the Davis Lake Valley east of Morton, a proposal was submitted

and adopted as part of the 2009-2011 harvest regulation process. The proposal modifies the 505 GMU to include the valley and provide additional hunting opportunities.

A major flood event occurred during the winter of 2008-09 causing extensive flooding and massive destruction throughout the Cowlitz River Valley, particularly from Morton eastward. Homes were destroyed and roads were washed out. The transportation infrastructure was compromised for nearly 2 weeks before partial travel in and out of the area was restored. The wildlife area was affected and the advances in many of the projects were completely undone. A listing of the affected projects and damaged sites can be found under new issues.

As part of the Habitat Conservation Plan for WDFW wildlife areas, the Cowlitz Wildlife Area was inventoried for species and activities in 2008. Inventories statewide should be complete in 2009 and the Habitat Conservation Plan is projected for completion in 2010.

NEW ISSUES

The winter of 2008-09 was hard on all of Lewis County and the wildlife area did not go unaffected. Flooding and mass wasting brought about several new issues. Below you will find a synopsis of the issues and proposed repair. It should be noted that most of these issues were not addressed in the 2009 Performance Measures. Some of these projects are dependent on cooperation from other agencies / stakeholders and some will require environmental permits. Therefore, the time-line on these projects is yet to be determined.

Spears Unit — The new approach we established to access the forage fields was partially washed out and needs to be repaired. This requires mostly re-rocking the approach and cleaning away debris from the culvert. This is a non-fish bearing drainage ditch (no photos available).

Kiona Unit — The new culvert placed in 2007 was blown out again. Most of Kiona creek leaves its natural channel upstream of the wildlife area on land owned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Yakima. Kiona then flows across the landscape with no defined channel and then enters an agricultural ditch on wildlife area land where it flows into Squaw Creek. The extra water was too much for the culvert to shed and the resultant overflow washed out the field approach and culvert. The scope of the repairs are yet to be defined but in general will include directing the Kiona creek back into its channel, repair the approach, and elevate the access road to prevent high water erosion.



Davis Lake — The culvert is blown out on the unnamed channel near the Allen Barn. The creek has left its banks and is now flowing out across the field. The channel doesn't exist in many places downstream of its present location due to sediment and rock. The culvert and ditch below the first field near the Allen Barn has been filled with sediment as well. It is likely that we have flood damage on the Smith fields but they are still inundated and cannot be evaluated. Most of the work that we have done on the hydrology falls under our HPA, yet to be completed. Plans are to work with the agency's habitat biologist to generate a plan that can expedite the project. It is likely that this project will be put out to bid.



Peterman Unit — Much of the road in this area has not yet been evaluated for damage. There is a complete failure of the road near the 2500 Road and the road prism is compromised, as is much of the bank at the 1500 Road. There is another complete failure on the 2500 Road as well. The mainline (1000 Road) is approximately 6 miles and much of that road has been braided by water running down the road and will need to be graded. Approximately 60% of the observed problems are new and due to flooding conditions this winter. Snow depths prevented evaluating the roads in higher elevations (1300, 1700, 1600, and 1500 systems) at the time of this report but some damage is expected. The general approach to these issues will be to bring them into compliance with the Forest Practice Act by using the Department of Natural Resources approved RMAP as our guide. Some roads may be abandoned as a result of culvert failures if the roads are deemed not essential for operational access.



Swofford Unit — The bridge over Sulphur creek has been undermined and will need to be armored at the abutments. The culvert just inside the gate off Green Mountain Road will need to be cleaned as it has been filled by sediment and debris (no photos available).

MAJOR STEWARDSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2004, private consultants finished a conceptual restoration / enhancement plan guiding future projects to improve the habitat value, restore the hydrology, and increase the wetland function of the Spears unit. One of the findings was that the southern bank of Channel “A” is believed to be functioning as a dike and creating an unnatural impoundment. In 2008, The SEPA checklist and the JARPA for breaching the southern side of Channel “A” were submitted to the Department of Fish &

Wildlife. The project was granted a Determination of Non-significance and an HPA was issued. The JARPA was sent to Lewis County, Department of Ecology, and the Corps of Engineers for any additional permits that may be needed. Lewis County responded and granted the project a county exemption. As of May 14, 2009 we have not yet heard from the Corps of Engineers and the Department of Ecology has responded but stated they will base their determination on the response from the Corps of Engineers.

The ability to manipulate the hydroperiod is essential to a wet soil management program. The Mossyrock unit has four ponds filled by natural seeps. Unfortunately, nuisance wildlife activity and normal decay of the infrastructure had compromised the ability to control the flow of water between the ponds. In 2008, the water control structure between pond one and pond two was replaced. This and the previous ditch work along the slab road improved the system to where both ponds were at maximum retention during the 2008 / 2009 winter. In addition, the catwalk above the water control structure on the large pond was rehabilitated and a gate was installed to control unauthorized access.

Over a mile of fence was removed from the interior of the Davis Lake unit's newest acquisitions to facilitate animal movement between the fields. Also, CWA staff continued the rehabilitation efforts on portions of these new acquisitions. The fields (~25 acres) on the site had lain fallow and reed canarygrass had dominated the fields making them largely unpalatable to grazing wildlife. They were planted in Fall 2007 with a forage pasture seed mix but high water inundation in Spring 2008 killed most of the new seedlings and conditions encouraged a flushing of rush species across most of the site. The site was prepared to provide a good seedbed by rototilling, disking, and harrowing the fields. The fields were then planted in fall 2008 using a drill, and if deemed necessary will be top-dressed with more seed in spring 2009. Chemical control will be necessary to control the broadleaf weeds that will undoubtedly flush due to the exposure of the seed bank from the mechanical operations on the fields in 2008.

In 2008, CWA staff controlled encroaching vegetation on over 27 miles of road on the Peterman Ridge Unit using both chemical and mechanical methods. This maintenance is necessary to keep roads open for both recreational and operational access and is an ongoing project.

STATUS REPORT OF 2008 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 2009.

2008 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress 2009 Related Activity Comments
Spray 6 miles of forest road on Peterman Hill to control hardwood saplings.	~27 miles of road were treated.	This is an ongoing project and will continue again in 2009.
Continue improving the wintering waterfowl habitat on the Mossyrock Ponds through moist soil management techniques.	In 2008, water control structure/culvert between pond 1 and pond 2 was replaced.	Additional maintenance activities to clear the ditches of vegetation will continue in 2009.
Continue with year 3 of the 5-year project to enhance the wintering waterfowl habitat on	No major work was accomplished on this project in 2008.	High groundwater in 2008 made access to this unit with equipment impossible.

the Davis Lake Unit by restoring the existing drainage to a functioning state.		Additionally, 2008-09 flooding erased much of the already accomplished work.
Continue timber-clearing enhancements on the Mossyrock Unit's lower timber clearings.	Site was visited and it was determined that the site should be monitored for a year.	It is likely that some active habitat manipulation will be necessary in 2009.
Conduct forage field enhancements on 3 acres of forage field on the Mossyrock Unit.	Work was accomplished as planned.	A chemical application to control broadleaf weeds will likely be needed in 2009.
Repair water control structure / catwalk on the large pond on the Mossyrock Unit.	Work was accomplished as planned.	Additional maintenance activities to clear the ditches of vegetation will continue in 2009.
Conduct forage field enhancements on 20 acres of forage field on the Davis Lake Unit.	See Major Stewardship Accomplishments above for details of work completed.	This project continues to be plagued by high water events.
Conduct annual weed control activities in accordance with legal requirements and guided by the weed management plan.	Work was performed as planned but objective is yet to be met.	The Japanese knotweed on the Mossyrock unit continues to be persistent and the thistle on the Kosmos unit is definitely declining.
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 2008	Annual activity
Work with Tacoma Power to develop a forest thinning prescription plan for Peterman Hill.	Ongoing – not completed.	Tacoma Power has secured a forester to write a prescription for both thinning and replanting the non-planted and under planted units.
Conduct annual field maintenance (~200 acres) in accordance with the field maintenance plan.	The 2008 objectives were met.	Annual Activity
Conduct maintenance on the Kosmos and Swofford public access sites. Road surface and pothole repair.	The project was completed	There are some minor additional repairs needed in 2009.

<p>Meet with area habitat biologist and habitat engineer to determine suitability of the Kiona Dike project. Complete and submit JARPA.</p>	<p>Partial completion. JARPA not completed or submitted.</p>	<p>To ensure completion of project the decision was made to work on the Spears Unit dike breach and ditch maintenance project first. Additionally, 2008-09 flooding created some additional issues that need to be addressed before beginning this project.</p>
<p>Complete and submit JARPA for the Spears Unit ditch maintenance project.</p>	<p>JARPA completed and submitted. Determination of non-significance issued as well as HPA.</p>	<p>This project was modified from the original specifications of ditch maintenance to also include breaching the south side of the dike along the channel known as "Channel A". As of May 2009, Lewis County has granted an exemption. The Department of Ecology is waiting to see how the Corps of Engineers responds.</p>

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 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. Strategies identified in italics are a response to issues provided through the Citizen Advisory Group meetings.

Note to the reader/reviewer: No new or updated strategies are being proposed at this time.

2009 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. 2009 projects include improving hydrology by removing restrictive vegetation, fixing breaches in the ditch and pond banks, and improving vegetation diversity through cultural practices such as tillage.
3. Continue with year 4 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. Due to recent flooding, this project may need to be bid out to meet completion date.

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 8 acres of forage fields on the Kosmos Unit. The site was mowed in 2008 and additional vegetation control is needed to control blackberry that is currently dominating the site.
6. There are two major projects that need to be completed along the 1000 Road on Peterman Hill. Flooding during the 2008-09 winter washed out the road at station 316+40 and the road prism has been greatly compromised at station 129+35.
7. Continue with forage field enhancements on approximately 20 acres of forage fields on the Davis Lake Unit. Plans are to evaluate the fall 2008 seeding and reseed in spring 2009 if necessary. Additionally, chemical control may be necessary to control broadleaf weeds.
8. Conduct annual weed control activities in accordance with legal requirements and guided by the weed management plan. Main activities will focus on the persistent community of Japanese knotweed on the Mossyrock Unit, the newly identified Japanese knotweed community on the Spears Unit, as well as the Scot's broom communities on the Spears and Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Units.
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. Continue working with Tacoma Power on the forest thinning / replanting 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 Kiona, Kosmos, and Swofford Units. Flooding during the 2008-09 winter has created issues along the Kiona access road, the Clevenger Road at Kosmos, and the Swofford Pond access road off Green Mountain Road on the south side of Swofford Pond. In general, rock needs to be applied to the roads in several places to restore the grade and downed trees need to be cleared to allow unimpeded access. Culverts need to be cleared in several places to restore the drainage back to its normal course.
14. Conduct maintenance activities on the Swofford Pond Trail.
15. Begin the Spears Unit project (if the ground is dry enough to access the site) to maintain the ditch and breach the south side of the dike along the channel known as "Channel A" in accordance with the plan outlined in the JARPA and HPA.

CITIZENS ADVISORY GROUP INPUT

A Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on May 12, 2009 to review management's progress, as well as address any new issues and receive input on existing issues. This year's meeting was well attended. Among the non-attendees were the Lewis County Weed Control Board and the Horseman's Association. Input was heard from several individuals and the issues have been summarized below.

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

Issue: The Mossyrock Trail needs additional signage. Users will look at the map on the kiosk and then have difficulty actually locating the trail.

Response: The maintenance and signage of the Mossyrock Trail is the responsibility of Tacoma Power. However, the Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff routinely reports to Tacoma Power and the suggestions will be forwarded to them.

Issue: A trail should be built looping back around to the park along the ridge southeast of the dam. Beautiful views of the lake can be seen from there and it would be a good addition to the trail system.

Response: The land that this trail would be built on is largely Tacoma Power recreational lands so responsibility and ultimately the decision to build this extension would fall to them. The Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff will forward this request to them for consideration.

Issue: The Swofford Pond Trail needs maintenance.

Response: Maintenance of the trail is considered an annual activity and is the responsibility of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. It is written into our annual report that trail maintenance and some structures over the wet areas will be installed this year.

Issue: An extension of the Swofford Pond Trail should be built into the Sulphur Creek Falls.

Response: The Cowlitz Wildlife Area actually considered this but the falls and a significant amount of the trail is on an adjacent private landowner. Attempts to contact the landowner and secure permission / easement were unsuccessful at the time. Input from CAG members suggested that there might be new ownership so we will address this project again.

Issue: "Rattlebox" and wild cucumber is showing up in the Mossyrock fields that are cooperatively managed as hay / forage fields.

Response: Neither "Rattlebox" yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) or wild cucumber (*Marah oreganus*) are recognized as noxious weeds. Since yellow rattle is an annual it should be controllable simply by cutting the plant before seed formation. It should also be susceptible to 2,4-D. This plant is partially parasitic to grass stands and therefore can cause depletion in hay yields. Wild cucumber is a perennial and spreads from seed. Any chemical control must be timed to ensure that the chemical migrates to the roots and shoots of the plant. The CWA does not manage the forage fields as "hay only" fields and diversity of the plant community provides a broader range of forage value to wildlife. The plants will be located and monitored to ensure that management objectives are being met. Action will be taken if deemed necessary to ensure that those objectives continue to be met.

Issue: The installation of a gate off the old highway at Kosmos to control vehicular access when cultural resources are vulnerable is a bad idea and will displace user traffic and campers into the Dogpatch site. This additional traffic could lead to talks about gating the Dogpatch site. Increased enforcement and education should be the first course of action.

Response: The WDFW enforcement program provides coverage for the wildlife area, as does the Lewis County Sheriff's office. However, the challenge is to be there when the activity occurs. It is not financially possible to have dedicated officers who are present all the time. Education as a solution is already being implemented but people are already driving around a 24" X 36" sign that clearly states that doing so is prohibited. The CWA recognizes the recreational value of the area and will seek to provide a solution that will minimize the adverse impacts to access and will meet the objective of protecting the cultural resources.

Issue: The signage at Dogpatch is ineffective at controlling unauthorized vehicular access. The signs are too small to be read and people are confused by the signage. A bigger sign with the rules and a map showing the boundaries should be installed in a more visible location.

Response: We currently have sufficient signage to indicate the boundary line, but individuals are not exercising their responsibility to read the signs. There is a rule sign located where individuals leave the Dogpatch parking lot to access the shoreline. However, a map illustrating the boundary line will be produced, and along with the rules sign, it will be placed in a highly visible location.

Want to see the full plan?

Go to –

http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/pdfs/cowlitz_plan-final.pdf

Contacts:

WDFW – Cowlitz Wildlife Area
PO BOX 758 / 350 State Route 7
Morton, WA 98356
(360) 496-6223