



# OLYMPIC – WILLAPA HILLS WILDLIFE AREA 2008 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



## Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area 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 Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Complex. The Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area encompasses a total of 23 satellite units comprising of approximately 10,430 acres. Individual units were acquired, dating back to the early 1950's, for their specific benefit for fish and wildlife diversity and recreational significance. These lands include a wide range of important fish and

wildlife habitats including riparian, estuarine, freshwater wetland, old-growth/mature forest, upland meadow, and coastal dune systems. Focus units include Olympic, Wynoochee, John's River, Chinook, and Chehalis/Hoxit.

The plan identifies needs and guides activities on the area based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) 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 develops, as public issues and concerns evolve, and as administration of wildlife areas change. This management plan update also includes 2007 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2008.

## Updates/Changes

The Cascade Land Conservancy will be transferring land rights to WDFW for wetlands located at Seal Slough, Cedar River, and South Shore Grays Harbor. These properties will be open to the public for recreational opportunities including waterfowl hunting.

Several Duck Stamp proposals were submitted

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and funded for wetland restoration throughout the wildlife area including projects for the Chehalis, Chinook, and John's River Units. These projects will help restore and enhance quality freshwater wetland habitats increasing the utilization by migratory waterfowl and shorebirds.

A capitol-funding request for removing fish passage barriers at John's River was granted. Fish passage barriers and RMAP improvements should be completed in the spring/summer of 2008.

WDFW maintained several sharecrop agreements to provide critical winter forage for elk on private lands adjacent to several of the wildlife area units. Forage enhancement was funded by a series of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation grants with the work be completed by private landowners and WDFW staff. Eight new landowner agreements have enhanced the forage quality and quantity on approximately 300 acres.

### New Issues

The early December 2007 storms resulted in severe damage across much of the Wildlife Area. The majority of the clean up involves tree removal on roads and clean up of debris that is scattered throughout the forage fields in the Olympic and the Wynoochee mitigation. Small landslides occurred on several access roads.



Work on the salvage-logging project began shortly after the storm. There are several hundred acres of state timber on the ground throughout the Olympic and Johns River Units. Most of the area has been assessed and the WDFW state forester has already made several visits to the wildlife area. There are many hurdles to cross prior to any logging activity including consultation for section 106 (cultural resources inventory) and Section 7 (Threatened and Endangered Species) with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. WDFW will also be contracting with a

local private forestry consultant in order to efficiently and effectively conduct this project. The Fish and Wildlife Commission will need to approve the project based on the amount of potential material to be removed.

Damon Point, located at the co-managed Oyhut unit, is now an island. The restroom and access road have both washed out. WDFW along with State Parks and DNR have met several times to propose a new access location on WDFW property. A grant proposal was submitted to the RCO for funding of the new access area including new restroom facilities, ADA trail, picnic area and interpretive kiosk.

### Major Stewardship Accomplishments

In 2007 WDFW continued its effort to provide quality winter forage for elk. This included mowing approximately 485 acres, fertilizing 400 acres and reseeding 45 acres. These activities occurred at the Olympic, Wynoochee, Anderson Homestead and Chinook Units.

Approximately 210 acres received a fall clipping that will provide enhanced migratory waterfowl habitat. This occurred at the John's River, Chehalis/Hoxit, and Chinook units. Additionally, 20 acres were cultivated for waterfowl habitat at the Chinook Unit.

At the Chinook Unit several key restoration projects occurred over the past year, which will improve fish passage, estuarine function, flood control, and invasive vegetation control. WDFW partnered with Ducks Unlimited, Inc. and the Washington Department of Transportation to replace the tidegates on the Hwy 101 bridge. The new tidegates have the ability to be mechanically lifted and left in an open position. Also, a failing culvert crossing was removed, reconnecting a critical slough to the mainstem of the Chinook River.



The cross dike at Willapa Wetlands (Potters Slough) was completed in late October 2006 and 2/3rds of the ring dike is now planned to be breached in the summer of 2008, re-introducing approximately 300 acres to tidal fluctuation. This project will have significant benefits for salmon, waterfowl, shorebirds, and marine invertebrates. Construction of the freshwater wetlands on the west side of the highway was completed in the summer of 2007. This area has several gated access points and is open to the public for hunting.

### **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.

| <b>2007 Performance Measure</b>                                | <b>Status of Performance Measure</b>                    | <b>Explanation of Progress/ 2007 Related Activity/ Comments</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| Reseed 30-50 acres of elk forage                               | Accomplished 45 acres at Wynoochee Unit                 | Per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan   |
| Mow and fertilize 400 acres of elk forage                      | Mowed 550 acres for elk forage and fertilized 435 acres | Wynoochee – 200 mow, 200 fertilized<br>Olympic – 200 mow, 200 fertilized<br>Chinook – 120 mow<br>Anderson Homestead – 35 mow, 35 fertilized |
| Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage | 55 acres Wynoochee, Unit 4-B                            | Location of re-seeding  |
| Test 10-20 soil samples  | 16 soil samples taken                                   | For development of fertilizer blend specific for each forage management area  |
| Develop 40+ new acres of elk forage (John's River Mitigation)  | Not completed   | Awaiting grant funding for mitigation of estuary restoration – Potential parcels have been located  |
| Release pheasants at the Furbache Unit                         | Completed throughout pheasant season                    | Will occur throughout the 2008 season as planned  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Maintain 4 water control structures for waterfowl habitat   | 1 structure at John's River is failing and is scheduled for emergency repair. Three other structures have been maintained by area manager. The Hoxit structure was replaced with a new "fish-friendly" screw-gate with reverse flap-gates | Johns River structure is still failing and needs to be addressed immediately with the installation of a fish friendly device.  |
| Plant 2000 lineal ft. of riparian buffer along Newman Creek   | Planted in March 2007   | Plants maintained throughout the summer of 2007  |
| Plant 70 acres of riparian forest buffer along the Chinook River  | Will be completed during 2/08-3/08  | Project size reduced to 48 acres based on available NRCS funding   |
| Remove 9 fish passage barriers/culverts (RMAP on John's River and Olympic)  | Not completed   | Two fish passage barriers replaced/removed.  |
| Restore 400 acres of estuary habitat  | Cross dike completed in October 2006 at Willapa Slough Unit   | The cross dike needs to settle for 1 year prior to breach of ring dike. Ring dike will be breached in the summer of 2008.  |
| Restore natural slough at the Chinook Unit  | Failing culvert and associated fill removed 8/07, per HPA # 107116-1  | Completed.   |
| Remove tidegate adjacent to the Chinook Unit  | Completed in 9/07   | WDFW partnered with Ducks Unlimited, Inc. and the Washington Department of Transportation to replace the tidegates on the Hwy 101 bridge. The new tidegates have the ability to be mechanically lifted and left in an open position. |
| Investigate and take appropriate action on trespass tree cutting and habitat damage on Ocean Shores Airport Mitigation Unit | Still under investigation by enforcement program  | Other landowners have requested to remove timber for optimum views.  |

### **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 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.

Issues identified in italics were provided by the Citizens Advisory Group. These public comments are captured at the end of this document. Although underlined strategies have no current funding source, identifying these needs is the first step to securing additional funds.

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

**1. Improve and Maintain Fish Populations**

- A. Strategy: Set-up an agreement with DOT for tide-gate removal on Hwy 101 at the Chinook Unit. Design and construct a winch system for leaving tidegate open.
- B. Strategy: Restore tidal slough through culvert removal at the Chinook Unit.
- C. Strategy: Set-up maintenance agreement with DOT for maintenance of tidegates including zinc anode replacement.
- D. Develop and implement a monitoring plan for the management of the new Chinook River tidegates

**2. Manage for waterfowl/wetlands**

- A. Strategy: Wet-soil management on 90 acres at the Chinook Unit (three year rotation involving cultivation and mowing for enhanced emergent wetland plant response)
- B. Strategy: Create a series of ditch plugs in wet-soil management fields (5 plugs)
- C. Strategy: Manage 3 new wetland cells created by NRCS and Ducks Unlimited at the Willapa Wetlands/Potters Slough Unit.

**3. Maintain big game populations**

- A. Strategy: Maintain 70 acres of elk winter forage at the Chinook Unit
- B. Strategy: Create landowner agreements to improve the quality and quantity of elk winter forage on private lands adjacent to wildlife areas and high damage claim locations.

**4. Manage for upland birds**

- A. Strategy: Continue pheasant release program on the Chinook Unit

**5. Protect and Restore Riparian Habitat**

- A. Strategy: Plant a riparian buffer along the Chinook River and tributaries covering approximately 70 acres and 30,000 new plants

**2008 Performance Measures**

1. Complete the proposed salvage and thinning project at the Olympic and Johns River Units.
2. Complete performance measures per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan
3. Reseed 30-50 acres with elk forage
4. Mow 400 acres of elk forage
5. Fertilize 400 acres of elk forage
6. Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage
7. Conduct soil samples for proposed forage locations
8. Develop 40+ new acres of elk forage (John's River Mitigation)
9. Fall clipping on 100-250 acres for waterfowl habitat
10. Conduct wet soil management activities (John's River, Hoxit, Chinook, and Chehalis Units)
11. Release pheasants at Furbache and Chinook Units
12. Maintain 4 water control structures for waterfowl habitat (three at John's River until fish enhancement of fish project is implemented, one at Hoxit)
13. Maintain riparian plantings along the Chehalis River at the Chehalis and Hoxit Units.
14. Plant 48 acres of riparian forested buffer along the Chinook River and its tributaries



15. Remove or replace 9 fish passage barriers/culverts (RMAP on John's River and Olympic)
16. Continue to implement the Snowy Plover Recovery Plan at Oyhut Unit
17. Initiate Emphasis Enforcement Patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit.

### **Citizens Advisory Group Input**

A CAG meeting was held on March 17, 2008 to review this update and provide feedback on any major issues or concerns. The major issues are listed here and the full meeting minutes are included as an appendix to the Wildlife Area Plan.

CAG members were very concerned about continued ATV impact at the Olympic Wildlife Area Unit. **Q.** When will a WDFW emphasis patrol occur? A discussion occurred regarding to the amount of damage that is caused to private lands when illegal ORV activity causes elk to leave the wildlife area. The impact associated with ORV usage is having multiple negative impacts. **A.** An emphasis patrol has been requested by the Wildlife Program to the Enforcement Program. No action has been taken at this time.

*The CAG was presented with a description of the upcoming salvage and thinning project at the Olympic and Johns River Units. The CAG members that were present were pleased to hear that WDFW was taking the appropriate action salvage the wind thrown trees and thin high density patches that currently exist in the units. Overall CAG comment – “This will be a beneficial project for wildlife for many years to come.”*



**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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