



OLYMPIC – WILLAPA HILLS WILDLIFE AREA 2009 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Elk utilization of Wynoochee Mitigation fields

Land Management Summary

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.

This is an update to the http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/ that provides management direction for the Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Complex. 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 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

As proposed in the 2008 Update, Wildlife Area staff was able to conduct and complete the majority of the project involved with the Olympic and Johns River Salvage and Thinning Project. Initial surveys took place in January and February and mapping of the affected units followed shortly thereafter.

Unit layout was determined largely by storm damage and accessibility. WDFW implemented a standard prescription following guidelines of Variable Density Thinning (VDT). The purpose of VDT is to accelerate the development of stand structures and plant and animal communities associated with late-successional forests. The permitting process for this project was extensive and extremely time consuming and at times

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jeopardized the project from occurring during the summer of 2008. The following permits, consultations, and approvals were obtained throughout the course of the project.

- District Team
- Citizen Advisory Group
- State Environmental Policy Act
- Section 7 Consultation with USFWS (Threatened and Endangered Species)
- Section 106 Consultation with USFWS, Quinault and Shoalwater Tribes
- Forest Practice Application (WADNR)
- Grays Harbor County Hauling and Right-of-Way Permits
- Fish and Wildlife Commission Approval



Olympic Unit Salvage and Thinning Project 2008

Due to the variable wind damage and the current market conditions WDFW chose to market the timber resources directly to the mills and contract the logging and hauling on a per ton basis.



Olympic Unit Salvage and Thinning Project 2008

This process placed more control of the project in WDFW's hands and was fiscally more advantageous. In the end, more than 600 loads of logs were delivered to the mills scaling at just under 2.8 million board feet. The net revenue created by the project totaled more than \$460,000. This revenue will be returned to the statewide Pittman Robinson (PR) Contract with the USFWS and will be utilized on all PR supported wildlife areas throughout the state. This habitat enhancement project will provide benefits for wildlife for many years to come, was responsible

forest management and helped create needed program income at an important time for the agency.

Several Duck Stamp proposals were submitted and funded for wetland restoration throughout the wildlife area including projects for the Potter's Slough (Willapa Wetlands), 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.

The Cascade Land Conservancy has transferred land rights to WDFW for wetlands located at the Nemah River, Cedar River, and South Shore Grays Harbor. These properties will be open to the public for recreational opportunities including waterfowl hunting. Wildlife area staff are currently in the process of signing these new properties, including the addition of several interpretive kiosks, and marking of property boundaries.



Cedar River Unit (Willapa Bay) – Acquired 2009

WDFW successfully managed the new Highway 101 tidegates on the Chinook River in a manner that has met the needs of the community and has created numerous benefits for fish and wildlife. The Chinook Unit continues to have a high rate of hunting use based on the numerous wetland and forage restoration projects that have taken place over the past four years. Duck Stamp funding was secured in 2008 to continue the habitat enhancement projects that are currently in progress



Chinook River Tidegates

New Issues

All state agencies, including the Department of Fish and Wildlife, are experiencing shortfalls in the projected budget for the next fiscal year. This will have many impacts on all future activities on wildlife areas statewide. There will be reductions in staff as well as general administrative and operating funding. The total impact is not yet known at this time, however it is certain that there will be many changes occurring over the next year.

Storms, Storms, Storms. Another season of severe winter storms has impacted the Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area. This will result in numerous projects that will need to occur over the next several months.

Over the past several years it has been brought to the attention of WDFW that there have been several serious trespass issues that have damaged WDFW property on the Oyhut/Ocean Shores Airport Unit. Issues include cutting of vegetation for views, planting of exotic plants, and filling of wetlands to increase property footprints. All of this has occurred on WDFW property and has resulted in extensive damage to valuable wetland habitats. WDFW is working with the City of Ocean Shores and private landowners to stop these violations and create mitigation for the damages that have already occurred.



Chelalis Unit – This sign was completely submersed just hours after photo was taken

Wildlife area staff are working with WDFW Engineering staff to ensure that all forest roads utilized in the Olympic/Johns River Salvage and Thinning Project are brought to current RMAP standards during the summer of 2009.

The road easement dispute that is blocking access into the “Lynn” fields at the Olympic Unit is still being handled by the Attorney General’s office, and WDFW is hoping that a resolution is found over the course of 2009. This dispute resulted in removing approximately 60 acres from the Olympic/Johns River Salvage and Thinning Project.

During unit layout for the Olympic/Johns River Salvage and Thinning Project WDFW became aware that approximately 10 acres of state-owned timber had been illegally cut. The large private timber company that was responsible made an “honest” mistake and WDFW and the adjacent neighbor have thus settled on a value for the timber that was illegally harvested. Part of the settlement will include a significant land transfer that will be utilized as a portion of the mitigation that will be necessary because of the Beaver Creek/Johns River estuary restoration project.



Timber trespass adjacent to the Johns River Unit

WDFW has been awarded a forage enhancement grant from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to improve the quantity and quality of forage available to Roosevelt Elk at the newly acquired expansion of the Anderson Homestead Unit outside of Forks. This project will be completed in the summer of 2009.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

In 2008 WDFW continued its effort to provide quality winter forage for elk. This included mowing approximately 485 acres, fertilizing 400 acres and reseeding 47 acres. These activities occurred at the Olympic, Wynoochee, Anderson Homestead and Chinook Units.



Elk Forage Management – Farming for high quality and quantity of forage available to elk - Olympic Unit Fields

Wildlife area staff utilized the help from Olympic Correctional Center work crews and Washington Conservation Corps to help with the numerous clean-up projects on agency lands that were impacted by the December 2007 storm event. These partnerships were invaluable to opening roadways, trails, and clearing of elk forage fields. Wildlife area staff will utilize these partnerships again throughout 2009.

Approximately 250 acres received a fall clipping that will provide enhanced migratory waterfowl habitat. This occurred at the John’s River, Chehalis/Hoxit, and Chinook units. Another ditch plug was created in the wetland enhancement fields at the Chinook Unit. This will expand the size of the sheet-water that is available to migratory waterfowl and it is expected to improve the waterfowl hunting conditions.



Constructing 5th and final ditch plug – Chinook Unit

Approximately 70% of the ring dike located at the Potters Slough (Willapa Wetlands) was removed during the summer of 2008. This finalized the 300 acre estuary restoration project that has been taking place for over eight years. 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. Volunteers constructed several blinds on-site and numerous hunters took advantage of the enhanced wetlands throughout the duration of the waterfowl season.



Potters Slough Estuary Restoration 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 2008.

2008 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2009 Related Activity/ Comments
Reseed 30-50 acres of elk forage	Accomplished 47 acres at Wynoochee Unit #3	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 Olympic – 200 mow, 200 fertilized Chinook – 160 mow Anderson Homestead – 35 mow, 35 fertilized

Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage	47 acres Wynoochee, Unit 3	Location of re-seeding
Test 10-20 soil samples	11 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)	Working with adjacent landowner in light of timber trespass	Should be finalized during the summer of 2009
Release pheasants at the Furbache and Chinook Units	Completed throughout pheasant season	Depending on budget
Maintain 4 water control structures for waterfowl habitat	Three structures at Potters Slough (Willapa Wetlands) and one structure at Hoxit were managed for enhanced wetlands	Moist-soil management will continue as planned in the rotation specified in the Management Plan
Maintain riparian plantings along Chehalis River at the Hoxit and Chehalis Units.	Completed as planned	Maintenance will occur throughout the summer of 2009
Plant 48 acres of riparian forest buffer along the Chinook River	Completed	NRCS may not have maintenance funding available for the summer of 2009
Remove 9 fish passage barriers/culverts (RMAP on John's River and Olympic)	Some work completed in 2008. Engineers replaced to major culverts at the Johns River Eastside Road while bringing the road to RMAP standards. Also, a turn-style horse gate entry was incorporated for access.	
Restore 300 acres of estuary habitat	2/3 of the ring dike was removed during the summer of 2008 completing this important restoration project	Project completed
Initiate Emphasis Patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit	Enforcement is responsible. Was not made a high enough priority for action	

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.

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.

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 total)

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. Protect and Restore Riparian Habitat

- A. Strategy: Plant a riparian buffer along the Chinook River and tributaries covering approximately 48 acres

2009 Performance Measures

1. Complete Olympic-Johns River Salvage and Thinning Project (temporary road abandonment, re-farming of elk forage fields, burn slash piles, re-plant, etc.)
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 6 water control structures for waterfowl habitat (three at Potters Slough, two at Johns River and one at Hoxit)
13. Maintain riparian plantings along the Chehalis River at the Chehalis and Hoxit Units.
14. Continue efforts to resolve fish passage barriers per RMAP on John's River and Olympic Units.
15. Initiate Emphasis Enforcement Patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit.

Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) and District Team (DT) Input

A District Team meeting was held on February 26, 2009 and a CAG meeting was held on March 5th, 2009 to review this update and provide feedback on any major issues or concerns. The major issues are listed below.

Both meetings had a slim turnout in regards to participants. The district team meeting had four participants in attendance (3 Wildlife Program, 1 Habitat Program). Many wildlife/habitat issues were covered the meeting, including the pending restoration at the Satsop Unit, mitigation site. This unit is described in the plan to be restored by the Habitat Program prior to be handed over to the Wildlife Program for long term management. Both programs will continue to address this transition over the next year. Other key issues of discussion focused on the Johns River/Beaver Creek Estuary Restoration project and its current status.

Likewise the Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) meeting received extremely poor turnout. Approximately 16 different user groups and individuals represent this CAG. The meeting consisted of just 4 individuals. Wildlife area staff briefed participants on the previous years stewardship accomplishments, new land acquisitions, and what was on the table for the next year. The meeting started with a summary of the agency's current budget forecast to present that the new year would have many challenges that are yet to be determined. No comments were provided by the CAG.

Enforcement staff continues to work with a Wishkah landowner on elk damage issues. No other major issues were addressed by the CAG.



Want to see the full plan?

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

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