



OLYMPIC - WILLAPA HILLS WILDLIFE AREA 2017 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

The Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Complex encompasses a total of 24 satellite units that collectively comprise approximately 12,000 acres. Individual units were acquired, dating back to the early 1950’s, for their specific benefit for fish and wildlife diversity and recreational opportunity. 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 Wildlife Areas.



This is an update to the management plan that provides management direction for the Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Complex. The plan identifies needs and guides activities that occur on the areas and are based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) Mission Statement (*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 biannually 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 accomplishments over the past three years, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2017.

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Updates/Changes

Region 6 Wildlife areas

Wildlife areas in Region 6 are now managed by two wildlife area managers, one for South Puget Sound/ North Olympic Wildlife Areas and one for Olympic - Willapa Hills Wildlife Area. Although management is separate, staff from the Willapa hills complex are shared with the North Olympic on restoration projects as well as general maintenance.

Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan Update

Outstanding Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP) work throughout the Olympic Willapa Hills Wildlife Area has been completed. Approximately 5.8 miles of forest road was updated to RMAP standards during 2014-2016. The last project to complete RMAP work, associated with the Johns River Beaver Creek crossing was completed at the end of 2014. After several years of planning and funding issues, a new bridge over Beaver Creek now allows public access and passage for heavy equipment (forestry and agricultural) along the Johns River eastside road beyond Beaver Creek. The pictures below show bridge construction and completion of the Beaver Creek crossing.



Agricultural Leases

Ferbrache agricultural lease started in 2012 and is in effect until April 2017. Hoxit agricultural lease started in 2014 and is in effect until April 2017. Osgood agricultural lease started in 2015 and will end short in 2015 with the unexpected death of the lessee. We are working through the process to have new leases in place before April 2017 for all three areas.

Johns River Unit

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access trail and hunting blinds were maintained at the west access of the Johns River Unit during 2014 - 2016. These blinds are approximately .67 of miles from the ADA parking area, along the dike trail of Johns River. WDFW manages the area immediately adjacent to the blind for wet soil management, this included mowing and flooding in 2014. In 2015 the area was mowed sprayed and flooded to propagate smartweed, a very desirable food source for migrating and wintering waterfowl. In 2014 the back fields were flooded to provide sheet water, however, in 2015 a leak in the back control structure prevented staff from flooding the back portion of the property during winter months. In 2016 an area behind the cross dike was cultivated to propagate smartweed production. The main control

structure was used to fill the ditches on the front portion of the property and flood the smartweed behind the cross dike as well.

Cedar River and Nemah Unit

In 2013, WDFW was awarded a grant from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) to construct parking areas on the Cedar River Unit and Nemah Access Site. Access on Willapa Bay for hunting and wildlife viewing has been limited. The project was completed in 2015. At the Cedar River Unit the new site consists of gravel parking area, native plantings and a kiosk. The Nemah access site consists of gravel parking area, a kiosk and a trail to the Nemah estuary.



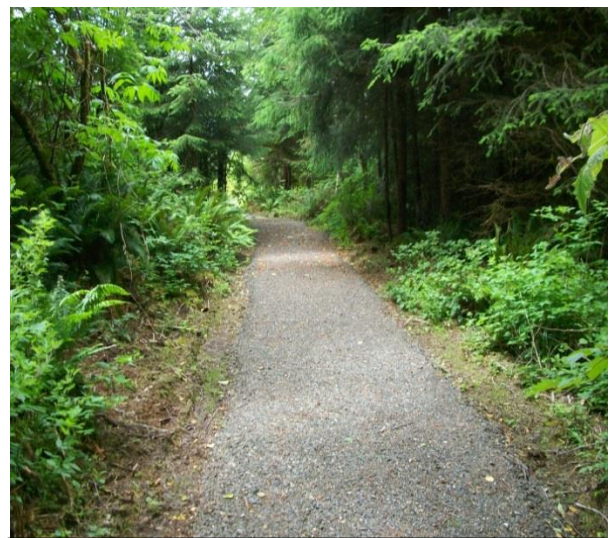
View from SR 105 Cedar River Parking



Cedar River Parking Off SR 105



Nemah River Parking



Nemah River Trail

Johns River Salt Marsh Conversion

The Johns River estuary was diked prior to 1950. During the summer of 2011 the water control structure that maintained the remaining diked area on the west side of Beaver Creek (north side of John's River) failed and resulted in a dike breach. Since the time when the breach initially occurred, the tidal action has changed the landscape and has caused some erosion to the east side road at the two large culverts. As a result, winter high tides have overtopped the road at the crossings as well as the Beaver creek crossing. High water against highway 105 is also a concern. Other unforeseen issues may develop as the area reverts back to a saltwater estuary. Pictures below show the habitat conversion.



Johns River Salt Marsh Conversion off SR 105



Johns River Salt Marsh Conversion

Migratory Bird Stamp Funds

Wildlife area staff were successful in securing Migratory Bird Stamp funds for 2014 - 2016. These projects were funded for enhancement work at the Chehalis, Johns River and Chinook wildlife area units. In 2014, WDFW staff completed all three projects which included mowing approximately 220 acres to develop sheet-water habitat and to control Reed canary grass. In 2015 all three areas were mowed for sheet water totaling approximately 800 acres with the majority of the mowing at the Chinook Unit. In addition, approximately 8 acres were cultivated at John's River Unit and 5 acres at Chehalis Unit to encourage smartweed production. The project at John's River complements two ADA blinds off the trail. In 2016, both Davis Creek Wildlife Area and Chehalis Wildlife Area had areas cultivated to produce smartweed. Cultivated areas were over seeded with barley for wintering waterfowl totaling about 20 acres. Photos below are examples of these efforts.

Chehalis Wildlife Area

In 2011, WDFW increased its ownership at the Chehalis Wildlife Area to approximately 650 acres. The Osgood Unit purchase contains 85 acres of wetlands that are now incorporated into the wet soil management activities of the Chehalis Wildlife Area. This purchase, increases management opportunities for wetland enhancement and increases recreational access to the wildlife area. Just off the Wenzel Sough road, the wildlife area unit provides a small two vehicle parking area and kiosk.

Chinook Unit

In 2012, WDFW was awarded a Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) restoration, acquisition and planning funding for its salmon recovery efforts at the Chinook Wildlife Area. Since that time, most of the restoration projects have neared completion. The tide gates have been installed and are functioning properly, new plantings of native grasses and trees have been completed, three access points were constructed, as well as the installation of new kiosks and wildlife area signs. This was particularly important because of the large amount of public usage on the wildlife area. It now provides an optimal recreational experience for public users. The newly acquired property has also been fenced and gated, with plenty of access points for the public. Staff continue to do their best to maintain the area by litter removal, weed control (spraying and mechanical eradication techniques), and the posting of signs and informational charts. The mowing aspect of the weed control also gives the native grasses an opportunity to green up and provide the resident elk herd with some winter forage. The strip mowing along the south end of the property provides a better hunting experience for pheasant hunters. The tide gates along SR101 were designed to allow fish passage and protect private property from flooding. Sea Resources, Inc. will be lowering and raising the tide gates throughout the winter as part of the protocol for fish passage.



**Main control structure flooding ditched
John's River**



Smartweed production John's River



Fall Mowing Chinook Wildlife Area



Kiosk and Access Construction 2015

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

In 2014, 2015 and 2016, wildlife area staff continued providing quality winter forage for elk throughout the Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area and Wynoochee Mitigation Project. This included mowing approximately 475 acres, fertilizing 400 acres and re-seeding 45 acres annually. These activities occurred at the Wynoochee Mitigation, Anderson Homestead, Quinault, Olympic and Chinook Units. These forage areas produce roughly 100 times the nutritional quality that is present in similar acreage habitats adjacent to the project area. In addition, wildlife area staff in 2014 mowed approximately 230 acres to develop sheet-water habitat and to control Reed canary grass. In 2015 with the addition of the Chinook Goulter property, wildlife area staff mowed approximately 800 acres on the three areas; Chehalis, John's River and Chinook wildlife areas. The majority of the mowing was on the Chinook Unit. In 2016 approximately 650 acres were mowed for sheet water with approximately 15 acres seeded in barley.

Status Report of 2014-2016 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 2017-2018.

2014-2016 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2017-18 Related Activity/ Comments
Complete performance measures per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan.	All activities completed.	Documentation of activities described in the annual Wynoochee Report.
Reseed 40-75 acres of elk forage annually.	Accomplished the following: 50 acres unit 2 2014 50 acres unit 4A 2015 45 acres unit 4B 2016	Per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan. Per Olympic/Willapa Hills Management Plan
Mow and fertilize 400 acres of elk forage annually.	Mowed approximately 475 acres for elk forage and fertilized approximately 400 acres 2014, 2015 and 2016.	Elk forage projects occurred at Wynoochee Mitigation, Anderson Homestead, Chinook and Olympic units.
Olympic and Wynoochee, remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage annually.	Wynoochee mitigation: 55 acres unit 2 45 acres unit 4A and 40 acres unit 4B Olympic Units – 15 acres	Location of elk forage projects/re-seeding and mowing.
Conduct 10 soil samples for proposed forage locations annually.	Completed.	For development of fertilizer blend specific for each forage management area
Develop 40+ new acres of elk forage (John’s River Estuary Restoration Mitigation – Habitat Program)	Not completed -- the dike breach that occurred in 2011 has further pushed the need to complete this task.	Lack of funding for mitigation of estuary restoration or separate funding for elk forage creation and road access.
Fall clipping on 100-250 acres for waterfowl sheet water habitat and control Reed canary grass annually.	Completed: 230 acres in 2014 800 acres in 2015 550 acres in 2016	Completed mowing at Chehalis, Chinook, Hoxit, Osgood, and Johns River Potter Slough units.
Spray and disc approximately 30 acres at the Chinook, Chehalis, John’s River, Hoxit, and Davis Creek wildlife areas to encourage smartweed growth.	2015 approximately 12 acres were sprayed and/or disc for smartweed development. In 2016 approximately 15 acres were sprayed and disc for smartweed production on Chehalis, John’s River and Davis Creek units.	In 2014 the site conditions were too wet to disc.

2014-2016 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2017-18 Related Activity/ Comments
Release pheasants at the Ferbrache Unit and Chinook units.	Completed throughout pheasant season.	Will occur as planned.
Working with neighboring landowners, manage tide gates at the Chinook Unit.	Experimental openings through the year occurred with the majority of the opening a success during the summer season.	BPA has funded a land acquisition to allow additional flooding to the area. Protocol for opening of the tide gates are being adjusted since the completion of the restoration work 2015-2016.
Conduct "Wet Soil" management activities at John's River, Chehalis, Hoxit, Willapa Wetlands and Chinook Units.	Completed.	Completed wet soil management activities at John's River, Chehalis, Hoxit, Willapa Wetlands and Chinook units.
Maintain ADA and temporary hunting/duck blinds at Willapa Wetlands Unit, John's River, Chehalis wildlife areas.	Access to hunting/duck blinds maintained. Three ADA blind maintained and signage installed.	Trails to hunting/ duck blinds were brushed to maintain access.
Maintain riparian plantings along the Newman Creek (Chehalis Wildlife Area) and the Chehalis River Hoxit units.	Plants maintained throughout the summer of 2014,2015 and 2016.	All areas were mowed annually. Survival at the sites is very good.
Maintain 9 water control structures for waterfowl and Reed canary grass control.	Three structures at Willapa Wetlands (potter Slough) and three at Chinook Wildlife Area were managed effectively. One structure at the Hoxit Unit, and two structures at John's River was successfully managed. One structure that floods the back portion has started to leak around the culvert.	Monitored and maintained annually to control desired water level. Raise level in main structure John's River to flood area behind cross dike 2016.
Complete annual RMAP requirements on the Olympic Units.	All RMAP work and reporting was completed 2014-16.	Funding and construction of the Beaver Creek Bridge was completed in 2015. Competing RMAP work for John's River.

2014-2016 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2017-18 Related Activity/ Comments
Where applicable, maintain all informational kiosks at Olympic, John's River and satellite wildlife area units.	Completed.	Three kiosks were installed at Chinook Wildlife Area. Two access sites were constructed at Cedar River and Nemah units in 2015 with kiosks. All other kiosks were maintained.
Initiate emphasis enforcement patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit	Not completed.	Staffing and priorities
Provide management guidance for the North Olympic and South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Complexes.	Completed.	Hired new manager for the South Puget Sound and North Olympic Wildlife Areas in 2016

New Strategies

The wildlife area plan identifies strategies or activities to address goals and objectives related to WDFW's Strategic Plan, 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.

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. Maintain big game populations

- A. Determine alternative locations for elk forage enhancements in the vicinity of the Johns River Wildlife Area to mitigate the loss of forage due to the 2011 dike breach.

2. Improve and Maintain Fish Populations

- A. Strategy: Manage the Chinook tide gates in a straightforward manner that minimizes "openings" and "closings" of the gates.
- B. Strategy: Assist in development of a long term tide gate management plan for the Chinook Unit that is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration for operations and maintenance (O&M) for the life of the project.
Strategy: Assist in the development of the estuary restoration improvements on the Chinook Unit that are consistent with the Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Management Plan and the Chinook River Estuary Restoration Project.
- C. Manage newly acquired 201 acres at the Chinook unit for invasive weeds with long term funding and assist with restoration.

3. Manage for waterfowl/wetlands

- A. Strategy: Wet-soil management on 20 to 30 acres at the John's River, Chehalis, Hoxit, Potter Slough and Chinook units involving cultivation and mowing for enhancement of sheet water and smartweed production 2017/18.
- B. Strategy: Assist in the Chinook River estuary restoration project O&M.
- C. Strategy: Maintain freshwater wetland units and water control structures at Hoxit, John's River and Willapa Wetlands (Potter Slough) Unit. Draw down water at both units and mow and/or cultivate soil to encourage smartweed production. Control spread of canary reed grass and thistle throughout the units.
- D. Strategy: Implement wet soil management practices that enhance habitat conditions for waterfowl at the Chehalis Unit expansion (Osgood) in 2017/18.
- E. Strategy: Coordinate with agricultural leaseholder and North Olympic Manager to improve wet swale conditions for wintering waterfowl at the Davis Creek Unit.

4. Protect and Restore Estuary

- A. Strategy: Coordinate with Forterra on land transfers throughout the Willapa Bay Coastline consistent with the approval from the Lands 20/20 process.

5. Protect and Manage Other Species

- A. Strategy: Coordinate with Diversity Division in the development of a snowy plover enhancement project at the Oyhut Unit.
- B. Strategy: Coordinate with Diversity Division and North Olympic Manager for prairie restoration project at Scatter Creek and West Rocky units.

Agency Objective: Provide Sustainable Fish and Wildlife-Related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible with Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats. Improve the Economic Well Being of Washington by Providing Diverse, High Quality Recreational and Commercial Opportunities.

1. Provide public access compatible with fish, wildlife and habitat protection.

- A. Strategy: Construct and install additional hunting blinds at John's River, Chehalis, Hoxit, Davis Creek, Chinook and Nemah units.
- C. Strategy: Capital projects for new vault toilets at Chehalis, John's River units.
- D. Strategy: Install informational kiosk at Olympic, Chehalis, Hoxit, Potter Slough and Naselle units.

Agency Objective: Provide Sound Operational Management of WDFW Lands, Facilities and Access Sites.

1. Maintain facilities to achieve safe, efficient and effective management of the wildlife area.

- A. Strategy: Continue agricultural leases on Hoxit, Osgood and Ferbrache units. Limit activities to silage and hay production that excludes livestock.
- B. Strategy: Develop project to build new storage and equipment shop at the Olympic headquarters.
- C. Strategy: 1) Repave and widen ADA trail road to 12 feet running surface with curbs and replace ADA loading ramp John's River. 2) Replace old leaking restroom with new CXT single vault restroom, resurface parking area and

access road with a 4” lift of crushed rock and replace boat launch planks with new planks.

2017-18 Performance Measures

1. Complete performance measures per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan.
2. Reseed 30-50 acres with elk forage at the Olympic and Wynoochee units.
3. Mow 400 acres of elk forage at the Olympic, Wynoochee and Chinook units.
4. Fertilize 400 acres of elk forage at the Wynoochee unit.
5. Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage at the Olympic and Wynoochee units.
6. Conduct soil samples for proposed forage locations at the Olympic and Wynoochee units.
7. Fall clipping on 100-250 acres for waterfowl habitat at the Chehalis, Hoxit, Johns River, Potter Slough and Chinook units.
8. Work with Forterra to transfer targeted parcels along the Willapa Bay coastline.
9. Conduct wet soil management activities (Johns River, Hoxit, Chinook, Willapa, Wetlands, Chehalis Units and wet swales at Davis Creek Unit) in coordination with the South Puget Sound/ North Olympic Wildlife area manager.
10. Release pheasants at Ferbrache and Chinook units.
11. Maintain nine water control structures for waterfowl habitat - two at Johns River, one at Hoxit, three at Willapa Wetlands (Potters Slough) and three at Chinook Wildlife Area.
12. Maintain riparian plantings on the Chehalis and Hoxit units.
13. Maintain 48 acres of riparian forested buffer along the Chinook River and its tributaries.
14. Maintain all informational kiosks on Olympic Willapa Hills Wildlife Area.
15. Continue assistance associated with the Snowy Plover Recovery Plan at the Oyhut Unit.
16. Initiate Emphasis Enforcement Patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit.
17. Develop a forage enhancement project that will mitigate for the loss of elk forage due to the Johns River dike breach which occurred in 2011.
18. Assist in development of a long term tide gate management plan for the Chinook Unit that is funded by the BPA for operations and maintenance (O&M).
19. Provide assistance to South Puget Sound/ North Olympic Manager.
20. Maintain access roads on Olympic and John’s River units to RMAP standards.
21. Maintain all ADA duck blinds for signage and safety.
22. Maintain wildlife area equipment, vehicles and infrastructure.

Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC) Input

Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area staff hosted a Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC) meeting on March 6th 2017 at the Region 6 office in Montesano. Invitations were sent to 10 WAAC members, however only 3 members attended the meeting. The meeting went well with good discussions and ideas from the advisory committee.

Those in attendance included:

WAAC Members

- Kurt Snyder – Grays Harbor Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association
- Ivars Matisons- Matisons Timber Services LLC

- Bruce W Grun – Poggie Club of Grays Harbor

WDFW staff

- Brian Calkins, Wildlife Regional Program Manager
- Jim Gerchak, Wildlife Area Manager
- James Gallegos, Assistant Wildlife Area Manager
- Denny VanBlaricom, Natural Resources Technician

The WAAC was given draft copies of the 2017 update, as well as a power point presentation presented by the wildlife area manager. WAAC comments are as follows.

Comment: Bruce Grun the newest member of the WAAC said he was not aware that our staff traveled such long distances and covered so many areas.

Comment: Ivars Matisons advised us of property that WDFW should have purchased in the Cedar River area.

Response: WDFW staff have looked at the area and decided that WDFW would not benefit by purchasing the property.

Comment: Kurt Snyder made a recommendation that WDFW look into limiting waterfowl hunting on wildlife areas to 3 days a week. This would give waterfowl resting time and foraging opportunity as well as better hunting.

Response: WAAC was advised that the wildlife area staff had no control over hunting days other than making recommendations to wildlife administration. Also that there would be a public comment opportunity as hunting regulations are developed. Members were advised of the following, *“The commission, which sets policy for WDFW, will also accept public comments on the proposed recommendations at its March 17-18 meeting in Olympia. Final action by the commission is scheduled at a public meeting April 14-15 in Spokane”.*



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Want to see the full plan?

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

