



SAGEBRUSH FLAT WILDLIFE AREA 2007 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary



Figure 1. Bridgeport Unit

This is an update to the 2006 Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area Management Plan (http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/pdfs/draft_sagebrush_flat_plan.pdf) that provides management direction for the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area located in Douglas County. 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, scientific knowledge develops, new regulations and

public issues and concerns evolve. This management plan update also includes 2006 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2007.

Updates/Changes

In 2006 we began active management of 2,350 acres acquired in late 2005. Previously owned by the Dezelle family of Bridgeport, this property contains high value habitats including: shrubsteppe, steppe, ponderosa pine, cliff/talus, wetland and riparian. Acquisition of this site advances the Department’s goal of preserving and protecting habitat for the sharp-tailed grouse. We are especially grateful to the Dezelle family for making this acquisition possible. Initial management activities included boundary survey, signing and weed control.

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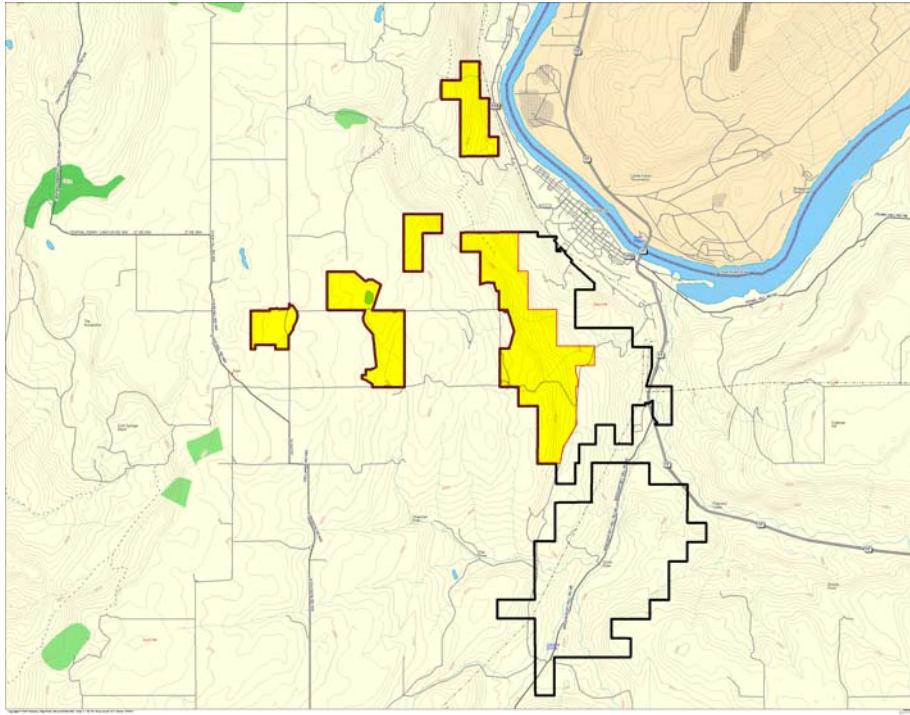


Figure 2. 2005 acquisitions in yellow

New Issues

As outlined in the 2006 Management Plan, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) provides the funding for this wildlife area. This wildlife area is one of 33 habitat mitigation projects within the Columbia River Basin funded by BPA. In July, BPA announced its desire to reduce funding by as much as 15% to all mitigation projects it funds including Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. WDFW has expressed its opposition to this proposal. As of this writing the issue remains unresolved.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments



Figure 3. Field restoration on the Bridgeport Unit

Efforts to restore shrubsteppe habitat on the Area's units continued in 2006. Nearly 260 acres of old agricultural fields on the Chester Butte, Dormaier and Sagebrush Flat Units were disked and summer fallowed. This acreage will be reseeded by 2009 with a mixture of native grasses, forbs and shrubs. On the Bridgeport Unit, 40 acres of former wheat fields were seeded with native grass, forbs and shrubs.

Enhancement along the West Foster Creek riparian corridor in the Bridgeport Unit advanced with the planting of several thousand willow stems plus 400 riparian shrubs. These were planted in

two locations each protected from deer browsing by 7 foot tall fencing. At one location, beaver relocation was needed when a beaver moved into the area and removed about 90% of the golden willow we had planted. On a positive note, however, this industrious rodent used the material to construct a small dam that now serves as settlement basin for runoff.

Work to augment the sharp-tailed grouse population continued. In April 10 sharp-tailed grouse were translocated to the Bridgeport Unit from Utah. Over the past two years a total of 30 birds have been released on the area. Releases on the area will continue for the foreseeable future.

Status Report of 2006 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 2007.

2006 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2007 Related Activity/ Comments
Begin restoration of former ag fields on the Dormaier and Chester Butte units (~150 acres)	Completed. Fields mowed then disked.	Continue summer fallow operations through 2007.
Begin restoration of experimental pygmy rabbit mounds on the Sagebrush Flat unit. (~15 acres)	Completed. Sites were leveled and disked.	Summer fallow sites through 2007.
Summer fallow 100-acre field on the Sagebrush Flat unit.	Completed.	Continue summer fallow operations through 2007.
Plant trees and shrubs on the Bridgeport Unit to enhance and expand riparian habitat.	Completed. Several thousand willow stems and 400 shrubs were planted in two sites. Built a drip irrigation system to supply water to 30 water birch seedlings. Seedlings were planted within a fenced enclosure to protect them from deer browsing.	Plant additional trees/shrubs within riparian corridor. Perform manual weed control when/where necessary to reduce competition.
Treat up to 150 acres infested with annual and perennial weeds. Treatments will include chemical, biological and mechanical means.	Completed. Treated approximately 250 acres to remove/reduce annual and perennial weeds.	Continue weed control in 2007.
Release up 6,000 bio-control agents to treat perennial weeds, particularly Dalmatian toadflax, on the Bridgeport, Chester Butte and Dormaier units.	Released 2,500 <i>Mecinus janthinus</i> on the Bridgeport unit. Six locations were selected, primarily on the new acquisition, for release.	Continue purchase and release of bio-agents.
Translocate sharp-tailed grouse from Utah to the Bridgeport Unit	Completed. Ten birds were released in early April. Research division staff monitored birds.	Plans are in place to trap, move and release additional birds.
Remove up to 12 miles of old dilapidated fence from four units, old corrals from the Chester	Incomplete. Area staff removed approximately 5.5 miles of old fence and one corral.	Continue work in 2007.

Butte and Sagebrush Flat units and unsafe building rubble and wreckage from the Chester Butte and Dormaier units.		
Maintain 110 acres of reseeded fields on the Bridgeport Unit. Weed control, mow and interseed as needed.	Completed. Weed control and mowing were performed as needed.	Continue work in 2007, prepare selected sites for interseeding.
Maintain shrubs, trees and native riparian habitat with weed control, fencing and replacement.	Completed. Manual and mechanical weed control performed within fenced enclosures. Repaired fencing as needed. Planted shrubs and trees within enclosure to replace those lost to mortality.	Continue work in 2007.
Maintain roads, parking areas, culverts and signs.	Completed. Graded 3 miles of road on the Bridgeport Unit. Performed weed control and sign maintenance at parking areas as needed.	Continue in 2007.
Maintain boundary fence on all units.	Completed. Repaired fences and gates as needed.	Continue in 2007.
Monitor sage and sharp-tailed grouse leks. Search for new or satellite leks on or adjacent to the area.	Completed.	Continue in 2007.
Search for pygmy rabbits and Washington ground squirrel presence on the Sagebrush Flat, Dormaier and Chester Butte units. Required prior to field restoration activities.	Completed.	Continue in 2007 as required.

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.

The Citizens Advisory Group provided issues identified in italics. 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 populations and their habitats.

1. Protect state listed species.

Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area was established to protect and enhance shrubsteppe habitat. This habitat is essential to the survival of three listed species: pygmy rabbit (endangered), sage grouse (threatened) and sharp-tailed grouse (threatened). Populations of these species have declined as suitable habitat has been converted to agricultural fields and was degraded due to intensive livestock grazing. Statewide, the population of sharp-tailed grouse has declined by nearly 90%, while the pygmy rabbit has declined to the point that it is functionally extinct. Efforts to recover the pygmy rabbit include land acquisition, habitat enhancement, predator control and a captive breeding program with facilities at Washington State University, Portland Zoo and Northwest Trek. A release program began in April of 2007 when 20 captive reared pygmy rabbits were released at the Sagebrush Flat unit. Translocations of sharp-tailed and sage grouse have taken place since 2005. These actions offer hope that these species can be recovered in Washington.

In addition to sharp-tailed grouse, sage grouse and the pygmy rabbit, at least 14 other state listed species use, or have the potential to use the wildlife area during the year. These include: Loggerhead shrike, Sage thrasher, sage sparrow, burrowing owl, Ferruginous hawk, golden eagle, merlin, peregrine falcon, northern goshawk, Sandhill crane, white-tailed jackrabbit, black-tailed jackrabbit, Washington ground squirrel and sagebrush lizard. Of these the sage thrasher, sage sparrow, white-tailed jackrabbit, black-tailed jackrabbit, sagebrush lizard are shrubsteppe obligates. Shrubland and grassland dependant species are burrowing owl, Ferruginous hawk and Washington ground squirrel.

Current management strategies designed to protect and enhance shrubsteppe, species diversity, riparian habitat, upland birds and big game populations will result in improved habitat for these listed species.

- A. Strategy: All management and enhancement activities will make protection of Listed and Candidate species a high priority. Timeframe: Ongoing.
- B. Strategy: Follow appropriate species management guidelines found in WDFW Status Reports, Management Plans, Recovery Plans, and Management Recommendations for Washington Priority Species. Plans can be found at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildlife.htm> Timeframe: Ongoing.
- C. Strategy: Consult when necessary with WDFW district biologists, research biologists and other biologists for management guidance. Timeframe: Ongoing.



Figure 4. Arrow-leaf balsamroot near McLean Lake

2. Protect Priority Habitats.

The WDFW defines a Priority Habitat as: A habitat type with unique or significant value to many species. An area identified and mapped as priority habitat has one or more of the following attributes:

- comparatively high fish and wildlife density
- comparatively high fish and wildlife species diversity
- important fish and wildlife breeding habitat
- important fish and wildlife seasonal ranges
- important fish and wildlife movement corridors
- limited availability
- high vulnerability to habitat alteration
- unique or dependent species

Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area supports a wide variety of Priority Habitats including shrubsteppe, riparian, steppe, cliffs, talus, snags and logs, freshwater wetlands and aspen stands. Management of these habitats will include protection from disturbance and degradation caused by weed encroachment, fire, vehicular traffic, cattle grazing and other factors.

A. Strategy: Follow WDFW management guidelines for these habitats. Habitat descriptions and management guidelines can be found at:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phspage.htm>

- B. Strategy: Consult when necessary with WDFW district biologists, research biologists and other biologists for management guidance. Timeframe: Ongoing.

2007 Performance Measures

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

- 1) Continue restoration of approximately 100 acres of abandoned agricultural fields located on the Dormaier Unit. Activities will include summer fallow and other weed control actions.
- 2) Summer fallow contour and mound areas in CRP field at the Sagebrush Flat Unit.
- 3) Continue restoration of 100-acre grass field located on the Sagebrush Flat Unit. Disc as needed to keep field free of vegetation.
- 4) Plant trees and shrubs on the Bridgeport Unit to enhance and expand riparian habitat.
- 5) Treat up to 150 acres infested with annual and perennial weeds. Treatments will include chemical, biological and mechanical methods.
- 6) Release up to 6,000 bio-control agents to treat perennial weeds, particularly Dalmatian toadflax on the Bridgeport, Chester Butte and Dormaier units
- 7) Maintain 150 acres of reseeded fields planted in the past 4 years on the Bridgeport Unit. Weed control, mow and interseed as needed.
- 8) Maintain shrubs and trees planted since 2000 as well as native riparian habitat with weed control, fencing and replacement of shrubs and trees lost to mortality.
- 9) Maintain the firebreaks at the Sagebrush Flat Unit to protect the area from fire.
- 10) Remove up to 8 miles of old dilapidated fence from four units, old corral from the Chester Butte unit and unsafe building rubble and wreckage from the Chester Butte and Dormaier units.
- 11) Maintain 15 miles of roads, 10 parking areas, 5 culverts and numerous informational signs.
- 12) Maintain up 50 miles of on boundary fence and on all wildlife area units.
- 13) Complete Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area Management Plan and annual update.
- 14) Produce BPA required PISCES reports
- 15) Produce BPA annual report.

Citizens Advisory Group Input

A Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on June 14, 2006 to review management progress, sharp-tailed grouse translocation progress plus performance measures and accomplishments for the January 2005 to June 2006 period.

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

- A. **Issue:** *Due to the acreage limit for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in Douglas County, WDFW should consider removing their land from the CRP program. This would allow an equivalent acreage on private land to remain in the program thus benefiting wildlife and local wheat growers.*

Response: WDFW has elected to retain our CRP contracts to provide us additional funding needed for the operation and maintenance of our lands.

The CAG reviewed the update in early May of 2007. No input was received.

Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

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

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