



# SAGEBRUSH FLAT WILDLIFE AREA 2008 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



## Bridgeport Unit

management plan update also includes 2007 accomplishments, new issues, and performance measures for 2008.

## Updates/Changes

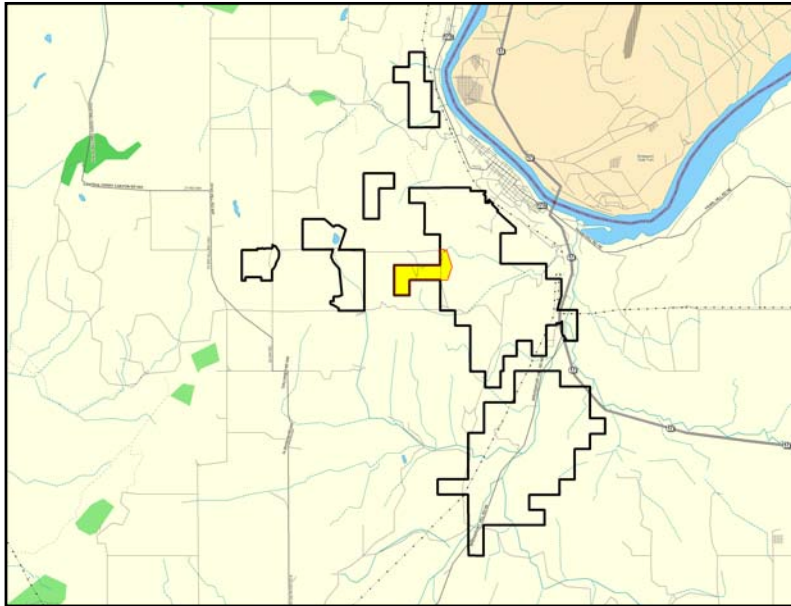
In 2007 WDFW acquired a 200-acre parcel adjacent to the Bridgeport Unit. See Figure 1 below. Initial management activities will include boundary surveying, signing and controlling weeds.

## Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area Management 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 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

<b>Inside</b>	
<b>Land Management Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Updates/Changes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>New Issues</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Major Stewardship Accomplishments</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Status Report of 2007 Performance Measures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>New Strategies</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2008 Performance Measures</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Citizens Advisory Group Input</b>	<b>6</b>



**Figure 1. 2007 Acquisition in Yellow**

### **New Issues**

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) reduced future funding it provides to this area by 15%. This reduction began with the start of the 2008 fiscal year in October of 2007. WDFW will continue to negotiate with BPA to restore the funding level. BPA has limited its funding to only those activities related to habitat maintenance, enhancement and protection. As a result, wildlife area staff does not participate in wildlife surveys, translocations or reintroduction efforts.

New issues provided by the Citizen's Advisory Committee (See CAG input, page 7)

1. There is a need for a fire management plan including post-fire treatment of affected site(s).
2. WDFW should consider the use of forage Kochia in firebreaks
3. Reintroduction of a species such as the pygmy rabbit may not be effective and a good use of limited funding.
4. WDFW should consider working with other agencies and volunteers to conduct surveys and studies and produce GIS maps.
5. Protection of known cultural artifacts should be a priority.

### **Major Stewardship Accomplishments**



We completed the summer fallow and reseeded efforts on the Chester Butte, Dormaier and Sagebrush Flat units. Nearly 260 acres of old agricultural fields were reseeded in November and December. Seed mixes included 6 varieties of native grasses, more than 9 species of forbs (most collected and grown in central Washington) and sagebrush. Future maintenance efforts on these fields will include weed

control, and interseeding where needed. Initially we had planned to seed these areas in 2008. Due to a reduction in BPA funding, however, we purchased seed and planted in 2007. This action removed these expensive items from our 2008 budget plans.

On the weed control front, we chemically treated more than 320 acres for a variety of weeds, primarily Dalmatian toadflax (235 acres). For the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year we released the bioagent *Mecinus janthinus* on the area. 1,200 were distributed between 5 sites on the recently acquired portions of the Bridgeport Unit. Since releases of this bioagent began we have seen a reduction of toadflax in some sites. The bugs have also been successful at moving into areas miles from where initial releases have taken place. We will continue to use chemical control for toadflax on roadways, restored agricultural fields, isolated patches and areas with low population densities. Within the broader landscape, however, we will continue releasing *M. janthinus*.

Roads within and adjacent to the Area’s units received weed control treatments as well. Thirty-one miles were treated to control diffuse knapweed and Dalmatian toadflax. This figure includes several roads leading to and through the Bridgeport and Chester Butte units where vehicular traffic may contribute to weed distribution.

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

In March 2007, 20 captive reared pygmy rabbits were released into the wild at the Sagebrush Flat unit. The released rabbits were the result of efforts by Washington State University, Northwest Trek and the Oregon Zoo. A WSU graduate student and DFW biologists monitored the released animals. One female rabbit did produce a litter; however, by the end of September, predators had killed 18 of the released animals. Two were captured and returned to WSU. At this time there are no plans to release animals in 2008 and the breeding facilities will change animal pairing and husbandry techniques.

**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/ 2008 Related Activity/ Comments</b>
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.	Completed. Seeding was completed ahead of initial schedule in anticipation of reduced funding.	Monitor for as needed weed control in 2008.
Continue restoration of 100-acre	Completed. Seeding was	Monitor for as needed weed

grass field located on the Sagebrush Flat Unit. Disc as needed to keep field free of vegetation.	completed ahead of initial schedule in anticipation of reduced funding.	control in 2008.
Continue restoration of approximately 50 acres of abandoned agricultural fields located on the Chester Butte Unit. Activities will include summer fallow and other weed control actions.	Completed. Seeding was completed ahead of initial schedule in anticipation of reduced funding.	Monitor for as needed weed control in 2008.
Summer fallow contour and mound areas in CRP field at the Sagebrush Flat Unit.	Completed.	Continue in 2008. Seed areas fall of 2008.
Plant trees and shrubs on the Bridgeport Unit to enhance and expand riparian habitat.	Completed. Planted 400 trees.	Continue in 2008
Treat up to 150 acres infested with annual and perennial weeds. Treatments will include chemical, biological and mechanical methods.	Completed. Approximately 430 acres were treated. This figure includes approximately 240 acres of former agricultural fields under-going restoration.	Continue in 2008
Release up 6,000 bio-control agents to treat perennial weeds, particularly Dalmatian toadflax, on the Bridgeport, Chester Butte and Dormaier units.	Completed. Released 1,200 <i>Mecinus janthinus</i> on the Bridgeport Unit.	Continue in 2008.
Remove up to 8 miles of old dilapidated fence from four units; old corrals from the Chester Butte and Sagebrush Flat units; and unsafe building rubble and wreckage from the Chester Butte and Dormaier units.	Incomplete. Area staff removed approximately 6 miles of old fence and capped an unused hand-dug well.	Continue work in 2008.
Maintain 150 acres of reseeded fields planted in the past 4 years on the Bridgeport Unit. Weed control, mow and interseed as needed.	Completed. Weed control and mowing were performed as needed.	Continue work in 2008. Prepare selected sites for interseeding.

Maintain shrubs, trees and native riparian habitat with weed control, fencing and replacement.	Completed. Performed manual and mechanical weed control within fenced enclosures. Repaired fencing as needed. Planted shrubs and trees within enclosure to replace those lost to mortality.	Continue work in 2008.
Maintain 15 miles of roads, 10 parking areas, 5 culverts and numerous informational signs.	Completed. Graded 3 miles of road on the Bridgeport Unit. Repaired road on Bridgeport Unit; used 70 yards of gravel. Improved one parking area on the Chester Butte Unit; installed new signs, fence posts, wire and gravel. Performed weed control and sign maintenance at parking areas as needed.	Continue in 2008.
Maintain up to 50 miles of boundary fence on all units.	Completed. Repaired fences and gates as needed.	Continue in 2008.
Monitor sage and sharp-tailed grouse leks. Search for new or satellite leks on or adjacent to the area.	Completed.	Continue in 2008.



## **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 present and public issues and concerns. The following new 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 (CAG) provided strategies that are identified in italics. Although underlined strategies have no current funding source, identifying these needs is the first step to securing additional funds.

### **Fire Management Plan**

*Strategy: Draft a fire management plan including a wildfire recovery plan particularly for weed-infested areas that may benefit from some immediate post-fire herbicide treatment followed by native plant seeding.*

### **2008 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) Summer fallow and seed contour and mound areas in CRP field at the Sagebrush Flat Unit.
- 2) Plant trees and shrubs on the Bridgeport Unit to enhance and expand riparian habitat.
- 3) Treat up to 150 acres infested with annual and perennial weeds. Treatments will include chemical, biological and mechanical methods.
- 4) Release up to 6,000 bio-control agents to treat perennial weeds, particularly Dalmatian toadflax on the Bridgeport, Chester Butte and Dormaier units
- 5) Maintain 400 acres of reseeded fields planted in the past 4 years on the Bridgeport Unit. Weed control, mow and interseed as needed.
- 6) 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.
- 7) Maintain the firebreaks at the Sagebrush Flat Unit to protect the area from fire.
- 8) Remove up to 2 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.
- 9) Maintain 15 miles of roads, 10 parking areas, 5 culverts and numerous informational signs.
- 10) Maintain up to 50 miles of boundary fence on all wildlife area units.
- 11) Complete Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area annual Management Plan update.
- 12) Produce BPA required PISCES and annual reports
- 13) Monitor sharp-tailed and sage grouse leks.

### **Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) Input:**

Wells, Chelan and Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Areas Citizens Advisory Group - 2008

Jim McGee

Public Utilities District No. 1 of Douglas County

Von Pope	Public Utilities District No. 1 of Chelan County
Bill Stegeman	Wenatchee Sportsmen’s Association
Bob Fischer	US Army Corp of Engineers – Chief Joseph Dam/ Adjacent Landowner /Recreationist
Tim Behne	Adjacent Landowner/Cattleman/Wheat Grower/Foster Creek Conservation District
John Musser	Wildlife Biologist, Recreationist
Steve Wetzel	Washington Department of Natural Resources
Mary Hunt	Douglas County Commissioner
Terry Nouka	Chelan County Weed Board
Vacant	North Central Washington Audubon Society
Vacant	The Nature Conservancy
Vacant	Chelan - Douglas Land Trust
Mallory Lenz	U.S. Forest Service
Bob Stoll	Adjacent Landowner and Member of Lands Management Advisory Council
Neal Hedges	US Bureau of Land Management

The CAG provided issues and comments that are identified in italics. CAG members were requested to assist in prioritizing “unfunded strategies” listed in the management plan. Some of the input listed below was provided in response to this request.

Fire Management: Mallory Lenz: *“My one overriding concern is fire management, and the need to anticipate and plan for fire, rather than respond to it as if it were unanticipated. Some of these areas have and will burn regularly, and it's generally going to be easier to work with the fire rather than against it (Fire management vs. fire suppression concept). I recognize that it is a difficult challenge.*

*Possibly pre-plan wildfire recovery actions, most specifically in weed infested areas that may benefit from some immediate post-fire herbicide treatment followed by native grass seeding. Strategic bitterbrush seeding (or planting) may also be an appropriate strategy, though on ranges shared by mule deer and bighorn, “strategic” is the operative word. The Easy Street fire occurred at a time when some cheatgrass seed may have been consumed by the fire, giving an opportunity for some effective post-fire weed control responses”.*

If funding and time is available, WDFW treats weeds and seeds the burn to native grasses, forbs and shrubs.

John Musser stated: *“Fire management plan for shrub steppe should be done; many shrub steppe habitats are not adapted to frequent fire and respond poorly or unpredictably to fire – even prescribed fire. Be careful here.”*

We will add a management plan strategy to address fire management and will use extreme caution when implementing prescribed fires especially in shrubsteppe.

Potential use of forage kochia as a firebreak:

Tim Behne suggested the use of forage kochia as a firebreak. He indicated, *“This is a perennial form of the plant with good forage value that might keep the dust down and create a firebreak, not an easy thing in this dry country. It may not be native but then neither is bare ground”*. Bob Fischer added *“it may have high potential for all of us”*. Mallory Lenz voiced some concerns: *“Non-native plantings can be extremely problematic. Though the forage kochia is not the same species as the “weedy” kochia, they are related (same genus, different species). Forage kochia is “highly aggressive for moisture” to the point where it robs its own potential seedlings. Yes, this will provide competition with other weedy species like cheatgrass, but it will compete with native plants, and would not be an appropriate species to consider in areas where the goal is restoration of the shrub steppe or grassland ecosystem, even if it does provide a fuel break or forage. It just depends on what your overriding goal is.”*

WDFW’s primary goal for using forage kochia is to create firebreaks (green strips) and protect wildlife habitat from wildfires. These “green strips” could also facilitate control burning. WDFW will seed these “green strips” in old agricultural fields and disturbed areas and would not favor replacing existing shrubsteppe or other native habitat with kochia or any other non-native species.

#### Species Reintroduction:

Tim Behne stated: *“My only reservation concerns the re-introduction of a species. The pygmy rabbit efforts are representative of my concerns. As I understand it even a successful re-introduction of pygmy rabbits in the Sagebrush Flats area would require regular releases of bunnies with genetic input from outside the area to sustain viable genetic diversity in the population. To me if the population is not likely to have enough habitat or become large enough to become self sufficient then all we are doing is prolonging the inevitable loss of the species. You are in effect just running a zoo out there. In these cases I feel more could be done with limited funding by spending it to help sustain wildlife populations that have a reasonable chance of succeeding or are succeeding in the existing environment. I am not as familiar with the sharp tailed grouse situation but if the chances of success are similar to that for the pygmy rabbits then this also may not be the best use of limited resources. If a wildlife population can be preserved or enhanced with a little input from us then it could be a worthwhile project but artificially sustaining one that has a low probability to exist on its own is not likely to be worth the effort in the long run.”*

Wildlife Area staff will not have the final word deciding on re-introduction of wildlife species. It will however be working on improving habitat on the wildlife areas for species of concern such as the sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit as well as other species.

We have already had some success in re-introducing sharp-tailed grouse in Washington. Sharp-tailed grouse re-introductions have a better chance to succeed since local remnant populations still exist and the bird's mobility can facilitate genetic exchange between populations. Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (the sub-species native to Washington) are also readily available from several other states and British Columbia. The quantity and



quality of the habitat available to sharp-tailed grouse in the future will greatly affect its long-term survival.

John Musser comments regarding “unfunded strategies”:

- When assessing impact of water development on listed species *at least evaluate springs and guzzlers to remove those that pose a risk to wildlife.*
- Conduct *only* waterfowl nesting and annual deer surveys on all suitable Units necessary *to satisfy regional data needs. Stand-alone data is not a priority for wildlife area.*
- Perform cultural resource survey and assessment as required. Protect American Indian and other artifacts. *Protection of known cultural artifacts would be a priority.*
- Determining species use by conducting and/or facilitating surveys of various bird, reptile, amphibian and mammal, vascular plant, moss, lichen and selected insect species *would be useful information that would be expensive if contracted, focus on qualified volunteers, universities, possibly exchanging work with other agencies etc.*
- Evaluate the area for western gray squirrel and sharp-tailed grouse re-introduction *in conjunction with other wildlife programs involved with these species.*
- Develop GIS layers of all resources, roads, trails, parking, *camping* areas and other facilities available to the public. *BLM / Nature Conservancy has a GIS specialist at the BLM office in Wenatchee. You may be able to accomplish what you need through interagency agreement.*

WDFW agrees with these comments and suggestions. Wildlife area staff will work with qualified volunteers, other agencies and WDFW programs as much as possible to increase efficiency in implementing these strategies.

**Want to see the full plan?**

Go to -

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/)

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