



SAGEBRUSH FLAT WILDLIFE AREA 2012 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Land Management Summary

Here is the update to the 2006 Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area Management Plan 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 every two years regardless of changes to habitat, species, regulations, scientific knowledge, or administration of wildlife areas. This update includes accomplishments, updates, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for the 2012 to 2013 period.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Shrub-steppe Restoration

We continued our efforts to reestablish native shrub-steppe habitat within old agricultural fields. On the Bridgeport Unit, staff prepared three fields and seeded a total of 180 acres with a diverse mix of native grasses and forbs.

Species included: bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, Idaho fescue, basin wildrye, arrowleaf balsamroot, blanket flower, prairie clover, shaggy fleabane, snow buckwheat, Venus penstemon, Lewis flax and yarrow.

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Also on the Bridgeport Unit, we began a restoration project on 300 acres that had been seeded with non-native grass approximately 25 years ago. This effort began with mowing the acreage in the fall of 2010. The following spring the area was treated with the herbicide Glyphosate to kill all existing vegetation.

Rather than use our disc to mechanical summer fallow the area, we decided to use a regimen of chemical fallow and harrow treatments on this site. We chose this course as there would less wear and tear on our equipment, it would retain the integrity of the existing soil profile, the vegetative residue would help reduce wind and rain erosion and it would be less expensive and more efficient. This acreage is scheduled to be seeded in the fall of 2012.



Unloading equipment for grass seeding, November, 2010.

Riparian Tree Planting and Deer Fencing

We created four plots of water birch trees on the Bridgeport Unit in the spring of 2010. The plots range in size from less than 1 acre to 3 acres and are irrigated via drip irrigation systems supplied by existing spring developments. Each site is fenced to prevent browsing. The goal of this project is to expand the amount winter forage available to sharp-tailed grouse. Trees for the project were grown at Clifty View Nursery in Bonners Ferry, Idaho from seeds collected here on the wildlife area.

Weed Control

Control of noxious weeds continues to be a priority component of our annual management activities. Our priority species for control include: Dalmatian toadflax, diffuse knapweed, Russian knapweed, Russian thistle, and kochia. Approximately 525 acres are treated annually. Treatment sites included previously restored agriculture fields, old agriculture fields currently undergoing restoration, disturbed sites, firebreaks, and individual weed patches. We also

performed weed control on 38 miles of roads including unimproved access roads within the units, county roads that bisect or are adjacent to the units and 6.6 miles of BPA service roads within the Bridgeport Unit. Many of the above sites and locations received follow-up treatments. Using an Integrated Pest Management approach, treatments included herbicide applications, mechanical means including mowing, disking and weed eaters and cultural control.



Herbicide application to non-native grasses.



Water birch plot under construction, Bridgeport Unit

Pygmy Rabbit Recovery Project

In 2011 the Department of Fish and Wildlife resumed efforts to reintroduce the endangered Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit into the wild with releases at the Sagebrush Flat unit. Release protocols developed by Research Scientist Penny Becker required the construction of numerous small (approximately 10 feet in diameter) soft release pens, and one

enclosure approximately 3 acres in size designed to exclude coyotes and weasels. To provide concealment and shelter, an artificial burrow made of black plastic drainage tile was constructed in each soft release pen. Multiple artificial burrows were built in the 3-acre site. Adult rabbits from the captive breeding facilities were released in the 3-acre enclosure where they would breed. At the same time, kits, born in captivity in the spring of 2011, were released into the soft release pens. After a 10 day acclimation period each pen was breached using plastic pipe that allowed the kits to exit and reenter the pen as they pleased.

Between May and August, a total of 88 animals had been released into either the 3-acre site or the soft release pens. By the end of this reporting period, 16 of 39 adults were still alive in the large enclosure and successful breeding here produced at least 5 kits. Of the 49 kits placed in soft release pens, all eventually dispersed. Biologists monitoring these animals found at least one new burrow system had been created suggesting that surviving kits were acclimating to their new home. This winter, when snow conditions permits, track surveys will be employed to assess pygmy rabbit numbers on the area.



Research Scientist Penny Becker, right, with vet staff from Northwest Trek, processing pygmy rabbit prior to release.

In the coming fiscal year, plans include trapping and translocating wild pygmy rabbits from Oregon, Nevada and Utah.

Status Report of 2010 -2011 Performance Measures

2010-2011 Performance Measures	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress 2012 Related Activity/ Comments
Continue shrub-steppe restoration on the Bridgeport Unit. Mow and disk up to 335-acres currently planted with non-native grasses.	Completed	Seed in fall 2012
Summer fallow 45-acre field on the Bridgeport Unit. This field is currently dominated by quackgrass, pubescent wheatgrass and bulbous bluegrass.	Completed. Seeded to grass in 2011.	Perform broadleaf weed control in 2012.
Plant water birch trees at 4 – 5 sites on the Bridgeport Unit to enhance and expand sharp-tailed grouse winter habitat.	Completed	Control weeds and tree re-growth as needed.
Build four drip irrigation systems to provide water to newly planted trees	Completed	Maintain in 2012
Develop 3 springs on the Bridgeport Unit	Completed	Maintain in 2012
Construct deer fence at 3-4 sites on the Bridgeport Unit to protect tree plantings.	Completed	Maintain in 2012
If needed, release bio-control agents to treat Dalmatian toadflax and diffuse knapweed	None purchased. <i>Mecinus janthinus</i> are widespread throughout the area	Evaluate in 2012
Maintain approximately 250 acres of reseeded fields planted in the past four years. Weed control, mow and interseed as needed.	Completed	Continue in 2012

Maintain the firebreaks (15 miles) at the Sagebrush Flat Unit to protect the area from fire.	Completed	Continue in 2012
Maintain up to 50 miles of boundary fence on all wildlife area units.	Completed. Replaced two miles of boundary fence at the Sagebrush Flat Unit.	Continue in 2012
Treat up to 700 acres for annual and perennial weeds. Treatments will include chemical, biological and mechanical methods. Treat up to 30 miles of wildlife area roads.	Incomplete. Treated approximately 500 acres	Continue in 2012
Maintain 15 miles of roads, 10 parking areas, 5 culverts and numerous informational signs.	Completed	Continue in 2012
Monitor sage and sharp-tailed grouse leks. Search for new or satellite leks on or adjacent to the area.	Completed	Continue in 2012
Seed 50 acres of shrub-steppe habitat including grasses and bitterbrush on the Bridgeport Unit. Interseed adjacent 20-acre field. Control annual weeds as needed.	Completed	Maintain in 2012

2012-13 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 shrub-steppe restoration on the Bridgeport Unit. Continue chemical fallow treatments on 300 acres. Harrow as needed. Seed in fall on 2012. During the 2013 growing season, control broadleaf weeds with chemical and mechanical treatments.
- 2) Interseed forbs in the above acreage in the fall of 2013.
- 3) Control broadleaf weeds in 45-acre field on the Bridgeport Unit. Mow as needed.
- 4) Mow 'Corral field' as needed.
- 5) Begin shrub-steppe restoration project on the Chester Butte unit. Coordinate with our funding partner, BLM, as needed.
- 6) Maintain drip irrigation systems.
- 7) Construct deer fence at sites on the Bridgeport Unit to protect tree plantings.
- 8) Treat up to 700 acres for annual and perennial weeds. Treatments will include chemical, biological and mechanical methods. Treat up to 30 miles of wildlife area roads.
- 9) Maintain approximately 250 acres of reseeded fields planted in the past four years. Weed control, mow and interseed as needed.

- 10) 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.
- 11) Maintain the firebreaks (15 miles) at the Sagebrush Flat Unit to protect the area from fire.
- 12) Maintain 15 miles of roads, 10 parking areas, 5 culverts and numerous informational signs.
- 13) Maintain up to 50 miles of boundary fence on all wildlife area units.
- 14) Complete Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area biennial Management Plan update.
- 15) Produce Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) required PISCES and annual reports
- 16) Monitor sharp-tailed and sage grouse leks.
- 17) Assist with pygmy rabbit recovery as needed.

Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) Input

The Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area was split from the Chelan Wildlife Area in late 2011. The new manager will be creating a CAG in 2013.

Information for BPA's Wildlife Mitigation Program

The Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration to mitigate for wildlife habitat losses from the construction of Chief Joseph Dam and Grand Coulee Dam. The project provides an estimated 6,411 habitat units (HUs) toward their overall Wildlife Mitigation Debt for the Columbia River hydroelectric system. By funding habitat enhancement for a set period of time, and maintenance and operation costs for the life of the project, BPA receives credit towards its mitigation obligation.



Winter on the Bridgeport Unit

Progress towards this obligation is assessed through the use of periodic surveys based on standardized Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) for four focal species: Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, greater sage grouse, pygmy rabbit and mule deer. By measuring a variety of habitat features, HEP surveyors apply habitat models for each of the focal species to arrive at a numerical figure between 0 and 1 that quantifies the habitat quality for a particular focal species. This figure is known as a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI). This figure is then multiplied by the area habitat being evaluated (acres of shrub-steppe, riparian, woodland, etc.) The result is expressed as a Habitat Unit (HU), which is the basic currency of HEP.

Reports/Proposals/Plans

Since 1992, the Bonneville Power Administration has provided funding for the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. Consequently, numerous reports, funding proposals and annual work plans have been produced, most recently in January of 2009. By following the links below, the interested reader can find detailed information on a variety of topics that the wildlife area is engaged in.

General information on the Mitigation Project

The 2010-2012 Funding Proposal Narrative submitted to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPCC) in January of 2009

<http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2010/narratives/990.doc> pages 1-12, 15, 16 contain detailed descriptions of the area's history, land purchases and rationale for mitigation and focal species)

Additional information describing BPA's role in mitigation and crediting can be found on the BPA web site: <http://www.efw.bpa.gov/IntegratedFWP/Wildlife.aspx> and <http://www.efw.bpa.gov/IntegratedFWP/wildlifecredit.aspx>

Management Activities

The NWPCC 2010-2012 Funding Proposal Narrative (pages 1-12 and 23-28) includes detailed descriptions of proposed management activities for the 2010-2012. It also includes proposed budgets and projected needs through 2018.

<http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2010/narratives/990.doc>

Monitoring and Evaluation

The NWPCC 2010-2012 Funding Proposal Narrative (pages 18-23, 28, 36-49) contains detailed descriptions and summation of wildlife surveys conducted on the area since 1995.

Habitat evaluation reports with detailed analysis of habitat conditions for the Bridgeport, Chester Butte and Dormaier units are included in the following:

<http://pisces.bpa.gov/release/documents/documentviewer.aspx?doc=P106525>

<http://pisces.bpa.gov/release/documents/documentviewer.aspx?doc=P106526>

<http://pisces.bpa.gov/release/documents/documentviewer.aspx?doc=P106527>

Acquisition Strategy

WDFW pursues an active acquisition program based on the internal Lands 20/20 which includes evaluating proposals based on criteria described in management plans for sage and sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit.

Funding Strategy

The NWPCC 2010-2012 Funding Proposal includes detailed descriptions of proposed management activities for the 2010-2012 time period including proposed budgets plus projected needs through 2018. It also contains detailed descriptions of work elements, capitol projects and cost-share opportunities and all projected budgets.

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Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

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