



SHERMAN CREEK WILDLIFE AREA/ LECLERC CREEK WILDLIFE AREA 2017 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Sherman Creek Wildlife Area (WLA) and LeClerc Creek WLA Management Plans http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/. These plans provide management direction for the Sherman Creek WLA located along the west side of Lake Roosevelt in the eastern foothills of the Kettle River Range, and the LeClerc Creek WLA located in Pend Oreille County along the east side of the Pend Oreille River. The Sherman Creek WLA consists of five parcels totaling 8,782 acres, which were purchased with Pittman-Robertson and State Wildlife funds in 1948. The West Branch Little Spokane WLA (Rustlers Gulch), managed as a subunit of the Sherman Creek WLA, consists of 2,772 acres and is located in southwestern Pend Oreille County, situated between Horseshoe Lake and Fan Lake. It was purchased as two



A mature white-tailed buck.

phases in 2008 and 2009 with Washington Recreation and Conservation Office funds. The LeClerc Creek WLA is located about 25 miles northwest of Newport and 65 miles northwest of Spokane. It consists of four land units totaling 614 acres which were purchased with Pittman-Robertson and State Wildlife funds in 1972. The majority of the areas are forested and managed for a variety of wildlife habitat improvements and public recreation opportunities.

The plans identify needs and guide activities on these areas based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Mission: “*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 every 2-3 years 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 2014-2016 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies, and new performance measures for 2017-2018.

Inside	
Land Management Summary	1
Updates/Changes	2
New Issues	2
Major Stewardship Accomplishments	3
Status Report 2014-16 Performance Measures	5
2017-18 Performance Measures	7
Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Input	9
Contact Information	9

Updates/Changes

Plan Update Consolidation: Management plan activities for the Sherman Creek WLA and the LeClerc Creek WLA continue to be combined into one document.

New Issues

Acquisition and Development Projects

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Region 1, District 1 staff applied to the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for funding of two acquisition/development projects in northwestern Ferry County in 2014. The Kettle River Water Access Project was funded but the Kettle Corridor Conservation Easement was not. WDFW is currently in the acquisition process of the Kettle River Water Access Project parcels. Development of parking areas, primitive boat launch and trails will take place once the parcels are acquired. Management of the Kettle River properties will be the responsibility of Sherman Creek WLA staff.



The northern parcel of the Kettle River Water Access Project.

Funding continues to be sought for parking area development to serve the West Branch Little Spokane WLA. Pend Oreille County submitted a grant application to the Recreation and Conservation Office in 2014 for funding of a cooperative parking area that would be situated on county land adjacent to the wildlife area near Fertile Valley Road. The Rustlers Gulch Cooperative Parking Project, which would provide recreational access to Pend Oreille County park land and the eastern portion of the West Branch Little Spokane WLA, has been funded. Additionally, the Inland Empire Chapter of Backcountry Horsemen are currently pursuing an RCO grant to provide for trail head maintenance at the Beaver Creek and Holly Road access point parking areas of the West Branch Little Spokane WLA.

The irrigation diversion at Sherman Creek WLA is planned for improvement to increase functionality and decrease maintenance. Preliminary plans have been drawn and funding is being sought for this project.

Development of shooting ranges at the Sherman Creek WLA has been identified as a priority of the agency. The gravel pit sites on Bisbee Mountain Road and along the Inchelium Highway are commonly used by shooters and therefore are logical choices for shooting range development.

Restoration

Habitat improvement needs were identified on the West Branch Little Spokane and LeClerc Creek Wildlife Areas in Pend Oreille County in 2014. Portions of forested areas are

overstocked, leading to degraded forest health and habitat, and increased fire danger. Commercial thinning operations began on both the West Branch Little Spokane and LeClerc Creek WLAs in 2015-2016 and should be completed in 2017.

Potential habitat restoration projects on two portions of the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area have been identified. One project area is the old field at the Sherman Creek WLA headquarters, and the other is an old field near the Reed Slide. Restoration for the benefit of native pollinators is a consideration.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Prescribed Fire

Sherman Creek WLA staff joined in with the WDFW Prescribed Burn Team in order to implement prescribed burning on thinned forest units of the Sherman Creek WLA. Prescribed burning is used to reintroduce this long absent component to the fire dependent ponderosa pine forests of the Sherman Creek WLA, which serve as winter range for wild ungulate species.

Approximately 300 acres were treated with controlled burns during the spring of 2014, and just over 100 acres during the spring of 2016 to reduce fire fuels and improve wildlife habitat. Fire would naturally occur in this forest type every 15-20 years.



Bridge Unit prescribed burning in the June 2016.

Sherman Creek/Oak Creek Perpetual Timber Rights

The Sherman Creek/Oak Creek Perpetual Timber Rights Exchange Timber Sale, which provides for forest health and wildlife habitat improvement, continues to be active. Associated harvest was completed on Sherman Creek WLA in 2016, but continues on the West Branch Little Spokane and LeClerc Creek WLAs.

Five hundred acres were thinned on the eastern portion of West Branch Little Spokane WLA from fall 2015 – spring 2016. One hundred fifty acres of LeClerc Creek WLA was thinned during the fall and winter of 2016. Boise Cascade is the owner of the timber and is working toward completing the contract. A WDFW forester, Sherman Creek WLA staff, and Boise Cascade staff have been working together to identify and prepare harvest units, monitor the thinning activities, and resolve issues.

Outreach to Local Schools

Sherman Creek WLA staff became involved with a forest health education program with the local Kettle Falls Elementary School in January of 2014. The program is improved every year with the involvement of state foresters and forest health specialists, as well as private industrial foresters. In each of the last three years, every 4th grade student in Kettle Falls has had the opportunity to visit the Sherman Creek WLA on various field days to learn about different aspects of forest health, as well as various management objectives and management tools used

on public and private lands. For each class, the students' forest health education experience culminates with group presentations of student developed management plans for a given forest stand from an adopted management perspective.

Fuel Reduction Project with Department of Natural Resources

A fire fuel reduction project was accomplished, in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources, on the eastern portion of the West Branch Little Spokane WLA during the summer and fall of 2015.



Portion of a hand-thinned unit for fire fuel reduction.

Hand-thinning was conducted on 15-20 acres of wildlife area land adjacent to the boundaries and between commercial thinning units to reduce fire risk in the area. Hand-thinned material was piled and wildlife area staff worked during the falls of 2015 and 2016 to burn most of those hand piles. The photo above illustrates a portion of a hand-thinned area where small trees and the lower branches of larger trees were removed, to eliminate ladder fuels that would carry fire from the ground into the tops of the trees. Notice the background of the photo where thinning had not been completed yet.

Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan

A majority of the Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP) work for the West Branch Little Spokane WLA was completed in October 2014. Road abandonment and drainage improvements were accomplished on 20 miles of roads, and three fish passage barriers were removed. The minimal RMAP work remaining at West Branch Little Spokane WLA was completed in the spring of 2016. The photo to the right shows an abandoned forest road where approximately 20 feet of fill material and an undersized culvert were removed to prevent a future wash out.



Location where an undersized culvert was removed.

Other Accomplishments

The old Kalstrom barn, located at the Sherman Creek WLA headquarters, has been in need of a new roof for quite some

time. The roof was replaced during the fall of 2015 as part of a state-wide project providing for improvements to WDFW buildings. The barn was originally built circa 1900. It was dismantled and moved to its current location due to the filling of the Lake Roosevelt reservoir in 1941. An animal sanitation, or compost, facility has been installed on the south end of the Sherman Creek WLA, adjacent to the agricultural fields. The purpose of the facility is to provide a place for livestock carcasses from areas within wolf pack territories to be brought so as not to be an attractant to wolves. The facility was completed in the fall of 2014 and received several livestock carcasses through the end of 2016, with most carcasses received during the late summer and fall months.

The agricultural lease at Sherman Creek WLA continued as in previous years. The five-year lease was renewed with the current lessee in the spring of 2014. Wildlife area staff have conducted annual weed control, field preparation and seeding of the wildlife food plots adjacent to the agricultural lease at Sherman Creek WLA, as well as conducted annual roadside and wild land weed control on all areas.

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/Related Activity/ Comments
<p>Work with WDFW forester and wildlife program staff to monitor and manage the ongoing Sherman Creek/Oak Creek PTR Exchange Timber Sale for habitat improvement. <u>Performance measure:</u> at least two field visits by the forester to logging sites per year.</p>	<p>Thinning activities continued through 2016. Forester has visited the logging sites several times over the past three years.</p>	<p>All thinning related to this project on the Sherman Creek WLA has been completed. Thinning will continue through 2017, and possibly 2018, with units remaining to be treated at LeClerc Creek and West Branch Little Spokane WLAs. WDFW forester will continue to monitor progress through visits to the site.</p>
<p>Work with fire fuels management staff on unit layout, fire lines, and other needs associated with the prescribed burning on Sherman Creek WLA. <u>Performance measure:</u> implement prescribed burning during the spring and fall of</p>	<p>Conditions did allow for prescribed burning to be implemented during the fall of this period. No prescribed burning was conducted during 2015 as no funds were available. The amount of prescribed burning completed during this period was</p>	<p>Prescribed burning on Sherman Creek WLA is planned to continue in 2017-2018 and beyond as the fire dependent ponderosa pine forest has a natural fire cycle of about 20 years. A total of 3,329 acres in 38 individual units is planned for prescribed</p>

2014-2016 to approximately 600 acres of Sherman Creek WLA.	approximately 400 acres.	burn treatment.
Monitor and maintain habitat improvement and manipulation projects, to provide annual benefit for game birds and deer winter range. <u>Performance measure:</u> maintain two food plots and one grass planting annually.	Maintained three food plots and one grass planting, to improve forage availability for game birds and wintering deer. Ongoing forest thinning projects provide early successional habitats beneficial to a variety of wildlife species.	Continue in 2017-2018. Prescribed burning as part of the Sherman Creek WLA Habitat Improvement Project is expected to promote sprouting of evergreen ceanothus, valuable forage for wintering wild ungulates.
Maintain/repair or develop water sources for wildlife use on Sherman Creek WLA. <u>Performance measure:</u> Maintain/repair or develop a new water source every two years.	Maintained water sources on Sherman Creek WLA. Water collector roof panel for two wildlife guzzlers need replaced.	Continue maintenance in 2017-2018; replace one water collector roof panel per year until all wildlife guzzlers are operating properly.
Coordinate with volunteers to maintain or replace bird nest boxes on Sherman Creek WLA. <u>Performance measure:</u> Maintain bird nest boxes annually and track condition of to determine when replacement is necessary.	A dozen new bird nest boxes were installed by a Master Hunter Volunteer and WDFW Enforcement in Spring 2014 and maintained in 2015-2016. All other nest boxes were checked by a second Master Hunter in 2014 and GPS located for map development.	This cooperative bird box management program will continue in 2017-2018, most likely with help from Master Hunter volunteers.
Appropriate weed control as outlined in the weed management plans for Sherman Creek and LeClerc Creek WLAs. Different control methods will be integrated to achieve effective weed suppression. <u>Performance measure:</u> Prioritize weed suppression along roads and new infestations to prevent new noxious weed species from becoming established.	Approximately 100 acres of weeds were treated in each of 2014-2016 by chemical, mechanical, and biological means on all areas. Target weeds included diffuse and spotted knapweed, various thistles, hawkweeds, longspine sandbur, hoary alyssum, and leafy spurge. Other weeds suppressed include common mullein, St. Johnswort, sulfur cinquefoil, and hounds tongue.	Weed control priorities will continue in 2017-2018. Cooperative work will continue with Pend Oreille County Weed board for weed control activities at LeClerc Creek WLA and the West Branch Little Spokane WLA.
Outreach Education. <u>Performance measure:</u> Conduct at least one project using volunteer or school	Participated in the annual Water Festival outdoor education program for 4 th grade students from various	Continue in 2017-2018.

groups for outreach and education.	local schools. Continued forest health education program with Kettle Falls 4 th graders. Kettle Falls Elementary School continued Adventure Day activities on Sherman Creek WLA.	
Ensure proper precautions were taken around a northern goshawk nesting site on Sherman Creek WLA. <u>Performance measure:</u> Proper “no-logging” zone was determined and instituted.	Thinning around the 90-acre exclusion zone was completed in 2012. The nest was located and determined to be unoccupied in 2014. The territory was confirmed occupied in 2015, in a previously unknown nest. Chick observed but survival unknown. The territory was confirmed occupied in 2016, in the original nest. Male fitted with GPS tag in June and chick confirmed in nest. Assumed chick did not survive that year due to downy feathers at base of nest tree in July.	Check to see if the territory is occupied in 2017-2018.
Wildlife Area staff will jointly monitor golden and bald eagle nest territories with district wildlife biologists. <u>Performance measure:</u> Monitor one golden eagle and two bald eagle nest territories on Sherman Creek WLA.	All eagle territories were occupied in 2014. The bald eagle territories were occupied in 2015-2016, but reproduction unknown. Status of golden eagle territory for 2015-2016 unknown.	Check to see if territories are occupied in 2017-2018.

2017-2018 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Sherman Creek and LeClerc Creek Wildlife Areas are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Monitor the progress of ongoing Sherman Creek WLA habitat improvement projects to accomplish Priority Habitats and Species and other management objectives specific to the Sherman Creek WLA.
- 2) Work with wildlife forester on habitat improvement projects for West Branch Little Spokane and LeClerc Creek WLAs.
- 3) Seed and maintain three wildlife food plots.

- 4) Maintain and repair existing water developments including the wildlife guzzlers, the hayfield pond, and the irrigation diversion system.
- 5) Expand open meadows by 2 acres and install 10 nest boxes for bluebirds, as time and funding allow.
- 6) Appropriate weed control on the wildlife area, focusing on areas adjacent to roads. Meet goals outlined in the weed management plan.



Mature bull moose observed on the West Branch Little Spokane WLA August 2014.

- Concentrate control efforts on longspine sandbur, leafy spurge, hoary alyssum, diffuse knapweed, spotted knapweed, Dalmatian toadflax, and hawkweeds.
- 7) Conduct at least one project using volunteer or school groups for outreach and education. At least one of these projects may be completed under Performance Measure #5, above, in the case of bluebird nest box installation, by the Kettle Falls High School Wildlife Management class or Master Hunter volunteer.
 - 8) Jointly monitor the northern goshawk nesting territory on Sherman Creek WLA with district wildlife biologists for occupancy and reproductive success.
 - 9) Jointly monitor the golden and bald eagle nesting territories on Sherman Creek WLA with district wildlife biologists for occupancy and reproductive success.
 - 10) Support Pend Oreille County with development of the RCO funded parking area on their Rustlers Gulch property, which would provide for recreational access to the eastern portion of the non-motorized West Branch Little Spokane WLA.
 - 11) Work with Department of Natural Resources to utilize grant program funds to conduct fire fuel reduction and forest health treatments on appropriate wildlife areas.
 - 12) The current agricultural lease at Sherman Creek WLA expires at the end of 2018. The wildlife area assistant manager will begin working through the new lease process in early 2018.

Wildlife Area Advisory Committee

The Sherman Creek Wildlife Area Advisory Committee meeting was held on March 21, 2017 at the WDFW District 1 Office in Colville. The group discussed management issues, including habitat improvement forest thinning and prescribed burning, irrigation diversion improvements, impacts of new beaver activity on Trout Creek, recent landslide activity at the old Reed Slide area, proposed habitat restoration projects, and potential shooting range development.

Attendance was very low due to illnesses, unforeseen schedule conflicts, and a vehicle collision that shut down Hwy 395 north of Colville for an extended period that evening. One individual, representing the Republic Chapter of Backcountry Horsemen, was present.

The West Branch Little Spokane Wildlife Area Advisory Committee meeting was held on March 28, 2017 at the Camp Reed Lodge on Fan Lake, near Deer Park.

Attendees:

Tom Vogt – YMCA Camp Reed
Bob Watt – YMCA Camp Reed
Sharon Sorby – POC Weed Board
Tammy Magnuson – Eloika Lake Association
Sheldon Magnuson – Green Tree Forestry
Greg Sweeney – Eloika Lake Association
Jim Hudkins – NE Backcountry Horsemen
Gary Cutler – NE Backcountry Horsemen
Tammy Kirk – Horseshoe Lake Resident
Alvin Roath – Horseshoe Lake Resident
Dick & Lynne Anderson – Horseshoe Lake Resident
Mel & Lori Vernoy – Horseshoe Lake Resident
Howard & Bev Rowley – Horseshoe Lake Resident
Bill & Janet Kemp – Horseshoe Lake Resident
Ken Elliot – Inland Empire Backcountry Horseman
Sherrie Elliot – Inland Empire Backcountry Horseman
Rebecca Cahill Kemmer – Fertile Valley Resident
Steve & Ann Apperson, Lost Lake Resident

The group discussed management issues, including wildlife area access points and parking area improvements, forest thinning for forest health and wildlife habitat improvement, fire fuel reduction projects, noxious weed suppression, future foot bridge project, and trail mapping. Concern was raised by Horseshoe Lake Residents regarding truck traffic associated with forest thinning activities and potential impacts to the Horseshoe Lake County Road. Horseshoe Lake residents also oppose an idea raised by wildlife area management staff to allow overnight camping, once improvements are in place, at the two parking areas on the west side and south end of the wildlife area.

Contacts:

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Want to see the full plan?

Go to –
http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/