



**WELLS WILDLIFE AREA
2008 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



West Foster Creek Pond, 1990-2007.

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Wells Wildlife Area Management Plan (http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/) that provides management direction for the 8,170 acre Wells State Wildlife Area including six separate land management units: the West Foster Creek (1,050 acres), Indian Dan Canyon (4,412 acres), Central Ferry Canyon (1,908 acres), Bridgeport Bar (450 acres), Washburn Island (about 250 acres – Douglas County PUD owned) and Okanogan River Units (100 acres+). 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, 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 2007 accomplishments and performance measures for 2008.

Photos: The West Foster Creek ponds project included a series of four ponds gravity fed from West Foster Creek. The photos above show the upper pond soon after construction in the spring of 1990 and as it appeared in 2007. All surrounding riparian trees and shrubs were planted in the early 1990’s. Some were planted after the 1994 fire that destroyed much of the original planting and the surrounding sagebrush.

Updates/Changes

WDFW negotiated a settlement agreement with the Douglas County Public Utilities No. 1 (PUD), which will provide operation and maintenance funding for the Wells Wildlife Area during the term of the new Wells Hydroelectric Project License beginning on

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June 1, 2012 (“Off-License Settlement Agreement – Resident Fish Stocking and Wells Wildlife Area Funding”). This agreement provides \$200,000 per year (2007 dollars) to the WDFW for operation and maintenance, funding for equipment replacement and \$50,000 for the term of the license for fire related habitat restoration.

Changes in Strategies:

Strategy: Conduct ~~annual~~ habitat surveys. Identify and prioritize information and survey needs.

“Annual” will be removed from the “unfunded strategy” since habitat survey frequency may vary.

New Issues: See Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAG) input (page 5).

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.
6. Activities and projects funded by the PUD need to be consistent with the terms of the agreements between the PUD and WDFW.

Major Stewardship Accomplishment

None reported.

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 modify priority strategies for 2008.

2007 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2008 Related Activity/ Comments
Capture and band 150+/- California quail on adjacent un-hunted sites following the hunting season and relocate on the Indian Dan Unit.	Captured and banded 118 California quail and relocated these on the Indian Dan Unit.	Will continue trapping and releasing quail in 2008.
Survey hunting related public use through the hunter registration program to document use and wildlife population trends.	Completed	To be continued in 2008.

Grow 75 acres of irrigated grain on Bridgeport Bar and Washburn Island (wheat, barley, corn, millet etc.) and 30 acres of dryland wheat on the Indian Dan and West Foster Creek Units.	Grew 120 acres of irrigated wheat and 20 acres of corn on Bridgeport Bar and Washburn Island. Installed irrigation valves to irrigate an additional 5 acres with a wheel line on Bridgeport Bar. Updated ¼ mile wheel-line with new couplers.	To be continued in 2008.
Establish and irrigate about 50 acres of permanent nesting cover on Washburn Island.	Not completed.	Time and resources were limited. Part of this is planned for 2008.
Plant about 1,000 shrubs and trees. Irrigate and maintain 60 acres of woody plantings.	Irrigated and maintained 60 acres of woody plantings. Planted 150 cottonwoods.	Time and resources were redirected to more maintenance of the established woody plantings
Fill and maintain 24 bird feeders located throughout the area.	Completed	To be continued in 2008.
Maintain 11 gallinaceous guzzlers and 6 developed springs on the Indian Dan, Central Ferry and West Foster Creek Units as needed.	Not needed.	Not needed at this time. Will inspect these developments and maintain them as needed.
Service and maintain about 100 nest boxes and 50 goose nest structures on and in the vicinity of Wells Pool including twenty islands, the Bridgeport Bar, Okanogan River and Washburn Units	Completed.	To be continued in 2008.
Maintain 3 deer exclosures surrounding West Foster Creek shrub and tree plantings.	Completed	To be continued in 2008.
Release about 3,000 bio control agents to control knapweed, purple loosestrife and Dalmatian Toadflax primarily in the West Foster and Central Ferry Canyon	Not completed.	Sites for planned releases were inspected and had established populations of bio control agents. These and additional sites will be surveyed in the spring of 2008 and insects

units.		released as needed.
Mow about 25 acres of weeds on the West Foster Creek Unit and treat 85 acres of weeds with herbicides throughout the wildlife area.	Chemically treated 118 acres of miscellaneous weeds, 12 acres of diffuse knapweed, 8 acres of puncture vine, 36 acres of Dalmatian toadflax, and 4 acres of whitetop. Mowed about 27 acres.	To be continued in 2008.
Maintain one mile of firebreaks on the West Foster Creek Unit and two miles on Bridgeport Bar.	Completed	To be continued in 2008
Maintain 13 hunter registration booths, one office building, a shop and storage facilities. Maintain vehicles and equipment.	Completed	To be continued in 2008.
Construct one equipment shelter.	Not Completed	Funding and time did not allow. To be constructed in 2008 if funding allows.
Survey goose nesting on 20 islands and wetlands adjacent to Wells Pool. Coordinate with volunteer to survey kestrel and wood duck nesting.	Completed: The estimated Wells Pool gosling production in 2007 was 302. Island nesting near Bridgeport Bar was lacking due to raccoon predation.	To be continued in 2008.
Conduct fall wildlife population surveys on the Indian Dan and Bridgeport Bar Units using other WDFW staff and volunteers. Extent of survey is dependent on volunteer availability.	Not completed.	This survey requires 9 observers. Manpower was lacking due to scheduling conflicts. To be continued in 2008.
Cultivate about 10 acres on Bridgeport Bar to be planted to permanent cover in the spring of 2007.	Mowed and cultivated 30 acres. Did not plant these fields	Lack of funding and time limited this work.

The 2007 Wells Wildlife Mitigation annual report will be available from the PUD web site in July 2008:

http://relicensing.douglaspud.org/background/annual_reports/annual_wildlife_mitigation.asp

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.

Agency Objective: Protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.

1. Protect West Foster Creek channel and meadow from erosion:

Strategy: Protect West Foster Creek channel and meadow from erosion. Install rock structures and plant woody vegetation to prevent further erosion of the West Foster Creek channel and raise the water table. “Head-cutting” in the incised channel threatens the adjoining meadow and riparian habitat.

2. 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.*

3. Habitat Surveys

Strategy: Conduct habitat surveys. Identify and prioritize information and survey needs.

(“annual” was deleted)

2008 Performance Measures

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

1. Capture and band ~100-150 California quail off the wildlife area following the hunting season and relocate these on the Indian Dan and other Units as needed.
2. Survey hunting related public use through the hunter registration program on the Indian Dan, West Foster Creek, Central Ferry, Washburn Island and Bridgeport Bar Units to document hunting use and wildlife population trends.
3. Grow 75 acres of irrigated grain on Bridgeport Bar and Washburn Island (wheat, barley, corn, millet etc.) and 30 acres of dryland wheat on the Indian Dan and West Foster Creek Units.
4. Establish and irrigate about 50 acres of permanent nesting cover on Washburn Island.
5. Plant about 1,000 shrubs and trees. Irrigate and maintain 60 acres of woody plantings.
6. Fill and maintain 24 bird feeders located throughout the area.
7. Maintain 11 gallinaceous guzzlers and 6 developed springs on the Indian Dan, Central Ferry and West Foster Creek Units as needed.
8. Service and maintain about 100 nest boxes and 50 goose nest structures on and in the vicinity of Wells Pool including twenty islands, the Bridgeport Bar, Okanogan River and Washburn Units. Install 15 to 20 wood duck nest boxes.

9. Maintain 3 deer exclosures surrounding West Foster Creek shrub and tree plantings.
10. Release bio-control agents as needed to control knapweed, purple loosestrife and/or Dalmatian Toadflax primarily in the West Foster and Central Ferry Canyon units.
11. Mow about 25 acres of weeds on the West Foster Creek Unit and treat about 85 acres of weeds with herbicides throughout the wildlife area.
12. Maintain one mile of firebreaks on the West Foster Creek Unit and two miles on Bridgeport Bar.
13. Maintain 13 hunter registration booths, one office building, a shop and storage facilities. Maintain vehicles and equipment.
14. Survey goose nesting on and adjacent to Wells Pool (Lake Pateros). Coordinate with volunteers to survey kestrel and wood duck nesting.
15. Conduct fall wildlife population surveys on the Central Ferry and West Foster Creek Units using other WDFW staff and volunteers. Extent of survey is dependent on volunteer availability.
16. Cultivate about 10 acres on Bridgeport Bar to be planted to permanent cover in the spring of 2009.
17. Cultivate and seed 20 to 30 acres on Bridgeport Bar to permanent cover.
18. Work with the Bureau of Land Management and volunteers to survey bald eagle winter roosts and American White Pelican and double crested cormorant using Wells Pool.
19. Work with volunteers to increase monitoring of non-game species on the area. Emphasis will be placed on monitoring use of restored sites.

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 Wetzell	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 then 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 it’s 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 make the final call 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.

Jim McGee comments regarding the “unfunded strategies”:

“All of the studies proposed (e.g. assess conflicts between the management of listed species and other wildlife) answer regional questions and should be considered low priority for the wildlife area funding”.

WDFW will conduct these studies with non-PUD funds. These will also involve volunteers and other WDFW staff.

“Douglas PUD does not agree that the Wells Wildlife Area should be managed for listed species when a conflict exists between listed species and other wildlife. The wildlife area and/or individual units should not be managed exclusively for one species. Somewhere along the way, WDFW has forgotten that the Wells Wildlife Area was created to provide hunting recreation in the vicinity of the Wells Project not the management of listed species. WDFW has purchased large tracts of land in the vicinity of the Wells Wildlife Area specifically for the exclusively dedicated to listed species management”.

As stated in the Wells Wildlife Area Plan Executive Summary: “Management objectives for the Wells Wildlife Area include 1) protecting, maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitat (habitat for state and federally listed species, priority habitat, upland game habitat and waterfowl, mule deer and non-game wildlife habitat), 2) providing public access and recreation compatible with the area’s wildlife and habitat objectives, 3) satisfying the terms of the Wells Wildlife Mitigation Agreement.”

Additionally the plan states: “The primary management goal for the Wells Wildlife Area initially was to enhance and manage upland game habitat and associated recreation. This goal has broadened to include the preservation of habitat and fish and wildlife species diversity, the maintenance of healthy populations of game and non-game species and the protection and the restoration of native plant communities. It also includes providing diverse opportunities for the public to encounter, utilize, and appreciate wildlife and wild areas.”

“Douglas PUD questions the need for additional covered equipment storage”.

Storage is needed to protect equipment from the weather and vandalism. WDFW does not plan to use PUD funds to construct additional equipment storage.

“Douglas PUD also questions the utility of performing annual habitat surveys. Habitat surveys performed every ten years would be more reasonable”.

When funding becomes available, WDFW will evaluate how frequently these surveys need to be or can be conducted. “Annual” will be removed from the strategy.

It should be emphasized that, as stated in the management plan, “The Douglas PUD claims no mitigation responsibility for unfunded needs. It considers these agency rather than mitigation needs.”

Want to see the full plan?

Go to –

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

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