



WHATCOM WILDLIFE AREA 2009 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



2009 flooding of Slater Rd - Nooksack Unit

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2008 Whatcom Wildlife Area Management Plan

http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/ that provides management direction for the Whatcom Wildlife Area. The wildlife area is located outside Ferndale, Washington in Whatcom County, and includes 7 sub-units comprising 5,327 acres. The largest unit is located at the Lake Terrell headquarters.

The plan identifies resource needs and guides management activities 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 includes 2008 accomplishments, new issues and management strategies, and 2009 performance measures.

Updates/Changes

The 2008 operating budget remained the same as previous years, although changes may occur in the 09-11 biennium due to state and federal budget shortfalls. A significant statewide reduction in WDFW staff and funding is expected. Jim Edwards’s Environmental Education Specialist position at the Tennant Lake Interpretive Center has been identified as a possible cut, and if so, will be eliminated July 1st 2009. More details will be available after the Washington State Legislative budget is released in late April. Further

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impacts to quality and quantity of natural resource protection and public services provided on the Whatcom Wildlife Area are, as yet, unknown.

Manager Winegeart successfully applied for two Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grants – a \$100,000 Non-motorized Off-road Vehicle Access (NOVA) to design a new Lake Terrell fishing pier, and a \$325,000 State Lands Development (SLD) grant for the first phase of pier installation. Funds become available in summer 2009.

A new parcel of land was added to the Tennant Lake Unit when the Nelle family donated 8.6 acres of wetland habitat to WDFW. The parcel lies on the east side of Tennant Lake, directly adjacent to existing WDFW lands. The property can be accessed from a gate at the intersection of Hovander and Smith roads, then down an easement that runs along the railroad corridor.

New Issues

The 2008 pheasant hunter car counts for the Whatcom Wildlife Area showed a 20% increase over 2007, possibly due to land use changes on the Skagit Wildlife Area. The Skagit WA is expected to lose an additional 200-300 acres of pheasant hunting land in 2009, and Skagit hunters will likely shift to Whatcom sites. WDFW is looking for replacement release sites in Skagit County, and Manager Winegeart is working with British Petroleum to find additional Whatcom release locations. Also, as part of statewide budget reductions the entire pheasant program is being evaluated for ways to reduce agency expenses. Potential cost-saving alternatives include increasing card fees, reducing bird numbers, or shifting to a private producer. Final decisions will depend upon the Washington State Legislature's 09-11 budget.

Lake Terrell will undergo a 3-foot drawdown in spring/summer 2009. The lake is lowered once every five years to invigorate shoreline vegetation, which provides important cover and forage for fish and wildlife. During the drawdown months WDFW will control noxious weeds (purple loosestrife), maintain island vegetation, improve boat launches and remove boat hazards.

The Nooksack River levee sustained additional damage after the January 2009 flood. High water created a shallow notch in the levee crest and caused existing scour holes to erode an additional 1-2 feet further into the levee. A cooperative repair project has been scheduled with Whatcom County Public Works for May 2009. Project will entail filling scour holes, covering the areas with geotextile fabric, and reseeding with grass. WDFW will cost share with the county and pay 30% of the estimated \$30,000 project cost.

Slater Road, the border between the Tennant Lake and Nooksack units, has a series of integrated projects planned for 2009. The Port of Bellingham will be finalizing a restoration proposal, and hopefully begin work in fall 2009. This project is mitigation for wetlands lost in the Bellingham Airport expansion and will entail controlling reed canarygrass, planting trees and shrubs, and creating open water to improve wetland function and waterfowl habitat on WDFW lands. In addition to the Port's project, Whatcom County Department of Transportation is hoping to begin the Slater Road Raising project if Federal stimulus funding comes through. The project will elevate the road and add large culverts to reduce flood closures on this major thoroughfare. A third project proposed for the area has been submitted by the Whatcom County Parks &

Recreation Department, and entails improving the levee trail from Slater Road north to Hovander Park as part of the Coast Millennium Trail system.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

In 2008 WDFW and the Whatcom CAG identified the need to replace an old fishing pier at Lake Terrell, and the structure sustained further ice damage in winter 2008. Manager Winegeart successfully applied for two Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grants – a \$100,000 Non-motorized Off-road Vehicle Access (NOVA) grant for planning, and a \$325,000 State Lands Development (SLD) grant for the first phase of installation. RCO funding will become available in summer 2009, and WDFW will hire an engineering consultant to design the project and obtain permits. Planning will take roughly one year to complete, and the first phase of installation will occur in late 2010. Another SLD grant will be sought in 2010 to provide any additional funding needed to fully extend the new pier.

A cooperative land use agreement was signed with the Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Department (P&R), which allows both P&R and WDFW to perform maintenance and stewardship work on each other's lands. Because P&R employs a maintenance crew, this is a tremendous benefit in the upkeep of the co-managed Tennant Lake/ Hovander Park lands, and WDFW's Pine/Cedar Lakes unit trail.

Due to numerous public requests for identification of recreation opportunities, WDFW staff created a series of maps displaying the locations of hunting blinds and boat launches on all Whatcom WA units. In addition, the WDFW web page has been updated to show the numerous recreational opportunities offered on WDFW lands throughout Washington.

Vegetation management continues to demand a significant portion of wildlife area staff time. Over 1,000 acres were monitored for noxious weed encroachment, and staff controlled weeds on more than 600 acres using integrated pest management practices. Species controlled included purple loosestrife, yellow flag iris, scotchbroom, Japanese knotweed, and reed canarygrass. Annual planting of waterfowl food plots continued, and 160 acres were planted into cereal grains by wildlife area staff and a contracted sharecropper. Total acres planted in 2008 were reduced from previous years due to a significant increase in fertilizer and fuel costs. Also, an unusually wet spring left standing water in some fields late into the year, and these areas could not be planted. All agricultural fields were sprayed for noxious weeds.

Over 6,000 students or members of the public participated in educational programs offered by the Tennant Lake Interpretive Center in 2009, and it is estimated the center hosts over 57,000 visitors each year. Jim Edwards provided an excellent outdoor education program comprised of field trips and school outreach classes, nature day camps, a Young Naturalist program, and numerous family outdoor education programs. This may be the last year of this program due to budget and staff reductions.

Status Report of 2008 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 2009.

2008 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2009 Related Activity/ Comments
Plant 180 acres of cereal grains for wintering waterfowl (190 acres corn, 72 acres barley)	Completed at reduced level (158 acres). Corn reduced to 98 acres due to wet soil conditions. Terrell barley was reduced to 40 acres due to rise in fertilizer cost. British Petroleum (BP) planted 20 acres of barley.	2009 corn planting is expected to be slightly higher - 110 acres, but Lake Terrell barley will remain at 40 acres due to budget restraints. BP still expected to plant 20 acres of barley.
Monitor and/or control weeds on 1,000 acres	Completed. Mowed 7 acres reed canary grass, 5 acres alders. Sprayed 21 acres Scot's broom, 25 acres purple loosestrife, and acres knotweed. Cut flower heads off scattered yellow-flag iris. Monitored weeds on 2000 acres.	Lake drawdown will increase purple loosestrife. Coordinate with WDFW weed crew to control. Increase reed canary grass mowing to 50 acres to improve hunting/ recreation and reduce reed canary grass vigor.
Monitor photo points on Marietta Slough restoration project	Not completed. Delay in agency shift to new GPS/ mapping software.	Points will be revisited when WDFW completes shift to Vista software (2009?)
Work to increase summer flows in Terrell Creek without negatively impacting Lake Terrell	Completed. WDFW Habitat staff and Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA) installed a new siphon system to allow more regulated summer spill.	Continue summer flow enhancement in Terrell Creek
Monitor success of Lake Terrell island plantings	Three islands were identified as lacking vegetation	Further planting will take place in 2009
Maintain one mile of fence line on Lake Terrell unit to protect reserve from trespass	Completed	Continue annual maintenance as necessary
Pursue opportunities to create an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) hunting site at the Nooksack unit lagoon.	Two agencies looked at restoring the lagoon, but were put off by the cultural resource issues. WDFW staff submitted capital project request for work sometime in the future.	Investigate alternative solutions that do not involve ground disturbance.

Coordinate local Washington Waterfowl Association's (WWA) construction/maintenance of 42 hunting/viewing blinds	WWA conducted work parties and maintained 42 blinds. WA manager attended WWA meetings and assisted as necessary.	Continue cooperative efforts with WWA. Repair blinds damaged in January '09 flood and plant cover vegetation near exposed Lake Terrell blinds.
Coordinate with Ducks Unlimited to install a water control structure at Intalco unit	One control structure completed, but cost more than anticipated. Applied for Washington State Migratory Bird Stamp funds to finish second structure.	Install second water control structure on the Intalco 40-ac pond in summer 2009.
Survey dog-walkers twice per month	Completed, but at reduced rate (once per month). Contacted 44 people. Results: 50% had been walking on state lands less than three years, indicating an increasing trend. 22% said they would actually use feces bags if a trash can were provided at the parking lot. Most popular route was Tennant Lake to Slater Road.	Try a 1-yr pilot of placing trashcans at Lake Terrell and Intalco parking lots. Discontinue if excessive dumping of household trash occurs.
Restrict dog use on Nooksack unit. Post leash areas.	Posted signs indicating dogs and people must stay on levee trail February-August. Dogs must be on leash during this time.	Mow the off-leash dog area north of Slater road to control weeds and make it more appealing to dog walkers.
Survey for bats in Marietta barn prior to demolition.	Not completed – cold spring made bat migration erratic.	Will attempt survey in spring 2009.
Post Lummi Island property	Completed	Re-post as necessary
Coordinate with BP to open more land to hunting and recreation	Ongoing	Discussing options to re-open planted area along Grandview Road. Requesting expansion of hunting on Pt Whitehorn.
Create maps illustrating dog areas, hunting blinds, and other recreation features	Partially completed. Maps of hunting blinds and boat launches were created. Still waiting for system migration to use mapping software.	Create maps of dog walking areas, archery range, etc. once software is available (2009?).

Coordinate with local sportsman's club to maintain archery range	Assisted Custer Sportsmen in maintaining Intalco range.	Improve course safety and design. Continue cooperative maintenance.
Apply for grants to meet various strategies as needed	Successfully applied for two grants. Total \$425,000.	Implement grant project (Lake Terrell fishing pier).
Coordinate 30-40 volunteers releasing 4,000 pheasants during hunting season	Utilized approximately 30 volunteers in 2008 pheasant release.	Continue to utilize volunteers. NOTE: pheasant program may be modified in 2009
Coordinate with other agencies	Ongoing - worked with Port of Bellingham on mitigation, Whatcom County Parks and Recreation on a land use, and Whatcom County Flood Department on levee repairs.	Continue cooperative work as issues arise.
Create action plan for Terrell dam resource impact issues	Partially completed. Discussed options with NSEA. Lack of ESA species limits funds. Spiny-ray impact on chum unknown	Investigate option of new Lake Terrell dam structure, and grants to fund upgrade.

New Strategies

The wildlife area plan identifies strategies or activities that address the Agency's goals and objectives, why the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species presence, and public issues and concerns. The following updated strategies have been added in response 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.

Issues identified in italics were provided by the Citizens Advisory Group. 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: Provide Stainable Fish and Wildlife-related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible with Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats.

1. Provide and manage resource-compatible hunting and fishing opportunities

- A. Strategy: Create an ADA accessible waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing site at the Nooksack unit vegetable washing lagoon. Timeframe: 2009
Funding source: Migratory Bird Stamp funds, Washington Waterfowl Association match, or possible RCO grant
- B. Strategy: Provide wheelchair accessibility at the Intalco unit archery range
Timeframe: 2009
- C. Strategy: Replace boardwalk at Tennant Lake. Estimated cost \$800,000
- D. Strategy: Raise two bridges along slough that block boat access to Tennant Lake. Estimated cost \$250,000

Agency Objective: Work with Tribal and Local Governments and Private Landowners to Ensure Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Management Objectives are Achieved.

1. Develop and coordinate fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation projects.

- A. Strategy: Continue negotiations with British Petroleum to open some portion of the 1,100-ac Pt. Whitehorn property to public hunting.
Timeframe: 2008-2010

Agency Objective: Reconnect with Those Interested in Washington's Fish and Wildlife.

1. Market the Whatcom Wildlife Area to a broader audience

- A. Strategy: Create maps detailing wildlife area boundaries and features such as dog-walking areas, trails, archery range target locations, etc. Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: state operating funds
- B. Strategy: Fund naturalist program and a full-time naturalist position at the Tennant Lake Interpretive Center (if position eliminated).
Estimated cost: \$60,000 annually

Agency Objective: Provide Sound Operational Management of WDFW Lands, Facilities, and Access Sites.

1. Maintain facilities, structures, and physical improvements

- A. Strategy: Assist WDFW Engineering staff with planning new Lake Terrell fishing pier. Timeframe: 2009-10, Funding source: state operating funds
- B. Strategy: Pursue grant funds to repair the Pine/Cedar Lakes unit boardwalk.
Timeframe: 2009
- C. Strategy: Coordinate Nooksack levee repair project with Whatcom County Public Works. Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: State Capital funds
- D. Strategy: Coordinate Marietta barn removal with WDFW Construction staff.
Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: State Capital funds
- E. Strategy: Improve boardwalk at Pine/Cedar Lakes unit. Estimated cost \$15,000.
Timeline: 2010

Agency Objective: Protect, Restore and Enhance Fish and Wildlife Populations and Their Habitats.

1. Maintain and improve nesting and wintering habitat for waterfowl

- A. Strategy: Coordinate with Ducks Unlimited to install a water control structure on Intalco unit 40-acre pond. Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: Ducks Unlimited, Duck Stamp Funds.

2. Maintain and improve fish populations

- A. Strategy: Conduct a three foot drawdown on Lake Terrell to invigorate emergent plant growth and improve fish and wildlife cover and forage. Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: state operating funds
- B. Strategy: Investigate options for replacing Lake Terrell dam to improve fish passage. Timeframe: 2009-2010.

3. Protect, restore and enhance wetland and riparian habitats

- A. Strategy: Assist the Port of Bellingham in implementation of the Slater Road mitigation project. Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: Port of Bellingham

- B. Strategy: Pursue land acquisition to protect wetlands adjacent to Tennant Lake.
- C. Strategy: Purchase last 3-ac parcel of privately owned lakebed at Lake Terrell
- D. Strategy: Provide co-op funding to County or City to buy out properties in Marietta and allow levee breaching on the Nooksack unit.

Agency Objective: Minimize Adverse Interactions between Humans and Wildlife

1. Monitor and manage public access to minimize negative effects on fish and wildlife

- A. Strategy: Coordinate with British Petroleum to realign safety zones where appropriate. Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: State operating funds
- B. Strategy: Evaluate cost effectiveness of maintaining year-round portable toilets at the Intalco and south Slater Rd parking lots. Timeframe: 2009, Funding source: State operating funds

2009 Performance Measures

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

- 1) Plant a minimum 160 acres of cereal grains for wintering waterfowl use
- 2) Monitor and/or control weeds on 1,000 acres
- 3) Coordinate weed control during Lake Terrell drawdown with WDFW weed crew
- 4) Continue monitoring 20 photo points when GPS/mapping software is updated.
- 5) Plant three of Lake Terrell's islands that lack cover around hunting blinds.
- 6) Pursue grant opportunities to create an ADA hunting site on the Nooksack unit lagoon
- 7) Release 4,000 pheasants with the assistance of 30-40 volunteers
- 8) Coordinate with WWA to maintain 42 hunting blinds and 4 boat launches at Lake Terrell, Tennant Lake, Nooksack and Intalco units.
- 9) Coordinate use and maintenance of Intalco archery range with Custer Sportsmen.
- 10) Survey for Townsend's big-eared bats in Marietta barn prior to summer demolition
- 11) Coordinate with Ducks Unlimited to install a second Intalco unit water control structure.
- 12) Coordinate with British Petroleum to open newly acquired land to public hunting.
- 13) Create maps of wildlife area boundaries and features such as dog areas, archery range etc.
- 14) Assist WDFW Engineering staff with planning of Lake Terrell fishing pier grant project
- 15) Coordinate with other land managing agencies

Citizens Advisory Group Input

A Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held April 1, 2009 to review management progress, address any new issues, and gather input on existing issues. Those in attendance included: Joel Macari, Doug Channel, Steve Lagerway, Jenifer Schwindt, Evan Hamilton, Jim Edwards, Joe Meche, Ken Miller, Gene Watson, Paul Woodcock, and Shana Winegeart.

CAG Top 10 project list for 2009 in order of priority (all currently unfunded)

- 1. Fund Tennant Lake Interpretive Center programs and Naturalist position
- 2. Reinstate WA Managers' limited commission to increase enforcement on State lands

3. Replace Tennant Lake boardwalk
4. Improve/replace Lake Terrell dam
5. Create ADA hunting/wildlife viewing site at Nooksack unit lagoon
6. Raise bridges over Tennant slough
7. Fund improvements on the Intalco archery range to make course wheelchair accessible
8. Pursue land acquisition to protect wetlands adjacent to Tennant Lake
9. Purchase 3-acre parcel of privately owned Terrell lakebed
10. Provide co-op funds to County or City to buy out properties in Mariett.

The following new input/issues were addressed at the CAG meeting:

Issue: If WDFW pursues property in Marietta, the project should include cleaning up sewage in the Silver Creek drainage.

Response: WDFW must assess any property it purchases and will look into any sewage contamination or leaking pipes prior to purchase.

Want to see the full plan?

Go to –

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

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