

Blue Mountains Wildlife Areas

2019-2020 Management Plan Update



View of the Blue Mountains

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [2019 Blue Mountains Wildlife Areas Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, as well as ongoing restoration efforts and public recreation opportunities at the Asotin Creek, Chief Joseph, and W.T. Wooten wildlife areas. Every 10 years, WDFW develops a process for revising the management plans for each wildlife area to identify new management priorities and actions. In between plan revisions, the update focuses on recent accomplishments over the last two years.

Management Highlights

Winter Lands Access Closure, Spring 2019

During the extreme winter of 2018-2019, the wildlife areas were closed during the spring of 2019 to all human entry, with a few exceptions such as fishing and river access areas. Big game were in extremely poor shape, and with an increasing number of “antler hunters” every spring on the landscape it was appropriate to not allow human entry on the wildlife areas, as that presence would add additional pressures to a struggling deer and elk population.



No entry sign on the wildlife area

Weatherly Unit Forest Thinning (*Goal #2: Protect and improve habitat for fish and wildlife*)

In 2020, a forest thinning project removed approximately 300 acres of diseased trees to improve forest health and wildlife habitat. The unit will be replanted with ponderosa pine in spring 2022.



Logging at Weatherly before and after

Cougar Creek Road Seasonal Closure (*Goal #4: Protect wintering wildlife from human disturbance*)

In 2019, WDFW worked with Asotin County Road Department and neighboring landowners to seasonally close Cougar Creek Road from Dec. 1 until March 31 of each year to protect wintering wildlife from motorized vehicles. This closure is already in place on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. Private landowners still have access, and the area is still open to the public for non-motorized use.

Cassidy Land Donation Grand Ronde River Access

In 2020, local resident Mr. Cassidy donated land along the Grande Ronde River to WDFW that would be managed for river access and a popular steelhead fishery. A plaque was placed on a bluff overlooking a popular fishing hole.



WDFW employees after placing the plaque

New Issues

February 2020 Tucannon River Flood Event

On Feb. 6, 2020, the Tucannon watershed experienced a rain-on-snow event which caused the Tucannon River to reach flood-stage. The event caused mudslides to cover the Tucannon Road and buried Campground 9 on the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area. The high river levels washed out the Watson Lake footbridge and several parts of the Tucannon Road, including a section on the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area. The Watson Lake footbridge was replaced in November 2021 and rehabilitation work is ongoing to repair the Tucannon Road. The Tucannon Road is owned and maintained by the U. S. Forest Service, and they are waiting for Federal Highway funding to make the needed repairs.



Tucannon River flowing down the Tucannon Road at Campground 4 on the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area (Feb. 7, 2020)

2020 COVID Shutdowns

The COVID pandemic caused the closing of public lands access across Washington. Signs were posted on the wildlife area at entry points to public use areas, informational kiosks, and access sites. There were disruptions in work due to safety protocols and employee sickness.