

# North Olympic Wildlife Area

## 2021-2022 Management Plan Update



This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [North Olympic Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities at the North Olympic Wildlife Area. Every 10 years, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (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**

#### **Protection Island Post-Fire Management (*Strategy 3.1.4*)**

In August 2021, a 25-acre fire occurred on the Zella Schulz Unit, located on Protection Island in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The fire largely impacted disturbed areas of brome and field mustard. In the spring of 2022, post-fire restoration included planting 3 acres with native forbs and

grasses. Weed control treatments occurred in the fall of 2022. While dry weather patterns and logistical challenges of island work have led to limited success, continued work from WDFW staff and contracted crews will help to improve this important bird habitat, which includes one of the largest rhinoceros auklet colonies in North America. Upcoming work plans include transplanting native dune grass to previously burned areas of the island, and ongoing management of annual invasive weeds.



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### **Weed Control Successes at Bell Creek (*Strategy 3.3.1*)**

The Bell Creek Unit near Sequim has several patches of poison hemlock and teasel, both considered noxious weeds in Clallam County. During this planning cycle, repeated treatments have helped reduce the weed populations. Mowing removed thatch and seed heads, and treatments of seedlings and rosettes with herbicide in the spring, plus manual removal, has helped the recover the native ecosystem. Coordination with the Clallam County Weed Board has helped target these infestations. Seasonal work by WDFW's Montesano Weed Crew has implemented regular treatments when plants are emerging in the spring.



### **Riparian Restoration at Discovery Bay (*Strategy 3.1.1*)**

Ongoing collaboration with the North Olympic Salmon Coalition (NOSC) has continued to boost riparian habitat quality in the Discovery Bay Unit. The land between Salmon and Snow creeks is being actively restored by regular tree and shrub plantings, improving ecosystem services and reducing the invasive Reed canary grass. NOSC coordinates with local schools to incorporate planting designs and field days into classroom lessons, giving unique opportunities for seventh grade students to learn about habitat restoration. This work is helping to improve the riparian habitat important for the federally threatened Hood Canal summer chum, monitored regularly by WDFW Fish Program staff.



## New Issues

### Duckabush Estuary Restoration Update (*Strategy 3.1.6*)

A major estuary restoration project is in the works at the Duckabush Unit. Updates on the project can be found at this [site](#). The project would reconnect the Duckabush River to adjacent wetlands by modifying local roads and elevating Highway 101 onto a bridge. WDFW is working in partnership with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group. This project will greatly enhance the productivity of the ecosystem, creating more habitat for out-migrating juvenile salmon. The design phase of the project is ongoing; it is planned to reach the 65% design milestone in late 2023, and the 100% design is anticipated near the end of 2024, with construction potentially beginning in 2025. As a cost-shared project between the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state, the majority of funding for this project has come through the Washington State Legislature. This project will also improve the parking area and trail needed to access the mouth of the estuary and may allow for an updated kiosk and vault toilet.





### **Bell Creek Oaks Working Group (*Strategy 3.1.7.2*)**

A portion of the Bell Creek Unit has been improved through an ongoing restoration project for the past 20 years, with around 2,000 Garry oaks planted by volunteers starting in 2003. The area around Sequim historically contained oak woodlands and prairies, and this project has aimed to restore those ecosystems and the services they provide. The next steps of this project are being developed through a working group of WDFW, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, local partners and volunteers. The working group is focused on restoring the understory plants by reducing invasive pasture grasses and transplanting native shrubs. The passion from local advocates for oak restoration at this unit has brought continued enthusiasm and dedication to this project and should lead to success.



### **Tarboo Unit Thinning (*Strategy 3.3.2*)**

An upcoming project is planned to improve 20 acres of forest health in the Tarboo Unit, near the mouth of Dabob Bay. Commercial thinning, in collaboration with the Northwest Watershed Institute, would allow for a shift from a fir-dominated forest to a cedar and Sitka spruce forest. A portion of the unit was successfully thinned in 2020. This project will allow for the 20 acres of healthier understories to form with more light coming through the canopy. The prescription will include thinning about 40% of the Douglas fir while retaining the largest firs, and all other tree species will be left untouched.

