

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area

2021-22 Wildlife Area Management Plan Update



Swans on Blue Lake.

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [2017 Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts and public recreation opportunities at the Sinlahekin 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

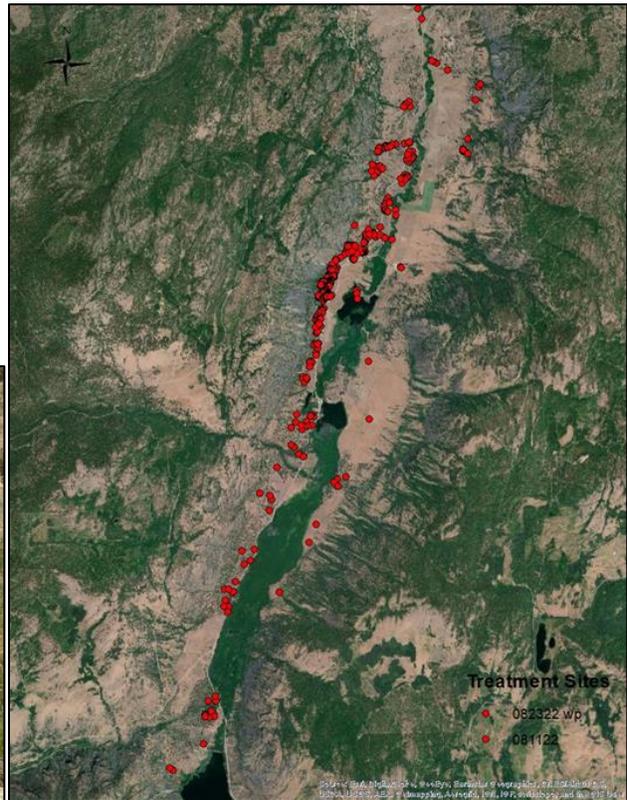
Noxious Weed Management (Goal #1, Objective B). Wildlife area staff have been busy with the constant emergence of new and old weed species across the entire Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. Approximately 15,000 acres have been inspected, and in 2021, approximately 650 acres were treated. Scotch thistle and rush skeletonweed are a significant problem on the Chiliwist Unit. This 5,000-acre unit requires constant vigilance throughout the spring, summer, and fall months. This requires treating plants at the rosette stage and cutting seed heads from older plants.

Other accomplishments include:

- Increased control of St. John's wort and Dalmatian toadflax through treatment.
- Released thousands of biocontrol agents to control diffuse knapweed and Russian Knapweed.
- Continued treatment of multiflora rose and bladder senna.
- Treated puncturevine and spiny sandbur infestations.



Scotch thistle patches.



Bladder senna and multiflora rose treatments.

Maintain Fences and Gates (Goal #1, Objective C). Old fencing on the Chiliwist Unit was rolled up and taken into the metal recycler. Some of the fencing material was from the Carlton Complex Fire fence rebuild. Boundary fence was also rebuilt around the inholding on the Chiliwist Unit. Approximately 6,500 feet of old fence on the Mcloughlin Falls Unit was removed. This included sheep fencing that was intermixed with barb-wire fencing. It was rewarding to see these hazards removed both for wildlife and recreationists in the area. On the Sinlahekin Unit, continued maintenance of fence occurred along the county road, which included approximately 1 mile of fence rebuild in the Fish Lake area and 3/5 mile in the Hahn Meadow Area.



Repair of boundary fence.



Chiliwist fence removal.

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration - Habitat Restoration Projects (Goal #1, Objective C).

Sinlahekin staff have been thinning areas within the boundaries of the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project. Statewide Forester, developed the thinning prescription to remove conifers less than a 7-inch Diameter at Breast Height (DBH). The project is being done to achieve a desired future condition of ponderosa pine savanna with a mature stand stocking density of 20 to 25 trees per acre, leaving ponderosa pine and western larch for species diversity. Douglas Fir should be a minor component of the stand.



Tree thinning on Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

Sustain individual species through habitat and population management actions, where consistent with site purpose and funding (Goal 2 Objectives A and B, Goal 5, Objective A, Goal 6, Objective A).

Wildlife Surveys

Deer – WDFW biologists conducted spring deer surveys within the Sinlahekin Unit for both mule deer and white-tailed deer.

Wolf - Monitored the Loup Loup wolf pack through winter track surveys and remote cameras.

Western gray squirrel – no surveys were conducted this year, opportunistic sightings were documented.

Sinlahekin Campground Renovations Project (Goal 7) – Barrier rock has been placed at various campgrounds on the Sinlahekin unit to minimize off road and better define improved campsites. In many areas old barb wire fencing was used as a barrier, but since has been removed. Twenty aspen trees were planted last fall in various sites within the campground to provide future shade. Staff also planted more aspen this spring at those sites. This was completed using funds obtained from a Recreation Conservation Office grant for campground renovations.



WDFW staff placing barrier rock.



Barrier Rock Fish Lake.

Community Outreach (Goal #8, Objective E) – Okanogan High School ecology class came out to the Driscoll Island Unit for their annual field trip. During their visit they conducted water quality tests, sampled, and identified invertebrates. Assistant Manager Riley was able to help the students identify the invertebrates they collected. The students appreciated being outdoors and got some hands-on learning and field experience. As a requirement for their class students looked for and identified invertebrates in the Okanogan/Similkameen Rivers. They also took water samples to calculate dissolved oxygen, ph, temperature, velocity and turbidity of the river. This has been a great location for the students, they can see how the Similkameen River influences the Okanogan.

Oroville High School Students came out for a field day on the wildlife area to learn various management techniques used to restore wildlife habitat. Students were taken on a hike through recent prescribed burn units on the wildlife area, and they learned how prescribed burns are developed and how to prepare dry forest habitat for these burns.

Tonasket Outreach Program spent a day at Driscoll Island. The students spent time identifying plants, they did a scavenger hunt along with identifying invertebrates. The students ranged from kindergarten to 12th grade. Assistant Manager Riley and Manager Wehmeyer enjoyed the day helping the students learn new things and answered many questions about the wildlife area.

Thank you to Okanogan Conservation District collaborating these field days with the local high schools. These days have been an excellent learning opportunity for the students. These events provide the opportunity for students to get out in the field and learn more about our public lands. Along with the variety of ways that the lands are managed for the benefit of wildlife.



Above Okanogan High School Ecology Class.



Oroville High School Students learning about prescribed fires.

New Issues

Restore and protect the integrity of priority ecological systems and sites (Goal #1, Objective E) – Recreation Conservation Office State Lands Restoration Grant – The grant has been used to help restore shrubsteppe on the Methow Wildlife area and on the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. Staff have been completing herbicide treatment of the sites that will be seeded in the fall of 2023. The sites were abandoned dryland agriculture fields that have become infested with noxious weeds and non-desirable plant species.

Riparian Restoration-

New Acquisition - McLoughlin Falls West (Goal #1) was acquired during 2022 and added approximately 339 acres to the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. The purchase was part of a collaboration with the Colville Confederated Tribes who acquired 388 acres to the north. Wildlife area staff are working on building an access site to the property from Crumbacher Road, south of Tonasket, with the hope of building a small parking lot to help keep vehicles from parking on the side of the county road.



Moose on Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.



Gray Squirrel on Sinlahekin- Photo Wehmeyer