

# Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area

2012-2022 Management Plan Update



*Monarch caterpillar on showy milkweed in the Windmill Ranch Unit.*

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [2020 Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts and public recreation opportunities at the Sunnyside Snake River 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**

### **Sunnyside-Snake River Wetlands – Improve Wetland Function (Goal/Objective 1.C).**

Wildlife area staff continued to improve wetland health and function. Obstructions were identified and removed within the irrigation structures and equipment was used to clean the

supply channel to Johnson Wetland, improving irrigation flows. Vegetation was mowed to create more open water for waterfowl prior to the fall hunting season, and WDFW staff coordinated with the agricultural lessee to remove dense stands of Reed canarygrass. The lessee swathed and bailed the grass and was able to use it for livestock feed. Removing the vegetation was highly beneficial for improving flow in waterways and maintaining open water, in contrast to mowing and leaving large amounts of debris on the ground. Select wetlands were seeded with mixes of smartweed, buckwheat, and millet to compete with undesirable vegetation, as well as provide forage for migratory waterfowl.



**Johnson Wetland following Reed canarygrass harvest – Sunnyside Unit.**

**Upland Vegetation Management-Aerial Herbicide Applications (Goal/Objective 1.D).**

Wildlife area staff have continued to implement the annual weed management plan in upland and post-fire restoration areas. Aerial spraying has increased efficiency by allowing for significantly larger treatment areas, as well as reducing logistical challenges associated with ground-spraying and mechanical weed treatment methods. An additional 580 acres of upland restoration areas were treated in the Byron, Windmill, and Mesa Lake units by aerial spraying. This method was highly effective for the treatment of annual grasses and other noxious weeds.



**Aerial spraying of a post-fire restoration area in the Byron Unit.**

**Windmill Ranch and Mesa Lake Beavers– Management of Nuisance Beavers**

**(Goal/Objective 1.G).** Wildlife area staff designed and installed three beaver deceivers within the Windmill Ranch and Mesa Lake Units. The design consists of a four-sided box constructed with fencing panels. The box is anchored to t-posts and is suspended on the surface of the water against water control structures. The beaver deceivers have been highly effective in preventing the obstruction of water control structures and culverts with debris from nuisance beavers. These structures have alleviated frequent flooding, as well as greatly reduced workload from manually clearing debris.



**Beaver deceiver structure installed at the 7-acre pond outflow in the Mesa Lake Unit.**

## **New Issues**

### **New Opportunities – Ducks Unlimited Collaboration**

State Duck Stamp funds will support expansion of wetlands at Mesa Lake, Windmill Ranch, and Sunnyside Units. This collaborative effort with Ducks Unlimited would create up to 200 acres of additional wetlands.

### **Sunnyside Bat Monitoring**

Wildlife area staff have assisted Diversity Division biologists with monitoring, trapping, and sampling of bats in the Sunnyside Headquarters Unit. The maternity colony in Sunnyside is being used as a control site for statewide white nose syndrome monitoring efforts.



*Sampling Sunnyside Bats.*



*Bat pups observed during emergent count.*

### **Shrubsteppe Restoration – Response to Fire at the Byron Unit**

In August 2022, a major fire destroyed shrubsteppe habitat in the Byron Unit. Staff members have been spraying and controlling invasive weeds in preparation for fall shrub plantings. Staff members and volunteers will be planting approximately 2,000 shrubs in fall 2023.

### **Sunnyside Dumping/Vandalism**

Wildlife area staff have been faced with the challenge of increased dumping along roadways and wildlife area access sites. In addition to frequent dumping, vandalism of parking areas and kiosks is on the rise.



*Dumping in the Sunnyside Headquarters Unit.*