

Colockum Wildlife Area

2021-2022 Wildlife Area Management Plan Update



Big horn sheep. Photo by Erik Brown.

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [2006 Colockum Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts and public recreation opportunities at the Colockum 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

Colockum Forest Restoration (Goal 1)

In 2022, WDFW initiated a 950-acre forest restoration project in the upper Colockum Creek drainage. This project consisted of thinning and removing tree species from overstocked stands ranging in elevation from 3,000 to 5,300 feet. Upper Colockum Creek is one of the few drainages on the Colockum Wildlife Area that has not recently been impacted by wildfires, and tree densities averaged 250 trees per acre on WDFW lands. This project reduced tree densities down to about 30-35 trees per acre in targeted areas, while also leaving untreated “skips” in each unit to provide habitat diversity and cover for wildlife species such as elk and mule deer. Removing smaller diameter trees and leaving larger, more fire-resistant trees is intended to more closely resemble a historic forest structure that can better withstand occasional wildfires as well impacts from insects and disease. By the end 2022, WDFW had treated 648 acres and removed an estimated 51,276 tons of wood. This project continued into 2023. Thanks go to WDFW foresters who were responsible for designing a thinning project with creative, wildlife-friendly objectives. Their work included identifying property boundaries, marking leave trees and riparian zones, handling the public bidding process, and monitoring the contract loggers selected to complete the project.



Examples of pre-thinning and post-thinning forests on Colockum Wildlife Area.

Forest Health, Prescribed Fire Treatment (Goal 1)

In the fall of 2022, WDFW completed a 275-acre prescribed fire treatment in the South Fork Colockum Creek drainage. This timber stand was thinned in 2006 but heavy logging slash remained. WDFW staff successfully submitted for Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) funding to conduct the burn. Preparation work included writing a burn plan, completing cultural resource surveys, installing containment lines, and laying out water hose for containment. In the fall of 2022, the WDFW Prescribed Fire Program Team -- along with Department of Natural Resources and private contract fire crews -- treated the site with prescribed fire, culminating a long-planned habitat enhancement to this site. The process of using prescribed fire as a management tool to accomplish specific habitat objectives is complex. Some aspects taken into

consideration include topography, fuel moisture, smoke management, permitting and property boundaries and adjacent landowners. Thanks go to the WDFW Prescribed Fire Program staff for meeting the treatment objectives and completing this project safely with no injuries or fire escapes.



Firefighter using drip torch to light prescribed fire and prescribed fire consuming logging slash and other ground fuels while leaving mature trees unharmed.



Containment fire lines being reseeded post-fire and a view of the same Colockum timber stand, six months after being treated with prescribed fire.

Recreation Management, Winter Non-Motorized Recreation (Stemilt-Squilchuck Recreation Plan) (Goal 3)

In cooperation with the Chelan County Natural Resources Department, WDFW began implementing the Stemilt and Squilchuck Basin Non-Motorized Winter Recreation Area described in the 2019 Stemilt-Squilchuck Recreation Plan. Signs were designed and printed, and a local winter non-motorized recreation group volunteered to post the signs. By the end of 2022 about half of the area is now signed.



Sign printed for newly established winter non-motorized recreation area, Stemilt and Squilchuck Basins.

Recreation Management, Green Dot Road Maintenance (Goal 3)

Colockum Wildlife Area staff continued to maintain the extensive Green Dot Road system by posting signage, maintaining readerboards, clearing culverts and repairing washouts. After storms, staff typically drives roads and clears downed trees or slides.



Downed tree being removed by staff.



Large snag blocking Colockum Green Dot road.



Colockum staff updating Green Dot readerboards with new signage.

Signage was updated on the readerboards to appear more welcoming to the public, clarify rules of the area and mesh better with regulatory signage of WDFW's sister agency, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. This is important since WDFW and DNR lands are checkerboarded in some areas of the Colockum Wildlife Area.

NEW ISSUES

Mission Ridge Ski Area Timber Thinning, Ski Lift Installation and Snow-Making Reservoir Expansion.

Many changes are planned for the Mission Ridge Ski Area. WDFW owns approximately 50% of the property at Mission Ridge, and leases it to the private entity operating the ski area. Some of

the projects being considered on WDFW lands includes a timber thinning project to improve forest health and reduce risk of wildfire, installation of one new ski lift referred to as “Bowl 4/Chair 5”, and expansion of an existing snow-making reservoir onto WDFW lands. Extensive environmental review and planning will be involved as these future projects are considered.

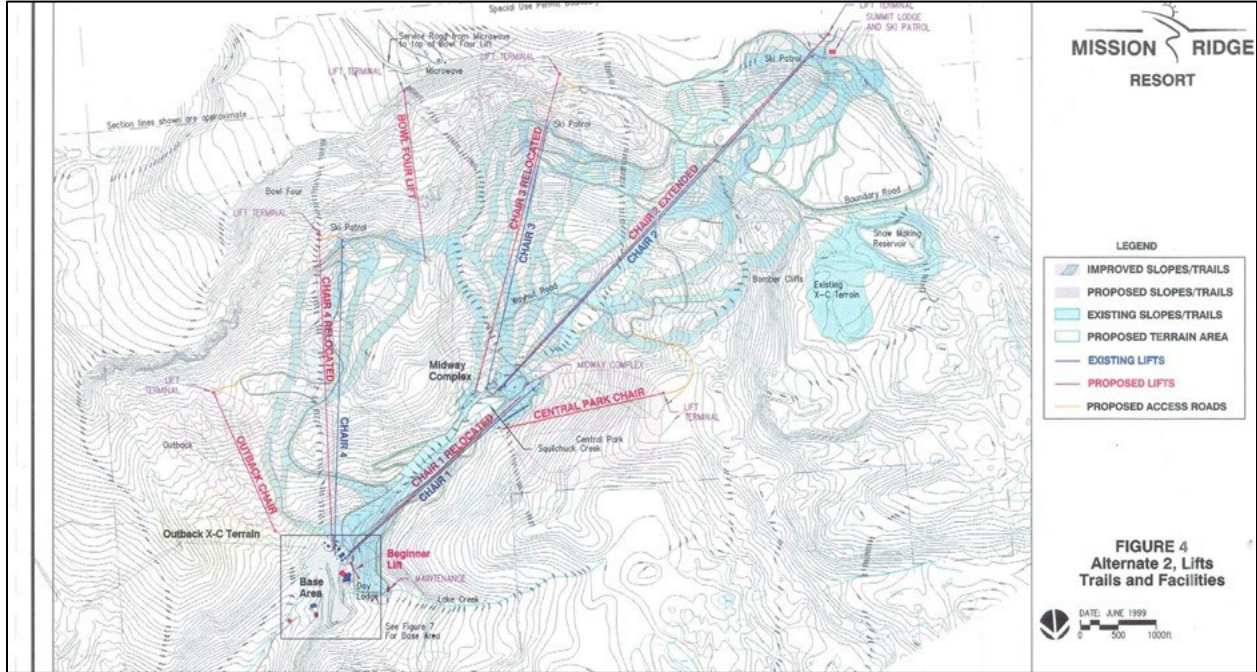


Diagram of the Mission Ridge Ski Area, with proposed Bowl 4/Chair 5 lift and snow making reservoir shown.