

## **Updates to W.T. Wooten sections of management plan**

### **UPDATES / CHANGES**

Tucannon Lakes: The 8 lakes on the WT Wooten WLA are in need of serious repair. The dams have needed repair for a number of years, but no funding has been provided to complete the work. A subcommittee of the District Team put together the *W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan*. The subcommittee also submitted a package of projects to the Capital Request process for funding to begin repairing the issues with the lakes. Funding was given to relocate 2 campgrounds out of the floodplain, and the money remaining from that project will be used to begin the feasibility study for the lake reconstruction projects.

Tucannon Power Line: WDFW is still looking for funding options to bury the power line from the Hatchery to Camp Wooten. The project is also still included in the *W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan*.

Beetle Kill: A beetle infestation is causing a majority of the mature ponderosa pine trees on the wildlife area to die. The hazard trees in and around the campgrounds have been removed as they die to reduce the chance of anyone being injured. The remaining dead and dying trees will be left on the landscape for wildlife habitat trees. WDFW will assess the Camp Wooten and the surrounding area and remove the hazard trees as necessary.

### **NEW ISSUES**

Campground Relocation: There are still 2 campgrounds that are located in the floodplain next to the Tucannon River. Those 2 campgrounds will be relocated in spring/summer 2014. Campground 6 is being moved across the road and up on the hill from where it currently is located. The old Campground 6 will be decommissioned and rehabilitated into native vegetation and riparian area. Campground 9 is being moved and split into 2 new campgrounds. One will be in the old log landing north of the mouth of the Little Tucannon, near where WDFW previously had a campground. The second campground will be located just south of the current Campground 9. The old Campground 9 will be decommissioned and rehabilitated into native vegetation and riparian area. The end result will be 11 campgrounds on the wildlife area.

Tucannon River Large Wood Projects: The Habitat Program has received BPA funding for summer 2014 to place engineered log jams in the Tucannon River from the Hatchery Bridge to Spring Lake. AWAM Dingman is working with the Columbia County Conservation District to place engineered log jams in the Tucannon River from the O'Shaughnessy property through the Russell Unit of the Wooten Wildlife Area. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation has gotten funding for summer 2014 to use a helicopter to place LWD in the Tucannon River from the mouth of the Little Tucannon River to Camp Wooten.

## MAJOR STEWARDSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Food Plots: The food plot that was created in 2011 was replanted in 2013 using seed donated by the Walla Walla Chapter of Pheasants Forever. Several white-tailed deer were seen using the food plot throughout the year, and pheasants could be found in the food plot in the fall.

## STATUS REPORT OF 2013 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2013 Performance Measures	Status of Performance Measures	Progress/ 2014 Related Activities/ Comments
Irrigate pastures	Headquarters and Hartsock fields irrigated throughout the summer.	Continue in 2014
Establish and maintain food plots (15 acres)	Hunters Dream and Wildlife Mix seed mixes were planted in the Hartsock fields. Turnips were planted over the existing Hunters Dream seed mix at the Headquarters.	Continue irrigating food plots in 2014. Look at making food plot at Headquarters smaller. Determine if food plots need replanted in 2014.
Maintain 8 lakes	Water level and inlet/outlet structures were maintained weekly. The <i>W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan</i> was written in 2012 to provide direction for restructuring the lakes and reconnecting the floodplain.	Continue maintenance in 2014. Continue subcommittee work. Start feasibility study for lake reconfiguration projects.
Maintain Spring Lake dike, repair damage caused by vegetation	DOE conducted a dike inspection in fall 2011, but results have not yet been received.	Look over DOE dike inspection results in 2014 and make necessary repairs.
Maintain four mineral sites	Sites were replenished with new mineral blocks in 2013.	Continue maintenance in 2014
Maintain information kiosks	WLA information was posted throughout the year. New kiosks were built and placed in each campground (except the 2 campgrounds to be relocated in 2014).	Continue posting WLA activity information. Install kiosks in the new campgrounds after construction.
Maintain 50 miles of boundary fence	Boundary fences were checked, fixed where needed, and maintained in 2013.	WLA staff will continue regular maintenance
Maintain western half of elk fence (10 miles)	Elk fence was checked, fixed where needed, and maintained in 2013.	Maintenance will continue in 2014
Maintain or improve 2 seeps on Abels Ridge	The spring at the head of McGowan Canyon was tapped and a new trough installed in August 2011.	Maintain McGowan spring in 2014. Work on improving another seep in 2014.
Reestablish food	Hunters Dream seed mix was planted in the	Food plots will be

plot on Abels Ridge	food plots on Abels Ridge in October 2008, but the planting failed. The food plots were replanted in October 2009 with a red clover mix.	monitored in 2014 and replanted if necessary
Modify Wooten campgrounds	Funding has been secured to relocate 2 campgrounds out of the floodplain in summer 2014.	Campground maintenance will continue in 2014. Three new campgrounds will be constructed to replace the 2 that are being closed.
Monitor existing CREP project	Monitor riparian planting success and maintain existing CREP project.	Continue monitoring in 2014.
Annually spot treat 50 acres of weeds along roadsides and access sites	WLA staff sprayed weeds along Tucannon Road, Hartsock Grade, Blind Grade, and Cummings Creek road. Also treated Hartsock fields, Blind Grade fields, Blue Lake field, and campgrounds. RMEF grant funds were used to aeriually treat 570 acres of yellow starthistle in Cummings Creek.	Continue weed treatments in 2014. RMEF grant was not funded due to miscommunication within RMEF. Will apply again next year. Applied for NWTf grants funds in 2014.
Seek funding to bury the Columbia REA power line	Burying the power line will reduce the chances of another fire on the Wildlife Area. An RCO grant request form was submitted in January 2012.	Continue looking for matching funds to bury power line. Power line burial was included in the <i>W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan</i> .
Maintain 12 guzzlers and 6 troughs	Several of the guzzlers were damaged during the School fire and others have been damaged from high winds.	This task will be continued in 2014. Need to find location information and determine if some guzzlers should be replaced or removed.
Revisit 33 post-fire monitoring photopoints	Photopoints were established following the 2005 School Fire to monitor vegetation regeneration. WDFW has started visiting the photopoints every other year. Photopoints were visited in 2012.	Visit sites in May 2014
Maintain/install 25 bluebird boxes and 10 wood duck boxes	Two wood duck boxes were built and installed near Deer Lake in 2009. One old wood duck box was refurbished.	Continue this task in 2014

## NEW STRATEGIES

Objective: Improve and Maintain Fish Populations

1. Work cooperatively with other watershed managers to identify and prioritize fish passage barriers on the wildlife area.
2. Improve one passage barrier annually as funds allow.
3. Identify and enhance one riparian area annually as funds allow.
4. Look for options to add large woody debris to streams, and do so as time and funds allow.
5. Identify ways to decrease or minimize soil erosion and/or soil delivery to streams. Close roads, reseed roads, or rock roads as necessary to achieve goal.
6. Continue work with the subcommittee to conduct public meetings and get input and comments on the *W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan*.

Objective: Provide Sound Operational Management of WDFW Lands

1. Pursue funding and support to bury the power line that runs from the Tucannon Hatchery up to Camp Wooten.
2. Look at options to utilize wildlife friendly fence when replacing existing boundary fences. Remove old and/or unnecessary barbed wire fences.
3. Implement a permanent annual sensitive period closure in Cummings Creek to reduce stress on wildlife during critical time periods.

Objective: Protect, Enhance and Restore Function and Structure of Native Habitats

1. Biennially revisit 33 photo-monitoring sites to assess post-fire and post-logging habitat recovery.
2. Identify and restore upland habitats that are in poor condition due to past land practices. Rehabilitate one area annually as funds allow.

## **2014 PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

- 1) Irrigate Headquarters and Hartsock pastures in summer months
- 2) Maintain 8 lakes by monitoring inlet/outlet structures twice weekly and regulating water levels.
- 3) Maintain 50 miles of boundary fence
- 4) Maintain 10 miles of elk fence. Look at ways to provide a fire barrier along fence.
- 5) Maintain or improve 2 seeps on Abels Ridge
- 6) Stock mineral blocks at four sites on Abels Ridge
- 7) Maintain 12 guzzlers and 6 troughs
- 8) Maintain/install 25 bluebird boxes and 10 wood duck boxes
- 9) Annually spot treat 50 acres of weeds along roadsides and access sites
- 10) Seek funding and support to bury the power line between Tucannon Hatchery and Camp Wooten
- 11) Identify and prioritize fish passage barriers on the wildlife area. Address at least 1 barrier annually as funds allow.
- 12) Identify and prioritize riparian areas on the wildlife area that can be enhanced. Address at least 1 area annually as funds allow.
- 13) Identify and restore upland habitats that are in poor condition due to past land practices. Address at least 1 area annually as funds allow.
- 14) Continue working with subcommittee to conduct public meetings and get input and comments on the *W.T. Wooten Floodplain Management Plan*.
- 15) Construct 3 new campgrounds and close 2 campgrounds in the floodplain. Restore the closed campgrounds to native vegetation and riparian habitat.

## **CAG INPUT**

Issue: How long will the feasibility study on the lakes take?

Response: The study will hopefully be done on each lake as the funding becomes available and will be part of the design and planning process. There is not a definite timeline at this time as to how long it will take.

Issue: Why can't the Department pay for weed control work without depending on grant funds?

Response: There is not enough money in the current operating budgets to fund weed control efforts without cutting funding for some other task or project. The grant funds are used to purchase the herbicide and when possible to pay for the helicopter time to spray the larger infestations that are difficult to get to.

Issue: What kind of the feedback does the Department get from the public on Large Wood projects?

Response: The Department gets both positive and negative feedback from the public on the Large Wood projects. Some people are very supportive of the efforts to improve salmon habitat and other people are very against it and feel it is a waste of money.

Issue: How close will the Tucannon River come to the spring branch on the Russell Unit? I am bothered by the potential of the river to migrate and disturb the spring branches on WDFW lands.

Response: There is the potential for the Tucannon River to overtake the spring branch on the Russell Unit. Historically the river moved around on the floodplain and captured and released spring branches as it moved.

Issue: Why does the old road bridge by Spring Lake have to be removed? Why can't it just be left where it is?

Response: The old road bridge at Spring Lake is not currently used and is extra infrastructure pinching the Tucannon River at that point. Removing the old bridge will remove part of the pinch point and allow for high flows to expand out across the floodplain after passing under the existing bridge.

Issue: What species of trees will be used for the Large Wood projects? Why pine? It will rot in a few years.

Response: Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir trees will be the primary species of trees used for the Large Wood projects. These species of trees are available in the large sizes needed to create the engineered log jams in order to make them stable enough to withstand high flows. The trees will rot over time, but being submerged in the river will slow down the rotting process.

Issue: WAAC agreed a quarterly newsletter mailed out would be the best way to keep the group informed of what is occurring on the wildlife area.

Response: A quarterly newsletter will be tried out during the coming year and will be revisited at the next WAAC meeting.

## Riparian Habitat

Riparian areas are defined by WDFW as *the area adjacent to aquatic systems with flowing water (e.g., rivers, perennial or intermittent streams, seeps, springs) that contain elements of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems which mutually influence each other.* They include the entire extent of the floodplain and the entire extent of vegetation adapted to wet conditions.

Riparian areas are described in WDFW's Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) as a priority area. A special report was compiled by WDFW regarding Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Habitats: Riparian (Knutson and Naef 1997), which states the following:

- 1) Riparian areas cover a relatively small area yet they support a higher diversity and abundance of fish and wildlife than any other habitat,
- 2) Riparian areas provide important fish and wildlife breeding habitat, seasonal ranges, and migration corridors,
- 3) Riparian areas are highly vulnerable to alteration, and have important social values, including water purification, flood control, recreation, and aesthetics.

Wildlife occurs more often and in greater variety in riparian habitats than in any other habitat type. Approximately 85% of Washington's wildlife species have been known to use riparian habitat. Riparian areas provide these critical functions:

- 1) Shading and cooling water in summer and warming water in winter
- 2) Filtering sediments and purifying water
- 3) Storage and conservation of water (e.g. raising or maintaining a high water table)
- 4) Stabilization of stream channels (e.g. vegetation roots hold banks together and allow uncut banks to develop and maintain narrow width to depth ratios for stream channels)
- 5) Nutrient (vegetative, animal) inputs to the aquatic system
- 6) Downed woody debris which creates pools that offer deep, low velocity, protected waters with hiding cover, over-wintering habitat, and juvenile rearing
- 7) Provides travel and migration corridors
- 8) Moderates stream volumes by reducing peak flows during flooding and by storing and slowly releasing water into streams during low flows

Riparian habitats are highly sensitive to environmental change, but also respond well to restoration efforts after damage has occurred. There are 7 major land use categories that affect riparian habitats: forest practices, roads, agriculture, grazing, urbanization, dams, and recreation and Knutson and Naef (1997) provide riparian management recommendations for these major land use activities. Their recommendations are made to protect *riparian habitat areas*, which are "areas that exhibit the full range of habitat functions necessary to support riparian-associated fish and wildlife." The Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Management Plan will consider and/or implement these recommendations to protect and enhance riparian habitat areas on the wildlife areas.