



OCTOBER 15, 2021

Floods, COVID, Drought, and Fires

The last 2 years have been a heck of a roller-coaster ride in general, but definitely on the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area and the Tucannon. In February 2020 there was the flood event that washed out part of the Tucannon Road and caused mudslides that plugged culverts, buried campgrounds, and blocked the Tucannon Road. Work is ongoing to repair all of the damage from that event.

Fall of 2020 brought us the Rattlesnake Fire which was fairly small in total acreage (less than 500 ac) but resulted in delaying the reopening of the Tucannon Road that had been closed from the flood damage.

Then we had COVID which resulted in a complete shutdown of the all state-owned lands for a brief period.

The year 2021 brought us severe drought conditions which resulted in the lightning-caused Lick Creek (80,421 ac) and Green Ridge(43,694 ac) wildfires that again shut down the Wooten Wildlife Area for several months while the Fire

Camp was occupying the wildlife area. After the camp moved out the Wildlife Area joined the rest of the state-owned lands in only being open for day use for a period until the fire danger subsided enough to allow for camping to again be allowed.

Which brings us to now, Fall 2021. The Wooten Wildlife Area is fully reopened to the public for camping and recreating. Rehabilitation work is being done on fields the Fire Camp used and dozer lines that were put on the wildlife area. Thankfully less than an acre of the Wooten Wildlife Area was actually burned by the wildfires.

Here's to hoping 2022 is nicer to the Tucannon!!!!



The Green Ridge Fire from Campground 9

Wooten Floodplain Management Plan

The Wooten Floodplain Management Plan (FMP) did not receive any funding for the 21-23 biennium in the Capital Projects budget. This is not the news that the group had hoped for as that means progress on the FMP will come to a grinding halt until future funding can be obtained.

With the funds remaining from the 19-21 biennium the FMP team had GeoEngineers move forward on the feasibility study and design for dredging and reshaping Deer Lake, and the potential for creating a new lake for fly-fishing only.

The project has run into a couple snags, other than lack of funding, and the future direction is still being determined.

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PROTECT AND
PERPETUATE FISH,
WILDLIFE AND
ECOSYSTEMS WHILE
PROVIDING
SUSTAINABLE FISH
AND WILDLIFE
RECREATIONAL AND
COMMERCIAL
OPPORTUNITIES.

Large Wood Projects

Phase 1 of the large wood project planned for the section of Tucannon River from the Hatchery bridge to the fish trap was scheduled for construction this summer. However, due to the Green Ridge and Lick Creek fires closing the area the project was shut down shortly after work began.

Phase 1 is now planned for summer 2022 and Phase 2 for summer 2023.

Weed Spraying

WDFW received the RMEF grant again this year to continue treating noxious weeds using a helicopter. The funds were used to spray 370 acres on the Wooten Wildlife Area this spring to continue to try to control the yellow starthistle infestation.

Elk Calf Mortality Study

WDFW started a study this spring/summer to look at elk calf survival. A total of 125 elk calves were captured and fitted with radio-telemetry collars. The collars were tracked daily and mortalities were investigated to attempt to determine the cause of death. Collared elk have experienced high levels of predation, predominately from cougars. Five collars were lost to material failure, which was lower than expected.

Bighorn Sheep Update

The current population size is 23 sheep, with 8 lambs surviving out of the 12 born Spring 2021. Two ewes died this fall from the blue-tongue virus, which is a first for the Tucannon herd.

Bear Hair Snare Study

Barbed-wire corrals were constructed and lure consisting of cow blood and fish oil was placed inside the corrals. Remote cameras were hung on the corrals to capture video of visiting wildlife. The corrals were supposed to be checked every 10 days and all bear hair on the barbed wire collected. However, the Green Ridge Fire shut down access to the area and about half of the snares were only checked twice. Five remote cameras were lost to the fire. No results from the hair collection are available as of this newsletter.

Wolf Update

There are currently 4 wolf packs in southeast Washington: Touchet, Tucannon, Grouse Flats, and Butte Creek. New wolf activity has been documented in an area north of the Touchet pack territory and west of the Tucannon pack territory. For wolf updates, visit the WDFW website:

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

[Gray wolf updates | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#)

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The W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area consists of 16,481 acres in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. The main valley contains the Tucannon River, along which are located 8 man-made lakes which were constructed in the 1950s. The lakes are stocked with hatchery raised rainbow trout for a put-and-take fishery. There are 11 campgrounds located on the Wildlife Area.

The area was historically a major big game wintering location and lies adjacent to National Forest lands. The bulk of the land purchases occurred from 1941-1944. The elk fence was constructed in the 1960s.

Current management objectives and problems are similar to past goals and problems which include providing maximum winter-range forage conditions while meeting recreational use demands. At the present time there is a harvest season of some type taking place 12 months of the year within the boundaries of the wildlife area.



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