



METHOW WILDLIFE AREA 2009 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



**Mule deer buck on the MWA
Rendezvous Unit**

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2009 Methow Wildlife Area (MWA) Management Plan http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/ which provides management direction for over 32,000 acres of Washington Fish and Wildlife land in Okanogan County. The plan identifies needs and guides activities on the area based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Mission of “*Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife*” and its underlying statewide goals and objectives as they apply to local conditions.

Plans are updated annually as habitat and species conditions change, as new regulations and scientific knowledge develop, as public issues and concerns evolve, and as administration of wildlife areas change. This management plan update also includes 2008 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2009.

Updates / Changes

The winter of 2008-2009 had lower than average temperatures and below average snowfall, with heaviest precipitation during the month of December. Snow depths did not exceed 2 feet on most of the winter range, leaving deer forage available throughout the winter. Spring thaw came early to the Methow. Spring arrived earlier than usual with bare ground exposed on higher elevation south slopes showing in February. The Methow Valley had higher than normal precipitation (snowfall) in March which helped make up for earlier deficits.

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Acquisitions

In early 2009, the WDFW purchased approximately 423 acres of upland shrub steppe and riparian habitats. This acquisition is located on the southern border of the MWA's Golden Doe unit. The new property provides key critical mule deer habitat and improves recreational opportunity and access to the MWA's Golden Doe unit.



The Richner Acquisition for the MWA Golden Doe Unit

Grants

The wildlife area successfully received a grant for shrub-steppe habitat restoration on historic dryland agricultural fields; this Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grant is for \$314,000 from 2007 to 2010. We successfully received a Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project (WHIP) grant for \$30,000 to restore a wetland and install protective fencing on the Big Buck Unit of the wildlife area. We received grant funding from Department of Ecology for \$6,000 for litter cleanup on the wildlife area.

Partnerships

Methow Backcountry Horsemen partnered with WDFW to cleanup and install 15 new fire-rings in Beaver Creek Campground. WDFW is a leading partner with Washington State Parks (WSP) in helping to design and provide trails and equine camping facilities near Pearrygin Lake State Park. WDFW and Pacific Biodiversity Institute (PBI) partnered on Rare Plant and Vegetation Surveys on 2,000 acres of the Methow Unit of the wildlife area, totaling approximately 10,000 acres now surveyed between WSP and WDFW land in 2006-2008.

WDFW is key partner in an effort to trap, hold, and relocate nuisance beavers to prime, unoccupied beaver habitat in the upper reaches of the Methow watershed. This effort is in conjunction with the US Forest Service, Methow Conservancy, and the Pacific Biodiversity Institute in order to enhance summer instream flows, restore and increase historic wetland habitat, and restore critical habitat for fish and wildlife. The project has received funds totaling over \$90,000 from Department of Ecology, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the EcoTrust Foundation.



Rough-legged Hawk on the MWA Fraser Unit

Staff

Our workforce in 2008-2009 includes: full time Manager, a full time Assistant Manager/ Maintenance Mechanic, a seasonal Biologist I, and a 6-month seasonal Habitat Technician. On October 1st, Tom McCoy took over as manager of the Methow Wildlife Area. He moved here from the Yakima area where he was a consulting rangeland ecologist/hydrologist and former watershed restoration manager for the Yakama Tribe. Our volunteer crews have been active as ever and we thank everyone who has participated in our seeding, planting and cleanup events!

Wildlife

Prairie falcons and Golden eagles have been observed once again at the Methow Wildlife Area as well as the elusive Lookout wolf pack, which resides predominately within the confines of the

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, and has been spotted moving through one of the wildlife area units.

New Issues

In late 2008 staff worked closely with the Washington Water Trust and Department of Ecology to resolve significant water right issues on the Big Valley, Patterson Ranch, and Judd Ranch parcels. We believe that an equitable resolution was reached that resulted in all unused water rights being placed into 5 year temporary trust. WDFW retained the option to take these rights out of trust when beneficial irrigation projects become available.

The capitol funds allocation that paid for the Big Valley center pivot irrigation project had approximately \$225,000 remaining to pay for additional irrigation efficiency projects in FY 2009. Wildlife area staff have worked out a project/contract proposal with WDFW Business Services (the fund administrating body) to upgrade irrigation facilities at Big Valley south, Lloyd Ranch, Wildlife Area Headquarters, Beaver Creek and the Judd Ranch. These projects will improve irrigation/withdrawal efficiency and refurbish existing systems so that they can be used for future restoration projects/agricultural leases.

Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and WDFW land exchange proposals are currently at a virtual standstill. Plummeting timber prices have influenced the value ratio (i.e. rangeland to timber land) of the proposed exchange to the point that DNR and DFW are waiting to see what happens in the coming year to determine how to proceed. For updated information see:

http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Topics/LandExchanges/Pages/amp_exc_wdfw_land_exchange.aspx



Major Stewardship Accomplishments

We successfully used agricultural farming practices to weed and prepare the South Pipestone and Martin fields for scheduled fall seeding with native grass species in 2009. They will be planted with a locally adapted variety of Methow bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue that we collected and had contract grown. In the fall of 2008, the Lower Cougar road and Headquarter fields were seeded. Other fields that were earlier sown in 2006 and 2007 appeared to be doing quite well. The planted native grasses have since established and grown in significant size, but weed treatments are continually needed to combat perennial weed problems. We plan to follow up on these sites with further plantings of shrubs and forbs, and then assess their biodiversity at a later time using long-term monitoring plots.

We continue to control, inventory, and map weed populations on the wildlife area. In 2009 emphasis will be placed on the wildlife area's popular right-of-ways. In 2008, approximately 350 acres of weeds were treated using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) control methods, which include mechanical farming, mechanical hand pulling, release of biocontrols, and chemical treatments. New noxious weed identification and suggested treatments informational public signs have been developed, in partnership with the USFS, and will be posted on the MWA kiosk boards and entrances to wildlife area's units in 2009.



Cougar creek culvert replacement shrub plantings

Multiple fish barrier culverts were replaced or removed in 2008. During the summer of 2008 the Cougar Creek culvert was replaced with a bottomless arch. The disturbed area was rehabilitated with native shrubs and grasses, which will be monitored for establishment in 2009. The large culvert on Pearrygin Creek at the Lloyd Ranch access point was also replaced in November. This was a

large flat bottomed pipe that took nearly a week to install. A smaller fish barrier culvert just upstream

was also removed during that project. Preliminary reclamation measures were taken following construction, and additional measures will be carried out in the spring of 2009. One other fish barrier culvert was removed in 2008. It was located at the Ramsey Creek Campground. In addition to the removal of this particular culvert, WDFW engineering abandoned approximately two miles of roads.

WDFW staff conducted an analysis of livestock grazing permit areas, and focused on long-term monitoring plots and vegetation surveys throughout the wildlife area. Infrastructure, stocking rates, long-term ecological integrity, and deferred rotations continue to be discussed and implemented with permittee and Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) assistance.

Fencing requires continuous maintenance on the wildlife area. In 2008, the wildlife area staff repaired approximately 2 miles of boundary fence between the USFS and WDFW properties on the Methow unit. An equal amount of perimeter and riparian boundary fence was repaired on the Rendezvous unit although there is still more work scheduled to reinforce these existing structures. In preparation for the future irrigation project at Big Valley South, three miles of internal fence line was removed and the materials recycled.

Water rights were temporarily donated to the Washington State Trust Water Rights Program to secure instream flow protection for water associated with the Judd Ranch (Texas Creek WL Unit, Methow River) and Patterson Place (Methow WL Unit, Beaver Creek). The water temporarily donated to Washington Water Trust (WWT) is to be used exclusively to enhance instream flows for fish maintenance and enhancement, recreational uses, or preservation of environmental and aesthetic values (“Trust Water Rights”), as allowed under RCW Chapters 90.03, 90.42, and 90.54. A clause was included in the contract that allows WDFW to remove water rights from WWT if funding and necessity become available.



Ponderosa pine thinning at the Bear Creek Campground

In the fall of 2008, the Methow wildlife area staff started the process that will return the Pearrygin Forest to productivity and health. The aim of the project is to restore wildlife habitat that has been lost, because of 90 years of fire suppression. The condition of the forest is currently a thicket of even-aged ponderosa pine of at least a thousand stems per acre. Outside of the USFS Research study location, the forest has not received any forest management. Today, understory plant community do not exist, only a desert of accumulating pine duff and branches. Older mature pines (>150 years) within the stand are now threatened and vulnerable to the outbreak of pine beetle infestations. The Methow wildlife area

has other forestland in similarly poor condition. The staff’s first step towards forest recovery was to remove several hundred trees per acre. A more detailed forest prescription is forth coming that will reduce those numbers even further. Funding is currently being sought in what hopes to become a larger project.

Status Report of 2008 Performance Measures

Key performance measures are identified each year to monitor progress and identify any issues that might interfere with planned priority activities. This information will be used to delete, add or alter priority strategies for 2008.

2008 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2009 Related Activity/ Comments
Follow-up treatment on the Rendezvous unit fields (Riser Lake and Gunn Ranch Rd.) that were seeded with native grasses in 2006.	Rendezvous fields were treated for weeds in 2008. seed.	Follow-up weed control treatments and spot seeding will continue in 2009.
Continue intensive weed treatment and planting of native shrub-steppe habitat in historic agricultural fields	Pearrygin Flats fields were treated for weeds. The Lower Cougar Road and Headquarter fields were seeded in 2008.	Pipestone and Martin fields were plowed and fallowed in 2008 and will be seeded in 2009.
Stop ALL hounds tongue seed production on Rendezvous Unit, Texas Creek Unit, and Little Cub Creek area with spot spraying and hand pulling crews.	Hounds tongue infestation still heavy on these units after hand pulling and spot spraying in 2007. Sites were hand pulled and treated for weeds in 2008.	Continue treatments in 2009 and evaluate methods.
Document and Control Dalmatian toadflax populations on the MWA units. Use biological controls when available.	New Dalmatian toadflax population was found and treated on Big Buck in 2008. Will plan to release more biological controls on wildlife area in 2009.	These efforts along with monitoring will continue in 2009.
Investigate opportunities for research projects for the wildlife area that would enhance fish and wildlife populations or fish and wildlife habitat.	Possible research may include studying bitterbrush and aspen in order to rejuvenate vigor and palatability on the wildlife area, investigating understory response after forest treatments, or the development of agricultural techniques that effectively restore upland habitats with minimal costs.	Pursue grant funding
Monitor golden eagle and cliff-dwelling raptor nesting success in appropriate areas on MWA.	Monitored raptor nesting success and documented results in Heritage database	Continue to monitor and gather information about additional areas of nesting habitat and success.
Survey, repair, and/or remove	Removed 3 miles of fence at	Ongoing

5 miles of fenceline per year.	Big Valley South. Repaired 2 miles of USFS/WDFW boundary fence between Pearrygin Creek and Bear Creek. Repaired 5 miles of boundary fence on Rendezvous Unit.	
Work with Coordinated Resource Management Program to establish relationships with other agencies and local ranchers and to continue improving range management.	Continue to support and reach out to local agencies for improving adaptive management plans in the Methow Valley.	MWA will implement CRM recommendations for 2009.
Rehabilitate Lloyd Ranch's native flora. Remove unneeded structures on the property.	Begin the restoration of the field north of the Vander-Yacht agriculture lease.	Restoration will begin in 2009. The work will be funded through the WWRP grant. Cleanup work will continue on this property.
Continue to develop and find funding for additional signs at key locations on the MWA.	Partnership with USFS's Therese Ohlsen to fund information signs regarding noxious weed populations.	Noxious weed signs are ready and will be posted in 2009.
Continue to promote and prioritize the development of an updated public map for the wildlife area. Update the WDFW MWA web page.	Not funded or prioritized to-date. First run of map is for kiosk signs. Web page is under construction.	Kiosk signs with local map attached were installed in 2008. Continue to promote Methow Wildlife Area to WDFW headquarters as a priority area for the hardcopy map development.
Install monitoring plots and conduct vegetative monitoring surveys to establish baseline data for long-term landscape changes to upland and riparian areas.	Six new long-term monitoring plots were installed and vegetation surveys completed in 2008.	Add four more long-term monitoring plots and conduct 4 more vegetation surveys in 2009.
Conduct photo points and vegetation monitoring to determine effects of cattle exclusion at Peters Puddles.	Photo points taken in 2005	Revisit site in 2010 to retake photos.
Continue rare plant surveys on the Methow Unit of the MWA.	In 2008, 1800 acres of the MWA were surveyed. <i>Cryptantha spiculifera</i> , listed as Sensitive by Washington DNR Natural Heritage	Will continue the rare plant surveys in 2009.

	Program was found near Pipestone canyon.	
Continue to document treatments and effects of treatments on white-top, and learn from all control measures including chemical, grazing, and mechanical farming techniques.	The following sites were treated in 2008: Riser Lake agricultural fields, Campbell Lake intersection with Lester Road, and lower Pipestone Canyon restoration site.	Ongoing
Work with local volunteers and Okanogan County Historical Society to develop management plans to safely preserve designated historic structures on MWA.	Set up temporary use permit with Schaffer Museum to remove and relocate the Selde barn off Hwy 20 Fraser Creek Unit.	Ongoing
Work with USFS Methow Ranger Station to outline long-term fire and fuels management partnership on WDFW land adjacent to USFS boundaries. Initiate a Forest Practice application to continue the forest thinning operations at the Pearrygin forest, and later Cougar Flats.	Meetings with fire ecologists to outline and discuss potential cross-boundary fuels reduction treatment grants. Areas of highest importance: upper Rendevous, Pearrygin Forest, and Cougar Flats. High priority should be given to save the older pines (>150 yrs) and the remaining aspen stands from further pine encroachment.	Continue to partnership and apply for grants with USFS. Upon approval of the FPA, resume thinning the Pearrygin forest.
Resolve the water right issues between the Department of Ecology and the WDFW and continue to work with agricultural lessees to develop and implement water efficiencies and habitat restoration goals in each area.	An agreement has been tentatively reached between involved parties to put the wildlife area's unused water rights into a five year temporary trust.	Ongoing
Upgrade irrigation facilities at Big Valley south, Lloyd Ranch, Wildlife Area Headquarters, Beaver Creek and the Judd Ranch.	Reallocated a portion of the capitol funds for Big Valley south center pivot irrigation project to other irrigation needs on the MWA.	Ongoing
Complete WHIP grant and/or search out additional funding for Scott Canyon (Big Buck) habitat protection and wetland restoration.	Awarded \$30,000 for Scott Canyon wetland and riparian habitat improvements and rehabilitation.	Fencing and weed control work to start in 2009.

Assist with Road Management and Abandonment Plans (RMAP) and culvert replacement activities. Complete and submit all RMAP Forest Practices Application (FPA) documentation to Department of Natural Resources.	Completed Cougar Road culvert replacement and Ramsey Creek culvert removal and road abandonment in 2008.	Replace the Cub Creek culvert and remove the Johnson Creek culvert and abandon road in 2009.
Return the Fraser Creek unit road to a drivable condition in 2009.	Funding source found. Engineering surveyed the damage and made recommendations in 2008. Awaiting the results from the cultural resource survey before proceeding.	Lacey Shop should begin work in 2009.
Work with the USFS to evaluate and determine if new hunting opportunity can be provided for disabled hunters. Continue to provide two areas of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) hunting opportunities.	No new area provided by USFS. WDFW Riser Lake trail mowed and maintained for ADA hunters. USFS closed road system on Bear Mountain available to ADA hunters.	Continue to explore options with USFS for new ADA area on upper elevation public land.
Maintain contact with CAG at least 2 times per year.	Had one CAG Meeting in spring 2009.	Plan to have next CAG meeting in fall of 2009.
Lobby for additional funding to hire additional FTE (Bio II) for the MWA.	Because current WDFW funding short-falls, a FTE (Bio II) position will not be hired in the near future.	Until economy improves, pursue additional funding through grants to support a wildlife area position.

New Strategies

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies or activities to address the agencies strategic plan goals and objectives, why the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species presence and public issues and concerns. The following updated strategies have been added to respond to previously unaddressed or new issues or changes on the wildlife area. New strategies may also be in response to adaptive management as staff evaluate the impacts of past management activities.

Strategy: Use all means available to minimize dispersal of noxious weeds on the wildlife area including herbicide and mechanical treatments along roads. Special emphasis should be placed on weeds that are wind dispersed or readily transported by animals or vehicles. Additionally, destroy satellite populations of weeds where they are newly established.

Action: Mow and/or spray roads that have weed populations on the center of the road where they can be tangled in the understorey of a vehicle or transported by road maintenance equipment.

Use the most viable means at our disposal to destroy stands of readily dispersed weeds including but not limited to: Canada thistle, diffuse knapweed and hounds tongue where ever they are found.

Well-managed livestock grazing on Department land on the MWA has been used as a tool to increase growth, vigor, and regeneration of bitterbrush as a practice to increase forage quality for mule deer. In recent years, WDFW management goals have changed to incorporate the concept biodiversity and ecological integrity, instead of the Department's previous single species approach to management of the landscape. "Livestock grazing must be integrated with other uses to ensure the protection of all resource values, the most important of which is maintaining ecological integrity" (Fish and Wildlife Commission Policy C6003). The Methow Wildlife Area has concurrently changed its management objectives when working with livestock permits over the last several years, seeking to improve native bunchgrasses vigor and overall shrub-steppe condition while continuing to meet habitat goals such as protecting riparian areas and wetland habitats.

Strategy: Implement use of conservative livestock stocking rates to increase bunchgrass vigor and ecological integrity of the shrub-steppe vegetation community.

Action: For all livestock grazing permits on the wildlife area, unless stated otherwise, the following changes were implemented. Maximum utilization will not exceed (within reason) 35% use of bunchgrasses on uplands, 35% woody vegetation on shrubby riparian areas, 6 inch stubble height on sub-irrigated riparian areas, and 60% use of surrounding vegetation within 100 meters from watering sites. WDFW will monitor triggers and evaluate adaptive management strategies in conjunction with individual permittees (WAC 232-12-181).

2009 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Methow Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Continue intensive weed treatment and planting of native shrub-steppe habitat in historic agricultural fields: mowing, cultivating, and seeding.
- 2) Work with the USFS to evaluate and determine if new hunting opportunities can be provided for disabled hunters. Continue to provide two areas of ADA hunting opportunities.
- 3) Continue to work with agricultural lessees, to develop and implement water efficiencies and habitat restoration goals in each area.
- 4) Control ALL hounds tongue on WDFW land: Riser Lake, Little Cub Creek, and Judd Ranch.
- 5) Post noxious weed signs that were developed in partnership with USFS. Continue to promote and prioritize the development of an updated public map to WDFW Headquarters for the Methow Wildlife Area.
- 6) Inventory and monitor grazing permits, and work with Coordinated Resource Management Program to continue improving range management.
- 7) Document and control Dalmatian toadflax populations on the wildlife area. Use biological controls when available. Destroy all new outbreaks/invasers.
- 8) Continue rare plant surveys on the Methow Unit of the MWA.

- 9) Continue to document treatments and effects of treatments on white-top, and learn from all control measures including chemical, grazing, and mechanical farming techniques.
- 10) Work with local volunteers and Okanogan County Historical Society to develop management plans to preserve designated historic structures on the MWA.
- 11) Continue the long-term monitoring plot installation and vegetation surveys on the MWA.
- 12) Continue to work with USFS Methow Ranger Station to outline long-term fire and fuels management partnership on WDFW land adjacent to USFS boundaries. Continue to thin the Pearrygin Forest and later Cougar Flats upon approval of the Forest Practice Application.
- 13) Monitor golden eagle and cliff-dwelling raptor nesting success in appropriate areas on MWA.
- 14) Assist with Road Management and Abandonment Plans (RMAP) and culvert replacement activities. Complete and submit all RMAP Forest Practices Application documentation to the Department of Natural Resources.
- 15) Update the Methow wildlife area's web page.
- 16) Continue to work with adjacent landowners and WDFW real estate services to provide access to wildlife area parcels.
- 17) Work with USFS Methow Ranger District on prescribed fire planning for Cougar Flats, and adjacent areas to USFS boundary.
- 18) Implement WHIP grant (Scott Canyon -Big Buck Unit) habitat protection and wetland restoration project.
- 19) Work with USFS's Respect the River Program and install signs on Chewuch River campgrounds.
- 20) Lobby for additional funding to hire additional FTE (Bio II) for the MWA.
- 21) Investigate research opportunities for the wildlife area and pursue grant funding.
- 22) Improve the driving conditions of the Fraser Creek Unit roads.

Citizens Advisory Group Input

A Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on March 30th, 2009 to review management progress and address any new issues or input on existing issues. Those in attendance included:

Tom McCoy	Wildlife Area Manager
Rob Wottlin	Wildlife Area Staff
Don Johnson (Absent)	Western Watersheds Project
Joyce Bergen	Washington Native Plant Society
John Hagan	Wildlife Area Staff
Jan Ford	Back Country Horsemen
Vic Stokes	Cattleman
Peter Morrison (Absent)	Pacific Biodiversity Institute
Troy Accord	Cattleman
Steve Bondi (Absent)	Methow Conservancy
John Rohrer	USFS Wildlife Biologist
Bill White (Absent)	Landowner
Cal Tresser	WDFW Enforcement Officer
Scott Fitkin (Absent)	WDFW Regional Wildlife Biologist
David Demyan	Private Land Forester

The following new input/issues were addressed at the meeting.

Issue: Federal economic stimulus funding.

Response: John Rohrer suggested Washington State could develop a youth work corps similar to what the state of Oregon is proposing to assist public land management needs.

Issue: Marketing the wildlife area to the general public.

Response: Ideas included: website development, calendar events listings, wildlife web cameras, the development of tourist pamphlets of the wildlife area for distribution, and kiosk bulletin board at wildlife unit entrances. Calendar event promotions include: bluebird arrivals, time periods of wildflower blooming, mule deer congregations, and waterfowl sightings on various wildlife area lakes. Suggestions for the wildlife web camera locations included: snake dens and carrion feeding locations.

Issue: Trespass of Richner's cattle on the Golden Doe unit.

Response: Tom agreed to investigate and resolve any fencing problems. This discussion led to Joyce's suggestion that information about cattle grazing activity on the wildlife area could be posted at the entrances of each wildlife area unit. Additional information regarding livestock grazing time periods may disarm the public who may mistakenly believe cattle are present on the wildlife area all summer long.

CAG New Strategies Suggested for Wildlife Management-Stewardship on the WLA

Maps for public distribution

Promote public use of the WLA.

Promote Volunteerism for the WLA

Implement forest management on the WLA

Want to see the full plan?

Go to –

http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/

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