



# SWANSON LAKES WILDLIFE AREA 2007 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



## Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Management Plan ([http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/index.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm)) that provides management direction for the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, totaling about 21,000 acres in central Lincoln 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 2006 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2007.

## Updates/Changes

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has received all the agreed-upon Habitat Unit (HU) credits from restoration activities at Swanson Lakes, as of September 30, 2006. BPA will no longer fund any habitat restoration at Swanson Lakes. This includes enhancement of degraded shrub/steppe, conversion of agricultural fields back to shrub/steppe, and planting of shrubs and trees. Any future work of this type planned at Swanson Lakes will require other funding sources. BPA funding for continued operation and maintenance (O&M) of Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is expected to continue, although the level of annual funding is uncertain at this time. BPA is currently examining the issue of cost for long-term O&M on wildlife projects, on a regional basis.

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### New Issues

The BPA-mandated/funded habitat restoration is complete at Swanson Lakes. (BPA will also no longer fund Swanson Lakes CAG meetings, as public outreach related to mandated restoration work is no longer needed.) This completion of restoration work on Swanson Lakes has freed up the wildlife area manager and assistant manager to now become involved with planning and execution of additional, off-site habitat restoration projects. Work is planned for 2007 and 2008 at WDFW's Audubon Lake parcel at Reardan, and at two sites owned by BLM in Lincoln County. These projects will pay for manpower, equipment and supplies we provide for their restoration work. As a result, the Swanson Lakes budget will be able to pay for the continued seasonal employment of a laborer, who will primarily perform weed control activities on Swanson Lakes.

Rainbow trout were planted in Swanson Lakes' "Z-Lake" in 2004, 2005 and 2006. These fish are thriving, with the largest fish approaching two feet in length in summer 2006. Although access is walk-in only, the lake has attracted several fishermen in the last two years. However, there is some concern about the adequacy of winter aeration, in this fairly shallow rim rock lake. Trout were planted in the lake many years before, when it was in private ownership, but those fish eventually died out. Swanson Lakes staff has researched options for aerating the lake, and is working to have a solar-powered aerator installed there by June 30, 2007. Funding for this aerator would be provided through WDFW's sustainability program.

### Major Stewardship Accomplishments

After killing off existing vegetation and working the soil, staff planted a 70-acre field to a native-like seed mix, in fall 2006. Some weed control will be required for the first one or two years afterward. This former cereal grain field had been planted to crested wheatgrass in the 1980's, during the early years of the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The seed mix included a variety of native and introduced grasses and forbs. This mix will provide a nutritious mix of plants for several upland wildlife species, including mule deer, sharp-tailed grouse, pheasants, and Hungarian partridge. The forbs will also attract a variety of insects, which are a valuable source of protein for upland birds, especially chicks.

Approximately 1,200 riparian shrubs and trees were planted at Swanson Lakes in spring 2006. They were placed in two plots, on different sections of the wildlife area. The plots were under seeded with a shrub-steppe grass/forb seed mix. Each plot was surrounded with 7-foot high plastic mesh fencing, to keep deer out. Fencing will be removed in approximately 5-6 years, when these plants are large enough to survive heavy deer browsing. Seasonal irrigation was set up, and will be used until plants are large enough to no longer need supplemental watering. An existing, operational pump and windmill were used on one plot. A solar-powered pump was installed on the other plot, using an existing well shaft. The well's old windmill tower was used as a base for the solar panels.

**Status Report of 2006 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 2007.

<b>2006 Performance Measure</b>	<b>Status of Performance Measure</b>	<b>Explanation of Progress/ 2007 Related Activity/ Comments</b>
<p>Appropriate weed control on the wildlife area, with focus on areas adjacent to road in the small drainages surrounding Lake Creek. Review the current year's weed control activities, using generated reports and compare the efforts and success to the previous year's weed control activities.</p>	<p>Appropriate weed control measures were generally completed. This is an ongoing annual activity. Accomplishments include: monitoring of 1-acre site where staff had eradicated yellow toadflax infestation, continued control of approximately 25 acres of whitetop, 70 acres of general weeds, and less than two acres of St. John's wort (infestation is light, and spread out).</p> <p>We were unable to keep up with routine herbicide control of Canada thistle, and did not spray as much as we had planned to. However, this weed does not appear to have spread since 2005.</p>	<p>Due to issues concerning funding, the weed control laborer was employed only three months in 2006, not the six months we've had in years past. This caused us to get behind on control of Canada thistle.</p> <p>We will continue weed control efforts in 2007. The seasonal weed control laborer will be rehired in 2007, for a full six months.</p>
<p>70 - 90 acres of old agricultural fields restored to native or native-like habitats, each year, barring unforeseen problems such as drought, major equipment breakdowns, etc.</p>	<p>Planted 70-acre field to native-like grass/forb habitat, in fall 2006.</p>	<p>BPA has received the agreed-upon Habitat Unit (HU) credits from restoration activities at Swanson Lakes, as of September 30, 2006. BPA will no longer fund any habitat restoration at Swanson Lakes. Any future work of this type at Swanson Lakes will need other funding sources.</p>

Continue augmentation of sharp-tailed grouse for the wildlife area's current population, and continue to monitor.	Augmented the sharp-tailed grouse population with ten birds from northern Utah, in April 2006. Tracked these new birds, from the ground and aerially, throughout the year.	Augmentation of grouse is scheduled for April 2007, with birds from southeast Idaho. The new birds will be fitted with radio collars and tracked throughout the year.
As habitat surveys are conducted and analyzed, determine general trend of habitat quality. If quality is declining, attempt to determine cause of decline and develop plan to improve the habitat.	No Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) surveys were performed at Swanson Lakes in 2006. These are often completed on five-year intervals.	No Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) surveys are scheduled at Swanson Lakes in 2007.
Maintain approximately 40 bluebird and kestrel boxes on the wildlife area.	Minimal maintenance was performed in 2006.	Local volunteer has been maintaining boxes, and repairing and replacing boxes as needed, in spring 2007.
Compare most recent population numbers of sharp-tailed grouse, to the previous years. If numbers continue to decline, consider additional future emphasis on habitat improvement and population augmentation, and pursue land purchase opportunities.	Total number of sharp-tailed grouse on Swanson Lakes WLA has generally held steady, due to augmentation efforts. Population growth due to augmentation is expected to begin within 2-3 years.	Continue to survey leks and total up numbers of sharp-tailed grouse on/around Swanson Lakes in spring 2007.
In 2006, plant a total of approximately 1,200 riparian trees and shrubs, in three irrigated fenced plots.	These trees and shrubs were planted in three plots. One plot is irrigated with existing windmill; two are irrigated using solar powered pumps, with the solar arrays mounted on windmill towers.	BPA has received the agreed-upon Habitat Unit (HU) credits from restoration activities at Swanson Lakes, as of September 30, 2006. BPA will no longer fund any habitat restoration at Swanson Lakes. Any future work of this type at Swanson Lakes will need other funding sources.

## **New Strategies, Deleted Strategies, and Changes to 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 present, 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.

Issues identified in italics were provided by the Citizens Advisory Group. These public comments are captured at the end of this document. Although underlined strategies have no current funding source, identifying these needs is the first step to securing additional funds.

Change to Strategy:

**Agency Objective: Protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.**

### **1. Manage for upland birds**

**b. Strategy:** Convert approximately 70 to 90 acres annually from old soil bank and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) single-species fields, and other former agricultural fields, back to native-like grasslands. Timeframe: spring to fall.

(Although not technically changed, this strategy will not be funded in the future by BPA. These habitat conversions/restorations will depend on acquiring other funding sources, in the future.)

**Agency Objective: Provide Sustainable Fish and Wildlife-Related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible With Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats. Improve the Economic Well-Being of Washington by Providing Diverse, High Quality Recreational and Commercial Opportunities.**

### **1. Provide commercial opportunities compatible with fish, wildlife and habitat protection.**

Commercial opportunities compatible with fish, wildlife and habitat protection are part of WDFW's mission statement. However, commercial opportunities must be controlled to protect fish and wildlife resources and to comply with federal and state regulations. *The strategy listed here is a grazing lease, being done as part of a good-neighbor policy, as well as to provide some baseline information on the effects of low-intensity grazing at the Wildlife Area. Low-intensity grazing may be used as a tool to improve wildlife habitat, in certain cases. Data collected from this grazing event will assist Wildlife Area staff with determining the best way(s) to improve habitat on the Wildlife Area.*

**a. Strategy:** As a result of the 2005 Wall Lake Fire, provide one-time, temporary grazing lease on Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, for adjacent landowner who lost approximately 3,000 acres of pasture grass to the fire. The grazing lease specifies no more than 70 AUM, over four weeks in late summer/early fall 2005. These cows will be move over approximately four sections of land, or roughly 2560 acres of land, during the period of

## **2007 Performance Measures**

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

1. Appropriate weed control on the wildlife area, with focus on areas adjacent to roads and in the small drainages surrounding Lake Creek. Review the year's weed control work, using reports generated, and compare effort and success to previous years' weed control activities.

Weeds to be controlled, by species and acres treated:

Yellow toadflax – less than one acre

Diffuse knapweed – 5 to 10 acres

Whitetop – 20 to 100 acres

Canada thistle – 50 to 150 acres

St. John's wort – fewer than two acres

General weeds – 60 to 140 acres

2. Continue augmentation of sharp-tailed grouse to the wildlife area's current population, and continue program of monitoring these animals. Monitoring will include tracking all grouse with operating radio collars, spring lek surveys, and spring searches for new leks.
3. Maintain existing habitat restoration sites, including approximately 900 acres of restored grasslands, two food plots, and four tree/shrub plots.
4. Evaluate, and maintain as appropriate, fire protection contracts with Lincoln County FPD's # 5, 6, and 7; and agricultural leases on Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area.
5. Maintain and fill nine upland bird feeders on the wildlife area.
6. Maintain approximately 40 bluebird and kestrel boxes on the wildlife area.
7. Monitor annual use of the wildlife area, by members of the public. This includes hunters, birders, and other visitors. Work with Lake Roosevelt Forum (LRF) to put on annual spring field trip for regional schoolchildren, at the wildlife area.
8. Maintain infrastructure, including buildings, fences, roads, parking areas, kiosk, etc.  
Buildings: office complex – office, shops, barn. Fence: 60 miles. Roads: 10 miles, both dirt and gravel. Six parking areas. One kiosk with vault toilet.
9. As appropriate, consider additional future emphasis on sharp-tailed grouse habitat improvement and population augmentation, and pursue land purchases. Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and BLM will start a Lake Creek riparian restoration project in 2007, using Duck Stamp money, and with technical assistance from Ducks Unlimited. One result of this

work will be expansion of winter roosting habitat for sharp-tailed grouse, in the form of riparian shrubs and trees, on Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and adjacent BLM property. Five sites have been identified for removal of levees or artificial channels, on Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. Numbers of trees and shrubs, acres covered by these trees, and acres covered by new plantings of grasses and sedges, have yet to be determined.

10. Administrative duties: Complete all BPA- and WDFW-required documentation, develop budget and manage expenditures, supervise assistant manager and seasonal weed control employee, manage inventory of expendable items and durable goods, meet safety requirements for all activities, ensure staff meets training and licensing requirements.

### **Citizens Advisory Group Input**

A Citizens Advisory Group meeting was not held between the publishing of the draft plan and the plan update. Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is 100% BPA funded. BPA will no longer fund CAG meetings, as Swanson Lakes has met its BPA objective for habitat restoration, and no further consultation on this restoration is needed.

At this time, there are no CAG meetings scheduled. Future CAG meetings will need to be funded through another source. WDFW's Jennifer Quan, who has been coordinating with wildlife area managers on CAG meetings, has been made aware of this.

However, the draft SLWA management plan and draft plan update, were sent to CAG members, for their review and comments. Two comments were received by the deadline, June 12, 2007:

1. Comment received by Spokane Audubon's Brian Miller. Text of the email is as follows: I have reviewed both the plan update and the base plan. I find the goals and work already accomplished commendable; I have no complaints or requests for changes. However, I am distressed to learn that SWLA is essentially unfunded at this point. It seems that addressing the funding problem must be SWLA's number one priority. I would be interested to hear your ideas on this subject. Are there similar funding problems with other BPA mitigation projects which have met their HU credits? If so, what are those projects doing? Is there any way the environmental or sportsmen communities can be of assistance? It seems really dumb to put all this effort into habitat restoration and then fail to maintain it; politics is irrational.

SLWA Manager's response:

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is getting by with BPA funding for only operation and maintenance (O&M), none for enhancement work. Some of the O&M money covers maintenance of previously completed enhancement work. However, BPA has approved slight funding drops over next three years; yet costs for labor, routine utilities, equipment, repair, etc. keep increasing.

Part of what's keeping SLWA afloat is that we are now also doing some additional activities, using different funding sources. This is taking up the time we previously used for enhancement work. One is a project on Swanson Lakes, and on adjacent BLM property, to enhance riparian function along Lake Creek drainage. We will be using Duck stamp, Ducks Unlimited, and a small amount of WA Dept of Ecology funds.

Another project we are working on is providing weed control and habitat restoration advice and labor, at the newly acquired Audubon Lake in Reardan.

So we have diversified to stay functional. We should be able to maintain our enhancements, as long as we have other tasks/projects on different funding sources, to offset expenses. Also, these other projects benefit, since no "new" hires are required, and our expertise is put to good use.

It's hard to say, whether other BPA-funded wildlife areas would be able to follow the same approach to managing funding, when BPA's HU requirements are completed.

It would be good if environmental and sportsmen's communities stay involved with projects on the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. Once the "glamour" of a new property purchase and the subsequent big push of enhancement work is over, we are still here doing good things. At this point Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is not in dire need of financial or physical assistance, but knowing that these groups still support what we're doing makes us feel confident, that we are doing right by our constituency.

2. Comment received by Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's John Phillips. Text of the email is as follows:

I looked over your plan and it looks great to me. Looks like you have covered all the bases. Anything more we could do to improve the pheasant situation out there would be desirable but I also believe that anything we do in the way of habitat will benefit all the critters. If you decide to have a CAG meeting, I will be happy to attend and do not need any sort of reimbursement. Let me know whatever assistance I can be. Thanks for keeping me in the loop and for all your hard work.

SLWA Manager's response:

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area staff believes that the habitat enhancements we have completed are benefiting all upland bird species on the WLA. As the restored grasslands mature and more native forbs begin moving in, their usefulness to upland birds for nesting and foraging will continue to improve.

No CAG meetings are planned, at this time.

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area may need to call upon civic organizations for volunteer assistance in the future. We will remember the valuable assistance the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council has provided us, and not hesitate to call upon this group again, when needed.

**Want to see the full plan?**

Go to -

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/index.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm)

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