

Maintenance of wildlife lands needs funding

*Dr. Jeff Koenings, Ph.D.
WDFW Director*

Managing more than 850,000 acres of public land is a tall order and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is pursuing fresh, collaborative approaches to do the job within a limited budget.

These lands were purchased by WDFW for their benefits to fish and wildlife and related recreation. But they also are integral to— and economically important for— nearby communities as well. Hunters, fishers and birdwatchers spend millions of dollars statewide each year. Local residents treasure the open space and environmental benefits public lands provide, and local schools commonly use them as outdoor classrooms.

Pinching pennies during multiple years of budget cuts, our land managers are masters of innovation. But despite these efforts, three significant land management responsibilities require additional support: Forest management, assessment of public lands that have

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Land Line is produced by the Lands Division and Public Affairs Office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

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Shrub-steppe species like sage grouse will benefit from WDFW-DNR land exchange

WDFW-DNR land exchange nearing completion

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) land exchange project that began over three years ago is coming into the home stretch.

This exchange between DNR and the WDFW is one of five different DNR land exchanges currently working underway. WDFW's exchange is primarily to secure lands the agency has leased from DNR for the last 40-plus years. Funding to continue leasing those lands was lost as a result of budget reductions in the 2001-03 biennium.

Some version of the proposal to swap about 55,000 acres of WDFW land for about 117,000 acres of DNR land will likely be decided this year, after public hearings, third party appraisals and final agreements.

General overall support for the exchange was heard at public information meetings about the project last fall, and it has the approval of WDFW's Land Management Advisory Council (LMAC), the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Board of Natural Resources.

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Post-wildfire timber salvage protects habitat, funds restoration

Thanks to a timber salvage operation, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area in the southeast corner of the state is on the road to recovery after the School wildfire burned most of its 16,000-some acres in August 2005.

WDFW's post-wildfire timber salvage became one of the largest timber sales in the nation last year, with about 30 million board feet of timber removed and sold.

WDFW wildlife forester Doug Kuehn coordinated the plan to first improve safety for the recreating public by removing charred and potentially hazardous trees near campgrounds and roadways. Then he planned out a timber salvage sale to both protect the area and help cover the costs of restoration.

"We wanted to get some limbs and tops on the ground to reduce sediment to our waterways," Kuehn explained, "and to provide shade from the sun, protection from the wind, and provide organic debris as nutrients for new seedlings."

Kuehn's plan required the logging contractor to use helicopters to remove available timber to reduce impacts to the post-fire fragile soils. Kuehn said fire intensity varied, depending on fuel loads, from a light mosaic under-burn to a high-intensity burn that sterilized soils.



Photos by Doug Kuehn

Kinzua Resources, Inc. of Pilot Rock, Oregon purchased the sale and Carson Logging of Grants Pass, Oregon was the contractor. Within one year of the start of the fire, 5,652 loads of logs were delivered to six mills in three states (JD Lumber and Riley Creek in Idaho, Boise and Kinzua Resources in Oregon, and Guy Bennett Lumber and Yakima Resources in Washington).

Kuehn's restoration plan includes a contract to grow and plant half a million conifers and 40,000 wildlife browse shrubs to reestablish native vegetation on throughout the burn. IFA Nurseries, Inc. of Canby, Oregon was awarded a contract for 540,000 seedlings to be planted in the spring of 2008.

Through inter-agency cooperation with Washington State Parks and Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), timber salvage rights were granted

and reforestation was also planned for other state owned or leased lands on and adjacent to the wildlife area.

Wooten Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Shana Winegeart coordinated restoration efforts, which included help from many other agencies and organizations.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and local conservation districts helped with aerial seeding of native vegetation on 1,000 acres of the most intensely burned riparian habitat. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation funded aerial spraying for weed control of 1,800 upland acres. The Umatilla Tribe donated \$15,000 in trees that were planted along the Tucannon River and Cummings Creek by volunteers from the Tri-State Steelheaders, Americorps, and WDFW staff. Over 1000 hours of volunteer time went into the planting effort. Idaho Department of Corrections vocational training crews were used to hand pull weeds in 12 miles of riparian corridor and to hand pile slash along access roads.

With assistance from WDFW habitat biologists Tom Schirm of Dayton and Dave Karl of Walla Walla, over 50 burned trees were felled for fish habitat use as large woody debris and for stockpiling to fix a fish passage barrier at Curl Lake this spring.



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Maintenance of wildlife, *cont. from page 1*

been in agricultural use, and weed control.

A \$480,000 request now pending before the Legislature as part of WDFW's overall proposed budget for the 2007-09 biennium would allow the agency to fulfill pressing management needs in all three areas.

To augment our management of forest lands, a portion of the funding would pay for forest management advice from the experts in the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

With over 100,000 acres of forestlands to manage, such a collaborative effort is a prudent investment to protect lands in our stewardship. One need look no further than the devastation of the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area as a result of the catastrophic 2005 School Fire to see the cost of deferred forest maintenance.

Prescribed tree thinning not only reduces the threat of catastrophic fire, it also improves forest health for an array of species. Analyses of historic timber stands and fire history, and design and implementation of timber-thinning and other projects to reduce insect damage, plant disease and fire danger will pay big benefits to fish and wildlife. In some cases, prescribed fires are needed to restore ecological functions that support fish and wildlife.

Significant forest management needs exist on the Sinlahekin, Scotch Creek, Colockum, L.T. Murray, Wenas, Oak Creek, John's River and Sherman Creek wildlife areas. Forest management on these lands would also serve local communities by creating jobs through timber production.

Since 1990, WDFW has purchased some lands that have been, or are still, in agricultural production. Part of our budget proposal would fund an evaluation to determine which of these lands should be restored to native habitat and which can be maintained in agricultural production.

In some areas agricultural production is vital to certain species of wildlife.

Several of these areas are in Okanogan County, where the 2006 Legislature provided capital funds to develop or repair irrigation infrastructure that would allow both agricultural practices and habitat restoration activities to occur. New funding would allow us to develop sharecrop leases, put some fields back into production, or undertake other restoration activities in Okanogan County and other areas of the state – all which could involve partnerships with local farmers and other landowners to sustain working landscapes on a community and regional scale.

Meanwhile, noxious weeds pose an increasing threat to fish and wildlife habitat, as well as recreational opportunity. Weed control has long been a high priority in our lands management, but the list of invasive weeds continues to grow while our funding to combat them shrinks.

An increasing threat to our lands comes from the common reed (*Phragmites*). This invasive plant spreads by both seed and rhizomes to develop 12-foot high monocultures towering in wetland areas. Wetlands choked with *Phragmites* are virtually unavailable to fish and wildlife or recreating people, and the weed threatens irrigation systems by altering water flow and quantity. Over the last five years, *Phragmites* has spread at a rate that has overtaken another major invasive weed, purple loosestrife.

Stemming the spread of *Phragmites* requires development and implementation of a control plan on our lands, in coordination with other land management agencies and regional entities. Initial efforts would focus on the Winchester Wasteway in the Columbia Basin and then expand to other WDFW lands with *Phragmites* infestations.

Funding for forest management, agricultural use assessments and weed-control efforts ensures that public lands will be sustained in a way that will benefit Washington's fish, wildlife and local communities.

Skagit Wildlife Area gains South Padilla Bay property

The Skagit Wildlife Area grew by about 107 acres this winter, thanks to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) purchases of two properties on South Padilla Bay in Skagit County.

A 45-acre parcel and a 62-acre parcel west of Mount Vernon provide important waterfowl habitat, long-term benefits for the estuary and salmon enhancement, and public access for hunting and birdwatching.

The acquisitions were funded by a federal National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a state Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account grant through the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation.

The two properties are currently leased for agriculture, which helps provides winter forage for waterfowl. A recent WDFW public open house provided interested parties an opportunity to discuss plans for the properties, including continued farming in conjunction with wetland enhancements.

The Washington Department of Ecology and Ducks Unlimited are working with WDFW to design freshwater habitat enhancements on the land. These partners are also working with Skagit County, the local diking district, other community organizations and farmers in designing projects.

Negotiations for other acquisitions in the South Padilla Bay area are underway.

Washington's Wildlife Areas: South Puget Sound

The South Puget Sound Wildlife Area is managed as a complex of 13 properties totaling over 8,000 acres, most in Thurston and Pierce counties, but also in Kitsap, Mason and Jefferson counties.

The oldest (acquired in 1922) and most familiar is the 90-acre parcel in Lakewood, formerly the South Tacoma Game Farm where pheasants were raised, still the home of the Lakewood Fish Hatchery, and now developing as the South Puget Sound Urban Wildlife Interpretive Center. Its old structures also serve as homebase for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) marine mammal specialists and headquarters for South Puget Sound Wildlife Area complex manager Richard Kessler.

"It's a little different for a wildlife area because we're completely surrounded by development," Kessler said, "and it's the only one in the state used entirely for non-consumptive recreation and education."

In the last decade, the South Puget Sound parcel has been most famous for work to recover state endangered western pond turtles. In 1994, rearing ponds were created in the area's spring-



Balsamorhiza on Scatter Creek prairie

Photo by Richard Kessler

fed wetland habitat for annual release of turtles reared at Woodland Park Zoo. The turtles dig nests in June and their eggs hatch in early October. Each fall biologists dig up the turtle nests to retrieve young hatchlings or unhatched

eggs and place them in the zoo's "Head Start" program to boost their survival for more releases.

"Now we're in our sixth year of natural reproduction of western pond turtles," Kessler said, "with at least 32 baby turtles doing really well."

Kessler said watching baby turtles hatch out in the fall has become one of the star attractions of the area's "Nature Fest," celebrated the first Sunday in October for the past nine years. Fish hatchery tours, birdwatching walks and talks, and children's activities are other highlights of the annual event, which is co-sponsored by the Audubon Society and Pierce County Environmental Services and Master Gardeners.

Up to 1,000 visitors are on site that day, but throughout the year many more use the area's trails through native oak woodland, prairie and wetlands, including a quarter-mile for disabled access. The area is open daily during daylight hours.

"We're working with groups and regular visitors on development of an environmental education and visitor interpretive center," Kessler said.



Puget Blue is one of many butterflies on the wildlife area

Photo by Kelly McAllister

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Washington's Wildlife Areas: South Puget Sound *cont. from page 5*

Restoration of South Puget Sound's oak woodland-prairie ecosystem is currently number one on Kessler's to-do list, not only at the Lakewood parcel, but even more so at Scatter Creek, a 1,060-acre unit of the complex located 20 miles south of Olympia in Thurston County.

Scatter Creek itself is a clear, cobble-bottomed, salmon-bearing stream running through a rare glacial outwash plain that lies in the Puget Sound Trough lowlands, with the Cascade Mountain range to the east, the Willapa Hills to the southwest, and the Black Hills to the northwest. The area supports a Roemer's Idaho fescue short-grass prairie with unique wildflowers, including camas, spring gold, lupine, strawberry, chocolate lily, and blue violet.

That native prairie habitat supports several species of butterflies, including the state endangered mardon skipper. In fact, Scatter Creek is one of only two sites left in lower Puget Sound that host the rare butterfly. Up until a year or two ago, it also hosted another state endangered species, Taylor's checkerspot butterfly.

Kessler said checkerspot females were trapped at another site and released on



South Puget Sound Wildlife Area ponds were created to help recover endangered western pond turtles

Photo by Richard Kessler

Scatter Creek in enclosures with their egg host plants, but it's too soon to tell if the effort will be successful in bringing the butterfly back.

Other uncommon prairie species that are occasionally still seen are the state endangered streaked horned lark, state

threatened Mazama pocket gopher, and state listing candidate Oregon vesper sparrow.

Riparian, wetland and forest habitat on Scatter Creek includes an uncommon Oregon white oak and grassland community, valuable to wildlife for its acorn crop. State threatened western gray squirrels once used these oak woodlands.

WDFW district wildlife biologist Kelly McAllister notes that when the first parcels of the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area were bought in the 1960's, native grasslands were abundant throughout lower Puget Sound. "But now, what we have left sticks out like a sore thumb among all the roaded development," he said.

Prairie preservation wasn't the initial motivation for the state's acquisition. Much of the Scatter Creek acreage was purchased for farm-raised pheasant releases for hunters and bird hunting dog training and field trials, so it has seen a lot of human traffic over the years. Along with surrounding land use changes, that was probably the beginning of exotic weed invasions and the end of some of the prairie habitat.



Newly-released endangered western pond turtles sport radio telemetry gear for monitoring

Photo by Doug Kuehn

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Washington's Wildlife Areas: South Puget Sound *cont. from page 5*

For example, McAllister explained, dog field trials are usually conducted with handlers, judges and even the "gallery" of spectators on horseback. Horse hooves trample native vegetation and expose bare ground, and horse droppings often include weed seeds.

Scot's or Scotch broom and tall oatgrass are the biggest threats to native grasses and forbs and Kessler spends more of his time and budget trying to control them than anything else. He mows and burns hundreds of acres each year, and recently is using more herbicides as products that don't harm native vegetation become available.

Weed control is just half of prairie restoration. Kessler works with WDFW wildlife biologists, the Native Plant Society, the Nature Conservancy's local prairie restoration office, and other interested parties to collect native plant seeds, propagate them, and get new stems in the ground.

"We've got 20,000 plugs of Roemer's Idaho fescue bunchgrass going in before Spring in an area where we've had an oatgrass infestation," he said. "We spray it all over with Poast, a herbicide that kills the oatgrass but doesn't hurt the fescue."

Funding for weed control and native propagation comes from the Natural

Resource Conservation Service's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Washington Department of Transportation (DOT) mitigation funds.

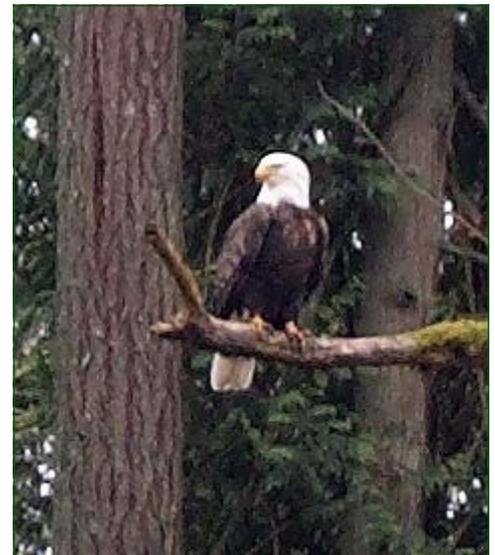
Kessler also works with wildlife area users, represented in a Citizen Advisory Group (CAG), to address some of the sources of the weed problem. CAG members recently came to a consensus that with 19 dog field trial events on Scatter Creek each year, restrictions on horse use are needed. Now horse use is limited to judges at most events, and participants are realizing that less Scotch broom is a good thing for their needs, too.

"Pheasant hunters have also come to see that getting rid of that tall, woody weed and replacing it with native plants makes for better bird cover and better hunting," he said.

The best long term solution is finding a replacement site for the high impact activities, such as the dog field trials.

"We're looking for a site without native vegetation and without any threatened or endangered species at stake," Kessler said. "I think most of our users would support that because it would mean less restrictions for them."

Kessler, who has managed the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area for the past 13 years, said working with the CAG and the



Bald eagles nest on McNeil Island unit
Photo by Richard Kessler

complex's wide variety of recreationists is one of the two best things about his job.

"It doesn't get boring around here," he said.

The other thing is working with such a diversity of wildlife species across so many different habitat parcels.

McNeil, Gertrude and Pitt islands, collectively known as the McNeil Island Wildlife Area unit of the South Puget Sound complex, are unique in many ways. At 4,449 acres, McNeil is by far the largest of the three islands, which are located in Pierce County in the southern portion of Puget Sound, about seven miles southwest of Tacoma. In 1986, WDFW acquired 3,119 acres – or about two-thirds – of the uplands and tidelands of the islands from the federal government; the other one-third is managed by the Washington Department of Corrections for a penitentiary, vocational training and farmland. For security, there is no public access.

"That makes it truly a refuge for wildlife," Kessler said, "and a unique opportunity for research. It's the only island left in southern Puget Sound where 90 percent of the shoreline is undeveloped."

Gertrude Island is the largest haul-out site for harbor seals in southern Puget



McNeil Island unit hosts harbor seals

Photo by Dyanna Lambourn

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Washington's Wildlife Areas: South Puget Sound *cont. from page 5*

Sound and WDFW marine mammal researchers make use of that to learn more about the species. McNeil Island has a large population of Columbian black-tailed deer, a great blue heron rookery, two active bald eagle nests, and lots of waterfowl use.

"It really works out well to share use of this island with the prison," Kessler said. "Corrections works with us on wildlife habitat management and we get help from prisoners with projects like bird nest box building."

The complex's other units acquired from the '40's through the '90's – Union River, Nisqually, Ohop, Black River, Skokomish Delta, Skookumchuck, Duckabush, Big Beef Creek, and Morgan Marsh – include water access, estuaries, floodplains, wetlands, riparian areas, and forestland. They support elk, deer, fox, bobcat, coyote, hare, raccoon, river otter, beaver, muskrat, hawks, owls, waterfowl, songbirds, salmon, trout, and many other species, and are used by fishers, hunters, and wildlife viewers.

The Draft Management Plan for the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area, developed over the last couple of years with the CAG and WDFW district team of biologists, (see http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm), provides detail on all but the latest acquisition in the complex.

In March 2006, with Washington's Wildlife and Recreation Program and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Act funds, WDFW purchased the best 806 of 2,000 acres of West Rocky Prairie on Beaver Creek, near Maytown, a few miles from the Scatter Creek unit.

"This place has mounded native prairie like the famous Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve managed by DNR further west in Thurston County," Kessler said. "Scientists aren't sure what geological or biological event left these unique forms, but because they were not developed, they should provide more native prairie habitat for our declining butterflies. We'll be adding the unit to the management plan this year."



State endangered Mardon skipper
Photo by Kelly McAllister



Mt. Rainier overlooks prairie and oak woodland of Scatter Creek unit
Photo by Kelly McAllister



State endangered Taylor's checkerspot butterfly
Photo by Kelly McAllister

Discovery Bay property transferred to WDFW

Three properties in the Discovery Bay estuary in Jefferson County on the Olympic Peninsula were recently transferred to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) from the Jefferson Land Trust as part of the Salmon/Snow Creek project.

Totalling 8.73 acres, these small parcels are located 10 miles southeast of the town of Port Townsend on Discovery Bay at the mouth of Salmon Creek and Snow Creek.

The Salmon and Snow Creek estuary is an important focus for conservation and restoration efforts of the Hood Canal/ Strait of Juan de Fuca summer chum salmon, which are listed as “threatened” under the federal Endangered Species Act. The estuary is the premier habitat for these fish.

This is the latest acquisition in an ongoing cooperative project with the “Chumsortium” – a coalition of private and public entities with the goal of protecting and restoring salmon habitat, including Jefferson Land Trust, Jefferson County Conservation District, Wild Olympic Salmon, North Olympic Salmon Coalition, Trout Unlimited, and WDFW.

The goal of the Chumsortium is to acquire up to 300 acres to provide critical habitat for summer chum and other resident fish, shellfish, birds and mammals. The Discovery Bay properties bring the project total to 166 acres.

The project includes tidelands, wetlands and riparian corridors. While the habitat will be managed by WDFW, all partners in the Chumsortium are involved in the discussions leading up to land purchases. That involvement will

continue as plans are developed for restoration and public access.

Historically the area has been home to a saw mill, railroad track and trestle, and log rafting and shellfishing operations. The valley has been in agricultural use for over 100 years. Both creeks have been dredged and one relocated for agricultural uses.

In spite of the impact of these historical uses, the creeks have a relatively high salmon run and form the most intact estuary of its type on the Strait and Hood Canal. Summer chum returns to Salmon Creek far outnumber returns to all the other streams of the Strait combined. A hatchery on Salmon Creek provides brood stock for restoration of summer chum salmon in Chimacum Creek.

WDFW-DNR land exchange nearing completion, *cont. from page 1*

Most of the 55,000 WDFW acres that would transfer to DNR are high-elevation forestland on the Colockum, Wenas, L.T. Murray, Sinlahekin and Oak Creek wildlife areas in Chelan, Kittitas, Okanogan and Yakima counties.

Most of the 117,000 DNR acres that would transfer to WDFW are shrub-steppe or lower elevation forestlands that support a diversity of wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. About 90,000 of those acres lie in checkerboard inholdings on the Oak Creek, Wenas, L.T. Murray and Colockum wildlife areas in southcentral Washington. Other parcels are in Adams, Asotin, Chelan, Columbia, Douglas, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Grays Harbor, Klickitat, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Thurston and Whatcom counties.

The higher acreage on the WDFW side of the exchange is due to the higher land value of forested lands compared to shrub-steppe habitat.

This exchange effort was initiated by WDFW in response to the budget reduction of 2001-03 and to address

long standing concerns about the vulnerability of leased trust lands from DNR that were interspersed throughout many of WDFW’s wildlife areas.

Most of the 1.4 million acres of state trust lands in Eastern Washington managed by DNR still reflect the checkerboard ownership pattern of the original federal land grants to the state in 1889.

In two large checkerboard landscapes, DNR and WDFW own every other square mile in a 170,000-acre landscape with different management goals and legal mandates. Exchanging lands will improve manageability, protect public access, and allow each agency to better address their specific management goals.

The exchange will not change the amount of public lands available to the public for wildlife or recreation.

For more information about the proposed DNR-WDFW exchange and updates on this year’s public hearings and final decision making processes, see <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/amp/transactions/exchanges.html#WDFW> .

Salvage protects habitat, funds restoration, *cont. from page 2*

The slash from the helicopter landings on the Mountain Road were chipped as hog fuel for the Potlatch Mill in Lewiston. Due to high fuel costs for transport, the slash piles at the helicopter landings along the Tucannon River were salvaged for firewood by local area residents. Remaining slash piles are either being burned this winter or left for wildlife cover.

WDFW engineers are currently converting three of the logging helicopter landings to campgrounds. These new campgrounds will replace camping sites that were damaged from the fire and closed to protect the sensitive riparian habitat where they were located.

“We wanted to get as much out of this fire as we could,” Kuehn said.

Five ranchers/farmers named to state wolf plan working group

Five members of Washington's ranching and farming community are among the 18 citizens recently selected for a working group to guide the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in developing a plan for management of wolves.

WDFW director Jeff Koenings noted that rural landowners, especially those with livestock, may be most directly affected by the expected natural re-establishment of wolves in Washington.

"Including ranchers and farmers as a substantial percentage of this new citizen working group is part of our 'Good Neighbor' policy as fellow land managers," Koenings said.

The five are:

- Daryl Asmussen of Tonasket, cattle rancher
- Jeff Dawson of Colville, cattle rancher
- Jack Field of Ellensburg, Washington Cattlemen's Association executive vice-president
- John Stuhlmiller of Lacey, Washington Farm Bureau assistant director of government relations
- Arthur Swannack of Lamont, Washington Sheep Producers president

Although gray wolves were largely eradicated in Washington by the 1930s, sightings have increased since federal wolf-recovery efforts began in Idaho and Montana in the mid-1990s. The success of those efforts has prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to propose removing gray wolf populations from the federal list of endangered species in three states and parts of four other states, including Washington.

"If gray wolves are removed from federal species protection status, Washington and other western states will have primary responsibility for



Gray Wolf, *Canis Lupus*

Photo by Gary Kramer, USFWS

managing their wolf populations," Koenings said. "We need to prepare for that possibility by developing a conservation and management plan that works for people and wildlife."

The gray wolf is also designated as a state endangered species in Washington, so the plan must identify population objectives and appropriate conservation and management strategies, as well as addressing wolf management in Washington after the species is removed from the federal list of endangered species.

WDFW's call last fall for nominations to the citizen working group solicited responses from 56 individuals. Koenings said 18 were selected with track records of building consensus and representing a diversity of interests.

The other working group members are:

- John Blankenship of Tenino, Wolf Haven International executive director
- Duane Cocking of Newman Lake, sportsman
- Paula J. DelGiudice of Seattle, sportswoman, National Wildlife Federation Western Natural Resource Center director
- Gerry Ring Erickson of Shelton, former Defenders of Wildlife Washington state field representative
- George Halekas of Deer Park, retired Forest Service biologist
- Kim Holt of Snohomish, Wolf Recovery Foundation secretary-treasurer
- Derrick Knowles of Spokane, Conservation Northwest outreach coordinator
- Colleen McShane of Seattle, consulting ecologist
- Ken Oliver of Newport, Pend Oreille County Commissioner
- Tommy Petrie, Jr. of Newport, Pend Oreille County

Sportsmen's Club president

- Bob Tuck of Selah, consulting biologist, former Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissioner
- Greta M. Wiegand of Seattle, retiree, outdoor recreationist
- Georg Ziegltrum of Olympia, Washington Forest Protection Association wildlife biologist

The working group will convene Feb. 28-March and will meet approximately every other month over the coming year. A draft plan is scheduled for completion by Dec. 30, and will be followed by a public review period. The final plan is expected by June 30, 2008.

A separate technical advisory group of biologists from state and federal agencies also will be formed to provide information and expertise to the citizen working group.

Second grazing project begins this spring

After preliminary success with the first pilot grazing project on a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) wildlife area last year, a second project will get underway this spring.

Parts of the Smoothing Iron unit of the Asotin Wildlife Area in southeast Washington will be grazed by cattle for a limited amount of time to improve forage quality and quantity mostly for elk, but also mule deer and other wildlife.

A grazing operation on the Pintler Creek unit of the Asotin Wildlife Area was the first venture in an agreement signed in the fall of 2005 between WDFW and the Washington Cattlemen's Association. Early monitoring so far indicates that the level of disturbance from 255 cattle on 4,280 acres for about 45 days last spring had a positive effect on native grasses and forbs for wildlife. The area had not been grazed for about 10 years.

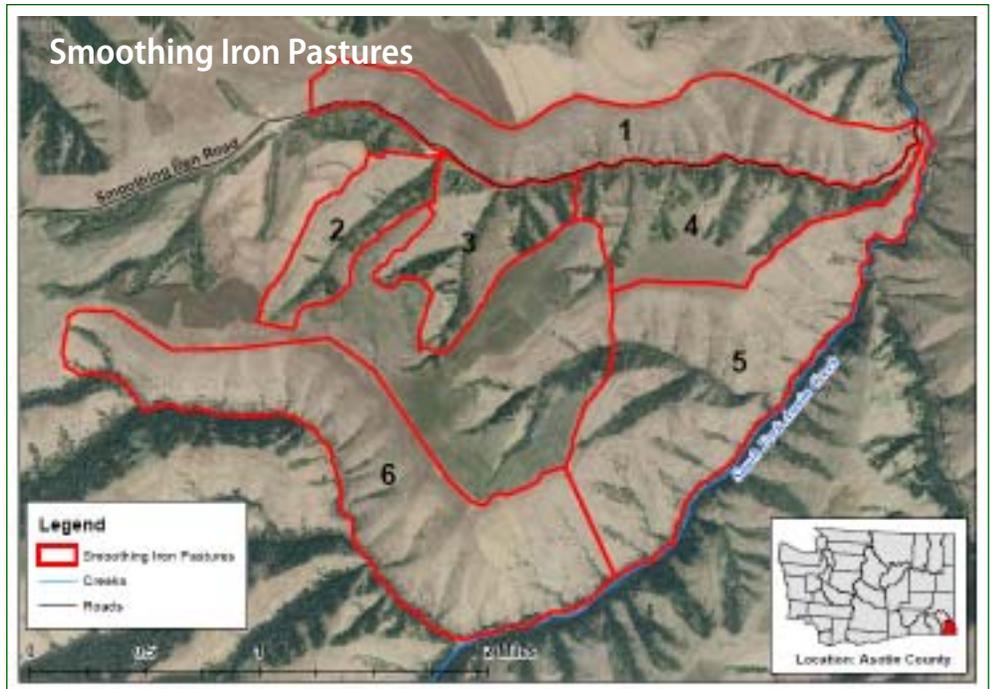
Starting April 15, the Smoothing Iron grazing plan rotates about 200 cattle through five pastures on about half of the 5,000-acre unit. The grazing area is in the vicinity of Warner Gulch and Cooper Canyon, excluding agricultural lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and in production under a sharecropper lease agreement.

The Smoothing Iron area was grazed extensively when it was part of a cattle ranch, but it was so well managed that it attracted the attention of WDFW for its fish and wildlife values.

The goals of the grazing plan are to:

- Improve the condition of habitat for elk, as well as mule deer, mountain quail, grouse, and various upland species;
- Maintain and improve productive upland and riparian plant communities;
- Reduce the abundance of weedy plant species such as yellow starthistle, Scotch thistle, houndstongue, and sulfur cinquefoil; and
- Do no harm to sensitive species such as steelhead, mountain quail, and sagebrush mariposa lily.

WDFW staff is establishing a series of vegetation monitoring plots to track both short-term and long-term effects of the livestock grazing on plant



communities. With assistance from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation volunteers, they are creating at least two one-acre vegetation monitoring exclosures, with half fenced to exclude all grazing ungulates and the other half excluding livestock.

Photo point monitoring, weed mapping, threatened plant species monitoring, surveys of breeding birds, elk and deer, elk calves, and mountain quail, and sediment-monitoring on the South

Fork of Asotin Creek are also planned.

The grazing operator is responsible for ensuring that livestock use is distributed throughout the grazing area, that animals are moved according to the pasture rotation schedule, and that animals remain where they are supposed to be at all times.

A third grazing project is planned for Spring 2008 on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area in the vicinity of Shumaker Grade in Asotin County.

Wildlife area plan updates underway

Draft management plans for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) 850,000-plus acres of wildlife areas across the state solicited many productive comments during the public review period that ended Jan. 31.

Wildlife area managers are now updating those plans with help from citizen advisory groups. Anyone interested in helping update these plans annually should contact their local wildlife area manager. For contact information, see http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm or look for specific wildlife areas by region through <http://wdfw.wa.gov/reg/regions.htm>.

This program receives Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is the policy of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to adhere to the following: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability and sex (in educational programs). If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, please contact the WDFW ADA Coordinator at 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, Washington 98501-1091 or write to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of External Programs, 4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 130, Arlington, VA 22203