



OAK CREEK WILDLIFE AREA 2010 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

This is the most recent update to the 2006 Oak Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan

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

This plan provides management direction for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area Complex including the 42,200 acre Oak Creek Wildlife Area Unit; the 4,960 acre Cowiche Wildlife Area Unit; the 10,000 acre Tieton Wildlife Area Unit; the recent acquisition of the 2,675 acre Rock Creek Wildlife Area Unit in Kittitas County; and various smaller “satellite” units, all located in Yakima County, Washington. 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.



Oak Creek Bull in the Rattlesnake Creek drainage

By Robert Inouye

Plans are updated 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 includes 2007-09 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies, and performance measures for 2010.

Updates/Changes

Major changes that occurred in 2007-09 affecting the wildlife area were the approvals and acquisition of the **Sanford Meadows,**

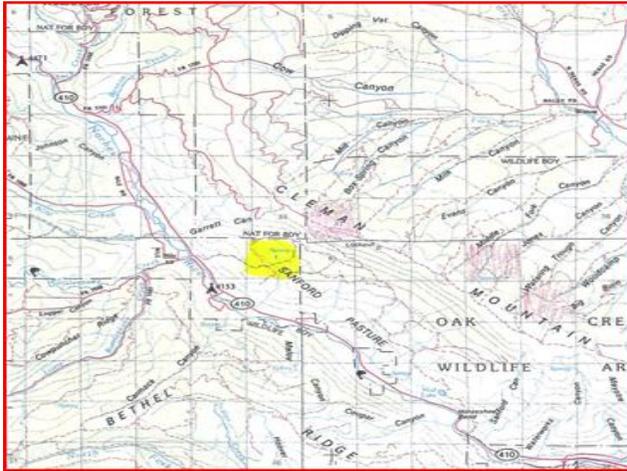
Rock Creek, Oak Flats, Tieton River parcels and several Cowiche parcels. The transfer/exchange of **Perpetual Timber Rights (PTR's)** from a corporate subsidiary back to WDFW, a **land exchange** between WDFW and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), completion of a draft **Oak Creek Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP),** and completion of surveys and initial improvements on the Oak Flats acquisition. These activities highlight the management priority that WDFW has on acquiring and protecting critical habitats

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and intact landscapes for the benefit of the wildlife resources, and providing secure access for public recreation far into the future.

Sanford Meadows Acquisition (T15N, R15E, Sec 1)

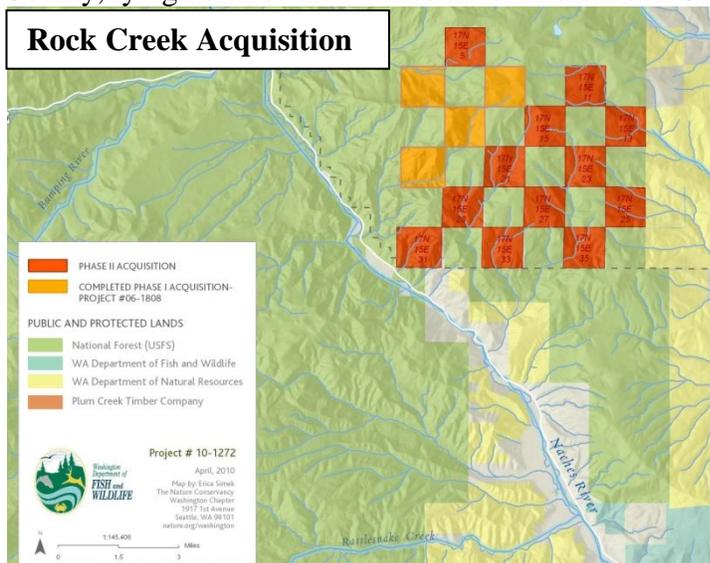
This acquisition was a team effort between WDFW and several other entities and organizations, particularly the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). The previous owners desired to liquidate their ownership as part of an estate settlement and after two of the heirs received a tour



and learned of the high value of the property to wildlife and public recreation, which allowed WDFW the time to arrange the purchase. During the time the property was on the market, there was high interest from a land development company. Sale of this critical location to a private company could have impacted wildlife habitat and populations across the landscape, and most likely would have eliminated public access to thousands of acres of public land. The property is located about 25 miles from Yakima lying north of the Naches River on a bench below Cleman Mountain.

Rock Creek Acquisition

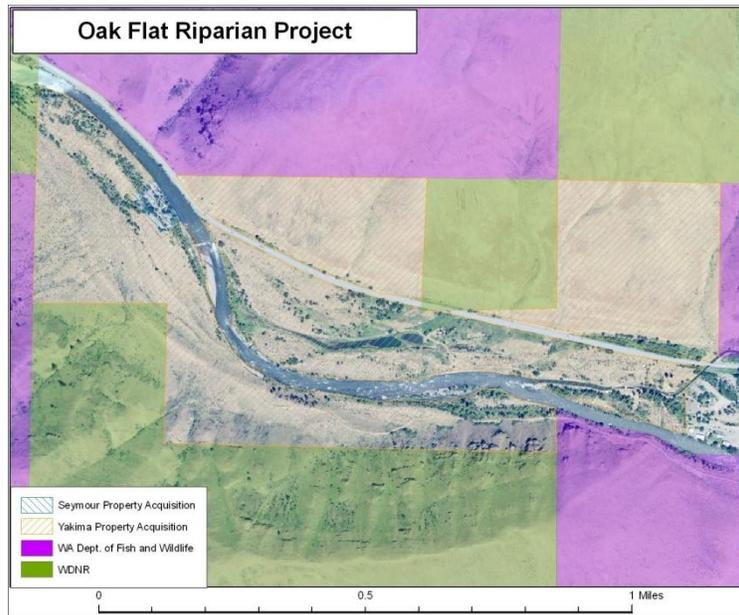
The first phase of a three phase acquisition project was completed in June 2009 with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation teaming with The Nature Conservancy to acquire 2,675 acres that will be managed by WDFW. Ultimately the plan is to transfer over 10,000 acres of Plum Creek land to WDFW by 2011 that will protect habitat from development and provide long term stability to wildlife. The habitat includes alpine areas home to mountain goats, shrub-steppe and basalt cliffs for elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep, and rivers and streams used by bull trout, cutthroat and rainbow trout as well as salmon. The property is 35 miles northwest of Yakima in Kittitas County, lying north of the Naches River in the Rock Creek drainage.



Oak Flats Acquisition

The Department of Fish and Wildlife purchased Oak Flats in 2008 from the City of Yakima. The 289 acres of shrub-steppe, oak woodland, riparian and floodplain habitat lies near the confluence of the Naches and Tieton Rivers in Yakima County, approximately 5 miles west of Naches and 20 miles northwest of Yakima. The property was purchased through grants by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) with a cost share strategy involving

other BPA grants including the Yakama Nation, Kittitas Conservation Trust, and the WDFW. The additional purchase of 3.80 acres from funding through the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) completed the project. The acquisition ensures continuing habitat availability along with preservation from potential development and blocks up surrounding WDFW ownership. It is entirely bisected by the Naches River and is nearly surrounded by state ownership, particularly Oak Creek Wildlife Area. The site is flat, has over 1.2 miles of river frontage with gravel access roads directly to Highway 410. Fish species present include federally listed bull trout and mid-Columbian steelhead. Spring Chinook from the American, Bumping and Naches River use the site for migration and rearing. Species associated with forest edge, riparian and shrub-steppe habitats occur and in particular, a winter concentration of bald eagles, bighorn sheep, mule deer, and elk.



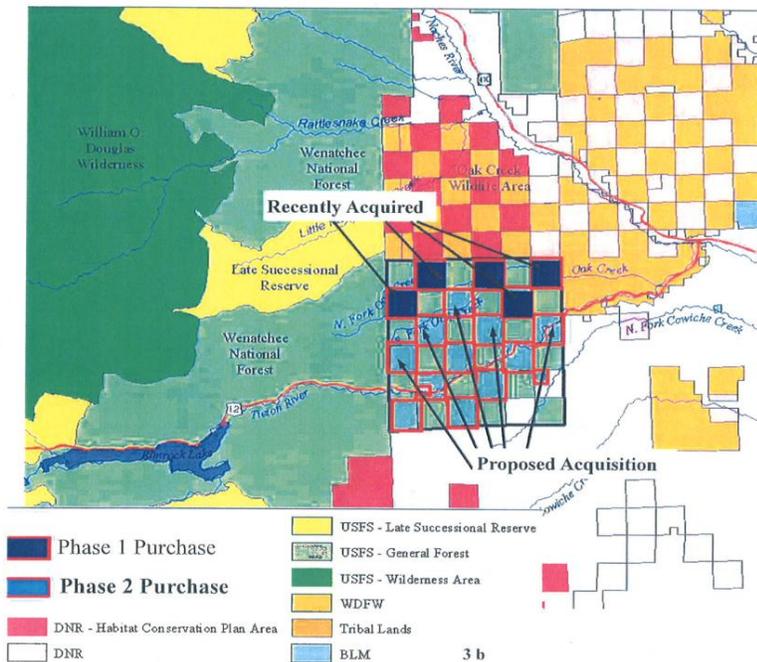
Tieton River Acquisition Completion

A four year effort to protect more than 10,000 acres in the Tieton River Canyon was completed with the transfer of 6,357 acres of land from The Nature Conservancy to the WDFW. The land was part of a checkerboard ownership owned by Plum Creek Timber Company from early 19th century land grants that was acquired by the Nature Conservancy and subsequently transferred to WDFW. The area remains in checkerboard ownership with the U.S. Forest Service and WDFW with one square mile remaining in The Nature Conservancy's ownership.

The effort conserves nearly eight miles of riparian habitat along the Tieton River as well as uplands abounding with intact shrub steppe-habitat, oak woodlands, ponderosa pine and Douglas fir forests, cliffs and talus slopes.

Bull trout and bighorn sheep habitat is at the core of this area with deer and elk resident as well as a myriad of ground dwelling wildlife. Cliff dwelling species such as golden eagles, prairie falcons and possibly peregrine falcons will benefit from the protection. Steelhead trout and other

fish inhabit the riparian areas along with harlequin ducks, dippers and other species. The property is approximately 25 miles northwest of Yakima and is bisected by the Tieton River with a majority of land in the Oak Creek Drainage.



Tieton River Acquisition

Thornton Acquisition- Snow Mountain Ranch

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife acquired 201 acres of shrub steppe habitat in Yakima County with help from two private, non-profit organizations the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy.

The property was a private in-holding within the 1,800 acre Snow Mountain Ranch, which was acquired by the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy in 2005 to maintain the natural landscape for public hiking, wildlife viewing, and other uses. About two miles southwest of the town of Cowiche (west-northwest of Yakima), it is adjacent to WDFW's 5,107 acre Cowiche Unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. The 201 acres, which supports a variety of shrub-steppe wildlife species, was purchased from a WWRP grant.

In 2009, a 3.8 acre in-holding on the Snow Mountain was acquired from the Yakima Tieton Irrigation District. The property was purchased with a WWRP grant. The property currently contains structures that are being evaluated for historical preservation.

Worrell Acquisition

The 2009 Worrell Ranch acquisition contained 2,340 acres of shrub-steppe habitat adjacent to the south side of the Cowiche Unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. The property had long been used for cattle grazing and remained in good ecological condition that will benefit a variety of wildlife including deer and elk that winter on the property. This acquisition helps maintain

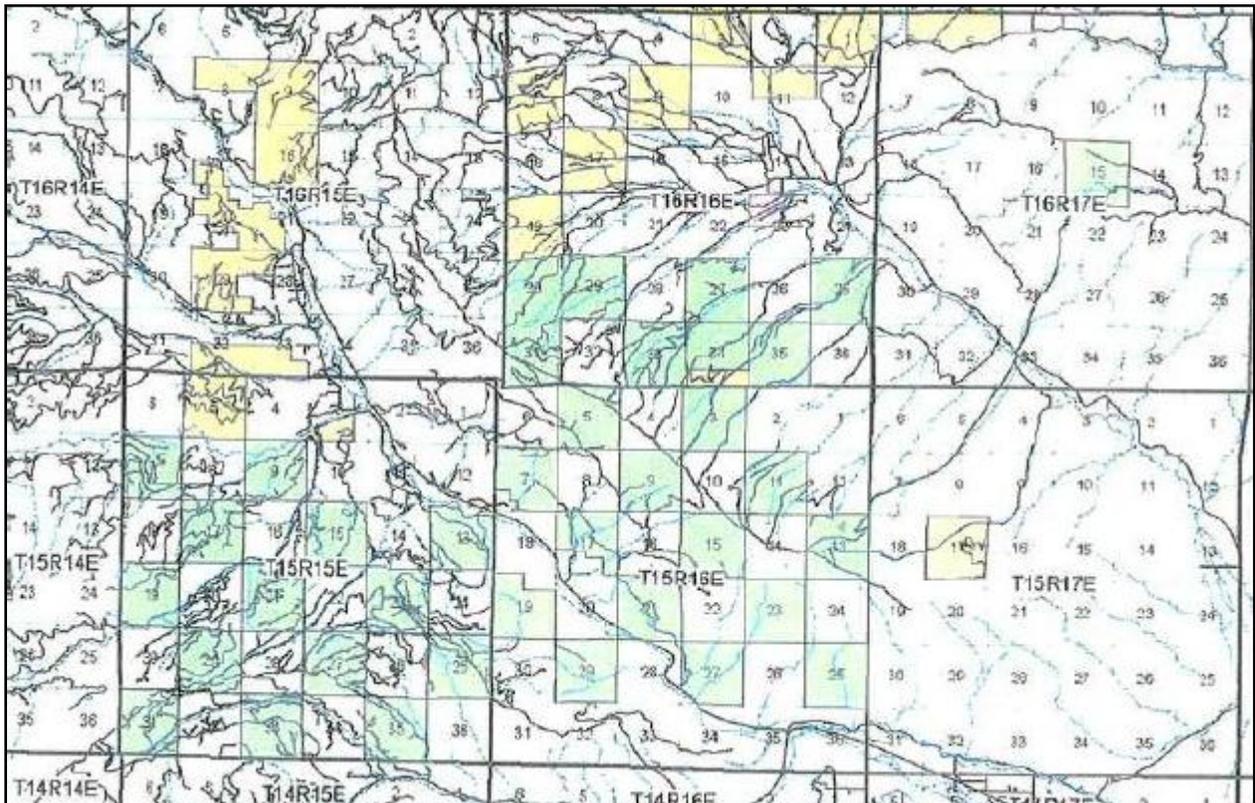
winter range for deer and elk in addition to providing shrub-steppe habitat for related dependant species. The property will be incorporated into the management of Cowiche Unit.

Hall Acquisition

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife acquired 181.5 acres of shrub-steppe habitat in 2009 from the Hall family that was an in-holding within the Cowiche Unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. The area will be managed in the same manner as the Cowiche Unit.

PTRs

In 2006, Boise Cascade sold their entire Pacific Northwest land holdings and other assets, including Perpetual Timber Rights (PTRs) they owned on the wildlife area to Western Pacific Timber LLC (WPT), a large land development corporation. WDFW entered into negotiations with WPT that recently resulted in an exchange that returned the PTRs to WDFW after 55+ years of ownership by Boise Cascade. This results in very positive management implications for future improvement of forest habitat on the wildlife area that relate to wildlife values, rather than timber production.



PTR Acquisitions (Green Highlight)

Land Exchange

The land exchange between WDFW and DNR is moving forward with Phase I and II approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the DNR Lands Commissioner. Phase I will be finalized on July 1, 2010 and Phase II will be finalized November 1, 2010. The Department of Natural Resources will consolidate ownership of forested sections, while WDFW will

consolidate ownership of shrub-steppe habitat. Eleven sections in the Rattlesnake drainage will be transferred to DNR, while WDFW will gain property along Highway 12, in the Sanford Pasture area and Cowiche Unit.

Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plans (RMAP)

In 2008 a draft of the RMAP plan for the newly acquired Tieton Township was completed using existing WDFW's Technical Applications (TAPPS) inventory of fish barriers and culverts along with past RMAP plans submitted by Plum Creek. The final plan was completed and submitted to DNR in 2009 and was approved on January 22, 2010. In 2009 WDFW removed two culverts and repaired approximately 1 mile of road. In 2010, RMAP plans call for the removal of an additional culvert and maintenance of a closure on an abandoned road. Completion of the RMAP plan for the recently acquired PTR lands is on hold pending finalization of the land exchange between DNR and WDFW of forested land on Oak Creek Wildlife Area. In 2010, work will begin to update RMAP plans for the Rock Creek Area.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Prescribed Burning - In 2009, WDFW collaborated with US Forest Service on the Naches Ranger District to expand the previously analyzed Elderberry Prescribed Burn Project on Forest Service lands into adjacent ownership of WDFW lands to meet ecological, economic, logistical, and safety objectives. Prescribed burning occurred on approximately 573 acres of these WDFW lands (Section 1: 3 acres; Section 3: 400 acres; Section 5: 170 acres). The proposal reduced the amount of built fire line by 12,840 feet (on WDFW and Forest Service property boundary lines) by using natural and existing fuel breaks; reducing ground/soil disturbance and saving \$27,606.

The treatment area was predominately located on southerly aspects that support dry forest plant communities that evolved with a predominance of frequent low intensity fire. Fire has been successfully excluded from the project area since around 1930. Objectives included: 1) treatment of multiple layered vegetative communities in a way that encourages the growth of single-layered fire resilient, drought tolerant, and insect and disease resistant plant communities; 2) reducing the likelihood of high severity fires and decrease resistance to fire control efforts by reducing surface and ladder fuels; 3) improving the health and vigor of native shrubs, grasses, and forbs by reducing tree shade and stimulating shrub growth to reduce the adverse effects of repeated browsing, shading, and fire exclusion. Meeting these objectives has the effect of improving wildlife habitat for species that have a high fidelity to dry forest plant communities.

Weed management - Wildlife area staff is working in close coordination with the Yakima County Noxious Weed Board (YCNWB) to address the recent rapid spread of Dalmatian Toadflax, particularly along the Naches River and the Highway 410 corridor. Biological control agents (*Mecinus janthinus*) have been released by YCNWB on both public and private lands at numerous locations along Highway 410. In 2008, agents were released on the recently acquired Section 1 in the Sanford Pasture Area. Establishment of control agents and amount of control is being monitored by both Wildlife Area staff and YCNWB. Over the last three years a variety of biological control agents have been released to control diffuse knapweed, spotted knapweed and meadow knapweed. Establishment of these control agents and amount of control is being monitored by Wildlife Area staff and YCNWB. *Weed control and use of biological agents was an important issue identified by the CAG.*



Administration – The high-speed wireless internet service needed to support business use for the Oak Creek WA and the use of wildlife cameras along Highway 12 is still in the planning stages. Work on the construction of infrastructure and the partnership with Yakima County and Washington Department of Transportation is needed. The project is on hold pending funding.

A new manager was hired for Oak Creek Wildlife Area in March, 2010 after the retirement of John McGowan in 2009. Ross Huffman is a native of Washington graduating from Washington State University with a Bachelors degree in Wildlife Management in 1999 and a Masters degree from Texas Tech University (Lubbock, Texas) in Wildlife Sciences.

He has worked for Idaho Fish and Game, US Geological Survey, US Army Corp of Engineers, the USFS Umatilla National Forest and most recently The National Wild Turkey Federation.

Hazard Waste - Hazmat and cultural review surveys were completed for the Seymour Property in the Oak Flats area in 2008-2009. Following completion of the surveys all infrastructure was removed including: two cabins, a pump house, an outhouse and a cable car. In 2009-2010 surveys occurred on the remaining Oak Flats Property acquired from the City of Yakima. Infrastructure removal began in March, 2010, but was halted due to concerns over potential sources of asbestos. Following testing, asbestos abatement occurred in April, 2010, and then the chlorination building and valve building were removed completing the infrastructure removal.

Status Report of 2007-2009 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 2010.

2007-09 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/2010 Related Activity/ Comments
Maintain seven elk and bighorn sheep feed sites to control wintering populations.	Fed approx. 4,000+ animals per day through the winter.	Early winter moderated and reduced hay need during later months. Surplus carryover (<i>low cost hay surpluses-three extra storage yards const.</i>)
Maintain winter range vehicle and early spring area closures.	Closures reduce disturbance to wintering wildlife when animal energy levels are low. Eyes in the Woods (EITW) remote camera system	Evaluate effectiveness of EITW program. Coordinate with enforcement to improve monitoring efforts.

	installed in 2009, expanded in 2010.	
Perform mandatory weed control on wildlife area and coordinate with YCNWB.	Staff controlled Scotch thistle, knapweed, and numerous other weeds species on 5,000+ acres annually.	Use of GPS has improved control efforts. Use of GIS software in the future will further improve efforts.
Reconstruct road access into Oak Flats and Cougar Canyon.	Cleared and rebuilt 800 feet of road again in 2009.	Road will require maintenance each year
Construct three educational signs at access points on the Cleman Mtn. bighorn sheep range.	Signs installed in 2007. No message on signs to date.	In 2010, evaluate planned message and update. Get input from District Team and CAG
Maintain golden eagle nest closures as needed.	Eagle activity was monitored annually and a closure installed around active nests.	In 2008 and 2009 nest was not located in main climbing area. Closure area was clearly marked and avoided by climbers.
Install wireless internet and wildlife camera at headquarters site.	Project on hold. No progress in 2007-2009. DOT system at junction has space for WDFW, 2 antennas needed to reach headquarters, and is cost prohibitive.	No plans to complete, pending new funding source.
Complete construction of low water pump station at Headquarters	Pump station was completed in 2006 and is operational.	Point of Diversion documents not submitted to Wash Dept. of Ecology. Complete in 2010.
Submit WWRP Riparian grant for Oak Flats acquisitions.	Both properties acquired. Seymour infrastructure removed 2009. Additional infrastructure removal planned for 2010	Final removal completed Spring 2010.
Provide guidance and liaison with Wildlife Education Corp (WEC) volunteer group to staff visitor center.	WEC continued to staff visitor center and provide education to thousands of public each year. Another 2-year ALEA grant successfully awarded in 2009.	Plan to assist WEC re-submit in 2011 for another two-year ALEA grant.
Assist with develop of Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for Oak Creek Wildlife Area	Ongoing	New manager and assistant manager assisting in plan development and providing input as needed.
Coordinate acquisition of Section 1 in the Sanford Pasture	Completed in 2008	Incorporated into Oak Creek management.
Negotiate solution with	Not completed	Negotiations continue with

landowner to provide public vehicle access to Mud Lake prior to September 2007.		landowner for long-term solution. Access by WDFW for administration achieved spring 2010.
Complete CAG selection to reform a group specific to the Oak Creek WA.	New CAG formed in 2007, one meeting held	Form new CAG for 2010 and hold meetings annually.
Facilitate controlled burn project in the Oak Creek drainage with collaborative partners.	Controlled burn occurred in 2009.	Controlled burn accomplished goals. Later season burn in upper basin experienced change in weather patterns resulting in smoke settling in Yakima for two hours. Future burns planned following settlement of air quality issues.
Inventory road system within existing RMAP for the Tieton township and the PTR lands to determine priority of maintenance needs relating to fish passage issues.	RMAP for Tieton Township inventoried in 2008, plan submitted in 2009, approved 1/2010. PTR portion on hold pending WDFW/DNR land exchange.	Phase I and II of land exchange to be completed in 2010. RMAP updates needed in 2010 for Rock Creek acquisitions.
Draft operational plans for Tieton and Oak Flats projects. Utilize the District Team / partners to develop plans.	Not completed, due to manager vacancy.	Will be completed in 2010 with addition of Rock Creek Unit.
Monitor temporary grazing permit on the USFS Tieton grazing allotment to monitor impacts to intersecting WDFW ownerships. Determine if a grazing plan will be required for 2008.	Not needed	No grazing occurring on WDFW lands in Tieton Township.

New Strategies

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies or activities to address agency 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.

If the Citizens Advisory Group provided public comments on new issues, they will be identified (*in italics*) 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.

Agency Objective 2: Protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.

1. Protect priority habitats and state listed species – HCP development.

WDFW began development of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for wildlife areas in 2006 that will inventory listed species and map their habitats, including species no longer present but with suitable habitat to support them still remaining on the wildlife area. As part of this effort, current management activities that occur on a wildlife area will also be inventoried, to determine if such activities are beneficial or detrimental to at-risk wildlife species. Depending on the outcome of the HCP, strategies will then be developed to address identified issues or concerns. Initial HCP development for the Oak Creek WA began in 2008 and inventory data was compiled in early 2009. Prioritization of species and associated habitat types will be determined from this data. Recreational and management activities that occur on the WA will then be reviewed to determine impacts to species. This review is in progress in 2010. Final determinations will be reviewed with the CAG to incorporate public comments.

2010 Performance Measures

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

- 1) Meet with CAG to discuss management activities and address emerging issues.
- 2) Maintain seven elk and bighorn sheep winter feeding sites to control wintering populations.
- 3) Maintain 32 miles of elk fence on the Oak Creek Wildlife Area.
- 4) Maintain winter range vehicle closure and early spring area closure.
- 5) Perform mandatory weed control on Oak Creek Wildlife Area and coordinate with YCNWB.
- 6) Maintain seasonal golden eagle closures along Tieton River, as needed.
- 7) Complete new Point of Diversion paperwork for Oak Creek Water Right with Dept of Ecology.
- 8) Inventory road system within existing RMAP for the Rock Creek Area to determine priority of maintenance needs relating to fish passage issues.

- 9) Coordinate with The Nature Conservancy to prioritize treatment areas in the Tieton Township using the National Fire Plan grant. Work to complete habitat restoration via mechanical treatments and additional prescribed burns.
- 10) Maintain active participation in Tapash Forest Collaborative.
- 11) Draft operational plans for Tieton Township and Rock Creek. Utilize District Teams / partners to develop plans.
- 12) Complete Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Cowiche Canyon Conservancy to manage in holding (Thornton Acquisition) on Snow Mountain Ranch.
- 13) Monitor grazing permit on Worrell ranch, complete invoices and bi-annual range evaluation.
- 14) Complete application materials and present project to Recreation Conservation Office's WWRP Critical Areas grant to continue acquisitions adjacent to the Cowiche Unit.
- 15) Complete display for already installed informational kiosks at the Headquarters and bighorn sheep viewing sites.
- 16) Liaison with the Oak Creek Wildlife Education Corp (WEC) to submit a new 2-year ALEA grant to support volunteer operations.
- 17) Pursue additional funding for restoration projects through grants (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Foundation, WWRP, etc).



Cowiche Elk
by Oak Creek Staff

Citizens Advisory Group Input

The last meeting of the combined Citizens Advisory Group for the LT Murray/Wenas, Colockum, and Oak Creek Wildlife Areas was held on November 21, 2006. The decision to restructure individual CAG's for each wildlife area was made in early 2007, and was accomplished. A CAG meeting was held in the fall of 2007 for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. Members were re-contacted in 2010.

CAG membership includes:

CAG MEMBER	REPRESENTATION
Paul Zeimantz	Motorized recreation
Ken McNamee	Dept. of Natural Resources

Ron Graham	Non-motorized recreation
Joan St. Hilaire	U.S. Forest Service
Larry Robinson	Audubon
Jim Stephenson	Yakama Nation
Gail Thornton	Grazing interests/North Yakima Conservation District
Randy Juette	Economic interests
Jim Walkenhaur	Hunting
Tom Baskin	Disabled Sportsmen Association
Brian Wiens	Fishing
Jack Thornquist	Non-governmental Organizations (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, etc.)
Reese Lolley	The Nature Conservancy
Bill Preston	Dept of Transportation
Betsy Bloomfield	Cowiche Canyon Conservancy
Dick Jacobson	Yakima County Noxious Weed Board
Don Forgey	Adjacent landowner
Don Witke	Vol. Orgs. (Advanced Hunter Education, Wildlife Education Coop, etc)

The following new input/issues were addressed at the June 3, 2010 meeting, CAG comments are in italics:

Issue: Reviewed recent land acquisitions.

Response: *The Yakima Nation representative expressed support for the recent acquisitions and was very happy with the goal of the Cowiche Watershed project. Will there be public access to Worrell property? The only access will be from the main Cowiche Unit.*

Issue: Reviewed 2010 planned activities

Response: *A Member expressed concern with feeding sheep and would prefer that we did not feed them. Recommended moving forward with a camera system and internet to people can view the elk online and asked about using RMEF grant to purchase equipment, or starting another donation fund. Current funding is not available and installation of high speed internet is cost prohibitive. As technology changes and other options emerge the issue will be re-evaluated. Would like to see applying for Stewardship WWRP listed in planned activities.*

Issue: Mud Lake road closure status and updates.

Response: *Expressed support for providing seasonal access to Mud Lake and Sanford Pasture and recommended possibly leasing some of the land to remove the landowner's liability. Yakima nation representative would like to see some area permanently closed to motor vehicles to reduce disturbance to wildlife and provide a better hunting experience. The Mud Lake/Sanford pasture area is currently closed in the winter to protect wintering wildlife.*

Issue: Requiring Vehicle Use Permits at Bear Canyon Trailhead.

Response: *Members supported requiring permits at access points on newly acquired property.*

Issue: How to deal with shooting ranges along Cowiche Mill Road.

Response: *The Long-term solution was education of youth incorporated into hunter education about responsible target shooting. Discussed posting vehicle use permit signs, they supported the idea but also expressed concern that it would just push people to start using new areas. Wanted increased coordination with the sheriff's department and increased enforcement presence.*

The CAG would like to see traffic study across the management area to see when and where areas are being used so the department can better direct enforcement. Shooting areas will not be posted at this time. Management area staff will continue to coordinate with enforcement. At this time vehicle counters would not provide additional information to direct enforcement. Problem areas change depending on weather, season and activity.

Issue: General Questions and additional comments.

Response: *Would salt blocks with selenium placed in traditionally used areas impact elk reproduction and survival?* There have been a number of studies on selenium, in California supplemental blocks increased fawn recruitment. Samples from deer and elk in eastern Washington suggest that selenium levels are low compared to cattle, however no one knows for sure what the levels should be for wild animals. When the studies were published, “Doc” Blanchard started putting out numerous blocks in the Colockum area, and recruitment actually decreased. Most literature suggests it is much better to fertilize with selenium if it is really needed. The danger is selenium can be toxic in high levels. Without base-line data, it is impossible to make a recommendation.

What is the status of the WDFW/USFS elk study? We have completed survival analysis, modeling pregnancy rates and rates of change between feedlots and free-ranging status for collared elk, and summer habitat selection analysis. The USFS is nearly done with a write-up of the basic vegetation sampling. Fall habitat selection analysis still needs to be completed as well as movement analysis and body condition data analysis.

Is the reduction in deer population a result of the increase in elk population? The recent decline in deer was caused by louse. To date there has been no evidence of elk impacting deer populations.

Will HCP planning be done by ecological system or broad brush, and will ecosystem process and function (“ecosystem health”) elements will be incorporated into consideration of management activities- such as restoration? WDFW is working with the DNR Natural Heritage Program to develop Ecological Integrity Assessments for ecological systems found on wildlife areas. Ecological Integrity Assessments outline a general conceptual model that identifies the major ecological attributes of the system (such as size and condition), describes integrity levels based on changes to those attributes, and uses a metrics-based approach to assess integrity levels. The assessment essentially gives us a definition of a system with high ecological integrity and the metrics to evaluate current conditions.

For the HCP, we are associating covered species with ecological systems and will be managing for high ecological integrity where species occur. The assessment provides a scorecard matrix by which metrics are rated and the ratings are integrated into an overall set of indices of ecological integrity for that system at a site. Through the life of the HCP, we can use this matrix to track the improvement in ecological integrity on our lands.

Data quality is of concern, as most ecological system maps are based on remote sensing. Through HCP implementation, we would have to evaluate the current integrity of ecological systems on our lands. Regarding process and function, these are often embedded in the assessments for ecological systems, and will certainly be considered when implementing management activities whose specific purpose is to improve ecological integrity.

Contacts:

Ross Huffman
Wildlife Area Manager
(509) 653-2390
WDFW Yakima Office
(509) 575-2740

Want to see the full plan?

Go to -
http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/index.htm