



# OLYMPIC - WILLAPA HILLS WILDLIFE AREA 2014 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

## Land Management

### Summary

The Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Complex encompasses a total of 24 satellite units that collectively comprise approximately 12,000 acres. Individual units were acquired, dating back to the early 1950's, for their specific benefit for fish and wildlife diversity and recreational significance. These lands include a wide range of important fish and wildlife habitats including riparian, estuarine, freshwater wetland, old-growth/mature forest, upland meadow and coastal dune systems. Focus units include Olympic, Wynoochee, John's River, Chinook and Chehalis/Hoxit.



This is an update to the management plan that provides management direction for the Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Complex. The plan identifies needs and guides activities that occur on the area and are based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (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 biannually 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 accomplishments over the past two years, new issues, new land management strategies and performance measures for 2014.

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## **Updates/Changes**

### **Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan**

All Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP) work that was required throughout the region has been completed. Some 8,575 ft. of forest road was maintained to RMAP standards during 2012-2014. The exception is for one problem area that is associated with the Johns River Wildlife Area. The eastside dike breached at this particular area in early 2011, which created new challenges on the east-side road and at the Beaver Creek crossing. The course of action still includes public access and passage for heavy equipment (forestry and agricultural) along the Johns River east side road beyond Beaver Creek. The picture to the top-right shows RMAP work that was completed in 2008 at the Beaver Creek crossing.



### **Davis Creek and Hoxit Agricultural Leases**

The Hoxit agricultural lease will expire at the end of April 2014 and plans are to roll it over for an additional 3 years. Davis Creek has a new lessee. The new agricultural lease does not include any livestock. The Conservation District completed a "nutrient management plan". This information will ultimately be utilized by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop a "Comprehensive Resource Management Plan (whole farm plan)". The "whole farm plan" will help ensure that the resources are being managed in a sustainable manner and will provide the avenue for the lessee to enroll the property into the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). This program has the ability to provide much needed resources for improving the function of the farming regime and guide our management of the area.

### **Johns River Unit**

The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) access trail and waterfowl hunting blind was maintained at the Johns River Unit in 2012 and 2013. This blind is accessible along the ADA dike trail on the west side of Johns River. WDFW managed the areas immediately adjacent to the blind for wet soil management. This included planting barley and mowing in 2012. In 2013 the unit was cultivated and mowed to propagate smartweed which is a very desirable food source for migrating and wintering waterfowl.



**Davis Creek Unit**

The Oregon white oak survival rate is 85% with signs of new growth on most trees. This area is mowed annually. In 2013, vandals removed the wiring out of the well pump house and the old milking parlor resulting in damage. A 2014 capital project budget for repairs has been submitted.

**Cedar River Unit**

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grant proposal for construction of a small parking area at the Cedar River Unit was received in 2013.

**Anderson Homestead Unit Parking**

Anderson Homestead is 41 acres located five miles south of Forks. The unit is managed as elk winter forage habitat and riparian habitat. Reseeding and fertilizing are conducted to improve elk forage. The parking area on the unit is a stopping point on the Olympic Loop Trail.

**Oregon Silverspot Butterfly (OSB) Thinning and Meadow Enhancement**

The Long Beach property managed for Oregon Silverspot Butterfly (OSB) habitat was maintained by mowing to control encroaching vegetation. In 2012, prairie specialists planted native plants in the project. The area is one of the few undisturbed second area dunes on Long Beach Peninsula, which represents conditions that are essential to violet and the OSB.

**Migratory Bird Stamp Funds**

Wildlife Area staff developed several operation projects specifically for the Migratory Bird Stamp Funding in 2012. Three of these projects were funded in the region for enhancement work at the Chehalis, Johns River and Chinook Wildlife Area Units. WDFW completed work at the Johns River Unit which included mowing approximately 60 acres to develop habitat and tilling 10 acres in 2012 to encourage smartweed production, which was flooded in the fall. Soil conditions were too wet in 2013 for any tillage and the area was only mowed. This project complements the ADA blind that was installed in 2010.

**North Willapa Bay**

WDFW has partnered with Forterra for the past decade as part of a joint acquisition effort throughout coastal estuaries in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. In 2013, Forterra transferred the titles to nearly 1,500 acres of protected land around Willapa Bay. Also included in the transfer were parcels located along the Palix and Naselle rivers. These properties include a mosaic of critical habitats including estuary, freshwater emergent and forested wetlands, late successional forests, tidal sloughs and channels and riparian corridors. Further, they provide the opportunity for a variety of recreational activities including hiking, bird watching, fishing, sea and river kayaking, shellfish harvesting, photography, waterfowl, upland bird and big game hunting, biking and multiple watchable wildlife opportunities.

## **New Issues**

### **Johns River Salt Marsh Conversion**

The Johns River estuary was diked on both sides of the river prior to 1950. In 2004, WDFW conducted several wetland restoration projects on the 1,500 acre wildlife area that included multiple dike breaches on the east side of Beaver Creek. During the summer of 2011 the water control structure that maintained the remaining diked area on the west side of Beaver Creek (north side of John's River) failed and resulted in a dike breach.



Since the time when the breach initially occurred, the tidal action has widened the breach. This has caused some erosion to the east side road at the two large culverts. Some winter high tides have over topped the road at these crossing as well as the Beaver creek crossing.

### **Chinook Unit**

In 2012, WDFW was awarded restoration, acquisition and planning funding from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) for its salmon recovery efforts at the Chinook Wildlife Area. The primary goal is to restore historically present tidal flows through the estuary. The outcome is a functioning estuary that will provide habitat improvements for in-basin (Chinook River) salmonids. In 2013 BPA and WDFW purchased 201 acres immediately upstream from the tide gates expanding the Chinook Wildlife Area to 1,051 acres. The acquired property not only contains a significant portion of the original estuary, but it allows for the WDFW property to undergo an increased inundation of tidal marshlands. Now that WDFW owns this property, WDFW can continue to test established new operation protocols which leave the tide gates open longer and allows more opportunity for salmon to use the river. The long-term vision for the tide gates is to create a management scenario that allows consistent openings with limited operations and maintenance costs with no adverse impacts on privately owned lands.

## Chinook Channel Proposed Modification

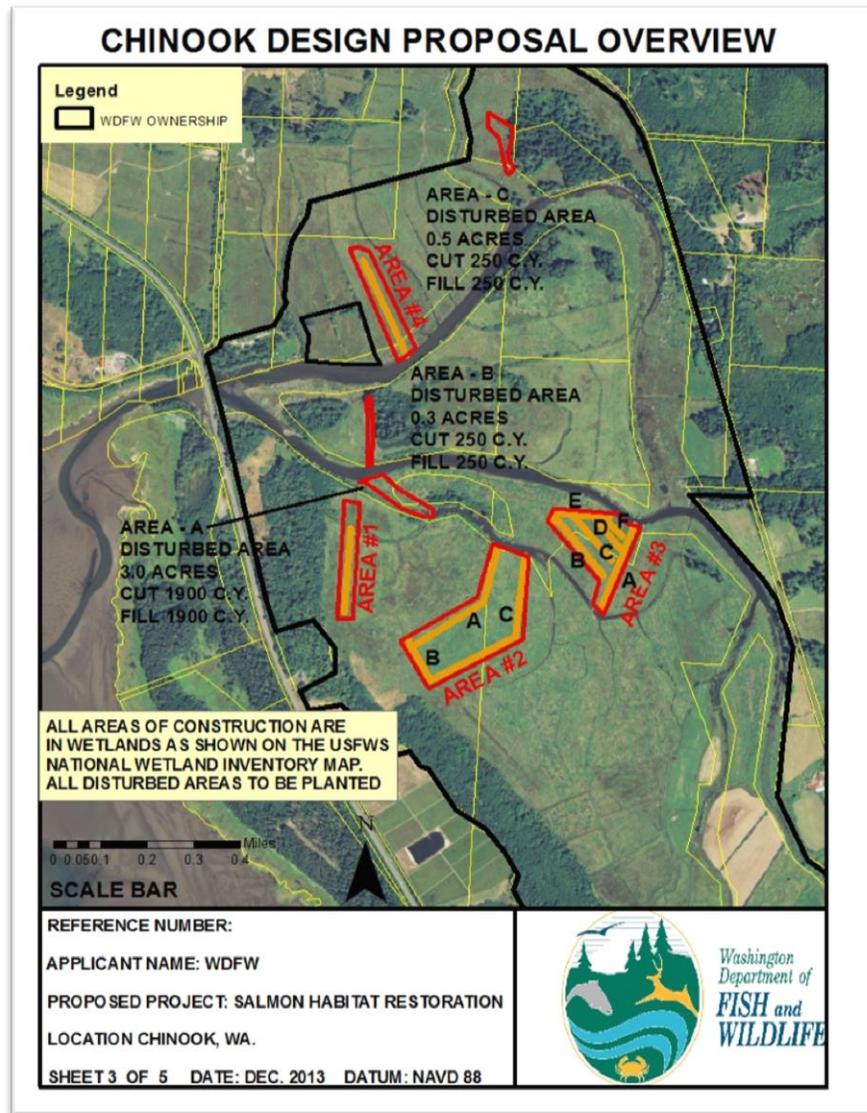
Restoring complex channel habitat within three areas (see map to the right areas A, B, & C) of the tidal floodplain is planned for the summer of 2014. Overall, this action will result in the restoration of more than 16 acres of historic tidal wetlands formerly converted to agricultural drainage ditches and pastures. In order to protect the adjacent landowner to the north from flooding while increasing inundation on the Chinook Wildlife Unit, culverts with tide gates will be installed on two agriculture ditches.

## Major Stewardship Accomplishments

In 2012 and 2013, Wildlife Area staff continued their efforts to provide quality winter forage for elk throughout the Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area and Wynoochee Mitigation project. This included mowing approximately 475 acres, fertilizing 400 acres and re-seeding 70 acres. These activities occurred at the Wynoochee Mitigation, Anderson Homestead, Quinault, Olympic and Chinook Units. These managed fields produce roughly 100 times the nutritional quality that is present in similar acreage habitats adjacent to the project area. In addition, staff mowed approximately 200 acres of waterfowl habitat to create sheet water and to control Reed canary grass.

## Olympic Timber Thinning Restoration Project

The Olympic 3 Sorts thinning project's logging portion was completed in the summer of 2011. The remaining units were harvested. These units held approximately 65 acres of salvage and thinning harvest that was harvested in the summer of 2011. The final restoration work was completed in 2012 with the replanting of elk forage areas. In all, 35 acres were reseeded with a



mix of orchard grass and red clover, the preferred winter forage of Roosevelt elk. The thinned forest habitat has started to recover with new vegetation filling in the under-story.

**Status Report of 2012-2013 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 2014.

<b>2012-13 Performance Measure</b>	<b>Status of Performance Measure</b>	<b>Explanation of Progress/ 2014-15 Related Activity/ Comments</b>
Complete performance measures per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan.	All activities completed	Complete annual performance measures for Wynoochee Mitigation
Reseed 40-75 acres of elk forage annually.	Completed	2014 Reseed 55 acres unit two; 2015 Reseed 45 acres Wynoochee unit; 2015 Reseed 60 acres Pinkney unit (pending funding) Olympic.
Mow and fertilize 400 acres of elk forage.	Mowed 485 acres for elk forage and fertilized 450 acres.	Annually mow 200 acres, fertilize 250 acres - Wynoochee unit; Mow 200 acres, fertilize 200 acres - Olympic unit. Annually mow and fertilize 30 acres Anderson unit; mow approximately 72 acres Chinook unit.
Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage.	Completed	2014 Remove brush around the perimeter of unit two 55 acres. 2015 unit 4A, 45 acres Wynoochee unit. 2015 Remove brush around the perimeter of Pinkney unit Olympic unit.
Conducted soil samples at Olympic, Wynoochee, and Anderson units. Conduct soil samples for proposed forage locations.	Five samples taken each at Wynoochee unit and Olympic unit. One sample taken at Anderson unit.	Annually conduct soil testing. For development of fertilizer blend specific for each forage management area
Develop 40+ new acres of elk forage (John's River Estuary Restoration Mitigation – Habitat Program)	Not completed -- the dike breach that occurred in 2011 has further pushed the need to complete this task.	Anticipate funding for mitigation of estuary restoration or separate funding for elk forage creation and road

		access.
Fall clipping on 100-250 acres for waterfowl sheet water habitat.	Completed approximately 280 acres	2014/2015 Fall clipping on 100-250 acres for waterfowl sheet water habitat at Chehalis, Chinook, Hoxit, Osgood, and Johns River Units
Spray and disc approximately 30 acres at the Chinook Unit to encourage smartweed growth	Approximately 17 acres were sprayed and disc for smartweed development 2012.	2014 and 2015 Spray/Disc 10-15 acres weather permitting.
Release pheasants at the Furbache Unit and Chinook Units	Completed throughout pheasant season	Will occur throughout the season as planned
Manage tide gates at the Chinook Unit, working with neighboring landowners	Experimental openings through the year occurred with the majority of the opening success happening during the summer season	BPA has committed to funding additional research and tide gate management, along with land acquisitions to allow additional flooding to the area
Complete restoration work after logging of the Lynn unit	Reseed approximately 20 acres of skid roads, landings and forage area	
Conduct "Wet Soil" management activities at John's River, Chehalis, Hoxit, Willapa Wetlands and Chinook Units	Completed in 2012 and 2013	
Maintain temporary hunting/duck blinds Willapa Wetlands Unit John's River, Chehalis WA	Access to hunting/duck blinds maintained	Maintain temporary hunting/duck blinds and access, Willapa Wetlands Unit John's River, Chehalis WA.
Complete acquisition of targeted parcels adjacent to the Chehalis Unit	Purchased Osgood property in 2012. Prepared for public access	
Maintain riparian plantings along the Newman Creek (Chehalis WA and the Chehalis River Hoxit Units	Plants maintained throughout the summer of 2012 and 2013	Mow plantings annually to increase survival.
Maintain six water control structures for waterfowl and Reed Canary grass control	Three structures at Willapa Wetlands (potter Slough) were managed effectively. One structure at the Hoxit Unit was successfully managed. Two structures at John's River Unit were successfully managed. One structure at John's River has	Monitored and maintained annually to control desired water level.

	failed and resulted in a dike breach as described in the “New Issues” section.	
Complete annual Road Maintenance & Abandonment Plan (RMAP) requirements Olympic Units	All RMAP work that is required throughout the Olympic Units has been completed except for one problem area associated with the Johns River Wildlife Area.	Complete Beaver Cr. crossing. Pending approval for new design. John’s River unit.
Where applicable maintain all informational kiosks at Olympic wildlife area units	Completed throughout 2012 and 2013 - new kiosks installed at three locations: Anderson Homestead, Oyhut WA, Chehalis/ Osgood unit. All others kiosk maintained with informational material	Maintained annually
Install kiosk Cedar River	Not completed	Will be installed in conjunction of new parking area 2014
Initiate emphasis enforcement patrol for illegal off - road vehicle usage at the Olympic Unit	Not completed	Staffing and priorities

### **New Strategies**

The wildlife area plan identifies many strategies or activities to address goals and objectives related to WDFW’s Strategic Plan, 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.

### **Agency Objective: Protect, Restore and Enhance Fish and Wildlife and their Habitats**

#### **1. Improve and Maintain Fish Populations**

- A. Strategy: Manage newly acquired 201 acres at the Chinook unit for invasive weeds and assist with restoration.
- B. Strategy: Fence boundary of new Chinook unit property and develop public access point.

#### **2. Manage for waterfowl/wetlands**

- A. Strategy: Wet-soil management on 20 to 30 acres at the Chinook Unit involving cultivation and mowing for enhancement of sheet water and smartweed production 2014.
- B. Strategy: Assist in the Chinook River estuary restoration project.

- C. Strategy: Maintain freshwater wetland units and water control structures at John's River and Willapa Wetlands (Potter Slough) Unit. Draw down water at both units and mow and/or cultivate soil to encourage smartweed production. Control spread of canary reed grass and thistle throughout the units.

**Agency Objective: Provide Sound Operational Management of WDFW Lands, Facilities and Access Sites.**

**1. Maintain facilities to achieve safe, efficient and effective management of the wildlife area.**

- A. Strategy: Continue Davis Creek Agricultural lease per WDFW farm plan limiting activities to silage and hay production that excludes live-stock.
- B. Strategy: Develop project to build new storage and equipment shop at the Olympic headquarters.

**2014-15 Performance Measures**

1. Complete performance measures per Wynoochee Mitigation Plan.
2. Reseed 30-50 acres with elk forage at the Olympic and Wynoochee units.
3. Mow 400 acres of elk forage at the Olympic, Wynoochee and Chinook units.
4. Fertilize 400 acres of elk forage at the Wynoochee unit.
5. Remove brush around the perimeter of 50-70 acres of elk forage at the Olympic and Wynoochee units.
6. Conduct soil samples for proposed forage locations at the Olympic and Wynoochee units.
7. Fall clipping on 100-250 acres for waterfowl habitat at the Chehalis, Hoxit, Johns River, Potter Slough and Chinook units.
8. Spray and/or cultivate approximately 15 acres at the Chinook Unit to encourage "smart weed" generation.
9. Work with Forterra to transfer targeted parcels along the Willapa Bay Coastline.
10. Assist in managing tide gates at the Chinook Unit working with neighboring landowners to minimize the threat of flooding during high water events while increasing habitat values for salmonids.
11. Conduct wet soil management activities (Johns River, Hoxit, Chinook, Willapa Wetlands and Chehalis Units).
12. Release pheasants at Furbrache and Chinook Units.
13. Maintain six water control structures for waterfowl habitat - two at Johns River, one at Hoxit, and three at Willapa Wetlands (Potters Slough).
14. Maintain riparian plantings along the Chehalis River at the Chehalis and Hoxit Units.
15. Maintain 48 acres of riparian forested buffer along the Chinook River and its tributaries.
16. Where applicable, maintain all informational kiosks at wildlife area units.
17. Continue efforts associated with the Snowy Plover Recovery Plan at the Oyhut Unit.
18. Initiate Emphasis Enforcement Patrol for illegal ORV usage at the Olympic Unit.
19. Develop a forage enhancement project that will mitigate for the loss of elk forage due to the Johns River dike breach which occurred in 2011.
20. Assist in development of a long term tide gate management plan for the Chinook Unit that is funded by the BPA for operations and maintenance (O&M).
21. Implement wetland enhancement activities on the Chehalis expansion area to improve habitat conditions for waterfowl.

22. Implement wet soil management activities on wet swales at the Davis Creek Unit.
23. Improve access to North Willapa Bay Units (Cedar River, Hawks Point, North River and Smith Creek).
24. Implement wet soil management practices that enhance habitat conditions for waterfowl at the Chehalis Unit expansion (Osgood) in 2014

### **Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC) Input**

Wildlife area staff hosted a Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC) meeting on March 20th 2014 at the Region 6 office in Montesano. Invitations were sent to 11 WAAC members, however only 4 members attended the meeting. The meeting went well with good quality discussions and ideas brought forth by the advisory committee.

Those in attendance included:

- Kurt Snyder – Grays Harbor Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association (WWA)
- Ivars Matisons- Matisons Timber Services LLC
- Jack Smith – Eyes In The Woods
- Todd Sandell – Wild Fish Conservancy (WFC)
- Olympic Wildlife Area Personnel: Jim Gerchak, James Gallegos and Robert VanBlaricom

The WAAC was given handout materials as well as a power point presentation. The update was presented by the Wildlife Area Manager, Jim Gerchak. High points included the following:

- When discussing the breached dike at John's River Wildlife Area, WFC representative stated that their studies have shown there is a healthy population of salmon in new estuary's created by dike breach.
- Grays Harbor Chapter WWA representative had concerns about spraying eelgrass on the outer bay, and the controversy between oyster growers trying to eradicate it vs waterfowl dependency as a food source. We advised the concern by informing the member that the agency is not responsible for eelgrass permitting on the twin harbors. The private oyster growers have been issued permits in both Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay by the Department of Ecology to control eelgrass in the shell fish beds. We advised them that we were aware of surveys for eelgrass that DNR was conducting in both harbors but that WDFW is not involved in any measures to control it.
- WWA representative brought to our attention of a break in the fence connecting the Osgood property and neighboring properties that has in the past been used to trespass by vehicle for hunting purposes.
- WWA's Grays Harbor Chapter also reminded us that they owe the department \$2,000 of in-kind volunteer work from our partnership with grant acquisition in purchasing Osgood property. He offered possible garbage clean up on the property. Jack Smith with Eyes in the Woods was also interested in partnering up with WWA in the cleanup efforts on the property.
- WWA representative expressed concerns over condition of duck blind on handicapped trail at Chehalis Wildlife Area. He exchanged contact information with Jack Smith for a possible partnership with Eyes in the Woods on game camera use to catch criminals causing the property destruction.

- Kurt Snyder offered helping with the construction, installation, and monitoring of wood duck boxes. He already monitors boxes at the Chehalis, Davis Creek, Scatter Creek, and West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Areas.



*The following is a comment made by WAAC member Jack Smith regarding funding for maintenance activities on the wildlife areas.*

*Acquisition of critical elk habitats is an important strategy in many elk plans. In order to maintain public support for this strategy however, adequate, stable funding for maintenance of WDFW lands and facilities must be emphasized.*

*A number of ideas surfaced in this process supporting funding for maintenance of these lands. One of the most interesting was to establish and maintain an endowment for each wildlife area. Interest on endowed money would be budgeted but the principal would be allowed to grow, as any new funding or unspent budgeted funds would be returned to the specific Wildlife Area Endowment. These funds could serve to meet the needs for reserve funds in the annual spending cycle but would accrue funding in an interest bearing account that would support Wildlife Area operations and maintenance. This would support elk habitat in two ways by providing for enhanced habitat on lands with public access and by generating public support for agency owned lands and the agency.*

*Another related idea was to ask for a re-authorization of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund that would allow for operations and maintenance expenditures as well as acquisitions. These federal funds are available for acquisition, which is great, but funding for operations and maintenance is lacking on most agency owned lands.*

*These two ideas working together could solve the long term issues of inadequate funding for agency owned lands and facilities and resistance to placing additional lands in government ownership for wildlife purposes.*

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Want to see the full plan?

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