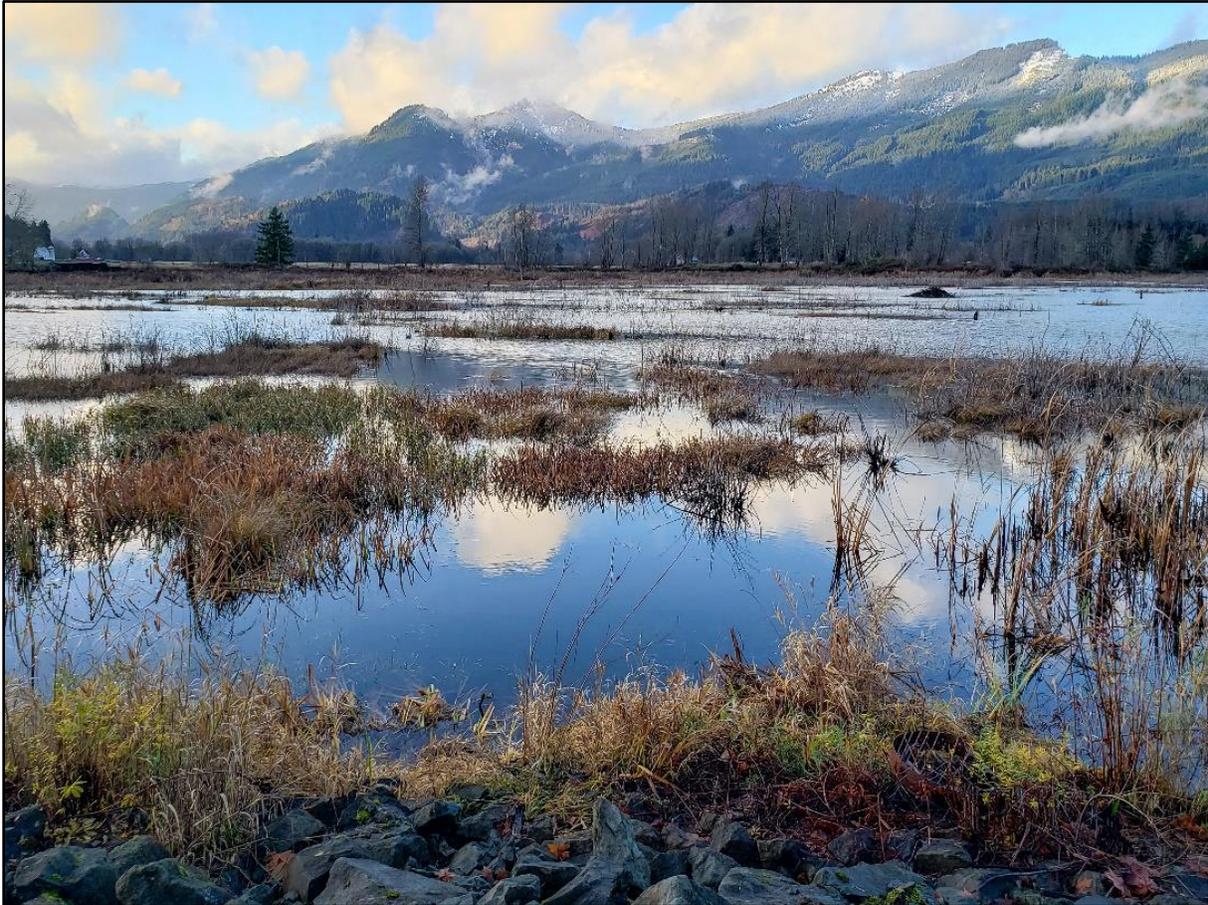


# Cowlitz Wildlife Area

## 2019-2020 Management Plan Update



*Spears Mill Pond*

This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the Cowlitz Wildlife Area Management Plan. The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities at the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. Every 10 years, WDFW develops a process for revising the management plans for each wildlife area to identify new management priorities and actions. In between plan revisions, the update focuses on recent accomplishments over the last two years.

### **Management Highlights**

#### **Forage Field Management (*Goal 1*)**

The Cowlitz Wildlife Area manages about 720 acres of forage fields, maintaining the fields with shorter, more nutritious grasses for the benefit of wildlife. This is achieved by controlling noxious weeds and providing setbacks for woody succession. The fields also provide winter waterfowl habitat, as they are generally located where the high winter water table creates ponding. Management occurs through a combination of agricultural leases, grazing, and mowing. In 2019,

the wildlife area negotiated two agricultural leases totaling 140 acres, as well as a grazing lease for 200 acres. The remaining acreage is maintained by department staff members, and is being evaluated for riparian forest restoration and enhancement projects.

### **Kosmos / Dogpatch Access Area Oil Seep (*Goal 7*)**

In 2019, an individual recreating near a short section of Rainey Creek discovered Bunker C oil seeping out of an eroded bank and reported it to the Department of Ecology. The seep was observed within the area of the former Kosmos industrial sawmill site. Tacoma Power has capped the seep and continues working to determine the extent of it. Wildlife area staff members are working with Tacoma Power to maintain public walk-in access and ensure the safety of those who recreate in the area.



*Bunker C oil seeping from bank*

### **Wildlife Area Parking and Kiosk Improvements (*Goal 3*)**

Wildlife area staff members improved parking at three locations on the wildlife area and installed informational kiosks. On the Kosmos Unit, staff members improved a parking lot adjacent to the Clevenger Road gate, constructed approximately 200 feet of new trail, and installed an informational kiosk. The new section of trail connects the parking area to the main Rainey Creek Trail. The 13,500-foot parking area will provide ample parking. Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff members also worked with Tacoma Power to install large rip rap material to upgrade the parking area and make it less attractive to individuals wanting to turn “cookies” in the gravel. The large rip rap around the vault toilet was moved, and additional rock was added to prevent RVs from dumping their waste tanks into the holding vault through the toilet. Tacoma Power conducted the work to mitigate for the impacts that the oil seep clean-up had on the parking area. The wildlife area also constructed a 50x50 parking area on the Davis Lake Unit. The area will provide a safer place for visitors to park their vehicles.



*Kosmos parking areas*

### **Mossyrock Moist Soil Management (Goal 1)**

In 2020, wildlife area staff members enlisted the Capital and Asset Management Program (CAMP) to design and implement infrastructure repairs and upgrades to two of the water control structures. The structures have failed due to attrition and water is no longer able to be impounded fully on two of the ponds. CAMP will design the project and secure the necessary permits in 2021 to implement the repairs and upgrades in 2022. Both flash board risers and drain culverts will be replaced. The walkway on Pond #1 (Big Pond) will be repaired. The replacement risers will utilize a gate valve to allow the pond to drain. Beaver deceivers will also be installed. The project is being funded by Tacoma Power through wildlife area operations and management funds provided annually as part of the Settlement Agreement.



*Failed Mossyrock Riser Pond #1*

### **Spears Pond Pumping Project (Goal 1)**

In 2020, wildlife area personnel enlisted CAMP to design and construct a portable pumping system to maintain the water levels in the 27-acre mill pond on the Spears Unit. Historically the pond was maintained by the plywood mill by actively pumping water from adjacent Siler Creek. Currently the pond is filled only when flooding occurs during the winter months and is then lost during the summer and fall through seepage into the ground and evapotranspiration. This is causing the pond to slowly be lost to emergent growth, as it is seldom full. The wildlife area has pumped water consistent with the water right in most years, but a permanent portable solution is

necessary to maintain a full pool. CAMP will design the system and secure the necessary permits in 2021 to construct the project in 2022. The project will utilize a screened submersible pump that will pump 2 cubic feet per second. A timer will control when the pump is active and a float valve will prevent the pump from overflowing the pond. CAMP will also upgrade the outflow culvert with a gate valve and a beaver deceiver. The project is being funded by Tacoma Power through wildlife area operations and management funds provided annually as part of the Settlement Agreement.

## **New Issues**

### **Spears Mill Site Improvement and Revegetation Project (*Goal 3*)**

The Spears Mill site location is heavily impacted from years of mill operations. The soils are heavily compacted, which allows noxious weeds to flourish and makes it difficult to establish a beneficial vegetation community. In addition, ORV activity has plagued this portion of the unit. The wildlife area plans to construct infrastructure using large rip rap and wildlife friendly fencing to limit vehicles to a defined parking area where a kiosk will be installed. A trail along the pond edge will connect the dike road to the parking area forming a loop around the 27-acre pond. The rest of the impacted area will be scarified if needed and revegetated.

### **Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Field Restoration (*Goal 1*)**

The wildlife area will begin restoration efforts on the Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Unit. The forage pastures will be replanted with tree species characteristic of undisturbed forested riparian terraces along the Cowlitz River. Portions will be unplanted to retain/create smaller forest openings. The habitat will benefit from restoring natural processes, which currently requires intensive management to control noxious weeds.