

# Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area

2021-2022 Management Plan Update



This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the 2006 Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Management Plan. The plan addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts and public recreation opportunities at the Wildlife Area. Every 10 years, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (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

### **Nemah Tidelands Acquisition and Development Grant (Goal 3)**

In 2022, WDFW completed the acquisition of a 103-acre property in Pacific County that will allow for a rare public recreational opportunity. Willapa Bay is the second-largest estuary on the West Coast, home to abundant populations of clams and oysters and supports the largest aquaculture industry in the country. Public access to this area is very limited as much of the shoreline is privately owned, inaccessible due to terrain, and is lacking access roads and parking. This acquisition, coupled with a development grant from the state of Washington, will allow for walk-in public access to over 500 acres of public tidelands for a variety of non-motorized, water related recreational activities such as the recreational harvest of shellfish. The development grant funds the construction of a parking area, paved road or trail to the beach, and the installation of a vault toilet. Construction of this infrastructure is expected to be complete by Fall of 2026.



*State-owned tidelands of Willapa Bay*

### **Elk Forage Management (Goal 2)**

The wildlife area has continued its ongoing efforts to maintain early-successional meadows on several units specifically for use by elk. These activities occur annually at the Wynoochee Mitigation Sites and Olympic units, but also the Chinook, Johns River and Anderson Homestead units, as time and funding allows. Each year approximately 450 acres are mowed, 250 are fertilized and 50 are cultivated and re-seeded to provide quality winter elk forage. Cultivation

and re-seeding generally occur on a five-year rotation at the Wynoochee Mitigation Sites and the Olympic Unit, less frequently at other areas. Aside from the mowing, disking, and seeding, this work also entails periodic herbicide application, brushing back trees and shrubs, soil testing and vegetation monitoring.



*Re-seeding at the Wynoochee Mitigation fields*

### **Waterfowl Habitat Management (Goal 3)**

Funded through a combination of the Migratory Waterfowl Fund, Bonneville Power Administration, Pittman-Robertson Act and State Wildlife account, the wildlife area has continued to provide and manage for waterfowl habitat in a variety of ways. Working with Ducks Unlimited, WDFW replaced the water control structure at the Hoxit Unit and will soon replace a structure at Johns River. Wildlife area staff have continued regularly mowing portions of the Chehalis, Chinook and Johns River units. When flooded, these areas provide shallow-water habitat that is attractive to a wide range of waterfowl and provides public hunting opportunities. Approximately 300 acres are mowed per year. Beginning in 2022, wildlife area staff began managing the three ponds at Potters Slough. With regular water level manipulation and vegetation management, staff aims to improve conditions for escape cover, food resources and hunter concealment.

### **Elk River Habitat Enhancement Project (Goal 3)**

At the time of acquisition in 2019, noxious weeds were abundant in both upland and wetland areas of the Elk River Unit and were ultimately limiting wildlife habitat. Beginning in 2021, WDFW has received funding for the treatment and removal of Scotch broom, Himalayan



*North Pond at Potters Slough following water level manipulation*

blackberry and reed canary grass, the restoration of native plant communities and the thinning of overstocked forests to benefit a variety of wildlife species. Since that time, WDFW has treated various weeds species using a combination of methods and has replanted 13 acres for forest habitat. Wildlife Area staff have also repeatedly mowed approximately 20 acres of reed canary grass per year to provide migratory waterfowl habitat. Roughly 40 acres of forest have been thinned thus far.

### **Lower Satsop River Restoration Project (Goal 1)**

The current phase of the Satsop project has been ongoing since roughly 2018 and is now nearing completion. Set in an otherwise agricultural setting, the aim of this project was to enhance floodplain connectivity on WDFW property for habitat restoration purposes, while also protecting agricultural infrastructure and soils from bank erosion on adjacent private property. Much of the earth moving work was completed several years ago, recent efforts have focused on revegetation of the disturbed area and ongoing weed management.

### **New Issues**

**Fish Passage barrier removal:** The Wildlife Area is facing several notable emerging issues, with one potentially impacting day-to-day operations more so than the other. Multiple fish passage barriers on the Chehalis Unit have been identified to be either removed or replaced under the 2013 federal court injunction. Wildlife Area staff will work with WDFW engineers over the next several months on a design that will satisfy all parties. Barrier removal likely would not begin until at least the year 2026.

**European green crab coordination:** The other emerging issue is the continued spread of European green crab, as well as its monitoring and removal. Although wildlife area staff does not directly conduct this work, they will periodically coordinate with other state and non-government partners regarding access and public outreach on wildlife area lands for these purposes.