

# Klickitat Wildlife Area

## 2019-20 Wildlife Area Plan Update



This document is intended to highlight accomplishments as they relate to goals and objectives identified within the [2016 Klickitat Wildlife Area Management Plan](#). This addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, ongoing restoration efforts, and public recreation opportunities at the Klickitat 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**

One of the most significant developments in 2019, the purchase of more land for the Simcoe Mountains Unit, was reported in the last management plan update.

### **Administrative**

The Klickitat Wildlife Area experienced disruptions in operations during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety measures that were designed to keep employees and the recreating public safe were implemented successfully, though the many changes in the way work was

performed slowed staff response times and added new procedures to daily routines. Signs to direct public use of the wildlife area were posted, and then changed as more information about public safety was understood by health experts. The campgrounds along the Klickitat River received heavy use as outdoor recreation became more popular, and some abuse occurred as well. To assist in handling the workload associated with the activity at the campgrounds, a temporary worker was hired. By the time deer hunting season arrived, staff work activities and recreational uses had resumed more normal patterns. The wildlife area manager was able to interact with visitors, and hunters enjoyed a successful 2020 deer season with many deer harvested. It was a year of rapidly occurring changes and adjustments in daily life and everyone was grateful for a return to traditional activities in fall.

The Klickitat assistant wildlife area manager position was vacant going into January 2020, and recruitment for this position was in process when state budget concerns related to a downturn in economic activity during the pandemic led to a freeze on hiring. The hiring process was renewed in fall 2020, but no one was hired. Fortunately, the temporary worker who worked at the campgrounds also did chores around the wildlife area headquarters, and the most essential tasks were taken care of through December 2020.

### **Drought**

The increasing severity of seasonal droughts have affected the Klickitat Wildlife Area. Managed grazing by livestock has become more labor intensive due to water sources drying up early in the season, and alternate arrangements for livestock watering were needed. Tree species that require more water such as quaking aspen and Douglas fir are succumbing at a faster rate, and Oregon white oak, along with most drought-tolerant tree species on the wildlife area, are entering dormancy in late summer in some areas. Ponds on the Sondino Unit are going dry in mid to late summer. This is presumed to have an adverse effect on western pond turtles. Drought is also impacting agricultural activities on the wildlife area with both agricultural leases experiencing a major decline in production in 2020.



*Drought-stressed Oaks Turning Yellow on the Klickitat Wildlife Area*

**Balch Lake (*Goal #2 Recover western pond turtle populations in the wildlife area to healthy, self-sustaining levels*)**

One positive outcome of the dry summer of 2020 was that the largest body of water on the Sondino Unit, Balch Lake, dropped so low that it became feasible to attempt to eradicate the fish in the lake. Records on western pond turtles occupying Balch Lake show that these turtles grow much more slowly than the turtles in the other ponds. The most likely difference in conditions is that Balch Lake contained a large population of warm water fish, which compete for the same foods as the turtles. No fish are present in the other ponds. By late September 2020, most of the larger fish in Balch Lake had died due to a lack of oxygen. Several WDFW employees set up two pumps at the edge of the lake to pump out water. The equipment had to be moved as the pool shrank, and while the pumps were running workers collected fish from the lake using dipnets. Thousands of small fish were removed from the water and an unknown number of fish expired in the mud. The turtles are not severely impacted by such action in early fall, and it is expected that turtles will show a significant improvement in growth now that competition for food is much reduced. Western pond turtles naturally leave the water in early fall to estivate (in a state of torpor or dormancy) until winter precipitation refills the ponds, so they are adapted to seasonal periods of dormancy.



*Netting Fish at Balch Lake*

## **New Issues**

### **Delays in Fence Construction Around Simcoe**

WDFW engineering staff members have worked with the Klickitat wildlife area manager to draft a plan and design construction of new fencing on the east and north boundaries of the Simcoe Mountains Unit, and WDFW has purchased most of the materials needed for construction of the fence. An archaeological survey of the project footprint has been completed and a report on the findings has been written. The report and the plans for the fence have been sent to the tribal

government that is interested in this project. The consultation process with the tribe is ongoing. Unfortunately, the grant that supplied the funds for the project expired during the extended consultation period, and the project now lacks funding for the labor to construct the fence. WDFW is working to have the funding restored, but is uncertain at this time.

**Weed Control (*Goal #1 Maintain or improve the ecological integrity of priority sites. Objective D.*)**

Interruptions in seasonal work due to the global pandemic and a vacant staff position have resulted in some planned work not being accomplished. Weed control work on the Klickitat Wildlife Area during 2019 and 2020 has occurred at a much-reduced level. Weed populations are expanding and much more attention will need to be focused on this issue to protect native habitats.