



# SINLAHEKIN WILDLIFE AREA 2010 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Photo by – Justin Haug

## Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2009 Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan [http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/management\\_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/) that provides management direction for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area (SWA) in Okanogan 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.

Plans are updated annually 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.

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## Updates/Changes

### Conners Lake Dam Repair

In the spring of 2009 refilling of Conners Lake began, after having been drained for over a year while undergoing assessment and repairs to address a leak. The refilling process entailed daily

closure of a hand pumped hydraulically activated gate on the low flow pipe passing through the base of Conner Lake Dam. The incremental closure was necessary to slow water flow thus increasing the water level in Conner Lake while keep an adequate flow of water in Sinlahekin Creek to meet the needs of aquatic animals.

#### Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project

Efforts began implementing the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP). The grant was awarded through the State Lands Restoration (SLR) category of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), administered by the Recreation Conservation Office (RCO). The budget for the project was based on anticipated income from fuels (i.e. logs) and since timber prices are extremely depressed, permission was requested and granted to expand the scope of the treatment area, which includes the area east of the Sinlahekin Road from the north end south to Blue Lake. This change of scope would allow greater flexibility in implementation treatments, e.g., instead of subsidizing the removal of potentially commercial timber, grant funds would be used to remove timber having very little commercial value even in a good economic environment. Thus fuels that would likely be subsidized to treat can be treated first over the larger area, unless the timber market returns and timber of value can be used to offset costs of treatment.

A contract was awarded to Central Washington University to conduct the Cultural Resources Survey for the SERP and to also collaborate with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to complete the Cultural Resource Survey requirements for the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) grant awarded to complete forest stand improvement and slash treatment on approximately 220 acres, an activity planned as part of the SERP.

A contract was awarded for conducting a fire history analysis on the project area.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has partnered on the SERP project. To date they have contributed over \$50,000 in cash plus personnel time towards the project. Specifically TNC has contributed in-kind cash for: 1) silvicultural prescription development and implementation, 2) silvicultural layout and marking, 3) stand reconstruction analysis of Sarsapkin and Sinlahekin Creek alluvial fans, and 4) contribution towards Forest Stewardship Council Certification for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. Additionally TNC provided staff time towards the SERP project.

The wildlife area received a \$75,000 grant through the Natural Resource and Conservation Service, Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) for timber stand improvement, i.e., fuels reduction on 220 acres west of Sinlahekin road from near headquarters to near Sinlahekin Creek Road. This grant integrates with the before-mentioned WWRP grant in trying to restore fire dependent habitat.

#### Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaborative work continued with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on finalizing the Sinlahekin Stewardship Agreement whereby BLM lands that are part of the Sinlahekin will be managed by WDFW with any potential income to be used by WDFW toward management of the same BLM lands.

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area continues to cooperate with the Tonasket School District, specifically with Scott Olson, a 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Elementary School Teacher, in his educational efforts involving photo monitoring. This educational experience is extremely valuable from many aspects by involving students in activities that contribute to development of critical thinking, photo interpretation, comparative analysis, paying attention to detail, development of interests in local history, seasonal plant phenology, botany, seasonal landscape changes, plant and animal community associations, plant and animal identification, animal identification by sign and sound, teamwork, communication, problem solving, computer skills, GPS skills, compass skills, photographic skills, outdoor oriented experience/exercise and public/peer presentations. This multi-faceted environmental learning begins from the moment students receive the 100+ year old photos in the class room and studying the photos for information and clues, to locating the photo-points in the field, retaking the photos, documenting the GPS coordinates of the photo-points, the azimuth of the direction of the photos, the plant communities and identifying the plants, the animals seen or heard and sign observed, to the classroom where “now” photos are manipulated and printed out, comparative analysis of historic conditions with contemporary conditions and developing written theories regarding documented changes with final presentations to peer groups and/or the public. Also the information developed contributes to management of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. For his work Mr. Olson was recognized as one of two Teachers of the Year for 2009 by the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, and also as Teacher of the Year for 2009 by the Washington Association of Conservation Districts.

The wildlife area hosted Evergreen State College (ESC) instructor, Carri LeRoy and her Environmental Education class (pictured below). Specifically the ESC students, broken into teams, developed curricula covering a variety of environmental subjects. The final portion of the ESC students assignment was to set up teaching/learning stations on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and Oroville School teacher George Thornton’s Oroville High School students, broken into groups attended each learning/training station for a specified time then rotated to the next station. The ESC students gained valuable real life experience in developing curricula for a specific topic and “teaching that topic” to the Oroville High School students who very much enjoyed the opportunity for outdoor learning.

A Master’s Candidate student, Matthew Weintraub, with the assistance of two University of Washington College of Forest Resources Professors, Dr. Tom Hinckley and Dr. Greg Etl, installed equipment at a location on the wildlife area to measure sap flow in ponderosa pine trees and collect weather data. After a year of data collection the stand will be thinned to evaluate the response of the “leave trees” to decreased competition for moisture, nutrients and shade. The first year of data collection was collected in 2010.



The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area continues to partner with the Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship (IRIS) in a program called “Witnessing Change”. The Sinlahekin is one of three sites in north central Washington participating in this photo-monitoring project, where the public is invited to visit designated sites on the Sinlahekin where photo-points have been established with initial photos taken and placed on a website <http://www.witnessingchange.org/>. Interested individual can get the information about the location of these sites and visit to take photos and “witness” the changes that take place over time by comparing photos over time.

Land acquisitions recently added to the Sinlahekin Complex include the 900 acre **Carter Mountain Wildlife Area**; and 850 acre **Horse Spring Coulee Wildlife Area**. Management objectives are continuing to be developed and plans will be made available in the coming months. Russian knapweed infestations were treated at both sites in 2009 and preliminary weed surveys have been done.

Continued with data collection, (e.g., fence location and maintenance, weed location and control efforts, roads, trails, fire scars, water control structures, cultural resource sites, etc.) for incorporation into the Sinlahekin GIS database. This effort began in 2003 with contributions from WDFW staff, interns and volunteers resulting in a substantial amount of information gathered. These data from this effort continues to be invaluable in planning and management of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.



A new agricultural lessee was welcomed on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area responsible for the irrigated and dryland alfalfa fields north of Fish Lake. The first season with the new lessee was a success.

The insulation of the headquarters facilities was upgraded using funding provided by WDFW’s Sustainability Program, and is expected to reduce energy consumption. Building insulation improvements included: the bunkhouse exterior walls, crawlspace and attic, machine shop attic, and residence attic and basement.

## New Issues

None where identified.

## Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Numerous volunteers including Master Hunter participants and candidates, Americorp, and Okanogan County Jail Trustees helped out on the wildlife area in 2009. These volunteers were responsible for various accomplishments including: fence repair and construction, clipping and bagging hounds-tongue, facility maintenance, and assisting with day-to-day operations. All Master Hunter Program participants learned about projects and volunteer opportunities through the WDFW Master Hunter website. This website posting has proven to be a valuable asset.



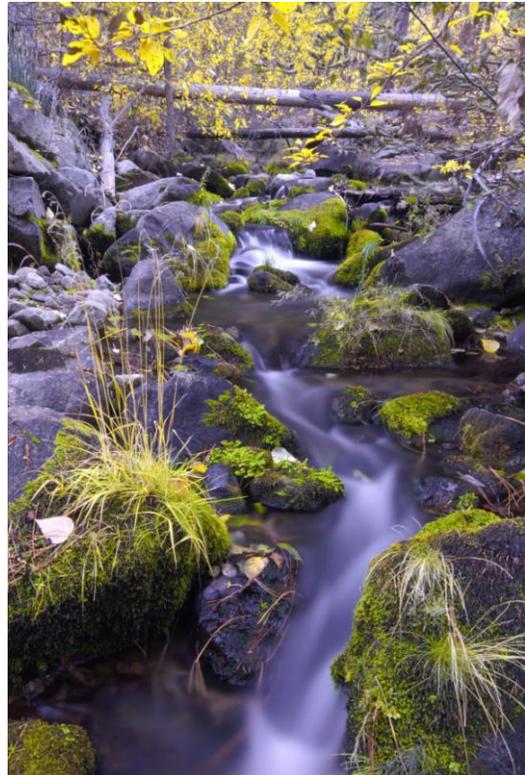
Tonasket AmeriCorps Volunteers – Photo by Justin Haug

### Weed Control

Several weed control techniques were employed including clipping and bagging seed heads from hounds-tongue and puncture vine, using a shovel to sever the tap root of hounds-tongue, and puncture vine and pulling the plant up. Sprayed (using mostly backpack spraying, ATV and truck mounted boom spraying) nearly 25 acres of weeds throughout the SWA covering nearly 500 acres of WDFW land. Major target weeds this year were Russian knapweed, hounds-tongue, St. John's wort, puncture-vine, Dalmatian toadflax and bladder senna.

Cultivation using a tractor and disk on food plots was used to control weeds.

Bio-control agents were monitored for at all infestations of weeds, including presence, abundance, impact on target weeds and the need for releasing more or potential sites for collecting bio-agents for redistribution to other infestations. Generally bio-agents are doing an excellent job of controlling diffuse knapweed, with less effectiveness shown on St. John's wort, and Russian thistle.



Cecile Creek: Photo by Justin Haug

**Status Report of 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 2009.

**The SWA performance measures for 2009 included:**

<b>2009 Performance Measure</b>	<b>Status of Performance Measure</b>	<b>Explanation of Progress/ 2010 Related Activity/ Comments</b>
Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract	Completed	
Complete the displays for the trails overlooking Blue Lake	Not Done	Will continue to work on this as time permits
Implement the WWRP and WHIP grants regarding fuels reduction and prescribed burning	In Progress	Will continue to work on this throughout the grant period
Renew grazing permits and agricultural leases expiring on or before December 31, 2009	Done	
Visit both the Horse Spring Coulee and Buzzard Lake properties to assess management objectives, issues and begin planning.	Partially Done - Fencing on Buzzard Lake property installed to exclude cattle. Reader boards and signs also installed. Survey done on Southern and SW portion of boundary.	Will finish exclusion fence in spring of 2010. Work on management plans will continue.
Survey and/or mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary.	Not done	No funds available to survey boundary
Seek funding for a complete fire history analysis of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area	Not done	An analysis is being done on portions of the SWA related to the SER project
Grid for weeds on 640 acres minimum. Locate and map, with GPS and GIS, all class B designate weed, e.g., Dalmatian toadflax, Russian knapweed and other weed infestations on the SWA, such that a layer depicting a map of each weed species is included	Sprayed weeds covering nearly 500 acres; did not use a grid system. All known class B designates were mapped via GPS, sprayed and incorporated into our GIS weed database.	An effort to grid an area will occur when time allows. All known class B sites will be visited and controlled again in 2010.

in the SWA GIS project		
Look for funding to produce new Sinlahekin Wildlife Area maps	Not done	Will search for funding throughout 2010
Organize fencing supplies and built structures to better house various equipment/supplies	Not done	Efforts will continue in 2010
Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan	Plans reviewed and updated, but not complete (fire management, weed control)	Completion of plans will occur as time permits, e.g., species lists, weed mgmt plan
Complete performance evaluations	Completed	
Complete layers on SWA GIS project including: fences, fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts, campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards, power poles.	New layers were created and refined throughout 2009.	This effort will continue thru 2010 and will be updated as information become available and desired.
Visit all known Dalmatian toadflax and Russian knapweed sites at least twice and initiate appropriate treatment.	Completed	
Stewardship inspection of Greg and Carol James' Conservation Easement	Not done	
Apply for at least one grant or other funding opportunities consistent with planned priorities to supplement funding	No grant opportunities for desirable grants; additional funding being provided for Bighorn Sheep study as part of SER project.	Will continue to seek grants and additional funding in 2010.
Complete the self-guided tour of the Sinlahekin.	Completed – Needs to be put on the web need final authorization from WSU and Okanogan County Historical Society to use their photos	Place pdf or jpg on the agency website; authorization still needed.

Identify a minimum of 5 miles of fence and rebuild and repair	Incomplete – rebuilt or repaired just over 2 miles of fence.	Continue to rebuild/replace fence throughout 2010
Use Okanogan County Jail Trustees for weed control and fence maintenance efforts as well as volunteers, master hunter participants, Americorp groups, and others willing to help in the wildlife area.	Americorp and volunteers used for weed control efforts. Jail Trustees not used.	They will continue to be used throughout 2010.
Work with private, county, state and federal land managers to promote use of prescribed fire, in a coordinated effort on all lands, to improve wildlife habitat, i.e., North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council	The North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council Steering Committee met four times in 2009 to pursue efforts toward facilitating the use of prescribed fire in North Central Washington.	Work in this area will continue in 2010.

### **New Strategies**

None were identified

### **2010 Performance Measures**

The 2010 performance measures for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Complete the displays for the trails overlooking Blue Lake
- 2) Continue to implement the WWRP and WHIP grants regarding fuels reduction and prescribed burning
- 3) Identify a minimum of 5 miles of fence and rebuild and repair
- 4) Renew grazing leases and agricultural leases expiring on or before December 31, 2010
- 5) Organize fencing supplies and built structures to better house various equipment/supplies
- 6) Grid for weeds on 640 acres minimum
- 7) Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract
- 8) Look for funding to produce new Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Maps
- 9) Seek funding for a complete fire history analysis of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area
- 10) Survey and/or mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary
- 11) Locate by gridding (see #6) and map, with GPS and GIS, all class B designate weed, e.g., Dalmatian toadflax, Russian knapweed and other weed infestations on the SWA, such that a layer depicting a map of each weed species is included in the SWA GIS project
- 12) Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan

- 13) Complete performance evaluations
- 14) Complete and or update layers on SWA GIS project including fence, fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts, campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards, power poles.
- 15) Visit all known Dalmatian toadflax and Russian knapweed sites at least twice to monitor and initiate appropriate treatment.
- 16) Connect Conner Lake-Hunters Camp Trail with Coulee Creek Trail and install more frequent trail markers.
- 17) Complete self-guided tour project by acquiring permission to use photos from WSU and Okanogan County Historical Society and putting tour documents on the agency website
- 18) Use Okanogan County Jail Trustees for weed control and fence maintenance efforts as well as volunteers, master hunter participants, Americorp groups, and others willing to help in the wildlife area.
- 19) Work with private, county, state and federal land managers to promote use of prescribed fire, in a coordinated effort on all lands, to improve wildlife habitat, i.e., North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council
- 20) Apply for at least one grant or other funding opportunities consistent with planned priorities to supplement funding
- 21) Produce management plans for Carter Mountain, Buzzard Lake, and Horse Spring Coulee Wildlife Areas.

### **Citizens Advisory Group Input**

An Eastern Okanogan County Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on January 28, 2010 to review Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island, Chiliwist and Scotch Creek Management Plans, management progress and address any new issues or input on existing issues. Those in attendance included:

Dave Sunde	Okanogan Valley Chapter Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Gail Sunde	Okanogan Valley Chapter Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Geral Cox	Rancher - neighbor
Mark Williams	Forester, Bureau of Land Management
Kathleen Johnson	Instructor, Wenatchee Valley College North
Dave Swanberg	Okanogan Valley Chapter Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Brandon Wood	Neighbor
Eric Keane	Small Landowner, Neighbor
Peggy Swanberg	Okanogan Valley Chapter Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Anne Lyon	Okanogan County Noxious Weed Office/Board
Joe Allemandi	Rancher- Sinlahekin grazing permittee
Jon Shoemaker	Small Landowner, Neighbor
Bob Rothrock	Operations and Maintenance Whitestone Reclamation District
Hugh Jensen	Sportsman and City of Tonasket Public Works Department
John Zabreznik	Sportsman
Rick Lind	Sportsman and USFS Fire Management Officer, Tonasket & Winthrop Ranger Districts
Tim Vugteveen	Highlands District Manager/Department of Natural Resources
John Oakes	Large Landowner – part of property in negotiations for purchase of a Conservation Easement

Cari Haug	Administrative Assistant Okanogan Valley Land Council
Andre Corso	Forester, Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project; Reforestation Forester - USFS
Tom Jones	Rancher – neighbor and sharecropper
Clare Painter	Large Landowner – neighbor

Issues of concern

Better access to Carter Mountain and Horse Spring Coulee Wildlife Areas.

No other issues identified.

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**Want to see the full plan?**

Go to -

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