



L.T. MURRAY COMPLEX WILDLIFE AREAS 2012 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 L.T. Murray, Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas Management Plan http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/ providing management direction for the roughly 110,000 acre wildlife area complex located near Ellensburg, in Kittitas 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 every two years 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 includes 2010-2011 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies, and performance measures for 2012-2013.

Updates/Changes

FACILITIES

After many years without a workshop or equipment storage facility, WDFW finally leased shop space in Ellensburg for the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area. While staff offices will remain at the Pearl Street building, the wildlife area workshop will allow field staff to repair and maintain equipment and store materials in a central location.

NEW CAG MEMBER

A new addition to the L.T. Murray Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) is Jeff Ross, representing ATV riders and motorized recreational users. Jeff came to the last CAG meeting in 2011, and his group’s input will be very helpful in the future of road management decision making.

NEW ENFORCEMENT STAFF

WDFW’s local Enforcement has changed significantly in 2010 and 2011 due to staff transfers and restructuring. Sergeant Mike Sprecher moved to a new position in Region 1, and Officer Steve Rogers retired, and those positions have been filled with new staff. Detachment 18 out of Ellensburg now consists of Officers Brent Scherzinger, Corey Peterson and Carlo Pace. These local officers are supervised by Sergeant Morgan Grant out of Yakima.

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HUNTING

Pheasants: In 2010-11 roughly 400 pheasants were released annually at the Green Gate unit of the Quilomene Wildlife Area. In 2011, all WDFW pheasant release sites were required to shift to “non-toxic shot only” hunting.

Elk: The Colockum Elk Herd Study is nearing completion and the remaining 53 data-collection collars will be retrieved in May 2012. Data analysis will occur throughout 2012, and hopefully provide insight into the annual movements of the herd. A winter motorized-vehicle closure in the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area has remained in effect throughout the study.

The Colockum Elk Herd is above the population objective, with total herd counts at roughly 5,000 animals after hunting season. Bull ratios however are still below the objective. The Yakima Elk Herd is increasing and currently above the population objective, with roughly 11,000 total animals after hunting season.

Deer: Deer numbers were still low in 2011, and lice impacts such as poor fawn survival and numerous adult deer with hair loss are still having an effect. Overall mule deer populations in the Kittitas valley remain below historic averages.

ROAD MANAGEMENT

Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP):

2010: A Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR)/WDFW interagency work group removed six culverts through the use of explosives in the Shadow Creek system, and a seventh was removed with an excavator. Staff completed hand work to correct runoff and sediment delivery at three sites in North Fork Manastash, and six culverts in the Hutchins/Tamarack areas were installed or replaced to meet fish passage requirements. In cooperation with the Yakama Nation, the dilapidated Yahne Bridge was finally removed, along with the fill and abutments on either side of Taneum Creek. Overall, 20 miles of road were improved, the condemned Yahne Bridge was removed, and 13 problem culverts were addressed as part of the RMAP process.

2011: In spring 2011 three significant flood events occurred, one of which was considered a 100-year flood event. High water caused damage to wildlife area roads, bridges and portions of the elk fence near the mouth of Taneum Creek. Numerous roads into the Wenatchee National Forest west of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area were severely damaged and remained closed throughout the year. A section of the Murray Road was nearly impassable and closed to motorized use over the Memorial Day Weekend, and a portion of the Hutchins Road was temporarily closed as well. During the week after the flood event, contractors completed 1.5 miles of road maintenance on the lower portion of Robinson Canyon Road to improve the drainage and grade rutted and eroded portions that limited Wildlife Area access. A DNR/WDFW interagency work group removed four culverts with the use of explosives. Overall, approximately five miles of road were improved and four problem culverts removed. Another five miles of road improvement work and one culvert removal is scheduled for 2012.

Green Dot Road Management:

GIS staff from the Ellensburg DNR office assisted WDFW in updating the Green Dot Road Management maps. The two agencies will continue to work together in 2012 to get the new maps into an electronic format that will be accessible online.

Capital funds have been allotted to improve the Whiskey Dick Ridge Road and close the Whiskey Dick Creek Road. The Creek Road crosses Whiskey Dick Creek in multiple places and has an erosion cut that is becoming a hazard to drivers. Improvements to the Ridge Road include installing water bars, reshaping the road prism, and fixing badly out-sloped sections of road, which will make this a safer alternative than the Creek Road. Archaeological surveys have been conducted and the SEPA review process will begin in summer 2012.

TIMBER MANAGEMENT

A Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew thinned overstocked timber stands in Taneum Creek drainage. The felled trees were placed on the ground to reduce erosion on steep slopes, and were used to build a buck-and-pole fence to protect the riparian area, and were added to the creek as large woody debris to improve fish habitat and stream function.

WEED CONTROL

In 2010-2011, roughly 520 acres of weeds were treated using a number of techniques, including herbicide application, burning, mowing and release of bio-control insects. Approximately 200 of these acres were treated as part of grant-funded restoration projects.

DNR LAND EXCHANGE

Phase I of the land exchange between WDFW and the DNR closed in 2011, and Phase II is expected to close in the summer of 2012. In summary for Phase 1, L.T. Murray acquired 2,662 acres from DNR; and transferred 1,293.6 acres to DNR. Maps of the exchange parcels can be found online at:

<http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Topics/LandExchanges/Pages/Home.aspx>

GRANTS

The Department of Ecology Litter Control Grant funding for the L.T. Murray was renewed for the 2009-2011 biennium (\$2,000). This funding allows for some increased emphasis on cleanup of litter illegally dumped or left behind by campers and recreationists. It has also funded the placement of dumpsters for use by elk hunters during the General Elk Season, our single largest influx of Wildlife Area users.

The L.T. Murray/Wenas Wildlife Area Multi-site Rehabilitation grant was funded in 2007, and an extension was granted to assist with restoration of fires that occurred on the Wenas Wildlife Area. Three sites on the Quilomene W.A. (Quilomene Bay, Hunt Creek and Wide Hollow) were treated with herbicide applications in 2011, and Quilomene Bay was reseeded with a native grass and forb species mix. Additional follow-up weed spraying occurred in spring 2012.

In 2009 Wildlife Area staff secured a \$137,500 Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) grant for the Parke Creek Restoration project. To date, the Parke Creek grant has been used to control

weeds on 124 acres in the Parke Creek drainage. In 2011, herbicide was aerially applied to 34 acres of roadside upland habitats, in addition spraying and mowing 14 acres of stream adjacent habitats. Nearly 14 acres of noxious weeds adjacent to the creek were sprayed in spring 2011. The area was burned, then sprayed and seeded in fall 2011. Follow-up herbicide treatments will be applied in 2012.

L.T. Murray staff successfully applied for a \$6,900 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) grant in 2011 to protect and restore vegetation at nine springs on the Quilomene Wildlife Area. This project tied in with the ongoing grazing program, and cooperative spring redevelopment work being conducted by the local Conservation District and WDFW's livestock permittee. RMEF funds were used to construct livestock exclosure fences around seven redeveloped springs and two existing springs. Eight of the nine springs were fenced in 2011, and the final spring will be fenced in 2012. Fences were built in a wildlife friendly manner – low top wires, high bottom wires, and hung with plastic tabs to make the wires more visible. Once fences were constructed, the interior areas were burned to remove standing dead weed material, sprayed to reduce new weed infestation, and seeded with native grass/forb species or planted with native shrubs and trees. Weed control will continue at all nine springs as part of regular wildlife area maintenance.

New Issues

GRAZING

A 5-year grazing permit was implemented in 2011 on the Quilomene Wildlife Area. Temporary WDFW staff was hired to address fencing, forage use monitoring and spring restoration tasks. Permittee Russ Stingley grazed 160 cow-calf pairs in the Vantage Highway and Whiskey Jim pastures, utilizing an average of 5% of the available forage. Boundary fencing is still lacking on the Upper Parke Creek pasture, limiting the ability to implement a functional grazing rotation.

In 2012, livestock will graze in the Lower Parke and Vantage Highway pastures April-June, before rotating onto the Wild Horse Wind Facility. Trespass livestock grazing continues to have a significant impact, and more aggressive management action will be taken to address stray livestock in 2012.

NOVA TRAIL GRANT

L.T. Murray staff will apply for Non-highway and Off Road Vehicle Access (NOVA) grant funding to create a 15-mile non-motorized trail connecting the Taneum and Manastash drainages. Grant proposals will be submitted in the summer of 2012, and funds will be awarded to the successful applicants in 2013.



Major Stewardship Accomplishments

In cooperation with the Kittitas County Conservation District and local livestock permittee Russ Stingley, seven springs on the Quilomene Wildlife Area were redeveloped for use by both permitted livestock and wildlife. WDFW staff secured grant funds to construct protective fencing at nine sites – seven redeveloped springs and two additional existing springs. This fencing effort excluded livestock from wetted ground surrounding the springs. The springs were planted with native vegetation to improve species diversity across the landscape.

In 2010-11, WDFW staff improved roughly 25 miles of road, submitted 44 miles of long closed forest roads for formal abandonment, and addressed 17 problem culverts. In 2012, WDFW intends to complete most remaining RMAP requirements, including improving another 5 miles of roads, submitting over 10 more miles for formal abandonment and addressing two more problem culverts.

Status Report of 2010-11 Performance Measures

Key performance measures are identified each year to monitor progress and identify issues that might interfere with planned priority activities. This information will be used to delete, add, or alter priority strategies for 2013.

2010-11 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2012 Related Activity/ Comments
Maintain 13 miles of elk fence annually	Completed annually	Made repairs as necessary. Some sections need replacement
Feed approximately 600 tons of hay annually	Completed annually. Warm winter temps and low snow reduced average hay fed.	2010-11: 441 ton over 103 days 2011-12: 343 ton over 69 days
Plant 10 acres of degraded riparian habitat to native spp.	Completed	14 acres planted in Parke Creek
Install vehicle barriers in riparian areas to protect fish and wildlife resources	Partially completed	Cabled Quilomene Creek barrier rocks together to keep public from moving them
Plant 20 acres of degraded habitat to native species	Partially completed	Planted 15 acres due to timing of RMAP work and funding.
Enroll appropriate Skookumchuck roads in the Green Dot system and rehabilitate closed roads	Partially completed	Gathered public input and consulted with other Agencies. Road changes will be submitted through the SEPA process.
Continue to address road issues identified in the RMAP process	Completed scheduled work annually	Submitted 44 mi of closed forest roads for formal abandonment and replaced six culverts.
Annually treat ≥ 600 acres of upland weeds, including 30 miles of road-side weeds	Partially completed	520 acres treated, including uplands and roadsides. Wet spring weather and grazing tasks reduced weed control staff time.
Enroll Skookumchuck unit in a fire protection contract.	Completed	New contract begins June 2012.
Permanent staff annually attends fire training, first aid certification, and pesticide applicators license renewal.	Completed annually	Staff completed first aid/ CPR and annual fire training. Spray licenses were renewed annually.
Repair/remove at least 1 mile of degraded interior fence	Completed	Staff repaired 7 miles of fence on Quilomene Ridge and Little Parke Creek in 2011
Complete required annual plans and reports	Completed	Completed RMAP and PR reports each year. Mgmt Plan Update completed in 2010.
Meet with CAG annually	Completed annually	Meetings were held March 2011 and April 2012.

New Strategies

The Wildlife Area Management Plan identifies strategies or activities that address the Agency's goals and objectives, why the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species presence, and

public issues and concerns. The following updated Strategies have been added in response 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 impacts of past management activities.

If the Citizens Advisory Group provided public comments on new issues, they will be identified (*in italics*) at the end of this document. Although underlined strategies have no current funding source, identifying these needs is the first step to securing additional funds.

Agency Objective: Provide Sustainable Fish and Wildlife-Related Recreational and Commercial Opportunities Compatible With Maintaining Healthy Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitats.

1. Provide public access compatible with fish, wildlife and habitat protection
 - A. Strategy: Establish an ADA hunting program for elk, deer and pheasant in the Green Gate area to promote diverse hunting opportunities on the wildlife area. Timeframe: 2013.
 - B. Strategy: Apply for grant funding to create a 15 mile non-motorized trail on the L.T. Murray from Taneum Creek to Manastash Creek. Timeframe: 2013 (with multiple phases to follow).
 - C. Strategy: Implement the 5-year Quilomene grazing permit. Timeframe: 2011-15

Agency Objective: Minimize Adverse Interactions Between Humans and Wildlife.

1. **Monitor and manage public access to minimize negative effects on fish and wildlife**
 - A. Strategy: Develop a Road Management Plan that balances wildlife refuge requirements with public recreation and access needs. Timeframe: 2013
 - B. Strategy: Improve the Whiskey Dick Ridge Road and close the Whiskey Dick Creek Road to reduce stream impacts and create a safer travel route. Timeframe: 2013

Agency Objective: Protect, Restore and Enhance Fish, Wildlife and Their Habitats

1. Protect, restore and enhance wetland and riparian habitats
 - A. Strategy: Pursue grant funding to remove dilapidated wire fences on the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas. Timeframe: 2012.
Funding: RCO grant.

2012-13 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Murray Complex Wildlife Areas are listed below.

Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes are monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Meet with CAG to discuss management activities and address emerging issues
- 2) Maintain 13 miles of elk fence on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area
- 3) Maintain 65 miles of boundary fence on the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas
- 4) Feed roughly 400-600 tons of hay each winter to minimize elk depredation on private land
- 5) Release approximately 400 pheasants annually in the Green Gate area
- 6) Control weed infestations on $\geq$ 500 acres of upland and roadside areas
- 7) Establish a regional Road Management Plan.

- 8) Implement 2012 permitted grazing rotation, including monitoring and fence maintenance
- 9) Complete scheduled 2012 RMAP work with WDFW Construction staff
- 10) Complete annual RMAP reports, PR reports, and Management Plan updates
- 11) Apply for an RMEF grant to remove old barbed wire on the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area
- 12) Download car counter data at least once per year

Citizens Advisory Group Input

A Citizen's Advisory Group meeting was held April 18, 2012, and was attended by the following members and WDFW staff: Ken McNamee (DNR), Jason Ridlon (Back Country Horsemen), Sam Kayser (Local rancher; Cattlemen's Association), Marc Eylar (Kittitas County Noxious Weeds), Bill Essman (Kittitas County Field and Stream Club), Bill Wilson (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation), Robert Kruse (Adjacent Landowner), Manager Shana Winegeart and Assistant Manager Wayne Hunt.

The following new issues were discussed at the CAG meeting:

Issue: When the Whiskey Dick Creek Road is closed will there still be motorized access for weed control activities?

Response: The lower end of the Creek Road will be blocked with a gate to maintain administrative access and enable weed control activities.

Issue: Is sufficient monitoring being conducted in the CRM pastures east of the Wild Horse wind farm to assure that when grazing is proposed again in 20 years (the timeframe agreed to in the lawsuit) we will be able to assess the pros/cons of grazing effects?

Response: Ecological Integrity Assessments were conducted on the entire CRM landscape prior to starting the current grazing program. This assessment effort established a baseline condition of numerous ecological characteristics – plant species composition, stream bank structure, etc. These ecological characteristics change slowly over time, and the same surveys can be conducted in the future to assess changes in ecological condition for both the grazed and ungrazed areas after 20 years. In addition, there are historic photopoint locations on the wildlife area that WDFW revisits every five years, and other monitoring efforts are being conducted by the Kittitas County Cooperative Extension.

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Want to see the full plan?

Go to –
http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/