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SCOTCH CREEK WILDLIFE AREA

ANNUAL REPORT

Project #: 1996-094-01 Contract #: 00034926

**FOR PERFORMANCE PERIOD:
OCTOBER 2007 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2008**

Jim Olson
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
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INTRODUCTION:

The Scotch Creek Wildlife Area is a complex of 6 separate management units located in Okanogan County in North-central Washington State. The project is located within the Columbia Cascade Province (Okanogan sub-basin) and partially addresses adverse impacts caused by the construction of Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee hydroelectric dams. With the acquisition of the Eder unit in 2007, the total size of the wildlife area is now 19,860 acres.

The Scotch Creek Wildlife Area was approved as a wildlife mitigation project in 1996 and habitat enhancement efforts to meet mitigation objectives have been underway since the spring of 1997 on Scotch Creek. Continuing efforts to monitor the threatened Sharp-tailed grouse population on the Scotch Creek unit are encouraging. The past two spring seasons were unseasonably cold and wet, a dangerous time for the young of the year. This past spring, Scotch Creek had a cold snap with snow on June 10th, a critical period for young chicks just hatched. Still, adult numbers on the leks have remained stable the past two years.

Maintenance of BPA funded enhancements is necessary to protect and enhance shrub-steppe and to recover and sustain populations of Sharp-tailed grouse and other obligate species.

New Issues:

This year two wildfires occurred on Scotch Creek. On the Scotch Creek unit, 450 acres of mostly grassland burned requiring the DNR and local resources to respond. Air attack, dozer lines and numerous firefighters controlled the blaze on the first day. The fire started due to a vehicle traveling in tall dry grass. The second fire on Pogue Mountain (the Green Lake fire) consumed about 1,200 acres of federal, state and private lands. 754 acres of the Pogue Mountain unit burned. This fire started from a private residence, where a pump house caught fire and quickly spread up hill and onto Pogue Mountain.

We have completed 3.5 miles of fence repair on both fires, by replacing wood line and corner posts, and reseeded 10 acres of dozer and hand lines with native grass seed. Plans and permits are being sought to salvage log some of the burned timber on Pogue Mountain.

2008 SOW:

Environmental Compliance Documentation was improved this year, as the Bonneville Power Administration staff was very responsive and flexible to cover work elements on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. BPA staff surveyed the ½ acre shrub planting, and the sediment pond enhancement elements. They also reviewed and cleared other work elements for compliance. The results were much improved over 2007, and appreciated.

The **Scotch Creek Riparian Channel restoration** project was postponed again this year due to budget problems. O&M funding this year on Scotch Creek was reduced causing a reduction in the number of work elements accomplished. Plans are to resume this project

in July 2009. Design and permitting is completed, materials purchased, and we are ready for construction next year when water table levels are low.

Staff at Scotch Creek was successful this period in the **Shrub-steppe Restoration** project, restoring 95 acres of previous Ag fields to a native shrub-steppe habitat on the Boyce acquisition. The area was summer fallowed to produce a firm and clean seed bed,

and was seeded in the fall of 2008. The seed mix included; Bluebunch Wheatgrass, Sandbergs Bluegrass, Idaho Fescue, Snow Buckwheat, Yarrow, Blue Flax, and Antelope Bitterbrush. This project was cost shared with the NRCS as part of a WHIP grant received in 2007 where 75% of the project cost will be reimbursed.

Over 120,000 seedling trees and shrubs have been planted on all Scotch Creek units since the beginning of the mitigation project.

Maintenance on these tree and shrub plantings this year included hand-pulling weeds, mowing to reduce competition, fertilizer applications and installation of rodent guards to insure survival and increased growth rates. These activities took place both in the spring and fall in 2008. Approximately 30 acres are maintained and this year included 500 Water Birch seedlings re-planted along Scotch Creek below the “corrals” area.

Boundary fence repair was completed by early summer. Inspection and repairs were made, concentrating on areas where trespass livestock could be a problem. Staff also completed fence repairs around a spring and stock watering area on Chesaw, and one mile of old fence on the north boundary against private rangeland.

Weed control begins in the fall after a hard frost with herbicide applications on tough perennial weeds such as Russian Knapweed and Canada thistle. In early spring we continue with bare ground maintenance on parking lots, roadsides and around buildings. Whitetop control included approximately 60 acres of scattered patches on the Scotch Creek unit. Diffuse Knapweed is unfortunately making a comeback all over Okanogan County, and again this year we controlled areas re-invading on Silver Hill. Musk Thistle on the Chesaw unit continues to take many hours to control, both with spot spraying and hand pulling. Effective weed control also includes continual survey and monitoring for new invaders. We had a very successful year fighting these aggressive weeds.

Maintenance on informational signs and reader boards. We installed 30 new Sharp-tailed grouse closure signs, 50 additional wildlife area boundary signs and various reader board signs for public information. All faded signs were replaced.

Various **physical improvements** on buildings, shop, office, etc. were completed on the Scotch Creek unit. Repairs were made to the residence porch roof, as heavy snows completely removed it from its original place. All bluebird nest boxes were cleaned out, repaired, or replaced. The Boyce residence and barn is scheduled for surplus in 2009. Photos have been taken and arrangements have been made to advertise in the spring. Staff also completed a facilities assessment of all structures on the Scotch Creek units with consultants hired by WDFW.

Maintenance on project roads and parking areas continued as needed throughout the season. Lack of funding this year did not allow for purchase of crushed rock as planned.

Remove Debris. All corrals and livestock enclosures on the Boyce acquisition were dismantled and stored at Scotch Creek facilities. It was decided to surplus the barn and Boyce residence to the public, reducing staff time that is needed for other projects.

The **sediment trap enhancements** were postponed due to the budget shortfall. Plans are completed, but permits are still being acquired. This project will be completed in the fall of 2008, if permits can be acquired.

Budget problems also led to the postponement of the **1/2 acre irrigated shrub planting** for this period. Plans are to attempt this project in the spring of 2009.

PILT and weed assessment payments were made to Okanogan county in April.

Scotch Creek staff met with the **Citizens Advisory Group** in March of 2008 for its annual meeting. Accomplishments for 2007 were presented as well as plans for 2008. Comments and suggestions were incorporated into the WDFW management plan update.

The manager also made two other public presentations. One was a Sharp-tailed grouse biology and habitat overview for the Okanogan Valley Land Council as part of a field tour of prospective conservation easements. The other was a Weed control presentation at the annual re-certification class for the Okanogan County Weed Control Board.

Administrative duties continue to take an increasingly larger portion of the manager's time, as information requests seem to increase every year. The manager this year spent a lot of time preparing and submitting a grant request to the Recreation and Conservation Office for trailheads and trail construction in the Coulee Creek drainage. Manager Olson also attended a forestry short course and prepared a forest stewardship plan for the timbered habitats on Pogue Mountain. Unfortunately the Green Lake fire arrived before the thinning and fuels reduction could take place. Manager Olson also participated in deer surveys of the new Eder acquisition where aerial surveys revealed over 800 deer wintering on the new acquisition. Applied for and received a 2008 WHIP grant to enhance habitat on the new Cunningham acquisition, and also applied for and was approved for \$73,096 additional funding (through a BOG request) to start maintenance projects on the new Eder acquisition. The 2009 SOW was prepared and submitted to BPA.