

ANNUAL REPORT SHILLAPOO WILDLIFE AREA

BPA Project #: 2003-012-00

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INTRODUCTION:

This report summarizes accomplishments, challenges and successes on WDFW's Shillapoo Wildlife Area funded under Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) Wildlife Mitigation Program (BPA project #2003-012-00) during the Fiscal Year 05 contract period October 1, 2004- September 30, 2005. The information presented here is intended to supplement that contained in BPA's PISCES contract development and reporting system. The organization below is by broad categories of work but references are made to individual work elements in the PISCES Statement of Work as appropriate.

The greatest success realized during this contract period was completion of the water system that will provide water to wetland basins within the Vancouver Lake Unit and three independent basins on adjoining Clark County owned lands. The water system paid for by Clark Public Utilities was designed and built under the direction of Ducks Unlimited. Having a reliable water supply for these areas has allowed us for the first time to begin making significant progress toward our wetland vegetation management goals on this unit. A reduction in the density of reed canary grass has already been noted and increased levels of native plant occurrence have been observed.

Our most notable setback was an increase in the infestation of purple loosestrife within a portion of the Shillapoo Lakebed including parts of the North and South Units. A great deal of effort and time was spent on addressing the problem including hand cutting and spraying individual plants.

WETLAND MANAGEMENT:

With the Vancouver Lake Unit water delivery system described above in place and operational a significant amount of time was spent learning how to operate the system and adjusting flows to balance water delivery to each wetland basin. Pond levels here were maintained until early summer at which time the water, levels were drawn down to afford native plants the opportunity to germinate. We were surprised to find wapato returning to one of the wetlands that had been completely dominated by reed canary grass in the past. Future plans include disking some of the basins as an additional method of removing canary grass from the wetlands.

Ducks Unlimited completed a portion of the levee to create the South Unit Wetland impoundment. Unfortunately after years of coordination, Olympic Pipeline who owns a pipeline within the project area, suddenly voiced concern with the project and would not allow construction in their right of way. Because of this, the project is on hold until a revised plan is complete and permits can be modified. Some repairs to the levee section already completed will also be required due to excessive cracking.

We were unable to implement disking due to wet conditions and scheduling issues. Many wetland basins were mowed to remove vegetative height and improve forage conditions for Canada Geese.

GOOSE FORAGE MANAGEMENT:

All major waterfowl pastures outside of grazing lease areas were mowed. These sites provide important winter food resources for Canada Geese in particular and are also utilized by Sandhill Cranes. Approximately 100 acres of pasture was fertilized to improve forage quality for waterfowl. The acreage was reduced due to an unexpected equipment failure causing the need to locate and purchase a new spreader. Over-seeding of pastures to improve stand characteristics focused on blackberry removal sites within the North Unit. These plantings of select sites within about a 50-acre area achieved positive results.

TREE AND SHRUB PLANTINGS:

Planting of Oregon White Oak seedlings occurred at two five-acre sites within the South Unit (Work Element I). These plantings have done well but further planting of Oak and other species in future years is planned to meet final objectives. The planting of Cottonwoods in the old rookery site was foregone this year due to the unavailability of suitable rooted planting stock. Maintenance of these sites after planting included mowing, placing mats and tubes and hand watering for a short period in late summer.

INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT:

Almost all field aspects of this project involve management of invasive plants. Efforts to control reed canary grass and foster reestablishment of native plant communities in wetlands are discussed above under Wetland Management. Other plants of particular emphasis in the project area include Himalayan blackberry, poison hemlock, purple loosestrife and Canada thistle (Work Element F).

Control of Himalayan Blackberry focused on a North Unit pasture area where about 30% of the ground was covered with this plant. The usefulness of this area for waterfowl had been severely diminished by this weed. As noted above the cleared areas were over-seeded successfully to reestablish a desirable pasture stand. Follow up maintenance of these areas in the form of mowing and spraying will be required to assure long-term success.

Poison Hemlock Control has long been a major focus on this Wildlife Area. Large stands once were rather common both on WDFW lands and in the surrounding area, which was of particular concern due to the plant's toxicity in addition to its competitiveness with desirable plants. This was the first year where we were confident that all known major stands of the weed on the wildlife area were treated effectively. The primary control method is spraying with follow up mowing or hand cutting as needed if the plants are not treated prior to bloom.

A dramatic increase in the occurrence of purple loosestrife was noted in areas of the Shillapoo Lakebed in both the North and South Units. Due to other dense vegetation the plants are difficult to spot in these areas and addressing the problem became quite labor

intensive. Searches were conducted with binoculars to locate the largest stands and then the sites were walked, seed heads were cut by hand and then the plants were treated with herbicide individually to avoid impacts to competing desirable plants. Mowing was avoided until we were confident that all plants that could reasonably be located were treated. This site, which is planned for wetland restoration, will remain an area of emphasis for control to maximize the chances of success of the future enhancements.

INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT:

Planned fencing projects (Work Element H) were deferred due to the recognition that further archaeological consultation needed to occur prior to construction.

Minor clearing of limbs or brush was done as necessary along interior administrative maintenance travel routes.

MONITORING:

Selected wetland, pasture and agricultural sites were surveyed for waterfowl use during the wintering period. The purpose of this effort is to assess the effectiveness of management treatments over time possibly leading to better prescriptions for future management.

ADMINISTRATIVE, PLANNING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES:

A substantial amount of the manager's time was spent on administrative activities. These include project planning and coordination, contracting and reporting, procuring supplies, and planning. Preparation of a draft management plan began again as a renewed effort by WDFW to provide clear direction for each of its wildlife areas. We do not anticipate that this process will result in significant changes to the planned habitat developments on this site.