

**ST. MARIES**  
**Wildlife Management Area**

**Management Plan**  
**July 1999**

**Idaho Department of Fish and Game**  
**Panhandle Region**  
**2750 Kathleen Avenue**  
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## **FOREWORD**

A key element of wildlife management in Idaho involves managing land and water - the habitat base required for all fish and wildlife species. Providing public access for hunting, fishing, trapping, or simply viewing wildlife is also an integral part of this state's wildlife management program.

In order to provide habitat for fish and wildlife species and public access, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) has developed a system of Wildlife Management Areas on Department-owned or managed lands throughout the state.

This document is the plan for the St. Maries Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Benewah County and replaces the previous plan adopted in 1985. The plan supplements the Department's Policy Plan 1990-2005: A Vision for the Future.

The reason for this planning effort is to ensure long-term protection and management of fish and wildlife resources on Department property within biological limits, economic, social and manpower constraints.

Management goals have been identified as well as those issues the Department believes could affect achieving the stated goals and ongoing management activities. Finally, objectives and strategies are proposed to deal with these issues.

Data used in this plan were those available through the spring of 1998. This plan should be viewed as a guideline for land and resource management decisions that will periodically be subject to change if necessary as new data regarding fish and wildlife resources, hunters, anglers, and other segments of the public become available.

An open house scoping session was held in St. Maries on February 15, 1996, asking the public to assist the Department in identifying issues that needed to be discussed in formulating the St. Maries WMA Plan. A second open house was held in St. Maries on November 19, 1996, asking the public to assist in formulating strategies to address issues previously identified. Public participation was invited by paid advertisements in local newspapers, flyers were posted at local businesses and the post office, and 90 personal letters were mailed to individuals, groups, government entities and elected officials with a stake in the future of the WMA.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Location**

The St. Maries WMA is located in Benewah County on the Lower end of the St. Maries River drainage five miles south of the town of St. Maries (Figure 1).

### **Purpose and Management Approach**

The Department acquired the WMA to provide public hunting and fishing opportunity and winter range for elk, white-tailed deer and mule deer.

Past management activities have been directed towards opening portions of the forest canopy to create additional winter range for big game. Timber sales have been used to create small clearcuts subsequently broadcast burned to promote the regeneration of desirable browse plants.

## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **Acquisition**

Land acquisition using Pittman-Robertson funding occurred primarily between 1941 and 1947 making this WMA one of the oldest in Idaho. Two additional purchases were completed in 1963 and 1978.

Since 1966, 4,527 acres of the original WMA have been traded to the Idaho Department of Lands and Potlatch Corporation in two direct exchanges and one four-party exchange for property at Winchester Lake, the Sawtooth Fish Hatchery, and the Snow Peak WMA.

The Department's ownership at St. Maries WMA presently consists of approximately 2,427 deeded acres. The Department leases grazing privileges from the Idaho Department of Lands on 592 acres and has entered into cooperative agreements on an additional 800 acres with the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Appendix A outlines the Department's history of acquisitions and exchanges. Appendix B contains a brief listing of developments and management actions on the WMA undertaken by the Department since 1967.

### **Timber Sales**

The St. Maries WMA was the first Department property where habitat management objectives were accomplished using timber sales. Since 1967, seven small clearcuts totaling 105 acres have been created to establish brush fields for big game winter range. The last sale (44 acres) was started in 1977 and completed in October 1978.

## ST. MARIES WMA MAP

**Figure 1. Map of St. Maries Wildlife Management Area.**

## DESCRIPTION OF RESOURCES

### Geographic Features and Climate

The most prominent features of the WMA are Lindstrom Peak and the St. Maries River that flows along the southern and western border. Elevations on the WMA range from 2,130' near Lotus on the St. Maries River to 4,695' at Lindstrom Peak. The two general soil types on the WMA are moderately deep, well-drained sedimentary loams having a high volume of volcanic ash. Both soil types have high erosion hazards.

The terrain is mountainous and covered with timber. North and west facing slopes fall steeply to the St. Maries River. South and east facing slopes are more gradual and are interspersed with abruptly rolling hills. Several live streams dissect the property draining into the St. Maries River. Smoke Chaser and Flat creeks flow south from Lindstrom Peak and Syringa Creek flows north. South and west-facing slopes along the St. Maries River below 4,000 feet provide winter range for big game.

Annual precipitation in the area averages 24 inches with about 40 percent in the form of snow. In the summer the average temperature is 64° F with a range of 40° to 100° F. In the wintertime, the average daily temperature is 29° F with a range of -20° to 45° F. The first snowfall may occur by mid-October.

Snow begins to accumulate late in November and normally stays in the upper elevations until late April. The lower elevations are generally snow free from March through November. Snow depths range from two to four feet but can exceed six feet in some years. The St. Maries River normally freezes each year to the limits of navigation near Lotus.

### Wildlife Game Species

Big game species commonly occurring on the WMA include white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose, black bear, and mountain lion. White-tailed deer are abundant and are the most sought-after game species. Hunter participation and success rates are relatively low. Most hunters are local residents who live less than a half-hour's drive away.

Wintering big game populations are estimated at 150-200 deer and 25-30 elk. South and west-facing slopes below 4,000 feet provide the majority of the winter range during a normal winter. In the past, the Department believed the WMA could support more deer and elk in the winter and used logging as a tool to create openings in the forest canopy. Shrub response to logging generally has been excellent, provided the small clearcuts are protected from all ungulate browsing by tall electric fences until plants become well established. In spite of past emphasis on creating forage areas, the Department has little evidence that the number of deer and elk wintering on the WMA has increased.

Winter deer and elk use of logged areas did go up as evidenced by an increase for several years in the number of fecal pellet groups counted in the spring. However, conventional aerial surveys using a helicopter failed to detect any increase in total numbers.

Upland game species include ruffed grouse and blue grouse. Ruffed grouse are common. Most grouse hunting occurs in September, however they are also often taken incidentally by deer and elk hunters in October and November.

### **Non-Game Wildlife Species**

There have been no systematic surveys of other mammals and birds on the WMA. Partial species lists have been compiled from random observations.

There are no known threatened or endangered animals or plants on the WMA. However, during the winter, migrant bald eagles are occasionally sighted flying along the St. Maries River as they search for prey.

### **Fish Resources**

The St. Maries River flows along the southern and western border of the WMA. Most anglers are local residents of Benewah County. The number of anglers and catch rates are low. Low flows and high temperatures during the summer months only allow seasonal use of this section of river by trout.

Game fish found seasonally in this portion of the St. Maries River include native westslope cutthroat trout and mountain whitefish and introduced rainbow trout, brook trout and kokanee salmon. Introduced smallmouth bass will likely utilize this portion of the river as they expand their range from Coeur d'Alene Lake. Common non-game fish include northern squawfish, largescale sucker and longnose dace.

### **Forest Resources**

The WMA is heavily forested. The predominant tree species are Douglas fir, western larch, grand fir, and ponderosa pine. Western white pine, lodgepole pine, western red cedar and western hemlock occur in lesser quantities.

North and east facing slopes are primarily forested with dense stands of Douglas fir and grand fir while the south and west slopes are primarily forested with open stands of ponderosa pine.

A variety of shrubs are found on the WMA primarily on south and east slopes - ocean spray, ninebark, snowberry, shiny-leaf ceanothus, redstem ceanothus, elderberry, boxwood, mountain maple, and willow.

Western red cedar, western hemlock, birch, alder, and sedges are found adjacent to stream beds and associated wet meadows.

Grassy meadows are common on south and west slopes and bluffs above the St. Maries River. Soils are shallow underlain with shale outcroppings and will not support shrubs and trees to any extent.



## **PUBLIC USE**

Due to its close proximity to the town of St. Maries, the WMA is used extensively by local residents for camping, picnicking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, and other outdoor recreation. These outdoor activities equal the use of the WMA by hunters and fishermen (Table 1). The estimated annual public use of the WMA is 2,250 user days.

Hunting seasons for upland game and big game span the months of September through December, depending upon the species. Most hunting occurs on weekends and is primarily for white-tailed deer. Hunting and fishing on the WMA is done primarily by residents of Benewah County. The number of hunters and anglers and success rates are relatively low and comparable to adjacent areas.

Livestock grazing was historically permitted on the WMA until the early 1960s. No grazing is currently authorized and problems with trespass livestock have diminished due to fencing and the elimination of the open-range law by Benewah County.

The WMA is accessed by a loop road system that also provides access for other land owners - Idaho Department of Lands, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Potlatch, and Crown Pacific.

## **MANAGEMENT GOALS AND ONGOING ACTIVITIES**

The following goals have been developed to guide management on the St. Maries WMA. The goals are responsive to the identified issues as well as the purpose for which the WMA was originally acquired.

1. Provide public hunting opportunity for big game and upland game species.
  - Accommodate and regulate hunting activity.
  - Maintain designated roads and trails.
2. Maintain or enhance winter range for deer and elk.
  - Maintain boundary fences to minimize trespass livestock.
  - Provide adequate thermal cover and forage areas for wintering deer and elk.
  - Limit snowmobile access to designated roads to minimize disturbance or displacement of big game.
  - Participate in winter aerial surveys to census deer and elk populations.
  - Prepare annual noxious weed control plans.
  - Participate in local grazing cooperatives.

3. Manage forest resources to benefit both game and non-game wildlife species.
  - Inventory forest resources.
  - Prepare a forest management plan that provides a diversity of habitats for all wildlife found on the WMA.
  - Use prescribed burning as a habitat management tool.
4. Provide outdoor recreational opportunities not in conflict with wildlife goals and programs.
  - Accommodate and regulate fishing activity.
  - Maintain existing roads and trails.
  - Limit camping to no more than 10 days in any 30-day period.
  - Accommodate and regulate other outdoor recreation pursuits unrelated to hunting and fishing.

### **ISSUES, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES**

The following management issues were identified jointly by the Department and the public. Objectives and strategies were then developed in concert with the public in an attempt to address these issues while still meeting the goals driving management on the WMA. Wherever possible strategies are quantified to assist the Department and public evaluate plan accomplishments.

Issue 1: Some members of the public believe the Department should not be managing timber on Wildlife Management Areas. They contend that the Department's mission is to manage fish and wildlife not timber. Other members of the public believe the Department should manage its timber resources to benefit wildlife and local economies.

Objective: Prepare a forest management plan for the St. Maries WMA by June 1999. Timber harvest activities will meet habitat management objectives so that impacts to fish, wildlife and recreation will be minimized.

Strategies: Timber harvest can produce revenue for Department operations. Harvesting timber is an appropriate use of the Department's property provided that wildlife habitat management objectives are achieved without detrimental impacts to other resources and public recreation. Wildlife habitat can benefit from specially designed harvest prescriptions to achieve a predetermined end result. For example, large diameter trees are valuable to a wide array of wildlife as nesting and foraging trees. Timber harvest activities can be designed to maintain or restore historical conditions such as large diameter trees or low elevation brush fields for big game winter range.

Although the Department has historically harvested timber on the St. Maries WMA, no forest management plan has been written that encompasses the entire area.

Issue 2: The WMA continues to receive unauthorized livestock grazing each year.

Objective: The Department will continue to maintain boundary fences to exclude unauthorized livestock.

Strategies: Department participation in local livestock grazing association meetings and range tours will be continued. This allows the Department to keep in close contact with adjacent landowners and livestock operators to minimize unauthorized grazing on the WMA.

Presently, unauthorized grazing is not as prevalent as it once was. The formation of grazing associations, better communications between concerned parties and the adoption of an ordinance by Benewah County eliminating the open range law have all contributed to reducing unauthorized use of the WMA.

Issue 3: Noncompliance with off-road vehicle (ORV) use restrictions continues to be a problem.

Objective: The Department will continue to seek greater compliance of ORV use restrictions.

Strategies: Unregulated ORV use can result in erosion on temporary roads and skid trails not designed to be used all year and frequently cause conflicts with hunters on foot or horseback.

Roads and skid trails not necessary for management purposes will remain physically closed to all but foot and horseback use. ORV use restrictions will continue to be posted and violators will be cited. The main access road that loops through the WMA will remain open to all vehicle use.

Issue 4: The spread of noxious weeds has the potential to decrease the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat on the WMA.

Objective: The Department will comply with Idaho State law pertaining to the control of noxious weeds and avoid those management activities that create conditions favorable for spreading noxious weeds if at all possible.

Strategies: A number of noxious weeds are present on the St. Maries WMA, primarily orange hawkweed, spotted knapweed and Canada thistle. Orange hawkweed is the most significant infestation and widespread over all ownerships in the vicinity.

Each year the Department sprays hawkweed along roadsides and areas readily accessible by vehicle. However, some landowners do little or no weed control effectively negating the Department's efforts.

Issue 5: Inconsiderate visitors who litter, vandalize fences and remove forest products without permission continue to be a drain on Department manpower and funding.

Objective: The Department will continue to make the public aware of the problem and cite violators when they are apprehended.

Strategy: Acts of vandalism are long term problems for all public and private land management agencies. Only through public awareness and enforcement programs can these problems be addressed and minimized.

**Table 1. Public use estimates on the St. Maries WMA.**

Activity	User Days
Hunting	1,000
Fishing	100
Subtotal Consumptive Use	1,100
Camping	300
Bird and Wildlife Watching	300
Target Shooting	200
Hiking	200
ATV Riding	100
Horseback Riding	50
Subtotal Non-consumptive Use	1,150
TOTAL	2,250

**APPENDIX A**  
**LAND AND WATER CONTROL**

**LAND ACQUISITIONS:**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Funds Used</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Acquired From</i>
<u>Benewah County</u>			
1941	PR	80.00	Clyde Shay
1941	PR	400.00	W. E. Neece
1941	PR	600.00	C. A. Taskey, et al.
1942	PR	480.00	Post Falls Lumber & E. A. Kirkpatrick
1946	PR	720.00	Benewah County
1947	PR	67.05	Charles E. Kelso
1963	F&G	15.26	Frankie Bredvold
1978	F&G	65.00	Pring Ranches
<b>Total WMA</b>		<b>2,427.31</b>	

**LEASES/AGREEMENTS:**

<u>Benewah County</u>			
1979	F&G	640.00	USFS Cooperative Agreement
1988	PR	2,860.84	Idaho Dept. of Lands grazing lease.
1989	F&G	160.00	BLM cooperative agreement
1967	F&G	0.50	Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, and Pacific Railroad Company access agreement
<b>Total WMA</b>		<b>3,661.34</b>	

**LAND EXCHANGES:**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Funds Used</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Exchanged With</i>
<u>Benewah County</u>			
1996	PR	555.00	Potlatch Corporation for 291 acres at Winchester Lake in Lewis County
1985	PR	310.00	Idaho Dept. of Lands for the Sawtooth Fish Hatchery site in Custer County.
1990	PR	3,662.00	RANECO, Inc. for 12,055 acres near Snow Peak in Shoshone County. (Plum Creek Timber Co. formerly BNRR Timberlands).
<b>Total WMA</b>		<b>4,527.00</b>	

**APPENDIX B**  
**DEVELOPMENT HISTORY**

1967-1978	Logging used to create seven small clearcuts in the forest to stimulate browse production for big game. Total acres logged - 105.
1970	Three miles of boundary fence constructed to control trespass livestock.
1970-1980	6.5 miles of trails cleared for access by recreational users.
1976	Emergency shelter cabin constructed by Idaho National Guard.
1977-1997	Three eight-foot electric fences constructed around clearcuts to exclude ungulates until palatable browse species became established. These exclosures were periodically rotated to new locations.
1980	4.5 miles of boundary fence constructed to control trespass livestock.
1993	Two small wooden bridges replaced with steel culverts.