

Cascadia Conservation District

Lake Chelan Mule Deer and Big Horn Sheep Winter Range Habitat

Final Project Report

August 29, 2011

This report documents the efforts of Cascadia Conservation District (CD) to provide outreach to landowners of private property along the north shore of Lake Chelan between Deer Point and Gold Creek to gauge landowner interest to improve winter range habitat for mule deer and big horn sheep in this area.

Background

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued the Order on Offer of Settlement and Issuing New License (License) and the Order on Hearing on November 6, 2006, and April 19, 2007 for the Lake Chelan Hydroelectric Project No. 637 that require Chelan Public Utility District No.1 (PUD) to provide funds for various protection, enhancement, and mitigation measures as described in the Settlement Agreement. One of these items is to pursue securing landowner agreements on privately owned land for the purpose of preserving and improving winter range habitat for mule deer and big horn sheep on the north shore of Lake Chelan.

Landowner Outreach

In the winter of 2010 and spring of 2011 the CD coordinated with the PUD and Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to agree upon the best method of approaching private property landowners between Deer Point and Gold Creek along the north shore of Lake Chelan. The purpose of contacting the landowners was to explain why we were contacting them while also explaining the benefits of entering into potential agreements to enhance/protect winter range habitat.

The three entities determined the best approach was a direct letter from the CD to private landowners in the area of interest. The letter was developed collaboratively between the three entities and was sent to area landowners on March 21, 2011 (Attachment 1). Concurrent to developing the letter, the area of interest was evaluated to focus the landowner outreach effort to those parcels with the greatest potential benefit to wildlife (parcels greater than 5 acres), and where a positive cost to benefit ratio was likely (above 1,100 feet in elevation). As a result, the number of landowners to be contacted was reduced from 34 (representing 909 acres) to 16

(representing 872 acres) providing the greatest opportunity to achieve the goal of securing agreements on at least 400 acres of private land along this area of Lake Chelan.

On April 5, 2011 a public meeting was held to further explain the background of the project and provide additional information to interested landowners. Online attendance was also offered via webinar. No one from target area attended the meeting.

Results

The response rate to the first letter was lower than expected (50%). Those that responded asked for additional information. Therefore, a second letter (Attachment 2) was sent to 12 landowners on May 13, 2011 providing more information on the type of agreement the CD was looking for on behalf of WDFW. The number of letters was fewer in the second mailing since 4 landowners responded to the initial letter and did not want to pursue any agreement.

Of the 16 land owners contacted in both mailings, 69% responded (7 interested and 4 not). Of those that responded, a 64% expressed interest in learning more, while 36% were not interested.

The 7 land owners that responded indicating they were interested in learning more represented a total of 457 acres. The 4 land owners that responded indicating they were not interested represented 20 acres, and the 5 land owners that did not respond represented 28 acres.

Conclusion

Further contact and detailed proposal information needs to be provided to the interested landowners to determine if landowner agreements can be secured on all or a portion of the 457 acres of interested landowners.

Using information obtained during this effort, Chelan PUD and WDF should consider a second phase of this effort to achieving the goal of obtaining conservation easements on 400 acres of private land between Gold Creek and Deer Point.

Attachment 1

March 21, 2011

Dear _____,

The Cascadia Conservation District is seeking to work with willing landowners to improve winter forage for mule deer and bighorn sheep along the north shore of Lake Chelan. This effort is intended to address winter range habitat for the animals, and also potentially decrease the property tax burden to private landowners who participate.

Annual wildlife surveys conducted since 1984 indicate that approximately 25% of the Lake Chelan mule deer and most of the bighorn sheep winter above the shores of the lake in the five miles between Camas Creek and Gold Creek. Much of the wildlife forage in this area has been affected by wildfire reducing its quality as a winter food source. Without a good nutrition source, the herds become susceptible to malnutrition and serious late winter/early spring mortality during severe winters. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), as the state agency responsible for wildlife management, has determined that increasing the abundance and availability of the wintertime forage supply will significantly improve the energy resources for mule deer and bighorn sheep, increase their resiliency, and greatly enhance their "survivability" especially during severe winters.

Property owned by you has been identified as being in the area where establishing/improving winter forage vegetation is desired by WDFW. The health of the mule deer and big horn sheep herds in this area depends, in part, on the vegetation growing on your property. We are seeking to work with you to help the herds by allowing us to plant a portion of your property with native vegetation that is both favored by deer and sheep and will satisfy their nutrition needs. The replanted area of the property would then need to be left in its natural state.

An agreement between you and the Conservation District would clearly identify what would be done, where it would take place and any long term obligations for each party. Participating in this effort could qualify your property for reduced taxation.

More detailed information regarding plant species, planting methods and other details will be presented at a public meeting on April 5, 2011 at Chelan City Hall from 7 to 8:30 PM. If you are unable to attend in person you can participate at the meeting via a web link. If you are interested in this method please send me your email address and a web link and pass code will be sent to you a few days prior to the meeting. If you would like to sign up for the planting program please contact me directly via phone (509.664.9345), email (mike.rickel@wa.nacdn.net) or mail (215 Melody Lane, Wenatchee, WA 98801).

Respectfully,

Michael J. Rickel
Cascadia Conservation District

Attachment 2

May 11, 2011

Dear _____,

I wanted to follow up with you regarding the letter I sent in March 2011. In that letter, the Cascadia Conservation District was seeking response to gauge interest from willing landowners to conserve and/or improve winter forage habitat for mule deer and bighorn sheep along the north shore of Lake Chelan. A public meeting was held in Chelan, Washington on April 5, 2011 to provide information regarding this project. No private landowners in the area of interest attended the public meeting; however, several landowners have contacted Cascadia Conservation District asking for more information.

I would like to thank those of you who responded, and take this opportunity to provide more information. -Our goal is to assess private landowner interest (not commitments) by July 1, 2011. If interest is sufficient to proceed, formal agreements may be pursued. If the level of interest or benefit to wildlife is insufficient, the project may be abandoned. Additional information is provided below.

Background

In April 2008, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the Lake Chelan Wildlife Plan as a component of the new Lake Chelan Operating License. The Lake Chelan Wildlife Plan requires Chelan PUD to conduct annual winter wildlife monitoring and to pursue conservation easements on the north shore of Lake Chelan between Gold and Camas Creeks to benefit wintering wildlife, particularly mule deer and big horn sheep.

Annual winter wildlife surveys conducted on Lake Chelan since 1982 show that the maximum numbers of bighorn sheep and mule deer are observed along the north shore of Lake Chelan in the area between Gold and Camas Creeks (Figure 1). Much of the wildlife forage in this area has been affected by wildfire, reducing its quality as a winter food source. Without a good nutrition source, deer and sheep herds become susceptible to malnutrition and serious late winter/early spring mortality during severe winters.

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the state agency responsible for wildlife management, has determined that conserving existing high quality habitat and increasing the quality of currently degraded habitats will significantly improve the winter range habitat conditions and thereby enhance the "survivability" of mule deer and bighorn sheep, particularly during severe winters.

Why you are being contacted

Mule deer and bighorn sheep herds in this area depend, in part, on the habitat available on your property. We would like your cooperation with managing the habitat that these herds rely upon by preserving the native vegetation and, potentially, making habitat improvements. Improvements may include weed management or planting native vegetation to improve the forage quality of the habitat for mule deer and bighorn sheep.

Property owned by you has been identified as important wintering habitat for mule deer and big horn sheep. WDFW and the Cascadia Conservation District would like to protect this habitat to the extent possible or even enhance it through a conservation agreement. This agreement between you and the Conservation District would clearly identify the area of interest, any habitat improvements, and any long term obligations. The agreement would also include limitations for actions that might impact the habitat in the area of interest. An example of the types of limitation is included in Table 1. Basically, we are looking to preserve and/or improve large tracts of habitat at or above 1,200 feet in elevation for the benefit of wildlife, particularly wintering mule deer and bighorn sheep. Areas included under the easement would need to be left in their natural state.

This agreement is not intended to restrict lakefront development for landowners; rather, we are more interested in the upland portions of your property that are well above the lake level. Any agreement between you and the Conservation District would only apply to portions of your land at or above 1,200 feet in elevation. The elevation of Lake Chelan when it is full is approximately 1,100 feet. By participating in this effort, your property could qualify for reduced taxation. Specific areas of your property can be excluded if you have interest in a particular use that is incompatible with the conservation easement.

Please let us know if you are interested in considering a formal agreement to conserve land on your property for the benefit of wildlife. If you are interested in finding out more and/or would like to sign up for the program please contact me directly via phone (509.664.9345), email (mike.rickel@wa.nacdnet.net) or mail (215 Melody Lane, Wenatchee, WA 98801) by July 1, 2011. If we have not heard from you by this time, we will assume that you are not interested.

Respectfully,

Michael J. Rickel

Figure 1. Maximum number of Bighorn sheep and Mule Deer observed for all years (1982- 2010) by Lake Mile along the north shore of Lake Chelan.

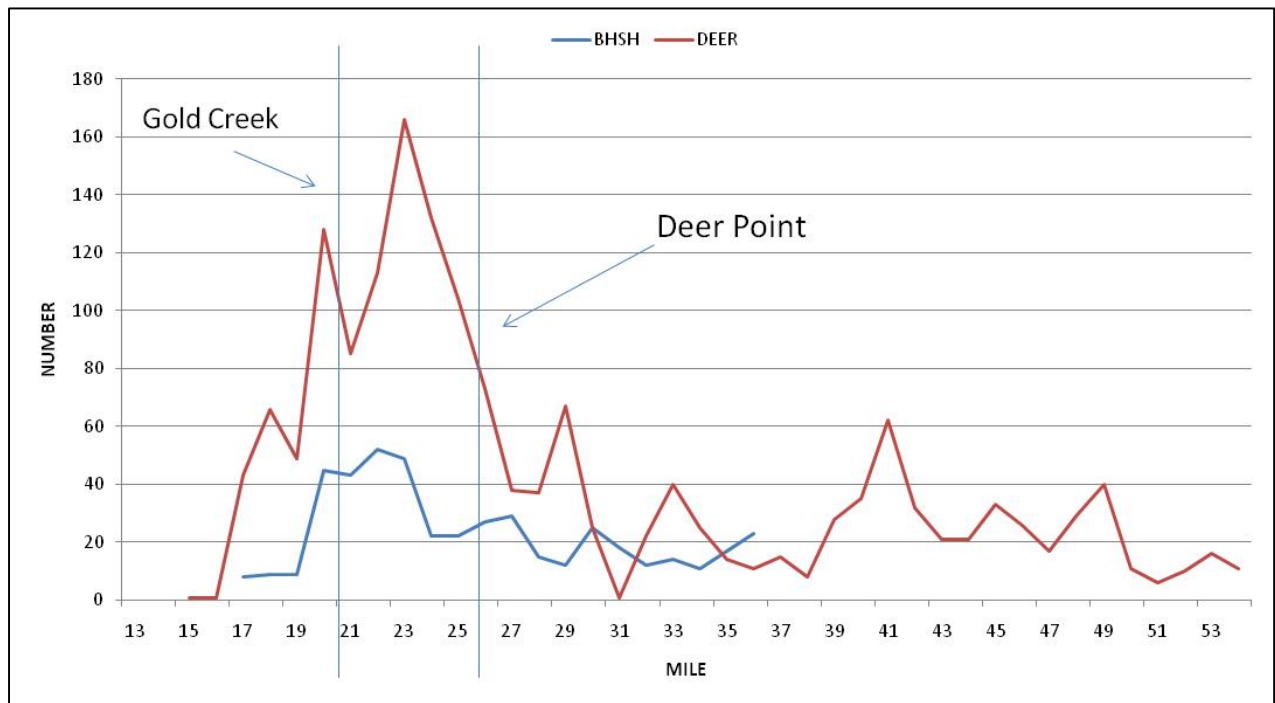


Table 1. Examples of uses consistent with or prohibited from a potential Conservation Easement. The area immediately adjacent to Lake Chelan shoreline is excluded. The area of interest includes the upland habitat above lake (above 1,200 feet in elevation). The following are general examples of uses and are not complete. Additional or modified uses may appear in a formal easement document.

Uses Consistent with Conservation Easement	
Title	Description
Forest Management	Forest management activities in accordance with an approved timber management plan on the Protected Property; provided that such activities are carried out in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations and the specific terms and conditions of this Easement.
Recreation	The undertaking of recreation activities such as hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, bird watching, cross country skiing, fishing, picnicking, and hunting on the Protected Property; provided that such activities are conducted in a manner and intensity that does not adversely impact the Conservation Values of the Protected Property.
Solar Facilities	The placement or construction of facilities for the development and utilization of solar energy resources solely for use on the Protected Property.
Composting and Storage of Wastes	The composting and use of organic and vegetative waste resulting from uses and activities on the Protected Property, consistent with the Purpose of this Easement, and the storage of other wastes generated by uses and activities on the Protected Property consistent with the Purpose of this Easement
Protection and Public Health of Safety	The undertaking of other activities necessary to protect public health or safety on the Protected Property.
Creation of Mortgage Liens	The creation of consensual liens, whether by mortgage, deed of trust, or otherwise, for the purpose of securing repayment of indebtedness of the Grantor is allowed, so long as such liens shall remain subordinate to this Easement.
Stewardship Activities	The undertaking of any activity performed pursuant to any Stewardship Plan covering the Protected property is consistent with the Purpose of this Easement.

Table 1. Continued.

Prohibited Uses	
Title	Description
Subdivision	Subdivision or portioning of the Protected Property.
Residential Use	Use of Protected Property for residential purposes.
Industrial Uses	Use of Protected Property for industrial purpose.
Commercial Uses	Use of the Property for any commercial purpose that is not subordinate to and directly supportive of the use of the land for farming purposes.
Commercial Recreation Activity	
Utilities	The placing of utilities (electricity, water, sewer, communications cables etc..) on the Protected Property
Construction	The placement or construction of any buildings, structures, or other improvements.
Alteration of Land	The alteration of the surface of the land, including, without limitation, the excavation, fill or removal of soil, gravel, rock, peat or sod; except as deemed necessary by Grantee in writing to preserve or protect the Conservation Values of the Protected Property.
Alternation of Water Courses	The draining, filling, dredging, ditching, or diking of wetland areas, the alteration or manipulation of ponds and water courses, or the creation of new wetlands, water impoundments, or water courses.
Erosion or Water Pollution	Any use or activity that causes or is likely to cause significant soil degradation or erosion or significant pollution of any surface or subsurface waters.
Feedlots	The establishment and maintenance of a commercial feedlot.
Agricultural Activities (grazing)	The conducting of grazing or agricultural activities of any kind.
Land Management Activities (except those outlined in uses consistent w/CE)	The conducting of land management activities of any kind.
Waste Disposal	The disposal of storage of rubbish, garbage, debris, vehicles, abandoned equipment, parts thereof, or other unsightly, offensive, or hazardous waste or material on the Protected Property.
Signs	The placement of signs, billboards, or other advertising material on the Protected Property.
Mining	The exploration for, or development and extraction of, minerals and hydrocarbons on or below the surface of the Protected Property.
Wildlife Disruption	The disruption of wildlife breeding, foraging and nesting activities.
Herbicides or Pesticides	The use of any herbicides or pesticides; except for weed control chemicals deemed necessary by Grantor and Grantee, mutually to preserve, protect or enhance the Conservation Values of the Protected Property.

Removal of Trees and Other Vegetation	The pruning, cutting down, or other destruction or removal of live and dead trees and other vegetation located on the Protected Property.
Introduced Vegetation	The intentional introduction of nonnative invasive species on the Protected Property, or the planting or introduction of any non-native species of vegetation within the Protected Property.
Harvesting of Native Plants	The commercial gathering, picking, taking, or harvesting of native plants, or any parts thereof, from the Protected Property.
Off-road Vehicles	The operation of motorcycles, dune buggies, snowmobiles, ATVs or any other motorized vehicles on the Protected Property.
Roads and Trails	Construction of roads or trails within the Protected Property.
Fences	Construction of fences on the Protected Property