



Success Story:

Wild Horse CRM Project

Wild Horse CRM Mission:

to enhance rangeland health, improve wildlife habitat and promote collaboration among the landowners and users, both public and private, in eastern Kittitas County.



Collaborative resource management plan incorporates wildlife and grazing interests in Kittitas County

The Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) Project in Kittitas County, Washington, began in the spring of 2006. A diverse group of people met to discuss solutions to improve the rangelands of eastern Kittitas County, which provide wintering and calving areas for a resident elk herd. The elk herd had been coming down from higher elevations onto irrigated hay and pastureland in the Kittitas Valley, making a significant financial impact on agricultural producers. The group decided to improve the condition of the rangeland through planned grazing with cattle. This solution came from a group known as the Big Game Management Roundtable (BGMR) following several years study of the elk depredation problem. BGMR had been formed and operated using the CRM model.



Big Game Management Roundtable Survey, Kittitas County

Laying the groundwork for success

The meetings of the Wild Horse CRM were facilitated by Doug Warnock and Dick Wedin, who were experienced in consensus-building. Tip Hudson, Washington State University (WSU) Regional Range and Livestock Extension Specialist, acted as recording secretary and project coordinator. The diverse group of 30 people participating included representatives of the following special interests: agricultural production, environmental

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Wild Horse CRM Project, executive tour meeting

preservation, wildlife and resource conservation, wind power energy, hunting and fishing, state and federal land management agencies, and the Yakama Nation.*

At the first meeting, the group developed a consensus goal statement that included:

1. A desired future landscape;
2. The need for healthy land and adequate water;
3. The desire to develop a high level of trust among all stakeholders and to work collaboratively to benefit the many interests represented within the group; and
4. The need for open communication and to build support from the community. This goal guided their plans and actions.

The group created the following mission statement: The mission of the Wild Horse CRM is to enhance rangeland health, improve wildlife habitat and promote collaboration among the landowners and users, both public and private, in eastern Kittitas County.

The geographic scope of work for the Wild Horse CRM comprised 60,000 acres. Ownership of this property included Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Puget Sound Energy (PSE), and several private landowners. Most of the property is managed by WDFW. It is known as the Whiskey Dick – Quilomene Wildlife Area in eastern Kittitas County. Through an open bidding process, a cattle producer was awarded a five-year lease for grazing the CRM area.

Putting the plan into action

Over the next 18 months, a team of range management specialists from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), WDFW, and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) inventoried the rangeland in the CRM area. This provided a base set of information on range condition for use in developing a grazing plan. Also, monitoring sites were established for periodic data collection to determine the results of the planned grazing.

In early 2010, the Western Watersheds Project, an organization based in Idaho, filed suit to stop the grazing on property managed by

*Participants in this project included: members of the Big Game Management Roundtable, Friends of Wildlife and Wind Power, Ginkgo State Park, Kittitas Audubon, Kittitas County Cattlemen's Association, Kittitas County Conservation District, Kittitas County Farm Bureau, Kittitas County Field & Stream Club, Kittitas County Commissioners, Kittitas County Noxious Weed control Board, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Puget Sound Energy, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Solar \$, a non-profit corporation, Trust for Public Lands, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington State Parks and the Yakama Nation. Also participating were several individual ranchers and landowners who did not represent any particular group or organization.

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WDFW. The court ruled that WDFW hadn't followed the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) process when it allowed grazing on the Wildlife Area. SEPA is not required when a grazing lease has existed during the previous ten-year period. A lease agreement had existed, but was verbal and undocumented.

A settlement agreement was reached between WDFW and Western Watersheds Project in January of 2011 in which the eastern half, approximately 35,000 acres, would not be grazed for 20 years. Grazing would continue on the western part of the area and monitoring data was to be collected and used for an evaluation of the effects of grazing over the twenty-year period.

Since then, grazing has continued on the western half of the area following a grazing plan that is developed and reviewed annually by

the Wild Horse CRM grazing committee. The grazing committee is composed of representatives of NRCS, WDNR, WDFW, WSU Extension and the lessee. Also, regular monitoring of the grazed area is being conducted and data collected is available to aid in making management decisions.

The Wild Horse CRM Project illustrates how a group with a very diverse number of interests can come together and collaborate to address a natural resources problem, arriving at a solution that is acceptable to all involved. The CRM group would have liked to establish a planned grazing program on the entire wildlife area but was able to achieve it on half the area and is collecting data that will be valuable in assessing the grazing program's impact and in directing future management of similar areas.



Left: Joe Meuchel and Tip Hudson collect monitoring data on a wind farm owned by Puget Sound Energy (located within the Wild Horse CRM). Right: Site visit during CRM executive tour.