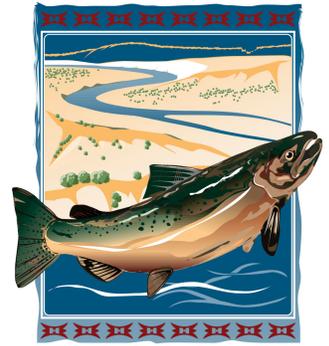




Wahluke Unit

Fact Sheet • August 2002



FWS photo: Rich Steele

Unit Size
57,000 acres

History and Administration

Since 1943, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has held title to the lands that make up this and all other units that became part of the Hanford Reach National Monument in 2000. From 1971 until 1999 this area was managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for multiple public uses under a permit with the DOE. In 1999, it became part of the Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, making the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the current primary land manager under a use permit with the DOE.



FWS photo: Heidi Brunkal

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Location

The Wahluke Unit extends from the east side of the Columbia River north to the Saddle Mountains. It is bisected by State Highway 24. Prominent natural features include a portion of Wahluke Slope and the Saddle Mountains, the White Bluffs and large dune fields above the White Bluffs.

Habitats

Riparian and shrub-steppe habitats dominate, but striated basalt outcroppings and the 600-foot-tall White Bluffs create additional habitats. Near the center of the unit are the Wahluke Lakes (also known as the WB-10 ponds), created and sustained by South Columbia Basin Irrigation District's canals.

Rare Plants

Rare plants found in this unit include Geyer's milkvetch, desert dodder and the newly discovered White Bluffs bladderpod, a federal candidate species for threatened and endangered listing.

Wildlife

Red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds, marsh wrens and northern harriers are a few of the birds that use the cover and nesting sites found in dense stands of bulrushes and cattails. Horned larks and meadowlarks can easily be seen along roadsides, and prairie falcons nest in the sheer bluffs. Herptiles include tiger salamanders, Great Basin spadefoot toads, sagebrush lizards, short-horned lizards and gopher snakes. The lakes have populations of introduced fish such as carp, bass and sunfish.

Public Uses

The Wahluke Unit has been open to the public since 1978, with day use allowed year-round. Current public

uses include hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife observation and photography. Motorized vehicles and bicycles are permitted on designated roads only. Overnight use, camping, open fires and off-road vehicle use are not allowed. Public facilities include the White Bluffs boat launch, additional river access sites, a scenic overlook and a parking area with walking access to Wahluke Lake. No restrooms or potable water exist on the unit.



1937 WPA photo: Louis Boeder

Cultural Resources

Deposition and erosion processes along the Columbia River channel provide information on the earliest known wildlife in the area, including mastodons, camels and ground sloths. For at least 8,000 years, the Saddle Mountains provided the ancestors of several Native American tribes with hunting and gathering opportunities, as well as stone sources for toolmaking. The Wahluke Unit includes part of the historic White Bluffs Road and river crossing, which by 1860 was one of the busiest crossroads in the Washington Territory. The White Bluffs landing log cabin is the earliest (1890s) standing structure remaining in the Monument.