

## **Habitat Management Plan for Beaver Wildlife Management Area Executive Summary – March 2020**

### **Primary Purpose of Beaver WMA:**

The Beaver WMA was formed to secure and improve critical winter habitat for big game. Big game and small game hunting is permitted on the Beaver WMA. Mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, wild turkey, dusky grouse, mourning dove, and cottontail rabbits are the most often hunted species. Wildlife viewing and photography is permitted on the WMA as well.

### **Wildlife Species:**

The properties that make up the Beaver WMA were purchased for mule deer winter range. Other protected species that inhabit the WMA include Rocky Mountain elk, wild turkey, dusky grouse, mourning dove, cottontail rabbits, bobcats and cougars. Many songbirds, raptors including bald and golden eagles, and other species also use and inhabit the Beaver WMA.

### **Habitat Improvement:**

A significant number of habitat improvement projects have been conducted on the Beaver WMA over the past decade. Pinyon and Juniper encroachment have been treated using Lop and Scatter and Mastication on all 4 units of the WMA as well as some sagebrush rejuvenation utilizing both the Dixie harrow and chain harrow on the North Creek and Easement Units. Future projects will focus on maintaining and expanding these treatments.

The WMA will be monitored yearly for habitat quality and evaluated for future treatments.

Prescribed fire may be used to treat the oak in the upper elevations of the North Creek Unit for decadency and to promote new growth, if deemed necessary. This would be done in conjunction with the Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands, U.S. Forest Service, and the BLM.

### **Access Management:**

The Beaver WMA is crucial winter range for big game in the Beaver herd (unit 22). Due to the sensitive nature of wintering big game and the potential for human use to further stress animals, an Access Management Plan has been developed for the Beaver WMA (see Appendix D).

### **Maintenance Activities**

The habitat seasonal crew walks all of the boundary fences annually and notes needs for major repairs or replacement while conducting routine fence maintenance and signing. Major repairs and/or replacements may be handled by the seasonal crew or contracted based on funding and prioritization. Dedicated Hunters will also be utilized in fence maintenance activities as opportunities arise. Private contractors or the Beaver County Road Department will do road maintenance on an as needed basis.

## **Habitat Management Plan for Beaver Wildlife Management Area March 2020**

### **I. Background Information**

#### **Purpose of Division Ownership**

The Beaver WMA was formed to secure and improve critical winter habitat for big game. The B-hill and North Creek Units were purchased using Pittman Robertson Federal Aid Grant (W-121-L) for the specific purpose of providing deer winter range. No federal aid was used for the other two properties, but they were purchased for the same use. The Easement Unit was purchased by Sportsman for Habitat, Inc., which granted a conservation easement to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. The first portion of the South Creek Unit was acquired in a land trade with Rowland and Mary Yardley and the second portion in a land exchange with the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA).

Big game and small game hunting is permitted on the Beaver WMA. Mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, wild turkey, dusky grouse, mourning dove, and cottontail rabbit are the most often hunted species. Wildlife viewing and photography is permitted on the WMA as well.

#### **Historic Uses**

All four parcels of the Beaver WMA have been used historically for grazing livestock. Other uses may have included non-commercial fire wood gathering and cedar post cutting.

#### **Public Recreation Opportunities**

Big game and small game hunting is permitted and encouraged on the Beaver WMA. Dispersed camping is allowed on the WMA. OHV and other motorized uses are limited to existing roadways and subject to the limitations specified in the Access Management Plan (See Appendix D). In recent years the Easement Unit has been host to a youth pheasant hunt day utilizing pen-reared birds.

#### **Key Wildlife Species**

The properties that make up the Beaver WMA were purchased for mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk winter range. Other protected species that inhabit the WMA include wild turkey, dusky grouse, mourning dove, cottontail rabbits, bobcats and cougars. Many songbirds, raptors including bald and golden eagles, and other species also use and inhabit the Beaver WMA.

#### **Grazing**

Cattle grazing is not currently permitted on the Beaver WMA. All of the units within the Beaver WMA may be made available as grassbank properties and could be made available to grazers impacted by wildfire or to facilitate livestock rest on completed habitat treatment projects. If grazing is deemed as beneficial to the properties at a future date the properties would be made available through a public bid process following the guidelines in the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Lands Use Policy (R657-28).

### **II. Property Information**

#### **Property Descriptions**

The Beaver WMA consists of four parcels of land totaling 2483.8 acres located on the west face of the Tushar mountain range in Beaver County (see Appendix A). This WMA was assembled through five transactions made between 1937 and 2013. All of the parcels on the Beaver WMA are within the Beaver River drainage. The WMA consists of the North Creek Unit, Easement Unit, B-Hill Unit, and the South Creek Unit.

The North Creek Unit is an entire section of land totaling 645.71 acres (see Appendix A), located in Township 28 south, Range 6 west, section 32, (see appendix B-1, warranty deed for legal description) and is approximately 5 miles northeast of Beaver city.

The Easement Unit is a conservation easement granted to the Division by Sportsman for Habitat, Inc. It is located about 1.5 miles southeast of Beaver city and contains 598.09 acres of land (see Appendix A) in Township 29 south, Range 7 west, sections 23,24,25, and 26 (see Appendix B-2, Deed of Conservation Easement for legal description).

The B-hill Unit is a full section of land located 2 miles southeast of Beaver city (see Appendix A), and consists of 640 acres in Township 29 south, Range 7 west, section 36 (see Appendix B-3, warranty deed for legal description).

The South Creek Unit is a 600 acre parcel situated approximately 3 miles south of Beaver city (see Appendix A) in Township 30 south, Range 7 west, parts of sections 2, 3, and 10 (see Appendix B-4 and 5, warranty deed for legal description).

### **Land Acquisition History**

The North Creek Unit was formed through a single land purchase as follows:

- November 10, 1937 from W. Reed and Laura M. Smith (see Appendix B-1).

The Easement unit was formed through a Deed of Conservation Easement as follows:

- December 20, 2001 from Sportsmen for Habitat, Inc. (see Appendix B-2). The Easement Unit was purchased by Sportsmen for Habitat, Inc. from SITLA. The easement agreement assigns management responsibilities to the Division.

The B-hill Unit was formed through a single land purchase as follows:

- September 3, 1974 from SITLA (see Appendix B-3).

The South Creek Unit was created with two land transactions as follows:

- February 22, 1990 by trading the Division owned Gillies Property to Rowland B. and Mary Linda Yardley (see Appendix B-4).
- January 9, 2014 from SITLA in a land exchange (see Appendix B-5).

### **Encumbrances**

There is a road right of way granted to the Beaver City ATV Trail Committee for a road through the North Creek Unit (see Appendix C). There are no other known encumbrances or limitations for the North Creek Unit.

The Easement Unit was purchased for its value as big game winter range, and all encumbrances and limitations are associated with that purpose. As mentioned above Sportsmen for Habitat, Inc. are partners in the Easement Unit of the Beaver WMA, and the deed with the Sportsmen for Habitat, Inc. allows for the development of Water Rights for the purpose of farming and wildlife habitat improvement. Sportsmen for

Habitat, Inc. also reserved the right for a livestock-grazing lease on the Easement Unit. However, the Division may manage livestock usage of the property in accordance with the purpose of the easement (see Appendix B-2). There are also radio towers on the Easement Unit and a road leading to them and then on to adjacent private and public land. The towers and the road were in place before the Sportsman for Habitat purchased the property.

Mineral rights are reserved by the state on the B-hill Unit (see appendix B-3) and there are existing rights of way for canals, ditches, tunnels, and telephone and transmission lines. All of these right of ways were purchased and established before the Division purchased the property in 1974.

The federal government reserved the right to mine and produce any materials essential to the production of fissionable materials on the South Creek Unit (see Appendix B-4).

### **III. Property Inventory**

#### **Existing Capital Improvements**

The North Creek Unit has several roads that run through it which provide access to the unit and to the USFS property above the unit. One of these roads is the designated OHV trail with a right of way granted to the Beaver City ATV Trail Committee. This unit is also entirely fenced and the fence is in good condition.

The Easement Unit has a boundary fence that was completed by dedicated hunters in 2002, including cattle guards at the high volume entrances. This fence is in good condition. There are several roads that run through the unit providing access to the unit and to the BLM property beyond the unit. In addition, there is an access road that runs to the radio towers on the unit which is maintained by the right of way owners.

The B-hill Unit is fenced and fences are in good repair. There is a single road on the unit running from the center of the northern boundary to where it leaves the property on the eastern boundary.

The South Creek Unit is being fenced at the time of the writing of this document. The fence will include gates or cattle guards at the known major entrances. In addition, there are several roads that run through the property providing access to the unit and to the BLM property beyond the unit.

Fences on all of these units are maintained annually by the habitat sections seasonal maintenance crew with minor repairs being made on the spot and major repairs noted so that necessary repairs can be planned and carried out depending on size and funding requirements.

#### **Cultural Resources**

Much of the area within the WMA has been disturbed at some point, either by farming practices or habitat treatments. No new surface disturbing activities will be completed without prior cultural resource surveys. Significant cultural resources will be avoided during surface disturbing activities.

#### **Sensitive Species**

Sensitive Species that occur in Beaver County and are likely to occur on the Beaver WMA include: Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Lewis's Woodpecker, Northern Goshawk, Fringed Myotis, Little Brown Bat, Spotted Bat, Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Big Free-tailed Bat, Red Bat, Burrowing Owl, and Preble's Shrew.

#### **Important Fish and Wildlife Habitats**

All of the properties within the Beaver WMA are important winter range for deer and elk. The I-15 corridor severely diminished the amount of winter range accessible to the Beaver herds of deer and elk. The objectives for deer herd unit 22 are 18-20 bucks per 100 does and a population of 13,000 deer. The most

recent herd estimate from 2019 shows the deer herd slightly above objective at 12,000. Elk herd unit 22 has an objective of 1050 and the most recent estimate of herd size from 2019 has them slightly above objective at 1275. Since I-15 has cut off access to much of the historical winter range the Beaver WMA is an important tool in the management of big game herds. Therefore, it is important to improve and maintain the winter range on the WMA.

Although the land was originally purchased for big game use, there is significant habitat for wild turkey, cottontail rabbits, mourning dove, dusky grouse, cougar, bobcat and many species of raptors.

### **Habitat Types, Range and Watershed Conditions, and Habitat Limitations**

The North Creek Unit is in fair to good condition. Juniper encroachment on the east side of the unit has been treated recently and will continue to be monitored for future treatments. Portions of the sagebrush and bitterbrush have also recently been chain harrowed and have responded well with increased vigor and leader growth.

The Easement Unit is in fair condition and has recovered well from historical overgrazing by livestock as a result of the increased protection from fencing the unit. The unit has also received a dixie harrow treatment that has increased the vigor and leader growth on the sagebrush as well as increasing the diversity of grasses and forbs in the understory. Pinyon and Juniper encroachment is monitored and kept largely in check with dedicated hunter projects.

The B-hill Unit is in fair condition and receives heavy winter deer use. Improved fencing and maintenance has resulted in a decrease in unauthorized vehicle and OHV use providing a significant benefit to the unit.

The South Creek Unit is in poor to fair condition largely due to overuse by livestock and humans. There has been some recent projects to remove encroaching Pinyon and Juniper and some consideration given to a harrow treatment. It was however decided to first invest in the fence that is currently being built and see how the ground recovers after the livestock use is removed.

### **Human Use-Related Problems**

The construction of I-15 has limited the winter range for big game animals to the areas east of I-15. The creation and use of unauthorized roads and trails as well as unauthorized overland travel by motor vehicles results in habitat degradation and fragmentation and increases stress to wintering wildlife. These unauthorized uses seem to be proliferating with the growing popularity of shed antler gathering.

### **Adjacent Land Uses and Potential Impacts**

BLM, Forest Service, and private lands border the Beaver WMA. Livestock grazing takes place on most of the adjacent federal lands. A large percentage of the private land is grazed as well. In addition, many private lands adjacent to or nearby the Division lands are farmed, with alfalfa being the main crop. Due to the amount of grazing that occurs on adjacent lands, fences and fence maintenance are important to avoid livestock trespass. Habitat improvement projects are important to minimize wildlife depredation on surrounding agricultural lands.

### **Zoning and Land Use Ordinances**

All of the units in the Beaver WMA are zoned for multiple uses, and there is little danger of adjacent land being heavily developed or urbanized. However, it should be noted that both the North Creek and Easement Units are directly adjacent to ranchette type developments.

## **IV. Management Goals and Objectives**

The management of these WMA's will take into account the goals, objectives, and strategies of other Division planning efforts. These other plans are briefly discussed below.

### **UDWR Strategic Plan**

The Beaver WMA supports several aspects of the UDWR Strategic Plan. Under the Agency goal Objective A1 "Promote a culture that builds teamwork..." the Beaver WMA plan implements a strategy utilizing employees of multiple sections to identify and address needs on the WMA. Under the Resource goal Objective R2 "Maintain existing wildlife habitat and increase the quality of critical habitats and watersheds throughout the state." is supported through the conservation and improvement of the lands within the WMA.

### **Wildlife Action Plan**

While the Beaver WMA was specifically developed for big game winter range there are multiple ways its management supports the Wildlife Action Plan. The WMA is home to and conserves habitat for several Species of Greatest Conservation Need. This plan also helps to protect and restore several Key Habitat types identified in the Wildlife Action Plan including Gambel Oak, Lowland Sagebrush, and Mountain Sagebrush.

### **Wildlife Species Management Plans**

Unit management plans for deer and elk on Unit 22 call for direct range improvements on winter range, working with partners through Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative for fire rehabilitation, managing vehicle access in UDWR lands to limit disturbance to wintering big game, and dealing with Pinyon and Juniper encroachment through the use of treatments. All of these directives have historically been implemented and will continue to be implemented on the Beaver WMA.

## **V. Strategies for Property Management**

### **Development Activities**

Upon completion of the South Creek Unit fence a significant majority of the acreage within the WMA will be protected by fence. In one instance on the South Creek Unit due to a small acreage being on the north side of a major roadway and the significant expense to install cattle guards fence will run along the south side of the road. The acreage to the north will be denoted utilizing WMA boundary signs on the corners and along the boundary line.

A majority of the units in the Beaver WMA have signs posted at the major access points. Signs are also placed at corners and appropriate intervals along fenced boundaries.

There are some historical unauthorized roads and trails on the Beaver WMA which are managed largely through signage and enforcement. An access management plan has been formed with input from the Habitat Section, Wildlife Section, and Law Enforcement. There are three categories of roads noted in the access management plan. Roads that are damaging to habitat and will be closed permanently. Roads that are necessary for management and access, but cause disturbance to big game using the properties in the winter. Such roads will be closed from January 1 to April 30 of each year reducing disturbance to wintering big game. Right-of-way roads, through roads, and roads that can be used without disturbing wintering wildlife will be left open year-round (see Appendix D).

### **Annual Maintenance Activities**

The Habitat Seasonal crew walks all of the boundary fences annually and notes needs for major repairs or replacement while conducting routine fence maintenance and signing. Major repairs and/or replacements may be either handled by the seasonal crew or contracted based on funding and prioritization. Dedicated hunters will also be utilized in fence maintenance activities as opportunities arise.

Private contractors or the Beaver County Road Department will do road maintenance on an as needed basis. Private contractors, dedicated hunters, and Division employees will be used to close unneeded and unauthorized roads. On right-of-way roads, the owners of the right-of-way will handle the maintenance.

Noxious weeds have not been a problem on the Beaver WMA. However, if it becomes necessary to control noxious weeds on the WMA the Division will either handle it in-house, in cooperation with Beaver County Extension, or by utilizing a private contractor.

In high traffic areas of the Beaver WMA signs are often removed and/or damaged. A sign replacement budget will be requested annually to allow for replacement of missing, defaced, and damaged signs as part of the annual regional WMA maintenance proposal.

## **VI. Strategies for Habitat Management**

### **Unit Management Plans for Wildlife Species**

The lands that make up the Beaver WMA were originally purchased for big game winter habitat and have been managed accordingly. The Beaver WMA will continue to be managed as important winter range for big game, and steps are proposed to be taken to improve winter range conditions. Wild turkey habitat will also be improved on the units that have good populations of the birds.

Unit management plans for deer and elk on the Beaver unit call for direct range improvements on winter range, working with partners through Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative for fire rehabilitation, managing vehicle access on UDWR lands to limit disturbance to wintering big game, and dealing with Pinyon and Juniper encroachment through the use of treatments. All of these directives have historically been implemented and will continue to be implemented on the Beaver WMA.

### **Habitat Improvement Plan**

A significant number of habitat improvement projects have been conducted on the Beaver WMA over the past decade. In areas that have experienced Pinyon and Juniper encroachment, Lop and Scatter and Mastication treatments have been completed on all four units. Future projects will focus on maintaining these treatments as well as addressing more Pinyon and Juniper encroachment on all units within the WMA. Both the North Creek Unit and Easement unit have also been treated by either dixie harrow or chain harrow to re-invigorate browse and diversify understory grasses and forbs. Both of these units also received a subsequent treatment with Plateau herbicide to remove cheatgrass competition from the establishing understory.

All units will be monitored yearly for habitat quality. In the event that quality is unsatisfactory, plans for necessary treatments will be developed and carried out.

Prescribed fire may be used to treat the oak in the upper elevations of the North Creek Unit for decadency, and to promote new growth. This would be done in conjunction with the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands, U.S. Forest Service, and the BLM.

### **Access Management Plan**

The Beaver WMA is crucial winter range for big game in the Beaver herd (unit 22). Due to the sensitive nature of wintering big game and the potential for human use to further stress animals an Access Management Plan has been developed for the Beaver WMA (see Appendix D).

### **Fire Management Plan**

Due to the difficulty associated with restoring browse species to burned landscapes and the importance of these browse species to wintering wildlife, a general practice of fire suppression will be used on all units within the Beaver WMA. Some limited prescribed fire may be utilized in the future in conjunction with the US Forest Service, BLM, and the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands in the oak communities as mentioned elsewhere in this plan.

In order to balance fire suppression practices on the WMA, an aggressive and proactive habitat restoration program has been and will continue to be implemented on the WMA. These restoration projects serve to reduce fire receptivity and behavior. Future projects will also focus on our uphill borders and creating defensible space that will allow for fire to be utilized on the upslope properties for beneficial purposes without creating a risk to the loss of winter range.

### **Wood Products**

Cedar posts and firewood are the most likely available wood products available on the Beaver WMA, with a little potential for Christmas trees. None of these are available in large enough quantities for commercial harvest, but individual use permits may be obtained through the Southern Region office.

### **Livestock Grazing Plan**

Cattle grazing is not currently used on the Beaver WMA. All of the units within the Beaver WMA may be made available as grassbank properties and could be made available to grazers impacted by wildfire or to facilitate livestock rest on completed habitat treatment projects. If grazing is deemed as beneficial to the properties at a future date the properties would be made available through a public bid process following the guidelines in the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Lands Use Policy (R657-28).

## **VII. Summary Statement of Proposed Uses**

The purpose of the Beaver WMA is to provide winter range for big game species. In addition, there is vital, high-quality turkey habitat on some of the units. Therefore, the Beaver WMA will be used to provide big game winter range for deer and elk, and to provide habitat for wild turkeys. Human uses that will be allowed include hunting, wildlife viewing, hiking, and horseback riding. Dispersed camping will also be allowed but not promoted. OHV use will be allowed on the Beaver WMA only on designated right of ways and marked open roads. Destruction and/or degradation of wildlife habitat from any of these uses may result in further restrictions to protect the resource.

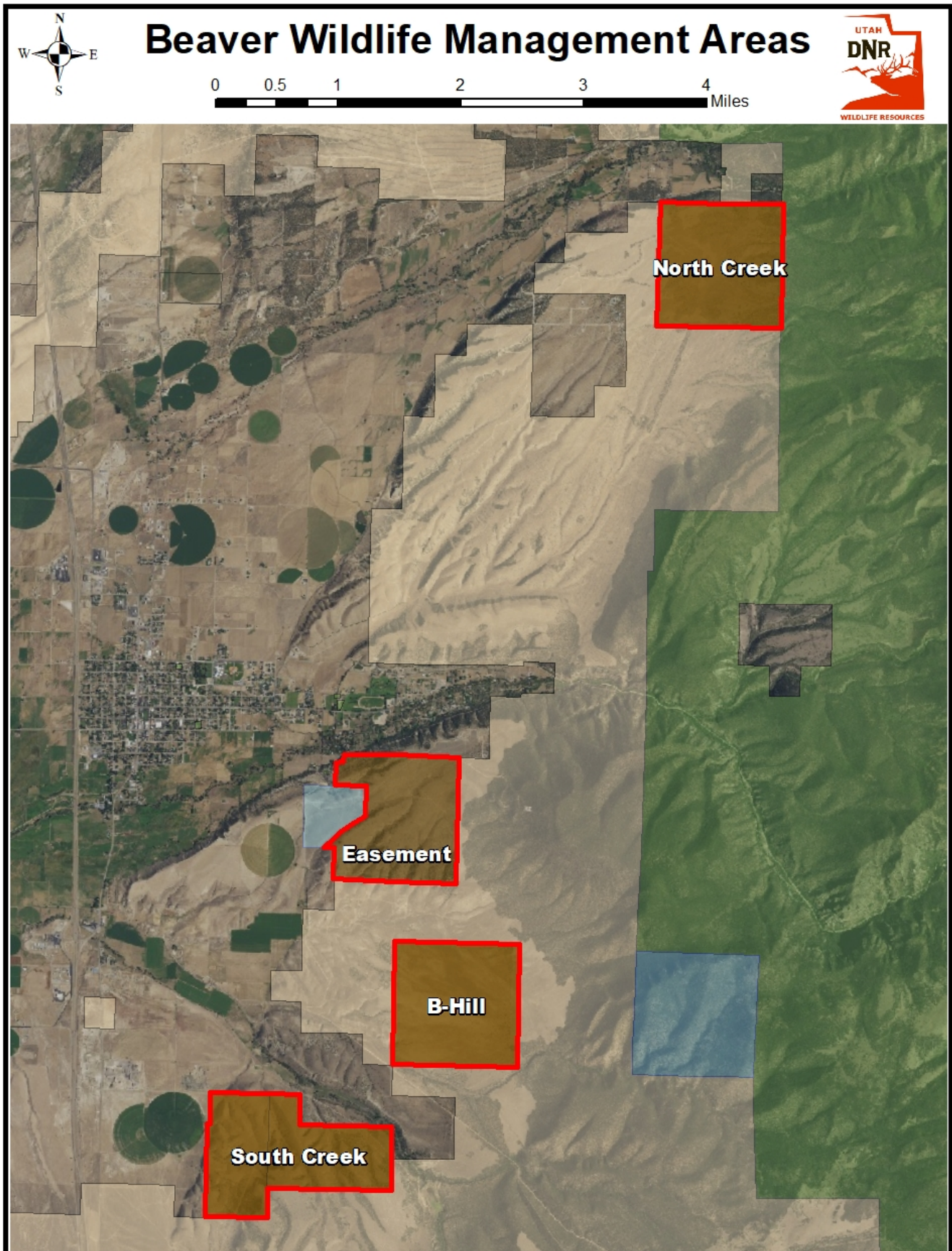
## **VIII. Monitoring and Evaluation**

The district wildlife biologist in conjunction with the area habitat restoration biologist and other habitat staff will do evaluations of the habitat and prepare habitat improvement proposals. The district conservation officer will monitor human use of the Beaver WMA and propose management modifications where problems are occurring with input from habitat and wildlife staff. The Habitat Section of the Southern Region of the Division of Wildlife Resources will present improvement projects to the Watershed Restoration Initiative, Habitat Council, and other sources for approval and funding.

## **IX. Appendices**

# **Appendix A**

## Maps



# **Appendix B**

## **Deeds**

**Copies of deeds related to the Fillmore WMA can be found at the  
Southern Regional Office of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, 1470  
N. Airport Rd. Ste. 1, Cedar City, UT 84720**

## **Appendix C**

# **Encumbrances, Rights of Way, Easements, and Water Rights**

**Copies of encumbrances, rights of way, easements and water rights related to the Fillmore WMA can be found at the Southern Regional Office of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, 1470 N. Airport Rd. Ste. 1, Cedar City, UT 84720**

# **Appendix D**

## **Access Management Plan**

# **Beaver WMA**

## **Access Management Plan**

The Beaver WMA is crucial winter range for big game in the Beaver herd (unit 22). Due to the sensitive nature of wintering big game and the potential for human use to further stress animals, an Access Management Plan has been developed for the Beaver WMA. This plan enacts seasonal road closures on some of the roads in the Beaver WMA. In addition, many roads and OHV trails on the WMA serve no purpose and damage wildlife habitat by leading off from established roads and reducing browse, forbs, and grass species. Those roads and trails will be closed permanently. All of the road closures will be closed under the authority of Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife Resources Administrative Rule **R657-28-1 sections 2 and 3.**

### **Road Designation**

**The roads on the Beaver WMA will be designated in one of three categories: Open roads, Seasonally Closed Roads, and Permanently Closed Roads.**

#### **Open roads:**

These are roads that will be left open to the public year round, and are roads on established rights of way granted to Beaver County, private landowners with land only accessible through WMA lands, and state agencies. Some additional roads that are less damaging to wintering wildlife and do not damage habitat may be left open for public access.

### **Seasonally Closed Roads**

All roads will be closed seasonally from January 1<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup> each year that are not on established rights of way and are not identified as open but are necessary for public access to the WMA. This will be done to limit disturbance of wintering big game when they are most vulnerable. Seasonal closures will also help to remedy the winter depredation problems on surrounding private land by allowing big game to winter on the WMA undisturbed. All roads will be closed between these dates unless posted open (Utah Code section 41-22-10.1).

### **Permanently Closed Roads**

All roads that are damaging to wildlife habitat and are unnecessary for public access or WMA management will be permanently closed (Utah Code section 41-22-13). The roads will be closed using signs, water bars, fencing and other obstructions. Some of the roads will be plowed and reseeded. Others in low traffic areas will be blocked and allowed to return to a natural state.

### **Carrying out Closures**

Habitat section staff, the district wildlife biologist, and district conservation officer will determine the status of each road on the Beaver WMA (see attachments 1-4). Input from the Beaver County Commissioners will be taken into consideration during the process.

Road closures will be carried out by dedicated hunters, Division employees, and private contractors. Dedicated hunters and Division employees will do reseeded with a seed mix developed by Division employees from the Great Basin Research Center.

### **OHVs**

OHVs will be allowed on open roads only (Utah Code section 41-22-10.1) or roads with recorded rights of way.

### **Enforcement of Closures**

DWR Conservation Officers will carry out the enforcement of road closures. Beaver County Sheriffs Department will also have jurisdiction (Utah Code Section 41-22-16). Trespass on closed roads is punishable as a class C misdemeanor and a monetary fine.

### **Informing the Public**

The public will be informed through signs at major access points, waterways, and on fence lines. The Beaver County Commission will also be notified of the Division's intent to close roads and given a chance to provide input. It should be noted that the roads on the WMA will be considered closed unless posted open; therefore, signing will be done as a courtesy to the public rather than being necessary for enforcement (Utah Code section 41-22-10.1).

