



Fitzner/Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve

Fact Sheet • August 2002



FWS photo: David Goeke

Unit Size

77,000 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. The Fitzner/Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology (ALE) Reserve was established here in 1967 to preserve “portions of vegetation types that once covered a great expanse of the West.” The ALE was designated a Research Natural Area in 1971 and a National Environmental Research Park in 1975. Since 1997, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been the primary land manager of this unit under a use permit with the DOE. The DOE retains administrative control of Rattlesnake Ridge and associated access road.

To Contact the Monument

Hanford Reach NM
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Location

This unit is southwest of the Columbia River and State Highway 240, between State Highways 24 and 225. Prominent natural features include the ridge top and mostly north-facing slope of Rattlesnake Mountain (the highest “treeless” mountain in the United States), portions of Rattlesnake Hills, and the east end of Yakima Ridge.

Habitats

This area contains one of the few remaining large tracts of native shrub-steppe vegetation in Washington. A major human-caused wildfire burned most of this unit in 2000. It devastated native plants, especially sagebrush which does not re-sprout after fire. Removal of the shrub cover reduced the diversity and complexity of the vegetation structure on the landscape. However, native grasslands are recovering and efforts to restore sagebrush to the area are underway. The fire also damaged the microbiotic crust, a critical component of shrub-steppe. This diminutive collection of mosses, lichens, liverworts, algae and bacteria stabilizes the soils and fills the space between bunchgrass clumps.

Rare Plants

A newly described plant species, Rattlesnake Mountain milk-vetch occurs on the top of Rattlesnake Mountain. Relatively large populations of Piper’s daisy, a state sensitive plant, also occur in this unit.

Wildlife

In addition to being a home for Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, coyote and other habitat generalists, this unit provides habitat for wildlife species that are dependent on sagebrush, and are considered shrub-steppe obligates in the Columbia Basin Ecoregion.

These include burrowing owl, logger-head shrike, sage sparrow, long-billed curlew, sagebrush vole, Merriam’s shrew, black tailed jackrabbit, sagebrush lizard and striped whipsnake. Many butterflies (46 species) and moths (107 taxa) also occur here.



FWS photo: Scott McCorquodale

Public Uses

Public use is currently limited to approved ecological research and environmental education activities.

Cultural Resources

Rattlesnake Mountain has spiritual significance for the local Native American people. It has been a traditional area for hunting and root gathering for thousands of years. From the 1880s to 1943, portions of this unit were used for livestock grazing, homesteads and small amounts of dryland and irrigated agriculture. Operating in the 1920s, the Benson and Snively Ranches were associated with the springs in this unit. More recently Rattlesnake Mountain became a strategic position for the operation of the Hanford Site. Several buildings from World War II and the Cold War era remain including an intact Nike missile silo.