

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

May 1 to 15, 2021

DIVERSITY DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Blue Mountains Elk Assessment: Biologists Wik and Vekasy participated in meetings for the Blue Mountains Elk Assessment and upcoming calf study. Biologists continued calling landowners for access permission and updated the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) layer and associated excel file to identify private landowners who granted permission to access their property for the calf study. Wik continued to coordinate the schedules of other staff members that are interested in assisting with the upcoming elk calf captures.

Wolf Trapping: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock checked traps with wolf biologist Roussin. She also practiced setting a few in case district biologist assistance is needed this summer.

Wolf Rulemaking: Wildlife Biologist Prince participated in a meeting of a small team asked to help develop the rule for lethal removal of wolves. The rule is being developed at the request of the Governor.

Loon Surveys: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock conducted common loon surveys at several unoccupied territories. No new territories were discovered.

Season Coordination: Wildlife Biologist Turnock participated in a meeting to discuss inter-agency plans for the upcoming northern bog lemming field season. Turnock and fellow Wildlife Biologist Prince also participated in a meeting to discuss plans for the upcoming Selkirk grizzly field season.

Western Bumble Bee Protocol: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock participated in the training call for the upcoming western bumble bee specific surveys.

Prairie Grouse: Biologist Atamian surveyed one historic sharp-tailed grouse lek complex, but no birds were observed, and neither was any sign seen.

Ferruginous Hawk: Biologist Lowe revisited two historic nesting territories along the Snake River to verify occupancy and check nesting status. One of the two territories is occupied and one of the adults was observed incubating the nest.

Washington Ground Squirrel: Biologist Lowe walked several grid cells to search for new Washington ground squirrel (WAGS) colonies by listening for alarm calls and looking for active burrows. A second new colony in southwestern Lincoln County was found. Biologist Atamian also walked WAGS grid cells but did not find any new colonies. This is part of an effort by WDFW to determine if the few known remaining colonies of WAGS truly represents the current distribution of the species or if there are more.



Two Washington ground squirrels observed in a newly found colony in Lincoln County



Pygmy short-horned lizard spotted during Washington ground squirrel survey

Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting: Biologist Atamian attended a portion of this year's meeting that was focused on turkey conflict in urban and rural areas. This meeting was supposed to be held in person last year in Spokane but was delayed a year and converted to a virtual meeting due to Covid-19.

White-Nose Syndrome Sampling: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock assisted white-nose syndrome coordinator Tobin with catching and sampling bats in north Pend Oreille County. The crew caught 22 bats for sampling.



Bats held for sampling; Myotis, Townsend's, and Myotis

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Bear, Turkey, and Bighorn Hunters: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock spoke to multiple hunters this week about local opportunities. Biologist Turnock sealed three black bears from successful hunters.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Demonstration Electric Fence: Wildlife Biologist Prince and Conflict Specialist Bennett installed demonstration electric fencing at the WSU extension garden in Pend Oreille County. They placed educational signs along with the fence promoting Defenders of Wildlife's electric fencing program. Electric fences can secure attractants and can prevent bear conflict.

Range Rider Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill spoke to several contracted range riders (CRRs) and prospect CRRs interested in completing the request for qualifications (RFQ) and either renewing or applying for a contract. Samsill assisted several range riders with clarifying questions surrounding concerns with the revised RFQ contract. Samsill coordinated start dates with several producers and range riders.

Producer and Landowner Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill communicated with several landowners and producers throughout the week via phone calls, texts, and emails. Samsill spoke to landowners and producers about Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) contracts, damage permit reporting, range riding options, crop damage complaints, Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for Livestock (DPCA-L) contracts, pilot projects, and plans for the upcoming grazing season.

Livestock Producer Check-ins: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb spent two days meeting producers as they brought their cattle in from winter/spring calving pastures. Having the chance to visit with producers while they branded, cut, vaccinated, and tagged their stock presented a good opportunity to discuss measures producers can take to minimize livestock conflict with carnivores on the landscape.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade continued pre-grazing season contacts this week. Wade contacted four producers to give updates on wolf activity and to discuss the upcoming grazing season. Wade was also in contact with a producer currently grazing on the 4-O Wildlife Area eastern allotment to check progress of preventative measure deployments. The producer reported that he is conducting daily range riding and has deployed Fox Lights throughout his pastures. Wade compiled documents and information about WDFW's wolf/livestock protocol and wolves in Washington for a new Grouse Flats producer as well.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Contact: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade was contacted by an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) district biologist regarding questions about the Grouse Flats wolf pack and a producer who will be grazing in both Oregon and Washington this season. The ODFW biologist reported that the producer has had wolf activity on their Oregon pastures already this season with wolves likely from the Grouse Flats packs savaging a carcass disposal sites. Wade will work to coordinate with the ODFW biologist on the issue.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area: Biologists Atamian and Lowe continued to assist Wildlife Area staff members with rebuilding a 4-strand barbed wire fence; the original was lost during the Whitney fire. The bottom and top wires will be smooth wire to make this fence as wildlife friendly as possible. The fence is needed as soon as possible so the neighbor can turn out their cattle on their pastures while keeping them off two sharp-tail lek sites.

Habitat Restoration: Biologist Baarstad and biologist Braaten planted 500 shrubs for sharp-tailed grouse and mule deer habitat in a riparian area in Douglas County impacted by fire.

Habitat Planting Maintenance: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked on weeding two past habitat plantings consisting of 3,200 plants for maintenance to eliminate competing vegetation within the plant holes and along the tarp edges.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Bear Aware Presentation: Wildlife Biologist Prince teamed with a Kalispel tribal biologist and Defenders of Wildlife to give a presentation about bear biology, conflict avoidance, and bear spray to the Metaline Border Patrol. Staff members were appreciative of the information and they'll each be receiving a free can of bear spray for use either on the job or in their free time.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Range Rider Coordination Call: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna facilitated another range rider coordination call to update the "DRAFT" placement of range riders on allotments. Participants included Colville National Forest, Cattle Producers of Washington, Northeast Washington Wolf-Livestock Collaborative and WDFW conflict staff members. Further discussion is needed due to Department of Agriculture grants expiring the end of June. WDFW will work with Department of Agriculture representatives to express the need for the new grants to be awarded in July to keep range riders in the field.

Duck Stamp Proposal Reviews: Private Lands Biologist Gaston worked on reviewing proposals for the Duck Stamp Grant to assist Waterfowl Biologist Spragens.

Diversity Work Matrix: Biologists Wik and Vekasy participated in the Diversity Work Planning meeting for Region 1.

District 3 Wolf Meeting: Wik participated in the first district wolf monthly update meeting of the grazing season. Meetings will be held monthly through the summer.

Regional Diversity Division Work Planning: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock participated in work planning for the next biennium.

Seasonal Field Staff Member Interviews: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock sat on the panel for interviews of the seasonal conflict technicians and natural resource worker at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area, respectively.

Supervisor Coaching Workshop: Wildlife Biologist Prince participated in a coaching workshop provided to managers/supervisors with responsibilities in District 1. The workshop was provided as part of the culture improvement planning process.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

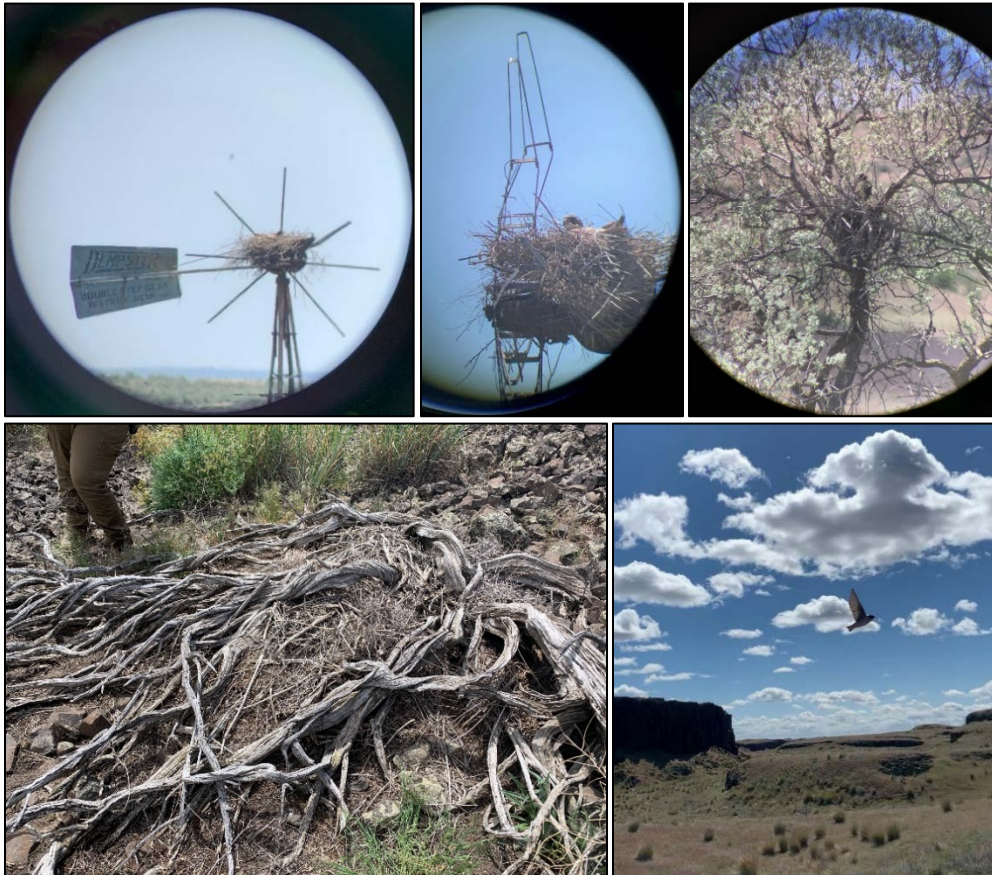


A stormy sunset above the Okanogan Valley – Photo by Haug

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Ferruginous Hawks: Biologist Rowan continued with formal hawk surveys and data entry, which take place roughly every five years. Fewer territories are occupied and demonstrating nesting than the low number counted in 2016, although we still have another week to finish occupancy surveys. These surveys were completed by seven people in 2016, although Biologist Rowan and Volunteer Bachman did their best to complete most of the site surveys. Diversity Technician Dwyer began hawk work in May, and Biologist Rowan spent a day compiling maps and aerials, uploading a garmin, and assembling other materials to help expedite her work.

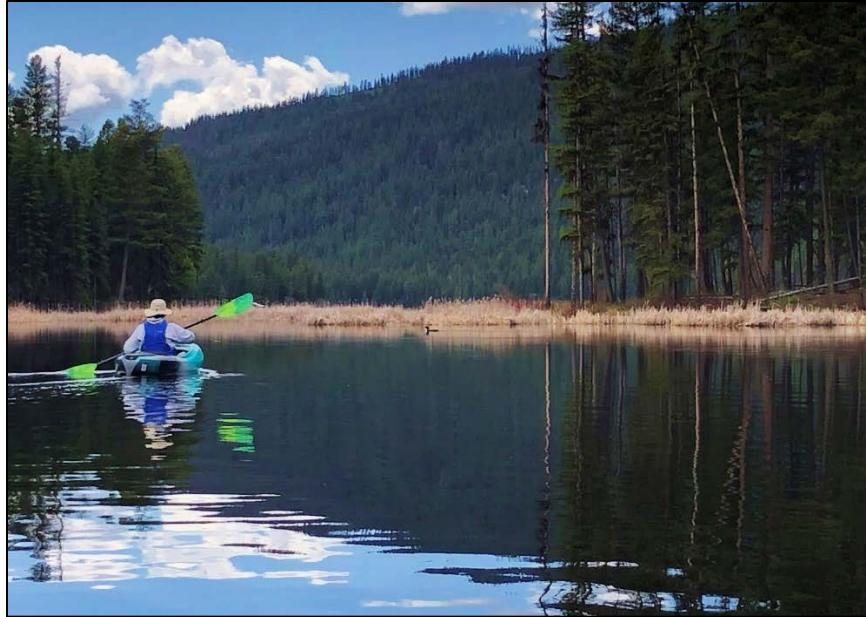
Rowan also spent a day training Dwyer in the field, where they visited an active ferruginous hawk territory, saw a bird in the nest. Some of the historic sites have had red-tailed hawks and ravens nesting in the area, and the rough-legged hawks took off around tax day only to be replaced by the incoming Swainson’s hawks. Conditions have been very dry this spring, with fires already having happened. Ferruginous hawks, along with many other species of birds, often nest on the ground where their eggs and chicks cannot outfly or outrun a fire.



The “Dempster” red-tail hawk in its nest, a Swainson’s hawk in its nest, a likely woodrat midden, and a special encounter with an inquisitive violet-green swallow. There is always something interesting afield – Photos by Ella Rowan

Cavity Nester Surveys: Cavity nester surveys for both Lewis’s and white-headed woodpeckers are proving successful, even if they are often in very challenging terrain. Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock performed surveys in the Mills Canyon and Chelan Butte study areas. A pair of white-headed woodpeckers was detected in one of the Mills Canyon grids, and pairs of Lewis’s woodpeckers were detected at two other grids, one at Mills Canyon and one at Chelan Butte.

Common Loon Management: This year WDFW is undertaking a common loon emphasis survey with the goal to determine nesting and productivity of common loons across the state. Thus far, WDFW Diversity Technician Pavelchek, Biologist Heinlen, and Biologist Fitkin conducted nesting surveys for common loons in District 6 on 11 lakes, finding eight pairs with six of those pairs nesting.



Technician Pavelchek observing a Common Loon on its territory – Photo by J. Heinlen

Biologist Jeffrey and Comstock paired with the North Central Audubon's Upper Basin Birder group to conduct the first round of common loon surveys for both Lake Wenatchee and Fish Lake. Volunteers from this group have adopted these lakes and will help conduct the three visits required to determine occupancy.



Volunteers from North Central Washington Audubon on their monthly census of Lake Wenatchee – Photo by Devon Comstock

Biologist Comstock conducted the first common loon survey on Lake Chelan at Stehekin. While common loons are a regular occurrence on the lake and loons were indeed seen in the vicinity the available nesting habitat is minimal and the lake levels fluctuate greatly. However, many delightful common merganser nestlings were seen and adored.



Common merganser nestlings (AKA merganserlings) hop aboard mom's back – Photo by Devon Comstock

Golden Eagles: Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock performed occupancy surveys at several historic golden eagle territories in Chelan County. Most were found to be unoccupied this year, but Biologist Comstock observed breeding pairs at two territories, one near Icicle Creek and one in Entiat. The Entiat pair was additionally observed to be rearing nestlings. Biologists Comstock and Jeffreys along with Conflict Specialist Bridges got to watch the release of a juvenile female golden eagle that had been rehabbed by Sarvey Wildlife Center. She had been picked up near Goldendale in the winter and had apparently been underweight. The eagle was released in the Swakane Unit of the Chelan Wildlife Area.



Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bridges looks on as Sarvey Wildlife Center volunteers release a rehabilitated golden eagle at Swakane Canyon – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

Grand Opening of Cashmere Canyons Preserve: On May 15 the Chelan – Douglas Land Trust held a small, invitation-only grand opening event for the Cashmere Canyons Preserve. In cooperation with a generous landowner the Cashmere Canyons Preserve is enrolled in a conservation easement, which allows for public access to over 2,000 acres of shrubsteppe and riparian habitats. Wildlife and wildflower viewing opportunities on this property are exceptional. Recreational access is limited to hiking only, so both mountain bikes and dogs are prohibited. WDFW provided written support for the acquisition of this easement and has worked with the landowner on mule deer winter range conservation efforts.

Mule Deer Collar Retrieval: Biologist Jeffrey went after two mule deer collars that sent mortality signals. The signals came from does who were collared as part of the four-year migration study intended to identify important migratory pathways for East Slope Cascades mule deer. One doe died at around 3,300 feet elevation near Tronsen Ridge, and Biologist Jeffrey was able to successfully retrieve her collar. An attempt had been made to retrieve this same collar earlier in the week by Biologist Oates in District 8, but he had no choice but to leave empty-handed as a sow black bear and her cub had been intently scavenging the carcass upon his arrival. Biologist Jeffrey hiked out to the carcass two days later and, although there was fresh bear sign all around, thankfully didn't encounter any bears. The other collar could not be retrieved as the signal was coming from 5,600 feet, and the roads still had quite a bit of snow at that elevation. Biologists will attempt to retrieve this one within the next couple of weeks as the roads continue to thaw.



The view from the top of the ridge before descending to retrieve a deer collar near Tronsen Meadows – Photo by Emily Jeffrey



*A turkey vulture takes a break from feeding on a deer carcass to sun itself high up in a snag –
Photo by Emily Jeffreys*

Washington Ground Squirrels: Biologist Rowan visited the Department of Transportation Right-of-Way off Highway 17 near Warden to evaluate squirrel activity and habitat conditions. The Department of Transportation has spent effort reseeding vegetation, although the species diversity is very low and very few squirrels were heard calling. This squirrel species and Townsend’s ground squirrel are both Priority Species in Washington due to drastic population declines.



A sea of mostly cheatgrass, a non-native invasive species that promotes fire and provides little benefit to wildlife. This is what invades when native soils are disturbed – Photo by Ella Rowan

Northern Leopard Frogs: Biologists Grabowsky and Dougherty continued surveys for northern leopard frog egg masses to bolster the number already being raised at Oregon Zoo. Six additional egg masses were found and portions of each were delivered to Northwest Trek to continue the captive rearing program. Based on updates from our partners, the captive eggs are doing well so far and have hatched into tadpoles. Communication between WDFW and the zoos is ongoing to ensure captive frogs develop at a similar rate as those in the wild.



Left: NLF egg mass freshly laid



Right: The same egg mass 5 days later with newly hatched tadpoles – Photos by Emily Grabowsky

For one final egg mass survey push, a Washington Conservation Corps team was recruited to assist Biologist Grabowsky with surveys. Though no additional egg masses were found, northern leopard frog (NLF) tadpoles were observed and the crew enjoyed their time assisting with wildlife surveys. Egg mass surveys are officially concluded for the season, but a few weeks of tadpoles surveys are starting on May 17, in hopes of capturing tadpoles from a different unit to increase genetic diversity of those already being reared in captivity.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunter Access Program: Biologist Hughes contacted several landowners who have expiring Hunter Access Program contracts that need to be amended. There were three landowners who wanted to renew their Hunter Access agreement. Additionally, Hughes reached out to two landowners who recently purchased sections from another landowner that sold all his property that was enrolled in the Hunter Access Program, SAFE and Safe Harbor. Hughes discussed the programs with the new landowners. One landowner was not open to allowing hunting on her property and the other one wants to make sure all the property he purchased remains enrolled in Feel Free to Hunt. Biologist Hughes met with the landowner who did not want to have a hunter access contract and removed the signs on the property she recently purchased what was previously enrolled in Feel Free to Hunt. Hughes worked on submitting a new contract for the other landowner who wants the sections he purchased to remain in Feel Free to Hunt. Hughes worked on getting signatures for all the new and amended hunter access contracts.



Posting a hunting by written permission access area in the Beezley Hills – Photo by Hughes

Methow Trails and Rise Lake Tour: The Methow Wildlife Area and Lands Ops Manager Haug met with the Methow Valley Trails Collaborative (MVTC) to potentially improve a few more stretches of trail at Riser Lake. MVTC had suggesting constructing new trail to bypass areas of the existing trail (two-track road) which get wet during certain times of year. After hearing their proposal and looking more carefully at those segments, it was determined DFW could improve the road in those areas to improve the experience for users and not construct new trail. Manager Troyer will coordinate those efforts in the weeks to come.

Recreation Strategy and Land Classification: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug participated in two recreation planning discussions involving classifying DFW lands for recreation planning purposes and a general update on the recreation planning effort. The classification discussion provided the group the opportunity to hear from WLA Manager Rotton about various challenges and conflicts with certain user groups on the Skagit Wildlife Area. Each unit provides unique challenges to managing recreation demands and this exercise demonstrated the challenges DFW faces when trying to plan for broad recreation activities on our lands.

Chiliwist Unit Parking Area Improvements: Sinlahekin Wildlife Area worked on improving the parking area at the base of Chiliwist Butte Road staff members had gravel hauled in and spread it over the existing parking lot and smoothed the area to provide a better access experience. This work will also help with the weed control in the parking area and help reduce the potential wildfire risk when people park over top dry vegetation.



3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Deer Damage: Specialist Heilhecker met with a landowner regarding deer damage to his hay. The hay is stored in a “shed,” basically a roof with no true walls. He has used various materials (woven wire, aluminum sheeting, etc.) to piecemeal together “walls” to block deer from accessing the hay. Since the materials are old and the structure has not been maintained, deer have easily compromised the “shed” in many places. The landowner does have game-proof fencing surrounding his property. However, approximately 1-mile section of fence was lost in the 2014 Carlton Complex Fire. Specialist Heilhecker explained a cost-share fencing agreement and the possibility of funding after July 1. The landowner was not interested. Specialist Heilhecker asked if he was interested in a damage cooperative agreement and two, 330ft rolls of woven wire, field fence to create “walls” for the shed to keep deer out. The landowner was not interested. The landowner is only interested in the department purchasing aluminum sheeting so he can build walls to protect the hay from the weather and deer. Specialist Heilhecker explained the fencing options again and suggested the landowner take some time to think over the options she suggested.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Methow Wildlife Area/Backcountry Hunters and Anglers Fence Roll up Event: On a beautifully warm and sunny Saturday afternoon, Manager Troyer and Assistant Manager Repp teamed up with a wonderfully diverse group of over 20 volunteers for the 3rd annual Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) Volunteer Day at the Methow Wildlife Area. All volunteers were either members of BHA or WDFW Master Hunters. This year was extra special as we finally removed the last of the dilapidated woven and barbed wire fencing that encircled over 100 acres of upland and riparian habitat at the Golden Doe Unit. The removal of this fencing has been a top priority since old fencing, especially woven wire fencing can prove to be very detrimental to wildlife, particularly fawns, as it acts as a movement barrier. In total, approximately 5 miles of woven wire and barbed wire fencing has been removed in 3 years and roughly 300 hours of volunteer service have been donated to this project. A sincere and massive thanks to all the hard-working people who came out to support a great cause and a special thanks to BHA members Carmen Vanbianchi and John Rohrer for rallying and organizing the troops. Also, after the workday, a barbeque and campout was held at Beaver Creek. A big shoutout to BHA for donating food and Old School House Brewery and 6 Point Cider for donating beverages.

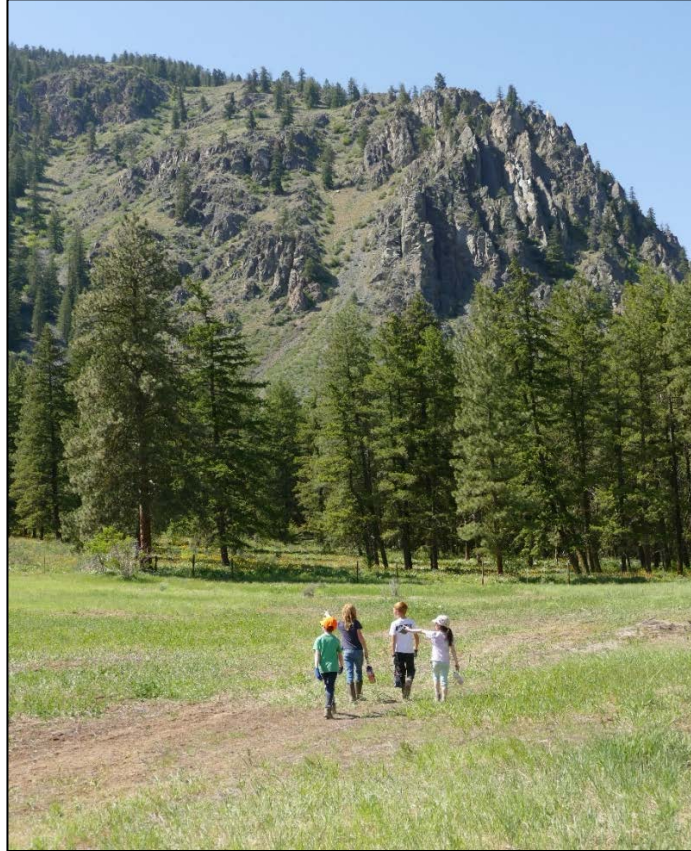
As this event seems to grow in popularity each year, we are excited to see what next year brings! Thanks for all the hard work, donations, and overall support to the WDFW Mission!



Carmen Vanbianchi – BHA East Co-Chair, Conservation and Policy Leader (Region 3) – Twisp



USFS Wildlife Biologist and devout BHA member, John Rohrer. John is the person who first approached the Methow Wildlife Area asking to collaborate with BHA on volunteer projects centered around preserving, protecting, and perpetuating public lands and wildlife habitat. Thanks for John!



The next generation of public landowners and wildlife conservationist. Each year, more and more parents are bringing their children, which is a welcomed and refreshing addition to these highly important and worthwhile events – Photos by Troyer

Target Shooting: Wildlife Manager Eidson visited the site of a recent fire in the Sun Lakes Unit. The fire originated very near a user-created shooting pit near Lake Lenore. The fire burned approximately 30 acres and was quickly controlled by local FPD staff members. This is the third fire that has started near this location in the last few years. The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area is looking to improve the sight to create a safer target shooting area as well as implement some fire abatement measures to hopefully curtail the frequent wildfires. This is the third reported fire on the Columbia Basin Wildlife already this year. Dry fuels created by very low moisture this spring have the fire danger high.

Vegetation Management: Assistant Manager Cole followed up on a Grant County Noxious Weed Control Board report of Myrtle Spurge near the Billy Clapp south end boat launch. The immediate infestation is approximately a quarter acre and was treated with herbicide, further ground truthing will determine if there are additional plants present and the extent. Myrtle Spurge, also called Creeping Spurge or Donkey Tail Spurge, is an escaped ornamental, non-native perennial succulent that crowds out native species. The white sap of the plant is caustic to humans and can cause redness, swelling, and blisters if it contacts skin, blindness if it gets in a person's eyes, and may cause nausea and vomiting among other symptoms if ingested. Domestic sheep and goats are able to graze Myrtle Spurge, though it is toxic to other livestock, and there is no identified wildlife value.

Low-Tech Riparian Restoration: Wildlife Area Manager Peterson and Assistant Manager Blake toured Big Bend riparian restoration sites with the owner of McLean Ranch (Bridgeport) and staff from Foster Creek Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Conservation Northwest. The group then visited McLean Ranch to discuss potential to partner on similar projects on this property and adjacent DFW wildlife area. Peterson and Blake visited with many of the same people plus staff members from Anabran Solutions all of whom are partnering on a riparian restoration project in East Foster Creek. The group are implementing a variety of low-tech techniques along eight miles of creek.

Big Bend Shrubsteppe Restoration: Assistant Manager Blake and Natural Resource Technician Chouinard have been working very long days on the Big Bend Shrubsteppe restoration projects. Current work has been a mop up of recent annual weed control work at the Mager site, plus initial control work of pubescent and tall wheatgrass at the Back Rock site.

Washburn Island Pivot: Maintenance Mechanic Rios and Natural Resource Technicians Ruiz and Chouinard dismantled the old Pringle irrigation pivot at Washburn Island, moving its remains to the far edge of the island. The following week, Lad Irrigation installed a new pivot system. WLA staffed work post-installation has revolved around trimming shrub rows and trees. Staff members from Lad Irrigation placed safety barriers and instructed WLA staff members on operation of system.

M2-Floodplain and Alder Creek Projects: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug worked with DFW staff members on a couple salmon habitat restoration projects along the Methow River. Staff members toured with Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation (MSRF) staff members at the M2 Floodplain site to understand a project proposal for additional work at that site. The project includes planting additional vegetation, removing culverts, re-charging side channels, placing structure in and along the river and potentially some instream manipulations. The Alder Creek project being implemented by the Yakama Nation has asked DFW for area closures during construction. Managers Troyer and Haug looked at each access site and determined there are alternative access and pathways the public could utilize with additional signage and outreach.

Sinlahekin Noxious Weed Control: Maintenance Mechanic Boulger has been spending significant time at the Chiliwist Unit treating patches of scotch thistle and Dalmatian toadflax. Scotch thistle is still in the rosette stage and its color contrast to the landscape makes it a little easier to spot. Most of the treatment sites have been on the lower elevation sites so far. He will continue to treat areas as weather permits.

Chiliwist Unit Cleanup: Sinlahekin staff members cleaned up old dilapidated fencing and other debris from the Chiliwist Unit. They took three dump trailer loads of debris from the area. They also repaired and rebuilt some fencing that goes around the inholding on the Chiliwist Unit. Portions of the fence had been destroyed by the Carlton Complex fire and yet to be repaired.

Habitat Restoration: Biologist Cook participated in a site tour of a cattle ranch in eastern Adams County. The landowners want to improve several miles of stream to bring back wildlife use that they saw as kids. This site tour included biologists from Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a neighboring landowner. This would be a large project and is just in the beginning phases of shaping the end goals. Cook sees potential WDFW role as providing some on-the-ground work for installation of this project and technical expertise in planning.

Habitat Restoration: Biologist Cook made an initial plan for installing pheasant nesting cover on a circle corner which is now dominated by crested wheatgrass. Cook will focus on spraying out current vegetation this spring and next with potential grass and forb planting Fall 2022. This property is in Grant County close to WDFW Wildlife Area property.

SAFE-CRP: Biologist Hughes conducted a site visit on a State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) field that is in the first year of a two year follow period. The field is being converted from general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) into SAFE Shrubsteppe. The landowner mowed the field last fall. Hughes spoke with the landowner who will spray the field within the week. Hughes discussed herbicide mixes with the landowner. A follow up visit next week will be conducted to see how successful the spray was.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Environmental Education – Snake Day 2021: Biologist Fitkin and USFS Biologist Rohrer conducted our annual snake survey on a portion of the Methow Wildlife Area as an adult (and some kids) education class for the North Cascades Institute (NCI). Despite the cooler than average temps we managed to find almost 20 snakes from four different species and gave approximately 20 participants and up close and personal scaly experience. A few days prior to the field day, Biologist Fitkin gave an online seminar for NCI on the “Herptiles of the Methow Valley” to around 40 viewers.



The wonder and beauty of a gopher snake up close – Photo by S. Fitkin



Painted turtles, the only member of the Testudine order in the Methow – Photo by S. Fitkin



From top: Upper Methow Watershed and Western fence lizard – Photos by S. Fitkin

Oroville Middle School Field Event at Tonasket Creek: Lands Operations Manager Haug took part in an outdoor learning event on the Eder Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, within the riparian areas adjacent to Tonasket Creek. During this field trip, students focused on how watersheds function. They observed and interacted soils, took water samples, installed native riparian plants, and did activities and games that build understanding of ecosystems and watersheds. Helping with the two-day event were the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Okanogan Conservation District, Methow Beaver Project, and the North Central Education Services District (NCESD). The Scotch Creek Wildlife Area staff members did a tremendous amount of work to get the area ready and safe to work around. The students had a great time and learned a lot about watersheds and riparian ecosystems.



Students working the various stations on the project site along Tonasket Creek – Photos by Haug

Oden Road Post-Wildfire Monitoring Day with Okanogan High School: Lands Operations Manager Haug participated in his 11th Oden Road post-wildfire monitoring day with Ms. Trout's advanced ecology class from Okanogan High School. The slimmed down version of the event started with an introduction to the area, the specifics of the 2009 wildfire and a discussion about fire ecology from Lands Ops Manager Haug. The students then took vegetation and fuels data along four 100m transects; hosted on private property above and around Loop Loop Creek. Additional data may be collected later this spring, but hopes are high that the full suite of monitoring data can be collected by next year's class.



Okanogan High School students group shot with educators and landowner – Photos by Haug

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Quincy Lakes Unit Safety Collaboration: Lands Operations Manager Finger participated with Grant County Fire District #3 in identifying and testing helicopter extraction sites with Airlift Northwest from the Sunshine Wall of the Frenchmen Coulee Climbing Area. This area has had multiple extractions in recent years including one-night extraction due to climbing accidents. This event really highlighted the importance of formally naming and designating trails so that first responders can have clear communication about how to access those in need. Our thanks go out to these dedicated professionals who are the first to assist when our visitors are in need.



A narrow passageway is not suitable for extracting a person on a backboard – Photo by Finger



FPD3 gathering around the landing site at '3rd gulley' – Photo by Finger

Swakane Canyon Shop: For the first time ever, a new building was constructed on one of the original units that make up Chelan Wildlife Area. When the Swakane Unit was acquired in 1967 it came with two story shop and storage building that was built a long time before that and should have condemned years ago. Thankfully, it was demolished in 2019 and the new building was finished in fall of 2020. This building provides secure storage for equipment and supplies and has enough room for a small shop. This little bit of infrastructure will help extend the life of equipment and supplies and allow repair and maintenance of equipment without traveling to the Wells Wildlife Area and borrowing their shop. Funding was provided through the State Capital Budget with the Capital and Asset Management Program managing every aspect of the project. A fine job of constructing the building was accomplished by Glacier Industries.



Swakane Storage and Shop Building – Photos by Daniel Hammerstrom, Glacier Industries

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Ferruginous Hawk Occupancy Surveys Complete: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with Scientific Technicians Merluccio and Martenson, partners, and volunteers to complete occupancy surveys for ferruginous hawks in District 4. Over 140 historic territories were surveyed in the district, with ten occupied territories identified. The ferruginous hawk is currently recommended for uplisting from State Threatened to Endangered and survey results will help advise management into the future for this declining species. Nest productivity surveys will be conducted at occupied sites this year.

Nesting Burrowing Owls Monitored at Artificial Burrows Near Tri-Cities: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and Scientific Technicians Merluccio and Martenson conducted nest checks at burrow sites for burrowing owls. Trained volunteers are also assisting to monitor some installed burrows. Nest checks identify site occupancy and breeding status, and are used to determine a timeline for banding young owls later in the season. Currently most pair are incubating clutches of up to ten eggs. The data is combined with partners regionally as part of a long-term project initiated by the Global Owl Project in Oregon.



Scientific Technician Martensen holds a banded burrowing owl for release after Merluccio records data from the recapture

Deer Trapped at Commercial Site in Pasco Safely Immobilized and Relocated: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra received a call from a business in Pasco of a young buck found in their fenced lot in a busy commercial area. Fidorra coordinated with WDFW Enforcement onsite and determined that chemical immobilization and relocation was the best option. Fidorra and Sergeant Fulton worked to immobilize the animal with help of other officers. The deer was relocated to a nearby greenspace where it was marked with an ear tag and successfully released once receiving reversal drugs.



District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and Officer Beltz moving immobilized buck for transport

Roadkill Pronghorn: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a report of a car/pronghorn antelope collision on Highway 221. No collar or ear tag was observed on the animal and coordination with the Department of Transportation (DOT) was initiated for carcass removal. Data on the incident was submitted to the Yakama Nation who initiated the reintroduction of pronghorn to south-central Washington.



Roadkill pronghorn

Deer Studies: Muckleshoot staff members and District 7 and District 8 biologists responded to five radio-collared deer reporting mortality. The causes of death were generally either cougar or unknown. One collared deer carcass was being guarded by a female black bear with a cub. The bear didn't want to leave the fresh meat, so it was left to finish consumption. Another carcass had an alligator lizard guarding the carcass. The lizard didn't want to leave but was less intimidating than the bear.



Deer mortality with a lizard nearby

Ground Squirrel Surveys: District 8 biologists continue to document Townsend's ground squirrel colonies east of the Yakima River. Biologist Oates followed up on leads provided by staff members at the Wild Horse Wind Farm, east of Ellensburg, to confirm two previously undocumented Townsend's ground squirrel colonies near wind turbines. Additional surveys to check for new colonies on Ginkgo State Park lands did not yield any presence of squirrels.



Townsend's ground squirrel burrow at the Wild Horse Wind Farm

Biologist Bernatowicz documented about 12 sites in the lower Yakima Valley. Ground squirrel numbers are down from historic highs in the valley but are still somewhat common around agricultural land. Bernatowicz checked an odd historic ground squirrel record on Clemans Mountain. The site is at 5100 feet, is cold (60 degrees at the site and 80 in the valley), has patchy snow in May, and has little soil. No sign of ground squirrels was found. The sighting may have been entered long ago because it was so unusual.



Site of Historic Ground Squirrel Record on Clemans Mountain

Bear Checks: District 8 Wildlife Biologists Bernatowicz and Oates checked two bears harvested in northeast Washington on spring permits. Mandatory checks were instituted in 2020 but delayed until 2021.

Wetland Management: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin continue maintenance of water flow into the Johnson Wetland area to provide stopover habitat for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, also providing easy walk-in access for birders.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunter Questions: The standard questions about opportunity on various permits are flowing in at the normal pace. District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz has been steering hunters away from Clemans Mountain sheep due to the recent pneumonia-related mortality and uncertainty on adult rams. District 8 Conflict Specialist Wetzel received several calls from turkey hunters asking about opportunity around damage sites. No turkey damage has been reported in several years in District 8.

Winter Closures End: L.T. Murray staff members removed locks and area closed/restriction signs from WLA access points on the L.T. Murray, Quilomene, and Whiskey Dick units. L.T. Murray Manager Babik cleared a fallen tree to gain access to the upper Hutchins gate. There were 87 vehicles lined up at the Joe Watt Canyon access point and a lesser amount at the Robinson Canyon site. Two sources reported seeing three hikers enter the Robinson Canyon site at 4am ahead of the crowd. Incidents like this are unfortunate, but overall, the day was a success with many visitors enjoying their WLA experience. Law enforcement continued their tradition of being onsite during the opener. A special thanks to Officers Nasset and Peterson for the great job they do on the WLA every day and for providing outstanding support to WLA staff members during these events.



Joe Watt Canyon WLA access point on May 1st opener



Old campsite discovered during the L.T. Murray opener

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Wolf Activities: The Naneum wolves appear to be focusing heavily on livestock areas this spring. One calf was attacked by wolves but is expected to survive. Other dead cattle were investigated but were either too decomposed to determine the cause of death or showed no signs of predation. Concern is mounting over carcass dumping by the public near the southern border of the Naneum State Forest, which attracts wolves to livestock areas and increased the probability of a depredation. Meetings among WDFW and cooperators have been initiated to address the issue.

Telemetry data from the radioed Naneum wolves indicated a possible den site in the Naneum State Forest. Both sheep and cattle producers were due to turn out soon, so knowing a den location was important. District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates checked the cluster of GPS-collar locations, but no signs of denning were observed. The wolves have also not been revisiting the location as frequently.

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Elk Damage: District 8 Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck hazed elk from areas in Caribou Creek and Badger Pocket. Other than a local group of 45, elk have recently appeared to have moved out. Previously, very large numbers of elk showed up early in the spring and stayed longer than usual. The presence of elk resulted in numerous complaints and potential damage claims. A crop adjuster visited a few irrigated fields to assess damage. In Badger Pocket, more elk are moving in and damage is increasing to intolerable levels. Much of the damage in Badger Pocket is from adult bulls. Fencing was recently installed around high value orchards. The bulls are simply walking around the end of the fence and visiting irrigated hay fields.



Bull elk damage in Badger Pocket

Corral Canyon Summer Bull Elk Hunt: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand prepared and delivered damage prevention permits to landowners in Elk Area 3721 to address crop damage by elk. Strong numbers of elk are leaving the Hanford National Monument for winter wheat fields on top of Rattlesnake Mountain. These permits are used to pressure elk off crops during this critical growing season.

Paterson Vineyard Patrols: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to haze deer and monitor several large wine grape operations along the Columbia River between Paterson and Crow Butte for deer damage.

Rattlesnake Hills Trail Cameras: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand checked on two trail cameras deployed in areas on Rattlesnake Mountain that elk have historically used to leave the Hanford Monument for winter wheat crops. Both cameras have been tampered with and damaged by elk and needed repairs.

Volunteer Project: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart partnered with Mountains to Sound Greenway staff members to guide volunteers in building a new kiosk at the Corrals access point to the L.T. Murray Whiskey Dick Unit. Winegeart worked with Natural Resource Technician Blore to set five posts ahead of the event which allowed the volunteer group to complete the kiosk in one day. Interpretive panels and header boards will be installed this summer.



Support post set for volunteer kiosk construction project at the Corrals parking area



Mountains to Sound Greenway staff members and volunteers at the Corrals parking area in front of the newly constructed kiosk

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

WDFW Fire Break Project Gains Support and Funding from Conservation District:

Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett met with the South Yakima Conservation District (SYCD) to get all the documents and roles designated for the final greenstrip of the Blackrock Greenstrip Pilot Project. WDFW will continue to provide technical assistance on the project while the SYCD provides funds, and the landowner will hold the contract with SYCD. Hulett also dropped off 50 pounds of Forage Kochia to be stored in their large freezer to prevent germination decay.

Noxious Weed Control: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin are continuing to spray areas of noxious weeds at the Sunnyside Unit, and have completed spraying adjacent to the access roads around the Rice Paddies, Giffin Lake, the Office Pond, and dense stands of poison hemlock on the Rupely peninsula. With the small tractor/sprayer in the shop for repairs, Ferguson hired Bleyhl's farm supply to spray the habitat plots in the irrigated ag fields where weeds were growing very quickly due to constant watering by the lessees.



North bank of Rice Paddies after several years of weed control; all hemlock and other noxious weeds are gone, releasing growth of native grasses for waterfowl nesting



South bank of Rice Paddies; still getting patches of kochia, hemlock, and pepperweed under control, but grasses are filling in much of the area

Ag Burn Provides Habitat: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber recently toured a prescribed burn area within Agriculture Circle #3 at the Windmill Unit. In early spring, the ag lessee burns off the residual corn stubble to prepare for spring planting. Small areas adjacent to the agricultural circle are also burned to remove dead vegetation and stimulate milkweed growth. The number of milkweed plants nearly double after the small prescribed burns. Milkweed is a very important plant to the monarch butterfly and many native bee species.



Recently emerging milkweed post prescribed burn

Managing Weeds Post Fire: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber and Natural Resource Technician Byers recently spent time treating yellow star thistle and Russian olive regrowth within the Esquatzel Unit as part of a post fire treatment plan. In the fall of 2020, staff members located an area approximately two acres containing yellow star thistle (noxious weed). Staff members will continue to monitor areas of regrowth.



Emerging Yellow Star Thistle post fire



Trina Byers applying herbicide to Russian olive regrowth post fire

Colockum Wildlife Area Boundary Fence: Colockum staff members continue to work on completion of two miles of boundary fencing in the Cross Over Road area. In preparation for an upcoming cultural resources survey, Colockum staff members re-flagged the fence lines so a contractor conducting the cultural survey could easily locate them.



Colockum Wildlife Area Assistant Manager John Hagan flagging fenceline

Another Wrecked Vehicle: Colockum Wildlife Area staff members inspected a truck found off the Orr Creek Road in the Stemilt Basin area, on WDFW land. We usually find one or two wrecked or abandoned vehicles each year on the Wildlife Area. This one was removed fairly quickly by the owner.



Wrecked truck found on Colockum Wildlife Area

Trespass Livestock: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Natural Resource Specialist Nass witnessed an unpermitted cattle drive taking place on the Green Gate subunit of the Quilomene. There is a real cost savings for driving cattle from pasture to pasture instead of hauling, but unnecessary damage may result from hoof action in restoration areas.



Cattle crossing the Quilomene's Green Gate subunit

Aerial Weed Survey: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart and Natural Resource Technician Blore flew with Central Valley Helicopters to check the status of weeds on the Whiskey Dick and Quilomene Units of the L.T. Murray WLA following three years of aerial herbicide treatments. Small weed infestations were observed in draw bottoms. Although weed occurrence observed were consistent throughout the canyons, the absence of large habitat altering populations was very encouraging. The L.T. Murray will partner with the Colockum Wildlife Area (WLA) for another round of aerial area weed control focusing on whitetop, Russian knapweed, and rush skeletonweed.



Weed inventory on the Whiskey Dick and Quilomene Units

Restoring an Old Ag Field: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members began a project to restore a 7-acre field which currently contains pasture grasses and weeds. The sites grasses were allowed to mature to anthesis and then mowed as low as possible. Forbs were treated chemically and once the grasses regrew to roughly seven inches, the site was chemically fallowed.



WLA staff members initiating a restoration plan for converting a 7-acre pasture grass field to quality habitat



Seven-acre pasture showing ATV tracks following herbicide application

Habitat Restoration Project: Assistant Manager Winegeart toured some mule deer migration corridor project sites on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Whiskey Dick Unit with the Pheasants Forever project coordinator and a potential contractor interested in demolishing roads.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Big Horn Sheep: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates provided an update on WDFW efforts to eradicate pneumonia from Yakima Canyon bighorn sheep to the Tri-State Test and Remove Working Group, a collaboration of bighorn sheep management and research biologists in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon.

Student Education Opportunity: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Natural Resource Technician Blore installed a kestrel box with the help of a Discovery Lab class which consisted of students from Kindergarten to fifth grade.



Natural Resource Technician Blore installing a kestrel box after speaking to a Discovery Lab class

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Wildlife Area Planning: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik and Assistant Manager Winegeart attended the L.T. Murray WLA planning meeting. The planning team discussed visions, goals, and objectives that will aid in developing a quality WLA plan.

7) Other

Safety Training: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber, Assistant Manager Rodgers, and Natural Resource Technicians Wascisin and Byers, attended ATV training hosted by WDFW Enforcement at the Moses Lake sand dunes area. Staff members learned safe operations of ATVs and basic handling techniques and went on a short trail ride.



Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area staff members enjoying a day of ATV training

Equipment Maintenance: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson repaired a broken boom lock, window latches, and door latch on the John Deere backhoe and topped off all fluids. He also repaired the broken wires on the four-wheel drive solenoid and fuse box panel on the John Deere 2755 tractor. Currently repairing a worn bearing on the large flail mower wheel.



New resident at WLA barn at Sunnyside unit; a young Great Horned Owl supervising staff member activity

Elk Mortality: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart noticed an elk carcass near DFW property along the access road to the Parke Creek subunit of the Quilomene. Winegeart was reminded of the reason miles of relic fence are removed from WLA property each year.



Elk mortality resulting from one of the many stock fences in the Quilomene unit area

REGION 4

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Sandhill Crane Survey: Biologist Bergh and DNR Natural Areas Steward Plemmons visited the Klickitat Canyon Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) to search for nesting sandhill cranes while Plemmons did a drone flight to document hydrology. One crane was observed foraging and the drone flight did not appear to disturb it or any other wildlife.

Plemmons also flew the drone at the Trout Lake NAP with direction from Volunteer Anderson. After reviewing the drone imagery, it appears that there is a crane nest at the Klickitat Canyon NRCA and possibly at the Trout Lake NAP. Both sites will be checked in mid-June to see if those spots were nests and also to look for colts.



Sandhill crane sitting on a nest identified in drone footage

Bear Harvest Inspection: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen inspected a bear that was harvested by a successful spring bear hunt applicant. The bear was harvested in GMU 172 and was a subadult female. Jacobsen pulled the premolar tooth for additional aging verification.



Black bear harvested by a spring special-permit bear hunter in the Blue Mountains

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Access Program Property Visits in Klickitat County: Private Lands Biologist Ferris visited several Private Lands Access Program properties on the spring turkey opener to survey hunter interest. Ferris was available to answer questions from hunters and recreationists. Klickitat is the most popular county to hunt wild turkey in Region 5, and there are many public and private land hunting opportunities available.



Dillacort Canyon owned by Columbia Land Trust is enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program in Klickitat County as a hunt by reservation site

Landowner Site Visit in Klickitat County: Private Lands Biologist Ferris and Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with Mount Adams Resource Stewards to begin a discussion about potential future partnerships. Ferris described programs and funding options for recreation and habitat enhancements best suited for the goals of their land.

Access Sites: Access staff members Rhodes and McKinlay finally have a tractor, thanks to the help of Region 6 Access. Rhodes and McKinlay immediately put it to use this week mowing access sites and clearing mud and other debris. All of Oneida Access has been mowed and made ready for the Sturgeon opener.



Mowing Oneida Access

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Trail Camera Check: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen returned to a Clark County farm to check a trail camera that he had deployed two weeks prior. The farm owner had been losing sheep to coyotes, but during the initial site visit, Jacobsen identified several spots where coyotes had been digging under the fences and the farmer had promptly repaired those sections of fencing. The farmer had also heeded Jacobsen's advice and had been keeping the sheep in a paddock close to the house and/or locked in a barn at night when possible. After checking the camera, no coyotes were detected on the camera. Several sheep were happy to make appearances and fill up the SD card on the camera, however.



Sheep showing off their fluffy wool coats

Cougar Depredation on Sheep: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and Officer Bolton responded to a Klickitat County residence where the landowner had recently lost three sheep to a predator, including one sheep the afternoon prior. Jacobsen conducted a necropsy on the sheep and confirmed that it was killed by a cougar. Jacobsen and Officer Bolton provided information and advice on living in cougar country and livestock husbandry. Jacobsen installed a trail camera over the carcass to see if the cougar would return. The landowner did not have any structure on-site to be able to pen up his livestock at night, so Jacobsen returned the following day to assist the landowner in constructing a semi-temporary night pen for his six sheep (his two llamas and two alpacas wouldn't go into a night pen). The landowner was very appreciative of the assistance in constructing a night pen for his sheep and will be planning ways to construct a similar structure in the future for his alpacas and llamas. Jacobsen checked the trail camera on the second day and confirmed that the cougar had returned. On that same morning, another report came in from an adjacent landowner of a cougar caught on a Ring camera. Advice was provided to that landowner regarding living in cougar country as well. Due to the multiple depredations over the course of a couple of weeks, as well as the fact that the cougar had killed the most recent sheep during the middle of the day and had returned after Jacobsen had inspected the carcass, it was decided that lethal removal of the cougar was appropriate if the cougar was still in the immediate vicinity. Jacobsen and a houndsman followed the cougar trail a considerable distance before calling off the search. When the cougar was again caught on the same Ring camera two days later, Jacobsen and the houndsman were able to pick up the fresh cougar track and the subadult male cougar was located and euthanized. Jacobsen deployed a Fox Light at the residence later in the week to help prevent additional depredations.



Cougar feeding on the sheep carcass



Cougar caught on a Ring camera by a different landowner after it fed on the sheep carcass



Semi-temporary night pen constructed to house the landowner's remaining six sheep. The pen was constructed from materials that the landowner had lying around the property

Deer Leg in Yard: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen spoke with a concerned Clark County landowner regarding a deer leg found in their yard. The landowner thought the deer may have been killed by a cougar and wanted to know if there had been any cougar sightings reported in the area. Jacobsen indicated that no reports had been called in for that area, but also indicated that the property was in ideal cougar, bear, and coyote country. Jacobsen provided advice and told the landowner that it was not possible to tell how the deer died with just a leg as evidence. The landowner was sent a cougar brochure and told to contact WDFW if she had additional questions or concerns.

Bobcat Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen spoke with a concerned landowner in Klickitat County regarding a bobcat sighting near her residence. Jacobsen provided advice and indicated that bobcats do not pose a threat to humans, which was the landowner's main concern.

Deer Damage to Tree Seedlings: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen followed up with a landowner who was frustrated with deer damage to his tree seedlings in Clark County. The landowner planted over 7,000 new seedlings to reforest his property for future timber harvest. The landowner had protected many of the seedlings with cages, but the deer have recently been pulling the unanchored cages off the seedlings. Jacobsen suggested anchoring options, but the landowner was not interested in anchoring the 7,000 cages.

Jacobsen also walked the landowner through some various options where public hunting could be used to help address the deer damage issue. Hunting seasons and methods were reviewed, and the landowner will contact Jacobsen in the fall if he wants to pursue that option further.

Coyote Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen fielded a phone call from a landowner in Skamania County who had recently lost nine chickens to an unknown predator. The landowner suspected a coyote was involved in the depredations. Jacobsen provided advice on measures to secure her chickens and deter predators from the area. Jacobsen offered to install a trail camera and perform a site visit, but the landowner opted to install a camera of their own and wait to see if any more chickens disappeared.

Raccoon Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by a concerned landowner who had been having issues with raccoons repeatedly defecating in her yard around her trees. Raccoons often use “latrine sites,” which are specific places where the animals regularly defecate (often at the bases of trees). Unfortunately, the landowner’s toddler recently discovered a fresh latrine site and handled and potentially ingested some of the raccoon feces. Jacobsen advised the landowner to contact her daughter’s physician immediately and shared the CDC information on Baylisascaris roundworms that can infect humans through animal (particularly raccoon) feces.

Fladry Installation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey and Biologists Holman and Stephens worked with a landowner to put up fladry fencing in hopes of reducing damage to her commercial produce caused by Columbian white-tailed deer. The landowner had already built fence around one garden plot and had installed heavy duty greenhouses over some other rows of vegetables, so the fladry was placed around the remaining produce. Columbian white-tailed deer are still federally listed as a threatened species, limiting the options available for the producer to deal with the damage issues. Many thanks to Biologists Holman and Stephens for the help!



Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey and Biologist Stephens installing fladry fencing

“Tame” Deer: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met with an individual who had two habituated deer show up on their property. The deer weren’t present during the visit, but options on ways for the individual to make their yard less desirable for the deer were discussed. Information was also shared about the dangers of habituated wildlife to be shared with the neighbors, some of whom have been feeding the deer.

Sheep Depredation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey and Officer Schroeder met up to investigate a sheep depredation. The sheep lost was a lamb that weighed approximately 40 pounds. Aubrey and Schroeder concluded that it was a probable coyote depredation, and information about husbandry practices and fence repair were shared with the livestock owner.

Nuisance Bear: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey contacted an individual to discuss concerns over a bear that has been getting into garbage during the night. The reporting party (RP) has already been putting their trash inside, but some of the neighbors have not been. The RP was going to contact the neighbors and advise them to secure attractants so the bear will move on. Aubrey and the RP will be in contact if the problem persists after attractants are removed.

Injured Eagles: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey responded to a report of an injured bald eagle near Vancouver Lake. Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald was leaving the area for the day and spotted the eagle. Aubrey showed up shortly after and was able to catch the eagle with the help of Manger Hauswald. The eagle was transported to a rehabber the next morning. Thanks to Manager Hauswald for the assistance; it would have been a long chase without a second set of hands!

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey also responded to a residence where it was reported that an adult bald eagle had been attacked by another eagle and could no longer fly. Aubrey was able to capture the eagle and transport it to a rehabber.

Cougar Concern: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met with an individual who was concerned about a cougar that was seen in the area the day before. Advice was given for living and recreating in cougar country, as well as animal husbandry practices for the individual’s animals.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Shillapoo Wildlife Area Prescribed Burning: Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald, Assistant Manager Breitenstein, along with local DNR Wildland Fire Crews completed the season’s prescribed fire activities on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. In total, prescribed fire was used to clear unwanted non-native brush on about 15 acres in the North and South Units this spring. Most of the brush that was burned was Himalayan blackberry and reed canary grass. The burned areas will be seeded or planted with beneficial plant species later this year to provide better cover and forage for wildlife. Assistant Manager Breitenstein’s knowledge and expertise of prescribed burning, and the extra help from the local DNR Fire Crews with their personnel and equipment helped to make the management activity a success. Wildlife Area staff members will likely conduct additional prescribed burning activities on Shillapoo later this fall.



Shillapoo Wildlife Area staff members and DNR Wildland Fire Crews conducting a prescribed burn along Bass Lake

Prescribed Burning at Shillapoo Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald, Shillapoo Assistant Manager Breitenstein, Technician Fox, and Mount Saint Helens Assistant Manager Wildermuth conducted several small prescribed burns on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area over the past few weeks. The burns (6 acres in total) are intended to remove a buildup of invasive Himalayan blackberry canes and help sterilize weed seeds that are in the soil. This practice will help with habitat restoration work as well as lessen wildfire risk. This is the second year that prescribed burning has been implemented at Shillapoo. These burns help with reducing the costs of removing unwanted brush, reducing herbicide use, exposing old fences that need to be removed, and improving sight distances for waterfowl to better utilize the area. Once the areas are burned any blackberry resprouts will be controlled and the sites will be planted with desirable plant species.



Shillapoo Wildlife Area staff burning Himalayan Blackberry

Cowlitz Wildlife Area – Vegetation Management: Wildlife Area staff members are taking advantage of all the good weather we are having by spending most of the week treating roadside vegetation, spraying parking areas and gates, and mechanically treating blackberries and Scotch broom. Mowing is an effective tool on perennial plants by removing the top growth at a time when most of its energy reserves have been depleted. Much of the Scotch broom in the photo below will die before it can regrow enough to store energy for next year's cycle.



Manager Vanderlip mowing Scotch broom

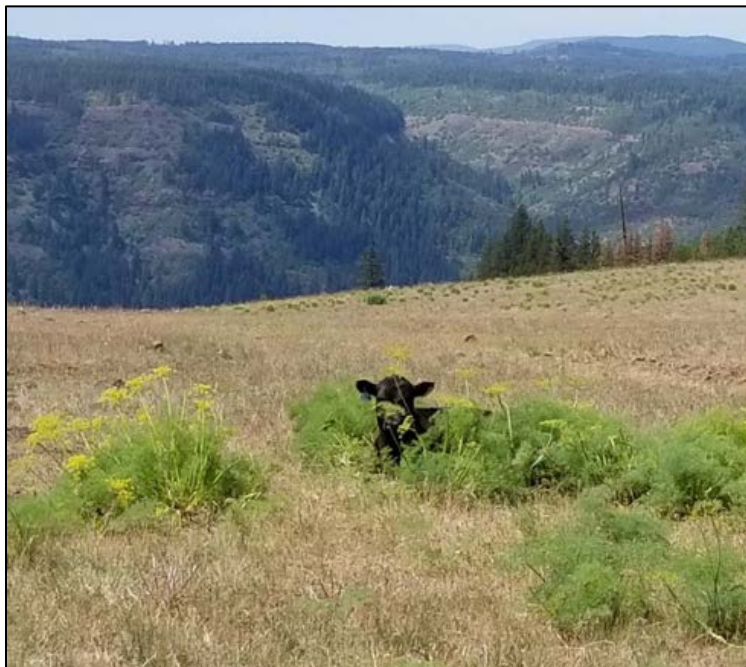
Cowlitz Wildlife Area – Kosmos/Dogpatch Gate Opening: The gate that seasonally blocks vehicular access to the popular camping area known as Dogpatch on the Cowlitz Wildlife Area is now open; the public can now drive in to get closer to the lake's shoreline and camping is allowed. Stays are limited to 14 days.

Cowlitz Wildlife Area – Kosmos Knotweed Treatment: Wildlife Area staff members spent time canvassing the banks and upland areas adjacent to Rainey Creek on the Kosmos Unit for knotweed. The stand in the pictures below is quite large and was discovered last year, but staff members were unable to treat the site. Controlling the knotweed is a three-part process and generally needs to be repeated in subsequent years to get complete control. Step one involves locating the plants, marking them for easy relocation and cutting back dead and new stems. Cutting the dead stems makes later treatment easier and cutting the new stems forces the plant to pour more energy into regrowth which ultimately helps weaken the plant. Step two requires visiting the stands every couple of weeks during the growing season cutting back the new growth. It is important that the cut material stays within the impacted area to prevent spread as knotweed can vegetatively reproduce from rhizomes and cut plant material. Step three involves spraying the knotweed in the fall when the plant begins actively storing energy (sugars) in the rhizomes for the next year growth. The process is time consuming, but persistence will pay off. It is important to note that when spraying knotweed, it is best to spray early and when pollinators are generally inactive.



Assistant Manager Steveson and Natural Resource Technician Wallace cutting back stems to facilitate later control measures

Klickitat Wildlife Area – Grazing on Soda Springs Unit: Water from natural sources continues to be in short supply on the grazing permit area, with only one stock pond serving as a watering spot for cattle. Assistant Manager Cochran worked on the water supply line for a tire trough but was unable to resolve all of the problems causing it to lose its prime. The permit holder has placed a total of five temporary water troughs at strategic points on the pasture. Four of these are being filled using a water truck and one is being filled by a hose from adjacent private property. Other than that, things are going well.



Peekaboo on Soda Springs

Klickitat Wildlife Area – Cattle Turn-Out on Soda Springs Unit: The grazing season has arrived, and cattle were turned on to the grazing permit area on the Soda Springs Unit this week. Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven and Assistant Manager Cochran counted cattle as they were unloaded, worked on three water troughs to get them in working order, erected electric fencing around a wet area to protect it from cattle, and took photos at photo points as part of the range monitoring protocol. Cochran also sawed a fallen pine tree away from one of the troughs and repaired a fence around a water structure to prevent cattle from damaging it. (The water reservoir has a fiberglass top that is not strong enough to support heavy animals.) Range conditions on the Soda Springs Unit are abnormally dry this year. Forage plants are short and maturing early, and most of the water sources are either dried up or are there but inadequate. Within days of turning the cattle out, the permittee brought one temporary water trough to fill from a nearby (private) water supply and will bring at least two more troughs to fill using a water truck. So many emergency measures have never been implemented on this grazing permit before, even at the end of the grazing season let alone at the beginning.



Temporary trough along Grayback Road

Klickitat Wildlife Area – Fence Repair and Reconstruction: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Cochran inspected and repaired a property boundary fence this week, and also resumed reconstruction of another fence on the Soda Springs Unit.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Elementary School Presentation: Biologist Bergh gave a Zoom presentation to the students and families of Carson Elementary School as part of their Science Night. She presented information on mountain goats and the locally famous mountain goat, Sweeny, who can often be seen from Highway 14. She also talked about their school mascot, the cougar, as well as bears and western pond turtles. The kids had lots of great questions and were excited to learn about Sweeny!

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Professional Development USDA Farm Bill Program Training: Private Lands Biologist Ferris attended a training on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land evaluations hosted by NRCS. Current knowledge of Federal Farm Bill Conservation Programs helps Ferris better assist private landowners.



Field portion of the training Ferris attended hosted by NRCS setting up a transect to create a sample area for a vegetation count

Employee Training: Private Lands Biologist Ferris visited Region 1 to assist in planting a field to grasses for conservation cover crops on a property enrolled in the Access Program. Private Lands Biologist Gaston instructed Ferris on how to properly operate the tractor, seed drill, and calibrate seeding rates to complete the project.



Twelve-foot seed drill and tractor used in Region 1 habitat project on Private Lands Access Program land

REGION 6

Nothing for this installment.