

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

January 1 to 15, 2022

LANDS DIVISION

Providing Recreation Opportunities

10-year Recreation Strategy: The 10-year Recreation Strategy for WDFW-managed lands was posted on the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) webpage on January 10. The public comment period will be extended to the end of February to allow time for translation of the draft into Spanish and robust engagement with diverse audiences.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Aerial Moose Survey Planning: Biologist Turnock finalized flight plans and coordinated with Biologists Atamian, Lowe, and Prince on moose survey details. The weather and helicopter availability have so far precluded any flights.

Chronic Wasting Disease: Biologists Prince and Turnock attended a season recap of hunter check stations run to collect samples for chronic wasting disease monitoring. One hundred and ninety-five samples were collected from check stations during the 2021 modern firearm seasons.

Deer Monitoring: Assistant District Biologist Vekasy compiled post-hunt deer survey data from November through December survey routes. Mule deer buck to doe ratios were 24.7, unexpectedly high considering summer hemorrhagic disease outbreak and much higher than the 5-year average of 17.9. Fawn to doe ratios were 45.0, fairly typical but below the 5-year average of 53.5. It was difficult counting a sufficient number of white-tailed deer, but we did reach a sample of 265 and calculated a buck to doe ratio of 23.0 (similar to 5-year average = 22.9) and a fawn to doe ratio of 60.0 (similar to 5-year average = 61.7).

Mountain Quail: District Biologist Wik and Assistant District Biologist Vekasy joined with district, regional, Olympia headquarters, and university staff members to discuss a graduate research project studying mountain quail in southeast Washington.

Blue Mountains Elk Assessment: District Biologist Wik and Assistant District Biologist Vekasy participated in the assessment working group meeting, which focused on recommendations to be made to the Department leadership in the near future. Wik discussed elk and carnivore issues with Tribal wildlife managers and county working group members. Wik also participated in the annual grant scoring process for Blue Mountains Elk Initiative funds.

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area Winter Elk Feeding: Wildlife area staff members have been monitoring designated feeding sites at Lick Creek and the South Fork of Asotin Creek for response from elk to hay placed for winter feeding. So far, we have had very little use by elk. One site in lower Lick Creek has had some use. Elk tracks have been visible higher up on the ridges where most of the snow is blown off and the sun is shining. Approximately 300 elk are still off the wildlife area on private lands in the Cloverland area. We are making near daily trips to the wildlife area to look for use.



Elk on the hill just above a feeding site at lower Lick Creek on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area



Hay placed along South Fork Road



Maintenance Mechanic Heimgartner plowing snow in upper Lick Creek with his service truck

Drone Certification: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch studied for his Federal Aviation Administration drone pilot licensing test. Finch completed part of a practice test this week. Both Finch and Natural Resource Technician Colvin plan to be fully licensed by the end of 2022. Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area uses its drone for inspecting habitat and infrastructure conditions. Staff members continue to investigate opportunities to conduct grouse surveys in a manner that is less invasive than the current method, people walking up toward the leks and ground counting or counting birds when they fly off after being disturbed. Unresolved questions include minimizing attracting raptors with the drone and determining the optimal altitude for counting leks aerially.

Sharptailed Grouse Status Meeting: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch and Wildlife Area Manager Anderson attended this statewide online meeting on Thursday, February 22. Finch discussed the habitat restoration work he has completed in the last year and has planned for the future at Swanson Lake Wildlife Area. The topics covered at the meeting included two of special interest to wildlife area staff members: potential development of a comprehensive list of desirable vegetation for sharptails, and funding opportunities for continued habitat enhancement.

Moose in the Yard: According to tracks in the snow, two moose passed through Sherman Creek Wildlife Area headquarters last night. They came across the field from the north, walked down the driveway to the yard, and then continued south. Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer assumes it was a cow-calf pair. They did not walk by the game camera!

Providing Recreation Opportunities

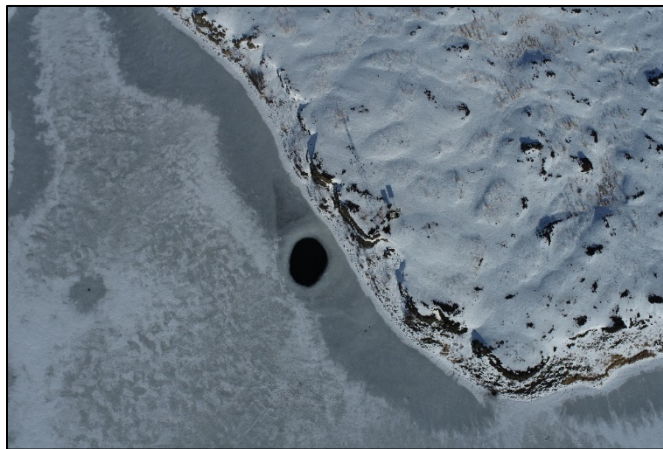
Sign Removal: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley received a call from an individual stating that he purchased property that was in a Feel Free to Hunt area and did not want to have the land open to the public. Thorne Hadley took the opportunity to discuss the Department's access programs to the individual for hopefully future opportunities and contacted the previous property owner to confirm the sale before removing signs and canceling the contract. The signs were removed.

Late Season Muzzleloader Hunter Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade coordinated with multiple late season muzzleloader hunters to share information regarding elk movements and private land ownership in Elk Areas 1081 and 1075. Wade also discussed winter hazing efforts with a hunter who was concerned with how hazing would affect his hunt.

Bobcat and Cougar Sealing: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock sealed multiple cougars, bobcats, and river otters for successful hunters. Biologists Wik and Vekasy sealed multiple cougars and bobcats.

Snowshoers: Wildlife Assistant Area Manager Palmer checked on Rustler's Gulch and LeClerc Creek properties, annexes to the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area. Everything was looking good, with no signs of illegal activity. Palmer noted lots of snow at the sites. Pend Oreille County had plowed snow at the Beaver Creek trailhead, at Rustler's Gulch. Palmer noticed sign of recreationists that have been doing some snowshoeing.

Z-Lake Aeration: Swanson Lake Wildlife Area staff members checked on the aeration system at Z-Lake on the east side of Swanson Lake Wildlife Area. They used their drone to inspect the site. This system was replaced in 2021 with help of many others, after the old system was ruined in the September 7, 2020, Whitney Fire. The new system is running as planned, programmed for daily on and off cycles. Aeration allows the planted rainbow trout to survive the winter. The trout are a draw for anglers looking for a walk-in rimrock lake fishing experience.



Z-Lake aeration hole, with windmill and solar panels to the right. At 250 feet of altitude, the angled panels are confirmed as snow-free

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Turkey Harassment: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman harassed 100 turkeys that were getting into horse feed while the horses are trying to eat. Westerman will continue to harass them in the following week.

Moose Complaints: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb received numerous complaints of moose eating vegetation in rural Walla Walla County. The reporting parties are upset that moose are eating their trees and shrubs. Kolb provided safety and deterrent advice.

Elk Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb responded to reports of bull elk damaging a haystack in Walla Walla County. The recent melting of snow in the area appears to have changed the movement patterns of the elk and they have moved on from the haystack for the time being. The affected producer has an active Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) and can utilize numerous non-lethal tools to deter the presence of elk around the haystack in the future.

Producer/Landowner Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade was in contact with a producer in the Grouse Flats area that reported all his cattle were moved out of the area in mid-November with 100% return. The producer keeps two bulls at his house through the winter and is experiencing issues with elk competing with the bulls for feed at his feeders. Wade also spoke with a Grouse Flats landowner who reported that he will be resting his pasture for the 2022 grazing season.

Cloverland Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade and Natural Resources Technicians Barron and Rimmelpacher coordinated with producers, Wildlife Area Manager Dice, District Biologist Wik, Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Woodall, and Natural Resources Technicians Misner and Heimgartner to make a coordinated hazing effort on a large herd of elk in the Cloverland area. Even with the best efforts of all staff members involved, the elk did not cooperate and were still in the Cloverland area at the end of the day. While in the area staff members observed an elk calf that had become entangled in a fence. Wik and Rimmelpacher were able to cut the fence and release the stuck calf. Rimmelpacher and Barron spent four days monitoring and hazing elk in the area as well.

Great Blue Heron in Distress: With the assistance of Biologist Earl, Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade responded to a report of a pelican stuck between fences at a Clarkston driving range. Upon arriving, Wade and Earl observed a great blue heron stuck between an eight-foot chain link fence and netting at the driving range. Wade was able to capture the heron and release it on site after determining that it was uninjured.



Great blue heron captured and released

Conflict Prevention: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill responded to an elk damage call in Pend Oreille County in which nearly 40 head of elk were consuming the reporting party's round hay bales intended for cattle and horses. Upon arrival, Samsill observed that several large round bales were almost completely consumed by elk. In response, he deployed energized electric netting around the haybarn where the hay was stacked. Samsill issued the landowner a kill permit for one cow elk and attempted to haze the nearby herd with cracker shells. Despite several shots, the herd only dispersed approximately one hundred yards from the starting point.

Samsill issued dozens of kill permits for wild turkey to address haystack damage complaints. He met several landowners and producers experiencing damage from wild turkeys and issued out paintball guns, screamer/banger guns, and other deterrents to haze the turkeys. Although Samsill offered netting to several producers to prevent entry into haybarns, no netting was accepted.

Carcass Investigation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb investigated a carcass that a landowner was concerned about. The landowner thought there might be evidence of a domestic cow. A search of the area confirmed that the carcass and skeletal remains belonged to a bull elk.



Skeletal remains of a bull elk

Elk Herding at Cloverland: Wildlife area staff members, along with Wildlife Conflict staff members and District Wildlife Biologist Wik, attempted to haze several hundred elk back to the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area from private property on the Cloverland area January 5. The elk were not cooperative and ended up near George Creek on property where personnel did not have permission to enter.



Elk moving in the Cloverland area on January 5

Nuisance Turkeys: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb spoke with a concerned homeowner in Walla Walla County about unwelcomed turkeys on their property. After asking a few questions it was evident that the homeowner's neighbor was feeding the turkeys. Kolb asked the homeowner to ask their neighbor to please stop feeding the turkeys.

Asotin County Injured Deer: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade responded to a report of an injured deer in Asotin County. Wade spoke with the reporting party and evaluated the deer. The deer had a broken right hoof and several scrapes but otherwise looked to be in good condition. Wade observed the deer feeding and walking up hill. The reporting party agreed to monitor the deer and contact Wade if it appeared to be having further complications with its injury.

Pollinator Grant: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade reached out to a producer who had substantial drought and deer damage to a pollinator field to discuss new pollinator grant funding that may be available. Wade provided the producer with contact information for Private Lands Supervisor Earl to further discuss the possibility of a joint project.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Pollinator Grant: Private Lands Supervisor Earl forwarded information on to a beekeeper in Garfield County who has been working with the county to establish 15 acres targeted at pollinator species. Earl will be meeting in the future with various parties if the grant fits their needs.

Trespass Livestock at Joseph Creek on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Dice was alerted by neighboring land manager Cunningham of the Rock-J-Ranch of many trespass livestock on WDFW lands along Joseph Creek on Monday, January 3. Approximately 100 animals were found the next day scattered along Joseph Creek Road. The cows belonged to three different owners and gained access to the wildlife area primarily by a gate lifted off its hinges next to a cattleguard on the county road at the wildlife areas south boundary. Some of the cows belonged to a grazing permittee on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest who was experiencing some pretty severe problems with livestock lost in the snow and starving. Some of his cows managed to escape to lower elevations in Washington and ended up on the wildlife area. Mr. Cunningham and Wayne Heitstuman gathered the livestock about a week later and pushed them off the wildlife area to corrals belonging to the Rock-n-J where they could be sorted and hauled off.



Trespass livestock on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. January 4, 2022



Some of the mess left at our buildings by trespass livestock – Gate off its hinges that allowed livestock to enter the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. The gate was subsequently repaired after this photo was taken

Response to Complaints: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer worked with Enforcement staff members and Wildlife Area Manager Anderson to respond to two complaints Palmer received from residents across the river from WDFW’s Kettle River Access Areas. The neighbors were unhappy with hunter behavior on the access areas, including people shooting high-powered rifles over the river and rounds landing on the complainants’ buildings. Staff members decided to adjust postings on site kiosks, emphasizing weapon restrictions. Complainants were also contacted by an Enforcement officer and advised on ways to collect and report violations to law enforcement.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Budget Review: Wildlife Area Manager Anderson reviewed the status of her several budgets with Analyst Nelson on Monday. Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is underspent enough that staff members are working on a financed purchase of a new tractor to replace the 28-year-old John Deere 6400. Sherman Creek Wildlife Area is underspent by about \$6,000 due to inability to hire a natural resources technician in 2021. Purchase of a new truck-mounted plow blade to even out the budget was investigated. However, the estimated cost of \$5,000 to \$6,000 was outdated, as blades now run around \$9,000 to \$10,000. Anderson and Assistant Manager Palmer will brainstorm other ways to either obtain more funding or find another needed item to purchase.

Shop and Office Maintenance: Region 1 Access Area Manager Dziekan was very busy this week as a strong storm system worked through the northwest. Dziekan kept parking lots and walkways clear of ice and snow at Region 1 headquarters after each dump of snow. Wildlife Area Assistant Managers Palmer and Finch also spent a good amount of time plowing and shoveling snow, at their respective office and shop locations.



Snowbank piling up at Swanson Lake Wildlife Area headquarters



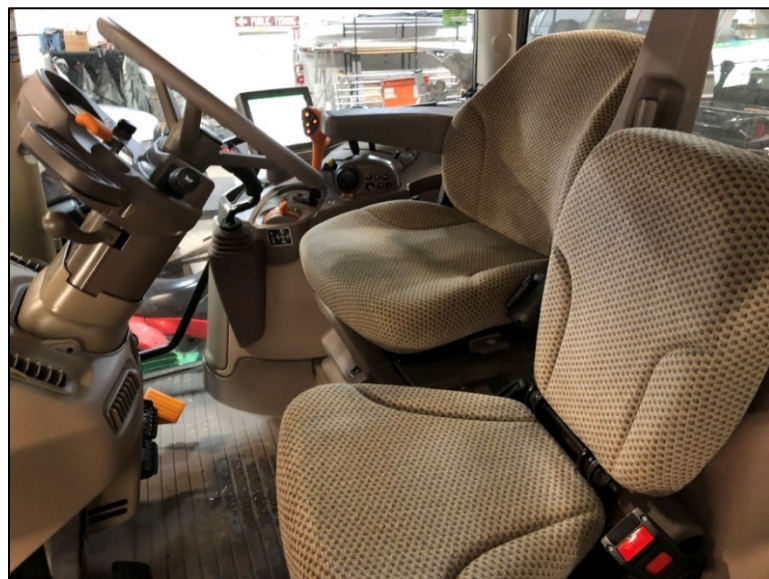
Plowed entry to Swanson Lake Wildlife Area office, with snowdrifts remaining by front porch

Wolf Advisory Group Meeting: Wildlife Biologist Prince participated in a two-day meeting of the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG). WAG is discussing predator-prey interactions and status of ungulates in Washington in preparation for their post-recovery plan input sometime in the future.

New Tractor for Asotin Creek Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Dice took delivery of a new tractor for the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area in early January from RDO Equipment. The tractor is a 6130R and will primarily be used on Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) project lands planting food plots for big game and habitat restoration work. A GPS guidance system and auto-steering will allow precision application of herbicides and other field work functions. Natural Resources Technician Stallcop will be the primary operator.



New John Deere 6130R tractor



6130R tractor cab

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area Winter Maintenance: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman has been spending time performing maintenance tasks to her office building. Painting, cleaning, and other tasks are being completed during this slow time of year at the Wooten.

Burn Permit: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch obtained a burn permit from the Washington Department of Ecology to remove some rotted hay bales at the Revere Wildlife Area, left by a previous hay flat lessee. The permit expires on June 30, 2022, but Finch is hoping to burn the bales in the next few weeks while the ground is still wet from snow.

Hay Lease Settlement: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch settled with the Revere Wildlife Area hay flat lessee for 2021 hay production. Finch sent all documentation and lessee's payment to WDFW's Seattle address for payments received.

Vehicle Replacement Preparation: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer had the mobile radio removed from his motor pool truck that is being replaced due to mileage. Palmer plans to travel to Tumwater to swap out trucks on Thursday, January 20.

Hiring Update: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer submitted the reallocation of the position description for the vacant Sherman Creed Wildlife Area Natural Resource Technician position. It was approved by Olympia staff members, so Palmer and Wildlife Area Manager Anderson will work on the recruitment request next week.

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Deer Study: Biologist Oates cleaned, formatted, and collated GPS-collar locations from 100 mule deer in the Wenatchee Mountains population (265,983 total locations) of Chelan and Kittitas counties, and 15 individuals in the Swakane population (68,574 total locations) of Chelan County. These locations will be analyzed by researchers at the Wyoming Migration Initiative to determine the migration dates, paths, and winter ranges of individuals as part of an annual update to the U.S. Department of Interior. Results from the analyses will inform land-use management that overlaps mule deer habitat, and mitigation measures for mule deer-vehicle collisions.

Cle Elum Ridge Trails and Wildlife: Biologist Oates met with Habitat Biologists Downes and Meyer to discuss camera trap placement and logistics for monitoring wildlife use of the Cle Elum Ridge area. This area is being considered for an expanded network of recreation trails. Images from camera traps will inform biologists what wildlife species are using parts of the area at specific times of the year to better understand what areas might be seasonally sensitive to human disturbance.

Carcass Composting: Biologist Oates attended the Voluntary Stewardship Meeting in Kittitas County to provide an update on logistics for the carcass composting facility that has been proposed near Ellensburg. Currently, federal funding to construct a facility is looking promising, and there are several public land parcels north of Ellensburg that are likely to meet permitting and site requirements. A carcass composting facility would provide a secure area for livestock owners to dispose of their animal carcasses and would likely reduce the frequency of various predator species searching the Kittitas Valley for easy meals left unsecured on the landscape.

Yakima Canyon Bighorn Sheep: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz has been radiotracking to get visuals on collared sheep in the Yakima Canyon. The main objective is to determine which collars might need to be removed due to being too tight or loose. Secondly, there is interest in survival as a new strain of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* was detected this fall. To date, no mortality of collared sheep has been detected.



Two collared Yakima River Canyon bighorn sheep

Overcoming Challenges with a Large Snowfall: After receiving between 24 to 31 inches of fresh snowfall near Ellensburg on January 5 and 6, L.T. Murray Assistant Manager Winegeart, Natural Resource Specialist Nass, and Natural Resource Technician Blore worked on snow removal duties. They did this work to clear the way for better and safer elk feeding access at both the Joe Watt and Robinson feed sites. This effort included snow plowing with a truck, utility task vehicle, tractor, and hiring a contractor who operated a snow blower.



Natural Resource Technician Blore arriving at Watt Barn to feed elk



Elk at Joe Watt feed site belly-deep in snow



Contractor Ken Kazmirski using his snow blower to clear the road



L.T. Murray staff members opening a path to feed elk using the Wildlife Area John Deere 5115M with blade



Access road to the Robinson elk feeding site and trying to toss flakes from the feed truck on snowbanks as high as the truck bed

Winter On the Colockum: Like other eastern Washington areas, the Colockum Wildlife Area was hit with a large snowfall in early January. About 30 inches fell at the wildlife area headquarters, and much more fell at higher elevations. Colockum Wildlife Area staff members spent several days plowing and shoveling snow for staff and public access.



Snow cleared at the Yoyo Rock Boat Launch by Colockum Wildlife Area staff members

Colockum Snowmobilers: The heavy snowfall at higher elevations was great for Colockum snowmobilers. The local Apple Country Snowmobile Club continued their grooming efforts on the Colockum. The club bases their operations out of the Lily Lake Snow Park, located along the Stemilt Basin Loop Road.



Snowmobile groomer on the Colockum Wildlife Area, and a view from the groomer's seat

Bighorn Sheep: Oak Creek Manager Mackey and Biologist Bernatowicz counted and classified bighorn sheep at the Clemans Mountain feed site. There were 126 ewes with only 2 lambs. The ewe count was very close to previous years. The pneumonia outbreak in 2020 did not kill many ewes, but apparently most of the 2021 lambs died. The long-term goal was to reduce the herd to a manageable level. The lack of recruitment will help meet that goal.

Strain typing revealed a new strain of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (MOVI) in the Yakima River Canyon bighorn herd. This finding puts test/cull on hold for a while. All three bighorn sheep herds in Region 3 have become infected with MOVI in one year. To date, the new infections in the Yakima River Canyon and Quilomene do not appear to be causing significant adult sheep mortality.

Wolves: This fall, both collared male wolves from the Naneum pack dispersed. One went to northeast Washington. The second original stayed on the west edge of the Teanaway Pack, but recently crossed I-90 and was headed south. The last locations had the wolf on the northern edge of the Yakama Reservation. Yakama Nation biologists were informed of the traveling wolf. Biologist Oates met with Department of Natural Resource (DNR) staff members Leach and Munzing about potential locations for a carcass composting facility. There are several options, and they look very promising. The main emphasis on a facility is to provide options for the public to dispose of carcasses legally and not attract wolves close to livestock/people. There will also be a benefit in reducing the food source for ravens.

Bobcat Harvest: Biologists Oates and Bernatowicz sealed four bobcats for trappers and hunters. Pelt prices are down, and all indicated they were getting the cats mounted.

Elk Feeding Begins: Wintering elk began moving into the feeding area sites on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area and feeding commenced on December 20. Thus far we have seen roughly 1146 total elk: 1030 cows and calves, 80 branched bulls, and 36 spike bulls. During elk feeding, all area staff members as well as rotating in volunteers participate!



Natural Resource Technician Blore and Nass clearing snow in preparation for winter elk feeding season in the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area



Wildlife Area Manager Bates and Natural Resource Technician Nass feeding elk in the L.T. Murray

Elk Fence Success: Natural Resource Technician Blore regularly checks elk fence to make sure there are no holes, damaged areas, or weak areas that may cause fence instability allowing for elk to pass through during the harsh winter conditions.



Natural Resource Technician Blore loading tracked quad to check elk fence



Calf and cow using re-entry gate above Watt feed site on the L.T. Murray



Elk feeding at the Robinson site on the L.T. Murray

Hoover Acquisition: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Assistant Manager Taylor met with a landowner to discuss additional items being worked through in the Hoover acquisition. Routes for WDFW to access the property for management needs and cattle crossings for the landowner's ranching operations were assessed in the field. Various options were discussed with the landowner. WDFW is working towards acquiring approximately 1,000 acres of land containing valuable shrub-steppe habitat and 60 acres of riparian habitat associated with 1.5 miles of North Wenas Creek and over one mile of Pine Canyon. The acquisition will secure valuable upland, instream and riparian habitat and improve connectivity for the Wenas Wildlife Area. The goal is to have the acquisition completed in spring 2022.

Wildlife Area Manager Field Days: To get better acquainted with the L.T. Murray Complex, Wildlife Area Manager Bates had a scheduled field day with each member of the L.T. Murray team. She and Assistant Manager Winegeart drove out to the Quilomene Wildlife Area to tour the different grazing pastures in person, such as Upper and Lower Parke Creek as well as the Vantage pasture. Manager Bates and Natural Resources Technician Blore also conducted elk feeding and drove to the Teanaway unit of the L.T. Murray to look at a Recreation and Conservation Office restoration site there. Manager Bates also spent a day with Natural Resources Technician Nass going over all the intricacies of elk feeding on the L.T. Murray.

Partner Collaborations: Wildlife Area Manager Bates attended a Coordinated Research management meeting with Rangeland Ecologist Burnham that also included partners from the DNR, Puget Sound Energy, and lessee Stingley to discuss the new lease terms and changes. Manager Bates also met with a local farmer to sign the contract for a new Agriculture lease for a small WDFW parcel near Ellensburg that will provide mutual benefits for the state land as well as for the farmer. She also attended a multi-agency collaboration with State Parks and DNR to discuss a new land classification system.

Wetland Updates: The northern section of the Johnson wetland (part of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area) was expanded by approximately 30 acres of Russian olive removal and mowing dense cattails and bullrush. This fall has been filled with about one foot of water providing additional foraging area/hunting opportunity for waterfowl.

Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resources Technician Wascisin began diverting water to Horseshoe Lake in the Reserve in late November and the lake filled quickly. It has been regularly seeing groups of up to 200-300 mallards, pintails, Canada geese, and occasionally other species roosting overnight and foraging throughout the lake.



Expanded northern area in Johnson wetland from Marsh Master on recent cold morning



Johnson wetland with thin coating of ice. Johnson is very full of water, the fullest we've ever seen, and providing lots of good hunting opportunities and foraging/resting stopover for geese, ducks, and swans in recent weeks (when not frozen)

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Mellotte Elk Feeding: Wenas Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Taylor has been leading the effort for elk feeding on the Wenas Wildlife Area. A high-count of 1180 elk was counted in mid-January at the Mellotte feed site. Taylor has been keeping up with plowing snowfall to access the site and plowing around the Wenas headquarters to allow for feeding operations to run smoothly. Manager Hughes and Wildlife Biologist Daling have been helping with feeding and learning from Taylor how daily operations of elk feeding are conducted.



Elk at Mellotte feed site on the Wenas Wildlife Area

Kahlotus Deer and Elk Damage: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand conducted deer and elk hazing patrols in several winter wheat fields in the Kahlotus area. Several small groups of deer were observed and hazed out of newly seeded fields. No elk were located, but a landowner near Palouse Falls reported seeing some fresh tracks in his winter wheat crop.

Rattlesnake Mountain Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to monitor elk activity on Rattlesnake Mountain and coordinated with landowners on possible damage permit opportunities. Almost all elk activity was occurring on the Hanford National Monument, with a couple of reports near the Blackrock area.

Paterson Deer Damage: Deer damage and activity at several tree fruit, vineyards, and a large row crop farm was monitored. Milder winter weather and active hazing operations by farm workers has resulted in deer using natural foraging areas away from crops.

Blackrock Coyote Control: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand met with cattle producers in the Blackrock area to discuss coyote management being implemented to reduce possible depredations during calving operations. Several coyotes have been harvested by hunters using calling techniques.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Herbicide Learning Courses: L.T. Murray staff members Assistant Manager Winegeart and Natural Resources Technician Blore both attended two herbicide learning courses provided by Wilbur-Ellis on vegetation management for range and pasture, as well as forestry vegetation management. This provided both employees with eight credits that count towards renewing their pesticide licenses.

Mitigation Funding Compliance: Wenas Wildlife Area Biologist Daling completed the Herbicide Use Form (HUF) to be submitted to BPA. The HUF form provides the BPA Environmental Compliance Lead information on actual herbicide use on the Wenas Wildlife Area for the year of 2021 and ensures compliance with contracting guidelines. Biologist Daling completed status reports for both the Board of Governors and Operation and Management contracts with BPA. The reports are to document status and completion of contract milestones to BPA contracting officers.

Solar Project Response Plan: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with Habitat and Wildlife Program staff members to strategize agency roles and procedures for responding to the large number of solar project proposals submitted in Washington. The team will update and clarify internal processes, coordinate data needs for both internal and external use, and determine appropriate outreach and engagement strategies.

Providing Education and Outreach

WDFW Guest Lecture at Rookery Bay Festival of the Birds: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra was invited to give a virtual presentation for the Rookery Bay Research Reserve in Naples, Florida for their annual bird festival. Fidorra presented on the conservation and research related to burrowing owls in District 4, which was relevant to issues related to the Florida subspecies of burrowing owl, and the talk was well received.



Conducting Business Operations and Policy

L.T. Murray Business as Usual: Assistant Manager Winegeart gave Natural Resource Technician Blore a ride to Yakima to pick up the international feed truck after making it sure it was checked out and ready to go for the upcoming season. Blore continued snow plowing operations in order to provide safe access to the two elk feeding locations. Winegeart updated the fence boundaries and grazing monitoring points for the Quilomene cattle grazing operation in ArcGIS. Winegeart also attended a virtual meeting with Wildlife Area Manager Bates regarding the Teanaway Unit's restoration project update and future planning objectives.

Other

The Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area's new truck and trailer combination pictured below have given staff members the ability to move equipment from site to site in a more efficient and safe manner.



The new truck/trailer combination is working out great for hauling wildlife area equipment



Headed out to Cowiche feeding site with small tractor

New Employee Orientation: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Bates attended the newly developed two-day Employee Orientation learning about the history of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, its structure, values, training opportunities, and information location.

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Dusky Geese: District Biologist Novack surveyed for dusky Canada geese in portions of Grays Harbor County and facilitated a mid-season check in with the other districts to assess the ongoing dusky goose monitoring effort and provide points for improving the Survey123 application used to record data.

Elk Hoof Disease: Biologist Novack had contact with three Master Hunters who harvested limping elk. After verification of abnormal hooves, the hunters were given authorization to obtain a second elk under their existing permit conditions. The hunt this year is a pilot effort to assess the effectiveness of utilizing hunters to remove elk exhibiting signs of elk hoof disease.

Oregon Spotted Frog: Biologist Tirhi participated in the quarterly internal planning meeting of the [Chehalis Basin Strategy](#) focused on Oregon spotted frog recovery. These quarterlies allow the WDFW spotted frog recovery team to discuss projects, needs, funding, and grant submission through the strategy. Tirhi considers strategy funding as the main source of funds currently for spotted frog recovery projects in District 11.

Western Pond Turtle: Biologists Butler and Tirhi represented WDFW's District 11 at the annual Western Pond Turtle Working Group virtual meeting. The annual meeting is attended by all partners working on pond turtle recovery in Washington including WDFW, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Woodland Park Zoo, Oregon Zoo, Northwest Trek, Cedar Creek Corrections Center, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and several other zoos and academia. Topics included the past field season, updates from recovery sites, ulcerative shell disease, husbandry, and recovery topics.

Wolf Monitoring: Biologist Butler, Biologist Tirhi, and volunteer Terry continue to rotate cameras within District 11 for wolf monitoring. There has been no confirmation of wolves within District 11 to date. Tirhi and Conservation Program Director Mueller of Northwest Trek met virtually with Mount Rainier National Park staff members to discuss a permit for 2022-2023 to place cameras within the park and conduct snowmobile/cross country ski track surveys. It is highly likely that wolves are frequenting the district as indicated by various credible reports regardless of the inability to capture them on trail cameras to date.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

South Montesano: Due to the recent flooding events of the Chehalis River and a second flood event of the Satsop River on January 12, the access has received severe erosion damage. This site has been closed for public safety until a full assessment of damage can be made. Provisions were made with barrier rock, ecology blocks, and signage to prevent vehicle access.



Flood water damaged the approach at the Porter Access Ramp. Excellent repair by team member Freimund



White Bridge- An excessive amount of runoff water caused damage to approximately 200 feet of the gravel road. Repairs will be scheduled in the weeks to come



The access team members also removed downed trees from our recent snowfall and cleaned parking areas at Misery Point. Some minor fence repairs will need to be made

Other Work Performed: The access team members have been helping with strategy on how to provide access while protecting habitat at Whitcomb Dimmel Access in Forks. The effects of flooding have caused a creek to reroute its channel, part of which is currently flowing directly down the former path used by vehicles to access the river to launch or retrieve drift boats.

Abandoned Vehicles: The access team members continue working with enforcement on dealing with abandoned vehicles, RVs, and derelict vessels. This continues to be a persistent problem at our access sites and wildlife areas. Removal of these items in Region 6 costs tens of thousands of dollars every year in addition to taking valuable work time from our wildlife officers and lands managers.



Whitcomb Dimmel



Abandoned travel trailer

Conserving Natural Landscapes

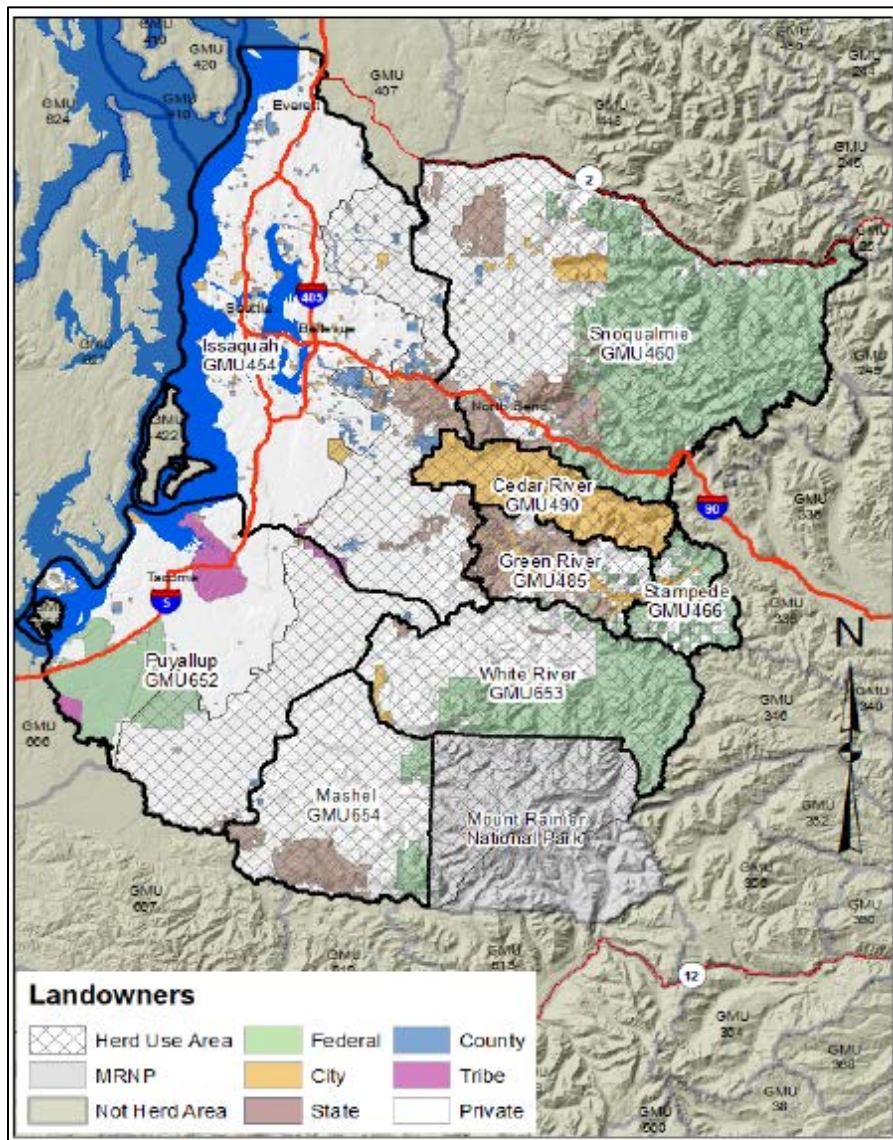
Lands 20/20: Wildlife Biologist Novack, with Wildlife Area Manager Bechtold and Habitat Biologist Bauernschmidt, finalized a draft Lands 20/20 application proposing to acquire habitat lands along North Willapa Bay for district team members and regional management team members' review.

Johns River Wildlife Area: Wildlife Biologist Novack inspected ongoing forest mastication efforts by a contractor in the Johns River Wildlife Area's Elk River Unit to thin overstocked stands. The contractor continues to do a great job and the project is almost completed.

Wildlife Biologist Novack planted some willow and elderberry cuttings to assess the success rate in the wet and sandy soils at the Elk River Unit. Hopefully, the recent snows don't impact the test run. One plot of 35 cuttings were marked with flagging and will be revisited during the next three months to assess rooting.

Providing Education and Outreach

North Rainier Elk Herd Survey Planning: Biologist Tirhi organized a planning session with Region 4 Biologists Anderson and Smith, Region 6 Program Manager Calkins, and Ungulate Section Headquarters (HQ) Biologists Garrison and Moore to review Tirhi and Smith’s North Rainier Elk Herd (NREH) survey proposal and seek support. HQ supported the proposal and put forward \$10,000 towards a survey in each of 2022 and 2023. The survey will high-grade those Game Management Units (GMUs) in the NREH that support the majority of the elk. Depending on the cost for helicopter survey time, the lower priority GMUs will be surveyed as funds are allowed (or may await 2023). Tirhi and Smith both took homework assignments to create survey routes for those GMUs that contain lower numbers of elk and thus will be surveyed on transects versus area wide searching.



North Rainier Elk Herd Area

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

District 17: Biologist Novack attended the WDFW Region 3 internal summit, the District 17 cross-program meeting and obtained district input on possible land acquisitions and restoration projects and drafted a new Position Description for the vacant assistant biologist position.

All-Terrain Vehicle Staff Training: Biologists Butler and Tirhi and volunteer Terry conducted two hours of online All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) safety training followed by 17 hours of field training, practice loading and unloading ATVs on a trailer, trailering, etc. Tirhi spent several hours purchasing safety equipment covered in the training. An ATV box was prepared that will be taken on all ATV outings to contain all tools, safety items, and checklists. Tirhi also interacted with the WDFW Safety Office for guidance.

Other

New Office Space: After months of making slow but gradual progress, the Olympic and Willapa Hills Wildlife Area staff members have moved into a new office space. For decades they have worked out of a small office tucked into the rafters of a pole building at the Wishkah Road property, north of Aberdeen. But, also found on the property is an old house that has been vacant ever since the former manager retired. It required some minor improvements for security, phone, and internet capacity, but this house will now function as the office and staff members have officially “moved in.” The house is fully climate controlled and offers plenty of space for workstations, storage, and a heated garage.



The living room/Assistant Manager Gallegos' office