

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

January 16 to 31, 2022

LANDS DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Conserving Natural Landscapes

South Puget Sound Wildlife Area: The Lands Division is excited to announce the [Final South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Management Plan](#) has been approved by the Director and has been posted on the WDFW website. An overview of the plan will be presented to the Commission in February.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Chelan County Mule Deer: Biologists performed annual post-hunt aerial surveys of the Chelan mule deer subherd, part of the larger East Slope Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone. Mule deer are currently on their winter range, so biologists flew over suitable habitat in the Wenatchee, Swakane, Entiat, and South Lake Chelan areas counting deer and identifying individuals to age, class, and sex whenever possible. Although the week presented some challenging winter weather as per usual, including patchy fog on most days and winds too severe to fly on one day, surveys were successfully completed. This will allow biologists to generate ratios (e.g., buck:doe, fawn:doe) for this herd as well as estimate abundance of the Chelan subherd for the first time in several years.



Mule deer winter range in the Entiat – Photo by Jeffreys



Mule deer winter range in the Chelan Wildlife Area – Photo by Jeffreys

Gray Wolves: While conducting aerial deer surveys, biologists observed four gray wolves in the Entiat between Baldy Springs and the junction of Harris Creek and Mud Creek. There is a good possibility that these wolves are part of (or possibly all of) the same group reported by multiple hunters and other outdoor recreationists in the Entiat Meadows area this past summer and early fall, and the wolves have traveled southeast to follow prey species migrating to winter range. This latest sighting strongly supports existing evidence that a new wolf pack has formed in Chelan County in 2021. Biologists plan to return to this area in late January/early February when snow conditions allow access to place cameras and get a better idea of the pack's territory and composition. Efforts will likely be made to place radio collars on one or more members of the pack in winter and spring of 2022.



Two of the four wolves sighted in the Entiat during December aerial deer surveys. The poor photo quality is a result of using a cell phone camera from inside a helicopter – Photos by
Jeffreys

Badger Mountain Solar Application: Along with other Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff members such as Grouse Specialist Schroeder, Raptor Specialist Watson, and Statewide Wind and Solar Energy Technical Lead Ritter, Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock submitted comments on the proposal by Avangrid Renewables, LLC to build a solar energy project on 2,390-acres of Badger Mountain in Douglas County. While WDFW personnel recognize the importance of renewable energy and are in full support of achieving state legal requirements for decarbonization in Washington, WDFW opposes the Badger Mountain Solar Energy Project (BMSEP) due to the proposed site's importance to the State Endangered greater sage-grouse. WDFW has serious concerns that disturbances associated with changes in land use resulting from the BMSEP would significantly impact greater sage-grouse, further exacerbating the declines this species has experienced for many years due to a host of factors such as widespread habitat loss due to land conversion and wildland fires.

Despite much of the proposed BMSEP being sited over existing dryland wheat fields, as opposed to shrub steppe, these fields are a vital piece in the mosaic of habitats (dryland wheat, shrub steppe, and the Conservation Reserve Program) that characterize the Badger Mountain Plateau. This mosaic of habitats, including dryland wheat, is utilized by all stages of sage-grouse for rearing, foraging, migration, and movement. Due to the conversion of natural habitat to human development, the sage-grouse population already occupied only eight percent of its historic range in Washington prior to the catastrophic fires in recent years. These devastating fires burned a large percentage of previously occupied sage-grouse habitat, with much of the now denuded landscape located in Douglas County to the east of the Badger Mountain Plateau.

As a result, any remaining habitat (largely the Badger Mountain Plateau) is vital to sustaining and recovering the State Endangered greater sage-grouse, particularly because Douglas County contains the last viable sage-grouse population in the state. Siting the BMSEP in such proximity to the largest traditional display ground (lek) in the state and proposing to construct within and over critical sage-grouse habitat and movement corridors at this location would negatively impact sage-grouse use on the Badger Mountain Plateau. Loss and fragmentation of sage-grouse habitat is not consistent with sage-grouse population stabilization and population recovery.

In addition to concern for Washington's imperiled population of greater sage-grouse, WDFW opposes the BMSEP due to the site's importance to raptor species, particularly as nesting and foraging habitat to the golden eagle, a State Candidate species experiencing population declines in Washington. Due to a variety of factors including land conversion for human use and declining prey populations, golden eagle territory occupancy has been low and reproductive output poor for decades. For these reasons, protecting remaining breeding territories that are consistently occupied is imperative to this species' persistence in Washington. At least two such occupied territories have the potential to be negatively impacted due to the proposed BMSEP. These two occupied golden eagle territories heavily overlap the proposed project site, with recently used nests located within 0.1 and 0.8 miles of the project boundary. In recent years, including 2021, these nests have produced young, suggesting a high availability of appropriate prey species in the adjacent habitats. Given the status of golden eagle populations in Washington, it would be imprudent to site the BMSEP in such close proximity to historically occupied and productive territories, risking possible abandonment or decreased productivity.

Population Monitoring-Winter Pygmy Rabbit Burrow Surveys: Each winter, we conduct active burrow surveys and counts within their known range and the release sites to determine survivorship of release pygmy rabbits and distribution and trend of the wild populations. Snow conditions provide reliable ways to locate and identify active burrows. At each active burrow site, we additionally collect fecal samples that partners from University of Idaho conduct genetic analyses on. These analyses identify the number of individual pygmy rabbits within each survey area allowing us to determine post release survival on release sites and provide a wild population estimate.

Thus far, we have completed surveys on the Beezley Hills Recovery Area. We found 77 active burrows, which is a significant increase of 79% from the total of 43 active burrows last winter. Their distribution is also growing in this area as they have expanded beyond the release areas into adjacent private lands. Genetic analysis of these samples will come back in the coming months and provide an estimated number of pygmy rabbits in this population and the survival rate of our release effort for 2021.

We completed survey efforts on the newly located subpopulation on private land within the Sagebrush Flat population. With the assistance of student volunteers from the University of Idaho, we found only 25 active burrows, which was 62% decline from the 66 active burrows found last winter. In the coming weeks we will now focus our survey efforts on the former core areas of the Sagebrush Flat population- the wildlife area and adjacent Conservation Reserve Program fields that experienced significant decline in the pygmy rabbit population the past couple of years.



A wild pygmy rabbit poking its head out of a burrow in deep snow on private land enrolled into the Conservation Reserve Program

Sharp-tailed Grouse Surveys: Scotch Creek Wildlife Area staff members surveyed the riparian areas of Tunk Valley, Scotch Creek, and Highway 20 from Tonasket to Aeneas Valley for wintering sharp-tailed grouse. Counts of five and nine were observed at Scotch Creek, one along Highway 20 and zero in Tunk Valley.



A single wintering sharp-tailed grouse observed in riparian habitat along Highway 20 – Photo by Dupont

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunter Private Lands Access Program: Biologists started the paperwork for updating and renewing multiple Private Lands Program contracts. Many contracts are expiring next year, and biologists will begin working to renew some of those contracts this year to spread out the workload. Most of the hunter access is in Adams County with some around Royal City. The last few weeks have seen goose numbers increasing in field in southern Grant County. Biologist Cook has noticed an increase in reservations for Hunt by Reservation Hunter Access properties as well. Hopefully this means hunters could get out for some good waterfowl hunting at the end of general waterfowl season. Biologist Morris continued checking Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program (WHAP) Hunter Access properties and collected hunter registration cards. The general migratory game bird season closed on January 30, but two WHAP sites will remain available for the late white-goose season that runs from February 12 to March 2. Morris also checked several other hunter access properties.



Deer herd in the snow near private lands hunting access property – Photo by Morris



A flock of Canada geese take off from a Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program corn field in Grant County

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Upland Bird Feeders: Manager Wehmeyer acquired approximately 5000 lbs of wheat seed from a local Okanogan Highlands farmer. The seed is used to fill the numerous bird feeders on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. Manager Wehmeyer picked the one day that it was snowing to fill the feeders and was able to get them all filled just before the sun came out. These feeders provide for supplemental feed during the winter for a variety of game bird.



One of the upland bird feeds adjacent to Forde Lake – Photo by Wehmeyer

TD-1 Remote Camera Waterfowl Traps: Biologist McPherson continued counting remote camera trap pictures from last year’s survey season. Remote cameras cover one acre footprint and capture a picture every hour from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Last year’s survey period ranged from February to May. Birds are counted and numbers are extrapolated for across the project area to give an estimated number of waterfowl use.



Sandhill Cranes using cell two of TD-1 last April - Photo by C. McPherson

Swakane Canyon Target Shooting Range: Since the late 1960s multiple sites in Swakane Canyon have been used for target shooting and suffered from the usual collection of garbage and debris. At least two fires are known to have been started by target shooting in recent years. In 2018, Chelan Wildlife Area Manager Fox started the long process to convert a user created target shooting range in Swakane Canyon to a fully developed range with two phases of construction. After securing funding in 2019, the Capital Asset Management Program team members, led by Hansen and Sater, got Phase One underway. This phase would construct parking, paths, concrete pad for firing lines, and 100- and 200-yard ranges. Surveys, cultural resources review, construction drawings, environmental review, geological assessment, permits, contracts, bids, and finally selecting a contractor were completed by early spring 2021. In June, Olin Excavation started to work the range and the work was completed by mid-July. Unfortunately, emergency fire restrictions were in effect and the range remained closed until October. When fire restrictions were lifted, use of the site was immediate. One of the first shooters to visit the new range was surprised that the old dumpy shooting site had been transformed into a real target shooting range. Phase Two will complete the range with a pistol range, shooting benches, and shed-style roofs over the firing lines. Funding for Phase One was provided by multiple sources: a Recreation and Conservation Office Firearm and Archery Range Recreation grant, Non-motorized Off-road Vehicle Access funds, a National Rifle Association Public Range Fund grant, and the Wenatchee Sportsman's Association.



Swakane Canyon user created target shooting range in 2018



Completion of phase one Swakane Canyon target shooting range in 2021

Water Access: Region 2 south access staff members have been operating as usual. Staff members completed snow removal right in time for the regional office to be closed on the day of the “big snow event.” Manager Harmon and Assistant Manager Steele have been working on the completion of the long-awaited dump trailer side racks. Natural Resource Worker Bilodeau, as always, is braving the cold and the snow keeping up on access parking lots and boat launches for the public.

Sinlahekin Campground Renovations: Capital Asset Management Program and Yakima shop crew members were able to install concrete parking bumpers around some of the camping pads in the Sinlahekin as part of the Recreation and Conservation Office Campground Renovation Grant. The parking bumpers will help to hold gravel in the camping pads and better define each camp site in the campgrounds. The crew members finished this up just before the late archery hunt and many of the campgrounds were full during the late hunt.



Camping pads installed on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area – Photos by M. Maier

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Elk and Deer in Orchards: Specialist Bridges has worked with a multitude of landowners in attempts to decrease orchard damage from deer and elk. Bridges has deployed master hunters, special permit holders, and other various user groups in an attempt to reduce damages. Constant communication with landowners is proving vital, with the excessive amounts of snow Chelan County received on January 6, 2022.

Permit Holder Information: Specialist Bridges continues to answer questions from successful special permit holders for the newly established Peshastin Antlerless elk hunt. Topics discussed include access issues, elk damage areas, and time when damage occurs. Overall, landowners have been open to allowing access, and most orchardists have noticed that this hunt seems to keep the elk moving around, so that no one orchardist bears the burden for all damage incurred.

Elk Damage to Haystacks: Specialist Heilhecker was contacted by a livestock producer who stated 100 head of elk have bedded down on their property and are eating their alfalfa stores. She was concerned brucellosis from the elk had killed one of their cows and suspected the infection came from elk urine and feces. Since the livestock producer requested to speak to someone other than Heilhecker, she forwarded the email to her supervisory chain. WDFW Veterinarian Mansfield was also contacted. Dr. Mansfield stated brucellosis was extremely unlikely to be present in the elk herd. If brucellosis was found in Washington, it would likely be picked up through routine testing of livestock long before it was detected in livestock. Dr. Mansfield also reached out to veterinarians with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Washington Department of Agriculture who concurred with Dr. Mansfield.

Heilhecker met with a landowner regarding elk damage. The elk are feeding on the round bales of hay put out for her goats. The landowner signed a damage prevention cooperative agreement.

Turkey Trouble: Specialist Heilhecker spoke to a livestock producer claiming to have 500 turkeys living amongst his cows and eating their feed. She, along with several WDFW staff members, are familiar with the property. While they agree there is a turkey problem, they believe that 500 turkeys was an overly high estimate. The producer signed a landowner damage cooperative agreement. She recommended the producer focus on removing female birds to reduce the population.

Radio Activated Guard Prototype: Specialist Heilhecker, along with a private property owner, are testing a prototype radioactivated guard (RAG) box. They are working under a timeline to get the RAG box out in the field to test. Unfortunately, they needed to place the box just prior to two significant snowfalls. The RAG box is now only accessible by snowmobile. The property owner has been unburying the RAG box and maintaining the battery. Of course, the wolves have not been back since installation.

Virtual Presentation to Wild Sheep Foundation: Specialist Bridges presented at the Wild Sheep Foundation's annual meeting in Reno, Nevada. The presentation centered around the Highway 97a bighorn sheep fence. Topics discussed included, history of acquisition, responsibility for maintenance, partnerships within non-governmental organization communities, and lessons learned from a 20-year perspective.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Conservation Reserve Program – Douglas County

Update: Private Lands Biologist Braaten spoke with Kent Stokes, Douglas County Executive Director of Farm Service Agency (FSA), regarding State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Conservation Reserve Program (SAFE) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) 2022 signup and general CRP signup. FSA is still waiting on updated Soil Rental Rates and further guidance regarding signup, so they are looking at possibly February and March of 2022. They also discussed assistance with providing information on 2023 SAFE CRP contracts that are expiring so that the large amount of CRP Status Review work can begin. FSA is willing to provide a list as soon as they have time to gather information. Private Lands Biologist Braaten was also informed that Douglas County Natural Resources Conservation Service Resource Conservationist Nansel retired. FSA has hired new staff members who are being trained. A February meeting was discussed to communicate more effectively. Braaten asked them to please send an invitation so WDFW staff members and new staff members could participate.

Similkameen-Chopaka Unit Forest Thinning: Scotch Creek staff members resumed thinning small diameter pines, to improve forest health and return the forest back to historical stand densities. The thinning prescriptions requires all slash to be within 18 inches of the ground. A majority of the slash had to be limbed and chunked to meet this requirement.



A small portion of the project area, showing the limbing and chucking – Photo by Dupont

Scotch Creek Riparian Restoration Project: Staff members took advantage of a sunny afternoon to continue adding weave materials to three existing beaver dam analogs in the project area. Staff members also fixed a couple holes in the high fence, after noticing a few of the newly planted shrubs had been damaged from deer rubbing their antlers.



Staff member Dupont adding weave material – Photo by Medina

Chesaw Unit Aspen Restoration: Staff members attempted to burn 45 slash piles; machine piled in late fall. Due to fall rains and eight inches of snow, results were mixed. Piles that didn't burn well will be restacked and burnt in the fall of 2022.



Mule deer foraging on the Chesaw Unit – Photo by Medina



Frozen Strawberry Lake on the Chesaw Unit – Photo by Dupont



Wintering Great Gray Owl in the Okanogan Highlands – Photo by Dupont



Sunrise from the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area office – Photo by Dupont



Early December snow around Forde Lake – Photo by Wehmeyer



One of the last snow-free days of 2021 east of Tonasket – Photo by Haug



Rough-legged hawk eating a rodent on the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit – Photo by Haug



Palmer Mountain in snow behind a frozen Whitestone Lake – Photo by Haug



Sub-zero temperatures in the Okanogan Valley at sunrise – Photo by Haug



Bitter cold evening in the Okanogan at -5 F to ring in the new year – Photo by Haug



Snow Geese on Potholes Reservoir during roost count – Photo by C. McPherson



Good mix of adults to juvenile Snow Geese – Photo by C. McPherson

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Tricolored Blackbird Survey Planning: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra is working with biologists from University of California, Davis to coordinate what should be the first range-wide breeding survey for tricolored blackbirds, a species that has declined dramatically in California where most of the breeding population resides. The species is a poorly known breeder in Washington with only a handful of known wetlands where they have bred in recent years. Volunteers will count birds at suitable sites over one weekend this spring.

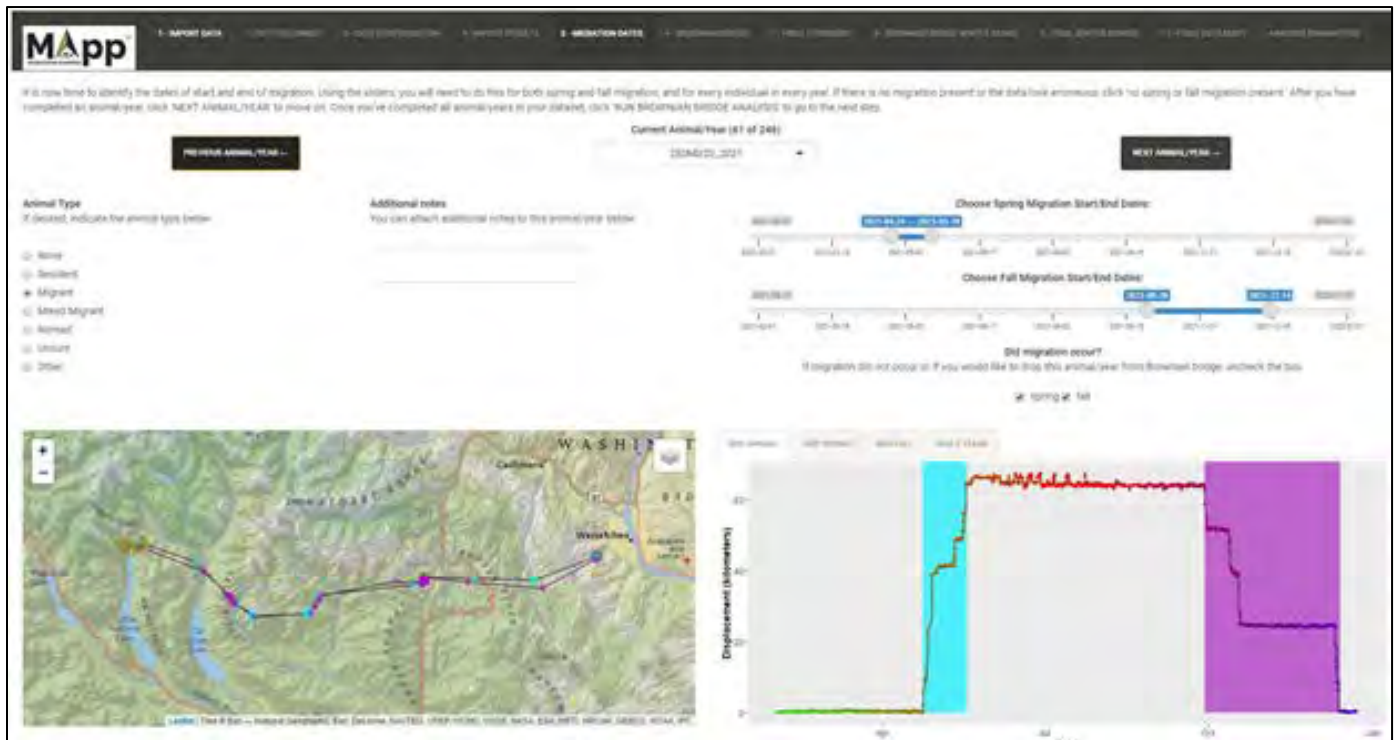
Audubon Climate Watch Bird Count: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra assisted Lower Columbia Basin Audubon with winter point count survey in Benton County as part of a nationwide effort. The count intends to track bird populations over time and involves a morning of 5-minute point counts twice over the year.

Bluebird Box Project: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra collected supplies for installation of bluebird nest boxes on the Thornton Unit and nearby private lands. The boxes have been in storage for over a decade and a volunteer quickly cleaned and repaired them to make them usable. A volunteer group will place the boxes next month and conduct annual checks and cleaning.



Cedar bluebird boxes ready for deployment

Wenatchee Mountains Mule Deer Population: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates analyzed GPS-collar data from the Wenatchee Mountains mule deer population (100 adult females) that are being monitored to better understand winter range use and migration paths. Program R is used to interface with the Wyoming Migration Initiative website and uses an equation called net-squared displacement, which calculates the distance from a starting location. The tool enables the user to identify what date the animal left its winter range to begin spring migration (turquoise shading below), when it arrived on summer range, and when fall migration began and ended (purple shading below). Mule deer in this population are a mix of migratory and resident individuals.



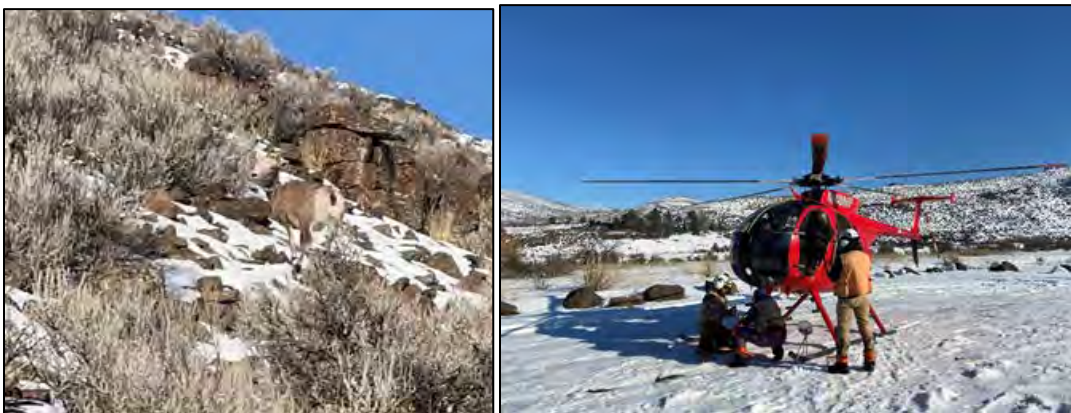
Migration Mapper is a tool developed by the Wyoming Migration Initiative that helps wildlife biologists interactively select GPS-collar locations from ungulates that represent seasonal ranges and migration paths. In the example above, mule deer 250MD20 spends winter in the foothills west of Wenatchee, migrates west, crossing US Highway 97 to arrive on summer range north of Little Kachess Lake, then migrates back to her winter range from October until December 2021.

Wolf Survey: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates and Wolf Specialist Maletzke scouted for wolf sign south of Rimrock Lake after receiving reports of wolf activity from the public. No tracks or scat were observed after snowmobiling for 45 miles. A camera trap was deployed on an elk carcass used by a cougar in hopes of capturing a photo if wolves investigate the site.



Statewide Wolf Specialist Ben Maletzke drags an elk carcass to the best spot for a camera trap

District 8 Wildlife Biologists Oates and Bernatowicz coordinated bighorn sheep captures with Leading Edge Aviation in the Yakima River Canyon. They went to find individuals with loosely fitting collars previously deployed last winter by a different helicopter capture vendor and have them refitted to avoid injury to the sheep. The collared sheep are part of a long-term project to eradicate pneumonia from the herd.



Deer Mortalities: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates picked up two collared mule deer mortalities. Both were hit by trains along the Yakima River. Conflict Specialist Wetzel responded to a third that was a cougar kill. The cat was bumped off the kill.



Cougar-cached deer, with melted out area being the location of the cougar when bumped off the kill

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Elk Feeding: Wildlife Area Manager Bates, Assistant Manager Winegart, Natural Resource Specialist Nass, and Natural Resource Technician Blore all continue to feed elk. Assistant Manager Winegart also assisted District 8 Wildlife Biologists in conducting elk counts at both the Robinson and Watt Feed sites.



Elk at Joe Watt Feed Site

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Wenas Wildlife Area Elk Feeding: Assistant Manager Taylor continued to lead the effort to feed elk at the Mellotte feed site. This past week there were 1,200 total elk at the feed site. Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Biologist Daling continued to assist Taylor in elk feeding efforts. A few elk got out and ended up on the wrong side of the fence near Mellotte. Assistant Manager Taylor was able to lure the elk back through the re-entry gates to restore access to the feed site for these elk.



Elk on the Wenas Wildlife Area's Mellotte feeding site

Pasco Deer Damage: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a new deer damage complaint from a large tree fruit operation near the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers. A 40-acre block of newly planted cherry trees has received substantial browsing by a herd of local deer. Non-lethal hazing techniques such as liquid petroleum gas cannons and pyrotechnics have become less effective in limiting the presence of deer in the area. Fencing and hunting options were discussed with the orchard manager and are currently being considered.

Kahlotus Deer Damage Hazing and Hunts: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand conducted deer hazing patrols in several winter wheat fields in the Kahlotus area. In addition, several youth and a couple of Master Hunters from the Region 3 damage roster hunts were deployed to two landowner properties to assist with hazing and removing problem deer.

Kittitas County: District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel received calls about elk and deer eating hay. In most instances the reporting party had failed to secure barns and haystacks from elk and deer. A simple closing of doors and covering with tarps prevented wildlife from eating hay.



Elk eating hay after being allowed access to hay stores

Several elk and deer were euthanized during this period due to causes such as vehicle collision, unknown injury, or what appeared to be old age. A cougar was also removed due to a confirmed depredation of a pet dog.



A very old elk removed from a residential yard

Many complaints were received from locations within Cle Elum city limits. Residents were feeding elk, and they have become a nuisance to most but are encouraged by a few.



Nuisance elk in Cle Elum resulting from ill-advised feeding



Road-injured elk near unauthorized feeding area. The elk was euthanized due to severe injuries

Yakima County: District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel received a call about a damaged elk fence near Sunset Road. Elk have been walking on the cattle guard and jumping the fence in the deep snow and accessing orchards in the area.



Damaged elk fence near Sunset Road

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Evans Canyon Post Fire Habitat Projects on Cleman Mountain: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Biologist Daling met with the Central Washington Mule Deer Foundation Chapter to discuss opportunities to partner together on conducting habitat projects throughout the area the Evans Canyon Fire had burned on Cleman Mountain. The Mule Deer Foundation is hoping to volunteer this coming fall to plant shrubs and forbs. They will be providing forb plugs to plant throughout the area. Manager Hughes lined out over 10,000 shrubs to be planted on Cleman Mountain throughout Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 with a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation grant. The Mule Deer Foundation will be expanding on this project with additional plugs and seed when available.

Solar Site Visits: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra met with Habitat Biologist Ritter and project representatives at proposed solar sites in Benton and Franklin counties that are still early in the process. One site was previously farmed and is largely degraded habitat and the other is half on existing agriculture and heavily grazed shrub-steppe. Specific wildlife surveys were recommended; more coordination will occur.

Weed Management for the L.T. Murray: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Winegeart worked on completing a current herbicide inventory as well as mapped out and updated our weed maps within ArcGIS, both to begin planning the 2022 order for the weed treatment this year.

Providing Education and Outreach

Volunteers Help to Feed Elk: The L.T. Murray continues to utilize volunteers to help conduct the elk feeding operations. Among the many Kittitas County locals who assist in these efforts are other Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife staff members from various divisions. This month the Region 3 Range Ecologist Burnham came out as well as both new foresters out of Ellensburg, Nequette and Lauffer.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Bonneville Power Administration Meeting: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Biologist Daling had a monthly check-in meeting with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). The Wenas Wildlife Area is primarily funded through mitigation funds from BPA. Manager Hughes discussed future equipment needs with them to improve the operations on the Wenas. Hughes submitted a proposal for using excess funds that built up from current staffing vacancies to buy a new truck, utility terrain vehicle trailer, and potential new implements for the skid steer for the wildlife area. BPA's contracting officer is on board with the ideas and is moving the proposal forward to contracting staff for approval. Hughes also began the process for putting in an order for a new truck.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Bates coordinated and held a meeting with several Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists to discuss a fire break control lines initiative on the L.T. Murray which will soon be including external partners such as the Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service. She also participated in several partner meetings with the Department of Natural Resources and State Parks to discuss a Land Classification, Use, and Recreation plan as a pilot project for the L.T. Murray. Lastly, she met with her partners at Mid-Columbia to discuss work on the current Recreation and Conservation Office grant project at the Teanaway Community Forest on L.T. Murray land and discuss extension and work scope change options for the project.

Other



Always be on the lookout for rattlesnakes in the Yakima area!

Equipment and Facilities Maintenance: Both L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart and Natural Resources Technician Blore worked on equipment maintenance this month, getting a quote to fix the spare feed truck's speedometer, buying new tires for the Natural Resource Technician position motor-pool vehicle, and performing a routine service for a Honda utility terrain vehicle. Assistant Manager Winegeart worked on coordinating with other Ellensburg staff to reorganize the L.T. Murray storage area that is shared.

WDFW All-terrain Vehicle Training: Wildlife Area Managers Hughes and Bates both participated in the WDFW-hosted all-terrain vehicle training at Moses Lake recently.

REGION 5

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Klickitat Mule Deer Mortality Investigation: Biologist Wickhem and Technician Downing went on a mortality investigation and collar retrieval this week. The doe was located on the side of a very steep hillside along the Klickitat River and had been scavenged by the time the pair arrived. This doe is part of a four-year study being conducted throughout Game Management Units (GMUs) 388 and 382 to track the annual movements of female mule deer and locate important migration corridors. Staff members are also attempting to determine cause of death when an animal dies, which has proven to be difficult. In winter 2021, 81 collars were deployed throughout GMUs for this effort. Twenty-two collars were deployed in the winter of 2022 - most of which were redeployments replacing study deer that died over the first year of the study. These collars and all others retrieved throughout the year will be redeployed in winter 2023.



Biologist Wickhem hiking back to the truck



Technician Downing taking tissue samples from the few organs that remained with the carcass

Dusky Canada Goose Survey: Biologist Wickhem conducted a dusky Canada goose survey on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area in Clark County this week. Dusky geese are a sub-species of Canada goose that spend summers in Alaska and migrate through and overwinter in the lower Columbia River. Dusky geese are closed to recreational harvest due to low population levels. The purpose of the surveys is to count dusky geese observed and read alphanumeric codes on any red-collared dusky. Wildlife managers survey the geese multiple times across their primary wintering grounds and use the data to generate survival estimates. Wickhem located 45 dusky geese on this survey and was able to record one red neck collar. She located another flock of about 25 dusky geese that had at least one collared goose, but the geese flushed before she was able to record the collar code. Wickhem also observed red-tailed hawks, bald eagles, American kestrels, sandhill cranes, many thousands of snow geese, a barn owl, and several species of ducks that were enjoying the high water.

Klickitat Deer Mortalities: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen investigated two different collared mule deer mortalities in Klickitat County. One deer was found to have been killed and cached by a cougar in a small, oak-filled ravine. Jacobsen was fortunate enough to actually observe the cougar leave the carcass as he approached. Jacobsen investigated the second deer mortality during a frosty day after a freezing fog event came through the area. Every blade of grass was covered in frost, apart from the 12-inch-wide circle of ripped up grass surrounding the deer carcass. A cougar had killed the deer and used the frosty grass to conceal the deer from other carnivores and scavenging birds. These deer are part of a four-year, federally funded study being conducted throughout GMUs 388 and 382 to track the annual movements of female mule deer and locate important migration corridors. In winter 2021, 81 collars were deployed throughout these GMUs for this effort. Staff members also attempt to determine cause of death for these deer when they die. These collars and all others retrieved throughout the year will be redeployed in winter 2022.



Ravine where the first mule deer doe was found by a cougar. The cougar was hiking in the small clump of evergreens when Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen arrived



Remains of a mule deer doe cached by a cougar. At this point, the cougar had been feeding the deer for the past six days



The site of the second mule deer mortality. The majority of the deer carcass was covered in grass by a cougar to conceal it



A coyote had been feeding on the deer when Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen arrived



A hungry coyote hiding in the frosty grass, patiently watching as Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen conducted a necropsy on the deer carcass



Cougar tracks in the snow leading away from the deer carcass

Klickitat County Mortality Investigation: Biologist Wickhem and Technician Downing went on another snowy deer collar recovery this week. After parking the truck, the pair decided to turn off the GPS and try to find the dead deer by looking for tracks in the snow. They were able to follow coyote and cougar tracks for about a half mile straight to the kill site, and then followed a drag mark in the snow for 208 yards to where a cougar had cached the carcass under a juniper tree. Despite also finding coyote tracks, the wounds on the animal were consistent with a cougar mortality.



Blacktail deer browsing on blackberry leaves in Cowlitz County

Radio-collar Re-deployment: Twenty-two radio collars were deployed on mule deer this week as part of the Klickitat Mule Deer Movement research project funded by Secretarial Order 3362. The collars came from 19 deer that had died in the past year, one warranty replacement from a collar that never worked after being deployed last year, and two collars that were no longer needed in a different study area. Biologists Bergh and Wickhem downloaded all of the data from the collars, cleaned them up, and tested them before re-deploying them. A helicopter capture crew members from Leading Edge Aviation did a great job catching deer in difficult terrain, vegetation, and weather. Most of the collars were put on deer on different units of the Klickitat Wildlife Area with 12 collars on the Soda Springs Unit alone. The collars collect a location every four hours and the goals of the study are to see if and where the deer migrate as well as attempt to determine the cause of mortality for deer that die during the study period, which goes through early 2025.

Dusky Canada Goose Surveys: Biologist Stephens and Holman conducted another dusky Canada goose survey in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. The purpose of the surveys is to count dusky geese observed and read alphanumeric codes on any red collared duskys. Wildlife managers survey the geese multiple times across their primary wintering grounds and use the data to generate survival estimates. The dusky geese are collared on their breeding grounds in Alaska every other year. Dusky, cackling, and western Canada geese were located during the survey as well as trumpeter and tundra swans. Additional wildlife species observed on the collective effort included elk, black-tailed deer, Columbian white-tailed deer, bald eagles, several species of ducks, sandhill cranes, and a group of approximately 20 California sea lions feeding on smelt in the Grays River.

Regional Wildlife Program Manager Jonker joined Biologist Holman to conduct another dusky Canada goose survey in Cowlitz County. Biologist Stephens concurrently did the survey in Wahkiakum County. Western, snow and Taverner’s/lesser Canada geese were located during the surveys as well as trumpeter/tundra swans. Additional wildlife species observed on the collective effort included elk, black-tailed deer, Columbian white-tailed deer, bald eagles, several species of ducks, sandhill cranes, and coyotes.



Trumpeter swans feeding in Gray's Bay

California Sea Lions Feeding on Smelt in the Grays River

Bat Hibernacula Survey: White-nose Syndrome Bat Coordinator Tobin and Biologists Wickhem, Bergh, and Stephens along with U.S. Forest Service biologists and a volunteer with knowledge of local caves surveyed two caves for bats in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. A total of 113 Townsend's big-eared bats and 15 myotis spp. were counted between the two caves. Additionally, some bats were swabbed in order to test for the presence of *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, the fungus that causes white-nose syndrome. Bats are known to move between various caves throughout the winter as they spend colder periods in a deep torpor and become active during warmer periods. Because of this, as many caves as possible are surveyed on the same day. Surveyors had to hike through a couple feet of snow to access cave entrances and followed decontamination protocols when exiting the caves.



White-nose Syndrome Bat Coordinator Tobin and Biologist Bergh prepare to go down into a cave entrance



A cluster of Townsend's big-eared bats in torpor on a cave wall



Two Townsend's big-eared bats hanging from a cave wall



The kill site, where the cougar removed a significant amount of hair and tried to bury the carcass



The drag mark in the snow, which was dotted with blood and cougar tracks



Deer #386, partially consumed and cached under a juniper



Technician Downing removes a tooth from the carcass; used to determine the age of the doe



Biologist Wickhem enjoying the blue skies and beautiful views

January Mudflow Elk Survey: Biologist Stephens and Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Risley conducted the monthly winter elk count on the Mudflow Wildlife Area. There was a lot of snow in the mountains and chains were required to reach the Forest Learning Center. The mudflow was covered in a few inches of snow and 101 elk were counted, which was less than expected given the snowy conditions. Classification of the elk was not attempted because of poor visibility.



Assistant Manager Risley viewing elk through a spotting scope

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Private Lands Access Program Maintenance: Private Lands Biologist Ferris worked with Private Lands Biologist Sundstrom to perform brush control and reclaim walking access entry to a hunter registration box near the Grays River on a property enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. This is a second registration box for the property which was not used frequently and being removed. Biologist Ferris also checked a registration box and removed blackberry brush at the Devil's Elbow Access Program property in Wahkiakum County. This property is open for public hunting of waterfowl, but hunters must register at the box before accessing the property.



Private Lands Access Program Biologist Ferris cutting back overgrown brush at the Kandoll Farm property



Private Lands Biologist Ferris checks a registration box and removes blackberry brush at the Devil's Elbow property

Water Access Sites: Access area staff members had the normal cleanup to do at Vancouver Lake and Shillapoo Access sites due to more illegal dumping. The Department of Corrections crew were a huge help with cleaning up at Access sites along with loading heavy items such as a waterlogged fridge or couch. Recent heavy rainfall has put many sites in danger of flooding with the Kalama River Access sites being some of the hardest hit. The river has flown into parking lots and has completely covered boat ramps.



Beginner Hole Access Site



Fisherman Loop Access Site



Hands Access Site

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Bear Attractant Issues: A concerned landowner contacted Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen to report that a bear had been getting into his trash and into his neighbors' trash as well. Bears should be hibernating during this time of year, and Jacobsen was concerned that this bear had become habituated to human food sources in the area. The bear had likely elected to continue to consume calories rather than to continue hibernating. Jacobsen warned the landowner about several attractants on his property, and shared information about the likely consequences for the bear and for the landowner if the attractants were not promptly removed.

“Cougar” Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by a landowner who was concerned about a young cougar that had been photographed on her porch by her security camera. The landowner shared the photo with Jacobsen, who determined that the feline in question was a domestic house cat.



House cat mistaken for a cougar

Deer with Arrow: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and Technician Downing made multiple attempts to catch a black-tailed deer in Skamania County that had been running around with an arrow in its front shoulder. The deer was hit by the arrow sometime in the early fall, but the arrow had still not fallen out. The landowner who reported the injured deer regularly feeds the deer with corn and feed pellets to attract them to his property. Jacobsen showed the landowner that, based on the condition of the deer droppings in the area, the deer were having a difficult time digesting this unusual winter forage and it was likely making them sick to some degree. Jacobsen strongly urged the resident to cease his deer feeding activities, which the landowner agreed to. Despite the attempts to catch the deer, it is still at-large with the arrow sticking out of its shoulder. Jacobsen will continue to try to catch the deer and remove the arrow over the upcoming weeks.



Young male deer with an arrow in its left front shoulder – Photo by the landowner



The brown staining in the snow all around the feed stumps is diarrhea from deer caused by the unnatural winter feed source – Photo by the landowner

Injured Deer: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen responded to two different incidents in Clark County regarding injured deer. Both deer had to be euthanized due to their poor condition. Vehicle collisions were likely responsible for both incidents.



Partially paralyzed deer that had been floundering in a yard for two days before it was reported

Elk Damage to Fences: A landowner in Skamania County contacted Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen after elk knocked down some of his fences and ate some of his stored hay during the deep snow event earlier in the month. The landowner was eventually able to erect some heavy-duty fencing around his hay storage to keep the elk out but was still adamant that he receives “hardship tags” to compensate him for his losses. Jacobsen offered patch fencing to the landowner to help repair his fence, along with fence construction assistance and explosive materials to help prevent the elk from returning, but the landowner wasn’t interested in anything other than tags to kill elk. When Jacobsen informed the landowner that his situation didn’t warrant the issuance of tags, the landowner directed some colorful language at Jacobsen and told him to get off the property and to never come back. Jacobsen left the residence.



Elk damage to fence

Cooperative Fencing Projects: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen worked with several different landowners across District 9 on cooperative fencing projects for deer and elk damage. Cooperative fencing funds for fencing materials have been provided by the legislature to assist farmers. The landowners receiving the fencing materials are responsible for the construction efforts and associated costs involved in erecting the fences. Currently, Jacobsen has partnered with six different landowners in Klickitat, Skamania, and Clark counties on deer and elk cooperative fencing.



Bundles of 12-foot fence ready to be unloaded



A partial load of fencing material delivered at a farm in Clark County

Coyote Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen spoke with several different Vancouver residents throughout the week regarding various coyote concerns. Several of the residents were concerned about the possibility of rabies and their perception that coyotes were becoming “more numerous” in Vancouver. One coyote dug under a landowner’s fence and had killed and eaten several chickens in the resident’s yard. The coyote likely had sarcoptic mange and was missing one of its eyes. As residential and commercial development continues to rapidly convert remaining green spaces into non-habitat in the greater Vancouver area, residents are likely to see and hear coyotes in their neighborhoods. Jacobsen provided advice on urban coyote populations and shared [statistics](#) from the Washington Department of Health on rabies in Washington. No coyotes have tested positive for rabies in Washington in recent history, nor have raccoons, skunks, or foxes.



Coyote that had killed and eaten several chickens in a resident's yard. The coyote appears to have a damaged left eye and has mange – Photos by the landowner

Deer with Dog Toy: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and Biologist Bergh responded to a report of a deer with a bright green dog chew toy ball stuck over its lower jaw. Ironically, this is not the first time Jacobsen and Bergh have responded to one of these incidents. Jacobsen attempted to approach the deer and immobilize it with a dart gun, but the deer ran off before they could get close enough. Homeowners in the area were advised to report the deer if it is observed again.

Elk Damage to Fences: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen provided advice to a landowner who was having issues with elk knocking down his fences. Jacobsen recommended modifications to his fencing as well as elk hazing techniques.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Klickitat Wildlife Area - Turtle Ponds Refilling: Snow meltwater is flowing and water levels in the ponds on the Sondino Unit are rising. Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven and Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Hunt checked on the property and found that gauges in two of the ponds are completely underwater and one gauge is topped out at the level where the pond is overflowing. This is a welcome contrast to the limited water received during the past two winters.



Overflow creek from pond A to pond B

Cowlitz Wildlife Area – Riffe Lake: Manager Vanderlip, WDFW Officer Sympton, and Tacoma Power staff members Russell and Neupane conducted a boat patrol of the north shore of Riffe to check and treat Scotch broom and to remove camping items left in a remote area on the wildlife area. The report of the camp came through Tacoma Power and after an initial visit to the site by Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff members, it appeared that an individual(s) had purposely left the items and had not been back in months. The group proceeded to remove the abandoned items, remove some structures that were built, and clean up the garbage that wouldn't decompose.

Cowlitz Wildlife Area - Weed Survey: Assistant Manager Steveson completed the annual weed survey for 2021. This report is provided to both WDFW and Wildlife's Weed Coordinator for agency reporting and to Tacoma Power as part the Annual Report. The weed survey is a qualitative assessment of the vegetation management conducted over the entire year on the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. The survey includes all costs, acreage, vegetation types, and methods of control.

Providing Educational Outreach

Presentation to Family Foresters Workshop: Biologist Holman presented "Mount Saint Helens Elk 1980-2020: Relationships Among Forest Succession, Elk Habitat, Productivity and Disease" to approximately 100 attendees of the 30th Annual Family Foresters Workshop. The workshop is a combined effort of Washington State University and the University of Idaho Extension Offices. For more information about these groups, see their websites at: [WSU Extension | Washington State University](#) and [University of Idaho Extension](#)

Wahkiakum County Commissioners Meeting: At the request of the Wahkiakum County Commissioners, a Commission meeting was attended by Regional Director Lee, Regional Wildlife Program Manager Jonker, Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey, and District Biologist Holman. Information on elk, deer, bear, and cougar populations and hunting season structures were presented to the Commission. Concerns related to hunter crowding, the length of hunting seasons, overall populations, and the loss of access to industrial forestlands for hunting were brought forward and discussed.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Personnel Updates: Melissa Hunt is the new Assistant Manager on the Klickitat Wildlife Area in the Region 5 Wildlife Program Team. Melissa most recently worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an Invasive Species Strike Team Field Crew Leader, monitoring known weed populations and surveying for new infestations using mechanical and chemical treatments to control weeds, as well as leading a crew of technicians in this work. Melissa's prior employment includes a broad array of raptor, waterfowl, and songbird surveys, wildlife damage management, scientific collection of animals, and surveys for several species of mammals ranging from pikas to wolves and big game, often working in remote locations and in all seasons. Melissa has also

taught a two-week waterfowl identification course at the State University of New York and has organized several events for Ducks Unlimited as an enthusiastic volunteer.

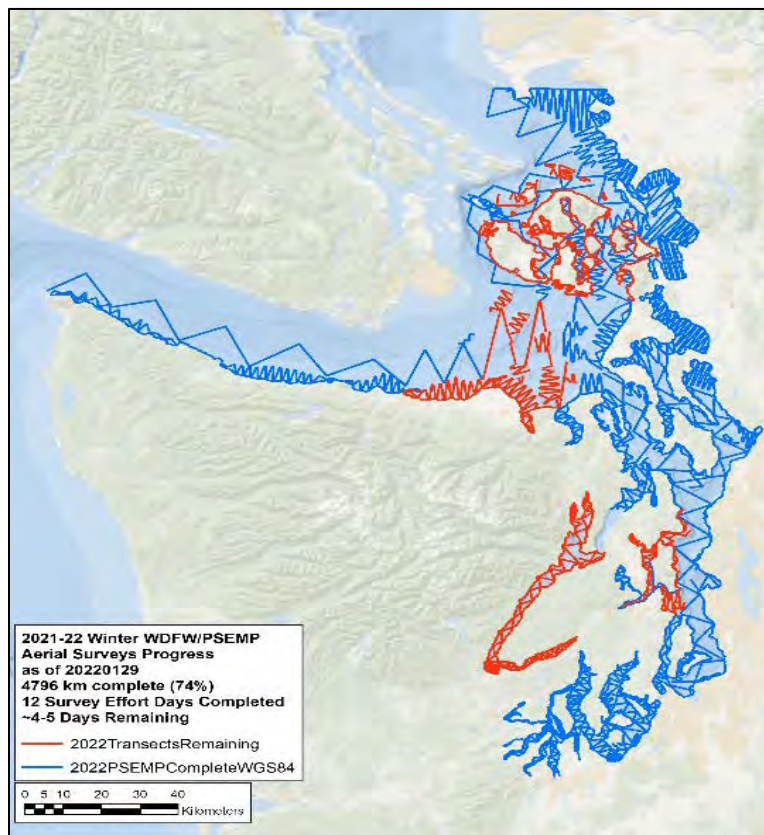
Her outdoor work adventures began in her home state of New York and crossed the continent to Montana, California, Oregon, and Washington. To say that Melissa is an avid hunter is to understate her passion for this pursuit, and she is looking forward to hunting elk and other big game in Region 5!

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program Survey: Each year, WDFW biologists (this year was, Evenson, Hamer, and Murphie) conduct a survey of wintering waterfowl (emphasis on sea ducks), marine birds, and marine mammals throughout the inland marine waters of Washington. This crew flies more than 4,000 miles in December and January. Observers tally what they see (species, count, and time) within a 50-meter strip on both sides of the aircraft, as they fly along 200 feet above the water at 85 knots (about 100mph). This crew has about five days left to complete the survey this season.



Dusky Goose Monitoring: Technician Martenson performed goose surveys in portions of Grays Harbor County.

Swan Survey: Biologist Novack conducted the annual winter swan survey in the Chehalis Valley. Just under 300 birds were counted between Montesano and Oakville.

Snowy Plover: Biologist Novack submitted reports and renewal applications for predator control efforts dedicated to protected Western Snowy Plovers.

Band-Tailed Pigeons: Biologist Novack reviewed telemetry data and ordered additional traps and telemetry devices.

Spring Bear Recommendations: Biologist Novack conducted a brief review and supplied some revisions to the justification for the proposed spring bear permit numbers in his district.

Oregon Spotted Frog: Biologists Tirhi and Butler met with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Engineers Klavas and Smith to review data collected thus far at a newly acquired WDFW property on which funds have been acquired to build one or two breeding ponds for Oregon spotted frogs that breed on the site. The engineers deployed water level and temperature monitors in the fall of 2021 in the general location of the ponds to understand the hydrology and guide the construction project. It was decided by the team that the project would benefit from more hydrologic data collection (i.e., one full year of data collection). Tirhi reached out to District Habitat Biologist Steinweg to begin the permitting process.

Wolves: Biologist Butler retrieved a game camera set out in northeast Peirce County. The camera was originally set in the late fall in response to a possible wolf sighting. Biologists Butler and Tirhi checked this camera and a second camera a month later. One camera was then taken down, but this camera was left up during that check. Butler observed no elk, deer, or wolf tracks in the snow on her way to the camera, but there were a lot of tracks from cross county skiers. The images from the camera have not been reviewed yet.



The basin where the game camera was located



Butler snowshoeing to camera location and successfully finding the camera

Trumpeter Swans: Biologist Tirhi conducted swan surveys across Thurston County as part of the western Washington midwinter swan survey. This survey is led by our Region 4 staff members and includes biologists from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Puget Sound Energy, the Swan Society, and various volunteers. The survey targets those areas supporting the largest flocks of swans and is used as an indicator of the swan population trend. Tirhi used swan sightings reported in the state swan database, previous midwinter surveys data since 1997, and eBird sighting reports to locate potential swan concentration areas. Tirhi drove 204 miles over 13 hours of survey time and recorded two flocks of swans in Thurston County, one on Capitol Lake, and one on Smith Prairie.

County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
Skagit	1/18/2022	Daniel Zimmerman	1
	1/18/2022	Maynard Axelson	1-A
	1/18/2022	Mel Walters/Haley Edwards	2
	1/18/2022	Doug Huddle	3
	1/18/2022	Callie Moore	4-A
	1/18/2022	Martha Jordan	4-B

County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
Whatcom	1/19/2022	Paul DeBruyn	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
	1/19/2022	Kim Cashon	9,10,17
	1/19/2022	Tony Fuchs	18,19,20
	1/19/2022	Callie Moore	12,13
	1/19/2022	Doug Huddle	11,14,15,16,21
	1/19/2022	Daniel Zimmerman	8
	1/19/2022	Robert Waddell	1, 2

County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
Snohomish	1/20/2022	Martha & volunteers	Hwy 2 Corridor (Snohomish Watershed)
	1/20/2022	Callie Moore & Rob Wingard	530 Corridor (Stillaguamish Watershed)

County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
King	1/21/2022	Mel Walters/Haley Edwards	North King to I-90 (aerial), Auburn, Kent, Snoqualmie Valley (flight); south of I-405 and west of Hwy 515
	1/21/2022	Mike Smith	King (South of I-90) - Enumclaw, Green Valley; Lake Washington
	1/21/2022	Mike Smith	North Bend

County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
San Juan - all ferry-served islands west of Rosario Strait	1/21/2022	Kathleen Foley	

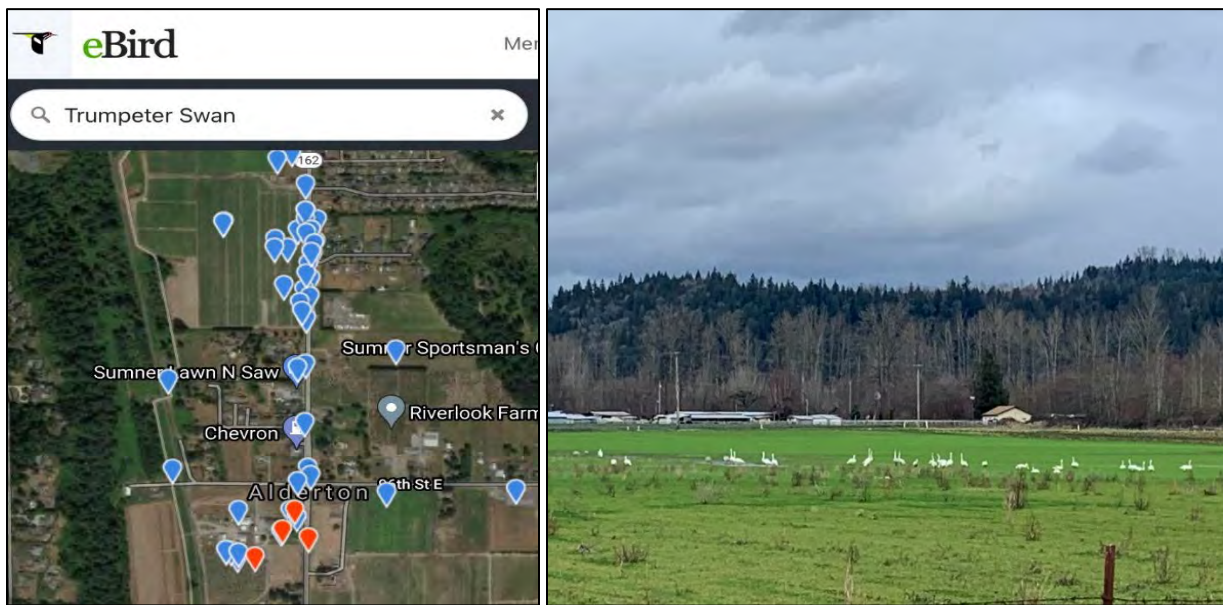
County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
Island		Rob Wingard	Whidbey
		Matt Wilson	Camano

County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
Pierce	1/18 & 1/19	Emily Butler	Sumner, Lake Tapps, General area

County	Date	Participant	Survey Area
Thurston	1/18 & 1/19	Michelle Tirhi	

Hunter Contact: Biologist Tirhi returned phone calls and provided both verbal and email information to one hunter regarding elk hunting opportunities in District 11.

Trumpeter Swans: Biologist Butler participated in the western Washington midwinter swan survey conducting swan surveys across Pierce County. This survey was performed from Whatcom County south through Thurston County with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists, Puget Sound Energy staff members, and the Swan Society all assisting in the effort. Butler reviewed past survey data, eBird sightings, and aerial imagery to determine the best survey route. Within Pierce County, Butler observed 4 flocks consisting of 224 swans with the largest flock containing 129 of those birds.



Past swan sightings reviewed on eBird, and a flock of swans observed during the survey

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Flooding and Storm Damage: Water Access Manager Reeves and the access team began site clean-up from recent flooding and heavy snowfall events.

Hood Canal, Pleasant Harbor: Due to heavy snowfall, wind, and the following melt, several access sites have downed trees, limbs, erosion, and hill slides. Pleasant Harbor is in the beginning stages of cleanup. The roadway and parking area were blocked by several fallen trees and debris. The site is ready for use but several more hours of cutting, chipping, and blowing are still to follow.

Before



After



Grays Harbor: Heavy rains and high water are a regular wintertime delivery team of silt to our access boat ramps. The team is working through the county as river levels drop. The Humptulips 101 Morley and Thoreburg were completed. The Satsop and Chehalis sites are next to be addressed. Thorburg shown below is Freimunds fine work.

Before



After



Mason County: The unfortunate but regular occurrence of illegal dumping is becoming more problematic as each month passes. The access team is spending an increasing amount of time dealing with collection and disposal of oversize items ranging from refrigerators and sofas to RVs and boats. The labor, expenses for disposal, and coordination with refuse sites does not include Enforcement's time and efforts in processing abandoned vehicles and vessels for disposal.

A special thanks to our Region 6 Enforcement Officers for helping us with these issues!



Other Work Performed: Access staff members worked with the Capital Asset Management Program on current and future redevelopment projects as well as preparing for the upcoming grant application window. They also worked on postings for two soon-to-be-open maintenance positions and preventative maintenance on equipment.

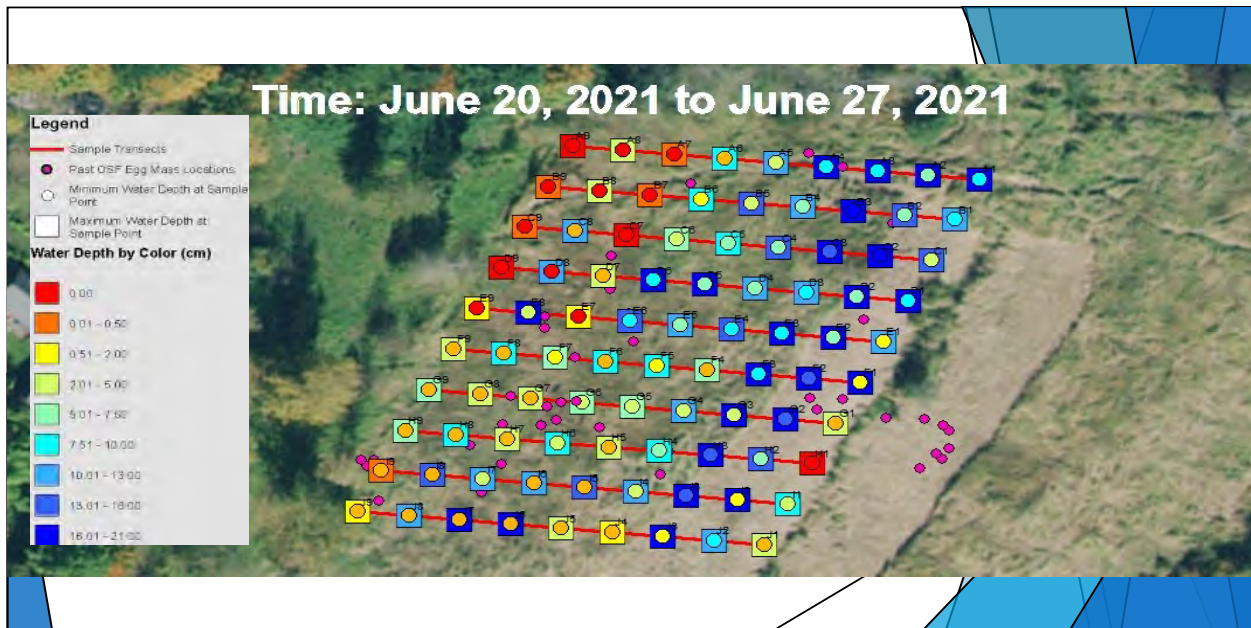
Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Sick and Injured Wildlife: Biologist Butler responded to reports of sick deer within Thurston County this past week. The two deer were observed to have diarrhea for an extended period of time. Butler discussed the situation with the reporting party, and they provided photos and videos of the deer. After speaking with the reporting party and discussing the situation with Wildlife Veterinarian Mansfield, supplemental feeding of the deer was presumed to be the cause of the illness. Butler provided the reporting party information about the effects of feeding deer. He agreed to stop supplementally feeding the deer and will continue to keep an eye on them for any changes.

Osprey Nests on Cell Towers: Biologist Tirhi completed two osprey nest removal permits for the removal of inactive osprey nests in District 11. One was in Gig Harbor, and one was in Steilacoom.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Chehalis Basin Strategy/Aquatic Species Restoration Plan: Biologist Butler presented at the Middle Basin Regional Implementation Team planning meeting. This meeting focused on project proposals for work within the Chehalis Basin. The team discussed each project presented and determine if each should move forward in the funding process. Butler presented on the Salmon Creek restoration efforts for Oregon spotted frogs. This project began last year, and additional funding was requested to continue the mowing of invasive reed canary grass as well as water monitoring and the addition of tadpole monitoring.



Hydrological data showing the maximum and minimum of the four water depths collected at set points every eight meters along transect lines

Biologist Tirhi participated in both the Middle Basin and Lower Basin Regional Implementation Team planning meetings and discussion. This discussion was designed for project proponents in those areas of the Chehalis River Basin to inform of Team projects they intend to propose for funding and seek approval to go forward with a funding request. Considering this is the first time these Implementation Teams have used this process, there are kinks to resolve. Regardless, the Team members approved Tirhi's Salmon Creek Oregon spotted frog project for funding. This involves funds towards ongoing hydrologic monitoring to guide site management, bullfrog control, and invasive reed canary grass control. Learn more: [Chehalis Basin Strategy](#).

Bush Prairie Habitat Conservation Plan Review: Biologist Tirhi completed her review of the first draft of the 240-page Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). This HCP is extremely important and has the potential to significantly impact the most important location for the state and federally listed Olympia Mazama pocket gopher and the South Puget Sound streaked horned lark. The plan also covers two other listed species: Oregon spotted frog and Oregon vesper sparrow (impacts to these two are far less and should be adequately mitigated by the HCP). The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) applauds the City of Tumwater and the Port of Olympia, the proponents of the HCP working in concert with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). WDFW greatly supports the proponents' desire to build a Conservation Reserve Network of protected lands into perpetuity for these species. However, WDFW intends to work very closely with all three entities on the proposed development on and around the Olympia Airport outlined within the HCP. WDFW's intention is no net loss of these four vulnerable listed species and is dedicated to their recovery, as supported by both state and federal recovery and action plans. This HCP was intense, and Tirhi's comments were extensive. WDFW looks forward to continued partnership with the city, the Port, and USFWS to produce a final HCP that each agency can support.

John's River Wildlife Area: Biologist Novack and Technician Martenson worked with Wildlife Area staff members to initiate tree planting efforts at the John's River Wildlife Area Elk River Unit.

South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Plan Finalized: Director Susewind recently approved the final draft of the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Plan. The document's contents represent many hours of work and meetings led by Wildlife Area Manager Lowery and Wildlife Area Planner Vigue. The effort would not have been nearly as successful and meaningful without the work and input of our advisory committee with representatives from a variety of partner organizations and interests. Comprised of representatives from each program, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's internal planning team should also be recognized for their commitment and writing substantial portions of the plan. The on-the-ground implementation is the next step and many prescriptions in the plan are already under way or in the planning stages.

Other

New Habitat Section Manager: Lowery, who had served as the Wildlife Area Manager, recently accepted a Section Manager position in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Habitat Program. During his tenure as manager, Lowery provided sound guidance through many challenging projects including recovery work from the Scatter Creek fire, writing two wildlife area plans, several estuary restorations projects, and an unfortunate issue involving a homeless encampment on one of the North Olympic Units. Congratulations, Lowery! Thank you for all your work and accomplishments and we wish you the best of luck in your new position.

Wildlife Area Manager Recruitment: Recruitment for two new managers will begin soon, one for the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area and one for the South Puget Sound and North Olympic Wildlife Areas. This is an opportunity that has become possible with new funding support by Lands Division in recognition of the extreme diversity and complexity of managing the three very different wildlife areas. This change should allow us to address numerous long-standing issues as well as continuing critical restoration work spread across the eastern portion of Region 6.