

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

Feb. 16 to Feb. 29, 2020

DIVERSITY DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Bats and White-Nose Syndrome Surveillance: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Biologist Tobin responded to a mass bat mortality event near North Bend. Since the beginning of February over 30 bats have been found dead below a bat house. Tobin was able to capture 15 live bats from this colony to assess their physical condition. Unfortunately, all had clinical signs of white-nose syndrome (WNS), a deadly bat disease. These bats were taken to Happy Valley Bat rehabilitation facility where WDFW is partnering with them to trial treatments for WNS. WNS has been documented in the North Bend area since 2016, but this is the first year we are observing mass mortality events and receiving an increase of reports from concerned citizens on the number of dead bats being found in this area.



One of the bat houses where bat mortalities have been reported in February (left), and a bat with clinical signs of WNS (right), e.g., orange fluorescence of wings under UV light

2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Forest Grouse Monitoring: Biologists from across the state gathered in Cle Elum for the annual forest grouse 'wing bee'. Throughout the forest grouse harvest season (Sept. 1 – Dec. 31), district staff members ask hunters to submit wing and tail samples from harvested forest grouse. Collection barrels are placed throughout the state to receive these samples. After the season closes, biologists assess the samples to identify species, sex, and age at the wing bee. These data provide critical information for monitoring trends in the harvested grouse populations. This year we processed more than 900 samples from the 2019 season. Thank you to the Ruffed Grouse Society for providing support at the wing bee, and a big thank you to all the hunters who submitted samples this season! For more information visit this [website](#).

Elk Procurement for Washington State University Research: Ungulate Specialist Garrison worked with biologists and other staff members from Region 3, as well as Washington State University (WSU) research personnel, to capture and transport eight elk calves from the Yakima population to Pullman. In Pullman, these elk calves will serve as critical subjects for research on treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD). In 2017, the Washington State legislature mandated that WSU create a program researching the causes of TAHD, monitoring the disease's distribution, and working to find management solutions to the disease. For more information on WSU's program, visit this [website](#), and for more information on TAHD and WDFW's efforts to understand and manage the disease, visit this [website](#).

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Nothing for this installment.

2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Coordinators Garcia (Region 3), Elliott (Region 5), and Montgomery (Region 6) along with Program Specialist Thorson and Division Manager Whipple met with pheasant farmer Chris White to discuss bird production needs for the upcoming season. The number and location of clinics and participants were discussed as well as the plans for managing this partnership in the future. With the growth of the clinic and mentoring programs, the team is working to make sure communication is happening early and often so that no unexpected issues arise.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

Region 5 Coordinator Elliott attended the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) Banquet in Clark County. She was accompanied by Master Hunter Advisory Group member Keith Pfeifer. They hosted a table to meet and greet and field questions from attendees of the event. Unfortunately, booth location was not ideal this year so the contacts were far less than last year, but Elliott and Pfeifer will work with event organizers to arrange better placement next year.



6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Nothing for this installment.

2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Real Estate Services: On Feb. 12 we closed on the second phase (around 900 acres) of the Van Wyk property located in Yakima County. This large, diverse landscape will achieve a significant and lasting conservation impact. The property is bisected by South Fork Cowlitz Creek which is designated as critical habitat for bull trout and an important spawning area for steelhead. This second phase of a larger project completes the addition of nearly 4,500 acres to the Oak Creek

Wildlife Area. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Forterra were our partners in completing this large, significant addition to our asset portfolio.

Society for Range Management Annual Meeting: Range Ecologist Burnham attended several sessions of the society's annual meetings. A good amount of technical information was presented that could inform WDFW grazing management, including a new application for gathering data that could provide real-time feedback to producers in the field, a proprietary software system for managing grazing that could help producers generate reports, electronic livestock monitoring, and virtual fencing, and (less immediately) Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAV) monitoring and photogrammetric techniques. There was also material on restoration strategies and collaborative grazing management and communication.

Grazing Permits: Range Ecologist Burnham joined district team staff members to conduct a House Bill 1309 ecosystem standards evaluation for a grazing permit renewal on the Klickitat Wildlife Area. Burnham incorporated comments into the draft grazing management plan and sent that along with other permit materials to Manager Van Leuven to start obtaining review signatures. Burnham also prepared renewal materials for a recently expired grazing permit on the Methow Wildlife Area. Manager Troyer indicated that the permit seemed to be working well and no major changes were needed.

Test Mowing on the Elk River Unit of the Johns River Wildlife Area: Statewide Weed Coordinator Heimer and weed managers Holcomb and Nunez performed a test mow of Scotch broom with the new Marshmaster mower. The machine did not mow taller broom very well, requiring multiple passes and leaving long, standing stems. A test mow of reed canary grass and blackberry at the Region 6 office fared much better.

Vancouver Lake: Statewide Weed Coordinator Heimer attended a steering committee meeting in Vancouver to review the first draft of the Vancouver Lake Integrated Aquatic Vegetation Management Plan hosted by Justin Collell (Clark County Noxious Weed Control Board). Heimer provided plan comments and vehicle use data for the Vancouver Lake Unit to Justin Collell as a proxy for public use which is part of the plan.

Agricultural Lease Renewals: Vegetation Ecologist Merg worked on reviews of five agricultural leases on the Skagit and Methow wildlife areas. Land Stewardship and Operations Section Manager Dahmer reviewed and approved the leases and forwarded them to Lands Division Manager Wilkerson for review. Merg, Dahmer and Real Estate Lead Woodruff updated language in the agriculture lease templates that Woodruff sent out to all wildlife area managers.

Shrub Steppe Definition Workgroup Meeting: Vegetation Ecologist Merg participated in a follow-up discussion of the workgroup that met in Ellensburg in early February. A final definition has coalesced under the limited scope of the current review, which is simply to integrate the role of fire into our definition of shrub-steppe. Most workgroup members agree that a more thorough rewrite of the definition ought to be done at the first opportunity, which appears to be next year.

Annual Rx Fire Council Meeting: Prescribed Fire Lead Eberlein participated in the meeting that covered topics including 2019 prescribed fire accomplishments, TREX update, Washington Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program update, Prescribed Burn associations, Urban Growth Area changes, Smoke Management Plan updates, legislative update, and the Strategic

Plan overview. Attendance came from a variety of organizations including federal, state, tribal, local governments and private associations.

Wenas Wildlife Area, Cleman Ridge Restoration Thinning Project: Forester Mize finalized details on the Forest Practice Application with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and received the approved application on Feb. 25. Forester Mize also worked with Contract Specialist Rennie to receive and analyze two bid proposals from potential contractors. Mize will determine the apparent successful bidder by March 2.

Chelan Wildlife Area, Swakane and Burch Mountain Restoration Thinning Project: Forester Mize commenced the field layout portion of this project on Feb. 20. At this point, initial field reconnaissance has found forest conditions that are severely overstocked throughout. Treatment boundary locations will be determined based on forest stand conditions, topography, and accessibility.

Weatherly Wildlife Area Forest Restoration Thinning Project: The Weatherly Forest Restoration Project was sold on Feb. 27, 2020. Forester Ashiglar anticipates harvest will begin in May or June. Access to part of the sale goes through private property and the property recently changed ownership. Forester Ashiglar is working with the new owner on the parameters of using this road.

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area and Smoothing Iron Forest Restoration Thinning Project: Forester Ashiglar initiated field reconnaissance for the Smoothing Iron Forest Restoration Project, looked at portions of the road system, and verified her prescriptions based on field inventory collected by 2019 summer interns. The project will have commercial and non-commercial components. She estimates approximately 300 acres will need treatment in areas with dense thickets of pine and Douglas fir, overstocked mid-seral forest, and heavy Douglas fir mistletoe infection. Unusual property boundaries will require cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) to access WDFW stands and use cross-boundary roads. Some stands may be best treated with prescribed fire.



Elk resting behind the potential pre-commercial thinning unit on Smoothing Iron Ridge of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area



Stand needing commercial thinning on Smoothing Iron Ridge

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Landowner Consultation: Vegetation Ecologist Merg consulted with a landowner in Otis Orchards that wants technical support for her restoration project. Merg explained the origins of the Kentucky bluegrass cultivar *Merion* and provided feedback about the potential detriment of this non-native, rhizomatous grass on the landowner's project.

Prescribed Burn News Release: Prescribed Fire Lead Eberlein worked with Public Affairs to get out a news release regarding restoration fires in the following popular areas that will begin in the coming month, weather permitting:

- Sherman Creek Wildlife Area, 524 acres in Ferry County, 10 miles west of Kettle Falls
- Rustlers Gulch Wildlife Area, 523 acres in Pend Oreille County, 15 miles southwest of Newport
- Methow Wildlife Area, 248 acres in Okanogan County, 10 miles northeast of Winthrop
- Colockum Wildlife Area, 500 acres in Chelan County, 10 miles southeast of Wenatchee
- Oak Creek Wildlife Area, 120 acres in Yakima County, 15 miles west of Naches
- Grouse Flats Wildlife Area, 400 acres in Asotin County, 40 miles southwest of Clarkston
- Additional burns on WDFW eastern Washington lands could be announced as conditions allow.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Cultural Resource Management Policy: Archaeologists Kelly and Major worked with Capital Asset Management Program (CAMP) cultural resource staff members, Tribal Liaison Woods, and the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) to draft a revised cultural resource policy. There were some major revisions compared to the previous version, but substantial progress was made toward finalizing the policy. A larger team will review and discuss the current draft in mid-March.

Senate Bill 6448 and 6519: Archaeologist Kelly completed bill analyses for senate bills 6448 and 6519, which would codify some elements of Executive Order 05-05 in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). There is reason to be supportive of the effort in general, but possible

revisions and additions are needed that would improve the bill. As written, the bill contains some ambiguities and lacks some elements, and it could become problematic if passed in its current form.

House Bill 1983: Land Stewardship and Operations Section Manager Dahmer completed a bill analysis on this bill that would exempt WDFW from the requirement to perform an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in certain circumstances related to grazing. Dahmer testified to the Senate, Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources and Parks Committee clarifying that most activities identified in the bill are already exempt from State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and that the department would pursue a Mitigated Determination of Non-Significance if the department ever chose to pursue grazing where any significant environmental impact was anticipated.

Real Estate Services: The agency's Lands 20/20 proposed list of 14 properties for the potential acquisition was presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission on Feb. 7. The director then approved the list to seek funding through state and/or federal grants. Five of the properties are being donated and funds must be identified to cover processing and due diligence costs.

7) Other

Rx Fire Staffing: Prescribed fire personnel from both the north and south teams have been interviewing to fill vacant positions. Both teams have seen good applications come through and hope to have selections for the vacancies soon. An updated fire unit manager position for the north team was announced along with recruitment for additional on-call burn boss positions. These recruitments close March 8 and interviews will take place shortly afterward. All seasonal team members start on March 1. All fire staff members will be participating in training, orientation, and fieldwork before the prescribed fire season starts.

Green River College: Foresters Mize and Pfeifle traveled to Green River College on Feb. 3 and conducted nine interviews with potential summer forestry interns. Upon completion of interviewing candidates, Foresters Mize and Pfeifle worked together to narrow the selection. Job offers were made and accepted on Feb. 12 by three students. They will begin with the department in June 2020.

Diversity Advisory Committee: Forester Ashiglar now represents southeast Washington and the Lands Division for two years as a member of the Diversity Advisory Committee. She met with other members for two days in Lacey to advise on policies concerning diversity, equity, inclusion, recruitment, retention, sexual harassment, and bullying.

Cultural Resource Exchange Workgroup: Archaeologists Kelly and Major, along with other department's cultural resource staff members, attended the last meeting of the Cultural Resource Exchange Workgroup (CREW). CREW is a team from state agencies working cooperatively to improve compliance and stewardship related to cultural resources and to help define and refine processes so that they are consistent across state agencies.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Forest Grouse Wing bee: District 2 wildlife biologists Atamian and Lowe joined with other district wildlife biologists from across the state, Ruffed Grouse Society members, and other volunteers to process the 960 forest grouse wings and tails submitted by hunters during the 2019 season. There are four species of grouse that make up the forest grouse clade in Washington, ruffed grouse, spruce grouse, dusky grouse, and sooty grouse. Dusky and sooty grouse were previously considered a single species, blue grouse. From the wings and tails, we can identify the species that were harvested, as well as sex and age. Tails are especially important from ruffed grouse because without them it is impossible to identify the sex. The identification of species lets us know how hunter pressure is distributed across the four forest grouse species and gives a rough trend of how the population of each is doing. Sex similarly gives us data on hunter pressure across the sexes, and with the female wings, we can get a very rough idea on nest success based on progress in molt at the date of harvest. Age lets us assess what portion of the population is receiving the greatest pressure (juveniles or adults) and we can calculate the chick to female ratio to get a rough estimate on production.



WDFW biologists, Ruffed Grouse Society members, and other volunteers processing forest grouse wings at WDFW 2019 wing bee



WDFW biologists Atamian and Garrison working with a young volunteer identifying the species and age of a hunter submitted forest grouse wing

Predator-Prey Research Project: Wildlife biologists Prince and Turnock, and research scientists Kertson and DeVivo captured and collared two adult female cougars as part of the Predator-Prey Research Project. Kertson is the principal investigator for the carnivore portion of the project, looking at both direct and indirect impacts of carnivores on prey species in Okanogan County and northeast Washington. Both cougars were captured in metal box traps and fitted with GPS radio collars.



Metal box cougar trap



Captured cougar



Cougar processing

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Water Access Site Cleanup: Daniel Dziekan Access Manager for the north half of Region 1, has been preparing water access sites for the spring fishing opener in April. He has been pressure washing restrooms and picking up garbage and green waste. Liberty Lake is a popular site that opens on March 1, so Dziekan has been focusing most of his efforts there, along with a few other early openers.



Left: Leaves and pine needles at Liberty Lake, which Dziekan picked up and took to the dump Center and Right: Dziekan repaired a fence abutting private property at Liberty Lake

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Areas

Pollinator Habitat: Private Lands Biologist Gaston assisted a landowner with installing a one-acre pollinator plot of habitat as part of a Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) program. The NRCS required the habitat be planted within the next few weeks, so the landowner was in a hurry to find some help. The landowner had previously sprayed the weeds on the site but wanted the wildflower seed to be drilled instead of broadcast. Private Lands Biologist Gaston provided the equipment and time to help install the habitat.



The one-acre pollinator plot after being seeded by Private Lands Biologist Gaston

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Asotin County Cattlemen's Monthly Meeting: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade attended the monthly meeting. McCanna gave a half hour PowerPoint presentation and had an hour of question and answer. McCanna explained the process on how the department decides to move into lethal control or not. The Grouse Flats wolf pack is now at five depredations in seven months and WDFW decided to employ additional non-lethal deterrents instead of lethal.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Retirements: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna received a phone call from Wildlife Conflict Specialist Weatherman stating he is going to retire from WDFW. McCanna also heard from Wildlife Conflict Specialist Rasley that he is going to retire the end of April. McCanna will work with both on appropriate paperwork.

Hiring Packets: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna completed hiring packets for Weatherman's six-month career seasonal position and Rasley's permanent position. McCanna is currently working with Human Resources on the job announcements.

Contracts and Payments: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna held a meeting with all Region 1 wildlife conflict specialists, Regional Wildlife Program Manager Robinette, headquarters conflict personnel, contracts, and fiscal staff members. The goal of the meeting was to improve customer service and get producers paid in a timely manner. This was a great meeting with input from all to improve timely contracts and payments. A follow-up conference call will be needed.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Washington Predator-Prey Project (mortality follow-up): Biologists Fitkin and Heinlen both conducted investigations of radio-collared mule deer mortalities this month. A small spike in the deer mortalities is expected in late winter and early spring when both snow condition and body condition can make deer more susceptible to multiple mortality sources. In general, it has been a mild winter in District 6 so excessive mortality is not anticipated.

Fisher Recovery: A private citizen in the Methow captured a video of a fisher on his remote camera about three miles west of Winthrop. The animal is believed to be M113, a male fisher released on the west slope of the North Cascades as part of the ongoing interagency reintroduction effort (see the video here: [fisher video](#)).



Translocated fisher outside of Winthrop – Photo by Michael Chiu

Bighorn Sheep- Mount Hull Herd: Biologist Heinlen was able to get a ground count of 66 animals in the Mount Hull herd this period. This is a good finding after pneumonia was discovered in the herd one year ago. Lambs and yearlings were observed which is a good sign the pneumonia is not as virulent as other outbreaks have experienced.

Forest Grouse Management: Biologist Heinlen participated in the annual WDFW grouse wing bee where hunter-harvested grouse wings and tails are identified by species, sex, and age. These are the wings and tails that hunters deposit in the grouse wing barrels throughout the season. The goal of this collection effort is to build an estimated population trend dataset for each species in order to evaluate harvest changes. This year 960 samples were processed compared to 724 last year. In addition to WDFW, the Ruffed Grouse Society and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) provided staff members to assist in identification. A big “thank you” goes to the hunters who deposit grouse wings and tails as this data couldn’t be collected without their efforts. More information can be found at this [website](#).



WDFW Forest Grouse Wing Bee

The annual forest grouse wingbee was held in Cle Elum on Feb.19. Wildlife biologists Emily Jeffreys and Devon Comstock worked with other biologists from WDFW and ODFW as well as volunteers from the Washington Ruffed Grouse Society to determine species, age class, and sex (when possible) for each wing sample collected from hunters in 2019. Data from wingbees provide estimates of the species, sex, and age composition of that year's forest grouse harvest, as well as supply information on year to year harvest trends across the state. These data help WDFW biologists to set and evaluate hunting seasons. In total, 960 forest grouse wing samples were processed during the Feb.19 wingbee.



Female (left) and male (right) spruce grouse wings

Chelan Mountain Goat Survey: Wildlife Biologists Devon Comstock and Emily Jeffreys performed aerial surveys for mountain goats on the south shore of Lake Chelan on Feb. 20 and 21. Biologists flew in a helicopter over known mountain goat winter range to estimate the population of the south shore Lake Chelan herd as well as the ratio of adults to kids.



Aerial view of Lake Chelan and the Glacier Peak Wilderness – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

Pygmy Rabbit Winter 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 also collect fecal samples so that partners from the University of Idaho can conduct genetic analyses. These analyses identify the number of individual pygmy rabbits within each survey area, providing a rough population estimate. The results were very discouraging, with only a total of 68 active burrows found in all three survey areas (Sagebrush Flat- 34, Beezley Hills- 10, and Burton Draw- 24). This is an especially shocking decline for Sagebrush Flat, where we had nearly 300 active burrows last winter. We still have a couple of areas to check out and the burrow total could increase, but we do not expect much.



One of the few pygmy rabbits detected this winter

Pygmy Rabbit Out of state Translocations: Following numerous challenges with the semi-wild breeding population in the past couple of years, we initiated several changes to improve this system. Shifting from the degraded permanent enclosures to new mobile enclosures on new sites where “fresh pasture” occurred over the past two years. Additionally, we sought new breeding stock harvested from our own established population at Sagebrush Flat. This worked well when that population was sufficient to harvest from. Given our recent decline in that population, they are no longer a suitable source of breeding enclosure rabbits. Thus, with concurrence from the Science Advisory Team, we will attempt to translocate pygmy rabbits from Idaho and Nevada for the first time since 2013. Coordinator Gallie, Section Manager Anderson, and Biologist Hayes have been rapidly making plans with these states. Thirty to forty pygmy rabbits will be captured from March 1 through March 21 in those states and translocated to the new breeding enclosures within our recovery areas. These rabbits will breed with the remaining resident pygmy rabbits with Columbia Basin heritage. The resulting offspring will be released into the wild in the Burton Draw and Beezley Hills recovery areas.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Northeast Washington Trail Initiative and Pacific Northwest Trail: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug participated in a meeting to discuss Okanogan County trails within the larger, landscape-level Northeast Washington Trail Initiative steered by the United States Forest Service (USFS) Pacific Northwest Trail Association (PNTA). Attending the meeting were the PNTA representative, Bureau of Land Management, Okanogan County Planning, Colville Confederated Tribe, Backcountry Horsemen, and local interest groups. The group heard a summary of the initiative and how Okanogan fits into the plan. Each group will provide PNTA an inventory of existing trails which may eventually get included in an online, interactive map available to the public.

Community Trail Grooming at Big Valley: Due to a longstanding agreement spanning several decades, the Methow Wildlife Area continues to team up with Methow Trails to provide free winter recreational opportunities at the Big Valley Ranch. Methow Trails regularly maintains the entrance road, parking area, and grooms several miles of winter trails with top of the line equipment. This is one of the truly free winter recreation trails in the Methow and is open to hikers, fat-tire bikers, snowshoers, and cross-country skiers. As a bonus, your furry four-legged friends are welcome to accompany you as well. The Big Valley trails are beloved by locals and tourists alike as they provide several miles of sweeping mountain views, open meadows, and dense riparian corridors. This diversity of habitats provides visitors with a wide array of diverse wildlife and recreational opportunities. The winter recreation season is winding down, but there’s still time to get out and enjoy this unique, collaboratively maintained winter recreational trail system at the Methow Wildlife Area’s Big Valley Unit.

Hunter Access Program: Biologist Hughes met with a landowner who is taking over management of his father’s ground that is in Grant and Douglas counties. The landowner is adding additional ground into a Hunt by Written Permission contract. During the meeting, Hughes updated the landowner on pygmy rabbits in the area. The landowner’s family has been in the Safe Harbor Program since 2008.

Waterfowl: Biologist Rowan worked with Washington Waterfowl Association (WWA) staff members and volunteers to restore and create new duck nesting tubes. Many thanks to WWA for

donating money for materials, Dick Price and to helpers Bruce Feagan, Jeremy Iverson, and Todd Teeters for their physical labor!



3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Deer Damage to Winter Wheat: Specialist Bridges and Supervisor Rickel met with a wheat producer in Adams County to review the crop depredation process while evaluating his winter wheat crop. Currently, there is no significant damage and it is anticipated the deer will likely move out of the area. The landowner was provided material to haze the deer out of the crop and will begin conducting daily patrols.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Thinning for Historic Densities: The multi-phase Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP) conducted over the past decade converted the Sinlahekin Valley from overstocked stands prone to disease and high-severity fires to more historic conditions that are dominated by an open understory that thrives on frequent, low-severity fires. Maintenance Mechanic Boulger and Assistant Manager Klehm continue to work toward improving conditions by touching up small patches of Ponderosa Pine and Douglas-fir regeneration that were not financially feasible to treat during the commercial phases of SERP.

Horse Spring Coulee Access Gate: Manager Wehmeyer replaced an existing wire stretch gate with a new pipe gate. He also installed a pedestrian gate so the public can access the area. There has been a problem with ATV and UTVs going through the stretch gate and accessing the area. Now the vehicle access gate can be locked, and the public can use the pedestrian gate to access the area. We hope this will help to minimize future problems.

New Sage Grouse Lek: Michael Schroeder confirmed the establishment of a new ‘Fairview’ Sage Grouse Lek in north Douglas County that Private Lands Biologist Braaten located and identified. Last year Private Lands Biologist Braaten found the possible Sage Grouse lek but it was not confirmed until this Spring. Ten sage grouse were present (five male, five female).



Sage grouse on lek - Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW

Safe Harbor Program: Biologist Hughes met with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to review a minor amendment and provide an update on pygmy rabbit recovery efforts. TNC is looking to amend their site plan and add 40 acres to their agreement, which currently covers 34,252 acres. Hughes provided maps of active burrows from the last three years that are close to TNC ground, there are no active burrows on their property currently. This information is helpful for TNC to know where pygmy rabbits would most likely cross over onto TNC land. TNC has had an interest in adding herbicide as a covered practice into their Safe Harbor agreement. Due to the lack of research on how herbicide affects pygmy rabbits, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) made the determination to not cover herbicide use as a practice. This does not keep TNC from spraying any herbicide, it simply means the practice would not be covered for incidental take of a pygmy rabbit. USFWS continued to review the service's current approach to restoration activities, including herbicide use that is stated in a service restoration biological opinion. The chemicals listed in terms of biological opinion are unlikely to have long term persistence in the environment. Hughes worked with TNC and USFWS and came up with a solution to reference the service's restoration biological opinion in the TNC's minor amendment. Although herbicide will not be listed as a covered practice, a reference in the plan to herbicides that are unlikely to influence the rabbits will provide TNC regulatory assurance to continue their restoration efforts throughout the pygmy rabbit recovery emphasis area.

Sinlahekin Spring Cleaning: Maintenance Mechanic Boulger worked hard to remove old fencing material and other building project debris from the Chiliwist, McLoughlin Falls, and Sinlahekin wildlife areas. Aside from being an eyesore and a hazard to recreationists, this type of material poses a threat to deer and other large ungulates because of the potential for them to become entangled and injure themselves. Additionally, Assistant Manager Klehm spent time cleaning out last year's nesting material from the bluebird nesting boxes that are placed throughout the Sinlahekin Valley. Annual cleaning is important because ectoparasites (such as fleas and mites) can overwinter in the old nesting material. Without cleaning, high numbers of these organisms can be detrimental to spring nest success of returning birds who have depleted fat reserves from the stresses of winter. These nest boxes provide excellent, highly accessible birdwatching opportunities for new and old birders alike and help to supplement nesting cavity availability in mid-seral forests that have been managed.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Environmental Education Presentation: Biologist Fitkin proudly teamed up with his daughter, Amy to give a talk on climate change indicator species to around 250 people as part of the Methow Conservancy's first Tuesday lecture series. Not surprisingly, Amy carried the team and impressed the audience by filtering the topic through a place-based and social justice lens. Dad at least had pretty pictures.



Amy Fitkin and dad being introduced at a talk given for the Methow Conservancy – Photo by S. Fitkin

Wenatchee Sports Show: District Wildlife Biologist Emily Jeffreys participated with other WDFW staff members in the annual Wenatchee Sportsman's Show on Feb. 21-23 to provide outreach to hunters and other members of the public and answer questions regarding wildlife.



WDFW personnel tabling a booth at the Wenatchee Sportsman's Show - Photo by Emily Jeffreys

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

What was going on 20 years ago?

Okanogan County District: Continued winter carnivore camera survey work. The team also conducted a snow-tracking survey in Blackpine Basin and Goat Creek drainages. Saw a live lynx at a short-range on the flank of Goat Peak! Wrote a letter for the USFS in support of wildlife monitoring during the upcoming Tussock Moth Spray Program. The letter helped forest biologists secure \$60,000 in funding for that purpose. Worked on providing data and documentation for a lynx recovery plan. Met with the Trust for Public Lands to discuss upcoming hearing for Bonneville Power Administration early action money allocation. Will be testifying on behalf of the Arrowleaf proposal.



Winter retains a firm grip on Mount Gardner in the Methow Valley – Photo by S. Fitkin



A cougar takes it's turn on the rub tree while the bears hibernate caught on a WDFW remote camera



Bald Eagle on a fence near Sinlahekin headquarters – Photo by Wehmeyer



Group of mule deer on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area - Photo by Wehmeyer



Rough-legged hawk taking off at Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Photo by Justin Haug



American kestrel in elderberry at Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Photo by Justin Haug



Signaling the approach of spring, a Western Meadowlark returns to the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area - Photo by Justin Haug

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members continue feeding elk at Joe Watt and Robinson feed sites. Numbers fluctuate between 100 and 400 at Robinson and between 150-350 at Watt. Weather continues to be mild.





Elk feeding on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area



Elk capture to research hoof disease at Washington State University (WSU)

L.T. Murray staff members assisted with a second elk capture to study hoof disease at WSU.

The Sunnyside, Byron, Windmill and Mesa units of the Sunnyside Wildlife Area are great places to watch migrating waterfowl from now through May. There are currently many species of ducks, geese, and sandhill cranes.



Snow geese landing at the Windmill Unit

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Rodgers and natural resource technicians Wascisin and Byers attended a week-long training on waterfowl wing identification through the USFWS in Redding, California. The group processed 30,000 waterfowl wings at the workshop, identifying species, age, and sex.



Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area representing WDFW at The Pacific Flyway Wingbee

Oak Creek Wildlife Area personnel continued feeding at the Cowiche feed site. Currently, staff members are feeding over 1100 elk. This is down about 400 elk since the last report due to elk ranging out significant distances in search of new growth that is just beginning to occur. The entire area continues to be snow-free and high temperatures are in the 50s.

Staff members also continued feeding at the Oak Creek headquarters feed site. Elk numbers continue to hover around 500. Currently, there is no snow on the ground given the past several weeks of above-normal temperatures.

Oak Creek Wildlife Area personnel continue to feed elk at the Nile feed site. There have consistently been around 250 elk here of late, which is an increase from previous reporting periods.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett met with a landowner enrolled in the Hunting Access program to discuss a section of land that has been taken over with litter. The landowner and Hulett came up with a three-step process to clean up the site, deter future dumping and begin restoring the habitat. The landowner is very interested in this type of work and would enjoy seeing other types of recreational use of the property than just hunting. Hulett will also be changing the site from “Feel Free to Hunt” to “Register to Hunt.”

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber attended a mentored pheasant hunt for hunters that successfully passed their hunters education course in Pasco. This event was put on by Pheasants Forever and Limits Game Farm.



There was also a one-day youth waterfowl hunt on Feb. 1. This provided some great waterfowl hunting for those that participated.



These young hunters had a remarkable day at the Windmill Unit

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand conducted hazing operations in winter wheat fields to reduce damage impacts that are occurring from mule deer. The largest group of deer observed totaled 85. Digital images were taken of field conditions, at the request of Olympia headquarters, to document possible flooding or erosion damage to the fields. Hand continued to coordinate with landowners in the Kahlotus area experiencing deer in winter wheat fields and deployed master hunters from the Region 3 master hunter list. Two deer were removed by hunters.



Mule deer in a wheat field near Kahlotus

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett worked with a landowner on his **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** EQIP wildlife habitat grass and forb seeding. Since the land is currently United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic the landowner wants to use non-synthetic means to perform his pre-plant management. Grazing and using an organic herbicide were decided as the best way to prepare the ground for the upcoming seeding.

Forester Hartmann and Wildlife Area Manager Mackey attended the Tapash Winter Quarter meeting, providing an update on current and upcoming projects in the Tieton Watershed. Forester Hartmann continued marking leave trees on the Windy Point Commercial Thin project and assisted with winter feeding operations at the Nile.



Douglas-fir stand marked using the Individuals-Clumps-Openings (ICO) strategy

An ICO or Individuals, Clumps and Openings is a tree marking strategy designed to restore or maintain diverse spatial distributions on thinning projects. Clumps can range from two to fifteen plus trees, and percent targets are assigned to each unit depending on the desired “clumpiness” using inventory data. Stocking levels of a stand assign values such as distance between “individuals” depending on the desired post-thin condition. In this way, prescriptions are uniquely tailored to a given unit’s needs.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra presented antlers, skins, and skulls from local wildlife to a Pasco elementary K-6 elementary school for their annual STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) night. The newly acquired outreach materials using Public Affairs funding were very well received.



WDFW's outreach table at the elementary STEM night in Pasco

Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett spoke to a fifth-grade class about how humans influence natural cycles. The class learned about how adding or removing something from the food web could have ecological consequences and how they could do their part to minimize their impact on these natural cycles.

Approximately 100 fifth-grade students from the Naches Middle School visited the Oak Creek Wildlife Area in a single day and received volunteer-led truck tours during this period.

Additionally, a small group of Onalaska High School Future Farmers of America (FFA) students were provided a guided tour viewing bighorn sheep and a truck tour at the Oak Creek feed site.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin met with the manager and field crew manager of the Benton County Mosquito Control Board to review the plan for the 2020 mosquito season as well as updates on West Nile Virus and new equipment the Mosquito Control Board is using. Ferguson and Wascisin were also invited to a conference of the Northwest Mosquito Control Districts in Richland featuring guest speakers on the effects of West Nile Virus on wildlife, non-chemical means of mosquito control, and land management strategies to reduce mosquito populations. We are planning on attending in April

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 4

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

District 12 and White-nose Syndrome (WNS) Coordinator Tobin have been working with area citizens and public land managers regarding a spike in anecdotal reports of dead, sick or odd behavior bats. Recently one public land manager has been in contact with District 12 and WNS Coordinator Tobin regarding a number of dead bats, iteratively (greater than 30 within a month), as well as bats crawling around bat boxes, on building walls, out and about during the day (Myotis – not typical of those species to be so regularly active during the day) and falling to the ground from the roost boxes. Coordinator Tobin and state certified Wildlife Rehabilitator Meg Lunnum of Happy Valley Bats worked with that land manager to capture 15 bats from one of the boxes showing individual bats with odd daytime behavior. Every single bat showed clinical field signs of WNS. Happy Valley Bats is one of the wildlife rehabilitator facilities trialing captive treatment of WNS affected bats. Unfortunately, all but two of those 15 bats from the one site have died in treatment. The two remaining appear to be improving in health and showing less clinical signs of WNS.



A recently reported bat that has been noted flying around a yard for the past week in the greater Fall City area. One of a handful of similar public reports along with area local government reports.

Stanwood and Camano Islands Snow Goose and Birding Festival: Biologist Milner and Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) Avian Ecologist Gary Slater have co-authored and taught a beginning shorebird class for this festival for many years. Slater was unavailable this year, so Milner taught the basic identification portion of the class on Saturday morning, assisted by CNLM biologist Tim Leque who taught the counting estimation portion of the class. About 35 people attended and this year the weather cooperated so festival participants could get out and see birds in the greater Skagit and Stillaguamish Delta.



Bird watchers enjoying a sunny day at Fir Island Farms – Photo by J. Baker



Snow geese were easy to view for the festival

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Region 4 Private Lands Access Program Waterfowl Hunting Sites: The waterfowl season is over in Region 4, with the late snow goose season ending on Feb.18. Private Lands Access Program staff members have begun removing field signage and blinds in Whatcom County. The exceedingly wet field conditions following river flooding has made work difficult and muddy.



Natural Resource Technician Deyo enjoying a muddy ride to remove a waterfowl blind and field signage from a partner landowner property in Whatcom County

Presentation to Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT): Projects Coordinator Brokaw presented to staff members at the WSDOT Northwest Regional Headquarters Office on Leque Island and WDFW restoration projects. One of the focuses of the presentation was the importance of working with local stakeholders to identify features that are valuable to local communities to gain support for projects, such as recreation features.



Projects Coordinator Brokaw worked with staff members in the Capital Asset Management Program on permitting documents needed to build a boat launch near Leque Island in the City of Stanwood

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

District 12 provided for a class presentation regarding urban wildlife ecology, suburban/rural wildlife conflict reduction, legalities, and attracting desired species to a class of 40 community members associated with the Shadow Lake Nature Center see more information on this [website](#). The quiz in the presentation was – is this a nutria or a muskrat...everyone said muskrat (it was a nutria specimen). Discussions on where to report wildlife observations at the WDFW website (including exotic species) were had purposefully after the quiz.



Executive Director Joy Stevens discussing community conservation efforts and introducing WDFW speaker – Photo by WDFW

Career Fair -Working at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Why YOU Should! Joint outreach of Licensing, Habitat, Wildlife, Enforcement and Fish Science – Scriber Lake Alternative Learning High School: District 12 provided Wildlife Program outreach in collaboration with Habitat, Licensing, Enforcement, and Fish Science staff members. WDFW provided the same joint outreach talk to four separate sessions of high school students interested in potential work with WDFW and/or in the natural resource field in general. The collaboration went very well and was liked by interested students and staff.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (SWAAC): Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm the first Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Advisory Committee meeting held on Feb. 26. Twelve stakeholder and user groups are represented by the Committee. All are excited to work together on Snoqualmie Wildlife Area interests.

Annual Reporting: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm completed the annual NOVA Grading and Roads Project request for the 2020 grading season.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

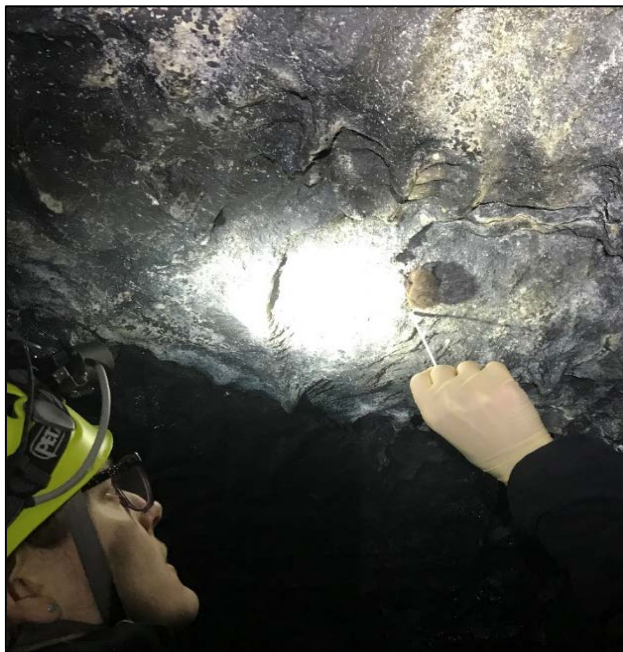
REGION 5

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Western Pond Turtle Annual Meeting: Biologists Wickhem and Bergh attended the annual coordination meeting for western pond turtles in Washington. The meeting is hosted by WDFW and partners working on western pond turtles in Washington including Woodland Park Zoo, Oregon Zoo, UFWS, USFS, Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), Shedd Aquarium, University of Illinois, Sustainability in Prisons Program, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, and turtle disease experts from across the country. WDFW personnel and partners present on the work that occurred in 2019 as well as plans for 2020. Coordination of work, as well as discussion of issues like shell disease, habitat restoration, head starting, and recovery goals, occurred during the meeting.

Bat Hibernacula Surveys: Biologists Holman and Bergh joined White-nose Syndrome (WNS) Coordinator Tobin for a survey of three caves near Mount Saint Helens. A crew of Forest Service staff members and volunteers also surveyed other caves that same day. Two of the caves surveyed are known as Townsend's big-eared bat hibernacula and one cave was targeted for WNS surveillance. One cave had 70 hibernating Townsend's big-eared bats and one myotis species while the other cave had no hibernating bats. Ten of the hibernating Townsend's big-eared bats were swabbed for WNS surveillance. Additionally, 25 locations were sampled in the third cave for WNS surveillance. Since WNS affects hibernating bats (though Townsend's big-eared bats are only thought to be carriers of the fungus that caused WNS and not affected by WNS), it is important to monitor hibernating bat populations as well as to conduct surveillance for WNS in hibernation locations. For more information on WNS please visit this [website](#).



WNS Coordinator Tobin swabs a big-eared bat for White Nose Syndrome



Biologist Holman and WNS Coordinator Tobin arrive at a cave entrance for a hibernacula survey - Photo by Eric Holman

Bat Check-in Attic: Biologist Stephens checked the attic space of a residence for the presence of bats. The residence is owned by WDFW and is located at the fish collection facility on the North Fork Toutle River. The residence is slated for demolition in a couple of months and bats have been observed flying into the attic during the summer months. It's likely this is a small maternity colony as the bats were not currently present. The opening to the attic was sealed off so that the bats will not reenter before the building is destroyed.

Oregon Spotted Frog Surveys: Biologists Wickhem and Bergh conducted the first informal survey for Oregon spotted frog egg masses outside of Trout Lake this week. They found eleven egg masses, marking the first time in at least recent memory (if not ever) that the frogs have started laying their eggs in February. Now that egg-laying has been confirmed for the season, a formal coordinated survey will be scheduled to cover the entire site. These surveys allow WDFW to estimate the population of this federally threatened species for the Trout Lake Creek watershed.



Mount Adams in the background



Biologist Bergh searching for egg masses

Eagle Rescue: Biologist Wickhem and Conflict Specialist Jacobsen responded to a call of an injured eagle next to the road outside Centerville. The reporting party said the juvenile bald eagle had been standing next to the road for at least 24 hours and had barely moved. The eagle appeared to have problems with its vision and was captured without incident and transported to a rehabilitation center. The rehabilitation veterinarian said the eagle likely would not have survived another day or night out in the wild. If the eagle can recover, it will be released back into the wild near where it was captured.



Biologist Wickhem after safely capturing the eagle



Rescued eagle at the rehab center

Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocations: Over the past several weeks, biologists Holman and Stephens along with wildlife conflict specialists Jacobsen and Aubrey and Diversity Section Species Lead Azerrad joined United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) staff members to capture and move Columbian white-tailed deer. The deer are being relocated from Tenasillahe Island to Deer Island. Tenasillahe is a unit of the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the deer and Deer Island is now held partially in conservation ownership through the Columbia Land Trust. Deer on Tenasillahe are near carrying capacity while Deer Island is mostly devoid of white-tails. The overall effort is designed to see if Deer Island will support a healthy population of Columbian white-tails. The opportunity to work directly with partners in the conservation of Columbian white-tails also allows for the exchange of ideas and collaboration with deer captures as the backdrop for the discussions. Additionally, the teamwork provides a chance to gain first-hand knowledge of multiple wildlife capture techniques including, cellphone monitored and triggered corral traps, drop nets, state of the art dart guns as well as blowguns. For more information on Columbian white-tailed deer visit the WDFW [website](#) or the USFWS [website](#).

Monthly Winter Elk Count on the Mudflow: Biologist Holman along with Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Wildermuth and Washington State University Intern Davidson counted and classified elk on the Mudflow Unit of the Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area. The survey is completed monthly during the winter and acts as an index of elk use on the Wildlife Area, winter severity, and roughly of elk abundance on the overall landscape. Survey conditions were very good with a calm overcast sky and light snow over fresh snow in the surrounding terrain. Two-hundred-ninety-six elk were observed on the survey with 245 classified. The resulting age and sex ratios were 32 calves to 100 cows to 137 bulls. The count and classifications were typical of February counts over the past several years.



Bull elk wintering on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area



Biologist Holman on Feb. 2020 Mudflow elk count



Elk herd wintering in the floodplain of the North Fork Toutle River on the Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument

Dusky Canada Goose Survey: Biologist Wickhem conducted a dusky goose survey in Clark County this week. Dusky geese are a protected subspecies of Canada goose, that breed in the Copper River Delta of Alaska and winter in the Willamette Valley of Oregon and along the lower Columbia in Oregon and Washington. During the summer, duskies are captured by biologists at their breeding grounds in Alaska and fitted with neck collars, each with a unique alpha-numeric code that can be read from a distance using a spotting scope or binoculars. When collars are sighted throughout the year, the collar number and location are reported to the USFWS, who can track the individual movements and migration routes of the collared geese. On this survey, Wickhem observed two dusky geese with red neck collars and recorded their codes and 34 uncollared duskies. Other species observed during the survey included: swans, several bald eagles, snow geese, sandhill cranes, American kestrels, several species of ducks, and a garter snake (in February?!).

Dusky Goose Survey: Biologist Bergh conducted her monthly survey for dusky Canada geese in Clark County. It was a great day for surveying as nearly every field she visited had geese of some variety. Four dusky goose neck collars and one cackling Canada goose collar with individual alphanumeric codes were observed and read. The collar read information will be turned into the USFWS for estimation of goose survival.



Red neck Collars on Dusky Canada Geese

Dusky Canada Goose Surveys: Biologists Holman and Stephens conducted dusky Canada goose surveys in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. The purpose of the surveys is to count dusky geese observed and read alphanumeric codes on any red collared duskies. 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. During the survey, dusky, cackling, Taverner's, white-fronted and western Canada geese were located and recorded. Additionally, Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey located a group of 12 dusky geese while recreating on the weekend. Four of the birds were collared and two collar codes were recorded.



Dusky Canada geese in Wahkiakum County



Western Canada geese in Wahkiakum County

Grouse Wing Bee: Biologists Wickhem, Bergh, and Stephens joined other WDFW biologists, ODFW biologists, and Ruffed Grouse Society members at a statewide wing bee. The purpose of the wing bee is to examine wings collected from hunters and determine the species, age, and sex of grouse that were harvested over the hunting season. During the one-day event, 960 wing and tail samples were processed.



Biologist Wickhem and others examining grouse wings



Blue grouse wing

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

I-5 Bridge Access: Someone was adamant to remove the toilet paper roll holder off the wall so access staff Rhodes and McKinlay drilled new holes and remounted the holder using anchors and concrete epoxy. While there, staff members also power washed the moss off the ADA parking spaces.



Vandalism



Power washing

Vancouver Lake Access: Access staff Rhodes and McKinlay made additional progress removing and clearing blackberries along the entrance road with the help of the Department of Corrections crew.



Removing and clearing blackberries

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Elk Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen talked to several landowners in Klickitat County regarding elk damage. With the mild winter, recent rains, and warmer temperatures, elk activity on freshly planted agricultural fields has increased. Damage permits were issued, master hunters were deployed, and hazing strategies were implemented to deter elk damage to agricultural crops.

Cougar Kittens: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and Officer Budai were contacted by a landowner in Cowlitz County whose neighbor had been observing a pair of cougar kittens in the yard over the last few days. The cougars were spending considerable time in the neighbor's driveway and the back yard as well. It was determined that the kittens were most likely orphaned and too young to survive on their own, so a plan was made to attempt to trap the kittens. Jacobsen, Aubrey, and Officer Budai placed two cougar traps at the residence with the assistance of the landowner and baited the traps with fresh deer meat. Trail cameras were installed in the vicinity to monitor the cougar behavior and to ensure that there was no adult cougar present with the kittens. Aubrey will monitor the traps.



Pair of cougar kittens in the landowner's driveway



Two cougar traps placed at the residence - Photo by Ami Davis

Nuisance Geese: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen received a call regarding a flock of over 100 Canada geese causing damage and leaving feces at a turf farm in Clark County. Jacobsen reviewed several options to deter the geese, including public hunting as well as non-lethal hazing options.

Injured Deer: Jacobsen was contacted by a concerned landowner in Skamania County regarding a deer with an injured back leg. It was determined that the deer was still mobile, and no action would be taken at this time, but the landowner said she would call back if the deer's condition worsened.

Beaver Complaint: A landowner contacted Jacobsen about nuisance beavers on a port property along the Columbia River in Klickitat County. The beavers were causing flooding issues on an undeveloped wetland property and cutting down the native trees in the wetland. A local wildlife

control operator has been unsuccessful at trapping the beavers. Advice was given on specific beaver-flood control measures that could be implemented to regulate the water level at the site.

Residential Skunks: Jacobsen was contacted by a landowner who was concerned about the skunks living under her several buildings and decks. Advice was given on evicting the skunks and on making modifications to the existing structures to prevent further use by skunks.

Wolf Observation Report: Jacobsen spoke with an individual who reported seeing a possible wolf in a residential area. Based on the information provided, the sighting was most likely of a domestic canine.

Elk Damage in Lewis County: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met and talked with several landowners in Lewis County about elk damage. There is a lot of flooding in the area resulting in elk having to spend more time anywhere they can find dry ground. A master hunter was deployed on a damage hunt to help address some of these issues. In one case, the landowner was issued a kill permit for elk damage to agricultural crops. Another property seemed like the perfect fit for the motion-activated Scary Man device. Aubrey will be coordinating with fellow WDFW employees to set up the device. Also, Aubrey met with two landowners in northern Lewis County experiencing issues with a herd of 30 elk. Advice was given to both landowners on ways to alleviate some of the damage being caused by elk. Aubrey will continue to work with the landowners going forward to address any ongoing issues.

Eagle Problems: Aubrey met with a homeowner experiencing a problem with bald eagles roosting in trees on their property and possibly killing chickens. Advice was given on ways to keep the chickens safe from the birds, as well as ways to potentially deter the birds from spending so much time in the trees on their property.

Goose Concerns: Aubrey visited with park managers about the number of geese spending time on and around public beaches and swimming areas. The managers believe the flocks of geese are residents and no longer migrate out of the area during summer months when they receive many complaints about the mess that large groups of geese leave. Advice and suggestions on hazing tactics and supplies were discussed, as well as other possible solutions to reduce the amount of time geese spend in these areas.

Injured Elk: Aubrey responded to a report of a sick elk that could no longer stand in a backyard in Cowlitz County. The elk was still in the backyard where it was originally reported when Aubrey arrived, however, it was up and moving around the yard. The animal had a noticeable limp but seemed to be moving well. Aubrey advised the reporting parties to keep an eye on the condition of the elk and to call again if the elk was no longer moving. Aubrey was contacted the next day and informed the elk had made its way out of the yard and was no longer in an area where the reporting party could locate it.

Nuisance Elk: Aubrey followed up on a contact originally made by law enforcement involving nuisance elk. Aubrey met with the individual who believes that a bull elk is ramming into her camper trailer, as well as causing damage to the garden plants on the property. Aubrey went over a variety of techniques to potentially dissuade the elk from using the area, including the possible use of a paintball gun or non-lethal shotgun ammunition. While there, Aubrey also covered basic chicken husbandry to answer some of the landowner's questions about that as well.

Cougar Trap Update: Aubrey checked the game cameras located on traps placed to attempt to capture two cougar kittens that had been reported. There was no activity on either of the cameras and no residents in the area had reported seeing the cougars since the day before the traps being set. Aubrey decided to remove the traps from the area with the assistance of Biologist Holman.

Bald Eagles Harassing Cattle: Aubrey was contacted by an individual who was having a problem with eagles harassing and attacking their newborn calves. Because of the multiple federal laws protecting eagles, Aubrey contacted the United States Fish and Wildlife Services as well as the United States Department of Agriculture to get in contact with the individual regarding the next steps they need to take to protect their livestock from the eagles. For more information on eagle depredation issues, please visit this [website](#).

Lewis County Damage Hunt: Aubrey deployed a Master Hunter on a damage hunt for elk. With the early green-up, a producer was consistently having a group of elk in their fields. The hunter was deployed to keep pressure on the elk and discourage them from visiting the fields.

Goat Injury: Aubrey responded to an area where a goat was injured overnight. The goat was in an enclosure with two guard dogs present. Because the goat was alive and mobile, it was difficult to get a good look at the injuries to determine what may have caused them. Aubrey left a camera in the area and will monitor the situation.

4) Conserving Natural Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area Tree Plantings: Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald, Assistant Manager Hawk, and Technician Fox have been busy planting about 3,000 trees and shrubs on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. These plantings have consisted of black cottonwood, red and blue elderberry, serviceberry, pacific crabapple, snowberry, and wild rose, which were planted at five different sites and mixed in with previous years plantings to replace plants that had not survived. Most of these plants will need tree tubes and weed mats placed around them to increase their chances of survival. Over the past twelve years, more than 60,000 trees and shrubs have been planted at Shillapoo to enhance riparian and oak prairie habitats.

Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Pond Restoration: Manager Hauswald and Assistant Manager Wildermuth visited the Hoffstadt Unit to check on a recently repaired water control structure on an old holding structure. The pond has refilled with water from the recent rain and, because of the slope of the bottom of the pond, the depth gradually increases from around two feet at the inlet to over nine feet at the outflow. The area should provide valuable wetland habitat well into the dryer months.



Before and after photos of the water control structure and pond on the Hoffstadt Unit

Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area Tree Cages: Assistant Manager Wildermuth and volunteer Davidson finished building and placing 150 tree cages on the Cedar Creek Unit. The young trees were planted by wildlife area personnel several years ago and have since outgrown the small tree tubes and are being browsed by deer and elk. The tree cages will protect the trees as they grow tall enough to survive the browsing. The trees will eventually provide cover and forage for a range of wildlife species.



Volunteer Davidson placing tree cages on young trees at the Cedar Creek Unit

Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area Mudflow Tree Planting: Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald and Technician Fox planted 500 red alder trees along the bank of the North Fork Toutle River in the Mudflow Unit. The trees were planted in an area where the bank had recently been swept away by high water, in hopes of establishing a riparian area that will stabilize the slope along the river.

Winter Storm brings Flooding to Cowlitz Wildlife Area: Large amounts of rain combined with snowmelt has caused wide-scale flooding in Lewis County. Also, the Cowlitz River above the Cowlitz Falls Dam is causing extreme flooding and preventing access to the Spears Unit of the wildlife area. The Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff members would like to remind people to obey road closures due to flooding. Even if you think the water is not deep, the roadway can be compromised by currents and erosion. It is better to turnaround and go around if you can. So, be safe everyone!



Cowlitz River at the US 131 Bridge in Randle Lake Creek at Temple Road in Morton

Klickitat Wildlife Area Soda Springs Unit Patrol: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven checked on road gates and road conditions, collected litter, followed up on a report of a downed tree in a campground and checked a couple of vehicles for Discover Passes. She also walked along property lines on the south end of the unit to check conditions of fences and see how the crops are doing in the agricultural fields. Along with the 29 empty beer and pop cans that were

collected at scattered locations, she picked up a case (less than two cans) of Bud Light stashed along a road. Van Leuven would have preferred to have found a case of frappuccinos!

Klickitat Wildlife Area Grazing Permit Environmental Review: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven, District Wildlife Biologist Bergh, District Habitat Biologist Johnson, District Fish Biologist Gardner, and Range Ecologist Burnham visited the Frey grazing permit area to check on the condition of the property in preparation for the renewal of the permit. The property hosts oak woodlands, open grassy hillsides, and rocky streambeds that had water in them at the time of the visit. Hiking around to view the property afforded plenty of opportunities to debate and discuss the qualities of the habitat.



Tour of Grazing Permit

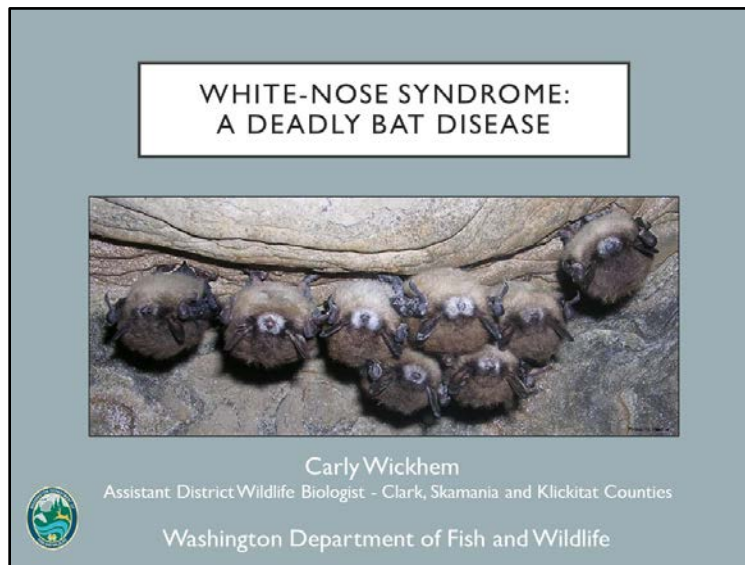
Klickitat Wildlife Area Weed Control: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven scouted a route for ATV access to a remote part of the wildlife area. This area was found to have an infestation of yellow starthistle and rush skeletonweed a couple of years ago, but no weed control work could be done due to difficult access. However, after planning with adjacent landowners, Van Leuven escorted a county weed control official to the site and he was able to treat the area with herbicide at an early stage of growth, which is the most effective time to do it.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Visit to Larch Correctional Center: Biologist Wickhem and Coordinator Pushee of the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) visited western pond turtles that are being cared for by inmate technicians at Larch Corrections Center (LCC) in Yacolt, Washington. The turtles were captured at a study site in the Columbia River Gorge last July and sent to the Oregon Zoo to be treated for shell disease. Once treatment was completed, they were transferred to LCC to recover from treatment until they are ready for release sometime this summer. Transferring the turtles to LCC allows the Oregon Zoo to use their limited space to care for other animals and gives inmates at LCC an opportunity to learn about this state-listed species. The inmate technicians are responsible for feeding, changing out water, and closely monitoring the health of each turtle. On this visit, all turtles were active, eating regularly and maintaining a healthy weight which is a good sign that they are on schedule for release. The SPP is a partnership between The Evergreen State College and the Washington State Department of Corrections that allows incarcerated individuals to participate in environmental conservation projects. For more information, please visit this [website](#).

Bullfrog Removal Presentation: Biologist Bergh and bullfrog removal contractor Lee Lynn and Michel Thompson gave a presentation at the Columbia Gorge Cooperative Weed Management Association annual meeting in Stevenson. The presentation outlined the need for bullfrog removal to protect juvenile western pond turtles, techniques used and results to date at two sites in the Columbia River Gorge. The talk was well received by the large audience who also had a lot of great questions.

White-Nose Syndrome Presentation: Biologist Wickhem gave a presentation on bats and white-nose syndrome to administrative and regional staff members from Wildlife, Fish, and Habitat programs. The presentation focused on threats to bats, the spread of the white-nose syndrome, WDFW's white-nose syndrome strategy plan and how staff members can help spread the word about this deadly disease. The audience had several good questions, and many were interested in learning more about bats and volunteering on WDFW's bat monitoring in the future. For more information on white-nose syndrome in Washington bats, please visit our [website](#), where you can also report sick or dead bats or an observation/location of a bat colony. For additional information on white-nose syndrome, including updates on new detections of the disease throughout the country, visit this [website](#).



White-Nose Syndrome Presentation

Responses to Public Reports of Elk with Hoof Disease: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey, Biologist Holman, Veterinarian Mansfield, as well as regional customer service and enforcement personnel responded to several public reports of elk with TAHD. These situations are addressed on a case by case basis and when necessary a site visit is conducted. To learn more about TAHD in elk visit the WDFW [website](#) or the Washington State University [website](#).

Watershed Stewardship Class Presentation: Biologist Stephens presented to a class hosted by the Clark County Conservation District. The audience was made up of Clark County landowners (rural and suburban) who were interested in their watersheds and how to protect or enhance them. The presentation highlighted local wildlife and how to make a property more wildlife friendly. The group was also able to view various educational props including pelts, track and scat casts, and skulls.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

New Supervisor Training: Wildlife Conflict Specialist and Private Lands Biologist Jacobsen attended a new supervisor training in Olympia.

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Goose Surveys #6 and #7: Biologist Michaelis conducted two more goose surveys in Pacific County. High numbers of dusky Canada geese were observed.

02/11/2020	Cackler	# Banded	Aleutian	# Banded	Tav/Lesser	# Banded	Dusky	# Banded	Western	# Banded	Vancouver	# Banded	GWF	Snow	Unknown/Other	Totals
Location																
South Pacific County	1,130	0	1	0	432	0	1,328	29	69	0	0	0	19	0	127	
Totals:	1,130	0	1	0	432	0	1,328	29	69	0	0	0	19	0	127	3,106

A total of twenty-nine marked dusky Canada geese were observed. While this number still falls short of the forty-plus marked number, there are many new codes never observed. These observations aid in the annual estimate of dusky survival and help us to understand their entire range.

02/26/2020	Cackler	# Banded	Aleutian	# Banded	Tav/Lesser	# Banded	Dusky	# Banded	Western	# Banded	Vancouver	# Banded	GWF	Snow	Unknown/Other	Totals
Location																
South Pacific County	0	0	0	0	313	0	1,164	8	36	0	0	0	0	5	477	
Totals:	0	0	0	0	313	0	1,164	8	36	0	0	0	0	5	477	1,995

Very mild weather during the second survey on Feb. 26 may have resulted in lower numbers of total geese observed compared to two weeks prior. Also, two locations along the Long Beach Peninsula were fogged in, preventing surveying. Fewer numbers of marked dusky Canada geese were observed as well.

Biologist Sundstrom completed the first half of the February biweekly dusky goose surveys in Grays Harbor and north Pacific counties. Only a fraction of dusky red collars were observed compared to incidental collar observations, which are conducted while performing goose hunter checks.

FEBRUARY																
2/11/20	Cackler	# Banded	Aleutian	# Banded	Tay/Lesser	# Banded	Dusky	# Banded	Western	# Banded	Vancouver	# Banded	GWF	Snow	Unknown/Other	Totals
Location																
Grays Harbor County	706		0		1143		463	1	395		0		0	0	0	2,707
North Pacific County	1,140		0		976		1,500	2	2		0		25	0	0	3,643
Totals:	1,846	0	0	0	2,119	0	1,963	3	397	0	0	0	25	0	0	6,350

Puget Sound Assessment and Monitoring Program Surveys: Biologist Michaelis assisted Sea Duck Specialist Evenson and Biologist Hamer with conducting four aerial surveys in the northern part of Puget Sound. Surveys are conducted from a DE Havilland Beaver floatplane which, are very durable and safe airplanes. During these surveys, all species are identified and enumerated within a defined transect width. Many sea ducks were observed including long-tailed, harlequin, scoters and buffleheads. Three different species of loons; red-throated, pacific, and common, were observed particularly in the areas around the San Juan Islands and southern Georgia Strait.

Along with seabirds, some harbor porpoises, California sea lions, Stellar sea lions, and harbor seals were observed as well. One group of over 30 harbor porpoises was seen near the western portion of Stewart Island. Audio recorded data was transcribed onto an excel database.

These surveys have been conducted annually since 1992 and represent a very detailed look at the number and type of species over-wintering in Washington waters.

Matheny Elk Habitat: Eyes in the Woods held another volunteer work party for the Matheny Elk Habitat Project. The weather was forecasted to be less than perfect, so participation was low. Still, eight volunteers participated, and the weather was better than expected. They got a lot done as usual and had fun doing it.



Group photo



Hiking to work site about 3/4 of a mile in



Passing through a previously treated area



Volunteers at work



Volunteer working his way through the slash



Volunteers found a great place to store the saws for the night

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Goose Hunter Checks: Biologist Sundstrom continues to search for goose hunters to field check throughout Grays Harbor and Pacific counties but it has not been easy. Hunter participation is low in the usual and known hunting areas. When contacts have been made, the usual tally of geese harvested is zero.

Dump Sites: Two very long days were spent in Jefferson County on private timberland property cleaning up four dumpsites, all but one were located behind locked gates. Site 1 took Biologist Sundstrom and Natural Resource Technician Tupen nearly four hours to clean up. This site was especially troublesome due to many discarded hypodermic needles. Needles were located inside, on top, sandwiched between, and under nearly every piece of garbage, the trash had to be picked up with grabbers and not by hand. The trash that needed to be picked up by hand had to be carefully inspected for needles before it could be removed. Site 2 was not nearly as large a dump site, but no less dangerous as discarded hypodermic needles were found throughout the trash. The last two dumpsites were virtually ‘needle-free’ but Site 3 was much larger and filled the dump trailer that was needed for the cleanup. Site 4 was small and only took about an hour.



Site 1 before (left photo) and after (right photo)



Hundreds of hypodermic needles – obvious and hidden



Site 2 before (left photo) and after (right photo)



Site 3 at Rocktogo Road in Jefferson County. The large heavy desk was chain-sawed into smaller pieces so it and the rest of the garbage would fit into the dump trailer

Wildlife Area Maintenance: The Olympic wildlife crew has been mowing scotch broom at the new Grayland acquisition. First to be mowed were the roads and spurs, with a few to be mowed after further exploration. The crew is currently mowing dense areas of scotch broom which are on accessible and relatively flat ground. Some of these areas appear to have been maintained at one time. Some of this scotch broom is considered old-growth and upwards of 12 feet high.



Assistant Manager Gallegos, 5 foot 8 inches, scotch broom 12 foot plus

Discoveries so far consist of a couple of abandoned homeless encampments which they are currently working with Grays Harbor County litter control for assistance cleaning up. Also discovered was a pile of old big skidder type tires, approximately six to eight tires which they are hoping to re-purpose and re-use in other fashions.



Leftover from homeless encampment

There does seem to be lots of use by the public and all contacts have been positive, and people seem to be happy with the progress so far.



After mowing scotch broom

Department of Natural Resources Access: Biologist Michaelis spent another day near Forks, field checking accessibility into Department of Natural Resource (DNR) lands in Game Management Units 602 (Dickey). Inclement weather with high rainfall and the instability of slopes prevented Michaelis from going too far into these remote areas. Areas on the northwest periphery of the Dickey GMU were investigated.

Storm Damage: Cleanup of recent storms is continuing at this time. Water flows ripped apart parking lots and entrance roads. High water deposited huge amounts of logs, debris, and silt on access launch ramps making them unusable. Staff members are and will continue to address issues of this kind in the following weeks.



Nisqually River Before



Nisqually River After



Humptulips River Before



Humptulips River After



Chehalis River Fuller Bridge



Bogachiel River Leyendecker

Pleasant Harbor: Trees blew down, damaging a guardrail and depositing debris all over the entrance road. Using the tractor, the crew spent three hours performing debris removal and clean up.

Other Work Performed: At Lake Saint Claire (Thurston County) a dump pile was discovered and removed. At Long Lake (Kitsap County) an abandoned boat was cleared by enforcement and was removed. The removal cost was \$708.50. Dumping of abandoned vehicles and vessels continues to be a real issue with staff time and funding.



3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.