

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

January 16 to 31, 2021

DIVERSITY DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

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**

Nothing for this installment.

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

Outreach Meeting: Program Specialist Trenda met with outreach staff members throughout the agency to discuss potential future actions, including how best to communicate with the public as the pandemic continues. The group talked about exploring partnerships, developing web content, and putting together internal materials for others to reference.

2021 Northwest Land Camp: The 2021 Northwest Land Camp is going to be a virtual experience, and Program Specialist Trenda, along with Lands Division Manager Wilkerson, Regional Director Lee, Regional Director Pozzanghera, and Communications Consultant Lehman, submitted a proposal for WDFW to host a workshop. The workshop would focus on different ways to talk about public lands, as well as utilizing new tools to tell the stories around the land.

The Northwest Land Camp focuses on relationship building, peer learning, and dynamic and interactive workshops to further the work of Northwest land trusts and conservationists.

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Falconry: Biologist Lowe banded a female goshawk that was captured by a Spokane area falconer.



Juvenile goshawk to be trained for falconry receives an identifying leg band

Predator-Prey Project Mortality Investigation: Biologists Prince and Turnock contacted a landowner to perform a field necropsy on a white-tailed doe that sent a mortality signal through the GPS collar deployed as part of the predator-prey project. Upon encountering the deceased doe, the biologists looked for sign that might indicate a cause of death. Ultimately the biologists concluded that the doe had likely died of rumen acidosis as a result of being fed corn. Samples will be submitted to the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (WADDL) before confirming this result.

Bats: Biologists Atamian and Lowe participated in a meeting with biologists statewide to discuss past and upcoming bat monitoring activities, including the NABat project, colony recon surveys, and white-nose syndrome surveillance.

Biologists Atamian and Lowe visited an abandoned and partially collapsed railroad tunnel on the Palouse River near Colfax to check for bat use as a winter hibernaculum. The owner of the tunnel had reported seeing a few bats on a hike there earlier in the year and came along on the visit. No bats were observed inside the tunnel and no evidence of significant summer use (i.e., guano piles) was found.



Abandoned railroad tunnel near Colfax investigated as potential bat hibernaculum

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Asotin Creek Target Shooting Range: Wildlife area staff members discovered vandalism and excessive garbage left at the Asotin Creek Target Shooting Range on January 25. Several holes were shot in the shooting bench shack with a shotgun including one through the roof and another in the direction of the county road. Wildlife Area Manager Bob Dice posted the range closed the next day and it has remained closed since then. The range will be opened when it can be posted with new range rules signs that reflect new agency target shooting rules.



Asotin Creek Target Shooting Range closed. Shotgun blast holes in the shooting bench shack

Access Area Question: A neighbor of the Liberty Lake Access Area contacted WDFW about boaters visiting the site only to find it's closed in winter, then having a hard time turning around to leave, even using other neighbors' driveways to make the turn. The reporting party asked if a sign could be posted back along the street, along the county right-of-way, to minimize the problem. After consultation with Access Supervisor Daniel Dziekan and Complex Manager Juli Anderson, Region 1 Real Estate Specialist Jerrod Ploof contacted a Spokane County public works representative. This person recalled there once was such a sign posted with seasonal ramp closure dates. He stated he'll have another sign made, and it may be posted as soon as a few weeks from now. This is a serendipitous solution for all involved.



The approach to Liberty Lake Access site. Note the sign/post under which access site open/close dates will be posted. The arrow further up the road shows the spot where disappointed winter boaters have been turning around

Access Sites and Parking Lots: Wynn Stallcop has been hauling quite a bit of gravel this winter to various access sites and parking areas throughout the wildlife area complex. Many historically muddy sites now have a layer of gravel on them which should make for a better user experience for the public.



The old schoolhouse parking area on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area getting a layer of gravel

Dead Steer: WDFW conflict and enforcement staff members investigated a reported steer carcass found in Columbia County. Based upon the evidence examined, a finding of probable wolf depredation was assigned.



Remains of a steer carcass in Columbia County

Non-lethal Tools and Deterrents: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb worked on gathering information through industry and entrepreneurial professionals about emerging technologies that have potential to assist in future conflict management tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Cloverland Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spent one day in the Cloverland area checking for elk activity this week. While in the area, Wade was contacted by a group of hunters who had been hunting the area and were having very little luck finding elk. After talking with the hunters, Wade located a group of elk that has been damaging crops during the nighttime hours and then retreating to property that does not allow hunting access during the day. Wade passed the information regarding the herd of elk onto the hunters and offered advice on where to set up to have a chance at harvesting an elk if they moved before dark. Later that evening, Wade was contacted by one of the hunters to let him know that the elk had moved shortly before the end of shooting hours and two young hunters in the group had successfully harvested elk, while pushing the remaining elk away from the commercial crops in the area.



A young hunter after harvesting an elk in the Cloverland area

File Updates: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked on updating current landowner access files to include past files recently obtained. One landowner was identified as having an access agreement with WDFW since 1958.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Pilot Project Review: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett continued to work on pilot projects to deploy in areas with wolf-livestock interactions. Bennett also participated in a small group working on a redesign of a radio activated guard device.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Teamwork: Biologist Baarstad and Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Turnock discussed opportunities to use duck stamp funds on private lands in District 1.

Donation: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley received a call from a landowner enrolled in WDFW's Feel Free to Hunt program and who owns the property where current WDFW habitat projects have been planted as well as habitat work done by the local Pheasants Forever chapter. The landowner donated two thousand dollars to the Pheasants Forever chapter as she appreciates all the work done, individually and coordinated, from both organizations in creating habitat for wildlife.

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.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Mount Hull Bighorn Sheep Herd: The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR) is leading an effort to deploy radio collars on Mt. Hull bighorn sheep to better monitor the herd. Biologist Heinlen spearheaded a coordination effort between CTCR and WDFW staff members for the project and was able to secure several additional radio collars and provide disease sampling kits for the effort. The team effort is coming together nicely with the helicopter net gun capture operation planned for mid-to-late February 2021.



Mount Hull bighorn sheep – Photo by S. Fitkin

Washington Predator-Prey Project: Radio collars deployed on mule deer in the Predator Prey Project include a drop-off function programmed to release the collar from the animal at a pre-set time. Collars deployed in 2017 are now reaching their programmed drop-off time. So far, six of the eight expected to drop off at the end of January have sent the expected mortality signal. Biologists Heinlen and Fitkin, with help from WDFW volunteer Fischer, have begun the arduous task of retrieving these dropped radio collars thus making them available for redeployment.



Success! Dropped collar found – Photo by J. Heinlen



WDFW volunteer Fischer making the long snowshoe trip out after a successful collar recovery effort and Biologist Fitkin with the prize – Photo by J. Heinlen and S. Fitkin

Population Monitoring-Winter Burrow Surveys: Each winter, we conduct active burrow surveys/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. Our current priority is to complete surveys on suspected occupied areas in the Sagebrush Flat population. This population experienced a 90 percent decline over the past two years. We finally had a good snowfall and received ample support from Region 2 district biologists, private lands biologists, and wildlife area staff members to help complete burrow surveys during this brief window of snow cover. We additionally had assistance from University of Idaho student volunteer groups coordinated by our graduate student Stacey Nerkowski. We completed nearly all the high priority areas and had great snow conditions, however we found very few active burrows. We collected nearly 30 samples from five burrow sites. We will continue to survey portions of formerly occupied areas on the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area as conditions persist.

Media: Coordinator Gallie took reporters from the Wenatchee World and Public Affairs Specialist Lehman out to see recovery efforts in the Beezley Hills area. We checked out several areas that are showing promising sign in the wild and acclimation pens (which have been breached for about a month now). We had some good luck with a photogenic rabbit that remained out of its burrow for several minutes allowing some good videography and even some selfies.



*Biologist Gallie successfully implementing a selfie with a pygmy rabbit. Try and find it.
Warning- this should only be attempted by professionals*

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Primitive Boat Launch Maintenance: Water Access Manager Harmon and Assistant Manager Steele addressed a concern brought on by the public about several primitive boat launches at Winchester Lake being too “primitive.” Easy fix! To solve the problem multiple loads of rock were brought in, dumped, and smoothed out for better access in and out of the water.



Road 3 northeast launch (before) – Photo by Manager Harmon



Road 3 northeast launch (after) – Photo by Manager Harmon



Road 2 northeast launch (before) – Photo by Manager Harmon



Road 2 northeast launch (after) – Photo by Manager Harmon

NOVA Trails Planning Grant: Lands Operations Manager Finger finalized and submitted a grant proposal seeking funding for trails management at Quincy Lakes Unit. Approximately half of the grant funding will go towards cultural resource survey needs; much of the remainder will be used to support our federal partners with NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) compliance.

Recreation Impacts Working Group Meeting: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug participated in a conference call with the Recreation Impacts Working Group to discuss Washington State Parks' Land Classification System and how a similar system could be implemented on WDFW lands to direct recreation use on those areas. Environmental Planner Jatczak invited WA State Parks Assistant Director Peter Herzog to present how their system was developed, how it's being implemented across the state, and the benefits and difficulties with such a system. Herzog presented very useful information and provided the group with much to discuss.

Target Shooting Rule Change Implementation: Lands Operations Manager Finger coordinated between staff members, PAO, and other engaged staff members to work through signage needs for the implementation of the rule change. Finger worked with Eidson and PAO to develop signs prohibiting target shooting in English and Spanish that can be placed in areas with significant safety concerns and no backstop. Finger worked with Fox and PAO to develop a sign which informs recreationists that the only target shooting that will be allowed in Swakane Canyon is at the designated target shooting area, again to address safety and resource damage concerns.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Mule Deer: Biologist Rowan created a database table for storing canal survey data and entered data from past few surveys. This is not an ideal method to survey for deer entrapped or dead in the canals due to limited visibility of the canal bottom while driving the roads, but it is a rapid method that offers some limited trend data. One live deer fawn, one carcass, and one femur bone that may have been from a deer were seen. Rowan also submitted a brief proposal for wildlife crossing structures in a region of the canal system where deer are often entrapped. This would utilize bridges that already exist while encouraging deer and other wildlife use through making them more natural-looking.



A deer fawn trapped in the canal and accounted for during survey. While canal walls don't always look steep, they are slick with ice, wet vegetation, and an algal slime that prohibits deer from gaining traction – Photo by Rowan

Turkey Trouble: Specialist Heilhecker received a call from a landowner about hunting turkeys within city limits. The neighboring orchard is feeding birds which has caused a large gathering of turkeys. The landowner was interested in either depredation tags or his eligibility to hunt during the regular hunting seasons. Specialist Heilhecker informed the landowner that damage tags were for agricultural damage and not for nuisance bird feeding. He could, however, hunt during the regular turkey season using archery, as the city ordinance allows.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Trout Unlimited Meeting: Lands Operations Manager Finger, Wildlife Area Manager Peterson, Trout Unlimited, the Foster Creek Conservation District, and a private landowner in the west Foster Creek area participated in a conference call to discuss potential partnerships for habitat improvement projects and grant opportunities.

Pearl Hill Fire FEMA Grant: Lands Operations Manager Finger worked with budget and contracts staff members to provide a letter of confirmation of \$110k of match contribution (post-fire restoration funding) to the Foster Creek Conservation Districts Pearl Hill FEMA grant proposal. With much help from Wildlife Area Manager Peterson and Assistant Manager Blake, we also provided the Foster Creek Conservation District (FCCD) with restoration and slope stabilization proposals which could potentially bring in additional funds for work within two miles of the City of Bridgeport.

Douglas County Sage Grouse Initiative Landowner Assistance: Private Lands Biologist Braaten met with a landowner to discuss a Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) project that requires buried irrigation polypipe across three State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) parcels to make his grazing more efficient. Private Lands Biologists will write a letter of support and justification to allow action with minor mitigation. Two-inch polypipe will be laid below and across about one mile of SAFE CRP grass using dozer poly pipe layer that causes minimal disturbance compared to other pipelaying methods. The landowner will reseed approximately three acres of CRP seed on disturbed areas. Project actions will take place outside of sage grouse nesting period and fire seasons (late fall installation in 2021). This project will allow landowner to efficiently graze cattle on several pastures using Sage Grouse Initiative rest rotational guidelines. Removal of windmills and some fencing will also occur to reduce threats to sage grouse. The WDFW recommendation will go to the Douglas County Farm Service Agency (FSA) Oversight Committee for consideration in March 2021.



Windmill to be removed to reduce threats to Sage grouse – Photo by Braaten

Grant County Habitat Project Proposal: Biologist Hughes met with a landowner and his family who are interested in developing and enhancing habitat for waterfowl and pheasants on their property. Hughes discussed timing and habitat enhancement methods. The landowner has several small ponds of standing water on the property. Hughes provided ideas on locations for trees/shrubs, food plots, and irrigated and non-irrigated native grass mixes for sections of the property. Different funding options were discussed; the landowner is planning to reach out to Grant County Conservation District for potential cost share to help fund some restoration efforts.

Douglas County Habitat Project Proposal: Private Lands Biologists worked with a private landowner to secure a location for a new habitat enhancement project which will restore approximately 12 acres of riparian habitat in north Douglas County. The project area is adjacent to the WDFW Big Bend Wildlife Area and will directly benefit sharp-tailed grouse which are located on the property. Plans are to plant approximately 2500 trees/shrubs.



Future riparian habitat project location in Douglas County

– Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW

Methow Salmon Recovery – Sugar Project Area: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug took part in a conference call to discuss potential future salmon recovery projects on the Methow River near our M2 property north of Twisp. Habitat and Fish Program staff members provided great input to their proposed project which was following up by an internal meeting to discuss in further detail. From a land’s management perspective, concerns of access, land use and adjacent ownership impacts were raised and will be addressed in the proceeding steps. Much of the input and guidance will be provided by Habitat and Fish Program staff members as the discussion moves forward.

Eder Unit Cleanup: Mr. Eder has begun the process to clean up the famous “boneyard” on the Charles and Mary Eder units so that WDFW can get the farming operation, including 200 acres of irrigated alfalfa, back up and running. A scrap metal contractor has been hired to remove about 12 acres of accumulated farm equipment, vehicles, buses, cement mixers, and various other farming debris. The contractor is loading and hauling the material to Snitzer Steel in Tacoma. All metal material should be removed by this spring.

Okanogan County Emergency Grazing Discussion: Lands Operations Manager Haug led a discussion to determine whether a formal, multijurisdictional structure is warranted in managing emergency grazing requests following wildfire events in Okanogan County. On the call were representatives from the DNR, USFS Tonasket and Methow RD, Conservation District, NRCS, and Methow Conservancy. Also representing the agency were Range Specialist Burnham and Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Manager Wehmeyer. Each representative gave an overview of how they handle post-wildfire grazing requests and those displaced by events. The meeting spawned enough interest to continue the discussion and begin to formalize a plan on how the group can work together to aid those who need it.

Chester Butte Acquisition: Lands Operations Manager Finger and acting Regional Director Livingston met with Douglas County Commissioners via Zoom. Finger presented the details of the proposed Dormaier acquisition. The proposal did not raise any significant concerns with the commissioners and most of the discussion was centered on the proposed greater sage-grouse up listing. Lands Operations Manager Finger participated in a meeting led by Wildlife Area Management Planning Coordinator Vigue and attended by USFWS to determine the best path forward for seeking Section 6 funding for the acquisition of the Dormaier section on Chester Butte. This section, once recovered from the Pearl Hill Fire, has tremendous potential to provide habitat important to the conservation of federally endangered pygmy rabbit and the state threatened, and under consideration for uplisting, greater sage-grouse, as well as other species of special status.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Wolf Internal Group Meeting Facilitation: Specialist Heilhecker led a wolf internal group subcommittee meeting regarding livestock injuries. The committee set possible sideboards as to what constitutes a probable or confirmed livestock injury. The sideboards are meant to re-emphasize statewide consistency in depredation investigation. The notes taken during the meeting will be sent to all wolf internal group members to provide input.

Herman Lake Culvert: Assistant Manager Steele is waging war with a beaver yet again. This time the pesky critter is working hard to plug the outflow culvert at Herman Lake. A private landowner (rancher) downstream from this culvert depends on this water for his cattle.



Herman Lake culvert post-cleanout, full flow – Photo by Jake Steele

7) Other



A very photogenic bobcat posed for a photo for the Troyer and Carlson families over the weekend. This bobcat was feeding on a roadkill deer carcass on the edge of a neighborhood near downtown Winthrop – Photo by Lisa Carlson of Moscow, Idaho



Bare slopes above Blue Lake on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area before the next round of snow – Photo by Justin Haug



Frozen Fish Lake on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area – Photo by Justin Haug



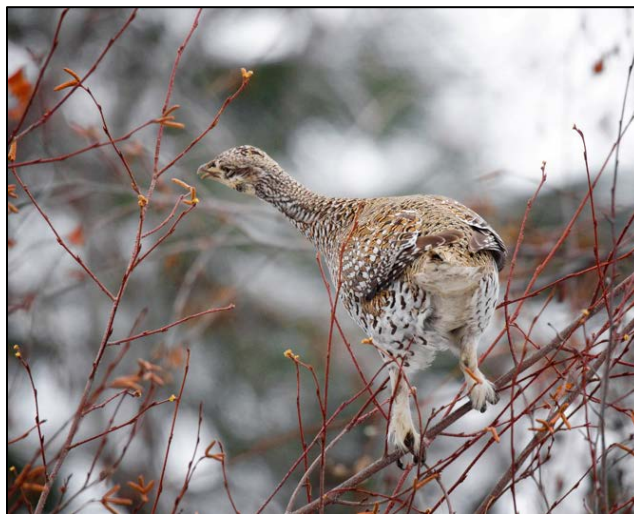
Common redpolls in water birch east of Tonasket – Photo by Justin Haug



Sharp-tailed grouse in water birch east of Tonasket – Photo by Justin Haug



Great camo. Sharp-tailed grouse in water birch east of Tonasket – Photo by Justin Haug



Sharp-tailed grouse feeding in water birch east of Tonasket – Photo by Justin Haug

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Wenas Wildlife Area: Staff members continue elk feeding at Mellotte. Feeding remains a challenge; the feed site was one of the areas that burned hot during the Evan's fire, leaving loose soils and no vegetation. The warm, wet weather has compounded the problem and getting around in feed site is difficult at best. Weekend count was around 450 head of elk.

The fencing contractor that is rebuilding elk fence has a crew are working their way west from the Mellotte area and a second crew west of the Calvert/Hoover corner working west towards Hardy Canyon.

Managing Wildlife Populations: A late January snowstorm concentrated bighorn sheep at the Clemans feed site. Oak Creek Wildlife Area Manager Mackey and District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz to the opportunity to count and watch for signs of pneumonia. Dead and sick sheep were reported in early October. Testing confirmed *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (MOVI) in roughly 90 percent of bighorn sheep sampled in early November. MOVI can cause high mortality in bighorn sheep and there were abundant reports of sick and dead sheep in October and November. There were roughly 20 known bighorn sheep that died in fall, mostly lambs and adult rams.

The count found 190 bighorn sheep on or near the feed site, which was normal the winter conditions. Combining what was reported/found dead and the counts, it appears that overall mortality to date has been light for a MOVI outbreak, with lambs and adult rams suffering the majority of the mortality. No symptoms of severe pneumonia were observed in sheep at the feed site. It appears that the worst of the initial outbreak may have passed. Long-term, the main concern is continued with the current outbreak is low lamb survival.

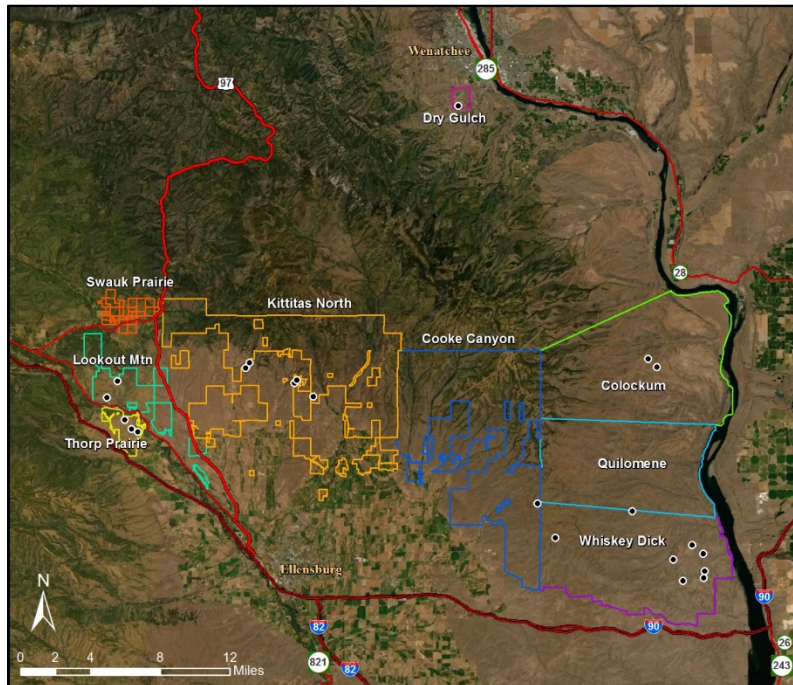


Clemans Mountain bighorn sheep at the feed site

Sage Grouse Populations: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz proposed raven control on the Yakima Training Center (YTC) to help sage grouse. The 2020 spring population estimate was 78 birds. Sage grouse survival has been good, but recruitment has been poor. The literature indicates that ravens can have a major impact on sage grouse recruitment when raven densities are over 0.4 per km². Raven densities on some surveys have been 1.2 km². The proposal has generated a lot of interest and many items are being worked on, including obtaining a permit from the USFWS.

Mule Deer Captures: From January 18 – 22, WDFW staff members in District 8 coordinated mule deer captures with a contracted helicopter crew and collared 22 adult female mule deer with GPS collars in Kittitas and Chelan counties. The capture effort is part of a multiyear project to identify and map migratory routes and seasonal ranges from GPS collar data. Locations from GPS collars will be analyzed to conserve or restore vital mule deer winter range and migration corridors. The project began in January 2020, and since then, we've learned that mule deer in Kittitas county are more resident than migratory. This year, WDFW targeted areas that have migratory individuals in an attempt to collect more data on migratory corridors. Most landowners WDFW contacted for permission were supportive of the effort. Below is a breakdown of the number of captures per capture unit.

- Dry Gulch (District 7): 1
- Colockum: 2
- Whiskey Dick/East Cooke Canyon: 9
- Kittitas North: 5
- Lookout Mountain: 2
- Thorp Prairie: 3



2021 deer capture locations in District 8

Elk Feeding: Oak Creek Wildlife Area staff members are feeding elk at Cowiche and Headquarters feed sites. Cowiche elk numbers are upward of 1300. Sunday's (1/10) count had cow/calf ratio greater than 30 percent, with more than 900 cows and over 300 calves. Cowiche has more than 60 branch antlered bulls and less than 30 yearling bulls. Overall herd health is good. Headquarters elk numbers are low, hovering at around 300 total elk. Cow/calf ratio for herd present on feed yard is under 20 percent, with 272 cows and 53 calves. Headquarters has four branched bulls and no yearling bulls. Overall herd health appears good. Bighorn sheep have been showing up at the feed site on Old Naches Highway. Sheep numbers have been sporadic at best, with a high of 120. There've been up to eight adult rams, and staff members have counted a high of nine lambs. Coughing and poor condition have been observed in a few animals.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members assisted District 8 Biologist Oates build 65 big horn sheep collars for the Test and Cull Study of the Umtanum herd.

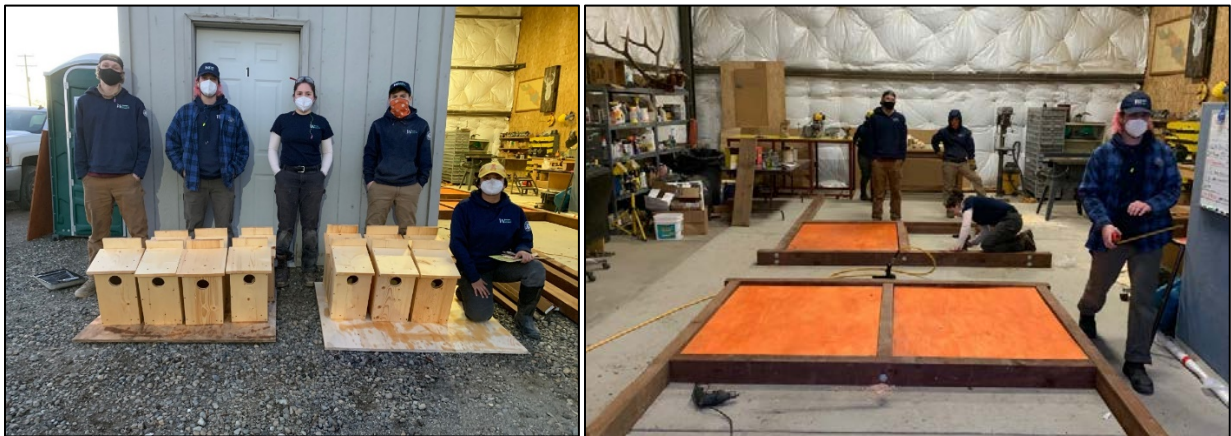


Biologist Oates doing “arts and crafts” day in the L.T. Murray shop. Building sheep collars from scratch takes some teamwork



Big horn sheep collars for the Test and Cull Study in the Umptanum

WCC Project: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart hosted a Washington Conservation Corps Crew (WCC) on Martin Luther King Day as they were searching for a service project. The five-person crew built two kiosks that will be installed in the spring and 15 kestrel boxes. All staff members and volunteers worked safely and followed COVID protocols.



WCC service projects

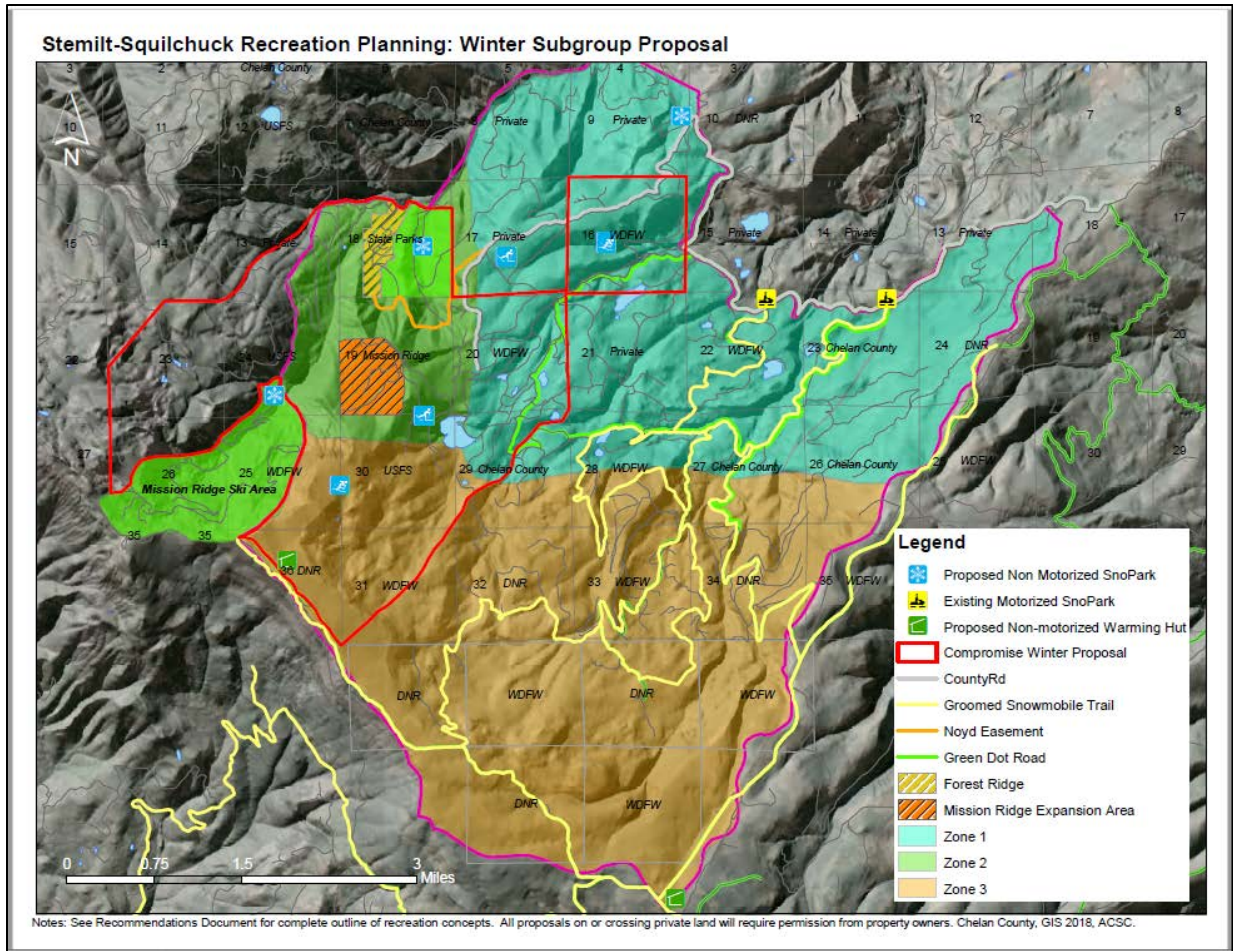
More Elk Feeding: L.T. Murray staff members continued to feed elk at Robinson and Joe Watt Canyons. Staff members counted 644 cow elk, 46 branched bulls, and five spike bulls at the Watt feed site. There were also an estimated 350 elk at the Robinson feed site. Increased numbers poured in at the end of the week with the new snow.



Elk at Robinson Canyon waiting for breakfast

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Stemilt-Squilchuck Recreation Plan Update: WDFW, Chelan County, and the Stemilt Partnership are working towards implementing the proposed non-motorized winter recreation area in the Stemilt and Squilchuck Basins. As part of the planning process, a compromise was reached as to where this area would be located. We are now starting to better define exactly where these boundaries are and how they would be marked on the ground. Representatives of the motorized and non-motorized groups are also starting work on designing signage for the boundaries.



*Compromise proposal for the winter non-motorized recreation area shown outlined in red.
Stemilt-Squilchuck Recreation Plan*

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Elk Hazing: Region 3 Wildlife Conflict Technician Leuck hazed elk from east Kittitas daily this period. A large group of 600 elk have been using the area adjacent to new timothy seeding.

District 8 Wildlife Conflict Technician Leuck checked the Thorp area for elk and located a group of 125 in and around Swauk Creek. After hazing, these elk moved north and west but did revisit the Swauk Creek area on a weekly basis.

Injured Elk: District 8 Wildlife Conflict Technician Leuck and Conflict Specialist Wetzel have received numerous calls about an injured bull elk in the Swauk Prairie area. After observing this elk on several occasions, the decision was made to leave the elk alone. This elk is mobile and appears to be severely injured on his left rear leg. Due to his impressive antlers, the residents who feed bulls in the area have all called wanting to salvage the elk. These callers were instructed to leave the elk alone and to contact WDFW if the elk dies, but he appears to be eating and moving and will be monitored to see if his condition changes.

Cougar Observations: District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel was called by a livestock owner in GMU 334 about two cougars he observed in a small corral with his horses. The cougars were observed on several nights going in and out of the corral area and agitating the owner's dogs. Advice was given as well as a reminder that cougar season is open in that area at this time. Wetzel was also called by a homeowner in GMU 336 about a cougar visiting the area at night. Similarly, a reminder that cougar season was open, and advice was given.

Oak Creek Wildlife Area staff members repaired a cougar trap for the Enforcement Program and began planning construction of additional cougar traps for Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Post-Forest Health Treatment: Colockum Wildlife Area staff members spent time inspecting the large slash piles left after a forest health treatment in Orr Creek, Stemilt Basin. For safety, we would like to burn these piles in the winter if possible. Recent snow has made accessing the piles difficult, requiring snowmobiles to reach them.



Orr Creek slash pile after summer timber treatment. Colockum Wildlife Area



Orr Creek slash piles covered in snow. Colockum Wildlife Area

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson rented a 59,000 pound excavator for two weeks in December and completed a couple of projects that had been difficult to do with available equipment at the wildlife area. He removed large rocks and chunks of concrete from the excavation site for the new South Emerald Road pump culvert, removed dense cattail tuber mats from the Haystack Pond and Giffin Swales culvert intakes, and cleared out cattails and other debris blocking the ditch leading to the Johnson Wetland.



Johnson inlet ditch after widening and clearing debris

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resources Technician Wascisin installed the new culvert pipe at the South Emerald Road pump on a recent sunny day and got the pipe situated. We are waiting for a dry, warmer day to complete sealing the pipe intake in the old water control structure and lay a concrete intake apron.



Lowering the new culvert pipe into position



Ferguson cutting away metal from old culvert to facilitate installation of new pipe

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik participated in the annual DNR/WDFW Green Dot coordination meeting. They discussed changes to the Green Dot maps for each area. Babik also worked with Senior Budget Analysis Nelson to review the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area budget variances and plan for the purchase of a new dump trailer.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members had their monthly staff meeting where they planned for the closure of the Whiskey Dick Unit of the wildlife area on February 1.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 4

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Annual Swan Survey: Region 4 staff members worked with partners from Puget Sound Energy, the Northwest Swan Conservation Association, and local birders to complete the region-wide, minimum count survey of swans during the week of January 20-23. During this survey, participants drive roads in their designated area and count any birds they encounter. The number of young birds is also counted, allowing us to gauge breeding productivity and survival.



A large group of trumpeter swans counted during this year's survey in Snohomish County



A pair of adults with an astounding seven young birds at private lake on Orcas Island

Monitoring Hunter Harvested Brant in Whatcom: District Biologists Waddell and C. Moore and Waterfowl Specialist Wilson stopped by boat launch locations used by brant hunters during the three-day season on January 16, 20, and 23. The team distributed informational flyers on the windshields of hunter vehicles asking them to voluntarily submit photos of the breast and wings of each bird they harvest. This monitoring was carried out because there are two varieties of brant winter in Washington; black brant and western high arctic brant (grey-bellies). The western high arctic brant is one of the smallest Arctic goose breeding populations in the world and winters only in a few areas, including Padilla and Samish Bays. Using the photos, we can determine the bird’s age and the population it came from. This helps us monitor the harvest of “grey-bellied” brant, which are susceptible to overharvest.



A juvenile black brant harvested during the season opener on January 16, 2021. The white barring on the wings indicates that this bird hatched last year - Photo by Hunter, Steve Peila

East/West Bear Project: District 12 staff members assisted Bear and Cougar Specialist Beausoleil and Assistant Bear and Cougar Specialist Welfelt with ongoing bear den work. This portion of the project entails locating dens, placing cameras to document emergence and cub numbers, and recollaring/adjusting collars on adult females and potentially collar yearling cubs.



A black bear in the den with a new collar - Photo by L. Welfelt

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Stillaguamish NOAA Grant: Projects Coordinator Brokaw had several calls with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) staff members to negotiate new items to add to WDFW's scope of work for a grant that is focused on habitat restoration in the Stillaguamish River Delta. This grant funded a portion of Leque Island construction that was completed underbudget. New scope items include improving the driveway into the site parking lot, monitoring fish use in the restoration area, non-native vegetation control by WDFW's noxious weed crew, education and communication videos, and several other key things.



An improved driveway into the Leque Island parking area is needed to accommodate the heavy use of the site by birders, hunters, walkers, and other recreators

Waterfowl Season: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm reports the waterfowl season is coming to an end. All the huntable Snoqualmie Units were very busy throughout the season. A welcome increase in activity was noticed at the Crescent Lake Unit. A variety of forage crops including corn, barley and grass seemed to attract a lot of birds, and the hunters were eager to participate.

Region 4 Private Lands Access Program Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program: Region 4 Private Lands Access Program wrapped up a busy and successful waterfowl hunting season. The last month of the season had great hunting weather and some weather that was great for everyone else.

Private Lands Access Program Island Deer Hunting Region 4 Private Lands Access Program wrapped up the deer season by making a few trips out to the islands to check properties and talk with landowners about the season. It was another very successful season with all landowners reporting positive interactions with hunters, and everyone wanting to enroll for next year. Great job island deer hunters being polite and respectful toward landowners and neighbors on these small properties that provide access.

Special Hunt Annual Setting: District 12 hosted the annual Muckleshoot-Tacoma Water-WDFW meeting in which harvests are set annually for state and tribal permit hunts within the Green River Watershed (GMU 485).

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Multilingual Carnivore Outreach: Bear, cougar, and coyote pamphlets that City of Bellevue lead production on, in collaboration with King County and WDFW, are now available. District 12 and others in the Wildlife Program provided review and comment on these efforts. We thank Bellevue for their huge efforts to get this much needed multilingual outreach in our local communities. Bear and cougar can be found [here](#). Bellevue is examining similar pamphlets on related urban human-wildlife conflict topics for future efforts.

<p>Compartir el vecindario con los coyotes</p>	<p>Соседство с койотами</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> El solo hecho de ver un coyote cerca no es motivo de alarma. Nunca alimente a los coyotes, esto reduce su desconfianza natural de los humanos. Asegure la basura y la comida para mascotas. No alimente a gatos salvajes o silvestres. Recuerde, los depredadores siguen a la presa. Mantenga a los perros y gatos en el interior desde el atardecer hasta el amanecer. Siempre amarre al perro mientras las caminatas. Los coyotes le pueden transmitir enfermedades y parásitos a los perros domésticos. Mantenga las vacunas de su perro al día. Si un coyote se acerca, demuestre que es un humano al pararse. Comportese de manera intimidante, agite los brazos sobre la cabeza y grite. Lance piedras o ramas si se lo necesita. <p>Si tiene preguntas o inquietudes sobre el control de la vida silvestre, comuníquese con el Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (Departamento de Pesca y Vida Silvestre de Washington). En las hojas informativas "Living with Wildlife" (Vivir con la vida silvestre), encontrará información adicional útil.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Просто увидеть рядом койота — это не повод для беспокойства. Никогда не кормите койотов. Это ослабит их инстинктивную настороженность по отношению к людям. Убирайте мусор и корм для домашних животных. Не кормите диких животных или диких кошек. Помните, хищники преследуют добычу. Держите собак и кошек в помещении в период от заката до рассвета. Во время прогулки держите собаку на поводке. Домашние собаки могут заразиться от койотов болезнями и паразитами. Своевременно вакцинируйте свою собаку. Если койот подбирается слишком близко, примите угрожающий вид и покажите, что вы человек, встав, взмахнув руками над головой и крикнув. Если нужно, бросьте камень или палку. <p>Если у вас возникли вопросы или проблемы, связанные с природопользованием, обращайтесь в Департамент охраны рыбных ресурсов и дикой природы штата Вашингтон. Дополнительную полезную информацию можно получить из их информационных бюллетеней «Жизнь с дикой природой».</p>	
<p> Para solicitar formatos alternativos, intérpretes o adaptaciones razonables, llame con al menos 48 horas de anticipación al 425-452-4195 (voz) o envíe un correo electrónico a lcvc@bellevuewa.gov. Para reclamos sobre adaptaciones, comuníquese con el administrador de la Ley de Estadounidenses con Discapacidad (ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act) del título VI de la ciudad de Bellevue al 425-452-6168 (voz) o envíe un correo electrónico a: ADATitleVI@bellevuewa.gov. Si es sordo o tiene dificultades auditivas, marque 711. Se puede acceder a todas las reuniones en sillas de rueda.</p>	<p> Для получения информации об альтернативных форматах и переводчиках, а также с запросами на предоставление разумного приспособления необходимо не менее чем за 48 часов обратиться по телефону 425-452-4195 (голосовая служба) или по адресу электронной почты lcvc@bellevuewa.gov. С жалобами по поводу приспособлений следует обращаться к администратору Bellevue по вопросам соблюдения Закона о правах американских граждан с ограниченными возможностями и главы VI Закона США о гражданских правах по телефону 425-452-6168 (голосовая служба) или по адресу электронной почты ADATitleVI@bellevuewa.gov. Если вы не слышите или испытываете трудности со слухом, дополнительно наберите 711. Все места проведения собраний доступны для посещения лицами на инвалидных колясках.</p>	

Coyotes – they are everywhere. They are not going away. This will not change. Learn how to live with them – outsmart the smart coyote

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Island Unit Alternatives Analysis: The Island Unit project team met several times to prepare project documents including an alternatives analysis report, frequently asked questions sheet, and a compilation of comments. These documents will be reviewed by WDFW management and will be shared with stakeholders and the public once completed.

Snohomish Delta Project Prioritization: Project Coordinator Brokaw, Habitat Biologist Lindsey Desmul, and Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm hosted the second meeting for partners in Snohomish Estuary Project Prioritization Advisory Group. The group is discussing three potential future projects on Snohomish County and WDFW property. More information is available on the [project webpage](#).

5) Providing Education and Outreach


Oregon Spotted Frog Outreach: District Wildlife Biologists Waddell and C. Moore worked with WDFW Olympia staff members to produce a brochure on the state endangered Oregon spotted frog, specific to populations found in Skagit and Whatcom counties. The brochure provides life history information, current status, threats, and ways for landowners to assist in conservation efforts for these frogs. The brochure also features an amazing piece of artwork by Serena Richelle, an artist intern with WDFW. By disseminating outreach materials like this, WDFW hopes that more landowners will allow WDFW and partners to survey for and aid with management of Oregon spotted frogs on their land.

Private landowners are key to conservation

In Skagit and Whatcom Counties, all Oregon Spotted Frog populations have been found on private property. Understanding where these frogs are will enable us to focus our recovery efforts. Private landowners can help WDFW track this species' range and abundance by allowing biologists to survey their land. This can increase our knowledge of Oregon Spotted Frog populations in Washington and may lead to the removal of this species from the state-endangered list.

Please call WDFW for advice on simple ways to help our local populations of Oregon Spotted Frogs, which may include:

- Mowing, burning, and managing grazing with consideration of timing to maintain and restore breeding habitat
- Reconnecting seasonal and permanent wetlands
- Working with WDFW before planting trees and shrubs along wetlands to prevent shading of breeding habitat
- Coordinating water retention and draining with the frog's breeding season
- Assessing grazing practices and how they might impact and benefit these frogs



Partnering for conservation

We can provide technical assistance to survey for Oregon Spotted Frogs and protect, manage, or improve Oregon Spotted Frog habitat on your land. We are grateful to landowners who currently are helping these frogs and hope you will join us in recovering this unique species.

Please contact us if you have questions or to discuss conservation of Oregon Spotted Frogs on your private property.

Contact

WDFW
North Puget Sound Regional Office
16019 Mill Creek Blvd, Mill Creek, WA 98012
425-775-1311
teammillcreek@dfw.wa.gov

US Fish & Wildlife Service
1009 College Street SE, Lacey, WA 98503
360-753-9440



Oregon Spotted Frogs Need Your Help




Meet the Oregon Spotted Frog

Size and Appearance: This is a medium-sized frog, two to three inches long. Its color ranges from dark brown to tan, pale green, or even brick red. The frog's head and back have spots with dark edges and a light center. Their yellow-green colored and upward-facing eyes are a unique feature.

Habitat: Oregon Spotted Frogs live their life in water. In winter and spring, they use seasonally flooded wetlands connected to permanent water. Examples include flooded pastures and hayfields next to rivers, ponds, wetlands, or ditches. In summer, the frogs move to deeper wetland pools that will not dry out.

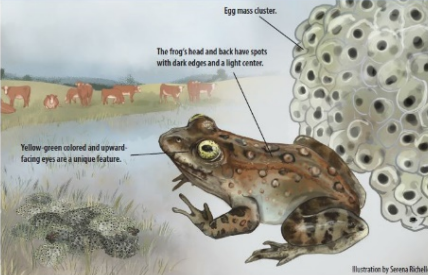
Geographic range: The known geographic range of Oregon Spotted Frogs extends from British Columbia, Canada to northern California. Though their range in Skagit and Whatcom Counties is not fully known, we know they live in areas along the South Fork Nooksack River, Samiah River, and Sumas River. Elsewhere in Washington, they occur in the upper Black River drainage, lower Trask Lake Creek drainage, and at Conboy Lake.

Mating & Reproduction: Oregon Spotted Frogs breed in shallow, still water with short plants and lots of sun exposure. In Washington, breeding occurs from late February through early April. Males call to females using a low-pitched "knocking" sound. Like the sound of a woodpecker tapping. Typically, multiple females lay clusters of eggs, called egg masses, one on top of the other, but single egg masses also can be found. A tadpole develops into a frog in about four months.

Oregon Spotted Frogs are in trouble

Oregon Spotted Frogs are state endangered and federally threatened because they do not have enough good habitat. Much of the wetlands they once used have been drained, diked, ditched, or invaded by tall, dense vegetation, such as reed canarygrass. However, certain farming practices, such as grazing and mowing for hay in seasonally flooded areas, can benefit these frogs by keeping vegetation short. The threats to this species include:

- Separation of breeding areas from permanent water
- Tree and shrub plantings that shade or replace frog habitat
- Quick-draining fields that strand egg masses and trap tadpoles
- Unmanaged areas of invasive weeds that replace frog habitat
- Removal of beavers and the habitat they create
- Non-native predators, including bullfrogs, green frogs, and some warm water fish
- Herbicides, pesticides, and other chemicals
- Lack of information on where these frogs live



Egg mass cluster.

The frog's head and back have spots with dark edges and a light center.

Yellow-green colored and upward-facing eyes are a unique feature.

Illustration by Serena Richelle

Front and back of a tri-fold brochure on the state endangered Oregon spotted frog in Skagit and Whatcom counties

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Songbird Salmonellosis Outbreak in Pacific Northwest: District 12 partnered with Wildlife Health, Public Affairs, and Wildlife Data Management to discuss salmonellosis in our local songbirds. Seattle Audubon hosted this live event on Facebook and other social media. This epizootic outbreak is particularly found in Pine Siskin (a winter finch); the outbreak may be exacerbated and driven largely by the presence of these wintering finches. More information [here](#).



6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Parking Lot Maintenance: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm completed the planning process for updating the CAMP roads and parking lot maintenance schedule for three Snoqualmie Valley units. Stillwater, Cherry Valley and Crescent Lake units are very popular and require regular gravel maintenance.

7) Other

Wind and Tidal Flooding Damage: Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Belinda Rotton reports that during the storm on the morning January 13 the Skagit Headquarters experienced wind and flood damage. A large portion of metal roofing was removed from the pheasant catch pens and damaged some of the net pen area.



In addition, the dike near the boat launch parking lot overtopped for the third time since the initial overtop event in March 2016. This event further damaged the dike, flooded the parking lot (with vehicles and boat trailers present), and damaged the bank of Wiley Slough where the water exited the site. Biologist Meis, Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove, and Natural Resource Technician Guess removed debris and downed trees, secured the roofing, and smoothed the remaining dike top material. Plans for the repairs are in progress and estimates of the damages were provided to CAMP for the FEMA damage estimates.



Recent storm damage on the Skagit Wildlife Area

REGION 5

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

District 9 - Dusky Canada Goose Survey: Biologist Bergh conducted her monthly survey for dusky Canada geese in Clark County. The break in the goose hunting season appeared to have attracted many geese to the Shillapoo Wildlife Area, with an enormous flock of snow geese and nearly 200 dusky geese observed in addition to the typical large flocks of cackling Canada geese. Despite the large number of dusky geese observed, only one had a red neck collar. These neck collars have a 3-digit alphanumeric code to identify individual geese. When re-sighted, these collars provide an estimate for dusky goose survival which is one of the metrics used by the USFWS to determine regulations surrounding goose hunting seasons.



Dusky Canada goose with a red neck collar and a blue-morph snow goose (with the white head)

District 10 - Dusky Canada Goose Surveys: Biologists Stephens and Holman continued 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 dusky. 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. Thousands of cackling, hundreds of Taverner's and lessers, as well as dozens of Western Canada geese were located and recorded.

Watchable Wildlife Wahkiakum County: While conducting the goose surveys mentioned above, Biologist Holman noted several species of charismatic wildlife on or near the Lower Columbia River in Wahkiakum County. Species observed during the survey included: multiple pairs of early-breeding-season bald eagles, California and harbor seals foraging for smelt in the Columbia, herons and egrets foraging in flooded fields, black-tailed and Columbian white-tailed deer feeding and resting, and a large group of Roosevelt elk feeding in a pasture along State Route 4 along with thousands of wintering waterfowl. Good locations for a driving-oriented trip through Wahkiakum County include State Route 4, County Line Park, Julia Butler Hansen Refuge, and Puget Island.

Injured Red-tailed Hawk: Biologist Stephens responded to an injured red-tailed hawk reported to have been in the same place for four days. The hawk had an injured wing and couldn't fly but, otherwise, it seemed to be in good condition. It was transported to Portland Audubon for rehabilitation.



Injured red-tailed hawk hustling across a road

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Private Lands Access Program Site Visit in Wahkiakum County: Private Lands Biologist Ferris checked all property registration kiosks and performed necessary maintenance. To access these lands, individuals must first register on the blue slip that is placed in the metal box at the kiosk.

Ferris met with Columbia Land Trust at their enrolled property to evaluate site conditions and discuss future enrollments. Access Program properties in Wahkiakum County are popular for waterfowl hunting and are open for public access by registration at the site.

Private Lands Biologist Ferris also visited potential sites of new property enrollments for Fall 2021. Interested hunters should always check the Private Lands Access Program website annually at the start of the hunting season to look for new opportunities that have been added for that year.



Private lands access site kiosk maintenance in Wahkiakum County



Private lands access site visit (Kandoll Farm) in Wahkiakum County



Private Lands Access Program potential future enrollment in Wahkiakum County

Kress Lake: Access staff members Rhodes and McKinlay were able to get caught up on some trail maintenance at the Kress Lake access site. They cut back brush and blackberries along both sides of the trail around the entire lake.



Kress Lake trail maintenance

Increased Use at Water Access Sites: Due to the increase use of many of the Region’s access sites and restrooms, vaults have to be pumped out more frequently. This week, multiple access site restrooms pumped out for a total of approximately 4,600 gallons at Rowland Lake, Puget Island, and Onieda access sites.



Vault pumping at Rowland Lake, Puget Island, and Onieda access sites

Water Access Sites: Access staff members Rhodes and McKinlay had a lot of clean up from the high-water. Using shovels, Rhodes and McKinlay cleared the boat ramps at Hand Access, Modrow Bridge, and the ADA path at Beginners Hole Access that were covered in mud and silt.

Vancouver Lake Access gave Rhodes and McKinlay an additional 240 pounds of trash and four tires to haul to the dump this week.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Citizen Engagement: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a Klickitat County citizen who was eager to assist in education and outreach opportunities to help minimize human-cougar conflicts throughout the area. Several ideas were discussed, and the citizen plans to collaborate with WDFW and the Mountain Lion Foundation to move some of these ideas forward.

Deer Damage to Vineyard: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a landowner in Vancouver to further discuss deer damage to his vineyard and to map out possible fencing options to exclude the deer from the vineyard. During the breeding season, the landowner observed at least 14 deer on his small property in suburban (almost urban) Vancouver. When Jacobsen visited, a few of the resident deer were there to observe the meeting. This residence is also within the Clark County “No Shooting” area, so explosives and other hazing measures (such as paintball guns) were not an option here.



Deer lounging in field next to vineyard

Deer Damage to Nursery: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a landowner at a small plant nursery in Ridgefield. The operation was incurring moderate damage from a handful of deer, both to potted plants as well as to Christmas trees. Jacobsen plans to enroll the landowner in a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement. The nursery is within the Clark County “No Shooting” area, so several hazing methods as well as lethal removal are not options for dealing with the deer damage. Other methods will be implemented to help curb the deer damage.



Deer damage to nursery plants

Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a landowner to sign his Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for deer and elk damage to wheat crops in Klickitat County.

Injured Deer: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen responded to a report of an injured deer on the side of the road in Klickitat County. Unfortunately, the deer was unable to get up after being hit by a car and had to be euthanized. Officer Bolton worked to find a citizen who could salvage the meat.

Hairless Deer Concern: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey spoke with an individual who regularly observes a deer that is likely suffering from hair loss syndrome. A discussion was had about wildlife disease and contributing factors to spread, including feeding wildlife which create artificially high concentrations of deer.

Nuisance Deer: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey visited with an individual who is having a difficult time with nuisance deer on their property. Aubrey gave advice and suggestions on ways to reduce conflict with the deer.

Elk Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey also worked with landowners throughout District 10 to mitigate elk damage. Hazing supplies and landowner permits have been issued. Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements were renewed with landowners in areas where late winter elk damage occurs.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area - Reader Board Roof: Shillapoo Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Breitenstein and Scientific Technician Fox were extremely helpful in building a roof over the large reader board on the Merrill Lake Unit. They worked with Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Wildermuth to build out a frame, cover in plywood, and top it all off with metal roofing to shed the rain and snow. Hopefully the roof will add longevity to the recently constructed reader board which showcases the partnership between WDFW, RMEF, and RCO in acquiring the property.



Under construction and finished photos of the Merrill Lake reader board

Cowlitz Wildlife Area - Kosmos / Dogpatch Scotch Broom Removal: Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff members canvassed approximately 75 acres, known as the Kosmos Flats, looking for and removing Scotch broom. Though approximately 200 plants were removed, this is far less than in previous years indicating that efforts are working, and the population is reducing.



Assistant Manager Steveson wrenching out a tenacious broom plant

Cowlitz Wildlife Area - Kosmos / Dogpatch Alder Thinning and Removal: Alders have heavily colonized the area since Tacoma Power began holding Riffe Lake Reservoir water levels 39 feet lower. The lower lake levels have allowed alders to grow where previously the lake would periodically inundate preventing trees from growing. Individuals recreating in the area hide garbage within the dense sapling stands as well as use them as bathrooms, creating a health hazard. In addition, the trees posed a hazard to those pilots who use the field adjacent to the camping area to land hang gliders and paragliders. The trees create wind eddies much like water flowing around rocks in a stream. These eddies are potentially dangerous when pilots are close to the ground with little time to react. Wildlife area staff members, to prevent the issues and dangers, thinned and removed alders from around and within the Kosmos / Dogpatch Access Area. Members of the hang-gliding community assisted with piling the cut alders in a central area for later disposal.

Klickitat Wildlife Area - Simcoe Mountains Unit Fence Project Planning: Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven and Project Coordinator Mosberger reconnoitered an area of the Simcoe Unit to gather information on locations of survey monuments, stream crossings, vegetation and soil types, locations of roads, and other existing fences. These data will be used to develop a plan for construction of new fences south and east of Box Canyon Road, where they are needed to manage livestock grazing on the WDFW property. There were two inches of snow on the ground and many animal tracks were seen, including deer, turkey, coyote, squirrel, and cougar tracks.



Simcoe Mountains Unit Fence Project planning

Klickitat Wildlife Area - Soda Springs Unit Conditions: During a general patrol of the Soda Springs Unit, Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven was pleased to note that the ponds are almost overflowing with water. This is very different from last winter when many key ponds on the Wildlife Area only held a fraction of their normal capacity for water at the end of the season. VanLeuven encountered only a few people while working in the field. The overcast day was quiet and a good time to appreciate oak trees against the winter sky.



Soda Springs Ponds



Sheep Canyon Road Oak

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.

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Dusky Goose Surveys: Biologists Novack, Sundstrom and Michaelis conducted the second Dusky goose surveys of 2021 in Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. Dusky goose numbers seem to be within their normal range with robust numbers seen along the Naselle River. A portion of Biologist Sundstrom's 'normal' route is being covered by Biologist Michaelis while Biologist Novack has taken over the south Pacific County areas that Michaelis typically would cover. Sundstrom has extended her route to include portions of Pacific County to the Nemah River area. With three biologists covering the routes, the workload is distributed more evenly, and survey days are no longer upwards of 10-hour days (depending on the number of geese to be counted).

Goose Hunter Checks: Goose hunter request cards continue to be placed on likely hunter vehicles asking for information if the hunter harvested geese. Voluntary reporting participation is very low. With brant season in full swing in Willapa Bay, Biologist Sundstrom has seen an increase in hunter participation for this species which has also increased reports of hunting violations. Concerns voiced by the hunting public phoned in to Sundstrom have been forwarded to WDFW Enforcement Program for follow up.

Winter Chehalis Valley Swan Surveys: Biologist Sundstrom conducted the annual winter Chehalis Valley Swan Survey on January 27. All areas from Oakville to Montesano were searched for swans and a dismal 129 total swans were counted (67 trumpeters, 36 tundra's, and 26 undetermined species of swan – viewing obscured by distance and vegetation). In previous weeks, it was estimated that at least 350 swans were using the valley, but an unexpected reshuffling of flocks was described by others throughout the range, possibly related to our warmer than usual weather conditions.

Biologist Butler along with Region 4 biologists and volunteers conducted the annual mid-winter swan survey recently. This was the first year that District 11 biologists participated in surveying Lake Tapps and the surrounding areas in Pierce County. Since there was no previous survey route to follow, Biologist Butler first reviewed eBird for past trumpeter swan sighting locations as well as aerial imagery to develop a course route to follow. In total, 279 swans were observed with the majority being found within three large flocks. No swans were seen exhibiting signs of lead poisoning.



Snowy Plover – Winter Surveys: Biologists Sundstrom and Michaelis, in collaboration with USFWS and Shoalwater Tribe members, conducted the winter plover count in Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. Robust numbers of plovers were discovered at Leadbetter point this year (over 100 birds!) bringing the statewide total to more than double any previous year’s count. Plover populations in neighboring Oregon have been doing especially well the past few years and it seems that some of those birds are making their way to Washington.

The annual range wide winter window snowy plover surveys were scheduled by USFWS for all states (Washington, Oregon, California) for the week of January 16 – 24 2021. Biologists Sundstrom and Michaelis were able to complete all surveys assigned, except Damon Point which has become an area least likely to encounter wintering snowy plovers. Areas surveyed were: Ocean Shores to Ocean City, Connor Creek, Copalis Spit (assisted by Joseph Fernandez of Washington State Parks), Oyhut Spit, and Midway Beach (North Cove to Bonge Avenue). Other smaller areas were also covered that were not listed as essential survey locations. The Graveyard Spit area was surveyed by Shoalwater Bay tribal biologists. The only beach where plovers were found this year within our survey areas were exclusively found at Midway Beach. The total number of plovers found was 52 which was down from the 2020 winter survey count of 66. No plovers were found along the Ocean Shores to Copalis Spit stretch whereas nine were found in 2020 and 10 in 2018. Winter foraging and roosting areas for plovers varies greatly from year to year depending on weather, tidal, and habitat conditions.

USFWS Willapa Refuge Biologist William Ritchie surveyed the Long Beach Peninsula areas from Benson Beach to the tip of Leadbetter. Biologist Sundstrom was approved to assist Ritchie on Saturday, January 24 for the Leadbetter portion of his survey area. A phenomenal 111 plovers were found at Leadbetter. Considering 0, 15, and 12 were found in the previous three years’ surveys (2020, 2019, 2018 respectively), this was a sight never before seen. Overall statewide total for 2021 was 167 for all areas in Washington, over double the statewide numbers from 2020 which was 75, 80 in 2019, and 50 in 2018.

REGION	SITE	OWNER	2018	2019	2020	2021	male	female	sex?	Date
Grays Harbor	Copalis Spit	State Parks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20-Jan
	Conner Creek	State Parks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20-Jan
	Ocean Shores/Ocean City	Private, State Parks	10	0	9	0	0	0	0	20-Jan
		Oyhut	DNR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Damon Point	DNR, WDFW	0	0	0	ns				
County Total			10	0	9	0	0	0	0	
Pacific	Midway Beach	Private, State Parks	28	58	66	52	0	0	52	19-Jan
	Graveyard Spit	Shoalwater Indian Tribe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20-Jan
	North Willapa Bay Islands	USFWS, DNR	ns	ns	ns	ns				
	Leadbetter Point	USFWS, State Parks	12	15	0	111	9	3	99	23-Jan
	South Long Beach	State Parks	0	7	0	4	1	2	1	22-Jan
	Benson Beach	State Parks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24-Jan
	County Total			40	80	66	167	10	5	152
Washington Total			50	80	75	167	10	5	152	

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Post Flooding Activities: The previous highlights report showed recent flooding and erosion that occurred at the Chehalis River South Montesano Access. A 15' wide by 90' long portion of the parking lot washed away. Barrier rock was ordered and delivered. Using a tractor, the new barrier rock matching the existing rock on site and blocking the drop off at the river's edge was installed. Additionally, after waters receded, silt, gravel and debris were cleaned up from the entire area.



Boat Launch Silt Removal: Several access sites in Grays Harbor and Clallam counties had major silt and debris deposited on ramps blocking access to launching, including the site Thorberg on the Humptulips River. Rivers have receded allowing the water access team to remove the silt and debris. Six river sites in Grays Harbor County and four in Clallam County were cleaned. Bank fishing is rarely interrupted during these activities.



Lake Tarboo Fence Repair: One hundred and ten feet of top rail fencing was illegally taken, allowing 150 feet of fence to fall on the ground. Foot and ORV traffic on the downed fence made this project more difficult to repair. Water access team members Reeves, Freimund, Mettler, and Walker repaired the fence while Access Manager Mitchell addressed brushing and sign replacement.



Bogachiel River Wilson Tree Removal: The water access team has been waiting for this latest high-water event (flooding) which typically creates empty parking lots. The team coned off the entrance to the site and using cable, blocks, and a vehicle, downed and removed this large dead and rotting hemlock.



Other Work Performed: Two illegal dumps were discovered and cleaned up on the Black River (Gate and Oakville). Between these two sites 30 tires, 48 needles, a love seat, and four large bags of household debris was cleaned up and removed.

A large poplar tree blew down at Spencer Lake in Mason County was cleaned up. At Tee Lake, both sides of the narrow 300-foot road were brushed out including the parking area.



Spencer Lake

Private Lands: Biologist Sundstrom spent several days checking on popular ‘dump locations’ on private timberland areas. Garbage continues to be found at most locations visited.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Elk Crop Damage: Biologist Harris deployed two master hunters with Region 6 designated permits and one youth hunter with a Region 6 youth designated permit. The elk must have heard about the master hunters and decided to move on with just a little hazing. Fortunately for the youth hunter, the elk did not take her seriously which resulted in a very happy nine-year-old filling the freezer. Her dad reported that she plans to tan the hide, make jewelry of the teeth, and European mount the skull. We are anxiously awaiting the pictures of the finished products!



Nine-year-old youth hunter with her first elk

Dead Bald Eagle: Biologist Butler assisted staff members from the McNeil Island fire department with a bald eagle that was found dead under some power lines on the island. Bald eagles are protected under the Bald & Golden Eagle Protection Act. Butler met staff members from the McNeil Island fire department at the ferry to retrieve the eagle and then transported it to the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. USFWS staff members collected all necessary information and will ultimately send it to the National Eagle Repository.

Oceans Shores Cougar: Biologist Harris continues to work with WDFW Enforcement Program monitoring cougar reports in Ocean Shores. WDFW has not received many reports recently. Ocean Shores Police have received a couple of reports. Animal Control Officer Beebe reported that he had credible reports of a female with kittens. This was supported by a verified social media post of a video showing mother cougar and two young kittens on a late-night stroll. It appears that we have an adult male and an adult female with two kittens frequenting the city. Overall social media indicates acceptance of the cougars and even some excitement.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Elk River Unit – Uplands Restoration: Wildlife Program staff members are actively removing vast areas of Scotch broom at the newly acquired Elk River Unit properties. Thus far, approximately two acres of Scotch-broom-infested lands are being cleared each day. Any underlying trees are left in place, but much of cleared areas were nearly 100 percent broom or Himalayan blackberry. Work will continue through the remainder of February and possibly March. A state lands restoration grant application was submitted in 2020 and is expected to provide funding for replanting the cleared areas with native tree species in 2021 and 2022.



Results from mechanical clearing of Scotch broom. Prior conditions exemplified by left side of road. Freshly cleared on right

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Educating the Public: Biologist Sundstrom spent several hours fielding phone calls from waterfowl hunters wanting information on everything from how to hunt brant, boat launch locations in Pacific County, areas to hunt ducks in Grays Harbor County, and issues of hunters without reservation confirmations utilizing HBR fields in Mason County.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.