

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

February 1 to 15, 2022

## **REGION 2**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Pygmy Rabbit Population Monitoring-Winter Burrow Surveys:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff members and volunteers continue burrow survey efforts on the Sagebrush Flat population. We have completed half the area thus far and found only 39 active burrows, which is more than double what we found last winter (18). What is more encouraging than just the increase, was that several areas that were unoccupied in the past couple of years are now occupied again. In the coming weeks we will focus survey efforts on the remaining core areas of the Sagebrush Flat population. Should snow conditions persist, we will conduct presence/absence searches in areas where pygmy rabbits have yet to be found.



*Technician Clements conducting pygmy rabbit burrow surveys on the Sagebrush Flat population*

**Bighorn Sheep Surveys – Mount Hull Herd:** In January 2022, Biologist Heinlen conducted a ground survey of the Mount Hull bighorn sheep herd, finding a total of 38 animals. This count is down considerably from the 92 documented in December 2020 prior to last summer's bluetongue virus outbreak. The good news is that this went up from the 28 animals observed from the air a month earlier. The additional animals primarily appear to be rams that were either not present or in hard-to-see locations during the aerial survey in December 2021.

**Predator Prey Project (PPP):** A team of WDFW staff members assisted volunteers Rohrer and Fisher in retrieving more than half of the 50 plus mule deer collars scheduled to drop off study animals last month. Retrievals ranged from simply picking a collar up from a landowner to an all-day snowshoe slog in the winter landscape. Perhaps the most interesting occurred recently when volunteer Rohrer discovered a collar entombed in the ice of Patterson Lake. The collar turned out to be attached to a whole carcass (deer died before drop-off) and it took creative work by the Methow Wildlife Area staff members with chainsaws to free it from the ice. The automatic drop-off mechanisms save the animals from having to wear the collar their whole life, plus they facilitate the timely retrieval, refurbishment, and redeployment of collars on other animals or projects. Collars in the most remote locations will be retrieved after snowmelt. Information on the PPP can be found here: [Washington Predator Prey Project](#).



*Radio-collared mule deer carcass or Pleistocene relic* – Photo by B. Troyer



*Volunteer B. Fischer after the slog and successful deer collar retrieval* – Photo by J. Heinlen

**Northern Leopard Frogs:** Biologists Dougherty and Grabowsky have been busy recruiting and interviewing for two seasonal technicians that will assist with the Northern Leopard Frog Recovery Project. After evaluating applications, interviews, and reference checks Biologist Grabowsky selected two candidates that will begin work in March. These two new staff members will greatly increase capacity to conduct field surveys.

**Sharp-tailed Grouse:** During the winter months, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (CSTG) congregate in water birch trees to forage on the catkins (seeds). Biologist Heinlen observed 32 CSTG in the water birch trees east of Tonasket this January. This is much higher than the spring lek counts in the same area, as the April 2021 lek survey only found four males on one lek indicating there are likely additional leks out there that we are not aware of.



*Columbian sharp-tailed Grouse foraging on water birch seeds* – Photo by J. Heinlen

### **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Wildlife Viewing:** Cross-country skiing remains good in the Methow Valley heading into President’s Day weekend. Sections of the trail network, particularly those near the river, are good for birding and afford opportunities for seeing waterfowl, dippers, eagles, woodpeckers, etc. Owls are currently quite vocal in the early evening as well.





*Methow Community Trail near Winthrop* – Photo by S. Fitkin

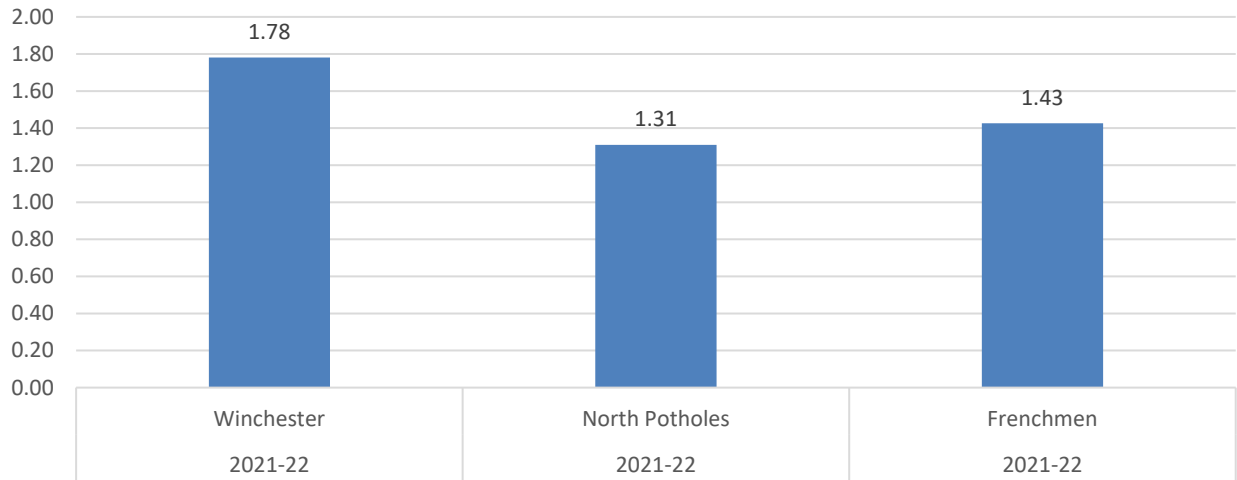


*Goldeneyes along the Methow River* – Photo by S. Fitkin

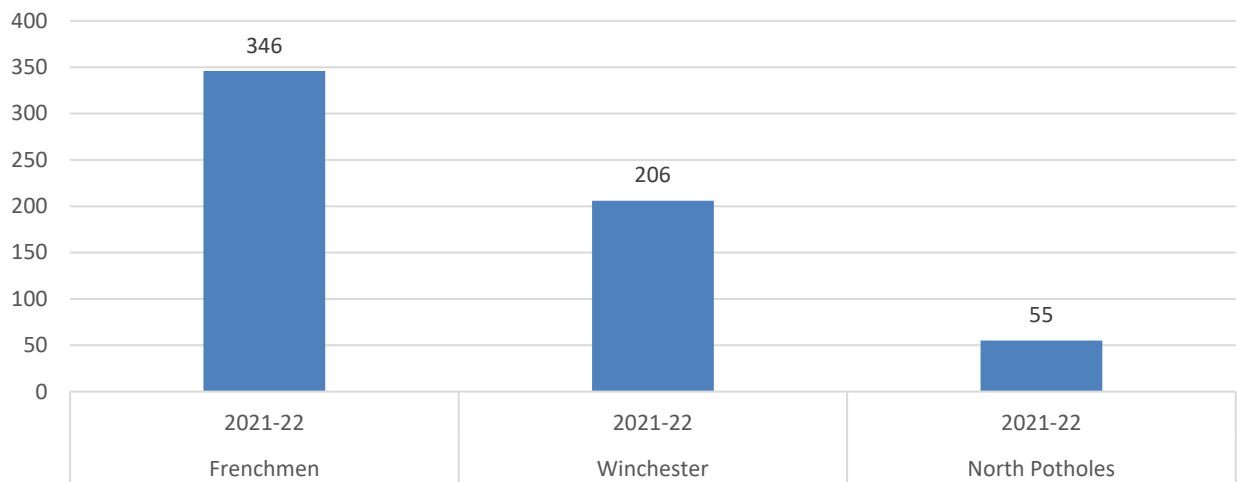
**Columbia Basin Regulated Access Areas:** The regular waterfowl season has finally come to an end. Overall, it was an average year for birds per hunter, total waterfowl harvested, and total number of hunters. Frenchman stayed constant throughout the season but did provide for some good mixed bag hunts later in the year. North Potholes did not provide much for early season hunting due to low water levels. Once water levels came up hunters had decent amount of harvest and opportunity. The Winchester had lots of birds and hunters using the area up until the hard freeze. Once basins froze it was difficult to even break open holes in ice.



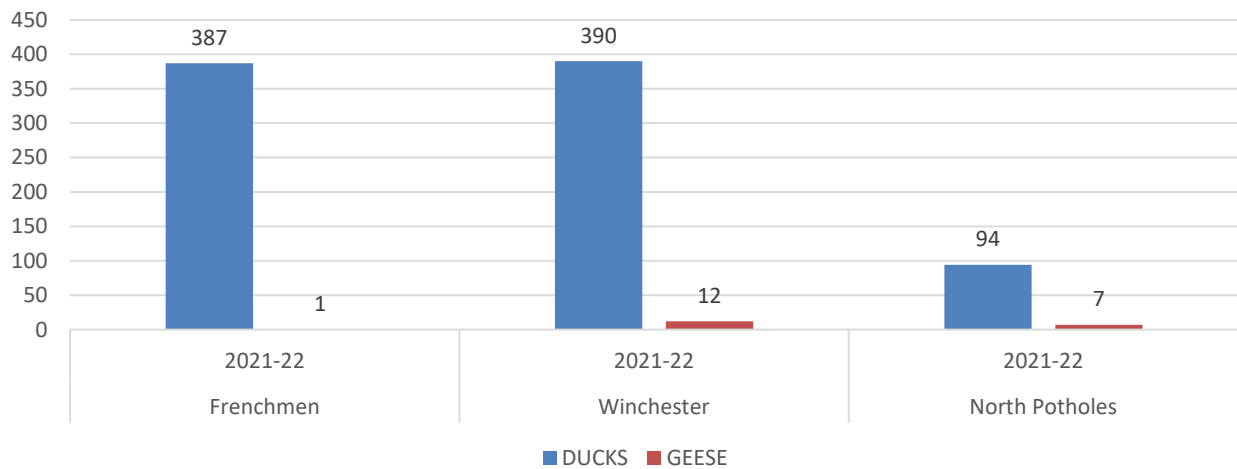
2021-2022 Birds Per Hunter by RAA



2021-2022 Total Hunters by RAA



2021-2022 Total Waterfowl by RAA



**Winchester Regulated Access Area Enhancements:** Wildlife Area staff members, the district biologist, and Ducks Unlimited staff members had a field meeting on possible improvements that could be made to the Regulated Access Area. Enhancements to the southern portion of the Winchester could reestablish wetland basins and help improve moist soil management efforts. These plans would help provide both more waterfowl habitat and recreational opportunities.

**Frenchman Expansion:** Biologist McPherson obtained a special use burn permit to continue burning Russian olive piles at the Frenchman. Most of the piles being burnt are in the southern cell of expansion. Piles have been aging for two to three seasons and Biologist McPherson is seeing good material consumption.



*Russian olive pile that had been aged for 3 seasons* – Photo by C. McPherson

**Hunter Access Program:** Biologist Cook started the paperwork for updating and renewing multiple Hunter Access contracts. Many contracts are expiring next year, and Cook will begin working to renew some of those contracts this year to spread out the workload. Most of the hunter access is in Adams County with some around Royal City. Cook hopes to find landowners interested in participating in the Hunter Access program near Othello and Mattawa where there are little to no Hunter Access agreements currently.

Biologist Cook responded to several hunter questions related to Private Lands Hunter Access for the end of general season waterfowl hunting. The last few weeks has seen goose numbers increasing in field in southern Grant County. Cook has noticed an increase in reservations for Hunt by Reservation Hunter Access properties as well. Hopefully this means hunters could get out for some good waterfowl hunting at the end of general waterfowl season.



**Deer Management:** Biologist Dougherty began soliciting feedback from other WDFW to determine interest and feasibility of changes to harvest and management structure of Game Management Unit (GMU) 290 Quality Deer Permits. GMU 290 is arguably one of the most coveted Quality Deer tags in Washington. After several discussions with other staff members, Biologist Dougherty was able to acquire the age data from previously harvested deer. The average age of harvested bucks is displayed below.

<b>Buck Harvest by Weapon Type</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Oldest Deer Harvested</b>	<b>Total Samples</b>
All Bucks Harvested	4.231	12	116
Archery	4	6	18
Modern Firearms	4.32	12	90
Muzzleloader	3.75	5	8

Based on available research and data collected in other states, mule deer bucks tend to have peak antler growth between 5 and 7 years. Based on this information there is the potential to manage deer populations within GMU 290 to meet that criteria, however, there will need to be more discussion and outreach that need to happen prior to making any changes to the existing management structure.

**South Region 2 Water Access Areas:** In January 15, Region 2 South Access staff members were operating as usual, staff members completing snow removal right in time for the regional office to be closed on the day of the “BIG SNOW.” Manager Harmon and Assistant Manager Steele have been working on the completion of the long-awaited dump trailer side racks. Yes, it will get finished and not just be a shop ornament soon! Natural Resource Worker Bilodeau as always is braving the cold and the snow keeping up on access parking lots and boat launches for the public.

On February 15, it has been business as usual for water access staff members; weekly site visits, cleaning up after the public, and routine maintenance. Manager Harmon and Assistant Manager Steele toured the site, making their list of “to do’s” leading up to the March 1 openers, eagerly waiting for the white stuff to melt off and puddles to dry so residual herbicides can be applied.

**Methow Commercial Use Permits:** The Methow Wildlife Area is seeing an increasing number of commercial use permits. Many of the permit requests are for mass participation events, particularly in the spring. This increase in requests equals an increase in disturbance throughout many portions of the wildlife area. Local staff members are collaborating with agency biologists about the potential effects of these events on wildlife and the local habitats. It’s likely we will have to start reviewing these requests through a more critical lens to ensure a variety of wildlife such as mule deer, golden eagles, sandhill cranes, and prairie falcons, to name a few, are not being disturbed during their most critical times of the year. This is likely a topic that will be discussed and evaluated further during our recreational planning process that is ongoing.

**Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Elk in Fruit Stand:** Rickel met with several landowners in response to a large bull elk hanging out in and around a roadside fruit stand outside Leavenworth. The bull appears to be old with deformed hoofs but is mobile. Dubbed “Frank” by locals, he has been in the area for a couple of weeks. Rickel explained the ramifications of feeding wildlife, potential for conflict and safety issues, and requested that they discontinue the practice immediately.



*Bull in fruit stand*

**Elk Damage to Haystacks:** Specialist Heilhecker received a call from a producer requesting a third landowner kill permit for elk this year. Elk have been eating from his haystack which has been a problem for the past seven years. Specialist Heilhecker reiterated killing elk will not stop the damage and that only preventing access to the haystack will stop damage. The hay is stored in a shed that is not game proof. She requested the producer sent her a list of fencing materials



that would be needed to make the shed game proof. The opportunity for fencing materials has been offered in the past but he did not accept the offer.

**Deer Eating Haystacks and Orchard Trees:** Specialist Heilhecker visited with several orchardists and livestock producers regarding deer damage to trees and haystacks. They all signed damage prevention cooperative agreements. Specialist Heilhecker issued landowner kill and damage permits.

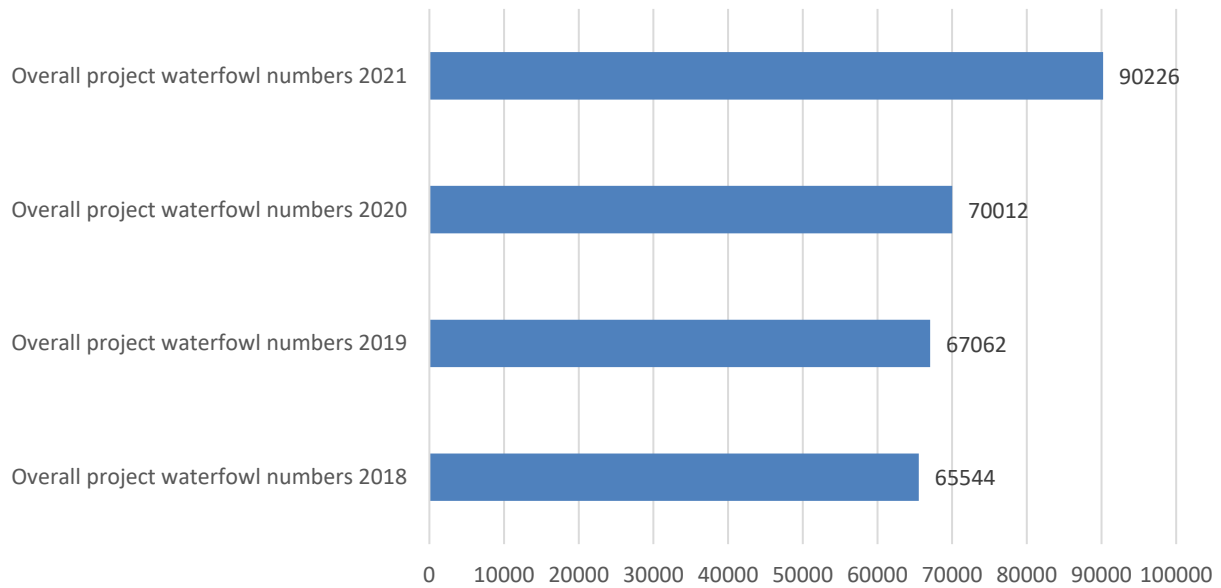
**Cost Share Fencing Contracts:** Specialist Heilhecker began working on cost-share fencing projects. She created a list of materials and cost estimates for several projects that include orchards and haystacks.

### **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

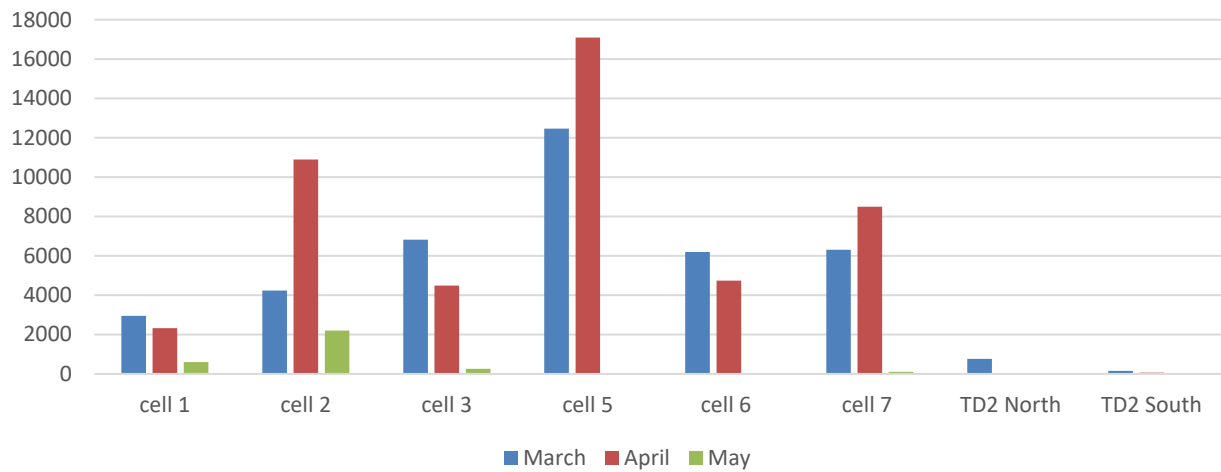
**Raptor Perch Deterrents and Powerline Markers for Sharptailed Grouse:** Staff member Dupont met with Okanogan Public Utility District (PUD) Right-of-Way Superintendent Christoph to explore the installation of perch deterrents and powerline markers on power poles and power lines on Silver Hill and around the Scotch Creek Headquarters. Dupont and Christoph discussed the various types and styles of deterrents and line markers. Due to the different configurations of power line construction and structure integrity, Christoph will be working with the PUD engineers to determine which deterrents and line markers are suitable for installation. Marking the powerlines will improve their visibility to upland birds, hopefully reducing the number of bird and wire collisions.

**Bonneville Power Administration Monitoring for Waterfowl Enhancements on Desert Wildlife Area's with Remote Camera Waterfowl Traps:** Biologist McPherson completed data processing for the 2021 survey season. The TD-1 project continues to increase in total waterfowl observed and waterfowl use days provided. After four field seasons, some remote cameras have started to malfunction, cameras will be replaced for the upcoming 2022 survey.

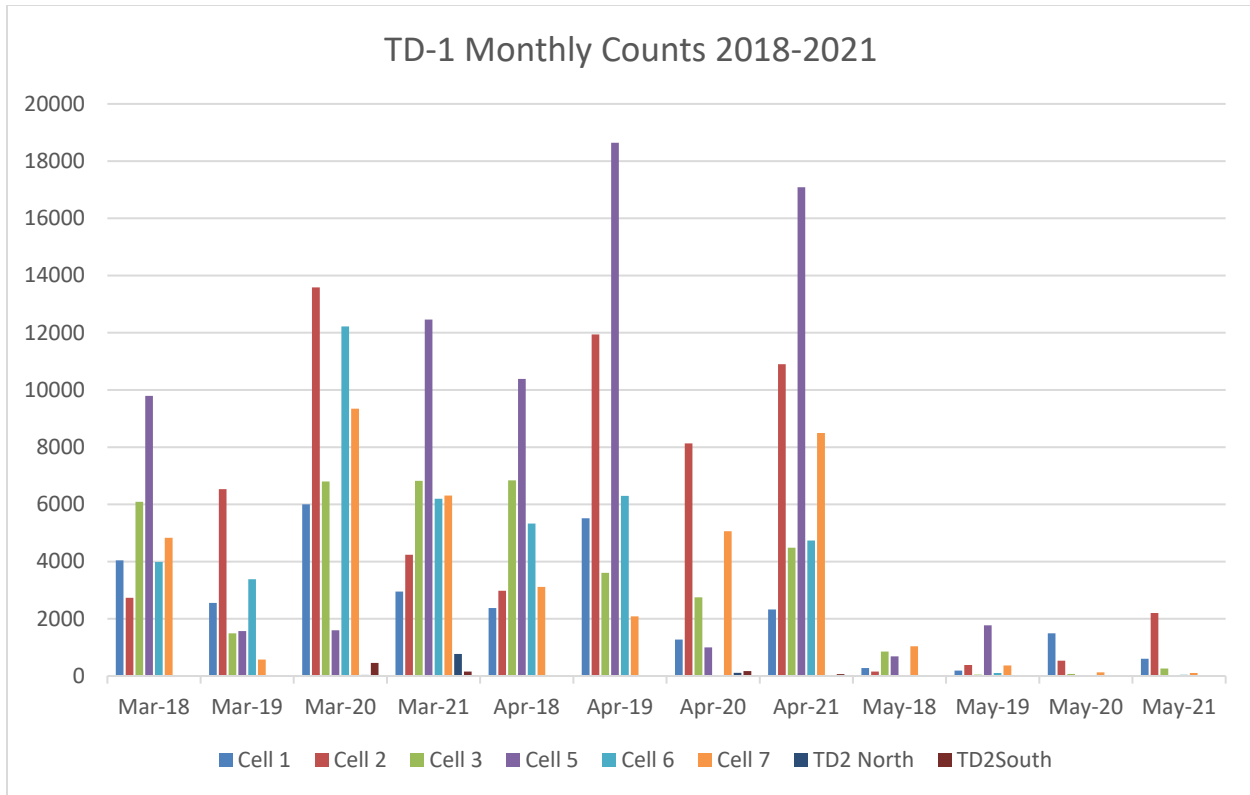
### Overall waterfowl observed at TD-1 2018-2021



### 2021 TD1 Camera Trap Survey







**2022 Lands 20/20 Projects:** Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug developed several project proposals for three acquisition projects in Okanogan County. Two projects encompass three different landowners in the Methow Valley and one project involves an inholding along the Similkameen River. Each will conserve either shrubsteppe or riparian habitats protecting wintering mule deer herds and priority aquatic species. Project applications will be submitted to the Recreation and Conservation Office in early May followed by presentation to the scoring panel. If ranked within funding levels, the projects would be funded in the 2023-25 budget.

**Methow Wildlife Area Management Planning:** The Methow Wildlife Area (WLA) is full steam ahead in its wildlife area management planning efforts. To date, we've engaged in two internal scoping meetings with a variety of agency staff members. The third internal scoping meeting is planned for next week. Additionally, the Methow WLA is actively working on scheduling the first Methow WLA Advisory Committee meeting around the middle of March. Not only are we engaging in the writing of a new management plan, but the Methow Wildlife Area is also piloting the first Recreation Management Plan, which adds a whole new wrinkle to the planning process.

**Eder Unit Ag Lease Discussions:** Lands Operations Manager Haug with Scotch Creek WLA Manager Dupont have been working with Water Rights Specials Knudsen and Property and Acquisition Specialist Woodruff on gathering all the details pertaining to the development of a new agricultural lease on the Charles and Mary Eder Unit of Scotch Creek. Knudsen and Woodruff have been doing an amazing job compiling water information and developing a path forward. Dupont has already drafted the lease documents and is waiting to issue a public request

for bids once the group is comfortable moving forward. This lease preparation only arose after the Eder family reduced their life estate significantly, a generous gift to the department.

**Utility Box Fabrication:** Staff member Medina constructed a metal utility box that sits elevated on the bed rails of the Polaris Ranger. The utility box will allow staff members more room to carry tools/equipment and keep supplies organized.



*Completed utility box, with newly installed flat bottom sprayer – Photo by Dupont*



*A couple of desert bucks* – Photo by C. McPherson



*Resident mice control at the Methow Headquarters* – Photo by Repp





*Looking north from the Sinlahekin WLA Headquarters* – Photo by Wehmeyer





*Winter is still hanging on in the Sinlahekin Valley. We received a couple of inches of new snow that covered some of the bare patches that were starting to show on the south facing slopes. The lakes are still frozen over with some open water in places providing areas for the snow geese to hang out. Our Ceanothus patches have been providing great browse for the deer in the valley this year (see above). Most of the patches have been browsed down to just stems, it is hard to find a leaf on any of the Ceanothus plants in the recently prescribed burned areas within or restoration project sites – Photos by Wehmeyer*



*Gray-crowned Rosy Finches near Fish Lake on the Sinlahekin WLA – Photo by Haug*





*Winter scene east of Tonasket* – Photo by Haug



*A view of Chopaka Mountain and melting snow west of Shanker's Bend* – Photo by Haug





*Mule deer fawn in the depths of winter* – Photo by S. Fitkin

### **REGION 3**

#### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Sage Grouse from Yakama Reintroductions Hang On:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and Private Lands Biologist Hulett followed up on a landowner report of two sage grouse on their property. On site, Hulett located some scat of sage grouse that helped confirm the sighting. The property is near the Yakama Reservation where the Tribe reintroduced sage grouse between 2006 and 2014. No grouse from that population have been confirmed since the single known lek site was abandoned in 2018. Any existing population is likely very small but the fact that some individuals are still present is encouraging. Lek searches will be attempted next month.



*Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett scouting for sage grouse sign*

**Elk Surveys:** Biologist Oates and Technician Leuck flew surveys of the Yakima elk herd while Biologist Bernatowicz and wildlife area staff members counted elk on feed sites. The surveys are timed so any elk not being tallied by ground observers on the feed sites are counted via the helicopter. The surveys have not been done since 2019 due to lack of snow concentrating elk on winter range. The visibility model is still being run, but the raw count indicates the final total will be above 11,000. When last flown in 2019, the total was 8,200. Based on recruitment data from feed sites and harvest, there was no indication the Yakima elk herd was now over 11,000 elk. Antlerless harvest has been reduced, increasing elk numbers. It is known that not all elk are seen on surveys. It is possible that recent fires and heavy snow had pushed a larger portion of the herd into the survey area. The survey will mean increased antlerless opportunity.



*Elk about to be counted at Oak Creek while the helicopter surveys nearby areas*

**Mellotte Feed Site Elk Count:** Wenas Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Taylor assisted District 8 staff members with the annual elk count at Mellotte. Taylor also was able to help with aerial surveys for elk. The elk being fed at Mellotte had dropped from 1200 head down to 326 at the time of this report. Assistant Manager Taylor has been monitoring the few elk that are on the wrong side of the fence and is trying to get to the holes to repair them. While doing aerial flights the crew members found a gate that had been left open that was then closed.

**Tricolored Blackbird Survey Planning:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra is working with biologists from the University of California, Davis to coordinate what should be the first range-wide breeding survey for tricolored blackbirds, a species that has declined dramatically in California where more of the breeding population resides. The species is a poorly known breeder in Washington with only a handful of known wetlands where they have bred in recent years. Volunteers will be used to count birds at suitable sites over the weekend of May 20.

**Bluebird Box Project:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and volunteers, including several Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society members, installed bluebird nest boxes on private lands along Case Road on the southside of Rattlesnake Mountain. The boxes were made by a group of Cub Scouts over a decade ago and needed some cleaning and repairs after years in storage at the wildlife area. Mountain bluebirds are not known to breed currently in Benton County, but they have been seen in the area. Whether they find and use the nest boxes will be interesting to see in the coming years. Male bluebirds begin to arrive in their breeding areas in mid-February. Tree swallows and wrens might also use the boxes. Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society volunteers will monitor the boxes. The boxes are viewable from public roads, but they are on private land and should not be approached from outside your car for the bird's and landowner's preferences.





*Volunteer assembly line quickly prepped boxes for placement*



*Fidorra and volunteer with finished box*

**Annual Burrowing Owl Project Maintenance Begins:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and volunteers began repairs and checks of the 80 artificial burrows used by burrowing owls in District 4. Some owls were onsite and likely overwintered at their breeding burrows to get a head start again this season. Fidorra and a volunteer spent one morning digging up and replacing burrow supplies at a site to keep predatory mammals out of the nest chamber.

**Elk Feeding on the Murray:** L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart locked public access gates leading into the winter closure area on the Whiskey Dick and Quilomene units of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area. Retired Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) enforcement officer Essman joined Winegeart on the trip and shared detailed history of the area. The last elk count at the Joe Watt feed site was 743 total animals on February 8. This number has decreased to less than 100 since. The last count at Robinson was 597 total animals which has decreased to 100 – 300 coming to feed.



*Locking gates for the Whiskey Dick/Quilomene elk winter closure*





*No snow remaining at the L.T. Murray's Joe Watt feed site*

**Elk Fence Repair:** Natural Resource Technician Blore checked out some reported holes in the L.T. Murray Elk fence, which turned out to be from coyote and deer activity.



*Coyotes digging underneath elk fence*



## **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Sheep Company Target Shooting Area:** Biologist Daling built 100 target holders to be used at the Sheep Company Road Shooting Range. Usually target building is a volunteer effort, but volunteers were unavailable this time around. There are ongoing challenges with managing the users at the shooting range. Several signs have been shot up to the point of no longer being readable, they will be replaced as soon as possible. Manager Hughes continued to talk to nearby neighbors of the Wenas about the weekly site conditions of the shooting area. Hughes coordinated with a neighbor who volunteers to help monitor and clean up the site. Two volunteers shoveled ice off the pavement and helped clean up garbage left at the shooting area. The shooting area is a high use area of the Wenas, and staff members are working on being present out there as much as possible.



*Freshly made target holders, ready to be delivered by Master Hunter Volunteers to the Sheep Company Shooting Range*



*Destroyed '25 Yard Range' and '100 Yard Range' signs at the Sheep Company Shooting Range*

**Wenas Green Dot Map Addition:** Assistant Manager Taylor made stickers that say “U R HERE” with an arrow to put on our maps at each kiosk. Taylor has been installing them on each map as time permits.



*Wenas Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Taylor's green dot map updates on the Wenas*

## Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Kittitas County:** District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel worked on several crop damage claims for hay in Kittitas County.

Conflict Specialist Wetzel worked on three large-scale fencing projects along the Kittitas Reclamation District (KRD) North Branch and the South Branch pump ditch. It is hoped that KRD may include part of the North Branch in a larger capital upgrade, allowing the remaining funds to be used on the pump ditch section.

Elk have been appearing in the Thorp area visiting haystack areas in places they have not been seen in several years. New landowners moving into the area don't realize that any unprotected hay will be found and utilized by elk in that area.



*Elk ejected from the Thorp area*



**Yakima County:** District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel worked with orchard owners in the Tampico, Cowiche, Tieton, and French Canyon areas to expel elk that are using orchard areas. As the snow recedes, elk use has begun to drop off.



*Damaged elk fence that elk are jumping over*



*Repaired elk fence*



*Elk trailing toward orchard areas in Tampico*

Conflict Specialist Wetzel responded to reports of a large number of elk outside the fence at Snow Mountain Ranch. Elk had worked a hole in the fence. The fence was fixed, and elk passed through a nearby re-entry gate.





*Hole in elk fence. Believe it or not, 36 elk went through this hole*

**West Richland Deer Damage:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a new deer damage complaint from a small orchard and vineyard operation along the Yakima River in West Richland. A small group of approximately 12 deer have browsed on several apple trees and wine grape plants. Non-lethal hazing techniques were discussed and encouraged including acoustic and visual alarms, fencing and repellants. The landowner will also investigate city and county ordinances that may limit potential hunting opportunities.

**Juniper Dunes Deer:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a new deer damage complaint from a landowner near Juniper Dunes who sustained deer damage to his corn fields last summer and fall and was looking for solutions. General season, special permit, and damage permit hunting was discussed as well as deterrent measures to keep the deer away. Monitoring the fields this upcoming season will be necessary.

**Kahlotus Deer Damage Hazing and Hunts:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand conducted deer hazing patrols in several winter wheat fields in the Kahlotus area. Both Master Hunters and Youth special permit holders have been deployed to damage areas and have been successful in hazing and removing problem animals.

**Silver Dollar Land Hunting Permit Program:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand met with landowners enrolled in the Silver Dollar Landowner Hunting Permit Program to discuss this year's hunting activity and to check in on current coyote predation during their calving season. Mild winter weather continues to create beneficial calving conditions and no real coyote problems are occurring currently.



**Wolf Activity:** Wolf activity has been routine for the remaining members of the Teanaway Pack. The dispersing Naneum pack member that went to Klickitat County for a few weeks is now on the north portion of the Yakama Reservation.

### **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Hoover Acquisition:** Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Property Acquisition Supervisor Woodruff conducted a site visit on the Hoover property. They met with the landowner and discussed how to proceed with the access and cattle crossing agreements, which will be developed with the sale of this property. Hughes and Woodruff assessed the fence line and boundary line along Wenas Creek and Wenas Lake to make sure the survey and legal description was correct. There were differences between what was mapped out on the county assessor's page and the legal description written out in the deed. Everything has been surveyed correctly and is moving along. The goal is to have the sale complete by the end of spring. This acquisition is going to add approximately 1,000 acres of valuable shrub steppe and riparian habitat to the Wenas Wildlife Area.

**Solar Project Reviews:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra, Habitat Biologist Ritter, and Biologist Watson met with project representatives at proposed solar and wind sites in Benton County. Mitigation topics were discussed as well as potential impacts to the state endangered ferruginous hawk. The same group also met with the Washington Audubon leaders to discuss birds and wildlife impacts to wind and solar proposals.

### **Providing Education and Outreach**

**Elk Feeding Volunteers:** L.T. Murray Assistant Manager Winegeart worked with a happy father and daughter to feed elk on the L.T. Murray.



*A father and daughter helping feed elk at the Robinson feed site*

### **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Required Training:** Colockum Wildlife Area Manager Lopushinsky recently completed a day of UTV training at the Moses Lake Sand Dunes. WDFW is developing training for UTV operators since these machines are becoming more and more commonly used by WDFW staff members. Topics covered included basic operation, safety, equipment checks, and maneuvers such as avoiding obstacles, quick stops, and backing.



*Participants of the recent WDFW UTV safety training at the Moses Lake Sand Dunes*

**L.T. Murray Business Ops:** Wildlife Area Manager Bates participated in a Cooperative Weed Management Meeting with Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Winegeart that hosted folks from several agencies and groups. Manager Bates also continued to participate and work on the WDFW Land Use and Classification strategy for the L.T. Murray Pilot project along with other State Agency partners within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and State Parks. She also continued work on a Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grant work scope change and project extension for the Teanaway Valley Unit as well as worked on a new RCO project proposal for stream restoration work on the Taneum using large woody debris. Lastly, Manager Bates worked on submitting two Position Descriptions for Natural Resource Worker 2s for the L.T. Murray.

## **REGION 6**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Oregon Spotted Frog:** Biologist Butler began preparations for upcoming Oregon spotted frog surveys. The Oregon spotted frog is an aquatic frog rarely found outside of water. It is federally listed as threatened and the State of Washington lists it as endangered with loss of habitat and the introduction of invasive species as major causes for its decline. Every three years the status of the population is determined through egg mass surveys of all known ovi positioning sites across the state. This three-year survey was supposed to be conducted last year, but due to Covid-19 concerns, the range wide survey effort was postponed to this year. Biologist Butler spent time this week reaching out to landowners for permission to access private lands and surveys will begin mid-February. You can learn more about the role private landowners play within Oregon spotted frog conservation here: [Landowners and Conservation: Oregon Spotted Frogs](#).



*An example of an Oregon spotted frog egg mass found within a shallow wetland*

**Western Pond Turtle:** Biologist Butler has been working with the Sustainability in Prisons Project for the past month to coordinate the training of new turtle technicians as well as the transfer of this year's shell disease treatment turtles from the Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) to Cedar Creek. Lockdowns due to Covid-19 at Cedar Creek have made it difficult to schedule and plan these events. If all goes well, the training of the new technicians will now occur at the end of February with the turtles being transferred soon after.





*Western pond turtles getting a CT scan to guide their shell disease treatment*

**Dusky Goose Survey:** Technician Martenson assisted with dusky Canada oose surveys in Grays Harbor County.

### **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Flooding and Storm Damage:** The access team members continued clean-up at sites damaged from weather events.

**Hood Canal, Pleasant Harbor:** Due to the series of weather events in December, several access sites have downed trees, limbs, erosion, and landslides. Pleasant Harbor Storm damage work is 90% complete from the efforts of team members Freimund and Walker.



*Before*



*After*

**Thurston County:** The access team has started preparing for spring by trimming low limbs, chipping fallen branches and blowing parking lots of leaves and needles.



*Before*



*Long Lake*

*After*





**Grays Harbor County:** The access team is continuing to clean mud and silt from numerous locations affected by high river levels. Double Bridges received some attention by removal of approximately 5 inches of mud deposited over 50% of the parking area. Finishing touches will be made in spring once the area has dried out.

*Before*



*After*



**Other Work Performed:** Access staff members were assisted by Enforcement on addressing four abandoned boats in one week! All of these were investigated by Enforcement and very quickly cleared for removal and disposal.



*Porter Ramp*



*Lawrence Lake*

**North Rainier Elk Surveys:** Biologists Tirhi and Smith met a second time to finalize plans for surveying the north herd this march. With limited funds (\$10,000) and high flight costs it will be difficult, but the team will attempt to fly as much priority area as possible using area and transect based searches.



## **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Sick and Injured Wildlife:** Biologist Butler responded to a report of a dead swan on Lake Tapps. The swan was observed looking lethargic and drooping its head in the day prior to it being found dead. These are possible signs of lead poisoning, and the swan's remains were collected for a necropsy to be performed. If the public sees a dead, sick, or injured swan, please call the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife 24-hour hotline: (360) 466-4345, ext. 266 and leave a detailed message. Do not handle the bird but note the location and condition of the swan. If possible, pictures and video of the bird can help biologists evaluate the swan's condition. WDFW collects this information to assess the impact of lead poisoning and power line collisions.

## **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Johns River Wildlife Area:** Technician Martenson and Biologist Novack continue with restoration and planting efforts at the John's River Wildlife Area - Elk River Unit. Biologist Novack inspected some of the final work that the masticator finished at the Elk River unit. The contractor has completed their portion of the project and will be removing their equipment.

**Chehalis Basin Strategy/Aquatic Species Restoration Plan:** Biologist Tirhi spent considerable time completing required application paperwork and presentation material for [Aquatic Species Restoration Plan](#) grant fund approval for projects on two Oregon spotted frog sites: Mima Creek and Allen Creek. This involves funds towards ongoing hydrologic monitoring to guide site management, bullfrog control, creation of ponds for spotted frog breeding, and invasive reed canary grass and other weed control.

**Olympia Airport Master Plan:** Biologist Tirhi continues to work internally and with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on review and input on the master plan. WDFW appreciates the efforts of the Port of Olympia to plan future operations and engage WDFW in that planning as a member of the technical committee. This location supports one of the most important populations of Olympia pocket gopher and streaked horned lark in the South Puget Sound region.

**Mazama Pocket Gopher Habitat Enhancement:** Biologist Tirhi and WDFW Forester Tveten met virtually with Natural Resource Conservation staff members to discuss a prairie and oak enhancement project on a property which both agencies own conservation easements (CE) and share a CE boundary.

## **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Snowy Plovers:** Biologist Novack submitted a report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on predator control efforts to protect snowy plovers and applied for a renewed permit.

**Field Season Planning:** Biologist Tirhi organized field season duties for District 11 field staff members to improve efficiency and preparedness. Tirhi then met with Biologist Butler to review and finalize field season plans and separation of duties.