

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

September 1 to September 15, 2020

DIVERSITY 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

Bat Research Training: WDFW Biologist Tobin assisted Central Washington University (CWU) graduate student Chapman on their project investigating bat activity along Interstate-90 and the wildlife crossing mitigation project. Tobin trained the student on acoustic monitoring techniques and assisted with deploying the acoustic detectors to passively monitor bat activity in the area through the fall. She also trained the student on bat capture techniques using triple-high mist nets. The graduate student's project will provide interesting data on possible effects of roadways on bat movement and foraging behavior.



WDFW Biologist Tobin and CWU graduate student Chapman setting up triple-high mist nets in the Interstate-90 wildlife crossing mitigation project area

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

SCIENCE 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

Fire Response: With active wildfires throughout the state, the Lands Division spent a lot of time assessing the impact on department lands. There were impacts on habitat and infrastructure on several department wildlife and water access areas from the Evans Canyon, Pearl Hill, Hawk Creek (also called Whitney road), Cold Springs, and Greenhouse fires, as well as potential damages from the Mima road/Bordeaux and Sumner Grade/Bonney Lake fires. This includes devastating losses of sage and sharp-tailed grouse leks and pygmy rabbit enclosures, as well as loss of mule deer and elk winter range.

The Evans Canyon fire burned approximately 15 miles of elk fence on the Wenas Wildlife Area, as well as a bridge over Wenas Creek that was scheduled to be replaced in an effort to improve access and flood plain function. These losses could greatly affect access and elk feeding going forward, though the full impacts are still unknown at this time.

The Hawk Creek (Whitney road) fire burned 95 percent of the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, and staff expect there to be no power until at least October. Fires are responsible for many land closures throughout the state, which will impact hunters and special permit holders as seasons are just kicking off.

The full effect and impact from the fires won't be known for some time. The losses to habitat and wildlife are heavy, but the department is committed to recovering from these fires and continuing our work to preserve, protect, and perpetuate fish and wildlife and their habitats in Washington. It may take some time, but we will rebound.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting: Lands Division staff members spent time this week attending this year's Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) conference. There were many workshops focusing on a variety of issues facing fish and wildlife agencies today, and how we can address those issues as we move into the future. The AFWA conference is incredibly valuable to staff members, as it allows connections with other agencies and the exchange of ideas and approaches that ensure we can move forward in our efforts to serve the public.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Bighorn Sheep: Gavin Cotterill investigated a bighorn sheep mortality along the Wenaha River. There was little left other than a VHF collar and bones so determining the cause of death was impossible, although a bear made several meals out of the remains. The collar was in remote terrain, and retrieving it was a thoroughly enjoyable, all-day adventure despite significant wildfire smoke. Gavin's other tasks this week included vehicle maintenance, the continued monitoring of lambs in Asotin Creek, and generating computer code to run population abundance models.



Wenaha Wilderness where Biologist Cotterill went to retrieve a dead bighorn

Cougar Harvest: Biologist Lowe inspected and sealed a female cougar harvested in game management unit (GMU) 127. The cougar had been ear tagged as a kitten by Research Scientist Kertson on a den visit in 2018, as part of the Predator-Prey Project. Her dispersal is impressive, as she traveled from her birthplace west of Waitts Lake in GMU 121, through Spokane, and south into farm country where she was harvested west of Rockford.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Private Lands Access Program Updates: Private Lands Biologist Gaston and Natural Resource Worker Holcomb worked towards completing new contracts for landowners enrolled in Hunt by Reservation or Feel Free to Hunt programs. Properties will be updated, and reservations uploaded onto the website as soon as possible. Many of the Hunt by Reservation sites have already been loaded up onto the public website.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nuisance Animals in the City: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman did an over the phone interview with a reporter from The Inlander about nuisance wildlife in city limits and how implementing a “no feeding” ban would be a beneficial deterrent.

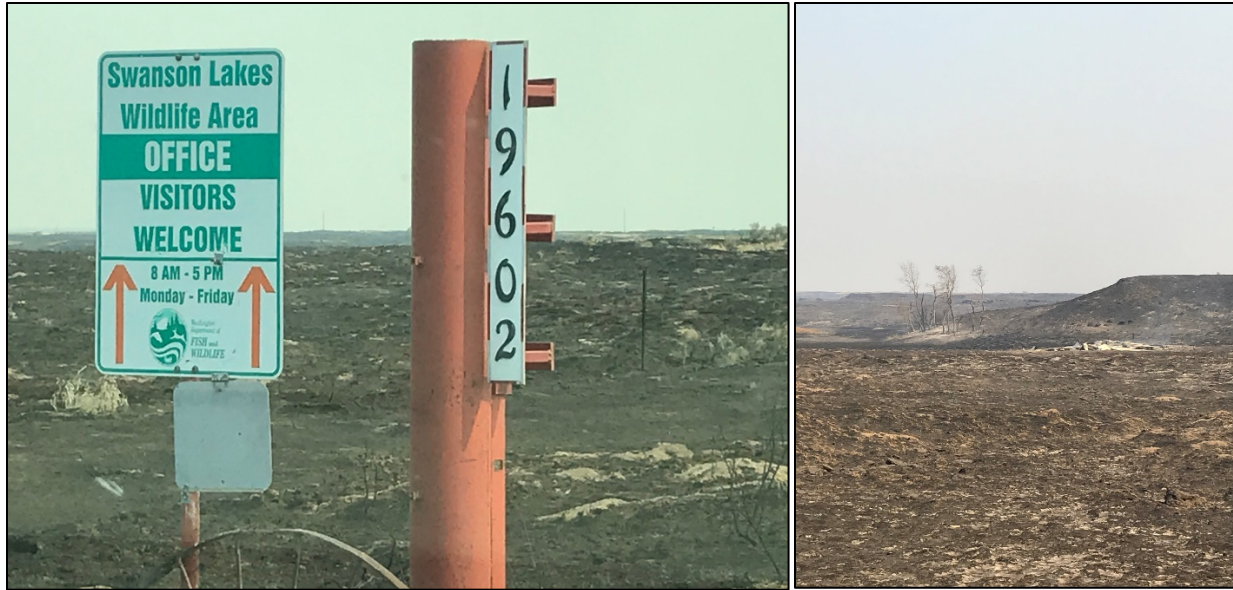
Wolf Non-Lethal Deterrents: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb continued working with a Columbia County livestock producer on proactive non-lethal deterrents. Non-lethal efforts appear to be working as wolf activity, sightings, and vocalizations have declined significantly this week in the private pasture where livestock are present.

4) Conserving Natural Areas

Revere Wildlife Area Wetland Project: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (WLA) staff members joined other WDFW biologists and two Ducks Unlimited employees this week to examine a wetland and start planning field activities for opening the waterway, which has been clogged by rushes and cattails. About \$35,000 has been granted for this work through duck stamp funding. The funds will not be enough to open the entire pond behind the existing water control structure, but it is a start.



Whitney Fire: The strong winds of Monday, September 7, 2020, allowed a spark to produce a catastrophic wildfire that began north of US Highway 2 and sprinted south and west, burning nearly all the 21,000-acre Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (SLWA). Dubbed the Whitney or Hawk Creek Fire, it was still burning in spots as of Friday, September 11, 2020. Both neighbors in the 60-acre inholding between SLWA and the United States Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Twin Lakes Recreation Area lost their homes and outbuildings. The shops, the new office, and a residence at SLWA were saved, although repairs will be required at the office. All other SLWA buildings are known or believed lost. Habitat loss and wildlife death are heartbreaking. Once fire danger has passed, staff members will begin inventorying infrastructure and habitat losses, planning for habitat restoration and essential infrastructure repair, and estimating costs and sorting out funding options. The Spokesman-Review has a good [article](#) on the fire.



Rattlesnake Fire Camp at Wooten WLA: The oversight of the Rattlesnake Fire operations was transferred back to the Pomeroy District of the Umatilla National Forest this week and the fire camp that was at the Wooten Headquarters moved out. There is still an area closure around the fire area and the main Tucannon Road is still closed at the Little Tucannon River bridge. WDFW Biologist Kari Dingman worked with Lisa Nelson to enter the contract for reimbursement from the fire costs into Novatus. Kari picked up the barricades that had been placed to close Campground 4 and returned everything to the barn for storage.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Cattlemen's Association: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb contact both the Columbia and Walla Walla counties Cattlemen's Associations to exchange contact information. Kolb has been invited to the October meeting for Walla Walla County Cattlemen's Association.

Hunter Education Instructor: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb spoke with the Region 1 Hunter Education Coordinator, Whorton, about becoming credentialed to teach classes in the Walla Walla area.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Washington Advisory Codes: Wildlife Conflict Specialist O'Connor reviewed Washington State Administrative Codes (WAC) 220-440-030 through 220-440-170 as part of new hire training. This was a great opportunity to review the policies dictating the management actions utilized as a wildlife conflict professional in the state of Washington. Reviewing WACs are necessary as specific actions require forethought and accountability when making decisions determining the outcomes in wildlife-human conflict.

Contracts: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked with Contracts Specialist Mielke with submitting new contracts for review and approval. Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley contacted landowners with notification of expiring contracts to renew as well as identifying new Voluntary Public Access contracts and per acre dollar amount. Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked with Conflict Specialist Kolb in signing up a landowner into a WDFW access program.

Administrative Staff Members and Lands Familiarization: Region 1 Headquarters Customer Service Specialist Mardi Hardwick came to Rustlers Gulch WLA on Tuesday. Hardwick and Palmer rode mountain bikes on the non-motorized trail system and checked out the Fan Lake Access Site, so Hardwick could familiarize herself these sites. While out there, they answered questions for a hiker they encountered. The hiker intended to return to Rustlers Gulch with a mountain bike later in the week. It would make a great promotional advertisement for Rustlers Gulch!



Customer Service Specialist Mardi Hardwick at Rustlers Gulch – Photo by Palmer

7) Other

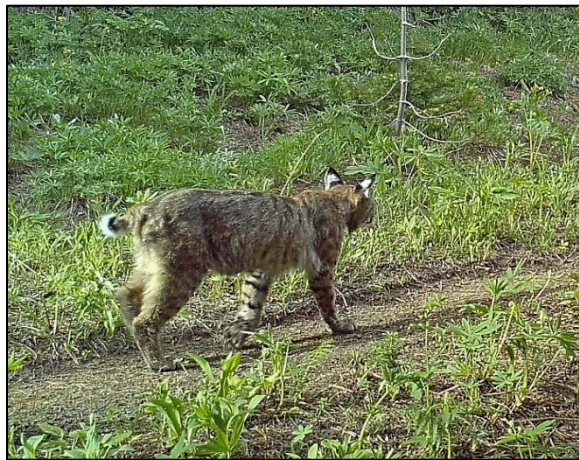
Nothing for this installment.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Lynx Monitoring: Biologist Fitkin conducted checks on the accessible front country cameras deployed as part of the Lynx Occupancy Modeling project in the Okanogan Lynx Management Zone. Cameras did produce some lynx detections along with the usual cast of characters. The outcome of this work will be to refine the existing model and develop a long-term monitoring strategy for this species.



Lynx (note all black tail tip, large feet, long hind legs)



Bobcat (note white tail tip underside, smaller feet, shorter hind legs)

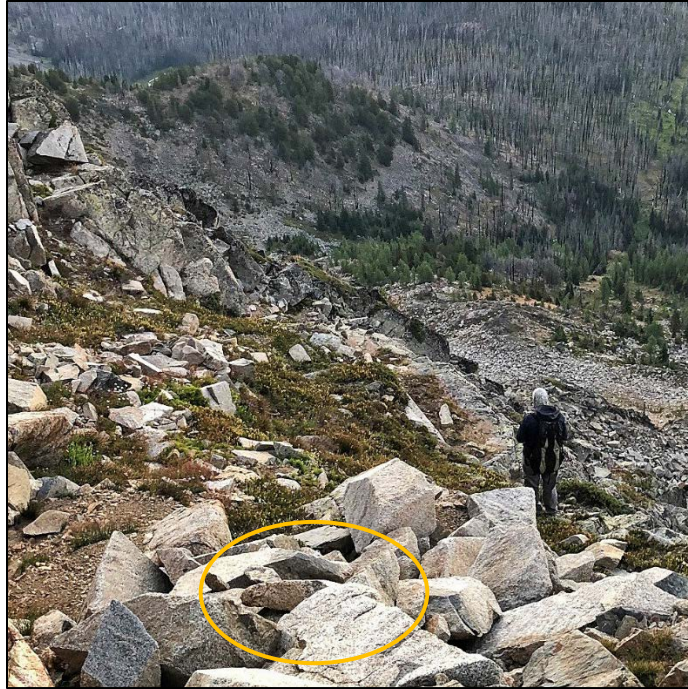


Black bear and cub



Coyote with pup

Ptarmigan Research: Biologist Heinlen assisted Research Scientist Schroeder on an expedition to Armstrong Mountain in the Pasayten Wilderness to band white-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucura*). The endeavor is part of a long-term research and monitoring effort to learn more about the ecology of this climate change sensitive species near the southern extent of its range. Shortly before sunrise, a calling male lead the team to a group of 13 birds including 12 previously banded males and a chick. No un-banded ptarmigan were located this trip. However, not to be denied, the crew successfully banded an adult female spruce grouse with two chicks below tree line on the way out.



Dr. Schroeder observing a flock of white-tailed ptarmigan on Armstrong Mountain – Photo by J. Heinlen



Sunrise from Armstrong Mountain and Researcher Schroeder capturing a hen spruce grouse (her chick is on the trail) – Photo by J. Heinlen

Wolf Monitoring: Biologist Fitkin checked cameras deployed to monitor continuing wolf activity in the South Sawtooths and wolf sighting reports in the Upper Methow. Two wolves continue to be detected by cameras in the Sawtooth area that do not appear to be part of the Lookout Pack. Collaring attempts have been unsuccessful thus far. No wolves were detected in the Upper Methow, but a camera at a natural salt lick is always good for some interesting photos.



Sawtooth wolf pair – WDFW remote camera



Mountain goats on a mission – WDFW remote camera

Monarch Survey: Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock returned to Gallagher Flats State Wildlife Recreation Area to perform a follow-up survey for monarch butterflies. No adult monarchs or larvae had been observed here in the course of the first survey in early August, but biologists hoped to detect monarchs in one or more larval stages during this second survey, at which point adult monarchs would likely have begun migrating south. Adult monarch butterflies lay their eggs on milkweed plants, so biologists divided up the Recreation Area and surveyed each patch of showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*) by carefully examining plants, particularly the undersides of leaves, for the presence of monarch eggs, larvae, or pupae. No monarch sign was detected. Monarchs were last documented breeding at Gallagher Flats State Wildlife Recreation Area in 2017.



A patch of showy milkweed (Asclepias speciosa) at Gallagher Flats State Wildlife Recreation Area – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

Biologist Rowan completed the second day of two-day surveys for Monarch butterflies or their larvae at numerous locations in Grant County. No signs of Monarchs were found. Some habitat patches had clearly been mowed recently, while most other sites have significant amounts of dead or oily milkweed. There have been significant declines continent-wide over the last few years. Some wintering sites have reported 90% declines.

Pygmy Rabbit New Mobile Breeding Enclosure: Despite temperatures into the 90's-100's the past two weeks, we built the last mobile breeding enclosure (four acres) in the northeast section of the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. We fabricated 92 wall fence panels in the Ephrata shop and then with the assistance of staff members from the Wells Wildlife Area and Region 2 Access sites, set up the enclosure within three days. This was the last mobile enclosure we built from scratch. At this point, each of our four mobile enclosures will be relocated every three to four years to prevent buildup in disease, noxious weeds, and over browsing on sites.

Pygmy Rabbit Semi-Wild Breeding Population: With the new enclosure in place, we can now relocate the 33 kits retained this year for future breeding efforts. We will place around 20-25 kits in the new enclosure and 5-7 kits between the two mobile enclosures built last year. We still have a couple of kits in each enclosure that have yet to be captured and we will continue this effort into late summer. Our goal will be to have all kits in their final "home" before September.



The finished enclosure blends into the brush



Science Technicians Smith, Soltysiak, Access Tech Follett, and Natural Resource Technicians Chouinard set up the panel walls while wearing masks in 95-degree weather

Forest Grouse Wing Collection Barrels: Biologist Comstock and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bridges set out wing collection barrels at four Chelan County sites: Cooper Mountain road (8020 road) at intersection of Black Canyon (4010 road) and Cooper Mountain roads; Shady Pass (5900 road); French Corral (Eagle Creek and 5800 road); and Colockum Wildlife Area, at the intersection of Colockum road and Ingersoll road. GPS coordinates are: 47.25964 -120.213922.

During the September 1 through December 31 hunting season, grouse hunters can help WDFW build estimated population trend datasets for each grouse species and evaluate harvest levels by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse harvested into a wing collection barrel. Hunters are asked to please place samples in one of the paper bags provided, or any paper bag, and then label the bag as outlined below before depositing it in the barrel. Use one bag for each bird. Avoid using plastic bags (especially Ziplocs), as they speed up decay. On the outside of the bag, please record:

- 1) The species of grouse.
- 2) The game management unit (GMU) where the grouse was harvested.
- 3) The county where the grouse was harvested.
- 4) The date of the harvest.



A wing barrel for depositing wing and tail samples of harvested forest grouse – Photo by Devon Comstock

Western Gray Squirrel Surveys: Impossible as it is to believe, field work for the Western Gray Squirrel (WGS) survey effort in District 6 is now finally complete, ending just in time to avoid sending Biologist Heinlen into therapy and having volunteer extraordinaire Fisher disavow all future WDFW field projects. Unfortunately, we ended on a down note with only four positive hits this year; it must have been a good year for natural forage, but that's okay because it means more leftover walnuts for weary staff members to eat. To say that a huge collective sigh went up from all involved is a big understatement. If we ever get to meet in person again, the team will be collectively hitting up Researcher Vanderhaegen and/or Survey Biologist Cotton for a beverage of their choice.

Chelan County Wildlife Monitoring: Specialist Bridges continues to follow up on reports of possible wolf sightings. Trail cameras have been placed to continue monitoring over the next few weeks. A few interesting photos showed up!





2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Blue Lake access site: Water access staff members addressed concerns about boaters not having full access to the newly installed boat launch and dock at Blue Lake due to swimmers and fisherman using the dock. Also addressed camping in a day use only parking lot with two shiny new signs.



Quincy Lakes Trails Planning: Lands Operations Manager Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson participated in a conference call to bring Joel Miner, Environmental Protection Specialist with Reclamation, up to speed on the Quincy Lakes Unit Planning effort. Finger provided the background information, timeline, and approach to grant writing and shared some of the hurdles we've yet to cross such as 25-year Control and Tenure documentation for the two five-year DNR leases or the Management Agreements with BLM and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Finger took a quick ride out on the Quincy Lakes to investigate a reroute option, where an existing trail goes through private lands.



Quincy Lakes Unit - Photo by R. Finger

Hunting Access on Private Property: Biologist Cook continued reposting hunting access signs on properties active in the hunter access program. Cook also entered Hunt by Reservation opportunities for properties in southern Grant. Cook continued to review Hunter Access contracts to verify accuracy and to find recently expired contracts with potential for renewal.

Private Lands Biologist Braaten continues to deliver Hunter Access Program materials to participating cooperators, repair/relabel access signs, and work on redoing access contracts with landowners.



Old and new signs - Photos by Eric Braaten

Biologist Hughes continued to post signs, handout books of permission slips, contact with landowners, and answer questions from hunters in preparation for the upcoming hunting seasons. Hughes went over the reservation system with Biologist Cook. Hughes and Cook updated hunts in the reservation system for sites in Region 2 that are reservation to hunt. A couple landowners discussed changes to their contracts with Hughes. One of which sold part of their property and another added 640 acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to their Hunter Access Program agreement. Hughes is working to update the sites and contracts for each landowner.



Walk-in Hunting Only and Hunting by Written Permission in Grant County - Photo By Hughes

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Deer Damage: Specialist Bridges worked with a multitude of landowners assisting with attempts to decrease damage from deer. Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements (DPCAs) were completed and permits were issued in a fashion that landowners were comfortable with regarding Covid-19 concerns. Specialist Bridges continues to assist landowners with directing special permit hunters to remove depredating deer on landowners' properties. As trust continues to build, so does the willingness of the landowners to work with hunters. Specialist Heilhecker received a call regarding deer damage to an alfalfa field near Molson. She conducted a site visit, renewed the landowner's damage prevention cooperative agreement, and issued one kill permit.

Cost Share Fencing: Specialist Heilhecker coordinated the final delivery of fencing materials to three landowners who received cost-share agreements. Each landowner must install the fence to complete their portion of the agreement. With the cost-share agreements in the place, the landowners are no longer eligible for wildlife damage compensation.

Injured Calf Investigation: WDFW staff members received a call regarding a calf injured by a bear. The livestock operator noticed the injured calf while gathering cattle and brought the calf back to the house. They examined a 200-pound, male, late spring calf with injuries estimated to be two to three days old. The locations of the injuries were consistent with those caused by a canine. The size and degree of bite marks to the testicles and both rear legs indicated the injuries

could have been caused by a single wolf. However, there was no scene to investigate and it is not known if wolves were in the area at the time of the incident. Therefore, it was determined to be a probable wolf-caused injury within the Beaver Creek pack territory.

Cougar Depredation: Specialist Heilhecker assisted a sheep producer with contacting the wildlife conflict section in Olympia. A cougar had killed seven, rare wensleydale sheep. The producer was having trouble finding the correct avenue to request a livestock loss compensation packet.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Okanogan County State Lands Development Project Submittal: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug revised and submitted the final grant applications for three water access improvement projects through the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and their State Lands Development and Renovation category. The three projects include: improvements to the Riser Lake/Lewis Butte Trail head near Winthrop, development of water access to Buzzard Lake and water access improvements to three separate sites along the Similkameen River (one site pictured below). Improvements include accessibility (ADA), vault toilet replacement/addition, better parking and enhanced signage.



An undeveloped water access site along the Similkameen River proposed to be developed -

Photo by Haug

Methow Noxious Weed Control: The Methow Wildlife Area (MWA) has been bustling with activity the last couple of weeks. In addition to the spraying of noxious weeds, Assistant Manager Repp accompanied Washington State University (WSU) Extension personnel in monitoring several Russian Knapweed bio control sites. All sites contained rosette galls of *Jaapiella ivannikov* and at least one site contained the stem galls of *Aulacidea acroptilonica* (see photo below). Maintenance Mechanic Wottlin has also been busy replacing spray tanks on the gator and has spent a considerable amount of time trouble shooting and repairing components of the irrigation system to get it up and operational at the Lloyd ranch property.



Stem gall of Aulacidea acroptilonica (left) and rosette gall of Jaapiella ivannikov (right)

Methow Wildlife Area Salmon Recovery Projects: Lands Operations Manager Haug and Methow Wildlife Area Manager Troyer met with regional and district WDFW staff members, the Yakama Nation, and the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation to discuss a number of ongoing salmon restoration projects and proposed south of Twisp. The group discussed project timelines, potential changes, and future work at three locations. Habitat program staff members have been working hard to keep communication open and field any questions either group may have. Some work on the ground could begin as early as next spring with staging equipment. Staff members from multiple programs will be engaged closely with each other throughout the process.

Sinlahekin Noxious Weed Control: Staff members continued treating areas of bladder senna and rush skeletonweed on the units that comprise the Sinlahekin. Along with herbicide control, Maintenance Mechanic Boulger also clipped scotch thistle seed heads and did some hand pulling of puncturvine.

Sagebrush-Steppe Habitat Restoration Project: Sinlahekin Assistant Manager Klehm completed revisions for the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Shrub Steppe Enhancement grant application. The revisions were done after receiving input from the technical review of the application. The proposed project includes restoring old agriculture fields with native vegetation on the Chiliwist Unit along with areas on the Methow Unit. This is a joint grant with the Methow Wildlife Area and the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

Sinlahekin Forest Thinning: The North Central Prescribe Burn Team continued thinning on the Sinlahekin. The crew has been thinning areas to meet the Dry Forest prescription that was developed by WDFW State Lands Forester Pfeifle. This will help to open up those areas and help to prepare the fuel bed so that we can bring prescribed fire into those areas.

Multiple Species General Conservation Plan: Biologist Hughes reviewed the monitoring component of the Multiple Species General Conservation Plan (MSGCP). Hughes discussed monitoring protocols for the MSGCP with Foster Creek Conservation District (FCCD). Landowners enrolled in the MSGCP are required to conduct monitoring on habitat of their enrolled property. The monitoring will answer questions for the MSGCP; asking if best management practices being conducted on private land are improving rangeland health and the overall habitat conditions for the four species covered under each permit. To meet compliance for the MSGCP and determine how best management practices are affecting habitat on private land, FCCD is looking for control areas that do not have ongoing best management practices being done. Hughes discussed the possibility of control sites being done on public ground and put FCCD in touch with the appropriate wildlife area personnel for WDFW.

State Acres for Wildlife Conservation Reserve Program: Private Lands Biologist Braaten completed planning assistance in Lincoln County developing 33 new 2020 State Acres for Wildlife (SAFE) CRP conservation plans.



Shrub-steppe in State Acres for Wildlife CRP field – Photo by Braaten

Palmer Fire: The Palmer Fire started on August 18, 2020 and burned approximately 18,000 acres north of the town of Loomis, Washington. This area was a mix of forested stands with shrub-steppe meadows scattered throughout and large aspen stands in the draws. The area held bighorn sheep from the Sinlahekin herd, provided deer winter range, and supported chukar, dusky and ruffed grouse habitat in addition to many other non-game species. Though habitats for these species has been reduced, it is expected that the clearing of decadent shrubs and forested stands will allow more grasses in the next year or two which should benefit the bighorn sheep, dusky grouse, and chukar. Deer winter range and ruffed grouse recovery will lag behind as the shrubs and aspen stands will take longer to recover (five to ten years).



Smoke column from the Palmer Fire looking west from the town of Tonasket – Photo J. Heinlen

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Bureau of Reclamation Funding Coordination: Lands Operations Manager Finger hosted a virtual meeting with BOR to discuss funding sources, past expenditures, and anticipated future funding. A significant portion of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area budget comes from federally controlled sources as such Soil and Moisture Conservation and Farm Unit 55 and 80 (also known as Block 26). The good news is that we've added another source this year. Title 28, which is new cost-share funding, will provide an extra \$37,000 for the next five years to address an Operations and Maintenance (O&M) backlog on federally owned portions of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

7) Other



Horseshoe Mountain looking north to Armstrong Mountain



Spring on Horseshoe Mountain looking west into the Pasayten Wilderness – Photos by J. Heinlen



Mount Bigelow reflected in Upper Crater Lake in the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness



Bear claw scars on an aspen trunk on the Methow Wildlife Area – Photos by S. Fitkin



Moses Coulee in the early morning - Photo by J. Gallie

REGION 3

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 4

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

District 9 Grouse Wing Barrels: On September 1, the opening day of statewide grouse season, Biologist Wickhem deployed grouse wing collection barrels at three locations within District 9; the Gifford Pinchot National Forest Ranger Station in Trout Lake, at the intersection of Northwestern Lake Rd and Lakeview Rd near Northwestern Park outside Husum, and at the Beaver Campground entrance along the Wind River Highway outside of Carson. Deposited wings and tails are used to identify what species was harvested and the sex of the bird. WDFW will use this information to develop a better understanding of grouse populations in the region and make informed management decisions. A full list of barrel locations can be found [here](#).



A grouse wing collection barrel ready to receive harvested grouse wings in District 9

Cougar Seal: This week, Biologist Wickhem sealed her first cougar of the 2020 season. The hunter was scouting for elk and bears in Skamania County when the adult, male cougar emerged from the bushes. He was thankful for the opportunity and has been busily making cougar sausage since his harvest. All hunters are required to have their cougar “sealed” by WDFW staff members after harvest. Staff members will collect information about the cougar, the area, and means of harvest, take a DNA sample, pull a tooth (used to age the animal), and attach a numbered seal to the pelt which indicates the animal was harvested legally. All successful cougar hunters must call the cougar harvest hotline (866-364-4868) within 72 hours to report their harvest, and have their pelt sealed within five days of notification. Please bring the carcass (or skull and hide) unfrozen with proof of sex attached.

District 10 Grouse Wing and Tail Collection Sites: Biologist Stephens and Cowlitz Wildlife Area Manager Vanderlip put out grouse wing and tail collection barrels in District 10 prior to opening day of grouse season. Hunters are asked to submit one wing and the tail of each grouse they harvest in collection barrels in Cowlitz and Lewis counties. Wildlife managers can determine age, sex, and species of the birds harvested which helps to evaluate population trends. The following locations are where hunters can find collection barrels in District 10.

- 1) Cowlitz County: Junction of the 1900/1901 on Weyerhaeuser land near Kid Valley. GPS 46.37706 -122.60943.
- 2) Cowlitz County: Junction of the 4100/4200 on Weyerhaeuser land east of the town of Toutle. GPS 46.30905 -122.6466.
- 3) Lewis County: Peterman Hill road, entrance to the Peterman Ridge Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. GPS 46.53417 -122.34213.
- 4) Lewis County: Western access point to Vail Tree Farm at intersection of Big Hanaford road and the 150 Rd near the gate.



Grouse Collection Barrel on Peterman Hill Road

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Regional Access Sites: This week, Access staff members Rhodes and McKinlay onboarded temporary Natural Resources Worker Holt who jumped right in to help Rhodes and McKinlay with all the maintenance and cleanup of the Region 5 access sites. The team was able to catch up on weed eating, cleaning, and painting at several sites.



Natural Resources Worker Devon at Langsdorf Landing



Turkey Hole Access filling up with campers for the weekend

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Damage Agreements: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with several landowners to sign their annual Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements for elk damage to their crops.

Deer Damage to Vineyard: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a landowner in suburban Clark County who has been incurring extensive damage to his grape crops from deer. The landowner has been living at the residence for over 20 years and has since observed all the green space around him turn into subdivisions. Approximately 15-20 deer have been taking refuge on his property and have found his grape plants very appealing. The landowner has an eight-foot fence around his crop, but the deer still manage to break in, jump over, or climb under the fence to get to the grapes. The county no-shooting ordinance makes it impossible to employ several non-lethal hazing methods, and lethal methods of deterrence are not feasible either. Jacobsen will enroll the landowner on a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) and explore additional fencing and hazing options for the landowner.



Heavily browsed grape vines in the foreground that produced no grapes this year due to deer damage

Emaciated Deer: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and District Biologist Holman responded to a report of an emaciated deer at a private RV vacation complex in Clark County. Based on the deer's condition, it was determined that it was a candidate for disease testing. Jacobsen and Biologist Holman were unable to locate the deer, but during the search, they did locate numerous campers who have been feeding deer unnatural feed from wooden troughs on a regular basis. This supplemental feeding likely contributed to, or was responsible for, the poor body condition of the deer in question. Though supplemental feeding of deer is not illegal, WDFW strongly discourages the practice for the sake of deer health and deer and human safety. Jacobsen and Biologist Holman provided advice to several of the campers in the area who had been feeding the numerous deer in the campground.



Emaciated deer in the campground

Depredation on Sheep: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and Officer Bolton responded to a report of several dead sheep in Klickitat County. Upon arriving, the landowner informed them that over three successive nights, he had lost two sheep, then two more sheep, and then four more sheep, respectively. All but one sheep was found dead in the landowner's fenced and partially wooded pasture (one was never located). A depredation investigation and necropsy of the carcasses revealed that the sheep were killed by a cougar. Ironically, Jacobsen and Officer Nelson had responded to the residence a few weeks prior on an unrelated matter and in conversing with the landowner, found out that he had several sheep that he pastured in his open field and woods at night. At the time, it was strongly recommended to the landowner that he pen up his sheep in the large barn on-site at night, as the landowner lived in ideal cougar, bear, and coyote habitat. The landowner wasn't concerned, as he had "lived there for years without carnivore issues." After the depredation investigation was complete, the landowner agreed to pen up his one remaining sheep in the barn at night. The landowner doesn't plan to acquire any more sheep in the future.



Sheep killed by a cougar, the landowner had moved the sheep from the kill scenes and piled them in one place at the time this photo was taken

Cougar Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by a family who was concerned that they had cougars shrieking back and forth across their property in suburban Clark County. According to the landowners, the sound apparently matched that of a cougar recorded on a popular YouTube video. Jacobsen has had reports of sounds matching this YouTube video countless times over the last several years. In most, if not all cases, the sounds that the landowners end up hearing are made by a pair of owls. This is the most likely explanation for the sounds heard by the landowners in this case as well. Advice was provided.

Elk Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey talked with a landowner recently enrolled in a DPCA about making an amendment to the contract to include additional property that the landowner leases. Aubrey also talked with other landowners and worked on DPCA's for ongoing elk damage issues.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey continued to meet with landowners throughout District 10 as elk damage ramps up with fall approaching. DPCA's were signed and non-lethal deterrents and permits were issued in areas where elk are already causing damage.

Injured Birds: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey responded to an area in Longview twice in search of an injured juvenile bald eagle. The eagle could reportedly fly, but not more than a few feet off the ground, and only for short distances. Aubrey was unable to locate the eagle on either occasion and received no further reports of the eagle being on the ground in that area.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey received a report for the Cowlitz Wildlife Area Manager Vanderlip about an injured hawk that was being dropped off at the Wildlife Area office. Aubrey picked up the hawk but, unfortunately, it was not in good enough health to be taken to a rehabilitator and was euthanized.

Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease and Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey responded to a report of an elk that could no longer move due to treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD). Upon arriving, Aubrey was unable to locate the elk with the help of the landowner. Two days later, the landowner contacted Aubrey again to report that the elk had died on a different part of the property.

Deer Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met with a landowner experiencing damage to trees from deer. The landowner was not eligible for a DPCA, so other options to address the damage we discussed, including the potential to allow public hunting access on the property.

Goose Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met with landowners who harvest grass seed. They were hit hard by geese after cutting their crop and were looking for options going forward. Aubrey issued hazing devices for short term help and got the landowners in touch with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services to address the issues in the future.

Bear and Cougar Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met with a concerned citizen in Lewis County who believes a bear has been frequenting their yard. There was no current evidence of a bear in the yard, and the last potential sighting was about a week prior to the report being made. Advice was given for living in bear country and how to prevent conflict with wildlife common to the area.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey contacted a homeowner who had found what he believed to be feces from a cougar on his driveway. The evidence had already been disposed of, so Aubrey left a trail camera in the area to monitor the situation and will be checking it in about a week. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey checked a trail camera placed last week for a homeowner concerned about a cougar on the property. The trail camera had been up for five days and no photos of cougars were captured.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Shillapoo Wildlife Area Fruit Valley Fire: On Tuesday afternoon, a wildfire ignited adjacent to the Vancouver Lake Unit of the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. With the gusty winds and dry conditions in the region, the fire developed rapidly burning across Clark County, Port of Vancouver, and WDFW properties. Local fire departments and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) responded to the fire, with there being more 50 firefighters, several engines and tenders, as well as two helicopters on scene to extinguish the flames. In total, 166 acres burned, most of which was grass and young trees. Luckily only about two acres of the WLA were blackened from the fire. Fire crews did a terrific job fighting the fire and keeping it from expanding onto WDFW lands. The western and northern fronts of the fire came within 50 feet of a large portion of the WLA.



Flames burning through Port of Vancouver



DNR Incident Commanders surveying the mitigation area fire scene



Front entrance to the Vancouver Lake Unit

Klickitat Wildlife Area New Lands Staff Member: This week, Natural Resource Worker Boyd began his three-month appointment to maintain water access sites and the Klickitat Wildlife Area. He is based in Klickitat County and is familiar with most of the water access sites through his own recreation activities. He is excited to be able to work in one of his favorite places and Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven is looking forward to having his help in stewarding the property under WDFW's care.

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

Nothing for this installment.