

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

February 1 to 15, 2021

## **DIVERSITY DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

## **GAME DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

## **HUNTER EDUCATION**

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

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

Nothing for this installment.

#### **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

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**

**Hunter Education Instructor Applications:** Region One Hunter Education Coordinator conducted a Pre-Service training session for new Hunter Education applicant instructors in Spokane on February 13. Six applicants were in attendance with several from rural counties. Region One Hunter Education Coordinator also recently certified two new female instructors, both of which are in Stevens County.

#### **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

## 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

## **LANDS DIVISION**

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

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Nothing for this installment.

#### 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Managing E-Bikes on WDFW-managed Lands:** WDFW is reviewing its current practice of limiting the use of electric bicycles (e-bikes) to trails and roads that allow motorized vehicles. Late last month, Planning and Recreation Manager Sisolak briefed the Wildlife Committee of the Fish and Wildlife Commission on the definition of e-bikes and three standard e-bike classifications based on speed and motor type. He described how e-bikes are currently regulated on other public lands in the state and outlined options for short- and near-term actions to balance access for e-bikes with conservation goals and the needs of other trail users. Sisolak will also testify on February 18 at the Senate Transportation Committee on Senate Bill 5452. This bill would require WDFW to allow e-bikes on roads and trails wherever nonmotorized bicycles are authorized. WDFW will ask the legislature for time to better study the implications of such a dramatic change in policy prior to its implementation or the implementation of a policy more compatible with WDFW-managed lands.

**Improving Signage:** WDFW will seek a consultant to develop WDFW Statewide Sign Standards and Guidelines. This contract work has been approved for an exemption of the current contract freeze. A request for proposal (RFP) will soon be issued.

**Tribal Consultation:** Late last year, WDFW initiated a series of consultations via Teams with tribes from across the state on the topic of outdoor recreation and the development of a WDFW Statewide Recreation Strategy. This consultation process is intended to get input early and often from tribes as the strategy is developed and implemented. Tribes requested that WDFW include DNR, Parks, and USDA Forest Service in these meetings to discuss topics of concern or interest to the tribes, especially related to the impacts of outdoor recreation on treaty rights. On February 18, the third in this series of consultations will focus on outdoor recreation and enforcement on public lands. Law enforcement leaders from WDFW, DNR, Parks, and the Forest Service will be on hand to hear directly from tribal leaders about their concerns.

**COVID-19 Guidelines for Recreation Permits:** Elyse Woodruff created COVID-19 guidance for Lands Agents when issuing both non-commercial and commercial recreational permits. These guidelines will be updated as counties throughout the state are moved into different phases of Governor Inslee's [Healthy Washington](#) reopening plan.

### 3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Annual Operational Plans to Reduce Livestock/Wolf Conflict:** Lands Stewardship/Operations Manager Dahmer, Division Manager Wilkerson, and Range Ecologist Burnham facilitated a workshop for staff members who may participate in preparing Annual Operational Plans (AOPs) for grazing permits where wolves occur, addressing and capturing staff member questions and feedback. Dahmer incorporated input developing instructions subsequently posted to the intranet in the Land Manager Toolbox.

### 4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Grazing Program Review:** Range Ecologist Burnham, Lands Division Manager Wilkerson, and Lands Stewardship/Operations Manager Dahmer prepared a decision notebook and formally presented proposed amendments to [WAC 220-500-200](#) and Commission Policy C-6003 to the Commission. A productive discussion ensued after which the Commission voted to approve the amendments. This was a milestone in the multi-year effort to consolidate in one document clear and transparent grazing guidelines and tools for use in providing consistent, responsible management of grazing on WDFW lands.

**Wenas Wildlife Area Monitoring Strategies:** Range Ecologist Burnham joined Habitat Biologist Downes and staff members from the Wenas Wildlife Area to discuss monitoring strategies amenable to public participation whereby success of post-fire restoration seedings could be evaluated in the Evans Canyon burn footprint.

**Oak Creek Wildlife Area Planning:** Range Ecologist Burnham joined a group convened by Environmental Planner Vigue to prepare a Section 6 management plan for recently acquired lands. Most of the group has some experience with this process and assignments were made.

**Teanaway Community Forest Monitoring and Management:** Range Ecologist Burnham joined Regional Director Livingston and DNR Manager Leach to deliver the update on Teanaway Community Forest monitoring and potential management strategies to the Watershed/Lands Subcommittee meeting (Yakima Basin Integrated Plan). The group discussed ideas and processes for achieving those goals that are not yet being met.

**Wildfire Recovery Coordination:** Land Stewardship/Operations Manager Dahmer continued to coordinate funding allocations for habitat restoration and infrastructure work on the Swanson Lakes, Sagebrush Flats, and Wenas wildlife areas. The program has approved \$800,000 in expenditures for work with the anticipation of getting our supplemental budget request funded by the legislature.

**Elk River Weed Control:** Weed Specialist Nunez assisted the Wildlife Area mowing approximately 10.5 acres of Scotch broom control with a skid-steer mower and pole saw at the Elk River site with Warren Michaelis. Nunez has had issues with reliability because the Scotch broom is hard on the rental equipment. Nunez also looked at a potential nearby waterfowl enhancement project with Jim Gallegos and Denny VanBlaricom.



**Milltown Island Project:** Statewide Weed Coordinator Heimer participated in a Teams meeting with Jenny Baker, Belinda Rotton, Bob, Curran Cosgrove, Greg Meis, and Daniel Zimmerman discussing the Milltown Island project. Topics discussed included restoration options for increasing flow, weed management, planting efforts, and a vegetation survey by Brenda Clifton (Skagit River System Cooperative).

**Vegetation Management Project Input:** Weed Coordinator Heimer provided Jim Gallegos cost estimates to use a Marshmaster for a Duck Stamp grant at Johns River Wildlife Area, reviewed several vegetation management projects put forward by Brian Boehm for the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area, researched an effective herbicide to use for a lessee's pasture, and participated in an interagency meeting to discuss flowering rush survey and control at Lake Roosevelt.

**Agriculture Lease Review:** Vegetation Ecologist Merg consulted with Wildlife Area Manager Boehm about a mixed ag and grazing lease on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area, and finished review of an ag lease on the Headquarters Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

**BPA Budget Oversight Group (BOG) Wildfire Response Request:** Vegetation Ecologist Merg pared down a request to Bonneville Power Administration's BOG for fire recovery needs resulting from the Labor Day fires in 2020 that significantly impacted the Wenas, Sagebrush Flats, and Swanson Lakes wildlife areas. Merg notified Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) that a request would be forthcoming at the quarterly coordination meeting.

**Shrub Plugs Ordered in Response to Wildfire:** Vegetation Ecologist Merg ordered sagebrush plugs at the behest of Wildlife Diversity Section Manager Gorrell. These will be delivered in Autumn of 2021 and used for replanting sites on wildlife areas that burned in the 2020 Labor Day fires.

**Agriculture Irrigation Equipment Financing:** Vegetation Ecologist Merg consulted with Fiscal Analyst Kerilla to learn how to finance agricultural equipment. Merg relayed the gist of the conversation to Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Manager Wehmeyer to advance an ongoing discussion about bringing irrigation to a perennial hay lease that could be far more productive.

**Planning for Controlled Burns on Eastern Washington Wildlife Areas for 2021:** Each year WDFW conducts controlled burns generally starting in March. This year the Prescribed Burn Team plans to start a bit earlier with burns to help manage wetlands on the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area in the Moses Lake area. The burn is tentatively planned for the Mid-February or Mid-March timeframe. Other burns throughout Eastern Washington will happen as the season continues. Information for the locations of these burns will be posted on the agency's website.

**Chelan Wildlife Area – Swakane/Burch Mountain Restoration Thinning Project:** Forester Mize is preparing documents, contracts, and permits for this project. The cultural resource survey and report is estimated to be finalized when weather conditions allow access in late spring/early summer 2021. After consultation is complete, the harvesting services contract will be issued, and the logs will be auctioned. Based upon this current timeline, project completion will likely be late summer/fall of 2022.

**Klickitat Wildlife Area – Soda Springs Restoration Project Phase 2:** Forester Mize continues to conduct western gray squirrel (WGS) nest surveys in the proposed units for Phase 2 with assistance from Forester Pfeifle. Surveys in Unit 4 (T5N R14E Sec 5) are almost complete. At this time, nest trees are being marked with flagging and an orange band of paint. When nest surveys are complete, the foresters will begin marking leave trees throughout the rest of the units.



*Remnant old-growth Douglas-fire remains as a legacy that was considered unmerchantable when this stand was harvested approximately 80-100 years ago. Tree is approximately 4 feet in diameter, contains several large cavities, retains a handful of green branches, and is likely 400+ years old. The proposed restoration project will thin the small trees that have encroached on this legacy and create a more resilient stand*

**Scatter Creek Wildlife Area – Oak Restoration/Fuels Management:** WDFW and DNR Wildfire Program staff members have started working together to simultaneously reduce wildfire risk and restore oak woodlands on the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area. The local DNR fire staff members have offered to combine wildfire crew training with wildfire risk reduction/forest health improvement on the area. Several DNR staff members joined WDWF wildlife and forest management staff members to make the first step in transforming fuels-overloaded oak woodlands. The goal was to make them more open, low-fuel savannas with reduced wildfire risk, increased ecological integrity, and higher value as habitat for multiple listed species. Treatment involve piling large, dead oak branches that have fallen since the 2017 wildfire, cutting and hand piling small trees, and pulling Scotch broom. Now that these actions have been taken, WDFW can maintain healthy, open savanna fuel in the future via annual mowing or prescribed fire.





*The blue polygon shows where forests were treated. The wildfire risk is highlighted by the red X which indicates where the historically important WDFW office burned down in a 2017 wildfire*



*Before/after photographs along the property line*

**Lands 20/20:** The Lands 20/20 public comment period, originally scheduled to close on February 5, was extended to February 12. Late last week the public comment period for all six projects, which span across seven counties, was extended once again to February 19. Lisa Coffman has been busy updating the ever-evolving project map for the Centralia Mine property, along with monitoring and providing periodic updates of incoming public comments to date and preparing for the upcoming February 26 Commission meeting. As of February 16, there have been 243 public comments received; 87.24% (212) of which are positive, 10.29% (25) negative, and 2.47% (6) are questions or requesting more information. Projects are: Ebsen Water Access (Asotin), Maloney Mountain (Columbia), Eyhott Island (Okanogan), Chester Butte (Douglas), Chehalis Wildlife Area (Grays Harbor), and Centralia Mine (Thurston and Lewis).

**Water Rights:** Cindy Knudsen has completed the water rights analysis for Voight Creek Hatchery in Pierce County and Giffen Lake on the Sunnyside Wildlife Area. Capital Asset Management Program (CAMP) process is being developed for moving water right changes forward.

**Property Management:** Analysis has been completed of the dozens of homesteaders' patents which may provide the pathway to the Bureau of Reclamation's plan to send water through the Gloyd Seeps Wildlife Area Unit.

## **5) Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

## **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Spending Plan Submitted:** Vegetation Ecologist Merg submitted a draft spending plan to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) for the fourth of five annual increases to WDFW's portfolio of wildlife areas enrolled in BPA's wildlife mitigation program for the federal dams on the Columbia River. The additional funding will increase Operations and Maintenance (O&M) dollars for wildlife mitigation by \$1M over five years.

**Prescribed Burn Team Staffing:** The Rx Fire program is working to fill vacant positions on both the Okanogan and Yakima teams. The Natural Resource Specialist 2, Crew Lead on the South Team was recently filled by Mike Surratt. Mike has worked in the Rx fire program for the past two seasons and will provide great leadership and consistency in the program. His old position will be advertised and filled as soon as possible, in addition to two vacant Natural Resource Technician 2, Crew Member positions on both the North and South teams and a Natural Resource Specialist 3 Unit Manager on the North End. All vacancies are out for recruitment and can be found on the agency website for employment.

**Annual Refresher Fire Fighter Training:** Required annual training for the 2021 fire season is being planned. What's different this year? The annual RT-130 refresher will be offered through a virtual live session. This will allow for a safe learning environment and provide opportunities for questions and answers during the event. As usual the training will include State Park staff members under our coordination agreement with Parks. The Work Capacity Test, deferred last year due to COVID, will be required this year consistent with National Wildfire Coordination Group recommendations and DNR training requirements. An announcement will be coming out soon with dates and other details on how to sign up.

**Legislative Bill Analyses and Fiscal Notes:** Weed Coordinator Heimer reviewed SHB1355 that makes changes to the noxious weed law ([RCW 17.10](#)). Changes made in the substitute bill are minor and will have no overall effect on WDFW management.

Land Stewardship/Operations Manager Dahmer reviewed HB1168 that would establish a fund to provide dollars for forest health activities. WDFW, along with multiple other entities, would request appropriations from this fund to accomplish forest thinning, prescribed burning, and restoration after wildfire. Dahmer worked with Budget Specialist Ashley to complete a fiscal note for the bill.



Land Stewardship/Operations Manager Dahmer reviewed SSB 5253 that would implement recommendation of the Pollinator Health Task Force including revising habitat restoration guidelines and techniques to improve pollinator habitat. The bill would also require that new public works contracts that include landscaping have at least 25% of the landscaping include pollinator habitat to the extent possible.

**Real Estate Services Staff Members Comings and Goings:** After six weeks as Acting Real Estate Services Manager, Elyse Woodruff returned to her permanent position as Property Management Supervisor effective February 1. Elyse was instrumental in ensuring management operations of Real Estate Services were ongoing and successful and Legislative requests were addressed as you were working to fill the position permanently. We are grateful for Elyse's willingness to lead the team and thank her for her dedication and leadership.

Effective February 1 Karen Edwards was hired as the permanent Real Estate Services Manager. This creates a vacancy of our Property Acquisition Supervisor position, which Karen plans to recruit for after consultation with Regional Directors.

Property Management Coordinator Mary Baldwin accepted a position with the Department of Commerce. Her last day was February 15. We will be taking a close look at this position to identify needs before recruiting. Mary provided us with good information on the position and our recruitment to attract applicable candidates.

Our permanent Region 2 Lands Agent position is still vacant yet being filled temporarily by Chad Buck until April 15. We hope to hire the Property Acquisition Supervisor position first so the new hire can play a role in the recruitment, interview, and hiring process for the permanent Lands Agent position, which that person will be supervising.

Our very own Megan Zarzycki and her husband welcomed baby Theodore over the President's Day weekend. Megan will be out on leave until mid-April yet plans to work a few hours each week, returning full-time in late April. Welcome, baby Theodore, and congratulations to Mom and Dad!

**Payment-in-Lieu of Taxes (PILT):** Elyse Woodruff and Mary Baldwin completed verification and correction to PILT requests for Columbia and Yakima counties.

**LIS:** LIS has been updated to show DFW's newest Wildlife Area Unit: Waikiki Springs Unit of the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area.

## 7) Other

**Cultural Resource Tools SharePoint Site:** Lands Archaeologist Kelly is working with Lands Data and Outreach Specialist Trena to develop and post information to a Cultural Resource SharePoint site to provide direction and material to facilitate cultural resource review and consultation.

**Assist CAMP with Hatchery Interpretive Plans:** Lands Archaeologist Kelly continues to assist with tribal consultation and coordination of the interpretive plans for the Soos Creek Hatchery, Tumwater Hatchery, as well as mitigation for the Soos Creek Hatchery Project as they reach conclusion of project mitigation efforts. Lands Archaeologist Kelly is assisting with CAMP Archaeologist Rorabaugh's efforts to coordinate/communicate successfully with the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP).

**Cultural Resource Policy Development:** Lands Archaeologist Kelly coordinated a meeting to continue development of a new cultural resource management policy and associated procedures.

**Forest Thinning and Prescribed Burning Project Cultural Resource Review:** Cultural Resources Specialist Major continues to work consultation for procedures for Forest Health Projects such as prescription fire and precommercial thinning. Major and Forestry Manager Tveten completed their monthly coordination meeting in preparation for spring thinning activities.

**Bonneville Power Administration Project Cultural Resource Coordination:** Lands Archaeologist Kelly continues to work with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) staff members to coordinate projects statewide. Recent efforts included consultation and research methodology development for projects in Methow (BPA Alder Creek and Golden Doe projects) including providing wildlife area staff members with the monitoring metrics for the restoration projects.

**Archaeological Interns:** Lands Archaeologist Kelly and Cultural Resources Specialist Major have identified the need for one or two archaeological interns to assist with survey on Forest Health Projects and regulatory reviews. They have begun the recruitment process.

## **SCIENCE DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 1**

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

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Bighorn Sheep:** This week Gavin Cotterill took a deep dive into visualizing animal social networks using hierarchical edge bundling in R and, to a lesser extent, Python. Using preliminary data from continuous-time movement models he is developing for Hells Canyon bighorn sheep, he let the estimated home range overlap of sheep inform connections between individuals and among herds (weighted edges). He is using this preliminary output (in the form of circular dendrograms and eventually plotted on maps) to refine his models and investigate tweaks that need to be made at different stages in this process.



*This is an example of the relationships between herds and individuals in northern Hells Canyon. At approximately 10 to 11 o'clock is the Tucannon herd, which has no known connectivity to other herds. The Asotin herd is located from 11 o'clock to approximately 3 o'clock*

**Ferruginous Hawk Platform:** Biologist Vekasy collected sagebrush branches to use as nest material and began refurbishing last year's newly installed platforms. Reports from other projects indicate that platforms with existing nest material are more likely to become occupied than platforms without material. No birds were observed on territories yet, although local Audubon reported seeing a ferruginous hawk during January raptor counts.

**Wolf Monitoring:** Wildlife Biologist Turnock teamed with a Kalispel Tribe biologist and a WDFW enforcement officer to look for wolf tracks in two different pack territories. Fresh tracks were found in each of the pack territories and a camera was placed for additional monitoring. In addition, a camera placed by Wolf Biologist Roussin was checked and pulled from the field.



*Images of wolf tracks taken while conducting track surveys for wolves*

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

## 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Pushing Elk:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb continues to push elk off agricultural fields in the Walla Walla Valley. Human presence is the most effective non-lethal tool during this time of year since the elk do not startle as much with this technique. Other techniques (e.g., pyrotechnic hazing) can cause significant damage to saturated fields with sprouted cereal grain crops when large numbers of elk are present.



*A bachelor group of bull elk move across a winter wheat field in Walla Walla County*

## 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

**Trash Removal:** Access Supervisor Daniel Dziekan emptied out his monofilament fishing line recycling stations this week. He recovered one year's worth, totaling four pounds, from 32 stations on 26 sites. Dziekan is cleaning the collected line so it can be properly recycled. WDFW's Public Affairs Office (PAO) is working on updating the list of mono-recycle stations statewide and publishing it online. Dziekan took the coordinates for all the sites with stations and the number of stations at each site and forwarded the data to PAO.



*Monofilament fishing line collected from 32 recycling stations on 26 sites*

## 5) Providing Education and Outreach

**Envirothon:** Private Lands Biologist Gaston met with Pierce Conservation District Planner Towe to discuss the upcoming Washington State Envirothon. Planner Towe discussed methods and ideas for the Envirothon and asked Private Lands Biologist Gaston to help with writing the “wildlife test” portion of the event. Private Lands Biologist Gaston will work with other organizations and committees who have volunteered to help with the wildlife test.

**Grizzly Bear Outreach:** Wildlife Biologist Prince coordinated with a Kalispel Tribe biologist and Defenders of Wildlife on our upcoming grizzly bear education season. We are planning virtual presentations through the Pend Oreille Public Library, Seattle City Light, and Border Patrol. Additional virtual presentations and recorded educational videos are also planned. In addition, we found out that Wildlife Biologist Turnock’s grant application to the IGBC was funded. YAY! This grant will be used to mail bear aware postcards to all residents within and surrounding the Selkirk grizzly bear recovery zone.

## 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 Monitoring:** A contracted crew successfully deployed several radio collars in the Mount Hull bighorn sheep herd this past week to facilitate herd monitoring. Of note was the deployment of radio collars within a small group of sheep between the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR) northern boundary and Tonasket. Since not much is known about this group, it will be good to learn more about their movements. This effort was led by the CTCR with WDFW providing several radio collars, disease sampling kits, and logistical support.





*Helicopter crew searching for bighorn sheep to capture on Mt Hull – Photo by J. Heinlen*

**Lynx Monitoring:** Washington State University (WSU) staff members and students continue to analyze data from last summer's camera work for the Lynx Occupancy Model project that WDFW is partnering on. In addition to providing valuable occupancy information for the Okanogan Lynx Management Zone, the camera work also occasionally gives us evidence of successful reproduction within the zone as seen in the photo below. The next step in this project will be developing and implementing a long-term monitoring strategy for lynx range in Washington.



*Lynx with kitten, Okanogan NF northwest of Conconully – Photo from WSU remote camera*



*Cougar making its rounds* – Photo from WDFW remote camera

**Columbia Basin Northern Leopard Frog:** Prescribed fire is a seldom-used tool at the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area but is one that WDFW plans to wield in the near future to improve habitat for the northern leopard frog. As much as 250 acres are included in the burn plan, although the actual number of acres to be burned this year is likely to be much lower. A coordination meeting was held this week and in attendance were representatives of the prescribed burn program (M. Eberline, D. DeLozier), district biologists (E. Grabowsky) and the Wildlife Area (J. Cole, N. Bechtold). A great deal of planning has been done to date, but additional work remains in order to even attempt to burn within the next few weeks. This work includes securing a clean air permit, mowing containment lines, and coordinating with local emergency management personnel (fire districts, WA State Patrol, etc.).

**Douglas County Bats White-Nose Syndrome:** Biologists Comstock and Jeffreys met with WDFW White-nose Syndrome Specialist Abby Tobin and biologists throughout the state to discuss plans for bat work in the spring and summer of 2021. Biologists will continue performing emergence counts of known bat maternity roosts and encourage members of the public to alert wildlife staff members to the presence of other bat roosts, such as those people may have in their homes or barns. These reports combined with initial roost survey and annual colony counts are crucial tools for WDFW biologists to monitor the distribution and status of bat populations throughout the state. Additionally, staff members will continue to monitor bats via acoustic recording devices placed throughout the state for several nights in the summer. Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock will place acoustic recorders at the same Burch Mountain site as was surveyed in 2020 and plan to record at a new site in Douglas County.

Additionally, following last year's positive detection of the fungus that causes white-nose syndrome in bats in Chelan County, biologists will monitor the bats in the infected roost and

survey others for signs of white-nose syndrome. To report a bat colony or an observation of a sick bat in Chelan or Douglas County, please contact District Wildlife Biologist Emily Jeffreys at (509) 663-9764.

**Pearl Hill Impacts to Prairie Grouse:** Given the recent impacts of the Pearl Hill fire on both Columbia sharp-tail and greater sage-grouse, district biologists convened a Douglas County specific coordination meeting with staff members and volunteers who conduct lek monitoring. A review of updates to lek count protocol was provided as well as an overview of a new proposed lek search method, with the intent to intensively search for leks that may have previously gone undetected or have been newly established following the severe habitat alteration of the Pearl Hill fire. District Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock are also hoping to complement this effort with aerial lek searches.

**North Central Washington Snowy Owls:** Snowy owls are a regular winter visitor to the Okanogan Highlands and Columbia Plateau. This year, we are fortunate to have a few owls consistently visible near Heritage Road. They are always a joy to watch and are a very popular attraction for birders from all over. The public are reminded to always respect private property, never approach owls, and that if wildlife responds to your presence, you are too close. The ideal way to observe these birds is from the comfort of your vehicle with a window mounted scope. Please be mindful of sharing unimproved roads with local drivers and sometimes heavy equipment.



*Snowy owl* – Photo by Cameron Hein



**Chelan County Radio Collared Mule Deer:** Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock investigated a mortality signal from a mule deer doe collared in January 2020. The carcass was on private lands off Fairview Canyon Road and had been heavily scavenged.



*Mule deer carcass approximately 48 hours after first mortality signal* – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Central Washington Hunter Access Program:** Biologist Cook submitted a contract for an expiring Hunter Access agreement to be changed from Hunt by Written Permission (HBWP) to Hunt by Reservation (HBR). This change will hopefully extend availability of the property for public hunting access and make it easier for hunters to gain access. Cook also replaced all HBWP signs with HBR on property.

Biologists sent out letters to landowners requesting permission slips given out this past hunting season be returned. Some letters also included boundary maps and requests for landowners to verify accuracy and look at specific discrepancies between mapped boundaries and legal descriptions. Overall feedback indicated that there was greater hunting pressure throughout Wilson Creek and Beezley Hills.

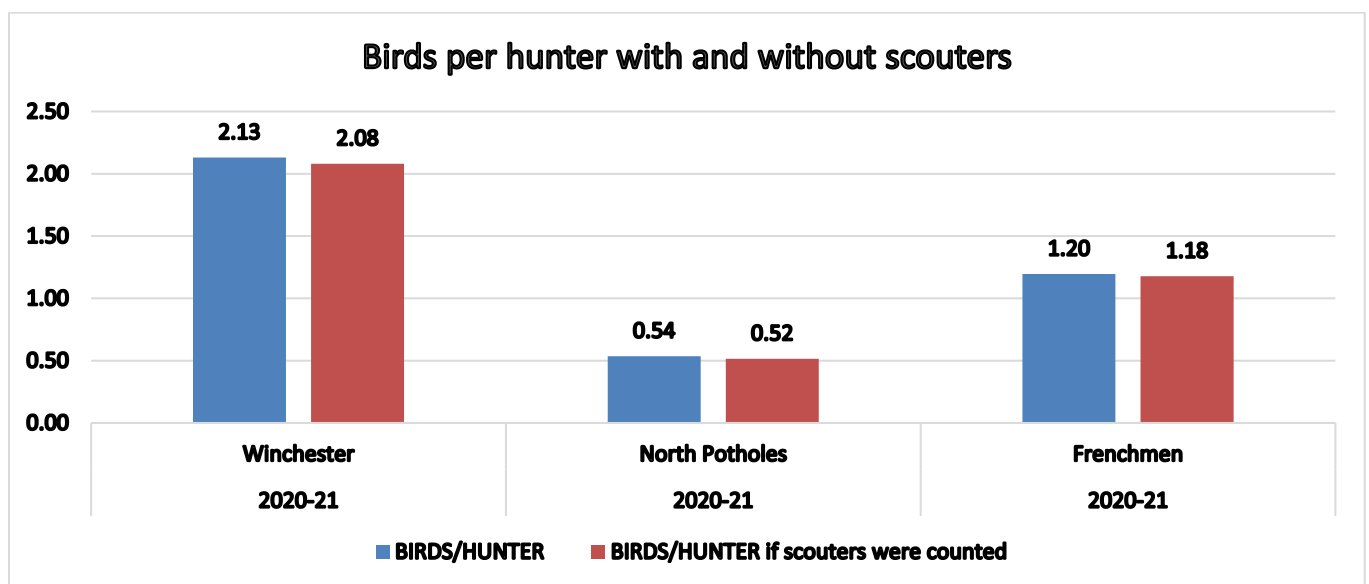
Biologist Hughes discussed renewing a hunter access agreement with a landowner in Beezley Hills that had expired. The landowner is re-enrolling 640 acres into the Hunting by Written Permission Program. Hughes developed the new contract and submitted it for approval to Olympia staff members. The landowner who is re-enrolling their acres has been working with

the department for over 20 years on hunter access, habitat enhancements and has played a significant role in pygmy rabbit recovery. The landowner explained his goals for the property with hunter access and pygmy rabbit recovery efforts and we developed an approved path forward.

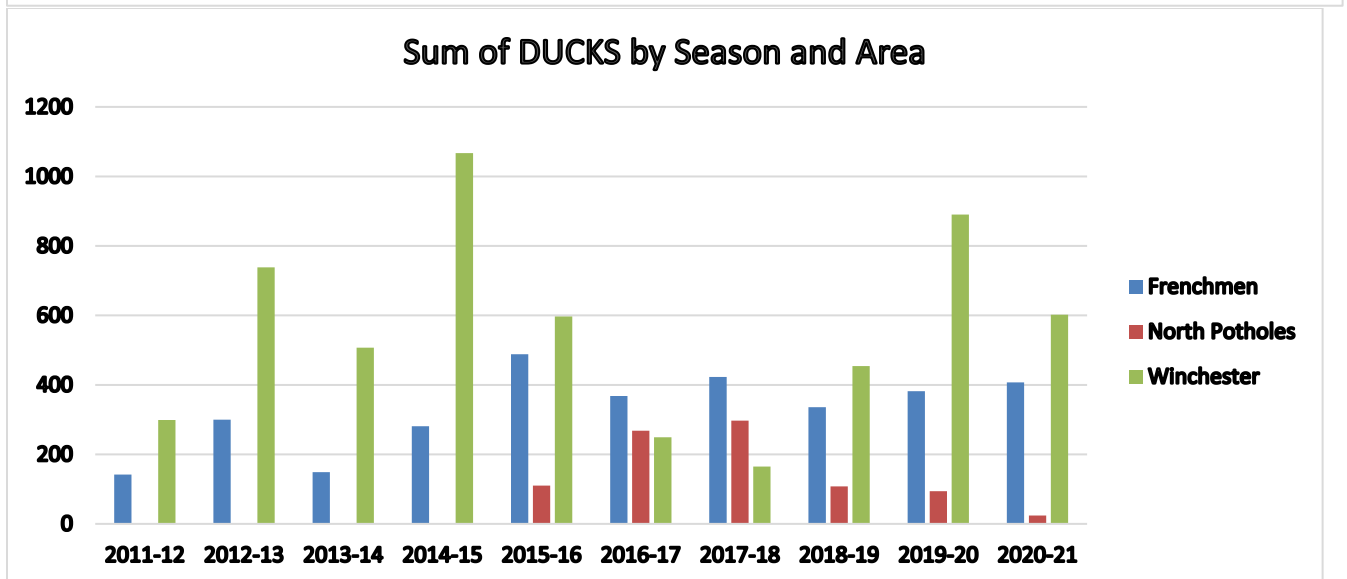
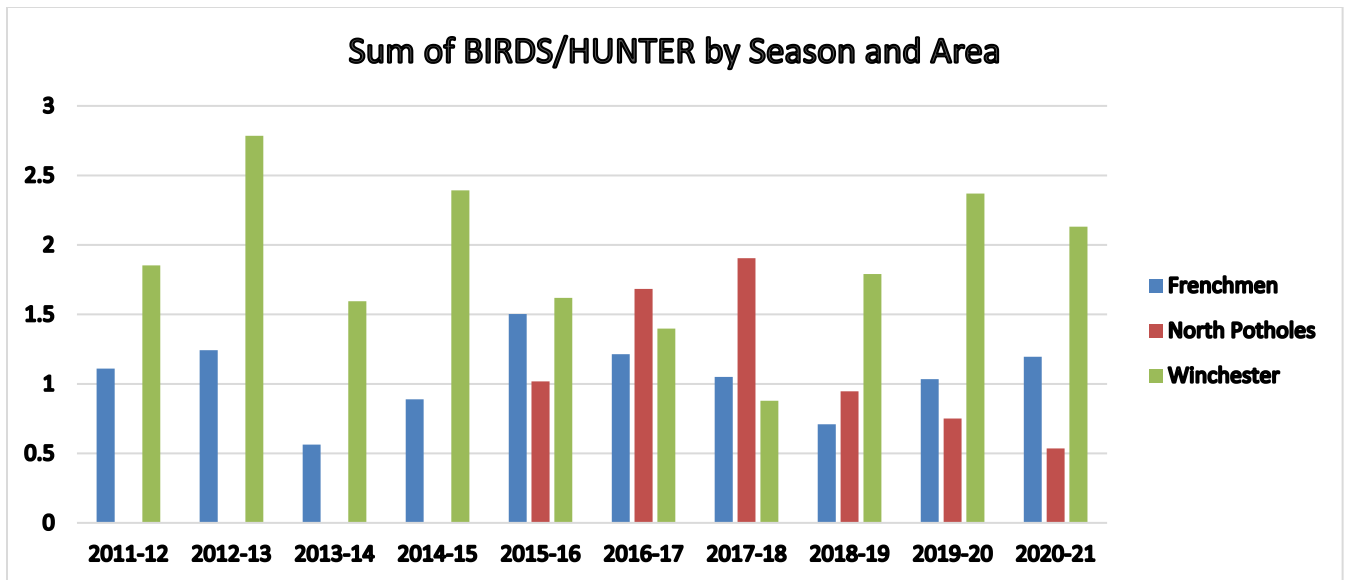
**Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Regulated Access Areas:** General waterfowl season ended on January 31 and each of the areas saw good amount of bird use, hunter participation, and harvest. On February 6, it was our second youth and veteran hunting day and all regulated access areas were used. Winchester by far had the most success. This was the first year on harvest cards we provided a spot for hunters to check box if they were just scouting the area, as we wanted to see if this was possibly affecting our birds per hunter average. Harvest cards showed that 40 hunters scouted Frenchman, 2 hunters scouted North Potholes, and 14 scouted Winchester.

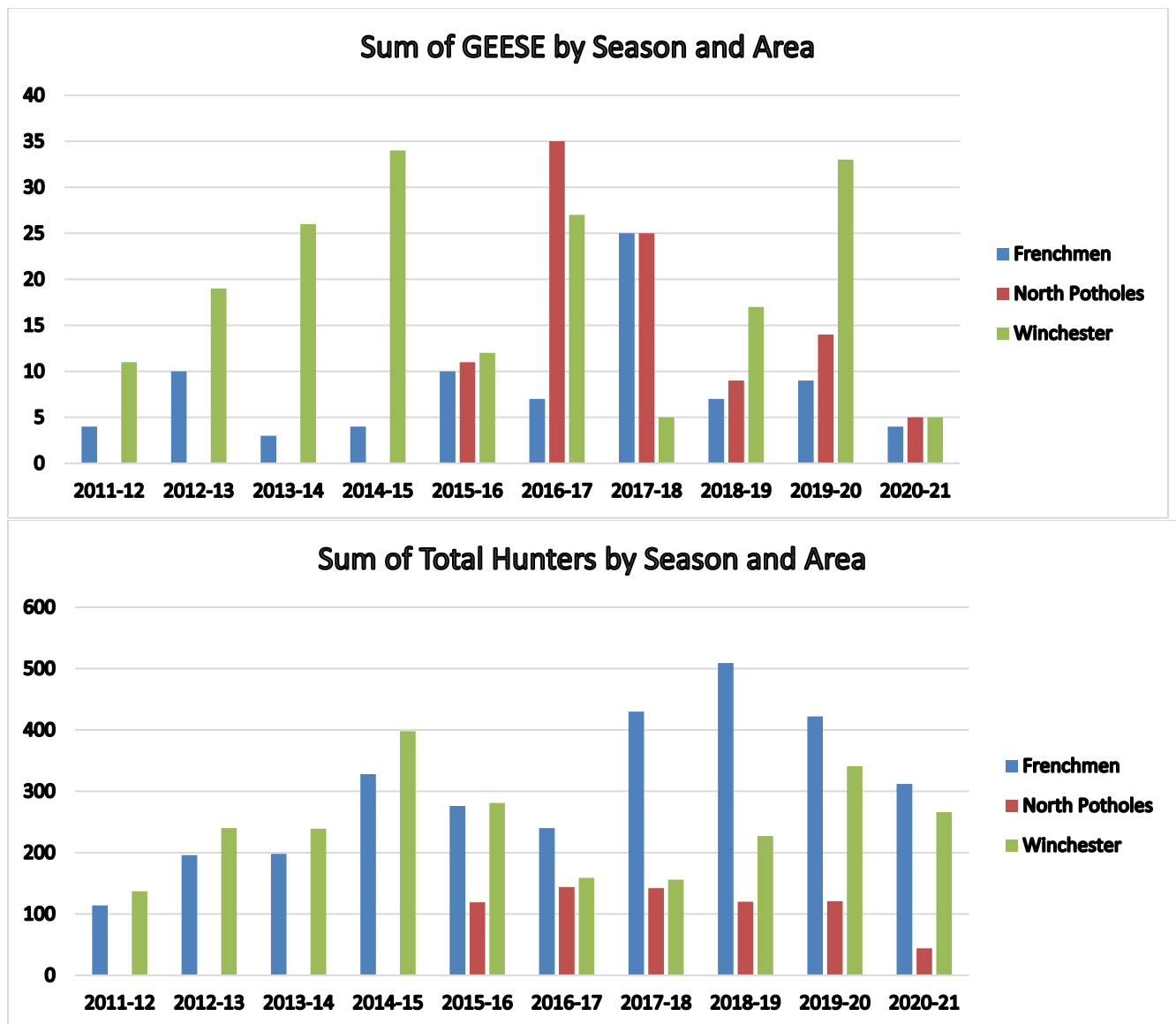
Area	Hunters	Ducks Harvested	Geese Harvested	Average birds per hunter
Frenchman	2	5	2	3.5
North Potholes	1	0	0	0
Winchester	9	51	0	5.66

*Harvest data for youth/active military/veteran only waterfowl day*









### 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Deer Eating Haystacks:** Specialist Heilhecker visited a landowner regarding deer damage to haystacks. The landowner has attempted to use a variety of means to prevent deer from accessing the haystacks. Nevertheless, deer have compromised a section of his efforts. Specialist Heilhecker suggested he block the gap underneath a gate as there was clear evidence of access being gained below the gate. The landowner requested fencing material assistance but Specialist Heilhecker explained there is insufficient budget for fencing materials at this time.

**Wildlife Area Grazing:** Specialist Heilhecker participated in a meeting with staff members on amending wildlife area grazing permits to include nonlethal deterrence measure for wolf-livestock interactions. Subsequently, Heilhecker worked with Okanogan lands division staff members to draft requirements to list in the annual operation plans.

**Nonlethal Wolf Deterrence:** Specialist Heilhecker participated in several meetings to discuss new ideas for nonlethal wolf deterrence measures. Staff members in northeastern Washington are leading the efforts and looking to expand their project area to other portions of the state.

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Habitat Restoration:** Biologist Hughes ordered trees and shrubs for spring planting. Most of the shrubs will be planted along a south facing rock wall in a canyon near Lind in Adams County. Elderberry is currently growing along the rock wall and Hughes is planning to increase the diversity of shrubs. The landowner is excited to start restoring the native habitat in the draw for mule deer and upland birds. Hughes met with a different landowner to discuss enhancements of an older habitat plot outside of Hartline in northern Grant County. The landowner is planning to mow the plot as soon as possible and get prepared to treat Canada Thistle that has been an ongoing issue in the plot. Hughes is planning to work with the landowner on noxious weed treatments and will re-plant some trees and shrubs in the area.

#### **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 3**

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

##### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Managing Wildlife Populations:** In preparation for the Yakima Canyon “Test and Remove” bighorn sheep project, Biologist Oates prepped 39 VHF collars, and completed work on 61 visual collars with help from L.T. Murray staff members Noel Winegeart and Tyler Blore. Captures are currently delayed because of weather conditions for flying.



*VHF collar and visual collars ready for deployment*

Last week, Biologists Bernatowicz and Oates completed composition surveys of elk at Mellote, Joe Watt, and Robinson feed sites. Wildlife Area staff members have been surveying sites south of Highway 12 / 410. Winter weather has returned, and feed sites will need to be re-surveyed.

	2021	Total	Cows	Calves	Spike	Branched	Bull:100C	Spike:100C
<b>PMU 33</b>								
Joe Watt	5-Feb	677	469	144	18	46	13.6	3.8
Robinson	5-Feb	376	291	55	3	27	10.3	1.0
Mellote	3-Feb	757	600	150	4	3	1.2	0.7
<b>PMU total</b>		1810	1360	349	25	76	7.4	1.8
<b>PMU 35</b>								
Nile	late Jan	91	78	10	2	1	3.8	2.6
Oak Creek	late Jan	600	466	97	4	33	7.9	0.9
<b>PMU total</b>		691	544	107	6	34	7.4	1.1
<b>PMU 36</b>								
Cowiche	late Jan.	1843	1347	385	40	71	8.2	3.0
<b>All</b>		4344	3251	841	71	181	7.8	2.2





*Mellote Elk Waiting for Feed*

**Elk Feeding:** Wenas Wildlife Area staff members continue feeding elk at the Mellotte feed site. The changing weather this winter has resulted in elk numbers shifting along with the weather, with current numbers around 900 head.



*Elk herd being fed at Mellotte*





***Elk tracks showing return to Wildlife Area through Hardy Canyon reentry gate***

L.T. Murray staff members continue feeding elk at Robinson and Joe Watt Canyons. Elk numbers have averaged around 700 animals at Watt and 475 at Robinson. A cold snap and some snow have brought icy conditions for feeding and pushed more elk into the feed sites recently. Two cow elk died this month of injuries. Both animals were checked for possible hoof disease, but no abnormalities were visible.



*Daily chaining up is required to reach the feeding site on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area*



*Elk feeding at Joe Watt Canyon, L.T. Murray Wildlife Area*



**Bighorn Sheep Collars:** L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members continued assisting District 8 Biologist Oates built 65 Bighorn Sheep collars and nasal swab kits for the Test and Cull operation of the Umtanum herd. Biologists are trying to remove infected sheep from the herd using these collars to locate and remove sheep that subsequently test positive for the pneumonia pathogen.

**WDFW Live Waterbird Webinar:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with Public Affairs staff members and USFWS McNary partners on preparations for an upcoming webinar on Waterbirds. Fidorra and partners around three different parts of the state will conduct a live video event on February 20 hosted publicly on Zoom.

**Pronghorn Survey Preparations Underway:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with Yakama Nation Biologists on coordinating an upcoming Pronghorn aerial survey for south-central Washington. The survey will provide updated abundance and distribution information for the reintroduced pronghorn herd. Fidorra also coordinated with Safari Club International volunteers who scouted presurvey for animal locations. The survey will occur in February or March, weather depending.

**Sunnyside Wildlife Area Proposals for Migratory Waterfowl and Wetlands Conservation (Duck Stamp) Program:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra, Sunnyside Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber, and District 4 Habitat Biologist Ritter worked on plans and site visits to three wetlands in Franklin County suitable for enhancement. The projects may be included in a proposal for funding based on regional priorities to enhance waterfowl breeding habitat, recreation, and other wetland species during migration.

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Master Hunters:** District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel received several calls from Master Hunters who had drawn permits for damage deer and elk. The hunters were updated on crop damage situations in District 8 and advised not to purchase damage tags until they were called. The Fairview permits have not been used since the general Master Hunter season was extended until January 15. The permits will not be issued in 2021.

**Snowmobile Signage:** L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik inspected the groomed trail at Cabin Creek to ensure snow mobiles were not leaving the groomed route. Babik was pleased with the signage and compliance but found the snowmobile groomer was grooming part way across a USFS bridge that was found to be unfit for heavy loads.



*Signage installed by State Parks to keep snowmobiles on the trail across a dangerous bridge*

**Manastash Ridge Trails Plan:** Wenas Wildlife Area staff members met with Regional and Olympia Lands staff members on edits to the Manastash Ridge Trails Plan. Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Confer Morris reviewed comments and provided edits to the text and Biologist Daling updated the plan maps in GIS.

**New Culvert:** Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resources Technician Wascisin continued work on installation of the new road culvert during a break in the weather and were able to finally get it situated in place inside the old water control structure and adjusted to about a 1% outflow slope. They began sealing in the gap between the old and new pipes with waterproof expanding foam in preparation laying a new concrete apron leading up to the pipe and filling the lower edges. Snowy weather forced discontinuation for now. This culvert is important for a direct water source to fill and maintain Horseshoe Lake that provides waterfowl habitat within the Snipes Reserve.



*New culvert pipe seated in place*

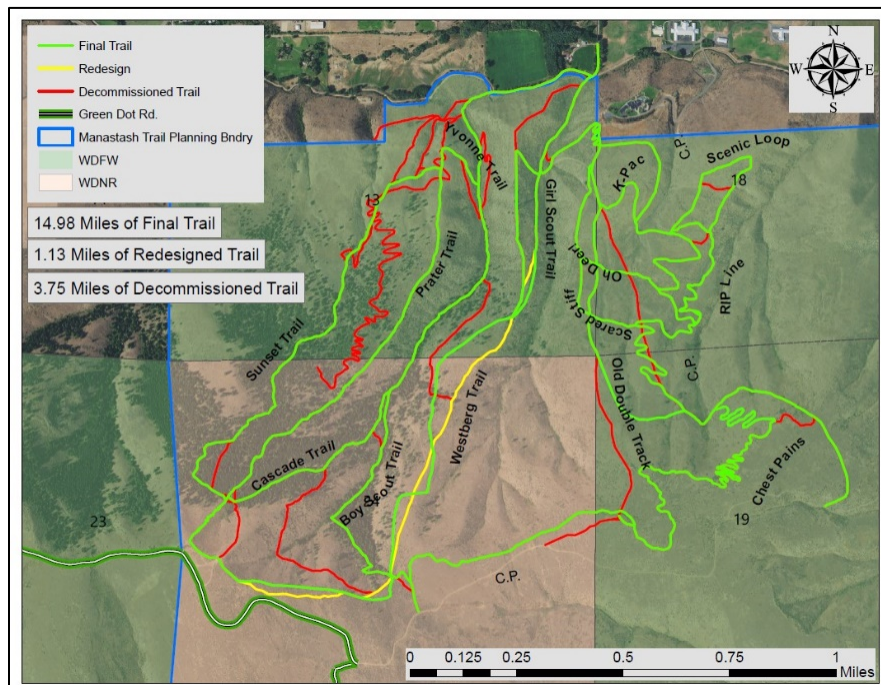
**Youth Hunt Success:** Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber went to the Windmill Unit during the February 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Waterfowl Day. He met two young hunters that had a great day of waterfowl hunting. They harvested 13 Drake Mallards and 1 Drake Teal. The youth season has been split up to an early season day, and a post regular season day that has really allowed youth hunters the opportunity to hunt greater concentrations of waterfowl with a higher rate of success.





*Successful youth hunters with their limits*

**Snow for Snow Goose Season:** The late snow goose season started on February 13 with a foot of fresh snow. The agriculture fields and waterways at the Windmill Unit of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area can provide areas to hunt snow geese in the late season. Snow geese can be unpredictable to hunt but have been frequently observed in that area of the Lower Columbia Basin.



*Manastash Trails to be decommissioned*



### 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Elk Activity:** District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck patrolled the Thorp, Kittitas, Badger Pocket, and Lauderdale areas for elk activity. Technician Leuck assisted several hay growers in moving elk away from fields. Leuck and Wetzel did receive calls from hay growers with new seeding fields in the Park Creek and east Kittitas areas. Elk were in the area near and on the fields, but hard frozen ground conditions helped minimize damage. Leuck worked daily to move and sometimes haze elk away from these areas.

Conflict Technician Leuck patrolled the Wenas Valley several days to check for elk in areas near the burned elk fences. No significant elk numbers were observed, and no calls were received from any landowners in the Wenas area this period.

Conflict Specialist Wetzel checked a camera placed at the cattle guard on Cowiche Mill Road near the Strand Orchard. No elk were observed crossing at that location, but elk had worked a hole north of that location and moved onto private land. Oak Creek staff members moved the elk back and fixed the hole. The area will be monitored for elk activity in the next few weeks.

**Euthanized Elk:** Leuck and Wetzel, as well as Enforcement Officers, have received calls about a sick bull elk in Hidden Valley. This elk was struck by a vehicle while going into the unauthorized feeding areas established by local residents. After several weeks of declining health and daily calls by the public about this elk, the elk could not move or get up and was euthanized.



*Euthanized elk that had been staying next to a local residence in Hidden Valley*



***Bull group at Hidden Valley coming into unauthorized feeding operations***

**Hole in Cleman Mountain Elk Fence:** Wenas Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Taylor was notified of a hole in the elk fence behind Conrad Ranches. He and Natural Resource Technician Stultz found snowmobile tracks that lead to the hole and continued into the winter closure. The tracks went up the face of Cleman Mountain and then back out. Numerous elk tracks at the site indicate that elk moved onto private land through the hole. The information was turned over to the Enforcement Program for investigation.



***Hole cut in the elk fence by snowmobilers***

**Kahlotus Deer Crop Damage Management:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand conducted deer hazing operations at multiple winter wheat fields in the Kahlotus area. Although strong numbers of mule deer continue to pressure wheat crops, hunting by deployed Master Hunters and hunters utilizing landowner permits have assisted with reducing damage impacts. Additional damage permits were issued to two landowners and a Region 3 youth permit holder and a Master Hunter was also deployed to assist with the landowners hazing operations.

**Paterson Deer Crop Damage Low:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand monitored for deer activity at several wine grape and tree fruit operations who have historically received deer damage. Some evidence of deer was in a vineyard close to the Columbia River, but no damage was observed. A heavy human presence from farm workers may also affect deer movements in these crops.

**Responding to HWY 240 Driver and Elk Safety Issues:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand responded to an area of Highway 240 on the Hanford National Monument to monitor elk activity near the roadway after an elk was dispatched by WDFW Enforcement personnel after being involved in a vehicle collision. Multiple groups of elk were observed, some numbering more than 400, but none closer than 1 mile from the roadway. The hooves were collected from the deceased elk and will be sent to WSU for treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) surveillance.

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Managing Past Greenstrips Firebreaks:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett spent a day managing one of the year old greenstrip seeding. This seeding was planted into an old pasture with a high degree of compaction which prevented the seed from reaching the proper depth in the soil. Hulett ran over the seeding with an ATV and small harrow over 5.5 acres to help cover any seed left on the soil surface. Two days after the management, the site received upwards of twelve inches of snow which will help settle the seed and promote germination.



*The ATV and harrow on the edge of area where the soil becomes compacted*



**Overcoming Challenges with Greenstrip Pilot Project:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett continued to coordinate on the final Blackrock Pilot Project greenstrip. After deliberating on the different options on this final project it has been decided to delay the final seeding until fall of 2021. This will allow for another round of chemical applications to clean up the seed bed and give us more time to seed at the proper timing. Hulett is currently working with South Yakima Conservation District to find supplemental funding to pay for these new chemical applications as well as the installation of a temporary electric fence to keep cattle out of the new seeding.

Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett attended a working group to discuss how WDFW Private Lands can help Pheasants Forever (PF) update their seed mixes for Washington. These current mixes are too broad for the diverse landscapes in Washington and PF needs to incorporate soil types, precipitation, and aspect into each mix.

#### **5) Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

#### **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Colockum Wildlife Area staff members worked to improve the security around the Colockum Wildlife Area Headquarters. A new gate will be installed on the driveway, and barrier rock will be placed on both sides of it to prevent vehicles from going around it. This week large rock was delivered and moved into place. Staff members also worked on altering an existing gate to make it work for this application.



*Barrier rock being delivered to Colockum Wildlife Area*



*Barrier rock moved into place at Colockum Wildlife Area Headquarters*

#### 7) Other

Winter is a good time to take care of maintenance items on wildlife areas. During this period, Colockum Wildlife Area staff members had new tires and shocks put on a vehicle, hauled a large tractor to the John Deere dealer for repairs and servicing, and had all 13 fire extinguishers serviced at the Colockum Headquarters. Colockum Wildlife Area Assistant Manager John Hagan also did maintenance on several eyewash stations at the headquarters, refreshing them as required.

#### **REGION 4**

Nothing for this installment.

#### **REGION 5**

Nothing for this installment.

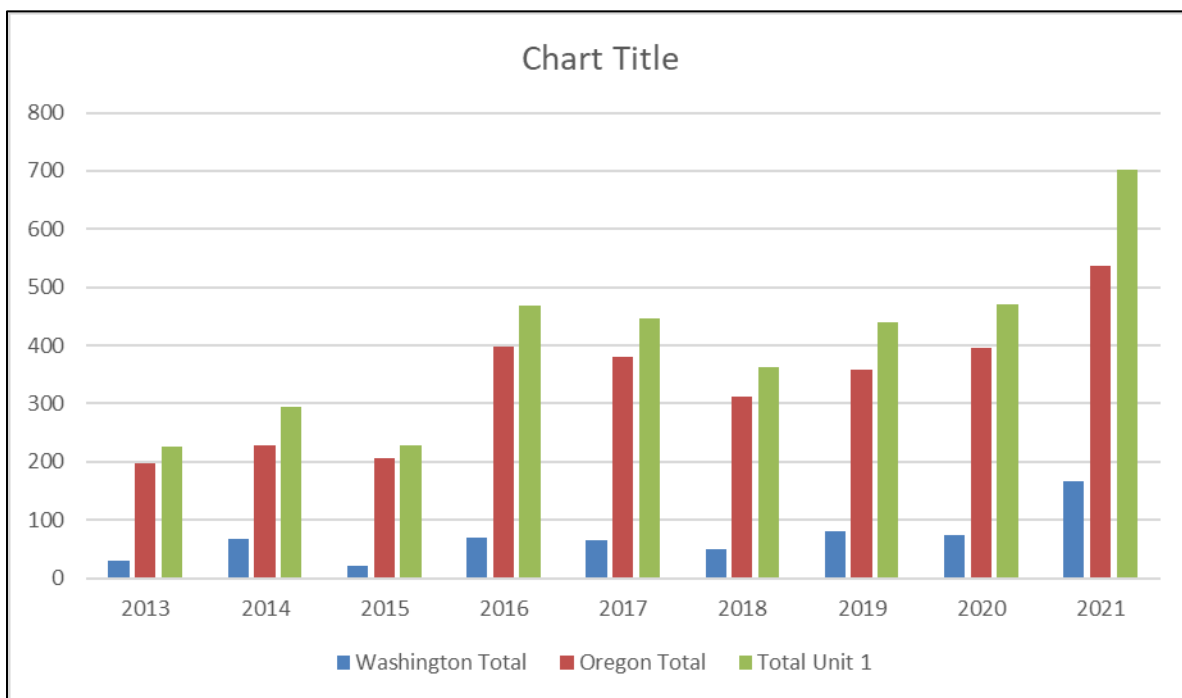
## REGION 6

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

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Dusky Goose Surveys:** Biologists Novack, Sundstrom, and Michaelis conducted a Dusky Canada Goose survey for the coastal and inland Goose Unit Area #2.

**Snowy Plover – Winter Surveys:** Results from the region-wide plover surveys, which includes Oregon and Washington, indicate that plovers did well throughout their northern range in 2021.



*Chart shows winter survey plover numbers for both Oregon and Washington. 2021 had the highest number of plovers ever recorded*

**Clearwater Elk Collaring:** In collaboration with the Quinault Tribe, monitoring strategies for elk in the Clearwater GMU include maintaining a sample of radio-collared cow elk distributed across this GMU. These radio-collars aid in detection of elk during composition surveys, which are flown in the Spring. Last year 25 cow elk were collared, of these, three died. Now, Biologist Murphie is attempting to capture new cow elk via ground darting to redeploy these collars in the Clearwater GMU. He reports being unsuccessful during this period.



## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Satsop River Wharton Parking:** This remote parking area accesses a walk into the Willis easement on the Satsop River. It has recently become very popular. This fall 18 vehicles were counted, all but four parking on the side of the narrow county road. Many decades of dumping brush, gravel, and asphalt on site has slowly limited the parking area. The water access team regained the original parking boundary from the 1950s using pole saws, chainsaws, chipper, and a tractor.



**Summit Lake, Thurston County:** A concerned neighbor reported a recent slide impacting his property. The water access team, led by Brian Mitchell, showed up and upon inspection noticed this slide had moved several parking stops, two bollards and wiped out 30 feet of DFW fencing. The crew removed the fallen trees using cables, chokers, chainsaws, and a tractor. All brush and trees were pulled to the upper parking lot by tractor and staged for chipping. Limbs and trees were also removed from the neighboring property. The large trees were cut up and the big sections loaded into a dump trailer. Two dump trailer loads of this material were taken to the yard waste section at the landfill. The remainder was chipped on site. This project took a considerable amount of time over two days. The team will be back in the near future for final cleanup and 30 feet of fence replacement.





*Summit Lake Trees and Damaged Fencing Removed*

**Chehalis River, South Montesano:** The parking lot at this site continues to slide. Ben Freimund addressed this recent loss by placing more large rock (stockpiled on site), blocking the dangerous drop off. Additionally, using the work truck, he chained up existing boulders on the river side of the new fracture and pulled them further back, into the parking lot.



**Chehalis River Fuller Bridge:** The team brushed out the long road to the parking area, better exposing the guardrail. The entire site was mowed and brushed out using a tractor, pole saws, and chainsaws. Finally, all asphalt was scraped and cleaned.

The team also did a complete brush out of the two fence lines (300 feet) at Lake McIntosh in Thurston County. Wildcat Lake in Kitsap County received the same treatment.





**Other Work Performed:** Traffic counts for the Region 6 water access sites are currently being analyzed for 2020. All sites have seen a dramatic increase in use during 2020 compared to previous years. For example, during the months of June through August, Black Lake saw 23,665 vehicles in 2020 compared to 15,623 in 2019. Other notable information shows 55,600 vehicles were counted entering the popular Luhr's Landing site on Puget Sound for the full year of 2020. On the North Olympic Peninsula near Forks, the Bogachiel River Leyendecker site saw 17,400 vehicles in 2020.

### **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Conflict Specialists Harris and Blankenship, Program Manager Calkins, Captain Chadwick, and other regional and headquarters staff members have been working on development of messages or responses to address public concerns related to cougar interactions with livestock or people in two different locations.

### **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. Approximately 2 acres of Scotch Broom infested lands are being cleared each day that mowing equipment is operational. Any underlying trees are left in place, but much of the cleared areas were nearly 100% Broom or Himalayan blackberry. Work will continue through the remainder of February and possibly March. A contract to remove and masticate an additional 40 acres is being developed.



*Results from mechanical clearing of Scotch Broom at WDFW's newly acquired Elk River Unit properties. Prior conditions of Scotch Broom infestation exemplified by left side of image, freshly cleared on right. Herbicide spraying of new weed growth will occur in Spring followed by replanting*

Biologist Novack visited an area in the southwest corner that is inaccessible to equipment via WDFW owned lands. An agreement is being developed to pass through a privately owned parcel to access 7 acres of Scotch Broom. Novack was impressed with some of the habitat he found, including 100+ year old Sitka spruce and a grassy area mixed in with the Scotch broom with a preponderance of elk usage.



*Small patch of pristine forest with over 100-year-old Sitka Spruce at recently acquired Elk River Unit lands*

#### **5) Providing Education and Outreach**

Biologist Murphie responded to several inquiries received by phone or email relating to:

- Mountain goat hunting in Olympics
- Cougar
- Eastern grey squirrels

#### **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**New Scatter Creek Headquarters Taking Shape:** Program Manager Calkins recently had the opportunity to stop by for a peek at the progress on construction of the new shop/office that replaces the Miller-Brewer house and barn that were destroyed in the Scatter Creek Fire. Although smaller, this new modern facility should be a big upgrade, even though all of us miss seeing the historic structures. The new facility is in a different location on Case Road, which is partially due to permitting challenges at the old location. Thanks go to WDFW engineers and construction crews for their work on this project that has taken a number of twists and turns.





*Nearly complete Scatter Creek Headquarters*

**Osprey Nest Removal Permits:** Biologist Murphie issued four permits to remove inactive osprey nests from cellular towers.

**Application Review, Olympic/Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Manager Position:** Biologist Murphie, Program Manager Calkins, Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald (Region 5) and Wildlife Area Planning Coordinator Vigue reviewed applications received for the Olympic/Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Manager position and selected candidates for the first round of interviews.

**7) Other**

Nothing for this installment.