

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

June 1 to 15, 2021

DIVERSITY DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Pack Goats Emergency Rule: A team of agency staff members from Olympia and the regions worked together to develop an emergency rule implemented on June 2, 2021 to address the risk of disease transmission from domestic goats and sheep to bighorn sheep. Goats and sheep are known to be potential carriers of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* which is a bacterium that causes pneumonia in wild bighorn sheep and often proves fatal. The rule requires that domestic goats and sheep must always be tethered and attended on specific wildlife areas called out in the rule where bighorn sheep populations occur. With the e-rule filed, the Department will move forward toward establishment of a permanent rule to address this risk.



2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Grazing Program Guidance and Grazing Management Tools: After many years of work, interaction with the Commission, SEPA review and public outreach, and important contributions from many WDFW biologists, planners, and managers, this document was finalized and posted on WDFW's external and internal websites. It represents WDFW's efforts to ensure that permitted livestock grazing is managed consistently with the Department's overall mission.

Forest Health Accomplishments: WDFW forest health staff members made significant progress performing prescribed burns and forest thinning to improve forest health and resilience and to reduce the risk of wildfire. WDFW's two burn teams completed over 1,100 acres of burning on five wildlife area units in northeast, southeast and central Washington – a great step forward after operations were curtailed due to Covid-19 last year.

Wildlife Area	Wildlife Area Unit	Acres
Columbia Basin	Potholes	200
Chief Joseph	Grouse Flats	330
Oak Creek	Oak Creek	85
Sherman Creek	Sherman Creek	440
Sherman Creek	Rustler's Gulch	53



Prescribed Fire at Rustler's Gulch (left) and Oak Creek Cougar Canyon (right)

WDFW foresters moved forward on five forest thinning projects. The Wenas Wildlife Area (WLA) Clemens project started in 2020 but was delayed and had to be extended beyond the original end date. Timber had to be re-auctioned in the spring of 2021. Fortunately, timber prices have skyrocketed, and forester Pfeifle was able to sell the wood at much higher prices than was possible last year. Harvesting will be completed by the end of June. The 280-acre L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Gnat Flats pre-commercial thinning project will also be completed prior to June 30. This project thinned overstocked young stands to accelerate succession and favor species that are more resilient to wildfire, insects, and drought. Thinning project planning, layout, and survey work is ongoing on the Klickitat, Chelan, and Scatter Creek/West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Areas. Foresters are working with biologist to complete wildlife surveys to better inform forest health planning including western gray squirrel nest surveys and goshawk surveys. Coordination with Habitat Program and Diversity Division staff members as well as regional staff members is ongoing.



Overstocked forest conditions on the Klickitat WLA vulnerable to wildfire and preventing trees from getting large enough to provide quality western gray squirrel habitat

Ecological Integrity Sampling: Range Ecologist Burnham conducted long-term/ecological integrity monitoring on the Chiliwist, Sinlahekin, and Chesaw Wildlife Areas.



Near a monitoring plot for a grazing permit on the Chiliwist Wildlife Area

Wenas Wildlife Area Habitat Monitoring: In mid-May, Vegetation Ecologist Merg resumed the habitat integrity monitoring project initiated on the Wenas Wildlife Area last year. This project is aimed both at developing an efficient method of assessing habitat integrity on our lands and at assessing how well the Wenas WLA has delivered wildlife mitigation for federal dams on the Columbia River. Merg's data should be useful during wildlife settlement negotiations that will begin with Bonneville Power over the summer. These surveys should conclude at about the end of June.

Plant Materials for Fire Recovery: Vegetation Ecologist Merg is beginning to conclude plant materials orders that he initiated at the end of 2020, in collaboration with several extra-agency groups including the Spokane Chapter of the Audubon Society. These plants will be used to help recover from the historic Labor Day fires that happened across Washington in September of 2020 and that burned several WDFW Wildlife Areas. Vendors are now harvesting native seed and are beginning to deliver live plant plugs. Merg continues to coordinate with those vendors to secure additional plant materials as supplies become available.

Diquat Project: Statewide Weed Coordinator Heimer and weed crew members Nunez and Tageant visited Satsop Ponds and NW Rock to see how the diquat was affecting knotweed several days after treatment. Treated plots of Bohemian knotweed all exhibited symptoms of wilting and changes in leaf color.



Before and after photos of the Satsop high rate

Heimer and Tageant returned to the Green Diamond site and finished the plot set up and data was collected by Lauren Kuehne (Omfishient Consulting), Heimer and Tageant the following day. Heimer and Kuehne treated the plots at Green Diamond on Friday. Heimer visited the Green Diamond site on Tuesday (four days after treatment) and the knotweed was showing symptoms.

Red Knot Survey: Les Holcomb and Rachel Tageant took Joe Buchanan into Willapa Bay (one day) to survey for red knots during their migration. They saw about 1,000 red knots at Snag Island (also known as Ellen Sands) which was very late for them to still be in Washington.

Scatter Creek Weed Treatment: Brad Morgan mowed Davis and Scatter Creek units and made another trip to Sequim where he and Josh Cook mowed, as well as broadcast sprayed poison hemlock and teasel. Morgan helped coordinate a volunteer program with a couple of the biologists involved in Endangered Species Act (ESA) work at Scatter Creek.

Cultural Resource Checklist for Brain and Big Bend Property Acquisitions: Archaeologist Kelly, under a very tight timeline, produced the cultural resources checklists for both the Taneum Creek – Brain property acquisition and Big Bend – DNR property acquisition. This step was critical to ensure timely closing of these property acquisitions and ensure reimbursement from the grant source, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), for the purchase. Due to RCO policy this step must be completed and attached in PRISM prior to seeking reimbursement for the purchase of the land. If not complete, any billing(s) for the purchase of land would have been rejected.

Violet Prairie Property Project: On May 28, just before this reporting period, The Conservation Fund (TCF) closed on the Violet Prairie property, commonly known as the alpaca farm, in Tenino. This 1,567-acre property is located just west of the City of Tenino and is now one giant step closer to conservation. DFW will acquire this property from TCF in phases as funding is secured, using a combination of federal and state grants. RES staff members spent much time and effort working with the seller and buyer to ensure necessary easements are in place for DFW's eventual acquisition.

Once acquired by DFW, this property will become a unit within the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area and conserve incredible wetlands and views, prairie and oak woodlands interspersed with mixed conifer forest, and provide wetland and riparian habitat to species like the federally listed Taylor's checkerspot butterfly and the Mazama Pocket Gopher. Additionally, the property will protect four DFW Ecological Systems of Concern: Willamette Valley Upland Prairie, Willamette Valley Wet Prairie, North Pacific Oak Woodland, and Temperate Pacific Freshwater Marsh, and provide for public recreation opportunities such as hunting, hiking, and horseback riding.

This project is the embodiment of a significant partnership between a State agency and a non-profit land conservancy towards conservation of an important piece of habitat for conservation and outdoor recreation. Additionally, the City of Tenino and Thurston County are interested in partnering on some amount of the purchase as credit towards their HCP mitigation requirements.

The Violet Prairie properties were approved as part of the 2016 Lands 20/20 application process and will be taken to DFW's Commission for approval to acquire as acquisition phases are identified.

On June 11: DFW closed on the 318-acre Taneum Creek property, which is now part of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area. This property includes nearly a mile of Taneum Creek shoreline and more than two miles of tributary streams. Taneum Creek is critical habitat for mid-Columbia River steelhead, which are listed as threatened with extinction under the federal Endangered Species Act and is used for Coho salmon reintroduction efforts in the upper Yakima River basin.

Bisected by Taneum Creek, the property lies at the transition of mixed forest and shrub steppe and contains a strong suite of habitats and species. Creek shoreline, wetlands, shrub steppe, cliffs, caves, snags, and talus habitats are found across the property and is now conserved for continued use by Coho and Chinook salmon, Columbia spotted frog, sharp-tailed snakes, golden eagle, elk, mule deer, and historic western gray squirrel.

The property acquisition was approved through the Lands 20/20 process in 2013 and by the Fish and Wildlife Commission on June 12, 2020. The \$1,867,804.18 purchase price was paid for using a WWRP-Riparian and WWRP-Critical Habitat grant from the Recreation and Conservation Office.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

WA Wild Brewshed Alliance and Lucky Envelope Brewing Partnership: Program Specialist Trenda and Watchable Wildlife and Community Outreach Coordinator Biswas are finalizing a partnership with WA Wild, a statewide conservation nonprofit organization, and Lucky Envelope Brewing to release the Public Lands Pilsner in mid-July.

The art on the beer can features the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area, the beer itself is being released to promote watchable wildlife opportunities on WDFW-managed lands. A percentage of the proceeds from sales will be put towards a conservation project sponsored by the Department and WA Wild.



Program Specialist Trenda, Watchable Wildlife Coordinator Biswas, and reps from WA Wild and Lucky Envelope Brewing at the brewery on Brew Day for the Public Lands Pilsner

RES Presentations: Several staff members in RES have been attending the weekly Thursday morning 2021 Land Camp presentations. These presentations have been informative and beneficial for staff members with a desire to attend again in hopes of them being in-person to provide more opportunity for networking and collaboration.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Wildlife Program PR Contract: Section Manager Dahmer completed the narrative for the \$5.8 million dollar PR 2022 grant providing federal funding for WLA operation and maintenance, planning, winter feeding, outreach, cultural resource management, and payment of leases and assessments.

Budget Allocation and Decision Pack Work: Division Manager worked with Lands Budget staff members Ashely and Nelson to allocate new funds received for O&M on newly acquired lands and to refine the draft Decision Package related to Increased Recreation Pressure on WDFW Lands for \$2.92 Million per FY for the FY22 Supplement Budget requests as well as with PRO Section Manager Sisolak on the FY22 Supplemental one-time request for \$500K of Discover Pass authority to address Increased Recreation needs on WDFW Lands. Both decision packages are under development and were discussed at the June 11th Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting along with several Lands Capital budget supplemental requests.

RES Coordination: Elyse Woodruff, in conjunction with Fiscal staff members, have been diligently ensuring all county assessments, fire district contracts, etc. are paid prior to the end of the biennium. This is not small feat and requires coordination and collaboration to be a success.

Lisa Coffman, Lands 20/20 Coordinator, is resurrecting the LAST (Land Acquisition Strike Team) in preparation for cross-programmatic collaboration to work towards finalizing the Lands 20/20 policy and procedure. The goal is to have the policy/procedure finalized, adopted, and provide any training necessary in preparation for the upcoming Lands 20/20 cycle in 2022.

7) Other

Recruitment Announcements: Thomas (Thom) Woodruff will be joining RES as DFW's Acquisition Supervisor effective July 1. Thom's impressive portfolio no doubt will be a solid addition to RES, and he will be an essential member of the DFW team by providing a lead role in prioritizing and performing land transactions and implementing strategies and processes for the acquisition of habitat and recreation property.

The recruitment announcement for the Region 2 Lands Agent vacancy, currently being filled temporarily by Chad Buck, has been drafted by HR, reviewed by RES and Region 2 management/staff members, and comments have been provided back to HR for the final announcement. The recruitment is expected to be announced within the next week or so along with the Region 4 Lands Agent recruitment announcement.

The recruitment announcement for the Region 4 Lands Agent vacancy, currently being covered between Fenner Yarborough, Elyse Woodruff and Shane Belson, along with their "regular" jobs, has been drafted by HR, reviewed by RES and Region 4 management/staff members, and comments have been provided back to HR for the final announcement. The recruitment is expected to be announced within the next week or so in conjunction with the Region 2 Lands Agent recruitment announcement.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Wolf Rule Development: Wildlife Biologist Prince continued working with a small group of staff members to develop a rule surrounding chronic wolf-livestock areas. The Department was directed by the Governor to develop a rule for this topic.

Acoustic Bat Monitoring: Biologist Turnock and Technician Martenson deployed acoustic recording devices to detect present bat species. These surveys are part of WDFW's participation in the North American bat monitoring effort.



An acoustic bat detector setup by a creek

Common Loon Surveys: Biologist Turnock trained and supervised Technicians Martenson and Merluccio on common loon occupancy and productivity surveys. During a training, two adult loons and two less-than-one-week old chicks were observed.



Two adult and two loon chicks seen through a poorly framed spotting scope picture

Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance: Wildlife Biologists Prince, Turnock, Atamian, and Lowe met with Ungulate Research Scientist DeVivo, Section Manager Hoenes, Veterinarian Mansfield, and Regional Program Manager Robinette to hash out a plan for this fall's chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance in Districts 1 and 2. The group decided to target sampling efforts at hunter check stations during the modern firearm deer seasons. Technicians will be hired to aid staff members in sample collection. Two WDFW-owned camp trailers located at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area have been offered as temporary housing for District 1 technicians.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Access Area Improvements/Clean-up: Region 1 North Access Supervisor Daniel Dziekan has recently worked with two different groups, for one project now completed and another coming soon. He supervised a group of volunteers from two fly fishing clubs in cleaning up and adding new gravel at the Amber Lake Access Area. Also, in coordination with Region 1 Lands Agent Jerrod Ploof, Dziekan worked out an agreement with the Loon Lake homeowners' organization. The group will remove derelict docks in the vicinity via WDFW's Loon Lake Access Area in late June, in return for the group picking up trash on the entire Access Area, including grassy areas.

Cummings Creek Horse Access Gate: Access Manager Greg Heimgartner with assistance from Dave Meisner modified a livestock pipe gate in a fashion to allow horse access and prevent unauthorized ATV access. The gate was installed on the Wooten Wildlife Area at the beginning of Cummings Creek Road. Tom Jensen assisted Greg with installation.



Horse access gate at Cumming Creek on the Wooten Wildlife Area - Tom Jensen is pictured near the gate

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Producer Check-Ins and Allotment Checks: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett contacted twelve producers after grazing season and five allotments were visited.

Range Rider Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill spoke to several range riders and prospect range riders interested in completing the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and either renewing or applying for a contract. Samsill assisted several range riders with clarifying questions surrounding concerns with the revised RFQ contract. Samsill helped deploy and onboard a couple range riders in various ranges.

Producer/Landowner Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill communicated with several landowners and producers throughout the week via phone calls, texts, and emails. Samsill spoke to landowners and producers about Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) contracts, damage permit reporting, range riding options, crop damage complaints, Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements for Livestock (DPCA_L) contracts, pilot projects, and plans for the upcoming grazing season. Samsill met with several producers to discuss special focus areas and pre-grazing season prep. Samsill spoke to several producers about wolf collar data clusters and data sharing agreements.

Wolf Sign and Activity: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb and Wolf Biologist Spence conducted a check of private pasture in Columbia County for wolf activity. Sign and trail camera photos of a single wolf were noted. The information was passed along to the producer and landowner.

Cattle Producer Contact: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade continued to stay in contact with producers who are currently grazing near wolf activity centers. Wade discussed current wolf activity and Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement invoicing and range rider logs.

4-O Wildlife Area Grazing Allotment West: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade and Wildlife Area Manager Dice spent a day touring the 4-O Wildlife Area west allotment. Dice showed Wade multiple interior pastures and access trails. Wade and Dice observed cattle currently grazing on the western allotment. They both contacted the permittee after observing several calves that appeared to be under the weight requirement and a small herd cattle that were observed in the wrong pasture. Wade recommended that the producer install/maintain cross fencing to aid in keeping cattle better grouped up and discussed the complications of having underweight calves in the area.



Part of the herd of cattle escaping the summer heat in the shade

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Prescribed Burning: Planned forest burning on Sherman Creek and Rustlers Gulch Wildlife Areas has now been shut down, due to heat and drought. Fire Coordinator Matt Eberlein reports that work his north crew completed by early May includes 440 acres on the Trout Lake unit at Sherman Creek, and 53 acres at Rustlers Gulch. The crew worked on more acreage as well, up to early June.

Boat Decontamination Plans: Region 1 North Access Supervisor Dziekan is working with WDFW's Fish Program, Region 1 Lands Agent Jerrod Ploof, and the Newman Lake Flood Control Zone Advisory Board, regarding the Flood Board's request to install a boat decontamination unit at the Newman Lake Access Area. The originally proposed unit location will need to be moved a bit, and traffic pattern changed. The decontamination station is intended familiarize boaters with best practices for keeping Aquatic Invasive Species out of Washington's waters.

Joseph Canyon Fire: Early morning lightning strikes on June 4 ignited the Joseph Canyon Fire in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington. The fire eventually burned over 9,000 acres and crossed the border into Washington State. About 960 acres of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area was burned. Some fencing was damaged but at this time, it is unknown exactly how much has been damaged. Wildlife Area Manager Bob Dice assisted efforts by providing a mowed area near the Chief Joseph Headquarter buildings for a firefighter spike camp. Much of the firefighting completed was with heavy lift helicopters making water drops and planes dropping fire retardant.



Joseph Canyon Fire (left) and WDFW lands burning on the south side of Joseph Creek (right)

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area Elk: As in previous years, elk are congregated on green annual crop fields at Smoothing Iron Ridge. Repairs by a local electrician were recently completed to the water system enabling us to begin filling storage cisterns and water troughs. We anticipate a dry summer meaning the troughs and other water developments will be critical to elk as summer progresses.



A typical scene on annual crop fields at Smoothing Iron Ridge: elk munching on winter wheat

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area Grazing Activity: Livestock belonging to Sam Ledgerwood crossed Asotin Creek Wildlife Area lands recently. This is a twice per year occurrence. No issues were reported or yet discovered with the crossing.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Youth Hunting Camp Initiative: A cross-program initiative is in the works to provide a youth hunter training camp in northeastern Washington during late summer. The idea is being built by staff members in the Wildlife and Enforcement Programs, for youth who already have passed Hunter Education but not yet shot any game. Mentors would work with the youth and their parent(s)/other authorized chaperone to improve the youngsters' shooting skills (at the Colville gun range due to wildland fire restrictions), and identify which animals are appropriate to shoot. It may be possible to use landowner depredation permits to allow young hunters a better opportunity to shoot a deer. The training camp would be located on Bisbee Mountain at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area. A variety of issues are still being ironed out, before the plan can be approved and implemented.

Clarkston School District Rendezvous: Private Lands Supervisor Earl attended an outdoor event for the Clarkston Schools, where Earl gave a presentation on outdoor hunting activities and how the WDFW monitors ungulate populations.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Culture Improvement Team: Wildlife Biologist Prince, along with other District 1 team members, participated in a full-day meeting of the culture improvement team as well as multiple other meetings on the same topic. Sherman Creek Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Daro Palmer provided the outdoor, socially distanced venue for the meeting.

Fiscal Year Close-out: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Mike Finch and Natural Resource Technician Donovan Colvin are finishing up with some office and equipment projects requiring completion by June 30, 2021. Headquarters interior painting has been finished, and replacement of smoke-damaged carpet with vinyl plank will be finished about June 25. They also ordered a Utility Terrain Vehicle (UTV or "side-by-side") set for delivery on June 28. This UTV will replace some four-wheelers dating back to the 1990s. In addition to being safer to operate than ATVs, this item will accommodate one or two passengers and the driver, with a utility bed in the back for field supplies. Finch and Colvin also purchased a trailer to tow the UTV to field locations. Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area also remotely completed its 2021 equipment inventory, providing photos of items to Jason Harlow in Olympia. The old four-wheelers and a few other large pieces of obsolete field equipment will be surplusd out.



Actual trailer (left) and example of Polaris Ranger 1000 (right)

Natural Resources Conservation Service Training: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley participated in a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Suitability and Feasibility Worksheets webinar hosted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

7) Other

Enforcement Internship interviews: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman assisted Sergeant Leonetti and Officer Erickson with interviews for the Region 1 enforcement internship.

REGION 2

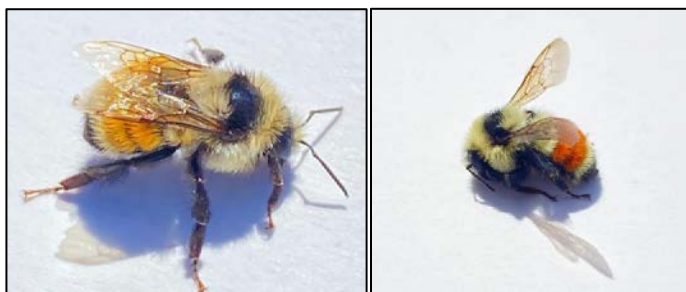
HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

PNW Bumblebee Atlas: Biologist Dougherty with the assistance of Biologist Grabowsky surveyed four Graves bumblebee survey cells to document presence and species richness at sites representing different types habitat. Overall, the effort was difficult due to bumblebees being absent from three of the four sites. However, there were 11 bumblebees captured and photographed at the fourth site. Biologists were challenged with the flowering plant identification and taking “good” photos of immobile bees. For more information check out the [Pacific Northwest Bumblebee Atlas](#) project.

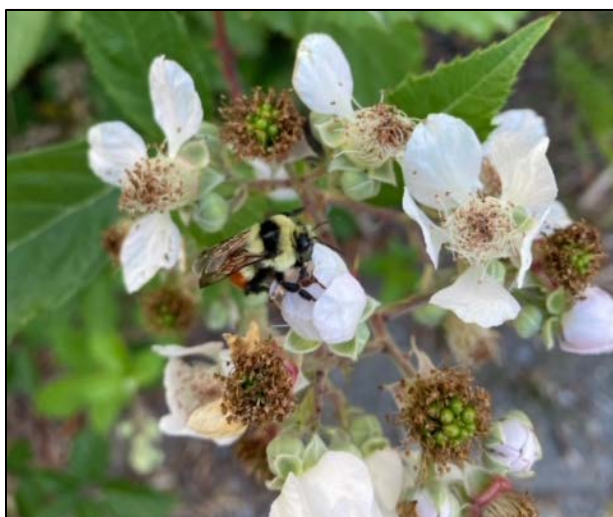


Two-form bumblebee (left) and Suspected eastern bumblebee (right) – Photos by Sean Dougherty



Central bumblebee (left) and Hunt's bumblebee (right) – Photos by Sean Dougherty

Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock and Scientific Technician Pavelchek conducted bumblebee surveys at several locations in Douglas County as well as in Black Canyon in Chelan County. Several bumble bee species were identified in the course of surveys, including two-form bumble bee (*Bombus bifarius*) and yellow-faced bumble bee (*Bombus vosnesenskii*). Not all bumble bees captured were able to be identified to species in the field, but detailed photos were taken of each bee. These photos will be meticulously reviewed by experts at the Xerces Society to ensure all bumble bees captured are identified correctly, which is critical as the purpose of these surveys is to assess and monitor species distribution throughout Washington. All flowering species present at the time of each survey are recorded, as well, to increase researchers' knowledge of the food resource and habitat requirements of each species. Bumblebee surveys in District 7 will be completed once biologists survey the final grid in the Shady Pass area in early July.



A Hunt's bumblebee (Bombus huntii) on Himalayan blackberry – Photo by Amy Pavelchek

Columbia Basin Bats: Biologist Dougherty assisted with North American Bat project by deploying detectors at four locations on the Quincy Lakes Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. The data collected last year informed management decisions regarding recreation at Quincy Lakes and will likely continue to do so. Last year there were 14 bat species detected, 4 of which were Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) species. The list below is all the species detected with SGCN species highlighted. For more information check out the [North American Bat Monitoring Program](#).

Common Name	Scientific Name
Pallid bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>
Townsend's big-eared bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>
Big brown bat	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>
Spotted bat	<i>Euderma maculatum</i>
Hoary bat	<i>Lasiurus ciner</i>
Silver-haired bat	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>
California myotis	<i>Myotis californicus</i>
Western small-footed myotis	<i>Myotis ciliolabrum</i>
Western long-eared myotis	<i>Myotis evotis</i>
Little brown bat	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>
Fringed myotis	<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>
Long-legged myotis	<i>Myotis volans</i>
Yuma myotis	<i>Myotis yumanensis</i>
Canyon bat	<i>Parastrellus hesperus</i>



Bat detector setup and ready to go – Photo by Sean Dougherty

Common Loon Surveys: Scientific Technician Amy Pavelchek revisited Jameson Lake to survey for nesting common loons. None were detected, but a couple of non-breeding loons were observed in the lake. Technician Pavelchek also surveyed Upper Wheeler Reservoir near Mission Ridge, but no loons were detected.

Golden Eagle Territory Surveys: Biologist Comstock rechecked an active nest in Entiat to confirm productivity. This nest has produced one chick that is approximately 6-7 weeks old. Productivity surveys of the other two active golden eagle territories identified earlier in the spring will be conducted in the coming weeks as the chicks approach fledging.

Black Bear Surveys: Biologists Fitkin and Heinlen and a handful of volunteers have completed roughly half of the bear hair-snag survey work being conducted in the central portion of District 6 this year. To date we've collected hundreds of bear hair samples for DNA analysis. The product of this effort will be a scientifically rigorous black bear density estimate for the study area and surrounding landscape that will help inform and shape black bear harvest management. In addition to the hair samples, we are capturing remote camera videos at each site that help with bear data analysis and document other species of interest. Special thanks to volunteer extraordinaire Bob Fischer.



From top: Biologist Heinlen and Volunteer Fischer in the midst of data collection, bear hair samples ready for collection – Photos by S. Fitkin



Lynx visiting a bear hair-snag site – Photo from WDFW remote camera



Bear family.mp4

Video of bears at hair-snag site

Cavity Nester Surveys: Biologists Comstock and Jeffreys completed the final woodpecker surveys for the year in the Mills Canyon area. Biologist Comstock confirmed the location of an active Lewis's woodpecker nest cavity in a ponderosa pine tree, but no new nesting pairs of Lewis's woodpecker or white-headed woodpecker were detected.



Lewis's woodpecker nest cavity tree – Photo by Devon Comstock



Lupine carpets the forest floor in one of the Mills Canyon cavity nester survey grids – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunter Access Program QR Code: Biologist Cook created initial online surveys that hopefully will be tested this fall in various locations across the state for both check-in at Register to Hunt properties and provide a harvest survey at those same sites. These surveys should allow multi-language surveys for individuals that need it. These will also be used with QR codes for easier access. Biologist Cook also began checking some Hunter Access signs to replace them as needed.

Quincy Trails Planning: Lands Operations Manager Finger and Recreation Planner Sisolak discussed the application of USFS Trails Standards to trails projects with Field Programs Manager Mortimer with the Washington Trails Association. Mortimer provided some insight on design considerations and shared perspectives on how to approach the trails designation and management process that we're grappling with.

Access Maintenance: Access Manager Harmon and Assistant Manager Steele removed, repaired, and reinstalled a badly wind damaged bathroom door at the Sam Israel access site on Lake Lenore. Harmon and Steele also reconnected the swimming platform to its anchor point at the Billy Clapp access site that had broken-free in an early season storm. Harmon and Steele continued to wrap up residual herbicide treatments on several water access sites.



Assistant Manager Steele retrieves broken anchor chain with magnet at Billy Clapp Reservoir
– Photo by Harmon



Steele installing the door frame at Sam Israel access site Lake Lenore – Photo by Harmon

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Bear Issue: Specialist Heilhecker received a call regarding a bear getting into garbage. The caller stated the bear had been coming up on her porch the past four afternoons and getting into her “garbage next to the entry way door.” The caller wanted to know what could be done about the bear other than killing it. Specialist Heilhecker reminded the caller that bears are very food driven and to please remove all food sources and attractants, then the bear will go away on its own. The caller claimed there was no food in the garbage that the bear would be attracted to, it was just trash. The caller asked about the Department trapping and relocating the bear. Specialist Heilhecker told the caller if law enforcement feels it is a dangerous wildlife situation, they have to may kill the bear, but bears are rarely trapped and relocated.

Specialist Heilhecker made suggestions on how to haze the bear and again emphasized the garbage needs to be put away. She informed the caller that law enforcement does have the ability to cite a landowner if they feel the garbage has created the nuisance situation. The caller was not happy to hear about the possibility of being cited for attracting the bear and did not appear willing to remove/secure her garbage.

Elk Issues: Specialist Heilhecker met with two landowners regarding elk damage in GMU 204. Elk are damaging fences and eating pasture grass before livestock can be turned out. Both landowners enjoy elk, however, the increasing elk herd has them concerned about further damage especially since there is no “any elk” modern firearms season. Both landowners signed Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements and will be issued landowner kill permits when the weather cools down.

Wolf Sighting: Specialist Heilhecker visited with a landowner who saw a wolf watching him while he watered his horses in their pasture. He fired a warning shot at the wolf. Shortly thereafter he went inside his house and saw a second wolf visible from the back door. The landowner has several pens of goats, chickens, and pet dogs. Even though the landowner’s yard is well lit, Specialist Heilhecker loaned him Foxlights to try along the back of the pens. They discussed fortifying the goat pens with electric fencing and left him information on a damage prevention cooperative agreement to cost share fencing materials to carnivore proof his livestock pens.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Biocontrol Dalmatian Toadflax Releases Douglas County Wildfire: Private Lands Biologist Braaten spent several days collecting, ordering, and releasing biocontrol agents for Dalmatian Toadflax infestations on private lands within the Pearl Hill Wildfire boundary. Private Lands Biologist Braaten and Hughes provided over 2300 weevils to private landowners for release who had the worst infestations. When the Pearl Hill wildfire burned the landscape, this allowed the Dalmatian toadflax to bolt and grow efficiently across the burn. The worse areas seem to be Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grass stands. These biocontrol agents have been used in the past here and were very effective once established. Timing of these releases will benefit landowners and habitat.



Mecinus jathinformus Stem boring weevils released to assist in controlling noxious weed Dalmatian Toadflax which has bolted after Pearl hill Wildfire in Douglas County – Photo by Eric Braaten (WDFW)



Dalmatian toadflax in general CRP where biocontrols were released – Photo by landowner

Post Fire Habitat Restoration: Biologist Hughes worked with USFWS on developing a contract for a habitat project they are doing together in the Beezley Hills. The project will be enhancing a full section that burned in 2017. The native grasses and forbs in the area have come back extremely well after the burn. There is room to enhance the habitat by planting shrubs. Historically, this site has never been farmed and was previously grazed over 20 years ago. Hughes received a Partners Fund grant for planting sagebrush from USFWS. Additionally, Hughes is contributing other shrubs from Hunter Access and habitat funds. The landowner has been enrolled in the Hunter Access Program for over 15 years. Hughes reached out to the landowner and went over the project proposal and the contract to be signed that is tied to the partners funds. The landowner is excited to have habitat work done on his property. The project is focused on pygmy rabbit recovery and will also benefit mule deer and upland birds.



Native bunchgrasses developed after 2017 burn – Photo by Hughes

Swakane and Chelan Butte Units – Riparian Restoration: Over the past eight years, fourteen riparian plantings totaling eleven acres have been completed on the Chelan Butte and Swakane Units with funding from the Chelan Public Utility District Rocky Reach Dam Settlement Agreement. In 2019, a one-acre planting was completed on Chelan Butte and two acres were completed in Swakane Canyon in 2020. It is commonly known that riparian areas provide habitat for a plethora of native mammals and birds and introduced game birds. This habitat type is also important to beneficial insects and pollinators. Shrubs that flower at different times during the growing season provide a more continuous source of needed pollen and nectar. Flowering shrubs that were planted include: smooth sumac, serviceberry, chokecherry, woods rose, hawthorn, Oregon grape, golden current, wax currant, blue elderberry, ocean spray, mock orange, and snowberry. Starting in 2018, all plots have included plantings of narrow-leaf milkweed and showy milkweed.



2013 Swakane Canyon Planting in 2014



2013 Swakane Canyon Planting in 2020

Big Bend Wildlife Area – Shrubsteppe Restoration: Sidra and Marco continue to work long days on two shrubsteppe restoration projects at the Big Bend Wildlife Area. They completed spraying the 150-acre Bissell Flat site then moved up the road to the 180 acre Back Rock site. Part way through the process, issues with our tractors necessitated them borrowing tractors from the Colockum Wildlife Area and the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area – which meant lots more driving around than anticipated. Fidel, Marco, and Dan mowed roads on all units. Total mileage over two or so weeks was upwards of 70.

Bridgeport Unit – Drip Irrigation and Biocontrol: Diante, Ataide, and Fidel finished repairs to drip irrigation systems on the Bridgeport unit. The unit has seven of these systems at sites that created to support water birch trees. All were severely damaged by the 2020 Pearl Hill Fire. Thousands of feet of hose, hundreds of emitters and one new solar array had to be installed. They also planted 220 water birch trees replacing many that were lost to the fire.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Cultural Resources: Dan spent three days working with WDFW archeologist Mo Major and archeology intern Megan Bridge. Mo and Megan are working on CR clearance for projects related to post-fire recovery efforts that are likely to have some level of ground disturbance. Holes were dug, soil sifted, volcanic ash likely from the Mazama eruption was rubbed between fingers, and an occasional flake was found. All in all, a much better time than being parked in the office.



Archaeologists Mo Major and Megan Bridge



A flake is found



Mazama ash layer below site loam



Columbia ground squirrel – Photo by S. Fitkin



Mule deer doe with fawn stand in SAFE CRP field that burned in Pearl Hill Wildfire last Summer. As you can see, recovery has been good! – Photo by Eric Braaten (WDFW)

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Elk Hooves Collection: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand collected nine sets of elk hooves from elk harvested on damage permits on Rattlesnake Mountain. The hooves will be sent to Washington State University to be used in their treponeme associated hoof disease (TAHD) research.

Ferruginous Hawk Breeding Survey Near Complete in Tri-Cities: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and Scientific Technicians Merluccio and Martenson monitored 140 historic nest sites in District 4 for Ferruginous Hawks. Approximately 10 active territories were located, with most of the pairs that breed mostly being successful! A few nests with young chicks remain, but once young survive to 32 days of age, the breeding attempt is considered a success. Success and productivity will continue to be monitored over the final nests.

Burrowing Owl Nest Season Wrapping Up: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and Scientific Technicians Merluccio and Martenson conducted nest checks at burrow sites for burrowing owls. Trained volunteers are also assisting to monitor some installed burrows. Nest checks identify site occupancy and breeding status and are used to determine a timeline for banding young owls later in the season. Most young have been banded, but some adults managed to escape capture. 15 sites were active during the season, and thus far 86 owls have been captured and released with bands including 12 groups of young. The remainder are nests located in natural burrows or inaccessible side-chambers dug out of the artificial burrows. Banding data is combined with partners regionally as part of a long-term project initiated by the Global Owl Project in Oregon.

Bumble Bee Surveys: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz finished the second round of “Graves Cell” bumble bee surveys in the wheatfield country around the Yakima, Benton, and Klickitat County borders. The goal was to survey various habitat types, looking mostly for western bumble bees. No bumble bees and few insects were seen during the surveys. Much of the area is wheat (or currently fallow). The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields appeared to have been heavily sprayed to keep weeds from becoming a problem. The result was low diversity grass patches. It was obvious efforts were made to avoid patches of native forbs; however, establishing those forbs in a dry environment is difficult. 2021 has been particularly dry, so plant diversity is likely even lower than normal.



Spray tractor tracks in draw near CRP



CRP with mostly crested wheat grass

Ground Squirrels: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz picked up a road-kill ground squirrel from a cooperative landowner in the Wenas Valley. The finding was noteworthy, as no ground squirrels were found on historic sites in 2020. A sample for DNA was collected and sent to Olympia.

Bear Hunter Check: District staff members have checked eight bears for local hunters who drew spring permits and were successful. Hunters are now required to bring in the skull/hide so a tooth can be extracted, and sex of harvest confirmed.

Wolf Surveys: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates followed up on a wolf sighting in Kittitas County that was reported on WDFW's website. The wolf sighted was likely the uncollared female of the Naneum pack. Oates met with Wolf Specialist Maletzke and researchers from the University of Washington and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives to discuss deploying some camera traps in hard-to-access areas east of Mount Rainier where there have been multiple reports of wolves, but no hard evidence of a pack. There will be some scat detection dogs in District 8 during mid-August to survey for wolf presence, as well as test the dogs' scat detection abilities in areas that we know have wolves (Teaaway, Naneum).

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Teaaway Llamas: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik took the opportunity to visit with a Teaaway neighbor and his llamas while assessing restoration efforts on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area. The neighbor is grateful for the Teaaway Valley Unit property to have easy access to adjacent public lands.



Teaaway neighbor and his pack of llamas

Special Permit Draw: Drawing results for special permits became available. Numerous happy winners contacted district biologists for information they hoped would make their hunt successful.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Rattlesnake Hills Elk Hazing: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to spend time hazing elk near the top of Rattlesnake Mountain, including late evening/early morning patrols. Increasing numbers of animals are leaving the Hanford site to forage in winter wheat crops on the southern exposure of Rattlesnake Mountain. Very dry conditions have limited the areas where pyrotechnics can be deployed because of the risk of wildfire.

Corral Canyon Summer Bull Elk Hunt: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to monitor damage hunts and prepared and delivered additional damage prevention permits to two landowners who successfully filled their existing permits. Large numbers of elk are leaving the Hanford National Monument for winter wheat fields on top of Rattlesnake Mountain, and these permits are used to deter elk from crops during this critical growing season. Several young calves are being observed as well.

Rattlesnake Hills Trail Cameras: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand checked and maintained two trail cameras deployed in areas on Rattlesnake Mountain that elk have historically used to leave the Hanford Monument for winter wheat crops. One camera was removed after being heavily damaged by curious elk.



Last picture from a damaged trail camera

Kittitas County: District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel attempted to haze elk in the Badger Pocket area. Elk use of the agriculture fields is steadily increasing in frequency and numbers of elk are going up. Hay growers are calling from the north, east, and south areas of the area. Elk are easily seen on the Yakima Training Center (YTC) and do not travel very far into the installation. Military training has limited access to haze the elk further onto YTC. Most of the elk are bulls, though cow numbers have been increasing this month.



Elk tracks in new seedings



New elk guard and return gate



Elk trail in one of several fields

Yakima County: Two orchardists in the Naches River area between Naches and Yakima called to report elk using their orchards. The locations were several miles apart and elk numbers were in the 10-20 range, with both bulls and cows present.

An alfalfa grower on 74th Avenue in Yakima called to report persistent elk activity in his alfalfa field next to Ahtanum Creek. He reported 14 elk have been staying on his property in the past few weeks and eating in his alfalfa field and damaging his fencing.

Wolf Activities: No wolf incidents or significant sightings have been reported this month. Cattle and sheep have been moved into both the Naneum and Teanaway pack territories. Agency range riders are working in each respective area, as well as producer range riders focusing on specific, mostly private pasture areas.

Carcass Composting: District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates has been working with agency staff members, the Department of Natural Resources, Kittitas County, Wildlife Services, and several NGOs to discuss interest and support for dealing with carcass dumping in the Kittitas Valley. Most large producers do a good job of disposing of dead animals, but cow, sheep, goat, and more are often dumped illegally along remote roads by small hobby farmers. The carcasses attract wolves and cougars and supply ravens with abundant food. The current concept is to build and operate a composting facility to provide the community with a better option for disposing of dead animals. Everyone has been generally supportive of moving forward, but no one jumped at the opportunity to lead the carcass composting work. Funding for such a facility remains uncertain, and some environmental permits will be required.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

State Acres for Wildlife Program Returns to Conservation Reserve Program: Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett was informed that all State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) programs are returning to Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) and will receive many more perks, such as 15-year contracts, better incentive payments, and no competition for enrollment. It is still unknown if the program will be lucrative enough to entice landowners. Enrollment for CRP and CCRP opened June 14, 2021 and will close August 6, 2021. Hulett attended the CCRP suitability and feasibility worksheet training put on by Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). This new document is required for all new and reenrolled CCRP contracts, including SAFE Contracts.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Treatments: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart coordinated with a local weed management company to chemically treat bull and Canada thistle within the 2018 Hutchins thinning boundary. Armed with backpack sprayers, crew members will initially concentrate on 400 acres of burned area.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart chemically treated weeds on Moonlight and Morrison roads in Taneum Canyon.



Morrison Road overlooking Taneum Canyon

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik and Natural Resource Specialist Nass rebuilt a buck and pole fence and wire fence that contained dispersed riparian camping along Taneum Creek. The fences were vandalized by users as the buck and pole fence was recently burned in the Moonlight Rave.



Natural Resource Specialist Nass and Manager Babik re-built the bucking pole fence and wire fence at a primitive campsite that was destroyed during the rave in March

Natural Resource Technician Blore removed a pile of old tires that were dumped in the Coral parking lot.



Natural Resource Technician Blore removed a pile of tires from the Corrals parking lot

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik reported trespass grazing on the Whiskey Dick to the appropriate owner of the cattle. Cattle were subsequently removed by the operator.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Natural Resource Specialist Nass harrowed a 6-acre field, prepping it for conversion from agricultural field to native shrub steppe habitat.



Natural Resource Specialist Nass harrowed the 6-acre parcel in the L.T. Murray WLA as part of the restoration efforts to return historic pasture to native habitat

Colockum Wildlife Area staff members met with WDFW Forester Mize to look at timber stands that were inventoried last year for possible timber stand improvement projects. Many of these stands are heavily overstocked, resulting from many years of fire exclusion, and they are greatly departed from a more natural, historic condition.



Colockum Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hagan and WDFW Forester Mize inspecting timber stands on Colockum Wildlife Area

Colockum Wildlife Area summer temp crews worked on boundary fence maintenance, adding fiberglass fence stays into the fence between fence posts.



Fiberglass fence stays being outfitted with metal clips for wire attachment



Natural Resource Worker Haynes installing fence stays on Colockum Wildlife Area boundary fence

Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Natural Resource Technician Trina Byers removed debris placed by beaver near Clark Pond. The debris was causing flooding on the adjacent private property.



Trina striking a pose while operating the skid steer backhoe

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Natural Resource Technician Wascisin sprayed Kochia and other broadleaf weeds recently at the Vance Ferry Unit Access site. Wildlife Area staff members will finish herbicide applications in the next few weeks and will transition to mowing as nesting season comes to an end.



Technician Wascisin spraying Kochia at Vance Ferry Unit

As many of the wetlands within the Sunnyside Wildlife Area dry up for the summer months as part of the moist soil management, some have undesired plants such as cocklebur that quickly emerge. Wildlife Area staff members have sprayed wetland cells at the rice paddies wetland of the Sunnyside Unit to control cocklebur. This will allow other wetland plants such as smartweed to grow and provide a food source through the winter months for migrating waterfowl.



Cocklebur prior to herbicide application



Cocklebur after herbicide application



Additional picture of before herbicide treatment and after treatment

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber recently observed many species of waterfowl and shorebirds using the receding water within the Johnson wetland. The shallow water provides foraging opportunities by providing newly emerged plants and macroinvertebrates. The area pictured below will slowly dry and the dense vegetation will be mowed prior to fall reflooding.



An assortment of teal located within the Johnson wetland



An Osprey feeds on a carp

5) Providing Education and Outreach

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart coordinated a volunteer work party with Mountains to Sound Greenway staff members to build and install an interpretive kiosk at the entrance to Parke Creek. His work continues to beautify the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area and condense signage into one location.



Newly installed Parke Creek kiosk

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Natural Resource Technician Blore put up signs at Pump House and Corrals access areas to alert the public to new emergency restrictions that prohibit grazing domestic sheep and goats in these areas untethered or unattended.



Emergency Restriction signs restricting domestic grazing in proximity with Bighorn Sheep

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart coordinated an outreach event for the Selah High School at the L.T. Murray's Joe Watt parking lot. Thirty students along with a career and technical education (CTE) teacher and vice principal participated in the event. The students installed two of the 26 location information banners they had created on the site's kiosk, collected nails from the parking lot, and removed trash from the sledding hill.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik gave a career talk and WDFW Forester Pfeifle showed the forestry students some forestry techniques using a variety of tools while delivering a motivational career talk of his own.



Location information banners created by Selah H.S. students



Selah H.S. students installing banners (left) and Manager Babik giving career talk to Selah H.S. students (right)

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart performed pre-cow monitoring in the Quilomene unit's upper Parke pasture. Very light and sporadic grazing by wild ungulates was observed. The hillsides are very dry with only deep-rooted perennials thriving.



Grazing monitor site on north aspect hillside (left) and grazing monitor site on south aspect hillside (right)

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 4

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 6

Nothing for this installment.