

# Wildlife Program

Week of December 7 – December 13, 2015

## **WOLF ACTIVITIES**

### **Region 2 Wolf Activities**

**Wolves in Chelan County:** An image of a collared wolf was recorded at a Conservation Northwest camera trap station in the Chiwaukum Mountains in Chelan County. In consultation with Wolf Biologist Becker, it was determined that the wolf is a female from the Teanaway Pack, captured and collared last February. It is common for pack members to travel similar distances in a normal activity year, and the female has since returned back to the more normal ranges of the pack. A temporary pause in collar function left a two-week gap in the female's GPS locations, keeping us from monitoring her travel to the camera trap site. While talking to a local resident about another issue, Biologist Gallie was informed of an unconfirmed observation of two wolves. The reports were discussed with Biologist Volsen and Wolf Biologist Becker.

*An image of a collared female wolf from the Teanaway Pack recorded in the Chiwaukum Mountains in Chelan County. The wolf has since moved back to the Teanaway area.*



## **REGION 1**

No report submitted this week.

## **REGION 2**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Northern Leopard Frogs:** Biologist Finger communicated with Nathan Lubliner from the Washington State Department of Ecology on the development of a study to assess pesticide impacts on northern leopard frogs. It appears the original study to assess direct and indirect impacts to leopard frogs may have been overly ambitious. The original plan was only reviewed by Finger. Because of this, ECY and the Grant County Mosquito Control District are suggesting that this project start with a deposition study to quantify the amount of pesticide that would

potentially make contact with a leopard frog. Finger discussed this process with Lubliner and requested time to respond to this recommended change after internal discussion.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Washington Conservation Corp Crews:** Wildlife Area Manager Olson supervised the Washington Conservation Corp crews from Wenatchee and Spokane on several projects relating to this year's fire damage on Scotch Creek. We were able to complete the last 12 miles of GPS marking of burned fences on the Pogue Mountain Unit. The crews also constructed 40 bluebird boxes, four reader boards, and several routed wood signs, all of which were lost in the fire. The crew also started the fire wise improvements by removing brush and trees from the perimeter of outbuildings.

*WCC crew working on nest boxes, reader boards, and wood signs* – Photo by Jim Olson

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCES***

### **Wildlife Management**

**Columbia Basin Waterfowl Hunting:** Last week was likely the best week of the season thus far as warm Chinook winds opened up much of the frozen wetlands in the basin. Ducks are happy to leave the crowded reserves and seek new wetlands when conditions allow. This likely resulted in phenomenal waterfowl hunting for at least a few days. Cooler weather will likely freeze some ponds up again but afternoon highs will keep ice from becoming thick. Expect good hunting over the coming week or two, particularly during weather events.

**Deer Surveys:** Biologists Finger (with assistance from Access Program Graves) and Duvuvuei conducted ground surveys in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284 (Ritzville) and aerial surveys in Phase 1 portions of the Columbia Plateau Cooperative Mule Deer Survey. Biologist Duvuvuei completed the three year report for Phase 2 of the Columbia Basin Mule Deer Surveys.

*Aerial mule deer survey in eastern Adams County*

– Photo by R. Finger





*Orrin Duvuvuei classifies a small group of mule deer in eastern Adams County – Photo by R. Finger*

**GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**Wildlife Areas**

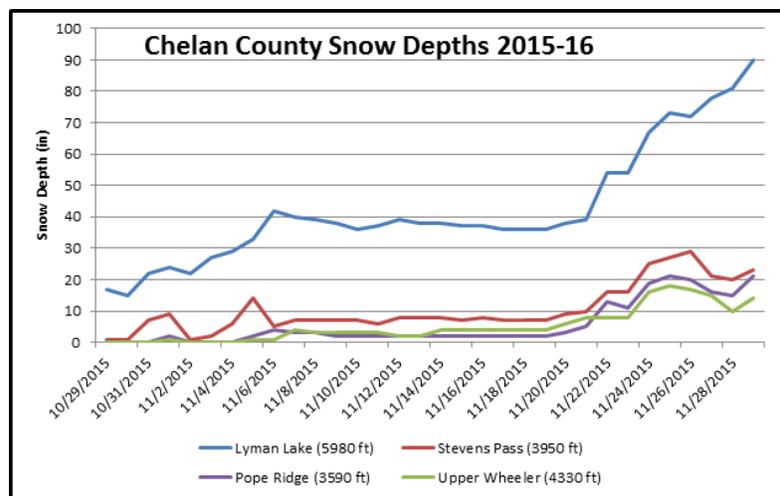
**Wenner Lakes/Chalfa Dam:** Manager Furnari hiked into the Wenner Lakes/Chalfa Dam to perform a safety water level inspection on the remaining damaged dam. She sent several photos to her management, Habitat staff members, and CAMP’s engineers.



***Winter Wenner Lakes/Chalfa Dam inspection***  
– Photo by Sherry Furnari

**Winter Weather Conditions:** Snow continues to accumulate at the higher elevations in Chelan County. Current estimates are that the snow pack is at 75% of normal at this point in the year. Warmer conditions have resulted in rain across the area, keeping snow levels down.

***Snow depths recorded at four Washington SnoTel sites in Chelan County***

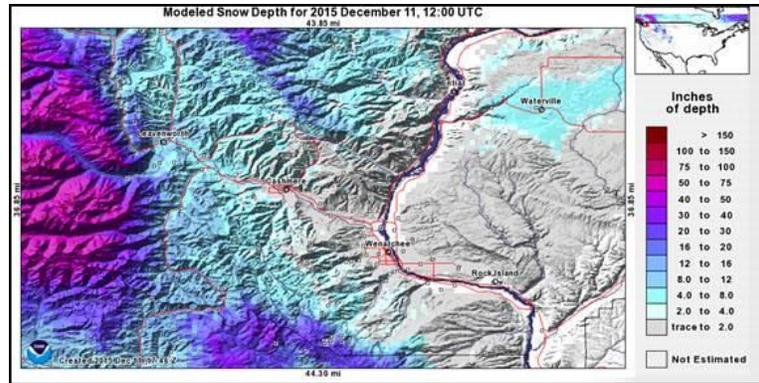


*A map of modeled snow depths across the primary mule deer winter range in Chelan County*

**REGION 3**

No report submitted this week.

**REGION 4**



**GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE**

**Wildlife Management**

**Elk Management:** Biologist Yarborough collected and processed elk roadkill data from Highway 20. This data is important in monitoring temporal and seasonal patterns of elk collisions over multiple years. This information is shared with WSDOT.

*Elk roadkill data is used to monitor temporal and seasonal patterns of elk collisions over multiple years*



**GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCES**

**Wildlife Areas**

**Waterfowl Season:** Cosgrove and Meis monitored water levels and waterfowl use on the Island Unit. High flows on the Skagit River have raised water levels throughout the Island Unit. Ducks have been feeding heavily in the fava beans and yellow nutsedge. Hunter use decreased some this past weekend compared to the weekend before even with good bird numbers and use in the area. Cosgrove continued to monitor waterfowl use at the Johnson/DeBay's Slough Unit. Sheet water and corn areas in the game reserve had high use by swans and all common species of dabbling ducks.

**Leque Island:** Meis checked the Leque Island Unit late in the week and found high levels of public use, both hunting and wildlife viewing. Short-eared owls are common to the site and provide good viewing opportunities.



*Short-eared owls are a common site on Leque Island this time of year*

### **Private Lands/Access Management**

**Wildlife Viewing Outreach and Coordination Efforts:** Private Lands Access Supervisory Biologist Caldwell conducted outreach and coordination efforts with regional Audubon, Habitat for Humanity, and The Nature Conservancy representatives. These preliminary efforts were conducted to inform these organizations about new efforts that

WDFW is implementing on private lands. Specifically, the Private Land Access Program branch of WDFW is seeking to partner with these organizations (and others) on efforts to promote wildlife viewing and other recreation on private properties across Whatcom, Skagit, Island, San Juan, Snohomish, and King counties. Further outreach, idea sessions, and meetings will be set up soon with local land trust organizations.

**Waterfowl Quality Hunt Sites:** Natural Resource Technicians Otto and Deyo, along with Private Lands Biologist Wingard, conducted use surveys of Waterfowl Quality Hunt sites in Whatcom, Skagit, and Snohomish counties, taking note and resolving any issues regarding the sites. Many sites were occupied with hunters enjoying some very good hunting conditions. Otto repaired two parking signs that were broken from recent high winds. Both Deyo and Otto collected completed hunter success/use cards from survey boxes and made sure there were ample supplies for any weekend recreationalist.

*Natural Resource Technician Otto encountered this Sandhill Crane foraging in a field with trumpeter swans near a Whatcom County Waterfowl Quality Hunt site*



### **Potential New Waterfowl Quality Hunt Site:**

Private Lands Biologist Wingard toured two potential Waterfowl Quality Hunt Sites for next year in Snohomish County near Monroe.

The two sites could provide high quality waterfowl hunting experiences, with one of the sites on a semi-permanent pond with multiple established blinds. The other site could be an excellent open field opportunity. Biologist Wingard developed hunt opportunity options and will meet with the landowner to discuss these options soon.

*Ducks and duck blind at potential Waterfowl Quality Hunt site near Monroe*

**GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE**

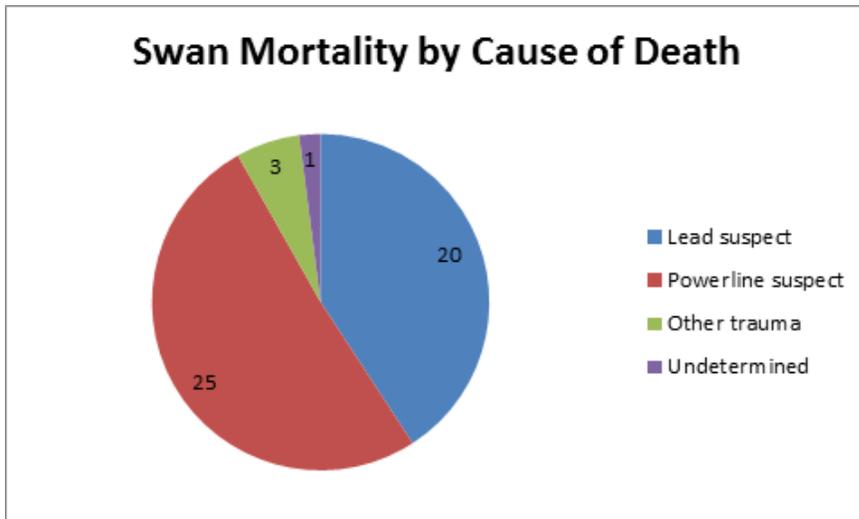


**Wildlife Management**

**Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study:** Below is the current tally. Currently there are three swans that are being treated for lead poisoning at the Whatcom Human Society. Last year there were 54 swan mortalities by December 11, and this year we have 50 mortalities by the same date. Half of our recorded swan mortalities are suspected powerline strikes, while 40% of mortalities are suspected to be lead-related.

**TRUS Weekly Mortality Report (as of 11Dec15)**

	<b>Lead suspect</b>	<b>Powerline suspect</b>	<b>Other trauma</b>	<b>Undetermined</b>	<b>Feather Pile</b>	<b>Total</b>
Sumas	2	1	1		1	5
Whatcom	13	13	0			26
Skagit	4	5	2	1		12
Snohomish	1	6	0			7
	20	25	3	1	1	50
Percent	40.00%	50%	6%	2%		



**Living with Wildlife:** Biologist Anderson had an interview with K5:  
<http://www.king5.com/story/news/local/2015/12/08/the-laws-about-dealing-with-nuisance-wildlife-on-your-property-and-your-rights/76983142/>

### **Wildlife Conflict Management**

**Wildlife Conflict Management:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman coordinated with Tribal co-managers on carcass retention after several elk were struck by vehicles. WCS Witman coordinated Master Hunter assignments on damage properties with Special Elk Area 4941.

**WDFW and Tribal Co-Management Fencing Projects:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman and Natural Resource Technician Cogdal coordinated with Tribal co-managers and private landowners on upcoming fencing project logistics. These efforts will soon be moving forward and will provide long term solutions on private properties that have chronic wildlife damage.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Island Unit:** Cosgrove and Meis assisted with moving the tug skiff from the barge on Freshwater Slough to the Headquarters boat launch. This will reduce the strain on the barge caused by the flooding Skagit River.

**Skagit Headquarters:** Wildlife area staff members attended to numerous projects related to high water and drainage this week. Staff monitored and maintained the Skagit pump station and auxiliary pumps being used to drain the east side of Fir Island during the Wiley Slough tide gate repair project. The tide gates are scheduled to be installed early next week. Late winter rains and high-river flows are continuing, which means we require increased pumping to manage drainage water. Cosgrove continued car counts at the Headquarters and Conway boat launches to monitor public use in the area.

**Samish Unit:** Cosgrove and Meis installed additional plywood to cover a culvert in a water-control structure at the Samish Unit to increase water-holding capacity at the site. Meis and Cosgrove monitored waterfowl and hunter use on the site.

**Cherry Valley Unit:** Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm informed WDFW Customer Service Reps that the Cherry Valley Unit is under water.

### **Private Lands/Access Management**

**Hunting Season Preparation:** Private Lands Biologist Wingard fielded multiple inquiries about the Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program in Region 4. All the sites are currently open and online.

**Hunt by Reservation Analysis:** Private Lands Biologist Wingard began compiling and analyzing data for the Hunt by Reservation system to assess the rates of booking and use of the sites. The results of this analysis will provide a clearer picture of how often these sites are used and how successful they are.

***GOAL 4: SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY***

**Training:** Wildlife Program staff members attended the Wildlife Program meeting in Wenatchee.

**REGION 5**

***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Wildlife Management**

**Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area January Elk Survey:** Biologists Holman and Stephens conducted the December winter elk survey on the Mudflow Unit the first week of December. A total of 87 elk were observed on the valley floor. The composition consisted of 32 cows, eight calves, and 47 bulls. There was no snow at the lower elevations and the snow line appeared to be around 3,000 feet. Most animals appeared to be in good shape and no mortalities were detected.



***December winter elk survey on the Mudflow Unit***

**Fisher Reintroduction:** After years of planning, the Region 5 Wildlife Program was glad to be in attendance for the release of fishers back into suitable habitats in the southern Cascades. Seven individuals were released in the Cowlitz River basin on U.S. Forest Service lands, with representatives from many conservation and natural resource related partners in attendance. Acting Listing and Recovery Section Manager Hayes, Biologist Lewis, and Deputy Director Stohr all spoke on behalf of WDFW and the importance of and excitement about the project. Additional speakers represented many of the other groups that helped facilitate the reintroduction, including members of the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Cowlitz Tribe of Indians, Conservation Northwest, the Cispus Center, etc. Region 5 Wildlife Program staff members will be participants in efforts to monitor the survival, movements, and reproduction of the fishers.

The fisher is a medium-sized weasel which preys upon small mammals, mountain beavers, and porcupines. In turn, fishers are preyed upon by cougars and bobcats. Fishers were completely missing among the Washington State fauna since they were eliminated by unregulated trapping during the mid-1900s. A previous release into the mountains of Olympic National Park has re-established populations there. For additional information on the effort to restore fisher populations in Washington, see the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/fisher/>.

Additionally, see the news release at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/news/dec0315b/> . Please see photos below of the fisher release. Thanks to all of the conservation partners for their many contributions to the effort to recover this native Washington species.



*Fisher release southern Cascades*

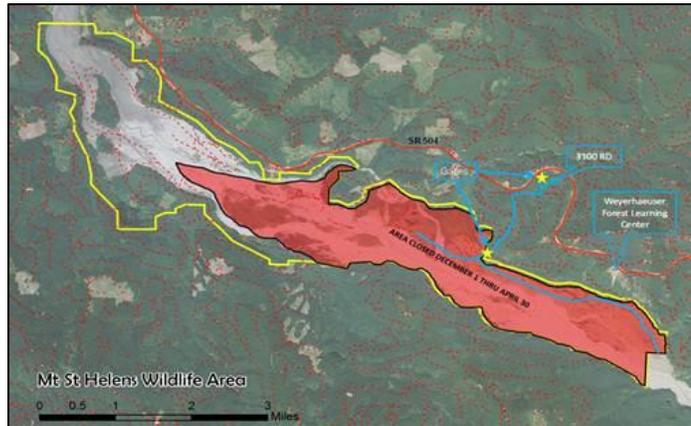
**Hoof Disease Public Working Group Meeting:** The sixth Public Working Group meeting was held last week. Topics discussed included the latest on the diagnostic testing of hoof diseased elk, results of the citizen science protocol survey that took place in March, and a detailed update on the current findings of the hoof disease survival study. Two members of the public provided public

testimony. Information on the Hoof Disease Working Group can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/ehd/>. Updated materials from the meeting are available on the website.

**Dusky Canada Goose Survey:** Biologist Butler and Scientific Technician Miller conducted a dusky Canada goose survey this week in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties. Areas surveyed included Shillapoo Wildlife Area, Woodland Bottoms, Kalama, Willow Grove, Puget Island, and areas near Grays Bay. No dusky geese were observed during this effort. However, several large flocks of cackling geese were counted.

### Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area

**Elk Winter Range Closure:** Starting December 1, part of the Mudflow Unit of Mount St Helens Wildlife Area will be closed to public access to lessen the energy demands on elk that winter there. The area is used by elk during the winter months to find forage and escape harsher weather conditions at higher elevations. Boundary signs and closure notices have been posted at several access points and along the Wildlife Area boundary. The area is closed east of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, the North Fork Toutle River, and Deer Creek. This area will be closed through April 30.



### *Elk winter range closure on the Mudflow Unit of Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area*

### **Riverbank Monitoring on the Mudflow Unit:** Wildlife Area Manager

Hauswald and Assistant Manager Sample surveyed the riverbank of the North Fork Toutle River in the Mudflow Unit to determine if there was any damage from the heavy rain and high river flows last month. Several areas had significant erosion along the riverbank, with an estimated loss of less than three acres along a 2.5-mile stretch. Several smaller trees within the riparian area washed away and there was major damage to two streambank protection structures, as well as minor damage to another. Several new photo points were also established to monitor the riverbank and future enhancements on the area.



*Riverbank protection structure 12/3/14*



*Riverbank protection structure 11/30/15*

### ***Bank erosion and loss of red alder trees***

#### **Klickitat Wildlife Area**

**Swale Creek Grazing Permit:** Manager Van Leuven checked on grazing activity that is occurring under a short-term emergency permit and found everything to be in order. Water is beginning to collect in the bed of Swale Creek.



*Swale Creek*

***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Klickitat Mule Deer Surveys:** Biologist Bergh spent a considerable amount of time this week preparing for this month's mule deer surveys in GMUs 388 and 382. She will be designing the surveys to align with other mule deer survey efforts on the east side of the state and has consulted with several other agency biologists. This week, survey units were mapped and assigned a stratum of high, medium, and low numbers of deer predicted to be observed during the survey. The strata are based on previous years' surveys as well as other biologist's knowledge of the area.

**Southwest Washington Management Area 2A Goose Hunt:** Biologist Butler, Scientific Technician Miller, and Law Enforcement Officer Van Vladriken traveled throughout Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties to monitor hunting activity in the field on both public and private land the first week of December. As of Sunday, December 6, approximately 117 hunters were contacted and 90 geese were checked.

Goose hunting closed at the end of the day on Sunday, December 6, and will reopen on Wednesday, December 16. One dusky was harvested during the closure. This brings the total number of known dusky Canada geese harvested in the area to seven. Information on the mid-season closure can be found within the Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons Pamphlet. <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>

## Wildlife Areas

**Late Archery Deer Season:** Technician Davis contacted several hunters the first week of December on the Soda Springs Unit and checked two harvested does. He observed quite a bit of hunting activity. This season continues to be popular with bow hunters.

## Access

**Vancouver Lake and Langsdorff Landing:** Access staff Spangler and Rhodes worked with the Clark County Corrections crew using blowers on the parking areas and picking up litter.

*Clark County Corrections crew using blowers on the parking areas and picking up litter*

**GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.**



## District 10 Wildlife Conflict

**Elk:** The conflict specialist met with a landowner in Randle and renewed a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement. The landowner planted a new eight acre field of hay that was a complete loss due to elk damage. Conklin observed a very well-used trail leading into the new field. Conklin will be deploying disabled hunters to this location. The landowner is very excited about utilizing the disabled hunters to assist in damage control.

### *Well-used trail leading into the new field*

In addition, Conflict Specialist Conklin visited a farm in Toutle. The landowner has had historical elk damage on his acreage for years. Conklin renewed the Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement and issued damage permits.

Conflict Specialist Conklin also met with Raintree Nursery in Morton and toured the newly completed cooperative fencing project funded by WDFW.



*Raintree Nursery in Morton with newly completed cooperative fencing funded by WDFW*



**District 10 & Mount St. Helens  
Wildlife Area Winter Conditions**

**Past Weather:** November temperatures and precipitation were both below normal, with several days of low temperatures in the 20s. There has been very little low elevation snow so far this winter. Heavy rains during the past week caused some flooding throughout the district. Conditions and possible habitat loss on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area from the flooding have not yet been assessed.

**Short-Term Forecast:** Snow levels will fluctuate between 2,500 to 4,000 feet during the upcoming week. The 6-10 and 8-14 day forecasts are for normal temperatures and above normal precipitation.

**Long-Term Forecast:** The December forecast is for above normal temperatures and precipitation, and the three month forecast is for above normal temperatures and an equal chance of above normal, below normal, or normal precipitation.

**Habitat:** Forage is available at all elevations.

**Snow Depths:** Lower elevations are currently snow free, with minimal depths at the middle and upper elevations.

**Animal Concentrations:** No unusual concentrations noted to date. The first winter elk survey was conducted on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area on December 3, with 84 elk being observed.

**Animal Condition:** Animals appear to be in good condition.

**Mortality:** No mortalities have been observed.

**Public Contacts:** None to report regarding winter conditions.

*The Public is reminded the portion of the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area lying east of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle, and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30, 2015, in an effort to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.*

## **District 9 Winter Conditions**

### **Past Weather**

#### **First week of December:**

The total precipitation for the year in the South Cascades was below average and approximately four inches of snow fell above 1,500 feet in the Columbia River Gorge.

#### **Second week of December:**

This week's precipitation in District 9 was extreme, with severe flooding occurring in areas of the Wind River and Big White Salmon drainages. Warm weather melted most of the snow pack below 3,000 feet. The Klickitat Wildlife Area received 4.13 inches of rain (as measured at the Klickitat Wildlife Area office) during the past week. This is a large amount of precipitation relative to the normal for this area. Warm temperatures have caused all snow to melt on the Klickitat Wildlife Area, leaving all forage readily available.

### **Winter Severity**

#### **First week of December**

The Soda Springs Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area experienced temps in the 20s during the first half of the week, accompanied by a light snowfall. At mid-week, more snow fell and temperatures rose to around freezing, causing a thin crust to form on the snow. As of the end of the week, there was about 90% snow cover, averaging around three inches deep, but melting with a daytime temperature of 40 degrees.

#### **Second week of December**

On the Klickitat Wildlife Area, soil and road conditions are soft, as soils are saturated. Seasonal and perennial ponds are filling up, and all creeks are running full. No flooding has occurred in the upland areas.

**Habitat:** Elevations below 3,000 feet have little snow accumulation and habitat is generally available for both deer and elk throughout District 9. There is no concern for the current severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County in the White Salmon River drainage. Those portions of Klickitat County east of Rock Creek have no snow accumulation and deer are reported in good condition.

**Animal Concentrations:** Deer are bunched in normal concentrations throughout the district.

**Animal Condition:** Deer and elk appear to be in good condition and no winter stress/mortality has been reported.

**Mortality:** None reported this week related to winter conditions.

**Public Contacts:** No concerns raised by the public this week related to winter conditions.

## **REGION 6**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Satsop/Mason Deer Project:** In 2009, WDFW initiated a study of the effects of forest management practices on black-tailed deer reproduction. Two of eight study sites are represented in District 15: Mason and Satsop. An objective of this study involves determining sources of mortality among all radio-collared deer. The radio-collars in the Mason cluster have remote monitoring capabilities and text messages are sent when certain events occur, although periodic field checks are recommended. The Satsop collars require field monitoring to determine status. Biologist Murphie reports that no mortalities have occurred recently.

**Sea Duck Surveys:** As part of a long-term, multi-species monitoring effort, Biologists Murphie, Evenson, and Cyra began their annual sea duck, marine bird, and marine mammal survey effort of Puget Sound recently. Two of an approximately 18-20 days were flown covering areas in central Puget Sound and the eastern Straits of Juan de Fuca.

**Goose Season Monitoring:** On Sunday, Biologist Michaelis conducted goose hunter bag limit checks in Goose Management Zone 2B. A total of four hunters were contacted either by phone interviews or direct contacts. Two of the four hunters were checked with two bag limits (eight geese) and none of them were dusky geese. The remaining two phoned in and reported no geese were taken from the USFWS Reikkola hunt area.

### ***GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE***

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Bell Creek Cleanup:** Manager Belson, with the assistance of J. Franklin at the Department of Enterprise Services, successfully sold an old 1975 Dodge 600 water truck through the DES online auction. The truck, still sporting Department of Wildlife door emblems and a Department of Game first aid kit, was stored at the North Olympic Wildlife Area Bell Creek Unit and was most recently used on the Sequim Prairie Savanna Oak Woodland Restoration Project for watering trees. However, having sat unused for many years and in direct view of the next door neighbor's



front door, it was time for it to go. The truck sold sight unseen for \$375 to a buyer from the Lacey area. Master Hunter Tucker assisted significantly by compiling much of the auction package (vehicle technical information, photos, etc.) required by DES and by checking on the site after the buyer's late night removal of the vehicle from the wildlife area. The mobile home (under which a suspected coyote den is located) in the photo background also sold at auction and will be removed soon, so stay tuned to the weekly.