

Wildlife Program

Week of December 14 – December 20, 2015

WOLF ACTIVITIES

Region 1 Wolf Activities

District Meeting: Biologist Shepherd attended the District 1 quarterly district meeting.

Conference Call: Supervisor McCanna and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett participated on the northeast Washington Legislators and county Commissioners conference call.

Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) Meeting: Wildlife Conflict Specialists Bennett, Shepherd, and Rasley attended the two-day WAG meeting held in Spokane. Topics discussed included the creation of a WAG mission statement, Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for livestock (DPCA-L), a sheep producer's wolf-livestock interaction plan, and presentations by hunters.

Monthly Washington Legislator and County Commissioner Wolf Conference Call: Supervisor McCanna and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett participated in a conference call regarding recent wolf activity primarily in northeastern Washington. Other topics of discussion included preparation for calving season, WAG updates, and coordination efforts.

Monthly Washington Legislator and County Commissioner Wolf Conference Call: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett updated local staff and applicable statewide staff on recent reported wolf sightings in Spokane and Whitman counties.

DPCA-L Agreements: Biologist Earl worked on updating checklists for DPCA-L cooperators. Earl also finalized and submitted A-19 forms for the cooperators who have submitted invoices for additional range riding and sanitation costs within known wolf activity ranges.

Sighting Reported: Biologist Earl received several calls from producers who have seen a trail camera picture of what appears to be a wolf on Alpowa Creek near the Asotin/Garfield County line. Earl was given the name of the person with the trail camera picture but was unable to contact him to get a copy.

Tracks: Earl talked to a cooperator who saw what appeared to be a lone set of wolf tracks in the snow on Little Butte in Asotin County. This cooperator has been working closely with Earl all year long to keep him informed of wolf activity near his grazing operations.

Region 2 Wolf Activities

Tunk Valley Canine Sighting Investigation: In early November, Biologist Heinlen investigated a sighting of several canines chasing deer in the Tunk Valley. Canine tracks measuring 3"x3 1/2" were found at the site and a camera was placed to capture any activity in the area. Biologist Heinlen collected the camera this period, finding coyote, domestic dogs, domestic cats, and a cow.

Domestic dogs caught on remote camera – Photo by WDFW

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Washington Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting: From November 30 – December 2, Farm Bill Coordinator Mike Kuttel, Jr. attended the Washington Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in Spokane. Kuttel provided a display that included information about the public comment opportunity for four periodic status reviews, the Sage-Grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances, WDFW Private Lands Access programs, personalized license plates, aquatic invasive species, Habitat Program’s duties, and several different Fish Washington stickers. The Fish Washington stickers were very popular, with all but one taken. The event was a great opportunity for Kuttel to connect with conservation district staff members and supervisors, as well as representatives from the agriculture industry.



Prairie Species Conservation: Ann Potter (Insect Conservation Specialist), Dave Hays (Restoration Ecologist), Mary Linders (Prairie Species Recovery Biologist), and Scott Pearson (Research Scientist), participated with regional prairie conservation partners in the two-day Joint Base Lewis-McChord Army Compatible Use Buffer Program annual strategy session. The goal of the Army Compatible Use Buffer program is to reduce impacts to training on Joint Base Lewis-McChord associated with the Endangered Species Act listing of prairie species by supporting conservation on lands off the installation. Taylor’s checkerspot butterflies, Mazama pocket gophers, and streaked horned lark are the focal species for this program. The group reviewed strategy goals and objectives, and refined primary conservation actions to develop new species-specific, measurable milestones and priority actions for Fiscal Year 2015. In addition, a series of meetings covered topics including endangered species conservation, land management, outreach and education, and land acquisition to develop a list of possible projects. The next steps include the development of a one-page prospectus for each project. These are reviewed by the

Joint Base Lewis-McChord Army Compatible Use Buffer and the Center for Natural Land Management. Partners will be notified by January 12, 2016 if their projects are accepted for full proposals.

SWG – Monarch Butterfly Project: Ann Potter, Insect Conservation Specialist, participated in a two-day meeting in Spokane to develop the SWG-Monarch project. WDFW, Idaho Fish & Game, and The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation developed and will be implementing the two year project collaboratively. At the meeting, partners reviewed work for each sub-project, identified action items with leads and timelines, identified contacts to solicit Milkweed and Monarch data, discussed Milkweed and Monarch survey protocols, established training content and a calendar, and discussed integrating our work with the USFWS western Monarch habitat modeling effort. The group is preparing for the first project field season, which is set to begin in June 2016. WDFW will conduct surveys for both Milkweeds and Monarchs in Regions 1, 2, and 3, as well as the Klickitat County portion of Region 5 in 2016 and 2017.

Lands 20/20: Section Manager Cynthia Wilkerson and Lands Planner Lauri Vigue presented the 2015-16 suite of land acquisition project proposals to the Executive Management Team on December 14. There are 10 new projects throughout the state. We also discussed the 11 returning and/or phased projects that were recommended to move forward for funding. Director Unsworth gave approval to move forward with the suite of projects to the public review phase. A three-week public review process for the new projects will occur in January. Two projects were flagged for further discussion regarding their funding strategy. This decision represents many hours of work from staff members and Regional Directors throughout the state, and involves Wildlife, Habitat, and Fish programs.

Estuary and Salmon Restoration Strategy: Section Manager Cynthia Wilkerson and Restoration Ecologist Dave Hays attended a cross-program meeting in Snohomish on December 1, focused on landscape restoration strategies in Region 4. They looked at major watersheds in the region and discussed the needs and opportunities for restoration work, including strategies on WDFW lands and working in partnership with community efforts on private lands. The meeting was well-attended, with Wildlife, Fish, and Habitat program staff members participating, as well as staff from the Director's Office.

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Moose Survey: Assistant District Wildlife Biologists Annemarie Prince and Carrie Lowe, along with Bighorn Sheep and Moose Biologist Jared Oyster, flew in a helicopter one day for moose surveys in District 1. Moose surveys are implemented using a distance sampling approach. The crew has about nine more days of surveys if weather and snow conditions permit.

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

Wildlife Management

Cougar sealing: Assistant District Biologist Vekasy sealed an adult female cougar harvested in GMU 154 outside of Walla Walla. Biological data is collected from all cougar harvested during the recreational cougar hunting season.

Collecting tooth and tissue samples

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

Wildlife Areas/Water Access Sites



Hog Canyon: During routine site maintenance, Dziekan took photos and measurements of the broken gate at Hog Canyon. During the offseason, someone hooked a chain to the gate and broke it open so they could access the lake. Dziekan was able to disassemble the broken parts of the gate in the field and bring them back to his shop. The eye bolt on the turnbuckle that was welded to a hinge point on the gate snapped in half. Dziekan welded it back together, fabricated a new lock to give the gate a little more strength, and reassembled everything back in the field. Dziekan fabricated a sign frame in his shop and attached it to an existing sign post. The sign is located at the top of the hill before you make the turn down to the lake. The sign is a public fishing sign with brackets attached to the bottom. There is a homemade sign attached to the fishing sign that informs users if the gate is open or closed. This will help prevent people from making the turn down the road when the gate is closed and not being able to reverse up the hill.



Broken gate, the turnbuckle holding the support cable snapped



Gate with repaired turnbuckle and tightened cable, now swings open and closed



The gate open sign attached to the post is temporary until new aluminum signs arrive

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area –Boundary Stock Fence: Biologist Woodall, Technician Meisner, and a couple volunteers from the Back Country Horseman’s Club worked together to remove some old stock fence and cut brush and trees in preparation for rebuilding a fence on the Thornton Acquisition.



Cutting brush



Removing old decrepit fence wire



Cutting out an overgrown fence line

REGION 2

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Pygmy Rabbit Recovery: Biologist Gallie, Technician Gibbs, and Volunteer Mikkelsen initiated active burrow surveys on the Beezley Recovery Area to determine the distribution and survival of kits released during the 2015 breeding season. Snow conditions were optimal to locate active burrows. However, we did not locate any on this portion of the release area. There is mounting concern, as there is no evidence of pygmy rabbits in the wild on the Beezley Recovery Area after more than 400 kits were released this summer and fall. While we were surprised at the lack of rabbit burrows, we were even more surprised to follow tracks to a den and find a porcupine – not exactly your normal shrub steppe companion.



New fallen snow on the Beezley Hills pygmy rabbit recovery area –
Photo by J. Gallie

Washington Ground Squirrel: Biologist Finger provided input to USFWS regarding the potential impacts of the 2015 wildfires on Washington ground squirrel populations. Because all wildfires within the Washington ground squirrel range occurred after June 12 (only two fires occurred prior to June 29), and due to excessively dry conditions prior to this time, it is likely that the vast majority of ground squirrels had begun aestivation. For that reason, direct and indirect impacts associated with these fires are expected to be minimal for the short-term. Finger was not able to provide any insight into the long-term impacts, as this would depend greatly on the condition of the habitat and the intensity of the fire at the time of the burn.

Okanogan Mule Deer Surveys: After being weathered out earlier in the month, Biologists Fitkin, Heinlen, and Hansen conducted annual aerial deer surveys in District 6. This year's effort focused primarily on the Okanogan Valley, although they also surveyed a few quadrats in the Methow to look at pre and post fire comparisons. In total, they classified 1363 deer before weather shut them down again. They observed fawn:doe and buck:doe ratios of 74:100 and 16:100 respectively, and 38% of observed buck sported antlers with ≥ 3 points. The fawn:doe ratio is a little below the long-term average. The buck:doe ratio is the lowest observed since 2004, although still above the minimum management goal of 15:100, while the percentage of legal bucks in the count is slightly below the long-term average of 39%, but down noticeably from 50% observed in 2014. The drops in buck numbers and the older age class percentage were not surprising given the apparent high hunter success rates during both the general and permit seasons. Additional data analysis will be undertaken to generate a population estimate for the western portion of the Okanogan watershed.

In addition to deer, they also incidentally observed a bobcat, 14 bighorn sheep near Loomis, a group of five elk, and three moose.



Okanogan elk – Photo by Scott Fitkin



Moose cow and calf – Photo by Sara Hansen



Sinlahekin Herd bighorn sheep – Photo by Sara Hansen

Chelan County Citizen Science Wild Turkey Count: Biologist Gallie prepared materials for the Wenatchee Sportsmen’s Association annual winter turkey count in Chelan County. Volunteers conduct three visits to 44 wintering sites, recording the composition of the flock as well. Now in its seventh year, this project continues to provide trends and distributions of the wild turkey populations within the county. Results of this effort are used in the annual Status and Trend Report, District Hunting Prospects, and hunter inquiries. The results are also provided to residents who either enjoy or despise the birds’ presence.

Wildlife Areas

Columbia Basin Feral Pig Eradication: On December 16, Biologist O. Duvuvuei and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Eidson showed USDA Biologist Schafer the area in which pigs have recently been sighted. Despite a fresh dusting of snow, the three did not locate any sign of pigs. Duvuvuei, Eidson, and Schafer deployed camera traps in likely areas in an attempt to capture photographs and estimate pig numbers. On December 13, two small pigs were harvested. It is hoped that they were among the last remaining pigs in the area.

Bridgeport Unit Weed Control: Noel assisted Vegetation Ecologist Kurt Merg with an application of the bacteria *Pseudomonas fluorescens*. This bacteria is believed to be effective at suppressing cheatgrass, and as we have an abundance of cheatgrass, the most difficult part of the application was picking a site. Kurt had enough material for a two to three acre application, so Dan and Noel selected an easily accessible location, even in snow, on the Bridgeport Unit. Applied on the snow, the bacteria should incorporate into the soil once spring arrives and the melting snow carries it into soil profile.

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

Wildlife Areas

20th Annual Bridgeport Christmas Bird Count: Friday, Dan was one of 14 people participating in this event. Organized, as usual, by local birder extraordinaire Meredith Spencer and WDFW Research Scientist Mike Schroeder, the group observed 87 species with an estimated count of 10,659 birds. Species that were relatively common, compared with their average count, were horned grebe, bald eagle, American kestrel, mourning dove, red-breasted nuthatch, pygmy nuthatch, and western meadowlark. Declines were mallard, American wigeon, and American coot. Mike and Dan teamed up for the day, and amongst their observations were Clark’s nutcrackers and sharp-tailed grouse.



Clark's nutcracker – Photo by Dan Peterson



Sharp-tailed grouse – Photo by Dan Peterson

Methow Recreational Opportunities (Weekender): Excellent skiing and snow tracking opportunities abound in the Methow Valley during the holidays. Hundreds of miles of groomed Nordic and snowshoe trails are available throughout the valley. Details of “Nature of Winter” snowshoe tours, focusing on winter ecology, wildlife and tracks, and snow science, can be found at the following site <http://www.methowtrails.org/winter-trails/snowshoe/>.



Hart's Pass comic for the week of Dec 16 – Comic by Erik Brooks

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

Wildlife Areas

Chelan Butte Sheep Fence: On Chelan Butte a 1970s vintage deer fence has been jointly maintained by Wildlife Area staff members and adjoining orchards to prevent deer damage and, lately, bighorn damage in the orchards on Stayman Flats, located on the east side of Chelan Butte. During the past summer, groups of up to 85 bighorn sheep broke out of the numerous weak spots in the fence. Wildlife Manager Fox and Conflict Specialist Bridges worked with the neighboring orchards to repair as much of the fence they traditionally maintained. In one section, maintained by WDFW, the sheep had burrowed under the decrepit old fence and knocked down a 100-foot section.

During the first week of December, Manager Fox, Natural Resource Technicians Zabreznik and Vallance, and a WCC crew led by Sam Neukom rebuilt the worst sections of WDFW-maintained fence. In spite of challenging weather conditions, 1,200 feet of fence was rebuilt or repaired. The new fence seemed to be holding the sheep, but by the next week 30-40 sheep had found other holes in the fence to the east and were once again in the orchards. A complete rebuild of at least two miles of fence will be needed soon to keep the bighorn sheep contained on Chelan Butte. Lastly, thank you to Pete Lopushinsky, Colockum Wildlife Area Manager, for the use of his skid steer and implements.

A frustrated bighorn sheep examining the newly constructed section of fence on Chelan Butte



Winter Conditions: Winter appears to be taking on a more normal appearance in portions of Chelan County this year. Snowpack in basins north of the Wenatchee River are at 90% of normal, while those in the southern portions of the county are at roughly 50% of normal. Snow accumulation to this point is enough to have moved mule deer down to their winter range along the breaks of the Columbia River. With adequate flying conditions, we expect to complete aerial surveys around the first of the year and have good confidence that the majority of the mule deer herd will be available.

Most of the 2015 fires in Chelan County occurred in deer summer range or at elevations above winter range. The exceptions are portions of the Chelan Complex fire near Chelan and the Columbia River (an area where relatively few deer winter due to development), and the Wenatchee fire. The post-fire habitat quality within the Wenatchee fire perimeter is poor, with a considerable amount of shrub vegetation having been lost to a sequence of wildfires. A winter green-up of invasive vegetation (mainly cheat grass) had occurred prior to snowfall, so there is some forage of value to deer in that area.



It continues to snow at the Methow Wildlife Area. About 18” snow at the headquarters, plus more expected this week. It’s a good time of year for snow recreational opportunities – Photo by Jamie Bass



From Top to Bottom – Northern flicker on the Whistler Canyon Trail near Driscoll-Eyhott Island Wildlife Area, group of trumpeter swans flying over Conners Lake on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, a bobcat just north of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, a snowy sunrise looking north from near HQ on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and a great horned owl along the Whistler Canyon Trail south of Oroville – Photos by Justin Haug



Pat Haley and fence crew hard at work – Photo by Dan Peterson



Not a bird but certainly photo worthy – Photo by Dan Peterson



Dyer Hill, Douglas County – Photo by Dan Peterson



Christmas bird count terrain, Dyer Hill, Douglas County – Photo by Dan Peterson

REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Areas

Oak Creek Wildlife Area: On the evening of Monday, December 14, Manager Huffman closed and locked the gates on Oak Creek Road and Bethel Ridge Road due to elk presence and snow. The following day, Huffman drove to the upper gate on Bethel Ridge and locked that gate as well to keep vehicles from accessing the feed site from the back side. Snow drifts were very deep and required chaining the truck up.



The upper gate on Bethel Ridge Road on the Oak Creek Wildlife Area is closed seasonally to protect elk from disturbance



Finding the road was easy on the way back to the Oak Creek HQ after locking the Bethel Ridge Road

Elk Feeding: On Thursday, enough snow was falling and elk were present that Manager Huffman made the decision to start feeding at all feed sites. By the end of the weekend, sites had pretty high numbers of elk. All staff members worked into their feeding schedules. Huffman contacted the Wildlife Education Corp (WEC) and it was decided to open the Visitor's Center on Monday, December 21. Huffman also contacted State Parks and they will have rangers start working Discover Pass compliance on December 26.

Despite the highway closure, quite a few visitors turned out to see the elk on Sunday at the Oak Creek HQ





Hungry elk waiting for the trucks to arrive at Oak Creek



Elk not waiting for hay to hit the ground at the Oak Creek HQ

Peak Elk Counts for Week

Headquarters – 700

Junction – 120

Nile – 135

Sheep – 140

Cowiche – 800

Winter Weather: With heavy snows this past week, feed sites have 10-18 inches of snow, with much more at higher elevations. Seasonal weather and snow chances continue this coming week. Elk are starting to come into the feed sites, with numbers increasing daily. Snow depth is limiting access to vegetation. Elk are in seasonally good condition.

LT Murray Wildlife Area Elk Feeding/Winter Conditions: Winter elk feeding commenced Monday. Elk numbers ranged from 200 to 275 at Watt and 200 to 250 at Robinson. 200 to 300 elk have been observed in the Heart-K property in the Taneum. Weather was mild early in the week, with highs in the mid-30s and lows in the upper 20s. Several storm fronts passed through during the week, dropping snow. There is a foot of new snow at Watt and 12-16 inches of new snow at Robinson. More snow is expected through the weekend and into next week.

Wildlife Management

Population Status Reviews: District Biologist Fidorra reviewed and submitted comments to section leads on both the Elk and Deer Population Status Reviews completed in line with Wildlife Program Initiative #6.

Mule Deer Sightability Survey: District Biologist Fidorra reviewed and provided comments on the three year report on the Phase 2 Mule Deer Sightability survey.

Ferruginous Hawk Survey: District Biologist Fidorra worked on preparations for the 2016 Ferruginous Hawk Survey, which will involve coordination with many volunteers, partners, and WDFW staff.

Chateau St. Michelle Field Visit: Private Lands Biologist Stutzman and NRCS staff members did a field visit with staff members from Chateau St. Michelle winery near Paterson. The winery is interested in improving wildlife habitat on their non-cultivated acreage. Stutzman provided some ideas to increase diversity and cover starting with planting ~1500 dryland shrubs over five years and 300 shrubs that will be irrigated. Later in the week, Stutzman worked with NRCS staff members to complete the conservation plan for the winery.

2016 Hunting: Biologist Bernatowicz updated the WACs with recommendations for the 2016 season. Among the recommendations were increasing the amount of Colockum bull permits, introducing new deer areas in the Yakima River bottom with antlerless seasons, and eliminating canyon ewe permits but adding ewe permits to Clemans. Most antlerless elk permit numbers will be updated after surveys and with 2015 harvest data.

Sheep Trap: Biologist Bernatowicz organized a sheep trap set up and a capture for next week. The sheep are concentrating with the recent winter weather.

Mule Deer Plan: Biologist Bernatowicz went over corrections to the Mule Deer Plan with Biologist Dobler.

Colockum Elk Body Condition Sampling: Biologist Moore entered the 2015 data and ran a preliminary analysis for Ingesta-Free Body Fat. Overall, sample sizes were decent with 48 in 2015 and 39 in 2014.

Bighorn Sheep Trapping: Moore set up the corral trap at the Clemans Mountain feed site with the assistance of Oak Creek Wildlife Area staff members. Set up went well and the weather seems to be cooperating with plenty of snow and colder temperatures. A trapping session will likely occur next week. Thanks to Bruce and Nick for all the help.

Bighorn sheep entering the trap area to access alfalfa pellets

Golden Eagle Offal Camera Station: Biologist Moore pulled a camera station set up on offal. The station was successful, with plenty of eagle participation documented.





Golden eagle at an offal bait site

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

Wenas Wildlife Area: Access Manager Garcia worked on reports sent to the Army corps of Engineers for the Duportail Access area. Manager Garcia and Natural Resource Worker 2 Barbosa unlocked all gates to sites that had flooded and documented

noticeable flood damage. We removed Silt and logs from roadway at Fitzsimmons access.



Rowe public access flood



Rowe public access flood damage



Granger



Granger (2)



Fitzsimmons site cleanup



Log Jam upriver from Fitzsimmons

Sunnyside Wildlife Area: Assistant Manager Sak met with an ADA hunter who is working with Ducks Unlimited and others to acquire funding to build more ADA accessible duck blinds on the Haystack Ponds and the upper end of Giffin Lake. They discussed appropriate areas to place blinds and WDFW’s contribution of equipment and staff time.

Wildlife Management

Deer and Elk Hunting Seasons: District Biologist Fidorra spent considerable time reviewing deer and elk hunting seasons and special permits to make updates to the WAC for the 2016 hunting season. Fidorra worked with USFWS staff at the Umatilla Wildlife Area to set new permit hunt seasons for the Whitcomb and Paterson Deer Areas on NWR land. The archery and muzzleloader hunts here will provide increased hunt lengths for permit holders and also include a new Youth Muzzleloader opportunity. Annual weapon rotation on these units will end in part to make seasons less confusing for the public. Fidorra also communicated with District Biologist Bernatowicz regarding a new Sunnyside Deer Area in Benton and Yakima County which will provide some additional opportunities to harvest deer near areas where crop damage occurs.

Corn Stubble Monitoring: Stutzman monitored corn stubble access fields over the weekend for bird and hunter use. Three of the four Finley fields were hunted on Saturday, but no one was out on Sunday despite good numbers of geese flying and using the fields.

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

Wildlife Areas

LT Murray Wildlife Area: Assistant Manager Hunt drove out to the Johnson Drain beaver dam site to look at the flows through the ditch and the two dams. Both dams have been pulled down, although the lower dam is still restricting flow enough to pond up a large amount of water. The upper dam is where our contract trapper has a trap set, but with high flows and muddy water

from the recent rain, there has been no beaver activity. Flows are down somewhat now, and the water has cleared enough that we may get one trapped soon. In the meantime, we asked our volunteers to pull more of the lower dam out. Hunt contacted the impacted landowners, who thanked him for making some progress. However, there is still much to do.

Wildlife Management

Elk Damage Claims: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received a call from a landowner who had previously submitted elk damage claims. The landowner wanted clarification on the cost-share crop adjuster reimbursement that was provided from Olympia HQ. After discussing the purpose for the reimbursement, the landowner was very appreciative.

DPP Permit Harvest: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand monitored the harvest of DPP permits in Elk Area 3721 & 3722. No elk were reported harvested this week. The total harvest for the current permit season is 27 antlerless and eight spike bull elk.

Elk Conflict: Snow has accumulated at all elevations, causing significant elk movements, with some associated conflict in agriculture areas and hay barns. Elk feeding has begun, which will hopefully attract elk away from damage areas.

Feeding at Joe Watt

Elk Hazing: Conflict Specialist Wetzell and Hunt Master Kiesel hazed elk and used master hunters to monitor and move increasing numbers of elk in the

Crinklewood/Reecer Creek area. Elk have moved down toward agriculture areas and several permit harvests have moved them north and west. Some elk moved east and on to suitable winter range.

Elk Hazing: A hay grower in Ellensburg reported nine bulls in a new seeding area. Hazing moved them out for several days, but they did return with an additional 35 cows and calves. Two landowner permits were used to haze elk out of the area.

Nine bulls in a new seeding



GOAL 4: BUILD AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATION BY SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

Wildlife Areas

Colockum Wildlife Area: Manager Lopushinsky, Habitat Biologist Scott Downes, and CAMP Engineer Erin Muldoon used the Colockum boat and ATVs to access the road crossing at Brushy Creek. The purpose of the trip was to inspect the problem culvert there and coordinate solutions to improve both fish passage and vehicle use. Traditional vehicle access into the area is difficult this time of year, with snow at higher elevations and muddy roads at lower elevations.

Scott Downes and Erin Muldoon returning from Brushy Creek on the Colockum Wildlife Area



Oak Creek Wildlife Area: Manager Huffman coordinated with the Yakima Construction Shop to repair the road near the Cowiche hay barn that was damaged in the previous week's heavy rain event. Assistant Manager Berry met with Yakima Construction Shop staff members on site. In addition, Huffman had the Yakima Construction Shop staff members evaluate repairs needed to the Junction Road where rock came down the hill on a cut bank, blocking vehicle access. Both road damages were submitted to CAMPS for the natural disaster. Unfortunately, the Yakima Construction Shop was not able to get the road repaired before heavy snow arrived. Repairs may have to wait until spring.

Nile Feed Site Road Repair: Manager Huffman coordinated with the US Forest Service to try and schedule repairs to the road accessing the Nile feed site. The road was damaged in flooding from the rain event and the Forest Service was not interested in fixing it. However, they were having a timber sale adjacent to the feed site and were going to use the road to skid logs, so it looked like the loggers may have to repair it. Unfortunately, that option has not worked out to date and no solution has been reached. Manager Huffman and Natural Resource Worker 2 Farias hauled a small load of rock on the one ton truck with the dump bed to fill in the deepest ruts.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study: Science Technician Trego documented 14 swan mortalities. Dead swans were collected and some samples taken. One of the 14 dead swans collected was a swan being treated at the Whatcom Humane Society Wildlife Rescue Program.

The humane society currently has three swans that are being treated for lead poisoning. The composition of mortalities did not change much from the previous week. About 40 % of swan mortalities are thought to be from lead poisoning, while 54% are from power line strikes.

TRUS Weekly Mortality Report						
	Lead suspect	Powerline suspect	Other trauma	Undetermined	Feather Pile	Total
Sumas						
Whatcom	18	17	0			
Skagit	4	5	2	1		
Snohomish	2	10	0			
	24	32	2	1	0	59
Percents	40.68%	54%	3%	2%		

Protected Wildlife Management: Biologist Anderson provided state consultation for Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive and Protected species, including various Priority or Species of Concern needs – most often nest take authorization and/or habitat consideration recommendations. Anderson continues to work with Habitat, local governments, and landowners to provide documentation and management where appropriate.

- Current items from this past week include osprey nest destruction requests, eagle nest “WDFW statement of consultation” for proposed projects regarding bald eagles – per Kenmore code requirements (and referring to USFWS for management needs), providing consultation assistance to Habitat staff members regarding PHS transition, and reviewing and commenting/referencing in collaboration with working-group (WA Audubon, Seattle Audubon, Seattle Parks and Recreation, USFS, USFWS, WDFW, Heron Habitat Helpers, and others) effort regarding bird conservation efforts and needs in Seattle towards becoming an Urban Bird Treaty City by USFWS.

One can assist WDFW with documenting wildlife via reporting at our Wildlife Observation Website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/observations/>

One can find department management recommendations for Priority Habitats and Species at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/>

Red-legged Kittiwake in King County: Biologist Anderson received a note from US Forest Service biologists regarding a red-legged kittiwake found at Snoqualmie Pass in November during a wind storm. Anderson gathered information from the biologists and passed it along to the Washington Ornithological Society Records Committee. What a bird! Way off course though....



Red-legged Kittiwake at Snoqualmie Pass in mid-November. This is a very rare species that is normally only seen, quite rarely, off the coast of Washington – Photo by Ron Hausinger, USFS

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

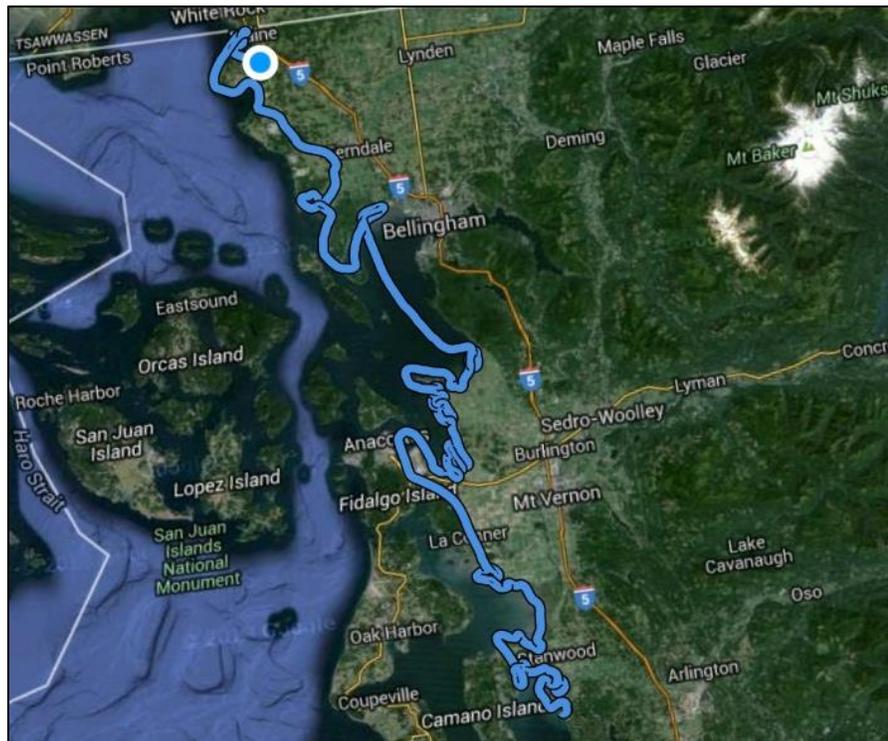
Wildlife Management

Hunting Regulations: Biologist Yarborough completed all draft hunt recommendations. These recommendations for District 14 will be discussed and incorporated into the 2016 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations Pamphlet.

Waterfowl Surveys: Biologist DeBruyn flew a dabbling duck survey from the mouth of the Stillaguamish to the Canadian

border. Numbers of wigeon were down from November, but it could be recent strong winds have pushed some ducks inland. Record numbers of teal from the November flight may have moved south with the freezing weather we had in the interim.

Flight track of the November 15 dabbling duck survey



Aerial Waterfowl Survey - Port Susan to Drayton Harbor					
12/15/2015	Pilot: Jeff Plane:QQ		Observer: Paul DeBruyn		
Weather:38-45 F N wind 0-18 p.Cloudy,rain		Tide @ Beginning: 11.0		Tide @ End: 6.0	
Location	Mallard	Northern Pintail	American Wigeon	Green-Winged Teal	Total
Port Susan Bay	1750	1050	700	450	3950
Livingston Bay	1550	600	600	3390	6140
Skagit Bay	29600	16400	16700	700	63400
Swin. Reserve	0				
Padilla Bay	15150	11940	12390	2820	42300
Samish Bay	10800	9320	4320	2100	26540
Nooksack Delta/Portage	125	75	75		275
Lummi Bay	2975	1487	2987	250	7699
Birch Bay	0	0	0	0	0
Blaine/Drayton Harbor	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	61950	40872	37772	9710	150304

Brant Age/Race Survey: Biologist DeBruyn rehabilitated a research blind at the tip of the Swinomish Spit and used it to observe graveling western high arctic brant. Almost 400 brant were seen, with 57 of those being juveniles. All birds that could be seen clearly were of the gray bellied race. This is a unique population of brant that breed in the western Canadian high arctic and winter in Padilla Bay. This is the first time in several years that a good number of juveniles have been observed in the population.

Shorebird Identification Class: District 13 staff members will be teaching a shorebird identification class at the Stanwood Snow Goose Festival in February. Staff members reviewed the existing PowerPoint file for this endeavor and began thinking about changes to improve the class for 2016.

Sky to Sound Water Trails Project: This project is in its infancy and seeks to establish a water trails network along the Skykomish and Snohomish rivers. A very large steering committee composed of many stakeholders has been established for the project and Habitat Biologist Bails has agreed to represent WDFW on the committee. In response to concerns about the first committee meeting, District 13 staff members met with staff members from the Fish and Habitat programs to work on language in the draft goals statement to ensure hunting and fishing interests are represented, as well as ensuring a resource conservation goal is considered in the project. We

are also concerned that the committee understands at the beginning of the project that user conflicts and “loving a place” to death need to be foremost in the planning process.

2015 Hunting Seasons: Biologist Anderson and Smith continue to provide guidance and information to hunters and land managers calling to inquire regarding specific hunt information, guidance, and how to hunt the district. Calls are concerning how to take animals, cougar and bear hunt methods given other seasons, where to bring bear specimens from District 12, scheduling CITES pelt seal needs, GMU boundaries, landowner reference information, and other general questions.

The current pamphlet can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>

2016 Hunting Season Draft Commission Proposals: District 12 Biologists Anderson and Smith provided draft recommendations to Program Manager Link regarding updates to hunts for the next 2016 season.

Wildlife Areas

Waterfowl Season: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove visited the Johnson/DeBay's Slough Unit twice this week to monitor waterfowl use in the area. Cosgrove and Natural Resource Scientist Meis observed hundreds of ducks (mostly mallards) in the Game Reserve field. No swans were observed on the WDFW property. Cosgrove checked on waterfowl use on the Hunt Field and found evidence of recent feeding in the barley.

Headquarters Unit Check: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove checked the west dike area at the Headquarters Unit for waterfowl use. This is an area that has been closed to the public since the Wiley Slough tidegate replacement project began in October and therefore has had very little disturbance. No ducks were observed.

Private Lands/Access Management

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 notes and resolving any issues regarding the sites. Otto and Deyo hauled and applied wood chips to multiple parking lot areas for Waterfowl Quality Hunt sites.

Private Land Access Pheasant Hunting Site Breakdown: Natural Resource Technicians Deyo and Otto removed boundary signs from the recently closed pheasant hunting site.

Public Comment and Questions: Private Lands Biologist Wingard and Supervisory Biologist Caldwell responded to public comments and questions regarding private land access and hunting for waterfowl species. Information was provided on habitat conditions, waterfowl use, hunting success, and web-based access options for reserving and viewing private land access sites across the state.

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 Release: Science Technician Trejo helped Whatcom Humane Society Wildlife staff members release a rehabilitated trumpeter swan at the Whatcom Wildlife Area. The swan was recaptured when it started snowing heavily and the bird showed some signs of being habituated to people.

Coyote Management: Biologist Anderson worked with staff members from USDA Wildlife Services and Vashon Nature Center to provide direction, legalities, and response points due to recent concerns over what is typical coyote behavior being found on the island. The Nature Center is looking into some possible outreach events to essentially provide understanding that “this is how coyotes exist throughout their range” across the community.

Elk Herd Assessments: Biologist Anderson provided District 12 comments regarding requests for review and information in efforts to finalize an assessment effort analyzing predator-prey interactions in the formal herds managed by WDFW. District 12 encompasses part of the North Rainier Herd.

Wildlife Areas

Snoqualmie Units: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm continued to monitor flood levels in the Cherry Valley Unit and report to customer service as the unit drained out. Manager Boehm removed four large logs and brush that were deposited at the south parking lot of the Crescent Lake Unit.

Island Unit: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove and Natural Resource Scientist Meis monitored water levels, hunter use, and waterfowl use on the Island Unit. With the lower river levels, water levels are generally dropping in most fields. Ducks are continuing to feed heavily during the night in fava beans and yellow nutsedge areas and public use remains high.

Skagit Headquarters: Manager Rotton attended the tour and status check of the Wiley Slough tide gate repair project with CAMP Project Manager Ray Berg and Dike District #22 representatives. The tide gates were delivered and installed this week. The project is near the final stages of completion following some weather related delays.



IMCO workers install tidegate (side-hinged) on Wiley Slough at the Skagit Headquarters



WDFW staff and Dike District #22 inspecting tidegate installation

Samish Unit: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove and Natural Resource Scientist Meis checked the six perimeter water control structures at the Samish Unit. Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove noted and took photos of three areas where water is flowing out of the unit, either over the retention berm or from fields into perimeter ditches. These areas will be targeted this summer to be raised or filled to further improve water holding capacity on the unit.

Siding Replacement: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove and Natural Resource Scientist Meis inspected and measured the metal siding on the barn at the Samish Unit and got a quote from a local building supply vendor to replace siding that has fallen or blown off in recent wind storms. This structure will be repaired in the next few weeks.

Private Lands/Access Management

Wildlife Conflict Management: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman monitored an elk herd that has recently started crossing State Route 20 east of Sedro Woolley. There were two elk struck by vehicles over the weekend near this location. Following the collisions, the elk herd was located and hazed away from the highway. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman met with a landowner in the Birdsvew area of Skagit County and discussed final preparations for an exclusionary fence project. The fence area is currently being cleared and preparation is approximately 30 percent complete. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman met with a Skagit County farmer to discuss mitigation strategies and efforts for dealing with elk that are moving across his property. The landowner is going to consider the discussed options and report back at a later date. Natural Resource Technician Cogdal worked in the Acme area attempting to recover an elk collar after receiving a mortality signal. Due to the location of the signal, additional searching is needed to locate the animal and recover the collar. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman entered DPCA's into the NOVATUS contracts system and continued prepping materials for an upcoming Cooperative Fencing Agreement for long-term elk damage mitigation projects with Tribal co-managers.

Elk herd utilizing field next to State Route 20

North Cascades Elk Management Meeting: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman, Natural Resource Technician Cogdal, and District Biologist Yarborough attended the North Cascades Elk Management meeting with Tribal co-managers. WDFW staff members updated the group on fencing materials that have been installed in the Day Creek Area of Skagit County, as well as where current fencing efforts are being directed to mitigate elk damage to agricultural properties.



REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Western Pond Turtle Program at Larch Correctional Center: Biologist Bergh visited the Larch Correctional Center in Clark County for the delivery of five western pond turtles. These turtles have been in treatment for Ulcerative Shell Disease (USD) at the Oregon Zoo since July and will spend the winter recovering at Larch. The inmate technicians are participating in the Sustainable Prisons Program led by graduate student Sadie Gilliom of The Evergreen State College. They will take care of the feeding and housing of the turtles and provide updates on the healing process. Bergh provided information to the inmates and staff members on western pond turtles and the investigation into USD. Three additional turtles remain in the care of the Oregon Zoo and will hopefully finish their treatment soon so that they can also be transferred to Larch.



Western pond turtle program at Larch Correctional Center

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. A few dusky geese were observed on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area within a mixed flock mainly featuring cackling geese and a few taverner geese. During the effort, several thousand cackling geese and a small flock of resident dark geese were observed. Among those birds, eight collard birds were spotted. In addition, a large flock of Sandhill cranes was observed in the Woodland Bottoms area.

Lower Columbia River Shorebird Survey: Technician Miller and Biologists Holman, Stephens, and Butler surveyed for shorebirds in the lower Columbia River. Species observed included semipalmated plover, dunlin, least and spotted sandpipers, and lesser yellowlegs. Areas with suitable habitat were accessed by boat and included Miller Sands, Pillar Rock, and Rice Islands in the lower Columbia River. Grays Bay and Deep River areas were surveyed from land. This survey effort was part of the Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey, a monitoring program designed to guide the management and conservation of wintering shorebirds in the Pacific Flyway. Data from this survey will contribute to the Migratory Shorebird Project, which is the largest coordinated survey of wintering shorebirds on the Pacific Coast of the Americas and spans from Canada to Peru.



Lower Columbia River Shorebird Survey

Western Pond Turtle Sites: District Wildlife Biologist Anderson reports that water levels at the western pond turtle sites in the Columbia River Gorge have improved with recent record rainfall in December. Prior to this month, drought conditions took a heavy toll on wetlands used by western pond turtles.



Sondino Ponds, Klickitat Wildlife Area, Klickitat County

Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area

Flood Damage on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife

Area: The recent flooding event and high river flows last week caused some minor habitat damage and loss on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area, and caused some significant damage to several riverbank stabilization structures. The high river flow last week is being recorded as a 100 year flow event on the North Fork Toutle River, surpassing the flow levels of February 1996. Only about 10 acres of forage habitat was lost last week, compared to about 400 acres of habitat loss in 1996. At least seven bank stabilization

structures were damaged from the high flows, with five of those receiving major damage. The structures will be assessed through the coming months and may be reconstructed later next year during the next phase of building additional structures. Several small streams also overflowed their banks, causing some damage to the road going to the wildlife area. Water flows on Bear Creek caused erosion in several areas as well.



Erosion along Bear Creek



Damaged riverbank protection structures

Klickitat Wildlife Area

Eagle Feeding Rate Study: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven and Technician Davis obtained a dead deer from a residence near Goldendale (it died of natural causes) and notified volunteers Flick and Fletcher, who are doing camera sets for WDFW Biologist Watson's Eagle Feeding Rate study. Technician Davis accompanied volunteers Flick and Fletcher to the camera set location

and helped them place the deer. Two cameras are set at each bait site this year.

Temporary Grazing Permit: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven visited the Swale Creek Unit to verify that the cattle were all off the property. All livestock had been moved. Overall, the forage was lightly utilized. There were some places that host sedges that the cattle find palatable, so they were grazed more intensively but not to the point of harming the plants.



Swale Creek Unit

Soda Springs Unit Agricultural Lease: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven met with the lessee of the Soda Springs Unit Agricultural Lease for the annual discussion of how things are going with this lease. Last

spring, the lessee requested to try a different treatment on three of the fields that seem to be prone to erosion. The lessee and Manager Van Leuven went out to check on the fields, to see if

the treatment worked to stabilize the soil. Both were pleased with the results, finding only minimal signs of soil movement even after the heavy rains last week. The condition of the fields reflected a better strategy of cultivation and crop planting than had been traditionally employed. They also visited three fields that were as the farming plan in the agricultural lease called for, which was to leave the alfalfa fields alone except to cut hay once a year. Unfortunately the alfalfa did not form a dense enough stand to prevent erosion of the soil in certain areas. The gullies are about 10 to 12 inches deep after two winters. The lessee and Manager Van Leuven agreed that the eroded areas of these fields should be treated as the experimental fields were. The eroded sections will be disked smooth in spring 2016 and planted in barley to stabilize the soil.



Agricultural field erosion

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

Wildlife Management

Southwest Washington Management Area 2A and 2B Goose Hunt: The 2015-2016 southwest Washington goose hunting season reopened this week. WDFW Biologist Butler, Scientific Technician Miller, and multiple Law Enforcement Officers worked together to conduct a waterfowl emphasis patrol this weekend. Technician Miller joined Officers Bolton and Chamberlin on Saturday for a boat patrol from Vancouver to Martin Island. Only one hunter was contacted at the upper end of Bachelor Island and he had no geese. This is an unusual situation since most years there are several hunt parties scattered amongst the islands in the Columbia. Biologist Butler monitored the Vancouver lowlands with Officer Van Vladricken on Saturday. Hunters here reported seeing mainly high flying geese and were having better luck hunting ducks.

The emphasis patrol continued on Sunday with Technician Miller joining Office Van Vladricken to check goose hunting areas east of I-5 in the Clark County area. La Center Bottoms was completely flooded and normal hunt areas were not occupied. Recent high water and flooding has undoubtedly changed the distribution of ducks and geese in the local area. Biologist Butler checked hunters near Woodland. Several flocks of geese were seen flying in the area, but overall, hunters stated seeing fewer geese in the area compared to previous years. Many thanks to the Law Enforcement Officers from both WDFW and USFWS for the emphasis patrol effort this weekend.

Flooding in La Center Bottoms

As of Sunday, December 20, approximately 140 hunters have been contacted and 102 geese have been checked this season. A total of seven dusky Canada geese are known to have been harvested in the area. Hunter checks will continue to be used to monitor the effectiveness of the 2015-2016 management strategy. Hunters interested in participating in this season can refer to the Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons Pamphlet for further details.

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>



Private Lands

Master Hunter Hunt: Conflict Specialist Peterson has been overseeing the first of three Master Hunter Trout Lake cow elk hunts. Three of the five hunters filled their tags on the opening day of the hunt. The hunters reported excellent support from Trout Lake landowners in gaining access to their properties and finding the elk. Peterson has put one of the remaining hunters in contact with a landowner experiencing elk damage in his fields and the hunter and landowner are looking forward to a successful hunt this weekend. The Trout Lake hunts were created to address the growing concerns of elk damage on the privately owned agricultural and dairy farms. The support and cooperation of local, private landowners, and responsible sportsman have resulted in an excellent hunting opportunity that benefits the community as a whole.

Access

Beginners Hole and Hand: Access Staff Member Rhodes closed down both sites and locked the restroom at Beginners Hole due to flood damage and safety concerns. The restroom is unusable and the sites are covered in two to three feet of mud and debris.



Flood damage

Vancouver Lake: Access Staff Member Rhodes collected a total of 440 pounds of trash, tires, chairs, blankets, etc. from the Vancouver Lake access site.

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

District 10 Wildlife Conflict

Deer: Conflict Specialist Conklin responded to an injured deer call at a city park in Kelso. The deer was dispatched and transferred from the park.

Elk Damage Hunts: Conflict Specialist Conklin escorted a master hunter on farm land in the South Rainier Unit. The master hunter harvested a cow elk. This hunt is supervised by the conflict specialist due to safety concerns and at the request of the landowners. Conklin also escorted two youth hunters who had drawn damage tags for the Region 5 area. In addition, Conflict Specialist Conklin deployed a master hunter to a farm in Wahkiakum County experiencing elk damage.

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 two weeks have caused some flooding throughout the district. The Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area appears to have lost no more than about 10 acres of forage habitat during the flood event last week on the North Fork Toutle River, which was recorded as a 100 year event, exceeding the flow of the 1996 floods.

Short-Term Forecast: Snow levels will fluctuate between 2,500 to 3,500 feet during the upcoming week. The 6-10 and 8-14 day forecast are for below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation.

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

Habitat: Forage is available at middle and lower elevations.

Snow Depths: Lower elevations are currently snow free, with minimal depths at the middle elevations (see spreadsheet below).

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: The majority of animals appear to be in good condition, but a couple observed have been in poor 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, to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

District 9 Winter Conditions

Past Weather: Precipitation in District 9 continues to be high with heavy snowpack above 3,000 feet. Current snow/water equivalent data indicates that the south Cascades are 91 percent of normal. The Klickitat Wildlife Area has approximately four to six inches of snow with light crust. Temperatures have moderated as the week progressed and additional warm wet weather is predicted through the weekend. This should begin to expose south facing slopes favored by deer. Creeks are not at flood stages yet, although reports of increased precipitation early next week could change that situation.

Winter Severity: Winter conditions are currently more typical of December weather in the south Cascades and Klickitat River drainage. Reports from Rock Creek in eastern Klickitat County indicate some recent snow (approximately two inches) and good overall precipitation considering drought conditions from this past year. Temperatures there have moderated and there are no current concerns for big game populations in that area.

Habitat: All habitats in the Columbia River Gorge this week have experienced snow conditions. Clark and Skamania counties are snow free below 3,000 feet. 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.

Animal Concentrations: Deer are bunched in normal concentrations throughout the district, with deer in western Klickitat County present more in the timber associated with recent snow depths.

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

Goose Area 2B Season Monitoring: Biologist Sundstrom worked two days this week throughout Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. A third day was combined with a scheduled goose survey day. Only five geese were physically checked over the course of the three goose hunt days. Goose hunters have been very compliant in calling when a request card has been placed on the vehicle, even though they may not have harvested a goose.

On Sunday, Biologist Michaelis conducted goose hunter bag checks in Goose Management Zone 2B. A total of four hunters were contacted either by phone interviews or direct contacts. Two geese were reported as being harvested.

Southern Pacific County Dusky Canada Goose Survey: Biologist Michaelis conducted another collar survey for dusky Canada geese in the majority of Pacific County. A total of 301 birds were examined, with nine being marked. In addition, he observed another two collared resident dark geese and received signals from three of four geese marked with radio transmitters in the Bear River area during July, 2013.

Grays Harbor/North Pacific County Dusky Goose Survey: Biologist Sundstrom conducted the second ground survey for the month of December in Grays Harbor County and the northern portion of Pacific County. Table 1 below summarizes those observations in the assigned areas. Comparing the numbers from the two counts in December (Tables 1 & 2), the greatest increase, or shift, in the numbers involved the Dusky goose: nearly one half fewer were observed in Pacific County while three times more were observed in Grays Harbor County between the November 30 survey and the December 16 survey.

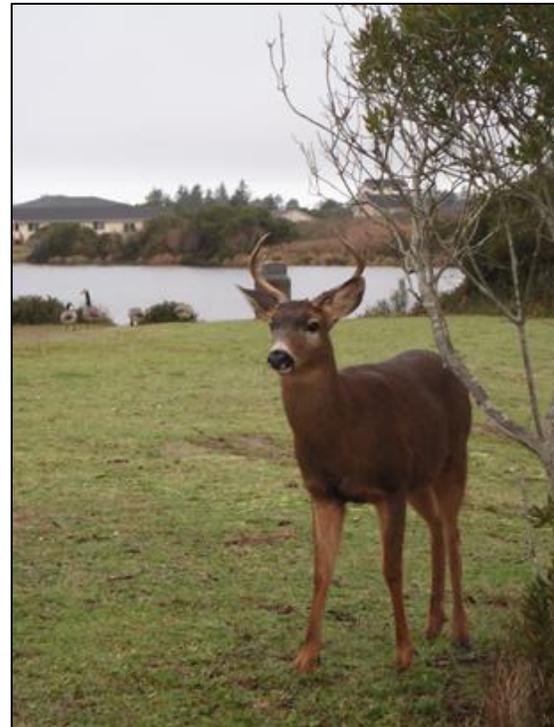
12/16/15	Cackler		Aleutian		Tay/Lesser		Dusky		Western		Vancouver		GWF	Snow	Unknown/Other	Totals
Location	# Banded		# Banded		# Banded		# Banded		# Banded		# Banded					
Grays Harbor County	361		0		246		492		210		0		10	0	0	1,319
North Pacific County	1,147		0		769		1,233	3	100		0		0	0	3	3,252
Totals:	1,508	0	0	0	1,015	0	1,725	3	310	0	0	0	10	0	3	4,571

Table 1: Goose survey from second half of December

11/30/15	Cackler	# Banded	Aleutian	# Banded	Tay/Lesser	# Banded	Dusky	# Banded	Western	# Banded	Vancouver	# Banded	GWF	Snow	Unknown/Other	Totals
Location																
Grays Harbor County	289		9		181		120		391		0		1	0	0	991
North Pacific County	1,125		0		471		2,477	4	2		0		0	0	0	4,075
Totals:	1,414	0	9	0	652	0	2,597	4	393	0	0	0	1	0	0	5,066

Table 2: Goose survey from first half of December

Although there are specific locations that the biologists go to for counting geese, other locations where geese are observed are not ignored and are included in survey totals. Sometimes more than geese want attention, as was memorialized in the photo to the right. The geese were the focus and reason for stopping, but the young buck wanted the camera time.



The geese – westerns – are in the background to the left

Sometimes other goose species are observed during these surveys and not always where they would be expected. The three brant were located in a vacant lot. The reason for particular interest by the biologist was because one of the brant was banded with a unique alpha/numeric band on its right leg.



Black brant photographed in a vacant lot through the lens of a spotting scope

Willapa Bay Waterfowl Flight #2: Data has been transcribed and totaled from the last November flight conducted in Willapa Bay for 2015. Observations for the second flight of the year were down when compared to a flight conducted on November 20, 2014.

Species	November 20, 2014	November 19, 2015
Mallard	3,225	5,289
Widgeon	8,605	4,004
Northern Pintail	7,369	1,837
Teal	1,220	1,177
Gadwall	2	0
Unknown dabbling ducks	2,165	1,735
Total	22,586	14,042

The third and final flight is scheduled to be during the first part of January, weather permitting.

Capitol Forest Deer: On Monday, Biologist Michaelis investigated and performed a necropsy on one of the collared does in the Capitol Forest cluster. The doe was estimated to have died within less than 48 hours and no signs of predation or human involvement were detected. The animal had good fat reserves and all organs appeared normal. This means the number of adult does being monitored is down to nine. Downloading of activity and GPS datasets is ongoing.

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

Private Lands /Conflict

Commercial Forestland Access: Biologist Harris and Regional Wildlife Program Manager Calkins met with representatives of a large timberland owner regarding public access. WDFW's goal is to work with the landowner to maintain free public access to approximately 175,000 acres in Region 6. An offer was made to help offset their costs associated with public use. A "Feel Free to Hunt" agreement was presented and discussed. The landowner's staff members presented some concerns with the agreement that will need to be explored. WDFW is working on addressing their concerns.

Damage Hunt Coordination: Conflict Specialist Blankenship met with a landowner and master hunter hunt coordinator in Tenino to discuss the upcoming master hunter hunt on the property. The landowner had expressed that he is very happy with the way the hunt is currently operated by the hunt coordinator and WDFW. Blankenship is looking forward to working with this landowner in the upcoming months.

Special Permit Hunt: Conflict Specialist Blankenship arranged a meeting with a hunter that was successful in drawing an antlerless elk permit in Elk Area 6014. Blankenship was able to advise the hunter on the hunt area and the properties where elk are currently being seen. Blankenship will continue to work with hunters that were successful in drawing this permit throughout the dates specified in the hunt.

Mallis Tags: Biologist Harris spoke with several hunters that drew the December Mallis tags in Elk Area 6010.

Involving Youth in Conflict Hunts: Biologist Harris worked with producers and a volunteer group regarding an upcoming damage hunt involving a terminally ill teenage girl. A landowner is giving the teenager a Damage Prevention Tag. Biologist Harris contacted other producers with damage problems in the general area. All producers gave permission to allow the permit to be used on their land.

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

Private Lands /Conflict

Support on Bear Issues: Biologist Harris was contacted for advice on a bear that had been causing problems on the west end of Jefferson County. The bear had damaged a cabin, car, and barbecue, and broke the lock off of a dumpster. The responding officer was advised and a request was made to call Biologist Harris back when the officer arrived on scene. The officer arrived and informed that the bear was ear tagged and appeared to have an injury to an ear. Because this bear was marked as a problem bear, Harris advised euthanasia. The bear was euthanized and brought to Biologist Harris. The bear was captured in Aberdeen on November 2, then marked and released 62 miles north (straight line) from the capture site in a remote area of the National Forest. The bear was in good condition when released. It was recaptured 32 miles (direct line) northwest of the release location. The bear had lost significant weight and was found to have a deep puncture wound below the right ear that extended down into the neck. The wound was severely infected. The cause of the injury was unknown. Meat was not donated because of the infection.

Biologist Harris also assisted Enforcement with an orphaned bear cub. The cub was kept at the Montesano office until it could be transferred for rehab.

Elk in Cranberries: The remote cameras in Grayland did their job again. Unfortunately the lack of action lately lulled the producers and Biologist Harris into not paying attention to their smart phones. A group of elk entered a cranberry bog after midnight and left before day light. A site visit was made and minimal damage was discovered. While we were unable to haze the elk, the cameras provide the advanced notice that is needed. The producer stated that it was unlikely anyone would be checking the area for several days. The camera let them know that they need to increase vigilance on that bog for a while.

Other

Injured Swan: Biologist Sundstrom received multiple calls regarding a sick/dying/injured swan in the Satsop area. Sundstrom had been watching this bird for the last week and half before the calls began coming in. The adult trumpeter swan has been observed walking, swimming, and feeding over the weeks, thus the possibility of a wing injury is suspected. The bird does not appear to be in immediate distress. Because of the continued lowland flooding and other logistical reasons, the swan will be left to nature at this time. The bird has now intermixed with other swans so it is not known which swan is which. Further monitoring will continue.



The white circle outlines the location of the lone injured trumpeter swan



Additional adult and cygnet swans are now using the same area, making it difficult to identify which swan is the injured swan at this time