

## **District 8**

### **Yakima and Kittitas Counties**

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District 8 is located in the south central Washington. Game Management Units (GMUs) in District 8 include 328 (Naneum), 329 (Quilomene), 330 (West Bar), 334 (Ellensburg), 335 (Teaway), 336 (Taneum), 340 (Manastash), 342 (Umtaneum), 346 (Little Naches), 352 (Nile), 356 (Bumping), 360 (Bethel), 364 (Rimrock), 368 (Coviche), 371 (Alkali) and part of 372 (Rattlesnake Hills). Hunters can choose a variety of habitats ranging from lowland shrub steppe and farmland to high elevation alpine wilderness.

District 8 is dominated by large blocks of public land and abundant hunting opportunity. The District is probably best known for elk. The Yakima elk herd is one of the largest in the state with over 12,000 animals roaming over 900,000 acres of public land. There are over 5,000 elk in the Colockum herd which inhabit mostly public land north of Ellensburg.

There is also plenty of upland bird hunting opportunity in District 8. Yakima County is near the top of the list in harvest of many bird species; ranking #1 for quail, #2 for dove, #3 for both duck and chukar, #4 for pheasant and #5 for goose. Bird hunters wanting to wander over large areas with low hunter densities have many areas to choose from. Along the breaks of the Columbia, the Yakima Training Center owns 327,000 acres south of I-90 (see current access discussion under the gray partridge section) while WDFW manages another 154,000 acres north of the interstate. West of the Yakima River, hunters can roam the 105,000 acre Wenas Wildlife Area. A motivated upland bird hunter with a good dog could find grouse, chukar, huns, quail, and pheasant in the same day.

Turkeys are a relative newcomer to the District. Birds were first introduced over 30 years ago, but populations remained low. In the late 1990's, a more extensive effort was made to augment existing pockets of birds. Post augmentation, the spring harvest has increased from 60 in 2001 to 413 in 2010. The populations in GMU 335 (Teaway) have become large enough to allow for a fall permit season. Turkey densities may never reach those found in Northeast Washington, but many hunters are finding decent hunting 4-5 hours closer to home.

District 8 is also home to over 70% of the bighorn sheep in the state of Washington. While it is still difficult to draw a permit to hunt, bighorns can certainly add enjoyment to a hunting trip. Rams are in rut mid-October through November when many hunters are traveling through the area. There are robust population of bighorns that can often be

easily viewed along Highways 821 (Yakima River Canyon) and 410 (Clemans Mountain, north of the junction with Highway 12).

**Pheasant:** There are few wild pheasant outside of the Yakama Nation (YN). Winter weather in the Yakima Valley rarely impacts pheasant populations. Pheasant populations fluctuate with the amount of idle land and the hatch. WDFW does not survey either in District 8. YN conducts production and posts the data in late summer. For information on hunting YN and their surveys, see [ynwildlife.org](http://ynwildlife.org).

Outside of YN, about 2,300 roosters will be released in District 8. Sunnyside Wildlife Area receives the majority of birds. Byron Ponds has been eliminated as a release site. Nontoxic shot is required on all pheasant release sites.

**Quail:** Quail can be found in most non-timbered portions of the district. The best habitat and highest number of quail can be found in the lower Yakima Valley. This is evident in the harvest statistics as Yakima County leads the state in quail harvest with an average of 24,000 birds over the last 5 years. In Kittitas County, the average quail harvest is only 2,700.

Quail numbers have been relatively high in recent years, but populations can change rapidly if the hatch is poor. YN conducts production surveys mid- July and August. WDFW owns various parcels along the Yakima River that hold good numbers of quail that are part of the Sunnyside Wildlife Area. YN runs an excellent hunting program and has great quail hunting opportunity. For information on hunting YN and their surveys, see [ynwildlife.org](http://ynwildlife.org).

**Gray Partridge:** Relatively mild winters and good spring moisture has resulted in increasing hun populations. Huns are often overlooked and the average harvest is only about 600 birds in the district. There is plenty of public land with good hunting opportunity in the district.

WDFW-managed Wenas, L.T. Murray and Colockum Wildlife areas all have decent populations of birds. Huns can also be found on the Cowiche unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. The Yakima Training Center (YTC) owns over 300,000 acres of potential hun habitat. Large coveys of birds have been noted on YTC the last few years.

YTC used to be a very popular spot for upland bird hunters. Decreased access due to military training and increased rules has limited the number of YTC upland bird hunters the last 5 years. Access to YTC in fall 2013 is unknown at this writing. The fall training schedule was not known and staffing has been reduced due to sequestration. Remaining YTC staff is currently on furloughs one day per week. YTC is planning to accommodate registered hunters through the military police on reduced hour/furlough days. The new federal fiscal year begins October 1 and plans could change. Hunter must go through a brief orientation, pay a \$10 fee, and register their firearms with YTC. For more information on the orientation and rules on YTC, call 509-577-3208 or 3209.

**Chukar:** Relatively mild winters and good spring moisture had resulted in increasing chukar populations. It appears that populations might be reaching peaks of the 9-10 year cycles. There is no information on the hatch in 2013.

There is plenty of public land with good hunting opportunity in the district. WDFW managed Wenas, L.T. Murray and Colockum Wildlife areas all have decent populations of chukar. Chukar can also be found on east portions of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. The Yakima Training Center (YTC) owns over 300,000 acres of potential chukar habitat. YTC used to be one of the premier areas for chukar hunters. Decreased access due to military training and increased rules has limited the number of YTC upland bird hunters the last 5 years. Access to YTC in 2013 is unknown at this writing. The fall training schedule was not known and staff has been reduced due to sequestration. The new federal fiscal year begins October 1 and future budgets are unknown. Hunter must go through a brief orientation, pay a \$10 fee, and register their firearms with YTC. For more information on the orientation and rules on YTC, call 509-577-3208 or 3209.

**Forest Grouse:** Harvest has been very low in recent years. In 2012, harvest within the district was 0.25 birds per day. No data is available in the 2013 hatch, but bird numbers are expected to be low. Many “grouse” hunters drive roads morning and evening, especially when the season first opens.

Research suggests brood hens and young are the most vulnerable in early September. Long term harvesting of successful breeding females may suppress populations in areas where open road densities are high. Hunters serious about finding grouse should look for areas with low densities of open roads and hike.

**Wild Turkeys:** Turkey populations had been are doing fairly well in the northern portion of the district, but appear to be declining. The 2012 harvest is not available and no information is available on brood production.

In this district there is a spring general season for bearded turkeys; and new this year is a permit only fall season in GMU 335 (Teaway) for either sex. Most of the harvest comes from GMU's 328 (Naneum), 329 (Quilomene), and 335. The best populations are on private lands in the lower elevations of GMU 335.

**Waterfowl:** Waterfowl banding in the district is conducted in August, so no data is available for 2013 at this writing. The USFWS flyway counts indicate total populations are down slightly from 2012, but are still 33% above the long term average. Mallard populations in the flyway were down 2% from 2012, which is insignificant.

Yakima County has averaged over 31,000 ducks harvested the last 5 years, which is 3<sup>rd</sup> best in the state. In 2012, the harvest was 45,000. The high harvest was due to an excellent local hatch and open water throughout the season.

The best hunting is in the lower Yakima Valley. Public hunting can be found on the Sunnyside Wildlife Area and Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge. The Yakama Nation (YN) runs a hunting program and has great duck hunting opportunity. The YN managed Satus Wildlife Area often averages over 4 birds per hunter opening weekend. YN is also working on retaining corn stubble on tribal lands. If successful, expect more mid-to-late season ducks in the valley. For information on hunting YN, see [ynwildlife.org](http://ynwildlife.org).

Band returns suggest many locally produced ducks are staying in the Yakima Valley. No data is available on the 2013 production, so it is difficult to predict early season success. Late season hunting can be difficult. Most ponds and side sloughs often freeze over around Thanksgiving. When there are long periods of cold weather, the vast majority of ducks roost in the Lower Toppenish Reserve during legal shooting hours. Even if the Yakima River stays ice-free, few birds are flying around areas with public access. For late season hunting, watch for significant changes in weather. If there is a quick thaw and rain, “new” ducks enter the valley and a week or so of good hunting can be had before the birds find the safety of private land and the reserves.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, see [“Let’s Go Waterfowling.”](#)

**Dove:** Trapping/banding has just begun at this writing, so no new information is available on survival/hatch. Yakima County ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the state for dove harvest. The best success is in the lower Yakima Valley. Good public hunting can be found on the Sunnyside Wildlife Area and the Yakima Nation (YN). YN grows wheat on portions of their Satus Wildlife Area. For information on hunting YN, see [ynwildlife.org](http://ynwildlife.org).

Hunting success depends on the weather pattern. Warm weather is needed to keep the majority of birds from migrating out of the valley. Cooler weather often hits the area late August or early September. Despite a 30 day season, the average dove hunter only spends 3 days (opening weekend) pursuing doves.

**Deer:** Deer hunting in District 8 has been the worst in the state for a number of years. The average success the last 5 years has been 8%. In 2012, the statewide average was 28%. The 2010-2012 harvests were the lowest in recent history. There have been mild winters and decent fawn production, but there hasn’t been much of a population response.

There are some signs the population might be starting to increase, but don’t expect great hunting. Hunter numbers have declined with the deer population. Many of the remaining modern firearm hunters are probably setting up camp and claiming their favorite spot for elk season. If you are looking for relatively low hunter densities, consider the higher elevations of District 8. Hunter success is typically highest in GMU’s 335 (Teaway) and 342 (Umtaneum), but so are hunter numbers.

**Elk:** This district is the best in the state for elk hunting. However with that distinction comes relatively high hunter densities. Opening weekend is usually crowded. However, a recent trend has been for hunters to pull up camp and head home before the second

weekend. If you are looking for a higher quality experience, consider hunting the last 2-3 days of the season. Surveys in spring 2013 showed increased elk populations and production. Since calves surveyed in March are spike bulls in the fall, bull harvest is expected to increase in 2013. Both the Yakima and Colockum herds are above objective and antlerless opportunity is being increased.

For big game hunters in eastern Washington, drawing a special permit in the quality bull category is the ultimate opportunity. That certainly applies to District 8 in the south-central part of the state where the majority of quality bull permits are available. Our advice to most hunters who come here is to hunt the general elk season opportunistically for spikes, but keep putting in for special permit hunts and accruing bonus points, so that someday you will draw a quality elk permit and already know the country for lining out your hunt.