

## District 11

### Thurston and Pierce counties and GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) of Lewis County

#### Michelle Tirhi, District Biologist

The core Game Management Units (GMUs) that comprise District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Land ownership in the district includes private residential and agricultural (e.g. GMUs 652 and 666), and both private and public industrial timber lands (e.g. GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.

Varied hunting opportunity exists within District 11 from waterfowl hunting on waterways of Puget Sound to deer, elk, bear and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW's Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Areas (GMU 667) and DNRs Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654) provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting. Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Hancock Timber Resource properties in GMU's 653 and 654 all provide excellent big game opportunities but require the purchase of access permits to enter (obtained through those respective companies: [Vail](#) and [Hancock](#)).

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier Elk Herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainer high country and follow river drainages to low elevations during the hunting season. Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in the South Puget Sound Region.

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston County. A map of Pierce County firearm restrictions can be seen on the [Pierce County website's Public GIS tool](#) (choose Public Safety then Sheriffs Restrictions). Thurston County no shooting and controlled shooting zones can be [seen here](#).

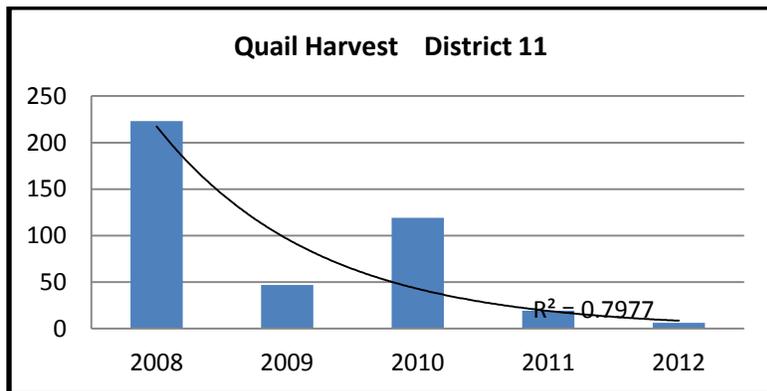
**Pheasant:** Game-farm produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites which are mapped on [Go Hunt](#) website and in the [Western Washington pheasant program booklet](#). The release program utilizes state (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federal (JBLM) managed lands. There are special access processes in place for [JBLM](#), so please visit their web site. Note that [nontoxic shot](#) is required on all pheasant release sites, statewide.

The general pheasant season is open from 8:00am to 4:00pm September 28 to November 30, 2013 with a daily bag limit of 2 (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek Wildlife Areas from December 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as general season. Pheasants are not released as part of the extended season. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. An overview of [the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) including a description and maps of all release sites can be found on the WDFW website.

Approximately 1900 pheasants will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays beginning September 17 through Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 3700 pheasants will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area with 60-70 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays. Some areas of Scatter Creek are off limits to hunters due to endangered species recovery work so please obey all posted signs. Approximately 5000 pheasants will be released on JBLM. Military training dictates which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744) at which time they will be informed about the pheasant hunting process including which fields are open for hunting.

**Quail:** Quail are limited in District 11 as they are throughout western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 has been trending downwards since a 5-year high in 2008 with only 19 birds reported harvested in 2011 and 6 birds harvested in 2012 in Thurston County (none in Pierce County for both years). Regardless of this trend, quail harvest in Thurston County ranks equally with the other 10 counties in western Washington that support a quail harvest.

California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11 with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County. Mountain Quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of Key Peninsula, Pierce County and southeast portions of Thurston County. However, access maybe limited. The western Washington California Quail season runs 28 September through 30 November with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and possession mixed bag limit of 30. The Mountain quail season runs September 28 through November 30 with a daily bag limit of 2 and possession limit of 4.

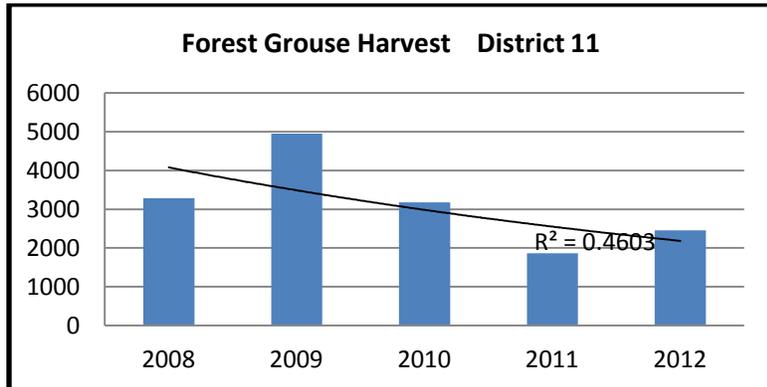


**Forest Grouse:** Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting will be near fruiting shrublands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Logging roads are particularly good locations since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. In particular, look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse.

Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500', particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (5-25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 666). Forest grouse have been experiencing a weak downward trend in

District 11 over the past 5 years. Regardless, Pierce County provides an average of 2,000 grouse harvested per year while Thurston County averages 1,000 annually.

A hunter must purchase a small game license to hunt grouse; grouse hunting is also included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs September 1 through December 31 with a daily bag limit of 4 of any species and a possession limit of 12 of any species.



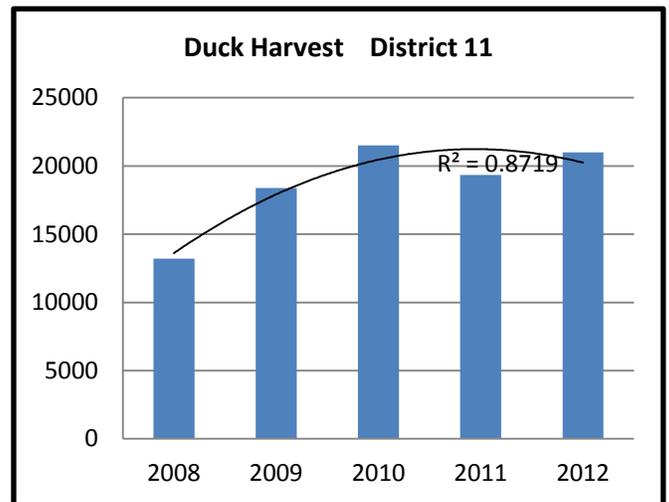
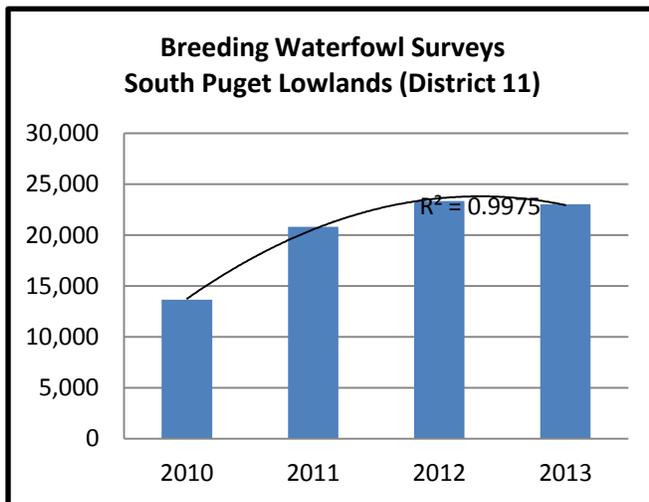
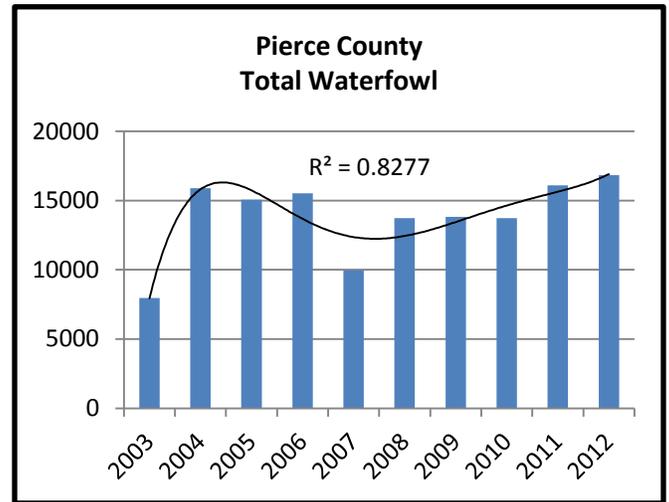
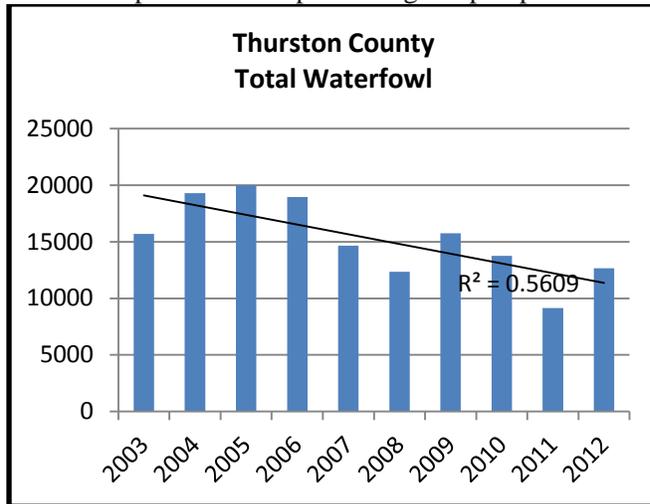
**Wild Turkeys:** District 11 is not managed for wild turkeys and the species remains relatively rare. WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula, Pierce County; Rochester, Thurston County; and along the Johnson Creek Corridor, Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. The statewide turkey season runs April 15 through May 31. Male turkeys and turkeys with visible beards only are legal with a western Washington limit of one (except two turkey limit in Klickitat County).

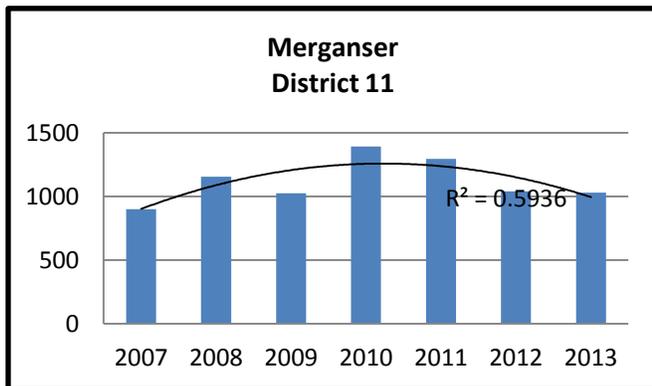
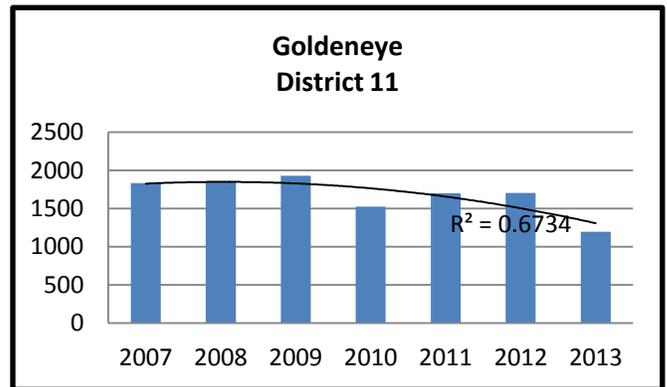
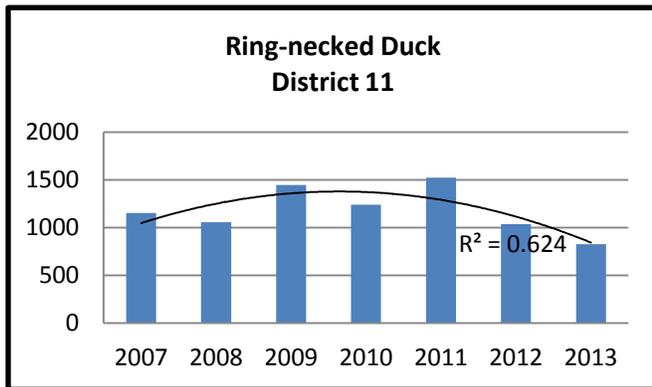
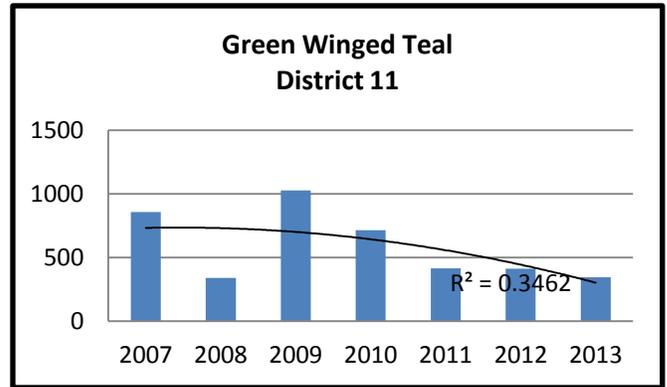
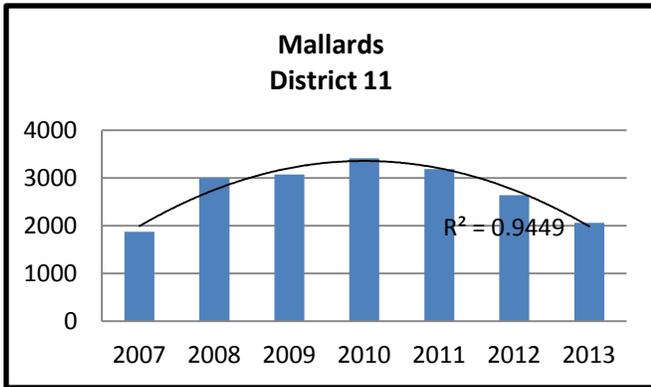
**Waterfowl:** The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and [Canada](#), as well as in [Alaska](#), northwestern Canada, and other western states. In recent years, waterfowl numbers have been on the upswing, but 2013 saw a 6% decline in overall duck breeding population estimates in the traditional survey areas. Regardless, this is still 33% higher than the long-term average according to USFWS. Additionally, the breeding population estimates for the 6 most abundant species increased from 2012 to 2013 in the primary North American breeding areas as follows (USFWS): mallard (+22%), green-winged teal (+12%), ring-necked duck (+24%), goldeneyes (+17%), and mergansers (+11%) .

District 11 continues to see a decline in mid-winter waterfowl counts in Thurston but not Pierce counties. This may be a result of changing hydrology patterns that have resulted in less water on historically flooding agricultural fields and more water on smaller sized ponds in Thurston County. In general, most of our most productive waterfowl sites in the district with the longest history of data collection show fluctuating trends over the years with no clear pattern, likely a result of annual weather fluctuations.

Overall, the South Puget Sound lowlands support almost twice as many waterfowl as any other Western Washington location. Breeding season waterfowl surveys for the South Puget lowlands continue an increasing trend. District totals for the five species counted as part of USFWS breeding surveys have also remained stable which should result in good hunting prospects for this season.

Duck harvest in Pierce County increased 17% from 2011 to 2012 and 21% over the previous 5 years. Combined duck harvest in the district mimics the annual breeding survey results. Unfortunately, there was a 3% decline in harvest of Canada goose from 2011 to 2012 although the 5 year average in the district is up 27% which provides good prospect for duck and goose hunters.





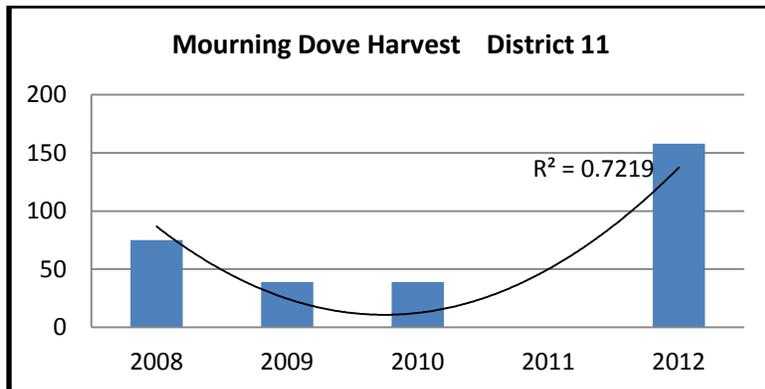
Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies in the district that are surrounded by housing; hunters are urged to obey all hunting regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county firearm restriction area. Rapjohn Lake in Pierce County has a register-to-hunt program and requires hunters to hunt from two established blinds. Registration for the blinds is on a first come basis and is established by parking in one of the two mandatory parking lots at [the WDFW Rapjohn Lake Access Site](#).

Best waterfowl hunting areas: Puget Sound including [Nisqually Wildlife Refuge](#); western islands of Pierce County; and Henderson, Budd, and Eld Inlets of Thurston County. Note that a majority of the

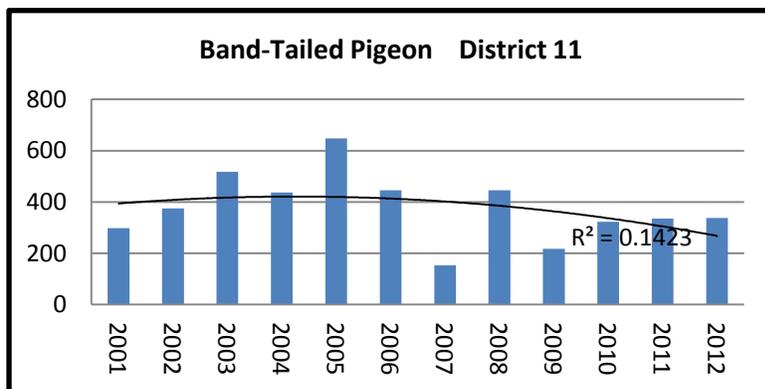
water bodies on Key Peninsula, Pierce County, are within a firearm restriction zone, thus prohibiting waterfowl hunting. Flooded agricultural fields in the western half of the district are good prospects for waterfowl hunting; hunters must seek landowner access permission prior to hunting these sites. The Centralia Coal Mine has a limited, high quality hunt; hunters are urged to contact TransAlta directly with questions regarding participation (360-736-9901).

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

**Mourning Dove:** District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area, although harvest significantly increased in 2012. Average harvest was 38 birds a year from 2008 to 2011 and then spiked to 158 birds in 2012 with twice as many birds harvested in Pierce County than Thurston County.

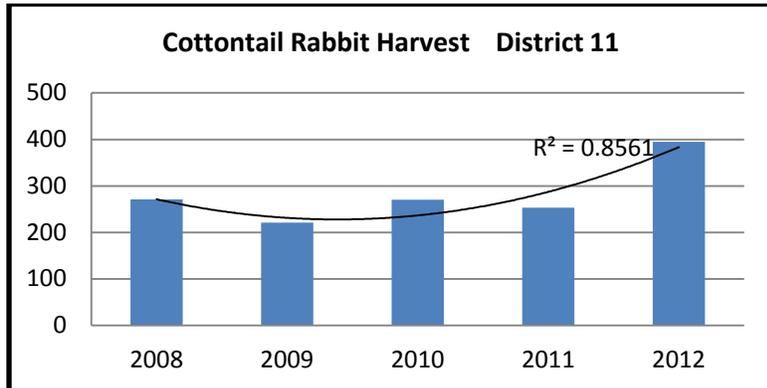


**Band-tailed Pigeon:** Pierce County (District 11) provided the fourth highest band-tail harvest in the state for the past 10 years averaging 57 birds harvested annually. Harvest statewide has been increasing annually which should provide good opportunity for hunters. The best hunting locations for band-tails in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge (Pierce County), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County) and along marine shorelines.



**Cottontail Rabbit:** District 11 provides some of the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunity in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce and Thurston counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest remained stable from 2008 to 2011 and the spiked in 2012 to 395 rabbits harvested across the district. Most of that increase was driven by harvest in Thurston County (Pierce County has been experiencing an 11% decline over the past 5 years). Thurston County provided

the 6th highest cottontail harvest in the state in 2012 while Thurston County provided the 10<sup>th</sup> highest harvest.

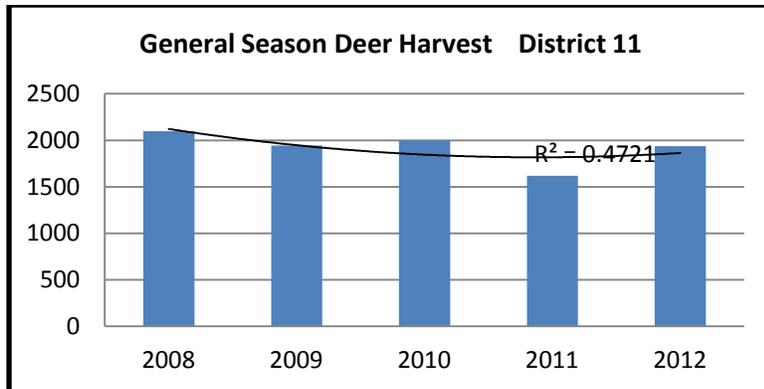


**Black-tailed Deer:** Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited and consist of one survey done in the highest quality location. Branched antler, spike, doe and fawn ratios are stable to increasing over previous years. Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667) and Hancock Timber Resources Group ownership (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653) continue to be worthy hunting areas for both deer and elk.

A new limited access recreation program for Vail Tree Farm begins August 1 2013. Hunters will be required to purchase an access permit in order to access Vail Tree Farm. Vail permits are \$150 each with a maximum of 750 permits to be sold with two vehicles allowed on each permit. Recreational leases are also available which allow a group to bid on a leased area; two leased areas are being offered on Vail in 2013. Additional information can be located on the [Weyerhaeuser website](#) or by calling 866-636-6531.

High elevation trophy black-tail hunting experiences can be found in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 (White River) and 654 (Mashel) accessed by US Forest Service road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (outside ski boundaries). A permit must be purchased to access Hancock timberlands; information can be obtained by calling 800-782-1493.

Warm weather over the past four hunting seasons, in particular over weekends, has resulted in lower harvest than expected. Hunters' best option is to wait for cloudy, colder weather. General season deer harvest in District 11 has been relatively stable over the past five years with a weak decline. In 2012, archery hunters enjoyed a 17.6% success rate, modern firearm hunters a 20.8% success rate, and muzzleloaders a 10.9% success rate during general season within the district.



**Elk:** Both the North Rainier and South Rainier Elk Herds are partially contained in District 11, providing ample opportunity to harvest elk. Elk availability should continue to increase in GMUs 652 (Puyallup), 653(White River) and 654 (Mashel) as the North Rainier Elk Herd continues to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 10 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in that unit. Hunters report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt.

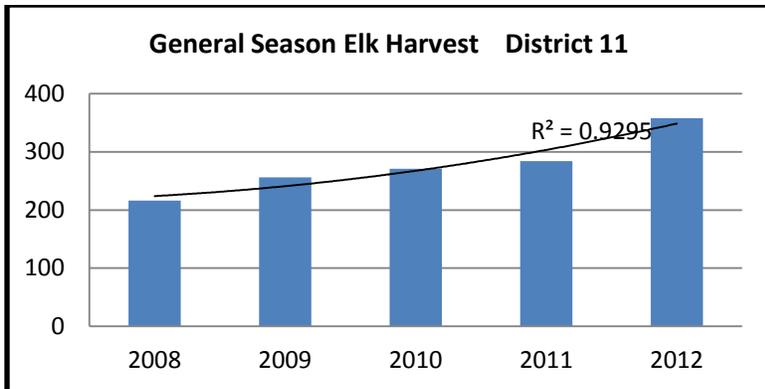
The larger portion of each elk herd migrates down from high alpine meadows in Mt Rainier National Park to lowland winter range; public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. Hunters are encouraged to scout for elk leaving the Mt Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area and the White River into the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

The Elbe Hills State Forest and UW Pack Experimental Forest in GMU 654 is a good prospect for deer or elk and can be accessed by boot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. Vehicle access during the hunting season in Elbe Hills is allowed only for hunter's having a disabled access permit. Elk continue to increase in GMUs 666 (Deschutes) and 667 (Skookumchuck) as sub-herds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and Skookumchuk Wildlife Area. Hunters are encouraged to scout the area from the [Skookumchuk Wildlife Area](#) south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667).

Non-migratory elk continue to increase on private farmlands in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm area) and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest). However, hunters must request permission to access private lands, and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g. visit property and ask for permission).

A new permit hunt is being offered within a select area of GMU 652 (Puyallup) in the elk damage area 6013. Ten antlerless elk permits (any weapon) are provided for the dates 1 through 20, 2014. Elk Hunt Area 6013 is comprised primarily of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes and supports approximately 100-150 total elk. Access can be limited and hunters interested in this permit are encouraged to seek access onto private property in the 6013 hunt area.

General season elk harvest has been gradually increasing over the past five years across District 11. Archery hunters experienced a 12.8% success rate in 2012, modern firearm hunters a 13% success rate, and muzzleloaders a 16.7% success rate (as compared to the statewide average success rate of 13.5%)

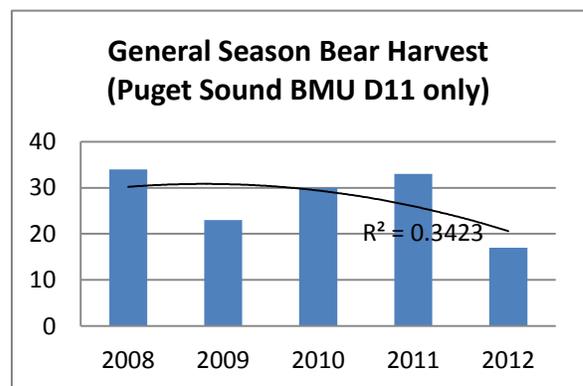
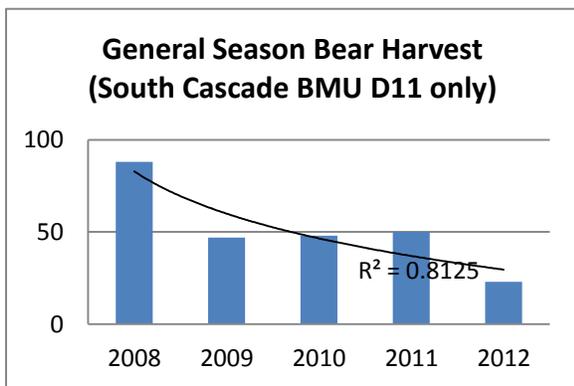


**Bear:** District 11 comprises GMUs in two Black Bear Management Units: Puget Sound (GMU 652, 666 and 667) and South Cascades (GMU 653 and 654). There is significant opportunity within District 11 to hunt bear both in the fall general and spring special permit hunting seasons.

Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group ownership (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653), Capitol State Forest (GMU 666) and Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Parks (GMU 654) are very good prospects for bear hunters. (See comments earlier regarding access permit requirements for Weyerhaeuser and Hancock properties).

A spring black bear special permit season is provided on Hancock’s Kapowsin Tree Farm within GMUs 653/654. A total of 150 permits will be available for the April 15 to June 15, 2014 season. Ninety three hunters successfully harvested eight black bear in 2012 under the spring permit hunt for a hunter success rate of 8.6%.

General season bear harvest trend in the District 11 portion of the South Cascades BMU (e.g. GMUs 653 and 654) has been generally declining over the past five years with a 52% decline in harvest from 2011 to 2012. General season bear harvest in District 11 portion of the Puget Sound BMU (e.g. GMUs 652, 666, 667) shows a weak declining trend over the past five year period with the largest decline between 2011 and 2012 (46%).



**Cougar:** Cougar are widespread in the forest lands of District 11; areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for cougar. WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012

with a liberalized season coupled with harvest guidelines (see [wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar)). Cougar seasons will run from September to December for any weapon, and may close after January 1 if harvest meets or exceeds the harvest quota in particular GMUs as specified in the game pamphlet. GMUs 652 (Puyallup) and 666 (Deschutes) have no quota limit, GMUs 653 (White River) and 654 (Mashel) have a quota of 4-6 cougar, and GMU 667 has a quota of 3-4 cougar.

In general, cougar harvest in District 11 slightly rose in 2010 followed by declines in 2011 and 2012. A total of 5 cougar were reported legally harvested within the district in 2012, which may represent significant under-reporting. This total does not include dangerous cougar removals, poached animals, and road kills.

