

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

September 16 to September 30, 2020

DIVERSITY DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Deer and Elk Surveys: District Biologist Wik conducted three deer and elk morning surveys this week. While on a survey, Wik received information from a hunter about possible illegal guiding on a wildlife area. Wik ran into one of the people associated with this complaint and found the suspicions to be valid. Information was passed onto WDFW Enforcement who investigated.

Deer Composition Surveys: Biologist Vekasy continued working on deer composition surveys. September composition counts provide information on pre-hunt fawn to doe ratios. Although we don't use August surveys for the fawn to doe ratios, they are an indicator of minimum ratios which are typically higher in September, and this year's August ratios were within the usual range for mule deer with counts totaling 960 deer and a ratio of 45 fawns to 100 does. Whitetail ratios were slightly lower than normal, with counts totaling 709 deer and a ratio of 39 fawns to 100 does.



Large two-point mule deer buck and doe

Deer Herd Composition Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe finished up road-based surveys in game management units (GMUs) 124, 127, 130, 133, and 139. The goal of these surveys is to estimate the composition of the deer herd (i.e. fawn and buck ratios) not population size. Therefore, routes are altered annually, as needed, to reflect changes in habitat and agricultural crops. Routes are run twice each year; once in August for the buck to doe ratios to estimate buck recruitment, and once in September for the fawn to doe ratios to estimate fawn production.



Doe and fawn mule deer group near Union Flat Creek



Bedded mule deer fawn

Bighorn Harvest: Biologist Lowe measured and pinned a bighorn ram harvested by a Spokane area hunter in the Umtanum herd near the Yakima River. The ram was 8 ½ years old.



Happy hunter with ram harvested in the Umtanum

Deer Deaths: A recent string of white-tailed deer deaths in Whitman County led to a collection of samples to be taken. Private Lands Biologist worked with WDFW Wildlife Veterinarian Mansfield and District Wildlife Biologist Atamian to determine which samples were needed. Private Lands Biologist Gaston collected deer femurs to be submitted to the Washington State University (WSU) clinic for testing of potential Blue Tongue Disease.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nuisance Black Bear Reports and Hazing: Wildlife Conflict Specialist O'Connor spoke with multiple residents of a small neighborhood in the Kettle Falls area voicing concerns of a bear. It was determined that the bear was rummaging through trash late at night at multiple houses. O'Connor educated the residents about proper trash storage, lighting, and noise making to deter the bear from returning. O'Connor is planning a follow-up site visit to pass out WDFW's *Living with Black Bear* pamphlets and continuing positive communications with the neighborhood residents.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist O'Connor received a call about a bear in a garden in the North Colville area. The residents have already worked with the department on hazing efforts and implementing electric fencing that was established by WDFW Enforcement and Wildlife Conflict Specialists Samsill and O'Connor. O'Connor arrived at the reporting party's (RP) property and discharged several paintballs at the black bear. The bear had a good response to hazing and began running before paintballs were discharged. The electric fencing was moved to a better location and the battery was changed.

Strawberry Crop Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb met with a Walla Walla County strawberry producer experiencing on-going damage from white-tailed deer. Although the final crops have been picked for the year, deer damage impacts the health of the perennial strawberry plant. Heavy post-harvest grazing by wild ungulates will negatively impact the regenerating nutrients available for the following growing season, resulting in reduced berry production. The producer employs a variety of non-lethal deterrents, including powerful parallel electric fencing. Kolb renewed an expired Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) for the producer.

Depredation Investigations: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett conducted two depredation investigations in Pend Oreille County. The first investigation included a bull mortality and was determined to be an unconfirmed cause of death. The second investigation involved a several hundred-pound male pig with injuries associated with structural damage. Information was provided to both parties.



A dead bull reported in Pend Oreille County



An injured boar before investigation in Pend Oreille County

Conflict Prevention: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill fielded several bear calls from different RPs. Samsill responded to a report of a bear causing significant damage to a fruit orchard. Upon arrival, Samsill confirmed the damage and determined that trapping and translocating would be the best alternative for the bear and the landowner. A trap was deployed along a prominent game trail on the perimeter of the orchard. After the trap was deployed for two days, the offending bear was captured, immobilized, tagged, and released on nearby Hancock Forest Management lands.

4) Conserving Natural Areas

Post-Fire Planning: After the Whitney Fire burned nearly all the shrub-steppe habitat at the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (SLWA) on September 7, 2020, planning has begun for infrastructure and habitat restoration activities. On Tuesday, September 22, several biologists met at SLWA headquarters. Inspection revealed that less shrubby areas fared better, with more evidence of bunchgrass survival. SLWA staff members and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wildlife Biologist Jason Lowe later mapped out polygons for reseeding on SLWA and adjacent BLM lands. They drew up a basic seed mix and obtained cost estimates for grass seed and aerial broadcasting. SLWA personnel are working with their Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) liaison for an additional funding request to BPA's Budget Oversight Group (BOG). WDFW construction coordinator Chris Alston will be out next week to inspect infrastructure and start the repair work estimating process. The Spokane chapter of the Audubon Society may contribute funding for purchasing forbs to reseed habitat damaged by bulldozers and utility trucks.



Trout Creek Bridge: Region 1 Lands Agent Jarrod Ploof completed permitting for Bonneville Power Administration to remove a ford at Trout Creek on Sherman Creek Wildlife Area. It will be replaced with a small bridge in a nearby location. This road is primarily used by BPA to access their high-tension lines that cross the wildlife area. The ford was regularly flooded by beavers, so the decision was made a few years ago to “leave it to beaver,” and install a bridge nearby. Construction contractors placed the bridge on site on Thursday, September 24, and will return next week to finish up bridge installation and abandonment of the old crossing.



The bridge installed over Trout Creek in cooperation with BPA

Whitney Road Fire: Biologist Atamian joined Swanson Lakes WLA staff members, BLM personnel, and other WDFW staff members on a quick visual assessment of burn severity in the restored fields and moderate to dense shrub stands on the WLA and BLM recreation area. The bunch grass in many of our restored fields look like they will recover from the fire. However, the understory in moderate to dense shrub stands will need reseeding to avoid invasion by annual grasses and weeds. Biologist Atamian also created several maps of historic photo documentation points at Swanson Lakes WLA to assist Natural Resource Technician Colvin in developing a set of photo points for monitoring fire recovery on the WLA.



Bunchgrass and alfalfa already putting some green shoots up in a restored field



Burned bunchgrass crown before (left) and after (right) foot swipe. Showing that no crown remains for bunchgrass to resprout.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Cougar and Bear Presentation: Wildlife Biologist Prince teamed up with Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett, WSU Extension, and Defenders of Wildlife to provide a virtual cougar and bear presentation. The presentation included information about each species' biology and how to avoid conflicts both in the woods and around the home. In addition, there was a bear spray demonstration by WSU Extension.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Pygmy Rabbit Safe Harbor Program: Biologist Hughes met with a landowner to discuss the Safe Harbor Program and pygmy rabbit recovery efforts that are taking place close to her property. Extensive communication with the landowner about the Safe Harbor Program has taken place since 2008 in hopes she would be interested in entering the program. After discussing the program more, the landowner is enrolling her property. A baseline survey effort was conducted by Biologist Hughes, Biologist Gallie, Biologist Rowan, Technician Smith, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partner's Biologist Veverka.

This survey found a total of 14 active burrows with 24 samples taken of pygmy rabbit sign. Some samples were taken on sites that had high activity, but no burrow was found. Those areas are being surveyed again for active burrows. The ongoing survey effort has now doubled the pygmy rabbit distribution throughout the Beezley Hills Recovery Area. The active burrows in the area are new since 2016, which is when the last survey was conducted on the site. Based on the amount of high activity and older signs, not all the pygmy rabbits on this site are from this season's release. Results on pygmy rabbit identification will come back in a few weeks.

The landowner is being asked to harrow her General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields this fall and mow the fields for mid-contract management five years from now. Some of the active burrows found were on her General CRP fields. Hughes worked with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on getting the landowner permission to not alter any sagebrush habitat that is within the CRP fields. Hughes is developing a write up for leave areas on the two General CRP fields, which will be reviewed by FSA. The leave areas will protect any habitat alteration of the sagebrush habitat that pygmy rabbits in the area are currently occupying and might potentially occupy in the future.

Biologist Hughes is continuing to keep the landowner and USFWS updated on survey efforts. This is the first Safe Harbor plan that has ever had an active burrow number other than zero as a baseline. The baseline number is a threshold of protected burrows that remain on the property. The landowner would not go below this number for incidental take. The landowner was very excited to find out that there were active pygmy rabbits on her property. After the survey effort is fully complete, Hughes is planning to take the landowner out and show her some of the active burrows.

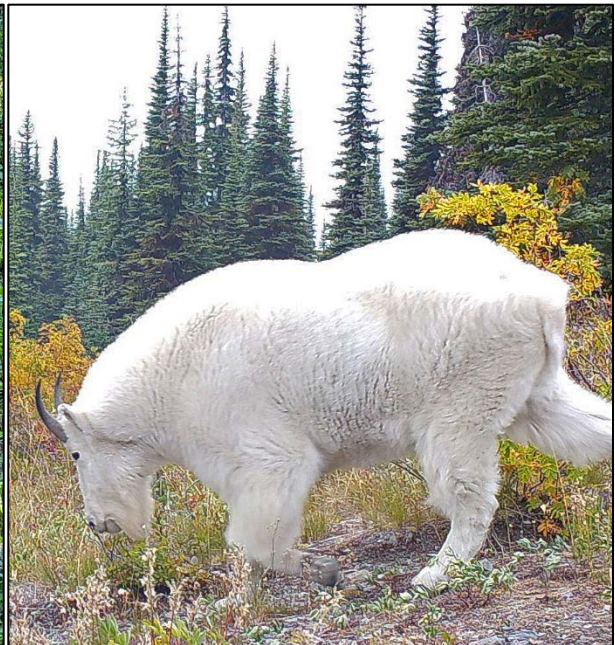


Lynx Monitoring: Biologist Fitkin and Washington State University (WSU) Technician Satterfield retrieved a dozen cameras deployed in the Pasayten Wilderness as part of the WSU Lynx Occupancy Modeling project in the Okanogan Lynx Management Zone. Eleven of 12 cameras captured lynx photos and one camera had 13 separate lynx detections. This underscores the importance of the Pasayten Wilderness as one of the last strongholds in Washington for lynx. Cameras also detected unexpected and entertaining photos of a variety of other species as well.





Lynx detected at four Pasayten Wilderness cameras – Photos by WSU/WDFW remote cameras



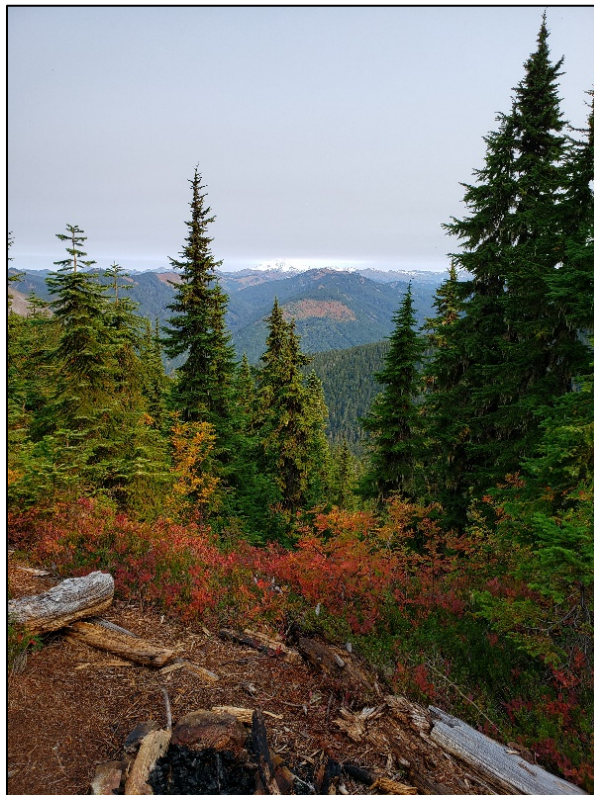
Sibling black bear cubs of the year and robust mountain goat – Photos by WSU/WDFW remote cameras

Wolf Monitoring: The cameras mentioned above deployed for lynx detected a pair of wolves in the northern portion of Pasayten Wilderness. Telemetry data suggest these animals are members of a pack that denned in Canada that was formed in part by a disperser from the Loup Loup Pack.



Wolf pair from a trans-border pack – Photo by WSU/WDFW remote camera

Chelan County Deer Collar Recovery: Biologist Comstock retrieved a deer collar from a deer mortality in the Wild Sky Wilderness, just north of Skykomish. This doe was originally collared in early January in Chelan County as part of a four-year migration study. An approximately eight-mile hike through alpine meadows and huckleberry fields made for a lengthy excursion following the Johnson Ridge Trail to the basin below Scorpion Mountain, which Biologist Comstock is calling “Scorpion Creek”. No scorpions were observed.



View of Glacier Peak obscured by smoke from ongoing wildfires – Photo by Devon Comstock



There's a deer collar down there somewhere – Photo by Devon Comstock

Waterfowl banding: Biologist Cook assisted District Biologist Dougherty and two others with one morning of waterfowl banding at Alkali Lake. Mallards, pintail, and green-winged teal were banded from the morning's effort. Biologist Rowan completed trapping attempts for about 165 mallards this year. The data collected from band reports are used to inform waterfowl management decisions.

Mule Deer: Biologist Rowan reviewed discussions concerning potential winter aerial surveys and permit issues and provided feedback. With the extensive fires that have taken place this past month, wildlife populations are a concern. WDFW personnel will perform ground surveys and may run routes twice instead of once this winter. Aerial surveys provide population estimates, while ground surveys provide sex and age ratio data.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Methow Shooting Range Trash Cleanup: With the increased use of WLAs also comes increased trash and dumping. WDFW staff members arrived at the shooting range to find piles of trash left outside the dumpster and spent most of the morning cleaning it up.



Overflow of trash at the Methow Shooting Range – Photo by WDFW

New Kiosk at Cougar Flats: Assistant Manager Repp also constructed a new sign kiosk at the north end of Cougar Flats to replace a tree that had been used for that purpose that recently blew down in a windstorm.



New Kiosk near the Cougar Campground on the Methow Wildlife Area – Photo by WDFW

Hunter Access Program and Habitat: Biologist Cook continued reposting hunter access signs and updating landowner contact information on the signs. Cook started the initial paperwork for renewing a Hunter Access Program contract that expired in 2019 and started a new contract with a different landowner.

Biologist Hughes met with a landowner who is enrolled in the Hunt by Written Permission program. Hughes updated signs, provided permission slips, and communicated with the landowner about upcoming seasons. The landowner has habitat plots planted about ten years ago. Hughes assessed older habitat plots and discussed future habitat projects with the landowner. Better weed control efforts will be worked on in the future and Hughes will pursue funding options for seeding a new section that will expand the current habitat plot.



Food plot planted by landowner and shrub rows WDFW planted with the landowner - Photo by Hughes

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Elk Issues: Specialist Heilhecker received a call from a landowner who routinely waits for the “any elk”, early archery season to end before calling about elk damage. This year, he called one day after the season ended. Specialist Heilhecker renewed the Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) that had expired in March.

Wolf Retrieval: Specialist Heilhecker and Assistant Manager Dupont searched for a radio-collared, female wolf in the Beaver Creek pack as a result of the collar signaling mortality mode. The following day, they retrieved the collar and the dead wolf. Specialist Heilhecker and Statewide Wolf Specialist Maletzke agreed the death was likely human caused. The wolf was not the breeding female and the cause of death is yet to be determined.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Douglas County Post-Fire Shrub steppe Restoration: Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock participated in an emergency sage-grouse technical team meeting to discuss potential post-fire restoration activities in sage-grouse habitat concentration areas. Multiple entities are involved in assessing burn severity and post-fire recovery needs. The most concerning impact of this fire remains the loss of winter cover and forage for multiple wildlife species including sage grouse, sharp-tail grouse, and mule deer. Biologist Comstock participated in a WDFW restoration tour to discuss various seed mixes and herbicide applications that could be implemented, as well as techniques for erosion control.

Okanogan Critical Habitat Project Presentations: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug presented four critical habitat projects to the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) scoring panel with the support of District Wildlife Biologist Fitkin. Each project supported several priority species such as mule deer and habitats like sagebrush-steppe. Three of the four projects ranked in the top six projects scored and will hopefully get funded, depending on the state's budget. A big thanks to Lisa Coffman who managed each project and entered all the information into RCO's grant platform PRISM.

Scotch Creek and Sinlahekin Noxious Weed Control: Staff members at Scotch Creek completed the Musk Thistle control project on the Chesaw unit. Many miles and hours were spent over the past three months controlling this Class "B" noxious weed. Persistence and dedication by Bryan Dupont, Greg Sklaney, and Oscar Medina provided great control this year. Sinlahekin WLA staff members continued treating areas of Spiny Sandbur and puncturevine. The main method of treatment is hand pulling during this time of year. They also treated a known infestation of Musk thistle on the Buzzard Lake Unit.

Buzzard Lake Forest Health Treatments: The North Central Prescribed Burn Team continued thinning on the Buzzard Lake unit of the Sinlahekin. The crew worked with State Lands Forester Rod Pfeifle on a prescription to reduce conifer encroachment on aspen stands on the Buzzard Lake unit. The crew has also assisted in repairing and rebuilding of a boundary fence on the Buzzard Lake unit. Their help on these projects has been greatly appreciated.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Okanogan County Emergency Grazing: Okanogan lands staff members worked together to aid ranchers who lost pasture as a result of the Cold Springs and Palmer Mountain fires. Managers Olson, Wehmeyer, and Troyer have been working on paperwork and infrastructure to prepare for producers to utilize previously used emergency pastures on the Similkameen-Chopaka, Eder, Horse Spring Coulee, and Big Valley Units. The number of requests vastly outweighed the amount of pasture available, however, any amount of relief is greatly appreciated.

Hazard Tree Removal at Wells WLA: Maintenance Mechanic Wottlin and Assistant Manager Repp spent several days falling and bucking hazard trees that were burned on the Wells Wildlife Area. Trees damaged following the Pearl Hill Fire pose a risk to the public after being compromised by the wildfire.



Methow WLA staff member falling and bucking up Cottonwoods damaged by wildfire – Photo by WDFW

7) Other







From the top: Fall colors in the Pasayten Wilderness, a hoary marmot enjoying the extended summer weather, and a weasel surviving the drought – Photos by Scott Fitkin



Great Horned Owl perched on our deck near Tonasket – Photo by Haug



Rainbow over Spectacle Lake – Photo by Haug



Tiger Salamander near Talkire Lake east of Tonasket – Photo by Parker Haug



Western Skink east of Tonasket - Photo by Cari Haug

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Landowner Hunting Permit Program Coordination: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand met with hunt coordinators of both Silver Dollar and Blackrock Ranches to schedule youth permit, landowner allocation, and general season hunting opportunities. Scouting information was shared to increase the success of the hunts.



Blackrock Youth Hunter with her first elk

Duck Banding for 2020 Season Complete: Private Lands Biologist Hulett, Natural Resource Technician Byers, and Officer Beltz helped District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra complete duck trapping for the annual Pacific flyway banding goals. Other Columbia Basin sites have had lower success than usual this season, while District 4 had average success, banding a total of 349 mallards, 16 pintails, 3 teal, and a local record of 62 wood ducks!



Officer Beltz with a male wood duck banded and ready for release

District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates organized and flew Mountain Goat surveys in the Naches Pass, Bumping, and Blazed Ridge units with Ungulate Specialist Moore and Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Berry. This year’s count was one of the lowest in recent history. It is unknown how much of the decline is real or just from large groups of goats being in cover and missed on the surveys. All “population” estimates will be likely under 100 adults. The Game Management Plan is unclear on how the current status might impact the permitted harvest. A new golden eagle’s nest was seen in the Norse Peak area during the survey.

<u>Survey Unit</u>	<u>Raw 2020</u>	<u>Raw 2018</u>
Naches/Corral	95	114
Bumping	76	120
Blazed Ridge	19	No Survey

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Pheasant Releases Kick off Youth Hunting Season: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra set up registration boxes to track hunter activity on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) release sites and released pheasants at four sites in District 4. This kicked off the youth weekend which was pleasantly clear after a week of horrible air quality in Washington.



A blur of color as the rooster is released

New Hunting Opportunities: Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett continued to work on hunting access contracts in preparation for the upcoming hunting seasons. Hulett met with two landowners to get signatures on their hunting access contracts and received two other signed contracts via email. All these contracts were sent to the contracting division for their final signatures. Once these contracts are completed, Hulett can put these hunts onto the website. Three other contracts are still out for signatures and Hulett has begun the enrollment on one additional contract set to expire December 31, 2020.

New Prototype Registration Box: Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett built a new prototype registration box that does not need to be placed into the ground. The idea was to limit the need for a Cultural Resource Reviews on Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP) contracts that could delay the opening of these hunts by months. The prototype includes a concrete-filled bucked that secures the 4x4 post that the registration box sits upon. The hope is that this box can withstand the high winds common in the area. This means that the prototype weighs a lot. Hulett feels that this box will do very well for properties that could be delayed by hunts that are short term. The overall cost to create the prototype was around \$15 but that excluded reuse of an older 4x4 post and an older metal registration box from an expired contract.



Providing Recreation Opportunities: A large volume of calls continue to come in from hunters. Besides the normal inquires for September, fire and land closures raised a lot of questions from hunters, especially those with special permits. Special permit hunts were evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Hunts where there was potentially significant loss of opportunity for elk, the permit holders have been offered “points” back, if they chose not to hunt. The season was extended until the end of October for bighorn sheep hunters on the expectation that lands would re-open. General hunts have not been altered and other than thick smoke, there is still plenty of United States Forest Service (USFS) and WDFW land open for hunters.

A very happy disabled hunter harvested a nice bull elk in the Thornton Unit of the Sunnyside Wildlife Area. The hunter expressed heartfelt gratitude for the hunting opportunity and the beautiful animal he harvested.



3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Cellular Trail Camera Deployed to Monitor Hanford Elk: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand reset a new trail camera on a historically heavily used trail used by elk leaving Hanford southern border on Rattlesnake Mountain. Elk activity continues to increase as volunteer wheat plants become available for forage and rutting activity interactions escalate.



Sparring Hanford Bulls

Paterson Deer Damage: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand conducted hazing operations in tree fruit and wine grape crops along the Columbia River in southern Benton County. Increasing human activity from harvest operations and both non-lethal hazing strategies and active hunting by general season archery hunters have reduced deer activity and crop damage concerns.

Cougar Conflicts: Conflict Specialist Wetzel responded to three more cougar depredations of sheep in different locations in addition to two other reports of cougars seen near livestock. Cougar depredations seem to be a weekly occurrence this year in District 8. Traps have been set at these locations as well as one kill permit to try to capture the cougar or cougars that killed the livestock.



One of six sheep confirmed killed by at least three different cougars in District 8 in two weeks

District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel was contacted by farmers in nearly all areas of District 8 about elk in orchards and hay. Due to the dry conditions, elk are persistently entering irrigated areas to feed, mostly at night. Damage harvest has been higher than usual, probably due to the dry conditions and elk being more motivated to feed in irrigated land and low elevation areas.

Wetzel was called about elk damaging an alfalfa crop near Tampico. A private elk fence protecting the field was damaged by elk and repaired by Wetzel and the elk herded out of the area. The landowner has deployed master hunters and other permits, but the elk continue to visit the field.



Damaged fence allowing elk to get into a crop field



Temporarily repaired private elk fence



Elk in alfalfa near Tampico during the middle of the day

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Kahlotus Fire Assessment: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand spent a day checking on fire-damaged areas near Kahlotus after a severe fire event in early September. Many of the county roads in the area remained closed from downed power lines, burned guard rails and signs, and destroyed bridges. Several buildings and a couple of homes were also consumed in the fire. Heavy habitat damage was observed in large tracts of property used by wintering mule deer along the Snake River Breaks, including CRP, wheat stubble fields, and shrub-steppe.



Burned bridge along the north shore of Snake River

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

WDFW Provides Comments to Yakima Training Center on Natural Resource Management:

District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and District 8 Habitat Biologist Downes compiled WDFW comments on a draft plan revision to the Yakima Training Center (YTC) after several months of coordination and document review. Many Wildlife Program and Habitat Program staff members participated in talks and review of these plans. WDFW's comments focused on suggested improvements to fire management, maintaining and enhancing sage grouse protections, and working with partners across the installation boundary to benefit wildlife and training opportunities. Director Susewind submitted the comments to installation commanders.

7) Other

Nothing this installment.

REGION 4

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Preseason Duck Banding: Assistant District Biologist Moore has been trapping and banding ducks in Whatcom and Skagit counties over the last couple of weeks. The wet and cold spring seems to have delayed trapping success, but a recent push of birds and colder temperatures was happily welcomed. Data gathered from banding activities across the continent guide the annual regulation-setting process for the duck harvest season. Moore's efforts contribute to the statewide goal set for the Pacific Flyway.



A beautiful adult female mallard (left) and an adorable adult female American green-winged teal trapped at a site in north Whatcom Co. this week - Photos by C. Moore

Forest Grouse Wing and Tail Collection: Assistant District Biologist Moore deployed two collection barrels for forest grouse wings and tails in frequently used grouse hunting areas before the beginning of the hunting season. The goal of this collection effort is to build an estimated population trend dataset for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Hunters should put the wing and tail from one bird into provided paper bags found in the mailbox on top of the blue barrel and record the GMU, county harvested in, and date harvested. The collection barrels can be found at:

- The intersection of Baker Lake Rd and NF-12 (GPS 48.64914, -121.7287)
- Eastside of the Welcome Grocery Store - 5565 Mt Baker Hwy, Deming



Wing barrel collection sites in District 14 from Baker Lake Road (top) and at the Welcome store in Deming

District 12 continues to check the three wing barrels in King County, all of which are providing for wing/tail collection. Barrels are located on the Snoqualmie Timber Farm (GMU 460) – at the two-timber farm access sign-in kiosks for those hunters holding Campbell Global Timber access permits to that timber farm; as well as at Lizard Lake, on open access USFS land, in the Stampede Unit (GMU 466). The Lizard Lake location is outlined at the [WDFW Grouse Wing Collection website](#).

Harvest Game Data and Inspection Requirements: District 12 personnel provided marking and inspection for a mountain goat that was harvested from the Avalanche Gorge Unit and a bighorn ram taken from the Quilomene Unit.



A Quilomene ram taken by a 19-year-old hunter and pinned at the Mill Creek regional office. Biologist Anderson thought the successful hunter might like 007 for the pin given she had gotten a ram and her dad has yet to harvest one after many attempts



Mountain goat billy taken on the first day of the Avalanche Gorge hunt. Hunter was very excited and happy with this harvest!

Protected Wildlife Management Needs: District 12 personnel provided outreach and education to neighborhood, tenants, landlord, real estate company, and tree service regarding protected wildlife and nests. A red-tailed hawk nest was destroyed by a tree company and reported (and documented via video and photo) by the neighborhood. The territory was still active, but the pair had fledged their young a few weeks earlier. Outreach focused on what to do for those situations rather than belaboring any possible violation; since the nest was not active at the time of destruction.

District 12 staff members also met with Sound Transit and WDFW Habitat Program staff members regarding ongoing efforts for preliminary West Seattle Light Link design. District 12 is assisting Sound Transit with take needs given the current project alignment is in/at a heron colony and falcon nest site.

Other nest destruction permits (e.g., osprey on cell towers) have started to come in during August and September as infrastructure managers examine work needs outside of the breeding season and meet any state legal considerations, given nests of native birds are protected under Washington regulations.

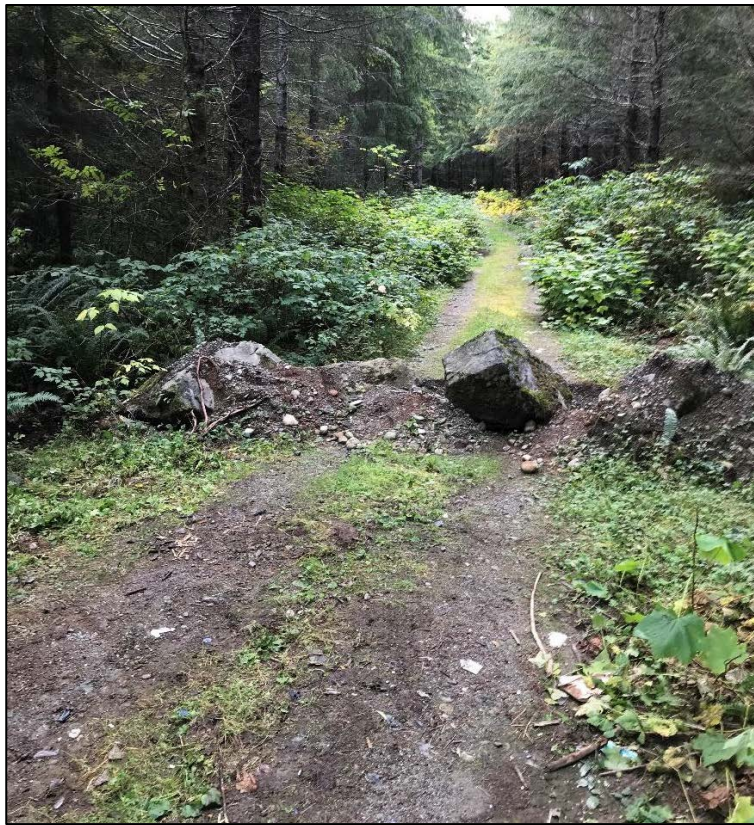
2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Region 4 Private Lands Access Program Waterfowl Access and Habitat: Region 4 Private Lands Access Program staff members met with partner landowners to sign waterfowl hunting access contracts. Private lands personnel are building waterfowl hunting units as soon as the fields are harvested and worked up.

Dumped Garbage on Partner Landowner Property: Private Lands personnel with assistance from wildlife conflict staff members removed several appliances along with assorted other garbage that was abandoned on private timberland. WDFW helps partner landowners deal with issues like garbage dumping.

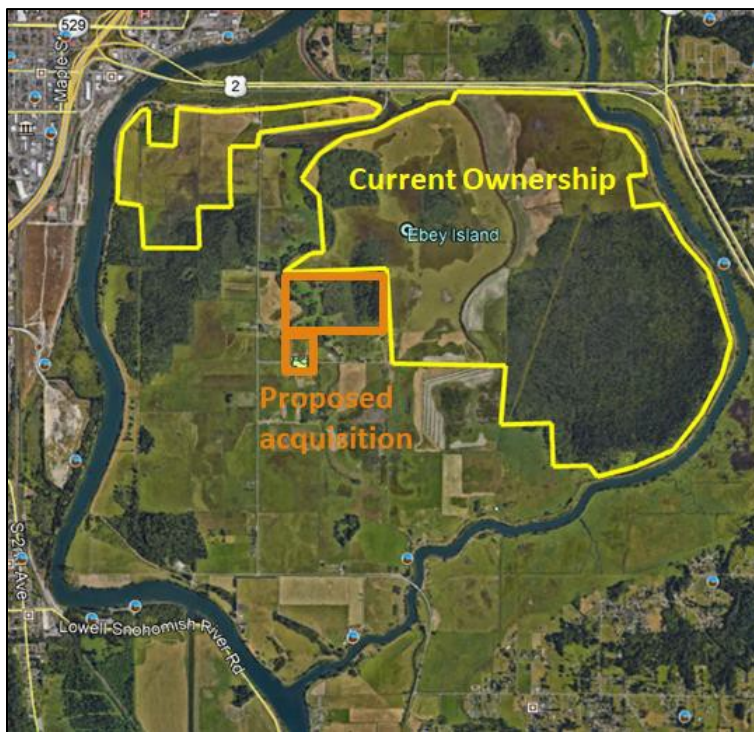


Picture of the garbage pile removed from Private Timber Partner property; garbage loaded up for proper disposal



Dumpsite after garbage removal

Ebey Island Wildlife Area Addition Proposal: Projects Coordinator Brokaw completed presentation materials in preparation for scoring by grant reviewers next week.



The orange outline shows properties proposed for acquisition from willing sellers that are adjacent to WDFW's Ebey Island Unit outlined in yellow

Special Permit Elk Hunt Meeting: Private Lands Biologist Wingard and District Wildlife Biologist Waddell met with hunters who drew muzzleloader and modern firearm special permits for the Nooksack elk hunt in Game Management Unit 418. Also, in attendance were representatives from Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) and WDFW Region 4 Law Enforcement. Hunters who draw special permits for this elk hunt have a unique opportunity to receive a gate key from SPI to access a large swath of prime elk habitat on their private commercial timberlands. Hunters were provided with a presentation on the North Cascades Elk Herd and a thorough review of the rules for hunting on SPI lands before receiving their key.

Special Permit Hunts in District 12: District 12 has been working with Region 4 customer service staff members, GMU 485 hunters, Tacoma Water, and WDFW Licensing regarding communication and coordination needs related to permit hunt letters that went out with wrong dates (pamphlet dates are correct). Region 4 followed-up with calls to hunters, checking if they received a new letter from licensing. A personal letter was provided to Tacoma Water to put in an orientation packet that explained the mishap with licensing and offer biologist contacts if any questions came up. Biologists personally called a few still having issues as well. The team did a great job of making sure all permit hunters stayed the course with the pamphlet. District 12 is similarly working with licensing to send out new, corrected permit letters regarding the GMU 460 buck permits. As with the GMU 485 hunts this year, GMU 460 letters sent out earlier by licensing had inaccurate dates (pamphlet dates are correct).

Forage Crops: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm reports that three of four Snoqualmie Units with agricultural leases have completed their harvest. Crescent Lake was caught by recent rainy weather, but the corn crop will be harvested soon. Each of the units will provide a minimum of 30 acres of crops left for wildlife. Most of the fields have ground cover and standing grass or grain stubble to optimize the forage and cover available for the hunting season.

Pheasant Season Opener: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm reports that all pheasant release units for Snoqualmie were ready for the annual season opener on September 19. A good turnout by youth and senior hunters leads the way for a very busy general season opener on September 26. Much appreciation goes to the Game Farm staff for producing a fine batch of birds this season.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

News Article on Cougars: Wildlife Law Enforcement Officer Valentine and District Wildlife Biologist Waddell conducted a phone interview on cougar sightings in and near Bellingham with a reporter from the Bellingham Herald. They discussed the low incidence of human fatalities caused by cougars in the last 100 years, why more people are reporting cougars, what to do if you encounter a cougar, and the typical WDFW response if a member of the public reports seeing a cougar, among other things. The article was published on September 28.

Urban Deer Issues: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman received a complaint about deer on San Juan Island getting a little too comfortable around the landowner's house. The landowner has agreed to enroll in the Private Lands Access Program to provide hunting opportunities on the property with the hope of changing some behavior.



4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Leque Island Muck Walk: Projects Coordinator Brokaw, Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Rotton, and Habitat staff Jenny Baker, Lindsey Desmul, and Seth Ballhorn visited the Leque Island restoration area to monitor channel development in the mudflats that are forming naturally due to increased water flow coming from Leque Island.



The group set out in the mudflats at Leque Island at low tide



Several large channels, including this one, are forming in the mudflats that convey water from the Leque restoration area. These channels provide habitat for fish and bird species.

Naval Station Everett and Jim Creek Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan

Annual Meeting: Biologist Milner met with Navy natural resources staff members to discuss progress and ideas for managing fish and wildlife on their installations. These meetings happen annually under the direction of the Sikes Act, which provides opportunities for partners to discuss resource issues on military installations.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Non-native Species: District 12, collaborating with Diversity Section Biologist Hallock and researchers with the University of California, Berkeley, met with a family that found a slender salamander in their yard in Kirkland. The nine-year-old son is the lead on salamander rescue and care, and he is doing a great job! Researchers are interested in genetics from this animal to determine species, general location of origin, and examine within a larger body of data examining cross-border translocation events, the commonality of occurrence of such events, and other factors of interstate commerce that may be promoting unwanted travel and other concerns in various amphibian species such as this one. This species may be the California slender salamander. The identification is yet to be determined as there are many slender salamander species in Mexico, California, and southern Oregon.



A biologist with the salamander in hand about to take a tail clip and the Salamander in its vivarium setting

Elk Hunting in King County (District 12): Stampede Unit (466) has been unusually busy this season given all the fires, people wanting to stay near home, and wanting to get a hunt in. Unfortunately, that can mean a bit of loving nature to death at times. Biologists went up the first Friday of archery and noted quite a few camps and hunters, more than seen in the past, in the 466 area (mainly USFS land with some open industrial timberland interspersed). After talking with a WDFW officer that patrolled that area, opening weekend for the general archery elk hunt had quite a few folks out. It is great to see folks out but some of the numbers have us a bit concerned.

The officer checked 54 hunters in 45 minutes that first Saturday of the hunt and continues to see much more than average vehicle traffic off the main roads. Many folks were relaying they didn't put in for an eastern Washington hunt due to various reasons. Fires and Covid-19 were also mentioned as factors to stay on the western side of the crest. Hunters from all over the state were in King County. Biologists will continue to monitor end of season harvest numbers and get field reports from officers who regularly patrol those areas to keep a tab on hunting pressure and general use of local game units. Folks are having a good time, aside from the aforementioned "packed in tight" scenario, and have been in contact with biologists regarding what they are finding, where to go, etc. The department has been getting lots of calls on elk and grouse hunting over the last month. Very glad to hear folks are out, enjoying nature and having positive experiences!



Bull elk in King County with what appears most likely to be an umbilical hernia. The animal is fine it is just a lump.

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Grouse Wing Collection: Biologists Novack and Sundstrom checked Grouse Wing Barrels for hunter submissions. Very few samples have been submitted at Cougar Smith Road compared to prior years. No samples have been submitted at Quinault Ridge Road.



Five remaining western pond turtle hatchlings released

Western Pond Turtles: Biologist Butler and Woodland Park Zoo staff members released the remaining five hatchlings at the Pierce County recovery site this past week. These hatchlings came to the Woodland Park Zoo as eggs in the summer of 2019 and hatched that fall. Zoo staff members cared for these hatchlings throughout the year, allowing them to grow more than would naturally occur in the wild. This provides them a head start, increasing their chance of survival. While most of the hatchlings were released in August, these five were too small to receive a pit tag and were held an additional month. Four of the five hatchlings grew enough to receive a pit tag before release, but one was still too small.

Mazama Pocket Gophers: Biologists Butler and Tirhi, along with Research Scientist Olson, IT App Developer Simper, and other staff members, met at the Scatter Creek WLA to learn how to use the new gopher mound survey equipment and data collection application. Extremely precise external GPS units that can attach to an iPad or iPhone were recently acquired to replace aging Trimble units. These work in conjunction with a newly developed data collection application which will allow for precise and efficient data collection. The training provided hands-on experience using the equipment before surveys begin in October.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

McIntosh Lake Fire: The water access team was notified of a fire on site. When Supervisor Mitchell arrived, response teams, including DNR, had the fire controlled- most of which was on private property to the east. Two large cedar trees were damaged, survivability to be monitored. Three sections of the fence were cut by the fire response teams to gain access to the neighboring property.





Filling Potholes, Road Transitions, and Ramp Plank Gaps and Edges: The water access team spent two and a half days picking up and delivering rock to ten lakes in Mason County, seven lakes in Thurston County, one Lake in Kitsap County, and one lake in Pierce County. 76,200 pounds of rock was used to fill potholes, ramp edges, and road transitions.





Abandoned Vehicles: One vehicle was discovered on the Black River Gate site. One tent trailer was discovered on the Chehalis River Porter site. Jesse Reeves, working with enforcement, has had the vehicle removed and is still working on the removal and disposal of the tent trailer.



Bighorn Sheep, Mountain Goat, and Bobcat Inspections: Biologist Butler met with a successful mountain goat hunter, a successful bighorn sheep hunter, and two successful bobcat hunters. Hunters are required to present the head of their harvested mountain goat and bighorn sheep for inspection and the horns of the bighorn sheep are then permanently marked. The horns of the mountain goat were measured and, based on the growth rings, the goat was estimated to be about 11 years old. The bighorn sheep horns were also measured and estimated to be 4 years old. The bobcats were examined and properly sealed.



3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Riparian Grant: Biologist Novack presented a PowerPoint to the RCO panel for funding to acquire lands adjacent to our Davis Creek Unit. (WWRP – Riparian grant program) This year, unfortunately, there was stiff competition for this grant source and our ranking of 7th out of 9 is unlikely to result in funding for the next legislative session.

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.