

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

April 1 to 15, 2021

DIVERSITY DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Incidental Take Statement for Lynx Update: Small game biologist Garrison met with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS) and other state biologists to discuss the recently updated Incidental Take Statement for lynx relative to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) program. Any lynx that are taken incidentally to bobcat trapping must be reported to WDFW customer service and WDFW will report to the US FWS. More information is available [here](#).

Quail Research, Wild Turkey Meeting, and Game Management Plan: Biologist Garrison continued work on developing a mountain quail research project to better understand the status of the species in Washington and inform conservation decision making. She also continued planning and preparations for the annual Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee meeting which will be hosted (virtually) by Washington in May 2021. She also met with other Game Division staff members to begin planning for the upcoming Game Management Plan update process and met with the state wildlife veterinarians and other staff members to discuss outreach about the risks of COVID-19 to wildlife.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

State Agency Survey: Small game biologist Garrison gathered information and participated in a survey of state agencies regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on turkey hunting for the National Wild Turkey Technical Committee. This information will be used to prepare a paper for the 12th National Wild Turkey Symposium.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Beaver Relocation Prep: Small game biologist Garrison made preparations for the upcoming beaver relocation permitting season and began issuing beaver relocation permits.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Game Bird Season Education: Small game biologist Garrison responded to an information request from Upland Almanac about upcoming game bird seasons. She also reviewed content from the WDFW marketing team to help promote turkey hunting and provide information for new turkey hunters.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Game Farmer Recruitment and Hunting Regulations: Biologist Garrison provided records for multiple public records requests and helped the Pheasant Release Program Manager conduct interviews for hiring a farmer position to help run the Bob Oke Game Farm. She also worked with customer service and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to respond to inquiries about public game farm licensing and helped with review of the 2021 big game hunting regulations pamphlet.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Nothing for this installment.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

USFWS CESCO Section 6 Grant Program: Wildlife Area Planner Vigue coordinated with WDFW staff members on the completion of two Recovery Land Acquisition grants.

The Violet Prairie project is approximately 725 acres of high-quality Puget lowland prairie habitat located in Region 6. It will protect habitat for the federally listed Taylor's checkerspot butterfly and Mazama pocket gopher. It is one of the last contiguous areas of oak prairie habitat in Thurston County. The Chester Butte project is 650 acres of shrubsteppe habitat located in Region 3. It is being purchased for protection of the federally listed pygmy rabbit. The site was impacted by the Pearl Hill Fire in 2020. The acquisition occurs within an identified recovery emphasis area for the pygmy rabbit. Regional and Headquarters staff members did an outstanding job in successfully finalizing the two grants applications.

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.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Prairie Grouse: Biologist Atamian completed a survey of a traditional sharp-tailed lek complex in Lincoln County and a search of a State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) field. No grouse or their sign were observed. Biologist Lowe also surveyed a traditional sharp-tailed lek area and found no grouse or sign. Atamian coordinated and joined in a trip to a sage grouse lek in Douglas County with Biologist Schroeder and Outdoors Reporter for Spokesman Review Eli Francovich. Impacts of the 2020 Labor Day wildfires on shrub-steppe and sage grouse were discussed. Atamian along with Schroeder, Teske, Lowe (BLM), and White (YTC) attended an impromptu meeting with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) biologists to review the Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP) and how well it models habitat in Washington State. RAP is an interactive web application designed to assist in managing and monitoring rangelands for invasive species, as well as forage productivity, other vegetation cover, riparian condition and sensitivity, climate, and drought monitoring, and more.

Raven and Raptor Surveys: Biologist Lowe completed a point count survey for ravens and raptors in the Swanson Lakes and Twin Lakes area, where their populations have the potential to impact prairie grouse. Common raptor species observed included rough-legged and red-tailed hawks and northern harrier.



Single ferruginous hawk observed in nesting territory in Lincoln County

Ferruginous Hawk Surveys: Biologists Lowe and Atamian checked several ferruginous hawk nesting territories in Lincoln and Whitman counties. Territories were checked by locating historical nest sites, potential nest structures, and hiking through territories when possible, to look for hawk activity. Territories that are found to be occupied are visited again to determine nesting activity and later, productivity; territories that appear unoccupied are visited twice to confirm they are unoccupied. Lowe revisited one occupied territory to check nesting status and found the nest had blown out of the tree and eggs broken on the ground.



Ferruginous hawk circling near a nest site along the Snake River



A historical ferruginous hawk nest occupied by a Great Horned Owl this year



Ferruginous hawk pair lost their nest in locust tree to wind in Lincoln County

Biologist Vekasy continued first occupancy checks at Priority 2 territories and began second occupancy checks at Priority 1 territories, including observations to determine breeding status: five nests had birds in incubating position, six nests had pairs present and will need follow-up to determine breeding status, and four territories remain to be checked. Vekasy also located another new golden eagle pair nest-building across from an unoccupied ferruginous hawk nest site.



Ferruginous hawk in incubating position on platform nest and badger in burrow

Black Bear Cub: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett, WDFW Officer Konkle, WDFW Officer King, Bear Biologist Beausoleil, and Bear Biologist Welfelt worked to get a severely emaciated black bear cub to a rehabilitation center. The black bear cub only weighed 14 pounds and did not survive.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunter Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spoke with more hunters this week regarding the spring turkey season. Wade will be meeting with two hunters next week, who are traveling from out of the area in hopes of harvesting a Rio to complete their “wild turkey grand slam.”

Access Signs and Contracts: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked with Contracts Specialist Lotonuu with particulars pertaining to a new access contract. Thorne Hadley also posted an access sign at a Feel Free to Hunt access location as well as replaced two missing Feel Free to Fish signs located in Walla Walla County.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Wolf Sighting: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb responded to a report of a single wolf loitering within a 100m of a homesite calving pasture in Columbia County. The producer hazed the wolf away from their cattle. Conflict mitigation measures were discussed and emphasized, and additional non-lethal deterrent tools were loaned to the producer.



A producer provided photo of a grey wolf observed near a calving pasture in Columbia County

Stateline Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb spend multiple evenings hazing elk from agricultural fields in Walla Walla County. The elk remain persistent and will require near-daily interaction.

Cloverland Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spent a day this week checking the Cloverland area for elk activity. Wade observed one large herd of elk on the Smoothing Iron Wildlife Area. Wade was in near-daily contact with producers and Wildlife Area staff members who were working in the area to monitor elk movement. The elk were reported to have stayed on the Smoothing Iron Wildlife Area.

Dead Bull Elk: Kolb received a call from a landowner about a dead bull elk on their property. The landowner was unsure how the elk died and wanted to know what they could do with it, specifically the antlers. The reporting party's information was passed along to WDFW Enforcement staff members for follow-up and guidance.

Deer Damage to Ornamentals: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb received a report of a homeowner complaining about deer damage to ornamental arborvitae shrubs. The homeowner had a sentimental attachment to the shrubs because they were planted and cared for by her late husband. In addition to the shrubs, the homeowner also had deer eating other species of trees and shrubs in the yard. Moreover, the homeowner's stated her dog was allergic to the deer droppings in her yard because after dog would eat the droppings it would come in the house and throw up. Kolb provided numerous recommendations for how to reduce deer activity around the property and he will check in with the homeowner periodically to document changes in deer activity levels.

Possible Cougar and Black Bear Sightings: Due to scheduling conflicts, Assistant District Biologist Vekasy assisted Officer Horn and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb in following up on a possible cougar sighting in Walla Walla County. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill fielded a report of a black bear sighting around Springdale. Based on the reporting party's description of the bear and the behavior displayed, Samsill decided not to conduct a site visit but provided advice instead.

Cattle Producer Contact: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade started pre-grazing season contacts this week. Wade discussed preventative measures and gave updates on wolf activity. Wade was also in contact with a new Grouse Flats producer and covered several WDFW programs to assist producers and minimize wolf livestock conflict, as well as gave updates on wolves and wolf activity. Wade also gathered herd information and dates for all producers contacted.

Producer Preparation Meetings: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett met with a local NGO (non-governmental organization) and four producers in preparation for the upcoming grazing season. Additional producers are being scheduled during this month.

Range Rider Contacts: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill spoke to several contracted range riders and prospect range riders that were interested in completing the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and either renewing or applying for a contract. Samsill emailed several contracted range riders and prospect range riders that were recently approved.

Producer/ Landowner Contacts: Samsill communicated with several landowners and producers throughout the week via phone calls, texts, and emails. Samsill spoke to landowners and producers about Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) contracts, damage permit reporting, range riding options, Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for Livestock (DPCA-L) contracts, pilot projects, and plans for the upcoming grazing season.

Wolf Concerns in Stevens County: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett continued working with a landowner near Northport with cattle and wolf concerns. A fencing contract was provided to the landowner.

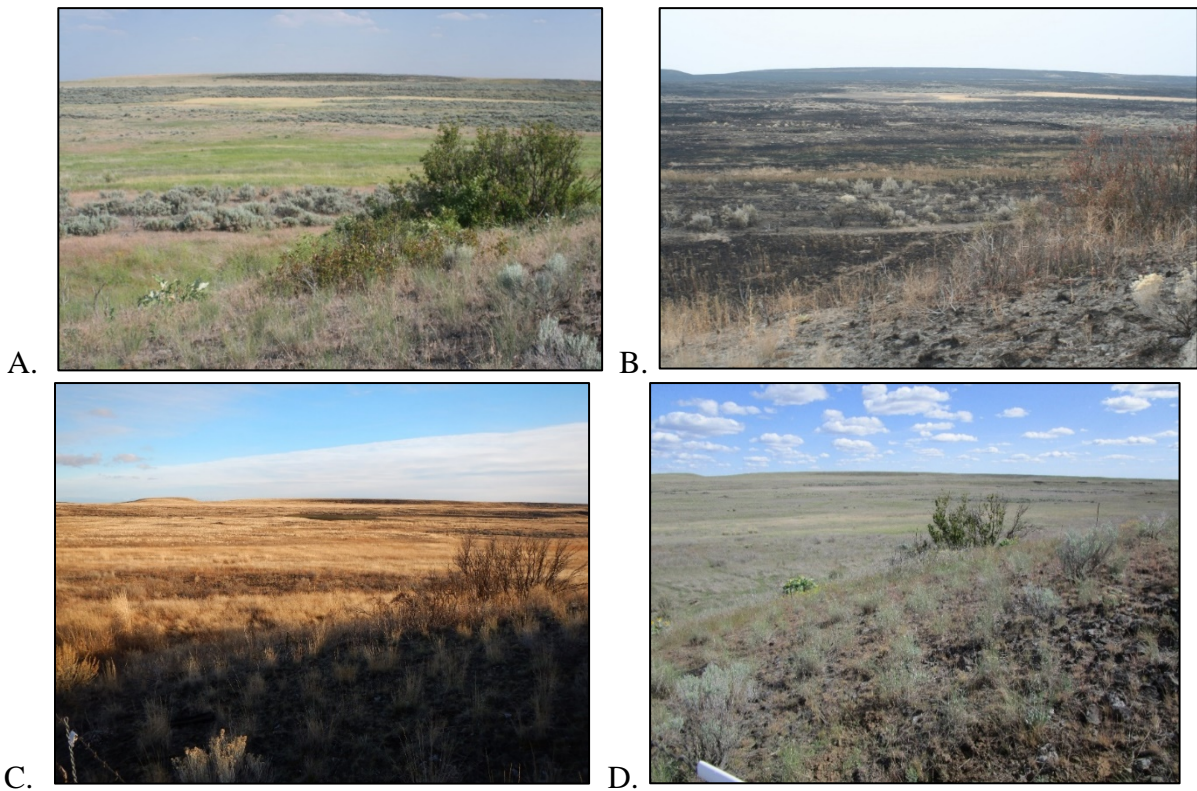
Radio Activated Guard Device Demo: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett participated in another meeting about deployment of the prototype of the RAG Box 2.0 into the field.

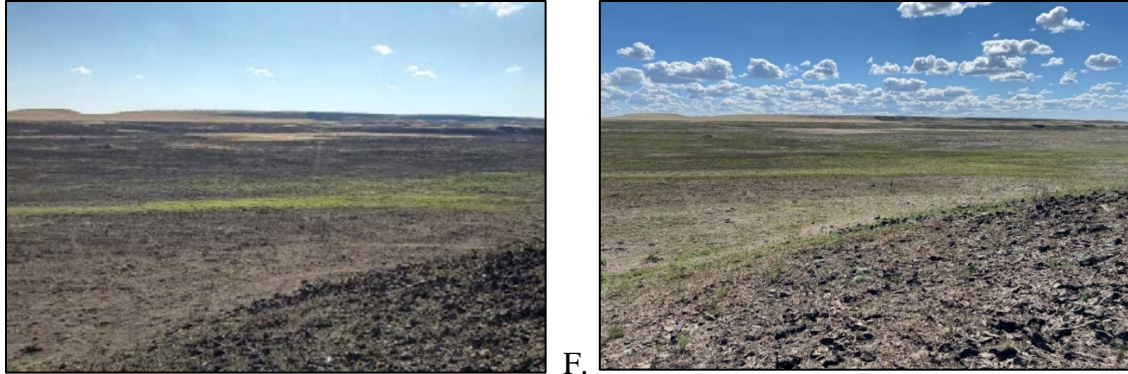
Wolf Advisory Group Meeting: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett participated in a WAG meeting where Special Focus Areas were covered. A draft recommendation will be provided to WDFW for wordsmithing.

United States Forest Service Coordination and Meeting: Wade and Kolb met with the new Pomeroy District Ranger and the USFS Range Manger to give a briefing and update on WDFW's grazing and wolf related work. The Wildlife Conflict Specialists discussed preventative measures, damage prevention contracts, and gave an update on current known wolf numbers. Wildlife Conflict Specialists Kolb and Wade met with Umatilla National Forest staff members in Pomeroy to discuss the coming grazing season. Contact information was shared amongst the staff members and both Kolb and Wade shared non-lethal deterrent examples from the current protocol with staff members.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Whitney Road Wildfire: Biologist Atamian finished up the remaining photo monitor points around the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area for this spring. Another set will be taken in late spring or early summer. The photo points were established in 2012 by Biologist Schroeder and have been repeated sporadically over the years. All were retaken in October of 2020 after the Whitney Road fire.





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Series of photos from photo monitoring points at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. A =2012 pre-Apache Pass fire, B = 2012 post-Apache Pass fire, C = 2013 fall, D=2015 spring, E=2020 fall post-Whitney fire, F = 2021 spring

Habitat Information: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley was contacted by a landowner interested in enhancing existing habitat. Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley provided many suggestions, including plant species targeting specific animal species.

Habitat Project Partnership: Thorne Hadley contacted and set up a meeting with the Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever to identify projected costs, materials needed and plant species to be grown to be able to then meet with and present to the Washington State Penitentiary greenhouse supervisor for approval.

Guzzler Install/Repair: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked with a gentleman from the Richland Rod and Gun Club to repair one of three existing guzzlers needing repair on a WDFW access site. Additional repairs on the remaining two will be done in the near future. Thorne Hadley and a member from the Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever Chapter installed a roof on a new guzzler on a Feel Free to Hunt access site.

Habitat Development: Biologist Baarstad worked with Biologist Gaston to seed some brood rearing habitat on a Hunt by Written Permission property in Whitman County.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Bear and Cougar Aware Presentation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett and District Biologist Prince partnered with the Pend Oreille WSU Extension Manager Jensen and Defender of Wildlife Washington Representative on another round of carnivore presentations. Cougars and both bear species information, bear spray, and bear spray exposure were discussed with the group.

Facilitating Turkey Hunting Access: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill provided several turkey hunters with landowner contact information to inquire about gaining permission for hunting access.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Conflict Workshop and WAG Meeting: Wildlife Conflict Specialists Kolb and Samsill tuned into the first bi-monthly statewide Conflict HQ Workshop to introduce the CODY software for reporting dangerous wildlife calls and responses. The two also attended a number of other critical meetings, including a two-day Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) meeting to discuss Special Focus Areas (SFAs) and to give updates.

Farm Bill: Biologist Baarstad participated in a Teams meeting with private lands staff members regarding the use of Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) field forms for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract work.

Recruitment: Biologist Baarstad worked with Human Resources staff members on the hiring process for the District 1 Natural Resource Technician 2 position.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Lynx Monitoring: Biologist Fitkin compiling all the lynx detections from the summer 2020 occupancy modeling work. Dozens of new detections will be added to the agency data base ahead of the pending species status review. In addition, a recent observation from the public near the town of Mazama had a blue ear tag indicating it was part of the Okanogan Lynx Study and is now at least 11-12 years old.



Lynx near Mazama (note blue ear tag) – Photos from Methow Conservancy

Predator-Prey Project (PPP): Staff members continue to follow-up on radio-collared mule deer mortalities. Biologist Fitkin and Research Scientist Devivo retrieved a collar from an earlier mortality in a remote location that was inaccessible during winter. Biologist Heinlen retrieved a camera deployed on a cougar kill in February. Cameras are deployed on recent study animal mortalities to monitor carnivore/scavenger activity. In addition to a cougar, other scavengers photographed included eagles, magpies, and a striped skunk. The camera even picked up a western gray squirrel. More information on the PPP is available [here](#).



Clockwise from upper right: Original cougar cache, scavenging birds (magpie, golden eagle, bald eagle), returning cougar, western gray squirrel – Photos from WDFW remote camera

Chelan County Cavity Nester Surveys: Biologist Comstock and Jeffreys met with Chelan Public Utility District (PUD) biologists to conduct a training and calibrate their broadcasting equipment in preparation for cavity-nester surveys this spring. Persistent snow at mid-elevations has prevented us from visiting two of our survey sites but these should thaw out soon with the consistent warm temperatures. Biologist Comstock conducted occupancy surveys in one grid in the Swakane Wildlife Area Unit and got a positive detection of a white-headed woodpecker. Biologist Jeffreys conducted an occupancy survey at Daybreak Canyon in the Chelan Butte Wildlife Area Unit and did not detect either of the two target species, white-headed woodpecker or Lewis’s woodpecker, but observed a diverse array of other cavity nester species including white-breasted nuthatch, pygmy nuthatch, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, and northern flicker.

Common Loon Management: Biologist Heinlen and Volunteer Fischer deployed a loon nesting platform (constructed by Fischer) in Blue Lake on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. This lake has had successful common loon nesting in the past, but a damaged diversion box has created fluctuating water levels that has reduced nesting habitat. Since loons nest on the water's edge or on floating mats, nests are vulnerable to these changes in water levels. The floating nesting platform mitigates for the changing water levels, keeping the nest at the proper level.



Loon nesting platform – Photo by J. Heinlen

Biologist Comstock attended the agency-wide common loon protocol training and subsequently began reaching out to partners to discuss historic detections and potential loon nesting habitat, as well as recruiting volunteers and agency partners to assist in the effort. WDFW will be expanding loon work this year beyond revisiting known nest sites to include surveying lakes with suitable nesting habitat but no confirmed reports of loons. Quite a few lakes fit this description throughout Chelan and Douglas counties, so these surveys will be a major component of May through July fieldwork in District 7.

Greater Sage-Grouse: Most district staff members completed their final sage-grouse lek counts in the first two weeks of April. This represents the peak of greater sage-grouse breeding activity, after which lek attendance begins to drop off. Preliminary results for observations of the Moses Coulee PAC indicate that sage-grouse lek attendance is down by about 12% from counts in 2020.



Greater sage-grouse female (foreground) observes males displaying at a lek – Photo by Mike Schroeder

Spring Mule Deer Surveys: Biologists Fitkin and Heinlen wrapped up annual spring mule deer composition counts, classifying well over 1,000 mule deer. Data analysis is not complete, but it looks like the estimated over-winter mortality rate will likely be below the long-term average.



Biologist Heinlen and Research Scientist Devivo enjoying a Methow deer survey, mule deer on the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area – Photo by S. Fitkin

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Columbia Basin Bare Ground Herbicide Treatments: An important component of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area’s weed management program is the annual bare ground treatment of parking areas and roadsides. The benefit of these treatments is two-fold; they keep these areas weed-free to help maintain public access and ensure a positive public experience, but they also allow these areas to function as fire breaks in the event of a wildfire. This annual effort takes place every spring, and when wind speeds are low, Assistant Managers Cole and sometimes Bechtold are likely to be out making these applications. These treatments often occur over a roughly two-month period due to the high number of sites and restrictive weather requirements.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Safe Harbor Agreement: Biologist Hughes met with a landowner and a neighboring landowner about new pygmy rabbit burrows that were found this past spring in the Sagebrush Flats Recovery Area. Hughes provided a map of where the active burrows are to the landowner who has them in his Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields. Hughes also showed the neighboring landowner how far away the active burrows are from his ground and explained the high potential for pygmies to move onto his ground in the future. Hughes also discussed the potential for hemorrhagic fever to end up in Washington State. Hughes got permission for the pygmy rabbit team to trap and vaccinate wild rabbits on the landowner's property. She explained logistics and timing of the trapping efforts. The neighboring landowner has not fully supported the Department in the past with pygmy rabbit recovery efforts. Biologist Hughes has been working with this landowner to foster and build a relationship over the past few years. The meeting ended with both landowners being supportive and comfortable with pygmy rabbits being present in the area. Both landowners have been in the Safe Harbor program since 2008.

Douglas County Habitat Wildfire Restoration Project: Private Lands Biologist Braaten coordinated Master Hunter volunteers to plant hundreds of trees and shrubs on private lands within Pearl Hill Wildfire area.



Planting trees/shrubs in Douglas County with volunteer Master Hunter – Photos by Braaten

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement – Conservation Reserve Program: Biologist Hughes met with a landowner and his operator to review a forb plot that was seeded Fall of 2012. The landowner was interested in having Hughes identify the native forbs and grasses for him throughout the field. The forb plot developed well along with the grass stand. Balsamroot, buckwheat, common yarrow, dusty maidens, 9-leave desert parsley and fleabane daisy were some of the forbs identified while surveying the plot. While surveying the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) field, the landowner pointed out to Hughes a location issue that occurred with his Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) plot. He was given the wrong location for his plot, and it ended up being in his SAFE field which is currently an active SAFE contract. The landowner had already mowed the EQIP plot in his SAFE field. Hughes reached out to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) about the issue, as the landowner's EQIP plot should be in the EQIP field and not in his active SAFE field. NRCS is working with the landowner on putting the plot in the appropriate field.



Erigeron spp. and Eriogonum spp. seeded in SAFE forb plot – Photo by Hughes

State NRCS/WDFW Meeting: Private Lands Biologist Braaten participated along with Todd Baarstad and Janet Gorrell from WDFW along with Bonda Habets and Richard Fleenor of NRCS to discuss Farm bill Contribution Agreement language and how to make things consistent across counties and regions. Also discussed was certification and recertification requirements and training issues. It was a good discussion and NRCS provided long awaited answers to questions Private Lands biologists have had regarding Farm bill workload, certification, AgLearn, deliverables, etc.

Douglas County Habitat Project Proposals Cultural Resource Surveys: Private Lands Biologist Braaten worked with Cultural Contractors to get landowner permission for survey work. Private Lands Biologist Braaten met with landowner and discussed cultural resource surveys on private lands and what was being planned for survey work. The permission was granted, and work will commence soon.

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA): The Methow Wildlife Area is again teaming up with members of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers for an annual volunteer event. This year, the event will take place on May 15 at the Golden Doe Unit. The primary objective for this event is to improve wildlife habitat and safer passage for all wildlife by removing unnecessary, dilapidated barbed and woven wire livestock fencing in the heart of the Golden Doe. This is the third year of this project and to-date, roughly three miles of fence has already been removed with another couple of miles to go. This fence removal project dovetails nicely with ongoing shrub-steppe restoration efforts directly adjacent to the project site. Moving forward, BHA and the Methow Wildlife Area are looking to team up on some noxious weed control projects as well as native planting projects.

Methow Noxious Weed Control: Assistant Manager Repp has been hard at work treating WDFW roadways with residual herbicides to minimize the spread of noxious weeds throughout the wildlife area. Repp has also been working diligently at trying to improve the wildlife areas severely outdated spray apparatuses and vehicles. Repp is also working with Washington State University (WSU) to order a variety of biological control agents to further aid in mitigating the negative effects of noxious weeds.

Noxious Weeds Pilot Project: The Methow Wildlife Area is reviewing a proposal to pilot a public noxious weed control project along the trail corridors at Riser Lake and Lewis Butte. The gist of the project is the public would hand pull weeds and put them in provided trash bags at well signed and very specific sections of trail. Wildlife area staff members are actively hashing out plans with Land Operations Manager Haug to determine how best to initiate this project to ensure its success.

Sinlahekin Fencing Cleanup: Maintenance Mechanic Boulger spent some time cleaning up old fencing on the Chiliwist Unit. Most of this was left over from the Carlton Complex fire. Besides cleaning up fencing, he has also been cleaning up around some of the campgrounds in the Sinlahekin in preparation of camping season. Staff members also cleared down trees and fixed broken wires. With the heavy winds this year there has been an abundance of down trees across some of the fences.



Pile of old wire from the Chiliwist Unit – Photo by Boulger

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Environmental Education and Rattlesnakes: Biologist Fitkin and USFS Biologist Rohrer were joined by “The Wild” podcast staff members on our annual Northern Pacific rattlesnake (NPR) monitoring forays. The Wild, hosted by Chris Morgan, is produced by station KUOW in Seattle and seeks to engage audiences with the wonder of the natural world and foster an appreciation of its wild critters. The episode will likely air later this summer and you can find more information [here](#).



The Wild podcast host Chris Morgan and Producer Matt Martin record the engaging sound of a rattling NPR, a very large snake (Smaug) – Photo by S. Fitkin

Scotch Creek Field STEM: Lands Ops Manager Haug worked with staff members from the North Central Educational Service District (NCESD) and WDFW district staff members on coordinating a Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) field trip to the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, Beaver Dam Analog Project. The event will focus on efforts to restore habitats to benefit the state endangered sharp-tailed grouse with a climate change component. Other partners include the Colville Confederated Tribe, Okanogan Conservation District and Tonasket School District. The event is to occur the last week and April.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

United States Bureau of Reclamation Management Agreements: Lands Operations Manager Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson discussed with Reclamation staff members the possibility of managing a section in Lower Crab Creek that they are about to acquire. There was confusion from Reclamation and USFWS as to who was currently managing the surrounding lands, as they thought it was WDFW. As such, we felt it more appropriate for USFWS to take on this additional parcel as it would be very isolated from our routine activities and would be inefficient to manage. In a side discussion with USFWS, Finger learned that the refuge is not interested in taking on any more land management responsibility. It is likely this section will end up under Reclamation management.



*Arrowleaf balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*) and lupine (*Lupinus* sp.) in bloom at Daybreak Canyon – Photo by Emily Jeffreys*



M. Devivo with deer survey bonus critter (rubber boa) – Photo by S. Fitkin



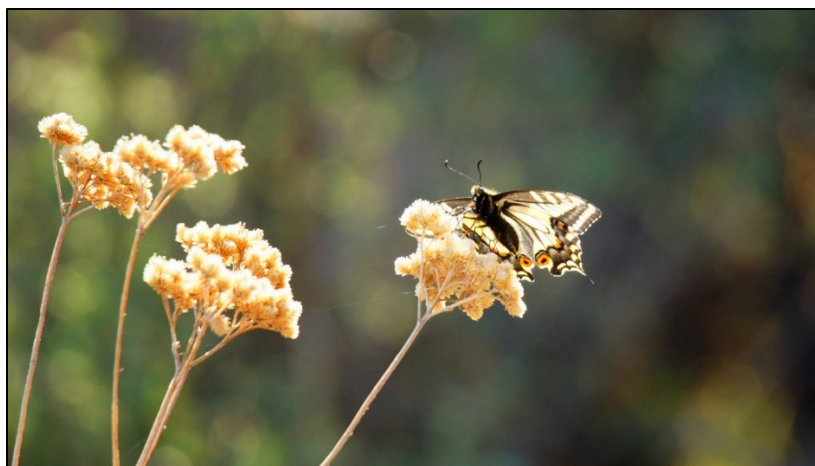
Bushy-tailed woodrat peering from the eave of an abandoned building – Photo by S. Fitkin



Red-necked Grebe at the Spectacle Lake Water Access Site – Photo by Haug



Female and male Bufflehead on Forde Lake – Photo by Haug



Early swallowtail butterfly on Yarrow. Carter Mountain Unit – Photo by Haug



Shrubsteppe on the Carter Mountain Unit – Photo by Haug



Stormy spring day on the Horse Spring Coulee Unit – Photo by Haug



Windblown bunchgrass and balsamroot on the Horse Spring Coulee Unit – Photo by Haug

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Raven Removal Project Starts: District 8 Wildlife Biologist B. Oates and Wildlife Conflict Specialist M. Leuck started field work on the raven removal project to aid greater sage grouse nest survival on the Yakima Training Center. WDFW staff members are collaborating with Yakima Training Center to locate and remove ravens and their nests.



A raven's nest on a water tower on the Yakima Training Center

Yakima Canyon Bighorn Sheep Removal: District 8 Wildlife Biologists B. Oates, J. Bernatowicz, and Wildlife Conflict Specialist M. Leuck culled seven bighorn sheep that were positive for pneumonia in the Yakima Canyon herd. Bighorn sheep that tested positive were located throughout the canyon, except on the Selah Butte South. The bighorn sheep removals are part of the Test and Remove project, which aims to eradicate pneumonia from the population.



Bighorn sheep ewes and lambs foraging in the Yakima River Canyon

Ferruginous Hawk Nest Surveys Underway: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with partners, volunteers, and WDFW seasonal technicians on completing the first round of occupancy surveys for ferruginous hawks in District 4. Over 140 territories will be surveyed in the district, and thus far only a handful were occupied with the target species. The ferruginous hawk is currently recommended for up-listing from State Threatened to Endangered and survey results will help advise management into the future for this declining species.



Historic ferruginous hawk nest in unoccupied territory, as typical for the species, made from large sagebrush branches with a commanding view



Female ferruginous hawk in nest

Migrating Waterfowl Habitat: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin are continuing maintenance of water flow into the Johnson Wetland area to provide stopover habitat for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, also providing easy walk-in access for birders.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Stemilt Recreation Management: Colockum Wildlife Area staff members inspected signs in the Stemilt Basin and discovered some recently marked with paintballs. Signs don't last long in the Stemilt Basin/Lilty Lake area, and most are either shot up or spray painted in short order.



Discover Pass and litter signs marked with paintballs, Lily Lake Road, Colockum Wildlife Area

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Installing Education Signs: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Natural Resource Specialists Nass and Blore installed signs and maps to provide education of WDFW's rules.



New target shooting sign and a fresh map at the Green Gate Kiosk on the Quilomene Wildlife Area



No overnight parking sign for the Teanaway Valley Unit of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area



No Unauthorized Vehicle signage added to the BPA right of way at Green Gate

Rattlesnake Slope Boundary Issues: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Manager Kaelber met with Stockton Taylor of the Gamble Land and Timber Company, owners of the former McWhorter Ranch bordering the south boundary of the Rattlesnake Slope Unit. Ferguson and Kaelber discussed the issue of the ranch's fencing cutting across approximately 300 acres of Wildlife Area (WLA) land. Ferguson and Kaelber came up with a tentative solution with Taylor involving placement of man-gates allowing access onto the land and to the hilltop viewpoints and installation of signage describing land ownership and boundaries.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Inspecting New Land Acquisition: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik assessed the Brain property for management needs as staff members continue working through the closing process. Babik is working with Capital Asset Management (CAMP) engineers to budget the cost of demolishing five structures, removing miles of historic barbed wire fence, placing barriers and gates on the old logging roads, and installing a non-motorized gate for public use. Real estate services have been working with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to find the tenants a new home and provide relocation costs to them. The dwindling Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grant received a two-year extension and hopefully WDFW will be able to find sufficient supplemental funds to remove structures, treat weeds, barrier roads, and install a pedestrian gate. There will be a lot of work burning old slash piles, treating weeds, and replanting the heavily thinned forest.



Slash pile on the acreage WDFW will soon be acquiring to add to the L.T. Murray WLA



Lots of weed skeletons litter the property WDFW will soon be adding to the L.T. Murray WLA

Noxious Weed Control: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members initiated 2021's weed treatment efforts.





Spraying for broadleaf weeds in in restoration sites in the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area

Road Maintenance: Colockum Wildlife Area staff members recently inventoried roads and culverts, finding several culverts that are plugged and need maintenance. The culvert shown below has a plugged inlet and is diverting water from a spring down the road. This culvert will be cleaned and made functional again in the coming weeks.



Plugged culvert on Colockum Wildlife Area road

Additional Funding Secured to Complete the Blackrock Greenstrip Pilot Project: Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett attended the Yakima Volunteer Stewardship Program (VSP) meeting. Hulett spoke to the advisory group about the Blackrock Greenstrip Pilot Project and why the project was requesting funding through the Conservation Districts. The project was approved for up to twelve thousand dollars. This will cover the final chemical applications, the seeding, and the installation of a temporary hotwire fence. WDFW will still be the lead on the project.

Oak Creek Forest Restoration: Forester Hartmann completed the timber cruise survey of Windy Point Commercial Thin Unit 1. Forester Hartmann also attended the virtual Washington State Society of American Foresters 2021 Conference, assisted Forester Pfeifle with road reroute layout at the Wenas, and assessed unit conditions at Cougar Canyon Underburn.



Left: 1 of 5 photos taken at select cruise plots on Windy Point Commercial Thin Unit 1. Plots are selected that represent the different stand conditions within a unit, the area photographed facing North/East/South/West/Into Plot Center and are revisited following treatment and 5-to-10-year intervals to monitor conditions. Right: Patchy snow along handline at Cougar Canyon Underburn. Crews are clearing established fire line of fresh debris, so units are prepped when weather is in prescription

Noxious Weed Control Project: Oak Creek Wildlife Area Project Manager Charlet has initiated noxious weed control efforts on the newly acquired portions of the Cowiche Unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area to include mapping and herbicide application. Work for this project is funded by Washington Department of Ecology through the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.

Cowiche Unit Road Repair: Oak Creek Wildlife Area Project Manager Charlet and Manager Mackey conducted a field visit of two spring development sites in the Reynolds Creek Drainage to discuss plans for improvements to the adjacent road. With consultation with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) engineer, an armored ford crossing will be installed at one of the sites. At the other, a small road re-route, and culvert will be installed.

Oak Creek Noxious Weed Control: Oak Creek Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Berry and Manager Mackey began working with a contractor to spray herbicide to control noxious weeds with grant funding from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF).

Sunnyside Noxious Weed Control: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Noel Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Sarah Wascisin are continuing spraying problem areas for noxious weeds including poison hemlock, kochia, whitetop, pepperweed, teasel, and goosefoot.

Sunnyside Food Plots: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin have mowed out all food/habitat plots in the irrigated ag fields including the entrance food plot at the corner Snipe's Pump and Holaday Roads. The plots will be sprayed with the large tractor sprayer to kill all extant weed and grass growth followed with planting various seed producing annuals including oats, millet, sorghum, sunflower, winterfat, clover, chufa, brassica, spring pea, short corn and native grasses using no-till methods. In addition, Ferguson and Wascisin have mowed the approximately eight acres (two four-acre sections) of pollinator plots that will also be sprayed and no-till planted with milkweed, *Lupinus* spp., California poppy, baby's breath, zinnia, gloriosa daisy, coreopsis, scarlet sage, etc.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Field Classes: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik hosted a class of Discovery Lab students to the Taneum meadows. Babik encouraged students to make observations of a reference reach downstream of a beaver complex and compared those conditions to those of the beaver complex upstream. Students were able to observe firsthand how beavers provide ecosystem services for a variety of wildlife.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Seasonal Technicians Arrive for Diversity Surveys: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra onboarded Scientific Technicians Merluccio and Martenson in April. The two will help complete surveys for ferruginous hawks, ground squirrels, burrowing owls as well as assist with game program priorities for waterfowl and dove trapping and banding. They have done a great job thus far and were ready to hit the ground running!

GIS Mapping: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson is currently busy making GIS maps for our BPA liaison Mandy Hope, showing locations and outlines of 2021 field season projects on Sunnyside WLA units.

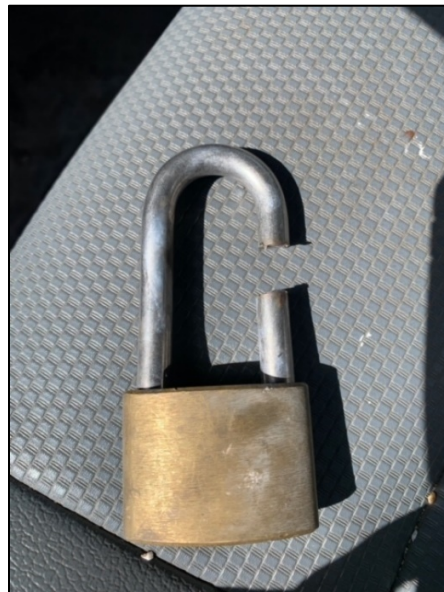
7) Other

Thornton Unit Vandalism: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Manager Kaelber visited the Case Road parking lot on the Thornton Unit located on the south side of Rattlesnake Mountain to investigate a reported case of vandalism of the informational kiosk. The kiosk has been broken down and burned. Wildlife Area staff members will replace the kiosk as time allows.



Photo of remaining pieces of informational kiosk at the Thorton Unit

Vandalism on L.T. Murray: L.T. Murray Natural Resource Specialist Nass replaced a gate lock that had been cut to gain motorized access into a restoration site in the Quilomene Wildlife Area.



Gate lock cut to gain motorized access through a restoration site in the Quilomene Wildlife Area

REGION 4

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Nothing for this installment.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Snow Creek Property Break In: The water access team was notified by Enforcement that the steel gate accessing the lower property had been cut open and vehicles were counted in the walk-in only piece of this property. The upper parking area, closed to all use, had also been breached and vehicles were witnessed there as well. Staff members arrived to find all buildings had been broken into. Staff members confirmed theft, vandalism, and evidence of illegal camping in all buildings to include the water treatment plant. On-site campers were asked to leave the property and were informed that this site is walk in only and no camping is allowed. Once the property was unoccupied by the public the crew spent many hours picking up garbage, sleeping bags, plastic used as tarps, several needles, and other drug paraphernalia. After decontaminating, staff members then used a one-ton truck and tractor to pull and push dock parts, derelict boats and other heavy items blocking the gated area. The site was then resecured with new locks on gates and new cables blocking other illegal entrances.





Boston Harbor Boat Launch: The water access team, working with the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) monofilament recycling program, spent three hours brushing out the Boston Harbor Access Site. Work performed included weed eating, limbing, hedge trimming, and parking lot blowing. Prior to this project, Reeves contacted the Boston Harbor Marina asking for permission to temporarily block off their adjacent parking lot, allowing us to perform work without compromising resort vehicles.



Hicks Lake: The water access team, working with the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) monofilament recycling program, spent four hours brushing out the Hicks Lake Access Site preparing for the fishing opener. Work performed included weed eating, branch limbing, hedge trimming, chipping, and parking lot blowing.



Mason County Fishing Opener Preparation: The water access team, working with the WCC monofilament recycling program, spent a full day at four water access sites in Mason County preparing for the fishing opener. Work was performed at Lost, Nahwatzel, Island, and Spencer lakes. Tasks included limbing, chipping, and weed eating. Additionally, Scotch broom was manually removed at Lost Lake. The WCC crewmembers also emptied and maintained the monofilament bins at each of these sites. Their help this week was instrumental in accomplishing these tasks.



Island Lake



Lost Lake

Bogachiel River Thomas: Team members Reeves, Walker, and Mettler fell trees and pole sawed limbs and brush, chipping all material on site to enlarge the parking area. The tractor was then used to mow the edges and fill the rutted-out areas. Once the area firms up with nicer weather, rock, and property boundary markers will be installed. This site has become more popular due to private land closures downstream. The additional room for parking and launching will be appreciated by the users.

Other Work Performed: Reeves and Freimund attended the Lewis County Invasive Pest Workshop for WSDA credits necessary to maintain pesticide licenses.

Abandoned Trailer at Chehalis River: Team member Reeves was contacted by Enforcement that another gem was dumped on WDFW property in Grays Harbor County. Once cleared by Enforcement, Reeves used the proper channels and resources to dispose of this RV properly.



3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Elk River: District staff members wrapped up their mowing efforts at the Elk River Unit. Approximately 50 acres Scotch broom were cleared. The effort took approximately two months of time with staff member assistance from the Wildlife Area, Spartina crew, and Fish Program. District Biologist Warren Michaelis and Pest Biologist Russell Nunez provided most of the staff members time to the effort. Early plans are being developed for tree planting and restoration with funding to be provided by an incoming State Lands Restoration grant in July.

Biologist Novack developed a Request for Quote to hire a contractor with specialized equipment to conduct further Scotch broom control at the Elk River Unit. A bid was received and a notice to proceed is being developed.

Oregon Silverspot Butterfly (OSB): Biologist Novack and Program Manager Calkins met with Biologist Potter (OSB species lead) to discuss potential methods to remove young pine trees that are invading a small meadow managed for this species. This butterfly is currently considered extirpated from Washington, but the USFWS is currently developing plans for a reintroduction on the nearby Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. Unfortunately, wildlife area staff members have not been able to conduct recent regular maintenance due to staff member capacity challenges and other staff member changes in the program.

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.