

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

October 16 to 31, 2021

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Hunter Check Stations: Wildlife Biologists Atamian and Lowe worked hunter check stations along Highway 395 and Highway 2 during both weekends of early modern firearm deer season. The focus of the check stations is to collect chronic wasting disease samples and provide outreach for our hunters. Overall, check stations were slow with few hunters and deer coming through, likely due to poor weather and the large epizootic hemorrhagic disease outbreak impact on the white-tailed deer population.

Pheasant Release: Wildlife Biologist Atamian, along with Mackelvie, Dingman, Vekasy, Robinette, and volunteers released pheasant at several Army Core of Engineers Habitat Management Units along the Snake River and other sites.



Pheasant exiting transport crate then flying off into the Habitat Management Unit (HMU)



MacKelvie releasing pheasant at a Feel Free to Hunt site

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Earlier Drone Request at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area: Region 1 Lands Agent Ploof checked with a caller who requested permission last week for recreational use of a drone on Sherman Creek Wildlife Area to obtain more details on the request. The caller stated he was inquiring on behalf of his supervisor, and then never followed up, so no action was required.

Access Area Activities: North Region 1 Access Area Manager Dziekan took some time this week to organize and deep clean his shop and storage area. He sharpened saw chains and winterized some pieces of equipment that are no longer going to be in use for the winter season. Dziekan will complete routine equipment inventory next week. The Vermeer equipment repair shop in Spokane informed Dziekan that his roughly 30-year-old woodchipper is unrepairable, so he will be adding that to the list for surplus, along with his old forklift.



Organized access area storage space

Pheasant Release: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley released pheasants on properties in Columbia and Walla Walla Counties for the upcoming pheasant season opener.

Water Depth Monitoring at Eloika Lake: Region 1 Lands Agent Ploof received a request from the Spokane County Parks Department to install a depth monitoring system on the Access Area dock this fall. Parks wants to place a flat gauge vertically and submerge a data logger out of sight and away from recreational activity. The two-year data collection plan is related to a water control structure that Parks placed on the lake's outlet as part of a habitat improvement project. WDFW Access Manager Dziekan noted that the dock is removed each winter (early November this year), so the gauge would need to be attached to pilings to stay over the winter. The logger is harder yet to place. Dziekan and Ploof will work with Parks to sort out details. A permit will take about two weeks to write and pass through the approval process, with final signature by Lands Division Manager Wilkerson.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Injured Hawk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb responded to a report of an injured sharp-shinned hawk at a city park in Walla Walla. The hawk was captured and will be evaluated by a veterinarian and Blue Mountain Wildlife to determine if rehabilitation is possible.



An injured sharp-shinned hawk in Walla Walla city park that was captured for evaluation and possible rehabilitation

Concerned Hunters: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb received multiple reports from concerned hunters who had harvested deer that appeared sick upon walking up to the deer. Kolb shared advice with one hunter on what is considered safe to eat and referred another report along to WDFW Enforcement staff members for follow-up due to possible carcass waste. Cross coordination was also conducted with Assistant District Biologist Vekasy about the reports of sick deer.

Deer Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb assisted a College Place commercial producer who farms inside city limits set up fladry to deter deer damage on their remaining high-value crops (lettuce, tomatoes, and peppers). The producer will move the fladry to keep deer out of the area. The effort has been successful thus far and the producer reports seeing fewer deer in the crop area. Use of pyrotechnics for hazing is not possible due to municipal ordinances.



Fladry set up on the edge of valuable commercial produce crops to deter and/or change deer movement patterns

Dead Cow: Staff members investigated a report of a dead cow in the Grouse Flats pack territory. The producer wanted the dead cow examined because they were concerned about it being a wolf depredation. The cow had been dead at least three days prior to the investigation and was not scavenged upon. Based upon the evidence examined, a determination of non-depredation was made.

Reported Injured Calves: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb received a report of four injured calves that were taken out of the area of new wolf activity in Columbia County. Coordination is on-going with the producer and WDFW staff members to investigate the reported injuries.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Upcoming Planting: Benson Farms, Inc. in Moses Lake will have 9,500 native shrubsteppe forb and plug starts ready for delivery to Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area on November 1. These plants are part of the recovery efforts after the Whitney Fire devastated Swanson Lakes in September 2020, to give a head start to shrub and forb regrowth. Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch and Wildlife Area Manger Anderson have scheduled a planting party for Saturday, November 6. Anderson is working with the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's Wildfire Recovery Committee and the Spokane chapter of the Audubon Society to provide volunteers. Public Affairs Officer Lehman will be recording the activity to post onto WDFW's Intranet and its social media page.

Revere Wildlife Area Wetlands: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch has been working with regional Ducks Unlimited staff members and U.S. Bureau of Land Management Wildlife Biologist Lowe, concerning options for further pond expansion (eutrophication reversal) for waterfowl, and associated weed control on the southern part of Revere Wildlife Area. The area recently opened has some weedy spoils that need cleanup and perhaps reseeding, and there is a possibility of opening a pond right behind the restored one.

Fire Pit Removal: Wildlife Area Assistant Finch and Natural Resource Technician Colvin removed a home-made fire pit they spotted in a parking area at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. All WDFW's parking lots are posted "No Overnight Camping," but this doesn't stop everyone. The photo shows the dry grass just outside the fence, which could have caught fire with one spark!



Removed fire pit

Fence Removal Planning: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch coordinated with WDFW Biologist Merg for scheduling a Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew to remove burned fence materials from Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area this fall. Finch provided details on locations and types of materials for removal.

Cutting Off "Cut-offs": Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer used his mini excavator to clean up around informal trails, also known as "cut-offs," that drivers on Sherman Creek and Rustlers Gulch Wildlife Areas have carved out that damage wildlife habitat. He secured rock and woody barriers in front of and around the cut-offs, closing them off to vehicular use.

Providing Education and Outreach

Qualification: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb completed nine hours of in-person training and was certified as a National Rifle Association (NRA) Range Safety Officer (RSO). This qualification will provide the ability to open and close the Walla Walla Gun Club in support of hunter education classes.

Schoolchildren and Shrubsteppe: Monday, Wildlife Area Manager Anderson met online with Melissa Mackelvie, a graduate student and WDFW Administrative Assistant, who is working on her time with a Spokane Valley middle school class to grow a mix of plants native to Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. This is a small project, with about 15 sagebrush plants in one-gallon pots, and 20 forb stems in “conetainers.” Mackelvie is hoping to overcome school transportation problems and bring the children out in late November, to plant the stems in the vicinity where the sagebrush seeds were collected last year.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

WDFW Sustainability Planning: Wildlife Area Manager Anderson attended a full-group planning Teams meeting on October 22. The group reviewed examples of other agencies’ plans for sustainability and greenhouse gas reduction, the scope the WDFW plan will have, and types of activities to address. Team charter was finalized. Planning timelines were discussed, including those for each sub-team (Anderson is on the Toxics team) to meet internally, and present information to and promote buy-in from agency staff members. Project Coordinator Edmonston is doing a great job moving the group forward and eliciting information and ideas as they go.

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) contract: Wildlife Area Manager Anderson joined a regularly scheduled conference call with contract liaison Kyle Goeke Dee and two other BPA mitigation staffers working on environmental and cultural compliance issues. Attendees discussed activities at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and change in status of Natural Resource Technician Colvin, from seasonal to year-round. Next week Anderson will submit a revised Line-Item Budget in BPA’s PISCES mitigation contracting program, reflecting the change. The group also discussed challenges in obtaining cultural clearance for post-fire habitat improvements in old farm fields, using special funding to mitigate for the 2020 Whitney Fire. A late 1990s comprehensive field survey resulted in farm fields being included with their farmsteads, as having cultural significance. BPA staff members expressed their intent to reexamine this classification by early next year and have these fields dropped wherever possible, to facilitate post-fire field work.

Swanson Lakes Surplused Trailer: An old, beat-up flatbed trailer that was surplused from inventory and sold through the state’s Enterprise Services was hauled away on by its new owner. Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch and Natural Resource Technician Colvin are relieved to have that item out of the equipment yard.



Wildlife area staff members loaded the old trailer for its new owner

Sherman Creek Water Issues: First, the underground supply valve for the spigot outside the shop failed. Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer heard the water running on and replaced the valve. This may have disturbed some debris in the entire water supply line for headquarters.

Second, the small tankless water heater at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area's bathroom malfunctioned between Thursday evening and Friday morning. Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer and Wildlife Area Manager Anderson cleaned debris from the heater's intake on Friday evening, but the heater couldn't be repaired. The Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sampling technicians camping at wildlife area headquarters now have no hot water in the bathroom, but they both have local gym memberships which allow them to shower in town.

Third, more disturbed debris apparently gummed up the toilet flush valve after staff members worked on the water heater on Friday evening, which meant flushing now required a bucket of water. Anderson changed the valve and flapper on Saturday, and the toilet works fine now, no buckets required. Palmer will order a new tankless water heater on Monday, November 1, for installation upon arrival.



Hole dug for valve replacement

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

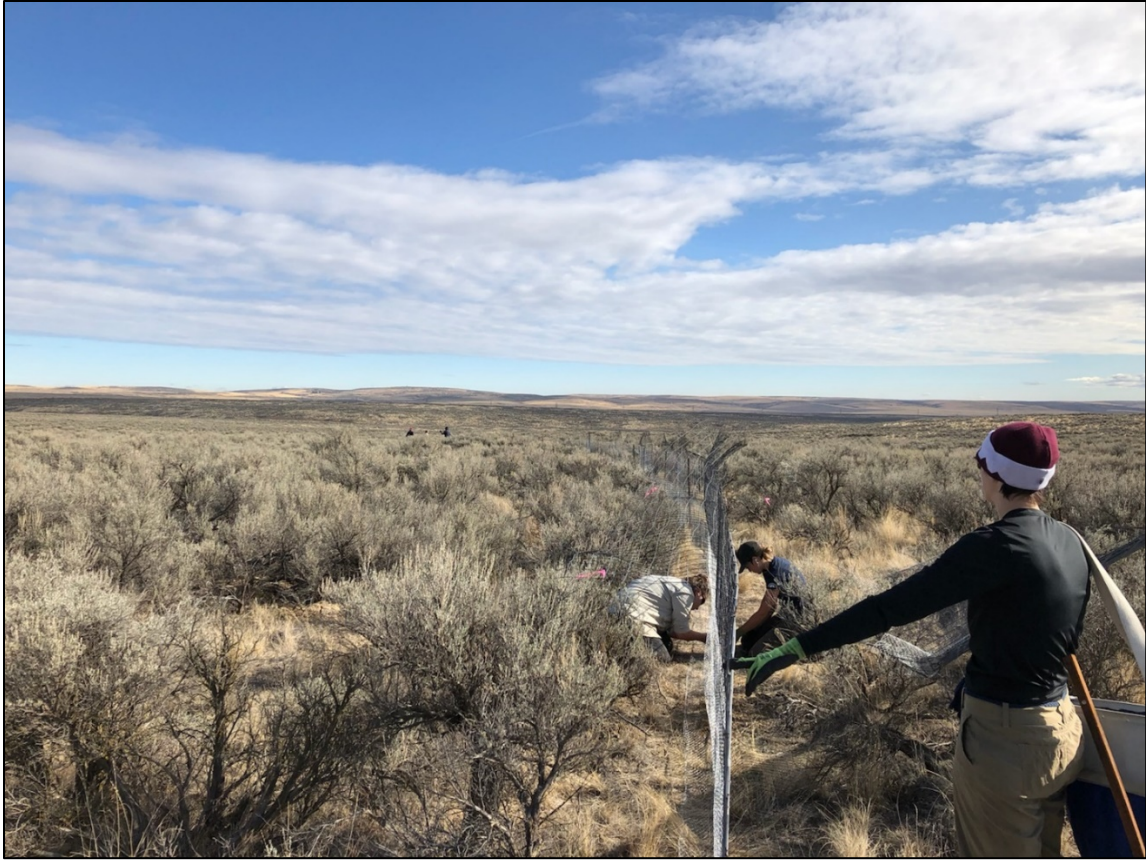
Managing Wildlife Populations

Pygmy Rabbit Breeding Enclosure Management: Our team has been busy with relocating and refurbishing breeding enclosure materials and sites. With the assistance of the Washington Conservation Corps, provided through the Shrubsteppe Proviso funding, we removed the enclosure panels from the site of the first mobile enclosure, established in 2017 in Beezley Hills. We have come full circle on this site with all the adults living out their natural lives and now relocating the enclosure panels to a new site for “fresh pasture.” By moving the enclosure to a new site, we prevent the problems experienced with the original permanent enclosure sites of site degradation, noxious weed infestation, parasite/disease buildup. The site was dismantled in one day with the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew. The bonus is that the resident wild rabbits occupying this area in Beezley Hills now have access to several acres of new habitat for them to utilize.



Crew hauling enclosure panels out from our first mobile enclosure site

Being our prototype, we refurbished some of the materials with new and improved ones. Once they were all complete, the WCC crew assisted us with building a new 6-acre mobile enclosure site on the north end of the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. This will be planted with kits in the spring of 2022 for sustain semi-wild breeding efforts for two-three years on that site.



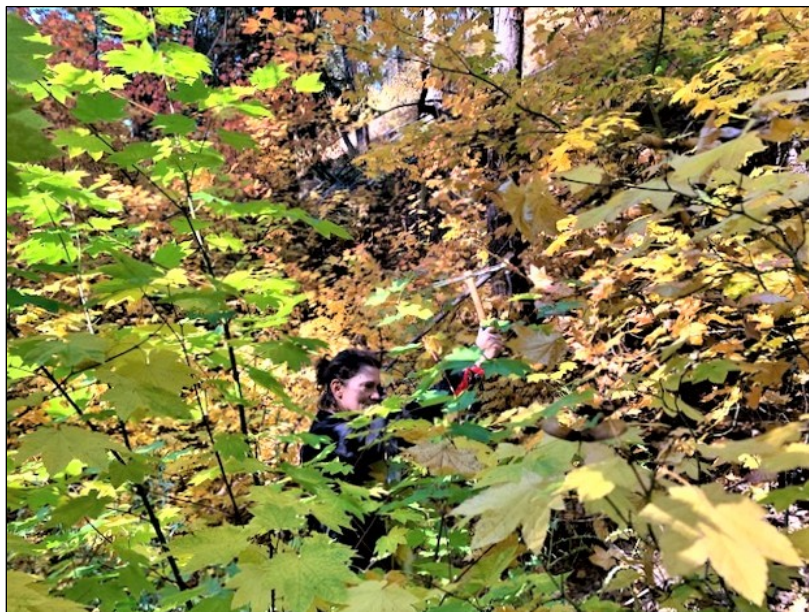
Crew establishing new breeding enclosure site on Sagebrush Flat WLA

Recovery Emphasis Area Expansion: Due to the loss of the Burton Draw Recovery Area, we are having to look for additional pygmy rabbit release sites (formally known as Recovery Emphasis Areas) to use in the next three-four years. The goal will be to select suitable habitat blocks within the existing recovery areas with connectivity to currently occupied habitat. Site visits have been completed and our Team has selected two areas, the Palisades (owned by the Bureau of Land Management, or BLM) and Rimrock Meadows (land is privately owned by the Rimrock Meadows Association) but is in a Conservation Easement held by the Nature Conservancy (TNC). U.S Fish and Wildlife’s Biologist Veverka is assisting with permitting compliance with the BLM and TNC and Safe Harbor Amendment. Unique to these release areas will be the first-time pygmy rabbits that will be released into areas with active grazing. TNC has enrolled their grazing allotments in a program with Sage grouse Initiative to improve habitat conditions and both Sage Grouse Initiative and the ranchers were supportive of our proposed reintroduction and welcome the opportunity to become an example of how grazing and species recovery can co-occur.

Chelan Count Bighorn Sheep Health: District 7 received a report of a bighorn ram seen in a pasture with domestic sheep. Due to the high risk presented to the herd from potential exposure to *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, it was determined that a targeted removal of this ram was warranted as a precautionary measure. Over the course of two days staff members surveilled the area for a ram that met the profile and appeared to be the same as in a video provided by the landowner.

With cooperation from neighboring landowners, Biologist Comstock and Wildlife Area Manager Lopushinsky were able to track this ram to an isolated parcel of BLM land. Once located, we determined that the most prudent action was to remove him while we had eyes on him, rather than waiting for air support to track him down the following day. This required superior marksmanship from WLA Manager Lopushinsky and a strenuous recovery. The ram in question was 5.5 years old. Nasal swabs were collected to test for the presence of *M. ovipneumonia*. With multiple herds in the state experiencing MOVI outbreaks and issues of chronic morbidity and declines in recruitment, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff members remain highly vigilant against reports of contact between domestic sheep, goats and wild sheep. Disease surveillance results for recently submitted nasal swabs from both the Swakane and Chelan Butte herd in District 7 both came back all negative for *M. ovipneumonia*. Biologists continue to remain vigilant for potential contact between domestic sheep, goats and bighorn sheep.

Chelan County Mule Deer Migration Study: Biologists Comstock and Jeffreys went in search of a radio collar in the Cole's Corner area belonging to a mule deer doe captured in Chelan County in January 2020 as part of a four-year study focused on determining migratory pathways and important movement corridors for mule deer in several herds throughout the state. The collars are all outfitted with GPS transmitters that send signals to satellites several times each day, and this particular collar had sent off a mortality signal back in mid-September. However, three attempts to locate the collar from mid-September to early October proved fruitless amidst the dense brush and slash, and no signs of a kill site or deer carcass (tufts of hair, heavily disturbed soil and flattened brush, bones or stomach contents, etc.) were observed. Ideally, biologists seek to retrieve collars from mule deer that die during the course of the study to download onboarded data and redeploy the collar on newly captured mule deer to maintain a sufficient sample number of individuals for the study. The next capture of mule deer in the East Slope Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone will take place in January 2022.



Biologist Devon Comstock listens for a signal amidst a sea of vine maples – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

District 5 Deer Management: Biologist Rowan continued preparations for drainage of irrigation canals, which impact mule deer due to their entrapment in canals when they attempt to cross them during autumn/winter migration to areas with less snow and better forage. Rowan continued coordination with volunteers, reconstructed a second mobile ramp, purchased supplies, and arranged for WCC assistance in November. These ramps are deployed into canals where WDFW receives reports of deer trapped, in hopes the deer will find them and understand they can be climbed allowing for escape. Rowan is planning to do monitoring of ramp-use this winter, to better gauge this as a reasonable method of deer escapement. We need to assemble or refurbish at least four more ramps by early November. Rowan also continued preparations for aerial surveys of our Desert Unit. These specific aerial surveys allow WDFW to obtain population estimates for our mule deer subherds.

Bats: Biologist Jeffreys responded to a call from a resident of Sunnyslope regarding a grounded bat she found on her porch that appeared sick and unable to fly. This resident knew to never handle a bat barehanded (approximately 1% of the bat population carries rabies) and safely placed the bat in a little box out of harm's way before calling WDFW. The bat (likely a little brown myotis or Yuma myotis) was unfortunately too weak to even move at this point and died shortly after Biologist Jeffreys retrieved it.



Adult male myotis sp. exhibiting piebaldism – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

No injuries that might have caused this bat's death were apparent, but interestingly it exhibited piebaldism, a rare chromatic disorder found in many mammal species. A chromatic disorder is a pigmentation anomaly that causes abnormal coloration of the skin and sometimes hair or fur. This abnormal coloration is caused by either a deficiency in or an excess of melanin. In the case of this bat, a lack of melanin in the wing tips led to a lack of the brown pigment found across the rest of the bat's wings and body.

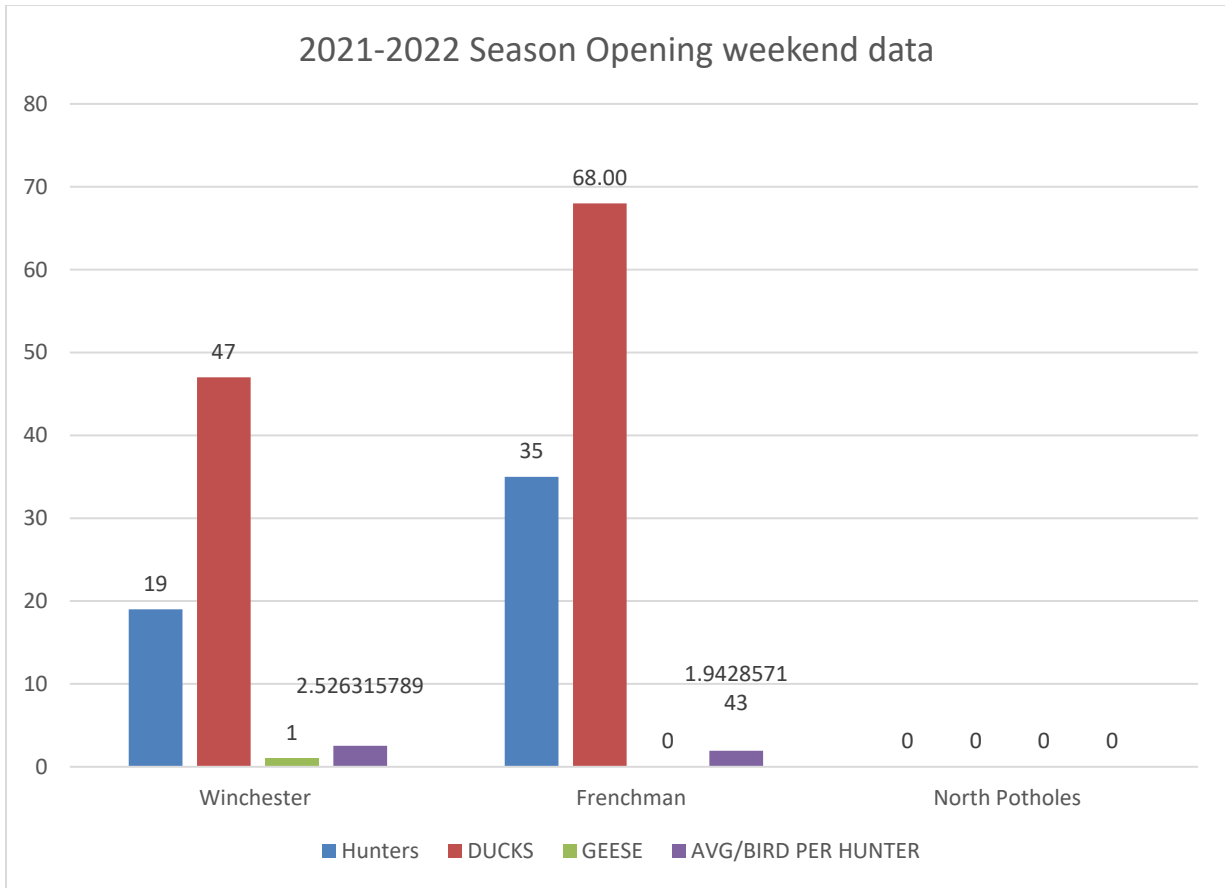
Right now, bats across Washington are entering hibernation sites where they will remain for up to six months until temperatures warm and insect prey returns in the spring. While hibernating, bats spend the vast majority of the time in torpor, a state in which their body temperature lowers significantly and they remain inactive to conserve valuable energy. However, due to the recent detections of white-nose syndrome (WNS)— a devastating bat disease that has decimated many bat populations in various locations throughout North America – in Central Washington, a shift in bat behavior can be expected to be observed with increasing frequency during the winters to come, one that may have significant consequences for Washington’s bats. The primary mechanism by which WNS infection directly leads to bat mortality is by causing the infected bat to undergo more frequent arousal periods during hibernation, raising body temperature and even cueing the bat to go outside in the cold winter to fly around and hunt for insects when there are none to be found. The resulting exposure and burning up of critical fat stores causes bats to die of starvation.

The public is asked to report sick or dead bats to WDFW yearround, but this winter biologists also ask for reports of any bats seen out flying or perched low and exposed. If a number of reports come from a particular area, this could indicate that bats here are infected with WNS. The link to submit such reports can be found here: [Report Bat Observations with Suspected White Nose Syndrome](#).

Conservation Reserve Program Wildlife Surveys: Biologist Morris was contacted by a farmer who has a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) field that requires work for re-enrolling in the CRP program. The farmer has a Safe Harbor agreement and contacts Biologist Morris about checking the field for pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) habitat before starting management actions. Biologist Cook assisted Biologist Morris in assessing the field for suitable habitat and surveying for pygmy rabbits. Biologist Morris will make recommendations for preserving potential habitat during management work.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Waterfowl Opening Weekend at Regulated Access Areas: October 16 and 17 was opening weekend of general season waterfowl. Biologist McPherson started seeing people setting up camps in proximity of regulated access areas (RAAs) early as Thursday before the opener. Frenchman and Winchester both had decent hunter participation and harvest. Due to water levels at North Potholes no hunters used that project opening weekend.



Deer Season on the Sinlahekin: Modern firearm deer season was another busy time on the Sinlahekin, all the campgrounds were full. There was plenty of traffic going up and down the valley, within a 2-mile stretch along the Sinlahekin road there were approximately 15 vehicles parked during opening weekend and even throughout the week there was plenty of traffic. Sinlahekin staff members answered many questions throughout the week about the wildlife area and places that might produce a successful hunt. There were many successful hunting camps and one of the disabled permit hunters was also successful.



Full camps of hunters at the East Fish Lake Campground – Photo by Wehmeyer

Blue Lake – Oroville Water Access Area Renovation: Lands Operations Manager Haug inspected the newly developed water access area known as Blue Lake – Oroville. Haug applied for funding in 2018 through the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) – State Lands Development category to improve Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) capabilities, add a vault toilet, better parking, ADA trail, wildlife viewing blind, loop/overview trail and better boat launch. The work was done by WDFW – CAMP crew members from Lacey and did a wonderful job. The loop trail still needs to be completed and signs installed but currently the site is open and much more user friendly than it once was.





Above – before and after of the Blue Lake – Oroville site and improvement photos of the site’s new wildlife viewing station, ADA trail, parking area, kiosk, and vault toilet – Photo by Haug

Hunter Access Program: Biologist Cook spent several days in the field checking Hunter Access signs and being present for landowners enrolled in the program. Cook spoke with several hunters, answering questions and responding to landowners as well.

Biologist Cook found some fields near Royal City where Hunter Access signs were removed, and the fields were posted with new No Trespassing signs. On following up with the landowner, Cook discovered that these fields were sold and will not be part of the Hunter Access program. However, these fields were only a portion of the property enrolled so there will continue to be access available in the vicinity. Cook has made the changes to online mapping and information systems, and they should be updated for the public facing websites.

Biologists Cook and Morris continued work on setting up Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program sites which will seem like the former Corn Stubble Program. Cook and Morris plan to add more properties to the program for this season and plan to try to offer sites for the late Goose season as well.

Biologist Morris spoke with a landowner about enrolling their fields in the Hunter Access Program. The fields are enrolled in the Safe Harbor program, and the landowner is concerned about protecting pygmy rabbit habitat. Biologist Morris and the landowner discussed potential Hunter Access programs that would maintain protection of pygmy rabbit habitat.

Upland Birds: Biologist Rowan collected harvest slips and added fresh signs in the Gloyd Unit, and removed one harvest slip box for relocation to Royal City lakes. Habitat improvements are planned for the Royal City Lakes area, and gaining data pre- and post-enhancement will help us better understand how improvements are impacting bird numbers as measured through harvest numbers.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

More Deer Issues: Specialist Heilhecker talked with a fruit tree nursery owner experiencing deer damage. She explained a damage prevention cooperative agreement, nonlethal hazing techniques, and filing for crop damage. The nursery owner will nonlethally haze deer until Specialist Bridges returns. In the meantime, Specialist Heilhecker also put the nursery owner in touch with a crop adjustor to find out how the tree damage would be evaluated.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Scotch Creek Riparian Restoration Project: Volunteer Bob Fischer and Scotch Creek staff members planted 30 Rocky Mountain junipers and 180 water birch within the restoration project area. The junipers were generously donated by volunteer Fischer. Staff members also cut and collected another load of limbs and weave material off the Chopaka Unit. The trailer full of limbs was used as weave on four separate beaver dam analogues (BDAs) within the project area.



Scotch Creek Staff Member Medina and Volunteer Fischer planting junipers in one of the high fenced enclosures within the Scotch Creek Restoration project – Photo by Dupont



Douglas fir limbs from the Chopaka Unit weaved into the Scotch Creek BDAs – Photo by Dupont

Chesaw Unit Aspen Restoration Project: Staff members completed the machine piling of down aspen within the project area. In total, 45 piles were created. The piles will be burnt later this year.

Piles of dead aspen to be burned later this fall/winter – Photo by Medina



Happy Hill Shrub Enclosure: Staff members completed the construction of a new high fence enclosure around a wet spring area on Happy Hill. Deciduous shrubs will be planted within the enclosure. The high fence will keep the deer from browsing the newly planted shrubs.



Before and After photos of the newly enclosed spring – Photos by Medina



60 newly planted water birch inside the enclosure + one of 600 water birch planted this year on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Photos by Dupont

Ramsey Creek Prescribed Burn – Methow Forest Restoration Project – Phase 2: The North Central Washington Prescribed Burn Team, Brothers Fire LLC, and the Methow Wildlife Area staff members initiated and completed the prescribed burn of the approximately 220-acre Ramsey Creek Unit on the Methow Unit. Approximately 90 acres of the unit’s northern extent burned in July during the Cub Creek 2 Fire which provided a great control area on that end. Local support from numerous citizens in the Methow Valley as well as Fire Adapted Methow Valley (Methow Long-Term Recovery) helped crews focus on the burning and Methow staff members talking one-on-one with hunters in the area who overwhelmingly supported WDFW’s efforts . . .if only a little wary of us burning into the general season. The burn crew did an outstanding job with smoke management in limiting the amount settling in the valley and burned as precisely in prescription as possible. They deserve a lot of credit! The project is funded by the WWRP – State Lands Restoration dollars and will significantly improve the ecological wellbeing of this ponderosa pine forest.







Photos of the Ramsey Creek prescribed burn on the Methow Unit near Winthrop – Photos by Justin Haug

Figlenski-Colville Confederated Tribes Conservation Celebration: Region 2 Director Hoenes, Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug, and Assistant District Biologist Heinlen attended a celebration in the Tunk Valley in which approximately 9,250 acres was acquired and donated to the Colville Confederated Tribes. The Figlenski Ranch, which dates to 1904, was purchased by Conservation Northwest as part of a long-running public-private coalition effort to protect that corridor called the Working for Wildlife Initiative, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. WDFW has been a part of this coalition since 2013 and continues to work towards conserving habitat and species in this ‘linchpin’ of an area that links the Kettle Range to the Cascade Mountains. More information on this conservation success story can be found at [Homesteading family’s lasting legacy realized in agreement to return nearly 10,000 acres of habitat to Colville Tribes in conservation deal | The Spokesman-Review.](#)



Celebration of Colville Confederated Tribes, Conservation Northwest, donors, and conservation partners on the Figlenski Ranch. Tunk Valley, Okanogan County – Photo by Haug

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

CAMP Tour of Funded Projects: Land Operations Manager Haug, CAMP Project Coordinator Hanson, CAMP Permitter Sample, and CAMP Archeologist staff members Carlson and Bass visited a number of 2021-Funded State Lands Development projects and one Boating Facilities Program (BFP)-funded site. The group discussed the feasibility of the proposed projects, challenges at each site and how best to solve those various issues. Haug will work with CAMP in the coming months to get us closer to implementation and have discussions with local partners to make sure the construction is successful.

Providing Education and Outreach

Okanogan High School Ecology Class: The Okanogan High School Ecology class made their annual visit to Driscoll Island to learn about the ecology of the island along with taking water samples of the Okanogan and Similkameen Rivers. The students look for macroinvertebrates and measure turbidity, ph and phosphorus levels in the river. This has been a great experience for the students to get some hands learning along with enjoying the sunshine and fresh air.



Okanogan High School students getting hands-on learning on the Driscoll-Eyhott Island Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area – Photos by Wehmeyer

Other

Fall Colors: Early-to-mid-October was the period of peak color for fall foliage throughout Region 2, and 2021 has delivered some particularly vibrant viewing opportunities. The Cascade Loop offers breathtaking hues of red, orange, and yellow, and those seeking a more up close and personal autumn outdoors experience have boundless miles of trails to choose from across the Eastern Cascades, from North Cascades National Park to the Alpine Lake Wilderness Area and beyond. Many deciduous tree species such as maple, ash, and aspen as well as a host of shrub species such as high-elevation huckleberry and thimbleberry provide outdoor recreationists with stunning shades of scarlet, fiery orange, and bright yellow. Trails known for an abundance of larches, which are a vivid yellow at this time of year, are especially popular.

Even when simply commuting to and from work or driving on the highway, one can look to the mountains right now and see bright pockets of yellow larches standing out against the ubiquitous sea of evergreens. We are now nearing the end of the primary outdoor recreation season. With some campgrounds already having closed until next spring and some high elevation locales already receiving snow, it won't be long before fall colors fade and many of these destinations become impassable.



Fall colors in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness: Sunrise at Ingalls Lake and subalpine meadows at Jade Lake – Photos by Emily Jeffreys



Western larch towering over Clara Lake – Photo by Devon Comstock

Injured Rough-legged Hawk: Biologist Comstock received an injured raptor from a man in Waterville. Initially it was reported to be an eagle, but was actually a juvenile rough-legged hawk. Rough-legged hawks overwinter on the Waterville Plateau and this young bird may have only recently arrived after migrating from the Artic tundra. The hawk was taken to a local veterinarian for an initial exam. Unfortunately, it was determined to have fractures to both the right radius and ulna, and was subsequently euthanized due to the poor prognosis.



Biologist Comstock holds an injured rough-legged hawk



Enjoying opening day! – Photo by Wehmeyer



Western Gray Squirrel. See if you can spot it – Photo by Wehmeyer



Bighorn ram south of Blue Lake on the Sinlahekin Unit – Photo by Wehmeyer



Cow moose crossing the road in the Okanogan Highlands – Photo by Medina



Flashback: Game camera photo from July 2018, Elk grazing an open meadow on the Chesaw Unit. Post commercial timber thinning and prescribed burn. Thinning and prescribed burn funded by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Recreation and Conservation Office.



Approaching winter season in the Methow Valley from near Sullivan's Pond on the Methow Unit – Photo by Haug



Haug hunting in the fog above Toroda Creek in eastern Okanogan County– Photo by Haug



Hunters in the fog above Toroda Creek. Okanogan Co. – Photo by Haug



Full pool wetland cell in expansion – Photo by C. McPherson



Preventing vehicles from going around barrier rock – Photo by C. McPherson



New reserve sign to be seen above tall emergent – Photo by C. McPherson



Potholes Reservoir with very low water level – Photo by C. McPherson

REGION 4

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Common Loon Banding: Biologists Smith and Anderson met with PAWS Wildlife staff members to band one of two common loons. Both loons came into care within the same week. One from the Enumclaw Plateau area and the other from the lower Snoqualmie Valley; both in King County. The older bird was banded and released quite quickly due to minimal injury. The younger, hatch-year bird is still in hospital due to fractures in multiple areas. It is self-feeding fine, which is positive.



Biologist Anderson and Smith working with PAWS Wildlife staff members to band a loon before release – Photo by M. Smith

Mountain Goat Survey: Biologists C. Moore and Waddell have been writing a summary report of the 2021 Mt. Baker Mountain Goat Survey. Biologist Hamer has already completed the report and will distribute.

Forest Grouse Wing/Tail Collection Barrels: Biologist Hamer, C. Moore, and M. Smith have been checking collection barrels weekly since the season started on September 15, 2021.

Information on locations of collection barrels near you can be at:

[Forest grouse wing and tail collection | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#)

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Middle Fork and Pratt Wild and Scenic River USFS Comprehensive River Management Plan Consultation: Biologist Anderson has been in ongoing discussions regarding WDFW input and collaboration in current efforts regarding the draft Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) for the Middle Fork and Pratt Wild and Scenic River area. Anderson has provided input regarding occurrences and habitat; and recommended due diligence management considerations be examined, where appropriate, for state species of greatest conservation needs. Species and their habitat within this special management area are being examined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFS) to strike a balance of human use overlapping with wildlife use; to retain species and overall biodiversity within any given species' sensitive areas/times in relation to increasing recreation and related projects supporting such – river use, wildlife watching, camping, hiking, etc. Hats off to USFS for their very thorough approach in current draft efforts.

North Rainier Elk Herd Management Needs: Region 4 and Region 6 district staff members discussed North Rainier Elk Herd (NREH) management history and needs with Olympia staff members. Follow-up exploratory team meetings in how to accomplish needs are forthcoming.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Skagit Level Loggers: Project Coordinator Brokaw, Habitat Planner Baker, and Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Rotton installed several water level loggers on the Island Unit that will record how the water elevation, salinity, and temperature changes throughout the year. The devices record a reading every 15 minutes and will provide important data that will help design the future restoration project. They also spent a day downloading data from 11 loggers that are currently deployed on the Headquarters Unit.



This is a level logger device. Several of these are deployed in and around Skagit Bay to help us understand how water levels and salinity change throughout the year under different river level and tidal conditions.



Downloading level logger data in a pair of wells adjacent to the Headquarters Unit