

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

December 16 to 31, 2021

## **REGION 1**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Placing Game Cameras:** Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch and Natural Resources Technician Colvin placed game cameras in groves at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. Some groves of aspen and other trees have at least partially survived the Whitney Fire of September 7, 2020, and a diverse mix of wildlife was seen using these areas last winter.



*Colvin setting out game camera at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area – Photo by Finch*

**Elk Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb responded to a report of elk damage on a haystack in Walla Walla County. The locations of the haystacks are in a chronic area of damage when snow is on the ground. Elk typically move in from Oregon in the middle of the night, feed on the haystacks, and are back in Oregon by sunrise. The affected producer has covered nearly all the hay in tarps which minimizes damage.



*Elk damage to an exposed end of a haystack in Walla Walla County*

**Asotin Creek Turkey Issue:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade received a complaint of several large flocks of turkeys causing issues in an Asotin Creek cattle producer's feed lot. The turkeys are damaging cattle feed, and the producer is concerned with possible disease transmission. The producer has been attempting to haze the turkeys daily without much success. Wade issued five kill permits to assist with the ongoing hazing and will also be assisting the producer with finding hunters who may be willing to assist by hazing/harvesting some of the turkeys.

**Conflict Prevention:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill fielded an elk damage call from a landowner in Pleasant Valley sustaining damage to his haystack yard. Samsill responded by issuing two damage permits and installing an electric fencing kit around the haystack to prevent future damage from occurring.

Samsill checked a property where several electric fencing kits were previously deployed around a feedlot to prevent elk from accessing the feed bunks. While checking the fencing, Samsill ran into the producer who reported that the electric fencing had already saved him thousands of dollars in lost hay costs. While nearly 100 head of elk were still frequenting the feedlot, it did not appear that any elk were causing damage to haystacks or feed bunks. Samsill updated the Deterrents List to show all the deterrents previously issued to landowners experiencing chronic elk damage.

**Elk Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman met with a producer who has hay and silage he feeds for his cattle and even after putting up a 3D electric fence. The elk keep getting into the wrapped silage bales. Westerman deployed a propane cannon and deployed a master hunter to keep the elk at bay.

**Cloverland Elk:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade and Natural Resources Technicians Barron and Rimmelspacher coordinated with producers and sportsmen in the Cloverland area this week. Barron and Rimmelspacher spent three days this week monitoring elk movements and hazing where appropriate. Wade also spent two days assisting with monitoring elk movements and hazing where appropriate. A herd of roughly 150 elk were observed in the area after being bumped up by a hunter who made an unsuccessful stalk. The elk were hazed out of the crops and moved to the breaks of Asotin Creek.



*Part of the herd that was pushed out by a hunter*

### **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Habitat Shrub Planting:** Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley met with two volunteers with Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever Chapter to plant 270 shrubs at a habitat project in Columbia County.

## **REGION 5**

### ***HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:***

### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Klickitat Mule Deer Mortality Investigations:** District 9 wildlife biologists responded to two mortality notifications from dead collared deer this week. First, Biologist Wickhem and Technician Downing went on a cold, snowy trek amongst the windmills to search for the remains of a deer that died over the Christmas weekend. Unfortunately, the deer appeared to have died several days before the mortality notification was sent, and all that remained when the team arrived was a frozen rumen, one ear, the radio-collar, and a pile of hair, making it impossible to determine the cause of death.



Later in the week, Biologists Wickhem and Bergh responded to another mortality notification. This second notification arrived in a timelier manner, and most of the carcass remained. The team determined the cause of death was coyote predation. These does are part of a four-year study being conducted throughout Game Management Units (GMUs) 388 and 382 to track the annual movements of female mule deer and locate important migration corridors. In winter 2021, 81 collars were deployed throughout these GMUs for this effort. Staff members are also attempting to determine cause of death when and animal dies, which has proven to be difficult. These collars and all others retrieved throughout the year will be redeployed in winter 2022.



*Left to right: All that remained of Mule Deer #445 and Biologist Wickhem digging a collar out of the shrubbery*



*Left to right: the final resting place of Mule Deer #433 and Biologist Bergh looking for tracks near the kill site in the snow*

**District 9 Dusky Canada Goose Surveys:** Biologist Wickhem conducted a dusky Canada goose survey on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area in Clark County. Dusky geese are a sub-species of Canada goose that spend summers in Alaska and migrate through and/or overwinter in the lower Columbia River. Dusky geese are closed to recreational harvest due to low population levels. The purpose of the surveys is to count dusky geese observed and read alphanumeric codes on any red-collared dusky geese. Wildlife managers survey the geese multiple times across their primary wintering grounds and use the data to generate survival estimates. Wickhem was unable to locate any dusky geese on this survey and had a hard time finding any Canada geese at all, likely because of the snow and frozen water bodies. However, she was able to find several raptors, sandhill cranes, many thousands of snow geese, and a hunting coyote who successfully caught numerous rodents in the short time Wickhem observed it.



*Left to right: a few of the thousands of snow geese observed and a hunting coyote observed during the Canada goose survey, fattening up on rodents*

**District 10 Dusky Canada Goose Surveys:** Biologists Stephens and Holman conducted another dusky Canada goose survey in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. The purpose of the surveys is to count dusky geese observed and read alphanumeric codes on any red-collared dusky geese. Wildlife managers survey the geese multiple times across their primary wintering grounds and use the data to generate survival estimates. The dusky geese are collared on their breeding grounds in Alaska every other year. Dusky, cackling, western and Taverner's/lesser Canada geese were located on the survey as well as trumpeter swans.

**Klickitat Mule Deer Aerial Surveys:** Wildlife Biologists Wickhem, Bergh, and Holman and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen joined forces this month to conduct aerial surveys for mule deer in GMUs 388 and 382. The survey consists of flying transects in a helicopter within randomly selected survey units. When a group of deer is observed, the team takes a Global Positioning System (GPS) point, and records the number of deer, age, and sex of the individuals. The team counted a robust 349 groups of deer, one of the highest numbers in recent years. The data will be plugged into a statistical model in the coming weeks, which will calculate a population estimate for the two GMUs. Several bald eagles, golden eagles, chukar, and coyotes were also observed, along with a small group of elk. Thanks to pilot Jason Moorehead of Hi Line Helicopters for a week of safe flying.





*Excellent views during the Klickitat deer survey*

**Columbian White-tailed Deer Survey:** Biologists Stephens and Holman conducted a Columbian white-tailed deer (CWTD) survey on Puget Island. This was the fifth and final survey of the season. A total of 173 CWTD were observed with a fawn to doe ratio of 39:100 and a buck to doe ratio of 42:100.



*Two Columbian white-tailed bucks grazing in a field on Puget Island*

**Columbian White-tailed Deer Survey:** Biologist Stephens and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey also conducted a CWTD survey on Puget Island. These surveys are conducted in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to obtain fawn to doe ratios and to get a minimum count of deer at various sites within the Columbia River population. A total of 176 deer were counted with a fawn to doe ratio of 32:100 and a buck to doe ratio of 36:100. Biologists will be conducting one more survey for a total of five this season.



*Left to right: Columbia white-tailed deer viewed in a field through a spotting scope and a group of Columbia white-tailed deer grazing*

**Lower Columbia River Shorebird Survey:** Biologists Holman, Wickhem, Stephens, and Technician Downing conducted a shorebird survey on the lower Columbia River. This annual effort takes place in coordination with [Point Blue Conservation Science](#), a non-profit conservation organization. This survey effort was part of the Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey, a monitoring program designed to guide the management and conservation of wintering shorebirds in the Pacific Flyway. Data from this survey will contribute to the Migratory Shorebird Project, which is the largest coordinated survey of wintering shorebirds on the Pacific Coast of the Americas and spans from Canada to Peru. Region 5 WDFW biologists are responsible for surveying Pillar Sands Rock, Miller Sands Island, and Rice Island. A total of 477 birds were counted during this effort which included sandpipers, dunlin, yellowlegs spp. and dowitcher spp.





*Left to right: Biologists Stephens and Wickhem counting and recording shorebirds on Miller Sands Island and Scientific Technician Downing counting shorebirds on Rice Island*



*Biologists Wickhem and Holman stopping to enjoy a double rainbow*

**Regional Director Lee Joins for Columbian White-tailed Deer Survey:** Regional Director Lee joined Biologist Holman to conduct a survey of Columbian white-tailed deer (CWTD) on Puget Island. Biologist Stephens completed a concurrent route. The survey involves counting and classifying all CWTD observed. Approximately 150 total CWTD were located and classified by the two teams. The survey is conducted five times between mid-November and the end of December. Companion surveys in other portions of the deer's Lower Columbia River range are completed by agency partners in CWTD management including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Cowlitz Tribe. Data are compiled by all participating parties and sent along to USFWS for summarization and for consideration in



management decisions related to this Federally Threatened and State Endangered species. Thanks to Regional Director Lee for joining the Wildlife Program in the field.



*Columbian white-tailed deer buck on Puget Island* - Photo by Kessina Lee

### **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Kalama River:** Access staff members helped clean up the remains of a homeless camp on the upper Kalama River on some agency owned property near Italian Creek Road. WDFW Enforcement evicted the individuals and had the vehicles they left behind towed away. Access staff members hauled 880 lbs. of trash to the dump from this "camp." Staff members plan on trying to sign this area again but given its location, the signs might not last. Sign theft and signs being destroyed have become a very frequent problem at many access sites.



*Camp cleanup*

**Oneida Access Site:** Access staff members have been very busy with parking lot cleaning, backpack blowing, debris cleaning, routine maintenance of the region's access sites. Over the past few weeks, the Department of Ecology in conjunction with the U.S. Coast Guard have been overseeing the removal of a derelict barge a short distance from the Oneida Access Site. The WDFW Oneida Access parking lot was used to clean up the old barge that was spotted leaking oil into the river a few weeks ago. The barge was towed to the site and lifted out of the river using a crane. Once placed safely on the ground and the oil was removed from the barge, the dismantling and disposal of the barge was completed. The Access Site parking should be cleaned and opened back to public use next week.



*Removal and disposal of derelict barge at Oneida Access Site*

### **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Wolf Observation Report:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen spoke with a hiker who believed he might have seen wolves while hiking a local trail. After speaking with the hiker, they both determined that the hiker likely observed domestic dogs.

**Elk Eating Horse Feed:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by a Skamania County landowner who was upset about a large herd of elk breaking his pasture fences and eating hay out of his horse troughs. Jacobsen provided advice and issued the landowner several hazing devices. Thanks to Officer Myers for helping shuttle the hazing tools to the landowner.

**Coyotes Under Shed:** A concerned Clark County landowner contacted WDFW to report a pair of coyotes denning under his shed. The landowner has several 3-7 lb. dogs and was concerned for their safety. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen provided advice to the landowner on ways to evict the coyotes as well as how to secure the shed to prevent further denning attempts.



**Deer Damage to Shrubs:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen fielded a call from a citizen in Clark County who was incurring damage to his ornamental shrubs from deer. Jacobsen provided advice and suggested several deterrent methods that the landowner could employ.

**Deer Trapped in Fence:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by a citizen who was concerned that approximately ten deer were trapped in a Department of Transportation (DOT) compound and would be stuck there over the weekend. Jacobsen indicated that the deer would likely find their way back out, and if not, then they would be fine in the compound until DOT workers arrived on Monday, especially given the size of the compound and the amount of available forage. Jacobsen indicated that he would check in with the employees at the facility on Monday to see if the deer were still present in the compound.

**Coyotes Killing Chickens:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen spoke with a Clark County landowner who had been losing chickens to coyotes. Jacobsen advised the landowner to modify his current chicken pen and fencing to permanently protect the chickens. Other hazing measures and potential future actions were also discussed.

**Cougar Advice:** A Clark County landowner contacted WDFW staff members after capturing a video of a cougar kitten on a trail camera at his house. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen provided information on cougar biology as well as advice on avoiding conflicts with cougars.



*Trail camera photo of a cougar kitten (residual spots still evident on the cougar's side and flanks)*

**Cougar Depredation on Goat:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and Aubrey responded to a residence in Clark County that had reported one of their goats being killed by an animal sometime during the night. Jacobsen and Aubrey identified cougar tracks next to the carcass and conducted a necropsy on the carcass, confirming the depredation as a cougar kill. Jacobsen and Aubrey discussed livestock husbandry and protection measures with the landowner and with neighboring landowners. The landowner who lost the goat planned to rehome their remaining goat in the immediate future. Jacobsen installed a trail camera over the carcass to obtain additional details about the cougar. Later that night, the cougar returned to the carcass and attempted to drag the carcass into the woods. The cougar appeared to be a sub-adult individual, as residual banding was still faintly present on the inside of the animal's legs.



*Deceased goat killed and partially consumed by the cougar*



*Cougar returning to the goat carcass*





*Cougar track in the mud next to the goat carcass. While there are faint claw indentations at the ends of the toes, the overall circular shape of the track and the distinctive shape of the interdigital pad (three lobes at the bottom, two lobes at the top) clearly indicate that this is a cougar track. Canine paws (dogs, coyotes, wolves) have interdigital pads with two lobes at the bottom and only one lobe at the top*

**Elk Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey continued to work with landowners throughout the district experiencing issues with elk damage. Master hunters were deployed on damage hunts and sent to assist landowners with fence repair work. Hazing supplies and other materials were also delivered to landowners in need. Aubrey also met with a landowner who had never previously worked with the agency before. After a site visit, it was determined the landowner would enter a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement with the agency.

**Eagle Depredations:** Aubrey met with an individual who was losing free range chickens to a pair of bald eagles. Protective measures and deterrence ideas were discussed to reduce further conflict.