

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

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DISTRICT 1 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties

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DISTRICT 1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 1 is in the northeastern corner of Washington, and includes Pend Oreille, Stevens, and Ferry counties (Figure 1). District 1 is comprised of seven game management units (GMUs): 101 (Sherman), 105 (Kelly Hill), 108 (Douglas), 111 (Aladdin), 113 (Selkirk), 117 (49 Degrees North), and 121 (Huckleberry) (Figure 2). The topography is dominated by four prominent mountain ranges that run north and south: the Selkirk, Calispell, Huckleberry, and Kettle Mountain ranges. There are broad valleys between these ranges drained by the Pend Oreille, Colville, Columbia, and Kettle rivers, all within the upper Columbia River watershed.

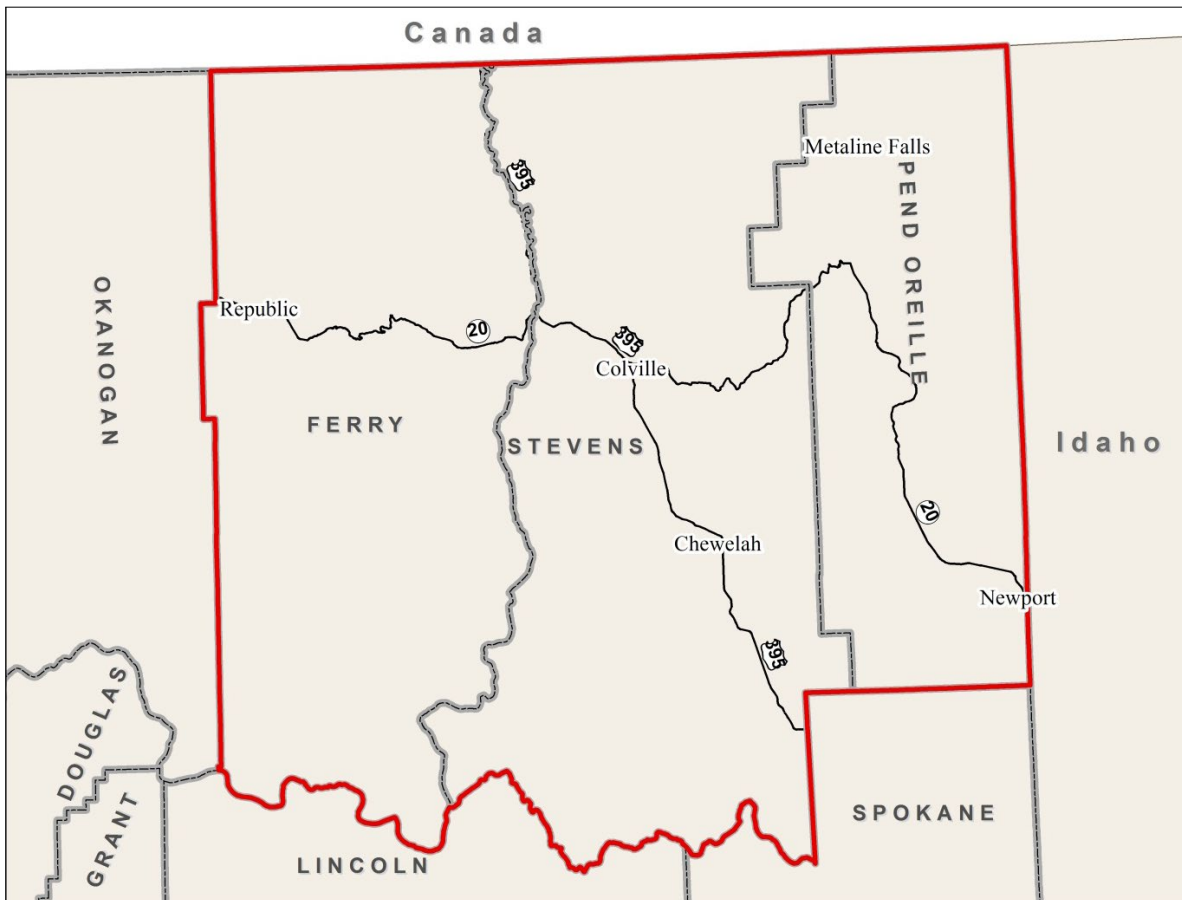


Figure 1. District 1 in northeastern Washington includes Pend Oreille, Stevens, and Ferry counties.

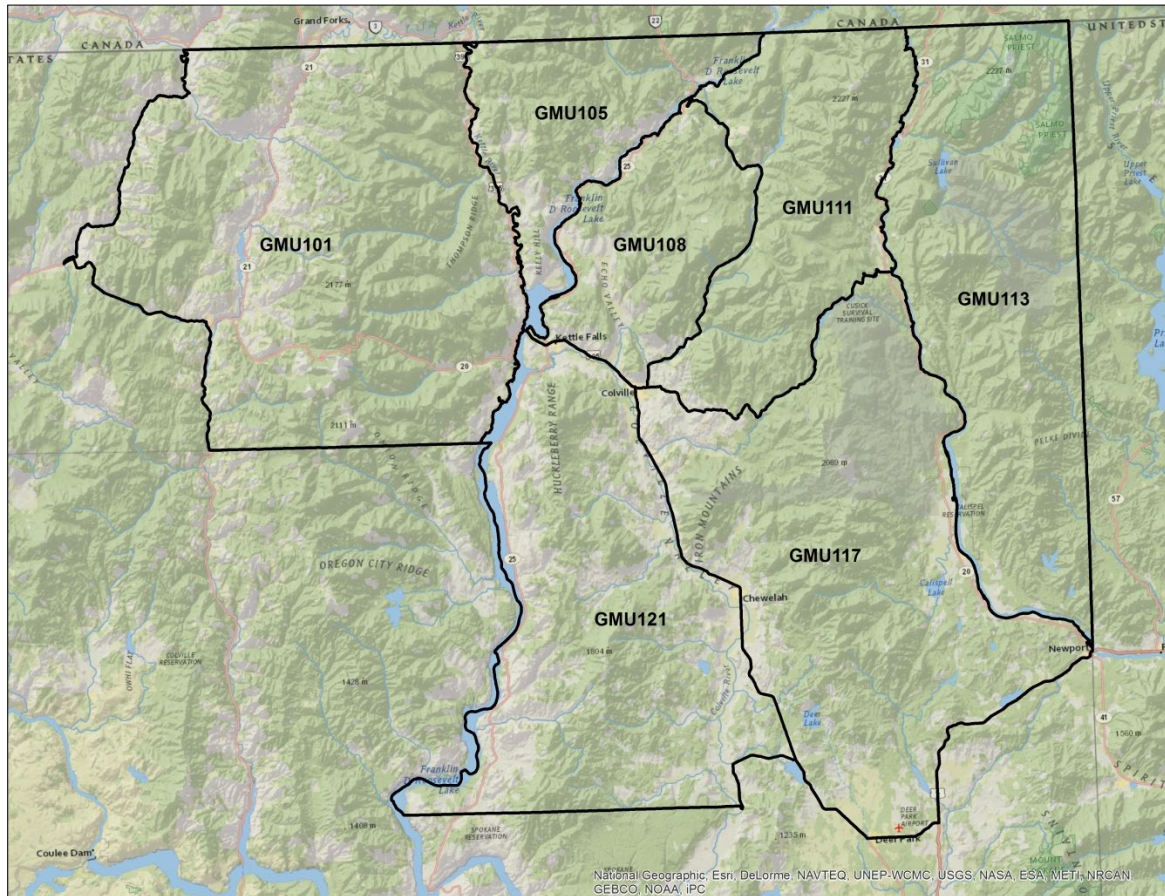


Figure 2. Game Management Units (GMUs) within District 1.

Elevations vary from about 1,290 feet at the normal pool level of Lake Roosevelt (Reservoir) to 7,309 feet on Gypsy Peak in the north Selkirk Range. Coniferous forest is extensive within District 1, covering about two thirds, or 68%, of the district’s landscape. Agricultural land, range land, and water features cover most of the balance.

Over one third (37%) of the land mass in District 1 is public land. It is mostly national forest, but Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) lands are also present. Additional public lands include Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and a few other government agencies. Most of the public lands outside of Indian reservations are open to public hunting. There are large timber company lands open to public hunting, although not necessarily open to private motorized vehicles. Private lands are typically only open to hunting by first gaining written permission from the landowner or manager.

District 1 is well-known for its white-tailed deer, moose, forest grouse, and turkey hunting opportunities. Quality hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including mule deer, black bear, and cougar.

Table 1 presents estimates of harvest and days per kill for most game species in District 1 during the 2022 general hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2021 season and the five-year average. For more specific information on harvest trends or permit statistics, please refer to the appropriate section in this document or go to the [harvest statistics](#) section of the WDFW webpage.

Table 1. Harvest for the most popular game species found in District 1 during the 2021 and 2022 general hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year average and a comparison of 2021 estimates and 2022 estimates and the five-year average.

Species	Harvest				
	5-yr avg.	2021	2022	% change (5yr)	% change (2021)
Elk	245	279	269	+10%	-4%
Deer (both species)	3958	3544	3161	-20%	-11%
Black Bear	261	276	281	+8%	+2%
Cougar	46	46	47	+2%	+2%
Turkey	3408	4235	3352	-2%	-21%
Forest Grouse	8247	7666	6435*	-22%	-16%

**Harvest number is not finalized*

ELK



GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

All elk that occur in District 1 are Rocky Mountain elk. There are ten identified elk herds in Washington, and elk in District 1 are part of the Selkirk Elk Herd. The quality of elk hunting opportunities in District 1 varies from poor to fair depending on the GMU, but in general, **opportunities are marginal and harvest success is low**. Elk are widely scattered in small groups throughout the densely forested region of northeastern Washington. Consequently, elk in northeastern Washington are difficult to both survey and harvest. Population data are limited, but there is currently no clear indication that bull to cow ratios or opportunities for quality hunting are declining. The best elk hunting opportunities occur in GMUs associated with the Pend Oreille sub-herd area, which includes GMUs 113 (Selkirk), 117 (49 Degrees North), and 111 (Aladdin). Elk hunter numbers in the Colville District have increased over the last several years with hunter participation and harvest well dispersed across the Colville District through all three hunting methods. **However, hunting elk successfully within District 1 is no small challenge.**

The management objective for elk in the Colville District is being met with a sustained annual harvest of a viable and productive elk population with desirable population characteristics. The prime bull (six points or more) percentage in the 2022 bull harvest (all weapon types) was 17%.

Currently, WDFW does not make formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor elk populations in District 1. Harvest levels have been relatively low for the northern Selkirk Herd compared with other regions of Washington. Consequently, devoting substantial resources to surveying bull to cow ratios has not been a high priority. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill, are used as surrogates to a formal index or estimate. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor

trends in population size and hopes to gain the resources necessary to begin monitoring populations using formal sampling designs in the future.

Increasing hunter harvest, documented expansion of elk distribution, and anecdotal information indicate that elk populations are at least stable and likely increasing in northeastern Washington. For more detailed information related to the status of Washington's elk herds, hunters should read through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#) and/or the [Selkirk Elk Herd Plan](#).

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Probably the most frequent question from hunters is, "What GMU should I hunt?" This is not easy to answer because it often depends on access to private land, the hunting method, and the type of hunting experience desired. For example, not all GMUs are open to late archery hunters.

Many, if not most, hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature bull. Although large mature bulls do exist in District 1, they are not very abundant, and hunters are usually advised to apply for special permit opportunities within District 3 (Blue Mountains) if they are searching for the best opportunity to harvest a large mature bull elk on public land in Region 1.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high densities of elk, low hunter densities, high hunter success rates, and be mostly if not entirely comprised of public land that's open to hunting. Unfortunately, this scenario does not exist in any GMU that is open during the general elk modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 1. Instead, because of general season opportunities, the GMUs with the highest elk densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of elk. Other hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of elk if that means there are also fewer hunters.

Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how District 1 GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The values presented are the three-year averages for each statistic. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of elk harvested and hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison, as GMUs vary in size.

Each GMU was ranked for elk harvested/mile² (bulls and cows), hunters/mile², and hunter success rates for the general season only. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum (lower rank sums are better). The modern firearm comparisons are the most straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same in each GMU.

For archery seasons, consider that antlerless elk may be harvested in all GMUs in the early season, but only five GMUs are open for any bull during late archery seasons. These differences are important when comparing total harvest or hunter numbers among GMUs.

Table 2. Rank sum analysis that provides a comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. Data presented are based on a three-year running average. As a generalization, the lower the rank sum, the better the overall elk hunting opportunity is within a GMU.

MODERN FIREARM										
GMU	Size (mi ²)	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
101	1,103	5	0.00	5	133	0.12	1	4%	4	10
105	296	8	0.03	3	140	0.47	2	6%	2	7
108	289	11	0.04	2	181	0.63	4	6%	2	8
111	455	7	0.02	4	273	0.60	3	3%	5	12
113	736	19	0.03	3	562	0.76	5	4%	4	12
117	954	38	0.04	2	747	0.78	6	5%	3	11
121	796	48	0.06	1	609	0.76	5	8%	1	7
ARCHERY										
GMU*	Size (mi ²)	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
101	1,103	5	<0.01	4	105	0.10	1	5%	5	10
105	296	5	0.02	2	64	0.22	3	9%	3	8
108	289	7	0.02	2	56	0.19	2	11%	1	5
111	455	7	0.01	3	103	0.23	4	6%	4	11
113	736	11	0.01	3	245	0.33	6	4%	6	15
117	954	19	0.02	2	351	0.37	7	5%	5	14
121	796	20	0.03	1	219	0.27	5	10%	2	8

MUZZLELOADER										
GMU	Size (mi ²)	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank		
101	1,103	2	0.00	3	36	0.03	1	6%	4	8
105	296	2	0.01	2	29	0.10	3	9%	3	8
108	289	3	0.01	2	27	0.09	2	10%	2	6
111	455	3	0.01	2	52	0.11	4	6%	4	10
113	736	6	0.01	2	164	0.22	7	5%	5	14
117	954	7	0.01	2	191	0.20	6	3%	6	14
121	796	14	0.02	1	115	0.14	5	12%	1	7

* GMUs bolded in the archery section are open during early and late archery seasons. All GMUs allow for antlerless harvest in the early archery season.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Elk populations typically do not fluctuate dramatically from year to year, but periodic severe winters can trigger substantial die-offs. The 2022-23 winter was generally mild, and no die-offs were detected. The 2021 harvest was the highest since 2008 at least and the 2022 harvest was just a little lower (10 less elk). We expect harvest in 2023 to be about the same as it was in 2022. Populations available for harvest are expected to be at least similar in size compared to the 2021 and 2022 seasons. However, the total hunter harvest of elk in District 1 is still low compared to other WDFW districts, hovering around 200-300 animals per year since 2008.

HOW TO FIND ELK

When hunting elk in District 1, hunters should research areas and spend plenty of time scouting before the season opener, because it is often difficult to predict elk location, especially after hunting pressure increases. Elk within District 1 are scattered in small groups throughout the district, but some drainages hold more elk than others. Many, if not most, hunters spend great amounts of their time focusing on forest clear-cuts, which makes a lot of sense because elk often forage in clear-cuts and are highly visible when they do. However, there are many elk (especially bulls) that do not frequent clear-cuts during daylight hours. Instead, they spend most of their time during the day in closed canopy forests, swamps, or young forest. Moreover, those highly visible elk often attract many hunters to open clear-cuts, and these areas can get crowded in a hurry.

From a landscape perspective, some generalities can be made that will help increase the odds of locating elk. When going to a new area, hunters will benefit by covering as much ground as

possible and making note of areas where they see signs along roads and log “landings.” Log landings from past timber harvest operations are an especially good place to look for signs because they are often not graveled, which makes it easier to see fresh tracks. This scouting approach will give hunters a good idea of what areas hold elk and where to focus their more intensive scouting efforts.

After those areas with abundant elk sign have been identified, hunters should focus in on higher elevation stands that provide cover and are adjacent to open hillsides and/or clear-cuts. During early seasons when it is warm, these areas often include creek bottoms, river bottoms, or any place that is near water. Once the season progresses and temperatures cool, typically by late October, elk are not as attracted to water and the challenge of finding them becomes more difficult. Hunting pressure also has an effect and will force elk to use areas that provide thicker cover or are less accessible to hunters because of topographical features.

Later in the season, it is a good idea to consult a topographic map and find “benches” located in steep terrain and thick cover. Elk often use these areas to bed down during the day. Any snow cover generally enhances the ability to find elk tracks. Hunting right after a fresh snow usually presents a particularly good advantage in tracking down an individual or group of elk. Lastly, provided that non-motorized access is allowed, hunters should not let a locked gate in an otherwise open area keep them from going in on foot, horseback, or bicycle to search for elk. More often than not, these areas hold elk that have not received as much hunting pressure, which can make them less skittish and easier to hunt. A popular approach to hunting these areas is to use mountain bikes or fat-tire bikes, which is not extremely difficult given the network of maintained gravel roads that frequently occur on timber company lands.

DEER



GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

In northeastern Washington, white-tailed deer are the most abundant deer species. Mule deer are locally common, especially in the higher elevations and throughout Ferry County, but their overall numbers are low compared to white-tailed deer on a district scale. Deer hunting opportunities in District 1 vary from fair to excellent, depending on the GMU. The best opportunities to harvest a mule deer in District 1 generally occur in GMUs 101 (Sherman) and 121 (Huckleberry). All GMUs within the district offer good opportunities to harvest a white-tailed deer. The white-tailed deer harvest management objective is to provide antlered and antlerless hunting opportunity for all hunting methods whenever feasible. Management goals for mule deer are to provide conservative hunting opportunity and allow population levels to increase by managing antlerless hunting opportunity.

Surveys for deer in District 1 are conducted before the modern firearm hunting season. Pre-season ratios come from roadside surveys conducted during August (for buck to doe ratio) and September (for fawn to doe ratio). These ground-based surveys provide an estimate of buck

ratios prior to the modern firearm hunting season (Figure 3). However, these surveys tend to occur in more agriculturally dominated areas where visibility of deer from a road is good. There are quality bucks in the more heavily forested areas within District 1, but they are not as visible and therefore not represented in our survey sample.

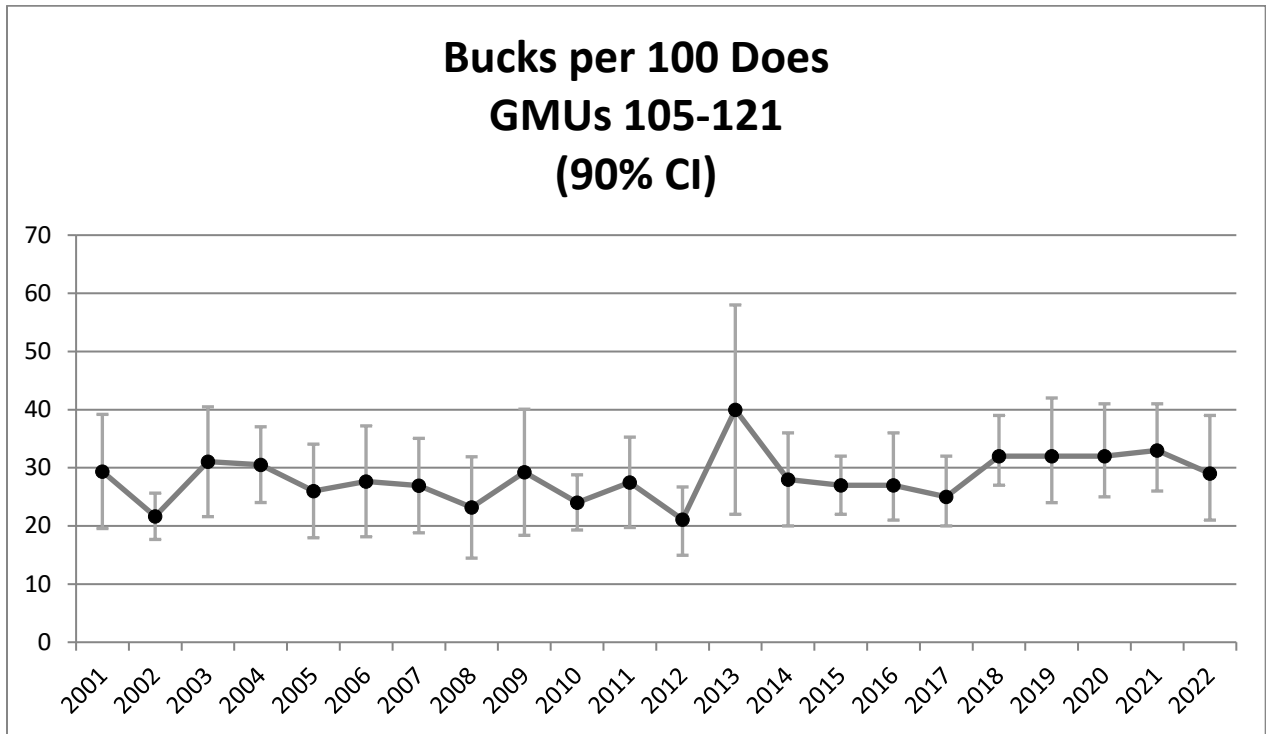


Figure 3. Pre-season white-tailed deer ratios and 90% confidence intervals from ground surveys within District 1.

Despite disease outbreaks, all available harvest and survey data indicate white-tailed deer populations appear to be stable in all GMUs associated with District 1. According to harvest data, mule deer populations appear to be stable or slightly decreasing. For more detailed information related to the status of deer in Washington, hunters should read through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#), which is available for download on the Department’s website. For more information, hunters could also look at the [White-tailed Deer Management Plan](#) and the [Mule Deer Management Plan](#).

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

One of the most frequently asked questions from hunters is, “What GMU should I hunt?” This is not easy to answer because it depends on the hunting method and target hunting experience. Some hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature buck, while others just want to harvest any legal deer in an area with few hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would be entirely or mostly comprised of public land, have high deer densities, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario does not exist in any GMU that is open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 1. Instead, because of general season opportunities, the GMUs with the highest deer densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of deer. Other hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if that means there are also relatively few hunters.



The information in Table 3 provides a general assessment of how GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. The values presented are the three-year averages for each statistic. Mule deer and white-tailed deer are combined for this table, but it is a reasonable assumption that in GMUs other than GMU 101, the vast majority of the deer harvested are white-tailed deer. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of deer harvested and hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison, as GMUs vary in size.

Each GMU was ranked for deer harvested/mile², hunters/mile², and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum. Comparisons are pretty straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same for most GMUs.

When choosing a species to hunt or a GMU to hunt in, differences that should be considered are:

1. Mule deer have a 3-point minimum harvest restriction during all general seasons.
2. The late archery season in GMU 101 runs longer than other GMUs.
3. There is no late modern firearm season in GMU 101.
4. There is no late archery season in GMUs 111 or 113.
5. There is a late muzzleloader season in GMU 113.

Table 3. Rank sum analysis that provides a quick and general comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. Data presented are based on a three-year average. As a generalization, the lower the rank sum, the better the overall deer hunting opportunity is within a GMU.

MODERN FIREARM										
GMU	Size (mi ²)	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
101	1,103	339	0.31	5	2344	2.13	2	14%	5	12
105	296	160	0.54	3	697	2.35	4	23%	3	10
108	289	239	0.82	2	950	3.28	6	25%	2	10
111	455	179	0.39	4	1043	2.29	3	17%	4	11
113	736	161	0.32	6	1117	1.88	1	14%	5	12
117	954	515	0.54	3	2828	2.96	5	18%	4	12
121	796	963	1.21	1	3516	4.42	7	27%	1	9

ARCHERY										
GMU	Size (mi ²)	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
101	1,103	145	0.13	1	601	0.55	7	23%	1	9
105	296	13	0.04	4	71	0.24	3	15%	5	12
108	289	14	0.05	3	76	0.26	4	19%	2	9
111	455	3	0.006	6	55	0.12	2	12%	6	14
113	736	8	0.01	5	62	0.08	1	6%	7	13
117	954	39	0.04	4	287	0.30	5	18%	3	12
121	796	53	0.06	2	269	0.35	6	17%	4	12
MUZZLELOADER										

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
101	1,103	33	0.03	2	176	0.16	4	19%	3	9
105	296	5	0.02	3	16	0.05	1	31%	1	5
108	289	2	0.01	4	25	0.08	2	8%	6	12
111	455	2	0.004	6	25	0.05	1	8%	6	13
113	736	35	0.05	1	223	0.30	5	16%	4	10
117	954	5	0.005	5	51	0.05	1	10%	5	11
121	796	17	0.02	3	78	0.10	3	22%	2	8

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Harvest declined in District 1 in 2022, an expected trend given the large-scale EHD/Bluetongue outbreak throughout eastern Washington in 2021. Because of the large die-off of mostly white-tailed deer, we expect harvest to remain below average in 2023. However, the mild winters since 2021 and wet springs with abundant forage should have provided for high survival for those deer that made it through the disease outbreak. Some GMUs seemed to be hit harder than others, including GMUs 121 and 117 being the hardest hit by the outbreak. **In 2023, hunters of any user group or weapon type will not be able to harvest a doe.** This regulation change was enacted in 2019 to protect the reproductive component of the population. Pre-season surveys for the past three years yielded stable buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios.

District 1 runs voluntary check stations on weekends during the modern firearm season. Check stations allow biologists to collect important biological information that informs management decisions. This may include removing teeth to determine the age structure of a population, detailed information about the size of bucks being harvested, and tissue samples to test for diseases like chronic wasting disease (CWD). Aside from collecting biological information, check stations allow biologists an opportunity to interact with the hunting community, answer questions, and receive immediate feedback on how the season is going.

During the 2023 hunting season, additional check stations will be run throughout District 1 for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance. We are very interested in sampling deer harvested throughout District 1. If you pass a check station, we encourage you to stop. If you're late getting out of the field, we can still sample your deer for CWD. In this case, only the head, with 2-3 inches of neck, needs to be brought into the check station or regional office.

CWD is a fatal illness of deer, elk, moose, and caribou. The disease is caused by mutated proteins known as prions, which can contaminate the environment and be transmitted between animals through their feces, saliva, urine, and other bodily fluids. The Department has information about [CWD and Washington's surveillance program](#) for the public to utilize.

To date, the disease [has been detected in a number of U.S. states and Canadian provinces](#), but has not been detected in Washington, although it has come as close as central Idaho.

Check station locations during the 2023 season are:

- Colville - [check website for exact location](#)
- Republic - [check website for exact location](#)
- Hwy 2 Weigh Station, Chattaroy
- Hwy 395 Weigh Station, Deer Park

In addition, there is a self-service kiosk at the Colville District Office at 755 S. Main Street in Colville.

To encourage hunters to have their harvested animals tested for CWD, WDFW is teaming up with the [Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers](#) (BHA), for a special drawing for multi-season deer tags. BHA helped pay for 100 multi-season deer tags. Hunters who provide CWD samples will be entered in a random drawing for those tags.

A good predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill. Figures 4 and 5 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where to hunt in District 1. From 2011-2014, a four-point minimum restriction was imposed for white-tailed deer in GMUs 117 and 121, which led to decreases in the overall harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Available evidence shows this regulation change brought about these decreases and not a dramatic decrease in the white-tailed deer population. With the retirement of the four-point rule within GMUs 117 and 121, the deer harvest increased substantially in 2015 (Figure 4). However, since 2015, following very high harvest, a bluetongue outbreak, and a harsh winter in 2016/17, harvest has been decreasing. Harvest was predictably low in 2021 and 2022 following another large-scale disease (bluetongue and EHD) outbreak in 2021.

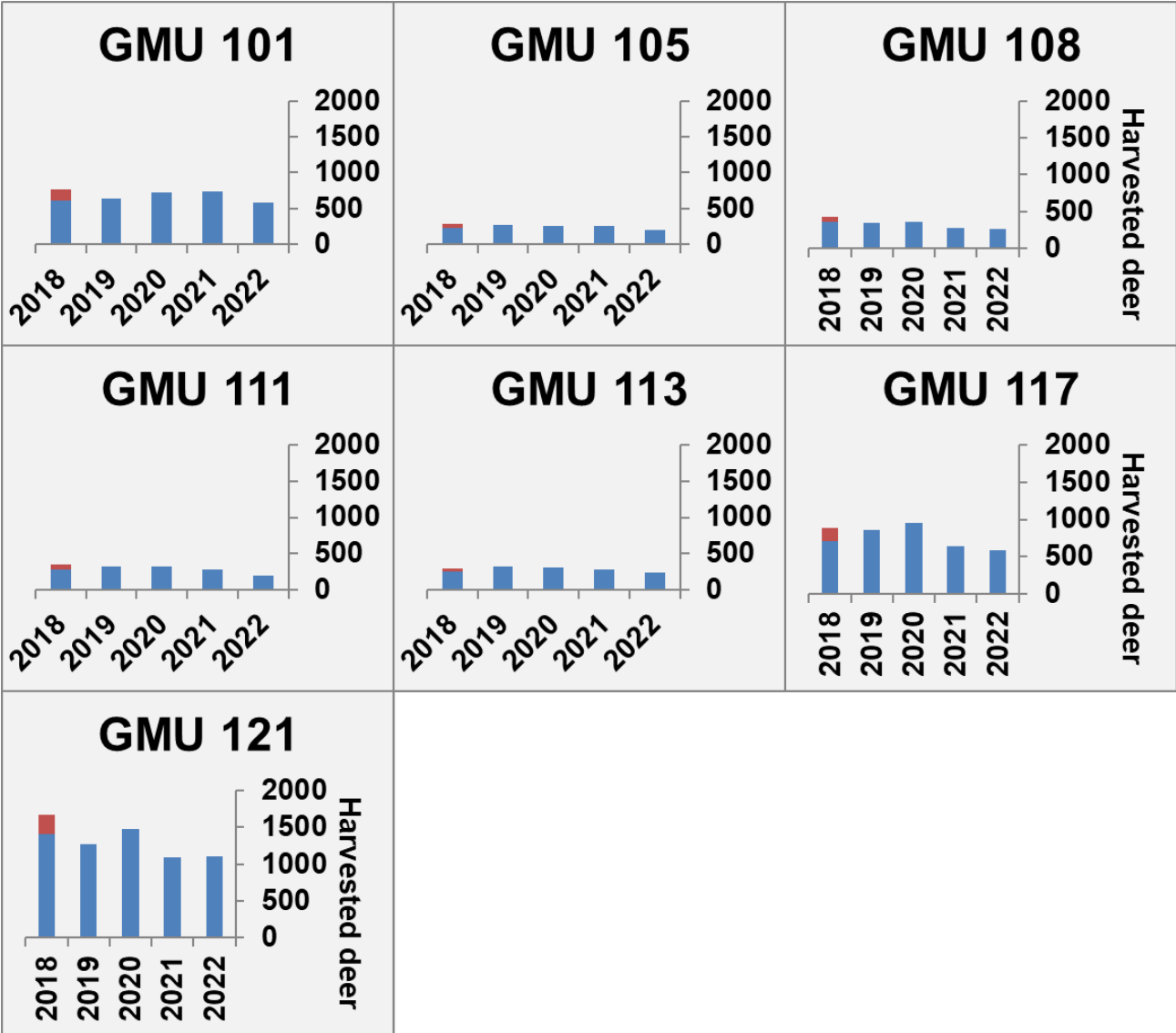


Figure 4. Trends in the estimated number of bucks (blue) and antlerless (red) deer harvested during the general season (all weapons combined) in each GMU from 2018-2022. Harvest totals do not include tribal harvest or special permit harvest.

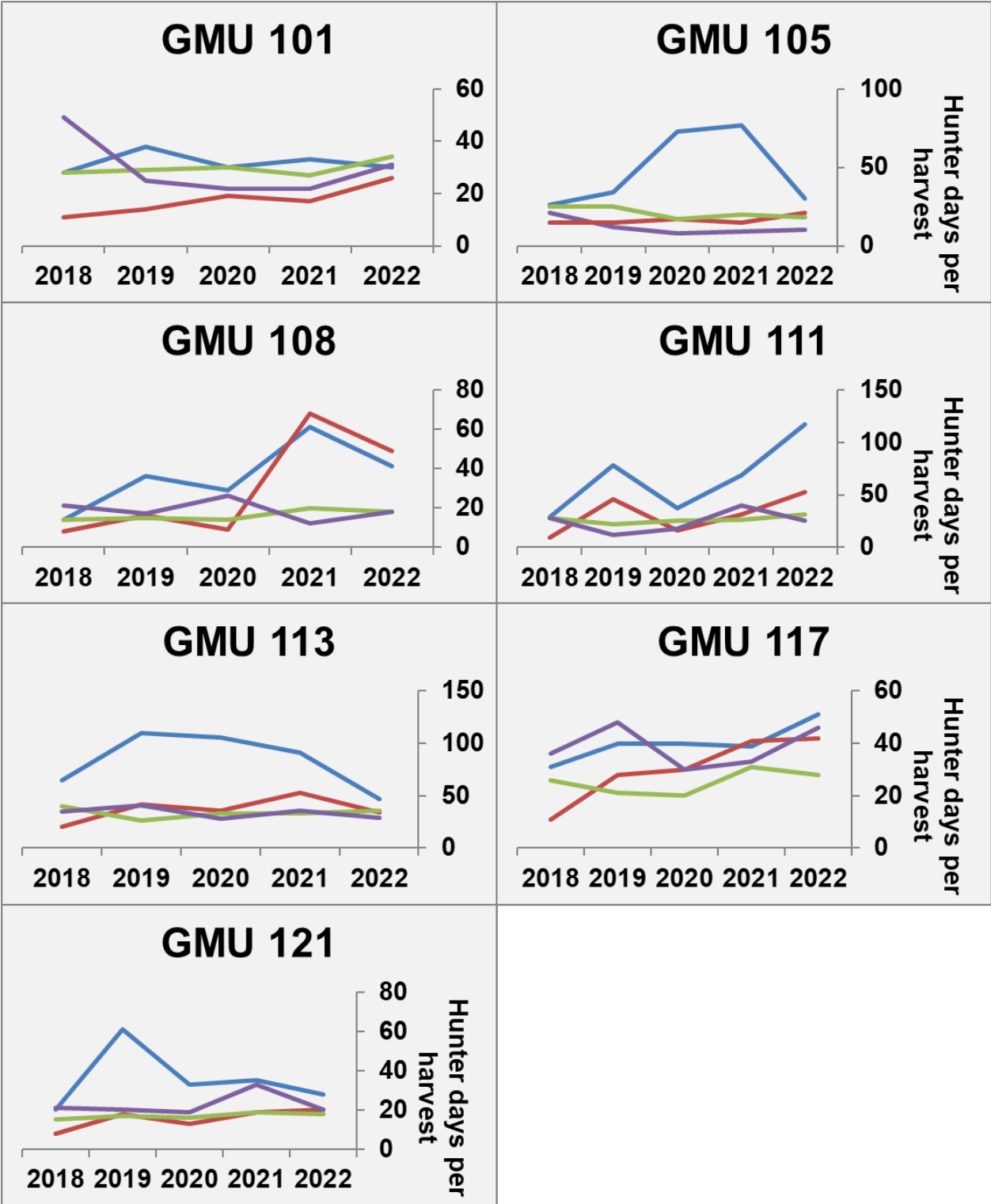


Figure 5. Trend in days per kill for archery (blue), muzzleloader (purple), multiple weapon (green), and modern firearm (red) during the general season for deer in each GMU from 2018 -2022 within District 1.

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT WHITE-TAILED DEER

As is the case with most game species, the key to harvesting a white-tailed deer in District 1 is scouting. White-tailed deer occur throughout the district and in nearly every present habitat type. White-tailed deer densities are highest on private lands in the valleys and foothill benches bordering the valleys, especially in the farm-forest mosaic within GMUs 105, 108, 117, and 121. GMUs 101, 111, and 113 also have white-tailed deer, but with more localized distributions, again with the highest densities typically on private lands.

The majority of hunting is done in or adjacent to agricultural fields or recent forest timber harvest areas. When deer are present, they are much more visible than in adjacent habitats. However, deer typically use these more open areas at night, dawn, and dusk, especially once they have been disturbed by human presence. Therefore, it is advantageous for hunters to seek out areas a short to moderate distance away from these openings, which provide cover where deer are spending more time. If a hunter is seeing large amounts of deer signs in an area, odds are those deer are not far away.

The traditional approaches to hunting white-tailed deer generally include several methods. The first is still hunting, where the hunter is moving, but very slowly through a patch of habitat, stopping frequently to scan or glass the vegetative cover ahead with binoculars. The hunter looks for parts of a deer, like legs, an antler, or a portion of the body or head, as opposed to the whole deer, which is usually not visible through the vegetation. Stand hunting is another technique. This method involves the hunter patiently waiting in a tree stand, on a stump, against a tree trunk, on a ridge rock, etc. in high deer use areas (highly traveled trails, habitat edges, bottlenecks, funnels, etc.) until deer show up. A third deer hunting approach is conducting drives. This technique involves at least two hunters, but larger groups maximize its effectiveness. The hunters divide into “drivers” and “blockers.” The blockers position themselves in an organized spacing, often downwind of a patch of deer bedding habitat (thick woods, forested swamp, or heavy brush field). The drivers then slowly hike through the habitat patch, alerting the deer and hopefully pushing them to the blockers. Sometimes it’s a good idea to post one blocker at the front of the habitat patch behind the drivers in the event that any deer double back to evade them. Although each of these approaches is highly effective, there is another technique that is not as well-known or used as much. This includes rattling and grunting to simulate two bucks fighting over a doe. This technique is more common with mid-western and eastern white-tailed deer hunters, but can be effective here as well, especially in the days leading up to the rut (deer breeding season) in mid-November. A quick internet search on this topic will yield plenty of evidence to illustrate its effectiveness when conditions are right. More information on deer hunting can be found in the Department’s [Basics of Deer Hunting resource](#).



HOW TO FIND AND HUNT MULE DEER

Mule deer occur in District 1, but in much lower abundance than white-tailed deer, especially east of the Columbia River. Although mule deer occur within every District 1 GMU, the highest density is in GMU 101. As is the case with most game species, the key to harvesting a mule deer in District 1 is scouting. The classical western method of hunting mule deer is sometimes called spot and stalk. The hunter uses good optics, binoculars, and spotting scopes to scan from ridge tops and other vantage points to find the mule deer, pick out suitable bucks, and stalk them to within shooting distance. Ordinarily, the stalk entails a strategic hike and cautious sneak action. Much of District 1 does not offer the open country required for this method of hunting, but where it does, it can be effective. More information on deer hunting can be found in the Department's [Basics of Deer Hunting resource](#).



DEER AREAS

There is one deer area in District 1, Parker Lake (Deer Area 1031). This deer area is described in the Area Descriptions section of the [Big Game Pamphlet](#). Hunting is by special permit only within the Parker Lake area.

NOTABLE CHANGES

All legal harvest is buck only for all user groups. This change was enacted in 2019 to conserve the reproductive portion of the population.

INFORMATION ABOUT EHD/BLUETONGUE AND DEER

During the late summer of 2015 and 2021, agency staff members documented a large-scale bluetongue and EHD outbreak in District 1. In certain areas, WDFW received many reports of large numbers of dead deer. The bluetongue outbreak in both years was brought about by the severe drought in northeast Washington. The summer of 2022 was much wetter than 2015 or 2021, and there was no disease outbreak. Summer 2023 has been drier than 2022 and it's still too early to predict if bluetongue or EHD will make an appearance, the potential for an

outbreak is always possible. Hunters may consider reviewing the Department's [bluetongue and EHD resources](#) for further information.

BLACK BEAR



GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

The goals for black bear management in Washington are to: 1) preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage black bear and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations; 2) minimize threats to public safety from black bears, while at the same time maintaining a sustainable and viable bear population; 3) manage black bear for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, wildlife viewing, and photography; and 4) manage populations statewide for a sustained yield. For management purposes, the state is divided into nine black bear management units (BBMUs). Harvest levels vary

between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions.

District 1 consists of GMUs in part of the Northeastern BBMU. The current black bear hunting season guidelines for the Northeastern BBMU are designed to maintain black bear populations at a level which would not increase impacts to big game herds. The metrics used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of harvested bears that were female, the median age of harvested females, and the median age of harvested males.

WDFW does not conduct annual surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size. Trends in harvest data are used instead as population surrogates or indices. However, in 2019, biologists conducted a survey to estimate black bear density in GMU 117. Density was found to be 31 bears/100km². Currently, black bear populations are believed to be stable in District 1.

Black bears occur throughout District 1, but population densities vary among GMUs. The best opportunities to harvest a bear likely occur in GMUs 101 (Sherman) and 117 (49 Degrees North), mainly on account of abundant public land that is open to hunting.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Although some hunters specifically target black bears, most bears are harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest and hunter success can vary quite a bit from one year to the next. Since 2004, hunter success in District 1 GMUs has varied from 4% to 18%. The success rate is likely higher for hunters who specifically hunt black bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while deer or elk hunting.

Overall, annual black bear harvest during the general bear season in District 1 showed a stable trend from 2014 to 2016 before declining sharply in 2017 and 2018 (Figure 6). Harvest has remained stable since 2019.

At the GMU level, most black bears will likely be harvested in GMUs 101 (Sherman), 117 (49 Degrees North), and 121 (Huckleberry). Harvest numbers, during the 2021 season and compared to long-term (ten year) and short-term (five year) averages, show a stable harvest in most GMUs within District 1 (Figure 7). Following the 2019 regulation change (August 1 opener and two bear bag limit), harvest throughout District 1 increased and has stabilized.

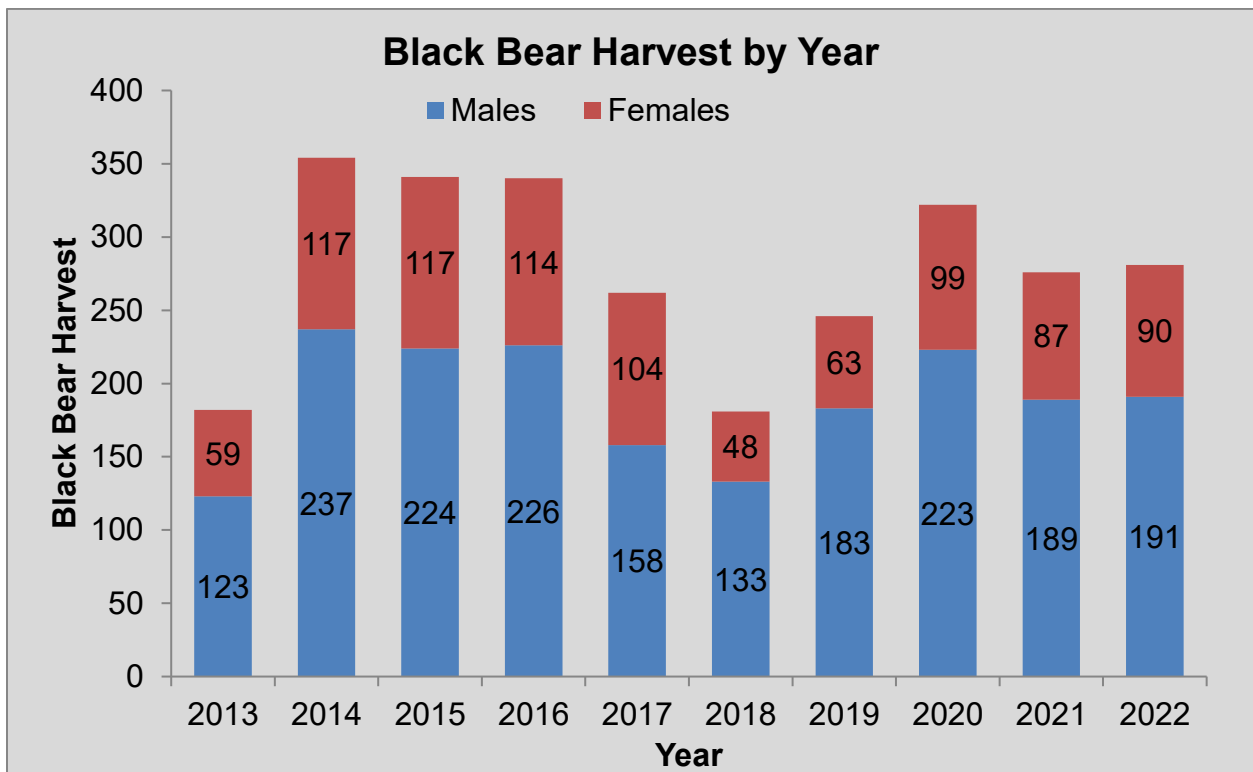


Figure 6. Trends in the number of male and female black bears harvested during the general bear season in District 1 (GMUs 101-121), 2013–2022. Harvest estimates do not include bears harvested during spring permit seasons or bears removed because they were causing damage to private property.

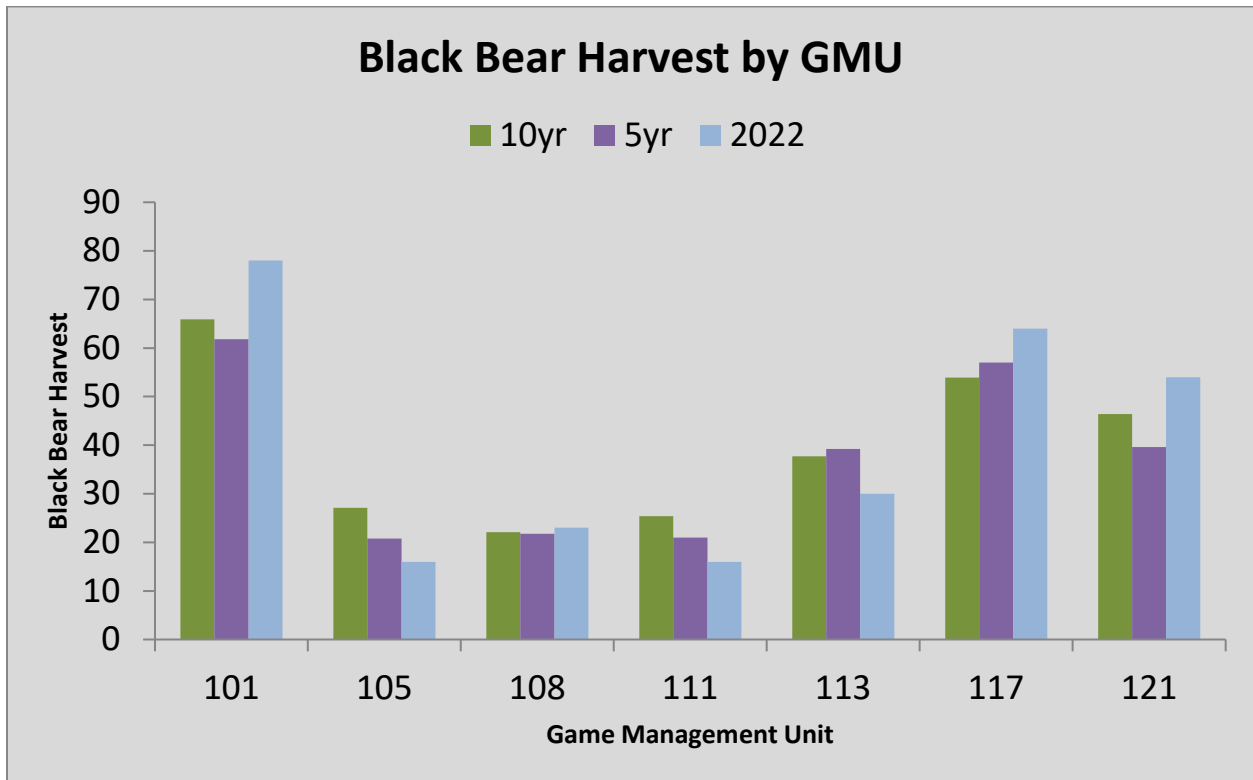


Figure 7. The number of black bears harvested in each GMU during the 2022 general bear season in District 1. Also included are the 10-year (2013-2022) and 5-year (2018-2022) average for the total number of bears harvested in each GMU.

HOW TO LOCATE AND HARVEST A BLACK BEAR

Scouting is an extremely important factor that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 1. Although black bears are fairly common and occur in some areas at high densities, they are seen infrequently because of the thick evergreen conifer forest and other vegetation that dominates the landscape.

Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types, so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. In the early fall, hunters should focus their efforts at higher elevations and in open terrain (e.g., open hillsides). Huckleberries ripen throughout the summer, but in the early fall prior to heavy frost, the most berries remaining are typically at higher elevations. A large huckleberry patch yielding lots of fruit would be a good place to hunt.

Bears can also be located in recent timber harvests that contain a large number of berry-producing shrubs, including huckleberries, serviceberries, snowberries, soapberries, and thimbleberries. During the fall, hunters need to find openings with these characteristics and hike through them to see if there are any signs of bear. If they do find fresh signs, odds are there is a bear frequenting the area. If hunters are patient and sit for extended periods of time watching these areas, they stand a reasonable chance of harvesting a bear. Patience is the key.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Black bear hunters in GMUs 101 – 117 are required to complete WDFW’s online bear identification test each year and carry proof that they have passed. Prep for and take the test at [Bear Identification Program](#).

There are consistent sightings and known resident grizzly bears in District 1. Grizzly bears are a federally threatened and state-listed endangered species. Killing one, either unintentionally or intentionally, can bring costly fines and penalties, and set back recovery efforts for grizzly bears. Just like with other similar looking game species such as elk/moose/caribou, mule deer/white-tailed deer, bobcat/lynx, and other animal groups, Washington hunters are responsible for being able to tell the difference between black bears and grizzly bears. This knowledge and skill are critical in areas where the ranges of these two bear species overlap (Figure 8). In addition, hunters within GMUs 113 and 105 are STRONGLY encouraged to carry bear spray while hunting. Hunters should know how to use bear spray before heading into the field. Information about bear spray and how to use it can be found [here](#).

Bear hunters are urged not to shoot sows with cubs. Sows may be accompanied by cubs in the fall that tend to lag behind when traveling, so please observe and be patient before shooting.

WDFW requires the submission of a tooth from successful black bear hunters. Hunters are encouraged to submit teeth by December 1 of the current hunt year. Biologists use this information to better monitor black bears, make management decisions, and evaluate the impacts of harvest on the population. In addition, black bear hunters that submit a tooth can find out the age of their harvested bear by entering their Wild ID into our [Tooth Age Lookup Tool](#). Just be aware that it takes about six months after the close of all bear seasons to receive the ages back from the lab, so there is a delay in this information being available. Hunters can pick up a tooth envelope at WDFW regional and district offices and some sporting goods stores. If available, a biologist can pull the tooth for you if the skull is not frozen. A helpful instructional video for pulling a tooth can be found [here](#).

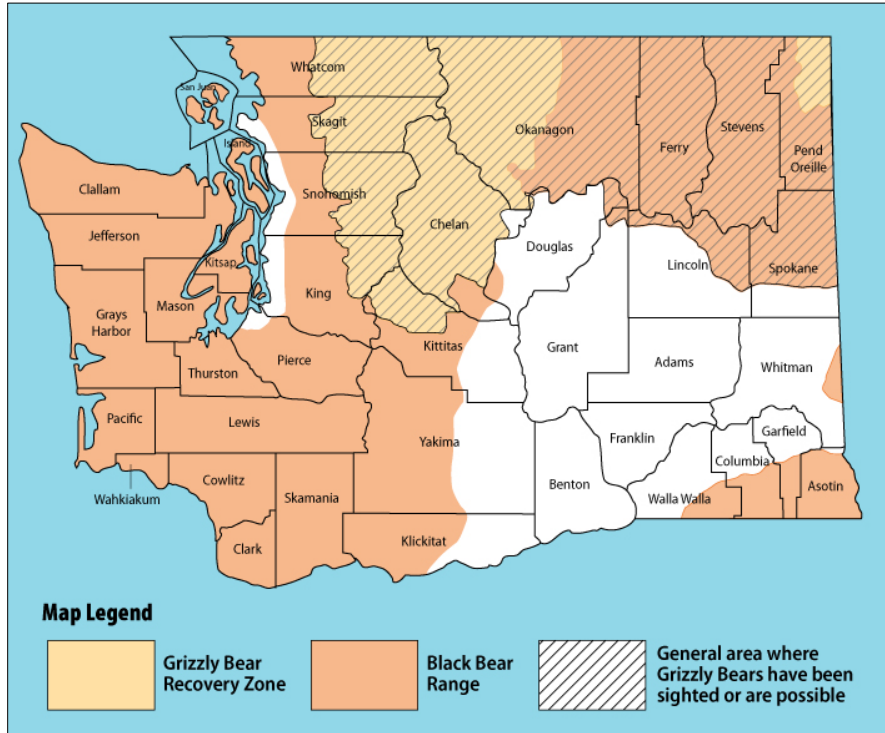


Figure 8. Black bear range and grizzly bear sighting areas in Washington.

NOTABLE CHANGES

District 1 black bear hunters (GMUs 101 – 117) are required to complete WDFW’s online bear identification test each year and carry proof that they have passed. Bear identification information can be found on the [Bear Identification Program website](#). Fall black bear season dates have been extended and bag limits have increased in eastern Washington, hunters now have the opportunity to start hunting August 1 throughout the state and the bag limit has increased to two bears. Hunters must purchase a second bear tag to harvest a second bear. As of this writing, there will be no spring bear permits available for the 2023 season.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Cougars occur throughout District 1, but local densities can vary among GMUs. Cougars in District 1 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population.

Beginning in 2012, WDFW changed cougar harvest management throughout Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougar harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with

harvest guidelines. The intent was to have a longer season, without any hunting implement restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

Beginning in 2015, cougar season dates were extended through April 30. **However, to hunt cougars after March 31 in a unit open for cougar harvest, hunters need to purchase a 2023 hunting license and cougar tag.** Harvest numbers are examined starting January 1 and any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed. **Hunting cougar after December 31 requires first confirming that the cougar season is open in the intended hunt area by calling 1-866-364-4868.** Harvest guidelines for each hunt area located in District 1 are provided in Table 4. Starting January 1, all hunters must report their kills via the cougar hotline within 72 hours (1-866-364-4868, press 3 after greeting). During the cougar season, kills must be sealed by WDFW within five days. Skulls and hides (with proof of sex attached) must not be frozen when presented to WDFW for sealing.

Hunt Area (GMU)	2021-22 Harvest Guideline	2022-23 Harvest
101	7-11	7-11
105	4	4
108,111	9-11	9-11
113	4-5	4-5
117	11-13	11-13
121	9-11	9-11

Table 4. Harvest guidelines and 2022-23 adult only cougar harvest for the six cougar hunt areas located in District 1.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

The total number of cougars harvested in District 1 in 2023 was a single cat higher than in 2022 (Figure 9). Beginning in 2020, only adult harvest (two years +) counted towards the harvest guideline. The average age at harvest is variable for both males and females but is typically three years old for males and five years old for females (Figure 10).

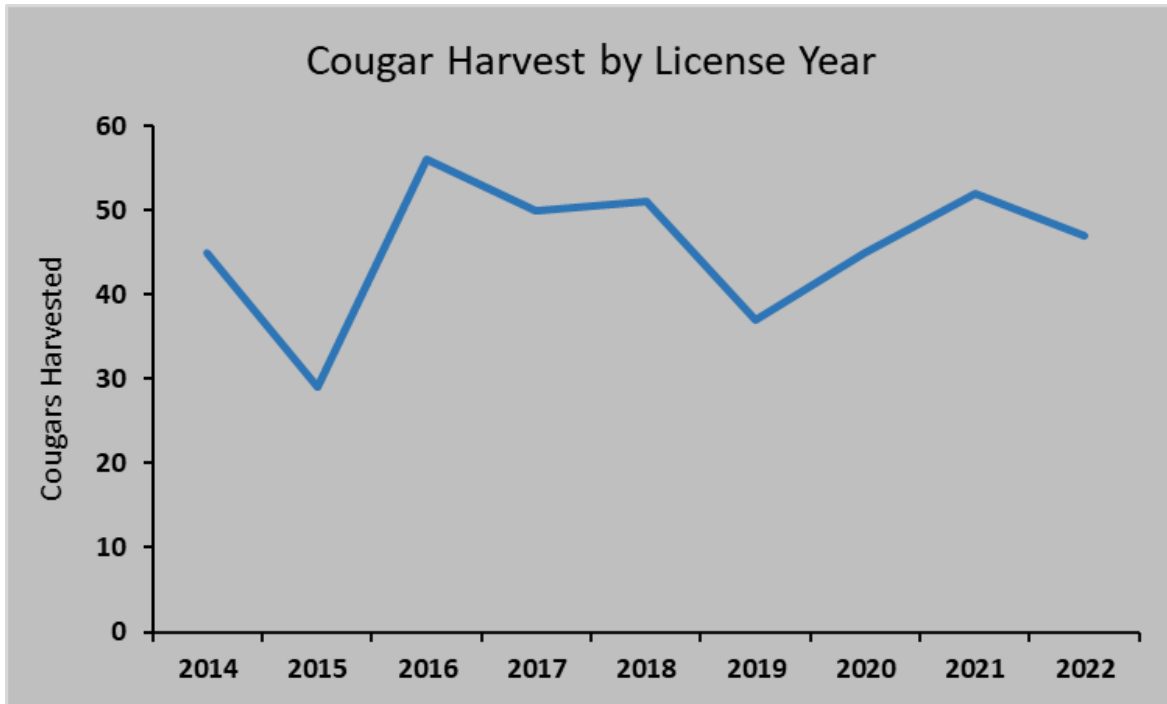


Figure 9. General season cougar harvest in District 1, 2014-2022. All harvest is displayed, but beginning in 2020, only adult harvest counted towards the harvest guideline.

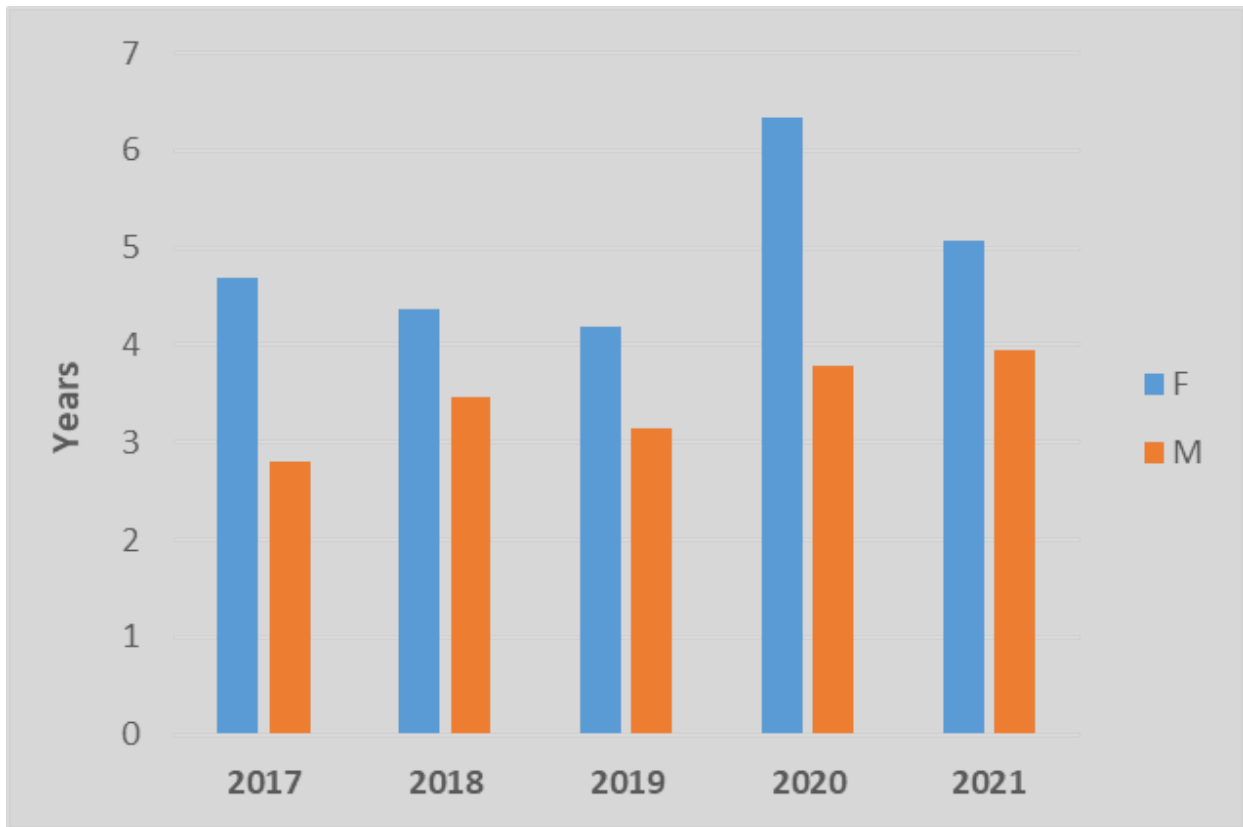


Figure 10. Average age of female (orange bars) and male (blue bars) cougar harvested during the general season in District 1, 2017-2021. Ages for all 2022 harvested cougars were not available at the time of publication of this document.

NOTABLE CHANGES

Cougar harvest guidelines were increased for GMUs within District 1 in 2020. Season dates will still be extended until April 30 unless harvest guidelines are met within the GMU. However, to hunt cougars after March 31 in a unit open for cougar harvest, hunters need to purchase a 2024 hunting license and cougar tag.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS



There are three species of grouse that occur in District 1: ruffed grouse, dusky (blue) grouse, and spruce grouse. Ruffed grouse are the most abundant and occur at lower elevations and valley bottoms. Spruce grouse are usually located in high elevation forest comprised of lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, and/or Engelmann spruce. In District 1, these habitats are prevalent within the Kettle and Selkirk mountain ranges. Dusky grouse can be found in habitats that occur at elevations between ruffed and spruce grouse habitat, but overlap does occur.

POPULATION STATUS

Trends in harvest data are generally used as surrogates for estimating a population or indices of population size. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), or birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 1, forest grouse populations appear to have declined since 2009. Harvest decreased slightly, possibly due to the season start date changing from September 1 to September 15 for the 2022 season (Figure 11).

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of forest grouse harvested in District 1 has generally declined from 2014-2022. However, 2015 and 2017 had higher than average harvest. We anticipate 2023 harvest to be similar to average years, but perhaps on the lower end. District 1 experienced a summer drought in 2021 and a wet spring/early summer in 2022 and this can sometimes negatively impact chick survival. The season start date moved to September 15 to protect brood hens and chicks and hens should be more dispersed on the landscape leading to fewer encounters with several grouse at once. The average number bagged amongst hunters fell to 0.31 in 2022 but typically is between 0.4 and 0.6 forest grouse per hunting day.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt forest grouse in District 1 is by walking little used forest roads and shooting them as they flush or after they roost in a nearby tree. Forest grouse tend to occur in higher densities along roads that do not receive much motor vehicle traffic. Consequently, hunters should target roads behind locked gates and roads that have been decommissioned by the respective landowner. Some forest grouse hunters use trained bird

dogs, a team system that can be extremely effective. To learn more about how to hunt each of Washington’s grouse species, see WDFW’s [upland bird hunting webpage](#).

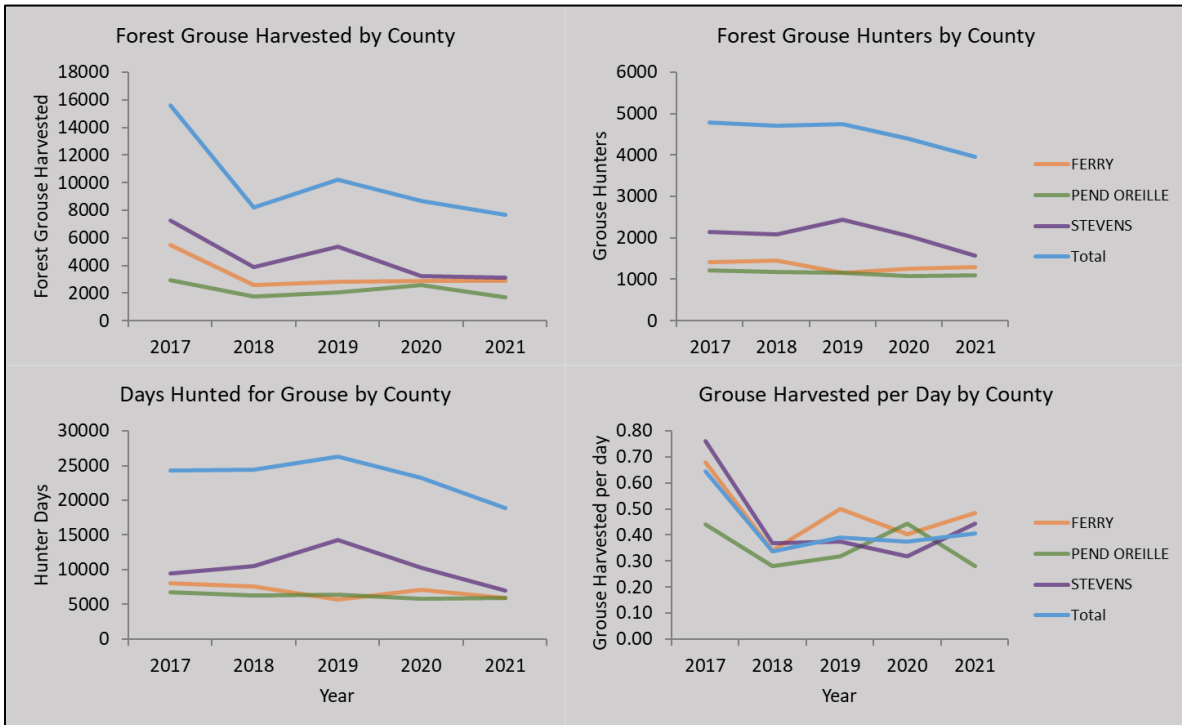


Figure 11. Trends in total harvest, hunter numbers, hunter days, and forest grouse harvested per hunter day during forest grouse seasons in Ferry County (orange), Stevens County (purple), Pend Oreille County (green) and throughout District 1 (blue), 2017–2021. Note: 2022 harvest data not final, therefore not displayed, as of publication of this document.

NOTABLE CHANGES

Season start date is September 15



Bag and possession limits are as follows:

Bag limit: four grouse with no more than three of any one species.

Possession limit: 12 grouse with no more than nine of any one species.

WDFW will have [wing and tail collection barrels](#) distributed throughout District 1 in 2023. **If you drive by a barrel, please follow the instructions at the barrel and deposit one wing and tail from each forest grouse harvested using the paper bags provided.** This information helps biologists determine the distribution of species, age, and sex in the harvest.

PHEASANTS

There is only a small, range-limited population of wild ring-necked pheasants in District 1. The population occurs almost entirely on private lands within the Colville Valley. Consequently, most pheasant hunting opportunity within District 1 is associated with the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement and Release Program](#). The primary intent of this program is to provide an upland bird hunting opportunity and encourage participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, thousands of captive-reared ring-necked pheasants are released



at 33 sites, and one of those sites (Sherman Creek Wildlife Area) occurs within District 1. The Sherman Creek Release Site is located in Ferry County south of the headquarters to Sherman Creek Wildlife Area between the Inchelium Highway and Lake Roosevelt (Figure 12).

To protect other wildlife species, including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is now required for all upland bird, dove, and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. At these release sites, hunters may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzle loading). Possession of lead shot is also regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons](#) pamphlet for more information. Visit the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement and Release Program](#) website to learn more about pheasant releases.

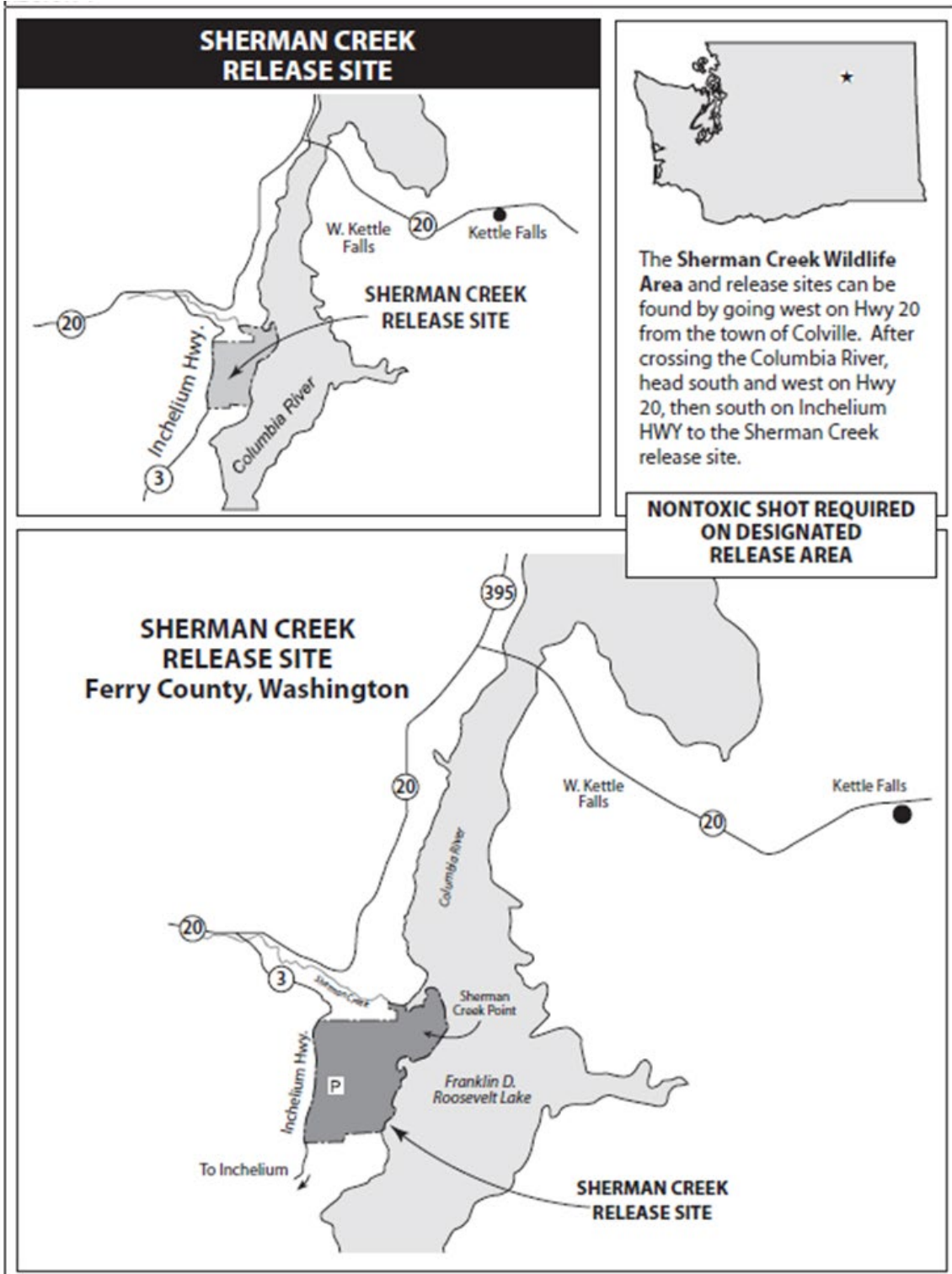


Figure 12. Map of the Sherman Creek Pheasant Release Site in Ferry County.

WILD TURKEYS

The turkeys found in District 1 are Merriam's wild turkeys. Merriam's turkeys flourished in the district after being introduced in 1961, but then slowly declined. Since a large transplant from South Dakota in 1988-89, this population has steadily expanded in both range and abundance. In most GMUs within the district, fall harvest has increased, while spring harvest has remained relatively stable (Figure 13). The recent increase in fall harvest could be from an increase in the population but is more likely the result of a longer season and more liberal bag limit that began in 2018. Harvest in spring 2022 was much higher than 2021, likely due to the later season start in 2021 and increased hunter participation in 2022. Harvest in fall 2023 and spring 2024 should be similar to harvest during the 2022 season.



HOW TO FIND AND HUNT TURKEYS IN THE SPRING

Increasing daylight between late winter and early spring triggers the beginning of breeding season, although unusually prolonged cold, wet, or warm weather may delay or advance it. Gobbling and strutting start well before mating, when turkeys are still on their winter range in late March or early April. There are normally two peaks of gobbling. The first occurs when males call and females are not yet nesting, and the second occurs a few weeks later, when most hens are incubating eggs. Finding these gobbling toms and moving close enough to call them in without bumping (flushing) them is the challenge and excitement to traditional spring turkey hunting. Hunters may consider referring to our [Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) resource.

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT TURKEYS IN THE FALL

During fall and winter, wild turkey priorities are food and roosting areas. In the fall, food remains critical for growth of poults (juvenile turkeys) and for adults adding fat reserves. Forest edges that offer seeds, nuts, and fruits, as well as some green vegetation, are used the most. At this time of year, turkeys are at their highest population and widest distribution within northeastern Washington, including District 1. As autumn wears on and snowfall comes, the turkeys gradually constrict their range to lower elevations. Where agriculture predominates, a mosaic of short grass fields or cropland and forest is generally the best place to find turkeys.



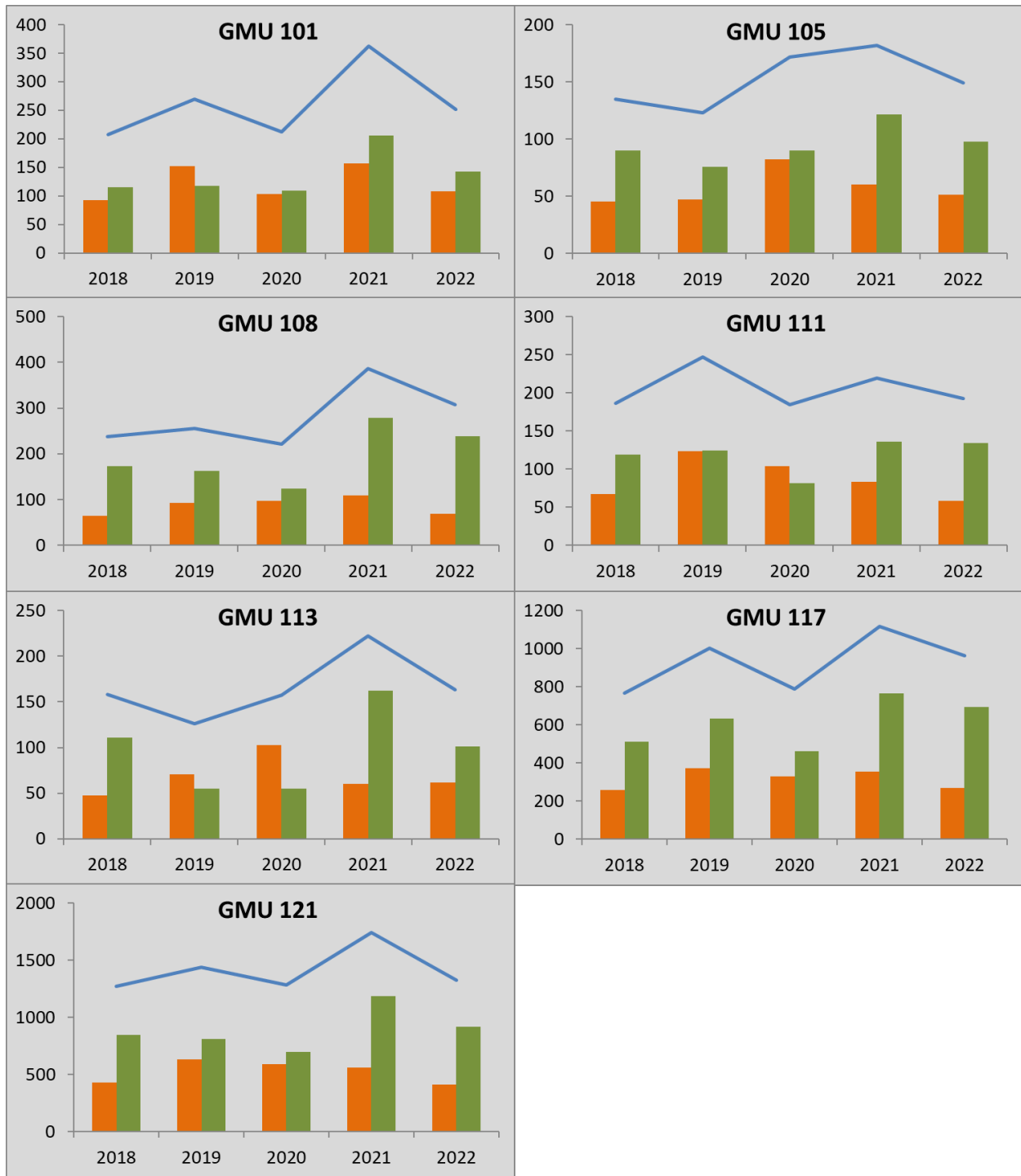


Figure 13. Fall (orange), spring (green), and total (blue) estimated turkey harvest for each GMU in District 1, 2018-2022.

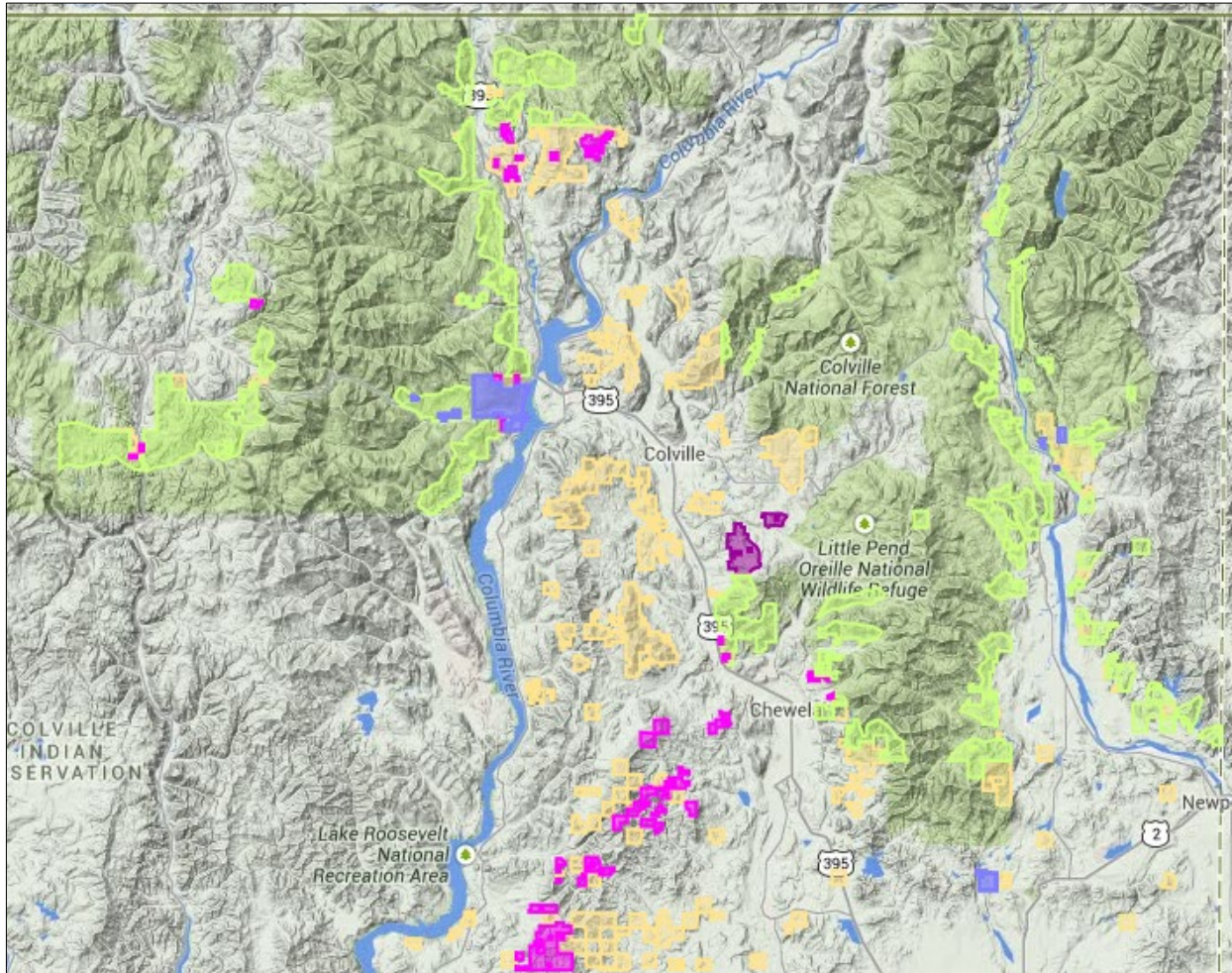


Figure 14. Map depicting public lands good for turkey hunting. This map is produced by Map Metrics.

WATERFOWL



COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 1. Common dabbling ducks include mallard, gadwall, American wigeon, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Diving ducks are also present, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, redheads, goldeneyes, and mergansers. Nesting wood ducks can be located in the Pend Oreille, Colville, and Kettle River valleys, and can provide a unique hunting opportunity early in the season. Mallards are the most abundant duck species in Washington and constitute the majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically \geq 50%). They are a commonly harvested duck in District 1 as well.

Canada geese are the only wild goose commonly found within District 1. They are abundant in the Pend Oreille, Colville, and Kettle River valleys, especially in the widest valley bottom areas where there is extensive farmland cultivation.

BEST HUNTING AREAS

Pend Oreille River

The upper Pend Oreille River, from Newport downstream to Usk, offers the best general waterfowl hunting opportunity within northeastern Washington. Outside of the east shoreline, alongside the Kalispell Indian Reservation, most of the river itself is open for hunting, along with several islands. In most instances a boat is required, either to serve as a hunting blind or for access to islands and sandbars open to hunting. There are also Pend Oreille Public Utility District lands, as well as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge land (the Cusick Unit) open to public hunting. These parcels are located near the mouths of Tacoma and Trimble creeks, into the Pend Oreille River.

Dabbling ducks: Moderate numbers during migration, mostly gadwall, wigeon, teal, mallards, and some pintails.

Diving ducks: Moderate numbers with the highest densities during peak migration periods.

Geese: Canada geese occur in the greatest abundance in this part of District 1.

Lake Roosevelt

Lake Roosevelt up to the 1310 feet elevation contour is mostly federally owned and managed by the National Park Service. Much of the lake shore also borders the Colville and Spokane Indian Reservations, however, and in these areas the tribes manage the shoreline. As such, where you can legally hunt is somewhat complicated. Hunters should call the National Park Service in Kettle Falls at 509-738-6266 for clarification before hunting.

Dabbling Ducks: Low to moderate numbers during migration, mostly wigeon, and mallards.

Diving Ducks: Relatively few, but higher densities during peak migration periods.

Geese: Canada geese have a scattered distribution in this hundred-mile-long reservoir and can occur in high numbers during peak migration.

Colville and Kettle Valleys

Almost all of the valley bottoms are private lands, so obtaining written permission for hunting access is essential. Ducks are most common where there are slow, meandering streams, sloughs, and/or farm ponds. Geese are most common in the agricultural areas.

Dabbling Ducks: Low to moderate numbers during migration, mostly mallards.

Diving Ducks: Relatively few, but higher densities during peak migration periods, especially on the Colville River.

Geese: Canada geese are evenly distributed in the Colville Valley. When heavy snowfall covers fields late in the season, they tend to migrate south to warmer, snow-free areas.



Hunting Techniques

Duck hunting methods are largely dependent on location. When hunting inland waters associated with ponds and rivers or feeding areas, traditional decoy setups work the best. Birds are most active during early morning and late afternoon as they move from resting areas to feeding areas. See [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) for more information.

The techniques employed to harvest geese are standard. Find agricultural areas where geese are feeding and set up decoy spreads well before daylight where geese are expected to concentrate. In District 1, agricultural areas where feeding geese congregate generally include hay fields and winter wheat (or other cereal grain crop) fields. Because of this, most goose hunting opportunities occur on private property and require hunters to gain permission before hunting. Figure 15 shows harvest data through the 2021 season. Final harvest statistics can be found on the [WDFW website](#).

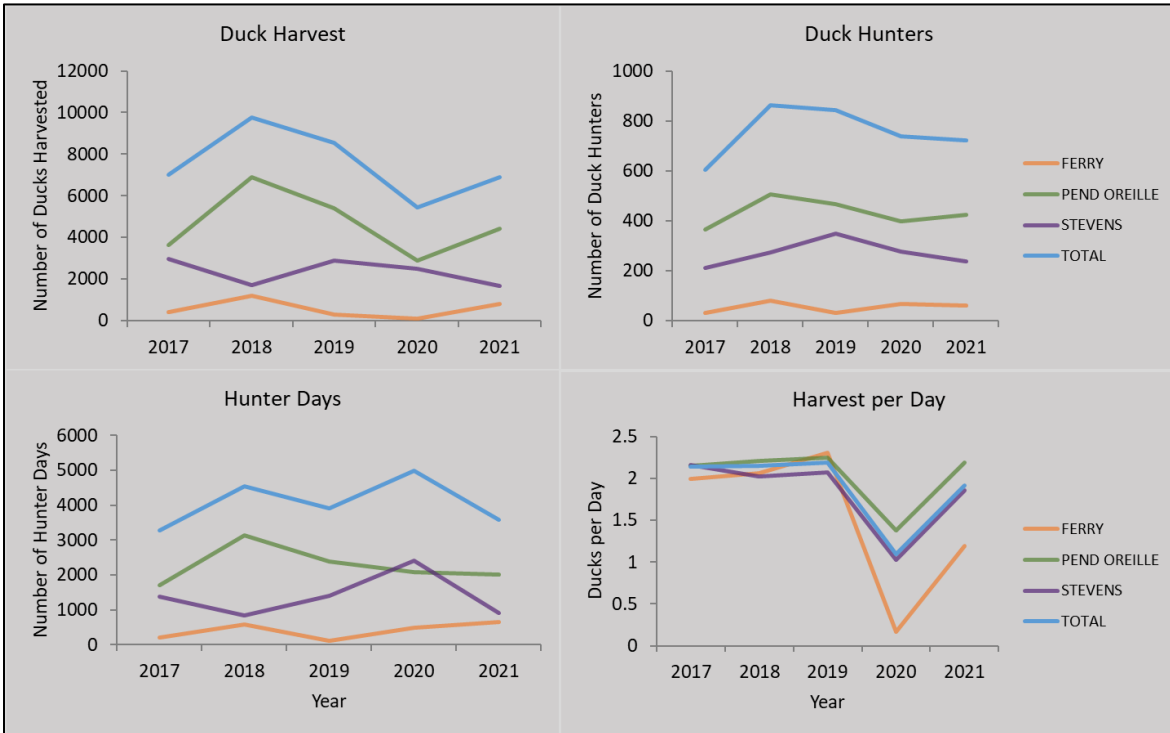


Figure 15. Trends in the number of ducks harvested, duck hunters, duck hunter days, and ducks harvested per hunter day in Ferry County (orange), Stevens County (purple), Pend Oreille County (green), and throughout District 1 (blue), 2017 – 2021.

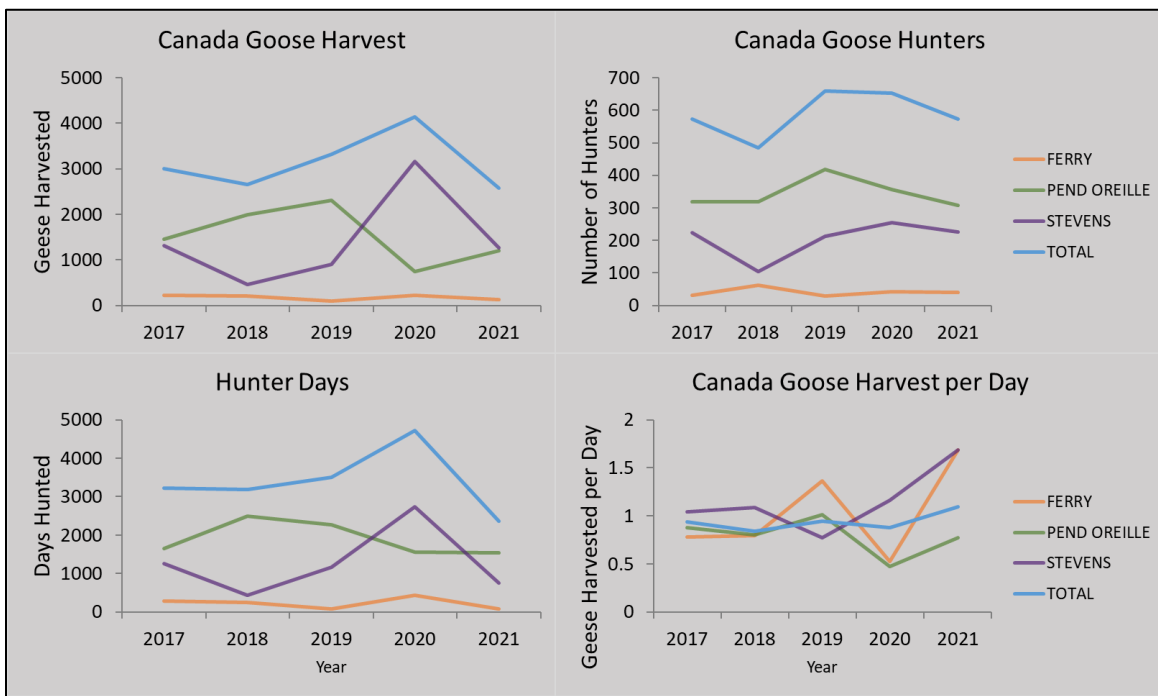


Figure 16. Trends in the number of geese harvested, goose hunters, hunter days, and geese harvested per hunter day in Ferry County (orange), Stevens County (purple), Pend Oreille County (green), and throughout District 1 (blue), 2017 – 2021.

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species that occur in District 1 but are not covered in detail include California (valley) quail, gray partridge, snowshoe hare, bobcat, and coyote. Additional migratory game birds include mourning dove, Wilson's (common) snipe, and American coot.

MOOSE – SPECIAL PERMIT ONLY



The moose in northeast Washington are Shiras moose (*Alces shirasi*), which is the smallest of the four subspecies of moose in North America. Shiras moose are named after George Shiras III, an ardent conservationist, explorer, and U.S. Congressman in the early 1900s. This subspecies is native to the northern Rocky Mountains and apparently migrated on its own accord into eastern Pend Oreille County in the 1950s. The first official state documentation of moose in Washington occurred in 1954. In the decades since, moose have dramatically increased both in numbers and distribution, and are now common throughout much of northeast Washington.

Moose may only be hunted by limited special permits that are available by a lottery drawing every year. Permit hunters should take note that while moose are fairly common, they are by nature a solitary animal, and occur only

individually or in small groups scattered over wide areas. They tend to select habitats based on forest successional stage and local climatic conditions. Moose can be found at any elevation in northeast Washington but are most likely found in the 3,000 to 5,000-foot elevation band. In the fall they seek deciduous browse, primarily willow, serviceberry, *ceanothus*, and other shrubs in logged over areas or burns approximately 15 years old or older. Moose are drawn to north slopes or east flowing drainages, which are cool and moist. Late fall and early winter snowfall do not seem to deter moose in any way.

Moose rut from mid-September to early October, and some hunters have been effective with calls. Hunters using calls should stay on stand for at least one hour or longer, as bulls come to the call from long distances. Early in the season, moose are widespread, and snow is generally not present for tracking. Nevertheless, road and hiking access is good in October. Usually by some time in November snow is common and locating moose tracks, as well as seeing these dark animals against a white background of snow, becomes much easier. However, by late November there is frequently deep enough snow to be concerned about having only limited road access into high elevation moose range. Inland Empire Paper Company and other private timber companies may close their roads to motor vehicle traffic depending on weather conditions.

Forest Service Ranger Stations located at Newport and Colville are good sources of information on moose, weather, camping, and forest road conditions or restrictions. The Washington

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also sells maps and has a regional office located in Colville.

KETTLE RANGE – GMU 101, GMU 105, GMU 204

Moose continue to expand their range in the Kettle Range moose unit, but currently the most productive locations for hunting are in two general areas. The first is within GMU 101 and includes the South Fork Sherman Creek drainage, the upper Barnaby Creek drainage, and the east slope of the Kettle Crest under Snow Peak, Sherman Peak, Barnaby Buttes, and White Mountain. There also tends to be a lot of moose sign on the west side of White Mountain up Hall Creek Road, but the dense timber makes sighting them difficult. The second area is in GMU 105 near the Canadian border in the vicinity of Churchill Mountain and Lead Pencil Mountain. The creek drainages may be most productive, including Sheep Creek, Crown Creek, and Flat Creek. The Little Boulder Creek drainage west of the Kettle River in Ferry County seems to be an area moose have recently expanded into as well.

SELKIRK – GMU 113

Good areas to hunt in the western portion of the Selkirk Mountains Unit include Skookum Lakes to South Baldy, along with the LeClerc Creek, Harvey Creek, upper Sullivan Creek, and Slumber Creek drainages. On the east side of the unit, the West Branch Priest River, Flat Creek, Goose Creek, Kalispell Creek, South Fork Granite Creek, Cache Creek, Willow Creek, and Gold Creek drainages can be productive.

DOUGLAS – GMU 108

Moose are frequently seen in the vicinity of Harrier Creek, VanStone Mine, and Rogers Mountain. Moose have also been commonly found in the headwaters area to Onion Creek.

ALADDIN - GMU 111

Moose are more frequently seen in the south and central portion of GMU 111, but some hunters have had luck in the northern portion of the GMU as well. Some specific areas that generally harbor moose in GMU 111 include Big Meadow Lake, Seldom Seen Mountain, Bon Ayre Ridge, North and South Forks Mill Creek, Amazon Creek, and Clark Creek.

49 DEGREES NORTH – GMU 117

The 49 Degrees North GMU is divided by a mountain range into east and west drainages. The areas near the crest of the divide or the drainages on the east side have the most moose activity. In the southern portion, good areas would be Boyer, Nelson, and Chewelah mountains, along with the Calispell, Tenmile, and Gletty creek drainages. In the north portion of GMU 117, Winchester, Small, Ruby, and Flodell creek drainages, along with Tacoma, Dirty Shirt, Little Calispell, Calispell, Goddards, and Olson mountain peaks, tend to hold significant numbers of

moose. There are many recent and older harvest units in 117, which allow ample opportunity to glass hillsides from a ridgeline or road.

PARKER LAKE – GMU 117 – NO PERMITS IN 2023 DUE TO EXTENSIVE LOGGING OPERATION

The Parker Lake Hunting Closure area is approximately 21,000 acres, and is very similar to the surrounding forest, with a blend of timber harvest, mature stand forests, and reproduction/burn units. From approximately September through May, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape Training (SERE) School is present in either the Tacoma, Cusick, or Ruby Creek watersheds. Training typically occurs 24 hours a day from Saturday through Thursday of each week, except for an approximate three-week period during the Christmas and New Year’s holidays. To aid hunters in their planning and to assist in establishing a pattern of avoidance, deer or moose special permit holders will receive a map of the SERE School area of operation from the USAF Training Area Manager. Moose are found throughout the Parker Lake Closure, but seasonal timing will dictate elevations, population densities, and hunting opportunities. There are quite a few small ponds and swampy areas where moose can be found. Northern slopes and eastern drainages between 3,000 feet and the crest of Timber Mountain should provide ample opportunities. The SERE School conducts little activity above 3,500 feet in elevation.

HUCKLEBERRY – GMU 121

Good areas to hunt in the Huckleberry Range are the mountains extending north and south of the Springdale - Hunters Pass off the Springdale - Hunters Highway. The east side of the pass has the majority of the moose habitat, especially the headwaters of the forks of Chimokane Creek and Deer Creek. Moose sightings are also common east of the Fruitland area with access to the mountains through the Fruitland Valley or up the “O-Ra-Pak-En” Creek drainage.

HARVEST TRENDS

Moose hunting in Washington is regulated through a permit system. Hunters are required to return their hunt report to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Permit availability, and therefore moose hunting opportunity, has increased in Washington in the last ten years. For more information about harvest trends, see the most recent [status and trend report](#).



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Hunters with permits to harvest antlerless moose are requested to refrain from taking cows with calves in their immediate vicinity. Some moose cows in Washington do not produce calves in all years or may have already lost them by hunting season. WDFW requests that hunters with antlerless moose permits avoid harvesting cows with calves.

All successful moose hunters are required to submit a tooth within 60 days of harvest in the envelope provided with your informational packet. Tooth samples allow WDFW to get an overview of the age structure of the moose population and make better management decisions based on this information. Extra tooth envelopes are available at most WDFW Regional offices. To find out the age of your harvested moose, see the [Tooth Age Lookup Tool](#).

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS AND GMU ACCESS

Over one third (approximately 37%) of the land mass in District 1 is public, consisting of mostly national forest, but also state DNR and WDFW, federal BLM, USFWS, and a few other government agencies. Most of these lands outside of Indian reservations are open to public hunting. The public lands tend to be at higher elevations, with steep terrain, a shorter growing season, no row crop agriculture, and in general a lower density of game animals, especially deer and turkey. GMUs with the most public land include 101 (Sherman), 111 (Aladdin), 113 (Selkirk), and 117 (49 Degrees North). If you plan to hunt on DNR land, you will need to purchase and display on your vehicle a [Discover Pass](#). For hunting on WDFW wildlife areas, you will need to display a WDFW [Vehicle Access Pass](#) (free with hunting or fishing license purchase) or a Discover Pass.

For more information related to the location of WDFW wildlife areas, see Figure 19 and see [WDFW's hunting access website](#). For more information on resources available to locate public lands, please see the Online Tools and Maps section.

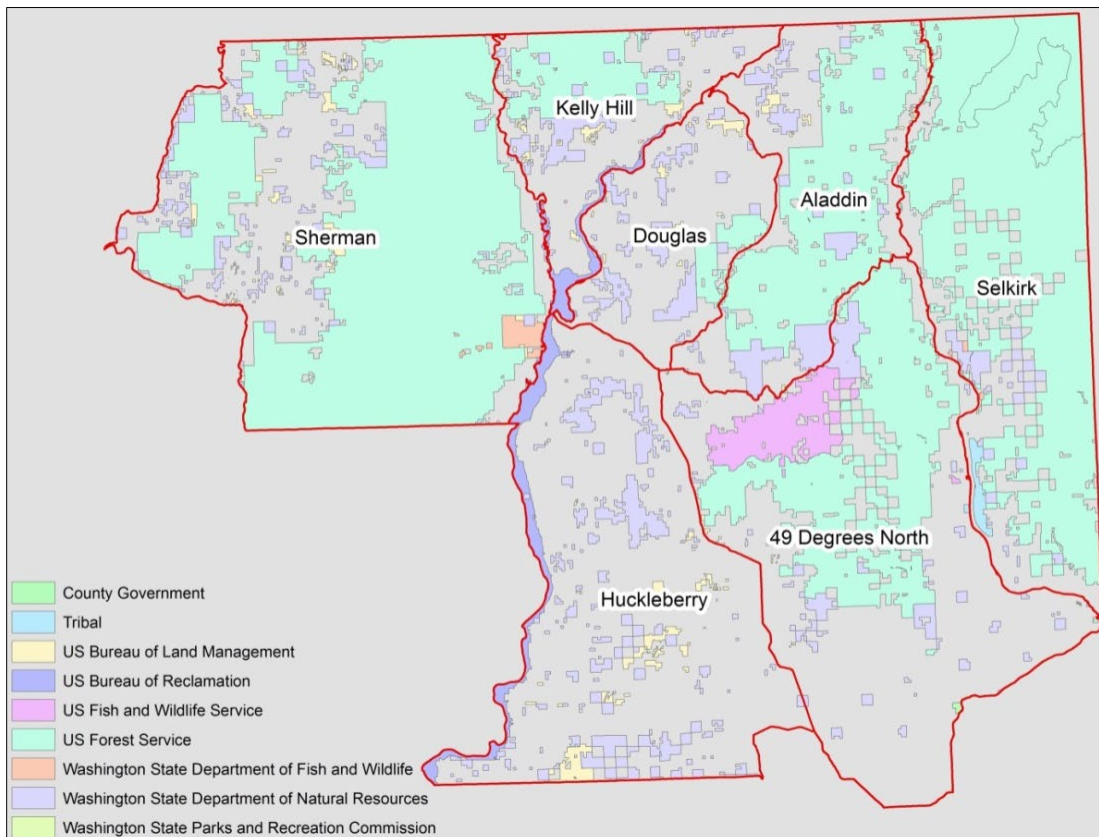


Figure 17. Map depicting the location of public lands within each GMU comprising District 1.

GMU ACCESS

Sherman – GMU 101

The majority of GMU 101 is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. All of the Kettle Range has good but somewhat limited road access for automobiles. In GMU 101, there are roads leading up to the Kettle Crest from both the east and the west, but only three that cross over, including two paved and maintained roads, Sherman Pass and Boulder Pass, and one unpaved road, Little Boulder. During the late hunt, some access may be limited in the higher elevations if there is snow. A four-wheeled drive vehicle is recommended in the late season if there is a possibility of snow. A Colville National Forest map is also recommended.

Kelly Hill – GMU 105

Much of the northern portion of GMU 105 is owned by the U.S. Forest Service. Largely in the southern portion of the GMU, there are lands owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), industrial timber companies (mainly Manulife, formerly Hancock Forest Management), and other private lands. The eastern portion of the GMU also has some private timber company ownership. Road access is good throughout the unit. A Colville National Forest map is recommended.

Douglas – GMU 108

The majority of GMU 108 is private, but there are a few sizeable blocks of Colville National Forest and DNR land. Road access is good in this GMU. A Colville National Forest and/or Department of Natural Resources map is recommended.

Aladdin – GMU 111

Access is best either from Colville north on the Aladdin Road, from Highway 20 between Colville and Tiger (south of Lone), or west of Highway 31 between Lone and Metaline. GMU 111 has good driving access south of Smackout Pass, and the majority of land throughout this GMU is owned by the U.S. Forest Service (Colville National Forest) with a lesser amount owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In the northern portion of the GMU, there are fewer roads with more opportunities for walk in, bike, and/or horse access, as well as cross-country travel. Throughout the GMU, there are closed or decommissioned roads to get off of the main road system by foot or other non-motorized method. A Colville National Forest map is recommended.

Selkirk – GMU 113

The northern half of GMU 113 is mostly within the Colville or Idaho Panhandle National Forest, but many of the roads are gated or retired, which limits vehicle access. The southern half of GMU 113 is a mix of private timber company, private property, national forest, and Washington DNR. Most timber company gates are locked year-round, as well as some national forest roads. If hunting the eastern portion of GMU 113, it may be easier to access the area through Idaho. The higher elevations in GMU 113 may likely have some snow during the late hunt. A four-wheeled drive vehicle is recommended if there is a possibility of snow. A Colville National Forest map is also recommended.

49 Degrees North – GMU 117

49 Degrees North is a mix of private property, Colville National Forest, the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge, and private industrial timber company land. Road access on national forest land is fairly good, but most access on industrial timber company land is restricted to non-motorized. In some of the southern portion of GMU 117, all motorized access is restricted within the Buck Creek Road Closure Area, which includes Boyer Mountain and Nelson Peak. The Colville National Forest travel map is recommended. The Washington DNR map is also recommended, especially for the southern portion of the unit.

Huckleberry – GMU 121

The majority of GMU 121 is in private ownership, but there are scattered sections or small blocks of Washington DNR and U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. Hancock Forest Management owns much of the private forest land in this area. Washington DNR maps are recommended.

PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Much hunting opportunity, especially for big game and forest grouse, occurs on private industrial forest lands. Timber companies that own large tracts of land and are the most well-known include Manulife (formerly Hancock), Stimson, and Inland Empire Paper. Hunters should be aware that there are a number of other smaller timber companies that have operations in District 1 but are not mentioned here.

WDFW recognizes that some of the best hunting opportunities occur on private industrial forest lands. WDFW works cooperatively with private timber companies to maintain reasonable public access during established hunting seasons. Private industrial forestlands have typically been open for public access, but **hunters should always remember access granted to private property is a privilege.** Hunters should also refrain from calling timber companies to ask hunting-related questions. Foresters are very busy, and hunters should be referring these types of questions to their local WDFW wildlife biologists.

Recently, there has been an increasing trend of timber companies restricting public access and shifting towards a permit system to limit the number of hunters who hunt on their lands. One of the primary reasons for access restrictions and loss of access is disrespect of the landowner's rules. WDFW reminds all wild land recreationists to treat this privilege with respect and follow basic access rules.

Electronic bikes (e-bikes) are a popular new mode of transportation for hunters. Please be aware that while they are not considered motor vehicles and allowed on most public land, some timber companies **DO NOT** allow e-bikes behind locked gates. These include Stimson and Molpus, but there may be others that do not allow them. Check first before riding behind a locked gate.

FIRE CLOSURE INFORMATION: Confirm that land is open before going out to scout or hunt. **Obey all posted signs.** Signs and access restrictions will be removed when fire danger has abated.

BASIC ACCESS RULES

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forest lands vary by timber company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide these rules on their website or will provide them to hunters who call to inquire about access. However, hunters are encouraged to follow these basic rules if they find themselves in an area they are not familiar with and are in doubt about specific landowner rules. The following are intended to be a general guideline of the basic access rules that are commonplace on many private industrial forest lands. Timber companies

may have more or less restrictive rules in place and ultimately, it is the hunter's responsibility to be familiar with those rules.

- ✓ Respect the landowner and other users.
- ✓ Obey all posted signs.
- ✓ Drive slow with headlights turned on when driving on roads opened to public access.
- ✓ Avoid areas of active logging.
- ✓ No camping (unless allowed), campfires (unless allowed), littering, ORVs, off road driving, target shooting, or forest product removals. Exceptions: mushrooms and berries for personal use.
- ✓ An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.
- ✓ Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles, including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors.
- ✓ Help prevent forest fires.

HEADS UP FOR ARCHERY AND MUZZLELOADER HUNTERS

Private timber companies have traditionally opened their lands to modern firearm hunters during established seasons. Archery and muzzleloader hunters should be aware they may not have full access, and access levels during their respective seasons varies by year and by landowner. Most often, access is influenced by industrial fire classifications issued by the Washington DNR. Hence, timber lands may be closed during archery and muzzleloader seasons, which typically begin earlier in the autumn when there is a greater risk of forest fire. Hunters are urged to respect landowners by adhering to any access restrictions they have in place.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES

Some landowners have hotlines and/or websites where hunters can find information about public access. **It is important to remember, however, that these companies do not have personnel dedicated to answering hunter questions.** Therefore, hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 1 office in Spokane (509-892-1001) if there are questions related to public access on private industrial forest lands.

- [Inland Empire Paper](#)
- [Hancock Natural Resource Group - Fire closure information ONLY](#)
- [Stimson Lumber](#)

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through a negotiated agreement. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and, in some cases, monetary compensation. In addition, lands under agreement are well known by WDFW Enforcement.

There are several private landowners in District 1 who are enrolled in WDFW’s Private Lands Access Program. Specific information, including property locations, can be found on [WDFW's Hunter Access website](#). Below is a summary, by GMU, of cooperators and acres currently enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. The Feel Free to Hunt Program acres listed are those lands in the Cooperative Road Management Program with private timber companies.

Table 7. Cooperators and acres currently enrolled in the private lands hunting access program within District 1.

Game Management Unit	Hunting Only by Written Permission		Feel Free to Hunt	
	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres
101 (Sherman)	5	907	2	4,126
105 (Kelly Hill)			1	240
108 (Douglas)			2	3,282
111 (Aladdin)	1	102	2	6,660
113 (Selkirk)			3	49,397
117 (49 Degrees North)	4	1,813	3	55,267
121 (Huckleberry)	9	3,922	2	22,472

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 1 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be extremely difficult to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. However, there are several online tools and resources many hunters do not know about but provide valuable information that helps solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources that are available to the general public.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS

A good source for identifying the specific location of public lands is DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website.

ONLINE PARCEL DATABASES

Technology has come a long way and has made it much easier for the general public to identify tax parcel boundaries and the associated landowner. However, because this technology has not been readily available in the past, many hunters are not aware that it exists. Information for parcels in these areas can be used as a resource.

- [Stevens County tax parcels](#)
- [Ferry County tax parcels](#)
- [Pend Oreille tax parcels](#) *You will need the address of the property to use this search tool.

WDFW'S ONLINE MAPPING TOOLS

WDFW's [Hunting Webmap](#) has been revamped and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public and private land hunting opportunities within each GMU.

COLVILLE AREA MAPS

There are a variety of maps showing trails, camping locations, public lands, and popular landmarks available for download on the Colville Chamber of Commerce [website](#).

OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

[Ferry County hunting page](#)
[Colville Chamber of Commerce](#)
[Ferry County Chamber of Commerce](#)
[North Pend Oreille Chamber of Commerce](#)
[Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge](#)
[Colville National Forest](#)
[LC Sportsmaps, Inc, and OnX](#)

COMMON WILDLIFE DISEASES

Wild animals can have a variety of diseases and parasites, many of which pose little to no risk to humans. Below is a list of diseases and parasites commonly encountered by hunters, either in the field hunting or while processing an animal for consumption. More information can be found by following the link for each listed disease or parasite. Please note, this is just a few of the most common diseases or parasites encountered by hunters. If you observe dead or sick/injured wildlife while out hunting, please report your observations on the [Wildlife Health](#) page of the WDFW website.

PAPILLOMAS OR WARTS

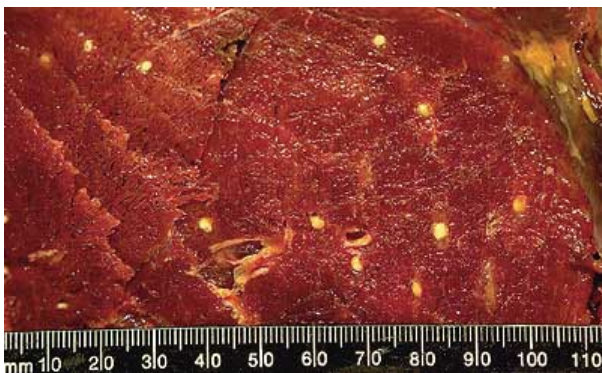


Picture 1: Photo courtesy Matt Harbin

a. Safety - The viruses that cause papillomas in wildlife are not contagious to humans. Pets and livestock are not susceptible to the viruses that cause papillomas in wildlife. However, they can become infected with papilloma viruses that affect their own species. Papillomas are limited to the skin and can easily be trimmed away. The meat from animals with papillomas is suitable for consumption.

b. Papillomas are most frequently observed on deer, elk, and moose.

TAPEWORM CYSTS



Picture 2: Photo courtesy of Alaska Fish and Game

c. Safety – Humans cannot become infected with *Taenia krabbei*. Meat from infected animals is suitable for human consumption and cooking the meat will kill the parasite. Dogs can be infected with tapeworms if fed the uncooked meat, so it is recommended not feeding raw infected parts to dogs.

d. Tapeworm cysts are commonly observed in moose, deer, and elk.

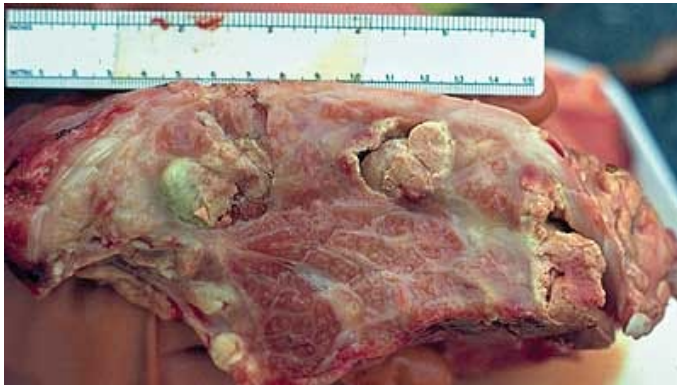
LIVER FLUKES



Photo courtesy of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

- e. Safety – Humans cannot become infected with *F. magna*. However, the appearance of the liver may be off-putting and undesirable to eat.
- f. Most common in deer and some elk.

ABSCESSES



Picture 3: Photo courtesy of Alaska Fish and Game

- g. Safety – Be careful not to cut into an abscess as the pus can be spread and contaminate other parts of the carcass. The portions of the meat with abscesses should not be eaten. Unaffected portions of the carcass are suitable for consumption.
- h. Can occur anywhere inside or on the body and can occur in any hunted species.

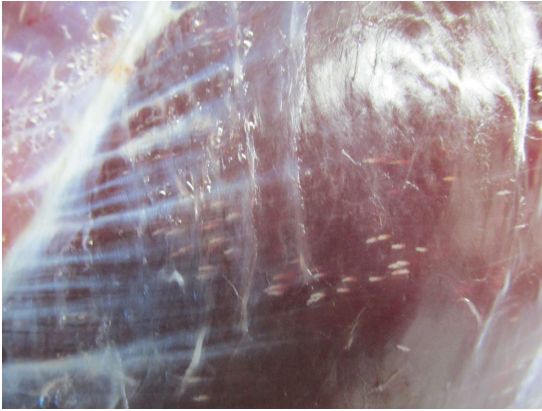
PHARYNGEAL BOTS OR NASAL BOTS



Picture 4: Photo courtesy Indian Dept. of Natural Resources

- i. Safety – Nasal bots do not pose a risk to humans. Meat from an infected animal is safe to eat.
- j. Most common in deer.

SARCOCYSTIS (“RICE BREAST”)



- k. Safety – Humans cannot be infected by the cysts of *Sarcocystis* spp. Cooking will kill the parasite. It is recommended not feeding infected meat to dogs.
- l. Most common in waterfowl but can occur in elk and deer.

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

CARRIE LOWE, District Wildlife Biologist
MATT BRINKMAN, Assistant District Wildlife
Biologist



Photo Credit: Susan Jensen



Photo Credit: Amie Schietel



Photo Credit: Mike Craddock

DISTRICT 2 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Spokane, Lincoln, and Whitman counties

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DISTRICT 2 GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) District 2 is in eastern Washington, bordering Idaho, and covers Lincoln, Whitman, and Spokane counties. Game management units (GMUs) in District 2 include 124 (Mount Spokane), 127 (Mica Peak), 130 (Cheney), 133 (Roosevelt), 136 (Harrington), 139 (Steptoe), and 142 (Almota) (Figure 1). Most of the district is in private ownership, so hunters are highly encouraged to secure access prior to the hunting season or applying for special permits.

The geography of District 2 includes the edge of the Rocky Mountain Range in the east, the Columbia Basin in the west, and the Channeled Scablands and Palouse in between. This diverse geography supports a wide range of habitats that include mixed coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir, larch, and Ponderosa pine, scattered aspen groves, scabland, sagebrush steppe, grasslands, and extensive agricultural lands. Topography varies from ~500 feet above sea level along the Snake River in the south to the 5883-foot Mount Spokane in the north. Dominant river drainages include the Spokane, Palouse, Columbia, and Snake rivers.

District 2 is best known for its deer hunting opportunities, including white-tailed deer in the Spokane and Palouse agricultural lands and mule deer in the Channeled Scablands and breaks of the Snake River. Quality hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including pheasant and elk, if hunters have secured access to private lands. Moose and bighorn sheep hunters can enjoy quality hunting if they are selected for special permit hunts and if they have secured private land access prior to applying.

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) continues to expand across the country and in 2021 was detected as close to Washington as Riggins, Idaho. Additional positive cases were detected in this same area of Idaho in 2022, but CWD has still not been detected in Washington. WDFW will continue to conduct active surveillance in 2023 for CWD, focusing on GMUs 101 to 186. If you harvest a deer in any of these units please stop by a hunter check station, contact your local WDFW office, or [request an appointment online](#) to have a sample taken. WDFW has teamed up with the Washington Chapter of [Backcountry Hunters and Anglers](#) to encourage hunters to have their harvested animals tested. BHA helped to pay for 100 multi-season deer tags. The names of all hunters who have their animals tested will be put into a random drawing for those tags, to take place in April of 2024.

Additionally, please be aware that due to the continued spread of CWD, restrictions on the importation of carcasses from out of state harvests have been expanded to all states and provinces regardless of CWD status; for further details see [Washington Administrative Code \(WAC\) 220-413-030](#).

BE AWARE OF FIRE CONDITIONS

Wherever you choose to hunt, be sure to check on fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. In addition to potential wildfires, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and WDFW may be conducting prescribed burns and/or forest-thinning projects in your hunt area. For more information, see:

- Wildfire status updates ([InciWeb – Incident Information System](#))
- [Northwest Interagency Coordination Center](#)
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#)
- [WDFW fire restrictions and closures](#)

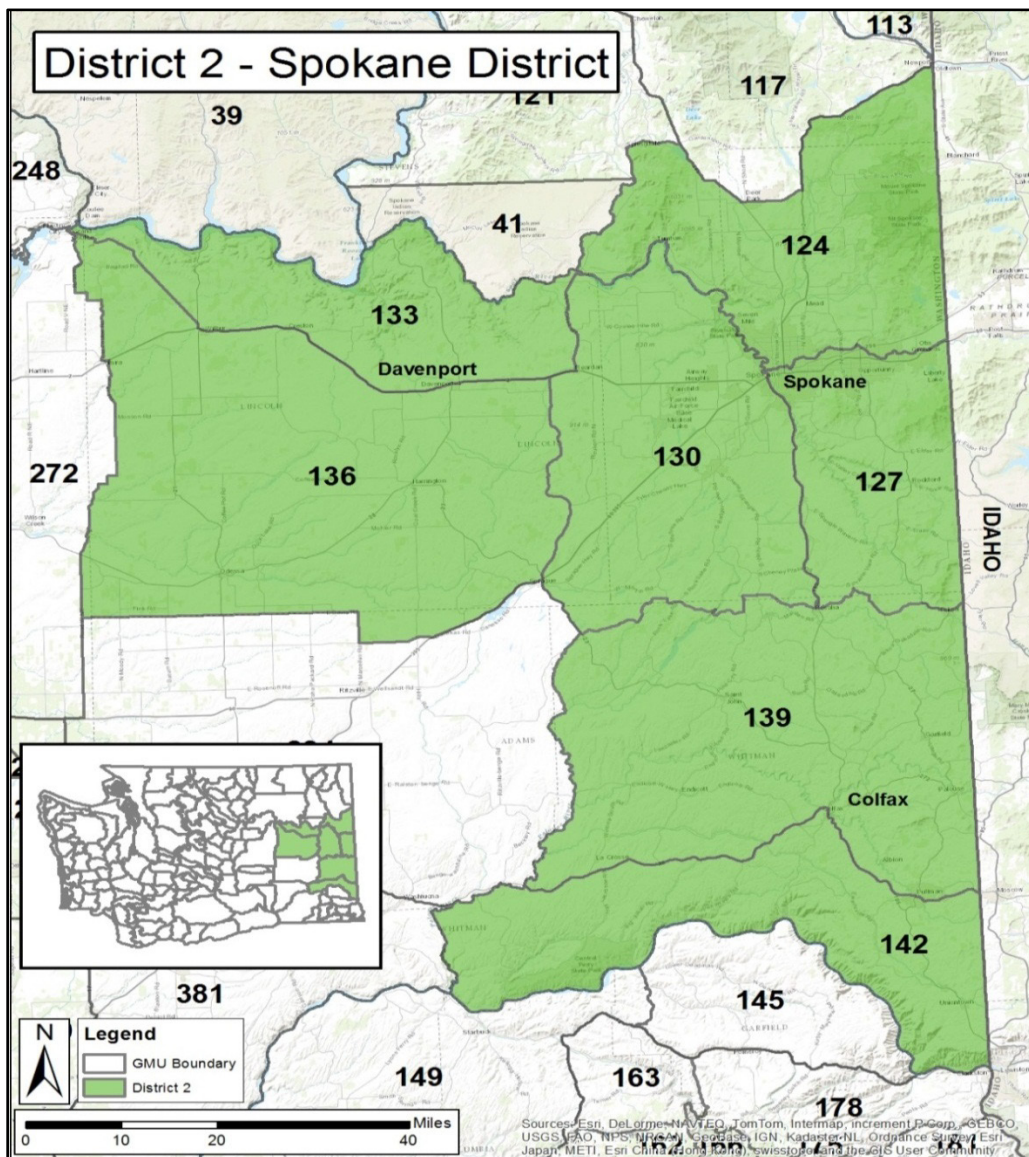


Figure 1. General location and game management units (GMUs) for WDFW District 2.

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



All elk that occur in District 2 are Rocky Mountain elk and belong to the Spokane sub-herd of the Selkirk elk herd. The Selkirk herd originated in Pend Oreille County and has expanded its range over the last 40 years to this area. As elk habitat in District 2 continues to be lost to agricultural conversion and urban sprawl, WDFW’s goal is to maintain the population at its current level (roughly 1000–1500 elk) while limiting agricultural damage and conflict within exurban (areas outside the denser inner suburban area, at the edge of a metropolitan area) areas. Consequently, an “any elk” harvest is offered for the general season in all GMUs in District 2. Most of the land in the district is in private ownership, so managing this population requires landowner tolerance and cooperation. Elk in this herd can be highly mobile and difficult to locate, so learning their behavior and gaining access to numerous private lands will greatly increase your chance of

success.

Currently, WDFW does not conduct formal population surveys to monitor elk populations in most of District 2. Rather, harvest data, opportunistic surveys, sightings, and damage complaints are used to indicate population trends. The exception to this is the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge located in GMU 130 (Cheney). Aerial surveys have been conducted on and near Turnbull for the last 15 years to obtain herd size and composition data. The survey area only covers a small portion of the Spokane sub-herd range; it is designed to inform management decisions for the Refuge and is not likely representative of the entire area. WDFW’s herd composition objective is to maintain a ratio of 15 to 35 bulls per 100 cows pre-hunt and/or 12 to 20 bulls per 100 cows post-hunt. Aerial surveys were not conducted in 2021 or 2022; however, the 2020 pre-hunt aerial survey of Turnbull and the surrounding area within GMU 130 found the bull to cow ratio to be well above this management objective. Also based on the survey, 2020 calf production was above average, with a calf to cow ratio of 60 calves per 100 cows. Combined data sources for the entirety of District 2 over the last ten years indicate an overall stable population with some local populations declining and others increasing. For more details on the status of elk in Washington, see WDFW’s most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#). Also available is a general how-to guide for elk hunting entitled “[The Basics of Elk Hunting in Washington](#).”

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

This question does not have an easy answer, because it depends on access to private land, hunting method, and the type of hunting experience desired. For archery hunters, GMUs 124 and 127 provide the best terrain and generally contain more forested land, irrigated agriculture, small, developed lakes, and riparian areas. The terrain in GMUs 136–142 is better suited for muzzleloader and modern firearm, with open landscapes dominated by shrubsteppe, scablands, and dryland farming.

Most of the district's elk harvest (25 to 50%) is usually in GMU 130, though a high proportion consistently occurs in GMUs 124 and 127 as well. Hunters who gain access to private lands in GMUs 127 and 130 have often had the highest success, though success in GMU 133 has also been increasing over the past few years. In GMU 130, hunters likely benefit from animals moving on and off Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge during the season. Elk are often targeted by nearby landowners due to seasonal crop, fence, and haystack damage. With participation by one-third of the elk hunters in District 2, GMU 124 (Mt. Spokane) sustains the greatest hunting pressure. As a result, overall hunter success is lower there, although the unit periodically produces one of the higher harvests of mature 6-point bulls. Private timber companies, especially Inland Empire Paper (IEP), offer public access in this unit with a paid permit. See [IEP - Recreational Use](#) for their rules and regulations. Hunters should be aware that motorized access may be limited or closed completely on IEP and other timber company lands due to road conditions, logging operations, or fire danger. Hunters are advised to check closures and restrictions before setting out. Axxess Recreation Management, the property access manager for IEP, provides access updates online. Also be aware that GMU 124 contains several County Parks, Conservation Areas, and State Parks, and they do not allow hunting. In addition, Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge in GMU 130 is NOT open for hunting except for Turnbull special permit holders.

The information in Table 1 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. The table also summarizes the number of elk harvested per square mile and hunters per square mile to account for the variation in sizes between GMUs.

Each GMU was ranked for elk harvested/mile², hunters/mile², and hunter success rates during the general season. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, the lower the score the better. Comparisons are most straightforward for modern firearm because seasons are the same across all GMUs. However, when choosing which GMU to hunt, differences that should be taken into consideration are:

1. In addition to the early general archery season in all GMUs, there is a late archery season in GMUs 124 & 127.
2. In addition to the early general muzzleloader season in all GMUs, there is a late muzzleloader season in GMUs 130-142.
3. There is a late Antlerless Only Master Hunter season for all weapon types in GMUs 127 and 130.
4. There are considerable differences in the sizes of GMUs, so looking at only total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison.

Table 1. Rank sum analysis provides a quick and general summary of how harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons. As a generalization, the lower the rank, the better the overall elk hunting opportunity is within a GMU. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2018-2022).

MODERN FIREARM											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	% Public Land (Open to Hunting)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Rank Sum
			Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Total	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
124	771	4%	51	0.07	2	549	0.71	7	9%	6	15
127	509	1%	54	0.11	1	305	0.60	6	18%	1	8
130	940	7%	47	0.05	3	292	0.31	5	17%	2	10
133	555	6%	14	0.03	4	114	0.21	4	12%	4	12
136	1586	11%	4	0.00	7	44	0.03	1	10%	5	13
139	1327	3%	13	0.01	6	113	0.09	2	12%	4	12
142	771	8%	15	0.02	5	90	0.12	3	16%	3	11
ARCHERY											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	% Public Land (Open to Hunting)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Rank Sum
			Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Total	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
124	771	4%	14	0.02	1	234	0.30	3	6%	5	9
127	509	1%	12	0.02	1	152	0.30	3	8%	4	8
130	940	7%	9	0.01	2	63	0.07	4	15%	2	8
133	555	6%	2	0.00	3	13	0.02	2	14%	3	8
136	1586	11%	0	0.00	3	6	0.00	1	0%	6	10
139	1327	3%	5	0.00	3	23	0.02	2	23%	1	6
142	771	8%	4	0.01	2	18	0.02	2	23%	1	5
MUZZLELOADER											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	% Public Land (Open to Hunting)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Rank Sum
			Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Total	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
124	771	4%	11	0.01	4	96	0.12	4	12%	7	15
127	509	1%	13	0.03	2	67	0.13	5	20%	1	8
130	940	7%	38	0.04	1	247	0.26	7	15%	5	13
133	555	6%	12	0.02	3	88	0.16	6	14%	6	15
136	1586	11%	3	0.00	5	16	0.01	1	16%	4	10
139	1327	3%	19	0.01	4	110	0.08	3	17%	3	10
142	771	8%	9	0.01	4	52	0.07	2	18%	2	8

ELK AREAS

Most of the special permit elk hunts available in District 2 occur in Elk Area 1015, which is located within Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Turnbull special permit hunts were created in 2010 to address damage to aspen stands on the refuge and address damage complaints from landowners in the area. These are walk-in only hunts, except for disabled hunt permit holders, and the area open to hunt is limited and determined by refuge staff. In the first several years of the hunt, one Any Bull permit (any weapon type) and 62 Antlerless permits were offered. Beginning in 2019, this was reduced to 58 total and includes 1 Any Bull, 4 Spike-only, and 53 Antlerless permits. Permits include each weapon type as well as hunts for youth, master hunters, and hunters with disabilities. Several hunters did not hunt or failed to report on their permit in 2022; those that did averaged 9% success for antlerless hunts, compared to the previous 5-year average of 18%. The Any Bull permittee did not report, and none of the Spike-only hunters were successful. For more detailed harvest information, view the [2022 Elk Individual Hunts](#). For more information about elk management in the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, visit [Turnbull - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#).

To address winter property damage in the area, there are also several late-season raffle permits and one WDFW special permit offered on Columbia Plateau Wildlife Management Association (CPWMA) properties in areas near Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. See the Private Lands Program section for more information on acreage enrolled and the [CPWMA](#) website for details on their hunt management.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

General season harvest of antlered and antlerless elk in the district has been evenly split, with an average of 201 antlered and 162 antlerless elk harvested per year over the last 5 years. In the 2022 season, 29% of bulls harvested were 6-point or better, and 21% of bulls were 5-point. Across all GMUs, elk hunter success during the general season has averaged 13% over the last 10 years, and hunter effort (days/kill) has averaged 39 days/kill. These numbers vary widely by GMU. A good predictor of future harvest during general seasons is the recent trend in the harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill. Figures 2 and 3 below provide trend data for these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where to hunt. These numbers are highly variable between GMUs, so pay attention to the scale of each chart as they are not all the same.

Elk harvest in GMUs 139 (Steptoe) and 142 (Almota) has been highly variable over the last few years (Figure 3). Timing and access to private lands will be the key to successful elk hunting in these GMUs, as elk likely move back and forth between Idaho and Washington. Complaints of agricultural damage have risen, especially in areas where crops have been recently converted to legumes. Scattered groups of 20–100 elk have been reported causing damage in several areas including Fairfield south to Tekoa in GMU 127, the area from Dusty east to Palouse, south to Uniontown, and along the Snake River breaks in GMUs 139 and 142, and from Tyler near the Lincoln/Spokane County border to Sprague and north to Edwall in GMU 130. Additionally, there

has been an increase in reported crop damage by 30–60 elk along the river breaks in northern GMU 133 in recent years; this GMU has also seen a steady increase in harvest over the past 5 years. A herd of 30-60 elk also frequents private lands in the Deer Park area bordering GMUs 117 and 124.

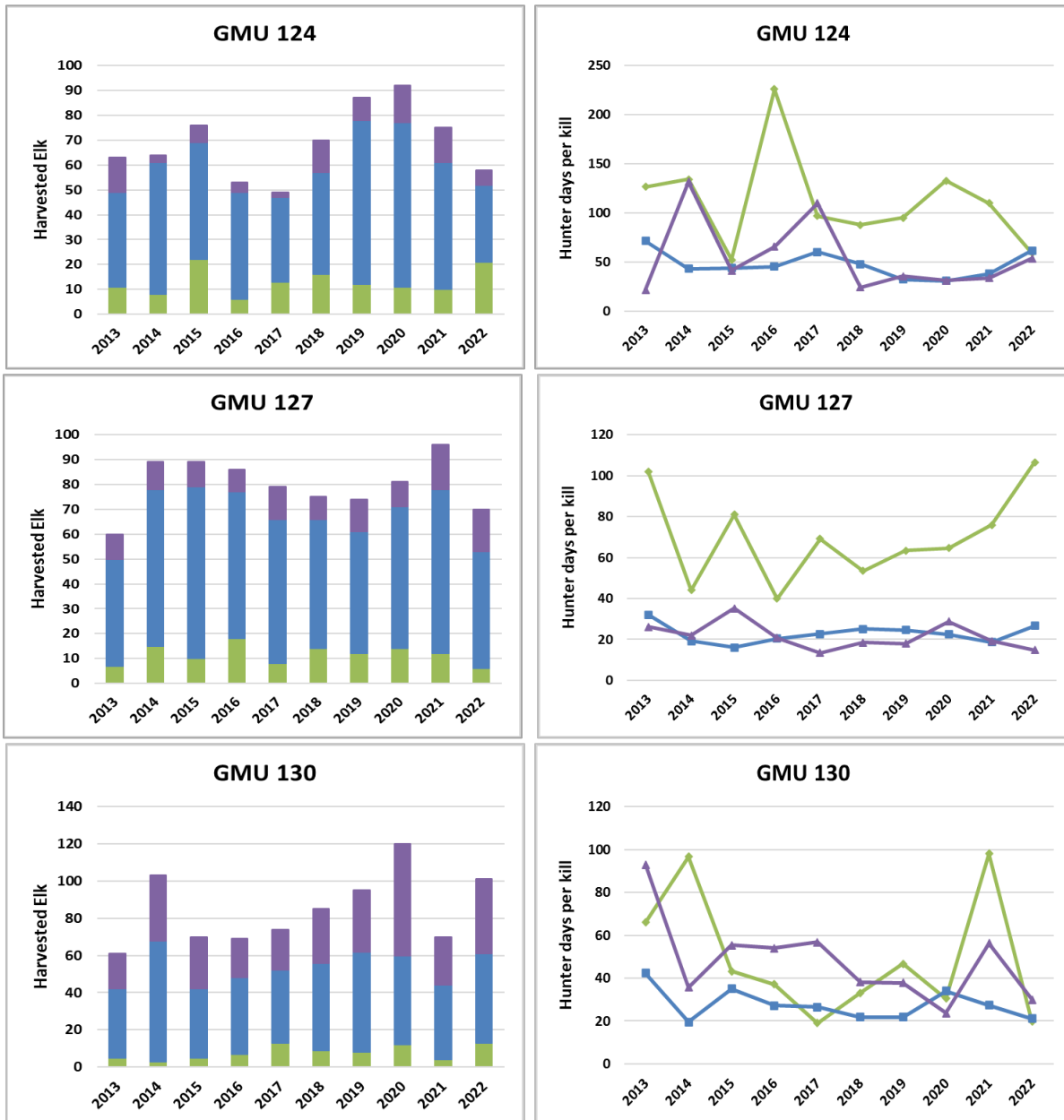


Figure 2. GMUs 124 – 130. **Left column:** Ten-year trends in general season elk harvest by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). **Right column:** Ten-year trends in general season hunter effort (measured in days per kill) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the difference in scales for each GMU.

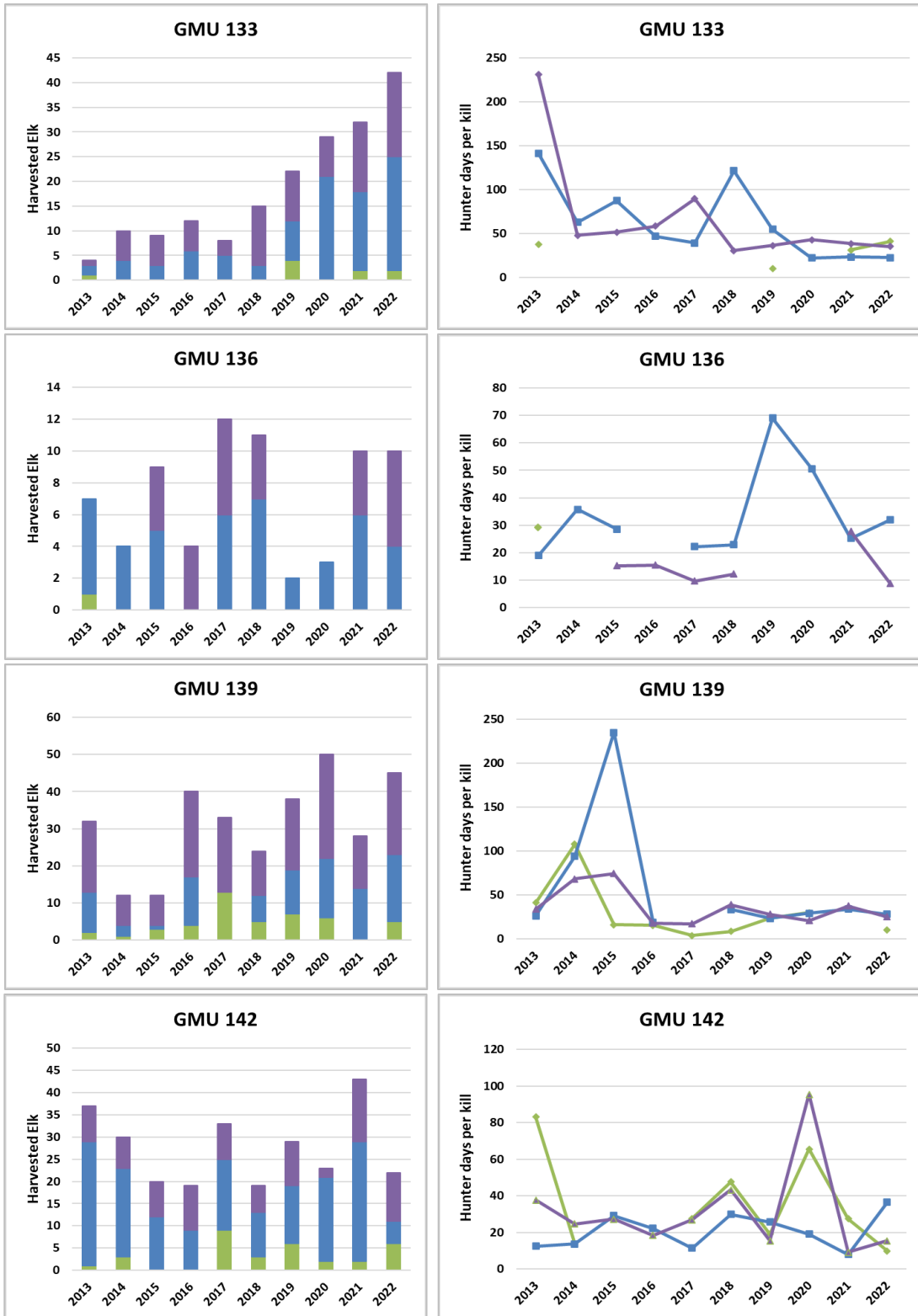


Figure 3. GMUs 133 – 142. **Left column:** Ten-year trends in general season elk harvest by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). **Right column:** Ten-year trends in general season hunter effort (measured in days per kill) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the difference in scales for each GMU.

Success depends heavily on the work the hunter is willing to put in to obtain access to private property. There are nearly 150 properties enrolled in WDFW's private land hunting access program in District 2. Many of these are built around upland game and deer hunting, however some also support elk hunting, so opportunities exist for elk hunters who do their research. For locations of these properties, visit our [Hunt Planner Webmap](#). For more detailed harvest information, see [District 2 - 2022 Elk General Season Harvest Reports](#).

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009–2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis County. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including three counties east of the Cascades. It has **NOT** been detected in the Selkirk herd to date.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Susceptibility:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect hooves of any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

- **Hunting in areas where TAHD is uncommon (GMUs in the 100, 200, and 300 series):** If you harvest an elk with abnormal looking hooves (for example, overgrown or broken hoof claws or skin lesions), please keep the hooves and report your observation to your local WDFW regional office. While there are several conditions other than TAHD that

may cause hoof deformities, we may want to examine the hooves and/or arrange for diagnostic testing.

- **Hunting in TAHD prevalent areas (GMUs in the 400, 500, and 600 series):**
 - Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's online reporting form (link below).
 - Clean shoes and tires: Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage [TAHD](#). Additional information on TAHD and the west-side incentive program to harvest elk with TAHD, can be found on pages 65–66 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

District 2 has both white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). White-tailed deer are found predominantly in the north and east portions of the district in forested habitat, irrigated ag fields, and along riparian corridors. Mule deer are predominantly found in the west and south of the district in the shrub steppe, scablands, and farmland habitats.

Deer population levels are closely tied to droughts, severe winters, disease, and land-use practices. The primary management objective for white-tailed and mule deer in District 2 is to keep the herds stable to slightly increasing and within landowner tolerance. Given that most of the land in the district is in private ownership, managing these populations without landowner cooperation is impossible.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to manage white-tailed deer populations in District 2. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, days per kill, and pre-hunting season sex and age ratios are used to monitor populations. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using these data to monitor trends in population size and is evaluating new approaches to monitoring white-tailed deer populations. Harvest metrics indicate a significant decline in the white-tailed deer population from the high in 2014. This decline has been predominantly driven by hemorrhagic disease outbreaks. One positive note is that pre-season ground surveys indicate fawn to doe ratios (i.e., recruitment) have rebounded (Figure 4). The buck to doe ratio in 2022 was much higher than in previous years but is more likely a product of small sample size caused by a reduction in herd size from hemorrhagic disease rather than a true increase in bucks on the landscape.



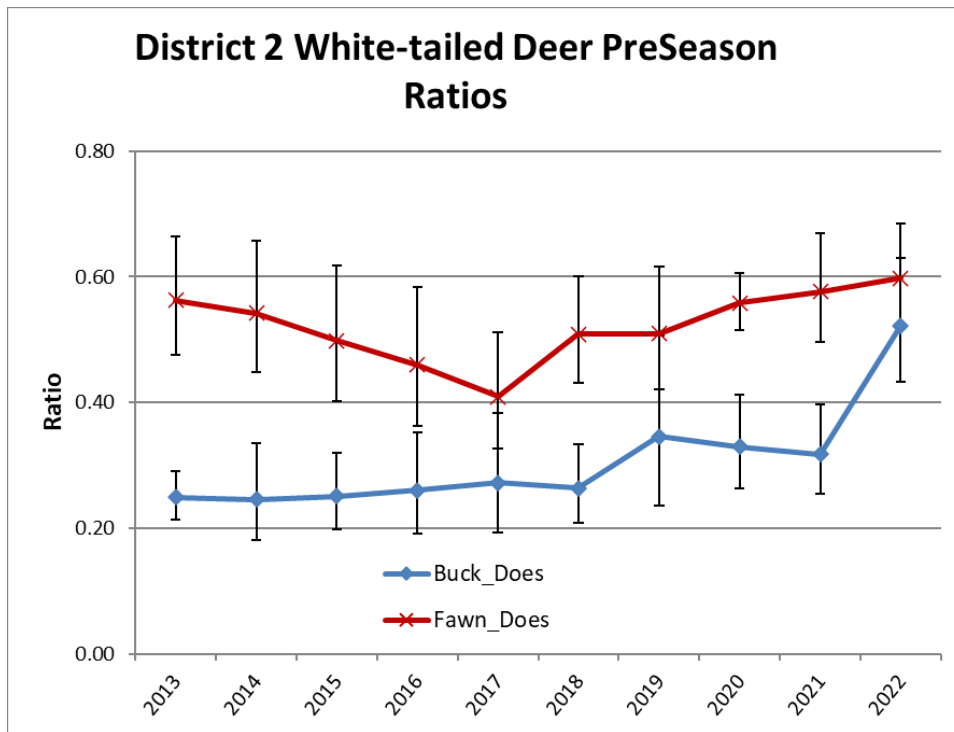


Figure 4. District 2 pre-season buck to doe (August) and fawn to doe (September) ratios (90% Confidence Interval in black) for white-tailed deer.

The harvest statistics noted above are also used in managing mule deer, but congregations of mule deer on wintering grounds allow for viable postseason aerial surveys to estimate populations. Flights are conducted every three to five years in conjunction with Districts 4 and 5, and ground surveys for ratios are completed every year. The last aerial survey for the Washtucna sub-herd (GMUs 139, 142, 284, & 381) was completed in 2021, resulting in an estimate of ~13,000 mule deer, in line with the two previous surveys conducted in 2011 and 2015. The 2022 ground survey estimated ~68 fawns per 100 does, which is above the 10-year average and the third highest observed since surveys were initiated in 2009. The Odessa sub-herd (GMUs 133, 136, & 272) was last surveyed from the air in 2019, resulting in an estimate of ~12,000 mule deer, and the 2022 ground survey estimated ~59 fawns per 100 does, which is higher than in 2021 but still lower than average.

For more details, please see the Columbia Basin Mule Deer Management Zone section and the Palouse White-tailed Deer Management Zone section of the [2022 Game Status and Trend Report](#).

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

Probably the most frequent question from hunters is “What GMU should I hunt?” This is not always easy to answer because it depends on the hunting method and the type of hunting experience desired. Some hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature buck, while others just want to “fill the freezer,” and still others prefer to hunt an area with the lowest chance of running into another hunter.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would be entirely or mostly comprised of public land, have high deer densities, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario does not exist in any GMU that is open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 2. Instead, because of general season opportunities, the GMUs with the highest deer densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to deter them from hunting in a GMU where they see lots of deer. Some hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if that means there are also very few hunters, and/or it provides a backcountry experience.

The information provided in Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. Furthermore, harvest and hunter numbers were divided by the area of each GMU to account for the variation in sizes between GMUs. Mule deer and white-tailed deer are combined in this table. Because both species can be hunted with the same tag, we cannot separate white-tailed deer hunters from mule deer hunters. However, the percentage of mule deer in the total harvest is given to provide a gauge of how prominent each species is in each GMU.

Each GMU was ranked for deer harvested/mile², hunters/mile², and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, the lower the score the better. Comparisons are relatively straightforward because bag limits and seasons are similar between GMUs. However, when choosing which GMU and/or species to hunt, differences that should be taken into consideration are:

1. There is a 3-point minimum harvest restriction for both species in all GMUs, except for white-tailed deer in GMU 124 where “any buck” is legal.
2. There is a late general modern firearm season for white-tailed deer in GMU 124. The late modern firearm season for white-tailed deer is by permit only for all other GMUs.
3. There is a late general muzzleloader season for white-tailed deer in GMUs 130-142.
4. There is a late general archery season for white-tailed deer in GMUs 124 & 127.

Table 2. Rank sum analysis provides a quick and general summary of how harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. As a generalization, the lower the rank, the better the overall deer hunting opportunity is within a GMU. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2018-2022).

MODERN FIREARM												
GMU	Size (mi ²)	% Public Land (Open to Hunting)	<u>Harvest</u>				<u>Hunters</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
			Total	% Mule Deer	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Total	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
124	771	4%	1104	1%	1.43	1	3640	4.72	7	31%	1	9
127	509	1%	117	10%	0.23	5	594	1.17	4	19%	6	15
130	940	7%	135	72%	0.14	7	799	0.85	2	17%	7	16
133	555	6%	184	66%	0.33	3	833	1.50	6	21%	5	14
136	1586	11%	284	93%	0.18	6	946	0.60	1	29%	2	9
139	1327	3%	319	53%	0.24	4	1133	0.85	3	27%	4	11
142	771	8%	314	74%	0.41	2	1039	1.35	5	29%	3	10
ARCHERY												
GMU	Size (mi ²)	% Public Land (Open to Hunting)	<u>Harvest</u>				<u>Hunters</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
			Total	% Mule Deer	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Total	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
124	771	4%	300	2%	0.39	1	972	1.26	7	31%	2	10
127	509	1%	105	3%	0.21	2	377	0.74	6	28%	3	11
130	940	7%	33	72%	0.03	4	148	0.16	4	19%	7	15
133	555	6%	35	76%	0.06	3	119	0.21	5	26%	4	12
136	1586	11%	27	93%	0.02	7	98	0.06	2	23%	6	15
139	1327	3%	24	66%	0.02	6	81	0.06	1	26%	5	12
142	771	8%	16	79%	0.02	5	48	0.06	3	31%	1	9
MUZZLELOADER												
GMU	Size (mi ²)	% Public Land (Open to Hunting)	<u>Harvest</u>				<u>Hunters</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		Rank Sum
			Total	% Mule Deer	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Total	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	
124	771	4%	36	8%	0.05	4	126	0.16	4	25%	4	12
127	509	1%	10	46%	0.02	7	27	0.05	1	24%	5	13
130	940	7%	74	46%	0.08	2	329	0.35	6	19%	7	15
133	555	6%	70	49%	0.13	1	239	0.43	7	27%	3	11
136	1586	11%	43	88%	0.03	6	119	0.08	2	33%	1	9
139	1327	3%	70	32%	0.05	3	218	0.16	5	29%	2	10
142	771	8%	31	48%	0.04	5	118	0.15	3	24%	6	14

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Overall, the white-tailed deer population is still down significantly in District 2 due primarily to two large hemorrhagic disease outbreaks: Bluetongue (BT) in 2015 and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) in 2021; you can learn more about these [diseases](#) from our website. Additionally, between these two outbreaks the area experienced hard winters; the winter of 2016/17 was one the most difficult in the past 10 years and decreased overwinter fawn survival, and the winter of 2018/19 was another tough winter, though not as bad as 2016/17.

Overall, mule deer herds are near their long-term averages. The mule deer populations also suffered losses due to the same series of events noted above, though mule deer do not typically die from BT and EHD, and the snows left the Columbia Basin a bit sooner than in the northeast, so the effects were not as devastating. However, the severe drought and heat wave of 2021 did impact mule deer, especially fawn survival/recruitment. This reduced recruitment may be evident during the 2023 season.

In general, the best opportunities to harvest a white-tailed deer in District 2 occur in GMUs 124 and 127. The best opportunities to harvest a mule deer in District 2 occur in GMUs 136, 139, and 142. For archery hunters, GMUs 124 and 127 provide the best terrain, whereas the terrain in GMUs 136–142 is better suited for muzzleloader and modern firearm.

White-tailed and mule deer hunting opportunities in District 2 vary from marginal to excellent, depending on the GMU and if private land access has been secured. A good predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in the harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill. Figures 5 and 6 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where to hunt.

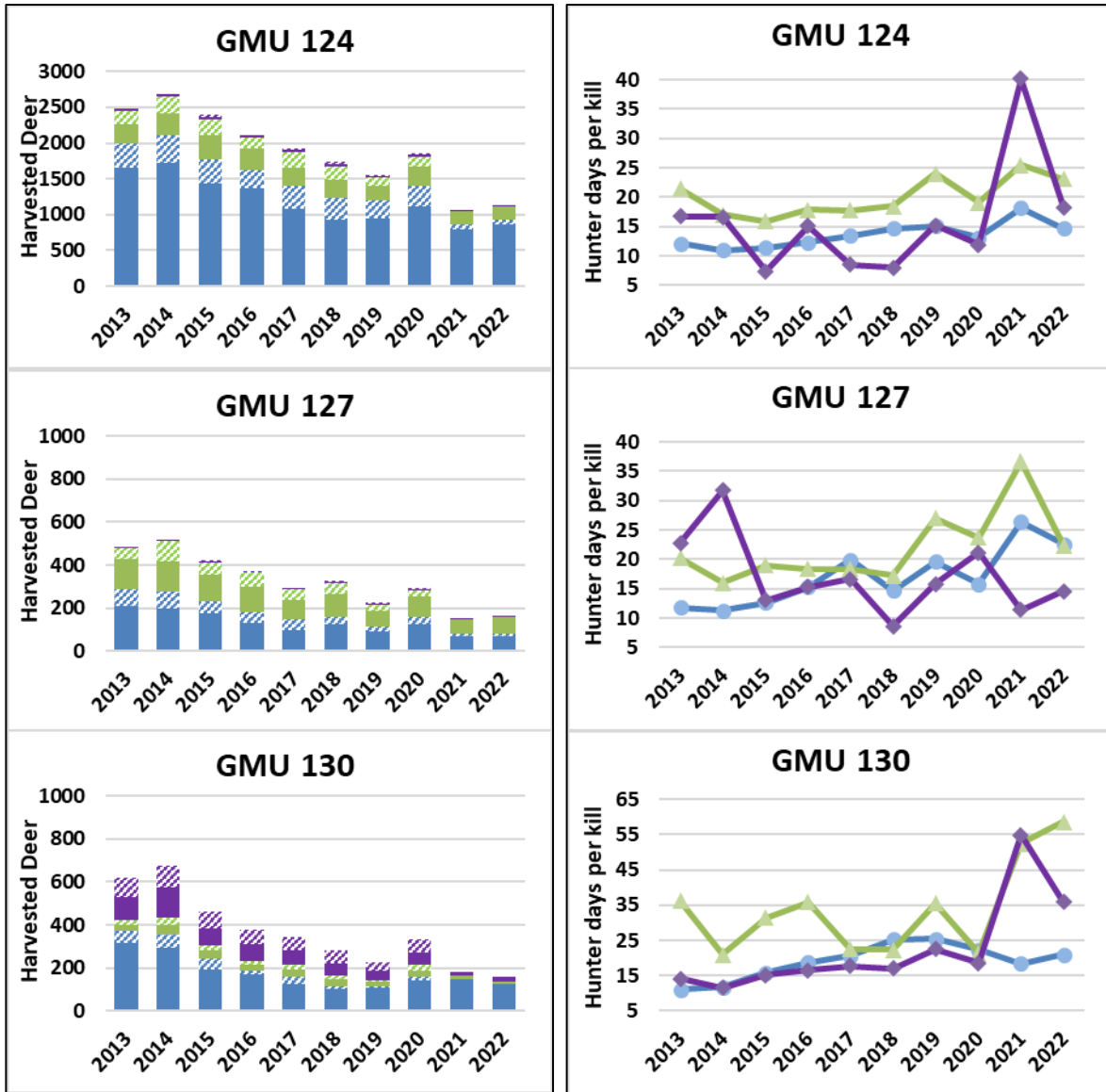


Figure 5. GMUs 124 – 130. **Left column:** Ten-year trends in general season harvest of deer bucks (solid) and antlerless (slash) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the different scale for GMU 124. **Right column:** Ten-year trends in general season hunter days per kill by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the different scale for GMU 130 due to high effort for archery in 2021 and 2022 and high effort for muzzleloader in 2021.

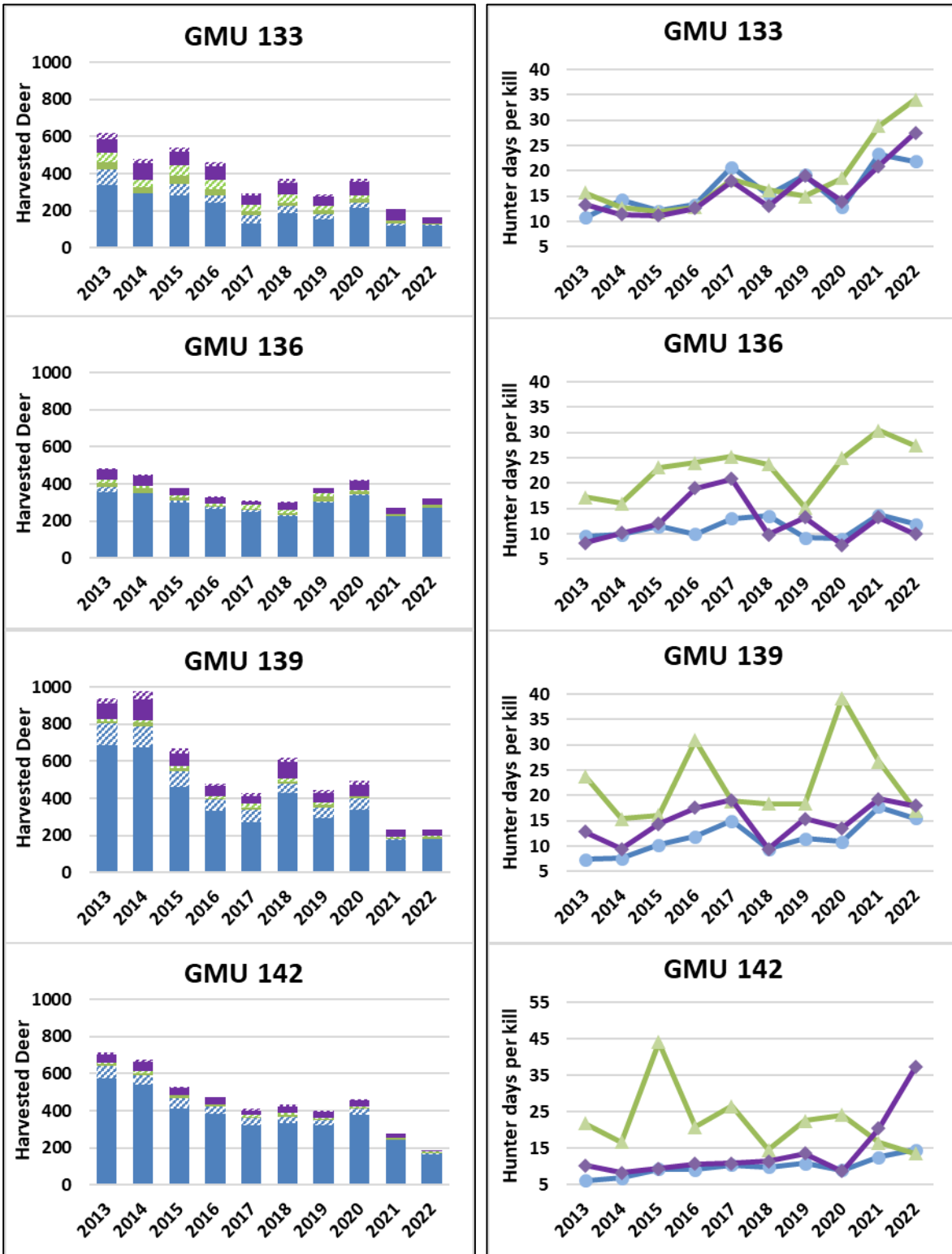


Figure 6. GMUs 133 – 142. **Left column:** Ten-year trends in general season harvest of deer bucks (solid) and antlerless (slash) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). **Right column:** Ten-year trends in general season hunter days per kill by weapon type modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note different scale for GMU 142.

There is a 3-point minimum antler point regulation in GMUs 127–142 for white-tailed deer, and the late white-tailed deer season in GMUs 127–142 is by permit only (the Palouse Special Permit Hunt) as of 2006. Hunter success over the previous 10 years is, on average, higher for the Palouse hunt (39% versus 27% in the general season). This includes data from the 2021 season where the success rate for the Palouse hunt dropped to only 13%, however the success rate improved to 35% in 2022. Additionally, 5+ point bucks make up, on average, a greater percentage of the kill (35% versus 28% in the general season). Historically there have been between 600-750 permits offered for the Palouse hunt, in 2022 it was dropped to 300 permits due to the decline in this population.

Mule and white-tailed deer populations overlap in District 2, so make sure to identify the species before harvesting an animal, as regulations can differ between species within a GMU. The bulk of District 2 is private land, and buck hunters will have to put in time to get access. Doe hunters should have an easier time given the agricultural nature of this district. Many landowners are enrolled in WDFW's hunter access programs in southeastern Washington. See the Private Lands Program section of this document and note that their locations can be mapped by selecting the Private Lands Hunting Opportunities on the [WDFW Hunt Planner](#).

For more 2022 harvest information from District 2:

- [Deer General Harvest District 2](#)
- [Deer Special Permits Harvest District 2](#)

BIGHORN SHEEP

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



District 2 is home to one herd of California bighorn sheep, the Lincoln Cliffs herd, found in GMU 133 north of Highway 2 in Lincoln County (visit the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#) for a map). These sheep can most often be seen throughout the residential community of Lincoln and the cliffs above it, and in the cliffs around Whitestone Rock approximately seven miles downriver from Lincoln on Lake Roosevelt. Sheep are also observed frequently in the cliffs and canyons above Sterling Valley (the area between Lincoln and Whitestone) and in surrounding agricultural fields, where they are

sometimes reported causing crop damage.

WDFW has conducted annual aerial surveys to assess the status of the Lincoln Cliffs herd since 2002. The minimum population size is estimated by the count of rams and ewes observed during these flights (Figure 7). After several years of increase, the population is showing signs of leveling off and has likely reached the largest feasible herd size here due to human tolerance and availability of quality habitat. For more details on the history of the Lincoln Cliffs herd and the status of bighorn sheep in Washington, see WDFW's [2022 Game Status and Trend Report](#).

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Bighorn sheep hunting in Washington requires a special permit. One ram permit for the Lincoln Cliffs herd was offered each year from 1997–2013 and in 2017. Based on ram numbers and population size, this was increased to two permits in 2014–16 and again starting in 2018. The average number of applicants for this ram hunt over the last five years is 2,156 and harvest success for reporting hunters has been 100%. Ewe permits were introduced in 2018, with two offered—one in the Whitestone Unit and one in the Lincoln Cliffs Unit. As of 2020, only one ewe permit in the Whitestone Unit has been available. The 2021 permittee did not report, and the 2020 permittee was unsuccessful in harvesting an ewe after 3 days of hunting. All other ewe hunters have reported 100% success on their hunts. The area is almost entirely private property and permittees will need to obtain permission to access these properties for their hunt.

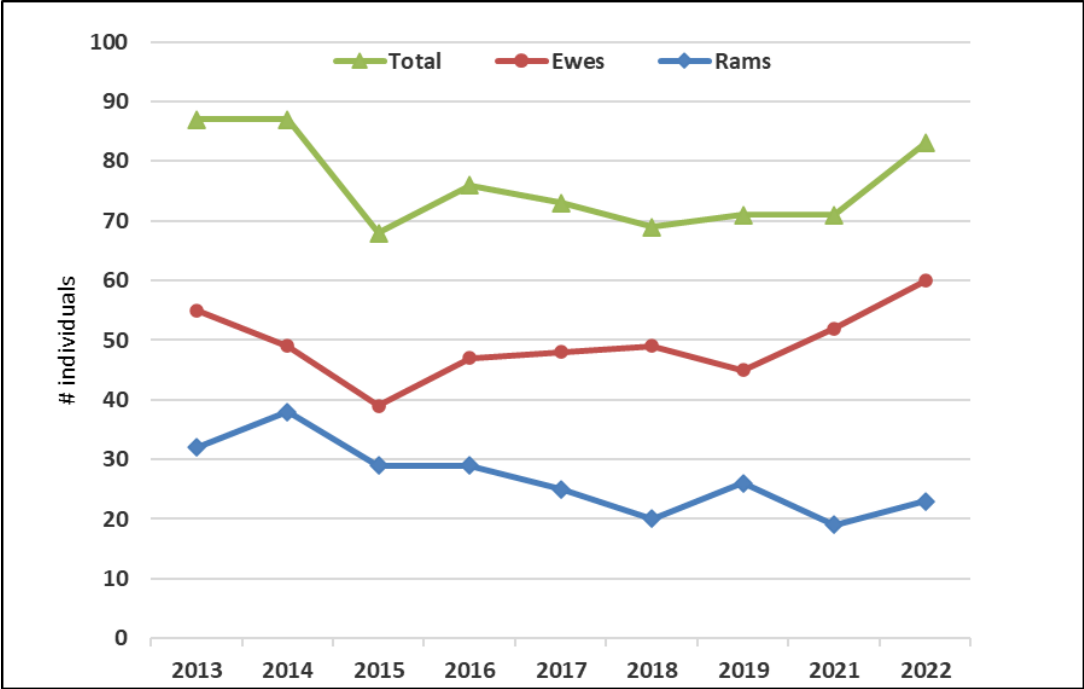


Figure 7. Lincoln Cliff's minimum population estimate by sex for 2013–2022. Estimated as the maximum adult count from helicopter surveys conducted each year. No survey was conducted in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.

MOOSE

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Moose in northeast Washington are Shiras moose (*Alces alces shirasi*), the smallest of the four subspecies of moose in North America. Moose were not believed to be common or widely distributed in the Rocky Mountain states in the 1800s, and it was not until 1908, when explorer George Shiras III found a fairly large population in Yellowstone National Park, that this mountain race was described. Shiras moose were only rarely noted in Washington until the late 1950s when distribution began to expand into eastern Pend Oreille



Photo credit: John Moore

County. Moose dramatically increased in number and distribution in the decades that followed and are now relatively common throughout northeast Washington.

Statewide moose management goals are to 1) Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage moose and their habitats to ensure healthy productive populations; 2) Manage for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes; and 3) Manage statewide moose populations for a sustained yield. The proximity of a moose population near the Spokane metropolitan area adds the challenge of balancing population objectives with human safety and the community's tolerance of moose.

From 2013-16, WDFW completed a project to develop a new survey methodology that would produce a reliable population estimate over the entire northeast area of Washington (GMUs 101–130). This project resulted in an estimate of 5,169 (95% credible interval = 3,510 to 7,034) moose in the northeast in 2015. Though the estimate produced by the new method was less variable than previous methods, the larger area of coverage made it impractical to apply the results to individual hunt units and the cost makes it unrealistic to repeat annually.

Currently, WDFW uses harvest, success, and hunter effort to monitor and manage moose populations in District 2. Based on these harvest metrics, and results from a WDFW/University of Montana partner study from 2014–2018 in northeast Washington, it appears that the ~5000 moose in 2015 was a high point in the moose population in northeast Washington that has since started to decline. Primary drivers of this decline are the poor body condition of cows and reduced calf survival.

Harvest management emphasizes quality hunting opportunities through limited special permits drawn by lottery each year. A total of 34 permits are offered in District 2 in a variety of categories (Table 3). Prior to 2012, District 2 had two moose hunt units (MHU), Mount Spokane (GMU 124 east of Highway 395), and Hangman (GMUs 127 and 130). In 2012, the Mount Spokane MHU was split into [Mount Spokane North and Mount Spokane South Moose Areas](#) to help distribute hunters more evenly across the area and increase hunter opportunity. In 2015, the Hangman MHU was split into the Mica Peak (GMU 127) and Cheney (GMU 130) MHUs, for the antlerless hunts only, to better distribute hunters and try to address increasing moose conflict in Cheney. The Hangman MHU was retained for bull hunts. Additionally, in 2015, the Spokane West MHU was split off from the Huckleberry MHU to distribute hunters and increase opportunity. In 2022, GMU 139 was added to the Hangman and Cheney MHUs; there are not many moose in GMU 139 but there are some and they periodically cause damage and nuisance issues. Adding this GMU allows for easier use of hunters to address these issues when they occur.

Table 3. Permits offered in District 2 by moose hunt unit for 2023.

Moose Unit	Antlered Bull	Antlerless Only		
	General	General	Disabled	Youth
Mount Spokane North	8	2	1	0
Mount Spokane South	8	2	0	1
Spokane West	2	2	0	0
Hangman	4	0	0	0
Mica Peak	0	2	0	0
Cheney	0	2	0	0

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Hunters should take note that moose are a solitary animal by nature and are scattered over very wide areas as individuals or in small groups. While they can be found at any elevation, they are most likely found between 3,000 and 5,000 feet. In the fall they are looking for deciduous browse, primarily willow brush, alder, serviceberry, ceanothus, and other shrubs in clear-cuts or burns 10–20 years old. Moose seek out cool, moist drainage basins and slopes, and generally prefer north slopes or east-flowing drainages.

Moose are still in the rut in early October and some hunters have been effective with calls. By November, snow is common and locating moose tracks and seeing these dark animals with a snowy background is much easier. However, by mid to late November, there is usually enough snow that motor vehicle access can be limited.

Moose seek out snow rather than avoid it in late fall and early winter because they are in their winter coats and start to experience thermal stress at temperatures exceeding 28°F. In years without much snow, they are typically found at a higher elevation and on north slopes with tree cover. In years with a lot of snow, they move down to the foothills of the mountains. Moose habitat in District 2 is largely located on private timber company lands, but smaller private

ownerships can also harbor good moose concentrations. Permit holders should exercise caution and know where they and the targeted moose are at all times given the percentage of private land ownership, proximity to Idaho, and non-hunting lands (State and County Parks, National Wildlife Refuge) within the moose hunting units. WDFW requires all successful moose hunters to submit tooth samples in the envelopes provided with their informational packet. Tooth samples allow biologists to get an overview of the age structure of the moose population, which will help inform future management decisions.

See below for specific harvest metrics and access for each MHU:

Mount Spokane North Moose Area

The success rate for the eight Bull Moose permits in this unit was 57% in 2022 but has averaged 89% since its creation in 2012. Hunters have spent 11 days per kill on average; however, the trend is increasing with hunters spending on average 16 days per kill in the last five years of the hunt compared to just five days per kill in the first five years. The average antler spread of bulls harvested is 34 inches, with the largest bull harvested measuring 49 inches.

Success rates for the Antlerless Only hunt in this unit was 100% in 2022 and has averaged 89% since its creation in 2012. Hunters have spent seven days per kill on average, though it reached as high as 19 days per kill in 2016. Decreasing hunter success rates and increasing hunter effort combined with low pregnancy rates and low calf survival in a local study led the department to reduce antlerless opportunity in this area to two permits starting in 2020. One antlerless permit is also offered to disabled hunters in this unit; the permittees for this hunt were unsuccessful in 2020 and 2021 having spent 18 days and 35 days hunting, respectively. The permittee in 2022 declined the permit after being selected, so no hunting occurred on that permit in 2022.

Access in this unit is primarily on timber company lands, Inland Empire Paper (IEP) and Hancock Timber, and DNR lands around the [East Blanchard Road area](#). The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates – they might be open in the morning if crews are working but you might get locked in that evening. IEP typically allows full-sized vehicles through October but may close gates at any time if conditions present risk of road damage or fire. IEP does charge an access fee, but it is reasonable and comes in daily and annual versions. For more information on IEP and maps of their property please visit [their website](#).

Hancock has traditionally had a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with WDFW to allow **non-motorized** access for free to hunters, but please check with Hancock or WDFW to confirm this MOU is still in place prior to hunting their properties. WDFW Enforcement officers monitor their property and will ticket offenders. Please respect the agreement or this access could be lost. Hancock does not supply a map of their property; hunters are encouraged to use the Spokane County Assessor's [online parcel map](#) to identify Hancock ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps).

Mount Spokane South Moose Area

The success rate for the eight Bull Moose permits in this unit was 71% in 2022 and has averaged 93% since its creation in 2012. Hunters spent 15 days per kill on average in 2022; the average for this hunt since its creation is eight days but has been higher than average the past five years (9-15 days per kill on average from 2018-2022). The average antler spread of bulls harvested is 34 inches, with the largest bull harvested measuring 48 inches.

Two antlerless permittees hunted this unit in 2022 and both were successful. Success has averaged 79% since its creation in 2012 but has varied considerably from 100% in 2020 to zero in 2021. Hunters have spent six days per kill on average, though it has been as high as 16 days per kill and the single permittee during the 2021 season hunted 22 days without success. This is drastically different from the two permittees that hunted in 2022 as they averaged just 3 days per kill. Observed decline in hunter success rates and increasing hunter effort combined with low pregnancy rates and low calf survival in a local study led the department to reduce antlerless opportunity in this area to two permits in 2020. There is also one antlerless permit offered to youth hunters in this unit; the 2022 youth was successful after seven days of hunting.

Access in this unit is primarily on Inland Empire Paper (IEP) timber company lands in the [Thompson Creek](#) and Brickel Creek areas. There is a small parcel of DNR lands north of the Brickel Creek area as well. The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates – they might be open in the morning if crews are working but you might get locked in that evening. IEP typically allows full-sized vehicles through October but may close gates at any time if conditions present risk of road damage or fire. IEP does charge an access fee, but it is reasonable and comes in daily and annual versions. IEP lands are adjacent to Mount Spokane State Park, which is not open to hunting, and the border with Idaho, so hunters need to know where they are before shooting at an animal. Hunters are recommended to use the Spokane County Assessor's [online parcel map](#) to identify ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps). For more information on IEP rules and maps of their property please visit [their website](#).

Spokane West Moose Hunt Area

The success rate for the two Bull Moose permits in this unit was 100% in 2022 and has averaged 100% since its creation in 2015; however, the single permittee in 2017 did not report and did not respond to calls. Hunters spent 12 days per kill on average in 2022; the average for this hunt since its creation is six days. The average antler spread of bulls harvested is 38 inches, with the largest bull harvested measuring 48 inches.

The success rate for the Antlerless Only hunt in this unit was 50% in 2022 (only one of the two permittees was successful) and has averaged 88% since its creation in 2015. Hunters have spent five days per kill on average, though it reached a new high of 18 days per kill in 2022.

Harvest stats and limited composition flights suggest the moose population in this unit may be doing better than the other units in District 2. However, most of the access is non-motorized, so **do not apply** for this unit if you are not in good physical condition or do not have private land access. Access in this unit is primarily on Hancock Timber Company lands and scattered DNR parcels. The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates; they might be open in the morning if crews are working but you might get locked in that evening. Hancock has traditionally had an MOU with WDFW to allow **non-motorized** access for free to hunters, but please check with Hancock or WDFW to confirm this MOU is still in place prior to hunting their properties. WDFW Enforcement officers monitor their property and will ticket offenders. Please respect the agreement or this access could be lost. Hancock does not supply a map of their property; we recommend hunters use the Stevens County Assessor's [property map](#) to identify Hancock ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps). Access to Hancock lands in this unit are from the gate east off [Hwy 231 just south of the intersection with Reservation Road](#).

Hangman Moose Hunt GMUs 127, 130, and 139

The number of Bull Moose permits offered for this hunt was reduced from seven to four in 2017, due to reduced success, $\leq 86\%$, and increased effort (as high as 23 days) observed the previous four years. Since this reduction, success had averaged 90% and effort had averaged 6 days per harvest. This was not the situation in 2022, as the success rate was 50%, the lowest ever recorded despite increased effort (47 days per kill). The average antler spread of bulls harvested in the last 10 years is 37 inches, with the largest bull ever harvested in this area measuring 52 inches. Overall, the moose population in this unit appears to be declining in areas open to general hunting access (e.g., DNR and Inland Empire Paper Company), but increasing in areas closed to hunting or where access is limited (Conservation Areas and suburban Spokane). *Hunters are strongly encouraged to secure private land access for this hunt before applying.*

Access in this unit is primarily on Inland Empire Paper (IEP) timber company lands on Mica Peak and scattered sections of DNR throughout. The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates before entering. IEP does **NOT** allow vehicular access on their lands in this unit due to a

history of road damage. Because it is non-motorized only, IEP does not require an access permit on Mica Peak. IEP lands are adjacent to Spokane County Parks lands, which are not open to hunting, and are on the border with Idaho, so hunters need to know where they are before taking a shot. Hunters are advised to use the Spokane County Assessor's [online parcel map](#) to identify ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps). For more information on IEP, maps of their property, and access rules please visit [their website](#). Two primary entry points for this hunt are the [Belmont Road County Park](#) trailhead and [FAA Starr Road gate](#).

Mica Peak Moose Hunt GMU 127

There are no Bull Moose permits specific to just this unit (Hangman MHU incorporates both Mica Peak and Cheney MHUs). The following Antlerless harvest statistics include the Hangman Unit data because most permittees prior to 2015 harvested their animals in Mica Peak. Due to declining hunter success, Antlerless Only permits were reduced from seven to four in 2017. The success rate for this hunt increased to 100% in 2017, up significantly from the previous 5-year average of 69% and remained at 100% in 2018. However, success dropped to 50% in 2019 and effort spiked to an all-time high of 21 days/kill on average. Permits were reduced to two in 2020; hunter success rebounded to 100% and hunter effort was similar (average of 5 days per kill) to that observed before the reduction in tags. In 2021 hunter success remained at 100%, but effort increased to 10 days on average. Effort increased again in 2022 (30 days per kill) and hunter success decreased to 50%. Overall, the moose population in this unit appears to be declining in areas open to general hunting access (e.g., DNR and Inland Empire Paper), but increasing in areas closed to hunting or where access is limited. *Hunters are encouraged to secure private land access for this hunt if they want to increase their odds of success.*

See the Hangman unit above for more access information.

Cheney Moose Hunt GMUs 130 and 139

There are no Bull Moose permits specific to just this unit (Hangman MHU incorporates both Mica Peak and Cheney MHUs). This MHU was split off from the Hangman MHU in 2015 for Antlerless only hunts because very few permittees hunted it while the number of complaints regarding moose in the unit's suburban/rural areas increased. This unit is almost entirely private land. The larger blocks of public land are NOT open to hunting, and the moose are dispersed and highly mobile. Since inception of this hunt in 2015, two antlerless permits have been offered annually and average hunter success has been 88%, with an average effort of 10 days per kill. Only one of the two Antlerless Only permittees reported for this hunt in 2015. The permittee was successful after 15 days of hunting. In 2016, neither permittee was successful after spending a combined 20 days hunting. In 2017, one permittee did not hunt, while the other was successful after nine days of hunting.

In 2018, 2019, and 2021, all hunters were successful and averaged 18, 10, and 5 days per kill, respectively. In 2020 only one hunter reported, and they were successful after four days of hunting. In 2022 both hunters were successful again and their average effort was eight days per

kill. Hunters are **STRONGLY** encouraged to secure private land access for this hunt prior to applying for the permit.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Cougars may be found in varying densities throughout District 2, depending on habitat availability. Cougars are managed to provide maximum harvest opportunity while promoting population stability and social structure and minimizing human-cougar conflict.

Beginning with the 2012 season, WDFW shifted away from using season length and/or permits to manage cougar harvest and instead divided the state into cougar hunt areas and implemented a standard early general season with no harvest limit across all hunt areas from September 1 to December 31, followed by a late season (January 1 to April 30) the duration of which is dependent on a harvest guideline. The harvest guideline is 12% to 16% of a hunt area's estimated adult population. Starting January 1, harvest numbers and composition of the

harvest in each hunt area are evaluated, and areas may be closed for meeting or exceeding the guideline with relatively short notice. Hunters that plan on hunting cougar after January 1 are responsible for knowing if their hunt area is open or closed; to confirm its status, hunters must call the cougar hotline (1-866-364-4868) or [check online](#). To facilitate implementation of the guideline, all successful late season cougar hunters are required to report their harvest to WDFW via the hotline within 72 hours of harvest. A pelt sealing for cougars harvested during either season must also be scheduled within five days of the kill.

GMUs 124, 127, and 130 comprise a single Hunt Area with a harvest guideline of 7–9 adults. Therefore, if you would like to hunt cougar in GMUs 124–130 after January 1, you will have to verify the unit is still open. Harvest in this unit has met or exceeded the guideline for four of the past five seasons and has been closed prior to April 30. GMUs 133–142 are part of the Columbia Basin Hunt Area that has no harvest guideline due to limited cougar habitat.

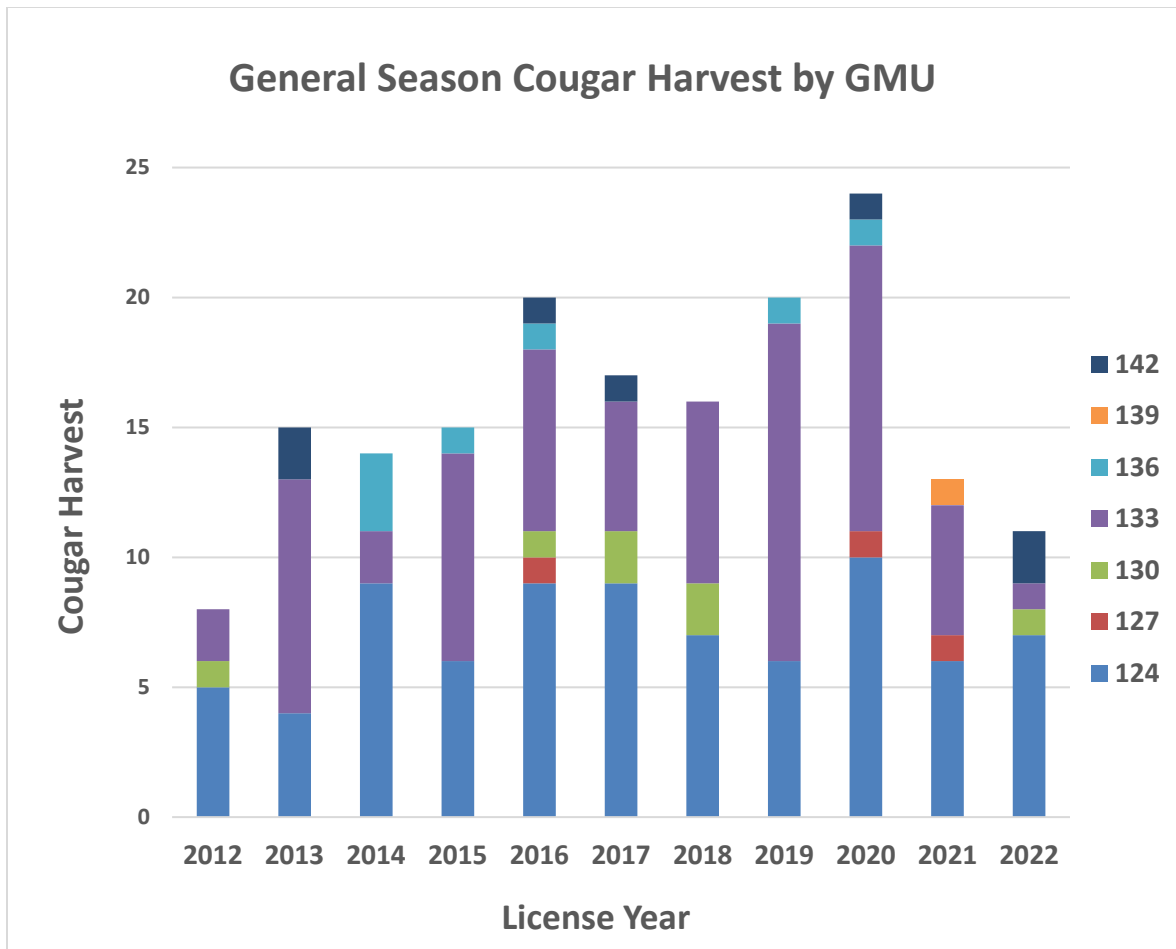


Figure 8. General season cougar harvest by GMU for license years 2012–2022.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Starting in 2017, the cougar season was extended until April 30. If you hunt in a unit that has not been closed to harvest, **you will have to purchase a 2024 hunting license and cougar tag to hunt cougar after March 31, 2024.**

In general, cougar harvest was increasing in District 2 through the 2020 license year when it reached a high of 24 cougars; however, harvest in the past two license years has declined to the lowest levels reported since the 2012 license year (Figure 8). This decrease in cougar harvest may be due, in part, to the large hemorrhagic disease outbreak in 2021 that resulted in a die-off of white-tailed deer, cougar’s primary prey base. Having fewer deer available to hunt may have resulted in cougars moving to other areas with more abundant prey or switching to other prey items such as livestock or pets, resulting in conflict situations with landowners. Less commonly, cougars will die of starvation when prey is less abundant, a situation that is more likely to occur with young cats (kittens or juveniles). A decrease in hunter participation may have also contributed to the lower cougar harvest, as most of the general season cougar harvest in the district is opportunistic, occurring while hunters are seeking deer or elk.

The average cougar harvest across the district over the last 10 license years is 16. Harvest is consistently the highest in GMUs 124 and 133, and sightings in these units are also more common than in other GMUs in District 2. Cougar harvest in all other GMUs in District 2 is usually very low (Figure 8). The proportion of males and females in the harvest varies each year, but the typical age at harvest is three years or younger. For harvest details by GMU, see the [Game Harvest Reports](#). The Department website has more information on [reporting and pelt-sealing requirements](#).

BLACK BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears in Washington are managed with the goal of ensuring healthy and productive populations while minimizing conflict with people. The state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs); District 2 is part of both the Northeastern BBMU (GMUs 124–130) and the Columbia Basin BBMU (GMUs 133–142). Harvest levels vary within and between BBMUs depending on local habitat conditions and corresponding bear densities, as well as hunter effort and access limitations. WDFW does not currently conduct annual surveys or have formal population estimates for bear but rely on harvest statistics to infer population trends and evaluate management decisions.



Bear harvest in District 2 is substantially lower than in the rest of the Northeastern BBMU, likely due to habitat and hunter access limitations. Bear harvest in District 2 also varies widely year by year (Figure 9), as bears are most often harvested opportunistically by deer and elk hunters. The proportion of males and females in the harvest is also highly variable year to year, likely for the same reason (Figure 10). Most of the harvest in the past 10 years has occurred in GMUs 124 and 127. Although the Columbia Basin BBMU is not thought to support resident black bear populations due to lack of forested habitat, GMU 133 has averaged 7 bears per year over the past 10 years. Bear harvest in the other GMUs in the Basin (136–142) is very low or nonexistent and therefore would not be worthwhile to target this species in these units.

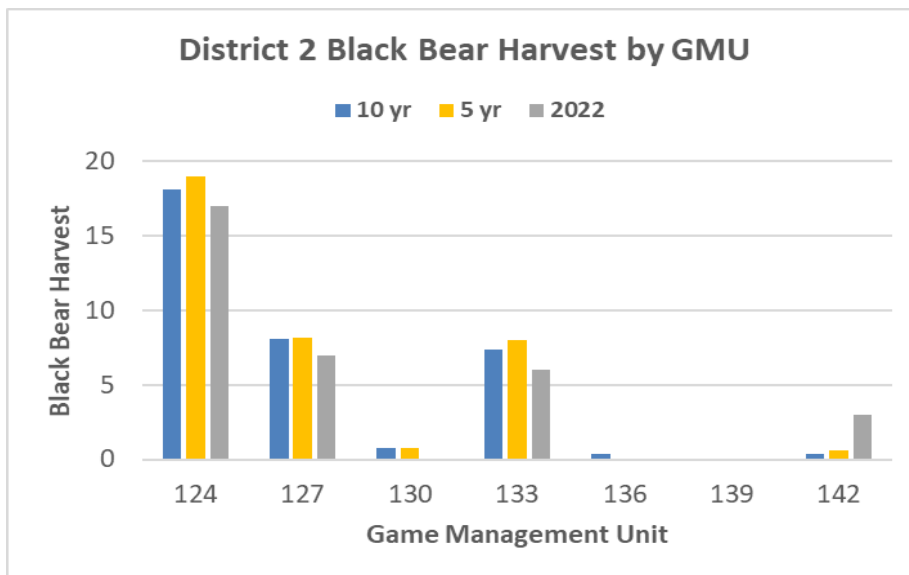


Figure 9. The number of black bears harvested in each GMU during the 2022 general season in District 2. Also included are the 10-year (2013–2022) and 5-year (2018–2022) average for the total number of bears harvested in each GMU.

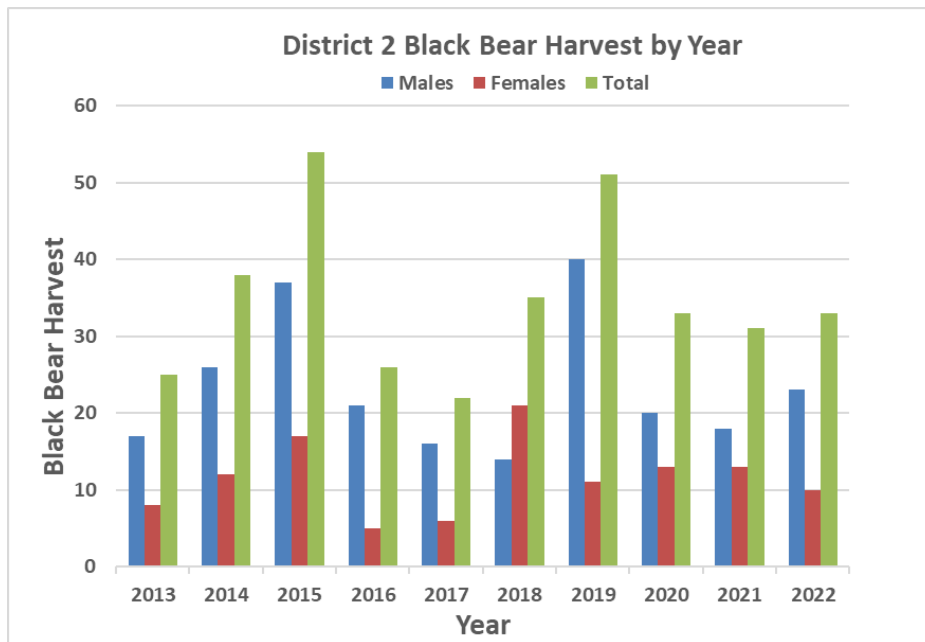


Figure 10. Black bear total harvest in District 2, 2013–2022.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Beginning in 2019, the fall general season dates were standardized statewide, allowing eastside hunters to start hunting August 1 in all GMUs. Additionally, the bag limit was increased to two bears, regardless of location. Hunters must purchase a second bear tag to harvest a second bear. District 2 is not known for black bear hunting, though an increase in harvest in recent years suggests the local population is doing well, especially in the forested areas of Spokane and Lincoln counties.

Scouting and securing private land access are extremely important factors that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 2. Although black bears are fairly common in some areas, they are seen infrequently because they tend to spend most of their time in forest cover and limit their time in the open to cooler times of the day. Much of the bear habitat in the district is either in State or County Parks and Conservation Areas (which are not open to hunt), or private timber company land (where you may need an access permit). See the public and private lands sections at the end of this document for more information on hunting access in District 2.

Bear hunters are strongly urged not to shoot females with cubs. In the fall, cubs are 30 to 50 pounds and tend to lag behind when traveling. Please be patient and spend time watching for cubs before shooting a bear. Remember that it is **mandatory** to submit a premolar tooth from all fall season harvested bears. Tooth envelopes are available at WDFW offices, and hunters are welcome to make an appointment for help with pulling the tooth if needed. If you are unable to reach a regional WDFW office for a tooth envelope, contact the Wildlife Program at (360) 902-

2515. Hunters that submitted a tooth can [look up the age of their harvest](#) several months after the close of the season.

WATERFOWL



At the statewide level, District 2 is not known for its duck hunting and is not a substantial duck production area due to the ephemeral nature of the water bodies in the Channeled Scablands. Local surveys indicate brood production has dropped back to pre-2016 levels (Figure 11). In 2016 and 2017 there was especially high precipitation in the winter and spring, resulting in dramatic increases in wetland size and numbers and increased nesting and broods. The most common breeding duck species in the area are mallard, gadwall, green-winged teal, and redhead. Other common waterfowl species in District 2 during the spring/summer include blue-winged and cinnamon teal, ruddy duck, American coot. Species that are seen in larger numbers during migration include northern pintail, American wigeon, scaup, ring-necked ducks and common goldeneyes.

Aerial breeding population surveys (BPOP) for the entire Potholes region of eastern Washington show a decreasing trend in ducks and coots observed since 2018; however, there are two years without data because flights in 2020 and 2021 were canceled due to COVID-19 (Figure 12). Observations of geese during BPOP surveys increased from 2018 to 2019 but were down in 2022 and 2023 (Figure 12). This trend aligns with brood counts from ground surveys in District 2 except in 2023 where a slight increase was observed in both duck and coot broods (Figure 11).

Given the limited number of local nesting ducks, waterfowl hunting opportunity in this district is dependent upon the number of migrants coming from Canada and Alaska, the amount of precipitation, and how long waterbodies remain ice-free. Although duck and coot brood counts were higher this year than in 2022, the totals are still considerably lower than observations from 2016-2020 (Figure 11), so early season hunting opportunities in District 2 could be limited with fewer local birds available. Hunters should focus their efforts on larger perennial waterbodies unless fall rains are significant, then shallow, flooded agricultural fields become duck and goose hot spots. Scouting after fall/winter storm events for incoming migrants and flooded agricultural fields, and subsequently attempting to secure permission on those private agricultural lands may provide the best opportunities for success later in the season. For more information on waterfowl hunting techniques and waterfowl hunting areas in Region 1, see the [WDFW waterfowl webpage](#).

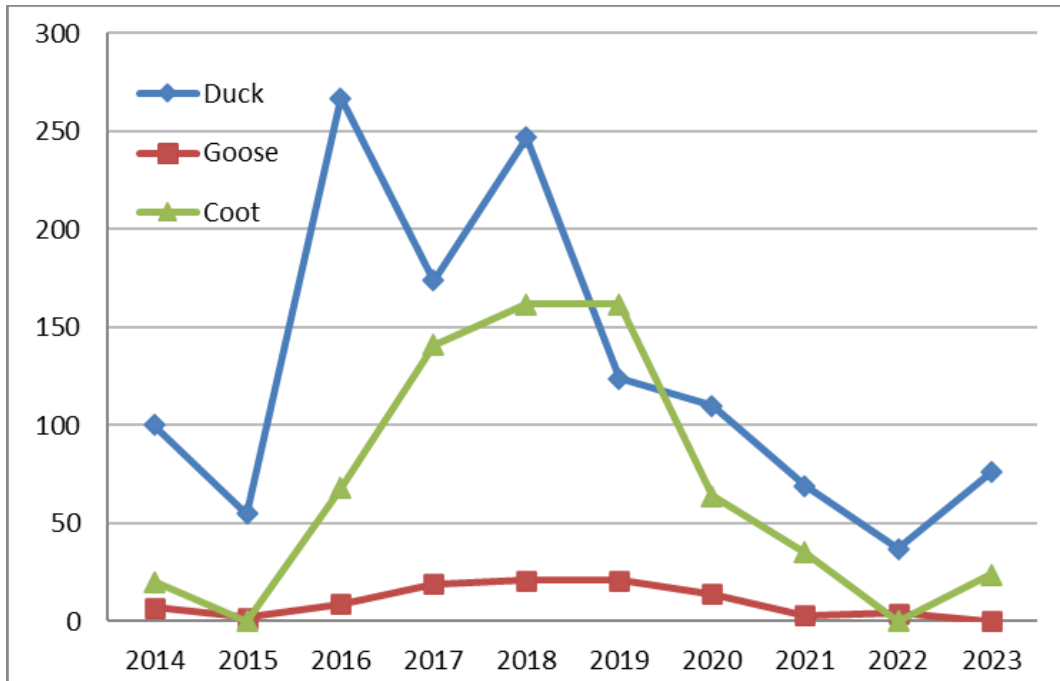


Figure 11. Total number of young of the year observed on District 2 brood ground survey routes for the past 10 years.

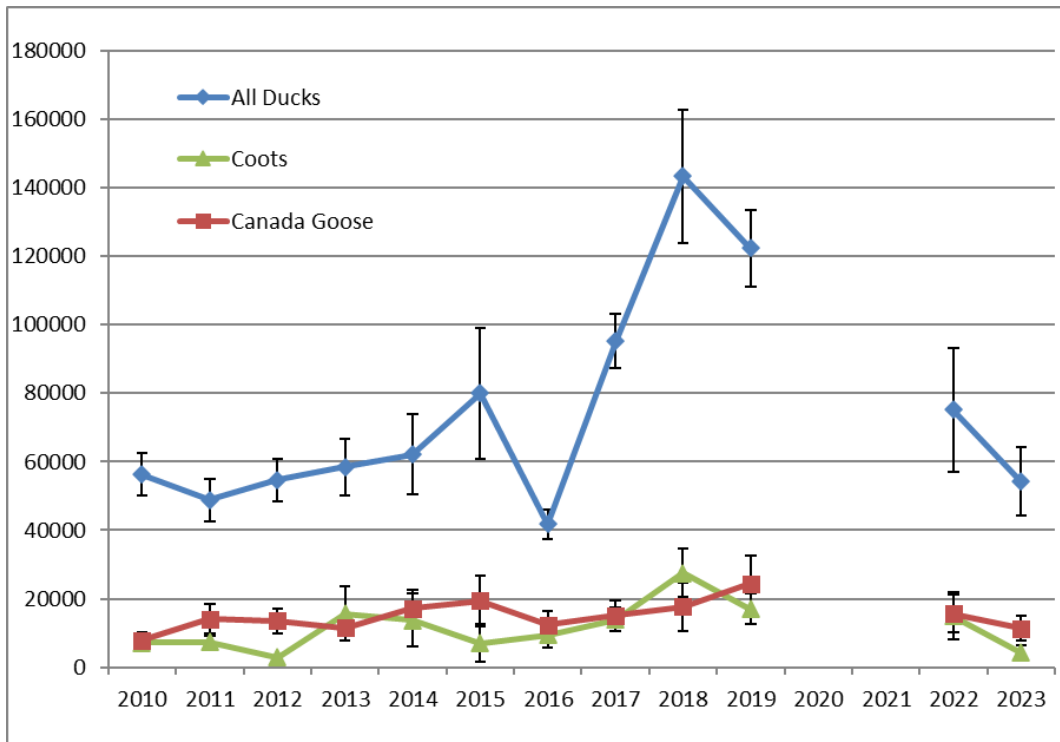


Figure 12. Waterfowl estimates from aerial breeding population surveys for the Potholes region of eastern Washington. BPOP flights were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19.

PHEASANT



The pheasant population available for harvest in the fall is highly dependent on annual recruitment. The late snow and wet, cold spring in 2022 likely resulted in reduced chick survival and recruitment for early nesters in 2022. It should have supplied more forage and insects for chicks for later nests, resulting in increased survival and recruitment for them. This was followed by a fairly typical winter in 2022/23 for eastern Washington and should have resulted in

average overwinter survival. The spring and early summer of 2023 was relatively mild, although below normal precipitation and early high temperatures in May and June may reduce forage available in late summer/early fall which could decrease chick survival prior to hunting opener.

District-wide harvest was on an increasing trend, reaching a 10-year high in 2020, but saw a steep decline in 2021 (Figure 13, top). WDFW's methods for analyzing harvest data changed in 2022 so estimates from last season should not be compared directly with previous seasons. However, 6.5% of estimated statewide harvest of pheasants occurred in District 2 (n = 6,223 pheasants; 13.4% of eastern WA pheasant harvest) in 2022. Hunter numbers have remained relatively stable (Figure 13, top), mirroring statewide trends. An estimated 2,043 hunters targeted pheasants in District 2 in 2022 (8.6% of pheasant hunters statewide), but again this should not be compared with previous seasons as new analyses were used to develop this estimate. Days per hunter have remained relatively stable in the district, but harvest per hunter dropped in 2021 (Figure 13, bottom). The 2022 estimates of days per hunter (n = 4.42) and harvest per hunter (n = 3.05) were similar to the previous trends observed. The declines seen in harvest in 2021 were likely tied to the extreme drought and excessive heat of 2021, reducing nest success and chick survival.

The majority of pheasant hunting occurs in Whitman County, which has about three times the harvest and about two times more hunters than Lincoln or Spokane counties. For more information on the harvest statistics see the most recent Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics here: [Pheasant – Statewide Only](#). For more information on pheasant status in Washington, see the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Overall, pheasant populations are experiencing long-term declines. This is a trend seen across the country and it is likely associated with current cleaner farming practices and habitat loss. Examples of this include the switch to large-scale monoculture farming, removal of hedgerow (farming through small creeks beds and up into the gravel of the road), the more efficient harvest machinery leaving less waste grain, increased use of herbicides and pesticides, and more recently the use of neonicotinoid insecticides. These factors combine to reduce adult,

nest, and chick survival through less food (fewer insects and forbs) and less cover, and in the case of neonicotinoids, potential direct mortality of individuals that consume the coated seeds.

Since most of the land in this district is private, hunters will need to spend some time seeking permission for access to the better sites. Many private landowners have recently enrolled in WDFW hunter access programs in southeast Washington. See the Private Lands Program section below for access program acres by GMU, and the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#) for mapped locations. The Department has [tips on pheasant hunting in general](#) and recommends hunters use the “[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)” publication.

WDFW will be releasing game farm-produced roosters once again this fall at the traditional release sites, which are also mapped on the Hunt Planner Webmap and the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) publication. There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

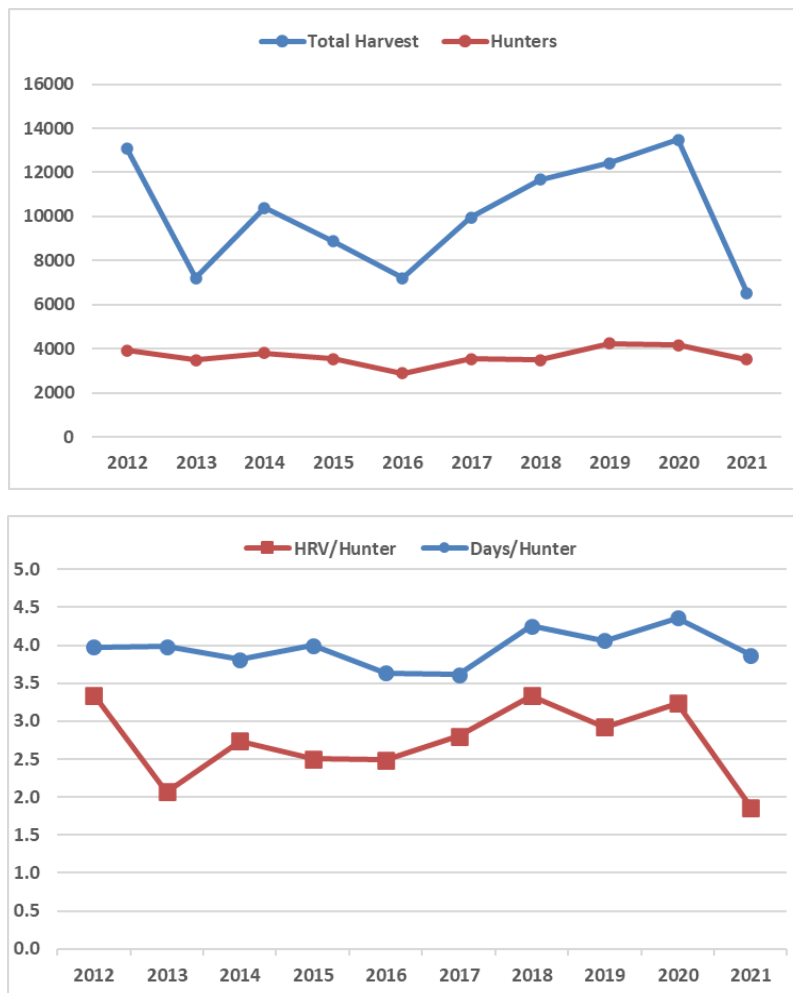


Figure 13. Top graph: Pheasant harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Bottom graph: Pheasant harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 were not included in these graphs as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

CHUKAR AND GRAY PARTRIDGE



Photos by Alan L. Bauer

Nest and early chick survival for chukar and partridge likely suffered from the cold wet spring in 2022, but the late nesters and re-nesters likely benefited from the increased forage and insects. The winter of 2022/23 was typical for the inland northwest and should have resulted in normal adult overwinter survival, and the spring of 2023 was relatively mild so hatching success should have been decent. Precipitation levels are below normal for the year, and that, coupled with above average temperatures may reduce forage in late summer and could decrease juvenile survival if those conditions continue into fall.

Harvest has varied over the past ten years with spikes in 2012 and 2018 and declines in 2020 and 2021 (Figure 14). Harvest estimates were calculated using different analyses in 2022 so the numbers should not be compared directly with previous seasons. In 2022, hunter effort for chukar and partridge in District 2 averaged approximately 4 days per hunter which resulted in 2.1 birds harvested per hunter. This effort is slightly lower than 2022 statewide hunter effort for these species ($n = 4.7$ days per hunter) and birds harvested per hunter is also lower than the statewide average ($n = 3.5$ birds per hunter).

Partridge are most common in Lincoln and Whitman counties and are most often seen in, and adjacent to, agricultural fields. When hunting for partridge in Lincoln County please be sure to identify your bird before pulling the trigger. There are populations of Sage grouse and Sharp-tailed grouse in the county, and both are State Endangered species.

There are very few chukar in District 2. They are predominantly found along the breaks of the Snake River, where the terrain is steep and rocky with limited public access from above. There is some access via the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers land along the Snake River from below, but not all the Corps lands allow hunting. See their [website](#) for details.

For more information on gray partridge and chukar harvest, see the [Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: Statewide and by County](#), and the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

The Department has tips on [chukar](#) and [gray partridge](#) hunting in general and recommends hunters use the “[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)” publication as well. There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

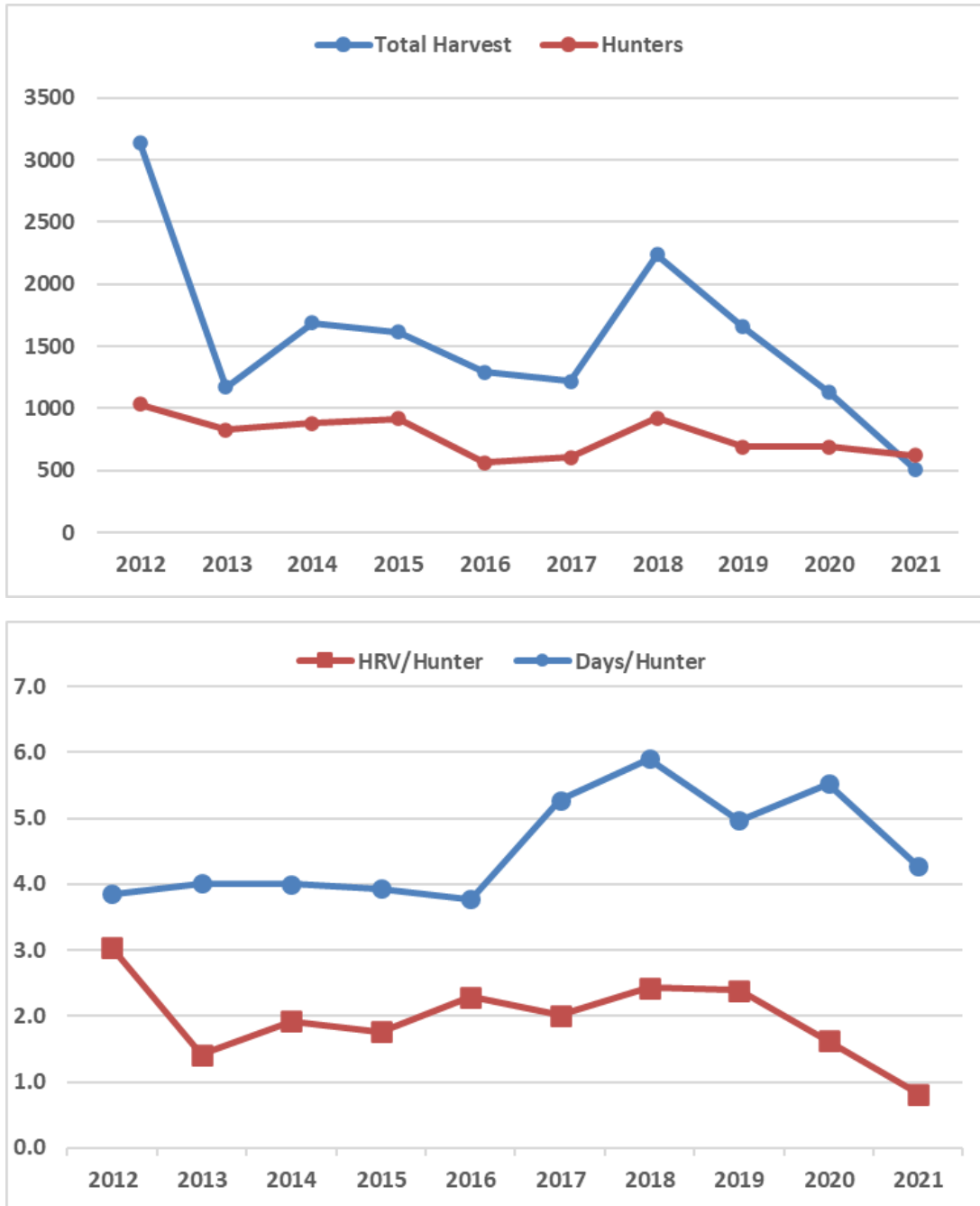


Figure 14. Top graph: Pheasant harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Bottom graph: Pheasant harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 were not included in these graphs as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons. Bottom graph: Chukar and partridge harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 were

not included in these graphs as WDFW's methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

FOREST GROUSE



The forest grouse season opener was delayed to September 15 in 2021 and will be opening on this date again in 2023. Statewide harvest data indicates a declining trend in the forest grouse population, and wing barrel data indicates that early season harvest is biased towards young of the year and brood hens. This delay has been implemented to allow for more brood break up to occur, thereby reducing brood hen vulnerability to harvest, ultimately resulting in a growing population.

Overall, forest grouse populations appear to be low but stable in District 2, with the best success found in the forested portions of GMUs 124, 127, and 133. Of the four forest grouse species, only ruffed and dusky grouse are found in District 2. Ruffed grouse are the most common of the two, but dusky grouse can be found in GMUs 124, 127, and 133. The relatively dry and warm spring in 2023 should have improved hatching success and chick survival of early nesters, but those hot and dry conditions continuing into the summer may decrease recruitment as it could limit forage availability.

Hunter numbers prior to 2022 were down relative to long term averages but were stable during the previous few seasons (Figure 15, top). Similarly, total grouse harvested, and hunter success (harvest per hunter) were down in 2021 which may have been due to drought conditions in spring/summer 2021 (Figure 15, bottom). In 2022, WDFW's methods for estimating small game harvest underwent significant modifications so data from 2022 should not be directly compared with previous seasons. In District 2, hunters averaged 4.5 days of effort in 2022 with average harvest of 1.3 birds per hunter (n = 770 total grouse killed). This is a lower hunter effort than what was estimated statewide (n = 8.4 days per hunter), but average harvest was similar (n = 1.6 birds per hunter).

For more information on forest grouse, see the [Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: Statewide](#), and the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#). There are [tips on hunting forest grouse](#) and the department recommends hunters use the "[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)" publication as well. There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

To evaluate population trends and harvest changes, WDFW began collecting forest grouse wings and tails from hunters in 2016 and will continue to do so in 2023. Collection barrels will be distributed at various hunting access points, as well as WDFW offices throughout Region 1. You can help with this effort by dropping off a wing and tail from each forest grouse harvested, following the instructions at the barrel. [Locations of wing barrels and other information about this sampling effort](#) can be found on WDFW's website.

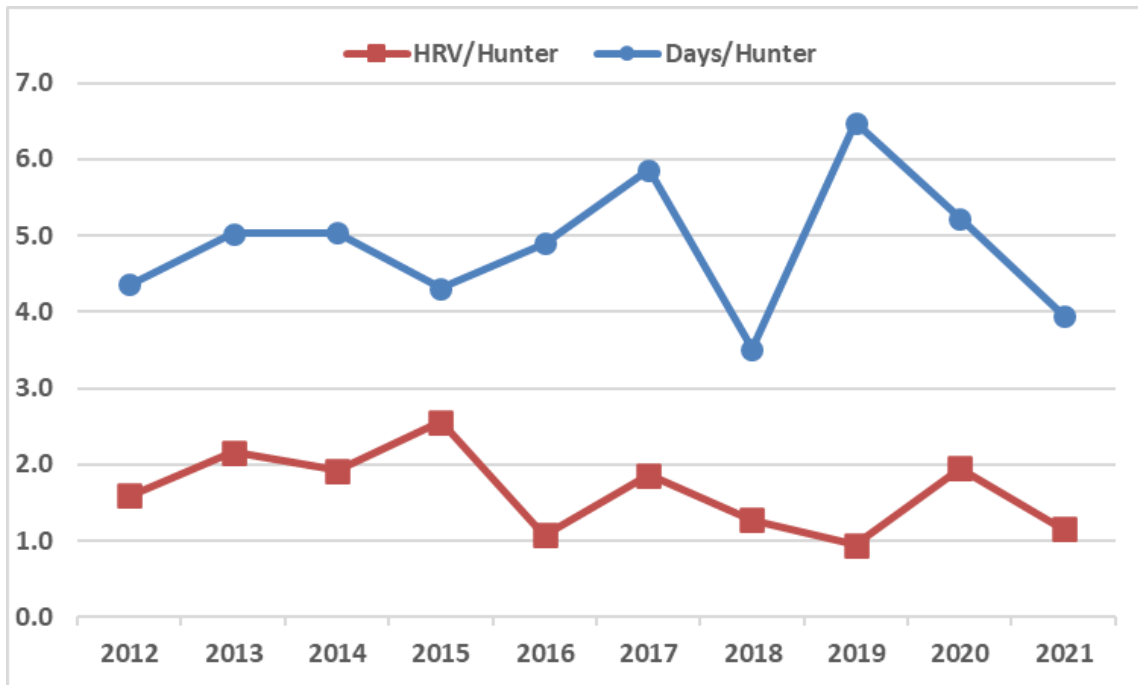
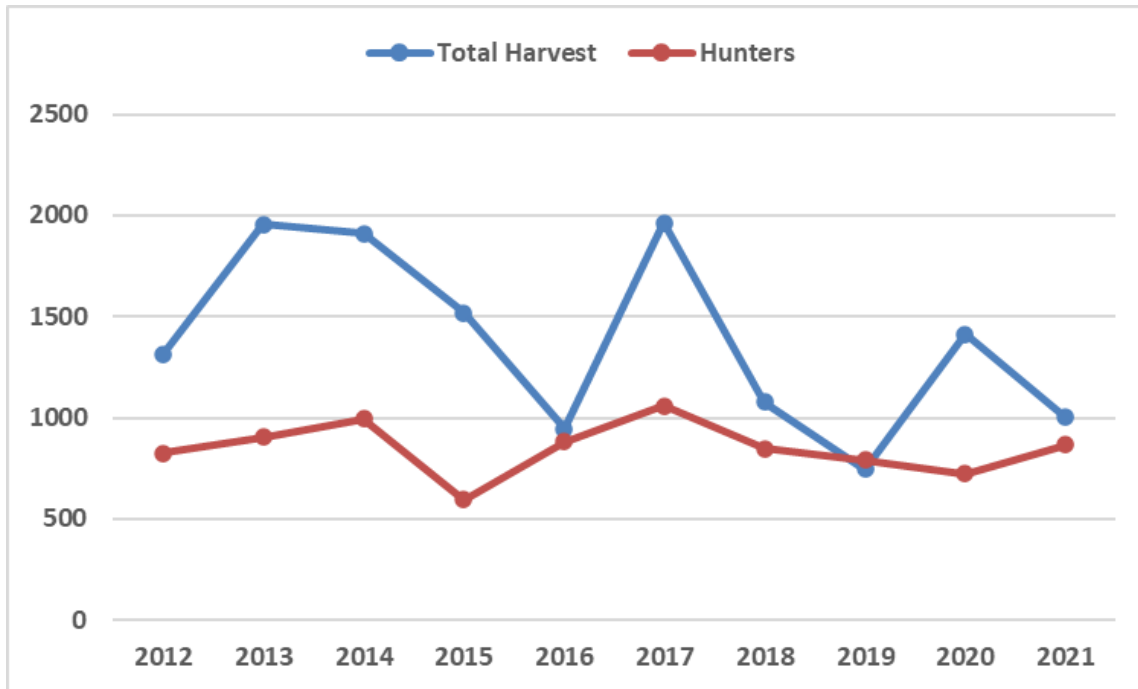


Figure 15. Top graph: Forest grouse harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Bottom graph: Forest grouse harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 were not included in these graphs as WDFW's methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

QUAIL



The cold, wet spring in 2022 likely hurt early nesters, but with quails' fecundity and tendency to double-brood, they likely were able to take advantage of the forage with later nests and re-nest attempts. The 2022/23 winter was typical and should have resulted in average adult overwinter survival and the relatively dry and warm spring in 2023 should have improved hatching success and chick survival of early nesters. However, those hot and dry conditions continuing into the summer may decrease recruitment as it could limit forage availability later in the summer/early fall.

Harvest was down and hunter numbers slightly up in 2021, but both were in line with ten-year average (Figure 16, top). Hunter success (harvest/hunter) was below average and hunter effort (days/hunter) was average (Figure 16, bottom). Harvest estimates were derived using different analyses in 2022 so the numbers should not be compared directly with previous seasons. Average hunter effort in District 2 during the 2022 season was 4.4 days and success rates were estimated at 4.5 birds per hunter (n = 2,923 total quail harvested). These numbers are lower than the statewide averages of 4.8 days of hunting effort and 6.1 birds per hunter in 2022; however, it is important to note that statewide totals include harvest of mountain quail which are only legal to hunt on the westside of the state.

Access can be challenging, especially with most of the good quail habitat occurring in and around farmsteads and towns. For more information on harvest statistics, see the Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics here: [Quail - Statewide](#). For more information on quail status in Washington, see the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Consider reviewing tips on [quail hunting in general](#), as well as the "[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)" publication available on the WDFW website. There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

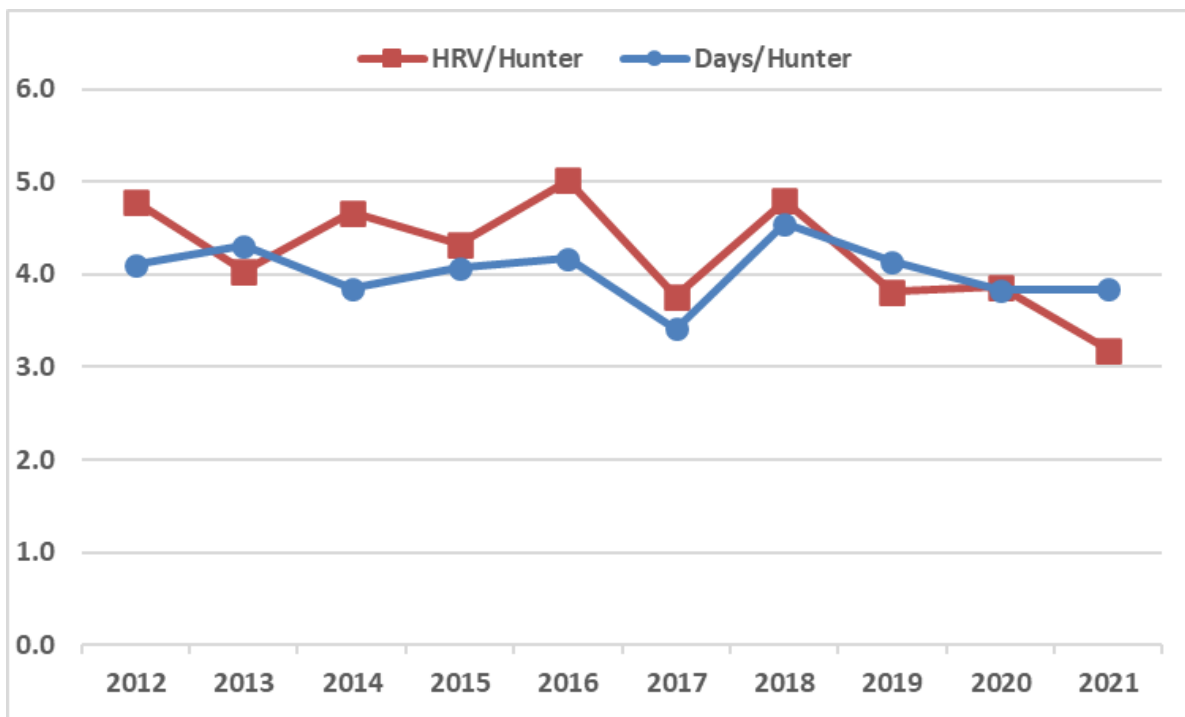
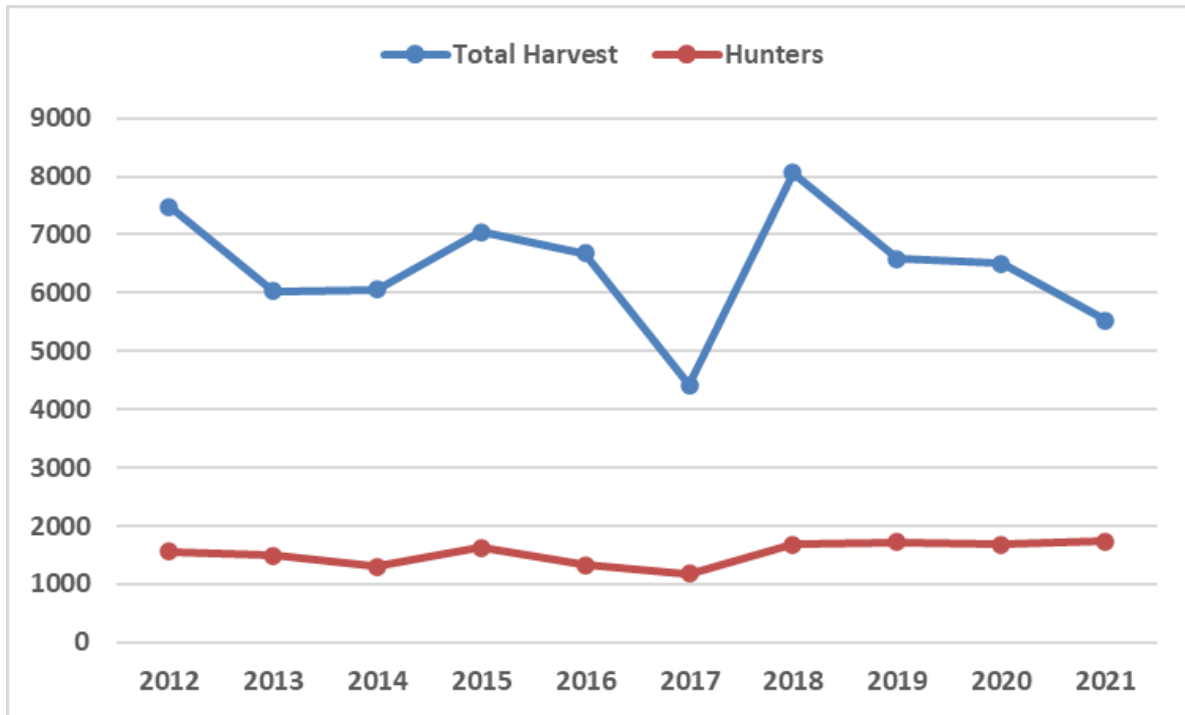


Figure 16. Top graph: Quail harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Bottom graph: Quail harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 were not included in these graphs as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

TURKEY



Opportunistic observations during fieldwork, public reports, and damage claims all indicate that the turkey population is doing well in GMUs 124–133 and stable in GMUs 136–142. Spring harvest increased again in 2022, marking two consecutive years of record harvest. This may be attributed to the new regulation in 2021 allowing hunters to harvest a third spring turkey in Spokane County. Spring turkey hunter numbers decreased marginally in 2022 after reaching the highest participation in 2021 (Figure 17). Fall hunter numbers and harvest rebounded slightly in 2022 after a significant drop in 2021 (Figure 17).

Hunter effort during the spring season in 2022 was 11 days/kill which represents a 22% increase from the previous 5-year average of nine days/kill. There was also an increase in effort per success during the fall 2022 season as hunters averaged 16 days/kill and the previous 5-year average was 10 days/kill. However, this rate was artificially inflated by the one turkey killed during the fall season in GMU 142 (52 days/kill) and drops back down to 10 days/kill if this single record is omitted. The continued decrease in fall hunter numbers from 2021 (Figure 17) is likely associated with lower deer populations after the large hemorrhagic disease outbreak because fall turkey harvest is often more opportunistic in nature while hunters pursue other game species (i.e., fewer deer means fewer hunters and therefore less opportunity to harvest fall turkeys).

GMU 124 has the most turkeys and the most turkeys harvested (1404 on average for the past five years), but with this comes the most hunters (average of 1441 in spring and 713 in fall for the past 5 years). GMUs 130 and 133 come in a distant second for turkey harvest (547 and 530, respectively for 5-year averages) followed by GMU 127 (200 on average). GMUs 136, 139, and 142 have relatively few turkeys (less than 100 harvested in each) compared to these other units, but hunting can be very good in some areas within these GMUs.

Again, the district is predominantly private land and securing access to private land will likely increase odds of success. Access during the spring hunt can be competitive but should be easier to acquire in GMU 124 for the fall “either sex” season, given the extensive turkey damage complaints the department has received from this area. Many private landowners have enrolled in WDFW Hunter Access programs recently in southeast Washington. See the Private Lands Program section below for access program acres by GMU, and the [Hunt Planner map](#) for mapped locations.

For more information on turkey harvest in Washington, see the [Turkey Game Harvest Statistics](#) and the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

For more information and tips on hunting turkey in Washington check out “[The Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#)” publication from WDFW.

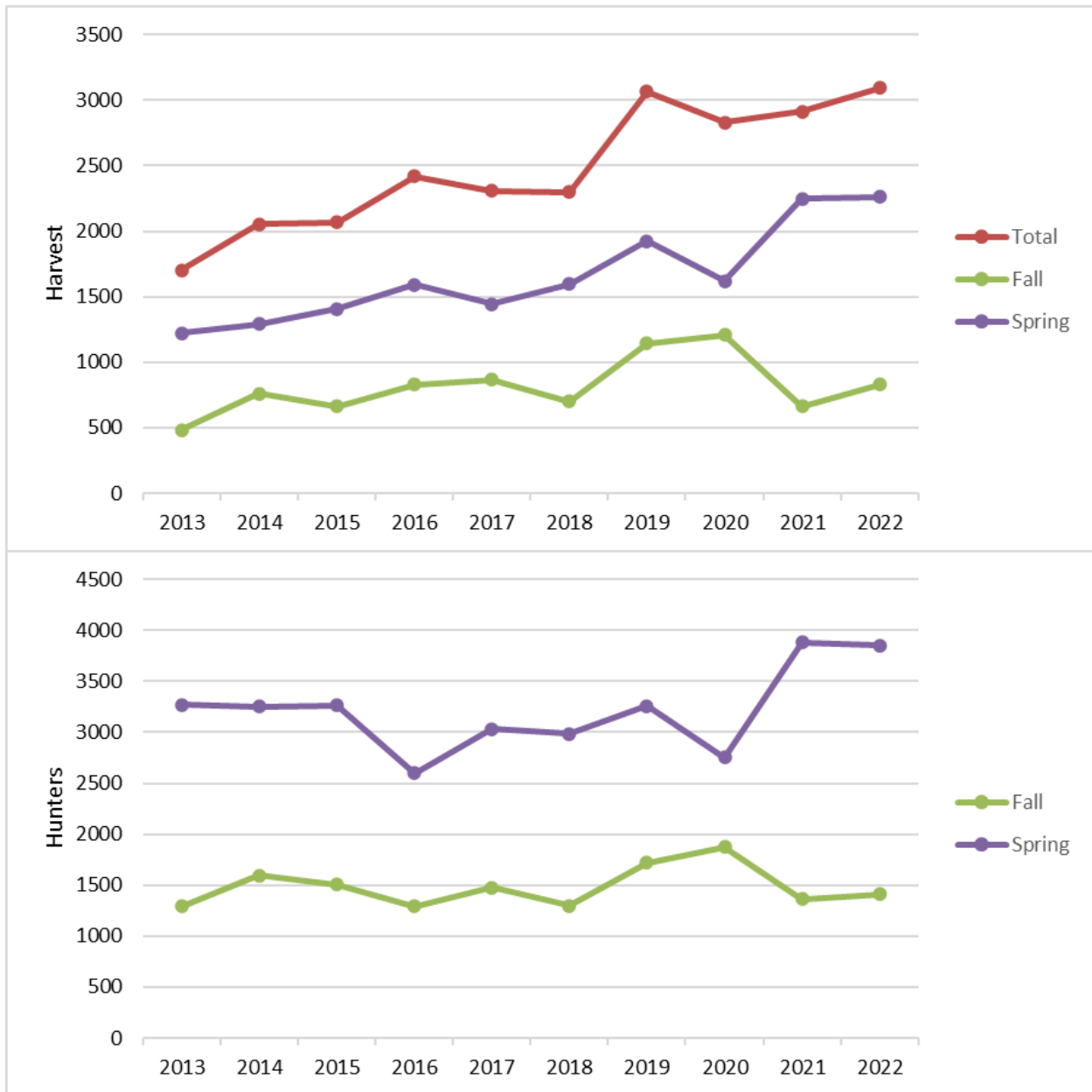


Figure 17. **Top graph:** Turkey harvest (spring, fall, & total) for District 2 for the past 10 years. **Bottom graph:** Turkey hunters (spring & fall) for District 2 for the past 10 years.

DOVE

Doves in District 2 occur at low population densities relative to the Columbia Basin and similar regions. As often as not, cool temperatures just prior to or during the dove season push many doves further south out of the district. Hunter harvest metrics have been variable (Figure 18, top), but prior to 2022, harvest averaged about 3200 birds a year by about 400 hunters. Hunter effort (days per hunter) has not changed much over the past ten years, although harvest per hunter spiked in 2020, to 10 birds, then dropped to 4.6 in 2021, a new ten year low (Figure 18, bottom). Harvest estimates were calculated using different analyses in 2022 so the numbers should not be compared directly with previous seasons. Hunters in District 2 in 2022 averaged 2.4 days of effort which resulted in an average of 6.8 birds killed per hunter (n = 913 total doves). As expected, these numbers are lower than the statewide averages of 3.9 days of effort per hunter and success rates of 14.1 birds per hunter.



It is important to note that eastside hunters have an additional dove opportunity – the Eurasian collared dove. This dove is an exotic dove that has invaded most of eastern Washington. It can be hunted and trapped with a license year-round. Eurasian collared doves are commonly found in and around towns and around grain elevators.

For more information on doves, see the Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: [Statewide and by County](#), and the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

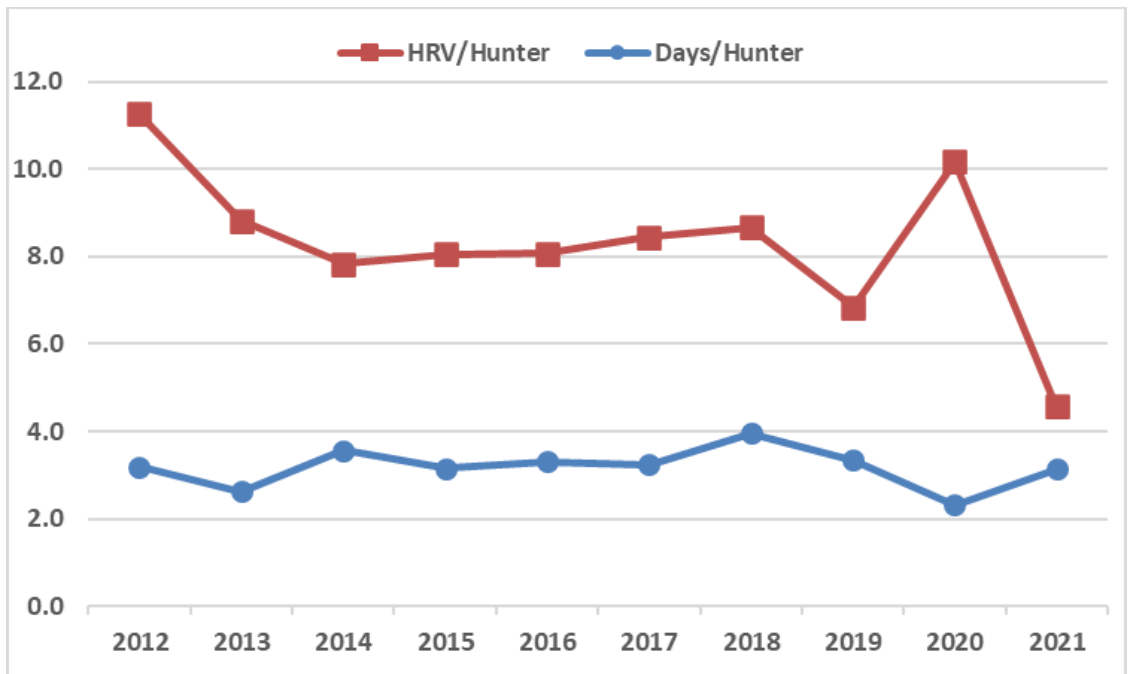
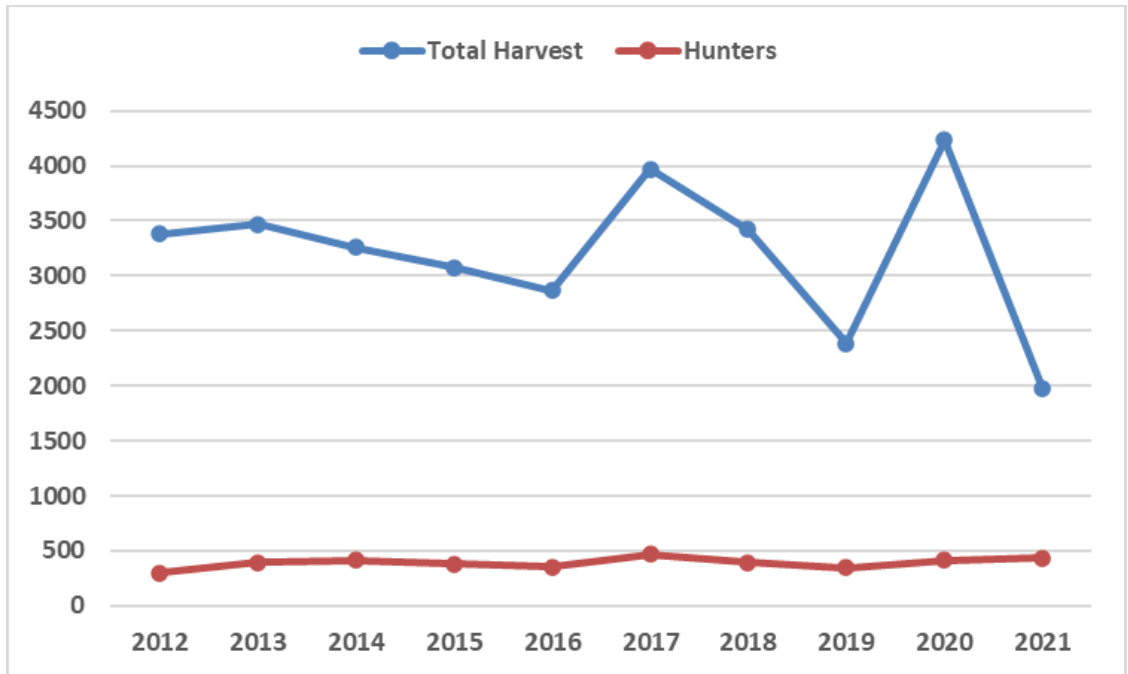


Figure 18. Top graph: Dove harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2011–2021. Bottom graph: Dove harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2011–2021. Data from 2022 were not included in these graphs as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

The majority of District 2 is privately owned. However, WDFW and BLM own about 60,000 acres in the center of Lincoln County and about 15,000 acres in northwest Whitman County. For more information on BLM property, or to order maps, please visit the [BLM](#) website. To hunt on WDFW Wildlife Areas, you will need to display a WDFW Vehicle Access Pass (free with hunting or fishing license purchase) or a Discover Pass. For more information on WDFW lands, see the [Wildlife Areas webpage](#).

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) maintains land open to the public for recreational purposes. Visitors to DNR land should be aware that a [Discover Pass](#) is required for access. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on DNR land can be found on the [DNR website](#).

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also maintains lands associated with the Snake River open to the public for recreational purposes. Not all of these lands are open to hunting, so hunters will want to research beforehand.

Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR) has a limited entry youth waterfowl hunt (details available through [TNWR](#)) and allows elk hunting by permit only (permits allotted via WDFW special permit draw in June). TNWR is also in the planning process of a fall turkey hunt beginning in 2023. The hunt will be managed through WDFW's Hunting by Reservation Only program.

Riverside State Park and Mount Spokane State Park, along with all County Parks and Conservation Areas in Spokane County, are open to public access, but NOT to hunting. There is one exception to this; Mica Peak Conservation Area in GMU 127 has special white-tailed deer and turkey hunting opportunities that can be reserved through the Hunting by Reservation system.

Several private timber companies allow hunting in Spokane County. The largest of these is Inland Empire Paper (IEP), which does allow vehicular access but will close gates to full-sized vehicles once there has been enough rain to soften the roads (typically in late October or early November). IEP does charge an access fee, but it is reasonable and comes in daily and annual versions. For more information on [IEP and maps of their property](#) please visit their website. Hancock is another large timber company in Spokane County, and at this time has signed a MOU with WDFW to allow non-motorized access for free to hunters. WDFW Enforcement monitors their property. Please respect the agreement or this access could be lost. Hancock does not supply a map of their property; we recommend hunters use the Spokane County Assessor's online parcel map to identify Hancock ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps).

Throughout the district there are private landowners enrolled in WDFW hunt access programs (see Private Lands Program below and visit the [WDFW Private Lands Access](#) website).

PRIVATE LANDS

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through a negotiated agreement. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases, monetary compensation. In addition, lands under the agreement are well known by WDFW Enforcement.

Currently, the private lands access program includes five basic access agreement types: Hunt by Written Permission (HBWP), Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH), Hunt by Reservation (HBR), Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP), and Register to Hunt (RTH). As of July 2023, the total accessible acreage in District 2 is over 142,000 acres. The breakdown of these acres by GMU and access program type are in Table 4. The LHP in GMU 130 is managed by the Columbia Plateau Wildlife Management Association (CPWMA). Access to the LHP is only available through WDFW special permitting and CPWMA raffle permit hunts (see WDFW's 2023 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet). More information on the other four access programs and where these enrolled lands occur can be found at WDFW's [Hunt Planner Webmap](#) and the [WDFW Private Lands Access](#) page.

Stimson and Hancock timber companies have traditionally had MOUs with WDFW to allow for **non-motorized** access for free to hunters, but please check with each company or WDFW to confirm these MOUs are still in place prior to hunting their properties. WDFW Enforcement monitors their properties and will ticket offenders. Please respect the non-motorized access agreement or this access could be lost.

Table 4. Acres of private land enrolled in WDFW access programs by GMU in District 2 as of July 2023.

Game Management Unit (GMU)	Hunt by Written Permission (HBWP)		Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH)		Hunt by Reservation (HBR)		Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP)		Register to Hunt (RTH)	
	Properties	Acres	Properties	Acres	Properties	Acres	Properties	Acres	Properties	Acres
124 Mt Spokane	3	669	Multiple Private Timber Parcels	~3000	1	370	0	0	0	0
127 Mica Peak	3	2,613			1	1,821	0	0	0	0
130 Cheney	2	5,014			0	0	1	2,878	0	0
133 Roosevelt	15	20,992	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
136 Harrington	13	14,768	6	5,509	0	0	0	0	0	0
139 Steptoe	15	12,777	4	3,901	32	29,222	0	0	0	0
142 Almota	13	17,241	0	0	21	25,040	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	64	74,074	10	9,410	55	56,453	1	2,878	0	0

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

PAUL WIK, District Wildlife Biologist

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DISTRICT 3 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla counties

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BE AWARE OF FIRE CONDITIONS AND ROAD CLOSURES

Wherever you choose to hunt, be sure to check on fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. In addition to potential wildfires, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) may be conducting prescribed burns and/or forest-thinning projects in your hunt area. For more information, see:

- [Wildfire status updates \(InciWeb – Incident Information System\)](#)
- [Northwest Interagency Coordination Center](#)
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#)
- [WDFW fire restrictions and closures](#)

It is recommended that hunters [check for road closures](#) before going on their hunts.

DISTRICT 3 GENERAL OVERVIEW

WDFW's District 3 is in southeast Washington and consists of 13 game management units (GMUs). Administratively, District 3 includes Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin counties, and is one of three management districts (1, 2, and 3) comprising WDFW's Region 1. GMUs in District 3 include 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), 157 (Watershed-Closed entry except elk hunting only by permit), 162 (Dayton), 163 (Marengo), 166 (Tucannon), 169 (Wenaha), 172 (Mountain View), 175 (Lick Creek), 178 (Peola), 181 (Couse), and 186 (Grande Ronde). The northern part of District 3 (north of Highway 12) includes the southeastern portion of the Palouse Prairie ecoregion, while the southern part of the district is in the Blue Mountains ecoregion.

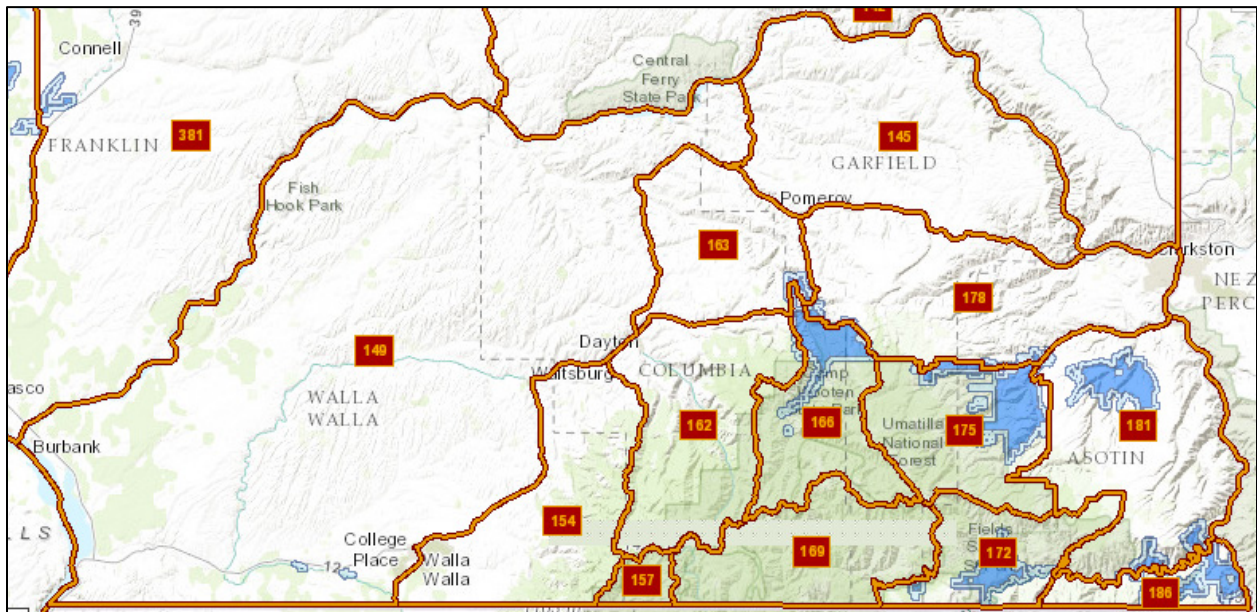


Figure 1. GMU map (from GoHunt) depicting District 3 GMU boundaries, west and south of the Snake River, east of the Columbia River, and north of the Oregon border. Green areas are U.S. Forest Service land and blue areas are WDFW Wildlife Areas.

The landscape in District 3 is dominated by agricultural land in the prairie and foothill regions, with interspersed grassland areas and brushy draws. In the mountains, the most common habitat is characterized by second-growth forests consisting primarily of Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, grand fir, and subalpine fir. The Blue Mountains have been characterized as a high plateau dissected by steep draws and canyons carved by numerous creeks and rivers. The Tucannon and Touchet rivers flow north out of the mountains, while major tributaries of the Wenaha and Grande Ronde Rivers generally flow south. Numerous creeks drain the western edge of the foothills, including Mill Creek, with its drainage located in the Walla Walla Watershed. Asotin Creek is a major watershed on the eastern side of the Blue Mountains that flows east into the Snake River.



Blue Creek in the western foothills of the Blue Mountains.

District 3 is best known for its elk hunting opportunities in the Blue Mountains and mule deer hunting opportunities in grassland/agricultural GMUs. However, hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including white-tailed deer, black bear, cougar, chukar, turkey, and pheasant. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest and harvest-per-unit effort (HPUE) for most game species in District 3 during the 2022 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2021 season and the five-year averages. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Species	Harvest					HPUE				
	5-yr avg.	2022	2021	% change (5yr)	% change (2021)	5-yr avg.	2022	2021	% change (5yr)	% change (2021)
Elk (General)	104	98	136	-6%	-28%	118	103	68	-13%	51%
Elk (Bull Permit)	66	42	45	-37%	-7%	NA	NA	NA	(Permit success)	
Deer	2232	1567	1811	-30%	13%	15.4	19.2	17.7	24%	9%
Bear	112	187	74	67%	152%	Not estimated				
Cougar	22	21	22	-9%	-7%	Not estimated			**	**
Wild Turkey	959	979	987	2.0%	-0.8%	0.1	0.07	0.08	-18%	-17%
Canada Goose	3763	*	4635			1.09	*	1.06		
Chukar Partridge	2453	*	1587			1.11	*	0.67		
Cottontail Rabbit	436	*	144			0.62	*	0.17		
Duck	28946	*	33437			2.58	*	2.70		
Forest Grouse	1835	*	1469			0.37	*	0.28		
Gray Partridge	800	*	260			0.38	*	0.14		
Mourning Dove	3477	*	2727			3.36	*	1.60		
Pheasant	9878	*	7179			0.65	*	0.56		
Quail	3945	*	4038			0.67	*	0.70		
Snowshoe Hare	40	*	71			0.08	*	0.08		

Table 1. General season harvest and HPUE estimates for most game species found in District 3 during the 2021 and 2022 hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year averages and a comparison of 5-year estimates and previous year to 2022 estimates. HPUE is expressed as #hunter days/harvest for elk, deer, and bear (lower is better), and as #harvested/hunter day for all other species (higher is better).

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

In Washington, elk are managed at the herd level, while harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. Population objectives are set at the herd level, and survey data is summarized at that level as well. District 3 is comprised of the single Blue Mountains elk herd (GMUs 145, 149, 154, 157, 162, 163, 166, 169, 172, 175, 178, 181, and 186).

Only the GMUs within the forested portion of District 3 are managed for elk population stability or growth (GMUs 154, 157, 162, 166, 169, 172, 175, and 186). GMUs 145, 149, 163, 178, and most of 181 are managed to limit elk numbers, although some recreational opportunity is provided as determined through surveys and damage complaints. In all GMUs, minimizing elk depredation to agricultural crops on private agricultural lands is a priority, ideally through non-lethal hazing. An additional management objective is to maintain a minimum of 22 bulls:100 cows in the post-season population, with a range of 22 – 28 bulls:100 cows as the management target. This target ratio, along with limited harvest of mature bulls, supports healthy reproductive attributes (bull breeding competition, cow pregnancy rates, single calf birth pulse and timing) within the elk herd.

Biologists in District 3 conduct helicopter surveys within the core elk areas to estimate the post-winter population size. In the spring of 2022, survey efforts resulted in a population estimate of 3,901 (90% Confidence Interval of 3,843-4,027) elk. The southern extent of the aerial survey runs along the Grande Ronde, Wenaha, and Mill Creek watershed, which all extend into Oregon, resulting in approximately 500-600 elk being classified on shared winter range that likely remain in Oregon during during the fall. The average five-year population estimate prior to 2022 was 4,488 elk, which is 15% higher than the 2022 estimate. The 2022 surveys documented a calf ratio of 17.2 calves per 100 cows and a bull ratio of 19.7 bulls per 100 cows.

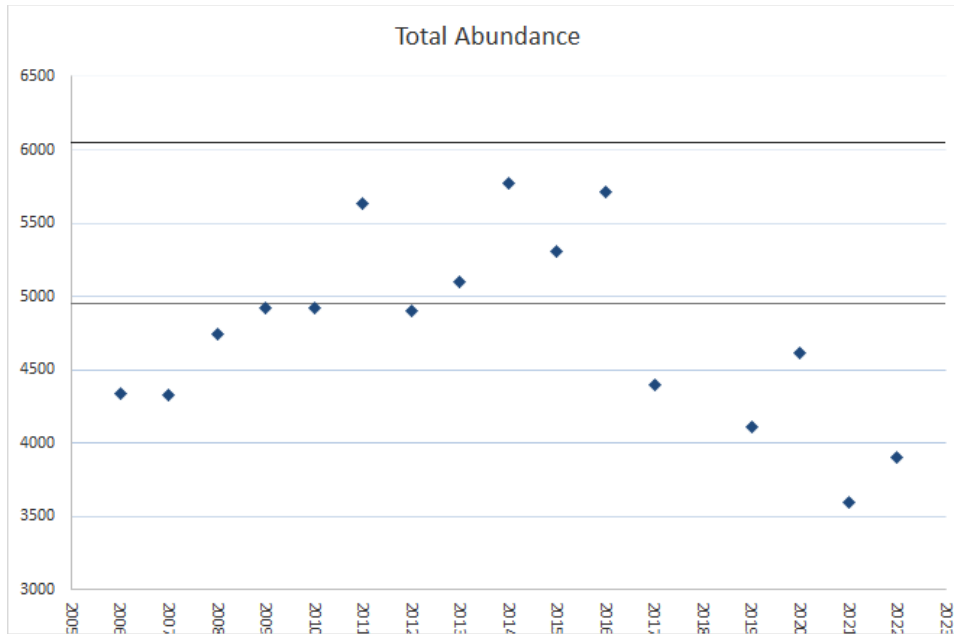


Figure 2. Abundance estimates for the Blue Mountains elk population.

Calf ratios in 2022 of 17.2 (90% CI +/- 0.3) dropped significantly below the 5-year average of 23.4. The low calf recruitment is attributed to high predation by cougars (WDFW 2022). Starting in May 2021, WDFW staff captured 125 neonate (newborn) elk calves and fitted them with GPS/satellite collars. The results from that work were published in April of 2022. In May and June of 2022 and 2023, WDFW captured and collared 102 (2022) and 115 (2023) neonate calves that will be monitored through 9 months of age.

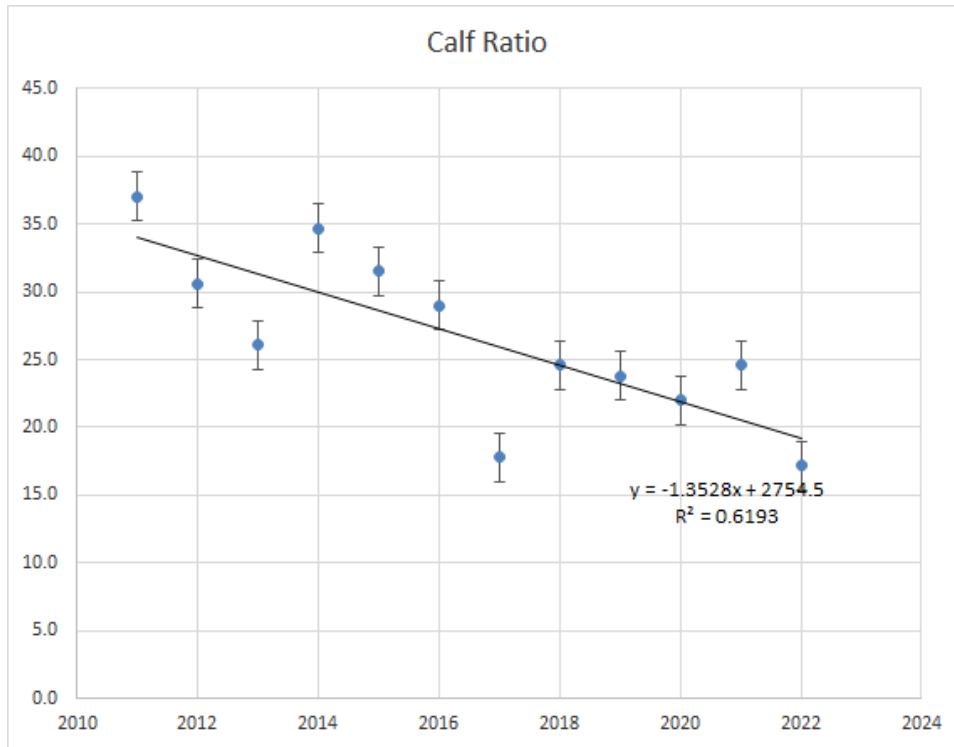


Figure 3. Calf ratios for the Blue Mountains elk herd, generated from helicopter surveys conducted in March. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals in the estimate.

Bull ratios and total bull numbers remained lower than the 5-year average (27.5 bulls per 100 cows) in 2022, which will be reflected in a continuing decline in permit numbers in future years. The recent decline in the number of elk in the Blue Mountains is likely a result of multiple factors, such as the severe winters observed in 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, summer droughts, and similar levels of predation over the past 5 to 10 years which cumulatively reduced survival of adults and negatively impacted recruitment. The low number of calves being recruited into the population in 2022 will result in a low number of yearling bulls (spikes) available for harvest this fall. This fall will be another below-average year for yearling bull harvest.

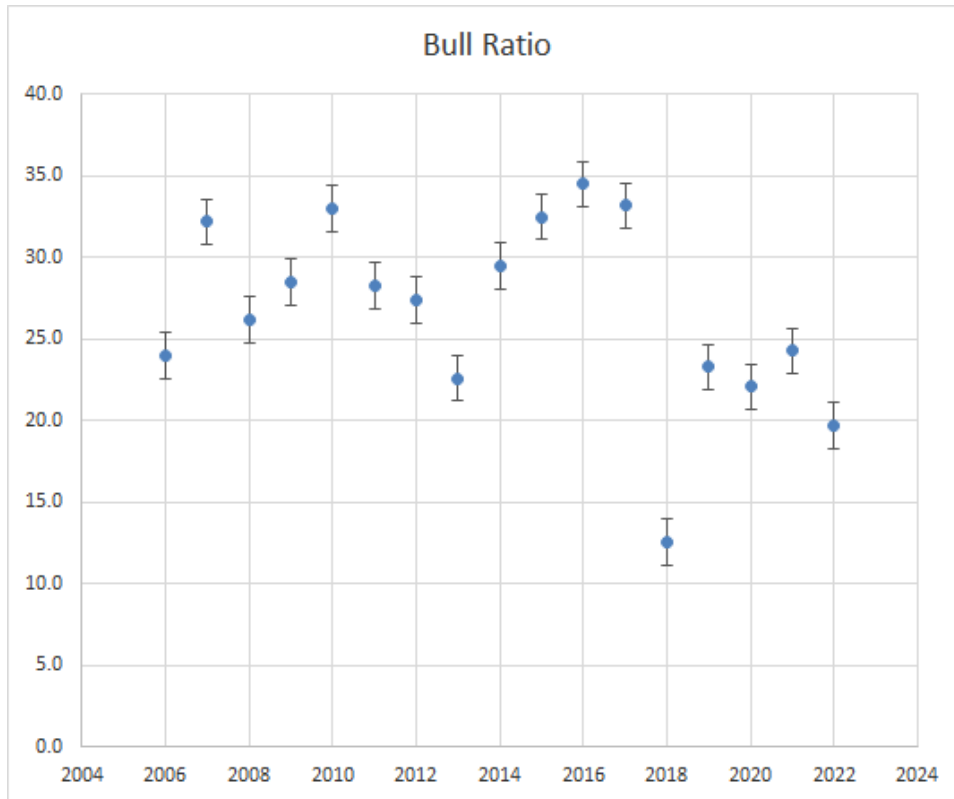


Figure 4. Estimated bull ratio (bulls per 100 cows) from helicopter-based surveys. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals. The bull ratio in 2018 is low due to the survey being ground based instead of helicopter. Finding bulls from the ground is more difficult and does not accurately represent the population.

For more detailed information related to the status of Washington’s elk herds, hunters should read through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#), which is available for download on the department’s website.

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Most general season hunters in the Blue Mountains have been hunting here for many years. New hunters to this area will have to consider several options, such as weapon type, private land versus public land, the difficulty of hunt desired (wilderness versus landscapes with roads), and, as archery hunters, whether the availability of antlerless opportunity is important. As in most years, wildfire activity could be an important consideration on where to hunt. Wildfire activity in 2023 is off to an average start.

Throughout District 3, the harvest of branched bulls is regulated through the permit system. All GMUs in District 3 are managed for quality hunting, except GMUs 145, 186, and some hunts in 149. The drawing of these tags can be difficult, and many hunters invest years before successfully obtaining a permit. Once a permit is obtained, district biologists are available to provide information on where to possibly hunt within a GMU.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH GMU

GMU 145

This is a private land unit not managed for elk. Very few elk reside in this unit. Their movements are unpredictable and make them difficult to locate, and knowledge of their locations is often not readily available.

GMU 149

This large GMU is predominantly private land managed to minimize elk numbers because of conflicts with agricultural activities. A relatively large number of bulls have historically inhabited the southwest corner of the GMU and crossed back and forth between Oregon and Washington. The Boise Cascade poplar tree farm has recently been transitioned to row crops, which has changed the pattern and occupancy of elk in this GMU. Another group of elk exists in the northern portion of the unit on the breaks of the Snake River. This can be a very difficult GMU to hunt without access to numerous private lands, as the elk are highly mobile in this area and can be difficult to locate.

GMU 154

This GMU is 99% private land but does include numerous landowners in the WDFW hunting access program. The elk are heavily hunted in this GMU due to conflicts with agricultural activities. Access has historically been available to branched-antlered-bull (branched-bull) tag holders and general season hunters. Most of the antlerless opportunity is being shifted south of Mill Creek where elk are concentrating along the state line. This GMU is rapidly being subdivided into small parcels where gaining access to elk is becoming more difficult.

GMU 157

This GMU is 99% public land but closed to the public to any entry other than branched-bull permit holders. The Mill Creek Watershed is the source of drinking water for the City of Walla Walla, and access is highly regulated. Successful permit applicants will be contacted by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) with an information packet containing rules for hunting the watershed. This unit is very steep and rugged, contains few maintained trails, and is physically challenging to hunt. No scouting or overnight camping inside the watershed boundaries is permitted. Only the perimeter roads and trails can be accessed for scouting.

GMU 162

The Dayton GMU is a mix of private and public lands and has historically supported about 1,000 elk. Currently, the number of elk in the Dayton GMU in March of 2022 was about 350. This unit has the highest density of general season hunters in District 3. Access to the northern portion of the GMU can be difficult, as it is predominantly private. The southern portion of the unit is mostly USFS, and lands owned by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). Both of these lands are open to the public, with motorized vehicle restrictions throughout.

GMU 163

This GMU is not managed for elk and only occasionally supports enough elk to hunt. The GMU is predominantly private land.

GMU 166

This GMU has recently had the highest success rate for general season hunters but also has one of the higher densities of hunters. The unit is mostly USFS and WDFW-owned lands. A portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness extends into this GMU and offers backcountry hunting opportunities.

GMU 169

Most of this GMU is located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. Numerous road access points occur along the edge of this GMU, but a majority of the unit requires backpacking or horse packing to access. This can be a physically challenging unit to hunt. Elk densities have remained low in this unit for the past 35 years and do not show indications of improving. However, a large wildfire burned in this unit in 2015 and another in portions of the GMU in 2021, which is expected to have a positive effect on elk numbers and habitat quality for years to come.

GMU 172

Elk numbers have declined slightly in the past couple of years in this GMU with low recruitment observed in the spring of 2022. Calf ratios of 26:100 were observed in 2021, which should be a good indicator of the number of yearling bulls available in 2022. Approximately 60% of this GMU is private and access can be challenging. The USFS lands within this GMU are physically challenging to hunt.

GMU 175

This GMU is predominantly public land owned by WDFW, USFS, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Access is good throughout the unit. One major change as the result of declining elk numbers observed in this unit is the restriction of archery hunters to spike-only, with no antlerless opportunity available for any weapon type. In July 2021, 80% of this GMU burned in a wildfire.

GMU 178

This private land unit is managed to minimize elk numbers due to conflict with agricultural activities. Access can be challenging to obtain. Elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and do not offer a reliable recreational opportunity during the general season without knowledge of landowners and herd behavior.

GMU 181

This private land unit is managed to minimize elk numbers due to conflict with agricultural activities. Access can be challenging to obtain. Elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and do not offer a reliable recreational opportunity during the general season without knowledge of landowners and herd behavior.

GMU 186

This unit is split equally between private and public lands, with very limited private land access available. This GMU is predominantly winter range for elk in Oregon, although approximately 100 elk reside in the unit throughout the year. The individual elk may reside on private land throughout the season where access is not available, although some years have proven highly successful for the few hunters that know the unit.

SUMMARY OF GMU HARVEST ATTRIBUTES

The information provided in Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how District 3 GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The values presented are from the 2022 harvest reports. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of elk harvested and hunters per square mile.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 10 for elk harvested/mi² (bulls only), hunters/mi², and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, with Public Access ranking excluded. The modern firearm comparisons are the most straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same in each GMU.

MODERN FIREARM											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	7	0.00	10	81	0.06	1	8.6%	2	3	13
154	216	2	0.01	8	166	0.77	6	1.2%	9	3	23
162	210	9	0.04	4	374	1.78	8	2.4%	10	2	22
166	131	3	0.02	6	190	1.45	7	1.6%	8	1	21
169	161	3	0.02	6	87	0.54	5	3.4%	6	1	17
172	108	20	0.19	1	199	1.84	9	10.1%	1	2	11
175	158	10	0.06	2	313	1.98	10	3.2%	4	1	16
178	275	3	0.01	8	75	0.27	2	4.0%	5	3	15
181	262	4	0.02	6	86	0.33	3	4.7%	7	3	16
186	53	3	0.06	2	23	0.43	4	13.0%	3	2	9

ARCHERY											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	8	0.01	4	56	0.04	1	14.3%	4	3	9
154	216	5	0.02	1	54	0.25	7	9.3%	5	3	13
162	210	2	0.01	4	55	0.26	8	3.6%	8	2	20
166	131	0	0.00	7	19	0.15	5	0.0%	8	1	20
169	161	0	0.00	7	29	0.18	6	0.0%	8	1	21
172	108	2	0.02	1	54	0.50	10	3.7%	3	2	14
175	158	0	0.00	7	57	0.36	9	0.0%	2	1	18
178	275	0	0.00	7	20	0.07	3	0.0%	1	3	11
181	262	0	0.00	7	23	0.09	4	0.0%	8	3	19
186	53	0	0.00	7	3	0.06	2	0.0%	8	2	17

MUZZLELOADER											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	10	0.01	1	36	0.03	1	27.8%	2	3	4
154	216	0	0.0	6	13	0.06	4	0.0%	1	3	11
162	210	2	0.0	6	27	0.13	5	7.4%	5	2	16
166	131	2	0.0	6	18	0.14	6	11.1%	3	1	15
172	108	7	0.1	2	67	0.62	8	10.4%	4	2	14
175	158	0	0.0	6	77	0.49	7	0.0%	7	1	20
178	275	0	0	6	11	0.04	2	0.0%	7	3	15
181	262	0	0	6	15	0.06	4	0.0%	7	3	17

Table 2. Rank sum totals that provide a quick and general comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. GMUs are generally limited to spike bull harvest, but some may have an antlerless opportunity as well (see hunting regulations for specific restrictions). Data presented are based on 2022 harvest reports.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

It has been uncommon for elk populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where severe winter weather conditions seldom occur. Unfortunately, the winters of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019 were uncommonly severe, with intermixed droughts in 2015 and 2021, resulting in a significant decline in elk numbers. Calf recruitment since 2016 has remained below average, consequently, elk numbers available for harvest will remain lower than years prior to the 16/17 winter. The 2023 general season is expected to be similar to the average during the past 5 years, with low numbers of yearling bulls (spikes) available for harvest. Harvest since 2016 has been the lowest in the past 20 years. Hunter numbers also typically do not change substantially from one year to the next, but a slow decline has been observed with the declining population. The weather during hunting season does change from year to year, which will influence success rates.

The spring and summer of 2021 was one of the driest and hottest since records have been kept, which resulted in greater than 130,000 acres burnt. The spring of 2022 was one of the wettest on record, resulting in great forage conditions for elk. In 2023, conditions have started out to be between these two years climatically, but drought conditions are worsening by mid-Summer. How this relates to elk hunting in the fall is unknown.

HOW TO FIND ELK

When hunting elk in District 3, hunters need to do their homework and spend plenty of time scouting before the season opener because it is often difficult to predict where elk are going to be, especially after hunting pressure increases. The majority of hunters spend their time focusing on open ridge tops where they can glass animals from a considerable distance. During the general season, past research on bulls has indicated that a majority of the elk will move to north aspect, mid-slope timbered hillsides within one day of the opener. With only nine days to hunt the general season, there is a lot of pressure in the first few days. Pressure declines as the season progresses and may allow the elk to return to normal behaviors if they are not close to major roads.

Later in the season, it is a good idea to consult a topographic map and find “benches” located in steep terrain and thick cover because elk often use these areas to bed down during the day. Lastly, on public land, hunters should not let a road closed to motorized vehicles keep them from walking into an area to search for elk. More often than not these areas hold elk that have not received as much hunting pressure.

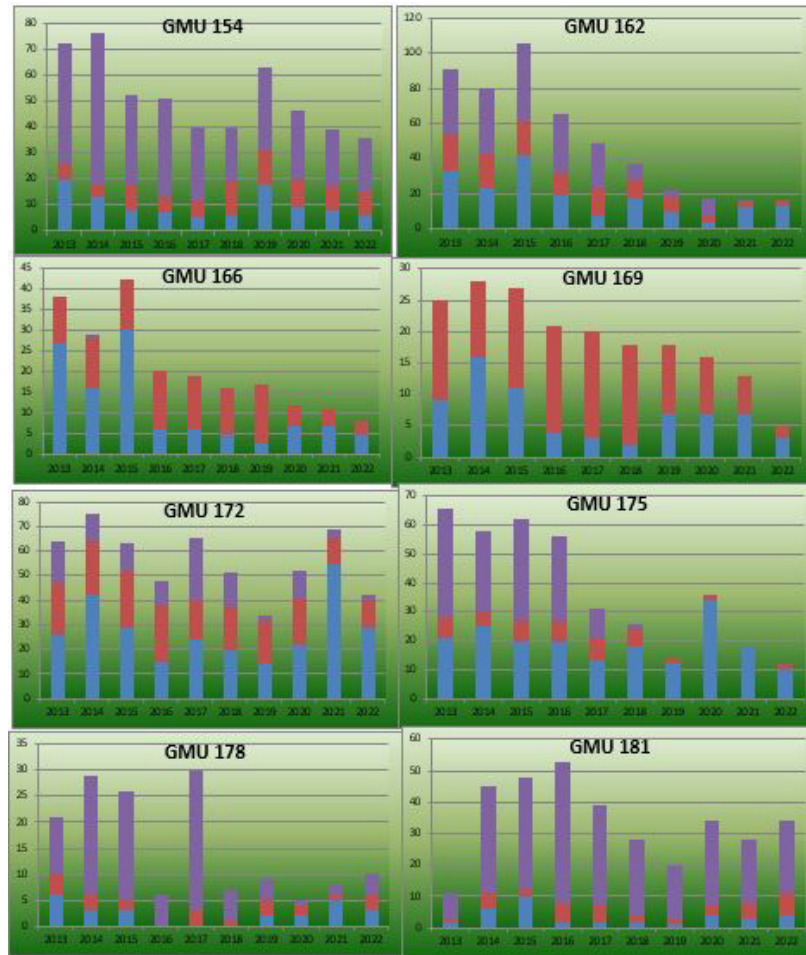


Figure 5. Trends in total number of yearling bulls (blue), branched bulls (red), and antlerless (purple) elk harvested during general and permit seasons combined, 2013-2022. Harvest does not include tribal harvest.

ELK AREAS

There are eight elk areas in District 3: Elk Area 1008 and 1009 (Wenaha Wilderness West and East), Elk Area 1010 (Dayton private lands), Elk Area 1013 (Mountain View Private), Elk Area 1016 (GMU 162 excluding the Rainwater Wildlife Area), Elk Area 1075 (Lick Creek Private Lands), and Elk Area 1081 (GMU 181 + extreme northeast corner of GMU172). Some of these elk areas have been taken out of use while the elk population remains below objective, but their future use is anticipated when additional harvest opportunity exists.

The intent of Elk Areas 1008 and 1009 was to distribute the hunting pressure within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. In the past, most permit hunters focused on the western corner of the unit where the road density was highest. By spreading out the hunting pressure, additional hunting opportunity was created.

Elk Area 1010 was used to focus antlerless and branched-bull elk hunting on private land in the Dayton Unit. In the past, branched bull tag holders focused on public lands where access was guaranteed, but also increased pressure on that segment of the population. This elk area is also used to focus antlerless harvest on the private lands where depredation complaints have historically been high but limits antlerless harvest on public lands where higher elk densities are desired. For the 2023 hunting season, no antlerless opportunity exists in any portion of the Dayton GMU.

Elk Area 1013 is used to manage hunters within GMU 172. Elk Area 1013 limits antlerless hunting to private lands where damage can occur on agricultural areas while maximizing elk numbers on public lands.

Elk Area 1075 was created to use hunters to alter the behavior of elk that leave the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area for private agricultural grounds during early winter. To minimize crop damage, hunters are being used to move elk off private lands in the Lick Creek GMU. The same is true for Elk Area 1081 in relation to the Mountain View GMU.

NOTABLE ISSUES AND HUNTING CHANGES

1. Calf recruitment has been at record low numbers for the past few years. This will result in low numbers of yearling bulls available for harvest in the general season. This also results in declining branched-bull permit numbers as recruitment into the older age classes has declined.
2. Antlerless elk opportunity has been eliminated in all of the core public land GMUs. Antlerless tags remaining in the Blue Mountains area are focused on private lands that experience agricultural damage. These hunts can be difficult to gain adequate access if the elk are moving across ownerships frequently.
3. In July and August of 2021, wildfires burned 80% of GMU 175, a large portion of GMU 166 and a small portion of GMU 169. Severe drought in 2021 reduced forage and water availability throughout the district. The following year (2022) had very wet conditions with above normal vegetation growth. 2023 has started out drier than normal, with a predicted hot and dry summer.
4. During the summer of 2015, a large wildfire burned through a large portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, extending slightly into GMU 172 on Grouse Flats. A large portion of the fire that occurred in Washington burned later into September, creating desirable habitat conditions for elk with low intensity burning.
5. Severe winters occurred during 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, resulting in high mortality rates of elk. Severe droughts occurred in 2015 and 2021, influencing recruitment in the following years. Antlerless opportunity throughout the Blue Mountains has been severely reduced on public lands as a result. Calf recruitment has yet to rebound, and harvest will remain below average.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Both mule deer and white-tailed deer occur throughout District 3. Deer hunting opportunities in District 3 vary from marginal to quite good, depending on the GMU. The GMUs with the highest success (GMUs 145, 149, 178, and 181) also have the highest amount of private land, and access can be limited. GMUs where access to public land is highest (GMUs 166, 169, and 175) have the lowest success, probably due to a combination of high hunter numbers, a high percentage of legal bucks harvested, higher predator densities, and lower quality deer forage. While overall harvest is one indicator of GMU hunting quality, harvest/unit effort (HPUE) and harvest/unit area (HPUA) equalize GMUs based on hunter numbers, number of days hunting, and GMU size. However, both HPUE and HPUA can be misleading, as HPUE is complicated by private land access limitations and HPUA is complicated by the amount of habitat in the GMU that supports deer. In general, HPUE seems to be a better indicator of hunting success. Hunter success and HPUE of either white-tailed or mule deer in District 3 is highest in GMUs 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 178 (Peola), and 181 (Couse), with GMU 186 (Grande Ronde) seeing a recent increase in success. Total general season harvest is highest in GMUs 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), and 162 (Dayton).

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 3. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and HPUE are used to monitor population status. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and are conducting annual road surveys to determine herd composition and periodic aerial sightability surveys to monitor deer populations that are independent of harvest data, in addition to using collared mule deer does to understand survival rates.

All available harvest data indicates deer populations are variable within a relatively narrow range in District 3; however, 2021 was an abnormal year, with extensive wildfires that closed access to the National Forest for parts of the September hunting season and a severe hemorrhagic disease outbreak across the lower elevations of the district. Harvest totals were significantly lower, but the change in HPUE was not as drastic, indicating the decline in harvest was due to both fewer deer being available but also heavily influenced by lower hunter numbers. HPUE was again influenced by hunter numbers in 2022, with record low hunter numbers and effort, but only a marginal decrease in percent success and harvest/day. It is believed there will be some recovery of the herds in the 2023 season but look for a return to long-term averages in the 2024 season as yearling and 2-year-old bucks reach legal antler point numbers. For more detailed information related to the status of mule deer and white-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

Probably the most frequent question from hunters is, “What GMU should I hunt?” This is not always easy to answer because it depends on the hunting method and the type of hunting experience desired. Some hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature buck, while others just want to harvest any legal deer, and still, others prefer to hunt an area with few other hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high deer densities, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario does not exist in any GMU that is open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 3. Instead, because of general season opportunities, the GMUs with the highest deer densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of deer. Some hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if that means there are also very few hunters and provide a backcountry experience.

The information provided in Table 3 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of deer harvested per hunter and the number of hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison since GMUs vary in size. For example, the average number of deer harvested over the past five years during the modern firearm general season in GMUs 149 (Prescott) and 154 (Blue Creek) has been 457 and 212 deer, respectively. Just looking at total harvest suggests deer densities are much higher in GMU 149 than 154. However, when harvest is expressed as deer harvested/mi², the result is an estimate of 0.33 in GMU 149 and 0.98 in GMU 154, which suggests deer densities are probably much higher in GMU 154 than they are in GMU 149.

This is further complicated by the amount of actual deer habitat in each GMU. For example, GMU 149 is the largest in total acreage but is comprised primarily of tilled croplands, and deer are concentrated in fields, rangelands, and along the breaks of the Snake River, so densities in a portion of the GMU are probably higher than the harvest/mi² indicates.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 12 (except for ties) for deer harvested/mi² (deer harvest density), hunters/mi² (hunter density), hunter success rates, and public land access. The ranking values were then summed (public land access excluded) to produce a final rank sum, lower totals being more desirable. GMUs are listed by GMU number, not by rank. Comparisons are straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same for most GMUs.

Differences that should be considered include:

- 1 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in WDFW Access programs, such as Feel Free to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, Hunt by Registration, or Hunt by Reservation, and may offer similar access to some GMUs with public land. See the Access section of this document for private land acreage available for public hunting in each GMU.
- 2 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in tilled croplands, and actual suitable hunting area may be much smaller, leading to higher-than-expected hunter densities (you will definitely see more hunters in GMU 149 than GMU 169 although those GMUs have similar hunter densities).

MODERN FIREARM											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	Rank Sum (Rank)
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	Score	
145	355	197	0.56	6	572	1.61	4	35%	1	3	11 (1)
149	1409	457	0.33	9	1532	1.09	2	30%	4	3	15 (4)
154	216	212	0.98	2	868	4.02	11	24%	5	3	18 (5)
162	210	246	1.17	1	1392	6.63	12	18%	9	2	22 (9)
163	149	88	0.59	4	378	2.54	9	23%	6	3	19 (6)
166	131	32	0.24	10	408	3.11	10	8%	11	1	31 (12)
169	161	10	0.06	12	162	1.01	1	6%	12	1	25 (10)

172	108	37	0.34	8	187	1.73	5	20%	8	2	21 (8)
175	158	28	0.18	11	293	1.85	7	10%	10	1	28 (11)
178	275	166	0.61	3	499	1.82	6	33%	2	3	11 (1)
181	262	103	0.39	7	332	1.27	3	31%	3	3	13 (3)
186	53	30	0.57	5	133	2.50	8	23%	6	2	19 (6)

ARCHERY											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		<u>Public Access</u>	Rank Sum (Rank)
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	
145	355	12	0.04	7	48	0.13	9	24%	5	3	21 (7)
149	1409	46	0.03	8	171	0.12	10	27%	4	3	22 (8)
154	216	47	0.22	1	201	0.93	2	24%	5	3	8 (1)
162	210	25	0.12	3	173	0.82	3	15%	8	2	14 (6)
163	149	34	0.22	1	161	1.08	1	21%	7	3	9 (2)
166	131	3	0.02	9	68	0.52	4	4%	11	1	24 (9)
169	161	2	0.01	11	16	0.10	11	14%	9	1	31 (12)
172	108	10	0.09	5	28	0.26	6	36%	2	2	13 (3)
175	158	1	0.01	11	38	0.24	7	3%	12	1	30 (10)
178	275	23	0.09	5	79	0.29	5	30%	3	3	13 (3)
181	262	3	0.02	9	27	0.10	11	13%	10	3	30 (10)
186	53	6	0.10	4	12	0.23	8	42%	1	2	13 (3)

MUZZLELOADER											
GMU	Size (mi ²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	Rank Sum (Rank)
		Total	Harvest per mi ²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	
145	355	19	0.05	4	47	0.13	2	41%	1	3	7 (1)
149	1409	58	0.04	5	175	0.12	1	33%	5	3	11 (4)
154	216	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
162	210	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
163	149	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
166	131	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
169	161	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
172	108	18	0.17	1	48	0.44	5	38%	3	2	9 (3)
175	158	4	0.03	6	34	0.22	3	12%	6	1	15 (6)
178	275	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
181	262	40	0.15	2	118	0.45	6	34%	4	3	12 (5)
186	53	8	0.15	2	20	0.39	4	40%	2	2	8 (2)

Table 3. Rank sum totals that provide a quick and general comparison of how total general harvest, hunter numbers, hunter success rates, and access to public land compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. GMUs in **bold type** are open during early and late seasons for the respective weapon type. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2018-2022).

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Wildfires are always a possibility that may affect hunter access to some hunting areas, and fires in the Lick Creek GMU two summers ago likely impacted an already declining harvest trend for deer in that GMU. This trend is most evident in success rates in the GMU, not overall harvest, and has been driven by the increase in hunters in GMU 175, which have doubled since 2001. With another wet spring promoting understory growth and projected hot and dry conditions through the summer, wildfire danger is likely to be high and hunters are **strongly encouraged**

to [check the status of wildfires](#) as well as public land access restrictions ([USFS](#)) before planning for the fall hunting season.

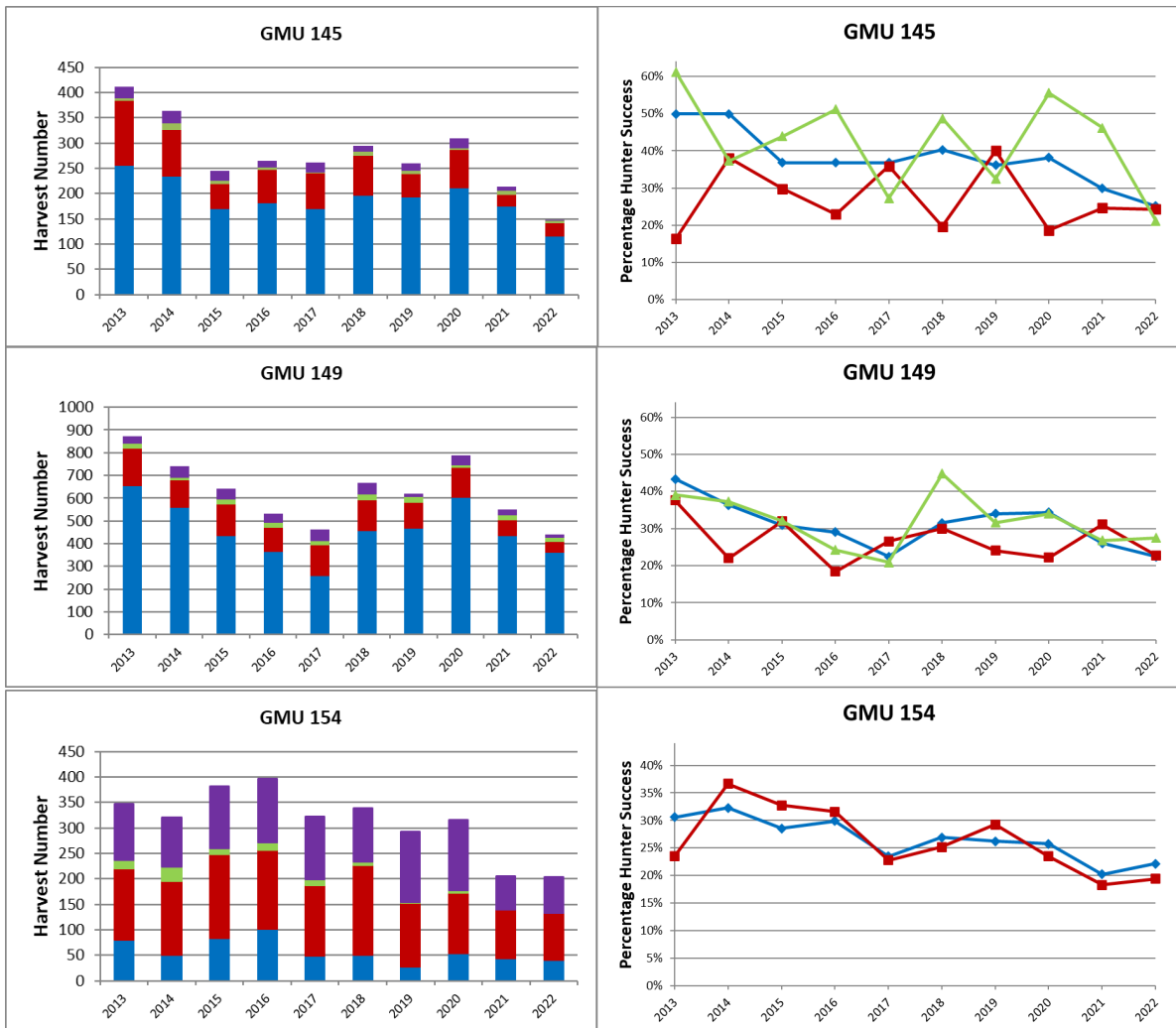
It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where winter and weather conditions are generally mild and do not result in large winter die-offs. With back-to-back average to mild winters over 2019-2022, we had been expecting to see improvements in deer populations across the district; however, drought conditions and hemorrhagic disease in 2021 took a toll on some portions of the deer herd and we did not see much evidence of recovery in 2022. The district saw increases in the number of days it took hunters to harvest a deer in almost all GMUs, with only the mountain GMUs showing stable or modest HPUE decreases, but this is likely due to lower hunter numbers. With good growing conditions last spring and an average winter, we expect overwinter survival was good, and are expecting deer harvest to marginally improve through the 2023 hunting season.

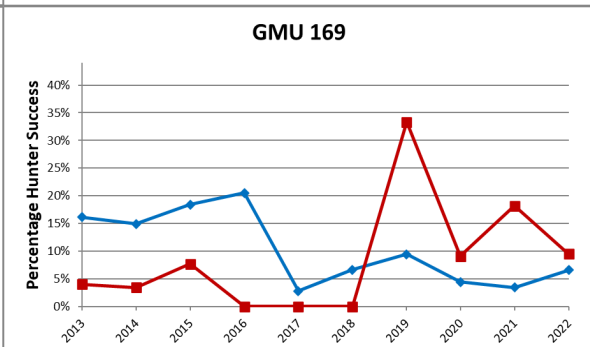
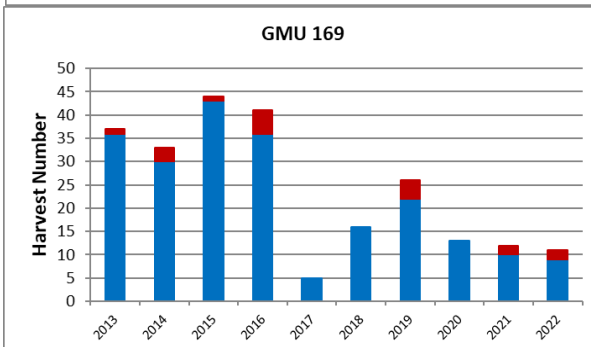
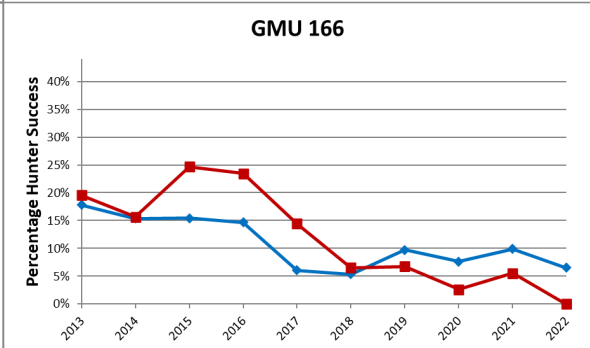
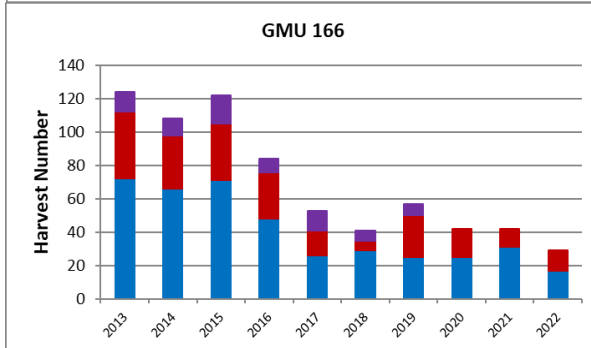
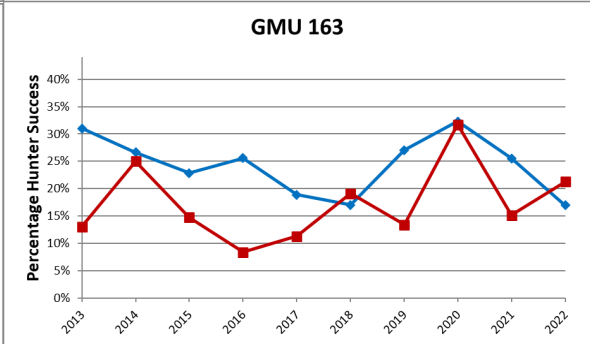
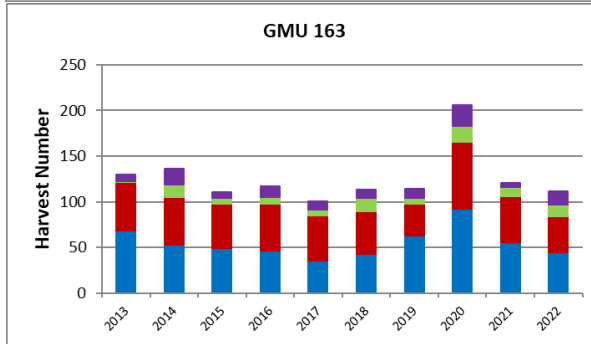
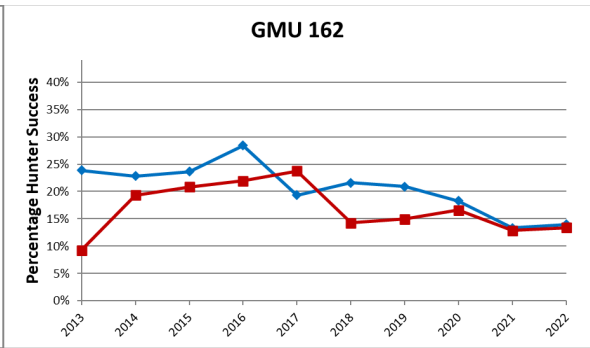
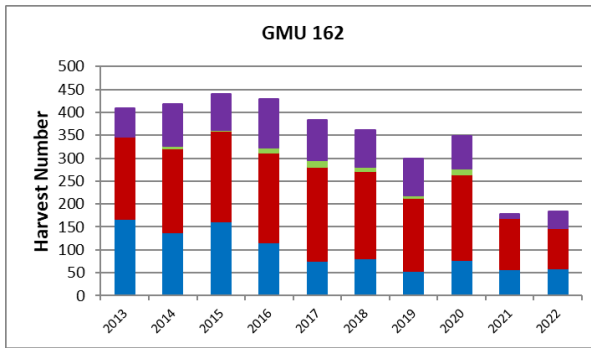
Periodic die-offs have occurred due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and bluetongue, both viral conditions transmitted by a biting midge, a small fly often found near water or marshy areas, which mainly affect white-tailed deer. The 2021 drought resulted in disease outbreaks across eastern Washington, affecting even portions of the mule deer herd, generally less susceptible than white-tails to hemorrhagic disease die-offs. While the sample size is small, approximately 15% of 40 radio-collared mule deer does were lost to either bluetongue or EHD. Although disease outbreaks are monitored annually, there is nothing feasible to be done to prevent outbreaks of hemorrhagic diseases. Research projects using relatively localized trapping of adult midges and spraying insecticides for emerging larvae have shown these methods are not effective in curtailing disease outbreaks in the wild.

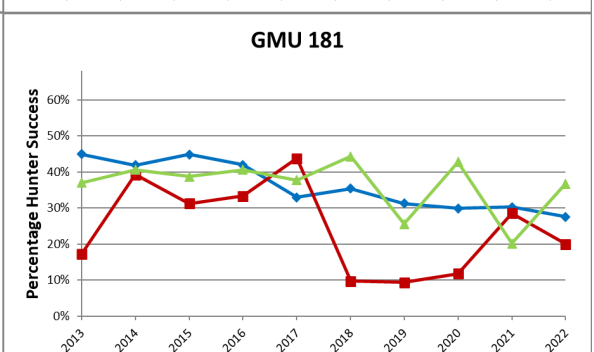
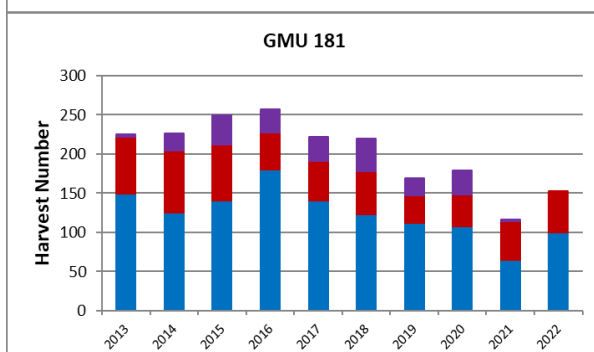
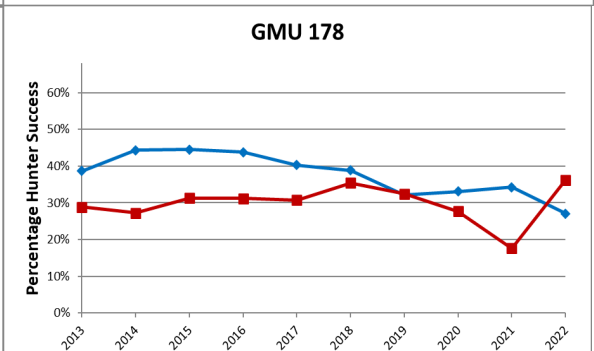
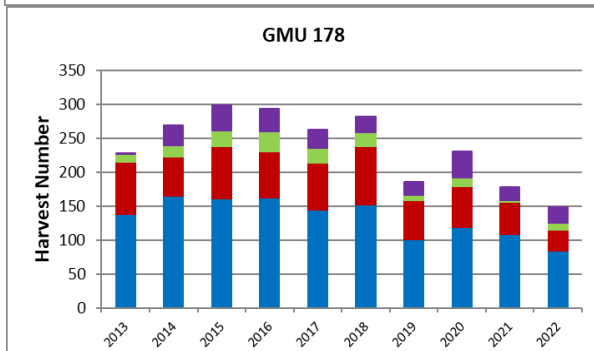
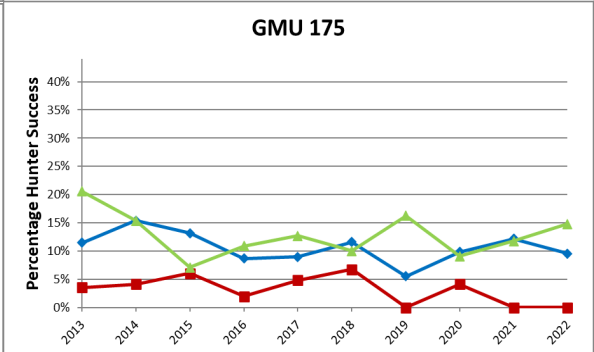
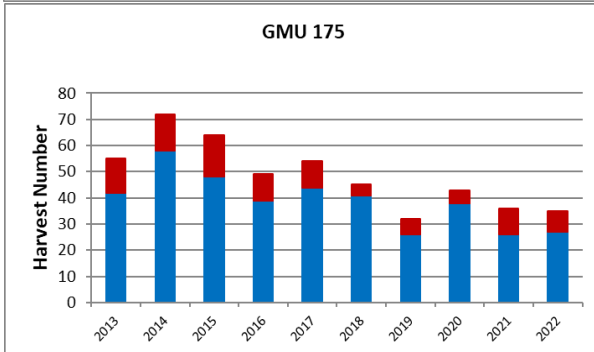
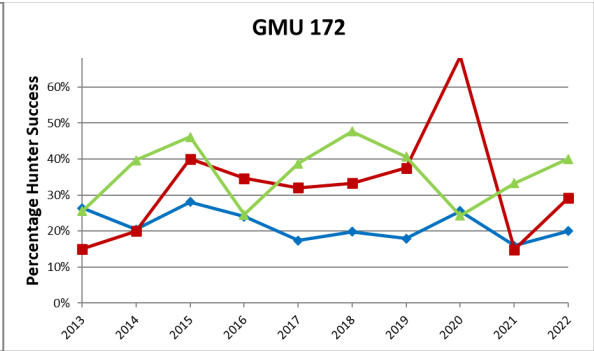
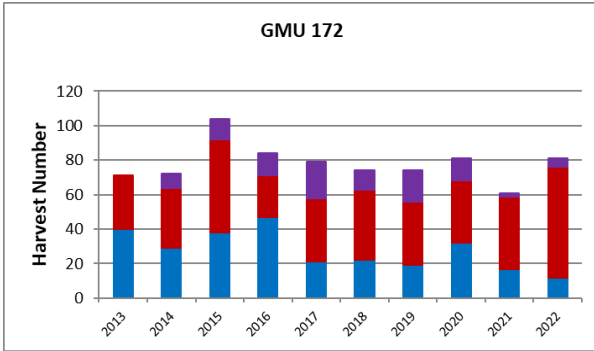
Mule deer populations have experienced long-term declines across much of the west with no definitive cause identified. Habitat loss is suspected to be one possible cause, particularly the loss of winter range. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has probably helped maintain winter range in District 3, and mule deer populations outside of the mountains appear to be stable. However, decreases in available CRP contracts over the last few years have resulted in more land going into agricultural production and will likely have long-term negative impacts on mule deer populations in the district. Mountain populations of mule deer continue to show poor harvest metrics. Recent wildfires in the Tucannon-Wenaha Wilderness should have improved habitat conditions for deer, and 2021 fires in GMU 166 and 175 should provide future benefits.

One reference WDFW currently has for future potential harvest during general seasons are recent trends in hunter harvest success and harvest/unit effort. Figure 6 provides trend data by GMU for total harvest and harvest success, which typically mirrors HPUE. The figures are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 3 and what they can expect to encounter regarding hunter success and deer numbers.

Overall, the recent trends in total harvest have been disappointing. With poor overwinter survival in 2017 and 2019, and drought conditions in 2021, environmental conditions have not been conducive to stable populations or herd recovery. Some of the decline is due to lower hunter numbers and recent restrictions on antlerless harvest, but even with that, buck harvest numbers have been declining. Harvest success has not declined by the same percentage due to the effect of declining hunter numbers, but the trend is still not positive. We have addressed the harvest declines by limiting antlerless opportunity both during the general weapon seasons and with lower permit numbers, and we anticipate seeing some recovery now that we are 2 years post-hemorrhagic disease outbreak that impacted both our white-tailed and mule deer herds.







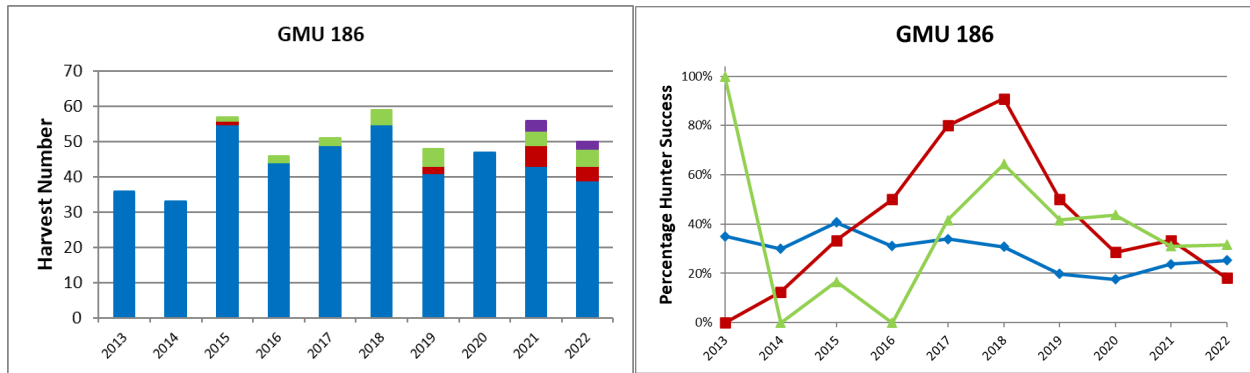


Figure 6. Left column: Ten-year trends in total numbers of mule deer bucks (blue) and antlerless deer (green), and white-tailed bucks (red) and antlerless deer (purple) during all general seasons combined from 2012-2021. Totals do not include permit harvest (**note the different scales**, from maximums of 50 - 1,000). **Right column:** Ten-year trends in percentage harvest success for each GMU in District 3 for modern firearm (**blue diamonds**), archery (**red squares**), and muzzleloader (**green triangles**) general season hunters for 2012-2021.

DEER AREAS

There are three deer areas in District 3 that were created for several purposes. Deer Area 1010 is located within the private land area of GMU 162 and was created to help manage deer damage while limiting antlerless harvest on public land in the GMU. Deer Areas 1008 and 1009 divide GMU 169 and help to manage deer by distributing hunters and harvest opportunity across the wilderness area.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. GMU 166 General Season Archery limited to 3 point minimum white-tailed and mule deer, no antlerless harvest allowed.
2. Deer Area 1040 (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area) **was eliminated three years ago** and is now open to general season deer and elk hunting under same regulations as GMU 172.
3. Deer Area 1021 was **eliminated in 2021**. This area was originally created to control resident deer in the area around Clarkston. Radio-collaring studies showed that it was likely that many of the harvested deer were only using the Deer Area for winter range and were not resident deer causing damage issues.
4. "Any Deer" permits were added for youth in selected GMUs.

BLACK BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears occur mainly in the foothills and forested areas of District 3, but population densities vary among GMUs. The highest harvest densities of bears occur in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton).

District 3 consists of GMUs that are part of the Blue Mountains Black Bear Management Unit 8 (BBMU 8), which is one of nine BBMUs defined by WDFW. Currently, WDFW regulates for only a general fall bear season, with the elimination two years ago by the WDFW Commission of the permit-controlled spring bear hunt. With harvest metrics that fall within healthy population parameters identified by WDFW and a recent robust population index modeled through DNA sampling, both indicate a thriving bear population in the Blue Mountains. The metrics used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of female bears in the harvest (no more than 35-39% of harvest), the median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years), and the median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years).

WDFW completed a DNA mark-recapture density estimate in 2021 to establish a baseline for monitoring trends in black bear population size. Results of this effort generated an estimate of 32.4 bears (95% CI 31.1-52.9) greater than 1 year old per 100km². Black bear populations have been demonstrated to be robust and stable in District 3. Because the age of harvest is used as a management metric, hunters are reminded that **it is required that a premolar tooth be submitted** (lack of hunter compliance with this regulation is one of multiple reasons the Spring Bear hunt has been “paused”). Tooth envelopes can be obtained by calling a regional office or stopping in at one of the district offices (call ahead as these offices do not have dedicated customer service staff), which may be available to help with tooth extraction as well.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Although there are hunters who specifically target black bears, most bears are harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest can vary quite a bit from one year to the next and overall hunter success is quite low. However, hunter success is likely higher for those who specifically target bears versus those who buy a tag in case they see a bear while deer or elk hunting. Since 2001, hunter success in District 3 has averaged just 6% and has never been higher than 9%, until 2022. Hunters averaged 16% success in 2022 and had the lowest number of days in the field per harvest in over 20 years at 41.6 days, compared to the previous 5-year average of 96 days.

Overall, if there is any trend in bear harvest during the general bear season in District 3, it has been one of long-term stability, until 2022, where the harvest showed a substantial increase. Whether that higher harvest will repeat itself in 2023, only hunter effort and success rates will determine. Harvest has generally fluctuated between 75 and 100 bears, excluding a few outliers: 2011 was a relatively poor year, with 66 bears harvested, but harvest rebounded during the 2012 and 2013 seasons before dropping off again in 2014 to 62 bears (Figure 7).

General season harvest in 2022 was reported as 187 bears, the highest general season harvest in over 20 years. With hunter numbers trending down, other factors are responsible for the higher-than-average harvest. We know the second bear tag contributed to some of the higher harvest, but we do not know if removal of a spring hunt influenced bear populations, or if bears were more visible in 2022 due to the wet spring/early-summer resulting in higher fruit crops, or whether increased hunter interest resulted in more bears being harvested.

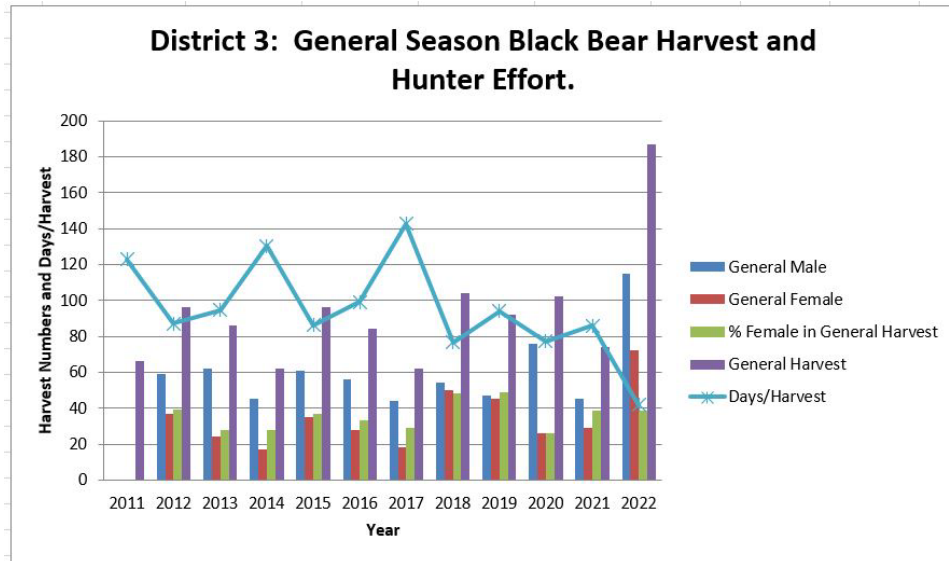


Figure 7. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season, and an index of hunter effort (hunter days/bear harvested) in District 3, 2011–2022 (the sex of harvested bears is not available for 2011).

At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) (Figure 8). Harvest numbers during 2014, 2017, and 2021 seasons compared to long-term (10-year), and short-term (5-year) averages were lower in both GMUs 154 and 162 during those years, but the yearly District harvest does not show any identifiable trends (Figure 7) other than there have been very few low harvest years back-to-back. This was again highlighted by the rebound in both the 2015 and 2016 harvests after the low 2014 harvest, and again in 2018 after the low 2017 harvest, and last year as well with a record 2022 harvest after the low 2021 harvest. Based on general long-term stability in District 3 bear harvest, hunters should expect similar harvest and success rates during the 2023 season. We may see some change in the harvest dynamic over time with the new regulation of a two-bear limit and August 1 opener (compared to a past September opener), but in the short term this will likely be offset by the lack of any harvest during a spring season. We did experience the two highest total harvests in 2020 (140 bears) and 2022 (187) since the 2002 harvest (165 bears), with the 2002 and 2020 harvest totals being bolstered by spring bear harvest, while 2022 harvest was only from the fall general season but supported by an increase in 2nd bear tag harvest.

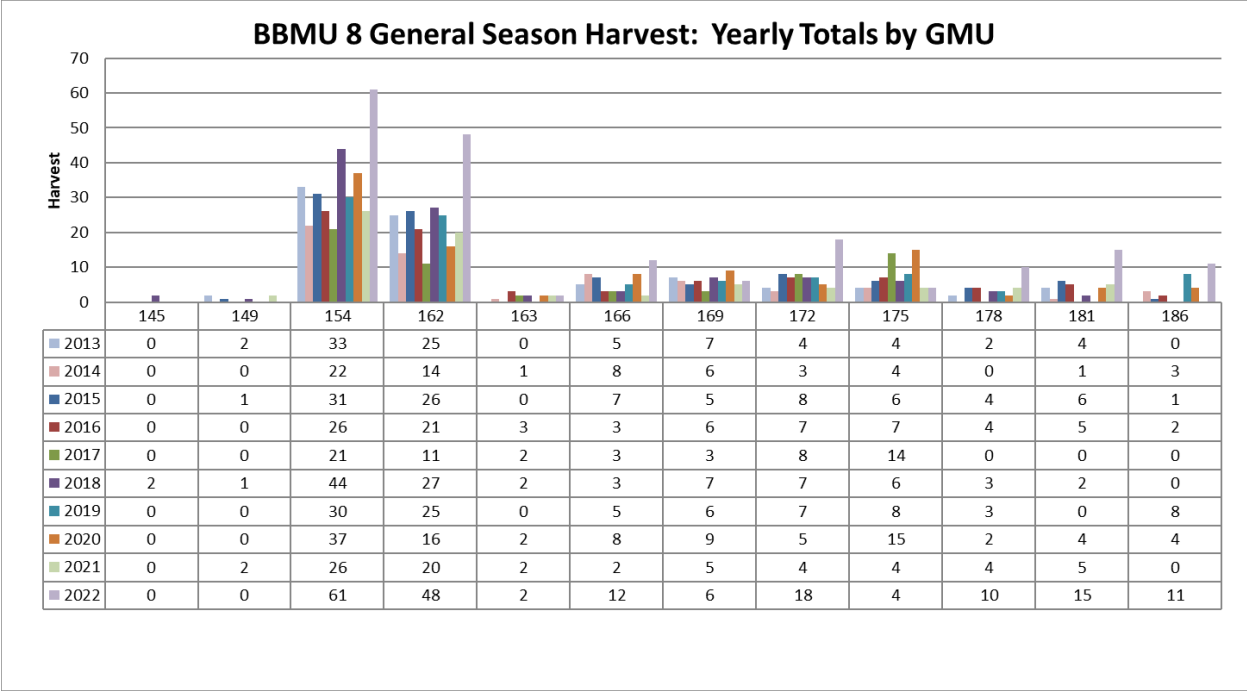


Figure 8. Number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2013-2022 general black bear seasons in District 3.

HOW TO LOCATE AND HARVEST A BLACK BEAR

Scouting is an important factor that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 3. Although black bears are extremely common and occur in some areas at very high densities, they are seen infrequently because they generally limit their time in the open to cooler times very early and late in the day, before moving into thick vegetation in draws and creek bottoms.

Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. Hunters should focus their efforts early and late in the day in areas with good food sources. In September, bears can spend a considerable amount of time in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountain foothills in search of fruit that has ripened in the riparian areas and around old homesteads.

Many hunters have found success using a predator call to attract a bear into shooting range. Again, scouting an area for fresh sign will help to increase the chance of success. Patience is the key, tempered with covering several strategic spots, and staying alert. Remember, using a predator call is attracting a bear, or cougar for that matter, that is expecting an easy meal. Choose areas where you have good visibility and plenty of distance from thick cover to give time to observe approaching bears.

Bears can often be located along riparian corridors that contain many berry-producing shrubs, including blackberries and elderberries, or along north-facing slopes with salmonberries, huckleberries, and blackberries. During the fall, hunters will generally find bears foraging across open slopes dissected by shrubby draws early in the day. Also, hunters should check riparian areas that may still have berries or rose hips, and hike through them to see if there is any bear sign. If fresh sign is found, odds are a bear is frequenting that area. If hunters are patient and sit for extended periods of time watching open areas in these riparian patches and corridors, they may get a chance to harvest a bear. Patience is the key.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

Beginning in 2019, bear hunting season dates in District 3 were standardized to an Aug. 1 opener running until November 15 to conform to new statewide standard opening and closing dates. In addition, the two-bear harvest limit was standardized and applied statewide.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 3, but densities likely vary among GMUs, with higher densities where shrub and forest cover make up a larger portion of the unit, corresponding to good deer and elk foraging habitat. Cougar populations in District 3 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining stable adult territories and population by limiting the harvest of adult cougars to approximately 12% to 16% of the cougar population. Beginning in 2008, WDFW has made multiple adjustments to the way it manages cougar harvest in Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested, and instead using a standard liberal (no harvest restrictions) early season coupled with a restricted late season (harvest guidelines applied). The intent was to have a longer season without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific PMUs (Population Management Units) if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

To accomplish harvest goals, WDFW established a series of PMUs (Population Management Units), each with its own harvest guideline and with standard season dates of Sept. 1 through April 30. **Harvest guidelines do not affect cougar hunting seasons until harvest numbers are evaluated prior to January 1.** At that point, any PMU that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed, depending on the age and sex composition of the harvest (only cougars greater than 24 months of age are counted towards the Harvest Guideline in Blue Mountain PMUs). If hunters plan on hunting cougar after Jan. 1, they must confirm that the cougar season is open in the area they plan to hunt. Harvest guidelines for each PMU located in District 3 are provided in Table 4.

In April 2020, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted higher harvest guidelines in the Blue Mountains and other PMUs for cougars, based on local harvest data instead of a Statewide average density estimate, to calculate available opportunity while still meeting the Game Management Plan (GMP) goals. Social stability is one goal stated in the GMP, which is maintained by adult territorial cougars. Based on this, only adult cougars (greater than 24 months of age) will count towards the harvest guideline in the coming years. It is unclear at this time if the harvest will change significantly under these new guidelines. The expectation of this change is that the winter season (Jan. 1-Apr. 30) should remain open in four out of every five years, allowing for good snow tracking conditions for hunters specifically targeting late-season cougars and potentially resulting in a higher harvest than observed in past years. Harvest guidelines would still apply, so hunters will still be required to check the WDFW website ([WDFW cougar hunting](#)) or call the hotline (1-866-364-4868) to ensure a given PMU is still open.

For the 2022 season and the upcoming 2023 season, the Commission approved the option to purchase a second permit applicable to only District 3 PMUs. This was in response to the “at risk” designation of the Blue Mountains elk herd and the demonstrated impact of cougar predation on radio-collared elk calves. The harvest guidelines remain in effect and PMUs will still close on Jan. 1 if the guidelines have been met or exceeded at that point in the season.

Table 4. Harvest guidelines and 2022-2023 harvest for the three cougar PMUs located in District 3. Harvest before the 2020 season was managed under a lower harvest guideline than first applied in 2021-2022; only cougars >24 months old are counted towards the guideline; total harvest including cougars <24 months is shown in (). Other mortalities (public safety removal, depredations) are not counted towards the harvest guideline, but are generally low in District 3.

Hunt Area (PMU)	2023-2024 Harvest Guideline	2022-2023 Adult Harvest (Total)
145, 166, 175, 178 (PMU 9)	6-7 adult	7 (10)-Closed Feb. 17
149, 154, 162, 163 (PMU 10)	7-9 adult	4 (10)- No Closure
169, 172, 181, 186 (PMU 11)	5-6 adult	0 (1)- No Closure
Bag Limit	2 per season	Only valid in Blue Mountains

For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit [WDFW’s website](#).

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Cougar harvest in District 3 has been variable over the years, with the average since 1990 of 17 cougars and a range between a low of 5 and a high of 33. However, in 14 out of the last 25 years, the range has been between 12 and 20 cougars harvested. Since 2013, the number of cougars harvested in District 3 has averaged 20 cougars, and sub-adults typically dominate the harvest. With the yearly variation, it is hard to predict future harvest, but cougar sightings in the district continue to be common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the harvest. Under the new harvest management guidelines (higher limits and only cougars >24 months counted toward the guideline), it is much less likely for all hunt areas to close by the Jan. 1 evaluation period, but hunters interested in a cougar harvest in any of these GMUs should still plan on taking advantage of good cougar tracking conditions prior to January.

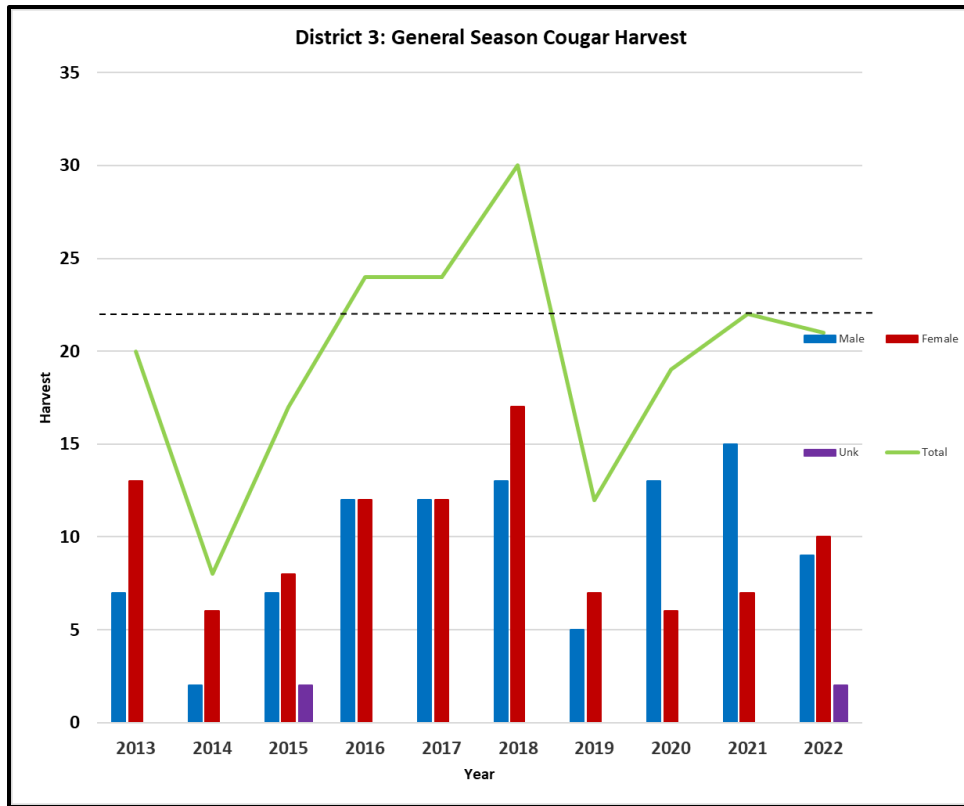


Figure 9. The reported number of cougars harvested in District 3, 2013–2022, including subadults (which are not applied to the guideline). The dashed line represents the upper harvest guideline for the three cougar hunt areas combined.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. The late season extends from January 1 to April 30, 2024. **Be aware that 2023 licenses expire at the end of March, and a 2024 hunting license and cougar tag is required to hunt cougar after Mar. 31. After Dec. 31, 2023, hunters should call 1-866-364-4686 prior to hunting to determine if their hunt area is open.**
2. The harvest guideline was increased for the 2020-2021 cougar season and continues for the 2023-2024 season, and only cougars 24 months of age and greater will be counted towards the harvest guideline.
3. In July 2022, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved a two-cougar bag limit in the Blue Mountains, with the stated goal of benefiting elk calf survival. A second cougar tag will be available for GMUs 145-154, 162-186 beginning in September 2022 and continuing through the 2023 season.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 3. Common dabbling ducks include mallard, northern pintail, American widgeon, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, canvasback, scaup, and common goldeneye are present along the reservoirs of the Snake and Columbia rivers and can occur in fairly large numbers.

Mallards are the most abundant duck species in Washington and constitute the vast majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically about 50%). Mid-winter surveys in the South Columbia Basin segment of District 3 typically yield more than 50% of mallards in the dabbling duck count, with goldeneye and canvasback making up 80% of the diving ducks. Hunters should expect harvest opportunities to be mostly mallard and American widgeon, although hunting by boat in the river reservoirs can yield good harvests of diving ducks.

MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY

There are very few ducks in District 3 during late spring and early summer. Beginning in mid to late September, birds will begin migrating south from British Columbia, the Yukon, and Alaska, and numbers will continue to increase until they peak in late October and early November. Although migration patterns have not been intensively studied, it is believed ducks use concentration areas in District 3 as resting and foraging areas and do not stay in the district for long periods of time. Consequently, the number of ducks located in District 3 most likely changes daily but begins to decline sharply as ducks continue their southward migration and there are no more new migrants coming into the area from breeding grounds to the north.

CONCENTRATION AREAS

In general, concentration areas include the wetlands and rivers around McNary National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the Columbia and Snake River valleys. Concentrations within these broader areas are dependent on many factors (e.g., hunting pressure, weather, food, etc.), and have the potential to change daily. The agricultural areas around McNary NWR attract large numbers of foraging ducks and geese, but most of these lands are closed to hunting or leased by private hunting outfitters and access can be difficult to obtain or expensive for a private guide.

POPULATION STATUS

The number of ducks in District 3 during established hunting seasons is most strongly related to the status of breeding duck populations in Alaska and Canada. The following are the trends from USFW/Canadian Wildlife Service monitoring data over the ten-year period from 2013-2022: the 2014 breeding survey estimated the breeding population in Alaska at 3.5 million ducks, a 6% increase over 2013 values, but still well below the 2012 estimate of 4.4 million. The mallard estimate recovered from 2013 lows of 338,000 to an estimate of 501,000 for 2014, a 48% increase, and similar to the 2012 estimate (USFWS, Trends in Duck Breeding Populations, 1955-2015).

In 2015, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats traditional survey area was 3.4 million, a 3% decrease from 2014 estimates, and 8% below the long-term average. The mallard breeding population estimate was 471,000, a decrease of 6% from 2014 levels, but still 24% above the long-term average. In 2016, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats area was 4.3 million, a 28% increase over 2015 estimates, and 17% above the long-term trends. The mallard breeding population estimate was 584,000, 24% above the 2015 estimates, and 54% above the long-term trend. In 2017, the total estimate for the Alaskas-Yukon area was 3.99 million, an 8% decline from the previous year, but 8% higher than the long-term average. The 2017 estimate for mallards was 538,000, an 8% decline from the 2016 estimate but 40% above the long-term average. In 2018, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 3.38 million, 15% below 2017 estimates, and 9% below the long-term average.

The 2018 harvest in District 3 mirrored the population estimates, with a 15% decline in harvest over the 2017 duck harvest. In 2018, the mallard population estimate was 451,000, a 16% decline over 2017 estimates but still 17% above the long-term average. In 2019, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 2.61 million, a 23% decline over 2018 estimates, and the third year in a row of population declines. 2019 also saw a continued decline in mallard breeding population numbers, with an estimate of 361,000, 20% below 2018 and 7% below the long-term average. There are no reports for the 2020 and 2021 years due to Covid restrictions, but surveys resumed for 2022. The total duck breeding estimate for 2022 was 3.8 million, a 47% increase over 2019 values and 4% above the long-term average. This reverses a 5-year declining trend. The mallard portion of the breeding duck estimate was particularly robust, with an estimate of 614,000 being 70% above the 2019 estimate and 59% above the long-term average.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Although we do not have the 2022 harvest data, recent harvests have mirrored the breeding estimates, as evidenced by the 2018 duck harvest being down 15% overall from 2017, marking the third year in a row of decreased harvest, mirroring decreased breeding estimates for two out of the last three years from the breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada. Harvests in 2019 broke this trend and were well above expected levels, being 16% greater than 2018 and only 2% below the 5-year mean despite declines in the breeding duck numbers. With widespread drought, hot and dry conditions, and early fires, the 2021 harvest was expected to be well below average but was essentially unchanged from the 2020 levels, which were 22% above the 2019 harvest. Breeding conditions in 2022 were generally favorable for waterfowl but drought conditions in Canada this summer may hinder brood production for the 2023 season. However, with robust breeding duck populations, we should still see an average to above average harvest this fall. Although hunter numbers have remained relatively stable, the number of hunter days were much higher in 2019 and 2020, resulting in the below average harvest/day rates, with 2019 being the lowest in the last 5 years and were well below both the five- and 10-year averages (Figure 8). The 2021 hunter days dropped back to the average, and with good harvest numbers, harvest rates are on the upswing. Traditional breeding surveys were not conducted in 2020 and 2021, and only local spring estimates are available in those U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports. The 2023 Waterfowl Population Status Report was not available at the time of this writing, but hunters should check the report at [USFWS](https://www.usfws.gov/) for insight into the 2023 population estimates for waterfowl hunting prospects.

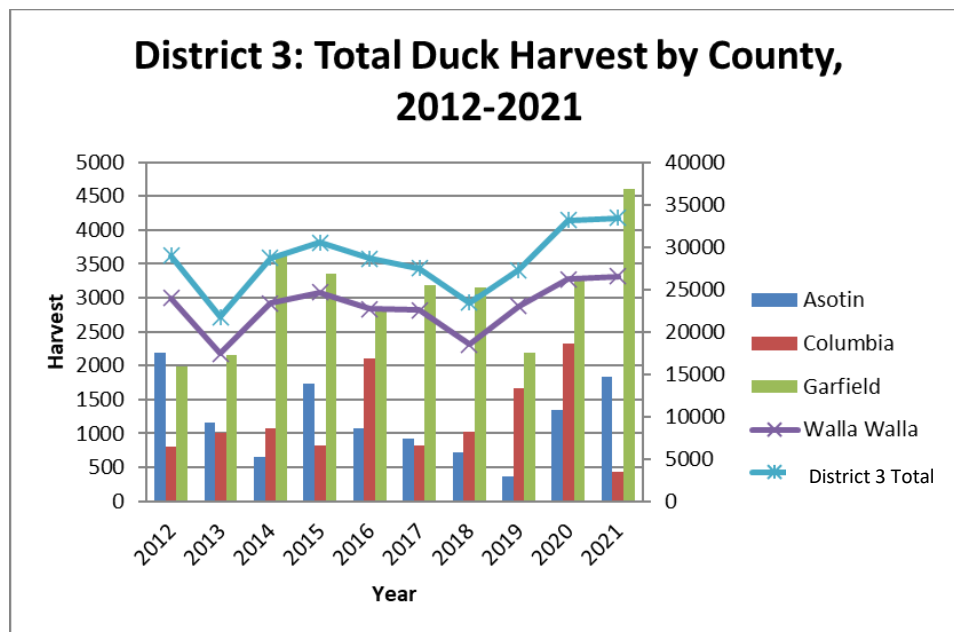


Figure 10. Trends in the total number of ducks harvested (blue line, right axis), and totals by county in Walla Walla (purple line, right axis), Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties (bars, left axis), 2012–2021.

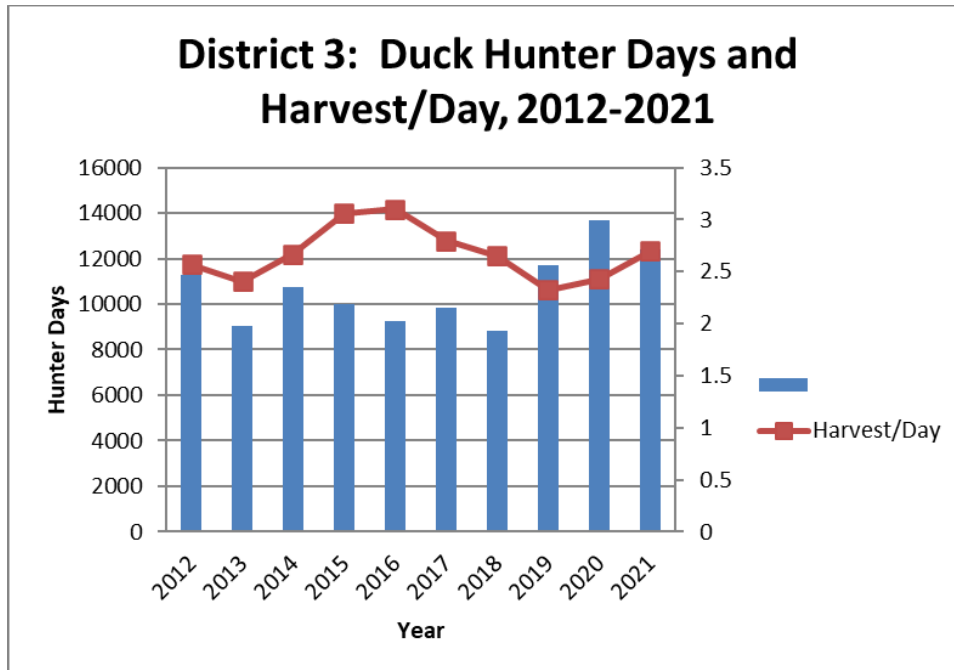


Figure 11. Trends in the total duck hunter days (left axis), and ducks harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2012-2021.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

How hunters go about hunting ducks is largely dependent on where they choose to hunt. When hunting inland waters associated with ponds and rivers, or feeding areas, traditional decoy setups work the best. Birds are most active during early morning and late afternoon as they move from resting areas to feeding areas. See the [WDFW waterfowl page](#) for more information on hunting ducks.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

There are several U.S. Army Corp of Engineer (USACE) Habitat Management Units along the Snake River in District 3 that offer good waterfowl hunting opportunities, and McNary NWR along the Columbia River offers some of the premier hunting opportunities in the district. WDFW Wildlife Areas in District 3 are primarily big game habitat and do not offer much waterfowl hunting opportunity, but hunters should see the [WDFW waterfowl hunting page](#) for more detailed information related to their location, current waterfowl management activities, and common species.

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

Canada geese are the only goose species available for harvest in District 3 during the early September season, while Canada, snow, Ross, and white-fronted geese may all be taken during the late season.

MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

The migration chronology of geese in District 3 is nearly identical to that described for ducks, with very few geese occurring in the district until migrants begin showing up from Alaska in September. However, one distinct difference between ducks and geese is goose numbers do not decline as sharply as duck numbers do around the latter half of November. Instead, many geese choose to over-winter in the agricultural areas of the district as long as snow cover does not become excessive.

POPULATION STATUS

Breeding Canada geese appear to be increasing in District 3, with many local lakes, ponds, and rivers hosting multiple breeding pairs. WDFW does not currently conduct breeding goose surveys in this part of the state. Locally breeding geese may help supplement migratory numbers and add localized hunting opportunity to the main goose concentrations in western Walla Walla County. Urban goose populations can be problematic at times but offer limited hunting opportunities.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 3 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most goose harvest will occur in Walla Walla County during the late season, where twice as many geese are harvested each year compared to Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties combined. Although harvest is low in the three eastern counties of the district, creative hunters can find opportunities along the Touchet, Tucannon, and Snake rivers by requesting access from farmers who have geese feeding daily in their crop fields, particularly alfalfa and volunteer wheat.

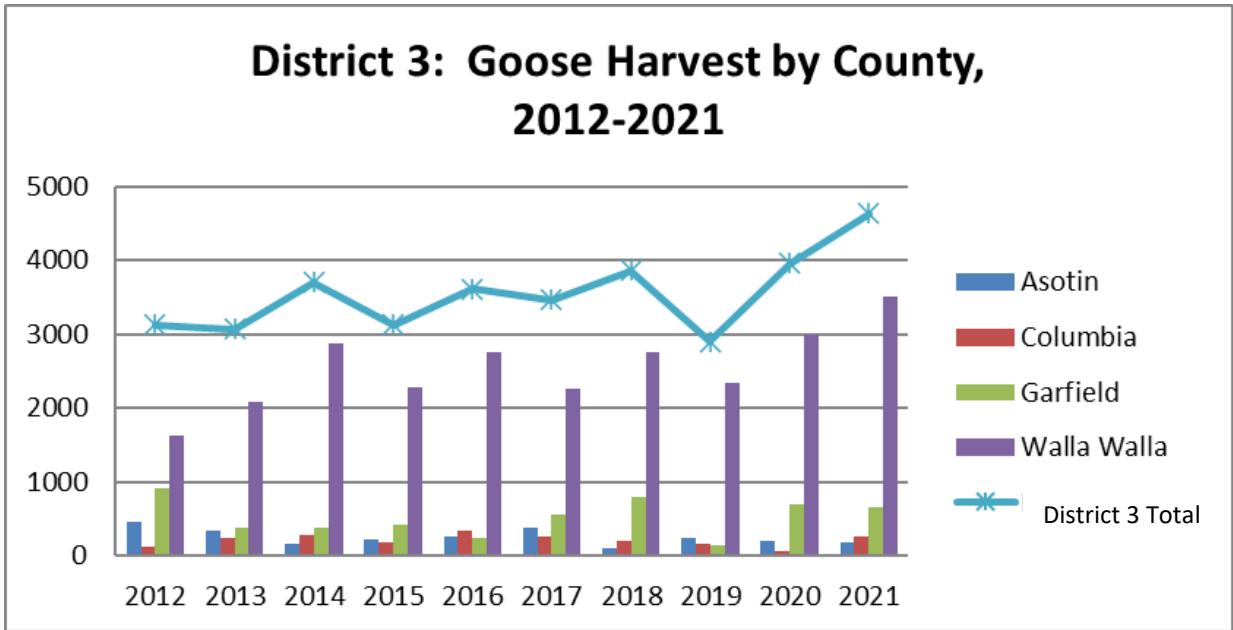


Figure 12. Trends in the total number of geese harvested (pale blue line), and totals by county in Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Walla Walla counties, 2012–2021.

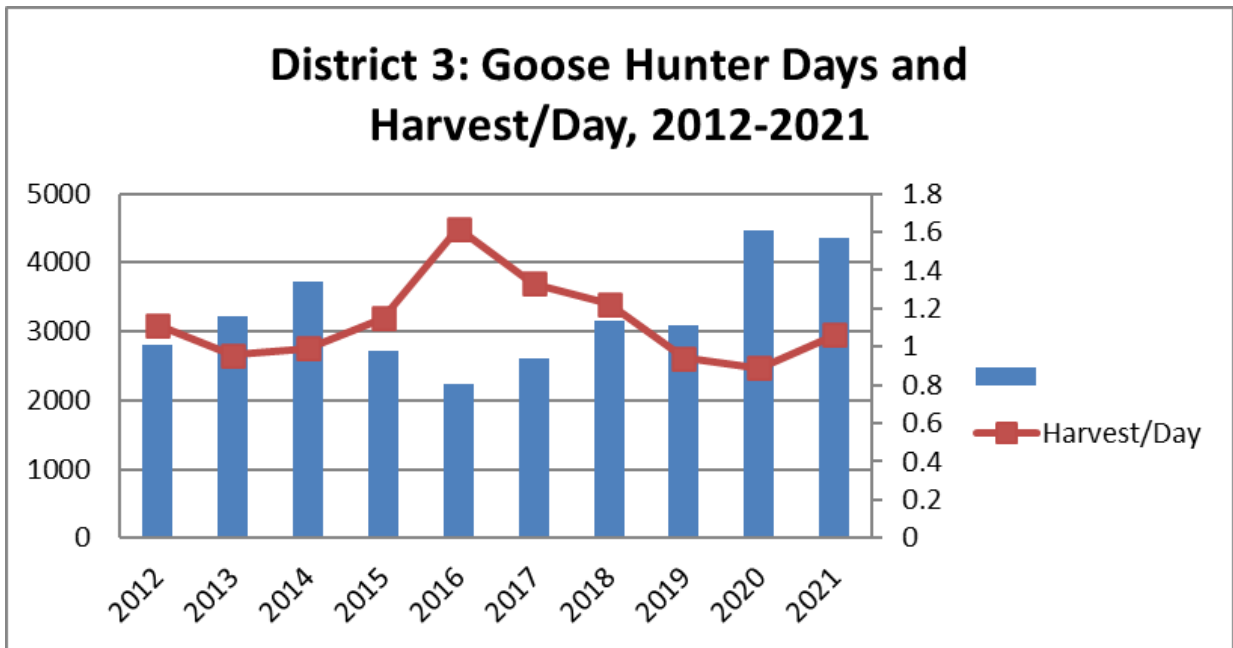


Figure 13. Trends in the total goose hunter days (left axis), and geese harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2012–2021.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

The standard techniques employed to harvest geese include finding agricultural areas where geese are feeding and setting up a decoy spread well before daylight in parts of the fields where geese are expected to concentrate. In District 3, agricultural areas where feeding geese congregate are dryland and irrigated agricultural fields relatively close to the Snake or Columbia rivers. Because of this, goose hunting opportunities most often occur on private property and require hunters to gain permission before hunting. There are multiple guide services available for hunters willing to pay for access and experience.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

It is strongly recommended that hunters review the most recent Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to ensure they comply, as there are specific daily regulations. [Pamphlets](#) are also available at any retailer that sells hunting licenses.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Two species of grouse occur in District 3; ruffed grouse and dusky grouse (formerly called blue grouse). Ruffed grouse are the most abundant grouse in the Blue Mountains and generally occur at lower elevations and along shrubby draws and riparian areas where hardwoods are present. Dusky grouse can be located in upper elevation timbered slopes and mountain meadows, often near springs or some other water source. Both species will be attracted to berry-producing vegetation, such as chokecherry, currant, elderberry, and snowberry, with aspen stands also being an attractive habitat for both cover and forage.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not conduct any standardized surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 3 (expanded wing and tail collection using “wing barrels” at major public land entry points is underway in an effort to identify age and sex of harvested birds, see information here: [Forest Grouse](#)). Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor the general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, grouse populations appeared to be at least stable if not increasing until the 2016 season, as HPUE has slowly increased from a low in 2011 until a drop in 2016. While both harvest numbers and hunter days have been decreasing, the increase in HPUE suggests grouse populations have been stable (Figure 11) but were likely impacted by difficult winters in 2016/17 and 2018/19. Harvest is also highly dependent on weather during brood rearing. Harvest is dominated by young-of-the-year birds, so poor hatching or brood rearing conditions greatly influence the harvest.

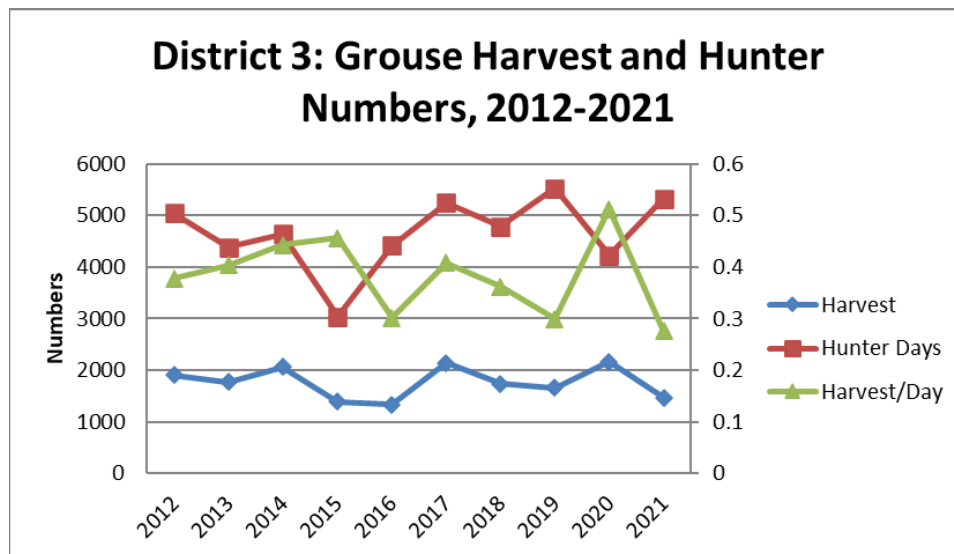


Figure 14. Number of grouse harvested, number of hunter days (right axis), and grouse harvested per hunter day (left axis), 2012-2021.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of grouse harvested in District 3 has declined significantly since 2009 when 5,147 grouse were estimated to be harvested. This is compared to 2,143 in 2017 and around 1,700 in both 2018 and 2019. Harvest in 2020 rebounded to 2,200 birds but was still well below the 2009 levels. The 2021 harvest was the lowest in over 20 years at 1,469 birds despite a large increase in hunter days afield. The trend in declining hunter days has somewhat stabilized within the range of 4-5 thousand hunter days. Typically, a hunter may go a few days without seeing birds or getting a shot at any but will harvest multiple birds on a given day, once they find good habitat and encounter birds still in family groups. Since harvest is so closely tied to brood production, weather conditions in the spring are a good predictor of hunting season success. This year's wet but warm spring should have minimal impact to early brood production and survival. Birds that fail early will often attempt a second clutch, and later nesting birds have had very good brood-rearing conditions, with abundant vegetation promoting superior foraging conditions for chicks. Overall, we expect average nesting success this year, resulting in some rebound in abundance during the coming hunting season.

New in 2021, forest grouse hunting season now opens September 15, extending through January 15, 2022.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt grouse in District 3 is by walking closed roads and trails and shooting them as they flush or flushing after they roost in a nearby tree. Dusky grouse tend to occur in higher densities in the higher elevations of the Blue Mountains and can occasionally be found in good numbers along grassy open ridges mixed with conifer forests. Ruffed grouse are closely associated with riparian areas throughout all elevations of the forested portions of the Blue Mountains. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's grouse species, see WDFW's [upland bird hunting webpage](#).

PHEASANTS

The best pheasant hunting opportunities in District 3 are associated with the Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program. Each year, approximately 3,500 pheasants are released in Region 1, and many of these are destined for release sites in District 3. Nine sites are located throughout the district. Four of those sites (Hollebeke HMU, Mill Creek HMU, Rice Bar HMU, and Willow Bar HMU) are owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, two sites (Asotin Wildlife Area and the Hartsock Unit of the Wooten Wildlife Area) are WDFW-owned, and the rest are on private lands open to the public under WDFW's Feel Free to Hunt access program. Releases take place for the youth season on most of the sites in mid-September, and the remaining releases happen sporadically throughout the pheasant hunting season. **Be aware that only non-toxic shot is allowed at any pheasant release site, regardless of public or private land ownership.** Hunters should be mindful of the regulation, and if they are using lead shot at other hunting sites but hunting multiple sites, be careful to leave lead shot in their vehicles and **not in their coat pockets** when visiting a WDFW pheasant release site.

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Pheasants are closely associated with agricultural and grassland habitats throughout the northern and western portions of the district. The best pheasant hunting is located in areas of permanent cover, usually associated with riparian or shrubby habitats. There is no question that the district has lost pheasants and pheasant habitat over the past 30 to 40 years, due in part to changes in farming practices, increase in invasive weed species, and potentially due to long-term changes in precipitation across the region. However, the district still offers many good hunting opportunities for both wild and planted birds.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not generate population estimates for pheasants. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor the general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which track birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, pheasant HPUE has shown minor increasing and decreasing trends over the past decade. HPUE in 2018 was 0.73 birds harvested per hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 0.69. The 2019 and 2020 seasons both saw decreases in HPUE, with much of that being attributed to increases in hunter days despite some uptick in hunter harvest. Other WDFW information implies that populations have declined during the past few decades but appear to have recently stabilized. For the period from 2006-2018, there is a correlation between the number of pheasants harvested and the number of hunter days, which also suggests a stable population over the same period. A small but significant portion of this harvest is likely supported by the pheasant release program and private release efforts, so harvest is likely not an adequate indication of wild pheasant populations.

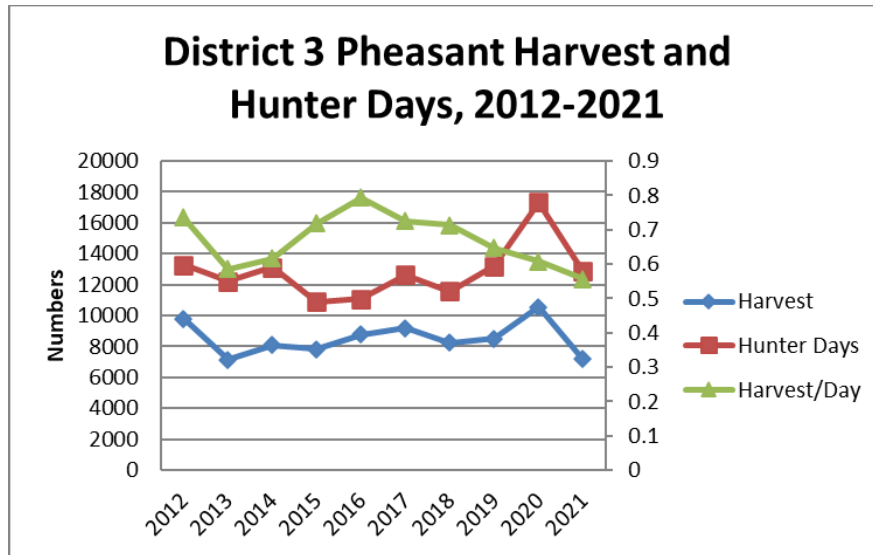


Figure 15. Total pheasant harvest, hunter days, and harvest per day in District 3, 2012-2021.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of pheasants harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season and is also buffered by the pheasant release program. Although the winter/early spring conditions in 2022 have been fairly mild and we should have good adult bird survival, spring/summer cool, wet conditions are likely to cause nest and brood rearing failures among early nesting birds. Some birds will reneest, and both seed crop and insect resources on which pheasants rely should be abundant and support good brood survival for those birds that do nest successfully. Overall, wild pheasant numbers are likely to be average this coming hunting season. Garfield County has been raising and releasing pheasants in an effort to bolster the pheasant population. While WDFW pheasant releases support a put-and-take hunt of male pheasants, Garfield County is releasing both male and female pheasants in appropriate habitat to encourage the expansion of declining populations. You can read more about [Garfield County pheasants](#), which includes information on how to support the project.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt pheasants in District 3 is with the use of a bird dog. Pheasants are usually located in thicker cover and often require a dog to flush them if they do not run-in front of hunters. To learn more about how to hunt Washington’s pheasants, please visit WDFW’s [upland bird hunting webpage](#).

Hunters should be aware that special regulations apply when hunting on eastern Washington pheasant release sites. Most notably, hunters are required to use nontoxic shot. To locate maps for the Mill Creek, Hollebeke, Rice Bar, and Willow Bar HMUs, as well as the Asotin and Hartsock WMA release sites, and to learn more about the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#), visit the WDFW website.

QUAIL

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

California quail are common in the lower elevation draws and drainages across the foothills of the Blue Mountains, and suitable pockets of habitat across the prairie areas and breaks of the Grande Ronde and Snake rivers. Mountain quail occur in District 3, but there are no sizable populations and sightings are uncommon. When they do occur, it is usually along the Asotin and Joseph Creek drainages and tributaries that have abundant shrub cover, and hunters looking for California quail in this area should be careful to identify their target, as mountain quail are protected in eastern Washington.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for quail. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, recent quail HPUE has improved significantly from low levels in 2013, likely due to weather during the nesting period. HPUE in 2014 was 1.23 birds harvested per hunter day and remained stable through the 2016 season at 1.38 birds harvested per hunter day but dropped drastically in 2017 to 0.64 birds/hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 1.14 birds/day. An expected improvement in quail harvest did not materialize in 2018, with another low harvest of only 0.62 birds/hunter day. Harvest in 2019 and 2020 did see improvement to ~0.7 birds/day, but still well below the 5-year average. Conditions in 2021 were not as favorable as 2019 or 2020, with drought conditions not conducive to successful brood rearing, but we saw stable HPUE at 0.7 birds/day. We don't have the 2023 harvest results, but with the opposite case of a cool wet spring likely inhibiting nest success, we expected a lower harvest in 2022. To date, 2023 conditions have been generally favorable for brood production, and we expect some increase in harvest for the coming fall season.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of quail harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. The breeding conditions during spring and early summer of 2023 have been good for nesting success and should also support good survival of any late nesting birds. Biologists predict that 2023 quail harvest numbers will recover from their recent slide.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt quail in District 3 is with the use of a bird dog. Quail are usually located in thicker cover and often require a dog to flush. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's quail, please visit [WDFW's upland bird hunting webpage](#).

TURKEYS

Wild turkeys of the Rio Grande subspecies have been introduced into southeast Washington and are common. Turkeys are found in the lower elevation draws and drainages across the foothills of the Blue Mountains and in suitable pockets of habitat across the prairie areas and breaks of the Grande Ronde and Snake rivers. Turkeys can be found in all GMUs but tend to be concentrated along riparian areas in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountains and often near farmsteads and towns.

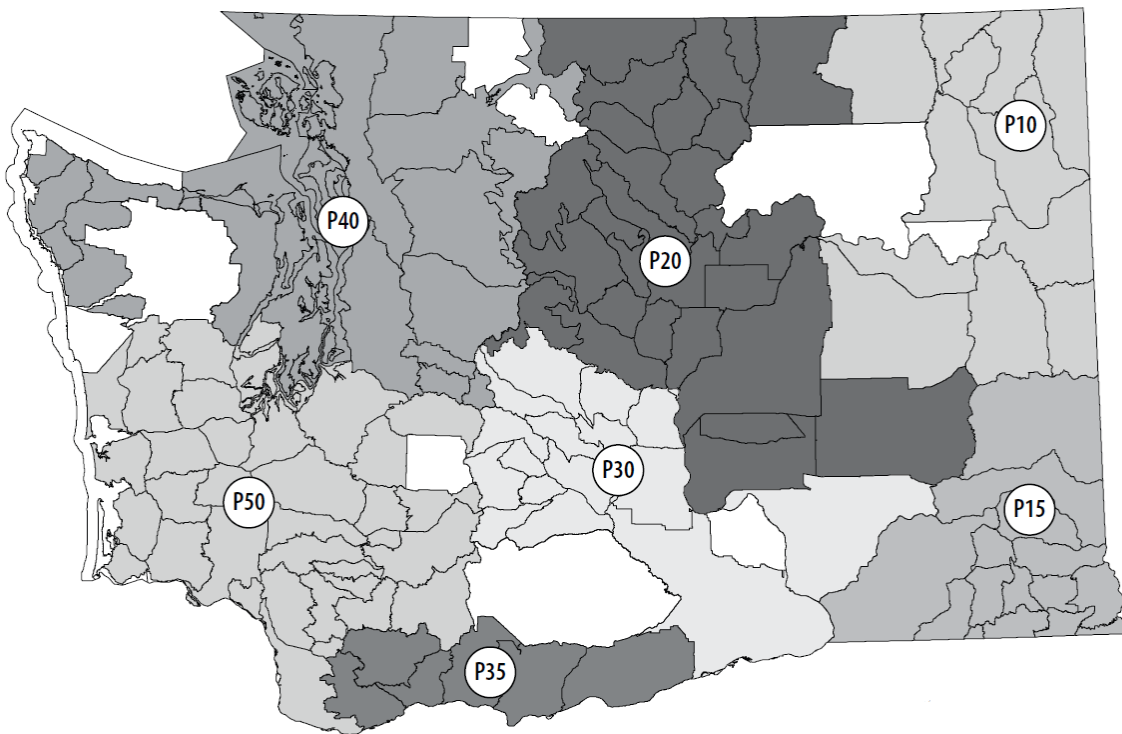


Figure 16. Map depicting WDFW's seven wild turkey population management units.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for turkeys. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. The 2019 harvest continued the improving trend from 2018, with a HPUE of 0.11 during the spring season, dropping a bit at 0.09 for the fall. However, the last 3 years of HPUE have seen a steady decline during the spring season, which may be an indication that recent increases in harvest limits are affecting the population. That said, the 2020 fall harvest was the second highest in the last 10 years, both in total harvest and HPUE.

The 2021 season saw a spike in hunter numbers and harvest, but HPUE was slightly down as the increase in hunter numbers was not quite matched by the harvest, and the 2022 metrics dropped off slightly in both categories. For the past five years, total harvest has been relatively stable at ~1,000 birds harvested, regardless of hunter numbers and effort. This may be a case where trend in HPUE is no longer tracking the population.

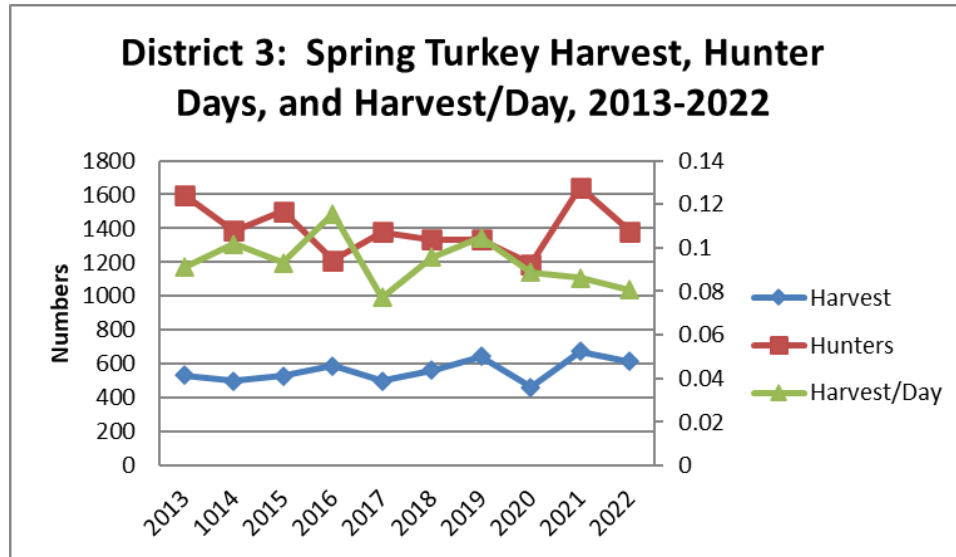


Figure 17. Spring turkey harvest numbers and numbers of hunter days (left axis), and harvest/day (right axis), 2013-2022.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of turkeys harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season and overwinter survival. The total harvest of 742 in 2014 was nearly average, followed by harvests of 770 in 2015, 773 in 2016, and 769 in 2017. With more liberal bag limits, 2018 saw a jump in harvest to 1,053 birds combined for spring and fall seasons, with a similar harvest of 1,048 in 2019, both years being well above the five-year average of 821 birds. Although harvest dropped during the 2020 through 2022 seasons, we still saw total harvest in the 940-990 bird range, continuing to be above the 5-year average which has climbed to about 960 birds. Both the 2021 and 2022 harvests were bolstered by healthy spring harvests of over 600 birds. The spring season limit remains at two bearded turkeys in Eastern Washington. Based on long-term harvest trends, turkey populations in southeast Washington appear to have stabilized after years of increasing harvest, and future harvest is likely to be most impacted by spring weather conditions on brood survival and the occasional hard winter impacting all age classes. Prospects for this season are very promising; the average winter should support good survival and possibility for higher nesting success, especially for yearling hens most impacted by winter severity, and the wet but warm spring should not have hampered poult production. Successfully nesting hens will find good poult rearing conditions with ample seed and insect food resources. All told, biologists are optimistic that we will see support of the new higher average harvest for the coming fall season.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

Most turkey hunters target gobblers in the spring when males are displaying and readily come to box, slate, and mouth calls that mimic hen groups. Setting a blind or using camouflage clothing near meadows or small forest openings used as strutting grounds can be very effective. Often only minimal calling is needed to bring turkeys within range. Identifying roost areas and setting up nearby can also be effective, but efficient calling will be needed to attract birds. Gobble calls should only be used infrequently, and hunters generally should not stalk or approach gobble calls, as it may be another hunter.

GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) have the highest turkey harvests. The highest densities are often found on private land in the lower foothill areas that have a mix of forest, grassland, and agricultural fields, and flocks can frequently be seen from roadways along the creek drainages in these areas. Some of these flocks have become nuisance birds, and landowners are often willing to grant permission to thin turkey numbers. Be respectful of private land and always ask for permission to hunt. Although densities are lower, good numbers of birds can be found on National Forest lands and local wildlife areas, including the Wooten Wildlife Area in GMU 166 (Tucannon), Asotin Creek Wildlife Area in GMU 175 (Lick Creek), and the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area in GMU 186 (Grande Ronde). Don't overlook the hidden gem of the George Creek Unit (GMU 181) of the Asotin Wildlife Area.

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 3 but were not covered in detail include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, bobcats, beaver, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional game birds with significant harvests in District 3 include chukar and gray partridge, and migratory birds including mourning doves, snipe, and coot. Asotin County accounts for the majority of the chukar and gray partridge harvest, with Columbia and Garfield counties having localized pockets of good hunting for these species. Walla Walla County accounts for the majority of the mourning dove harvest, and the introduced Eurasian collared dove, which can be hunted anytime with a small game license, has become common in the developed areas of all four counties.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2) is a fatal disease in rabbits affecting both domestic and wild populations. To date, the disease has been detected across the Southwest in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. Although RHDV2 **does not impact human health**, the disease is highly contagious among rabbits and can easily be spread by rabbit hunters who contact infected rabbits. Rabbit hunters should be cautious with all harvested rabbits to avoid the possible spread of the virus by keeping carcasses contained in an area that can easily be disinfected with a 10% bleach solution. It is also a good practice to disinfect boots and wash all clothing before hunting in a new area or visiting anywhere that has domestic rabbits. Hunters should report any incidence of multiple dead wild rabbits they encounter to federal or [state](#) officials.

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

District 3 does offer considerable public land and Feel Free to Hunt access opportunities. Public land opportunities within the district are comprised of U.S. Forest Service (Umatilla National Forest), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Bureau of Land Management, and WDFW, while the Rainwater Wildlife Area of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is in the Feel Free to Hunt Access Program.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include GMU 157 (Mill Creek Watershed, closed to entry except by permit), GMU 162 (Dayton), GMU 166 (Tucannon), GMU 169 (Wenaha), GMU 172 (Mountain View), GMU 175 (Lick Creek), GMU 181 (Couse), and GMU 186 (Grande Ronde).

For more information related to the location of WDFW wildlife areas and other public lands, visit WDFW's [hunting regulations web map](#).

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

One of the most common questions from hunters is, “What is hunter access like in particular GMUs?” Generally, this question is referring to the amount of public land in each GMU, and the following ratings reflect that assumption. Please refer to the Private Land Access Program section of this document to determine which GMUs have significant amounts of additional lands available for public hunting.

The following rating system was developed for District 3 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they want to hunt. For the purposes of this exercise, access ratings are specific to the level of public land available. Each GMU was given a rating of excellent, good, or poor, with the level of access associated with each rating as follows:

- **Excellent** – A majority of the GMU is in public ownership.
- **Good** – There is a mix of public land within the GMU.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is privately owned.

The information provided is a brief description of major ownership. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Eastern Region (Region 1) office in Spokane Valley (509-892-1001) with other questions related to hunter access.

GMU 145 - MAYVIEW

Access rating – Poor

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) owns the shorelines of the Snake River. In many places, USACE lands only extend a couple of hundred yards above the waterlines, but there are a few large habitat management units that provide considerable recreational opportunity. There is significant acreage from this unit enrolled in WDFW’s Access Program.

GMU 149 – PRESCOTT

Access rating – Poor

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although USACE owns the shorelines of the Snake River. In many places, the USACE lands only extend a couple of hundred yards above the waterlines, but there are a few large habitat management units that provide considerable recreational opportunity. There is significant acreage from this unit enrolled in WDFW’s Access Program, and the Tucannon Wind Resource area managed by Portland General Electric has limited hunting (see GMU 163 for information and links).

GMU 154 – BLUE CREEK

Access Rating – Poor/good

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although several large landowners participate in the department's private land access program. Hunters wishing to hunt in this GMU are highly encouraged to contact landowners long before their season opens to secure access. Hunters applying for special permits in this GMU are encouraged to secure access before applying.

GMU 157 – MILL CREEK WATERSHED

Access rating – No entry without permit

Although this GMU is 99% public lands, access is restricted to special permit holders. The Mill Creek Watershed has regulated public access because it is the source of drinking water for the City of Walla Walla. Currently, there are only elk permit opportunities within this GMU.

GMU 162 - DAYTON

Access rating – Good/poor

Approximately half of this GMU is in public ownership, primarily USFS and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Private land access can be difficult to obtain within this GMU, although a few landowners participate in the department's private land access program.

GMU 163 - MARENGO

Access rating – Poor/fair

A majority of this GMU is in private ownership. This GMU has a large percentage of the land developed for wind power. Special rules are in place to ensure the safety of hunters, residents, wind project workers, and equipment. More information is available through the wind project [hunting video](#). Remember, hunting on private lands is a privilege and, as with all hunting activities, rules and prohibitions, is enforced by state game agents and local law enforcement. Access to PacifiCorp's Marengo wind facility, Puget Sound Energy's adjacent Hopkins Ridge wind facility, and Portland General Electric's Tucannon River wind farm is jointly administered by the utilities. With this shared access program, hunters only need to register with one utility to hunt at any of these wind facilities.

Written permission for access to these lands may be obtained by completing the online registration form. Forms are also available at:

The General Store
426 Main Street
Dayton, Washington, 99328
509-382-1042
tgsdayton@gmail.com

The Last Resort Kampstore
2005 Tucannon Rd.
Pomeroy, WA 99347
www.thelastresortrv.com

Four Star Supply
2255 Villard St
Pomeroy, WA 99347
509-843-3693
pomeroyfourstarsupply@hotmail.com

GMU 166 - TUCANNON

Access rating – Excellent

A majority of this GMU is owned by WDFW and USFS. Access is good throughout most of the unit, with a portion of the unit being located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness.

GMU 169 - WENAHA

Access rating - Excellent

This GMU is 100% public lands, with 95% of it located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. This is a very rugged wilderness topographically and access can be physically challenging.

GMU 172 – MOUNTAIN VIEW

Access rating – Good/fair

Approximately 50% of this GMU is in public ownership. Access to private lands can be difficult to obtain.

GMU 175 – LICK CREEK

Access rating – Excellent

A majority of this GMU is in public ownership, administered by the USFS, WDFW, and DNR. Access is excellent and this GMU has the highest road density of any of the District 3 GMUs.

GMU 178 - PEOLA

Access rating – Poor/fair

This GMU is predominantly private land, with the public land (DNR sections) often being landlocked from public access. Landowners tend to allow significant access throughout the GMU, and numerous landowners participate in WDFW private lands access program.

GMU 181 - COUSE

Access rating – Good/poor

This GMU is mostly private land, but WDFW does own a considerable amount of land. See the WDFW wildlife area webpage.

GMU 186 – GRANDE RONDE

Access rating – Good/poor

Approximately half of this GMU is in public ownership. Access to most of the private land in this GMU has not been available to the public in recent decades.

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

There are a multitude of private landowners in District 3 who are enrolled in WDFW’s Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, cooperative agreements with some of these landowners have not been finalized. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Eastern Region (Region 1) office in Spokane Valley (509-892-1001) or periodically check for updated information in this document or on WDFW’s [Hunter Access website](#).

The following is a summary of anticipated private land acres available through the department’s Private Lands Access program in **2020**. There have been a number of land ownership changes and withdrawals from the Access Program, so hunters should be sure to check current conditions before heading out to their usual hunting spots. There are some **Feel Free to Hunt** properties that may **not** appear on under Private Lands Hunting Opportunities due to contracts that haven’t been signed. Be sure to ask your local Private Lands Biologist about other opportunities that may be available.

District 3 Access Acres										
<u>GMU</u>	Hunting Only BY Written Permission (HOBWP)		Feel Free To Hunt (FFTH)		Register To Hunt (RTH)		Hunt By Reservation (HBR)		Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP)	
	<u>Cooperators</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Cooperators</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Cooperators</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Cooperators</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Cooperators</u>	<u>Acres</u>
145 Mayview	3	5,697	8	5,781	1	1,837	1	480		
149 Prescott	11	28,407	17	40,065			4	11,563		
154 Blue Creek	9	4,615	21	22,636						
162 Dayton	1	620	4	16,272						
163 Marengo	7	8,946	9	10,050						
166 Tucannon			1	368						
172 Mountain View										
175 Lick Creek	2	2,525								
178 Peola	11	13,503	4	3,604	1	2,602	2	940		
181 Couse	6	7,235	2	3,420	1	1,617				
186 Grande Ronde										
Total	50	71,548	66	102,196	3	6,056	7	12,983	0	0
Total Private Lands Access Acres	192,783									

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 3 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be extremely difficult to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. However, there are several online tools and resources some hunters may not know about that provide valuable information that helps solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources available to the general public.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands is DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than \$10 on [DNR's website](#).

ONLINE PARCEL DATABASES

Technology has come a long way and has made it much easier for the general public to identify tax parcel boundaries and the associated landowner. However, because this technology has not been readily available in the past, there are several hunters who are not aware it exists.

County tax parcels can be searched using the county GIS site, which is a user-friendly mapping program that allows users to zoom in to their area of interest, click on a parcel, and identify who the owner of that parcel is. The following counties can be accessed online.

[Asotin County GIS](#)

[Columbia County GIS](#)

[Garfield County GIS](#)

[Walla Walla GIS](#)

WDFW'S MAPPING TOOL

WDFW's mapping tools have been updated as the new [WDFW Hunt Planner map](#) and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU. The web map can be accessed by clicking the above link or going to WDFW's hunting website.

2023

JASON FIDORRA, District Wildlife Biologist



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 4 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Benton and Franklin counties

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DISTRICT 4 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 4 is in the Columbia Basin in south central part Washington (Figure 1). The district is comprised of Benton and Franklin counties and is part of WDFW's south central Region 3. The following game management units (GMUs) are included in District 4: 372 (Rattlesnake Hills), 373 (Horse Heaven), 379 (Ringold), and 381 (Kahlotus).

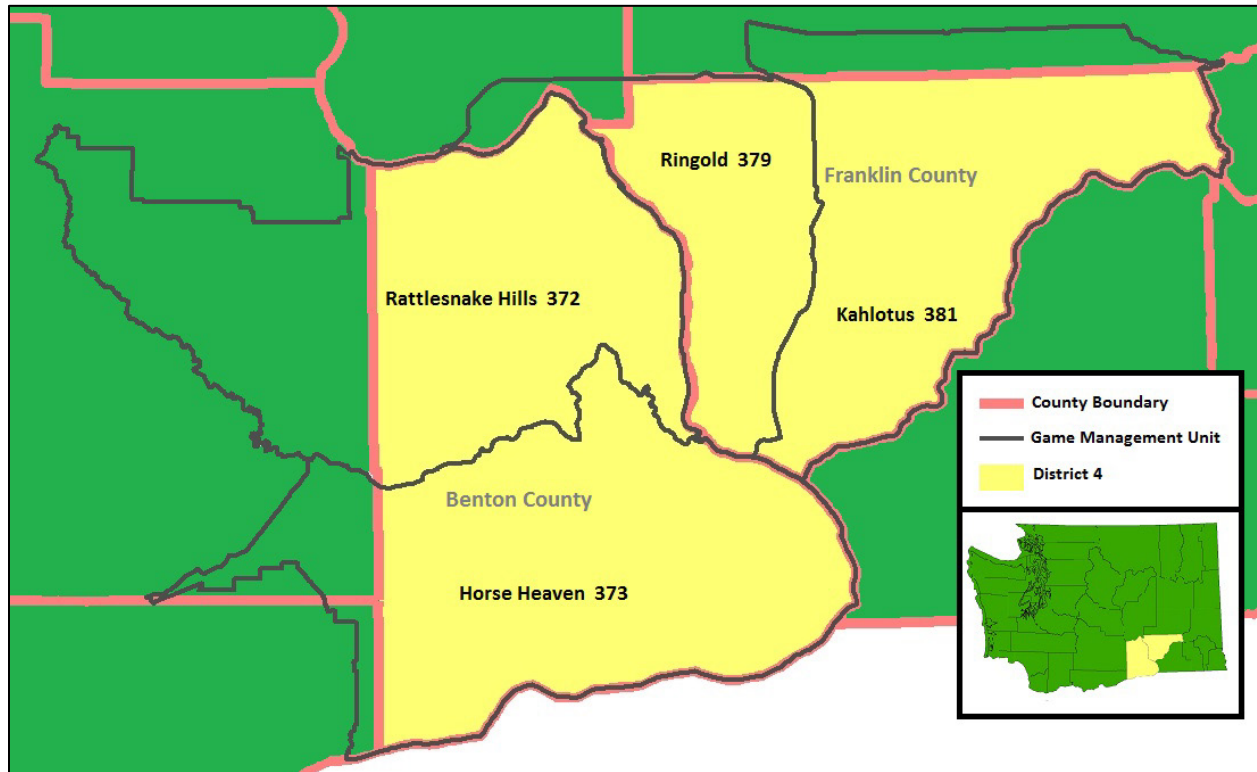


Figure 1. Location of District 4 in Washington and associated counties and game management units.

Several of Washington's major rivers are in District 4. The Hanford Reach of the Columbia River runs between Benton and Franklin counties. This 50-mile stretch is one of the most scenic segments of the Columbia in Washington. The Snake and Palouse rivers delineate the eastern boundary of Franklin County. In District 4, you'll find the confluence of the Yakima, Snake, and Walla Walla rivers with the mainstem of the Columbia River near Tri-Cities (Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland). Large populations of waterfowl congregate throughout the district for breeding, migrating, and wintering, even though this is the driest part of Washington with only six to nine inches of precipitation annually. While this district is a mostly treeless landscape, riparian and shrub-steppe vegetation provides habitat and cover for game birds, and the breaks along the Snake and Palouse rivers are favored by wintering mule deer. The Rattlesnake Hills elk population is centered on the access-restricted Hanford Site and Hanford Reach National Monument, though lucky hunters may find small groups scattered across the district.

Upland habitats are part of the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion, historically dominated by native shrubsteppe. Intensive irrigated agriculture—supporting many crops, orchards, and vineyards—

is a major land use in the Yakima River Valley, southern Benton County, and western Franklin County. Dryland wheat is dominant in central Benton County and eastern Franklin County. Many thousands of acres of this wheat country have been enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Program (SAFE), providing cover for mule deer and other wildlife that have lost much of their natural shrubsteppe habitat. Fires are currently the largest threat to the remaining habitat and are frequently human caused. Invasive cheatgrass has created a flammable carpet throughout the shrubsteppe, often facilitating large and fast-moving fires. Sagebrush takes decades to return post-fire, so please be careful and fire-wise.

In Benton County, large east-west trending ridges, including the Horse Heaven Hills and Rattlesnake Hills, add to the topographic diversity of the district. The eastern Franklin County landscape includes the rolling hills of the Palouse Prairie and the southernmost extent of the channeled scablands. Western Franklin County contains several small lakes and depression wetlands that provide additional wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

Hunting access in District 4 is more limited than in some other parts of the state, as much of the district is in private ownership or on federal properties, which are closed to hunting. However, quality opportunities do exist, and WDFW is always trying to expand hunting access. Information and related links to several public sites listed in each game section can be found in the Major Public Lands section. Information on where to hunt including WDFW-managed Wildlife Areas, public land maps, and access to private land through one of WDFW's access programs is available in the Where to Hunt section on the [WDFW website](#).

Overall, the landscape of District 4 provides a diversity of habitats favored by waterfowl, upland birds (including chukar, partridge, pheasant, quail, and dove), and big game (including deer and elk). Welcome to District 4 and happy hunting!

ELK

Opportunities for elk hunting in District 4 occur on lands surrounding the Hanford Reach National Monument in Rattlesnake Hills GMU 372, which contains Blackrock Elk Area 3722 and Corral Canyon Elk Area 3721. There are also parts of the Ringold 379 and Kahlotus 381 GMUs where small groups of ~100 elk reside. Surveys on the Hanford Monument in January 2020 yielded a total herd estimate of 1,646 elk (Figure 2). This herd is well above the management objective of 350, but harvest remains challenging, as the herd often seeks refuge on closed federal Hanford lands in daylight hours during hunting season.

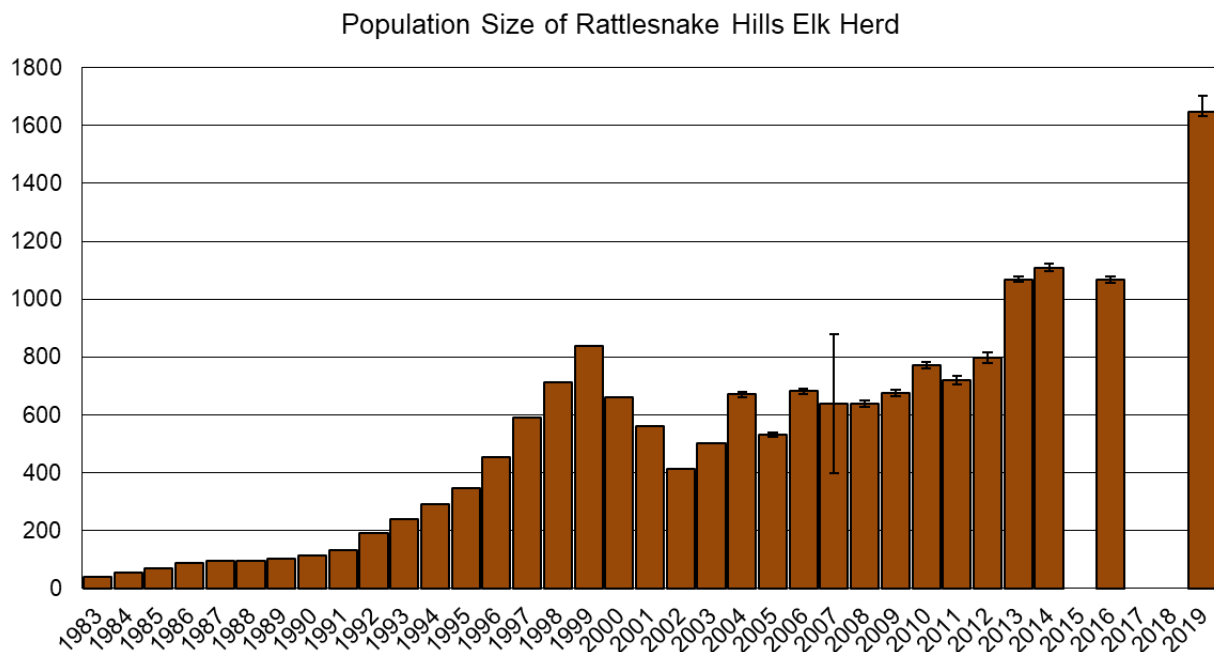


Figure 2. Winter population estimates of Hanford elk herd over time.

While most of the land around the Hanford Monument is private, hunters can pursue elk in Benton County on WDFW’s Thornton and Rattlesnake Slope units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area during Modern Firearm season. If looking at private land, know that there is high demand for access in this area, so coordinate well ahead of time to improve success. One way to gain access to private lands here is through the Blackrock Ranches and Silver Dollar special permit hunts. These offer a chance to hunt Hanford elk on private land. If selected, permit holders are typically issued a one-day “guided” hunt coordinated by the landowner. There are permits for youth and hunters with disabilities, plus Quality Elk and Antlerless Permits open to any hunter. See the current [hunting regulations](#) for more information.

Increasing numbers of hunters have had success in the Ringold 379 GMU where there are both early and late archery and muzzleloader seasons for elk, in addition to modern rifle seasons. The numbers of elk here are small, but the Windmill Ranch and Bailie Units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area might be your best bet. Each of these hunting areas has two

designated parking areas where hunters are required to park and register, and each allows a maximum of eight vehicles per lot. Occasionally the Ringold Unit of the [Hanford Reach Monument](#) (shotgun, muzzleloader, and archery see [USFWS Regulations](#)), and rarely the Juniper Dune Wilderness, have elk during hunting seasons. In Kahlotus 381 GMU, small groups roam between Kahlotus and the Palouse River, but they are rarely encountered off private land.

During general hunting seasons, 200-300 hunters report that they pursue elk in District 4. Of which 25-55 are usually successful (Figure 3). You can see online [Harvest Reports](#) for any species, weapon, or hunt over past years. Harvest success usually depends upon private land access, forage conditions on the Hanford Site, and the availability of forage crops outside of the restricted area. Hunters are usually more successful early in the season.

For more details on game populations in the Columbia Basin and statewide, see WDFW’s annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

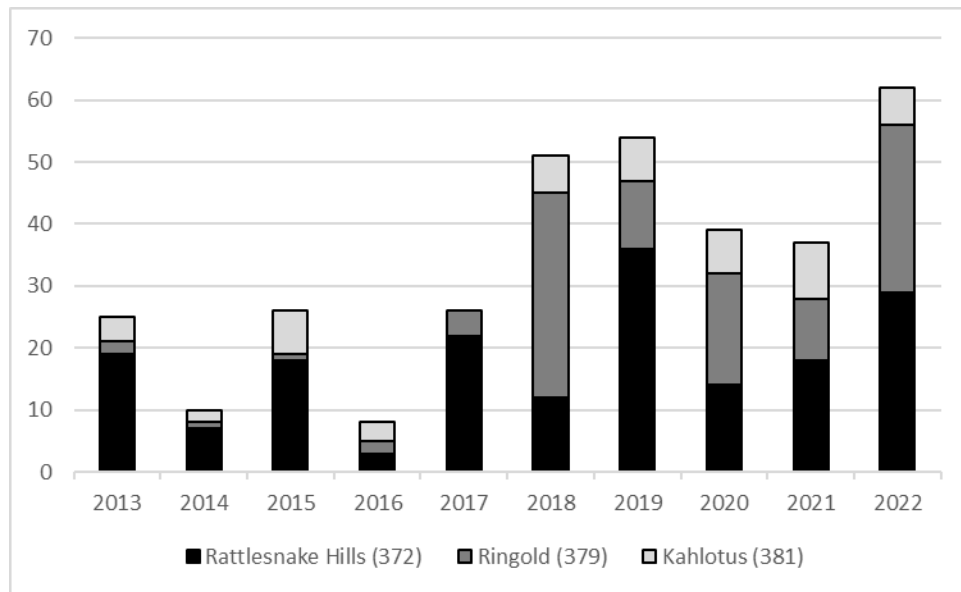


Figure 3. General Season elk harvest in District 4 by GMU over time.



Image 1. Youth hunter with elk harvested in GMU 372.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Elk Hoof Disease is currently not known to occur in elk from District 4. The disease is concentrated in southwest Washington, but it occurs occasionally in other herds around the state. WDFW diagnostic research, in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that the reported hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest process, cooking practice, and good hygiene, the meat is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning

and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's online reporting form (link below). If you harvest an elk with abnormal looking hooves in eastern Washington (for example, overgrown or broken hoof claws or skin lesions), please report that harvest to your local WDFW regional office.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments and others to better understand and manage TAHD. There's more information about [TAHD and the online reporting tool](#).

DEER

District 4 primarily offers mule deer hunting opportunities. White-tailed deer are relatively uncommon in the district, making up less than one percent of deer on surveys, but white-tail seasons exist to allow hunters to legally harvest white-tailed deer if encountered. In 2022, the hunter success rate during the general seasons for deer across all weapons in the District was 23%, with a five-year average of 26% success. Statewide, average general season deer hunter success was 22% (all species).

Eastern Franklin County (Kahlotus – GMU 381) is an important wintering area for mule deer that migrate to the relatively mild winter conditions near the Snake River. A small resident population does exist, but most mule deer migrate in from more northern GMUs starting in October. During mild winters, some of these deer may remain further north or delay moving into the district. The late general muzzleloader season in Franklin County (GMUs 379 and 381) usually provides a good opportunity to find mule deer in November. The season allows the harvest of bucks three-point or better.

In addition to GMU specific special permit hunts, hunters should look for “Washtucna” permit hunts in the pamphlet that include GMU 381-Kahlotus along with three adjacent GMUs (Figure 4). These replaced most of the Kahlotus hunts offered prior to 2018. Washtucna permits include late muzzleloader antlerless, modern antlerless, plus youth, disabled, and senior permits.

Post-hunt surveys in December 2022 yielded an estimated 9.5 bucks to 100 does in GMU 381 (Figure 5), which is below the management goal of 15-19 bucks per 100 does for the population. This includes non-legal bucks (spike and 2 point). High hunter success and low buck escapement in the open country where this population lives can contribute to challenges locating legal bucks. Fawn numbers were at 67 fawns per 100 does (Figure 5). The 10-year average has been 67 fawns per 100 does. The extremely dry spring and summer of 2021 caused lower fawn survival that year, likely reducing the cohort within the population that would contain the coming-of-age three-point bucks in fall 2023. Population estimates for the broader Benge sub-herd which contains part of GMU 381 appear consistent over time. For more details on deer populations in the Columbia Basin and statewide, see WDFW’s annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

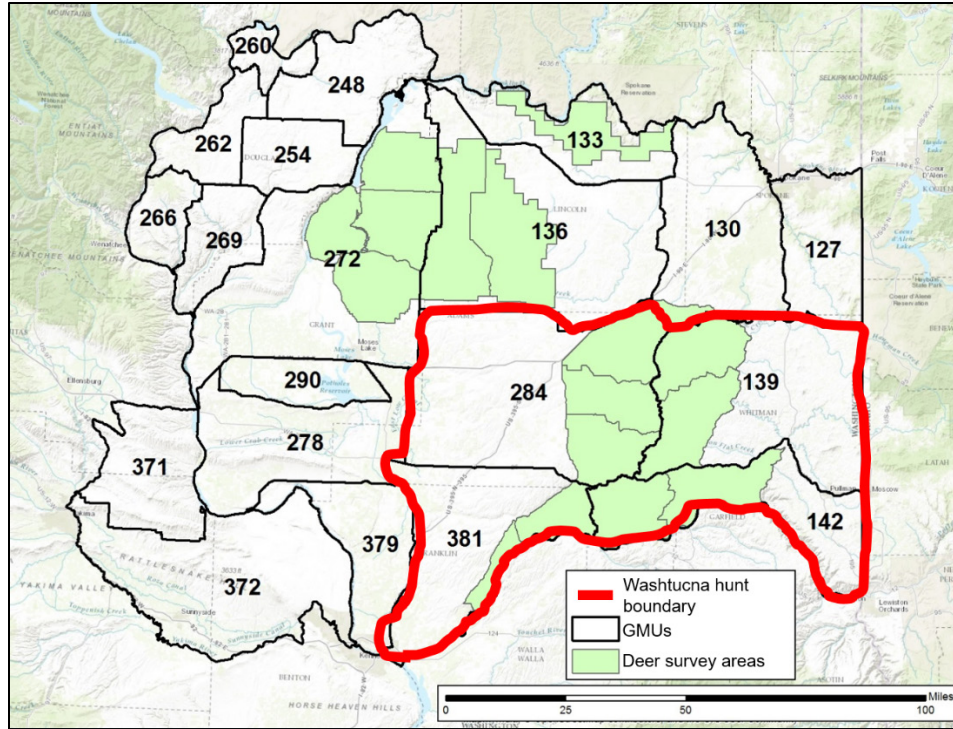


Figure 4. Boundary map of the Washtucna Hunt area encompassing four GMUs.

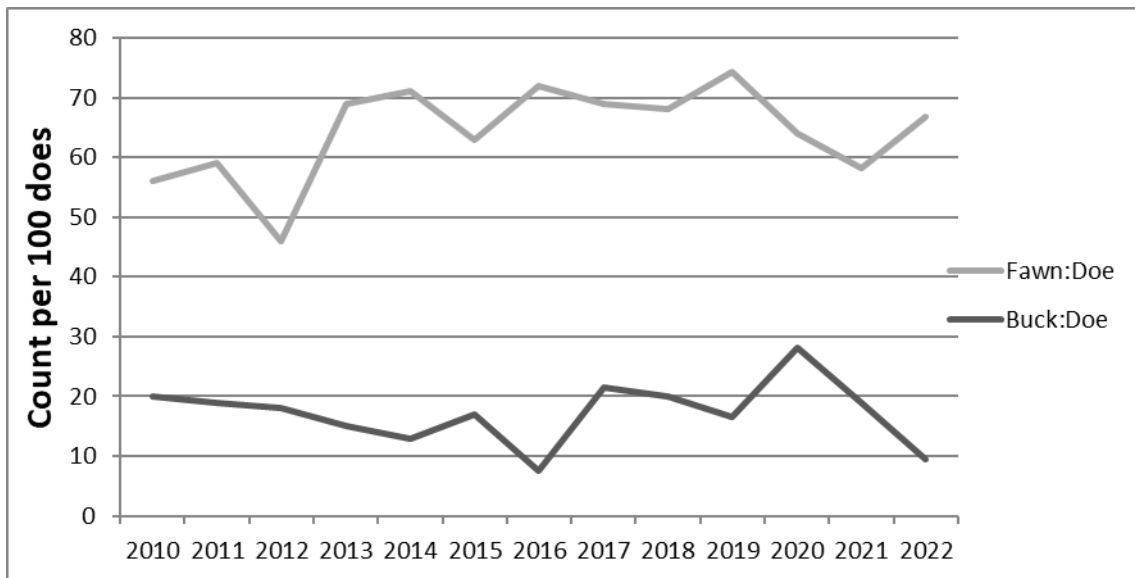


Figure 5. Buck and fawn ratios per 100 does in Kahlotus GMU 381 based on post-hunt road surveys.



Image 2. A buck harvested in Franklin County in GMU 381.

In western Franklin County (Ringold – GMU 379), units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area and the Ringold Unit of the Hanford Reach National Monument ([see weapon restrictions](#)) provide public hunting opportunities for deer. Like Kahlotus, there is a late Muzzleloader season and early archery and muzzleloader seasons, plus the Modern season.

In northern Benton County (Rattlesnake Hills - GMU 372), spend some time scouting for deer in the Thornton and Rattlesnake units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area. There are also some Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) parcels available. Be sure to know who's land you are on, and do not trespass on private property, including when navigating property corners and retrieving game.

In southern Benton County (Horse Heaven Hills - GMU 373), there are deer on BLM lands in the Horse Heaven Hills, scattered tracts of DNR, and private property within WDFW access programs. Part of GMU 372, Deer Area 3372 - Sunnyside (Benton and Yakima counties) provides an early muzzleloader opportunity along the Yakima River from Prosser to Union Gap.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) [Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge \(NWR\)](#) Deer Areas 3071 (Whitcomb) and 3072 (Paterson) provide 80 special permits to harvest deer on the NWR, including archery and muzzleloader hunts. Permits are available through the state permit draw in the [Hunting Regs.](#)

There are many properties where hunters can gain access to deer through one of WDFW's private land access programs. Preseason scouting is advisable to learn where to hunt and

obtain permission from private landowners where needed. WDFW's [Hunt Planner Web map](#) (select your species, then be sure the PHLO--private lands hunt opportunities, is checked) and [Private Lands website](#) is where updated access info and locations can be found. Access Program properties frequently change from year to year and sometimes within a season. Please double-check that lands previously available for hunting are still open to the public.

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permit hunts for any GMU are [online](#). For more details on game populations in the Columbia Basin and statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

UPLAND BIRD

Benton and Franklin counties offer upland bird opportunities for quail, dove, pheasant, and even a few chukar and partridge, if you are lucky (Figure 6). Habitat and weather are the key components influencing the survival and reproductive success of birds. Increasingly, fires have reduced cover and forage for upland birds in the Columbia Basin and District 4. Be sure to review the WDFW [Game Bird Regulations](#) for seasons and regulations. For more details on game populations statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

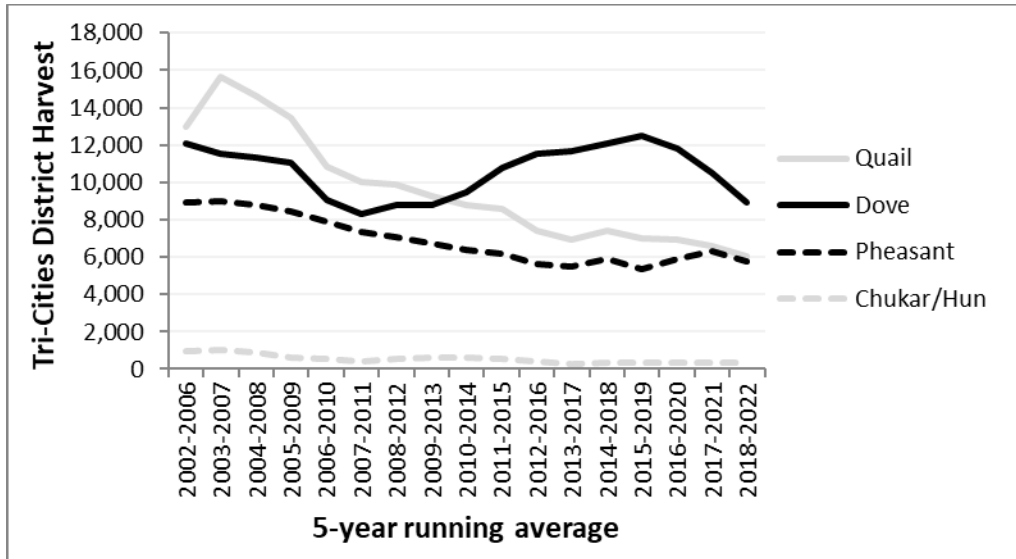


Figure 6. District 4 upland bird harvest trends based on five-year running averages.

PHEASANT

Ring-necked pheasant hunters and harvest have varied over the past decade in District 4 (Figure 7). Pheasant hunters should focus efforts in dense weedy and grassy areas adjacent to wetlands, streams, and irrigation waterways. Birds may also be found around irrigated farmland. Some of the best pheasant habitat in the district is in north Franklin County on and surrounding WDFW's Windmill Ranch Unit (nontoxic shot), Mesa Lake Unit, and the Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch. Each of these hunting areas has two designated parking areas where hunters are required to park and register, and each allows a maximum of eight vehicles per lot. Other areas with good pheasant habitat include USFWS' Hanford Reach National Monument's East Wahluke Unit, Ringold (GMU 379), USACE Habitat Management Units along the Snake River, and [Umatilla NWR](#) along the Columbia River, near the town of Paterson. For more details on game populations statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

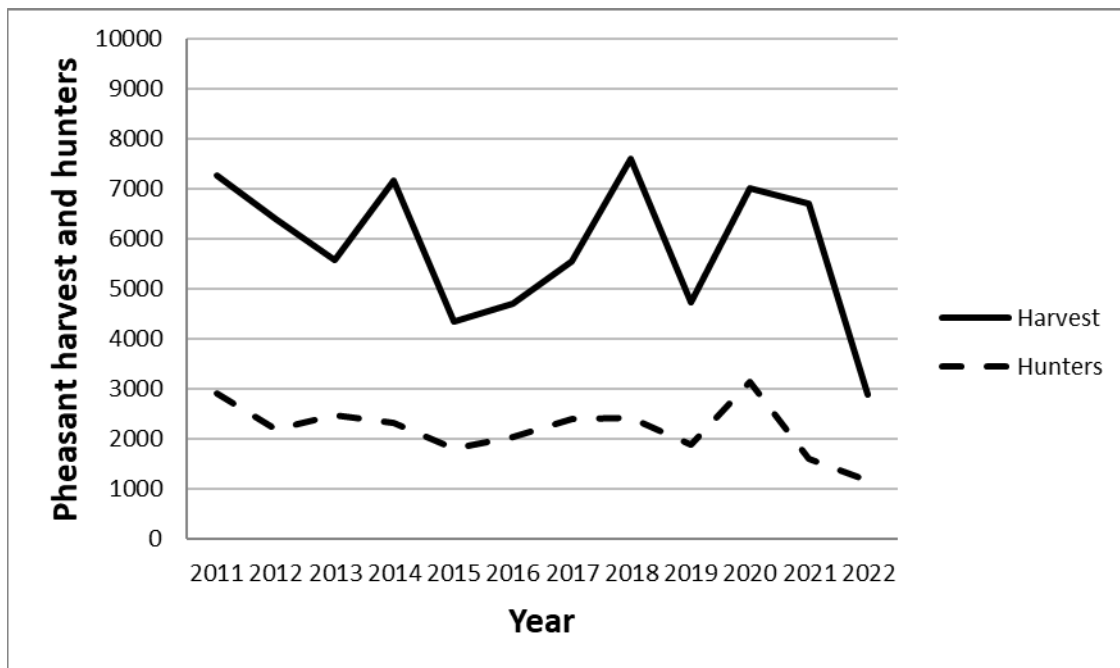


Figure 7. Pheasant harvest and hunters in District 4.

Pursuing birds released as part of WDFW's [Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) is a great way to work dogs and gain experience for new hunters. WDFW releases pheasants at three locations in District 4: the Hope Valley Unit of the WDFW Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area, and the Big Flat and Lost Island Habitat Management Units (HMU) held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) (Figure 8). **Note that releases at the Toothaker HMU in Benton County have been discontinued until habitat recovers from a 2021 fire.** Pheasant release site locations can be found in the program link above or on WDFW's [Hunt Planner Web map](#) (be sure to select the Layer > WDFW Places > Pheasant Release Sites). Army Corps HMUs information contact is available [here](#). **Nontoxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites.**

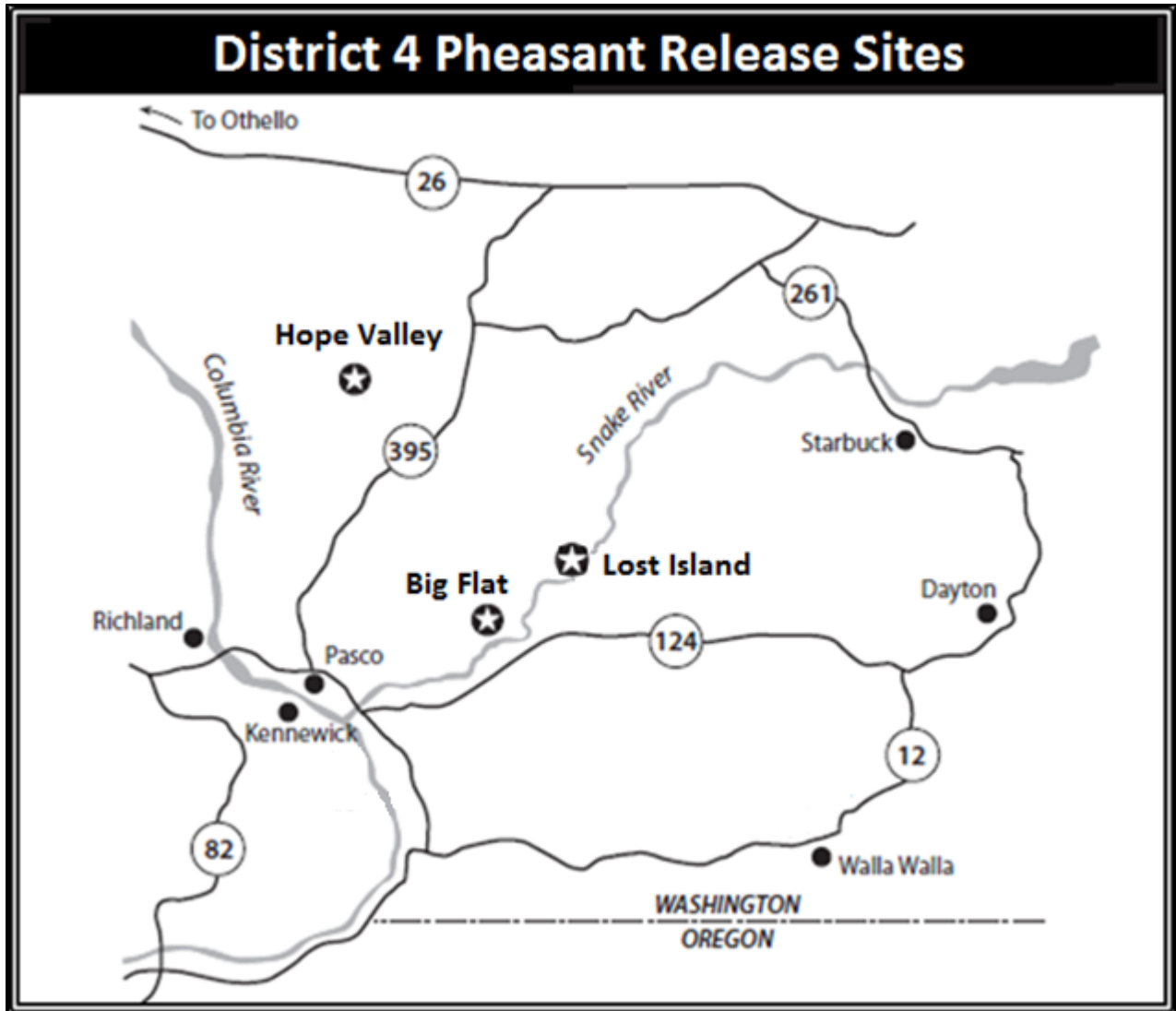


Figure 8. Location of District 4 pheasant release sites.

QUAIL

Abundant California quail are present in the district. There has been a decreasing trend in harvest numbers over the past decade (Figure 9). The best quail habitat in District 4 is similar to those listed above for pheasant. Also, anywhere along water bodies where riparian and herbaceous vegetation intersects provide quail habitat. An ideal setting is where Russian olives or willows are adjacent to black greasewood or sagebrush. For more details on game populations statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

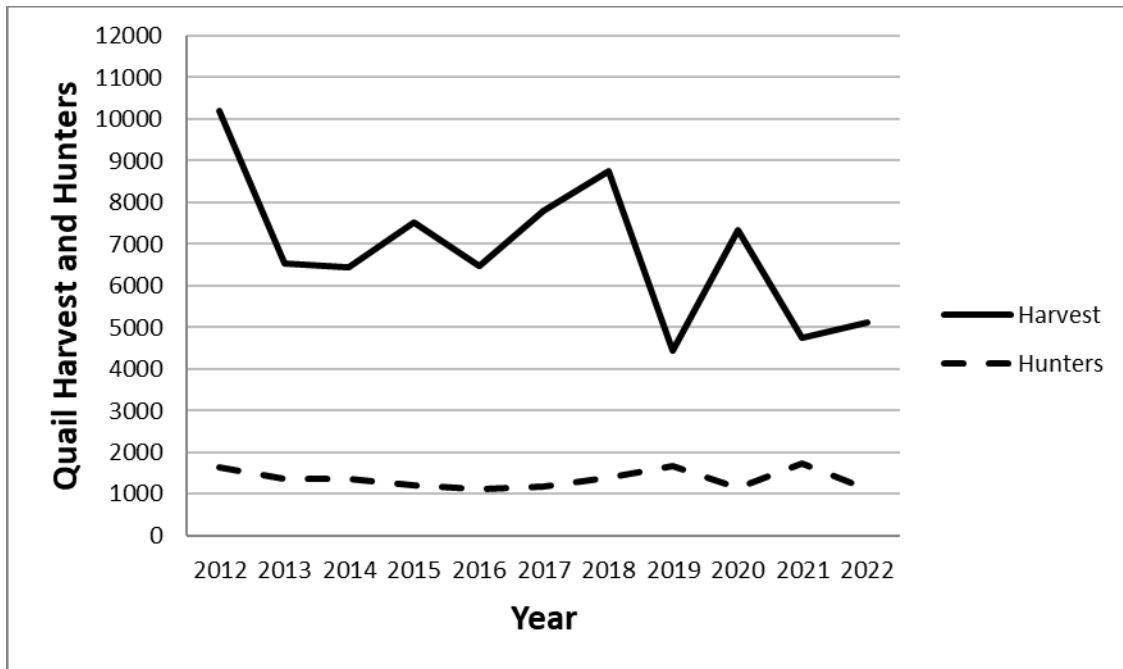


Figure 9. Quail harvest and hunters in District 4.

DOVE

Mourning dove harvest in District 4 has been decreasing over the past few years (Figure 10). There should be an opportunity for hunters to find doves moving through the area and in local patches where production has been successful. Weather patterns play a critical role in determining how many doves are present during the season opener. Focus your hunting efforts in or near wheat or corn stubble fields in the irrigated Yakima and Columbia Basins. The best combination of habitat includes a stubble field near water and large isolated trees or power lines where doves perch and attract other doves.

Dove hunters are also encouraged to harvest Eurasian collared doves, an introduced exotic species that has spread across North America. They are larger than mourning doves with a square tail and thin black half-collar on the back of their necks. This species is usually most abundant in rural and suburban areas near mature trees. Numbers have been increasing across eastern Washington since first appearing in the state in the 1990s. There is no limit and collared doves can be hunted year-round in Washington. Hunter must have a big or small game hunting license. For more details on game populations statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

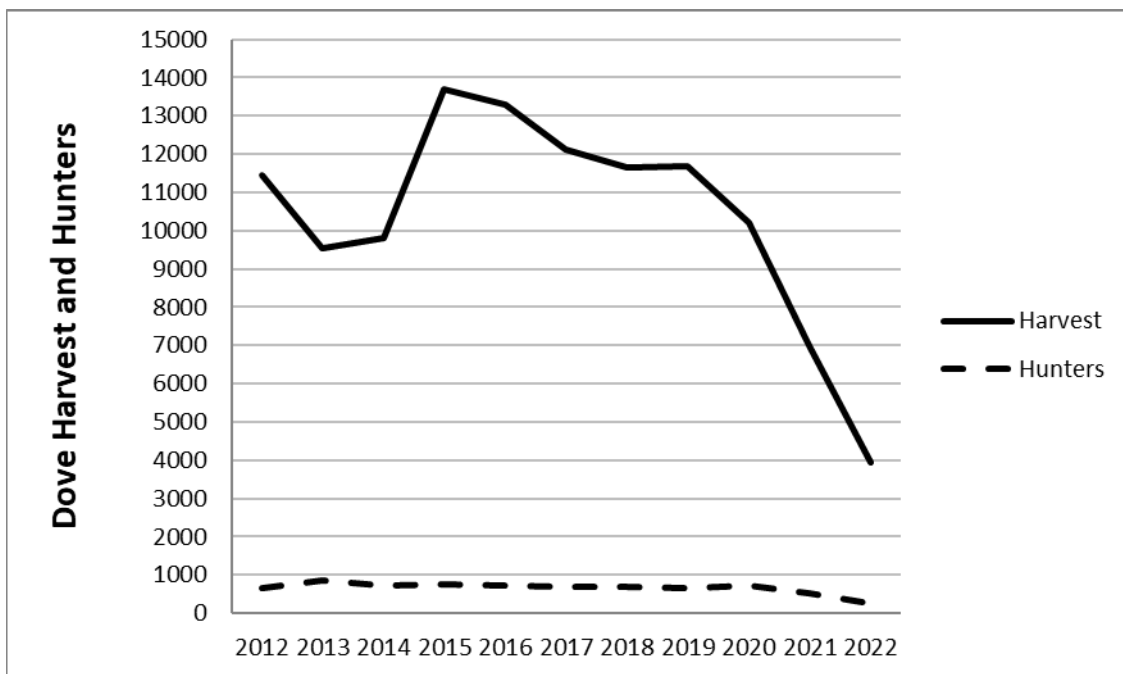


Figure 10. Dove harvest and hunters in District 4.

WATERFOWL

There are many places to hunt ducks and geese in the district. Small ponds and lakes can be found on WDFW's Windmill Ranch Unit, Mesa Lake Unit, and Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch. Continued management of the [Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area](#) units will result in more habitat for waterfowl and opportunities for hunters in the coming years. Several Sunnyside Snake River WLA Units in Franklin County are managed especially for waterfowl hunting. Scootenev Reservoir, managed by the [Bureau of Reclamation](#), can also provide good hunting.

The Snake and Columbia Rivers and associated water bodies will hold tens of thousands of ducks once the cold weather sets in. See details and map in the Public Lands Section of this document below for river hunting. Access can be gained at the USFWS McNary and Umatilla NWRs and the Hanford Reach National Monument, or one of the many WDFW managed Water Access Sites on the [Hunt Planner Web map](#) (select Layer > WDFW Places > Water Access Sites).

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, see [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) on the WDFW website and be sure to check the [WDFW Migratory Bird Regulations](#) for seasons and rules. For more details on game populations statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

Duck harvest in District 4 has been relatively high since 2015, while the goose harvest has remained stable (Figure 11). After the season opener, hunter success will likely taper off as the local ducks become less naïve and restrict their daytime movements to local reserves and sanctuaries. At that point, hunters will likely have to wait for the migrants to arrive in the mid to late season. Weather patterns will determine when they arrive and where they will congregate. Freezing temps can eliminate opportunity from inland waterbodies and push ducks to the rivers or further south out of state.

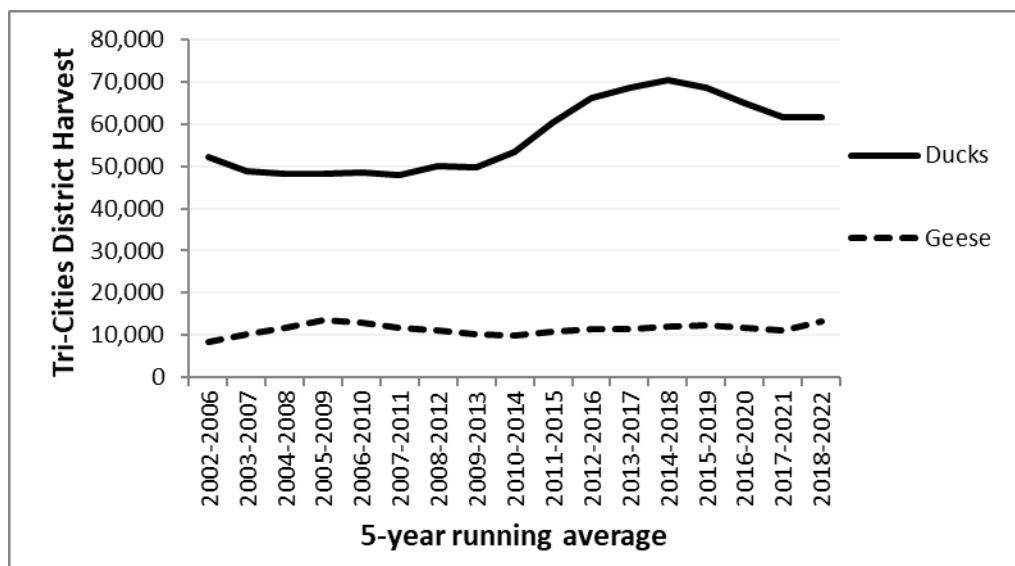


Figure 11. District 4 waterfowl harvest trends based on five-year running averages.

Resident Canada geese nest on river islands in the district. In addition, thousands of migratory Canada geese arrive sometime in October or November. They can be pursued in the farm fields near the Snake and Columbia Rivers. Most of the land is private property, so hunters will need to secure permission before hunting.

Statewide goose regulations set separate daily limits for snow and white-fronted geese in addition to Canada and Cackling (dark) geese. Whereas white-fronted geese and most snow geese usually pass through the district before and after the main goose season (Figure 12), an increasing number of snow geese have been present in the district during goose season, but peak in February/March. In response to this, WDFW set up a White Goose Season. The dates in District 4 (Goose Area 4) were expanded further in 2020 for Snow, Ross’s, and “Blue” Geese from mid-Feb to early March (see [season summary](#) for dates). Snow geese are found in large flocks on farmland near the Snake or Columbia Rivers especially near Plymouth and McNary NWR but are occasionally mixed in with large flocks of dark geese at any location.

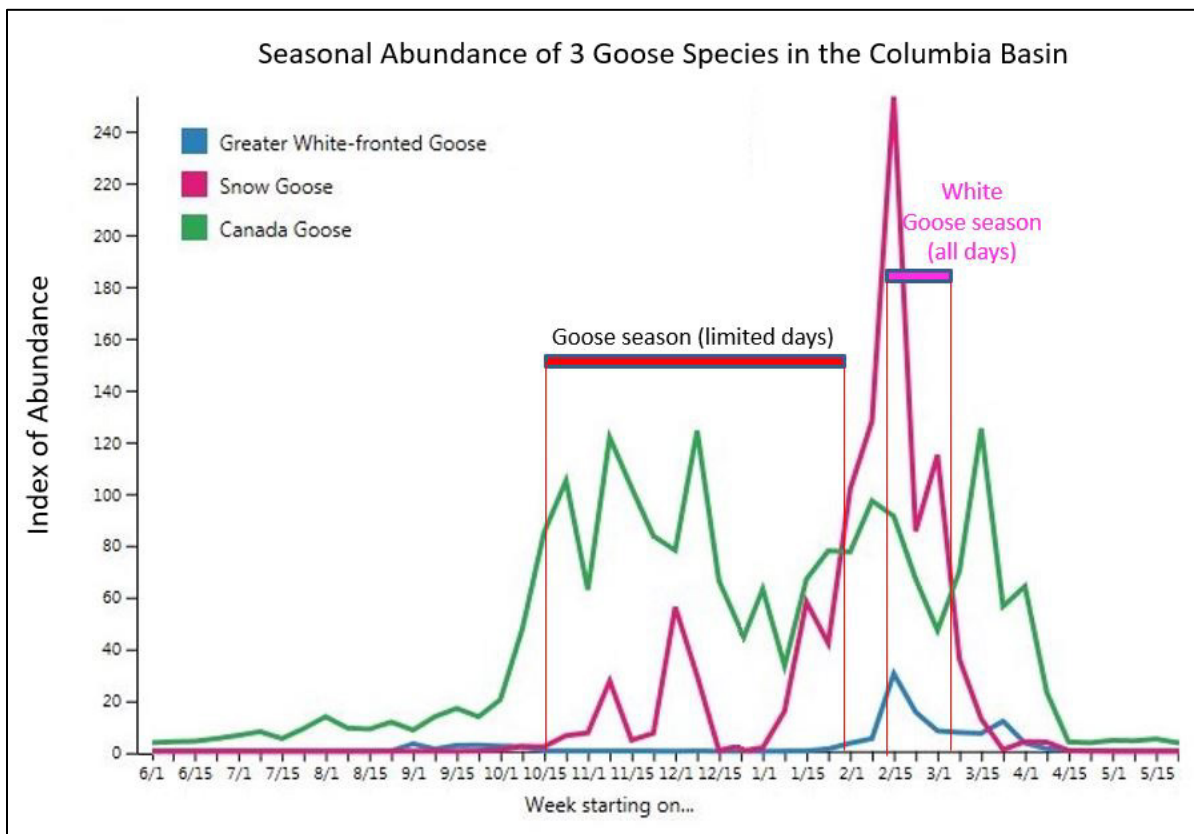


Figure 12. Seasonal abundance of three goose species in the Columbia Basin relative to hunting seasons (illustrated dates approximate). Data source: www.eBird.org



Image 3. Goose harvest in the Tri-Cities.

In winters 2017 and 2018, outbreaks of avian cholera occurred at the end of the hunting season in the Tri-Cities area, killing thousands of waterfowl. Botulism outbreaks (summer) and avian influenza (spring) are additional wildlife diseases impacting birds in our area. Fast response can contain outbreaks and hunters are encouraged to report groups of more than five sick or dead birds to WDFW using the link at the WDFW [wildlife diseases webpage](#).

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

Hunting access in Benton and Franklin counties is more limited than in some parts of the state as much of the district is private property or federal land closed to hunting. However, quality opportunities on both public and private land exist, and WDFW is continually working to expand hunting access.

WDFW SUNNYSIDE SNAKE RIVER WILDLIFE AREA

This wildlife area (Figure 13) comprises WDFW-managed land in the district and most parcels are open to hunting with specific restrictions at some units. Most of the units are managed specifically for wildlife, and enhanced hunting opportunities are possible through crop, habitat, and wetland management. For more information and maps please visit the [WDFW website](#).

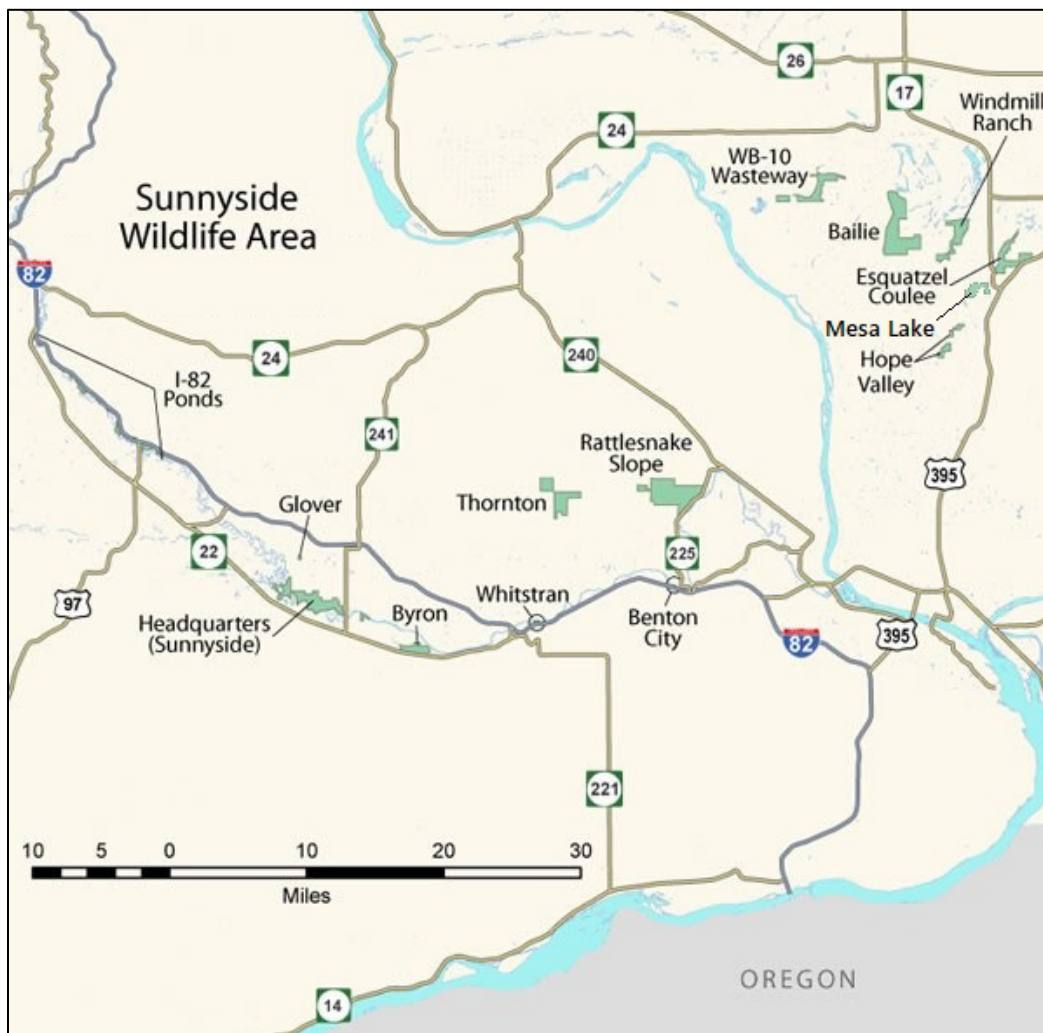


Figure 13. Map of the Sunnyside Wildlife Area units.

MID-COLUMBIA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX

The USFWS allows hunting on several units of this refuge complex, including a portion of the Hanford Reach National Monument, a portion of the Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge, and certain areas within the McNary National Wildlife Refuge. Hunting lottery information, regulations, and maps can be found [here](#).

THE COLUMBIA AND SNAKE RIVERS

All islands, except privately owned islands, and the Benton County shoreline below the high-water mark, Central Hanford Department of Energy property, and any peninsula originating on the Benton County shoreline between Vernita Bridge on Highway 24 downstream to the Richland city limits are designated as closed areas to hunting wild animals and wild birds. The only exception is waterfowl hunting, which is open below the high-water mark between the old Hanford townsite power line crossing (wooden towers) and the Richland city limits. These details are printed in the [Big Game Regulations](#). Several other closures and reserves impact river hunting in the district (Figure 14).

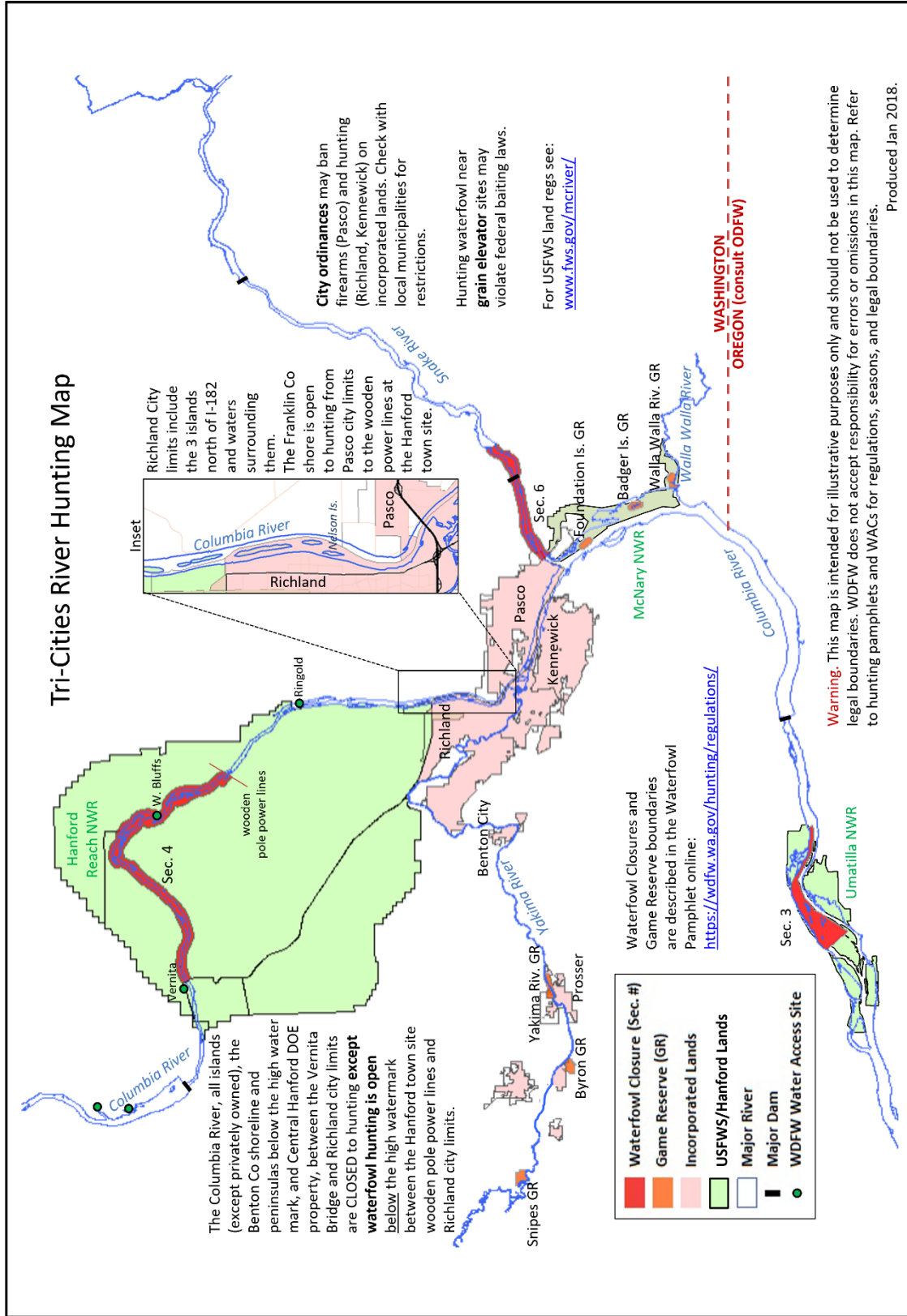


Figure 14. Generalized map of Tri-cities Area rivers, game reserves, closures, and municipalities.

OTHER PUBLIC LANDS

Each agency/landowner can enact their own weapon and area restrictions related to hunting. Obey all posted signs and contact the land manager with questions.

The DNR manages land that is open to hunting unless otherwise posted. Benton and Franklin counties have a large amount of DNR acreage, but it is often leased to private landowners for agriculture. While leased land is still open to hunting, hunters should always be aware that adjacent landowners are often managing DNR land as part of their business operations, and hunters should be respectful of property boundaries, which may not be signed. Consult a public lands map or [Hunt Planner Web map](#) for or more information (Public lands layer is the default base map).

BLM allows hunting on most of their land and highlights [several BLM properties for hunting](#) across WA, including the Juniper Dunes and Horse Heaven Hills.

The USACE and the Bureau of Reclamation allow hunting on most of their land, but each agency/landowner can enact their own weapon and area restrictions. Several USACE HMUs along the rivers are only open for shotgun and archery hunters.

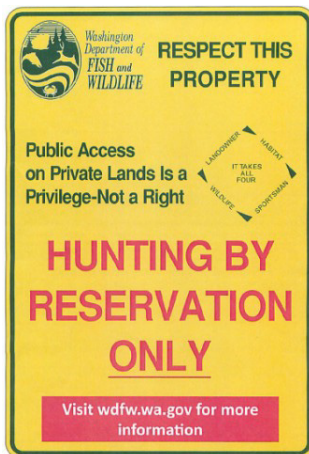
In Washington, it is NOT LEGAL to cross private or closed land without permission to access public lands. Therefore, access to some parcels of public land may not be available.

PRIVATE LANDS

WDFW provides and maintains a Private Lands Access program that allows the public to hunt on land owned by cooperating private landowners. In most cases, these landowners receive no financial compensation for their enrollment in the program, and hunters should always respect their property and follow all rules. By being a responsible guest on these private lands, hunters can help ensure they remain open for years to come and will continue to enhance WDFW's mission to expand private lands access. Access properties frequently change year to year and sometimes even within a season. Double-check that lands previously available for hunting are still open to the public and in the same access program each year.

Information about private lands access sites, including site-specific regulations, locations, season availability, and contact information, can be found [here](#) and at the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#) (select the Layer icon > WDFW Places > Private Land Hunting Opportunities). For questions, contact Seth Hulett, the WDFW Private Lands Biologist for Region 3: 509-778-2630.

There are four main private land programs. Although each provides public, walk-in only access to private land, they function differently.



Hunt by Reservation The Hunt by Reservation program requires hunters to [register online](#). Hunters are required to print out and carry a permit, and they are provided a map of the property. In Benton and Franklin counties, multiple opportunities are available for both big game and bird hunting. **Opportunities are only listed once available for reservation**, which is usually a few weeks prior to the season. [Hunt by Reservation Properties](#)

Feel Free to Hunt Feel Free to Hunt is the largest access program in District 4. It allows hunters walk-in access during specified hunting seasons without any prior approval. Most District 4 Feel Free to Hunt properties provide access for mule deer hunting, with some potential for upland bird hunting as well. [Feel Free to Hunt Properties](#)





Register to Hunt District 4 has several Register to Hunt sites in Benton County. Register to Hunt requires hunters to sign in at registration kiosks and carry a permit with them. No prior coordination needed. District 4's Register to Hunt sites primarily provide waterfowl and upland bird hunting opportunities. [Register to Hunt Properties](#)

Hunt by Written Permission Hunt by Written Permission sites requires hunters to contact the landowner for access. Landowners then issue permits at their discretion and hunters are expected to carry this permit while they hunt. **Landowner contact information can only be found on the yellow signs marking the site.** WDFW does not give out contact info online or by phone. You should try to contact the landowner weeks or months in advance of your season to increase your chance of gaining access. Hunt by Written Permission properties provide opportunities for both big game and bird hunting in District 4. [Hunt by Written Permission Properties](#)



ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permits for any GMU and Permit Hunt for all game species are online at [WDFW Hunting Game Harvest](#)

WDFW has released a Hunt Planner Web Map to search for game seasons and private land access around the state: [WDFW Hunting Map](#).

A good starting point for hunters looking for a place to hunt is the Web Map that provides hunters with information about public and private lands access points, GMU boundaries, hunting seasons, pheasant release sites, water access points, landscape features such as roads and topography, public lands, and much more (Figure 15).

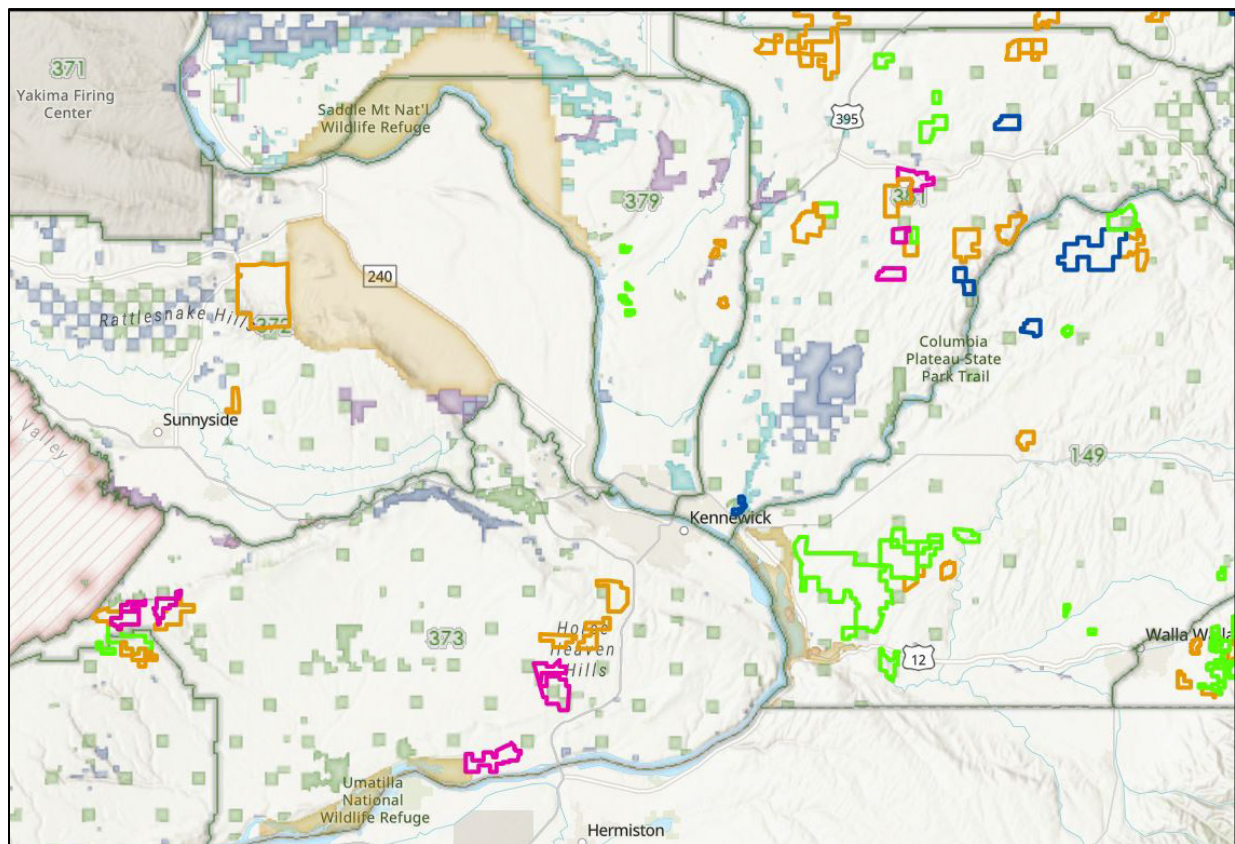


Figure 15. Depiction of private lands access and public lands layers in District 4 from WDFW's Regulations Web Map. Pink, Green, Orange, and Blue bordered parcels are lands in the various public lands access programs. **Figure for illustrative purposes only** Check the [online map](#) for up-to-date access and parcel information.

2023

SEAN DOUGHERTY, District Wildlife Biologist
PAULA CLEMENTS, Assistant District Wildlife
Biologist



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**



Food plot waiting for migrating waterfowl at Frenchman Regulated Access Area

DISTRICT 5 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Grant and Adams counties

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DISTRICT 5 GENERAL OVERVIEW

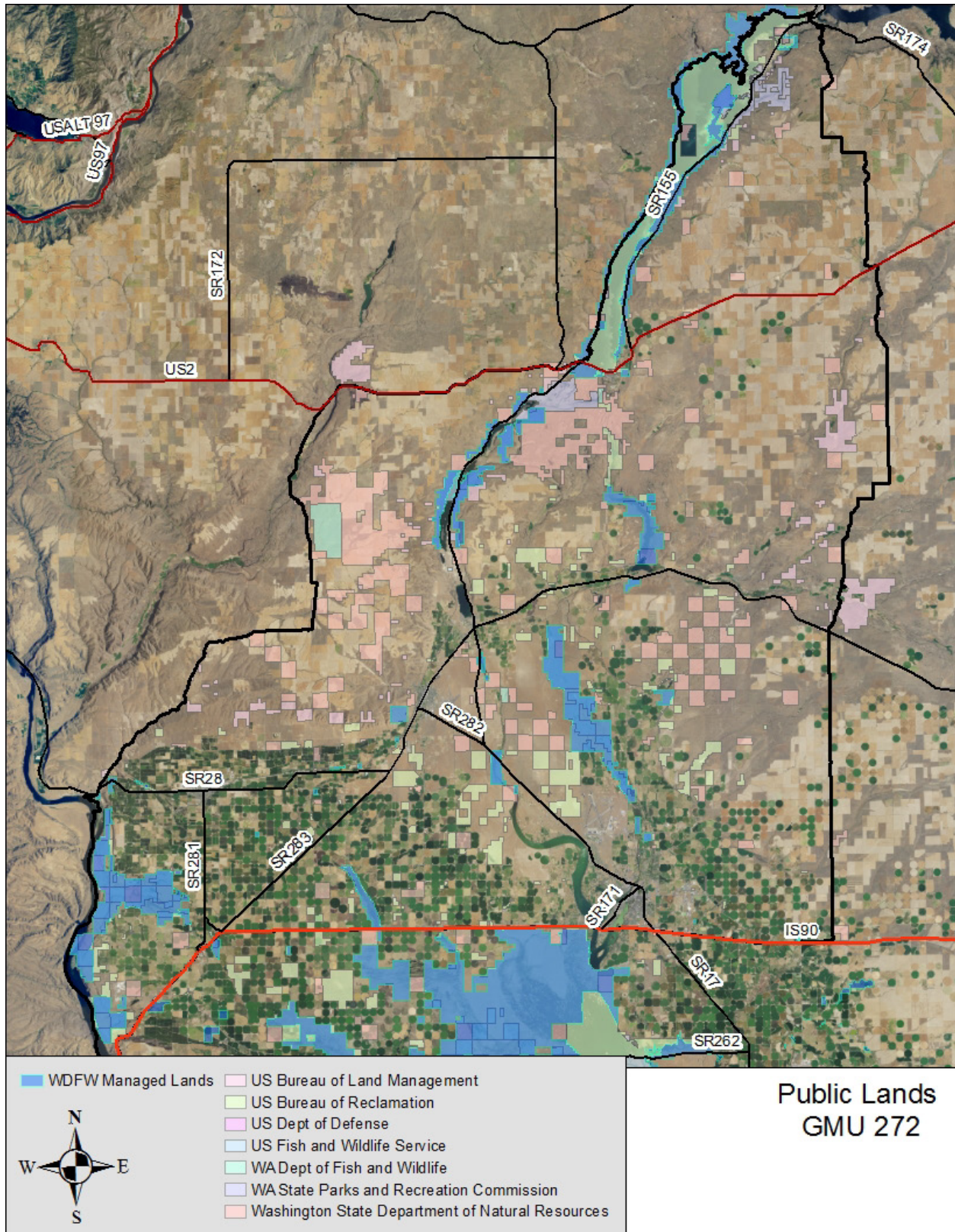
The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)'s District 5 encompassing Grant and Adams counties, provides abundant opportunities to hunt waterfowl, upland bird, and mule deer. Ring-necked pheasants and California quail continue to be the most abundant and popular upland game birds in District 5, and Grant County is one of the top-producing counties for both species. Elsewhere in the district, hunters can find mourning doves, bobcats, cougars, chukar, gray partridge, cottontail rabbits, coyotes, and both general season and permit opportunities for mule deer. Hunters can harvest elk in Game Management Units (GMUs) 278 and 284, but elk populations are small and dispersed.

WDFW manages the [Columbia Basin Wildlife Area](#) that boasts approximately 190,000 acres of public land (Figure 5). There are additional public lands in District 5 managed by the [Washington Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\)](#), [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#), Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Habitat in District 5 consists primarily of crop fields, shrubsteppe, and wetlands in Grant County and dryland crop fields, rangelands, and shrubsteppe in Adams County. The district's shrubsteppe habitat is dominated by native upland vegetation like big sagebrush, bitterbrush, rabbitbrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg's bluegrass, great basin wildrye, needle-and-thread, and Indian ricegrass. Cheatgrass is the most common non-native species in District 5 habitats.

Riparian areas and wetlands are abundant in Grant County and mostly associated with the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project (CBIP). Coyote willow, golden currant, and Woods' rose are the dominant native shrubs associated with riparian habitats. Non-native riparian species include Russian olive, which is found throughout CBIP. There are many important crops for wildlife within the CBIP, including corn, wheat, and other grains; alfalfa, and orchards. Within the CBIP, hunters can expect to find abundant waterfowl as well as pheasants, quail, and mourning doves.

Fragmented shrubsteppe, dryland wheat, coulees, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands surround the CBIP. In these areas, hunters can expect to find gray partridge, mule deer, and chukar in the steepest portions of the district (Sun Lakes, Quincy Lakes, and Banks Lake units). For more information, see the [WDFW website](#).

PUBLIC LANDS IN DISTRICT 5 GMUS



Public Lands
GMU 272

Figure 1. Public Lands in GMU 272.

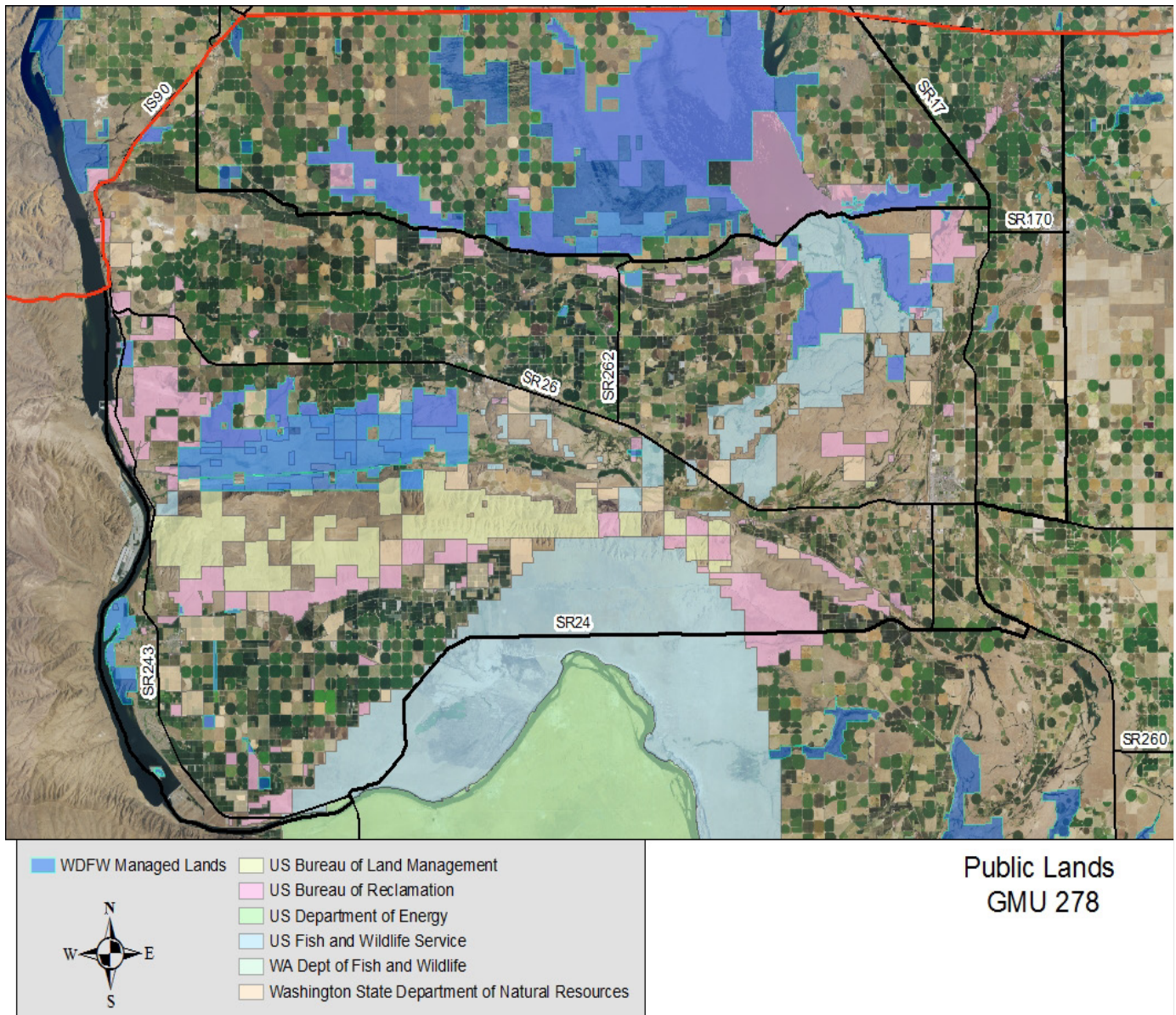


Figure 2. Public Lands in GMU 278.

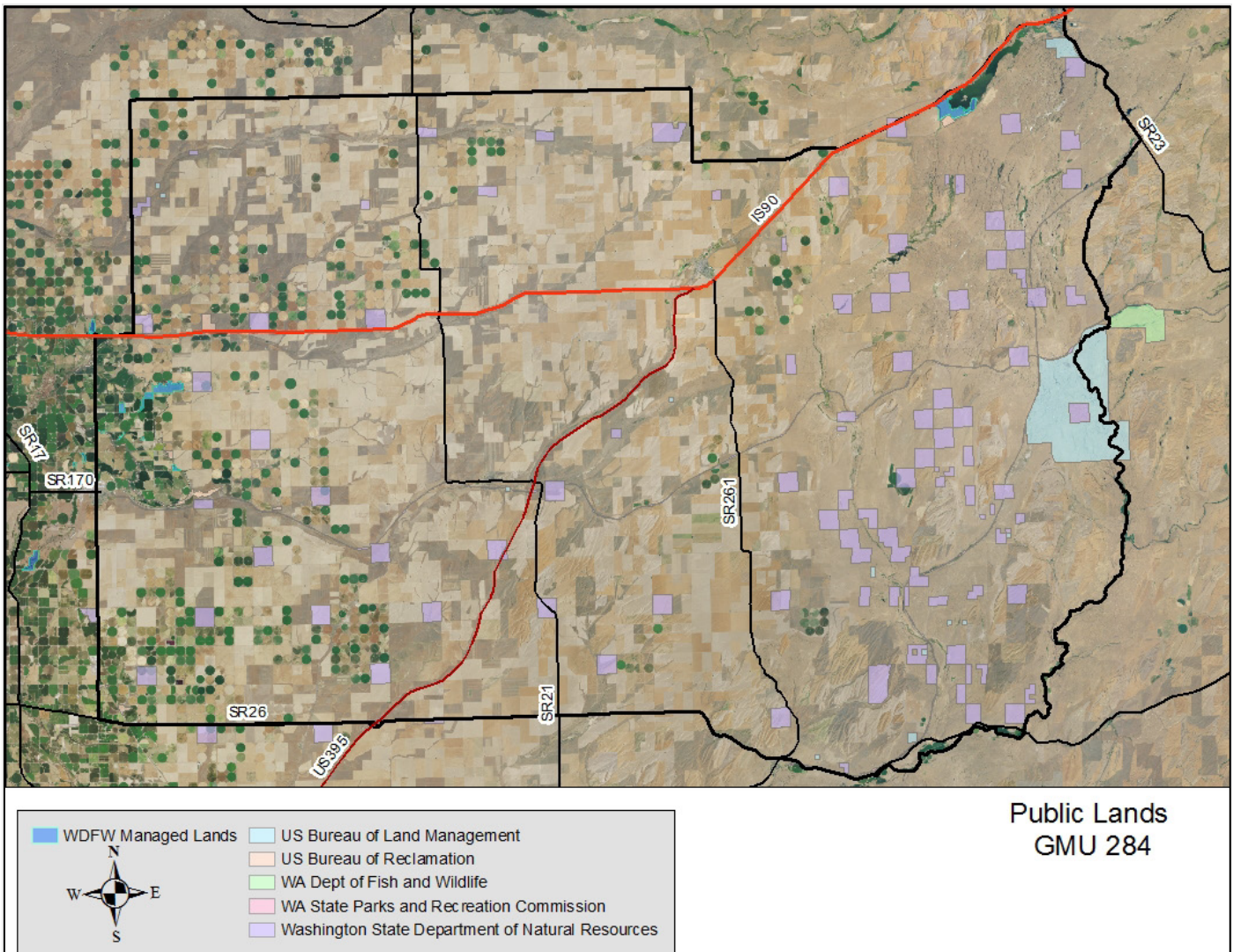


Figure 3. Public Lands in GMU 284

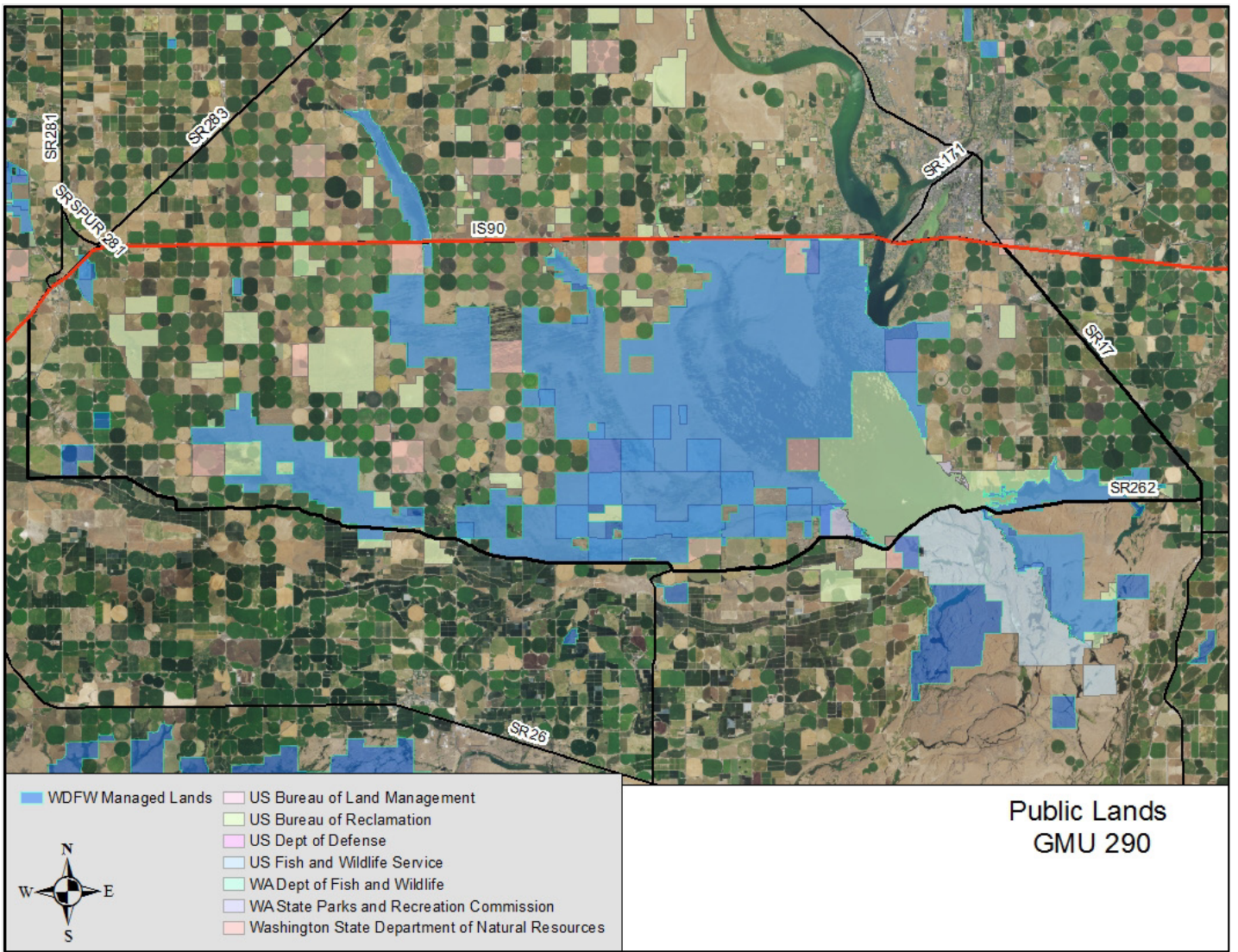


Figure 4. Public Lands in GMU 290.



Figure 5. *WDFW Columbia Basin Wildlife Area units available for hunting highlighted green.*

Chance of Locating Species of Interest

Species/ Habitats	Banks Lake	Sun Lakes	Gloyd Seeps	Quincy Lakes	Winchester Lake	The Desert	Potholes Reservoir	Seep Lakes	Goose Lakes	Lower Crab Creek	Priest Rapids	Billy Clapp	Sprague Lake
	Mule Deer	G	F	L	VL	N	VG*	VG*	L	L	F	L	N	N
Bear	VL	VL	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Elk	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	VL	N	N	N
Cougar	VL	VL	N	VL	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Coyote	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	F	L	F
Bobcat	L	L	VL	VL	N	N	N	N	N	VL	N	N	N
Rabbit	L	L	F	F	L	VL	VL	L	L	F	L	L	L
Chukar	G	F	N	L	N	N	N	N	N	F	L	F	N
Gray Partridge	F	L	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	N	N	VL	L
Pheasant (Wild)	L	VL	G	L	F	G	G	VL	VL	G	VL	VL	L
Pheasant (Released)	G	N	VG**	N	N	N	N	N	N	G	G	N	N
California Quail	G	G	G	F	F	VG	VG	F	F	VG	L	F	L
Ducks	G	F	F	F	VG	VG	VG	F	F	G	F	N	N
Geese	F	F	L	L	L	F	F	F	F	F	L	N	N
Mourning Dove	F	L	G	F	F	G	G	F	F	F	L	L	L
Bullfrogs	L	VL	F	L	F	VG	VG	F	F	F	L	VL	L

Figure 6. Generalized Hunting Opportunity for Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Units.

Very Good	VG
Good	G
Fair	F
Limited	L
Very Limited	VL
None	N

GAME RESERVES

Hunting, trapping, and wildlife disturbance is prohibited within game reserve boundaries. These reserves provide undisturbed areas for waterfowl and improve hunting opportunities in other nearby locations during hunting season. Hunters can find game reserve boundaries in the [WDFW Hunt Planner](#).

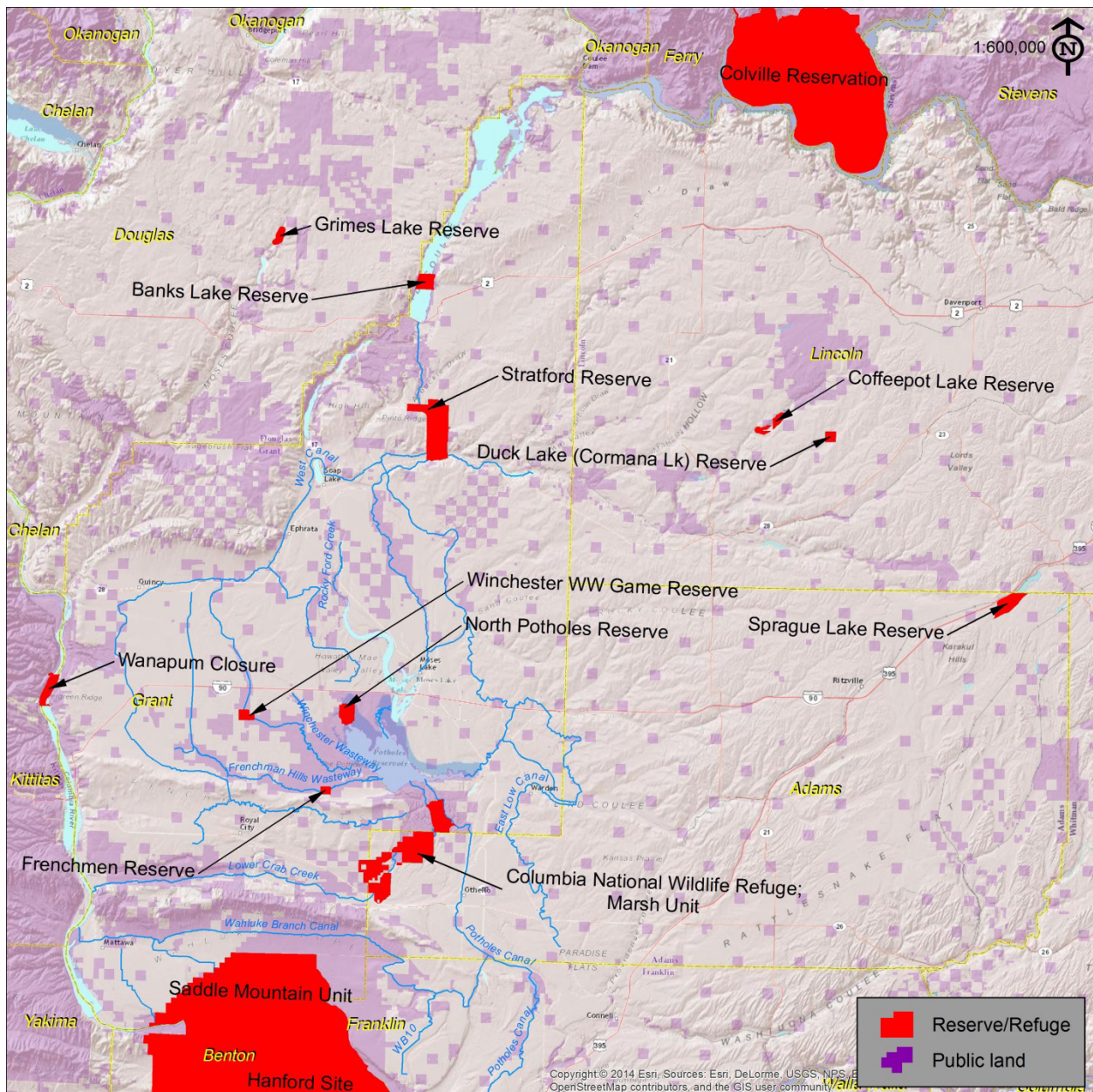
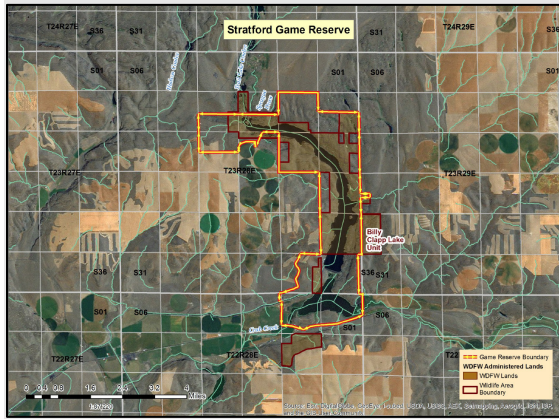
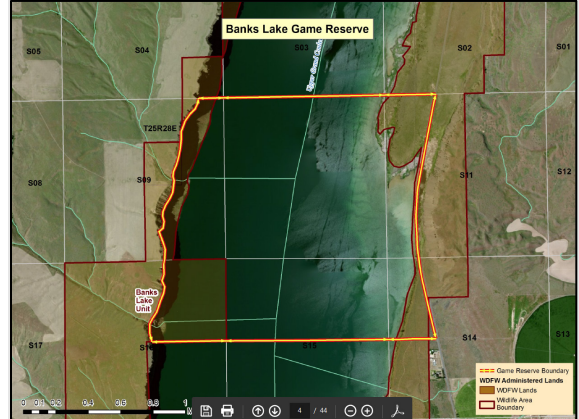


Figure 7. Location of game reserves and closed federal refuge units (in red) throughout and adjacent to District 5.

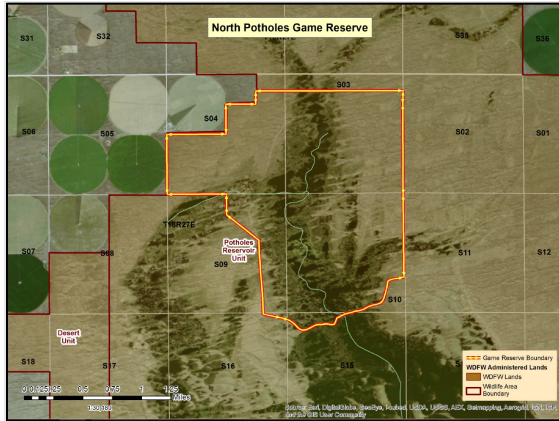
Stratford Game Reserve (Billy Clapp Lake Unit)



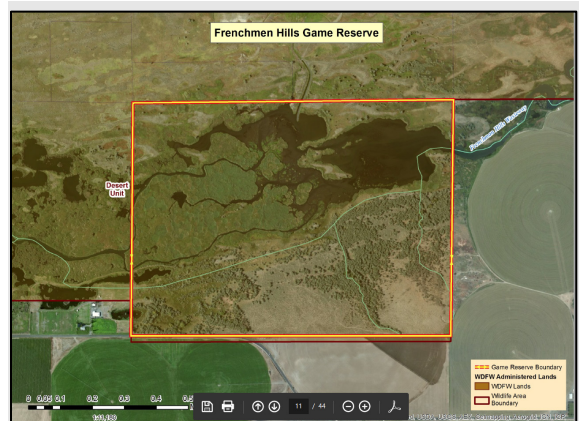
Banks Lake Game Reserve (Banks Lake Unit)



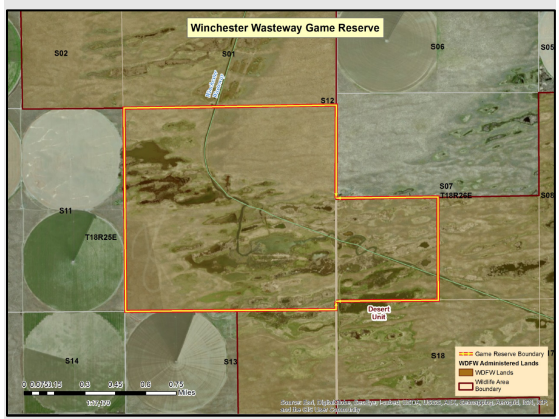
North Potholes Game Reserve (Potholes Reservoir Unit)



Frenchman Game Reserve (Desert Unit)



Winchester Game Reserve (Desert Unit)



Sprague Game Reserve (Sprague Lake Unit)

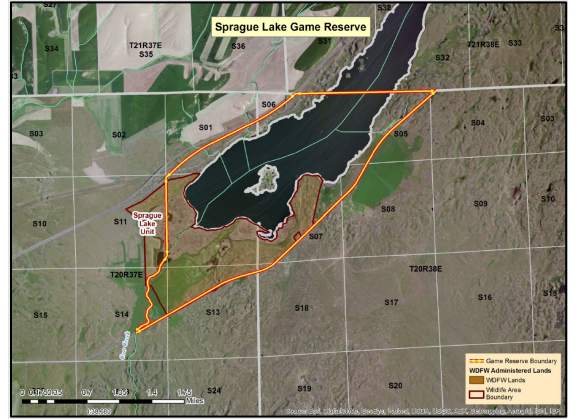


Figure 8. Game Reserve boundaries with Township, Range, and Section numbers in District 5.

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Elk are rare in District 5. There are no resident elk herds in game management unit (GMU) 272, 278, or 290. Due to the potential for significant crop depredation, WDFW does not encourage the establishment of elk herds in District 5. WDFW provides *Any Elk* hunting opportunities during the general archery, modern firearm, and muzzleloader seasons.

GMU 284 is near the Hangman Creek sub-herd of the Selkirk elk herd. This herd of approximately 300-500 elk is typically found approximately 16 miles northeast at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge (GMU 130). These elk enter GMU 284, where hunters may harvest them.

Hunters harvested 25 elk in District 5 in 2022. There were 10 elk harvested in GMU 284, nine elk in GMU 278, and six in GMU 272.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

If hunters wish to hunt elk in District 5 during the 2023 season, they should seek access on private lands in the eastern portions of GMU 284. Public land opportunities for elk hunting are very limited in District 5.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Figure 9. Bachelor group of mule deer bucks. Photo by Eric Braaten.

GMU 272 includes approximately 53,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Gloyd Seeps, Banks Lake, Sun Lakes, Billy Clapp, and Quincy Lakes units), most of which is open to hunting. The number of deer hunters that hunt general seasons (including multi-weapon permits) within GMU 272 ranges from about 1,000 to 1,700. The reported success rate of antlerless permits for disabled hunters was 100%. The success rates for youth permits are good.

GMU 278 includes approximately 36,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Lower Crab Creek Unit), which is predominantly shrubsteppe habitat with some interspersed wetlands along Crab Creek. Numerous parcels within DNR and federal ownership also exist in this GMU. The number of general season deer hunters within GMU 278, including multi-weapon permits, ranges from about 100-310 and harvest ranges between 20 – 90 deer. WDFW does not perform formal surveys in GMU 278, but harvest data indicates a stable deer population.

GMU 284 is predominately private property, so hunters should plan to get permission to access private lands and/or plan on hunting lands enrolled in the WDFW Access Program. There are some small parcels (<640 acres) of public lands scattered throughout this GMU. The number of deer general season hunters within GMU 284 ranges from 650-1,100.

GMU 290 is a special-permit Quality Deer Hunt Unit, with restrictions that reduce hunter density and encourages older deer. The unit is also open for various upland hunting and contains three Regulated Access Areas for waterfowl. Buck-doe ratios have remained consistent at approximately 50 bucks:100 does, with most bucks classified as greater than 2.5 years old during aerial surveys.

Harvest success for bucks varies greatly by hunt choice. Hunts listed in order from highest to lowest success rates are: late modern, early modern, muzzleloader, late archery, and early archery. This GMU contains very few access roads, and scouting is **strongly recommended** to increase success. 41% of the land in GMU 290 is part of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and managed by WDFW, so public opportunity is widely available. Public land in this unit consists of riparian and wetland areas associated with the Winchester and Frenchman waste ways and is surrounded by sandy dunes with varying densities of shrub cover. Most of the private agricultural land in this unit is in the western half. Hunters with permits will experience much greater success by hiking further away from access roads and scouting the area. Other hunting takes place on this unit during almost all permit hunts, with waterfowl and upland birds being the most popular.

Table 1. Mule deer harvest summary for District 5 GMUs by weapon type.

GMU	Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
272	Archery	40	28	68	297	23%
	Modern Firearm	0	215	215	1186	18%
	Multi-Season	13	39	52	179	29%
	Muzzleloader	0	12	12	74	16%
	Totals	53	294	347	n/a	n/a
278	Archery	6	7	13	77	17%
	Modern Firearm	0	34	34	201	17%
	Multi-Season	3	18	21	65	32%
	Muzzleloader	0	4	4	19	21
	Totals	9	63	72	n/a	n/a
284	Archery	4	4	8	73	11%
	Modern Firearm	0	268	268	804	33%
	Multi-Season	0	29	29	70	41%
	Muzzleloader	0	15	15	72	21%
	Totals	4	316	320	n/a	n/a
290*	Modern-Early	n/a	14	14	17	82%
	Modern-Late	n/a	5	5	5	100%
	Archery-Early	n/a	3	3	7	43%
	Archery-Late	n/a	2	2	6	33%
	Muzzleloader	n/a	1	1	2	50%
	Second Deer	16	n/a	16	17	94%
	Youth	4	n/a	4	5	80%
	Totals	20	25	40	54	n/a

*Please note that GMU 290 data are based only on hunter reports; not all hunters reported effort or harvest.

For additional information, please see the [Adams and Grant counties Deer Harvest Statistics](#).

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Most deer harvest occurs in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284 (Ritzville). In both GMUs, post-hunt buck:doe ratios from ground surveys in 2022 were within advised management objectives (20:100 bucks:does). Fawns were abundant during the surveys, implying that the deer numbers are stable. Hunters should expect another good year for mule deer hunting throughout the district.



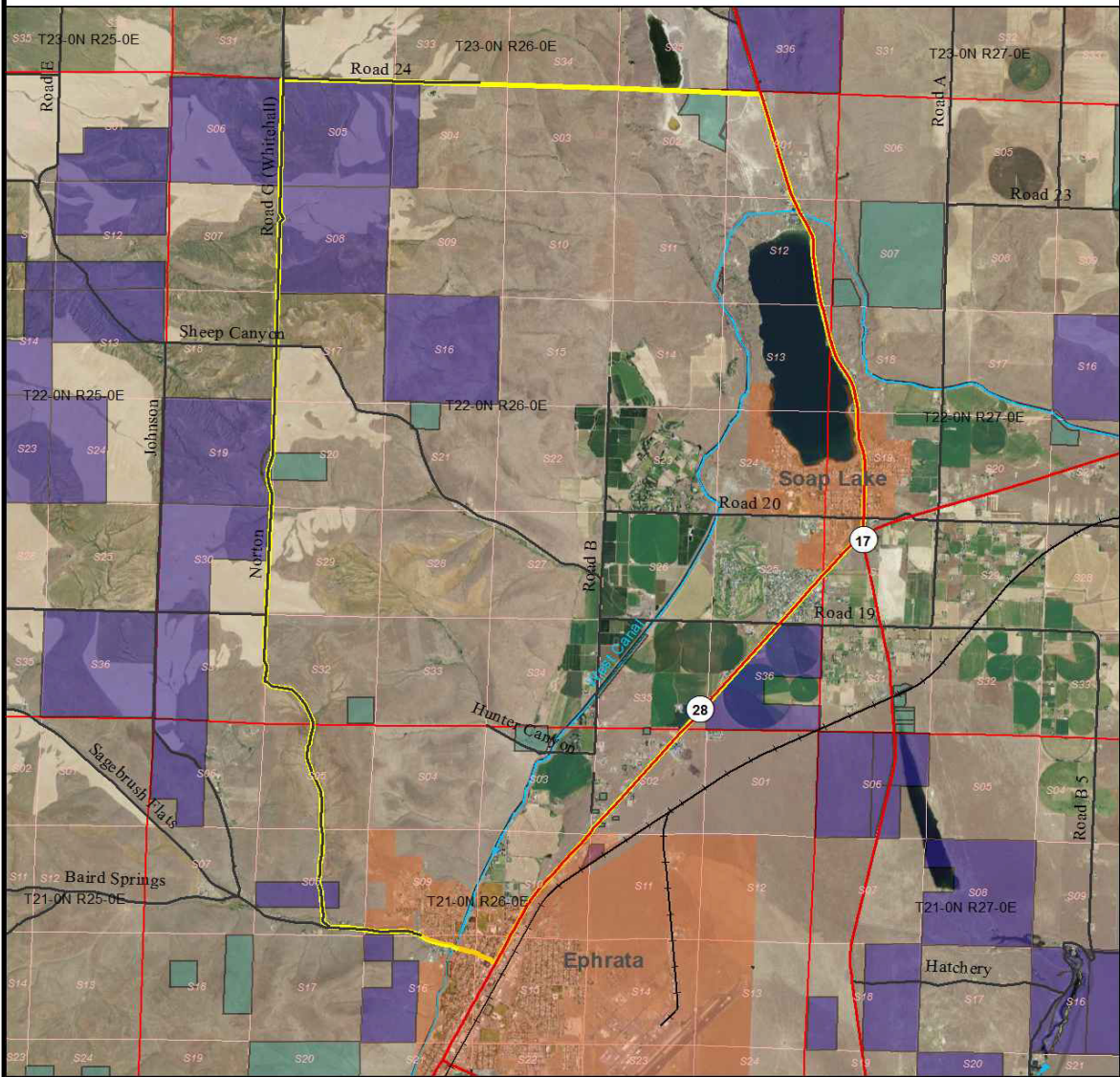
Figure 10. Mule deer doe in ripening wheat. Photo by Eric Braaten.

DEER AREAS

There are localized deer concentration areas in District 5 where deer have the potential to cause crop damage during harsh or prolonged winters. WDFW provides limited, permit-only opportunities to harvest antlerless deer near these areas to discourage congregations of mule deer that can cause crop damage. District 5 Deer Areas include Deer Area 2010 (Lakeview) in GMU 272 and Deer Area 2011 (Benge) in GMU 284. See the most recent [Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions.

Lakeview; Deer Area 2011

Ephrata District



DISCLAIMER

Due to the dynamic nature of data and the need to rely on outside sources of information, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions in the data and information contained in and products produced from this application. There are no warranties which accompany the maps and information contained in or produced by this application. For legal definitions of hunting regulations, seasons, and boundaries, the user should refer to Chapters 232-12, 232-16, and 232-28 of the Washington Administrative Code (<http://www.leg.wa.gov/wac/>).

- Highway
 - County
 - Seasonal closure
 - Closed road
 - WA_Railroads
 - Waterway
- Ownership**
- Federal
 - State
 - City limits
 - Deer area



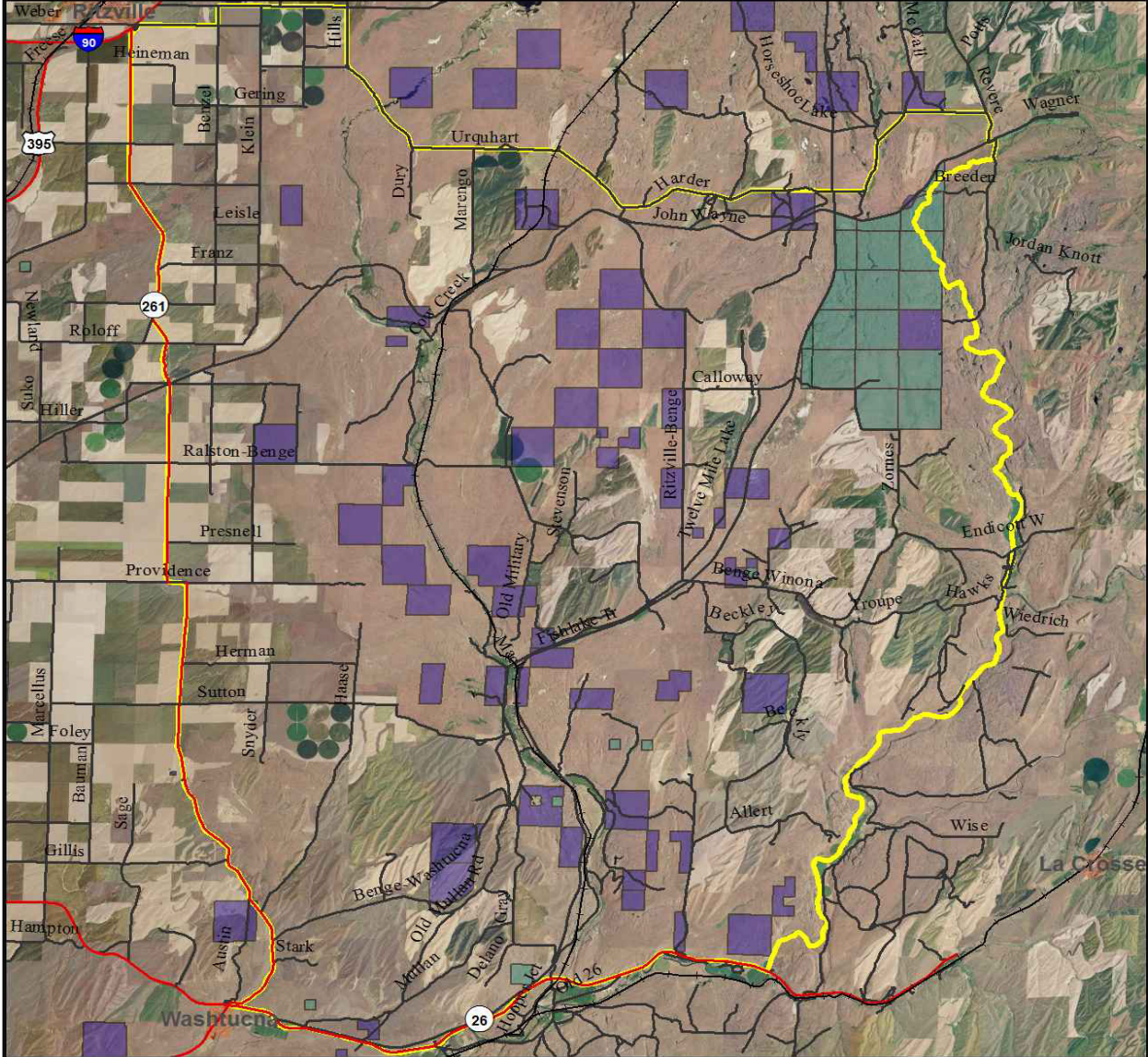
1:75,000



Figure 11. Lakeview Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow)

Benge; Deer Area 2010

Ephrata District



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- WA_Railroads
- Highway
- County
- Seasonal closure
- Closed road
- City limits
- Deer area
- Ownership**
- Federal
- State



1:200,000



Figure 12. Benge Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow)

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

District 5 does not have a resident black bear population and it is unlikely that one would become established soon.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

District 5 is not an optimal area to target black bears. Occasionally, bears may disperse through this district, especially near the Beezley Hills and areas surrounding Banks Lake.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

There is a small population of adult cougars in District 5, and the annual harvest is very low (typically fewer than 10 per year). Cougar harvest comes mostly from GMU 272 (Beezley Hills). Populations are expected to remain stable in this area for the foreseeable future.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

District 5 is not an optimal area to target cougars. However, the most likely places to encounter cougars are Beezley Hills, Moses Coulee, and along the Crab Creek drainage upstream from the town of Stratford.

PHEASANT

Since 2006, the highest number of pheasants in Washington have been harvested annually from Grant County. In 2022, hunters harvested 4,249 birds in Grant County and 509 in Adams County for a total harvest of 4,758 pheasants in District 5. See [Adams and Grant counties Pheasant Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information and to see the most recent harvest information.

The largest concentrations of wild pheasants on WDFW lands in District 5 are found within GMU 290 (Desert Unit) between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George, although private lands can host good populations. Both wild and released birds can be found in the Lower Crab Creek and Gloyd Seeps units, whereas hunters will likely only find released birds in the Dry Falls, Steamboat Rock, Quincy, and Buckshot sites. Hunters can find directions to pheasant release sites in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) pamphlet.

Nontoxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites. Please note that pheasant release dates are not made public to reduce overcrowding at release sites and ensure the safety of WDFW staff members during releases. Hunters can count on pheasants being released before the youth upland season (Sept. 16-17) and before the general season opening day (Oct. 21), with two additional releases taking place before the end of November.

Hunters looking for wild birds should focus their efforts on areas of dense cover. Thickets of Russian olive, cattail, roses are popular with pheasants, as well as weedy areas associated with irrigation ditches, canals, and ponds. Hunters should be prepared to do some walking when pursuing wild pheasants, as they tend to flush well in advance of hunters and are just about as likely to run as flush. Hunters can increase their odds of both finding and retrieving the birds in dense cover by hunting with a dog. Be aware - porcupines are often seen in many of these areas.

Hunters can anticipate seeing lots of pheasants in District 5. Most hunters who invest effort and cover a lot of ground will find wild birds. Hunters can increase their chances for a productive hunt by selecting nontoxic shot and diversifying the game bag with waterfowl.

Pheasant hunting is an excellent starting point for new hunters, with numerous opportunities available for success and mentorship. Visit the [Columbia Basin Pheasants Forever page for updates on mentored and youth pheasant hunt opportunities](#).

QUAIL

Grant County is typically one of the best producers for quail. In 2022, hunters in Grant County harvested 3,756 birds and hunters in Adams County harvested 331 birds. See [Adams and Grant counties Quail Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information.

In Grant County, there are many opportunities to hunt quail on public lands (Figure 6). Hunters focusing on Adams County should seek permission on private lands to improve the chances of finding birds. Private lands access can be granted through the WDFW Private Lands Access Program or by simply knocking on a few doors. Hunters will improve their odds of finding and retrieving birds by hunting with a trained dog.

Large coveys (flocks of quail) are difficult to find on public lands come mid-season. Successful hunters will benefit by identifying multiple coveys to pursue throughout the season. Riparian areas will offer the best hunting, and hunters can increase their chances by securing access to private lands where hunting pressure can be much lower. If pressure is high, some coveys can be found in shrub cover away from heavily hunted areas. Hunters willing to do more hiking will likely find more birds.

Quail hunting is expected to be good again this year with reports from the field painting an optimistic picture. Hunters can increase their chance of a successful hunting trip by using nontoxic shot and targeting multiple species.

CHUKAR AND PARTRIDGE

During the 2022 season, hunters harvested 149 Hungarian partridges and 291 chukars in Grant County. In Adams County hunters, harvested 25 gray partridges and 20 chukars. The harvest success rates for both species in District 5 fluctuates dramatically from year to year, in part because both species are widely dispersed. See [Adams and Grant counties Chukar Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information.

District 5 is not a popular destination for chukar or gray partridge hunters due to relatively small populations, but hunters can still find birds throughout much of the district. Most chukar



hunting in the district occurs in the Coulee Corridor areas around Banks and Lenore lakes and along the Columbia River breaks north of Vantage. Gray partridges occur in low densities throughout the Columbia Basin. Hunters rarely target them, but they are harvested opportunistically by those hunting chukars, quail, or pheasants. Most gray partridges occur in private agricultural fields, particularly in the dryland wheat portions of Adams County and, to a lesser degree, Grant County. Reports from the field paint a very good picture for both chukars and gray partridge.

Figure 13. Chukar brood. Photo by Eric Braaten

DOVE

Grant County is consistently one of the Washington's top destinations for mourning dove hunting, with hunters harvesting 9,528 birds in 2022. Hunters harvested 1,775 doves in Adams County in 2022. Dove hunting has been extended through Oct. 30 this season, and dove hunting is expected to be like last year. If conditions are stable, the birds found during scouting trips should be around during the hunt, but unstable conditions often redistribute birds. Hunters may improve their success by securing access to wheat fields for morning hunts. Evening hunts can be productive in wheat fields or traditional roosting areas. Look for large stands of trees (ideally with dead limbs) near water and surrounded by agriculture for the best roost hunt results. Hunters can find roost site hunting along the north and west sides of Potholes Reservoir, east side of Winchester Lake, and throughout the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

Hunters should remember that Eurasian collared doves can be found in the same areas as mourning doves and **do not** count towards daily bag limits. Eurasian collared doves are classified as a *Deleterious Species* in Washington and have few regulations governing harvest, so be sure to take a few when the opportunity arises.



Figure 14. Banded mourning dove

UPLAND BIRD MANAGEMENT

District 5 manages upland birds through sharecropping, strategic use of bird feeders to increase over-winter survival, and actively working to improve nesting cover on private and public lands.

See Figure 6 for more detailed information on huntable species within the wildlife area units.

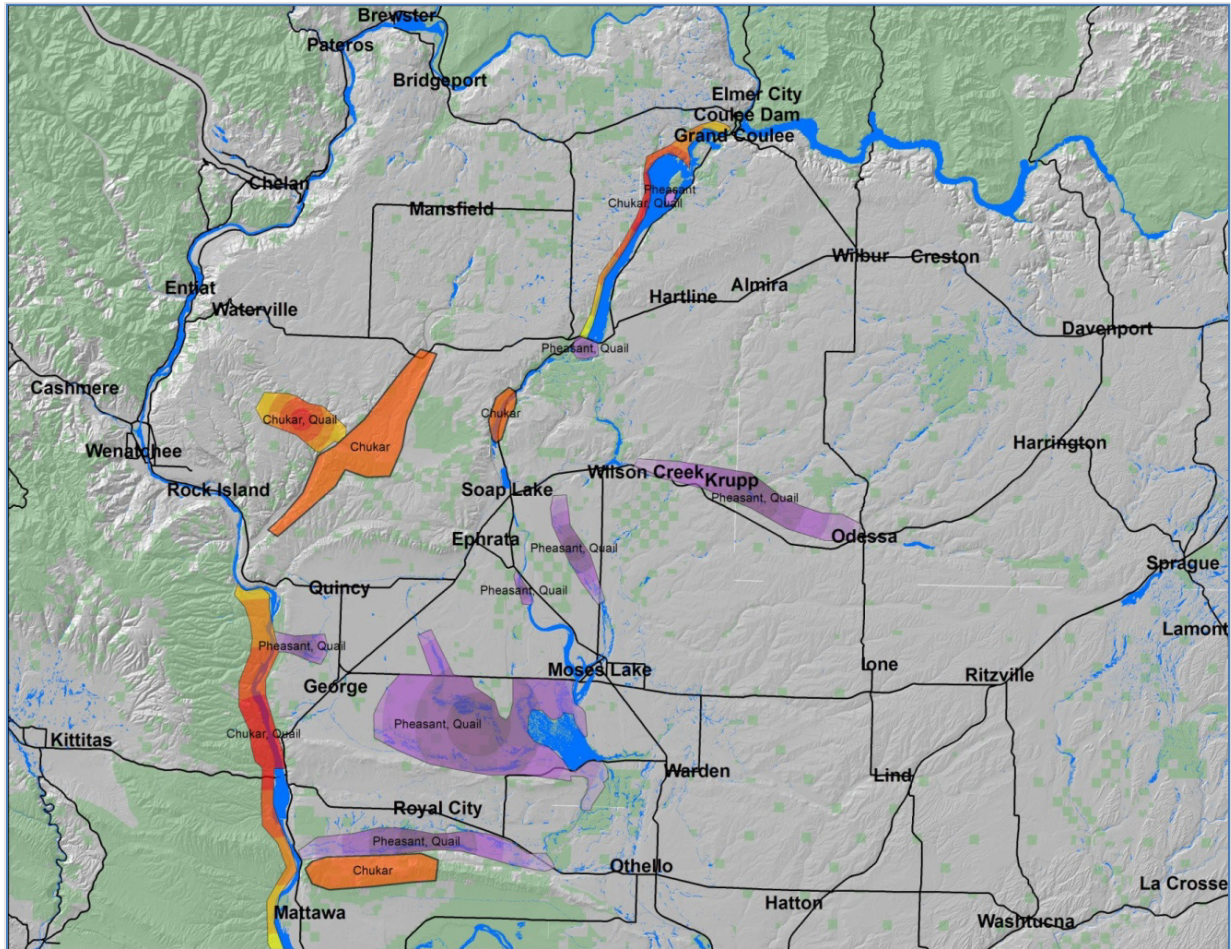


Figure 15. Generalized upland bird concentrations (pheasant, quail, and chukar) throughout the Ephrata District.

WATERFOWL

Grant County is typically one of Washington's top destinations for duck and goose hunting. In 2022, hunters harvested 57,788 ducks in Grant County and 18,495 in Adams County. Hunters can find additional information at [WDFW's game harvest statistics webpage](#).

In 2022, hunters harvested 22,487 geese in Grant County, and Adams County hunters added 5,174. Hunters can find additional information at [WDFW's game harvest statistics webpage](#).



Figure 16. Drake cinnamon teal. Photo by Eric Braaten

HUNTING TIPS

Scouting

Scouting is the key to success when waterfowl hunting. There are many places in District 5 where the public can go waterfowl hunting, but hunters should first identify general flight paths to determine feeding and roosting locations. Duck feeding flights usually occur early in the morning and near dusk -outside legal shooting hours.

Select areas to hunt based on the species you want to target. Dabbling ducks are more common on the Columbia Plateau, where grain corn and wheat fields attract mallards and pintails and shallow wetlands attract teal, American wigeon, and gadwall. Canada geese feed primarily in

wheat and alfalfa fields, so requesting permission from private landowners is often necessary to secure field goose hunting.

Diving ducks are typically hunted along the Columbia River, particularly at Wells Pool, Wanapum Pool, and Priest Rapids Pool. They forage over beds of submerged aquatic vegetation such as pondweeds and milfoil. Knowing when and where ducks are feeding will help hunters determine the best locations to intercept the ducks with decoy spreads. Setting up a decoy spread on waters between the feeding and roosting sites will generally yield good hunting opportunities, particularly during periods of wind, snow, or fog. Typically, the larger roosting sites will be the Wanapum Closure (Columbia River), Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, and Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Marsh units.

Hunters should be mindful that water (and muck) depths are highly variable, and it takes a lot of trial and error to learn where you can and cannot set decoys. For some areas, boat access may be the best or only option. Winchester and Frenchman waste ways (the two major drainages entering the west side of Potholes Reservoir) are crossable in some areas with chest waders, but use caution, as there are deep holes and it can be difficult to navigate patches of muck, particularly when packing decoys.

Early and Late Season Goose Hunting

Goose bag limits are still separated by species, giving hunters the potential to harvest more birds. The changes will not affect where to go, but goose hunters in mid-October could increase their focus on white-fronted geese around Moses Lake, Winchester Lake, and along the Winchester Wasteway. There is no guarantee that those birds will be around during hunting season, but in typical years, there are 200-500 white-fronted geese for the first few weeks of the waterfowl season.

During the later parts of the waterfowl season, there have been increasing numbers of snow geese observed around Potholes Reservoir and even Moses Lake. Hunters pursuing those birds should focus efforts on the grain fields surrounding reservoirs south of Interstate 90. In 2017 and 2018, approximately 1,500-2,500 snow geese spent the winter on Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. Those birds were frequently observed flying north towards agricultural fields surrounding Potholes Reservoir.

Where to Hunt

Regulated Access Areas

Dogs are often necessary for retrieving throughout most of District 5, but Regulated Access Areas (RAAs) have some shallow ponds that can be effectively hunted with only chest waders. Hunters can find time restrictions and the number of vehicles allowed for the RAA in the hunting pamphlet and Table 3 (below). These sites are Register to Hunt, so be sure to register at the box provided in the parking areas. WDFW collects hunter information from these sites to

inform management decisions and justify further habitat improvements. Each RAA is discussed in more detail below.

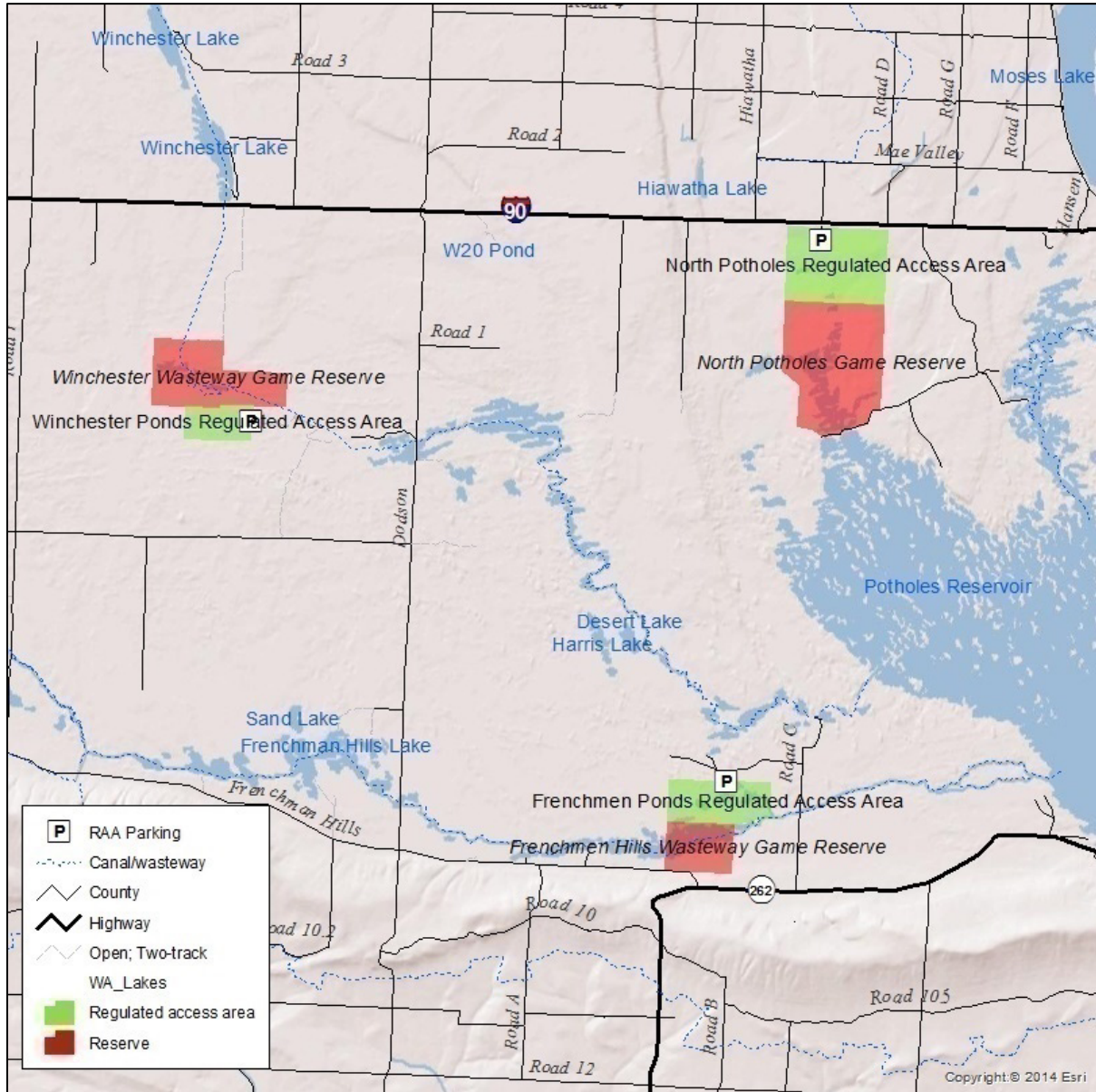


Figure 17. Regulated Access Area locations adjacent to game reserves closed to hunting.

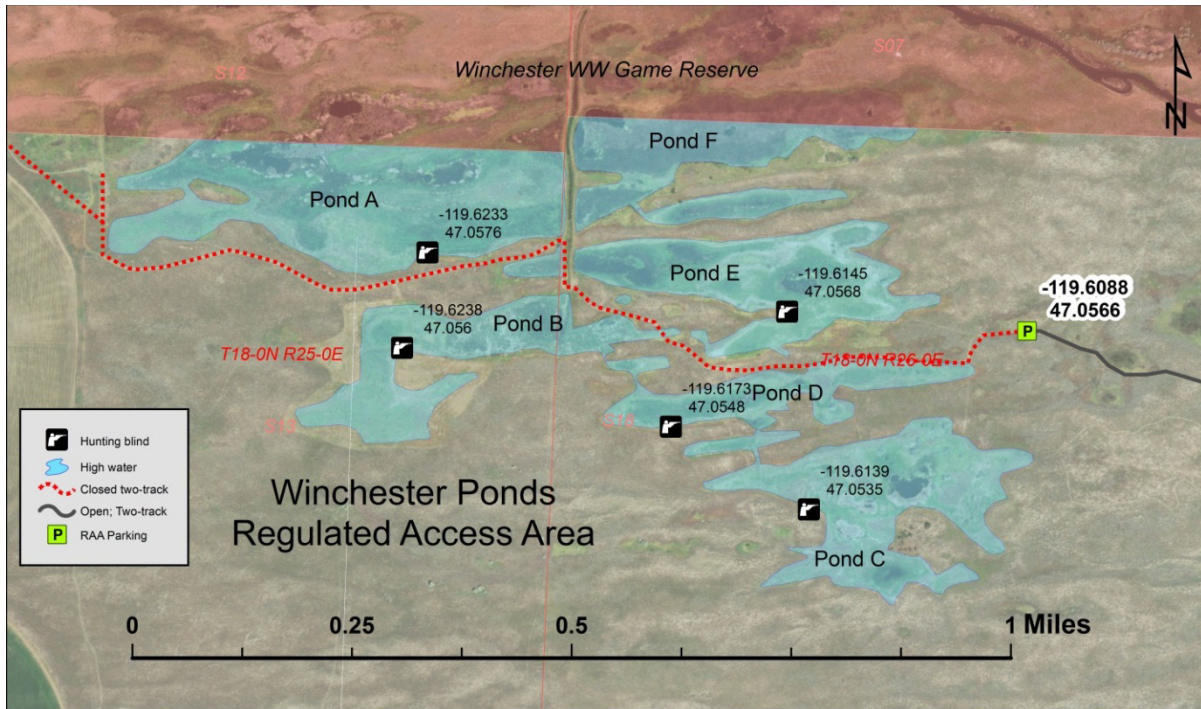


Figure 18. Winchester Ponds Regulated Access Area.

Winchester Ponds RAA

Winchester Ponds is the most popular RAA in the district and consistently has birds. Five blinds are distributed throughout the access area and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters are not required to hunt from blinds, as the area is open to free-roam. Typically all five parking spots are filled once access opens at 4 a.m. This RAA is only open during Goose Management Area 4 Goose Days.

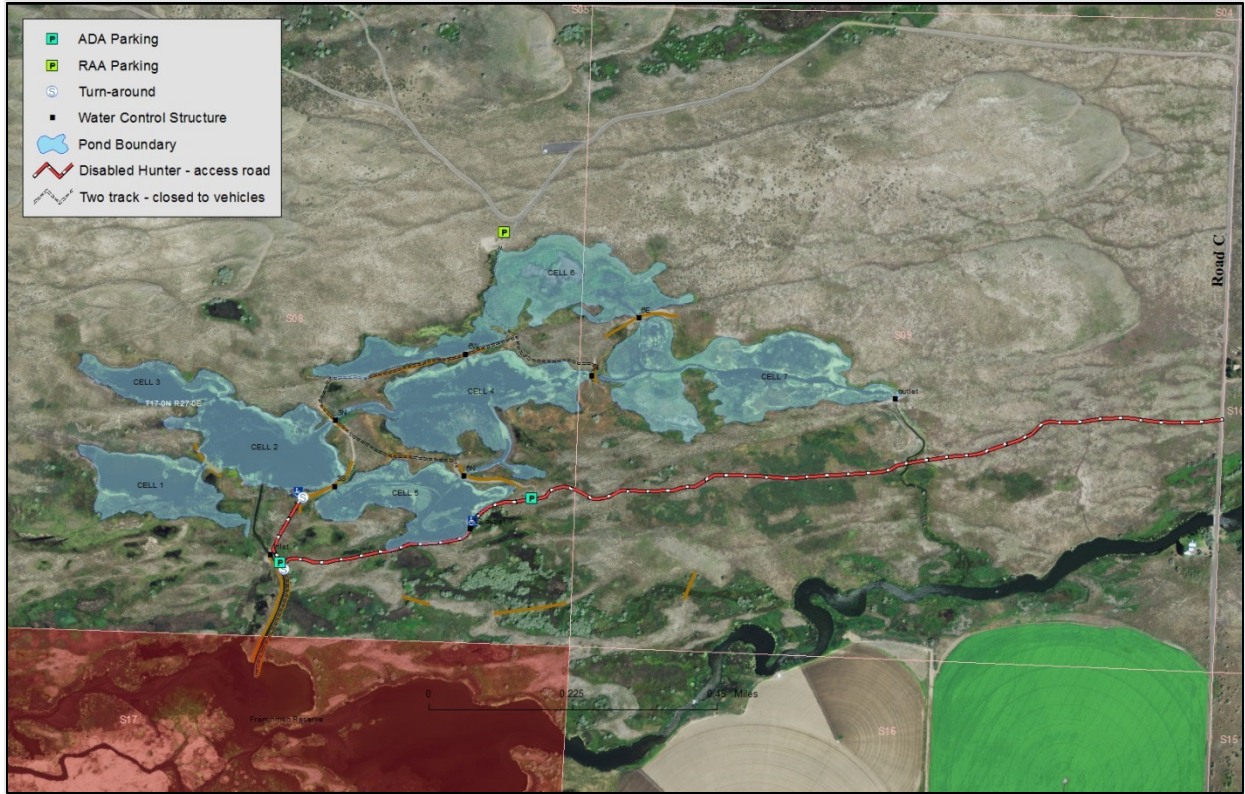


Figure 19. Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area.

Frenchman Ponds RAA

Frenchman Ponds had extensive restoration work performed in the past few years and will hold good numbers of waterfowl throughout the hunting season. The area is open to free-roam and allows for both upland and waterfowl hunting. Two wheelchair-accessible hunting blinds are open to all hunters but must be forfeited by non-disabled hunters if a disabled hunter requests the site. Disabled hunters will be able to drive to the blinds and park relatively close, but those hunters will need to contact the regional office at 509-754-4624 for details.

This area is open seven days a week throughout all hunting seasons.

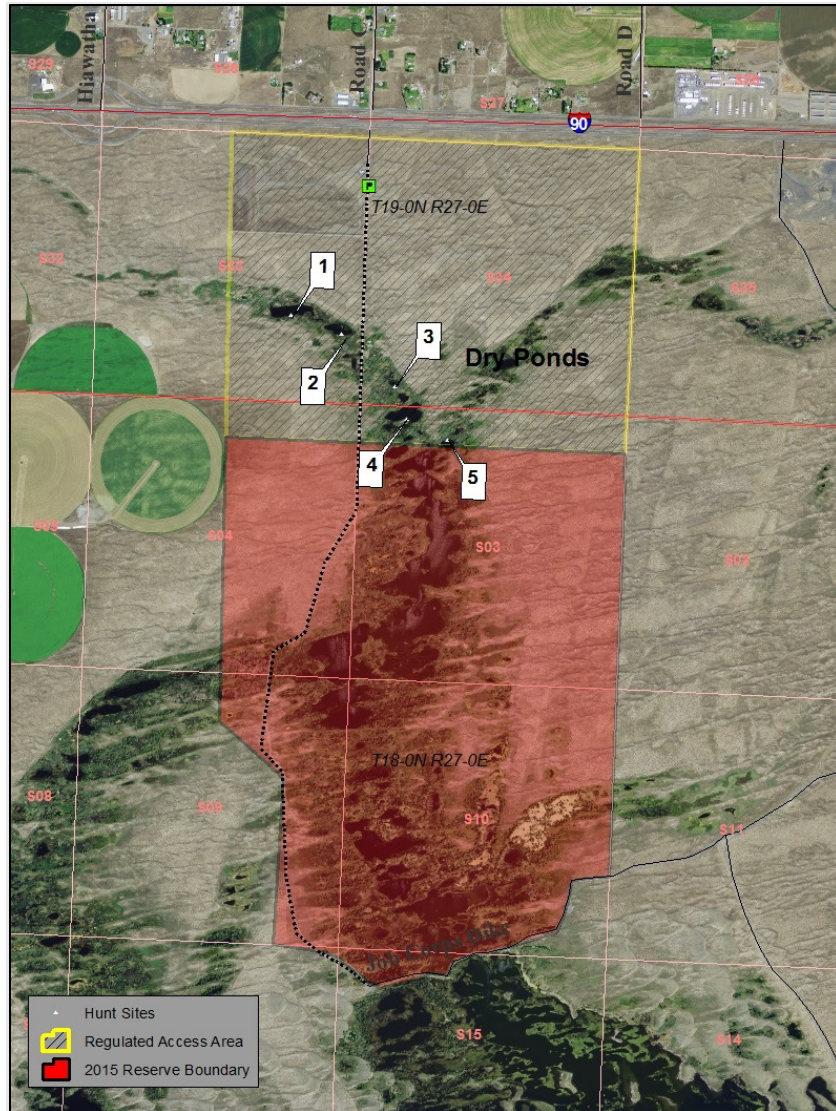


Figure 20. North Potholes Regulated Access Area.

North Potholes RAA

North Potholes RAA has unique hunting conditions because the Potholes Reservoir determines water levels within these ponds. Some identified hunt sites, like Ponds 3 and 5, could be dry, particularly from October through November during the hunting season. The lowest water levels probably occur during the first half of November. Because the deepest portions of these ponds do not dry out, early season hunting can be extremely mucky. Parking spots correspond to specific hunt sites. Hunters will be required to hunt within eyesight of identified sites in the field. Hunters must not hunt waterfowl away from their designated hunt site but may pursue other game, such as upland birds, mule deer, coyote, and cottontail rabbits, on a free-roam basis. Hunters pursuing species other than waterfowl are strongly encouraged to stay at least 400 meters (1/4 mile) from designated waterfowl hunt sites.

This area is open seven days a week throughout all hunting seasons.

Hunter Collected Data from RAA

Table 2. Data collected from Hunters at each RAA in District 5.

Regulated Access Area	Parking Spots	Register to Hunt	Hunt Days	Other
Winchester	5	Register on site	Wed, Sat, Sun; Mgmt Area 4 goose hunting days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.
Frenchman	5 + 2 ADA	Register on site	All huntable days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.
North Potholes	5	Register on site	All huntable days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.

Winchester Ponds	Harvest		Frenchman Ponds	Harvest		North Potholes	Harvest	
	Duck	Goose		Duck	Goose		Duck	Goose
2012-13	738	19	2012-13	300	10			
2013-14	507	26	2013-14	149	3			
2014-15	1067	34	2014-15	281	4			
2015-16	597	12	2015-16	461	9	2015-16	110	11
2016-17	249	27	2016-17	368	7	2016-17	268	35
2017-18	165	5	2017-18	394	25	2017-18	297	25
2018-19	454	17	2018-19	336	7	2018-19	108	9
2019-20	890	33	2019-20	382	9	2019-20	94	14
2020-21	602	5	2020-21	407	4	2020-21	24	5
2021-22	390	12	2021-22	387	1	2021-22	94	7
2022-23	599	22	2022-23	614	11	2022-23	4	8
Average	569	20	Average	334	8	Average	125	14

Other public lands

Many hunters consider the previously discussed RAAs to be the best option in District 5 for public waterfowl hunting. While this may be true under the right circumstances, it is not always the case. When migrant waterfowl are in the area, just about any suitable site can be productive. Many places throughout the Columbia Basin provide excellent hunting opportunities.

One of the more popular waterfowl hunting areas is Potholes Reservoir. The abundance of small dune islands provides excellent cover for hunters, making this an attractive area. Most hunters use the northern portion of the reservoir, where they find shallow water and numerous islands. New hunters should be aware that Potholes Reservoir water levels do increase dramatically through the hunting season. Hunters looking for less hunting pressure should choose weekdays.



Figure 21. Aerial imagery showing difference between high water (June) and low water (September) levels on Potholes Reservoir.

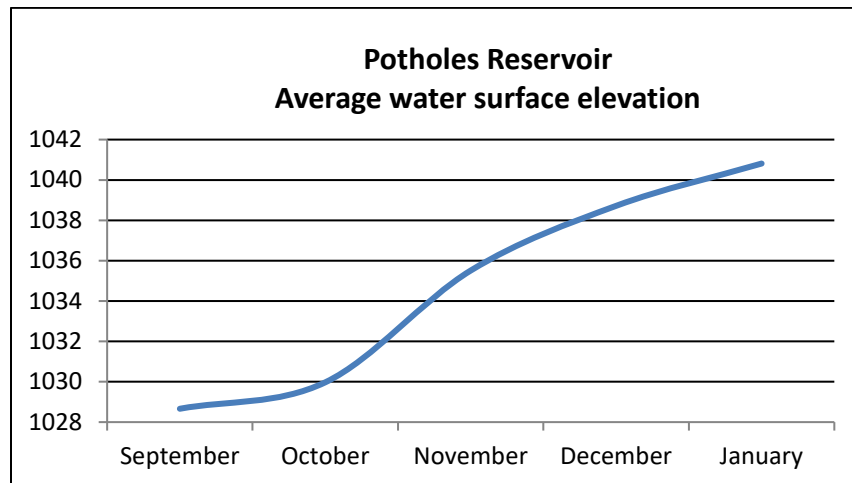


Figure 22. Potholes Reservoir water surface elevation (in feet) during waterfowl season. Note that water surface elevation is measured at the O’Sullivan dam and some lag in flooding will occur in the upper portions of the reservoir.

Winchester Lake is another location where hunters can expect to see good numbers of ducks, but hunting pressure can be relatively high there, too. Winchester Lake sits in a prime location, getting traffic from mallards that feed on grain corn in the surrounding area. Ducks typically come from Winchester Game Reserve, Potholes Game Reserve, Moses Lake, and/or the Wanapum Closure to feed in fields, and they occasionally attempt to shorten their commute to the roost by stopping at Winchester Lake.

Realistically, there are very few “secret spots” within the Columbia Basin - just places that are hunted less frequently. Hunters willing to put some time into exploring new areas will likely discover a few gems. Walk-in areas that hold waterfowl include Desert Unit, Lower Crab Creek, and Royal Lakes. Most of these areas are predominantly public land.

SMALL GAME

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION STATUS

the most common small game targeted in District 5 is bobcats, raccoons, foxes, crows, coyotes, and cottontail rabbits. There are no sizeable populations of forest grouse, but there is a small population of turkeys in the northern portions of GMU 272. WDFW does not conduct formal surveys to assess the population status of small game species.

Bobcats occur in small numbers, and harvest is relatively low.

Raccoons occur in fair numbers in association with wetlands and residential developments when adequate habitat exists.

Fox farms occurred adjacent to the Columbia Plateau during the early 1900s but declines in fur prices during the 1950s resulted in foxes being released into the wild. A few descendants of these individuals can still be found in the area; however, these introduced foxes are still considered relatively uncommon, with most reports coming from areas north of Moses Lake.

Crows are typically hunted in areas where damage occurs on private property. Local hunting opportunities for crows are limited.

Coyotes are a common and wide-spread small game species within the district. Hunters interested in pursuing coyotes should be sure to spend time refining their tactics and be patient when making calling sets. There are many online resources available to interested hunters, and many landowners are willing to allow access for hunters who ask permission.

Cottontail rabbits are widespread and common throughout District 5 in areas of optimal habitat. In native landscapes, hunters should look for rock outcrops, greasewood patches, or other brushy thickets where suitable escape cover occurs. These rabbits are often found along habitat edges. Therefore, focusing efforts in areas near two or more of their preferred habitats will produce the best results, particularly if green forage is nearby. On private lands, cottontails can be found within and around equipment storage areas or rock piles. To be successful hunting rabbits, hunters should cover lots of ground while “kicking” brush. Stopping periodically will cause nearby rabbits to become nervous, and they will oftentimes flee when you resume walking, providing a brief shooting window. Another popular way to hunt rabbits is using trained beagles. Hunters targeting cottontails must be able to differentiate between cottontails and pygmy rabbits, which are a federally endangered species. Pygmy rabbits look like cottontails but have a brown tail. Pygmy rabbits are found in small pockets of shrubsteppe and CRP habitat. Hunters would likely only encounter pygmy rabbits north and northwest of Ephrata.

PUBLIC LANDS

WDFW-MANAGED LAND

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (approximately 190,000 acres) provides essential or critical habitat for hundreds of species. These lands exist to allow for sustainable wildlife populations while providing compatible recreational opportunities. For more information on this wildlife area, please visit the WDFW [Wildlife Areas webpage](#). A Discover Pass or Vehicle Access Pass is required to access all WDFW lands.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Washington Department of Natural Resources maintains lands that are open to the public for compatible recreational purposes. A Discover Pass is required for access. More information is available on [DNR's website](#).

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages land to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Columbia and Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuges, Hanford Reach National Monument, and lands owned by the Department of Energy are managed by the USFWS in District 5. Hunting regulations for these lands can be found on the [USFWS website](#).

NATIONAL FOREST

There is no National Forest System land in District 5.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

The Bureau of Land Management manages land to sustain its health, diversity, and productivity for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Some BLM land is found in District 5 and is open to public hunting and other compatible uses. For more information regarding BLM property, please visit the [BLM website](#).

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

The Bureau of Reclamation manages, develops, and protects water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public. Their land is open to public use for compatible recreational purposes. Much, but not all, of the Reclamation property in District 5 is managed by WDFW. More information about recreational opportunities on Reclamation lands can be found on the [Reclamation website](#).

PRIVATE LANDS

LAND OWNERSHIP

Whether hunting, hiking, or wildlife viewing, it is important to respect private property rights and always ask permission before entering private lands. Fortunately, technology has made it easy to determine land ownership. Simply log on to the [Adams County parcel map](#) or the [Grant County parcel map](#) and use the interactive map program to zoom in on your area of interest. Clicking on the parcels will reveal landowner information. The disadvantage of these resources is the lack of portability and difficulty scanning a large area for the availability of public land. However, these are by far the best available resources for identifying ownership of specific locations. The best resource available for identifying public land is the [Department of Natural Resources public lands quadrangles](#) (1:100k), available for a fee at the DNR website. Other mobile applications are now readily available and can be purchased through various sources.

PRIVATE LANDS PROGRAM

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners statewide to provide public access through negotiated agreements. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection under [RCW 4.24.210](#). Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases monetary compensation. Lands under the agreement are well-known by WDFW Enforcement.

Currently, the Private Lands Access Program includes four basic access agreement types: Feel Free to Hunt, Register to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, and Hunt by Reservation. For more information, see [WDFW's private lands webpage](#). There are approximately 179,000 acres of private property in District 5 that are accessible to hunters through these agreements. When accessing these lands, hunters should obey all posted rules and respect the property. Most complaints received from hunting access cooperators concern hunters not following rules and being disrespectful. Many hunters are not aware of the tremendous opportunities that are available on these private properties. With a little scouting and planning, hunters could improve their odds of success. To learn more about these opportunities, use [WDFW's private lands search](#) online or the [Mobile Hunting Regulations](#) mapping feature.

Private Lands Access Program	Grant County	Adams County
Feel Free to Hunt	10,273	7,061
Hunt By Written Permission	45,742	92,460
Hunt By Reservation (Online)	15,939	2,050
TOTAL ACRES	71,955	101,571

Table 3. Approximate acreage of access available by access type.

ADA ACCESS

The Ephrata District maintains sites accessible to people with disabilities at Rocky Ford Creek (Drumheller Pond), Buckshot Ranch, and the Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area. Hunters must have a Disabled Hunter Permit to access hunting areas behind locked gates. For additional information, please call or write to WDFW's Civil Rights Coordinator: WDFW, 360-902-2349, Fax: 360-902-2392, title6@dfw.wa.gov

DIRECTIONS

Rocky Ford Creek: Travel south from Ephrata on SR 282 for 7.2 miles. Turn right onto Neppel Road (Old Moses Lake Highway). Go 0.1 miles and turn right at the public fishing sign. Continue 0.5 miles to the access site. The access duck blind is on a small pond off the creek. A vehicle can be used to drop off a disabled hunter next to the blind. The ground around the blind is rough and access into the water is best with a small hand launch boat or raft. An accessible vault toilet is in the parking lot located nearby for the walk-in anglers. The use of the blind is by reservation only. Hunters can obtain a key from the Ephrata Regional Office by calling 509-754-4624.

Buckshot Ranch: Drive south on SR 243 along the Columbia River from Vantage toward Mattawa. Turn right (west) onto Road 26 SW and go about one mile to the Priest Rapids/Buckshot Wildlife Area. Follow the gravel road into a parking area and turn right between two fence posts. Follow the dirt road north 0.25 miles to a locked gate on the left. A ground-level roll-in goose pit blind is available with seasonal success dependent on weather. Call the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 to reserve the blind and obtain a key.

Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area: From Moses Lake, travel south on Highway 17 to Road M SE and turn right (south). Continue on Road M for about six miles and turn right (west) onto Highway 262 (O'Sullivan Dam Road). Continue on Highway 262 across O'Sullivan Dam and past Potholes State Park and turn right (north) onto Road C SE. Proceed north on Road C SE for 1.4 miles and look for the disabled access gate on the left-hand side of the road. For further detail, see the map in the Regulated Access Area section of this document. Call the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 to reserve the blind and obtain a combination to the lock.

Additional opportunities may be available to those seeking accommodations. Please contact WDFW's Civil Right Coordinator at 360-902-2349 or email title6@dfw.wa.gov.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

YOUTH HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES: WATERFOWL

There are youth hunts scheduled for Sept. 30, 2023 and Feb. 3, 2024. Both dates will provide tremendous opportunities to get kids out hunting. Additionally, the Feb. 3 hunt day is **after** the general waterfowl season, meaning there will likely be more ducks in the area. Those ducks will be widely distributed and will have become habituated with no hunting pressure.

PHEASANTS

WDFW and the Columbia Basin Chapter of Pheasants Forever have been collaborating in recent years to host a day of pheasant hunting during the youth season, with details about this year's event to be announced. The event typically takes place on the first Saturday of the Upland Youth Hunt weekend. WDFW Hunter Education instructors are onsite during the event to help with shooting instruction and offer "loaner" shotguns, and volunteers provide dogs to assist youth hunters. Pheasants Forever typically provides food for all hunters and parents and giveaways to youth hunting participants. For more information, visit the [Columbia Basin Chapter of Pheasants Forever - Facebook Page](#).

BIRD DOG TRAINING

District 5 does not currently have any areas designated for bird dog training, although work is underway to develop a dog training area. Any training on WDFW land must be within the established bird dog training season, which runs from August 1 – March 31. Please see the [website and regulations booklet](#) for more details.

TARGET SHOOTING

Per [WAC 220-500-140](#), target shooting is allowed on WDFW-managed lands. Shooters should review regulations and other information available on the [WDFW website](#).

Table 4. Information for shooting range facilities.

County	Name	Contact
Adams	Lind Golf & Gun Club	509-671-3314
Adams	Othello Gun Club	509-488-3768
Adams	Ritzville Gun Club	Gun Club Road, Ritzville
Adams	Washtucna Gun Club	509-646-3263
Grant	Boyd Mordhorst Memorial Range Ephrata	509-345-2550
Grant	Coulee City Sportsmen	509-632-5137
Grant	Marlin Trap Club	509-982-2445
Grant	Moses Lake Gun Club	509-765-1382
Grant	Quincy Gun Club	509-787-5506

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

Numerous resources are available to help hunters find hunting opportunities and improve their experiences. WDFW has created numerous mapping tools that identify public and private lands and their associated regulations. WDFW also provides the public with access to our Status and Trends Reports, Management Plans for species, and harvest statistics. These can all be found on the [WDFW website](#).

Handheld GPS units can help identify your location in remote places, but even smartphones can work in areas with and without cellular reception. Numerous resources are available through retailers to assist with mapping and personal comfort, but scouting, improving shooting proficiency, and learning wildlife habits will provide the best chances of hunting success.

BE A WILDLIFE STEWARD - GET INVOLVED

WDFW and other agencies are always looking for good volunteers to improve habitat for wildlife. Find time to help with wildlife-related projects and encourage kids to learn about nature and our wildlife heritage through our [WDFW Volunteer Program](#).

HUNTER TUTORIALS AND RESOURCES

If pages won't open on your browser, try a different browser (e.g., Google Chrome rather than Internet Explorer)

Share the Land and Clean Up After Yourself: Healthy, connected habitat is necessary to ensure the persistence of wildlife species with healthy and sustainable populations. Respect and share the land - clean up after yourself and reduce your impact on the environment. Pick up your shotgun shells, carry out your garbage, and tread lightly.

Hunting Ethics and Fair Chase:

[Popes & Youth](#)

[Boone-Crockett](#)

[WDFW Ethics and Safety](#)

“How to Hunt”

Hunter Education: Many links to resources about specific topics.

[WDFW Hunting Requirements](#)

Hunting Clinics and Publications: Thorough explanations about the basics of hunting, from wildlife behavior to hunting tips and tactics.

[WDFW Hunting Clinics](#)

How to Prepare for the Season:

[WDFW Preparing to Hunt](#)

First Hunt Foundation (mentored hunt):

[Mentored Hunt](#)

Many Additional Resources: WDFW’s website has many documents and plans that give details on the history of wildlife, management harvest statistics, and other items of interest. They can be found here:

[WDFW Hunting Resources](#)

“Where to Hunt”

WDFW maintains a web map tool that allows you to zoom into different areas and indicate the hunt-type of interest. You can see different land ownerships and regulations on different parcels:

[WDFW Hunt Planner Map](#)

WDFW Public Lands: Be aware there are some closed areas and Game Reserves where hunting and trapping are prohibited. Read the Regulations Pamphlet and read and obey signs.

[WDFW Hunting Locations](#)

[About WDFW Lands](#)

[WDFW Pheasant Enhancement Program](#)

Other Government Lands: Washington Department of Natural Resources and federal public lands are generally available for hunting. Read the agency's regulations, read and obey signs, and do not cross fences without permission.

[DNR](#)

[Bureau of Reclamation](#)

[USFWS Refuges](#)

Private Lands: Many private landowners allow hunting on their property, although permission requirements vary. Each landowner's parcel indicates the permission type required, species that can be found there, and specifics about the parcel.

[WDFW Private Lands](#)

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2023

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Biologist



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 6 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Okanogan County

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All photos by Scott Fitkin unless otherwise noted.

FIRE AND ROAD CONDITIONS UPDATE

As of August 10, 2023, only one major fire (Eagle Bluff) has burned in District 6. It is primarily on private land in the northeast portion of GMU 209, and therefore is expected to have minimal impact on district-wide hunting opportunities. The fire burned the eastern portion of the Ellemehan Unit on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, but access to this area is currently open.

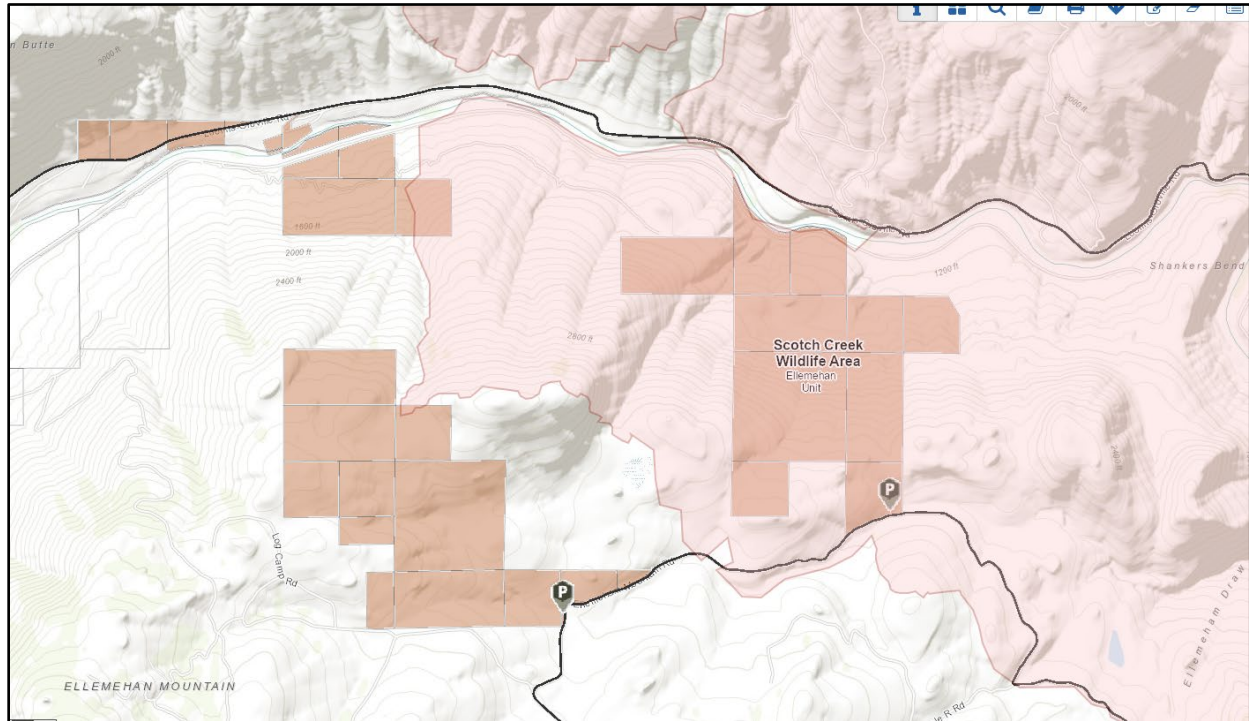


Figure 1. Eagle Bluff fire perimeter encompassing part of the Ellemehan Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area

Additional information on current and past fires can be found on [InciWeb](#) and [CalTopo](#).

Some United States Forest Service (USFS) roads may be closed due to localized washout events, particularly in recent fire perimeters. Check with the appropriate USFS district for current conditions.

- [Okanogan National Forest, Methow Valley Ranger District](#)
- [Tonasket Ranger District, Colville National Forest](#)

DISTRICT 6 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 6 is located along the Canadian border in north central Washington and encompasses 10 game management units (GMUs): 203 (Pasayten), 204 (Okanogan East), 209 (Wannacut), 215 (Sinlahekin), 218 (Chewuch), 224 (Perrygin), 231 (Gardner), 233 (Pogue), 239 (Chiliwist), and 242 (Alta).

The western two-thirds of the district, stretching from the Okanogan River to the Pacific Crest, lies on the east slope of the Cascade Range and is dominated by mountainous terrain that gets more rugged as you move from east to west. Vegetation in this portion of the district ranges from desert/shrubsteppe at the lowest elevations to various types of conifer forests, culminating in alpine tundra on the higher peaks, which top out at almost 9,000 feet. More than three-quarters of the land base in this portion of the county is in public ownership, offering extensive hunting access. Game is plentiful and dispersed throughout the area for most of the year, concentrating in the lower elevations in winter when deep snow covers much of the landscape.

GMU 204 includes the eastern third of the district, from the Okanogan River east to the Okanogan County line, and features moderately rolling terrain, generally rising in elevation as you move east. The vegetation changes from shrubsteppe near the Okanogan River to a mix of tall grass and conifer forest throughout the remainder of the unit. This portion of the district is a near-equal patchwork of public and private land, with the public lands generally being higher in elevation. Again, game is plentiful and dispersed throughout.

Weather in the Okanogan District can be quite variable and capable of changing quickly in the fall. Be prepared for everything from warm, sunny days to the possibility of winter temperatures and significant snow at higher elevations by the second week of October.

Agency biologists are not currently running the biological check and information station at the Red Barn in Winthrop. Instead, efforts will be focused on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) monitoring farther east in the state following recent positive detections in northwest Idaho. Hunters bringing cervid carcasses from other states are required to comply with current CWD restrictions.

Customizable map products are available on the [WDFW Hunt Planner webpage](#).

Please be respectful of private land and treat landowners and their property the way you would want to be treated.



From top: View from the Methow Wildlife Area and Pasayten Wilderness

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Overall, elk numbers are low in District 6. However, conditions vary noticeably between the east and west portions of Okanogan County.

The western two-thirds of the district are not currently covered under a WDFW elk herd management plan, and the existing harvest strategy (any elk general season) is designed to minimize elk



numbers to prevent agricultural damage. As such, elk west of the Okanogan River are very difficult to find without extensive local knowledge. Hunters harvested 10 elk in the nine western Okanogan County GMUs combined in 2022.

The eastern portion of the district (GMU 204) is covered by the Selkirk Elk Herd Plan and supports part of the Pend Oreille subherd population. The area's current management objective is to gradually increase elk numbers. Any bull elk may be harvested during general modern firearm and muzzleloader seasons in this unit. Elk are not currently abundant enough to warrant a survey effort in District 6, but observations suggest numbers continue to increase in GMU 204 and improve harvest opportunity accordingly. Even so, harvest remains modest with 26 animals taken in 2022.

For specific harvest information see the [District 6 General Season Elk Harvest - 2022](#).

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

GMU 204 is the only GMU in District 6 with a significant number of elk. Within this unit, elk tend to be most numerous in the area from Havillah north through the Molson and the Chesaw Wildlife Area; the Waconda Summit / Mount Annie area, and USFS lands bordering the Colville Reservation. In the rest of the district, finding elk is extremely difficult unless you have up-to-date knowledge on one of the few small bands of elk that travel in and out of the western portion of the county.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

District 6 supports one of the largest migratory mule deer herds in the state, and Okanogan County has long been prized by hunters for its mule deer hunting opportunity. The district also supports significant numbers of white-tailed deer, particularly in GMUs 204 and 215. The current District 6 deer management objective is to grow the white-tailed deer herd following recent declines due to drought, fire, disease, and harsh winter weather.



Post-season fawn:doe ratios (productivity) this past fall fell noticeably following extreme temperatures, drought, and wildfires during summer 2021. In addition, overwinter fawn survivorship (recruitment) fell below the long-term average the past two winters, particularly during the winter of 2022-23. These survey results indicate the herd has likely undergone a modest decline the past two years. Fortunately, the winter range has recovered significantly since the 2014-15 fires and all wildfire scars on the district are producing good summer forage. As a result, the population is poised to recover nicely in the absence of extreme drought or harsh winters.

Blue tongue and epizootic hemorrhagic disease were not documented in 2022 and have not been documented in 2023 as of mid-summer.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Slightly lower-than-average estimated fawn recruitment in 2022 likely means a modest decrease in 2.5-year-old bucks in 2023. Conversely, last December's observed mule deer buck:doe ratio of 29:100 indicates a good chance to encounter older bucks this season. Overall, total general season harvest and success rates are anticipated to be a little below the five-year averages, but the average age of harvested animals may be up slightly.

Summer temperatures this year have been only modestly above average, but for the most part it has been quite dry including in the high country. This pattern is expected to continue between now and the general seasons. By fall, animals may be more concentrated up high around areas that retain green forage, similar to other dry years.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

All units in District 6 support significant numbers of deer and large blocks of accessible public land, offering good to excellent deer hunting opportunity. Mule deer are abundant throughout the county, with the highest densities in the western two-thirds of the district.

Overall, white-tailed deer are less numerous than mule deer in Okanogan County, and in contrast to mule deer, white-tailed deer abundance generally increases as you move east in the district. The largest population is in GMU 204, where white-tailed deer comprise about half of the overall deer population. Although white-tailed deer numbers are less abundant in the western portion of the district, you can still find them in most drainages up to mid-elevations, particularly those with significant riparian vegetation. The highest concentrations in this area are in the Sinlahekin Valley and surrounding drainages. In many areas west of GMU 204 and outside of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, white-tailed deer frequent private lands. Prospective hunters wishing to target white-tailed deer may want to seek permission before hunting season to access private land.

Hunters harvested 1,882 deer (1,690 bucks, 192 antlerless) in District 6 during the 2022 general seasons. This total is down from last year and a little below the five-year average of 2,096. Similarly, general season success rates dipped noticeably across all weapon types. The success breakdown across all GMUs by weapon is as follows: Modern 13 %, Muzzleloader 17 %, Archery 23 %, and Multiple 22%. As expected, GMU 204 (the district's largest unit) yielded the greatest overall general season harvest of 705 deer. In the western portion of District 6, GMU 215 produced the most harvest with 271 deer.

For specific harvest information, please visit [District 6 2022 General Season Deer Harvest](#) [District 6 2022 Special Permit Harvest](#)

Maps for specific GMUs can be found on WDFW's [Game Management Units \(GMUs\) webpage](#) The [WDFW Hunt Planner](#) is an interactive tool that allows hunters to create a customize map.

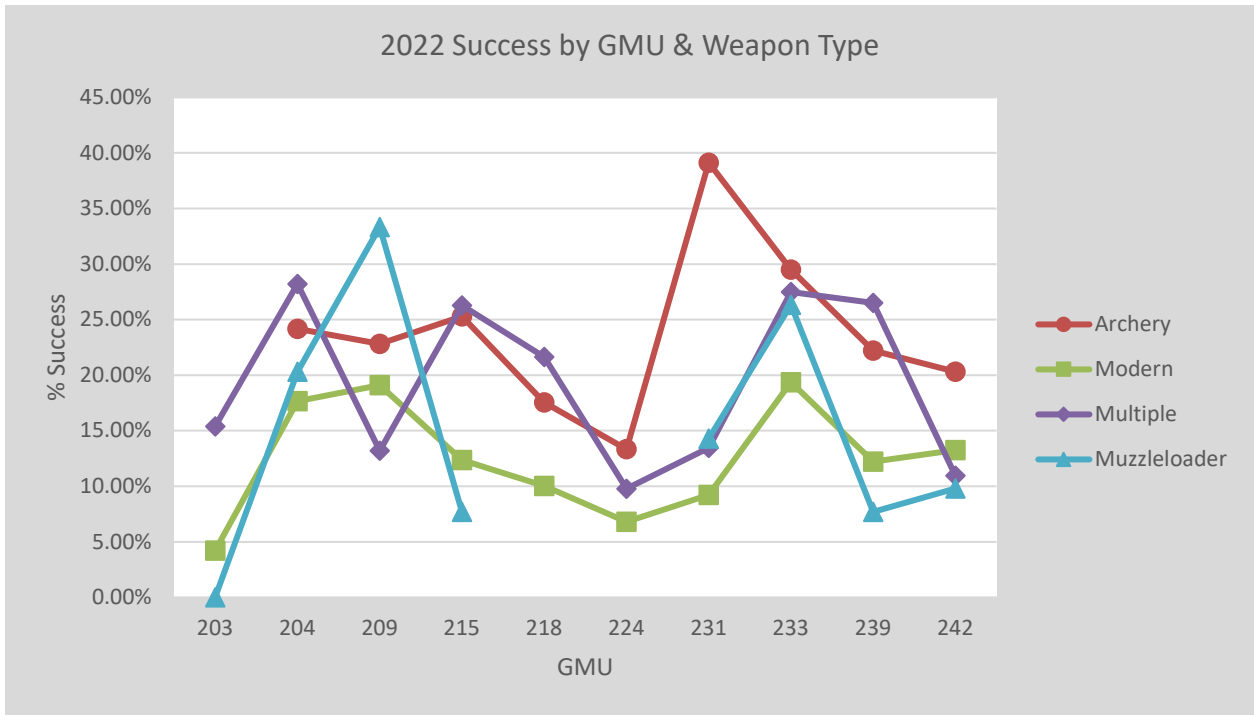


Figure 2. District 6 2022 general season hunter success by weapon type and GMU

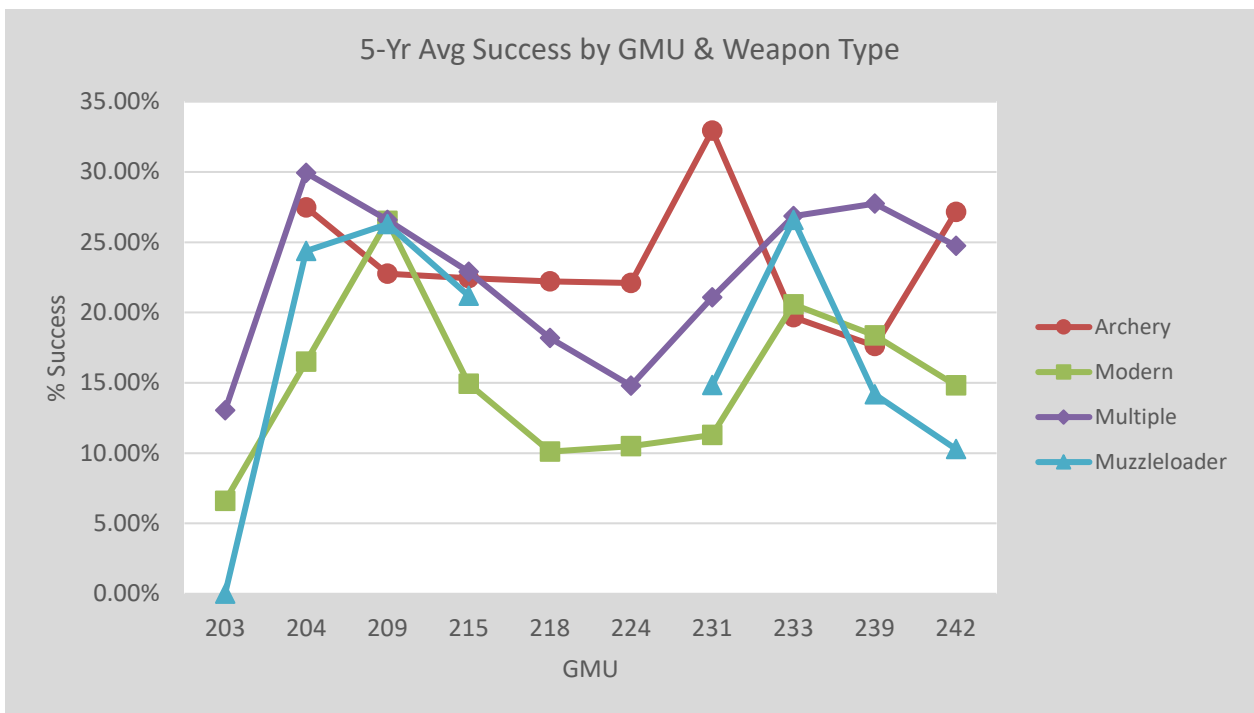


Figure 3. District 6 5-year average general season hunter success by weapon type and GMU

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT MULE DEER

During the early general seasons, deer will generally be widely distributed on the landscape and not yet concentrated in migration areas or on the winter range. Mature bucks are often at high elevations in remote locations, particularly if succulent vegetation is available. Many of the burn scars from wildfires since 2001 are producing high-quality summer forage, especially at middle and upper elevations. Hunters have high probability of finding significant deer activity in these areas. Although mule deer will use a variety of habitat types, they will often forage well into open environments, particularly at dawn and dusk. As a result, they can often be glassed and stalked from a considerable distance.

During the high hunt, deer will still be spread across the landscape and are found in good numbers throughout the Pasayten Wilderness all the way to the tree line. At this time of year bucks are often more concerned with security than forage, and will often bed in tree clumps with commanding views. Hunters on foot can find easier access to higher, more open country via the Harts Pass and Iron Gate trailheads at the western and eastern ends of the Wilderness, respectively. For those with horses, the Andrews Creek and Billy Goat trailheads offer access to good deer terrain further in.

Does are spread throughout the district during the general season, so youth, senior, and disabled hunters holding antlerless tags should be able to find antlerless animals anywhere they have legal access.

During the late permit seasons, most deer will move to winter range areas at lower elevations for the breeding season, often on more southern-facing slopes. In District 6, there is likelihood of high deer numbers at WDFW wildlife areas and immediately adjacent federal lands in late fall. In years with lesser snowfall, some mature bucks may linger at higher elevations. In exceptionally mild years, hunters may have to travel a bit higher than usual to find deer concentrations.

GMU-specific recommendations for late mule deer permit holders:

GMU 215: Look for deer on south-facing slopes in the Toats Coulee drainage, open portions of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and south-facing slopes of the major drainages to the west of the Sinlahekin, including Cecil, Sarsapkin, and Sinlahekin creeks and their tributaries.

GMU 218: The Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and the Cub Creek, Buck Lake, and Lower Boulder Creek area of the Okanogan National Forest often have late season concentrations of mule deer.

GMU 224: Common locations for mule deer include portions of the Methow Wildlife Area and adjacent Okanogan National Forest lands in the southern portion of the unit. This includes more open habitat in drainages such as Pearygin, Ramsay, Bear, Blue Buck, Beaver, and Frazier creeks.

GMU 231: Check out the Big Buck portion of the MWA, as well as the Virginia Ridge, Thompson Ridge, and Little Bridge Creek areas of the Okanogan National Forest.

GMU 233: The main unit and Pogue Mountain Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, the Carter Mountain Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and public land in the Salmon Creek Drainage are good places to start.

GMU 239: The Texas Creek Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, along with the adjacent Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land, offer good opportunities. Upper portions of Finley, Benson, and Texas creeks on the Okanogan National Forest are also worth a look.

GMU 242: Look for deer on the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and south-facing slopes on public land in the Libby Creek and Gold Creek drainages.

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT WHITE-TAILED DEER

White-tailed deer in Okanogan County typically migrate less than mule deer and generally favor brushier country with denser cover at lower and middle elevations. Look for white-tailed deer along stream drainages and in other areas where riparian vegetation or thick cover are adjacent. Like mule deer, white-tailed deer are most active at dawn and dusk, but white-tailed deer often won't venture as far into larger openings unless under the cover of darkness. Look for white-tailed deer in edge habitats where denser cover abruptly transitions into more open meadows. Many white-tailed deer hunters will wait patiently at a stationary position along an obvious game trail or the forest edge, often employing the use of a blind or tree stand.



White-tailed deer

During the late permit season, some white-tailed deer summering at modest elevations will move a little way downslope, but most will be in the same areas where they spent the summer.

GMU-specific recommendations for late permit holders and late archery season in the western portion of the district:

GMU 215: White-tailed deer are abundant on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.

GMU 218: Look for deer in the Eight-mile drainage, along the Chewuch River, and in the lower half of the Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area (despite the open habitat).

GMU 224: Brushier areas along Bear Creek, Upper Beaver Creek and its tributaries, and basin drained by the West Fork Salmon Creek west of Conconully are promising locations.

GMU 231: Good possibilities include the huntable portion of the Big Valley Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area, and the portion of the unit in the Twisp River Valley (north of the Twisp River Road). White-tailed deer can sometimes be encountered on the south slopes of the Big Buck Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area as they move uphill off private land.

GMU 233: Despite the open terrain, the Happy Hill area of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area is productive, along with the Buzzard Lake Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 239: White-tailed deer can be found on Okanogan National Forest land in the South Summit area between Loup Pass and Leecher Mountain and in wetter areas in the western portion of the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 242: Productive areas include the brushy areas along the river and in the northern half of the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area, as well as the valley bottom of the Twisp River drainage. Public land along Libby and Gold creeks is also a possibility.

Antlerless white-tailed deer permit holders should look for deer in the same areas mentioned above, with the added expectation of a few more deer in the higher reaches of areas like the Twisp River and Eight-mile drainages than might be expected during the late season.

DEER AREAS

Hunters with second deer permits in Deer Areas 2012 – 2016 should remember that those permits are good **only on private land**. Permit holders are responsible for contacting private landowners to secure hunting access.

BLACK BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears are reasonably abundant and well-distributed throughout District 6 and are managed for sustainable harvest and diverse age structure. The local black bear population and associated harvest appeared to be relatively stable through 2018. In 2019, the bag limit was raised to two bears in eastern Washington. Since this change, harvest has increased by an average of 32% in District 6 as a whole and by roughly 45% in the western two-thirds of the district. Recent data from western Okanogan County estimated black bear densities (including cubs) to be about 22 bears per 100 square kilometers; about average for eastern Washington. Densities in GMU 204 in the eastern third of the district are suspected to be somewhat higher, and WDFW plans to launch a similar density survey effort there next spring.

For hunters pursuing black bear in the northern portion of the Washington Cascades, it is critical to be able to positively identify bear species, as endangered grizzly bears could potentially be seen in this area. WDFW's website features some interactive training materials on how to tell the difference between black and grizzly bears. View the Interactive Bear Identification Program and take the Bear Identification Test on [WDFW's website](#).



Cinnamon-phase black bear

WHICH GMU SHOULD BEAR HUNTERS HUNT?

All GMUs in the Okanogan District provide good black bear hunting opportunities. In 2022, the success rate (11.6 %) in the Okanogan portion of Bear Management Unit (BMU) 5 rose noticeably along with an almost 50% increase in harvest. These increases were likely the result of increased harvest vulnerability as bears wandered widely in search of food during a particularly bad berry year. By contrast, both the harvest and the success rate fell modestly in GMU 204 in the Northeastern BMU(7) last year.

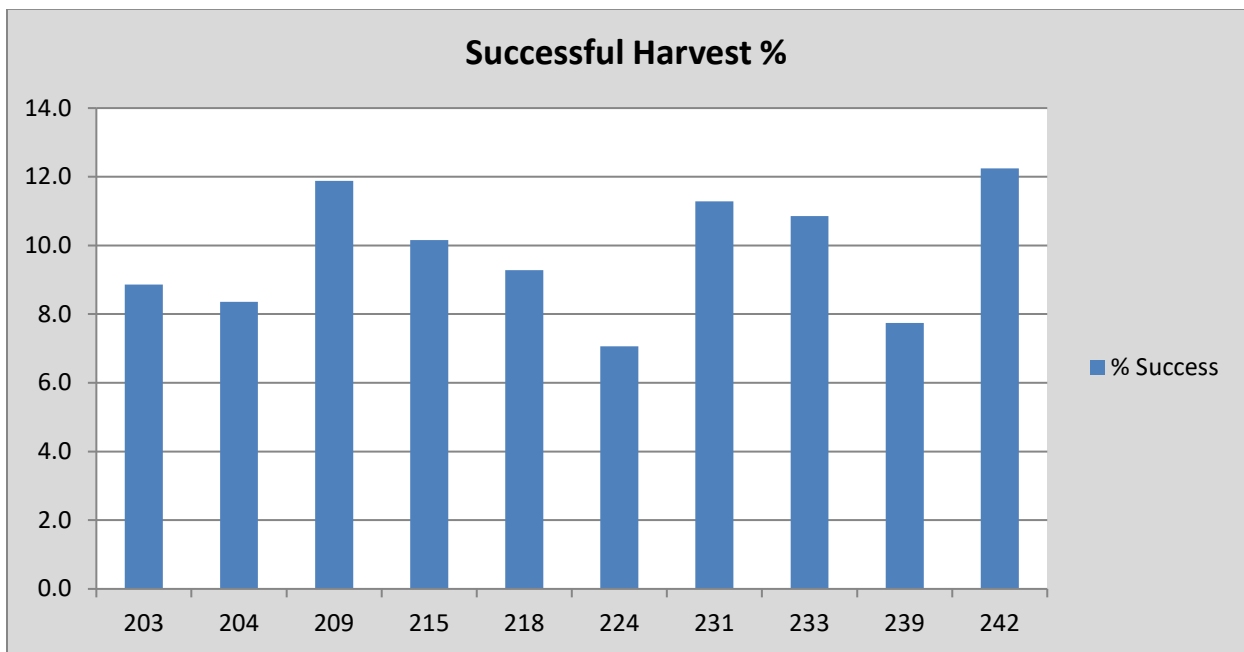


Figure 4. Okanogan District 5-year average black bear harvest success rates by GMU

For specific harvest information, visit [BBMU 5 2022 Black Bear Harvest](#) and [BBMU 7 2022 Black Bear Harvest](#).

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

At the beginning of black bear season, animals are likely to be found at middle elevations in areas where berries are peaking. As the season progresses, expect bears to follow the ripening berries to higher elevations. Most berry crops appear to be robust this year. An exception may be a lack of huckleberries at high elevations near the Cascade Crest in some locations. As we move later into fall, animals will range over a wider gradient to take advantage of a variety of late-season food sources.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

The District 6 cougar population is healthy and dispersed throughout the landscape. In the Okanogan District, cougars are managed by a harvest guideline at the scale of one or two GMUs to better promote stable population structure and high-quality sustainable harvest, while also minimizing human-cougar conflicts.



Cougars follow the deer herds, which means they will be spread throughout the district through late October and concentrate more at lower elevations as deer move to winter range. Much cougar foraging activity takes place at night, so the best opportunities to spot the cats on the move are at dawn and dusk.

WHICH GMU SHOULD COUGAR HUNTERS HUNT?

All Okanogan District GMUs support cougars and are open to hunting. After Jan. 1, individual Population Management Units comprised of one or more GMUs close on short notice once the harvest guideline has been reached. Hunters are responsible for knowing if a unit is open or closed. This information is available via the WDFW hotline (1-866-364-4868) or [WDFW's website](#).

Last season, harvest in District 6 did not exceed the guideline in any PMU and control-related mortality was low. As a result, cougar numbers should be robust and hunting opportunities in District 6 should be good in 2022-23. See the five-year harvest summary table (Table 1) for more information.

PMU Hunt Area GMUs	Adult Harvest Guideline	2018-2019 Adult Harvest	2019-2020 Adult Harvest	2020-2021 Adult Harvest	2021-2022 Adult Harvest	2022-2023 Adult Harvest
203	4-5	0	0	0	0	0
204	6-8	8	4	4	3	3
209, 215	3-4	4	3	6	3	4
218, 231	4-5	2	0	1	0	1
224	2	2	0	0	0	0
233,239	4-5	4	2	2	0	3
242,243	5-6	5	3	2	1	2

Table 1. District 6 cougar harvest guidelines and 5-year harvest by GM

WATERFOWL

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Okanogan District offers modest waterfowl hunting opportunities as compared to many other areas of the state. The largest concentrations of birds occur at the southern edge of District 6, at the mouth of the Okanogan River and on the Columbia River. The main stem of the Okanogan and Upper Similkameen rivers and the larger lakes and potholes in the Okanogan Watershed are good secondary sites. Hunters can find good public river access at the Washburn Island Unit of the Wells Wildlife Area, the Driscoll-Eyhott Island Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.



From top: lesser Scaup pair and Canada geese

Water levels in smaller local potholes recovered somewhat following last winter's significant snowfall, but dry summer weather is now shrinking some quickly. River levels are currently running below normal, and the long-term forecast suggests this will be the case into the fall. Aside from water levels, waterfowl hunting opportunities are mostly dependent on the number of birds migrating from Canada and Alaska, and how long it takes before water on the district freezes.

2022 waterfowl harvest numbers will be made available on the WDFW [Game harvest reports webpage](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

The Okanogan supports robust populations of ruffed, dusky (blue), and spruce grouse within the forested areas of the district. Ruffed grouse are generally associated with deciduous tree cover at lower to middle elevations, particularly in riparian habitats. During the hunting season, dusky (blue) grouse are generally encountered in mid- to upper-elevation conifer forests, often moving to ridges as snow begins to accumulate. Spruce grouse are found in higher elevation conifer forests throughout the district on a year-round basis. Additional tips on hunting forest grouse can be found on WDFW's [Forest grouse hunting tips webpage](#).

Forest grouse populations (particularly dusky and spruce grouse) remain below historical norms within the boundaries of the many recent large wildfires within the district. These fires burned in some of the best and most densely occupied forest grouse habitat in the region. However, grouse habitat within the burns is improving annually. Some of the older burns, such as the Needles, Farewell, and 30-mile fires have been aggressively colonized by deciduous vegetation and could now support good ruffed grouse populations. The conifers, preferred for dusky and spruce grouse habitat, will take longer to recover, but the birds are beginning to use the habitat again in some portions of the Tripod fire area. Bird numbers outside of burned areas appear to be relatively stable, but fluctuate annually with the severity of winter and spring weather.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

For several upland bird species, the number of adults in breeding areas this spring and summer appears to have declined following the extended winter; however, the brood success of these birds looks good.

Last year's harvest figures are not currently available.



From left: female spruce grouse and male ruffed grouse.

PHEASANTS

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Pheasants occur at low densities and in a patchy distribution throughout the Okanogan watershed portion of District 6, with most harvested birds coming from pheasant release sites. This year, pheasants will again be released at the Bureau of Reclamation's Hegdal and Kline sites, and at the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. What little wild production exists within the county comes mostly from private land. Hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private property. Additional hunting tips for pheasants can be found on WDFW's [Pheasant hunting tips webpage](#).

Pheasant release sites are mapped in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Program Booklet](#). Hunters are reminded that nontoxic shot is required for **all** upland bird hunting on **all** pheasant release sites statewide.

2022 pheasant harvest numbers will be made available on the WDFW [Game harvest reports webpage](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.



Pheasant release – Photo by Jeff Heinlen

QUAIL

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Quail are locally abundant and widespread throughout the district's lower elevation shrubsteppe and open pine forest habitats. District 6 Wildlife Areas offer good access to quail habitat. For several upland bird species, the number of adults in breeding areas this spring and summer appears to have declined following the extended winter; however, the brood success of these birds looks good. Tips for hunting quail are available on WDFW's [Quail hunting tips webpage](#).

2022 quail harvest numbers will be made available on the WDFW [Game harvest reports webpage](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

TURKEYS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The fall turkey season in District 6 is now a general season opportunity in all GMUs from Sept. 1 through Dec. 31. Turkey numbers are highest in GMUs 204, 215, and 239, but all GMUs except 203 offer good opportunities. Hunters can find turkeys in scattered groups throughout the district where they often concentrate on private land near agriculture areas later in the fall. Prospective hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private land. Hunters harvested 220 birds during the general fall season in North Central Washington. Both the harvest number and the 31% success rate were similar to the previous season.

For specific harvest information visit [2022 Statewide Turkey Harvest by Management Unit.](#)



Wild turkeys

CHUKAR AND HUNGARIAN (GRAY) PARTRIDGE

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

In general, Hungarian partridge populations are widely distributed and locally abundant throughout the district's shrubsteppe habitats. Hunters frequently encounter partridge on most all wildlife area units in the district. Scattered groups of chukar can be found in rocky areas in lower elevations of District 6. The steep hills along the Similkameen River in the north part of the Okanogan Valley and the rocky areas of the Pateros and Indian Dan Wildlife Areas typically hold good numbers of birds. See tips for hunting chukar and Hungarian partridge by visiting [Hungarian partridge hunting tips](#) and [Chukar hunting tips](#).



Hungarian Partridge

For several upland bird species, the number of adults in breeding areas this spring and summer appears to have declined following the extended winter; however, the brood success of these birds looks good.

2022 partridge and chukar harvest numbers will be made available on the WDFW [Game harvest reports webpage](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

DOVE

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Look for doves in planted food crops in the Sinlahekin and at lower elevations on other public lands. With warmer fall temps becoming the norm, doves now frequently stay in District 6 well past the Sept. 1 opener.

2022 dove harvest numbers will be made available on the WDFW [Game harvest reports webpage](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.



Mourning dove on the Methow Wildlife Area

2023



EMILY JEFFREYS, District Wildlife Biologist
JOHNNA EILERS, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist



Photo by Cameron Hein

DISTRICT 7 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Chelan and Douglas counties

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DISTRICT 7 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Divided by the Columbia River and comprised of Chelan and Douglas counties, WDFW's District 7 is at the heart of Washington. From the crest of the Cascade Range to the shrubsteppe of the Columbia Basin, the Wenatchee District offers an incredibly diverse array of habitats and hunting opportunities. Hunters in District 7 have access to a variety of small and big game species, with hunting opportunities ranging from agricultural fields and sagebrush to alpine basins tucked away deep in the wilderness.

Douglas County, the eastern half of the district, is a plateau of shrubsteppe, farmlands, and deep basalt coulees. Ownership is mostly private, but Douglas County offers excellent opportunities to hunt a variety of species. Hunters seeking pheasant, quail, doves, gray partridge, chukar, and mule deer will find many areas to hunt across the county. The game management units (GMUs) in Douglas County are 248 (Big Bend), 254 (Saint Andrews), 260 (Foster Creek), 262 (Withrow), 266 (Badger), and 269 (Moses Coulee).

Chelan County descends approximately 40 miles from a high point of 9,500-feet atop the Cascade crest at its western boundary down to a low elevation of 800-feet along its eastern border, the Columbia River. Chelan County encompasses five mountain ranges (Sawtooth, Chelan, Entiat, Chiwaukum, and Wenatchee), providing hunters with virtually unlimited terrain.

Home to some of the best mule deer and bighorn sheep hunting in the state, Chelan County is a destination for many hunters. With its large public land base, the county offers almost unlimited opportunities to find a place of your own. Four of the state's six high deer hunt wilderness areas are in Chelan County, as well as three bighorn sheep herds. GMUs in Chelan County are 243 (Manson), 244 (Clark), 245 (Chiwawa), 246 (Slide Ridge), 247 (Entiat), 249 (Alpine), 250 (Swakane), and 251 (Mission).

CURRENT SPECIES STATUS

Big game: Almost all the deer harvested in District 7 are mule deer, with very few white-tailed deer. Black-tailed deer can also be found in Chelan County along the Cascade crest, and mule deer here share more black-tailed genes than hunters realize. Elk are present primarily along the southern edge of Chelan County. These elk represent the northern extension of the Colockum elk herd, centered to the south in Kittitas County. Black bears roam across almost all habitats in Chelan County. Their densities are higher in the wetter timbered habitats in western Chelan County and near the crest of the Cascades, and at somewhat lower densities in drier habitats farther east. Hunters harvest few black bears in Douglas County, but they do occur in small numbers in brush-filled riparian draws along the Columbia River and other drainages. Cougars occupy all habitats where deer and elk are found. While most cougars are harvested during deer and elk seasons, the cougar harvest typically does not meet the harvest guidelines and are not over harvested. Winter conditions and fresh snow determine the ease or difficulty of a dedicated cougar hunt. There are three California bighorn sheep herds in the district, the Swakane, Chelan Butte, and Manson herds. The world record California bighorn sheep came

out of the Swakane herd in Chelan County in 2010, and the Chelan Butte herd has become known for producing quality California bighorn rams. Mountain goats occupy some of the high elevation habitat in Chelan County, but there are no known herds of sufficient size to allow for hunting. As such, there are currently no mountain goat hunting opportunities in District 7.

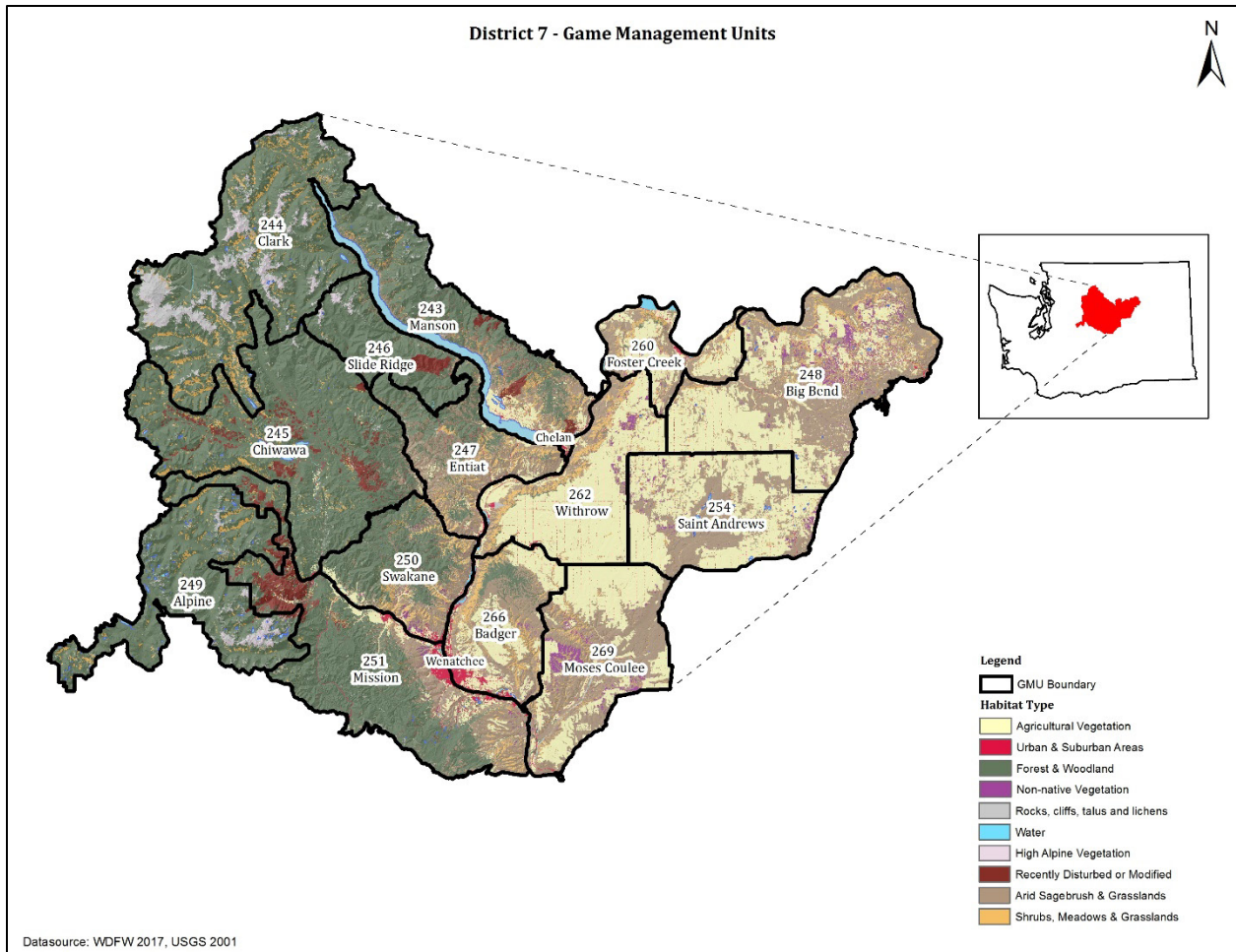
Upland birds: Upland bird hunting opportunities are available across the district. Turkey hunting occurs mainly in Chelan County, but numbers are growing in northern Douglas County, and some newly acquired wildlife areas are expanding opportunities. Hunttable grouse species are found in forested environments in both counties. Hunters can pursue sooty, dusky, spruce, and ruffed grouse in different parts of the district. The three other grouse species found on the district (greater sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, and white-tailed ptarmigan) are protected species in Washington and cannot be hunted. Chukar and partridge require hunters to climb steep ridgelines and traverse rocky slopes to bag their quarry. Valley quail, as their name suggests, prefer gentler terrain, and usually stay in greater numbers near agricultural areas. Gray partridge, or Huns, are found primarily in Douglas County. Doves are hunted in both counties, but most hunters find success is in Douglas County. There are two ring-necked pheasant release sites in Chelan County at the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife areas.

Small game: Coyotes are the most widely adaptable species in Washington, and as such, can be found across District 7 and beyond. Bobcats are another widely distributed species hunted across a wide range of habitats, from high mountains to dry shrubsteppe. Raccoons are almost everywhere, except for the highest peaks and the driest desert. Crows are another small game species available, and rarely pursued. Rabbits and hares offer hunting opportunity throughout the district, with snowshoe hares at higher elevations (mainly in Chelan County) and cottontail rabbits in a variety of habitats in both Douglas and Chelan counties.

Waterfowl: There are opportunities for duck and geese hunting in different portions of the district. The bulk of waterfowl hunting in District 7 takes place along the Columbia River, with ducks being the primary focus. Goose hunts are mainly in Douglas County, but opportunities are also available along the Columbia River.

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS

The 14 Game Management Units (GMUs) in District 7 run from the crest of the Cascade Range to Moses Coulee and Banks Lake. Units in western and central Chelan County are high, rugged, and timbered. Eastern Chelan County units grade from mid-to-high elevation forested terrain down into low elevation dry habitat that provides mule deer winter range. The eastern half of the district lies above the Columbia River and encompasses six GMUs in Douglas County. Shrubsteppe and grasslands comprise native habitat in Douglas County and agricultural lands offer some of the best upland bird opportunities in the district.



District 7 Game Management Units

Each GMU is unique and offers a different experience for hunters. GMUs 244 and 249, for example, are legally designated Wilderness Areas administered by the U. S. Forest Service (USFS). There are no roads within these Wilderness Areas and no mechanized vehicles, including bicycles, are allowed for any type of recreation. In turn, these two GMUs offer exceptional hunting experiences for those willing to go by foot or horse. By contrast, GMU 262 is the heart of Douglas County's wheat production and provides great upland bird hunting and open country mule deer hunting where access is granted. GMU 269 offers the most dramatic coulee habitat in the district with stunning landscapes and a variety of hunting opportunities. GMU 260 is in the center of the district's rangeland and features big ranches and big views.

Once you have a GMU in mind, refine your scouting efforts by using the websites below to identify specific hunt areas, WDFW Wildlife Areas, and private lands offering hunting.

- [Printable maps of each GMU](#) with its respective land ownership composition and roads
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#)
- The [Public Lands website](#) offers multiple ways to search for and identify public lands in Washington
- The [WDFW Hunt Planner Web Map](#) allows you to select any GMU to see what hunting opportunities are available there and when the seasons run
- The [Washington Department of Natural Resources](#) offers LIDAR images if you need detailed topographic information

WILDFIRE

At the time of this report, several small brush fires have occurred in Chelan County in 2023, near the city of Wenatchee. On July 20, 2023, a wildfire near Badger mountain burned 475 acres but was quickly contained.

Watch for wildfire condition updates in the monthly Weekender hunting reports, WDFW news releases, or WDFW social media posts. Access restrictions can be put in place on short notice in the event of an emergency, so make sure to check fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. There are multiple websites where you can check regional and statewide wildfire updates:

RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AGENCY WEBSITES

- [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#)
- [Washington Department of Natural Resources](#)
- [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest](#)
- [Bureau of Land Management](#)
- [Chelan County](#)
- [Douglas County](#)

FIRE MONITORING WEBSITES

Visit these sites to see what wildfires are active near your favorite hunting spots.

- [Inciweb](#)
- [National Fire Map](#)
- [WA Smoke Blog](#)

Fire is a natural part of the ecosystem in eastern Washington and a common occurrence in District 7, affecting both forested and shrubsteppe habitats. However, fires have increased dramatically in frequency, severity, and size over the past decade. Summer and fall are our primary fire seasons and this reoccurring pattern of fire on dry landscapes has shaped the tree, shrub, and grass species that provide habitat for the game we hunt.

2022 WILDFIRES

The 2022 wildfire season was once again an active one, with multiple shrubsteppe and forest fires occurring in Chelan and Douglas counties. Over 25,000 acres of habitat burned in District 7, a similar amount to what burned in 2021.

In late July 2022, the Stayman Flats fire began burning on the Chelan Butte wildlife area and burned 1,200 acres. This area is within the range of the Chelan Butte bighorn sheep herd and provides winter range for mule deer. The largest fire in District 7 in 2022 was the White

River/Irving Peak fire near Lake Wenatchee in GMU 245, which started in mid-August 2022 and continued until November 2022, burning 11,180 acres.

Table 1. Acres burned by wildfires in District 7 in year 2022.

County	2022 Fire Name	Acres Burned	GMU
Chelan	Stayman Flats	1,200	247
Chelan	White River Irving Peak	11,180	245
Chelan	Minnow Ridge	5,140	246 & 247
Douglas	Mohr	6,944	269
Douglas	Nilles	589	248

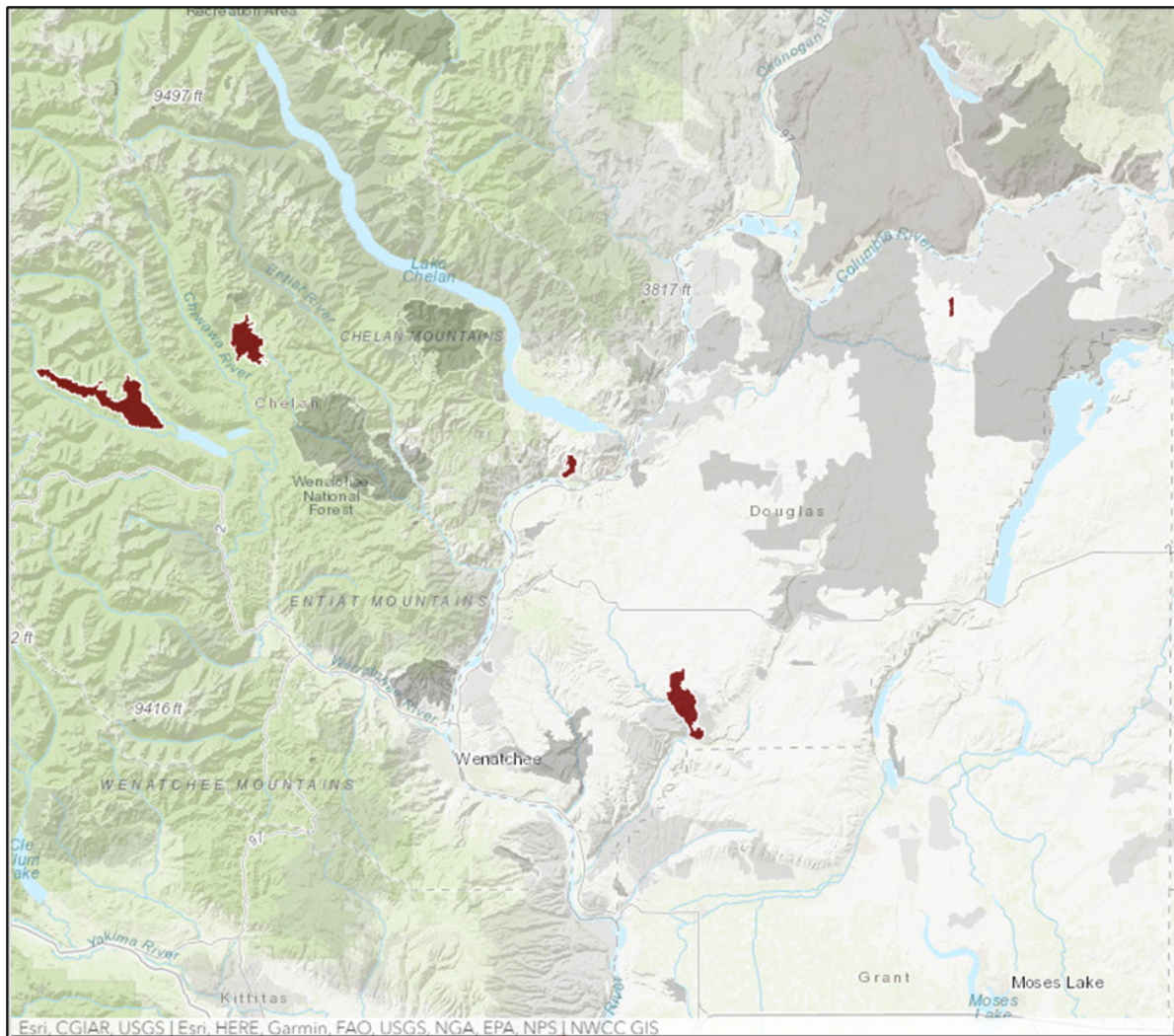


Figure A. Map of wildfire in Chelan and Douglas Counties during year 2022 (dark red). The grayscale layers are historic wildfires. Map collected from [NWCC :: Home \(nifc.gov\)](http://nwcc.nifc.gov)

2021 WILDFIRES

Central and eastern Washington experienced severe drought in 2021, with precipitation up to 50% below average in places. A record-setting heatwave developed in late June and lasted a couple of weeks, and temperatures remained above average throughout July.

The 2021 wildfire season started with the Batterman Road fire in early July, which burned more than 14,000 acres of GMU 266 (Badger) in the Badger Mountain area of Douglas County. In mid-July, the Red Apple fire rapidly burned through approximately 12,000 acres of the southern portion of GMU 250 (Swakane) in the foothills north of Wenatchee, burning public and private lands, including parts of the Swakane Unit of the Chelan Wildlife Area. This area is home to the Swakane bighorn sheep herd and provides important winter range for mule deer. In mid-August, the Twentyfive Mile fire began burning on the south shore of Lake Chelan near Twentyfive Mile Creek State Park and quickly expanded south and west of the area. This fire continued to burn through late September and eventually burned more than 22,000 acres. The Twentyfive Mile fire primarily impacted GMU 246 (Slide Ridge) but also reached into the far northwest portion of 247 (Entiat), with closures and reduced access due to safety hazards continuing into the general season and beyond.

2020 WILDFIRES

In September 2020, the Pearl Hill fire spread across 224,000 acres of shrubsteppe habitats in northern Douglas County. This impacted both upland and riparian habitats in parts of GMUs 260, 262, 254, and 248. Post-fire recovery and restoration in the burn area has been variable depending on burn severity, resources for active restoration, and precipitation. WDFW wildlife areas implemented habitat recovery efforts on units in GMUs 248, 254, and 260. Those efforts focused on weed suppression, seeding native grasses, rebuilding irrigation systems, installing erosion control materials, building fences, and planting woody vegetation in creeks. Partner organizations including Foster Creek Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Chelan – Douglas Land Trust, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have conducted similar efforts on private and other public lands. These efforts will continue in the coming years to the extent that current and additional funding allows. New riparian plantings and beaver dam analogs in East Foster Creek are designed to stabilize streambanks, help with soil deposition, and provide woody browse in the future.

The South Navarre Campground and surrounding trails on the north side of Lake Chelan have been reopened, but these areas sustained significant damage in the 2017 Uno Peak fire.

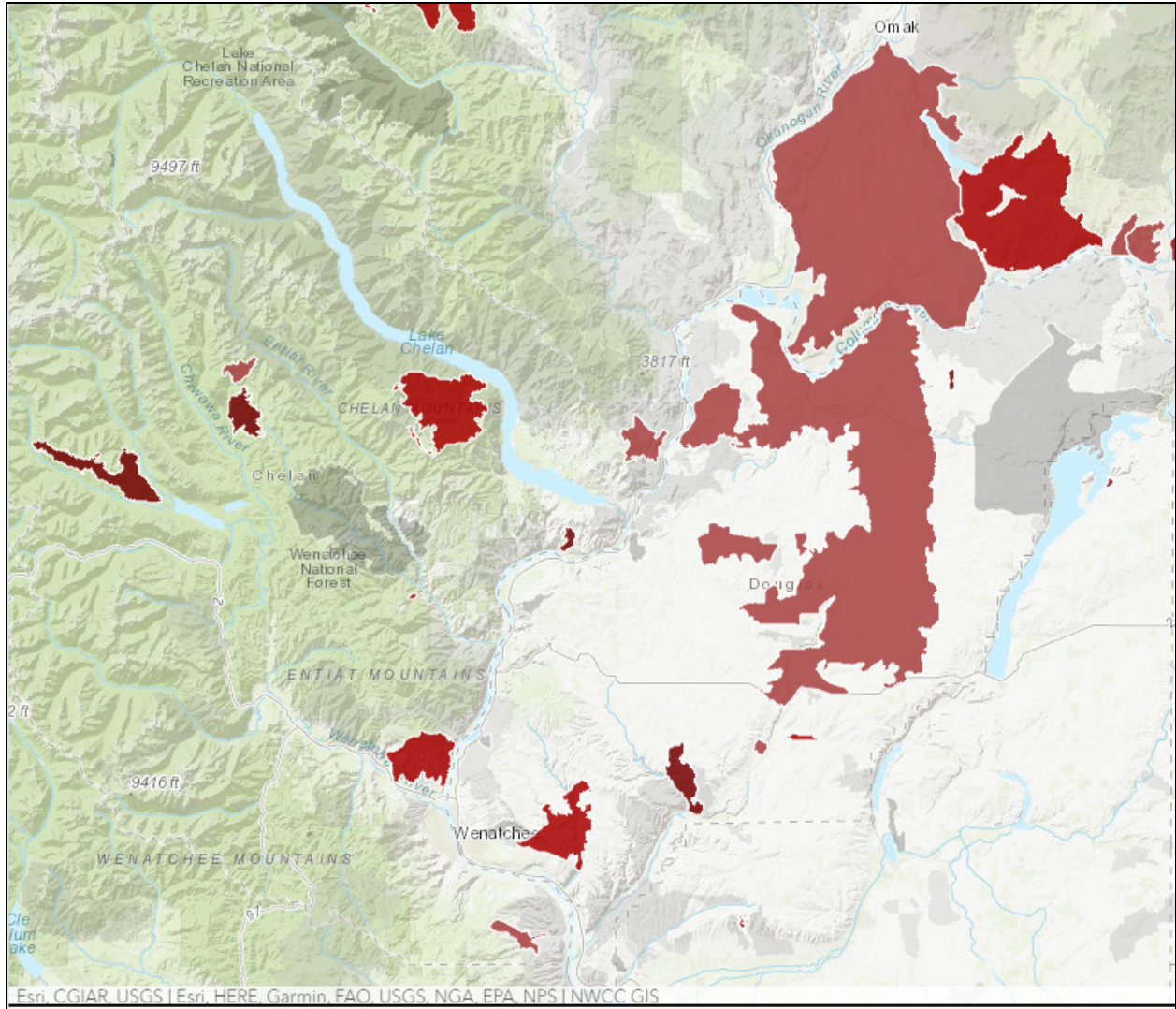


Figure B. Map of wildfires in Chelan and Douglas counties in years 2020 through 2022.

ELK



Photo by Pete Lopushinsky

GMU 251 (Mission) continues to offer the best elk hunting in the district. Most elk harvested in the Wenatchee District come from here, where the Colockum Herd reaches its northern range extension in southern Chelan County. In District 7, elk are known to reliably use Jumpoff Ridge, Tronsen Meadows, the Camas Meadows/Peshastin area, and areas throughout upper Mission Creek. Elk are also found loosely distributed through the southern half of GMU 249 (Alpine). In 2009, WDFW implemented “true spike” restrictions for most general season harvest opportunities. Opportunities to harvest a branched-antler bull are primarily through limited-entry hunts.

A few elk harvests are scattered across Douglas County each season, but that harvest is not consistent from year to year and elk are very scarce throughout the county. Liberal harvest seasons are in place in Douglas County to keep elk from establishing herds in the agriculture-dominated landscape where they can cause commercial crop damage.

Elk eat a wide range of forage including grasses and forbs in the summer months, incorporating shrubby browse as more palatable plants dry out. Areas where timber

harvest or wildfire has occurred can be excellent places to find elk, especially adjacent to creek drainages and intact timber stands. The disturbance stimulates the growth of elk's preferred forage. Cow elk are especially dependent on finding high-quality forage in the fall to prepare their bodies for pregnancy over the winter.

Elk in GMUs 245 through 250 occur at very low densities and in small, dispersed bands. Local hunters who live and work in the area are often the hunters are most successful harvesting these elk. GMU 249 comprises a large block of public land within the USFS Alpine Lakes Wilderness. While this GMU offers an opportunity for an over-the-counter archery tag for a branch-antlered bull, elk occur at relatively low densities here and occupy rugged terrain where hunters cannot use motorized vehicles. Hunters participating in the GMU 249 archery season are often surprised at the numbers of other hunters chasing elk.

There are opportunities for elk hunting throughout most of GMU 251. However, elk density is not very high and can vary across the unit. Hunters harvest elk across the GMU, with most of the elk hunting occurring between Blewett Pass to the west, Wenatchee to the east, and the mountainous and timbered habitat south of State Highway 2. The Mission Unit does have a significant number of private land, and hunters need to know property boundaries when hunting elk near private ownership.

Downloadable maps of WDFW Elk Areas in Chelan County, 2032 (Malaga), and 2033 (Peshastin) are available on [WDFW's website](#). The Malaga elk unit offers the greatest numbers of permits for antlerless elk, intending to reduce elk numbers within and along the boundary of the Stemilt Basin agricultural area.

In 2021, WDFW reinstated both antlered and antlerless hunts in the Peshastin Elk Area (EA 2033) as biologists and agricultural producers noted an increase in elk use in the area, prompting concerns about orchard damage. Elk tend to concentrate in orchards in the winter once sufficient snow has accumulated at higher elevations, driving elk to seek lower elevation food sources. The first two years of re-established Peshastin hunts have proven successful in providing a quality experience for hunters as well as keeping elk moving across the landscape and decreasing the time elk spent in any one orchard. In 2023/2024, 20 cow tags (mid-December through early February) and four any-bull tags (mid-February) are available for the Peshastin Elk Area. Access is highly restricted to private lands, so be sure to contact landowners early if you have drawn a permit for EA 2033. Permit holders should contact the Wenatchee District Office for additional information.

Several recent changes to elk general seasons in District 7 have resulted in increased opportunity for hunters since 2021. One notable change is that GMU 251 was opened to early and late general season archery elk hunts for spike bulls. This increase in archery opportunity was reflected in the 2021 harvest statistics, with an increase in the number of archery hunters as well as elk harvested by archers over the previous years. That same level of success was maintained in fall 2022.

Aside from a slump in the 2017 and 2018 seasons following the harsh winter conditions of 2016/2017, hunters typically harvest 40-55 elk under general seasons in Chelan County annually, and 45 were harvested in 2022 (Figures 1 and 2). Antlerless harvest varies year to year, with the focus placed on local elk to combat damage in the Malaga Elk Area. Most of the elk harvested come out of GMU 251 (Figure 6), with the remaining few harvested in GMUs 249, 245, and 244, and very small numbers coming inconsistently out of other GMUs. Although District 7 does not formally monitor the elk population, hunters and landowners alike report seeing increasing numbers of elk over the past several years, and the 2023 season should yield a harvest similar to the last few years.

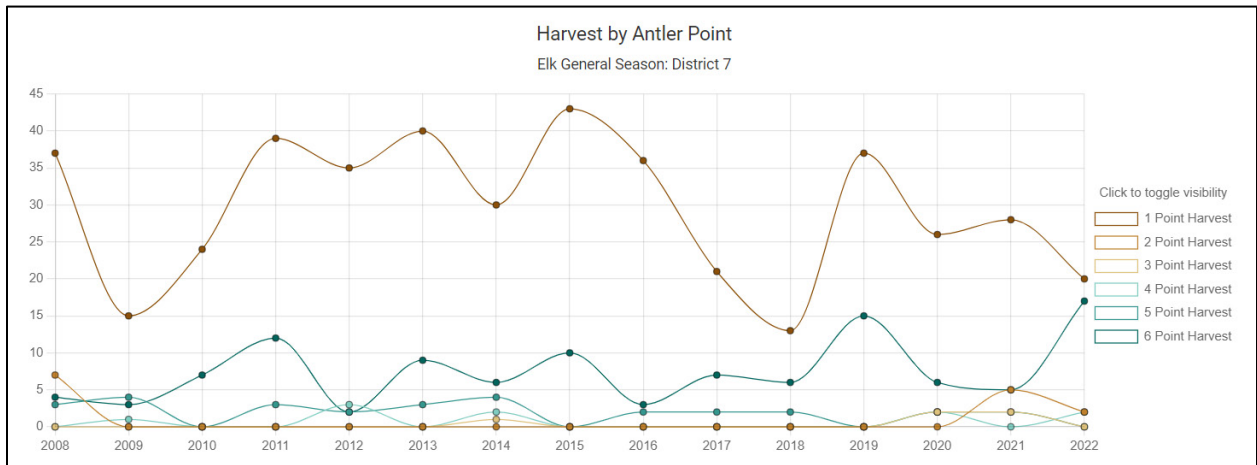


Figure 1. Total number of elk harvested by antler point during the general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

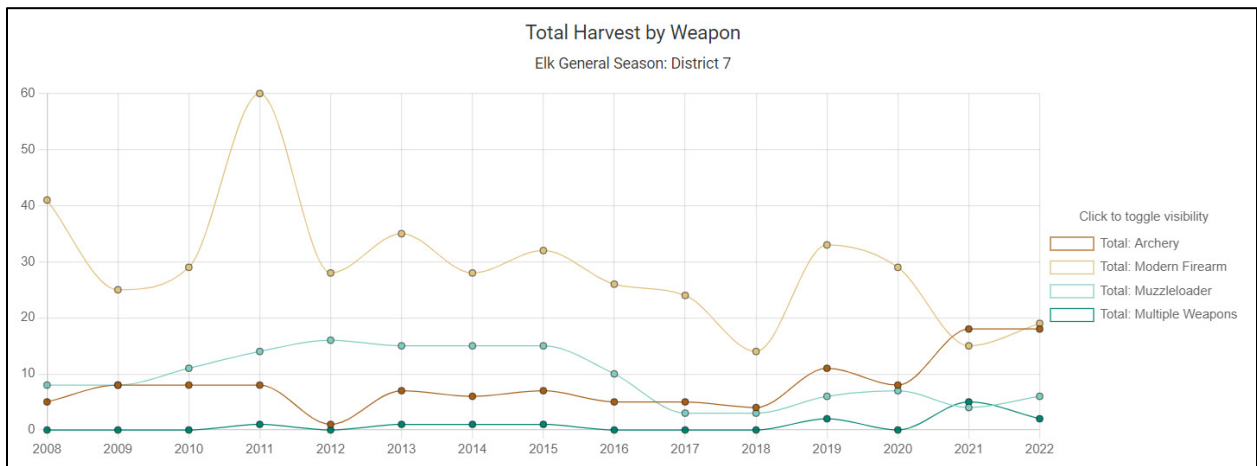


Figure 2. Total number of elk harvested by weapon type during the general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

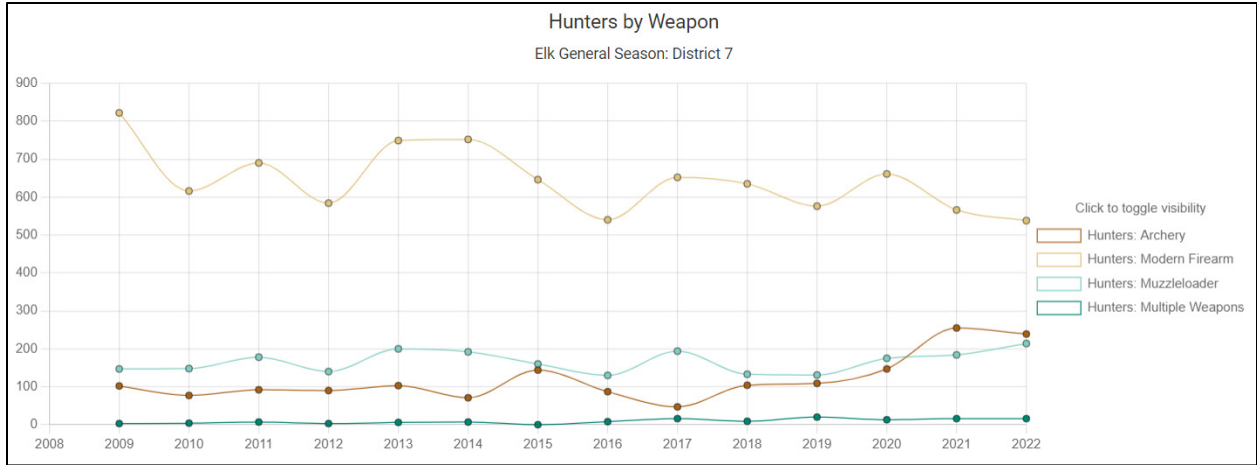


Figure 3. Number of general season elk hunters in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

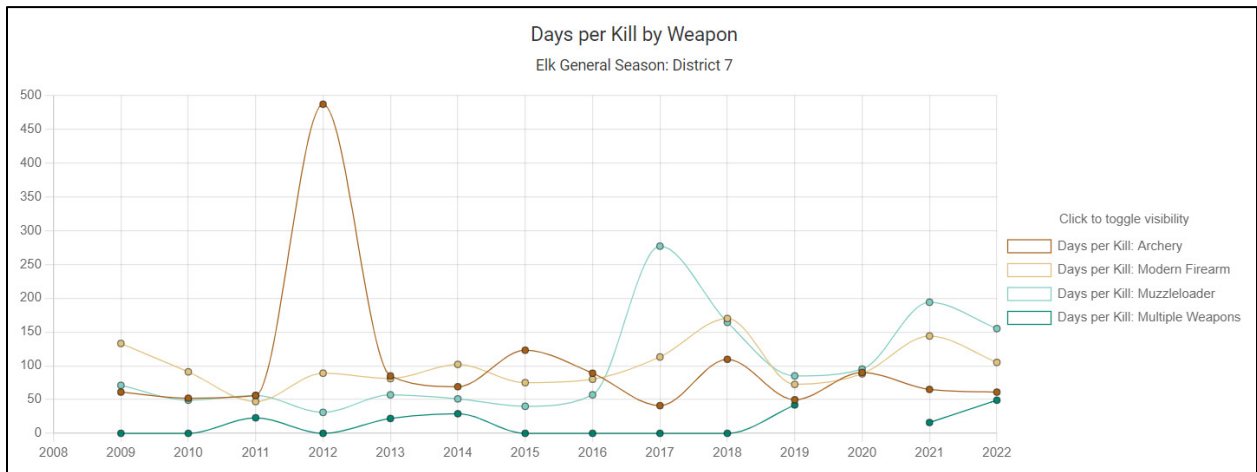


Figure 4. The number of days spent hunting per kill during elk general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

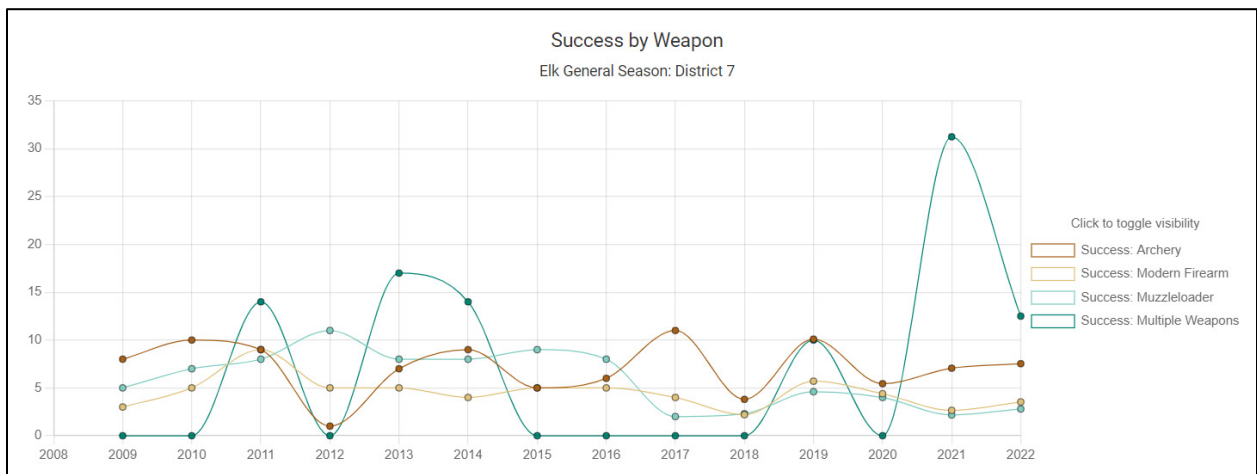


Figure 5. The percentage of successful hunters by weapon type for elk general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

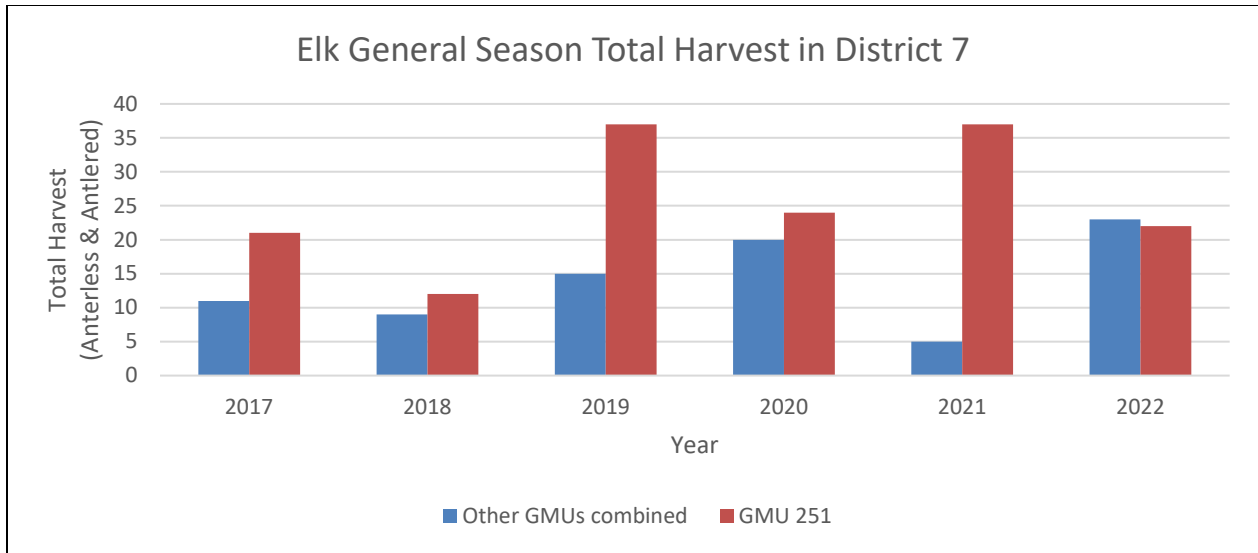


Figure 6. Snapshot of general season elk harvest illustrating the preeminence of GMU 251 for elk hunting in District 7.

EELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. WDFW diagnostic research from 2009 to 2014, in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate.

The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is found less frequently in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area. **TAHD has not been detected in the Colockum Herd or anywhere in District 7 at this time.** However, hunters are asked to be on the lookout for any signs of this disease.

If you harvest an elk with abnormal looking hooves (for example, overgrown or broken hoof claws or skin lesions) in eastern Washington, please report that harvest to your local WDFW regional office. TAHD appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. The hooves of any elk—young or old, male or female—can be affected by TAHD. Tests show TAHD is limited to animals’ hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat. Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk through the Department’s [online reporting form](#).

Additionally, anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires

before leaving the area. WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, see [WDFW's website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Regulations Pamphlet.

DEER



Photo by Kim Anderson

Mule deer hunting is the bread and butter of the Wenatchee District. While the district does support a few white-tailed deer, mule deer far outnumber them and dominate hunters' attention. Chelan County has become a destination hunt for many mule deer enthusiasts across Washington, with late season limited entry permits being highly prized. Within District 7, hunters can pursue deer across a range of habitats, including high alpine basins along the crest of the Cascades in Chelan County or expanses of sagebrush in Douglas County.

1,355 deer were harvested from Chelan and Douglas counties during the general season in 2022, an approximate 24% decrease from 2021's harvest of 1,800 deer (Figures 7 & 8). This number represents roughly 2/3 of the number of mule deer harvested in years 2019 and 2020. There are likely several factors contributing to last year's low general season harvest, including the unseasonably warm temperatures before and during the modern firearm season.

Approximately 85% of mule deer found within Chelan County (comprised of the Wenatchee Mountains and Chelan subherds of the East Slope Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone) are migratory and summer at higher elevations outside of the most popular GMUs (including Entiat and Swakane). Modern firearm hunters represent the largest portion of mule deer hunters by far, and hunters struggled to find deer in low to mid-elevations throughout Chelan County in 2022, as the heat and lack of snow at high elevations meant that bucks had no reason to head

to lower ground in October. As Figure 8 below illustrates, modern firearm harvest decreased substantially in 2022, whereas archery harvest remained stable and muzzleloader harvest declined modestly. Another, albeit smaller, impact to mule deer harvest numbers in District 7 is likely due to the number of modern firearm hunters decreasing for the second year in a row.

It's unknown whether a decline in overall mule deer abundance in Chelan County is another factor that contributed to last year's low general season harvest. Biologists are working to improve monitoring methods to answer this question and respond accordingly with appropriate management actions. That being said, biologists are more confident that a decline in mule deer abundance within the Douglas subherd of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone can at least partially explain last year's low harvest in Douglas County.

The Entiat (GMU 247) and Swakane (GMU 250) units in Chelan County and the Big Bend Unit (GMU 248) in Douglas County once again produced the most harvest of the District 7 GMUs in 2022 (Tables 2 & 3). Of these three units, Big Bend appears to be especially productive. This unit attracts significantly fewer hunters each year compared to other Chelan GMUs, but outpaces these in harvest numbers.

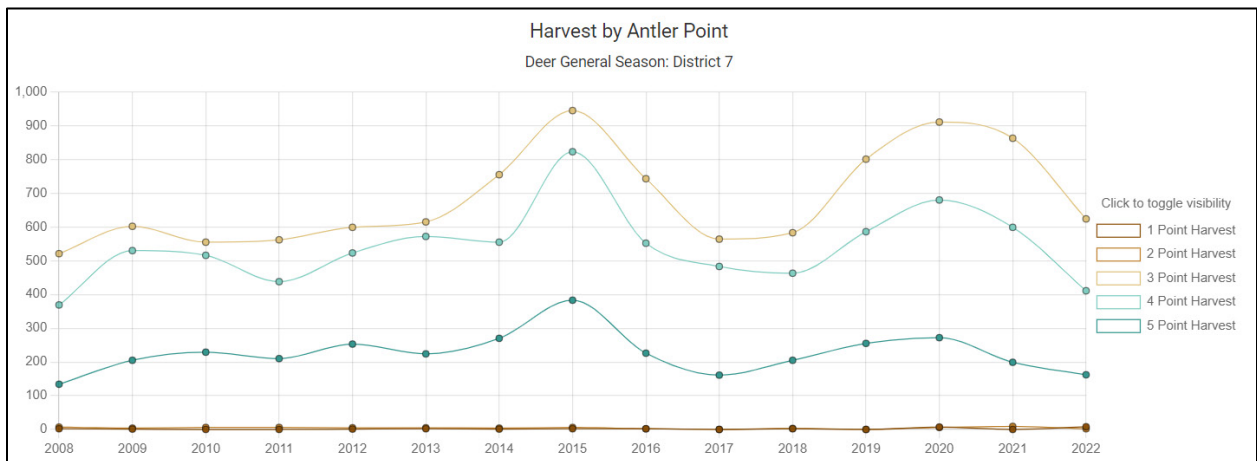


Figure 7. Total number of mule deer harvested by antler point in District 7 from 2008 to 2022.

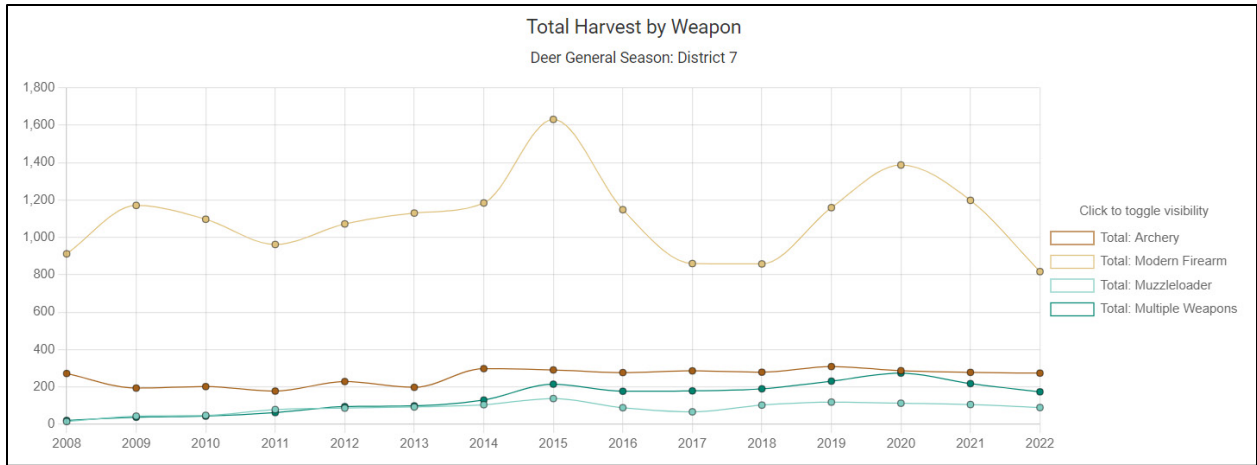


Figure 8. Total number of mule deer harvested by weapon type in District 7 from 2008 to 2022.

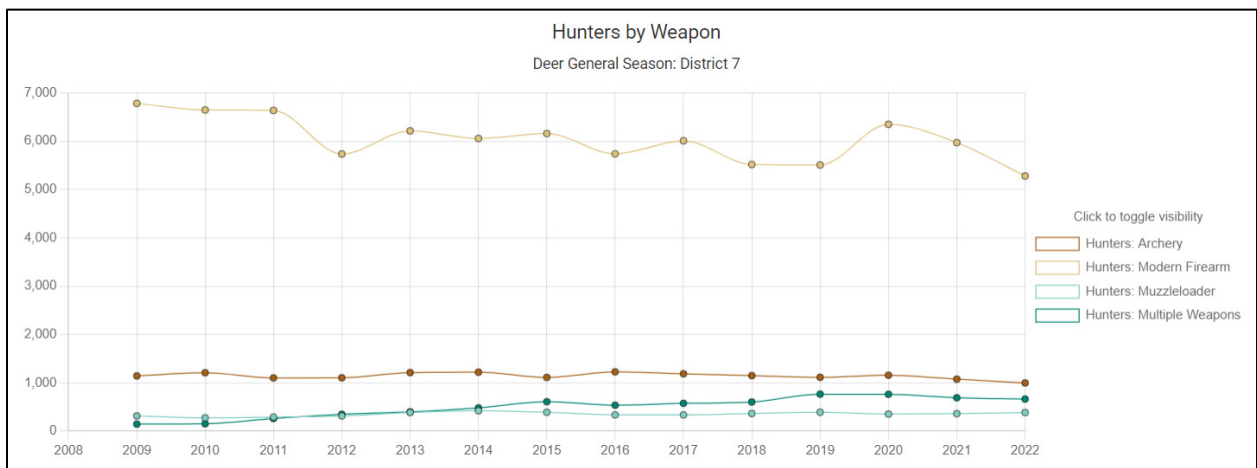


Figure 9. The number of hunters by weapon type for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

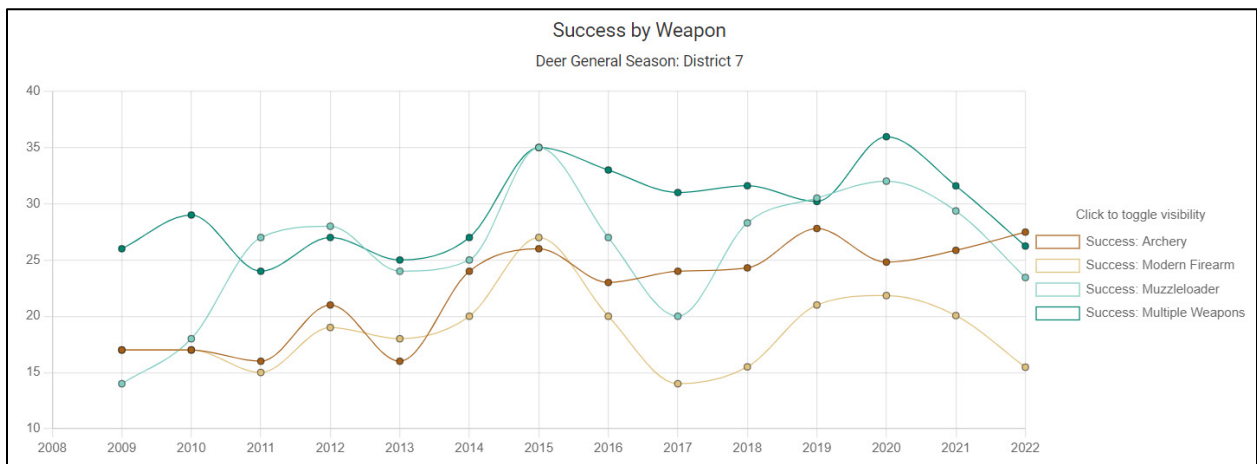


Figure 10. The percentage of harvest success by weapon type for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

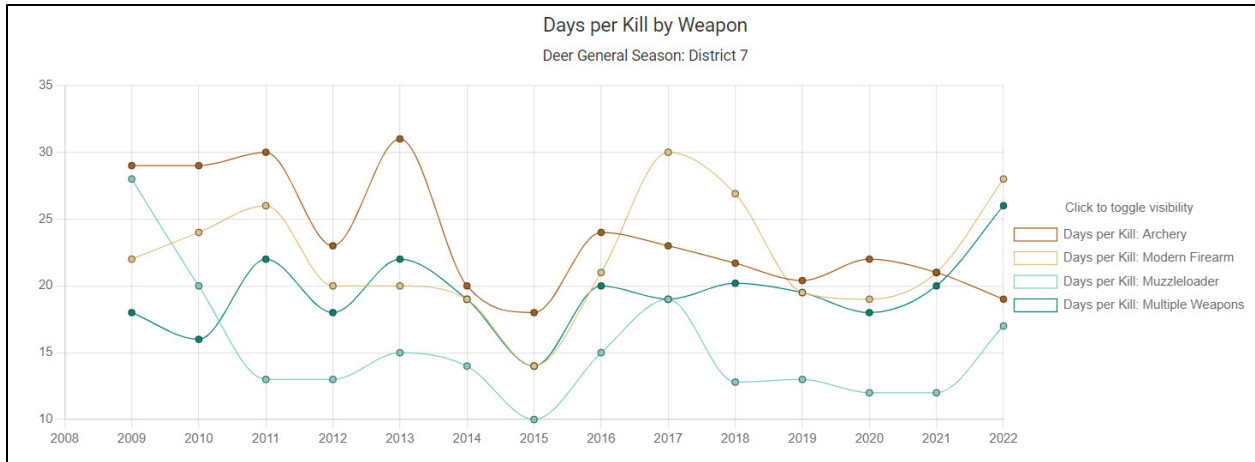


Figure 11. The number of days spent hunting per kill for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2022.

CHELAN COUNTY MULE DEER

The Chelan County portion of the district’s management goal 25 bucks per 100 does (minimum) post-season has been successful in providing hunters with opportunities for quality bucks over the last 10 years. After a two-year hiatus due to persistent inclement weather and safety concerns regarding COVID-19, aerial post-hunt population surveys of the Chelan subherd resumed in December 2021 and revealed an estimated buck:doe ratio of 24:100. This is a slight increase from the estimated buck:doe ratio of 23:100 obtained from aerial surveys in 2018, which was in turn a major increase from the previously estimated buck:doe ratio of 18:100. The 2021 post-hunt fawn:doe ratio was estimated at a robust 76:100.

No post-hunt aerial survey of the Chelan subherd was conducted in 2022 as resources were allocated towards a Douglas County subherd aerial survey. Another aerial survey of the Chelan subherd is planned for December 2023. Surveying mule deer in Chelan County is very difficult due to consistently poor winter flying weather, tree cover, and extremely limited winter road access. For this reason, biologists plan to test using remote game cameras to obtain sex and age ratios in fall 2023. During this pilot project, biologists will place 25 game cameras along known mule deer migration corridors used by the Wenatchee Mountains mule deer herd in time for 2023 fall migration. Data garnered from these cameras will be compared against ratios obtained from the December 2023 aerial survey.

The 2022 fire season was not extensive enough to displace significant numbers of deer, and the nature of general season hunts in Chelan County remains unchanged. Ultimately, fall weather and deer movements determine harvest success in large part because greater snowfall results in mule deer moving farther off high-elevation summer range and into mid-to-low elevation transitional and winter range. The Chelan County mule deer herd spends winters on the breaks along the Columbia River and surrounding foothills, but disperses into the large expanse of the Cascades during summer. These movements are characteristic of a strategy used by mule deer to maximize forage quality during summer and minimize energy expenditure during winter. Some Chelan mule deer travel as far as 40 to 50 miles while transitioning between summer and winter range.

A typical hillside of mule deer habitat in the Cascades will transition through the seasons from bright green in the spring and summer to light green to yellow, to orange, to red, to brown, then to bare branches. While we see changes in color, mule deer are perceiving changes in forage quality. The summer forage that supports deer and allows them to produce young and grow antlers does not retain its high quality all year, so as it changes, so do the habitats that deer occupy.

As early as mid-September, deer start responding to changes in vegetation by moving lower in elevation and occupying north-facing slopes where conditions are cooler and wetter and forage is of better quality. From mid-September through the onset of winter, deer respond to changes in the quality of the available forage and utilize areas that best meet their needs. By mid-November, bucks are in condition and focused on breeding, but until then they are focused on food and security.

While hunting on winter ranges may sound appealing, as hunters can see long distances, most Chelan County deer will still be in areas of higher quality forage and greater security during the general seasons. Most deer will be in thicker cover where the food is higher quality and they have protection. These are usually the brushy north-facing slopes or at elevations much higher than typical open mule deer winter range.

There is one Deer Area in District 7 (2017, North Lake Chelan), a site of localized deer concentration where crop damage is a concern. WDFW provides limited, permit-only opportunities here to harvest antlerless deer to deter mule deer presence and reduce crop damage. See [Washington Hunting Seasons & Rules | eRegulations](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions. A map of Deer Area 2017 is available [on WDFW's website](#).

Table 2. The number of harvested mule deer for each GMU within Chelan County in 2022.

GMU	Anterless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
243	0	108	108	6	0	48	32	22
244	3	6	9	0	0	2	2	2
245	20	55	75	0	0	25	19	11
246	5	35	40	0	0	16	16	3
247	68	108	176	2	0	60	38	8
249	2	10	12	0	0	8	1	1
250	27	158	185	0	0	77	51	30
251	0	106	106	0	0	45	43	18
TOTALS	125	586	711	8	0	281	202	95

HIGH BUCK HUNTS

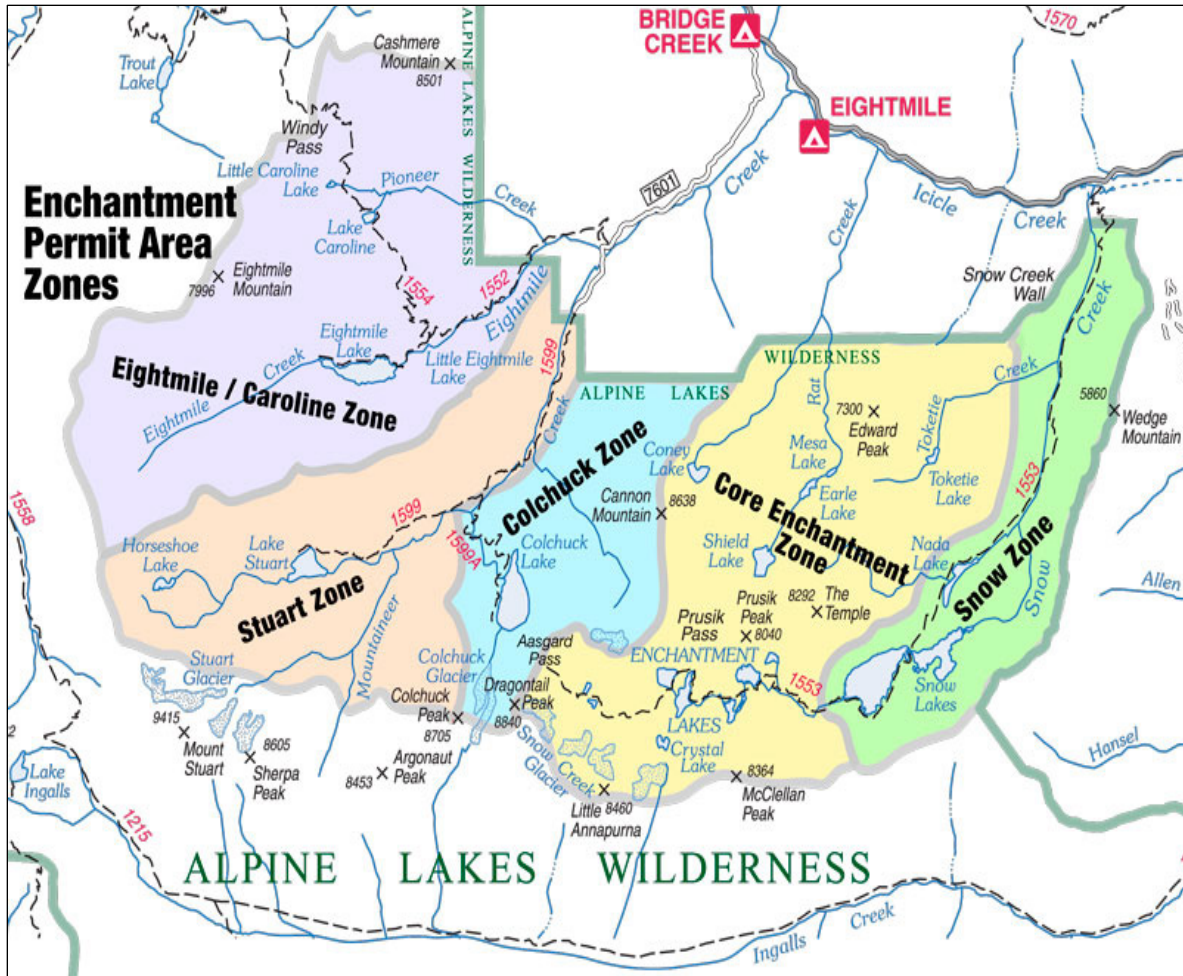
High buck hunts in the Cascade Range are one of the most popular opportunities provided in the district. Each year, hunters don backpacks and ride pack strings into the heart of wilderness areas to pursue mule deer bucks and black bears. Within District 7, the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, Henry M. Jackson Wilderness, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area include open high buck hunt units. The administrative boundaries of these wildernesses and the recreation area are the hunt boundaries.

Hunters should remember that **the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness is closed to high buck hunting Sept. 15-25** but opens for early archery where it overlaps GMU 243.

Hunters need to be aware of permit requirements in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and the Enchantment Permit Area Zones. Any overnight trips into any of the five zones within the Enchantments require a permit from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Permits are distributed through a lottery drawing system and are highly sought after. Hunters who have hunted these zones in the past need to be aware that permitting dates have changed. Without a permit, they may not have access to previously hunted areas. For more information about the Enchantment Permit Area Zones, visit the [Okanogan-Wenatchee web page](#) or contact USFS directly.

It is common to have active wildfires in wilderness areas during our September hunts. We encourage hunters to keep track of fire conditions and contact local U.S. Forest Service (USFS) offices for updates.

High-quality topographic maps and aerial imagery can help hone in on spots to target for scouting. Bucks can be difficult to encounter during high hunt seasons because of the complex topography of Chelan County and the vast acreage of dissected terrain and escape cover available that time of year. Hunters should scout early, when bucks are still in velvet and protecting their antlers, making them more likely to occupy less dense habitat, increasing their visibility. During the high hunt, deer are still on their abundant summer range and occur at low densities, making this hunt even more challenging.



Map of the Enchantment permit area zones within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

DOUGLAS COUNTY MULE DEER

Post-hunt aerial population surveys were conducted in Douglas County in winter 2022, with an estimated population of 11,873 mule deer. This represents a 22% decline from the last aerial survey performed here in 2018, which returned a population estimate of 15,254. The buck:doe ratio was calculated at 20:100 (20 bucks per 100 does), which exceeds the management objective of 15-19 bucks per 100 does, and the fawn:doe ratio was a healthy 67:100. While the Douglas subherd's sex and age ratios look good, the significantly lower abundance estimate in 2022 over that of 2018 is cause for concern, particularly when paired with reports of hunters and landowners seeing fewer deer in some of the Douglas County GMUs in recently. Biologists do not know what is driving this apparent decline, and several factors could be at play including prolonged drought, severe wildfires, disease, and emigration to other parts of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone. Biologists seek to learn more in the coming years through continuing ground and aerial surveys. There are also discussions about potentially initiating a collaring project to track the movements of mule deer and investigate mortalities.

While deer numbers may be down in recent years, Douglas County still offers good mule deer hunting opportunity in a very different environment than found in Chelan County. Unlike Chelan County’s largely migratory population, Douglas County’s mule deer herd is thought to consist primarily of residents, and the landscape here poses a different set of conditions for deer hunters. Because much of the county is comprised of private lands, hunters have less opportunity to pursue deer freely across habitats, as they must pay attention to ownership boundaries. However, deer are more vulnerable in Douglas County’s relatively open habitat with an extensive road network, compared to the rugged terrain of the Cascades.

Without the diverse cover provided by mountains and forests, buck escapement is lower in the sagebrush. This means a smaller portion of the bucks surviving are mature. Deer utilize the dry shrubsteppe habitat where forage quality remains higher longer, while balancing the need for security. Optimal hunting areas will include a mixture of sagebrush cover or steep, broken, rocky terrain and adjacent agricultural fields for forage (mostly winter wheat and canola fields). Large expanses of sagebrush, while not providing the best forage, can give deer the security they need.

In the broken Coulee County, the topography provides security for deer and riparian vegetation provides food resources. Deer in these areas often become experts at living in small, secure habitat pockets where they meet their needs and avoid hunters. While most of the county is private, more than 80,000 acres are enrolled in WDFW’s Hunter Access Program. Start scouting now for deer herds on private lands and reach out to landowners before the rush of other hunters descend on them days before the season starts. Many farmers are partial to allowing youth hunters.

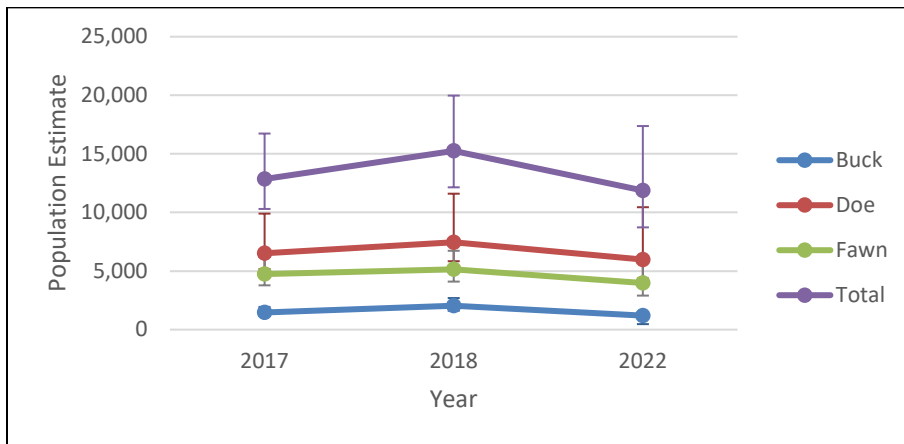


Figure 12. Aerial survey estimates of Douglas County mule deer population and structure, calculated from the modified Idaho Sightability Model, 2017-2022; 90% confidence intervals are demonstrated with brackets.

Table 3. The number of harvested mule deer for each GMU within Douglas County in 2022.

GMU	Anterless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
248	9	164	173	0	0	98	54	12
254	5	128	133	0	0	75	31	22
260	9	97	106	0	0	49	41	7
262	0	92	92	0	0	56	27	9
266	0	68	68	0	0	26	27	15
269	0	72	72	0	2	39	29	2
TOTALS	23	621	644	0	2	343	209	67

BLACK BEAR



Bears at Mud Creek

Bear harvest in the district is managed sustainably to maintain a stable population and healthy age and sex composition, and Chelan County continues to provide good bear hunting opportunity. Black bears are common throughout much of Chelan County, particularly in the forested slopes of areas such as Mission Ridge, Blewett Pass, and Lake Wenatchee. Black bears also occur in significantly lesser numbers in some areas of Douglas County, with usually fewer than 10 bears harvested from the Douglas GMUs each year.

Recent research by WDFW monitoring bear survival and productivity has contributed to our understanding of black bear population densities and sex and age structure in District 7. However, age analysis conducted using the teeth of harvested bears remains the most consistent method of monitoring black bear populations.

Research conducted in Chelan County indicates that fall forage availability influences reproduction and survivorship of cubs and yearlings. Black bears in Chelan County typically have a large amount of forage available to them and are most predictably found in areas suitable for berry crops, like huckleberries. As the season progresses and temperatures decrease, bears tend to move up in elevation to take advantage of berries that are able to continue ripening in the later growing season of higher altitudes. By October, berries become scarce and bears enter a period of frenzied eating known as polyphagia to prepare for hibernation. During this time,

bears wander a broader range of elevations and habitats in search of all possible sources of food.

Most bears harvested in the district are taken during open deer and elk seasons. Dedicated bear hunters will often hunt early in the season when bears are foraging on predictable annual berry crops. The incidental harvest that occurs during open deer and elk seasons is much more dependent on bear behavior and how widely they will have to travel for food.

In District 7, GMU 251 (Mission) most consistently produces the highest number of harvested bears, closely followed by GMU 245 (Chiwawa). These units, along with all the other GMUs in Chelan County except for 243 (Manson), are part of the East Cascades Bear Management Unit (BMU 6). The East Cascades BMU is comprised of 23 GMUs along the Central Cascades, and the Wenatchee District is normally responsible for a substantial amount of the unit's harvest. In 2019 and 2020, District 7 accounted for almost 40% of black bear harvest in BMU 6, rising to comprise 45% of BMU 6 black bear harvest in 2021, and 43% in 2022. BMU 6 saw a dramatic increase in black bear harvest and hunter success in fall 2022, with 50% more bears harvested here last year than in 2021. An increased number of black bears were harvested in fall 2022 in nearly all District 7 GMUs where bears are reliably taken. Bear harvest in GMU 245 actually exceeded that of GMU 251 last year (Figure 13). This may be partly attributed to anecdotal evidence of a relatively poor berry crop east of the Cascade crest last fall, resulting in bears spending less time at high elevations throughout the hunting season and more time closer to human food sources in areas such as Lake Wenatchee and Leavenworth.

While success relative to effort fluctuates from year to year, participation has been relatively stable, with approximately 4,000-4,600 hunters participating in the black bear season throughout BMU 6 each year.

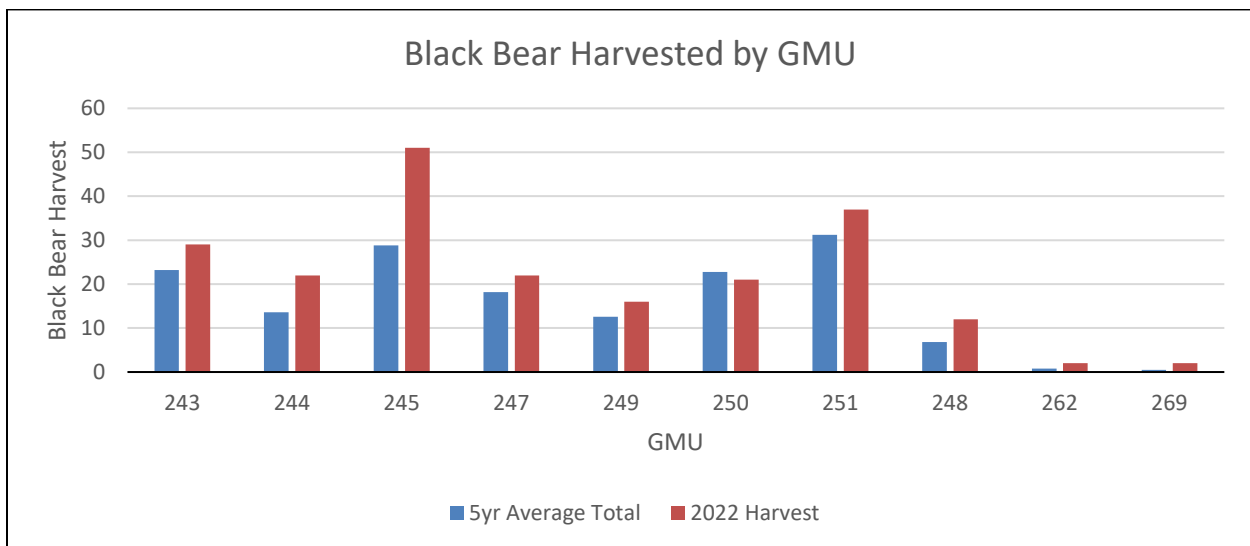


Figure 13. The number of black bears harvested during the general season in each Game Management Unit (GMU) in District 7. The total number of bears harvested in 2022 (red) are compared to the 5-year average (blue). Other GMU's in District 7 that are not included in this figure and had zero bears harvested in 2022 are: 246, 254, 260, and 266.

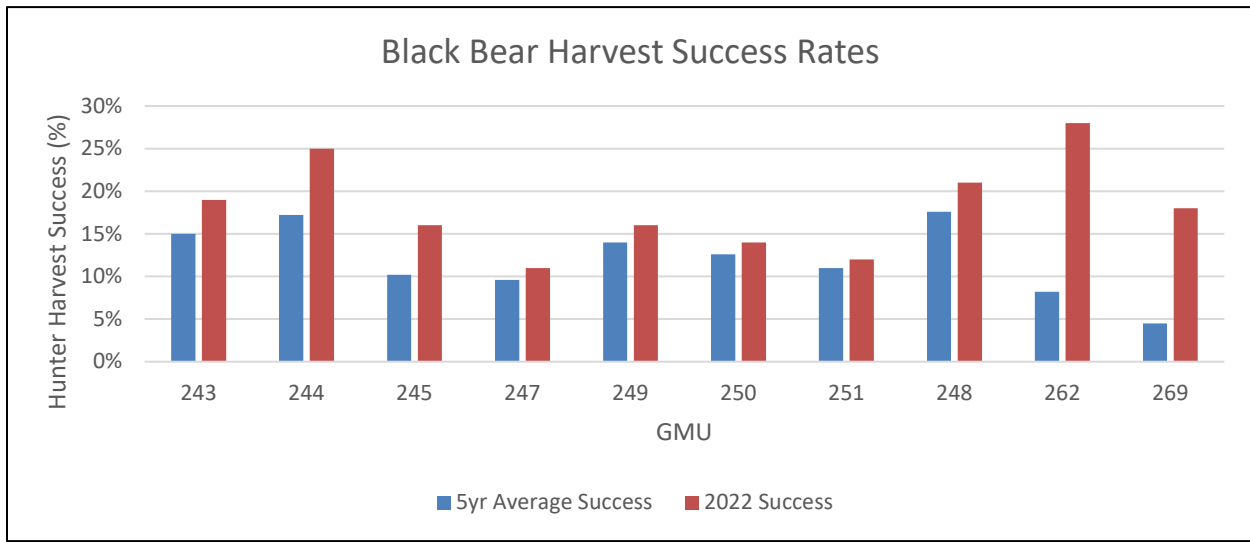


Figure 14. Black bear general season harvest success rates (%) in each GMU in District 7. The total number of bears harvested in 2022 (red) are compared to the 5-year average (blue). Other GMU’s in District 7 that are not included in this figure and had zero bears harvested in 2022 are: 246, 254, 260, and 266.

In Douglas County, hunters can find bears sparsely distributed in small numbers in brushy riparian draws along the Columbia River and other drainages. Douglas County is part of the Columbia Basin Bear Management Unit (BMU 9), which is largely comprised of the most arid lands in Washington and makes up the smallest percentage of bear harvest in the state by far. Bear harvest in Douglas County makes up a far smaller portion of District 7’s total. In both 2019 and 2020, seven bears were harvested from Douglas County, five harvested in 2021, and 16 harvested in 2022. Most bears in Douglas County are harvested in GMUs 248 and 260.

Hunters statewide are required to submit a premolar tooth from all harvested black bears by Dec. 1. Please contact the district office if you need assistance with submitting a tooth. For more information, see page 68 of the Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

COUGAR

Like black bears, population monitoring for cougar management comes primarily from harvest data. In District 7, cougar hunt areas are split into four different Population Management Units (PMU) in Chelan County and a Columbia Basin PMU which includes Douglas County. Within each of these hunt areas, harvest guidelines are established based on ungulate habitat and cougar population biology. Throughout District 7, cougar populations appear stable, and cougars are dispersed widely throughout both Chelan and Douglas counties. Both counties offer good hunting opportunities, especially when enough snow falls to allow for tracking.

There is a two-part cougar season in District 7, starting with an early cougar season during big game seasons (Sept. 1 – Dec. 31). Starting Jan. 1, a more focused cougar season opens when conditions make hunting easier. The Jan. 1 season closes April 30 or when harvest guidelines for the PMU are reached. In 2021, no PMU reached or exceeded the maximum harvest guideline in District 7.

2022 cougar harvest data will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#).

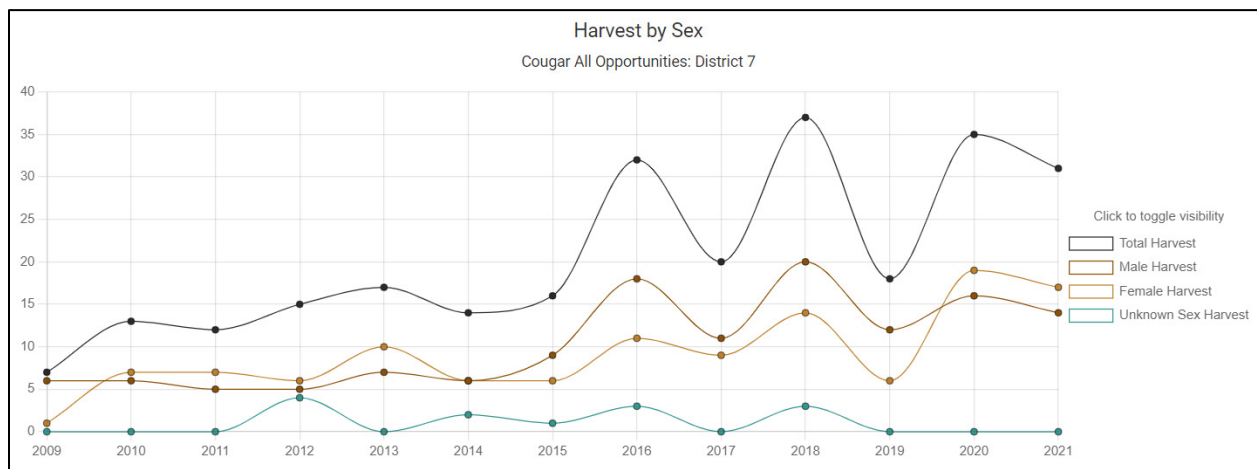


Figure 15. Number of cougars harvested by sex in District 7 from 2009 to 2021.

While many cougars are harvested in Chelan County opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons, dedicated cougar hunters will wait until snow accumulation allows for tracking later in the winter. Cougars are most active when deer are most active, typically at dawn and dusk. Cougars follow deer herds and can typically be found at lower elevations as the early season progresses and deer move off summer range and migrate to winter range.

Douglas County also offers good cougar hunting opportunities. Most hunters will focus on the Columbia River breaks, Moses Coulee, and Rufus Woods Reservoir. This rough country allows cougars access to deer herds while providing stalking cover. Successful hunters often wait for snow and track cats on foot. Foster Creek (260), Badger (266), Moses Coulee (269), and Withrow (262) have consistent cougar harvest. There are no changes to cougar hunting opportunities for District 7 in 2023.

BIGHORN SHEEP



Bighorn Sheep - Photo courtesy Mark Beardemphl

Within Chelan County, WDFW manages three bighorn sheep herds: Swakane, Chelan Butte, and Manson. Each of these herds is the result of multiple translocation efforts beginning in 1969. Each herd continues to thrive today, offering prized, once-in-a-lifetime sheep hunting opportunity.

SWAKANE

The core range of this herd is within the Swakane Unit of the Chelan Butte Wildlife Area and the surrounding public lands adjacent to the Wildlife Area. Hunting pressure on this herd is low, with only two mature ram permits offered each year. This unit is famed for producing the world record California bighorn in 2010 as scored by Safari Club International. Over the past two decades, this herd has increased from approximately 100 animals to a minimum count of 200 animals in 2019, well above the population objective for this herd. A 2022 spring aerial survey of the Swakane herd returned a minimum count of 195 sheep with a ram:ewe ratio of 84:100 and a robust population of mature rams. The 2023 season will no doubt provide another year of world-class sheep hunting opportunity here.

Bands of sheep are routinely found on the cliffs and steep slopes along the Columbia River breaks. Permit winners can take advantage of the network of USFS roads within the Swakane

bighorn hunt unit to gain access to high points for glassing and scoping for groups of rams. Hunters can also glass for this herd from the east side of the Columbia River at pullouts on Highway 97. In recent years, the Swakane herd has expanded its range, and sheep are regularly observed as far north as the Entiat River.

CHELAN BUTTE

This herd is central to Chelan Butte between the Columbia River and the city of Chelan. The Chelan Butte herd provides some of the best access of all the sheep herds in Washington and is known to produce large rams. This fall will be no exception as the November 2022 aerial survey returned a ram:ewe ratio of 97:100 and a high proportion of mature rams. Apart from mature ram hunting opportunities, WDFW offers both ewe and juvenile ram permit hunts for the Chelan Butte herd for hunters with disabilities.

A county road bisects the Chelan Butte Wildlife Area, providing access to state and federal lands open for hunting. Some of the best glassing is available from the hang-gliding launch near the summit of Chelan Butte. For views of the cliffs along the Columbia River, try glassing by boat or from points along Highway 97 east of the Columbia River. Bighorns in this herd tend to stay on the river or east side of Chelan Butte and range north as far as Wells Dam. Hunters have also harvested rams from Deer Mountain, just north of Chelan.

The minimum population estimate for the Chelan Butte herd was 84 from fall 2022 aerial surveys, which is a decline from the 114 bighorn sheep observed in spring of the same year. This in turn was a decrease from the 150 bighorn sheep observed in a 2019 aerial survey of the Chelan Butte herd. This drop in sheep numbers observed may not represent a true population decline, as aerial surveys are only conducted once per year, making it difficult to ensure you're surveyed a representative sample.. It is also possible that the Chelan Butte herd is expanding outside of its known range and traditional survey units. However, further monitoring of this herd will be necessary to determine if one or both of these factors is at play or whether a true population decline is occurring. Multiple ground surveys are planned for late summer/fall 2023 to obtain another population estimate, including a lamb:ewe ratio. The lamb:ewe ratio from 2022 fall season aerial surveys was 44 lambs per 100 ewes. In the meantime, the high proportion of 3/4 and full curl rams in this herd will still make for exceptional California bighorn sheep hunting.

MANSON

The Manson herd primarily occupies USFS land on the north shore of Lake Chelan, concentrated between Antilon Creek north to Lone Fir Creek. The Manson herd occupies some of the most rugged and inaccessible terrain of all the sheep herds in Chelan County and Washington as a whole.

This herd is most readily accessible by boat on Lake Chelan. USFS maintains several public docks and campgrounds along the Lake Chelan shoreline. A Federal Dock Permit is required to use any

USFS dock between May 1 – Oct. 31. **Note: The Safety Harbor dock and campground remains closed in 2023 due to continuing risk of flash flooding.**

The Manson Unit hunt season occurs much later than the season for the Swakane and Chelan Butte herds and is timed when rams should be more concentrated at lower elevations along the lake. A spring 2022 aerial survey returned a count consistent with that of the past several years, estimating the herd at approximately 70-80 animals, with a ram:ewe estimate of 37 rams per 100 ewes. The comparatively remote, rugged terrain and lower number of rams in the Manson herd makes for a more challenging hunt than either the Chelan Butte or Swakane Units, with days per kill consistently averaging higher here than in the other two sheep units in Chelan County (Figure 17). While it may take hunters more time to find the ram of their choice, hunters in the Manson unit still enjoy a 100% success rate each year along with some of the best scenery in the state.

DISTRICT 7 BIGHORN SHEEP SURVIVAL AND HEALTH

Over winter survival for adult sheep remains high in all three of the Wenatchee District's sheep herds. Annual lamb mortality is characteristic of most sheep populations, where lambs suffer the highest rates of mortality during their first year of life, and the highest mortality of the year immediately after birth. With at least two herds stable to increasing, permit numbers may increase in the future, tracking any increases in ram numbers. WDFW plans to census these herds in fall 2023.

The deadly pathogen *M. ovi* has now infected bighorn herds to the north and south of District 7, so the public is asked to be on the lookout for signs of infection in Chelan County's bighorn sheep. *M. ovi* can cause pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn herds resulting in high sheep mortality. Symptoms of *M. ovi* in sheep include coughing, nasal discharge, persistent headshaking, lethargy, and sudden death. **Hunters are asked to report observations of any symptoms right away to the Wenatchee District Office and provide GPS coordinates for the observed sick or dead sheep.**

Hunters selected under these drawings are encouraged to contact District 7 for additional information. All hunters harvesting a bighorn sheep ram in Washington State are required to have the horn sets measured and plugged by WDFW within 10 days. Hunters should call a WDFW Regional or District Office to schedule an appointment with a biologist.



Each harvested ram must be pinned with an aluminum pin featuring a unique ID number.

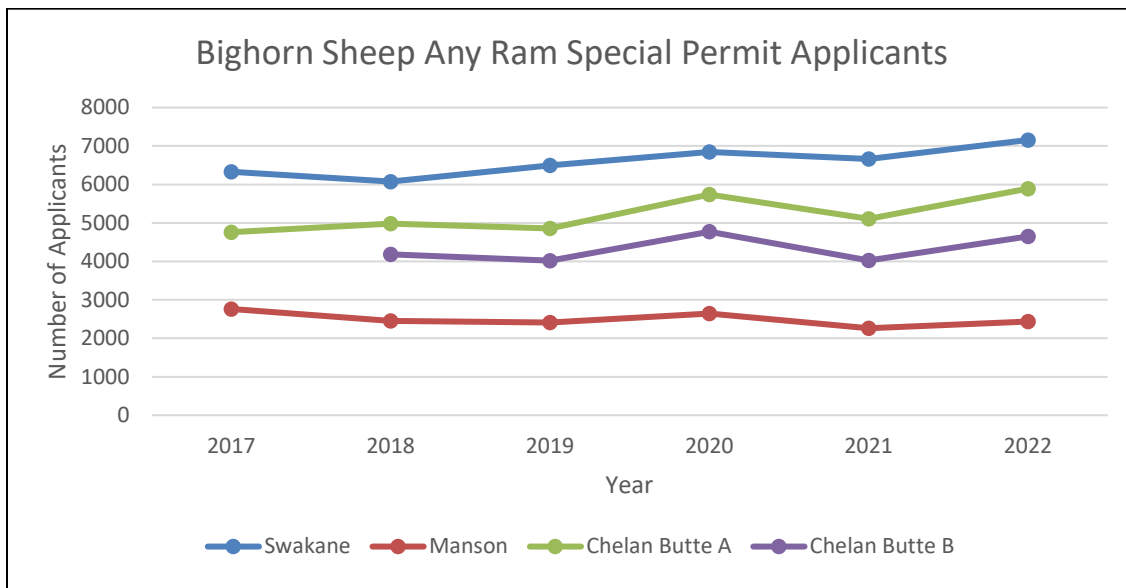


Figure 16. The number of applicants for Any Ram special hunt permits within District 7.

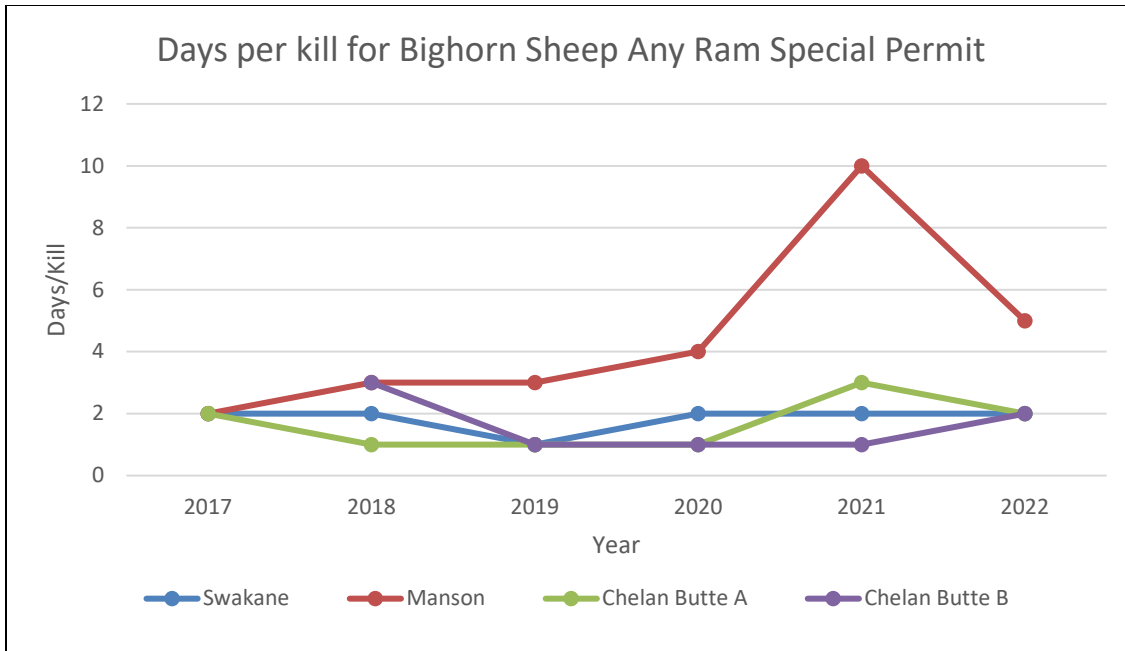


Figure 17. The number of days per harvest by each hunter for Any Ram special hunt permits within District 7.

TURKEY



Merriam's turkeys in Chelan County descend from over 400 birds released between 2000-2002. Turkeys are not native to Washington, but their popularity with hunters make them a prized game species. Turkey densities in the district are relatively concentrated, but populations appear to be increasing in the northern portions of Douglas County and parts of Chelan County.

In Chelan County, the number of turkeys the landscape can support is determined primarily by the amount and availability of wintering habitat under typical snow depths. When winter snow depths reach 20 inches or more, wild turkeys have a difficult time making it through the winter. In areas where turkey can utilize ranches, barnyards, and farms for winter forage, they can show significant survival over winter. In Chelan County, GMUs 245, 250, and 251 produce the greatest turkey harvest.

Hunters should target more consistent turkey producing areas, such as the Colockum Wildlife Area. The Stemilt Basin outside of Wenatchee and canyons of the Wenatchee River between Cashmere and Leavenworth offer good opportunities to find turkeys. Turkeys can often be found in these areas near the edge of private and public lands. Recent forest thinning projects and logging on public lands have created good spring turkey habitat. Areas to focus for turkeys on recently logged USFS lands include Derby Canyon, Yaksum Canyon, Mission Creek, Eagle Creek, and any other canyons that lead off Chumstick Highway between Leavenworth and Plain. Hunters can also find turkeys west through Plain, but they are often on private land. In Douglas County, GMUs 266 and 248 have been producing an increasing number of turkeys. Remember to scout early and get permission to hunt private lands.

Turkey hunters have enjoyed greater harvest opportunities in District 7 since 2021, when a fall season for Chelan and Douglas counties was introduced that allowed for the harvest of one turkey of either sex. Both fall seasons since have yielded very similar hunter turnout, harvest levels, and hunter success, with 706 hunters in the North Central PMU harvesting 220 turkeys in the fall of 2021 and 611 hunters harvesting 218 turkeys in fall 2022. For the spring 2022 turkey season, the bag limit for bearded turkeys in Chelan County was raised from one to two, which, as anticipated, resulted in an increase in hunter numbers and harvest levels in the North Central PMU. These bag limits remain in place for the coming fall and spring turkey seasons.

QUAIL

District 7 offers some of the best quail hunting in the state. In both Chelan and Douglas counties, quail benefit from a variety of agricultural land uses that create edge habitat, such as where the edge of an irrigated field meets shrubsteppe, that they rely on. Edges of standing corn, wheat, or other grain fields, medium to heavy cover surrounding harvested fields, and other places where weed and grass seed are readily available are prime places to look for quail. Fortunately, areas such as these are plentiful in Douglas County.

Quail are also often found in thick tangles of trees and tall brush, especially near stream beds, valley bottoms with patches of Russian olive, oak or high sage; and weather-break tree lines and fence lines. In Chelan County especially, quail tend to be found in and around orchards and other irrigated crops. Swakane Canyon also provides great quail opportunity in Chelan County.

Public lands can be tough places to find larger coveys well into the season. To improve success, hunters should seek out those areas without easy access and spend some time seeking permission from private landowners. For more information, see [Quail Hunting](#).

2022 quail harvest figures will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

GRAY PARTRIDGE



Photo by Neil Paprocki

Gray partridges, or “huns” as they are commonly called, are more common in Douglas County than in Chelan County and are associated with grasslands or agricultural areas that are interspersed with patches of sagebrush. Brushy hedgerows adjacent to agricultural fields can often harbor huns in the winter. They occur at low density, with coveys dispersed across larger areas. Look to fields of grain crops enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program with lots of grass cover extending into draws, as these are often a good place to find coveys. Covering a wide range of cover types is the best way to locate coveys.

District 7 hun harvest increased dramatically in 2021, with almost three times as many huns taken that year than were taken in the previous season. This is especially noteworthy as hun harvest experienced a precipitous decline statewide in 2021, District 7 harvest making up nearly half of the statewide total. The 2020 gray partridge harvest in District 7 was low at only 408 birds, but in 2021 hunters harvested 1,197 birds, far exceeding the five-year average of 687. Much like chukar, hun populations are subject to steep yearly fluctuations, so the high level of harvest enjoyed in 2021 doesn’t provide any evidence as to the overall trend of local hun populations.

2022 partridge harvest figures will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year’s results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

CHUKAR

Traditionally, more chukar have been harvested in District 7 than in any other district in the state, and opportunities for chukar hunting are numerous here due to a large amount of prime habitat on public lands. On the Chelan County side of the Columbia River, BLM, USFS, DNR, Chelan PUD, and WDFW all manage lands with chukar hunting opportunities, such as the Chelan Wildlife Area and Rocky Reach Wildlife Area. Chukar are also abundant on the north shore of Lake Chelan in the rocky exposed grassland habitats below Grade Creek Road. Along the Douglas County breaks, almost all chukar habitat falls under private ownership, and landowner permission is required to hunt.

Chukar hunting falls into two distinct seasons: with snow and without snow. While trying to negotiate chukar habitat with snow and ice on the ground can be hazardous, there is no doubt that birds become concentrated following the accumulation of snow, so serious chukar hunters take advantage of this change in conditions. Throughout the season, the Columbia River breaks provide the majority of chukar habitat, along with areas adjacent to Banks Lake and Moses Coulee.

The 2016-2020 hunting seasons saw an average annual harvest of 4,400 chukar from Chelan and Douglas counties. District 7 saw a dramatic decline in chukar harvest in 2021, with the 2,345 birds harvested last season coming in at less than half the number taken in 2020. While WDFW conducts no official monitoring of chukar populations, this species is subject to major population fluctuations, so one year of abnormally low harvest is not necessarily a cause for concern. The heat wave and drought conditions in summer 2021 may have significantly impacted chukar production, as chukar clutch size is often greatly reduced in drought years. Some chukars do not breed at all in such difficult conditions.

2022 chukar harvest figures will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years. For more information, see [Hunting Chukar Partridge](#).

FOREST GROUSE



Left to right: Ruffed, Dusky, and Spruce grouse. Photos by Neil Paprocki.

Three species of forest grouse can be found on the Wenatchee District: blue grouse (dusky grouse), spruce grouse, and ruffed grouse. Most grouse harvested in District 7 are taken in Chelan County in GMUs 245, 246, and 251, although 243 and 244 also offer good grouse opportunity. There are fewer dispersed opportunities for ruffed grouse and dusky grouse hunting in Douglas County, but coniferous and riparian forests offer the best hunting opportunities. GMUs 248 and 266 are the most promising for grouse hunters.

Most grouse harvest on the district occurs over opening weekend and then increases again with the general mule deer season. Hunters are asked to deposit one wing and the tail from each harvested grouse in wing barrels located across Chelan County. For directions on collecting these samples and a list of wing and tail collection barrel locations, visit the [WDFW website](#).

Hunters can find ruffed grouse in healthy riparian forests and aspen stands at the margin of timbered habitat, and dusky grouse will use timbered stringers that extend down as far as the shrubsteppe. Spruce grouse are restricted to higher elevation conifer forests, usually above the Ponderosa pine.

Hunters interested in forest grouse will improve their chances by searching out areas where fewer hunters concentrate. Popular road systems can provide early season hunting; however, they often “dry up” quickly due to the numbers of hunters and the vulnerability of hatch-year birds. Chelan County has a relatively limited road system within grouse habitat, and dedicated hunters know where they are, so hunters can increase the productive length of their season by hunting areas on foot away from roads and the bulk of the other hunters.

Harvest figures for the 2022 season are still being calculated, but the 2021 grouse season saw the continued decline of grouse harvest and hunter numbers in District 7. Forest grouse harvest was down 45% and hunter participation down 17% from 2020. When compared with the five-year average from 2016-2020, forest grouse harvest in District 7 is down by 55% and hunter participation down by 32% as of 2021. Forest grouse harvest and grouse hunter numbers have

also declined regionally and statewide over this time period, but District 7 appears to have experienced one of the more dramatic reductions in harvest.

In 2021, WDFW changed the forest grouse season to September 15 – January 15 to reduce harvest of reproductive age females and allow for brood dispersal, which will help sustain a harvestable population over the long run. Previously, the September 1 opening weekend had often seen the greatest number of grouse hunters on the landscape. This change in season dates may be contributing to the decline in forest grouse harvest and hunter participation, but other factors are likely at play. These factors could include prolonged drought in the region, increasing wildfire, and the influence of climate change on early spring temperatures and precipitation, which would impact brood success.

The Sept. 15 grouse season opening date will remain in effect for the 2023 season.

2022 grouse harvest figures will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year’s results will not be directly comparable to previous years. For more information, see [Hunting Forest Grouse](#).

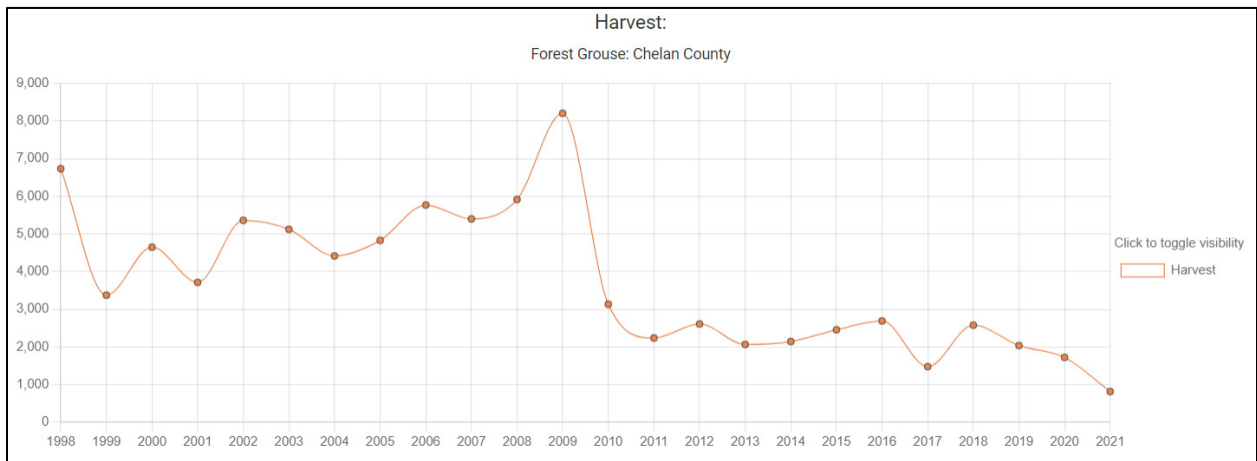


Figure 20. The total harvest of forest grouse in Chelan County from 1998 to 2021.

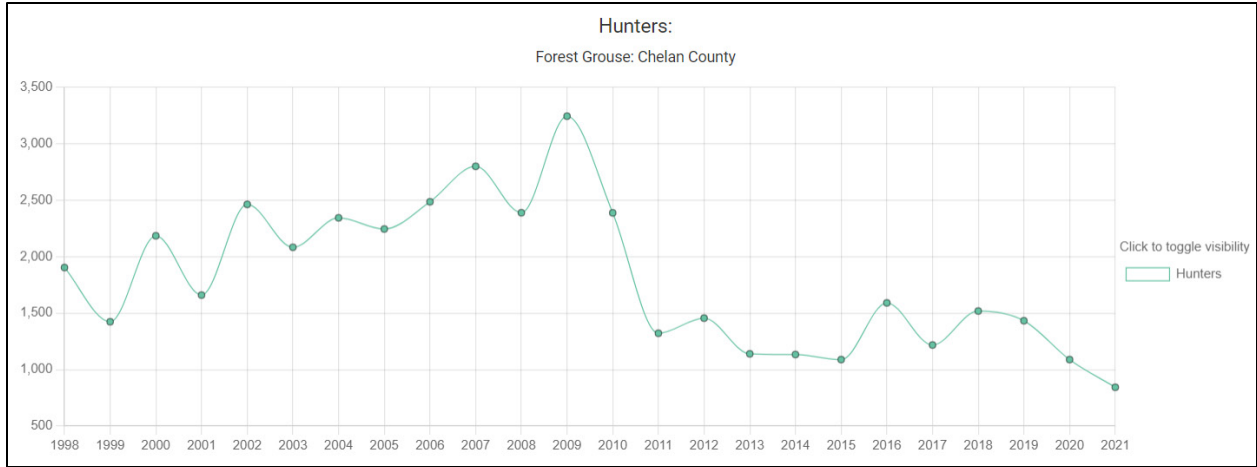


Figure 21. The total number of forest grouse hunters in Chelan County from 1998 to 2021.

DOVE



Photo by Neil Paprocki

District 7 offers good dove hunting opportunity, and harvest levels have been increasing here over the past couple of years. Most mourning doves harvested in District 7 are taken in Douglas County, but viable options for dove hunting exist in Chelan County and in places like Swakane Canyon. Hunters should contact private landowners to secure hunting opportunities and gaining access permission to private lands. Look to areas near wetlands, brushy upland streams, agricultural fields, and orchards where birds find both roosting cover and food later in the season. The amount and distribution of CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) fields has increased in Douglas County over the past few years, with new seed mixes providing more diversity in forage within stands. Scouting for these habitats can be a productive way to find new, unexploited hunting areas.

Hunters should remember that Eurasian collared doves can be found in the same areas as mourning doves.. Eurasian collared doves are classified as a deleterious species in Washington and do not count toward daily dove bag limits, so be sure to take a few when the opportunity arises. The Eurasian collared dove is a stocky bird with a distinct black collar on the dorsal side of the neck. See a photo comparison of the two species in the [Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlets](#).

2022 dove harvest figures will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

PHEASANT

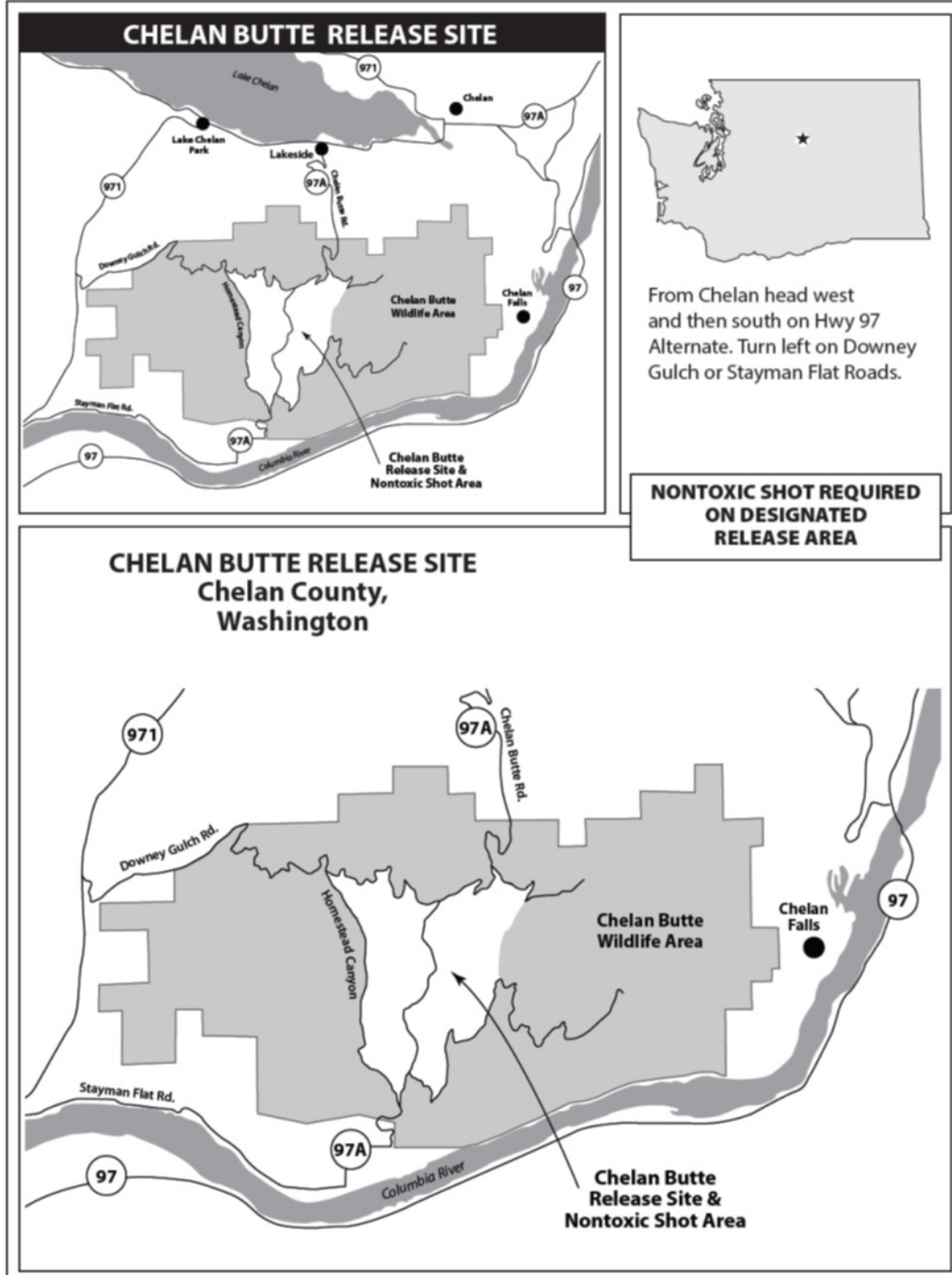
Wild populations of pheasants can be found on public and private land in a few locations in Douglas County. Hunters should focus on areas with a mixture of native shrubsteppe habitat, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands, and wet meadows/wetlands. Look for weedy and tall vegetation on the roadsides, which provides good cover. Good pheasant hunting can be found in Foster Creek (GMU 260), St. Andrews (GMU 254), and Big Bend (GMU 248).

In Chelan County, WDFW releases cock pheasants annually at both the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife units. Hunters interested in hunting pheasant release sites in these units can visit the [WDFW hunting website](#) for more information.

2022 pheasant harvest figures will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

Pheasant release sites in Chelan County.

REGION 2



REGION 2

SWAKANE RELEASE SITE



To reach the **Swakane Wildlife Area** and release site, travel north from Wenatchee on Alt. Hwy 97. It follows the Columbia River on the west side toward the town of Chelan. To find the release site, head west up the Swakane Creek Road.

**NONTOXIC SHOT REQUIRED
ON DESIGNATED
RELEASE AREA**

**SWAKANE RELEASE SITE
Chelan County, Washington**



WATERFOWL



Photo by Adam Neff

While not a major waterfowl hunting destination, District 7 provides opportunity for duck and geese hunting in several areas across both counties. In Chelan County, most waterfowl hunting is focused along the Columbia River. It is important to note that, due to county ordinances and the expansion of Wenatchee City Limits, **there is a no-shooting zone from the Odabashian Bridge to the George Sellar Bridge** which connects Wenatchee and East Wenatchee.

The Columbia River is the primary site for waterfowl hunting in Douglas County. The Bridgeport Bar Unit is a popular and productive hunting location, where ducks form large rafts on the Brewster Pool. Northern Douglas County also has a concentration of small lands and ponds that hold waterfowl. The success of the season depends on the timing of migration through the area.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, visit [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#).

2022 waterfowl harvest figures will be available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to previous years.

PRIVATE LANDS HUNTER ACCESS

WDFW maintains hunter access agreements with hundreds of participating landowners across the state, providing public hunting to on private lands. There are thousands of acres of Hunter Access Program lands in Douglas County to utilize throughout the season. Please respect any closures and be aware of all wildfire restrictions during hunting season. Access lands are marked with signs displaying contact information, and hunters can also locate all private land hunter access areas on [WDFW's website](#).

In Chelan County, private landowners often allow hunting access in areas of high deer or elk concentration, but there are no formal hunting access agreements. Hunters in Chelan County must be proactive in gaining permission from landowners. Hunters wishing to apply for tags in the Lake Chelan North Deer Area, the Malaga Elk Area or the Peshastin Elk Area are encouraged to contact the Wenatchee District Office prior to applying.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

As digital technology has rapidly advanced, today's hunters have a plethora of apps and online resources available to them to help plan their hunting trips. While these tools are excellent for focusing your efforts, navigating, and coordinating logistics, they can't replace scouting in the field. Below is a list of helpful resources to help you plan your hunting trip.

- [USGS Topo maps](#): downloadable topographical maps for the United States.
- [GoogleEarth](#): free application for exploring aerial and 3D imagery. Useful for importing and exporting locations.
- [AgWeather Net](#): Washington State University maintains an array of weather stations from across Washington. View real-time and historic weather data. Also available as a free app.
- [Interactive Snow Depth Map](#): This map compiles NOAA snowfall data for the U.S.
- [SNOTEL](#): Customizable tables looking at historic and forecast data as well as current snow conditions.
- County landownership maps: Most counties in Washington publish web maps with landowner data by parcel. These maps can be used to ensure you are hunting on public lands and are aware of where private land permissions may be needed. District 7 encompasses [Chelan](#) and [Douglas](#) counties.

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

ERIN WAMPOLE, District Wildlife Biologist
CALLIE MOORE, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist



DISTRICT 8 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Yakima and Kittitas counties

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DISTRICT 8 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 8 is in south central Washington and includes Yakima and Kittitas counties and game management units (GMUs) 328 (Naneum), 329 (Quilomene), 330 (West Bar), 334 (Ellensburg), 335 (Teanaway), 336 (Taneum), 340 (Manastash), 342 (Umtanum), 346 (Little Naches), 352 (Nile), 356 (Bumping), 360 (Bethel), 364 (Rimrock), 368 (Cowiche), 371 (Alkali), and part of 372 (Rattlesnake Hills). Hunters can choose a variety of habitats, ranging from lowland shrubsteppe and farmland, to high elevation alpine wilderness.

Large blocks of public land dominate District 8 and provide abundant hunting opportunities. The district is best known for excellent elk hunting. The Yakima elk herd is one of the largest in the state, with more than 11,000 animals roaming over 900,000 acres of public land. There are about 4,000 elk in the Colockum herd, which primarily inhabits public land north of Ellensburg.



Figure 1: Rainbow over the Yakima River from the Wenas Wildlife Area on a cloudy day.

The public land provides plenty of upland bird hunting opportunities in District 8, but populations have fallen on hard times and aren't likely to rebound. Wild pheasants are almost extinct, and nearly all species have declined to near historic lows. Bird hunters wanting to wander over large areas have many options in District 8. Along the breaks of the Columbia, the Yakima Training Center consists of 327,000 acres south of I-90, while WDFW manages another 154,000 acres north of the I-90. There are 9,000 acres on the [Wild Horse Wind Farm](#), which utilizes the [Hunt by Reservation](#) system. A motivated upland bird hunter with a good dog could pursue grouse, chukar, partridge, quail, and pheasant on the same day.

Turkeys were introduced more than 40 years ago, but populations remained low. In the late 1990s, a more extensive effort was made to augment existing pockets of birds. Populations in GMU 335 (Teanaway) have become large enough to allow for a fall permit season. Turkey densities may never reach those found in northeast Washington, but many hunters find decent turkey hunting closer to home.

District 8 is also home to more than 70 percent of the bighorn sheep in Washington. While drawing a permit to hunt sheep is still challenging, bighorns can add enjoyment to a hunting trip in District 8. Rams are in rut from mid-October through November when many hunters travel through the area. There are robust populations of bighorns that can often be easily viewed along Highways 821 (Yakima River Canyon) and 410 (Clemans Mountain, north of the junction with Highway 12).

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each public or private landowner to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [Electric-assisted bicycles on WDFW-managed lands](#) for the most recent information.

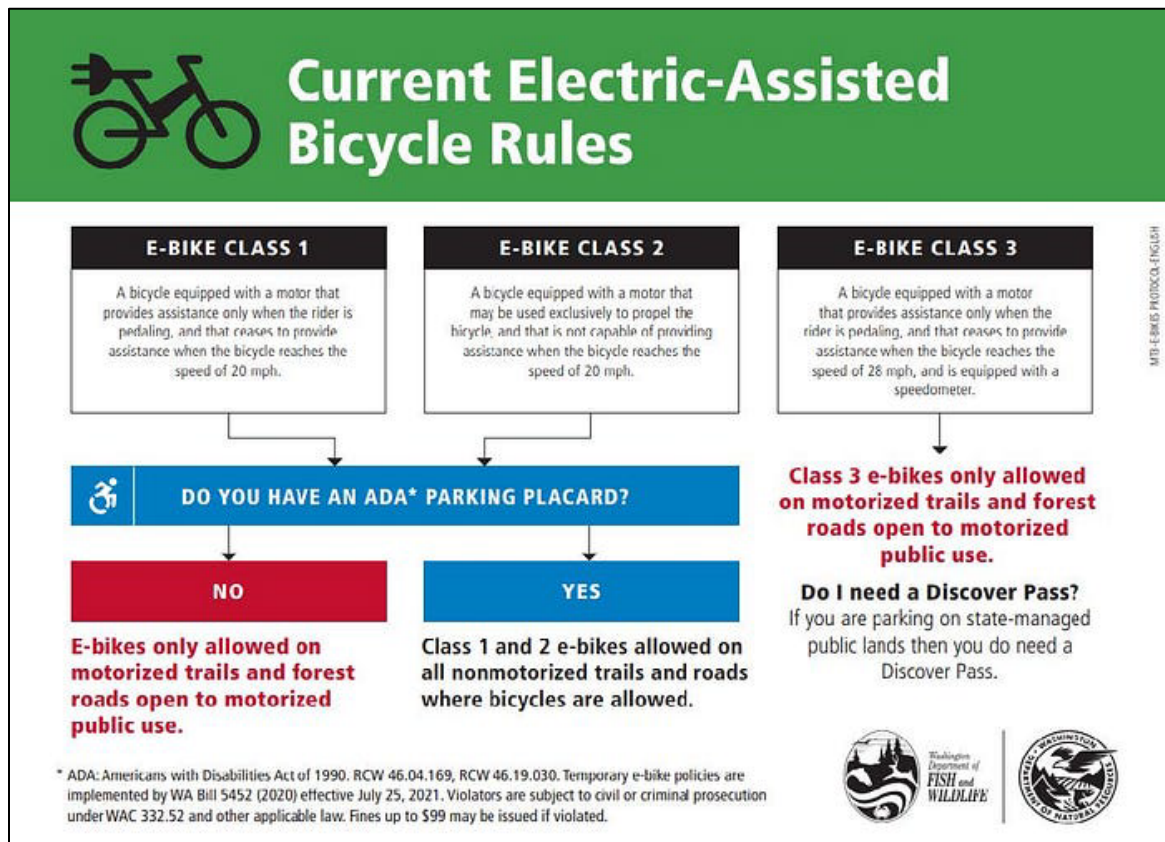


Figure 2: Current e-bike rules

ELK

District 8 was once considered some of the best elk hunting areas in the state. This reputation results in relatively high hunter densities throughout the hunting season. Opening weekend is crowded, with hunters setting up camp early and heading home before the season ends. For those looking for a higher quality experience, consider hunting the last two or three days of the modern firearm season or opt to hunt during the quieter archery or muzzleloader seasons.



Bull elk

The only antlerless archery general season is now in GMUs [334](#), [335](#), and [371](#). These GMUs are managed for minimal numbers of elk due to human-wildlife conflict issues in adjacent agricultural lands. This year's archery season runs from Sept. 9–21. Elk Area 3911 covers all GMU 334 and the lower portions of GMU 335, where most elk in these units reside.

Master Hunters can harvest antlerless elk using modern firearms from Aug. 1, 2023–Jan. 20, 2024, in 3911, so archery hunters in Elk Area 3911 **must** wear hunter orange or pink. In 2022, archers harvested 10 antlerless and four antlered elk from GMU 335, and four antlerless elk from GMU 334. Overall, archery hunters find more success (7.2%) in these GMUs than those opting to use modern firearms (3%). Success rates last season averaged around 4% (Table 1).

The open terrain of GMU 371 on the [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC) has good numbers of elk and boasts a hunter success rate of more than 50%, with 45 antlerless elk harvested last season. YTC is open to the public for various recreational activities, including hunting, bird watching, mountain biking, horseback riding, hiking, falconry, and archery target practice. All patrons wishing to access YTC lands for recreational purposes must have a [YTC Recreation Access Card](#). Access to these lands can change based on military training schedules. Please call the Blanchard Physical Fitness Center (509-577-3208) for current information and rules.

Once seasons begin, hunters will find more elk at higher elevations and away from roads. The wilderness areas in the Yakima herd range can provide some of the better opportunities in the district for those willing to invest the effort to chase elk in the high country away from roads.

Table 1: 2022-23 District 8 general season elk harvest by sex.

GMU	Antlerless	Antlered	Total	Hunters	Success
328	24	83	107	2347	4.6%
329	18	35	53	1165	4.5%
334	10	0	10	283	3.5%
335	20	8	28	800	3.5%
336	6	23	29	949	3.1%
340	0	33	33	1811	1.8%
342	0	43	43	1252	3.4%
346	0	67	67	1280	5.2%
352	0	16	16	731	2.2%
356	0	18	18	666	2.7%
360	0	27	27	1061	2.5%
364	0	36	36	990	3.6%
368	15	79	94	1615	5.8%
371	45	0	45	86	52.3%
Total	138	468	606	15036	4.0%

District 8 contains elk from the designated Yakima and Colockum elk herds. The Yakima herd has met the population management objective of 9,500 individuals for the last three years. In contrast, the post-hunt aerial survey estimate of 3,835 individuals for the Colockum herd remains below the objective of 4,500 individuals. Harvest trends (Figure 3) are consistent with population trends, whereas opportunity and harvest decrease with lower populations. The severe winters of 2015-2017 caused significant population declines and reduced opportunity/harvest.

Interested parties can find annual harvest reports and harvest statistics online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). Hunters in District 8 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on [Washington 2023 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

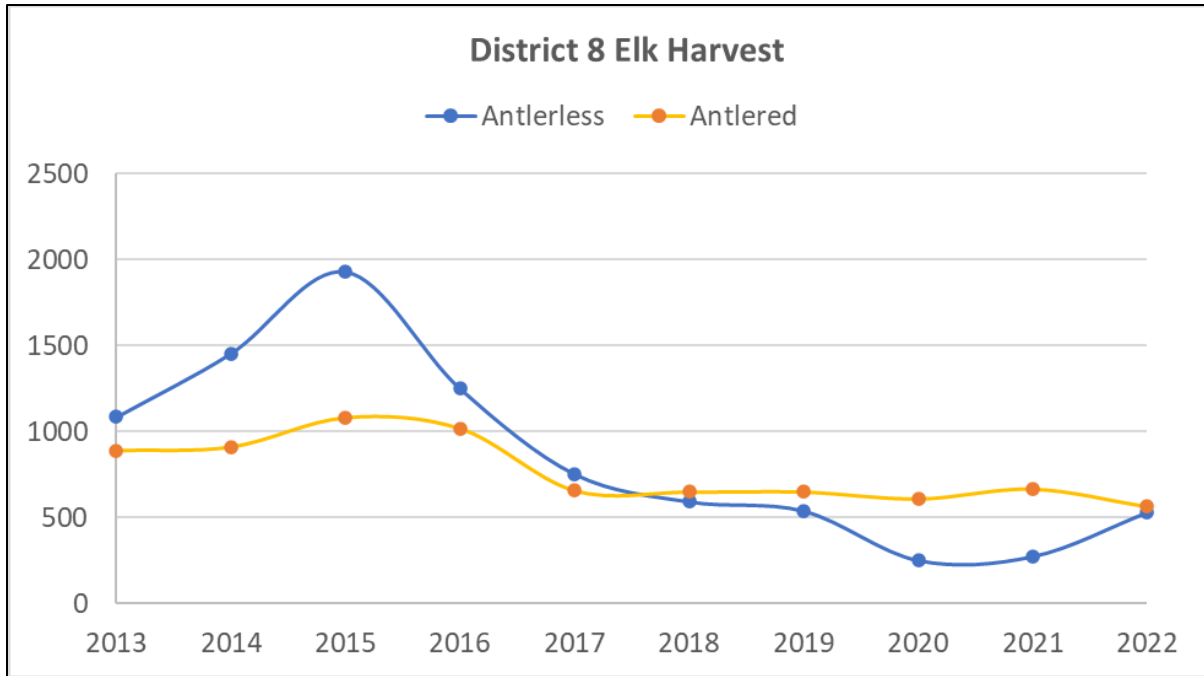


Figure 3. Combined general season and special permit harvest trend of antlerless (cow) and antlered (bull) elk within District 8.

DEER

All District 8 GMUs are managed using mule deer hunting regulations. However, the area boasts a combination of mule deer, mule-black-tailed hybrids, and black-tailed deer. This species diversity makes hunting especially interesting since these species all use slightly different elevations and habitat types. Deer harvest in District 8 hit its lowest levels in 2017-2018 and has since rebounded slightly (Figure 5). The average general season hunter's success is about 7% compared to a statewide average of 23%. The 2023 harvest is hard to predict, but in the past a decreased deer harvest was linked to widespread drought across eastern Washington. In contrast it appears that the two consecutive harsh winters in the area did not appear to increase the mortality of radio collared individuals. Harvest stats and hunter numbers by GMU over the last three years are shown in Table 2.



Figure 4. A doe with her two fawns during fall in Region 3.

Hunter numbers have declined with the reduced deer population. Many of the remaining modern firearm hunters now set up camp and claim their favorite spot for elk season. If you are looking for relatively low hunter densities, consider the higher elevations of District 8. Harvest and hunter numbers are typically highest in GMUs: 335 (Teaway), 328 (Naneum), 340 (Manastash), and 342 (Umtanum).

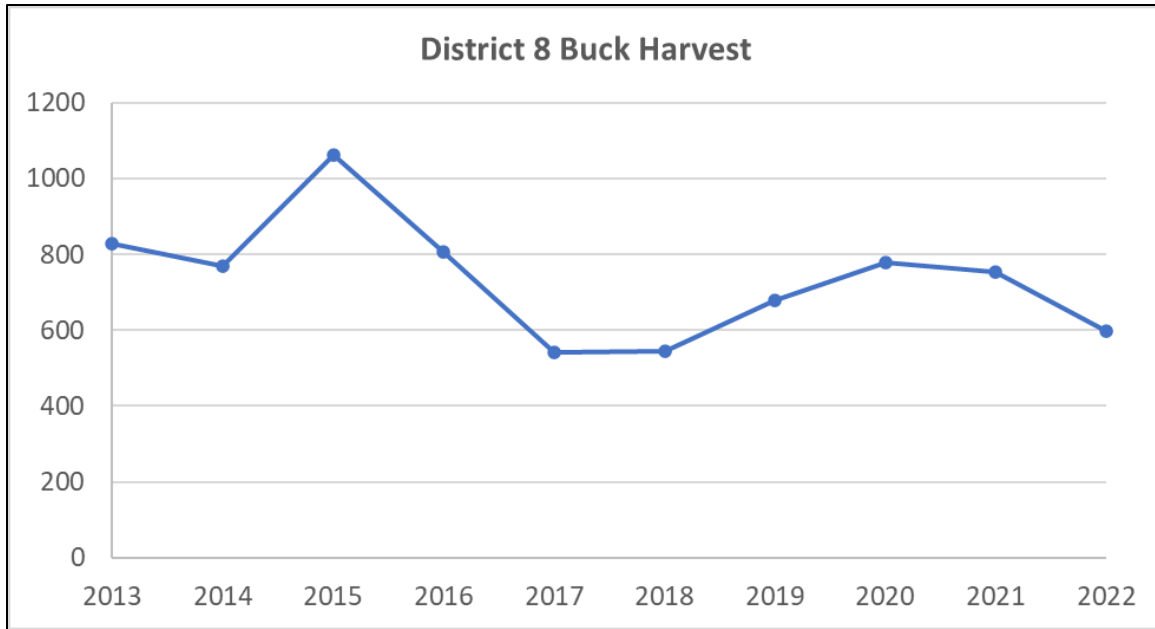


Figure 5. General seasons buck harvest in District 8 from 2013-2022.

Table 2: Total buck harvest, number of hunters, and overall success rate for the 2022-23 season by GMU.

GMU	Buck Harvest	Hunters	Success
328	122	1297	9%
330	4	18	24%
334	33	292	11%
335	198	1588	12%
336	47	741	6%
340	66	868	8%
342	84	998	8%
346	23	708	3%
352	15	443	3%
356	5	206	2%
360	10	355	3%
364	8	375	2%
368	55	1033	5%
Total	669	8922	7%

BEAR

Black bears live in diverse forested habitats throughout the state, from coastal rainforests to the dry woodlands of the Cascades' eastern slopes. They are found in hardwood and coniferous forests, meadows, alder thickets, burns, clear cuts, and sub-alpine parkland. Core bear habitat can occur in all of Washington's vegetative zone except the shrub steppe, which is considered fringe habitat. Good habitat typically includes water or wetlands. In District 8, they primarily occur in the forested areas in western and northern District 8. The Teanaway GMU 335 has the most bear habitat in the district, the most bear hunters, and averages the highest harvest and hunter success rate in the area. Black bears tend to move to higher elevations in the fall, following the progression of seasonally available foods, so when scouting, look for food items such as huckleberries and other berry-producing plants or acorns which occur in some areas of Yakima County. Recent wildfires have impacted bear habitat in several places throughout the District, so while these areas cannot currently support a large bear population, as the habitat recovers, it will be better suited for bears and other wildlife.

In 2023, WDFW biologists conducted a population monitoring effort in GMU 352, 356, and 360 to obtain a more accurate population density estimate for this area. Using hair snare corrals

(Figure 6), biologists collected more than 600 hair samples.

These samples are being processed and will be sent to a lab for genetic testing. With this information, an estimate of the number of bears per 100 km² (i.e., # of bears per 39 mi²) for the GMUs will be calculated. This, coupled with the harvest reports and age data obtained from premolar teeth, will improve local estimates of age and sex ratios and population size and trends that guide bear harvest



Figure 6: Example of the hair snare corral system used during the bear density estimation study.

guidelines. Most recent monitoring efforts produced a median age of harvested bears in D8 as 3.5 for males and five for females, consistent with the statewide numbers.

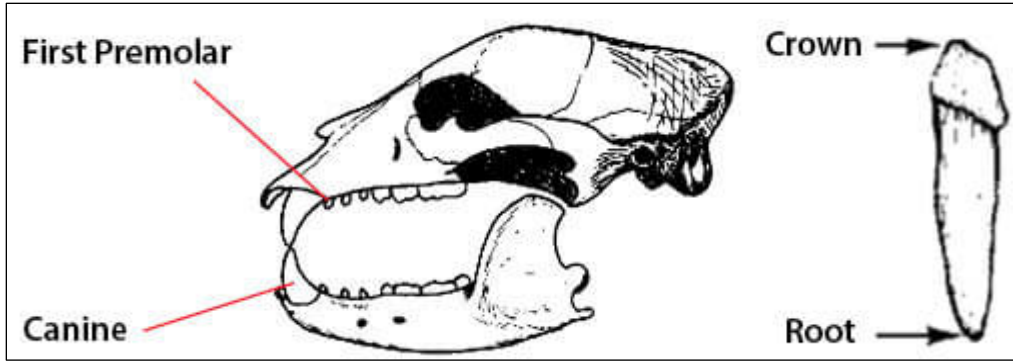


Figure 7. The location of a black bear's first premolar required tooth submission to WDFW.

Fall black bear season begins Aug. 1 and runs through Nov. 15. Hunters are strongly urged not to shoot a female black bear with cubs. During the fall females may be accompanied by cubs (weighing 30-50 lbs.) which tend to lag when traveling, so please observe and be patient before shooting. All successful fall black bear hunters statewide **must** submit a black bear premolar tooth per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department within five (5) days of harvest or by Dec. 1, 2023. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw. Tooth envelopes are available at all WDFW offices.

Bear hunters are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2023–2024 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

Table 3. Bear harvest in District 8 by GMU for 2022-23 season.

GMU	HARVEST
328	13
329	4
334	0
335	54
336	15
340	10
342	3
346	7
352	5
356	7
360	6
364	7
368	20
371	0
372	0

COUGAR

Most cougars in the district are harvested by deer and elk hunters who opportunistically cross paths with a cougar during general deer/elk seasons and have a cougar tag. A hunter who wishes to harvest a cougar must possess a valid big game license, including the cougar species option, before harvesting a cat. The primary prey for cougars in the district is mule deer, so hunters who spend time in areas with more deer will increase their chances of seeing and harvesting a cougar. Independently, cougar hunting is a fun and challenging experience. The



Figure 8: An adult cougar peers from behind a snow-covered tree.

early season is open from Sept. 1 – Dec. 31. The late season starts on Jan. 1 and continues until harvest guidelines (Table 4) are reached. All GMUs close on April 1 if their harvest guideline has not been met that season. The hunter is responsible for verifying if the late hunting season for the GMU they are hunting is open or closed by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline (1-866-364-4868) or visiting the WDFW webpage for [Cougar Hunting Area Openings and Closures](#). The hotline and webpage will be updated weekly beginning Jan. 1, 2024. The use of dogs to recreationally pursue and harvest cougars is illegal statewide.

Table 4. District 8 GMU cougar harvest guidelines

HUNT AREA	HARVEST GUIDELINE
328, 329, 335	8-10
330, 334, 371, 372	N/A*
336, 340, 342, 346	9-11
352, 356, 360, 364, 368	7-9

Male cougars are territorial and use a broader range when deer and elk are dispersed in summer and early fall. Deer and elk typically migrate back to the winter range by mid-November. Cougars will follow, and the highest densities can be found in lower elevations in late fall and winter. One popular cougar hunting technique is to use calls. This is most successful when snow is on the ground and tracks can be found. Rather than following the cougar hoping to find it, hunters call, trying to get the animal to come to them. Several calls work. During deer and elk seasons, hunters might consider a fawn bleat call, which typically won't spook deer or elk. Without snow, it can be challenging to know where to start. Rather than working large

blocks of timber, consider timbered stringers. Cougars inhabit open terrain but prefer cover. Cougars hunting open shrubsteppe will likely hide in timber stringers during the day. Cougars inhabit nearly every portion of the district, but some online hunting groups post where cats have been seen recently. Checking those sites may improve your success.

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually <80 lbs.) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. Hunters should be aware of how to identify young from adults by consulting the [Cougar](#) Brochure prior to hunting. Females can have dependent young throughout the year. Since cougars are solitary, observing multiple tracks suggests a female with offspring. However, smaller kittens may not be visible to hunters so please observe and be patient before shooting.

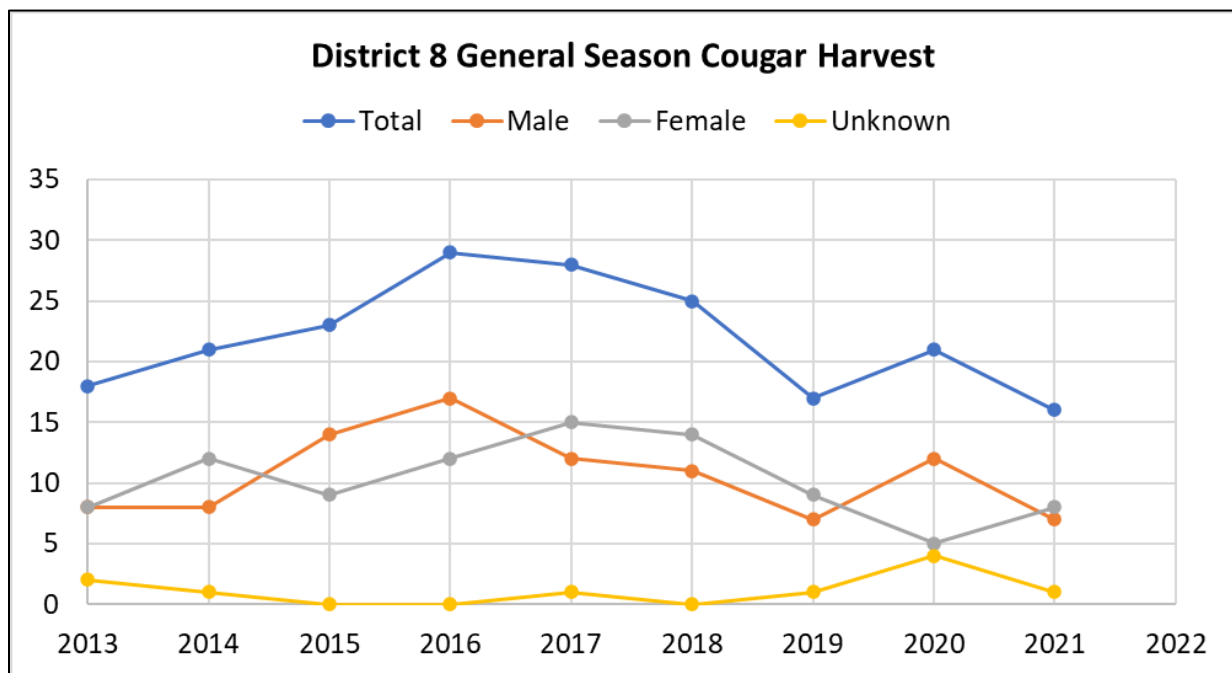


Figure 9. General season cougar harvest in District 8 from 2013-2022.

WATERFOWL

The Washington Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey is conducted yearly and is an index of breeding abundance since all areas of the state cannot be sampled. This year's survey was conducted May 1 – May 5 in eastern Washington. Parts of the district are within the Yakima and Columbia Irrigated survey stratum (Figure 10).

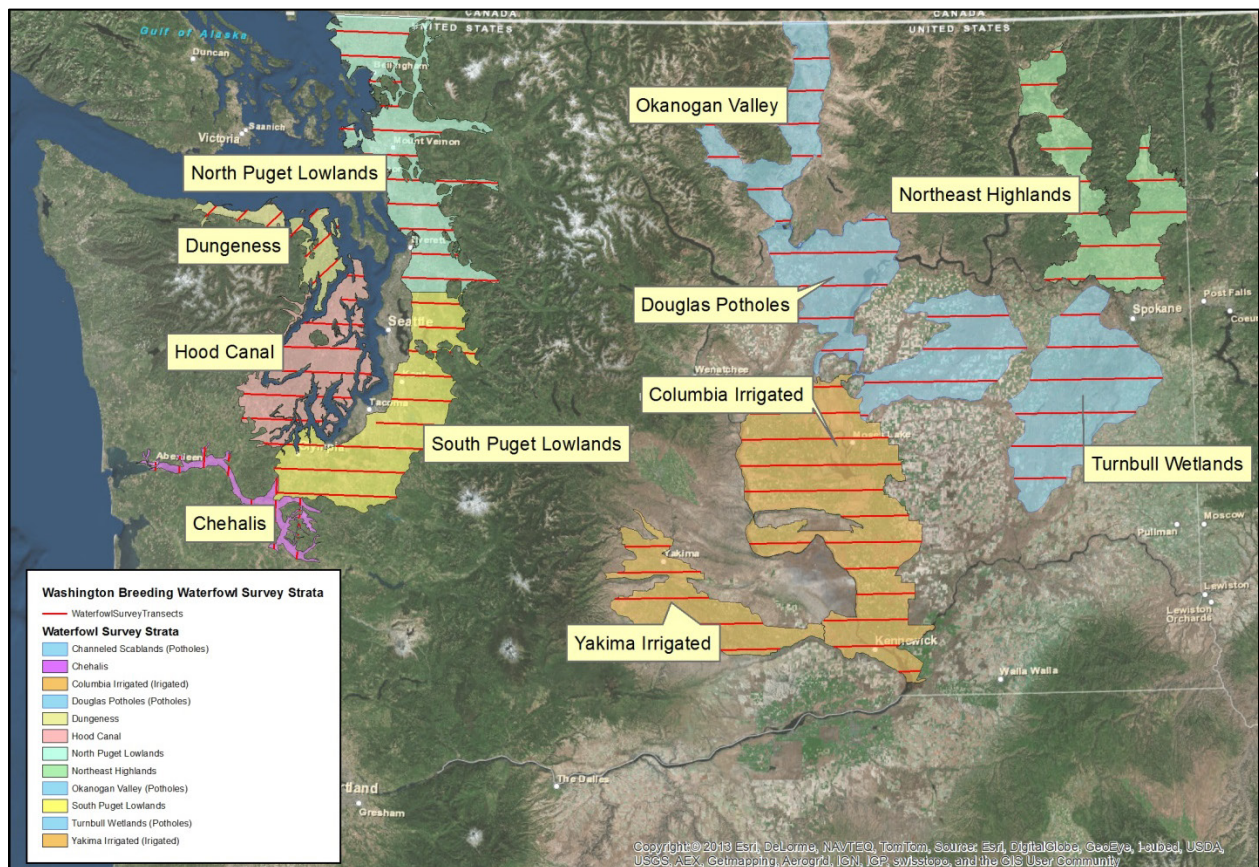


Figure 10. Washington State breeding waterfowl strata and long-term Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey transects and survey strata.

Statewide spring precipitation values in 2023 were generally drier than average but were not as dry as last year. However, only 6% of the area of the two survey strata were classified as being abnormally dry. April brought enough rainfall to form widespread areas of standing water during the survey period but may have occurred too late to increase nesting success. The statewide population estimate of all ducks was 7% less than the 2022 survey but 4% higher than the long-term average. The 2023 eastern Washington estimate of 107,090 was 20% lower than the previous year and the long-term average.

Mallards are the most abundant breeding and wintering waterfowl species in Washington. Unsurprisingly the estimate of breeding mallards in 2023 in eastern Washington was 42,999,

which is 5% lower than 2022 and 26% lower than the long-term average. This was the first year that western Washington had a higher mallard estimate than eastern Washington. One factor contributing to the high mallard estimate in western Washington, was the high number of grouped mallards. In 2023, grouped mallards comprised 27% of the statewide BPI compared to 8% in 2022, a more typical year. Ultimately, ducks need water, and the extreme drought throughout the west and prairie potholes negatively impacted populations in 2020, 2021, and 2022.



Figure 11: Waterfowl hunter adjusting decoys.

In District 8, fall and winter populations have been declining. Harvest peaked at around 50,000 birds in 2012 and has declined to roughly 20,000 in recent years (Figure 12). During the 2022-23 season harvest exceeded the 10-year average (29,693 birds) but did not exceed the 20-year average (33,038 birds). It is somewhat surprising harvest held above 20,000 during the 2022-23 season. There appeared to be few ducks, especially mallards, in the district. Harvest estimates were either inflated, or hunters took many more teal and ring-necked ducks. As row crops like corn are converted for hop cultivation, orchards, and vineyards, there is little reason for large ducks to stay in the district.

The best waterfowl hunting is in the lower Yakima Valley, especially on Yakama Nation (YN) lands, which tries to increase waterfowl hunting opportunities along the Yakima River every year. Review their [Feel Free to Hunt map](#) annually, use Google Earth to pre-scout, and don't be afraid to explore. YN's Satus Wildlife Area is the most popular and is open to hunting Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays. The Satus Wildlife Area is very popular due to relatively easy access. Hunting can be just as good on Mosebar ponds and north Satus.

Public hunting can be found on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) (SSWA) and [Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge](#). The Sunnyside Unit of the SSWA has several managed wetlands which include the Rice Paddy Wetlands, Johnson Wetland, and the North and South Haystack Ponds. There are three blinds on the SSWA, all of which require the use of waders while putting out decoys. The blinds offer mostly duck hunting with a rare flock of geese passing by. These are

first-come first-serve, with ADA hunters having priority if the blind is occupied 1 1/2 hours prior to daylight. Infrastructure problems in recent years have left one or more blinds dry. For information on which blinds have water and to obtain the combination to the lock, call the SSWA at 509-545-2028. The wildlife area also has several agriculture fields with small grains that can also provide some field hunting opportunities. Harvest and hunter days on Sunnyside have been low and are likely influenced by the challenging nature of managing dense vegetation and low water levels during drought years.

Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge has also had difficulty filling wetlands, especially in October. Water can only be pumped from Toppenish to fill wetlands in the Robins Unit if flows exceed 30 cubic feet per second. The Pumphouse wetlands depend on Toppenish Creek side channels to fill at higher creek levels. Flows in those side channels have been unpredictable in recent years. At a gauge height of three feet, the channels should fill. Hunters can check flow/levels at the [USGS website](#). Summer flows in Toppenish Creek are always low. Significant fall rain is needed, which usually doesn't come until November. A private hunt club due east of the refuge that attracted large numbers of ducks to the area was abandoned a few years ago. Few ducks were seen leaving the reserve and flying over the Toppenish Refuge last year. Before making a trip to Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge, calling the refuge at 509-865-2405 for conditions would be best.

Band returns suggest many locally produced ducks are staying in the Yakima Valley. Early season success is likely tied to regional production. The May mallard breeding population was down >40% in eastern Washington. There is no information on 2022 production. Banding takes place in August after this report is written.

Late season success is probably more dependent on naive northern migrants. The USFWS surveyed northern areas this year, but population estimates aren't published until August. The first cold wave is typically around Thanksgiving. Once ponds and sloughs freeze over, the Yakima River can be productive. For the best late-season hunting, watch for significant weather changes. If there is a quick thaw and rain, new ducks enter the valley, and a week or so of good hunting can be had before the birds find the safety of private land and the reserves. A freeze and thaw may also fill wetlands that had been dry earlier in the year.

Check out the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information about migratory waterfowl and upland game hunting. There are some bird hunting opportunities that get underway in September so hunters can start making plans now by checking out the upcoming seasons. Additionally, an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting in Washington can be found on the WDFW [Let's Go waterfowl hunting webpage](#).

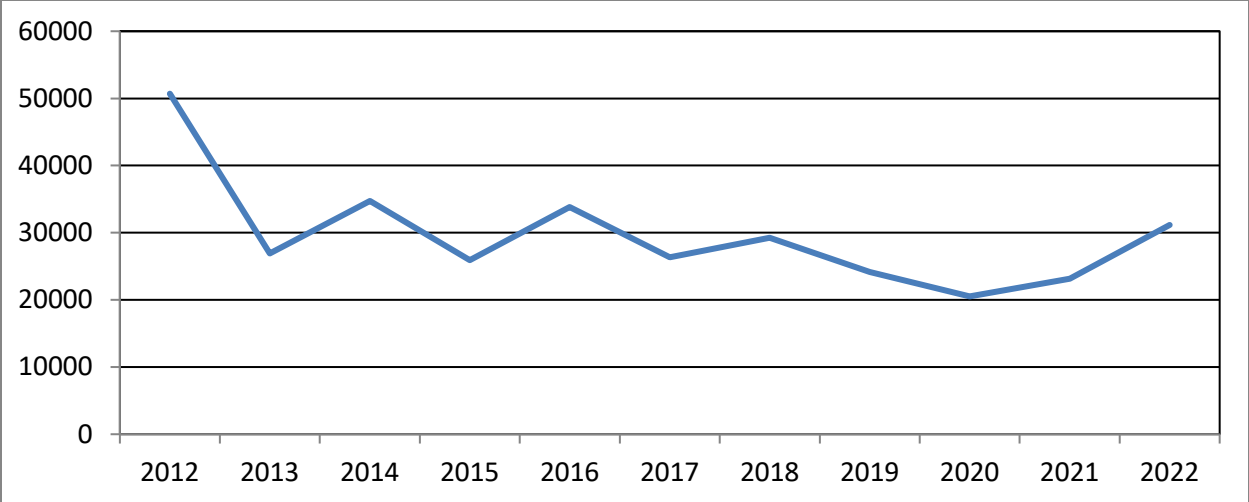


Figure 12. Duck harvest estimates in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

DOVE

Yakima County typically ranks second in the state for dove harvest. Harvest had declined until recruitment increased in 2020-2021 (Figure 13). The recruitment was obvious at banding stations in 2022, however no dove banding occurred in District 8 in 2023 because of staffing capacity issues.

To hunt mourning doves, hunters must possess a small game license and a state migratory bird permit. The season runs from Sep. 1 – Oct. 30, with a daily bag limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45. The best hunting success in the lower Yakima Valley occurs on private land. Better public hunting can be found on the Yakama Nation Reservation. Yakama Nation grows wheat on portions of the Yakama Nation's Satus Wildlife Area. Information on hunting on Yakama Nation land is available on their [website](#). The [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) has public dove hunting, but registration boxes suggest a relatively poor harvest. Hunters typically average <1 bird per day. The plentiful agricultural fields on the wildlife area provide abundant opportunities for dove hunting.

Dove numbers in the area often depend on the weather pattern. Warm weather is needed to keep most birds from migrating out of the valley. Cooler weather often hits the area by late August or early September. Despite a 30-day season, the average dove hunter only spends three days, usually opening weekend, pursuing doves. It is best to scout a few days before the season to find birds.



Figure 13. Comparison between a mourning and Eurasian collared dove

Many hunters ask about Eurasian collared dove hunting opportunities, as the season extends year-round without bag limits. Eurasian collared dove numbers have increased dramatically, but there was a die-off in 2018-2019, probably due to Avian Paramyxovirus-1. The virus was widespread nationwide in Eurasian collared doves, and populations have not rebounded. No information is collected on collared dove harvest, nor are there surveys. The difficulty for hunters is that most collared doves are in urban areas. Collared doves behave more like rock

doves (pigeons) than mourning doves. Some hunters occasionally find opportunities at roost sites and in a few fields, but good hunting is rare. Eurasian collared dove harvest is more of a bonus while hunting other birds rather than a target for most hunters. Making a trip to target Eurasian collared doves may be frustrating.

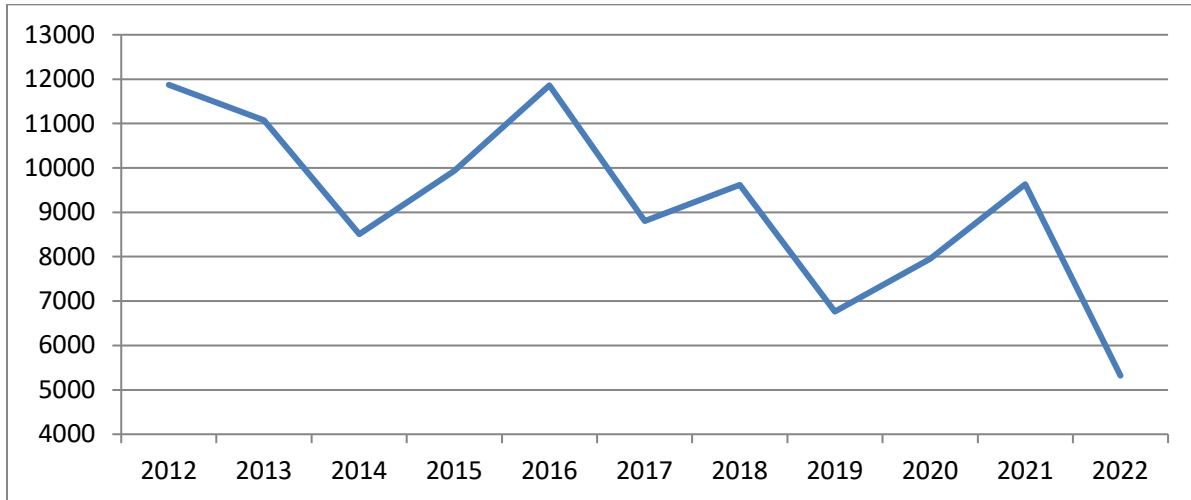


Figure 14. Dove harvest estimates in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

FOREST GROUSE

Traditionally, the harvest in District 8 was made up of primarily blue grouse. However, 45% of last season's harvest was made up of ruffed grouse. While around 30% of harvest was of blue grouse (sooty or dusky), and 5% spruce grouse. The remaining 20% of harvest was reported as unknown species. Grouse harvest in District 8 hit an all-time low in 2021 (Figure 16) but rebounded slightly during the 2022 season



Figure 15: A lone grouse hiding in the understory.

but was still significantly lower than long-term average. Some of the decline over the last two seasons was likely a result of fires and the associated closures. Hunters that reported hunting only took 0.17 birds per day (~6 days per grouse harvested) which is slightly higher than the year prior. There is no information on the 2023 hatch, but it would be hard for novices to find some grouse in the district.

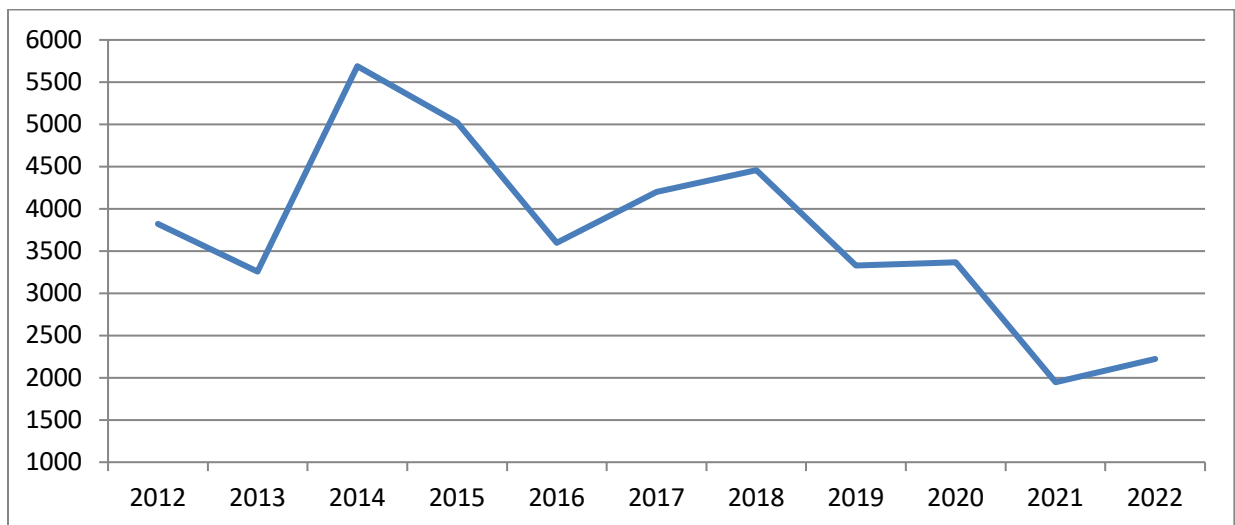


Figure 16. Harvest estimates for forest grouse in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

A common tactic used by many grouse hunters is driving roads in the morning and evening, especially when the season first opens. Research suggests brood hens and young are most vulnerable in early September. During the 2021-2023 season setting rulemaking process, the WDFW Commission adopted a decision to delay the forest grouse season two weeks from the

original opening date of Sept.1 to the new season dates of **Sept. 15 – Jan. 15**. WDFW biologists recommended the rule based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. Setting the season back to Sept. 15 helps protect brood hens that are more vulnerable to harvest during early September. More information is [available in this 2021 blog post](#). Hunters serious about finding grouse should look for areas with low densities of open roads and hike morning or evening.

WDFW FOREST GROUSE WING & TAIL COLLECTION

Biologists collect wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse throughout the season using designated collection sites. This collection effort contributes to a long-term statewide dataset that allows for a better evaluation of population trends and age-ratio data necessary for the local management of forest grouse species. Grouse hunters in District 8 can help with this effort by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse they harvest into one of our collection barrels located statewide ([WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection sites](#)). In District 8, collection sites are at the following locations:

- **Coleman Creek** - Coleman Creek Road at the entrance to Naneum State Forest.
GPS: 47.10453, -120.39865
- **Taneum Creek** - W Taneum Road, Entrance to L.T. Murray Wildlife Area.
GPS: 47.08702, -120.79056
- **Nasty Creek** - Junction of North Fork and Nasty Creek Roads.
GPS: 46.56476, -120.91966
- **Oak Creek Rd** - Junction of Oak Creek Road (1400) and Hwy 12
GPS: 46.72399, -120.81432

Please be sure to use the provided bags at the site and to fill out all necessary information. If these locations are inconvenient for hunters, we suggest looking through the statewide wing barrel site list on our website's [Forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) webpage or calling your local, [regional office](#) for information.

PHEASANT

Pheasant harvest in District 8 has declined about 50% over the last ten years and recently leveled out at very low levels (Figure 8). Habitat loss due to conversion from fallow land to crops has been identified as the reason for the decline as well as the decline of hunter participation. The best pheasant hunting in the district is around the irrigated farmland along the Yakima River in Yakima County. A large part of the irrigated farmland in Yakima County is located on the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation. Hunters interested in hunting on tribal lands should contact the office of the Yakama Nation (YN) at (509) 865-5121. For maps of WDFW-owned and managed land along the Yakima River, contact the Yakima Regional office at (509) 575-2740. There has been no change in this trend.

Wild pheasant populations in District 8 successfully hatch young when moisture is high. This year saw below-average moisture levels during the spring nesting period, which may decrease the overall wild pheasant recruitment. Additionally, several consecutive years of poor moisture levels and the effects on wild pheasant reproduction are a small cause for concern. The reality is that wild pheasants contribute little to the total harvest in the district. In Kittitas County (no wild birds), 490 pheasants were released, and harvest was estimated at 1100. However, For county level harvest especially, it's important to look at the confidence intervals, not just the point estimate. With small sample sizes per county, the estimate can be driven by a small number of hunters. This should be less of a problem with the new harvest survey, but still will occur where sample sizes are small. The harvest estimates are most valuable for looking at trends, not precise numbers.



Figure 17. A successful youth hunt in District 8

No pheasant surveys are conducted in District 8; thus, there is no information on the 2023 wild pheasant nesting season. Released pen-raised pheasants are the district's main source of opportunity for hunters.

About 1200 birds will be released at the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) and 500 birds at the Green Gate Entrance on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#) (also referred to as Whiskey

Dick). To hunt pheasants in Eastern Washington a small game license is required. The small game license is \$40.50, it is \$22.00 if purchased with any big game license. Youths under 16 can purchase the small game license for \$18.50, or \$8.80 with a big game license. Birds are released for youth and general season openers. To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, non-toxic shot is required for all upland bird, dove and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. More detailed information can be found in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) pamphlet. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). The use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

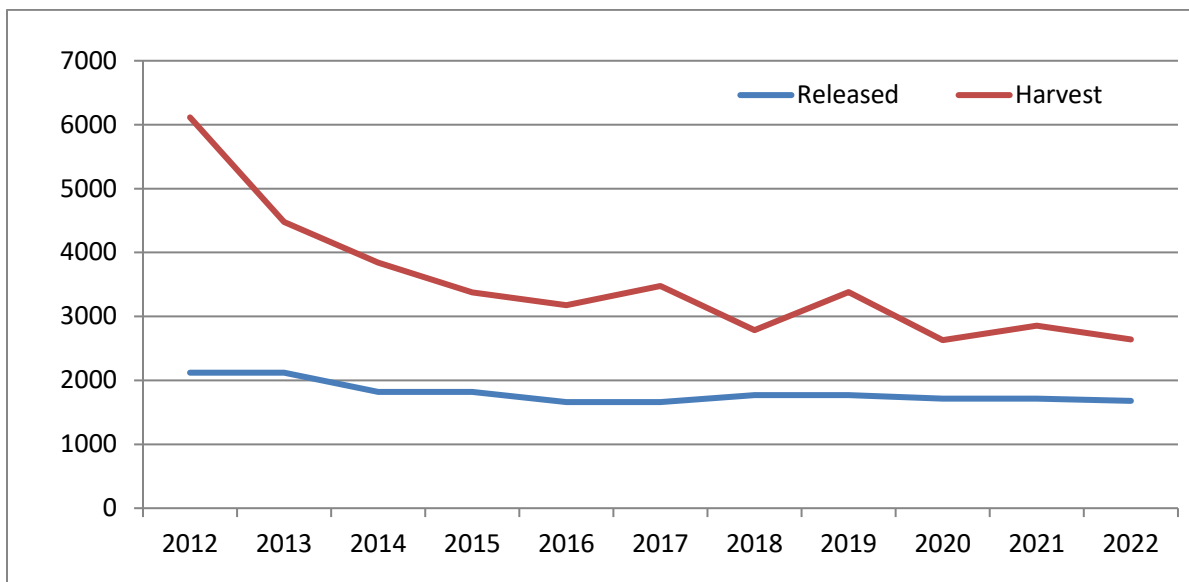


Figure 18. The number of released pen-raised pheasants and harvest estimates based on hunter reporting for pheasants in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

QUAIL



Figure 19: Quail perched atop a fence post.

California quail can be found in most non-timbered portions of the district. The best habitat and highest number of quail are typically in the lower Yakima Valley. The trend has been for declining total quail harvest for the last ten years (Figure 20), and 2021 was the lowest harvest ever recorded. Last season, harvest rebounded significantly. A variety of factors, from deep snow (2016-17) drought (2020-2021), and fires have reduced quail populations. Additionally, closures of public land because of fires in the 2021 and 2022 season may have had some effect on the decline in harvest.

Quail in riparian draws surrounded by sagebrush are getting hard to find. Most of the quail habitat in the Wenas Wildlife Area has burned in recent years. The best chance of finding good coveys will be near rivers and irrigated land. The best quail hunting opportunity in District 8 can be found along the lower Yakima River on the [Yakama Nation](#). WDFW has parcels along the river on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area \(SSWA\)](#), but registration boxes show poor harvest. Roughly 87% of upland bird hunters are unsuccessful at harvesting quail on SSWA, and harvest averages 0.16 per day.

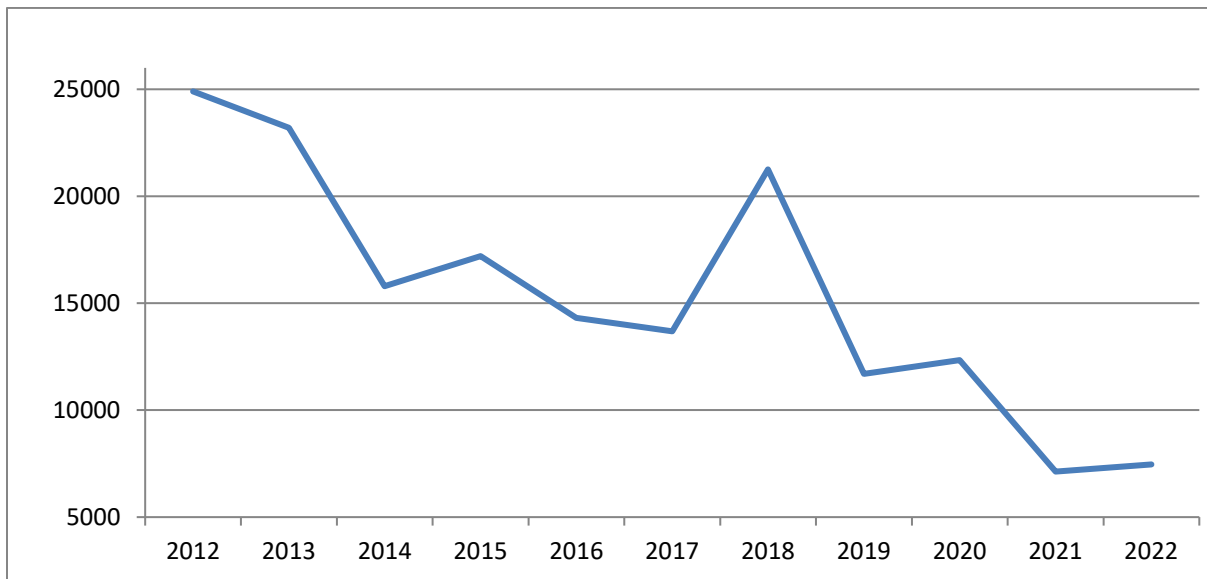


Figure 20. Harvest estimates for quail in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

TURKEY

[Turkey](#) harvest has been increasing since 2014 (Figure 21). The best hunting early in the spring is on private lands in the lower elevations of GMU 335, which is why most of the District 8 harvest comes from GMU 335 (Table 5). However, this GMU sees 40% of the district's hunter days spent a field. By May, some birds will move into higher elevations which opens opportunity on the Teanaway Community Forest. The remainder of GMUs yield a harvest of fewer than 30 birds. The 2022 season saw the highest hunter success rates in GMU 346 (25%), 336 (23%), and 340 (19%).

Turkey hunting can be one of the most exciting and shareable hunts. Adequate scouting and preparation are important for hunter success. Finding where birds roost at night and sneaking into a spot nearby before sunrise is a common tactic used by die hard turkey hunters. Because the hunting season aligns with the spring breeding season, male turkeys respond well to calls and decoys. They are trying to attract a mate at this time, so males will strut to display their dominance and will occasionally fight with other males often resulting in a very entertaining and memorable hunt. A great resource for new turkey hunters is [The Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) document released by WDFW's hunter education program.



Figure 21: First-time turkey hunter found success in Cle Elum – Photo credit: Orlando Naranjo

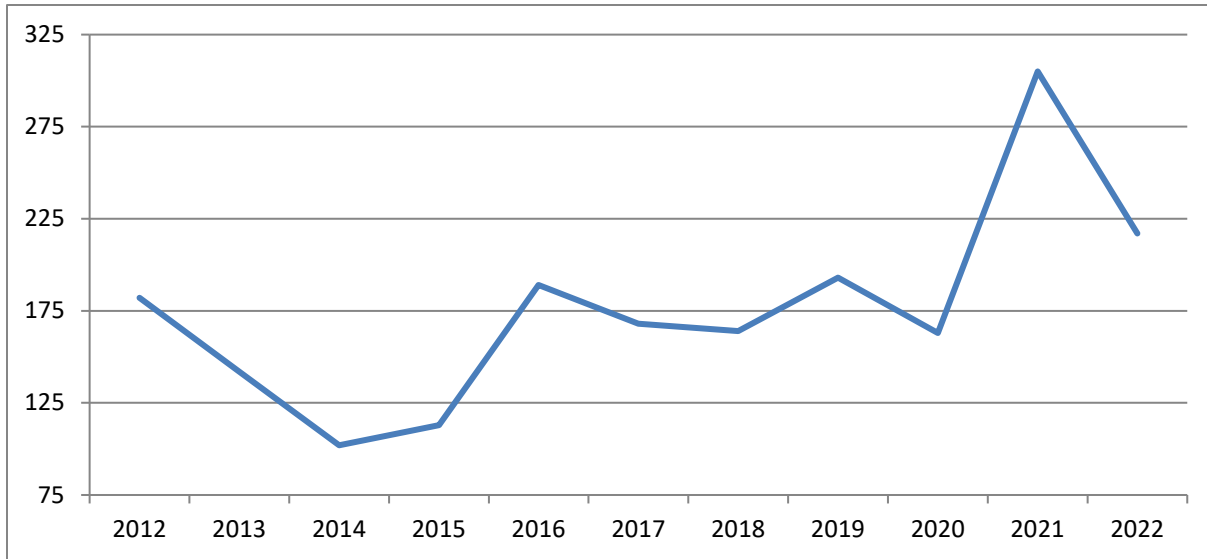


Figure 22. Harvest estimates for turkey in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

Table 5: District 8 spring turkey harvest by GMU for the 2019-2022 seasons.

GMU	GMU Name	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG
328	NANEUM	25	17	27	24	23
329	QUILOMENE	16	11	25	3	14
334	ELLENSBURG	17	14	20	20	18
335	TEANAWAY	70	59	112	84	81
336	TANEUM	20	26	42	33	30
340	MANASTASH	16	9	32	25	21
342	UMTANUM	16	18	17	13	16
346	LITTLE NACHES	0	0	2	3	1
352	NILE	3	0	3	0	2
356	BUMPING	0	3	0	0	1
360	BETHEL	0	2	3	0	1
364	RIMROCK	0	0	5	0	1
368	COWICHE	10	4	10	9	8
372	Rattlesnake Hills	2	2	7	3	4
	Total	195	165	305	217	

PARTRIDGE (CHUKAR/HUNGARIAN)

Partridge harvest in the district has been decreasing since 2018 (Figure 24) with drier conditions. As hunter numbers and harvest decline it makes estimating total harvest more difficult and less accurate. This is why it is important for all hunters to accurately report their harvest, even if it was zero.

History has shown that abundant snow and a wet, cold spring produces a lot of vegetation and birds. There are few three-year-old game birds, so the population is composed primarily of hatch-year birds. Precipitation came late in 2022, and the spring was cold. Hatches in 2022 were better than in 2021 but were late because of the delay in precipitation. This year, we experienced a dry early spring, with ample water later than usual. This may result in similar conditions to last year. The best hunting in recent years has been on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#) and the [Colockum Wildlife Area](#).



Figure 23: A successful chukar hunt – Photo credit: Marissa Sandoval

The [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC) is very popular with long-time chukar hunters. Much of YTC has burned in the last decade, and 2021 was an extreme drought year for the area. The hatch in 2022 was better, and this year's wet spring may result in an increase in local populations.

To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

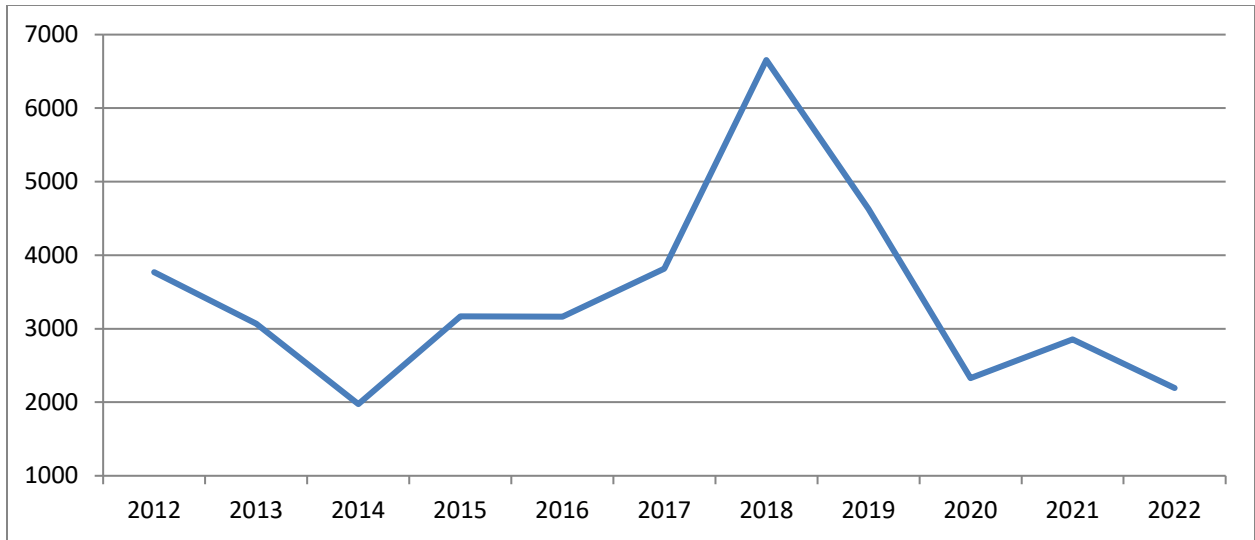


Figure 24. Combined harvest estimates for chukar and Hungarian partridge in District 8 from 2012-2022.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permits for any GMU and Permit Hunt for all game species are online at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-harvest

Updated detailed information on population size, compositions, or trends of game species is available through annual [Game Status and Trend Reports](#). You can use the search tool on the online document to quickly find the species and population of interest.

WDFW has released a Hunt Planner Web Map to search for game seasons and private land access around the state: geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/. A good starting point for hunters looking for a place to hunt is the Web Map, which provides hunters with information about public and private lands access points, GMU boundaries, species area units, hunting seasons, pheasant release sites, water access points, landscape features such as roads and topography, public lands, and much more (Figure 25).

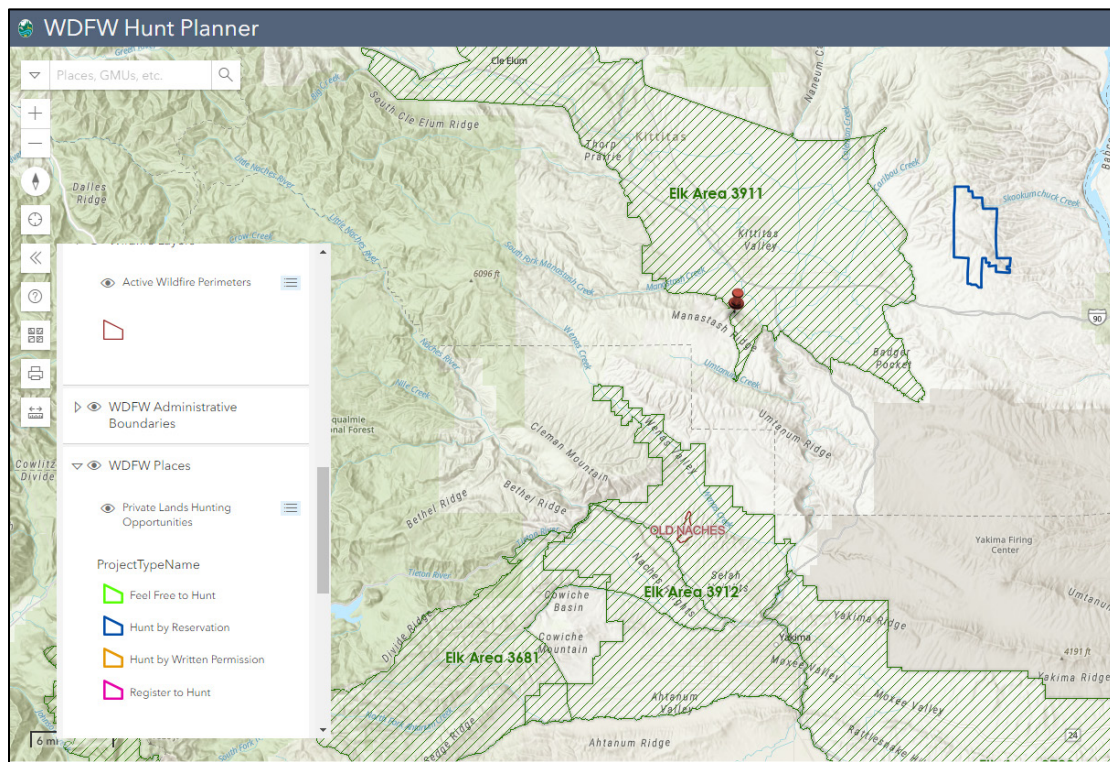


Figure 25. Depiction of active wildfire perimeter, private lands access, and elk area layers in District 8 from WDFW's Regulations Web Map. Pink, Green, Orange, and Blue bordered parcels are lands in the various public lands access programs.

Together with the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and private landowners, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) cooperatively manages many roads within Yakima and Kittitas counties under a "[Green Dot](#)" system. This system provides access

for camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, and ATV and off-road vehicle riding, while protecting sensitive habitat from damage caused by motorized vehicles. The maps can be used in an internet browser on a computer or phone or can be accessed in the field with your smartphone by downloading the “Avenza Maps” app to your phone, then download one of the 38-inch-by-26-inch Green Dot area maps listed on this page. When you open the map in the app, you'll be able to see your location on the map to aid in navigation. Hard copies of Green Dot maps (in useable black-and-white format) are available at individual wildlife area headquarters, and the following locations:

WDFW Yakima Regional Office

1701 S. 24th Ave
Yakima, WA 98902
509-575-2740

WA DNR Southeast Regional Office

713 Bowers Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926
509-925-8510

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

STEFANIE BERGH,
District Wildlife Biologist
CARLY WICKHEM,
Assistant District Wildlife Biologist
MONIQUE GRAY,
Private Lands Access Program Biologist



Simcoe Special Permit Success – Photo Courtesy of Ken Morris

District 9 Hunting Prospects

Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat counties

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DISTRICT 9 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 9 is in the southwest/central part of Washington and is the only district in the state that spans the Cascade Crest. Game management units (GMUs) in District 9 include 554 (Yale), 564 (Battle Ground), 568 (Washougal), 560 (Lewis River), 572 (Siouxon), 574 (Wind River), 578 (West Klickitat), 388 (Grayback), and 382 (East Klickitat). Hunters can choose from a variety of habitats, as well as areas covered by westside or eastside season dates and permit regulations.

The Cascade Mountain Range dominates the geography of District 9, dividing the district into westside and eastside zones. Topography varies from near sea level along the Columbia River and its lower tributaries to alpine habitats associated with Mount St. Helens and Mount Adams in the Cascade Range.

Dominant westside river drainages include the Lewis, Washougal, and Wind Rivers. Major eastside watersheds include the White Salmon and Klickitat Rivers. Rock Creek in eastern Klickitat County is the primary watershed in ponderosa pine/oak and shrubsteppe portions of the district. The Columbia River bounds the southern border of the district.

District 9 features some of the most diverse habitats of the state and includes westside coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir and western hemlock. These forests give way to Oregon white oak and ponderosa pine as you travel east of the Cascade Mountains. In eastern Klickitat County, pine and oak habitat transition into shrubsteppe dominated by grassland and sagebrush.

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands make up the majority of the westside forestland. These lands are open to public access. Weyerhaeuser owns blocks of land in GMU 568 (Washougal) and scattered lands throughout GMU 578 (West Klickitat). Hunters must have permits or leases to access most of this land and can find more information about recreation on Weyerhaeuser property [here](#). Weyerhaeuser does allow free public access **only** on their lands enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program. To locate those lands, visit the [Private Lands Hunting Access webpage](#).

Eastside forest and shrubsteppe/grassland habitat is primarily privately owned with limited public access. Large tracts of private timberland in GMUs 574 and 578, which typically allow some degree of public hunting access opportunities, are held or managed by the following companies: Manulife Forest Management (formerly Hancock), Green Diamond Resource Company/TCT Columbia Holdings (lands formerly owned by SDS), The Conservation Fund/Lupine Columbia Holdings (lands formerly owned by SDS), and American Forest Management. These lands are popular for deer, elk, bear, and turkey hunting but generally are not open to motorized vehicles. Most of these timber companies maintain recreational access

hotlines where hunters can find out if the land is closed before hunting. Hunters can find a list of recreational access websites and hotlines maintained by private industrial timber companies at the end of this document and a list of timberlands enrolled in WDFW's hunting access programs can be found on [WDFW's Private Lands webpage](#). Due to high fire danger, as of 7/28/23 all lands owned or managed by the following parties in Klickitat, Skamania, Yakima counties are closed to public access until further notice: American Forest Management, Broughton Lumber Company, Columbia Land Trust, DGS Timber, Green Diamond Resource Company, Kreps Ranch, Kreps Family LLC, Lupine Forest, Manulife Forest Management, Twin Creeks Timber (TCT Holdings), and Western Pacific Timber LLC. The [WDFW Hunt Planner webpage](#) has useful layers like GMU and elk/deer area boundaries, roads, Wildlife Areas, and different base maps (aerial photos, topography).

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [WDFW](#) and [DNR](#) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

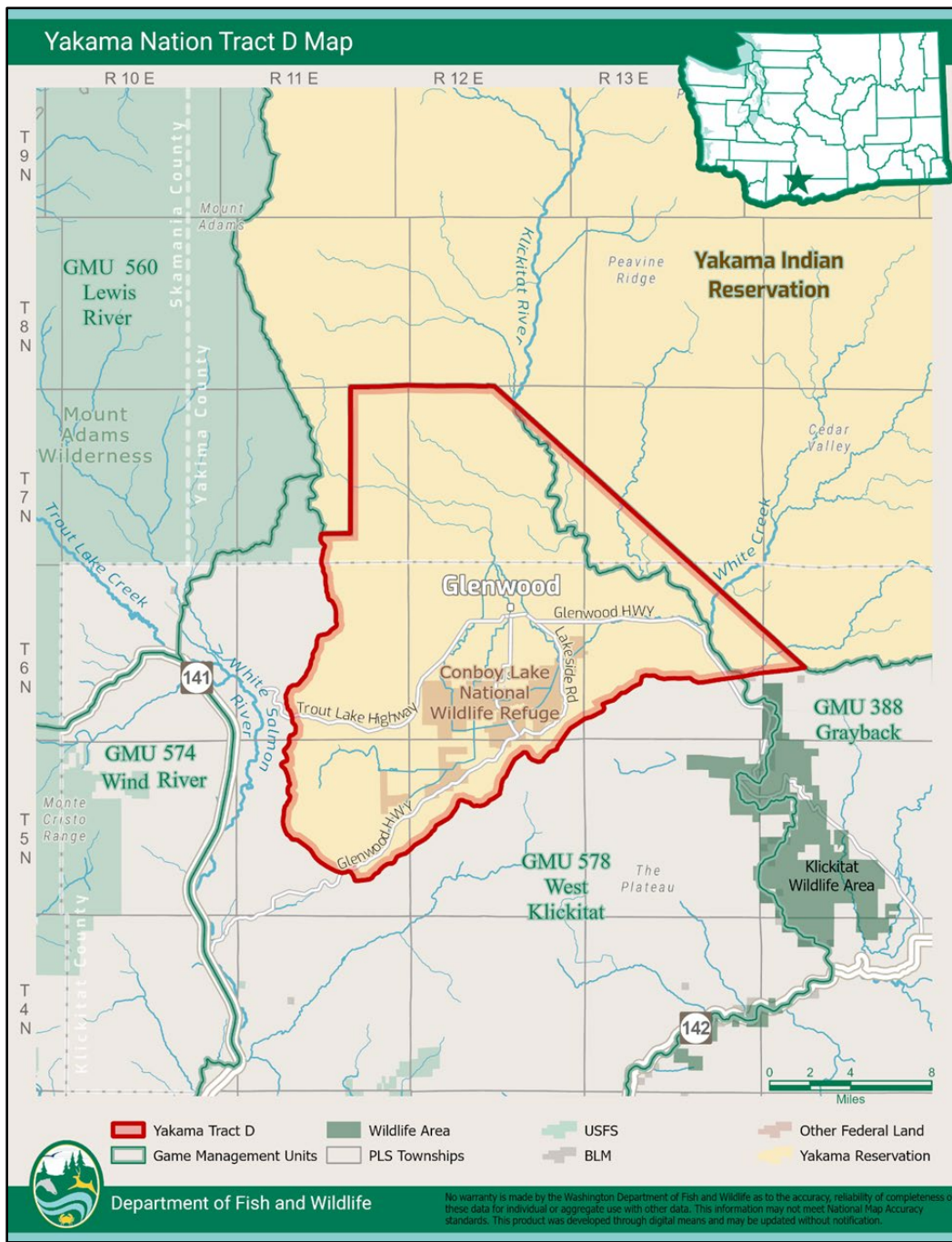
Visitors to WDFW- and DNR-managed lands with a parking placard for people with disabilities can use Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes on all non-motorized natural surface trails and closed roads where bicycles are allowed until June 30, 2023, or until new legislation is enacted.

GMU OVERVIEWS

382: Almost all private land except for the [Simcoe Mountains Unit](#) of the Klickitat Wildlife Area, which has some parcels of BLM land adjacent to it. The Simcoe Mountains Unit is Deer Area 5382, therefore deer hunting in the unit is by special permit only. There are several private hunt clubs that cater to deer and upland bird hunters. This GMU is mostly shrubsteppe, dryland agriculture, and you'll find oak-ponderosa forests in the northwestern quarter as well as in the major drainages. Deer are the most popular game species here, although chukar and partridge can also be found throughout.

388: Mostly private land except for the [Soda Springs Unit](#) and other small units of the Klickitat Wildlife Area. As of 9/1/23 all Western Pacific Timber lands in Klickitat County are **no longer** open to any hunting access of any kind. There are a few [other smaller Private Lands Program hunting options](#) in this GMU as well as [several pheasant release sites](#). This GMU is a mix of shrubsteppe, dryland agriculture and oak-ponderosa forests with heavier timbered areas in the northwest corner. The units of the Klickitat Wildlife Area provide good opportunities for deer and turkey hunting. There are a few scattered elk in the northwest part of the GMU and you will need an eastern elk tag to hunt elk here. The northwest finger of this GMU is now within the boundary of the Yakama Nation as part of the area known as "Tract D" (see map below). As

with all landownerships and jurisdictions, hunting is a privilege, and we remind you to please be respectful of landowners' posted access requirements. While there are no changes to the 2023-24 state hunting regulations within Tract D, please be extra cognizant that public or private land within Tract D is also within the Yakama Nation reservation. We are committed to working with Yakama Nation on long-term management of wildlife within the Tract D area and other geographic areas where we cooperatively manage wildlife with Yakama Nation.



578: Most of this GMU is private land except for some blocks of DNR land and small parcels of the Klickitat Wildlife Area. The northern portion of this GMU is now within the boundary of the Yakama Nation as part of the area known as “Tract D” (see map above). As with all landownerships and jurisdictions, hunting is a privilege, and we remind you to please be respectful of landowners’ posted access requirements. While there are no changes to the 2023-24 state hunting regulations within Tract D, please be extra cognizant that public or private land within Tract D is also within the Yakama Nation reservation. We are committed to working with Yakama Nation on long-term management of wildlife within the Tract D area and other geographic areas where we cooperatively manage wildlife with Yakama Nation. There are several industrial forest landowners within this GMU, and many allow free public walk-in access (see section at the end of this document). Most of the GMU is forestland with a mix of oak-pine-conifer forests. This GMU has good success rates for deer and turkey, provides opportunity for elk in the northern and western parts of the GMU, and offers bear or cougar hunting opportunity.

574: This GMU is mostly public land with the majority of lands within the [Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area](#) and the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#) along with a large block of DNR land in the western quarter of the GMU. There are a couple of private industrial forest landowners in the southwestern part of the GMU that allow free walk-in hunting access (see section at the end of this document). Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on public lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where there are clearcuts or recent forest thinning. Forest grouse can be found throughout the GMU and turkeys can be found in the lower elevation, southern, and eastern portions of the GMU.

572: This GMU is nearly all within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. In 2020 the Big Hollow Fire burned a significant portion of GMU 572. Hazardous conditions and closures may still be present. For the latest information on closures, please check with the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#) before scouting or hunting and read more about the fire [here](#). The northwest corner of this GMU is DNR and [PacifiCorp](#) offers free walk-in hunting access on some of its lands along the reservoirs along the northern part of this GMU. Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on public lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where there are clear-cuts or recent forest thinning. Forest grouse can be found throughout the GMU.

560: This is GMU is quite large and most of the land is within the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#). [PacifiCorp](#) offers free walk-in hunting access along the reservoirs in the southern part of this GMU. Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on the national forest lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where

there are meadows or recent forest thinning or fires. This GMU offers bear or cougar hunting opportunity. Forest grouse can also be found throughout the GMU.

554: This GMU is small and most of it falls within Clark County which has firearms restrictions (see page 90 of the Big Game pamphlet). There is some DNR land as well as free walk-in access on some of [PacifiCorp](#)'s lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where there are clearcuts or recent forest thinning.

568: The Washougal GMU has a mix of private land, DNR, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and private industrial forest lands. The [Yacolt Burn State Forest](#) is a popular and accessible spot for residents of Clark County. Walking or biking behind locked gates can be a good option to get away from other hunters. Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on public lands. This is a good GMU for black-tailed deer and offers bear or cougar hunting opportunity. Forest grouse can also be found throughout the GMU.

564: This GMU is an urban/suburban area that is firearms restricted and mostly private land. The three [Shillapoo Wildlife Area Units](#) do provide good public access for waterfowl and upland game bird hunting as well as limited black-tailed deer hunting. There is a pheasant release site at the Wildlife Area. [Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge](#) offers waterfowl hunting via a pre-season lottery reservation system.

ELK



WDFW manages elk in District 9 as part of the Mount St. Helens (MSH) Herd, described in the [Mount Saint Helens Elk Herd Plan](#) on the WDFW website. You can find more information on elk management in District 9 in the [Game Harvest Statistics](#) and [Game Status and Trend Reports](#).

Elk hunting within District 9 is managed under a variety of seasons, so check regulations closely before going afield. Hunters should be aware that GMUs 388 (Grayback) and 382 (East Klickitat) require Eastern Washington elk tags, while the remainder of District 9 is within the Western Washington elk tag area. Additionally, GMU 564 (Battle Ground) and 554 (Yale) are Firearm Restriction GMUs.

GMU 560 (Lewis River) offers the most opportunity for elk hunting in District 9 in terms of size. Most of this area is public land within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. [PacifiCorp](#) also offers non-motorized access to their lands on the north side of Swift Reservoir. Early-season snow levels can affect hunter access and success during the modern firearm season. GMUs 574 (Wind River), 572 (Siouxon), and 578 (West Klickitat) are also good elk units. GMUs 574 and 572 are primarily public U.S. Forest Service and WA State DNR lands, while GMU 578 is primarily private land with some Washington state DNR land so be sure to have good maps to identify ownership in this area.

GMUs 388 and 382 in Klickitat County have very few elk and are generally considered better for deer hunting. GMU 564 in Clark County only has elk in the northern and eastern portions of the GMU. This area has a mix of public and private lands, and it's important to research ownership before planning your hunt in this area.

Some areas may be closed to both motorized and non-motorized access. Even in familiar areas, we recommend extra scouting because elk distribution may have changed, and normal hunting lands may be closed due to fire danger.

ELK POPULATION INFORMATION

Elk populations in the GMUs comprising the Mount St Helens (MSH) elk herd area are down from historic high levels during the mid-2000s. This population reduction was implemented per the objectives of the [Mount Saint Helens Elk Herd Plan](#). Liberal antlerless elk hunting opportunity, combined with several years of late-winter and spring storms, reduced the elk population in these GMUs. The winter of 2016-17 was unusually severe, with early snowfall and persistent cold, wet conditions throughout the winter. Severe winters have a larger impact when animals are in relatively poor condition entering the winter. Elk within the MSH herd typically lack large fat reserves to help with long, hard winters.

Reflecting on these challenging conditions, the 2017 spring survey of elk in the monitored portions of the MSH herd showed a 30-35% reduction from 2016 numbers. The winters of 2017-18 and 2018-19 were mild, however elk hoof disease continues to impact survival and reproduction in this herd. Survey efforts conducted during the springs of 2018-2019 and 2022 indicate that the MSH elk herd has stabilized at this lower population level (surveys were not conducted in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions and in 2022 due to budget restrictions). These indicators point toward an elk population that is below objective and well below historic highs. Therefore, hunters should expect a generally less productive elk hunting season during the 2023 hunt. WDFW has reduced antlerless hunting opportunity accordingly.



Elk in the oaks in GMU 574.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TAHD)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the MSH elk herd area. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009-2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. Disease prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties, but is also found in all three counties of District 9.

All of District 9 falls within the MSH elk herd range. TAHD is most prevalent among elk in the southwestern part of Washington, however the disease was detected outside Trout Lake (GMU 578) in 2018 and has since been confirmed throughout Klickitat and Skamania counties.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot [program](#) to encourage westside (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The objective of this program is to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of Sep. 1 – Dec. 31 will be awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

So, what can hunters do to help?

- **Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs**
- **Turn in your elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington**
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, see WDFW's website at https://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/health/hoof_disease/ and [Washington](#)

[State University's website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.



Example of elk hooves deformed by TAHD.

DEER



Deer in GMU 382 – Photo courtesy of Bob Harvey

Deer populations are generally stable in lower-elevation units such as Washougal (568) and Battle Ground (564). Deer harvest in West Klickitat (578), Grayback (388), and East Klickitat (382) was slightly lower in 2022 than in 2020-2021, although hunter effort was much lower in 2022. Deer populations are generally low in the Cascade Mountain GMUs, including Lewis River (560), Wind River (574), and Siouxon (572). The extreme winter of 2016-17 hurt deer populations throughout District 9 but recent harvest statistics indicate some recovery. December 2022 aerial surveys in GMUs 388 and 382 indicate a slight decrease in the population and March 2023 driving route surveys in 388 showed a low fawn:doe indicating that fawns born in 2022 had low survival. The decline in the population was likely due to a summer 2022 outbreak of [AHD](#) and slightly harsher than normal winter conditions. To facilitate recovery of the deer population in GMUs 578, 388, and 382, nearly all antlerless permits have been removed. As the population recovers those permits will be slowly added back.

Deer harvest and success is remarkably consistent within District 9, where hunters are expected to harvest approximately 2,000 bucks during the 2023 general season, representing a success rate of 20-25 percent. You can find historical information on deer harvest trends in District 9 on the WDFW website under [Game Harvest Statistics](#) and [Game Status and Trend Reports](#).

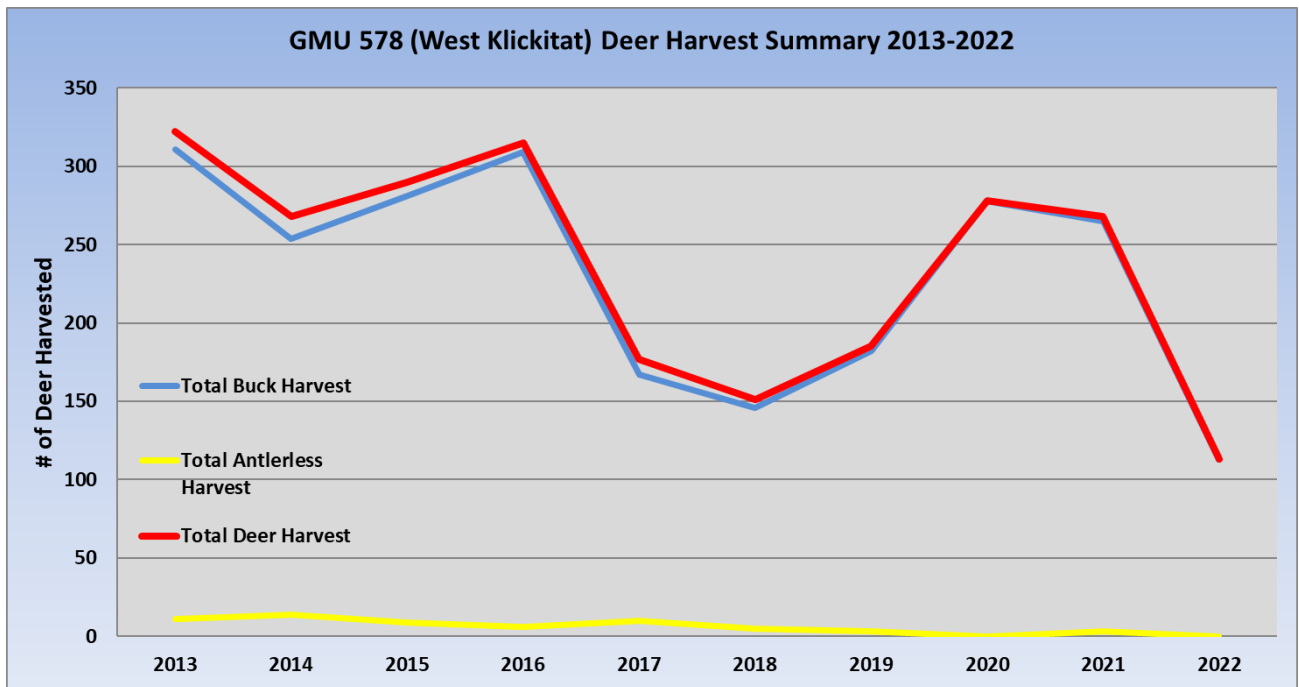
Successful hunting for black-tailed deer is primarily a function of the effort that hunters put into the hunt. Black-tailed deer thrive in heavily vegetated habitats and are often very nocturnal. Successful black-tailed deer hunters must be in position early in the morning and carefully hunt near sources of food and secure cover.

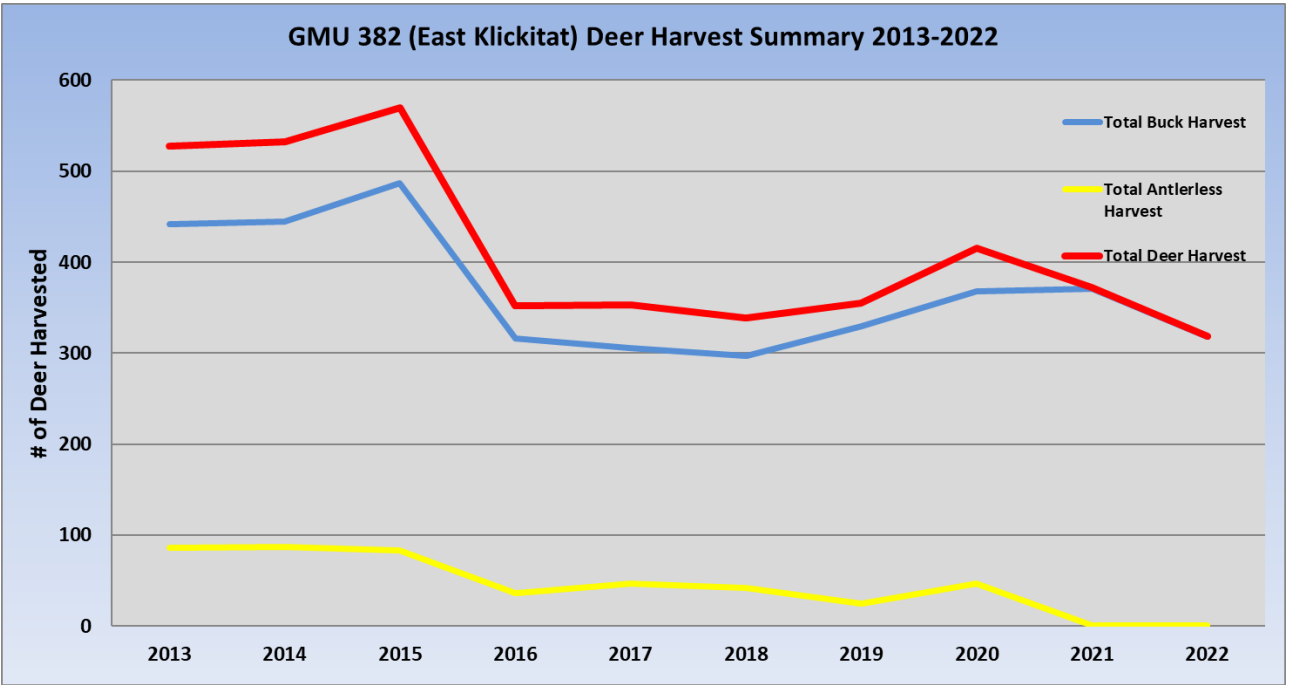
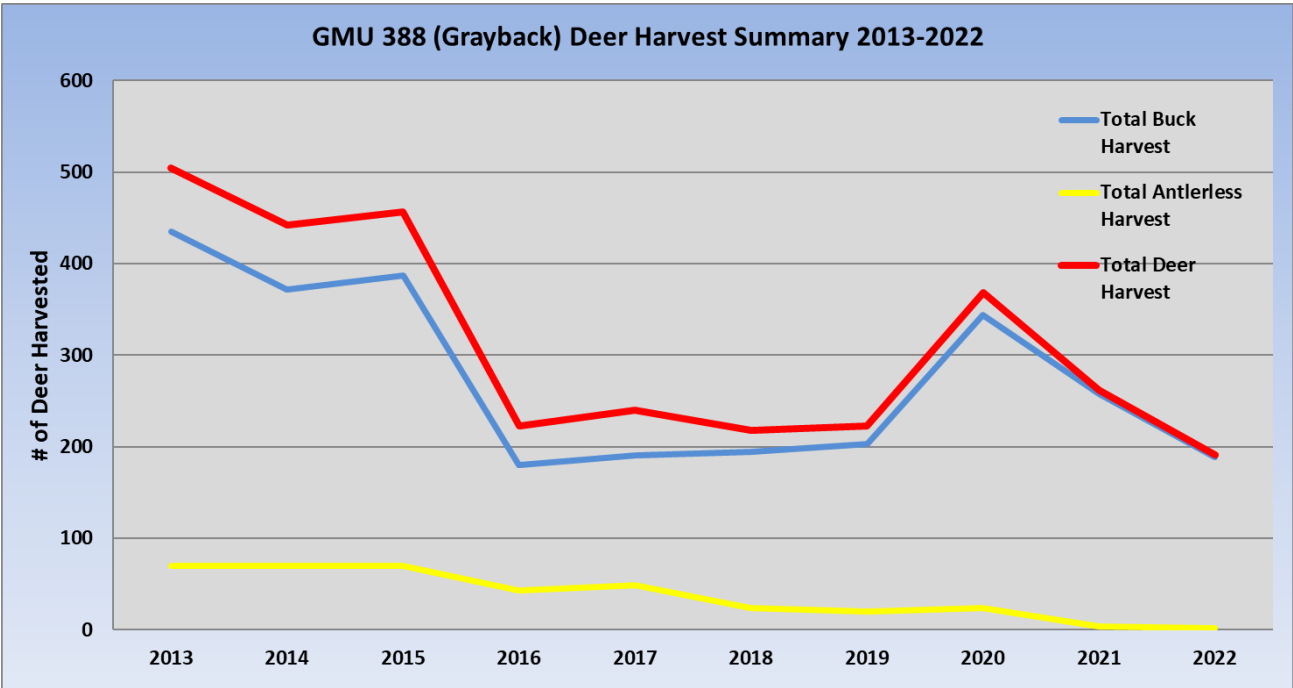
Bucks travel more during the rut, covering large amounts of territory searching for does in estrus. This makes bucks more vulnerable, as they spend less time hiding and you can sometimes find them in open habitats such as clear-cuts and meadows. Not surprisingly, approximately one-third of the annual buck harvest in Region 5 occurs during the four-day late buck hunt held each November.

Within District 9, GMUs 554 (Yale), 560 (Lewis River), 564 (Battle Ground), 568 (Washougal), and 572 (Siouxon) offer an attractive general season hunting opportunity. Hunters should note, however, the firearm restrictions in GMUs 554 and 564 (see page 90 of the [2023 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations Pamphlet](#)).

Those interested in trophy-hunting opportunities for deer might consider any of the Klickitat County units. GMU 578 (West Klickitat), GMU 388 (Grayback), and GMU 382 (East Klickitat) are all managed under a 3-point or greater antler restriction. Collectively, the Klickitat GMUs support an annual harvest of around 1,000 three-point or greater bucks. Hunters are advised to carefully review the regulations before going afield, as the rules differ in each unit and none of the Klickitat GMUs allow general season late buck rifle hunting. GMU 382 is mainly private land and deer hunting is by permit only on the Simcoe Mountains Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area (Deer Area 5382). The main units of the Klickitat Wildlife Area are located in GMU 388 and provide good deer hunting opportunities. GMU 578 has some blocks of DNR land as well as private industrial forestlands that are open to non-motorized access.

Some areas may be closed to both motorized and non-motorized access. Hunters are advised to do extra scouting even in familiar areas because deer distribution may have changed, and normal hunting lands may be closed for fire danger.





BEAR



Bear in GMU 574 – Photo courtesy of JP Sullivan

District 9 makes up part of both the South Cascades and East Cascades black bear hunt zones for the fall bear hunting season. In 2023, both the South Cascades zone (which includes GMUs 574, 572, 568, 564, and 560) and the East Cascades zone (which includes GMUs 578, 388, and 382) are open from Aug. 1-Nov. 15. The bag limit is now two black bears per license year statewide. In 2022, hunters harvested 254 bears in the South Cascades (8 percent success rate) and 389 in the East Cascades zone (10 percent success rate), which are above the harvest rates for 2021. The 2022 success rates are just below the 2022 statewide average of 12 percent. Currently, no spring black bear hunts are available in District 9.

All successful bear hunters are **required** to submit the premolar tooth in a tooth envelope by Dec. 1, 2023. See page 68 of the [2023 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations Pamphlet](#) for details.

MANDATORY Submission of Bear Teeth Statewide

All successful black bear hunters statewide **MUST** submit a black bear premolar tooth per WAC 220-415-090. Pre-paid and self-addressed tooth envelopes can be obtained at all WDFW offices (see page 6). The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw.

Successful hunters are required to submit a tooth from their bear to the Department. Please submit within 5 days of harvest or by December 1, 2022.

WDFW uses teeth to get an accurate age of kills, hunters wanting to check the age of their harvested bear can visit the following website: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/harvest-reporting/tooth-lookup>

Teeth are aged by an external laboratory and turnaround time for age results can be up to 6 months after the close of the fall big game hunting season.



COUGAR



Cougars are difficult to hunt, and deer and elk hunters typically harvest them when the opportunity presents itself. The early cougar hunting season runs from Sept. 1 to Dec. 31. In 2012, a season harvest guideline system was initiated, which closes hunt areas after Jan. 1 if the harvest guidelines have been met or exceeded. The late hunting season is from Jan. 1 to April 30 or when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever comes first. For more information on these guidelines and to check if the area you are interested in hunting is closed, see the [cougar webpage](#). All successful cougar hunters must report their harvest to the hotline (866-364-4868, press 3 after the recording) within 72 hours, and all cougar pelts must be sealed by WDFW within five days of harvest (skull and hide unfrozen with proof of sex attached to the pelt). Contact a [WDFW office](#) to make an appointment to have a cougar pelt sealed.

WATERFOWL



Goose Hunting in Clark County – Photo courtesy of Brad Cady

GOOSE HUNTING

Most goose hunting opportunities within District 9 occur in Clark County, which is a part of Goose Management Area 2 - Inland. Hunters are reminded of the complex goose hunting regulations designed to protect wintering populations of the dusky Canada goose. New hunters and those whose hunting authorization were invalidated for Area 2 (Coast or Inland) during the previous year need to pass an exam with a minimum of 80 percent to receive authorization for the current year. Please visit our [Goose Identification](#) page for more information.

Very little goose hunting is available in Skamania County. Goose hunting in Klickitat County is limited and primarily associated with private lands where landowner permission is required. Please note that the daily bag limit remains 23 geese per day, which includes up to three Canada geese of any subspecies (except dusky geese), up to 10 white geese (Snow and Ross's

geese), and up to 10 Pacific white-fronted geese. Check the [2023-24 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more specific information on season length and bag limits.

A successful season in Clark County relies on sufficient precipitation in the fall and early winter to fill the wetlands, and cold weather in the northern portions of the migratory route to push the geese south. Check hunting reports from northwestern Washington and Coastal British Columbia, monitor weather forecasts, and scout your hunting areas ahead of time to ensure geese have arrived and are congregating in areas that allow hunting.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR AREA 2 GOOSE HUNTING

Goose hunting in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties is subject to the additional restrictions of Goose Management Area 2 - Inland. These restrictions are in place to protect the dusky subspecies of the Canada goose. We encourage goose hunters to review the different subspecies of Canada geese in southwest Washington before each hunting season.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved the following regulations for the 2023-24 southwest Washington goose season in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of Oregon and Alaska:

- The season for dusky Canada geese is **closed**. If a hunter takes a dusky Canada goose or does not comply with a field check, that hunter's authorization will be invalidated, and the hunter will not be able to hunt geese in Goose Management Area 2 for the rest of the season.
- Goose Management Area 2 is split between the Coast (Pacific County and a portion of Grays Harbor County west of Highway 101) and Inland (Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, and a portion of Grays Harbor County east of Highway 101).
- In Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland), legal goose hunting hours begin 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours to 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours.
- Starting in 2019, goose hunters planning to hunt in Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland) began receiving a harvest record card when purchasing their licenses. Immediately after taking a goose, you must fill out your harvest card in ink. You are required to report the information on your harvest card to WDFW by using the [online reporting system](#) or by mailing the cards to: WDFW, Wildlife Program – Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141, Olympia WA 98504. The reporting deadline is March 20, 2024. Reports need to be postmarked by the reporting deadlines even if you did not harvest any birds. Please note that you must comply with these reporting requirements, or you

will be required to pay a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card the next year.

- The goose hunting season will be open every day from Sept. 2-10 as well as Oct. 14-29, and on selected dates (Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays) from Nov. 22, 2023-Jan. 14, 2024, and Feb 10-March 6, 2024.

Hunters are advised to review the revised goose identification [training program](#) before hunting this season and check the [2023-24 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information. Wildlife managers are relying on southwest goose hunters to make this season format successful, so goose hunting can remain open in permit zones.

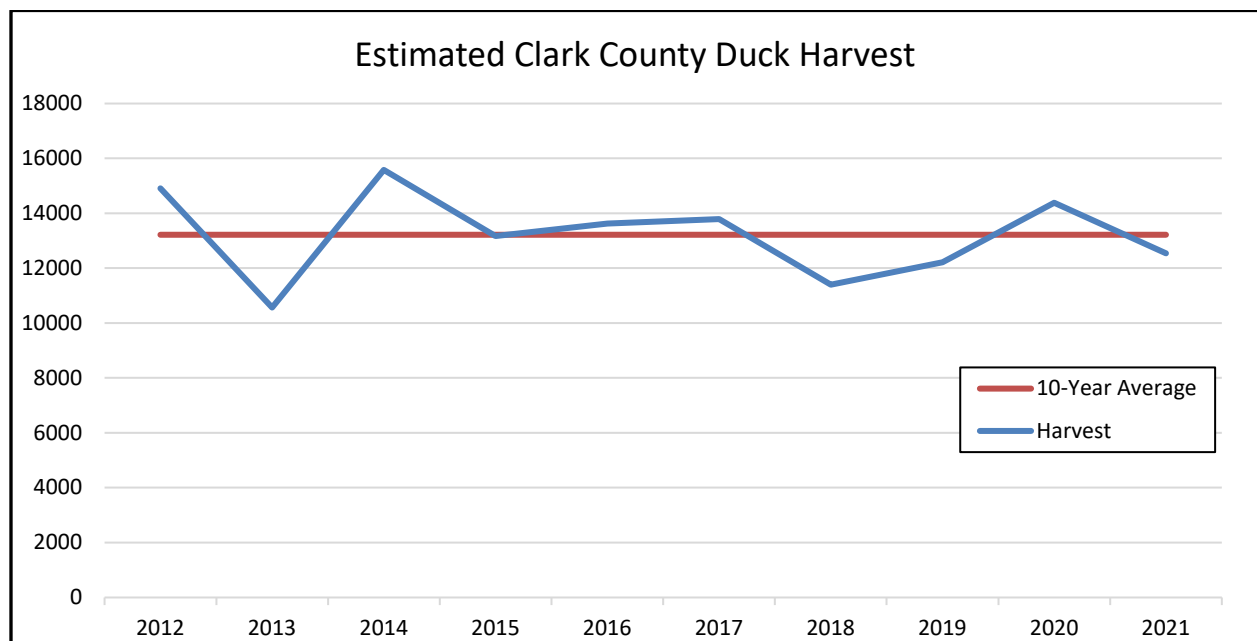
Most public goose hunting in Clark County is in the Vancouver lowlands and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Hunter access to Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is by [reservation only](#). As of the writing of this document, the 2022 goose harvest estimates were not yet available to the public. Once the data are finalized, they will be available [here](#), under the heading “Small Game.”

DUCK HUNTING



Photo courtesy of Sam Gibbons

The Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved a liberal duck hunting season of 108 days, which includes two youth hunt days (one in eastern Washington and one in western Washington), a one-day hunt for youth, veterans and active military members, and a 105-day general season. The daily bag limit is seven ducks. Like Canada goose hunting, most public access for duck hunting in Clark County is limited to the Vancouver lowlands and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. The daily bag and possession limits of ducks (as well as coots, snipe, and pigeon) have not changed in recent seasons, however starting in 2022 Harlequin ducks were closed to harvest statewide. The annual estimated harvest of ducks in Clark County has been relatively stable over the last ten years, averaging 13,218 ducks taken each season. As with goose season, a successful duck hunt in Clark County will require a good amount of rainfall in the fall and winter. Be sure to scout the area you plan to hunt or call the local refuge/wildlife area manager for a water-level report before heading into the field. As of the writing of this document, the 2022 duck harvest numbers were not available to the public. Once the data are finalized, they will be available [here](#), under the heading “Small Game.”



Estimated duck harvest in Clark County from 2012-2021

You can find more information on North American waterfowl populations and places to duck hunt in Clark County using the following links:

<https://www.fws.gov/program/migratory-birds>

<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/ridgefield/visit-us/activities/hunting>

<https://wdfw.wa.gov/places-to-go/wildlife-areas/shillapoo-wildlife-area>

TURKEY



Turkeys along the Klickitat River – Photo Courtesy of WDFW

Wild turkey populations in Klickitat County continue to be very healthy and hunting conditions for fall 2023 should be typical for this area. The 2023 fall season in District 9 is open to general season hunting, which means no special permit is required. Fall hunt dates are Sept. 1 to Dec. 31, and the bag limit is one turkey (either sex). This is the third year of a four-month-long general season, which is an exciting new opportunity! Please refer to page 36 in the [2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information.

In fall 2022, 221 turkeys were harvested in the District 9 fall general season (includes GMUs 382, 388, 568-578) with a success rate of 35 percent. While this success rate was relatively consistent with previous fall seasons (2021: 23%, 2020: 38%, 2019: 40%), the number of turkeys harvested was significantly higher (2021: 164, 2020: 155, 2019: 150).

The spring turkey season in Klickitat County has historically resulted in a much higher harvest when compared to fall season with a 10-year average of 500 birds. The 2022 spring season estimated harvest was 594 turkeys, lower than the 729 taken in 2021, but still well above average. Both 2021 and 2022 spring seasons saw a considerably higher number of hunters and hunt days compared to 2019 and 2020. Spring success rates have ranged between 24 and 40 percent since 2012.

The majority of quality turkey hunting areas in Klickitat County are below 1,500 feet. Popular hunting areas are generally associated with the White Salmon and Klickitat River drainages. East of the Klickitat River, you can find turkeys on the Klickitat Wildlife Area and in the Simcoe Mountains to the north and west of Goldendale. Most of the land in and around the Simcoe Mountains is owned by private timber companies. Please refer to the “Private Industrial Forestlands” section below for details on hunting access and be sure to have good maps that correctly identify ownership if you are planning to hunt in these areas. Please note that a

sizeable amount of private timberland in Klickitat County that was previously open to walk-in hunting has been sold to other industrial timber companies as well as to small, private landowners. Just because you have hunted for turkey in an area in the past does not mean it is still open to public hunting. Please do your research before heading into the field and check your mapping apps or the [Klickitat County GIS website](#) for ownership information.

Some landowners in western Klickitat County complain of turkey damage on their property and may be willing to provide access to turkey hunters that ask for permission and practice good hunter ethics.



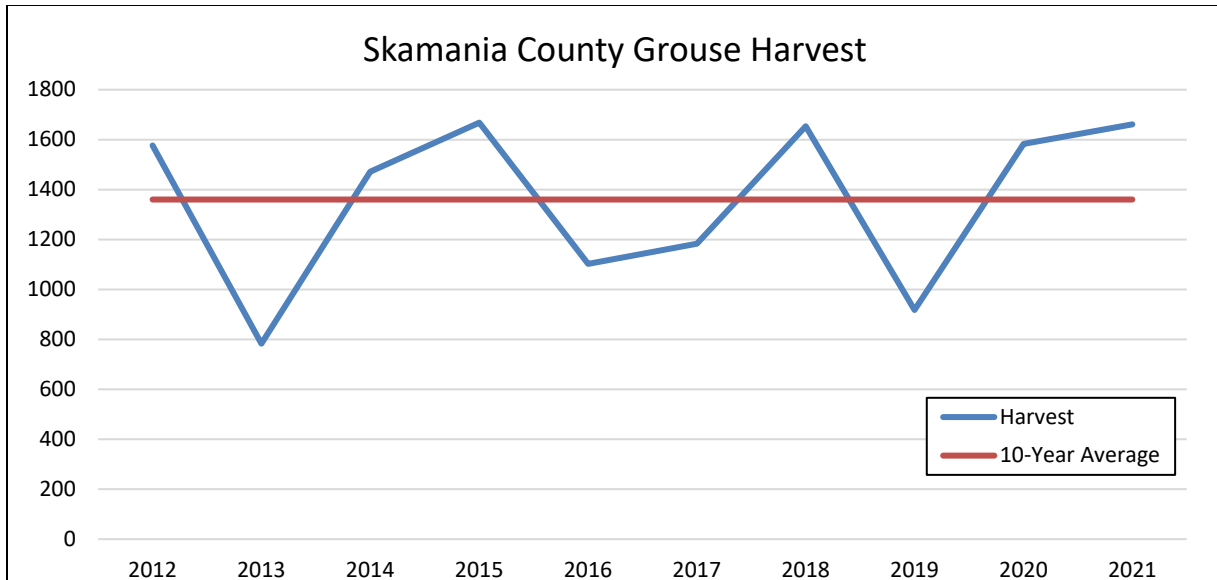
Successful Spring Turkey Season– Photo Courtesy of Chris Wilson

Outside of Klickitat County, there is less opportunity for turkey hunting within the district. In Skamania County, turkey populations are located primarily in the eastern part of the county between the Wind River and Underwood and below 1,000 feet in elevation, although flocks of turkeys have been reported as far west as Beacon Rock. Clark County offers little to no turkey hunting opportunity.

FOREST GROUSE



Grouse season in Washington runs from Sept. 15 – Jan 15. The change to Sept. 15 was made in 2021 to protect brood hens with chicks. Skamania County, which is predominately public land, provides hunters with the most opportunity in the district. In District 9, the majority of quality grouse habitat is on USFS lands in Skamania County and certain areas of the Simcoe Mountains west of Highway 97 in Klickitat County.



Estimated forest grouse harvest Skamania County from 2012-2021

Most grouse harvest in District 9 is associated with general deer and elk hunting seasons, when birds are hunted opportunistically. Prospective hunters should focus hunting efforts on brushy riparian zones, overgrown abandoned logging roads and forest service roads for the best chance at success, especially for ruffed grouse. Hunters interested in forest grouse will improve their chances by scouting areas before their hunt. As of the writing of this document, the 2022 grouse harvest estimates were not available to the public. Once the data are finalized, they will be available [here](#), under the heading “Small Game.”

In 2019, District 9 began collecting the wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse intending to collect more data to help track population trends of each species. Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of harvested grouse into wing collection barrels that are located around the district. Paper collection bags and instructions are available at each barrel location. Please use one bag for each bird and do not deposit wings in a plastic bag. The barrel locations for each district can be found [here](#). Barrel locations are subject to change before or during the grouse season, so please check the website frequently.



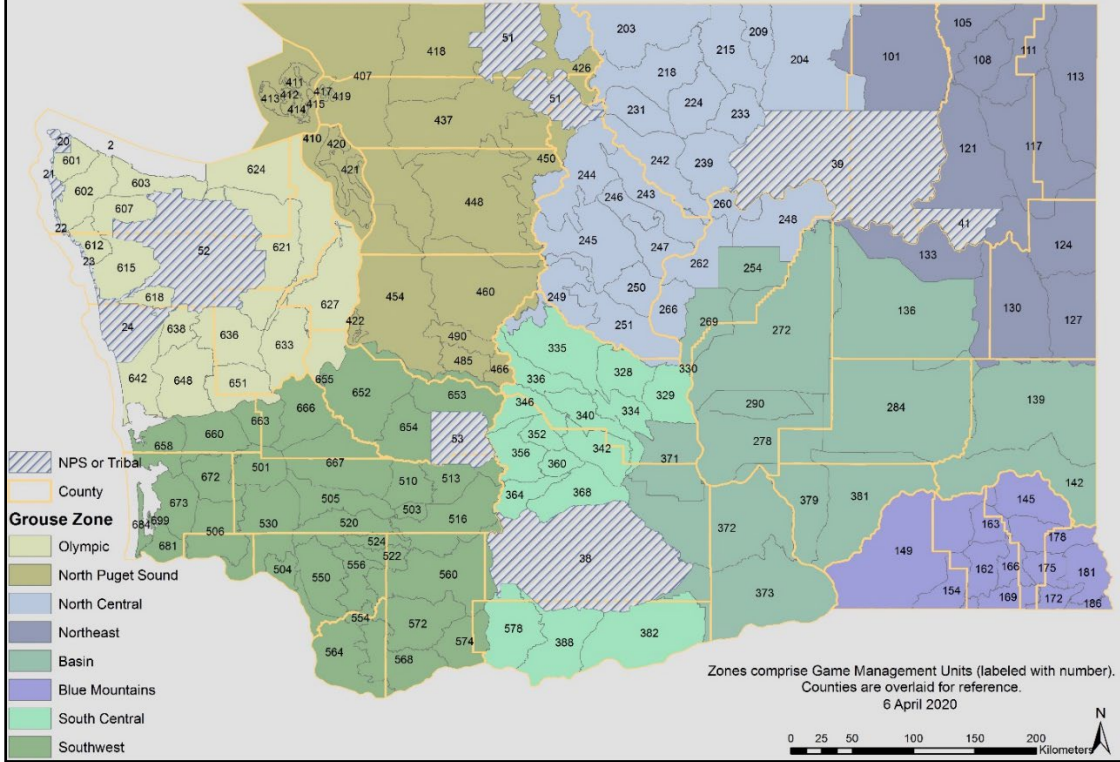
Skamania County Wing Collection Barrel - WDFW

District 9 falls within both the Southwest (Clark and Skamania Counties) and South Central (Klickitat County) Forest Grouse Management Zones. In 2021, 78 percent of the wings submitted from the Southwest zone were ruffed grouse, and 22 percent were blue grouse (dusky or sooty). As of the writing of this document, the results from the 2022 grouse wing collection effort were not available.

Zone	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Basin	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Blue Mountains	0	3	0	0	37	0	40
North Central	349	458	367	330	332	184	2020
North Puget Sound	0	0	0	41	170	126	337
Northeast	148	190	145	140	176	188	987
Olympic	32	169	100	173	143	151	768
South Central	90	180	150	125	7	34	586
Southwest	3	0	234	260	222	188	907
Unknown	0	2	57	45	10	17	131
Total	622	1002	1053	1116	1097	888	5778

Number of forest grouse wings collected in each Forest Grouse Management Zone, 2016-2021

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Forest Grouse Monitoring Zones



DOVE



Dove hunting is open statewide annually from Sept. 1 to Oct. 30. In District 9, most dove harvest occurs within Clark and Klickitat Counties. In Clark County, dove hunting opportunity exists on WDFW lands in the Vancouver lowlands, including the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. Over the past ten years, dove hunters took a yearly average of 364 birds in Clark County, but as displayed by the table below, estimated harvest varies widely depending on participation in any given year.

Year	Harvest	Number of Hunters	Number of Hunter Days
2012	302	25	68
2013	259	28	126
2014	8	30	38
2015	549	92	357
2016	395	78	353
2017	291	61	321
2018	819	103	878
2019	206	46	149
2020	722	139	538
2021	86	49	142

Estimated dove harvest and participation in Clark County from 2012-2021

Most of the hunting opportunity in Klickitat County is associated with private hunt clubs in the eastern part of the county. The majority of Klickitat County is privately owned, so please be sure to secure permission from private landowners before you hunt on private land. Dove harvest in Klickitat County averages 219 birds over the last ten years and still varies widely despite relatively stable participation.

Year	Harvest	Number of Hunters	Number of Hunter Days
2012	303	25	76
2013	412	59	143
2014	73	15	37
2015	24	16	24
2016	492	35	91
2017	0	0	0
2018	265	20	35
2019	23	11	34
2020	601	8	40
2021	0	0	0

Estimated dove harvest and participation in Klickitat County from 2012-2021

As of the writing of this document, the 2022 dove harvest estimates were not available to the public. Once the data are finalized, they will be available [here](#), under the heading “Small Game.”

As a reminder, the above statistics refer to mourning doves only, which have a daily bag limit of 15 and possession limit of 45 for the hunting season. Eurasian collared doves are an invasive species and can be hunted year-round with a valid hunting license. These doves are often found in urban and human-occupied areas, so be sure to abide by any local firearm restrictions. Eurasian collared doves are larger than mourning doves, have a distinctive black “collar” on the back of their neck and have a square-tipped tail (mourning doves have a pointed tail).

PHEASANT



Pheasant hunting in Clark County – Photo courtesy of Brad Cady

District 9 has very little, if any wild production of pheasants, especially compared to other areas of eastern Washington. Essentially, all hunting opportunities are associated with pen-raised birds that are released at specific locations in Klickitat County (Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Sites) and Clark County (Western Washington Pheasant Release Sites). In Clark County, an average 3,366 pheasants are harvested each season with most pheasant hunting being associated with the Vancouver Lake and Shillapoo release areas. In Klickitat County, most pheasant hunting occurs on three release sites near Goldendale or the surrounding private properties (with landowner permission). Only an average of 214 birds are harvested each year in Klickitat County, where there is less overall acreage available to public hunting and fewer pheasants released. Please read more about our [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) (for Clark and Skamania counties) and [Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) (for Klickitat County) on our website, which includes maps of the release sites. As of the writing

of this document, the 2022 pheasant harvest estimates were not available to the public. Once the data are finalized, they will be available [here](#), under the heading “Small Game.”

You can find details about each of the pheasant hunting sites below.

CLARK COUNTY PHEASANT RELEASE SITES

Shillapoo Wildlife Area

The Vancouver Lake and Shillapoo release sites are on WDFW-managed land and comprise approximately 1,450 acres. To reach both the Vancouver Lake and Shillapoo release sites, take the Fourth Plain Blvd. exit (exit #1D) off I-5. Go west on Fourth Plain Blvd. For the Vancouver Lake release site, head north on Fruit Valley Road, then west on La Frombois Road to the site. For the Shillapoo release site, stay on Lower River Road to the site. Keep in mind that these areas are extremely popular on Saturdays, with typically more than 100 vehicles at the Shillapoo release sites.

KLICKITAT COUNTY PHEASANT RELEASE SITES

WDFW releases approximately 350 pheasants at three sites in Klickitat County each year. One site is located on department-owned land and two are on privately-owned lands enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program “Feel Free to Hunt”. Please respect the land; hunting on private lands is a privilege. All sites are day-use only, and no overnight camping is allowed. These sites are relatively undeveloped, with primitive road access. In early fall, there is usually a high fire risk so please take necessary precautions. Roads may become slippery and very muddy after fall rains and snow. Be cautious when choosing parking spots next to roads to avoid getting stuck. Driving off-road or on private land is not allowed, regardless of the season. The use of non-toxic shot is required within designated release areas.

Goldendale Hatchery Pheasant Release Site

WDFW manages this 240-acre site. It is bounded by Hill Road on the west side and Fish Hatchery Road on the north side.

From Goldendale, drive west on Highway 142 approximately four miles to the intersection with Hill Road. Drive about a half-mile north on Hill Road, across the bridge over Spring Creek, then turn east on a dirt road onto WDFW property. This road goes into the center of the property.

A parcel of private land adjacent to the Goldendale Hatchery release site is currently enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program as a “Hunt by Reservation” property called Fish Hatchery Road. To hunt on the land, you must make a reservation online. Please consult the

[WDFW Private Lands page](#) to make your reservation, access property details and maps, and see information on temporary closures of these sites.

Note: The hatchery facilities are located along the east boundary of the parcel. Please stay away from the immediate vicinity of the buildings to protect workers and infrastructure.

Gun Club Property (Private Lands Access Program) – Feel Free to Hunt

This 480-acre site is privately-owned. It is bounded by Rogers Road on the north and Fenton Lane to the east. This property boasts high quality wildlife habitat and cover with a combination of open grasslands, shrub cover, trees and a small lowland area that seasonally hold water.

From the intersection with Broadway Street in Goldendale, drive east on the Bickleton Highway 5.6 miles to the intersection with Purvine Road. Turn right (south) on Purvine Road and drive 0.9 miles to the T intersection with Rogers Road. Go either left or right on Rogers Road and look for wire gates accessing the property. There are two gates. Both are marked with the WDFW Access Program signage. Park along Rogers Road, outside the fence, and walk in. CAUTION- Purvine Road may be impassable when wet. For the best access, go east another mile on the Bickleton Highway, and turn right (south) on Fenton Lane. Follow Fenton Lane south one mile to its intersection with Rogers Road. Turn right (west) onto Rogers Road and drive about 0.1 miles west to a gate and parking area.

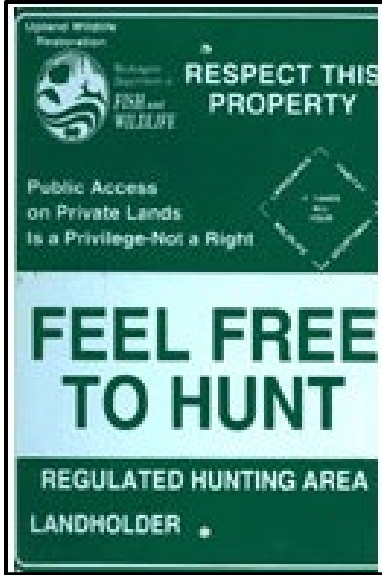
You may hunt this property without a reservation or registering. Please consult the [WDFW Private Lands page](#) for property details and maps, and temporary closures of these sites.

Finn Ridge Road Property (Private Lands Access Program) – Feel Free to Hunt

This 160-acre site is privately-owned. It is bounded by the Finn Ridge Road along the south property line and Ahola Road to the west. This property consists of gently rolling, open grassland with no shrub cover.

From Centerville, drive two miles west on the Centerville Highway to a 90-degree bend in the highway to the south. Turn right (north) on Erickson Road. Drive 1 mile to the intersection with the Finn Ridge Road. Turn left (west) onto Finn Ridge Road and follow it about 1.5 miles to the first sign marking the corner of the site, on the right. It is marked with green and white WDFW Feel Free to Hunt signs.

You may hunt this property without a reservation or registering. Please consult the [WDFW Private Lands page](#) for property details and maps, and temporary closures of these sites.



Example of Access Program signage, WDFW



Pheasant release in Klickitat County

QUAIL, GRAY PARTRIDGE, AND CHUKAR



Chukar and California Quail – Photo Courtesy of Tom Kogut

In District 9, upland game birds are almost exclusively hunted within Klickitat County, with quail being the most successfully hunted of the three species by far. An estimated average of 767 quail are taken in Klickitat County each season, compared to approximately 200 chukar and 77 gray partridge. Most access for upland bird hunting is restricted to private lands and hunt clubs in eastern Klickitat County. Hunters interested in hunting this area should seek access permission in advance of the season. Most hunt clubs have waiting lists for new members, and access is difficult without membership for those lands. As of the writing of this document, the 2022 upland game bird harvest estimates were not available to the public. Once the data are finalized, they will be available [here](#) under the heading “Small Game.”

PUBLIC LAND RESOURCES

DNR-PACIFIC CASCADES OFFICE (CLARK AND SKAMANIA COUNTIES)

601 Bond Road
PO Box 280
Castle Rock, WA 98611-0280
Phone: 360-577-2025
pacific-cascade.region@dnr.wa.gov

DNR-SOUTHEAST REGION OFFICE (Klickitat County)

713 Bowers Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926-9301
Phone: 509-925-8510
southeast.region@dnr.wa.gov
[Link to purchase DNR quad maps](#)

GIFFORD PINCHOT NATIONAL FOREST

Cowlitz Valley Ranger District

360-497-1100
10024 US Hwy 12
PO Box 670
Randle, WA 98377

Mt. Adams Ranger District

509-395-3400
2455 Hwy 141
Trout Lake, WA 98650

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument & District

360-449-7800
42218 N.E. Yale Bridge Rd.
Amboy, WA 98601

Forest Headquarters

360-891-5000
987 McClellan Road
Vancouver, WA 98661

[Forest Alerts and Closures](#)
[Mapping Resources](#)

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS RESOURCES

WDFW PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

Public hunting opportunities for different game species are available through the Private Lands Access Program free of charge. The website will list the properties available by county, GMU or type of access allowed such as:

- Feel Free to Hunt
- Register to Hunt
- Hunt by Written Permission
- Hunt by Reservation

Each property will designate what species can be hunted. Read each property description carefully and find property maps at: https://privatelands.wdfw.wa.gov/private_land/

**** Every year NEW properties are added or may be removed, frequently check the website for property updates. ****

For Private Lands Access program information within Region 5 contact:

Monique (Ferris) Gray

(360) 696-6211 ext. 6721

Monique.ferris@dfw.wa.gov



Dillacort Canyon Access Program Property in Klickitat County, photo by Monique Ferris, WDFW

PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

****NOTES:** Private industrial forestlands are often closed to all recreation from mid-late summer through early fall because of fire danger. Be sure to check on the status of these lands before scouting or hunting. Also, private timberland is often bought-and-sold between timber companies, so be sure to have updated ownership maps. Due to high fire danger, as of 7/28/23 all lands owned or managed by the following parties in Klickitat, Skamania, Yakima counties are closed to public access until further notice: American Forest Management, Broughton Lumber Company, Columbia Land Trust, DGS Timber, Green Diamond Resource Company, Kreps Ranch, Kreps Family LLC, Lupine Forest, Manulife Forest Management, Twin Creeks Timber (TCT Holdings), and Western Pacific Timber LLC.

BROUGHTON LUMBER COMPANY (AMERICAN FOREST MANAGEMENT)

- Generally, allows non-motorized access. Please abide by any signs posted at access points.
- See the AFM website for hunting access maps and more information:
<https://www.americanforestmanagement.com/licensable-tracts/columbia-gorge-district>
- Mainly GMUs 578 and 388.

DGS TIMBER LLC (AMERICAN FOREST MANAGEMENT)

- Generally, allows non-motorized access. Please abide by any signs posted at access points.
- See the AFM website for hunting access maps and more information:
<https://www.americanforestmanagement.com/licensable-tracts/columbia-gorge-district>
- Mainly GMUs 578 and 388.

MANULIFE (FORMERLY HANCOCK FOREST MANAGEMENT - HFM)

- Generally, allows non-motorized access. Please abide by any signs posted at access points.
- Access hotline (509) 364-3331
- Mainly GMUs 578 and 388.

PACIFICORP

- Own over 15,000 acres within the Lewis River basin that are managed for fish and wildlife and are generally open to non-motorized access.

- See their website for hunting access maps and more information:
<https://www.pacificorp.com/community/recreation/washington/lewis-river-hunting-access.html>
- Mainly GMUs 554 and 560

RAYONIER

- Hunting access by permit
- [Rayonier Hunting | Recreation Licenses | Hunting & Recreation Licenses](#)
- 855-729-4868
- GMUs 572 and 560

THE CONSERVATION FUND/LUPINE FOREST/LUPINE COLUMBIA HOLDINGS LLC (FORMERLY STEVENSON LAND COMPANY)

- Some lands remain open to non-motorized access.
- Mainly GMU 578

GREEN DIAMOND RESOURCE COMPANY/TCT COLUMBIA HOLDINGS (FORMERLY STEVENSON LAND COMPANY OR BROUGHTON LUMBER)

- Many of the parcels owned/managed by Green Diamond (59,000+ acres) are enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program (Feel Free to Hunt and Hunt by Reservation). Please visit the Private Lands webpage for more details and contact information. [Private Lands Hunting Access | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#)
- Generally open to walk-in access on some parcels, please abide by any posted signs. More information at <https://www.greendiamond.com/>
- Mainly GMUs 574 and 578
- Hunters should be aware that certain blocks of lands are now closed to access.

WEYERHAEUSER

- Recreational access hotline 866-636-6531 or online:
<https://recreation.weyerhaeuser.com/>
for details and maps.
 - Yacolt (Columbia River East)
 - Access is by permit only and permits can be purchased at the website above. Please see the website for details, including maps.
 - GMU 568

- Klickitat County
 - Access is by Recreational Lease only. Please see the website for details, including maps.
 - GMU 578

WESTERN PACIFIC TIMBER

- As of 9/1/23 all Western Pacific Timber lands in Klickitat County are **no longer** open to any hunting access of any kind.

2023

ERIC HOLMAN, District Wildlife Biologist
NICHOLLE STEPHENS, Assistant District
Wildlife Biologist
MONIQUE GRAY, Private Lands Biologist



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**



District 10 Hunting Prospects

Lewis, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties

District 10 Blacktail submitted by Tom Rhodes (WDFW)

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DISTRICT 10 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 10 is in southwest Washington and includes Lewis, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties. Game management units (GMUs) in this district include 501 (Lincoln), 503 (Randle), 504 (Stella), 505 (Mossyrock), 506 (Willapa Hills), 510 (Stormking), 513 (South Rainier), 516 (Packwood), 520 (Winston), 522 (Loo-Wit), 524 (Margaret), 530 (Ryderwood), 550 (Coweeman), and 556 (Toutle). The landscape of this wide area ranges from tidally influenced Columbia River shorelines to Cascade peaks. In the “Individual Game Management Unit (GMU) Specifics” section of this document you will find details for each GMU including size, the approximate percentage of public land, primary landowners, and access roads.

A high percentage of this district is privately owned. Private timber companies often limit public access to their lands or sell hunting access permits to a limited number of participants. When planning your hunt, it’s important to understand the recreational access policies of individual timber companies. You can typically find recreational access information on websites or by calling access hotlines. A list of recreational access websites and hotlines maintained by private industrial timber companies is included at the end of this document.

Weyerhaeuser owns a significant amount of land in District 10. Major changes to hunting access in 2015 included a requirement that hunters buy an access permit to hunt on most of Weyerhaeuser land, including the Saint Helens Tree Farm (GMUs 550, 520, 524, and 556). Motorized access permits are being sold for between \$250 and \$400, while non-motorized access permits are between \$75 and \$125. Visit their [website](#) for details. Weyerhaeuser does allow free public access on their lands enrolled in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Private Lands Access Program. To locate those lands, visit the [Private Lands Hunting Access webpage](#).

Other industrial timber company lands are generally open to public hunting without an access fee, but vehicle access may be limited. These major industrial forest landowners in District 10 include Hancock Forest Management, Port Blakely, Sierra Pacific, Green Diamond (permit fee access), Rayonier (very limited access), and Pope Resources/Olympic Resource Management. Access to these lands may be restricted in August, September, and sometimes October due to fire danger. You can find more information about hunting opportunities on private land on the [WDFW website](#), on page 96 of the [Big Game pamphlet](#), or by using the [Mapping Tool](#).

Public land in the district includes WDFW’s Cowlitz and Mount St. Helens Wildlife Areas. You can find details about the [Wildlife Areas](#) on the WDFW website. Additionally, there is the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#) in eastern Lewis and Cowlitz counties, as well as state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) scattered throughout all three counties. Contact this email for more information: pacific-cascade.region@dnr.wa.gov. These state and federal lands are open for public access.

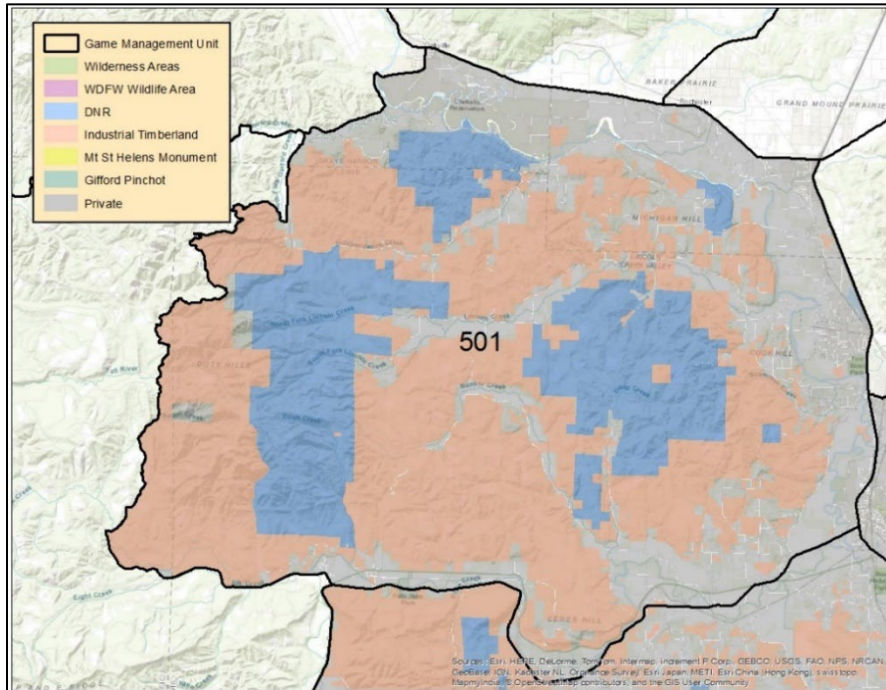
For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [WDFW](#) and [DNR](#) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

Visitors to WDFW- and DNR-managed lands with a parking placard for people with disabilities can use Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes on all non-motorized natural surface trails and closed roads where bicycles are allowed until June 30, 2023, or until new legislation is enacted.

INDIVIDUAL GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT SPECIFICS

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 501 - LINCOLN

GMU 501 is located in the northwestern corner of WDFW Region 5, west of Interstate 5 (I-5), near Chehalis and Centralia, and lies predominantly in Lewis County. The GMU is a mix of private agricultural lands and rural homes in the lower elevations and closer to Interstate 5 but transitions quickly into forestlands as elevations increase. The predominant geographic features of GMU 501 are the Chehalis River, Interstate 5, and the Doty Hills. The unit is generally very good for black-tails and poor for elk.

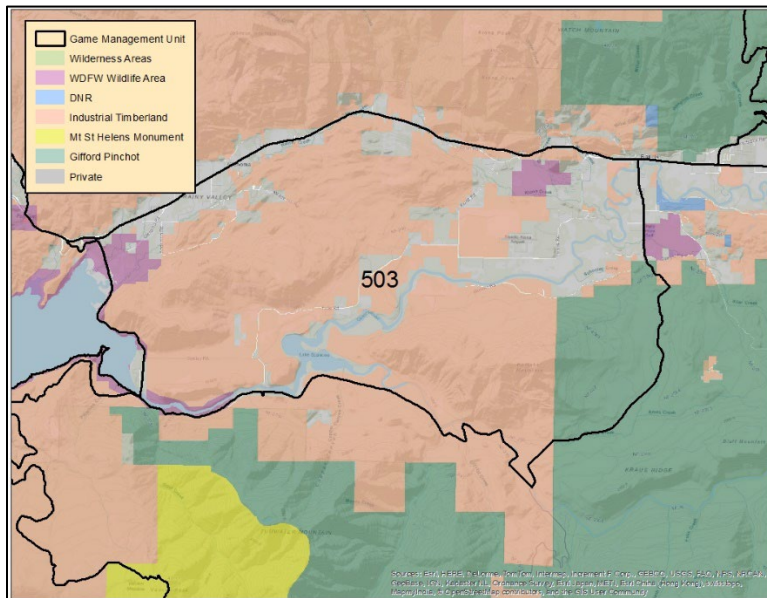


Square Miles	232
Percent Public Land	~35%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~45%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~10%

Primary Landowners	Weyerhaeuser
	DNR
Habitat / Terrain	Small Agricultural Owners
	State and Industrial Forestlands
	Floodplain / Private Agricultural and Residential
	Mix of Flatter Agricultural Areas and Steeper Hills
Primary Access Points	State Route 6
	Lincoln Creek Road
Small Game / Waterfowl	Average for ruffed grouse, very good for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 503 - RANDLE

GMU 503 is located east of I-5, near Randle, east of Riffe Lake, South of State Route 12 and lies entirely in Lewis County. The GMU is a mix of private agricultural lands and rural homes in the lower elevations, private industrial forestlands, and U.S. Forest Service lands. The Kiona Creek and Kosmos Units of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area also lie within this GMU. The predominant geographic features of GMU 503 are the Cowlitz River, Cispus River, USFS (United States Forest Service) Road 25, and State Route 12. The unit is generally moderately productive for black-tails and elk though its small size and significant amount of private property make access challenging.

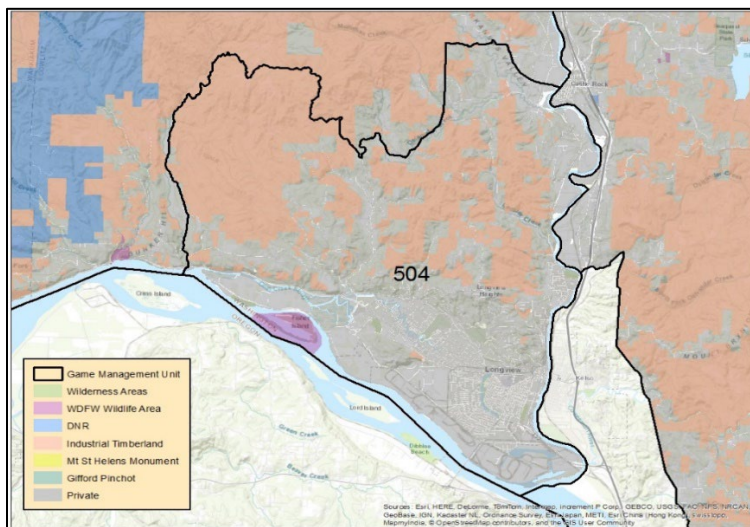


Square Miles	56
Percent Public Land	~20%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~50%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~0%

Primary Landowners	Small Agricultural Owners
	U.S. Forest Service
	Private Industrial Forestlands
Habitat / Terrain	Floodplain / Private Agricultural and Residential
	U.S. Forest Service Lands
	Forested Hills and Flatter Agricultural Areas
Primary Access Points	State Route 12
	U.S. Forest Service 25 Road
Small Game / Waterfowl	Average for ruffed grouse / Low for Waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 504 - STELLA

GMU 504 is located west of I-5, lies entirely in Cowlitz County, and includes the city of Longview. The GMU is a mix of urbanized areas, industrialized areas, private agricultural lands, and rural homes in the lower elevations, as well as private industrial forestlands. The Fisher Island Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area also lies within this GMU. The predominant geographic features of GMU 504 are the Columbia River, the City of Longview, and Coal Creek. The unit generally has low productivity for black-tails and elk. Access to the GMU is challenging due to its small size, the predominance of private lands, and urbanized areas. Additionally, the GMU is “Firearm Restricted”, meaning the use of modern firearms for hunting is not allowed. See the annual Big Game Regulations for specific details. Finally, the GMU has a small population of Columbian white-tailed deer in low-elevation areas near the Columbia River. Hunters are reminded that there is no open season for these deer and should check the Big Game Pamphlet for specifics.

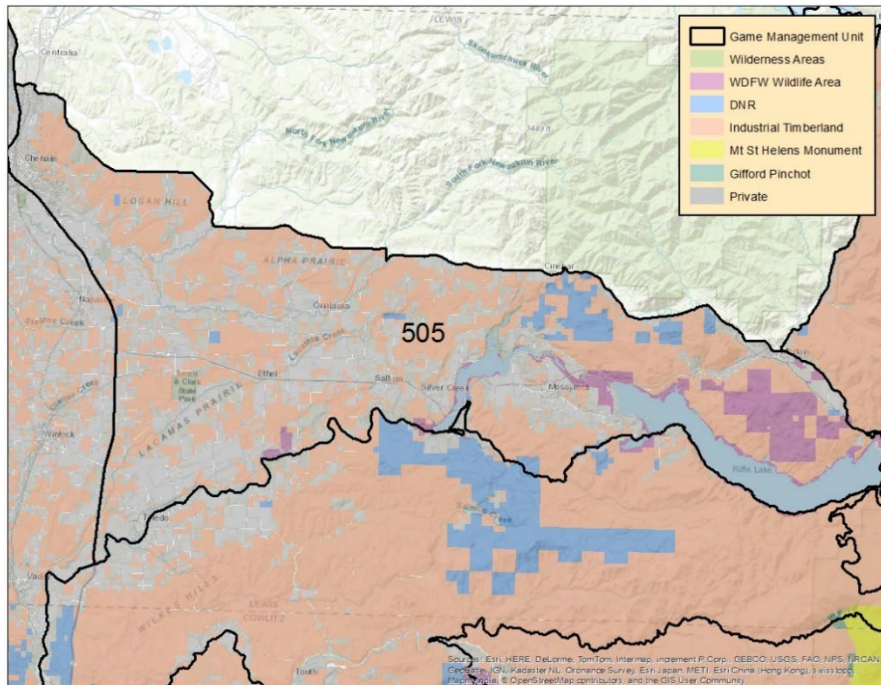


Square Miles	96
Percent Public Land	~5%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~40%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~35%

Primary Landowners	Small Agricultural landowners
	Weyerhaeuser
	Urban/Suburban
Habitat / Terrain	Industrial Forestlands
	Floodplain / Private Agricultural and Urban
	Mix of Forested Hills and Flatter Developed Areas
Primary Access Points	State Route 4
	Coal Creek Road
Small Game / Waterfowl	Average for ruffed grouse
	Good for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 505 - MOSSYROCK

GMU 505 is located east of I-5, north of the Cowlitz River, and lies entirely in Lewis County. The GMU is primarily a mix of private agricultural lands and rural homes. The Peterman Hill and Swofford Pond units of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area are also within this GMU. The predominant geographic features of GMU 505 are the Cowlitz River, I-5 and State Route 12, as well as Riffe and Mayfield Lakes. The unit generally has good productivity for black-tailed deer, but only a small elk population. Access to the GMU is challenging due to the predominance of small private landholdings. However, the Peterman Hill Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area does provide access to solid deer hunting opportunities.

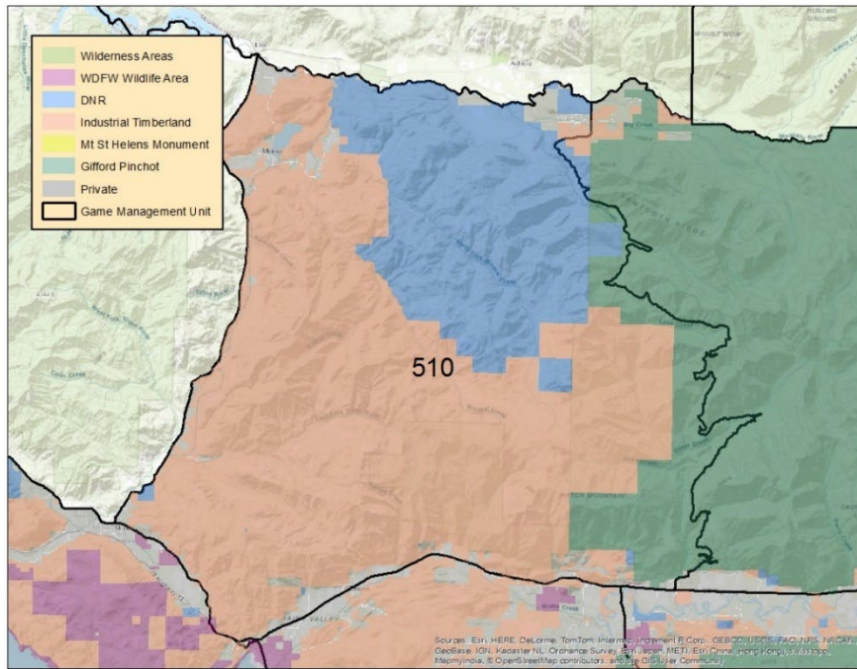


Square Miles	295
Percent Public Land	~20%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~45%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~5%

Primary Landowners	Small Agricultural Owners
Habitat / Terrain	Private Agricultural
	Private Industrial and State Forestlands
	Mostly Flatter or Rolling Topography
	Some Steeper, Rugged Terrain
Primary Access Points	State Route 12
	Peterman Hill Road
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse
	Modest for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 510 - STORMKING

GMU 510 is located in northern WDFW Region 5, north of State Route 12, east of State Route 7, and lies entirely in Lewis County. The GMU is primarily a mix of private industrial forestlands, DNR forestlands, and USFS-managed lands. The predominant geographic features of GMU 510 are the Tilton River, Stormking Mountain, and Kiona Peak. The unit is generally low in productivity for black-tailed deer and elk.

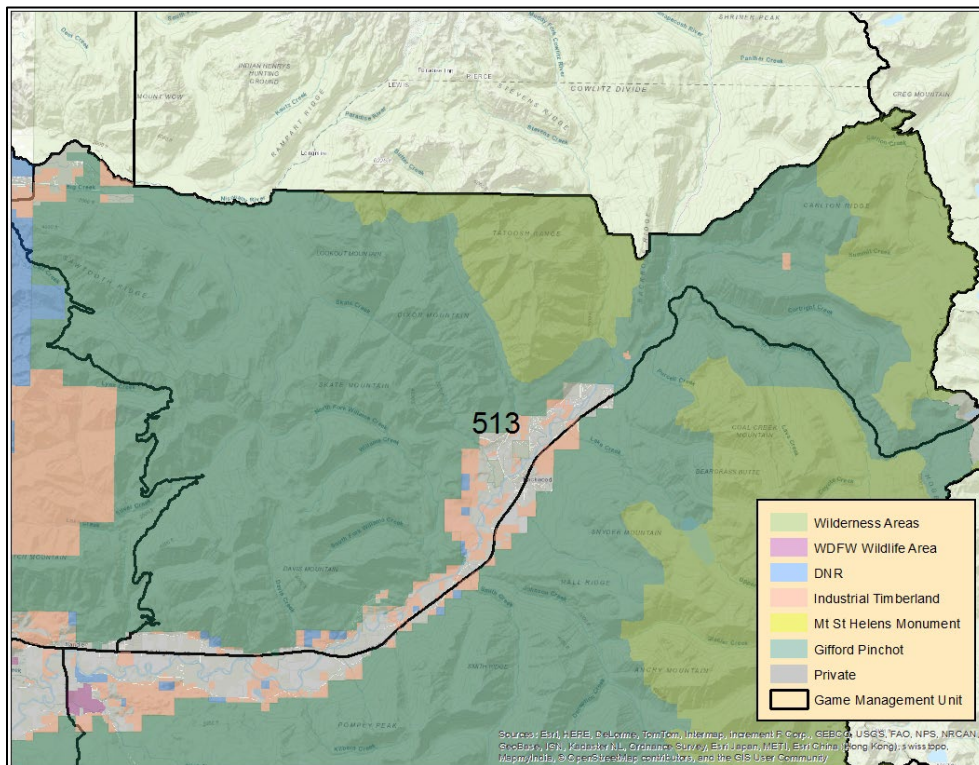


Square Miles	208
Percent Public Land	~50%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~45%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~0%

Primary Landowners	Hancock
	Sierra Pacific
	DNR
Habitat / Terrain	Private Industrial, State, and US Forest Service Forestlands
	Rugged mountainous terrain
Primary Access Points	State Routes 7 and 12
	USFS Road 47
	DNR Road 1
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed and Sooty Grouse
	Poor for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 513 - SOUTH RAINIER

GMU 513 is in the northeastern corner of WDFW Region 5, north of State Route 12, south of Mt. Rainier National Park, and lies entirely in Lewis County. The GMU is nearly entirely managed by the USFS except for a narrow band of private lands along State Route 12 and the Cowlitz River. The predominant geographic features of GMU 513 are the Cowlitz River, Sawtooth Ridge, Skate Mountain, and Carlton Ridge. Two USFS wilderness areas are found within GMU 513; Tatoosh and William O. Douglas. The unit is generally low in productivity for black-tailed deer and elk.

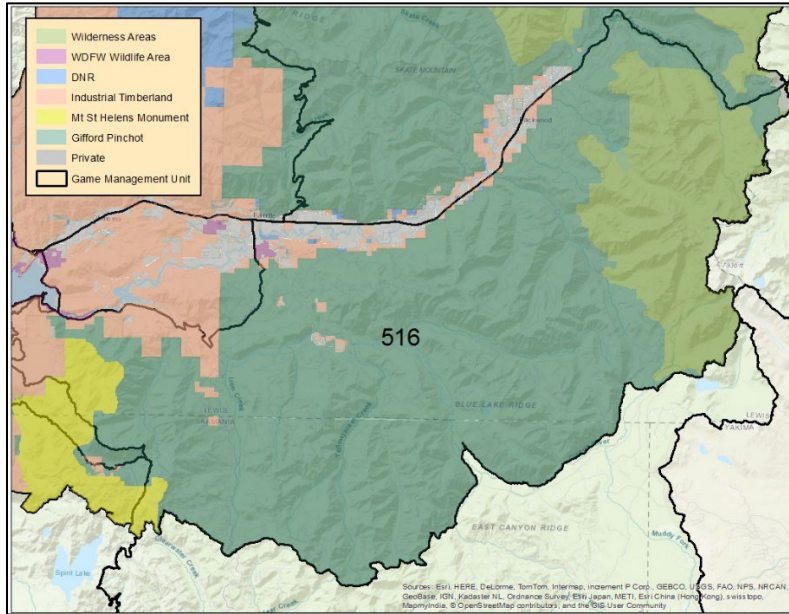


Square Miles	240
Percent Public Land	~95%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~0%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~0%
Percent Wilderness	~20%

Primary Landowners	U.S. Forest Service
Habitat / Terrain	US Forest Service Forestlands
	Rugged mountainous terrain including wilderness
Primary Access Points	State Route 12
	USFS Road 47
	Pacific Crest Trail
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse
	Poor for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 516 - PACKWOOD

GMU 516 is a very large unit located in the northeastern portion of WDFW Region 5, south of State Route 12, and lies entirely in Lewis County. The GMU is nearly entirely managed by the USFS except for a narrow band of private lands along State Route 12. The predominant geographic features of GMU 516 are the Cowlitz River, Cispus River, and Goat Rocks Wilderness. The unit is generally low in productivity for black-tailed deer and elk.

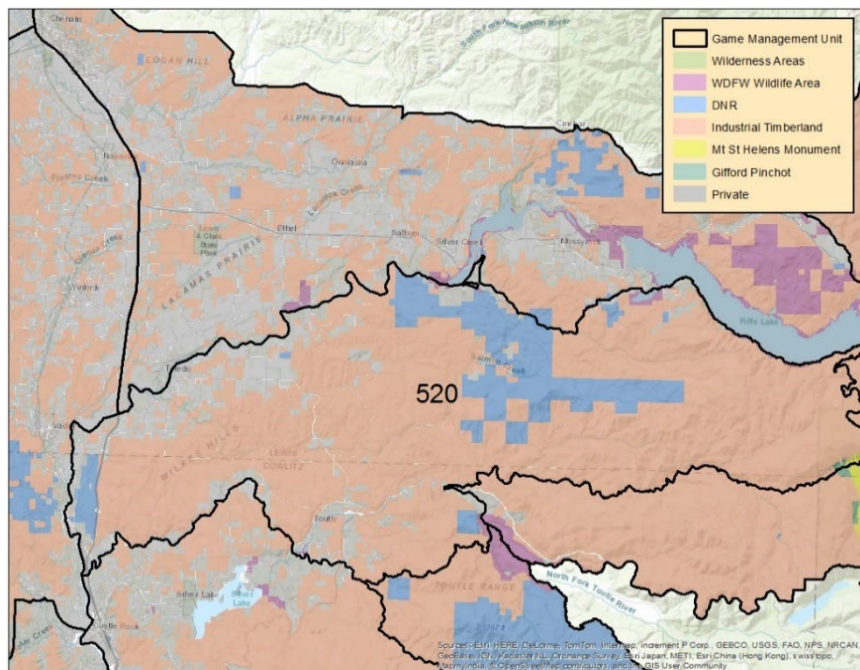


Square Miles	538
Percent Public Land	~95%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~2%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~0%
Percent Wilderness	~20%

Primary Landowners	U.S. Forest Service
Habitat / Terrain	US Forest Service Forestlands
	Rugged mountainous terrain including wilderness
Primary Access Points	State Route 12
	USFS Roads 20 and 23
	Pacific Crest Trail
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse
	Poor for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 520 - WINSTON

GMU 520 is located east of I-5, lying primarily between the Cowlitz and Toutle/Green Rivers. The unit sits primarily in Lewis County but is partially within both Cowlitz and Skamania counties as well. The GMU is primarily private industrial forestlands with a modest amount of DNR lands, a small area of USFS at its extreme eastern margin, and rural homes and agricultural areas in the northwestern part of the Unit. The predominant geographic features of GMU 520 are the Toutle River, Green River, Cowlitz River/Riffe Lake, as well as Salmon Creek. The unit has good productivity for both black-tailed deer and elk. Access to the GMU involves navigating the property boundaries and access policies of private industrial forestland owners as well as locating public lands.

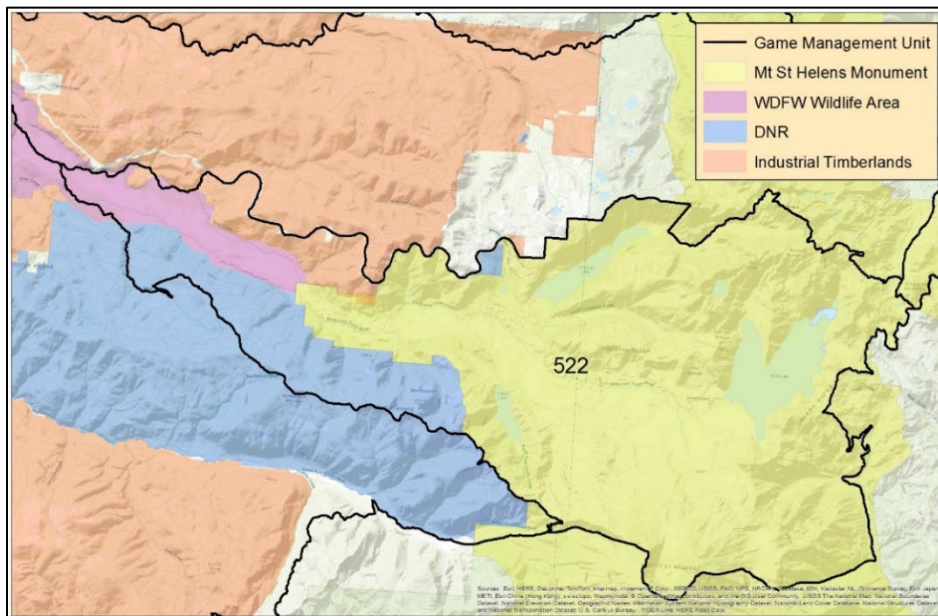


Square Miles	299
Percent Public Land	~20%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~75%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~2%

Primary Landowners	Weyerhaeuser
	Olympic Resource Management
	DNR
Habitat / Terrain	Private Industrial Forestlands
	mountainous terrain Flatter in the western portion of GMU
Primary Access Points	State Routes 505 and 12
	Winston Creek Road
	Weyerhaeuser 1900
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse
	Poor for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 522 - LOO-WIT

GMU 522 is a small unit located in the central portion of WDFW Region 5, south of State Route 12, and lies within Skamania and Cowlitz counties. The GMU is dominated by the USFS Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, with much smaller portions owned/managed by DNR, Weyerhaeuser, and WDFW. The Mudflow and Hoffstadt Units of WDFW’s St. Helens Wildlife Area lie partially within GMU 522. The predominant geographic features of GMU 522 are Mt. St. Helens and the North Fork Toutle River. Recreational access to the unit is severely limited by the policies of the Monument, which are in place to protect the valuable ecological features of the recovering Mt. St. Helens landscape. **The unit is closed to hunting with the exceptions of elk and mountain goat hunting on a permit-only basis.**

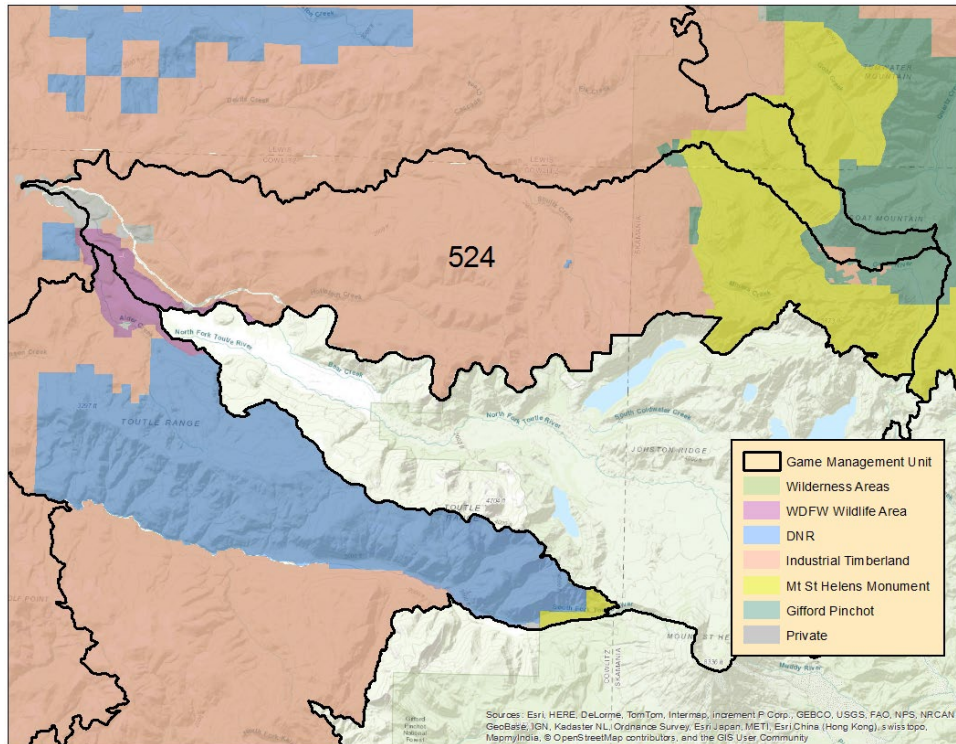


Square Miles	93
Percent Public Land	~95%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~5%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	0%

Primary Landowners	U.S. Forest Service St. Helens Monument
	DNR
	WDFW
	Weyerhaeuser
Habitat / Terrain	Mt. St. Helens Blast Zone and Mudflow
	DNR / Private Industrial Forestlands
	Remote Mountainous Terrain
Primary Access Points	State Route 504
	U.S. Forest Service Road 26/99
	DNR 3000 Road
Small Game / Waterfowl	Closed Season for these Species

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 524 - MARGARET

GMU 524 is a small Unit located in the central portion of WDFW Region 5, south of the Green River, and lies primarily within Cowlitz and Skamania counties. GMU ownership is dominated by Weyerhaeuser, the USFS Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, a small area of private industrial forestland, and a small portion of WDFW's St. Helens Wildlife Area. The predominant geographic features of GMU 524 are the Green River and the Mt. Margaret Backcountry. The easternmost portion of the unit (as defined by Elk Area 5066) is closed to general-season elk hunting. Hunting in this portion of the GMU is instead offered on a permit-only basis.

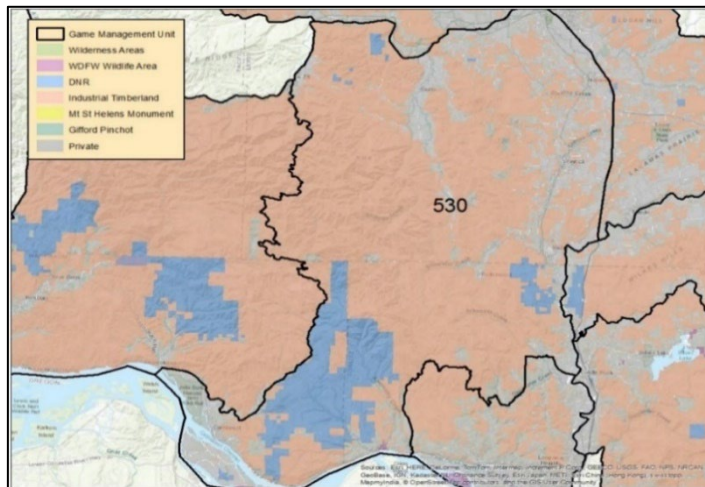


Square Miles	96
Percent Public Land	~20%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~75%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	Zero

Primary Landowners	Weyerhaeuser
	U.S. Forest Service St. Helens Monument
Habitat / Terrain	Private Industrial Forestlands
	Mt. Margaret Backcountry
	Remote Mountainous Terrain
Primary Access Points	State Route 504
	Weyerhaeuser 1100
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse
	Poor for Waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 530 - RYDERWOOD

GMU 530 is located along the western side of I-5 from roughly Castle Rock to Chehalis and lies in a combination of Lewis, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties. The GMU is primarily private industrial and DNR forestlands but contains private agricultural lands and rural homes on the valley floors and Puget Island. The predominant geographic features of GMU 530 are the Willapa Hills, the Columbia and Chehalis rivers, as well as State Routes 4 and 6. The unit has very good productivity for black-tailed deer and a good elk population. Access to the GMU involves navigating the property boundaries and access policies of private industrial forestland owners as well as locating public lands. The GMU has a population of Columbian white-tailed deer in low elevation areas near the Columbia River, especially in the vicinity of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the deer and on Puget Island. Hunters are reminded that there is no open season for these deer and should check the Big Game Pamphlet for specifics.

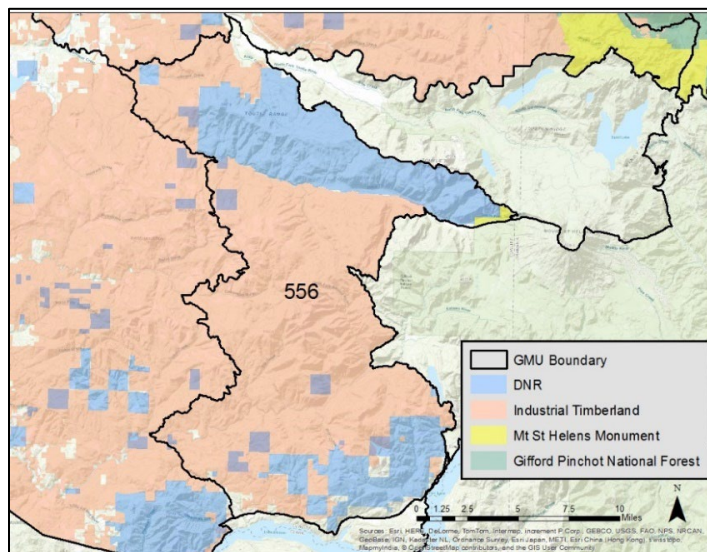


Square Miles	541
Percent Public Land	~20%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~70%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	~5%

Primary Landowners	Sierra Pacific
	Weyerhaeuser
	DNR
	Small Private / Agricultural
Habitat / Terrain	Private Industrial and DNR Forestlands
	Floodplain / Private / Agricultural
	Mountainous Terrain
Primary Access Points	State Routes 4 and 6 and 506
	Boistfort Road
	Germany Creek Road
	Abernathy Creek Road
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse
	Good for waterfowl

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 556 - TOUTLE

GMU 556 is located east of I-5, in the upper watersheds of the Kalama, Coweeman, and South Fork Toutle rivers. The unit sits entirely within Cowlitz County. The GMU is largely private industrial forestlands but does have a meaningful amount of DNR lands in the northern and southern portions of the unit. The predominant geographic features of GMU 556 are The South Fork Toutle, Coweeman, and Kalama Rivers, as well as Lakeview Peak and Elk, Big Bull, and Little Cow Mountains. The unit has modest productivity for black-tails and good productivity for elk. **Hunters should note that all elk hunting in GMU 556 Toutle is by Special Permit Only -- there are no General Seasons for elk.** In 2021, the boundary between the Toutle and Yale GMUS was adjusted to simplify hunting regulations. The new boundary on the southern end of the Toutle GMU now follows Lewis River Road. Access to the Toutle GMU involves navigating the property boundaries and access policies of private industrial forestland owners as well as locating public lands.

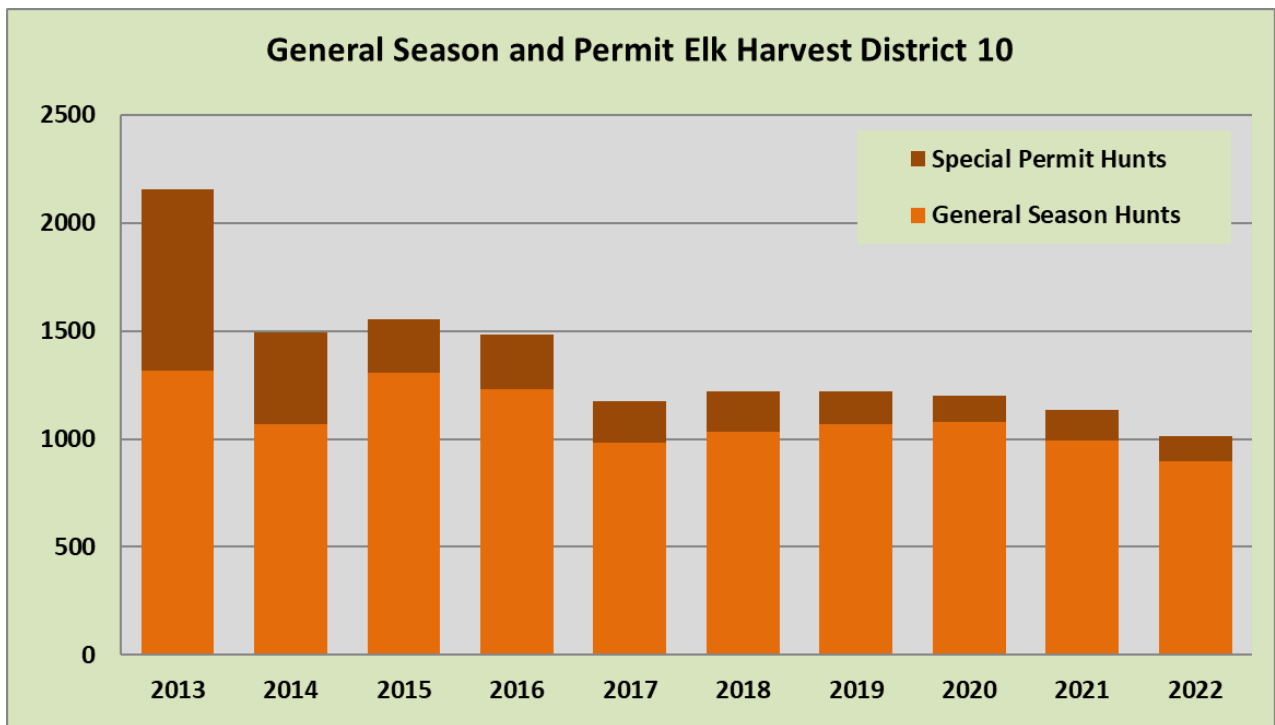


Square Miles	230
Percent Public Land	~35%
Percent Industrial Forestland	~65%
Percent Urban/Sub-Urban	Zero

Primary Landowners	Weyerhaeuser
	DNR
Habitat / Terrain	Private Industrial and DNR Forestlands
	Mountainous Terrain
Primary Access Points	State Routes 503 and 504
	DNR 4200 and 4250 Roads
	Weyerhaeuser 4950, 5500, 7200, 1400 and 6600
	Rock Creek Road
Small Game / Waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse
	Poor for waterfowl

ELK

Historically, District 10 has been among the leaders in statewide elk harvest. The highest general season harvests in 2022 occurred in GMUs 506 (Willapa Hills), 530 (Ryderwood), 520 (Winston), and 550 (Coweeman). There are also many permit hunts in District 10, which are offered to manage the elk population, address agricultural damage caused by elk, and provide recreational opportunity. Additionally, two GMUs – 522 (Loo-Wit) and 556 (Toutle) – are permit-only for both cow and bull elk. In 2022, 897 elk were harvested during the general season in addition to 115 elk harvested by permit in District 10. Elk found west of I-5 are considered to be of the Roosevelt sub-species, while those in the Cascade Mountain Range are of mixed origin. Specifically, Cascade elk are a genetic combination of native Roosevelt elk and introduced Rocky Mountain elk. The Figure below shows the trend in District 10 elk harvest over the past ten years and how this harvest is divided among general and permit seasons.



Additional metrics help decide where to begin scouting for an elk hunting location. The table below includes elk harvest, percentage success, number of hunters, number of hunters per square mile, elk harvest per square mile, and the percentage of harvest comprised of five-point or larger bulls. The data are listed by GMU and presented for the five-year averages of the 2018-22 hunting seasons. Data represent modern firearm general seasons only.

Elk Hunting Statistics; WDFW District 10						
Modern Firearm General Seasons 2018-22 5-Year Averages						
GMU	Elk Harvest	Percent Success	Hunters	Hunters / SQ Mile	Elk Harvest / SQ Mile	Percent of Bulls 5-PT. +
501 (Lincoln) *	16	6.8	218	0.9	0.07	0.57
503 (Randle)	6	3.4	158	2.8	0.11	0.61
504 (Stella) *	7	10.4	75	0.8	0.07	0.18
505 (Mossyrock)	12	6.2	190	0.6	0.04	0.84
506 (Willapa Hills)	123	14.2	875	2.4	0.33	0.4
510 (Stormking)	12	8	147	0.7	0.06	0.71
513 (South Rainier)	13	7	199	0.8	0.06	0.70
516 (Packwood)	21	3.2	626	1.2	0.04	0.59
520 (Winston)	70	8.4	844	2.8	0.23	0.62
524 (Margaret)	23	8	294	3.1	0.24	0.66
530 (Ryderwood)	83	10.8	774	1.4	0.15	0.54
550 (Coweeman)	53	6.4	808	2.3	0.15	0.42
WDFW District 10 **	443	8.1	5128	1.5	0.13	0.52
* = Antlerless Elk Included in Harvest in GMUs 501 and 504, All Others Are Bulls Only						
** GMUs 522 (Loo-Wit) and 556 (Toutle) Not Included; All Elk Hunting in These GMUS is by Special Permit Only						

ELK POPULATION INFORMATION

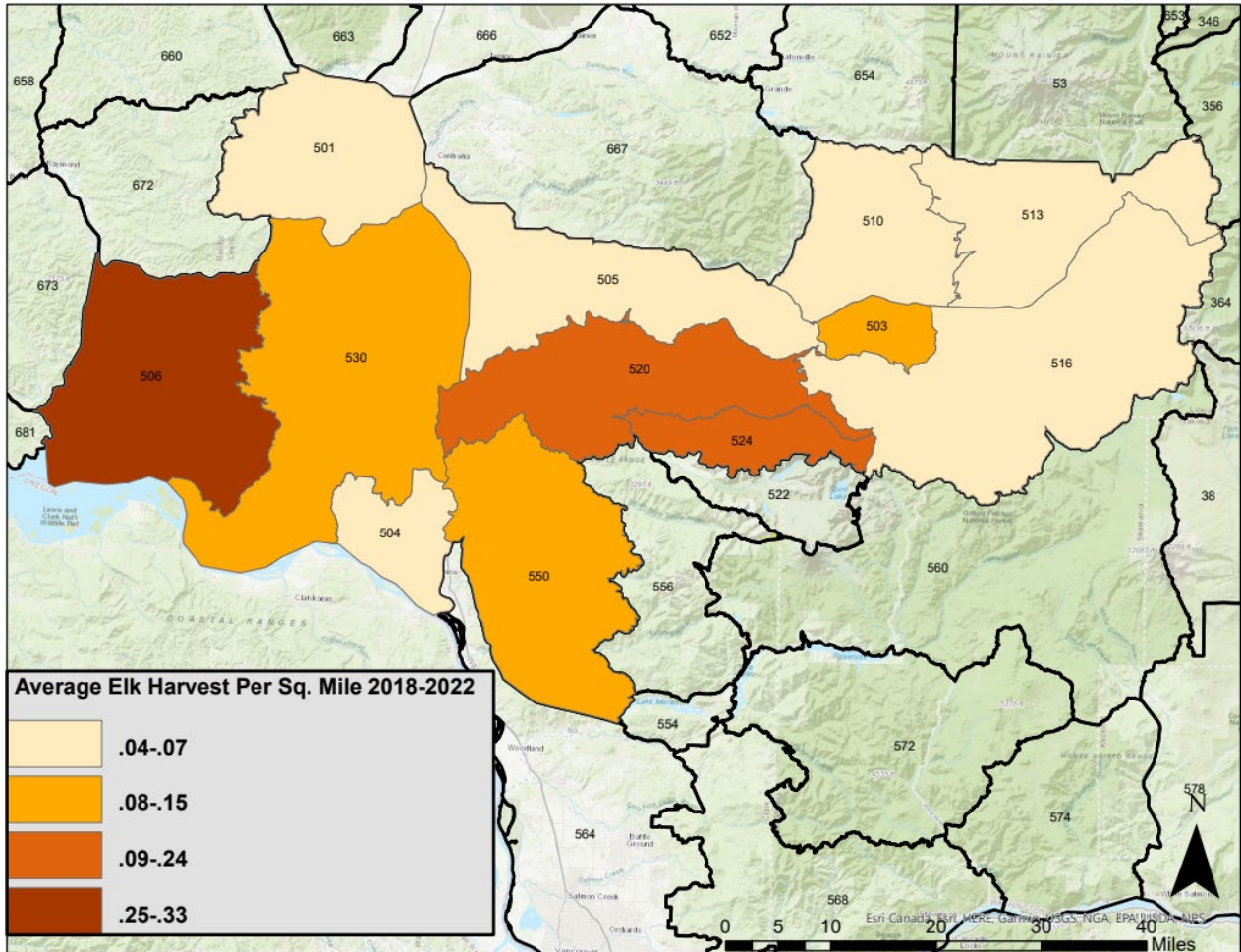
Elk populations in the game management units including the Mount St. Helens elk herd area are down from historic highs during the mid-2000s. This population reduction was implemented per the objectives of the [St. Helens Elk Herd Plan](#). Liberal antlerless elk hunting opportunity, combined with several years of late-winter and spring storms, reduced the elk population in these GMUs. Elk within the St. Helens herd typically lack large fat reserves to help with long, hard winters. Additionally, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is common in District 10 elk. Female elk suffering from this debilitating condition have been documented to have lower pregnancy rates, poorer body condition, and lower survival rates than healthy elk in the same landscape (WDFW-Unpublished Data).

Survey efforts conducted during the spring of 2018, 2019, and 2022 indicate that the Mount St. Helens elk herd has stabilized at a population level of about 1,000 adult elk in the area used to index the population. Available data points toward an elk population that is below objectives and well below historic highs. Therefore, hunters should expect a generally less productive elk hunting season during the 2023 hunt. WDFW has reduced antlerless hunting opportunities accordingly.

Elk population surveys in GMUs 506 (Willapa Hills) and 530 (Ryderwood) are conducted on an intermittent basis and were most recently completed in spring 2023. Surveys conducted in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2023 indicate stable elk populations in GMUs 506 and 530. Severe winter conditions rarely cause population-level impacts on Willapa elk populations. Hunting opportunities and success rates should be similar to recent years.

The general bull elk season is always challenging, but the District 10 elk population produces a harvest of nearly 1,000 bull elk annually, and those hunters who put in the effort and remain focused may be rewarded with success. See below for an illustration of the average elk harvest per square mile during 2018-2022 seasons, by GMU in WDFW District 10 during the modern

firearm general season. Note that GMUs 522 and 556 are excluded because all elk hunting in these two units is by special permit only.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

You can find annual Harvest Reports for deer and elk based on hunter reporting [on the WDFW website](#). For more information regarding elk management in the Mount St. Helens, Willapa Hills, and South Rainier elk herd areas, review the [Elk Status and Trend Reports](#) on the WDFW website.



Photo by Jeff Larson

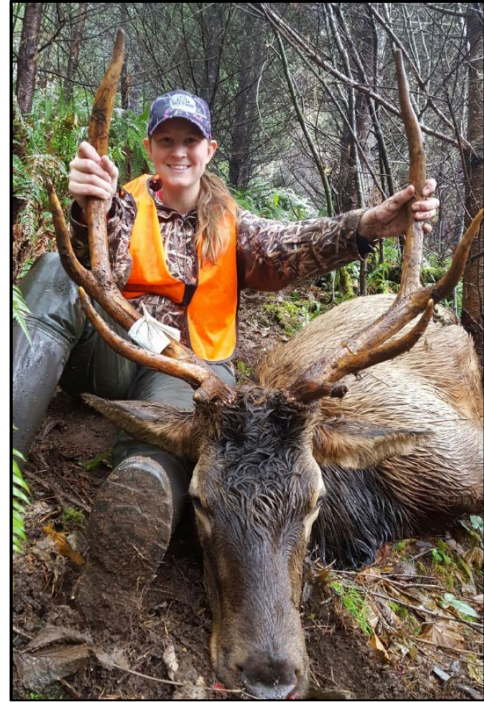


Photo submitted by Frank Gordon

ELK SCOUTING STRATEGIES

Use the [Hunting Regulations Mapping Tool](#) to look at aerial photos to identify recent clear-cuts and drainages. You can do some preseason scouting on the commercial tree farms by bike or on foot, as most areas will not be open to motorized access yet. Motorized access and camping are available on DNR lands unless there is a high fire danger. Prospective elk hunters should keep in mind that the animals often prefer cooler, wetter areas during times of warmer weather, and are more often active during dawn and dusk.



Bull elk in GMU 556 photo by Eric Holman (WDFW)



Elk taken in GMU 520 photo by Lisa Hallock (WDFW)

TREPONEME-ASSOCIATED HOOF DISEASE OF ELK

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum and western Lewis County. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The objective of this program is to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. See the WDFW website for the locations of collection sites. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of Sep. 1 – Dec 31 will be awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

So, what can hunters do to help?

- **Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.**
- **Turn in your elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington.**
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, see [WDFW's website](#) and [Washington State University's website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65-66 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.



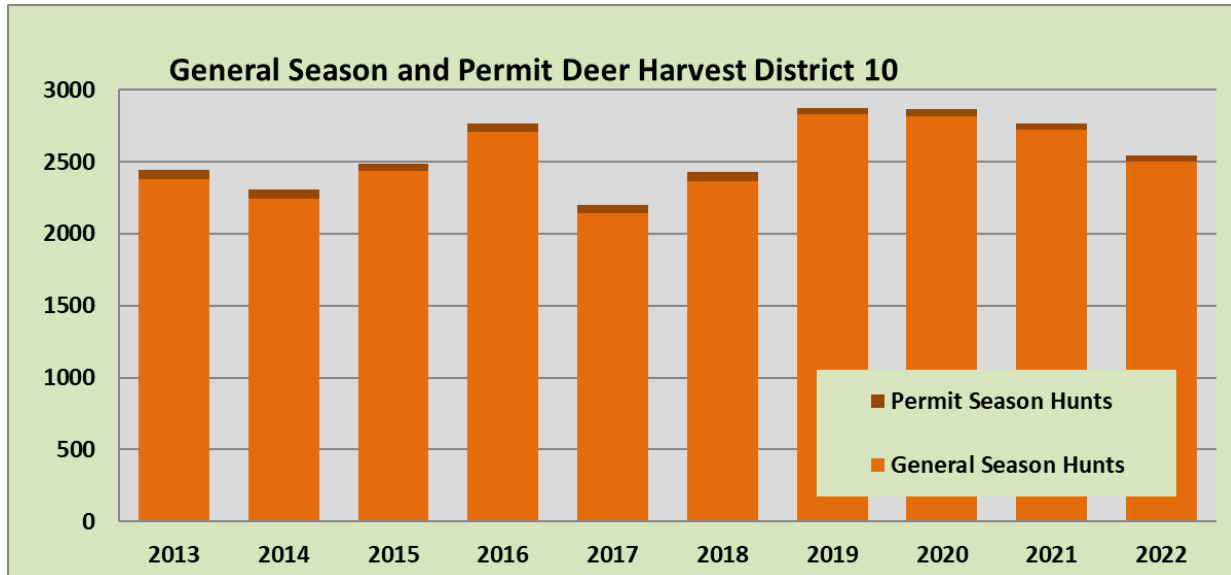
WDFW Research on Hoof Disease photo by Eric Holman (WDFW)



Study elk captured in GMU 550 photo by Eric Holman (WDFW)

DEER

Several GMUs in District 10 are among the best in the state for black-tailed deer harvest. The highest 2022 general season buck harvests within District 10 occurred in GMUs 550 (Coweeman), 520 (Winston), 530 (Ryderwood), 556 (Toutle), 505 (Mossyrock), 506 (Willapa Hills) and 501 (Lincoln). Most harvest occurs during general seasons, with a small portion of the harvest occurring during special permit seasons (see figure below). For more information on deer in District 10, see the annual [Game Status and Trend Report](#) on the WDFW website.



Additional metrics can help decide where to begin scouting for a deer hunting location. The below table includes buck harvest, percentage success, number of hunters, number of hunters per square mile, buck harvest per square mile, and the percentage of harvest comprised of 3-point or larger bucks. The data are listed by GMU and presented for the five-year averages of the 2018-22 hunting seasons. Data represent modern firearm general seasons only.

Blacktail Buck Hunting Statistics; WDFW District 10						
Modern Firearm General Seasons 2018-22 5-Year Averages						
GMU	Buck Harvest	Percent Success	Hunters	Hunters / SQ MI	Buck Harvest / SQ Mile	Percent Bucks 3 PT. +
501 (Lincoln)	218	24.6	893	3.8	0.94	31.4%
503 (Randle)	39	14.0	276	4.9	0.69	37.0%
504 (Stella)	44	27.6	158	1.6	0.46	46.8%
505 (Mossyrock)	205	26.8	771	2.6	0.70	37.1%
506 (Willapa Hills)	215	24.0	890	2.4	0.58	29.8%
510 (Stormking)	31	11.2	283	1.4	0.15	56.7%
513 (South Rainier)	21	10.0	212	0.9	0.09	38.4%
516 (Packwood)	51	9.2	556	1.0	0.09	38.8%
520 (Winston)	315	25.6	1230	4.1	1.05	29.5%
524 (Margaret)	29	18.2	155	1.6	0.30	46.3%
530 (Ryderwood)	322	24.0	1325	2.4	0.60	31.8%
550 (Coweeman)	423	28.0	1545	4.5	1.22	27.8%
556 (Toutle)	168	20.8	810	3.6	0.76	25.3%
WDFW District 10	2016	20.3	8896	2.5	0.59	31.7%

Black-tailed deer populations are stable to increasing in District 10. The annual harvest of more than 2,000 bucks for all user groups combined has been typical for many years. The severe winter of 2016-17 caused some deer mortality and led to a decline in harvest in the 2017 season. The recent winters have been mild, and deer hunting opportunity should again be good in 2023.

Hunting for black-tailed deer is often best near the end of the general season when conditions improve for stalking and moving through the woods in heavily vegetated western Washington. The best opportunity often occurs during the late buck hunt, when favorable stalking and weather conditions combine with the breeding season or rut. The 2023 late buck season runs Nov. 16-19. Black-tailed deer generally favor dense vegetation and have small home ranges. The most successful hunters study the area carefully and move very slowly, constantly searching for deer.

See below for an illustration of the average buck harvest per square mile during the seasons of 2018-2022 by GMU in WDFW District 10 during the modern firearm general season. Note that GMU 522 (Loo-Wit) is not included as this unit closed to deer hunting.

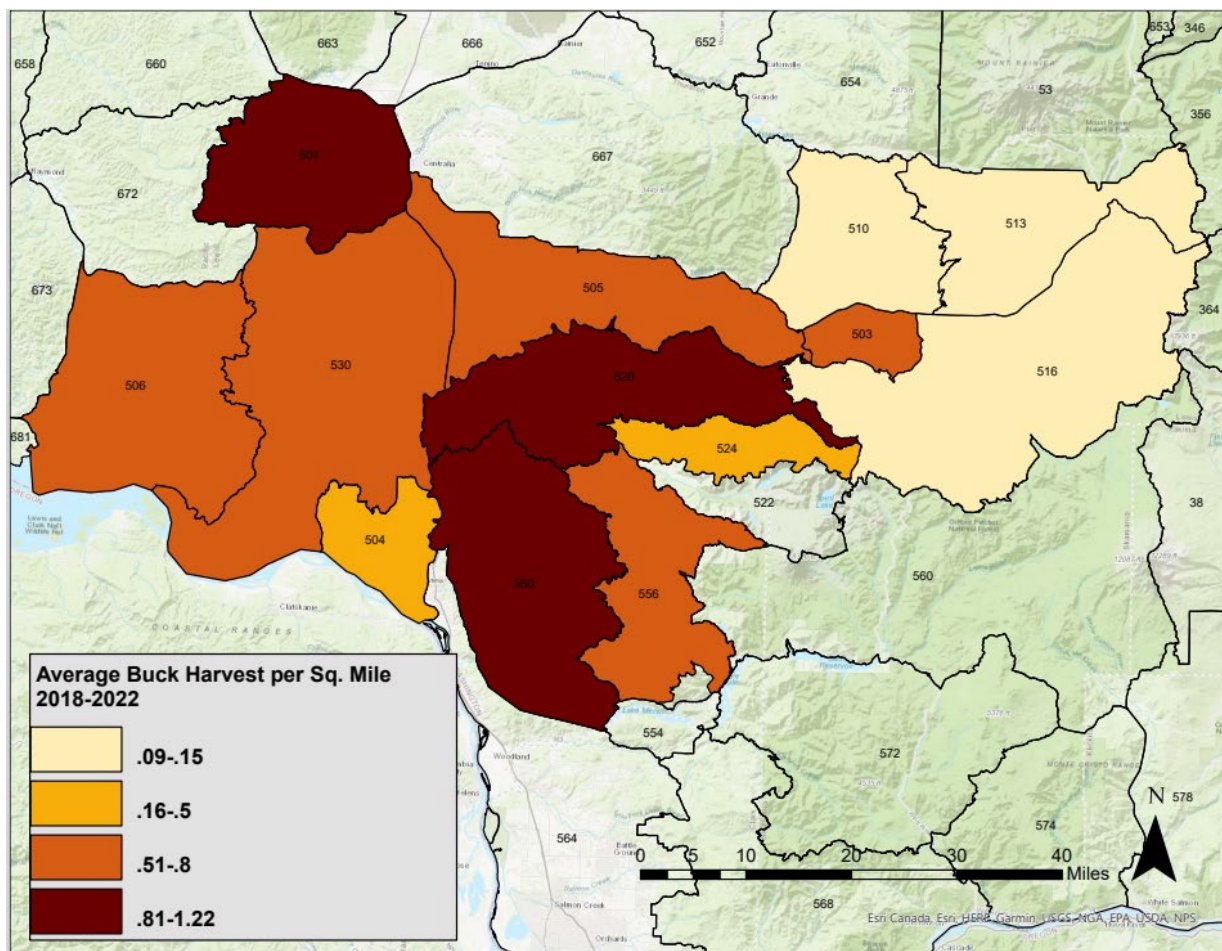




Photo by Eric Holman (WDFW)



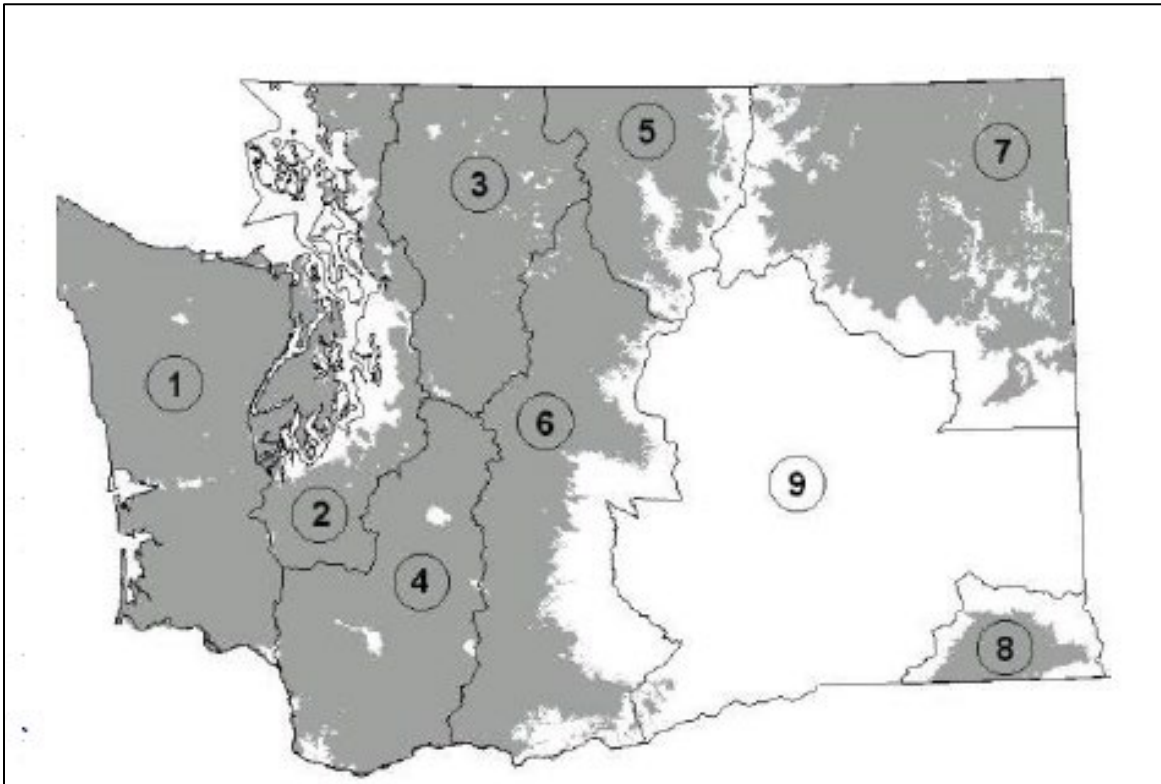
District 10 black-tailed buck submitted by Dan Howell



District 10 black-tailed bucks submitted by Tom Rhodes (WDFW)

BEAR

District 10 makes up part of both the South Cascades and Coastal Bear Management Units (BMU) for the fall bear hunting season which is open from Aug. 1-Nov. 15. There currently are no spring bear hunting opportunities in District 10.



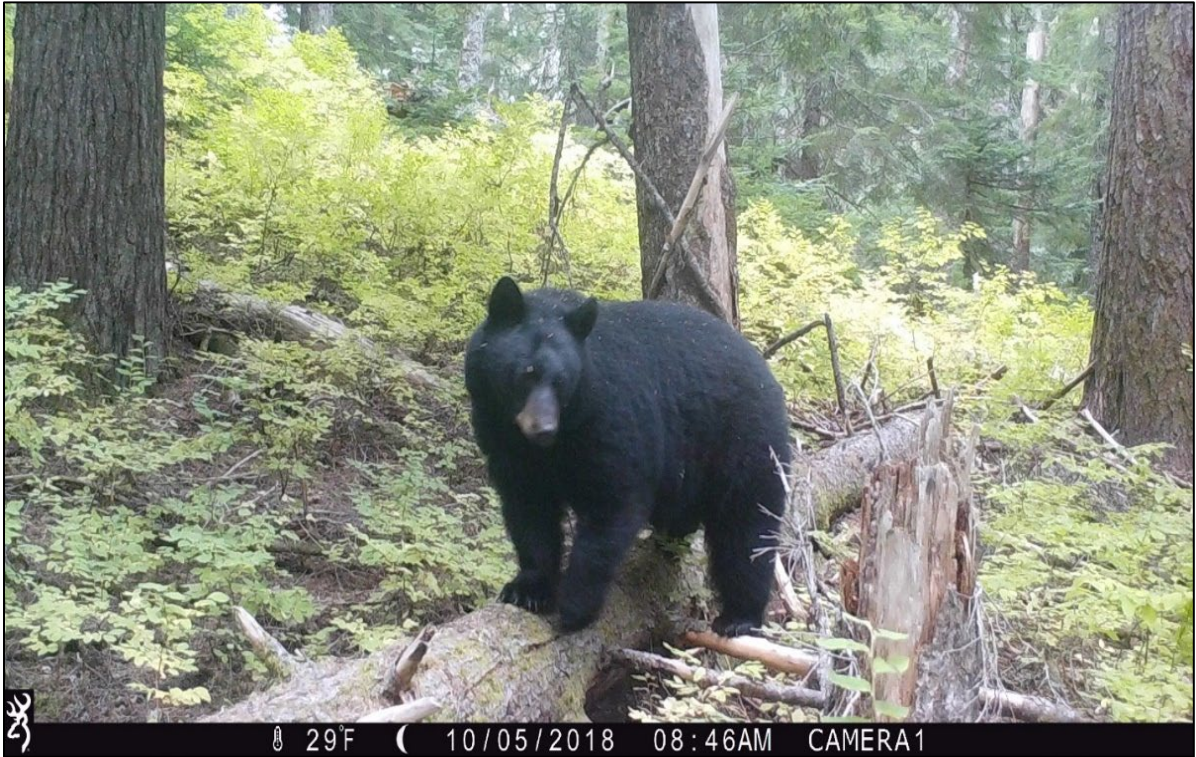
Black bear distribution in gray and 9 Black Bear Management Units in Washington

Harvest numbers and hunter success in 2022 were up from the dip in harvest seen in 2021. See table below for harvest numbers and hunter success by GMU. For more information on the management of black bears in Washington, including the Coastal and South Cascades management zones, see the [Status and Trend Report](#) on the WDFW website.

Successful bear hunters must submit a premolar tooth to WDFW. See page 68 of the [Big Game pamphlet](#) for details.

Hunting for black bears is challenging, but also can be rewarding. Hunters should try a variety of methods, including targeting areas of favored foods like huckleberries, blackberries, cascara trees, etc. Other methods include glassing clearcuts or alpine areas at dawn and dusk, as well as predator calling.

Black Bear Harvest in District 10 GMUs 2020-2022						
GMU	2022		2021		2020	
	Total Harvest	Hunter Success	Total Harvest	Hunter Success	Total Harvest	Hunter Success
501 - Lincoln	13	6%	6	3%	12	5%
504 - Stella	2	7%	0	0%	7	19%
506 - Willapa Hills	21	7%	12	4%	23	8%
530 - Ryderwood	20	7%	15	4%	26	7%
503 - Randle	6	9%	0	0%	2	2%
505 - Mossyrock	8	8%	6	4%	12	11%
510 - Stormking	5	6%	4	5%	5	6%
513 - South Rainier	11	11%	15	12%	12	8%
516 - Packwood	31	12%	10	4%	9	3%
520 - Winston	10	3%	4	1%	3	1%
524 - Margaret	4	5%	3	3%	7	9%
550 - Coweeman	8	3%	2	1%	12	4%
556 - Toutle	5	4%	0	0%	4	4%



Black bear in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest near Mount St. Helens. Photo by Nicholle Stephens (WDFW)

COUGAR

In 2021-22, hunters harvested 14 cougars in the GMUs that make up District 10. 2022-23 harvest summaries are not yet available but will be similar. Cougar hunting in this region is managed under a harvest guideline designed not exceed harvest of 12-16 percent of the adult population annually. The season consists of an early (Sept. 1-Dec. 31) and late (Jan. 1-April 30) hunt period. The harvest guideline may be achieved during the early hunt period, and prospective hunters should visit the [cougar hunting page](#) to assure that the season in their prospective area remains open.

Most cougar hunting in Western Washington occurs as an additional opportunity concurrent with deer and elk hunting. Hunters who want to harvest cougars should focus on areas with concentrations of deer and elk. Fresh snow facilitates tracking, and hunters may want to try predator calling.



Photo provided by Todd Brewer

MOUNTAIN GOAT

The southern Washington Cascade Mountains support a robust population of mountain goats. Areas with goat populations span the boundaries of WDFW districts. Specifically, the Goat Rocks population lies in both Districts 8 and 10, while the Mount St. Helens population lies in Districts 9 and 10.

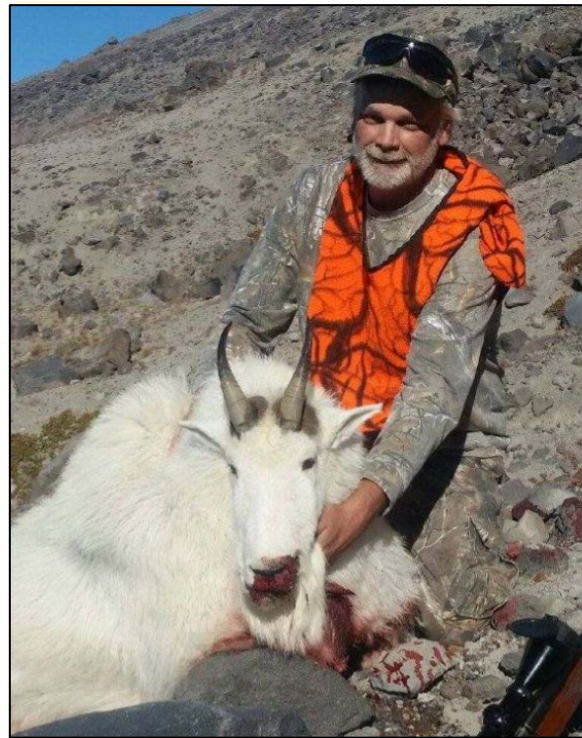
Goat populations in the Goat Rocks area have dipped in recent years and currently stand at roughly 140. Tag numbers have been adjusted downward and hunters fortunate enough to draw these permits should still enjoy a successful hunt. The Goat Rocks area has been divided into two hunt areas. Selected hunters need to review the boundaries of the hunt areas before going afield.

Beginning in 2018, mountain goat permits were made available for the Mount St. Helens population. Goats have re-colonized the area following the 1980 eruption and the population is now approximately 335 goats. For hunting management, two hunt areas have been delineated and one tag was awarded in each area, each year, during the period spanning 2018-2022. Beginning in 2023, two tags are available for each hunt area.

Successful draw applicants for all hunt areas will receive a letter with additional details regarding hunt areas, mandatory checking requirements, mandatory goat identification training, biological sample collection, and more.



Goat Rocks Mountain Goat photo provided by Kristina Luttrell



Mount St. Helens Mountain Goat photo provided by Jim Rich



Mt. Margaret Backcountry goat provided by Nate Corley

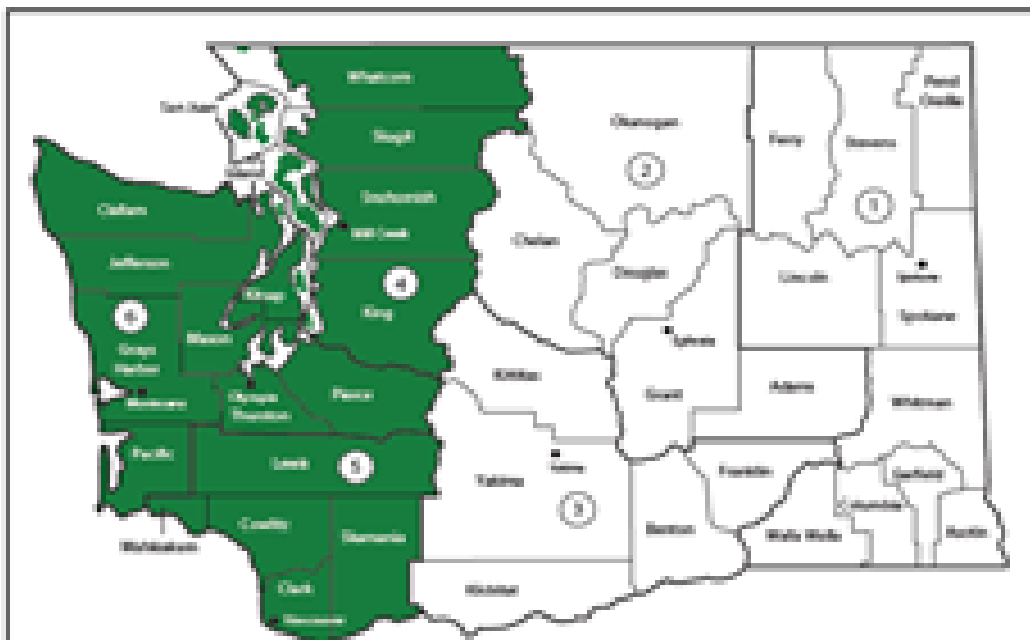


Mt. St. Helens goat provided by Brad Croce

PHEASANT

WDFW releases pheasants multiple times throughout the pheasant hunting season at locations in District 10: In Lewis County at the Kosmos Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area and on DNR property on Lincoln Creek. There is also a private lands release at the site referred to as Woodland Bottoms. For more information about the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program, visit the [WDFW website](#) and the property location guide with accompanying maps in the 2022 Western Washington pheasant release pamphlet -available in late summer 2023.

Western Washington Pheasant Release Program





Woodland Bottoms Pheasant Release Site 2020, photo by Monique Ferris (WDFW)



Releasing pheasants, photo by Monique Ferris (WDFW).

Youth hunters and those over 65 years of age should check the regulations for opportunities to hunt earlier in the season.

Hunting hours are from 8 a.m.- 4 p.m.

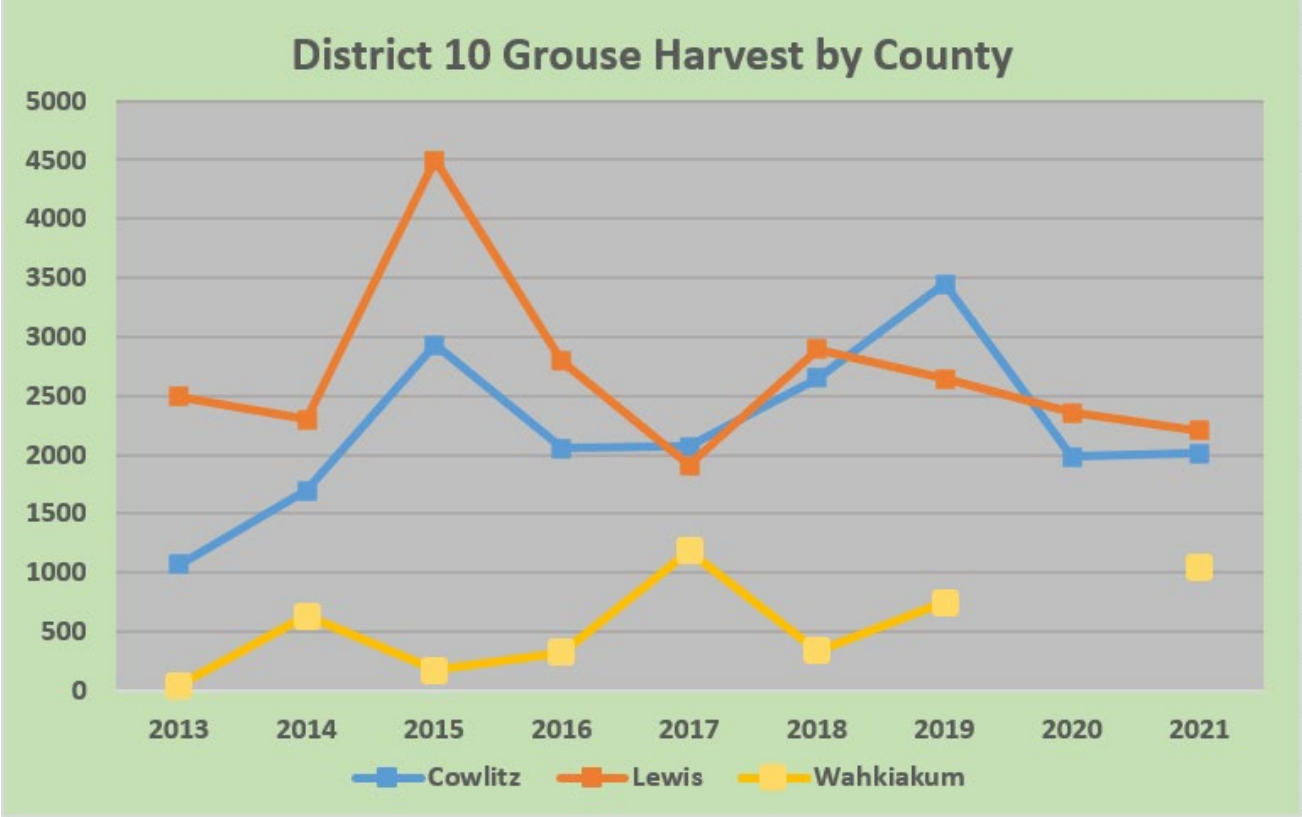
FOREST GROUSE

District 10 supports substantial forest grouse populations and is one of the top-producing areas for hunters in western Washington for ruffed grouse and sooty grouse. Spruce grouse could also be found in the higher elevations of District 10. Grouse hunters will want to take note that the statewide grouse season for forest grouse in 2023 will again be Sept. 15-Jan. 15 (the season previously ran from Sept. 1-Dec. 31). This change was implemented for the 2021 hunting season after several rounds of public input and was put forward due to the increased vulnerability of breeding females to harvest during the first half of September. After brood break-up in mid-September, females are much less vulnerable to harvest. Since females drive population growth or decline, delaying the season start is a strategy to increase the grouse population. Some good strategies for hunting grouse include hunting riparian areas with mixed forest vegetation and walking closed or abandoned roads.

WDFW is collecting wings and tails from hunter-harvested grouse at barrel locations around the state. The submission of wings and tails is voluntary and helps wildlife managers determine the species, age, and sex composition of the grouse harvest locally. Locations where grouse barrels will be placed for the 2023 season can be found [online](#).



Grouse Wing and Tail Collection Barrels (WDFW)



2022 Harvest Information Not Yet Available

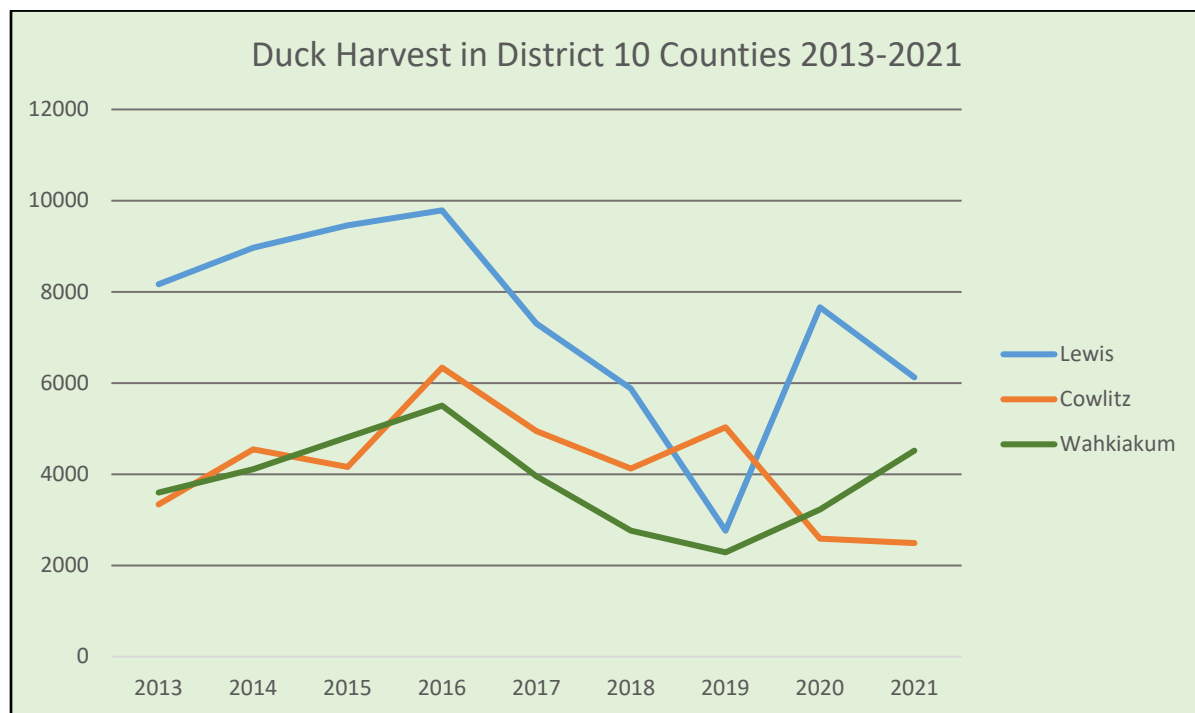
WATERFOWL

DUCK HUNTING

For the first time since onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat survey was conducted in 2022. At time of writing, the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) had not yet published the results of its breeding waterfowl surveys for 2023, however, when they are published they can be found here: [Waterfowl Population Status Reports | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](#)

Hunters are reminded to consult the [Migratory Waterfowl Rules](#) pamphlet for details on hunting regulations. Prospective hunters should take special note of the late September season open only to youth hunters. Check the regulations closely for the details on this mentored hunting opportunity for early-season ducks.

Hunting early in the season is often best along the Columbia River and other large, permanent bodies of water. The Columbia River up to the Bonneville Dam is tidally influenced, so it is a good idea to be aware of outgoing tide conditions to avoid getting your boat stuck. Later in the season, high water might disperse birds, and hunters may have more success by targeting flooded farmlands. Prospective hunters should be aware that success often depends on the severity of fall/winter weather, with wet, blustery conditions generally producing better duck hunting in southwest Washington.



[2022 Harvest Information Not Yet Available](#)



Duck Hunting in District 10, submitted by Elliot Johnson (WDFW)

GOOSE HUNTING

Hunters are reminded of the complex goose hunting regulations in Goose Management Area 2, designed to protect wintering populations of the dusky Canada goose. New hunters and those whose hunting authorization for Goose Management Area 2 was invalidated the previous year, need to pass a goose identification exam with a minimum of 80% to receive their current-year hunting authorization. Goose hunters are encouraged to review the different subspecies of Canada geese in southwest Washington, where the ability to identify those birds is critical for a productive and enjoyable season.

Please review the [information regarding goose identification](#) before hunting this season, and see the [WDFW Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons pamphlet](#) for more information.

While dusky Canada geese remain of concern, several other subspecies are abundant and support large annual harvests.

Goose hunters are also encouraged to take advantage of the early goose season in September. See the waterfowl hunting pamphlet for details on this enjoyable goose hunt for western Canada geese.



Canada geese during a banding effort in southwest Washington – Photo by Brian Davern

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR AREA 2 GOOSE HUNTING

Goose hunting in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties is subject to the additional restrictions of Goose Management Area 2 - Inland. These restrictions are in place to protect the dusky subspecies of the Canada goose. We encourage goose hunters to review the different subspecies of Canada geese in southwest Washington before each hunting season.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved the following regulations for the 2023-24 southwest Washington goose season in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of Oregon and Alaska:

- The season for dusky Canada geese is **closed**. If a hunter takes a dusky Canada goose or does not comply with a field check, that hunter's authorization will be invalidated, and the hunter will not be able to hunt geese in Goose Management Area 2 for the rest of the season.

- Goose Management Area 2 is split between the Coast (Pacific County and a portion of Grays Harbor County west of Highway 101) and Inland (Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, and a portion of Grays Harbor County east of Highway 101).
- In Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland), legal goose hunting hours begin 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours to 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours.
- Starting in 2019, goose hunters planning to hunt in Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland) began receiving a harvest record card when purchasing their licenses. Immediately after taking a goose, you must fill out your harvest card in ink. You are required to report the information on your harvest card to WDFW by using the [online reporting system](#) or by mailing the cards to: WDFW, Wildlife Program – Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141, Olympia WA 98504. The reporting deadline is March 20, 2024. Reports need to be postmarked by the reporting deadlines even if you did not harvest any birds. Please note that you must comply with these reporting requirements, or you will be required to pay a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card the next year.
- The goose hunting season will be open every day from Sept. 2-10 as well as Oct. 14-29, and on selected dates (Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays) from Nov. 22, 2023-Jan. 14, 2024, and Feb 10-March 6, 2024.

PUBLIC LAND RESOURCES

DNR-PACIFIC CASCADES OFFICE (SW WA)

601 Bond Road
PO Box 280
Castle Rock, WA 98611-0280
Phone: 360-577-2025

[WA - DNR](#)
pacific-cascade.region@dnr.wa.gov

[Link to purchase DNR quadrangle maps](#)

GIFFORD PINCHOT NATIONAL FOREST

Headquarters

10600 N.E. 51st Circle
Vancouver, WA 98682
360-891-5000

Cowlitz Valley Ranger District

10024 US Hwy 12
PO Box 670
Randle, WA 98377
360-497-1100

Mt. Adams Ranger District

2455 Hwy 141
Trout Lake, WA 98650
509-395-3402

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument

42218 N.E. Yale Bridge Road
Amboy, WA 98601
360-449-7800

PRIVATE LAND RESOURCES

WDFW PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

Public hunting opportunities are available through the Private Lands Access Program free of charge. The website will list the properties available by county, GMU or type of access allowed such as Feel Free to Hunt, Register to Hunt or Hunt by Reservation. Not all properties allow the same hunting options, landowners can select hunting all legal species or choose to be more restrictive such as deer and elk only, waterfowl only, etc. Read each [property description carefully for property rules, and maps of property locations](#).

**** Every year new properties are added or may be removed, please frequently check the website for property updates. ****

District 10 – Access Program acres as of 7/22/22	13,682 acres
Weyerhaeuser (multiple parcels) - All species allowed, Feel Free to Hunt	6,297 acres
Columbia Land Trust (2 properties-Wahkiakum Co.) - Waterfowl Only, Register to Hunt	259 acres
Woodland Bottoms (2 properties) - Pheasant Only, Feel Free to Hunt	369 acres
NEW! Nisqually Land Trust (Catt Creek Rd.) - Deer and Elk Only, Feel Free to Hunt	200 acres



Photo by Monique Ferris (WDFW).

For Private Lands Access program information within Region 5 contact:

Monique (Ferris) Gray
360-696-6211 ext. 6721

Monique.ferris@dfw.wa.gov

Please be respectful, hunting on private land is a privilege.



Private Lands Access Program, Register to Hunt property in Wahkiakum County, photo by Monique Ferris (WDFW).

PRIVATE FORESTLANDS

Green Diamond

- Recreation permits must be purchased for motorized and non-motorized access.

Manulife (formerly Hancock) Forest Management (HFM)

HFM Cathlamet Tree Farm

- Open for non-motorized recreational access

Pacificorps

Generally open for non-motorized recreational access _ NO CAMPING

[Lewis River Hunting Access \(pacificorp.com\)](http://pacificorp.com)

Pope Resources/Olympic Resource Management

- Was recently acquired by Rayonier

Rayonier

- Hunting access by lease or permit depending on location
- [Rayonier Hunting | Recreation Licenses | Hunting & Recreation Licenses](#)
- 855-729-4868

Port Blakely

- Generally open to public access
- Check website for information on roads that are open to walk-in or motorized access

Sierra Pacific

- Generally open to walk-in, day-use access
- Access hotline 360-623-1299

Weyerhaeuser

- Includes St. Helens Tree Farm, Yacolt (Columbia River East), Vail, Pe Ell, Columbia Timberlands
 - Access is by permit only except on lands enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program (Feel Free to Hunt).
 - Motored and non-motorized permits available
- [Recreational access webpage](#)
 - Access hotline-866-636-6531

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

Michelle Tirhi
District Wildlife Biologist

Emily Butler
Assistant District Wildlife Biologist



Two local District 11 youth hunters, one with her first black bear harvested in GMU 667

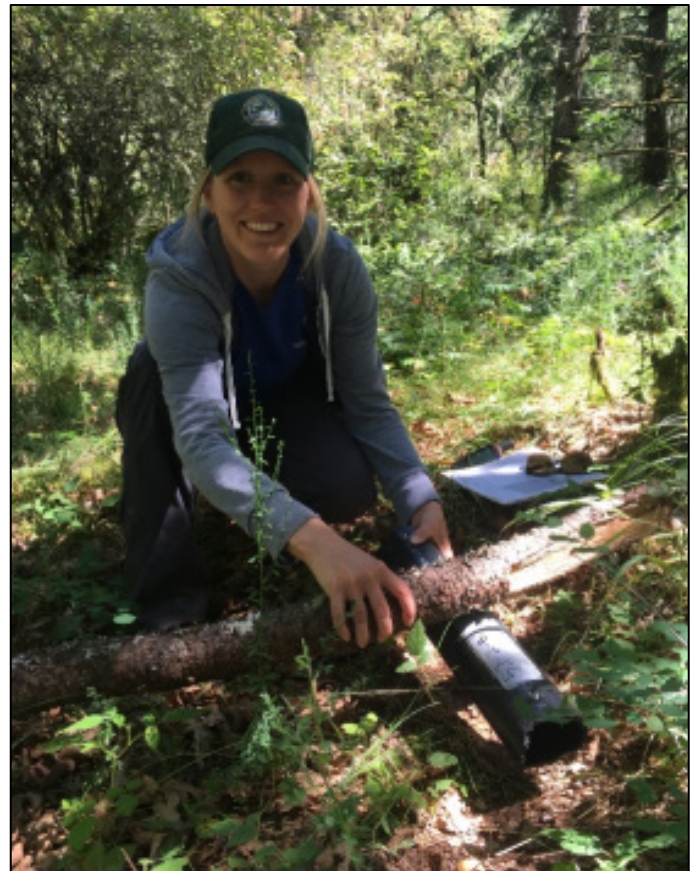
DISTRICT 11 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Thurston and Pierce counties and GMU 667 of Lewis County



Your District 11 Wildlife Management Team

Biologist Tirhi collecting black bear hair samples as part of 2020 District 11 bear density monitoring project.



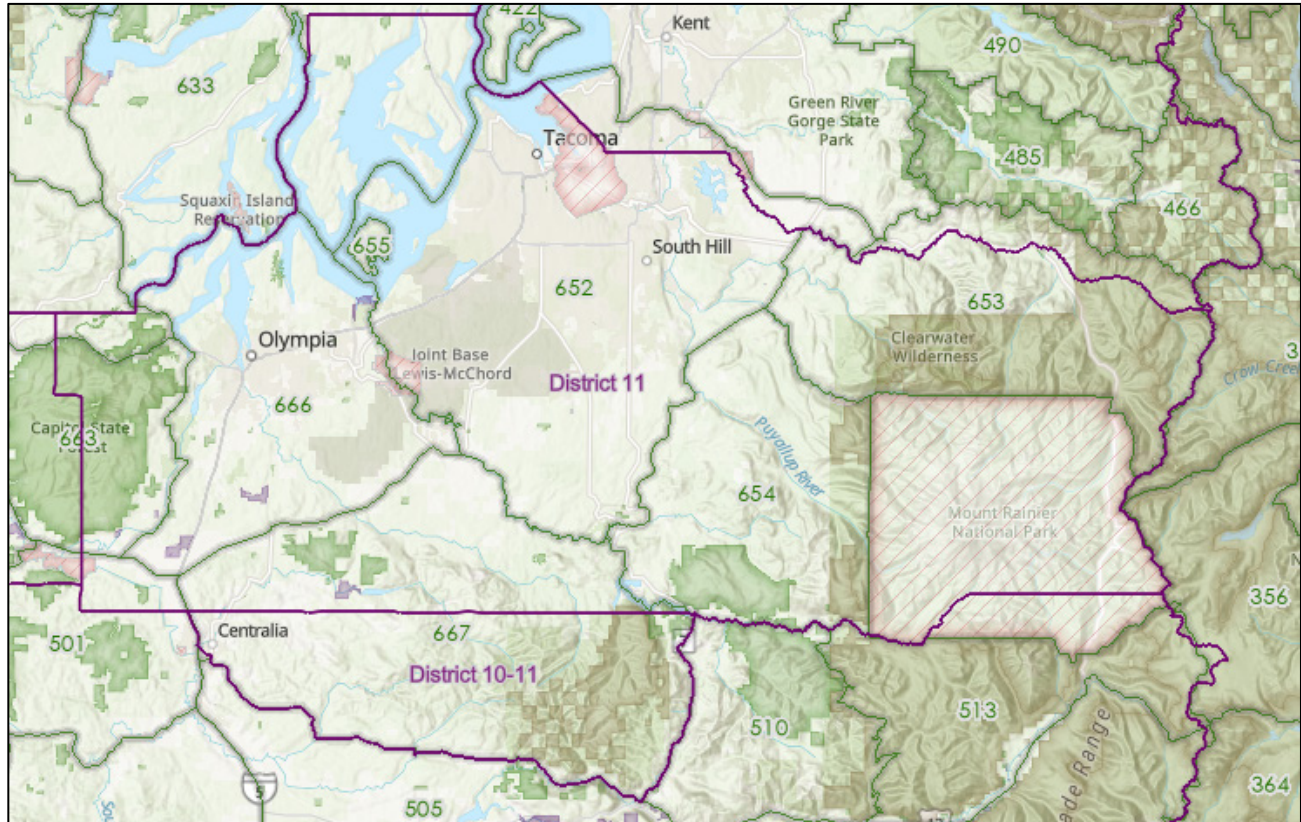
Biologist Butler checking western gray squirrel hair tubes on Joint Base Lewis McChord (2019).

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DISTRICT OVERVIEW

The Game Management Units (GMUs) that comprise District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), Anderson Island (GMU 655), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Land ownership in the district includes private residential and agricultural (e.g., GMUs 652 and 666), and both private and public industrial timberlands (e.g., GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.



Map depicting the six District 11 Game Management Units and surrounding units in neighboring districts (400s for Region 4 and 500s for Region 5).

Varied hunting opportunity exists within District 11, from waterfowl hunting on Puget Sound waterways to deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW's Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie wildlife areas (GMU 667), and Washington State Department of Natural Resources' (WWDNR) Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654), Tahoma State Forest (GMU 654/667), and additional patchwork ownership in the district provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting on public land. U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land surrounding Mount Rainier National Park in the eastern portion of the district is also accessible. Hunting is not allowed within Mount Rainier National Park.



WESTERN DISTRICT 11

The western GMUs within District 11 include Anderson Island (GMU 655), Puyallup (GMU 652), Deschutes (666), and the western half of Skookumchuck (GMU 667). More urbanization characterizes this side of the district as compared to the eastern half. Because of this, WDFW often uses hunting regulations and management to stabilize rather than increase game populations as well as control wildlife nuisance and damage. For example, WDFW provides hunters more liberal seasons and damage hunts for deer and elk in these western GMUs. However, urbanization also results in more private property in the western half and hunters must seek access permission for most hunting. Hunters can only access Anderson Island by private boat or ferry, which can make hunting difficult (in addition to seeking access permission from private landowners). Despite these hurdles, urbanization in the western GMUs also contributes to less hunting pressure and pockets of higher game species density, in particular deer, elk, coyote, beaver, river otter, and waterfowl.

EASTERN DISTRICT 11

The eastern GMUs within District 11 include the White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), and the eastern half of Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Eastern District 11 is characterized by expansive forestland, both public and private, and higher elevation mountainous areas. Most of Mount Rainier National Park lies within District 11 and dominates the southeast corner of the district. The elevation as it increases moving eastward across the district has a profound impact on game species. Habitat condition, food availability, and seasonal migration patterns are all dictated by this gradient and resulting weather patterns. Snowpack from September through July in eastern District 11 affects both game availability and road access; these in turn affect hunting opportunity and success. Hunters interested in a more rugged, challenging, and mountainous hunting experience will certainly appreciate the eastern half of District 11. Access can be challenging since most of the eastern district is either national or state forest, tribal forestland (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe), or private timberland. A series of secondary and primitive roads provide access into these forestlands but require hunting by foot or horse away from roads and deep into timber or along river systems and often in snow.

FIREARM AND WEAPON RESTRICTIONS

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston counties of District 11. Maps of Pierce County firearm restriction areas are available on Pierce County's [Public GIS tool](#) and the Pierce County firearm regulations can be found at: piercecounitywa.gov (type firearm regulation in the search button to find a list of related material). Maps of no-shooting and controlled shooting zones in Thurston County can be found at: co.thurston.wa (Open 'Show Me Everything Map', choose Maps and Layers tab, type 'controlled shooting' in the lower search button, click the 'controlled shooting zones' layer to turn on). Note that fire season can result in both public USFS and private industrial timberlands closing for all access. Hunters should check with the local ranger station on closures for USFS before setting out during fire season. The [Incident Information System](#) also includes wildfire information. Anderson Island is mostly private property with some public property and so much of the island would be 'hunt by permission.'

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

District 11 encompasses parts of two national forests: Gifford Pinchot and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. USFS land is found primarily in the eastern half of District 11 surrounding Mount Rainier National Park on its northern and western sides. This includes the Clearwater Wilderness bordering Mount Rainier on the north. USFS land is free to hunt but much of it is either permanently or seasonally gated and requires access by foot or horse (reference Road Closure section).

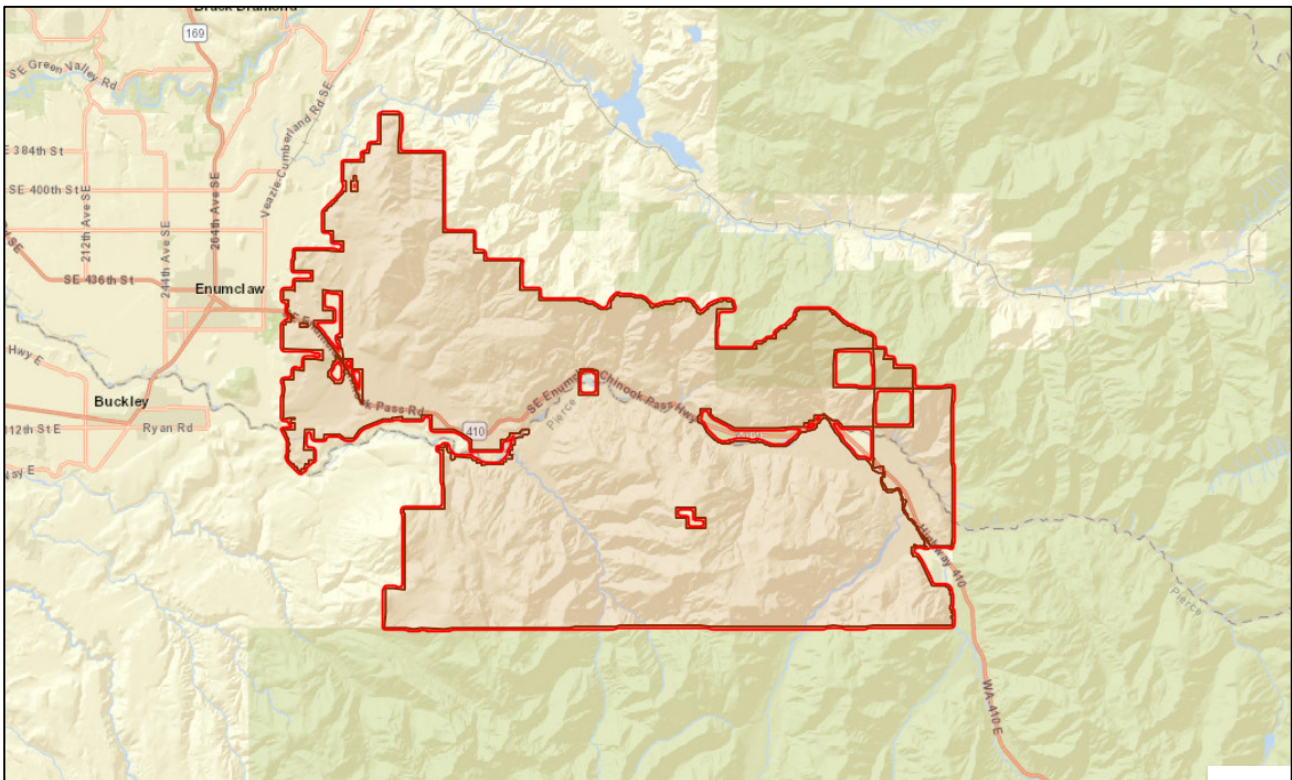
Washington State Department of Natural Resource (DNR) manages 3 million acres of public trust lands in Washington. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) manage over 1 million acres of public lands. Outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing, are allowed on most of those lands with a Discover Pass to park. Visiting Washington State Parks also requires a Discover Pass although hunting is not allowed in Washington State parks. Discover Passes are available for purchase at discoverpass.wa.gov. WDFW issues a Vehicle Access Pass at no charge with the purchase of any annual hunting, trapping, or fishing license, excluding an annual razor clam or shellfish/seaweed license. A Vehicle Access Pass allows visitors to park at WDFW wildlife and water access areas. A Vehicle Access Pass is transferable between two vehicles. See sections below on ways to obtain maps of DNR, WDFW, and Washington State Parks managed lands.



PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

Timberlands throughout the district are owned or managed by various private commercial timber companies and tribal governments, each having their own access regulations, including some with fee access programs. These lands provide some of the best opportunity for both small and large game hunting in District 11.

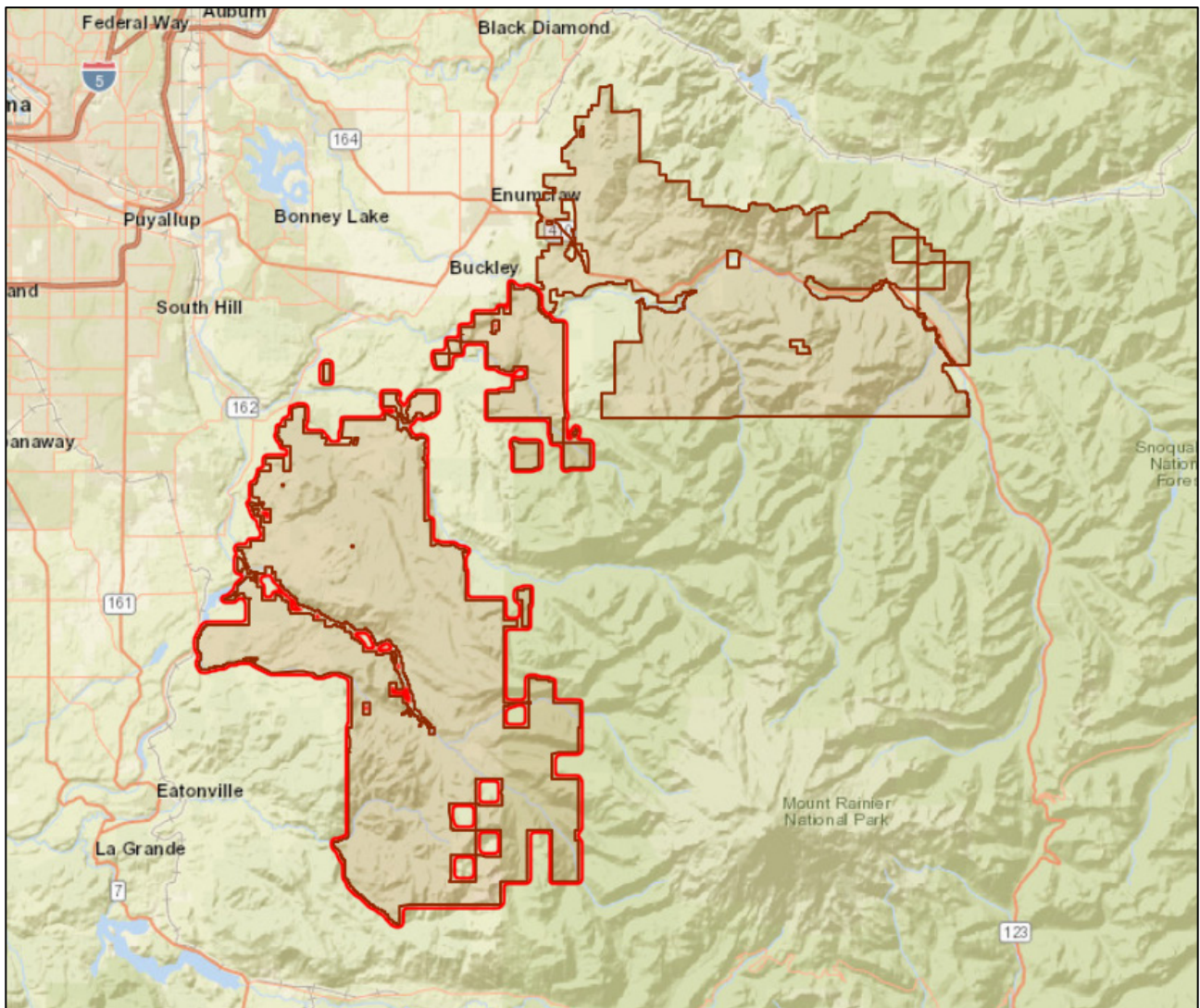
THE MUCKLESHOOT INDIAN TRIBE owns the White River Tree Farm (78,121 acres), previously owned and managed by Hancock Natural Resource Group, which is now under the ownership Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture, Inc. (Manulife). The [Muckleshoot Indian Tribe](#) continues to allow non-motorized access only under a fee access program managed by Manulife. Non-motorized access requires a non-motorized access license. A map of this tree farm, prices, and application process for fee access program, and rules and conditions of that program can be found [here](#). The license allows access April to December, with no access July 2-5.



Muckleshoot Indian Tribe's White River Tree Farm.

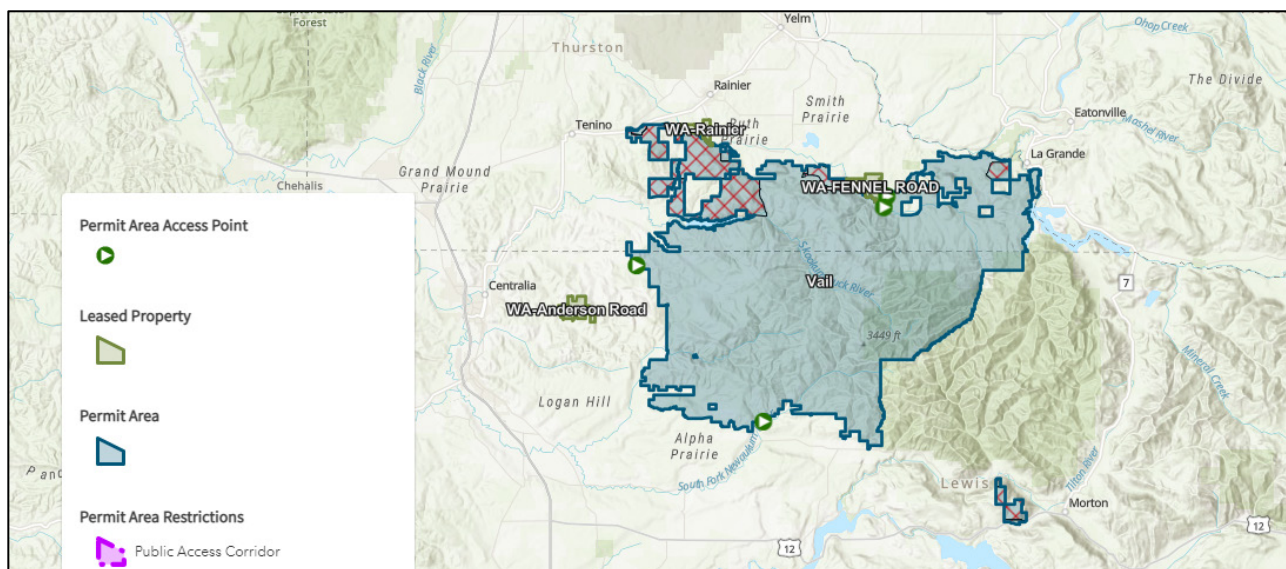
MANULIFE INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT TIMBERLAND AND AGRICULTURE, INC. (MANULIFE, PREVIOUSLY HANCOCK FOREST MANAGEMENT) continues to own a portion of the Kapowsin Tree Farm (103,462 acres) but has also sold a significant amount of land to various other companies/tribes. Motorized and non-motorized access is controlled through a fee access program. Maps of this tree farm, prices, and application process for the fee access program, including its limited elk hunt (see the Promotional Contest of Chance pdf link), and rules and conditions can be found [here](#). A Manulife Recreation Access License is required for motorized access into the

Kapowsin. Access by horseback, walking, or bicycling is also allowed, but only if visitors have a motorized access permit, as there is currently not a separate non-motorized access program for this area. Elk and Deer hunters: reference the Kapowsin Rules for special restrictions on hunting both species on this tree farm. Be advised other timber companies have small inholdings within the Kapowsin Tree Farm that may have additional access restrictions. Currently, most permits allow access from April 1– March 30, with no access the first week of July or during the bull elk seasons. Motorized general public recreation permits are available through Manulife for the White River Forest with the season running April 1 through December 31 with no access the first week of July. A reduced price non-motorized access permit is also available into the White River Forest. The Eatonville Forest (53,000) is owned and managed by [Hampton Tree Farms](#). A recreational access permit is required for the Forest; visit their website for information.



Manulife's Kapowsin Tree Farm (outlined in red; Muckleshoot White River Tree Farm to the northeast).

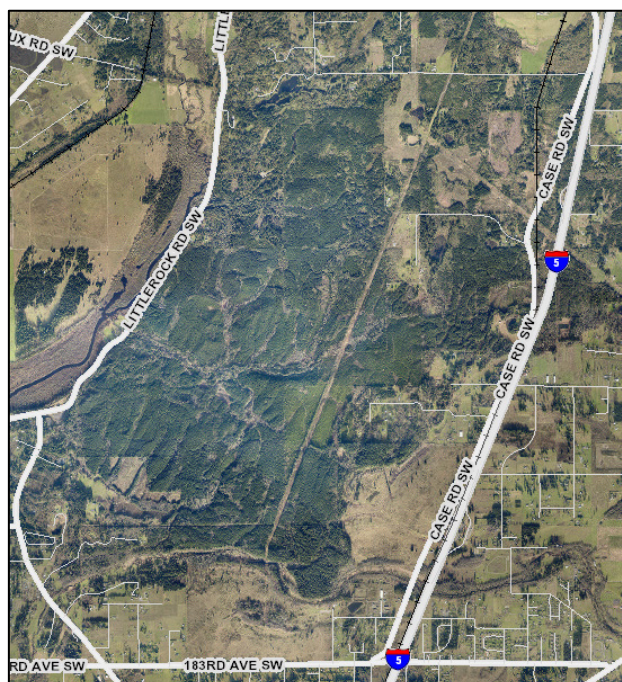
WEYERHAEUSER owns property scattered across District 11 including lands in northwestern GMU 653 and the Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667. Weyerhaeuser lands in Washington have NO free access programs; a recreational permit is required to access any of Weyerhaeuser property. A limited access recreation program is in effect for the Vail Tree Farm (152,079 acres) and hunters are required to buy an access permit to access the tree farm. Two programs are available: lease and permit. Motorized and non-motorized permits go on sale in May and allow access for one year (August through following July) and typically sell out well in advance of the hunting season. All forestry operations continue during the permit season. Information on Weyerhaeuser’s recreational program including purchasing leases and permits can be found on [Weyerhaeuser’s recreation page](#).



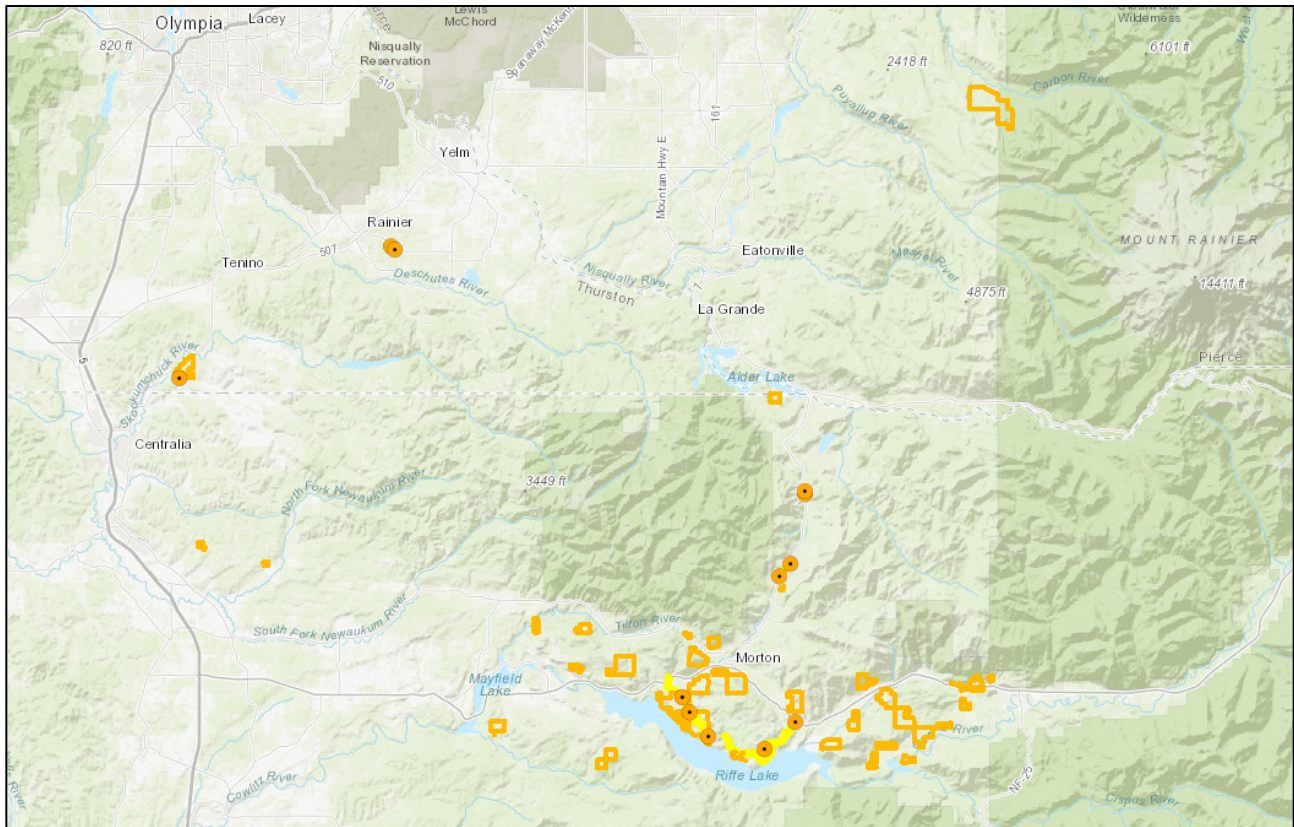
Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm.

BASCOM PACIFIC LLC owns a large swath of forestland in Thurston County bordering WDFW’s Scatter Creek Wildlife Area. Bascom Pacific allows non-motorized access only without the need for permit. Ebikes are also not permitted.

Bascom Pacific LLC timber ownership in Thurston County.



RAYONIER owns various properties scattered across Lewis, Pierce, and Thurston counties in District 11 where hunting is permitted. All access to Rayonier lands requires an access permit, some of which is free and some that is fee based. Visitors must have the permit on-hand. Maps of Rayonier's hunting lands (free and fee-based) and information on purchasing permits can be found on Rayonier's [hunting page](#).



Rayonier timber ownership in District 11.

PORT BLAKELY owns two parcels just east of Delphi Road SW and three parcels south of Old Highway 99 (just east of the Highway 12/Interstate 5 interchange) that is open for non-motorized public access only for hunting including walking, bicycle, and horse. Information on the Port Blakely public access program can be found [here](#).

MANKE LUMBER COMPANY owns a few smaller forestland parcels in District 11. The company website has no information regarding access for recreation; hunters are encouraged to contact the company directly with questions [here](#).

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES

In eastern Pierce County (GMUs 652, 653, and 654), the following ownership and contact information may be found:

- [Hampton Lumber/Mid Valley Resources](#) (access managed under Manulife Access Program)

- Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture, [Hancock Recreation](#) (Phone: 800-782-1493)
- Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (access managed by Manulife Access Program), [Home \(muckleshoot.nsn.us\)](#)
- Rayonier [Rayonier | Forest Products, Timber & Land Management Company](#)
- Manke Lumber Company [Manke Lumber Co.](#)

In Thurston County (GMUs 666 and 667):

- Manke Lumber Company: [mankelumber.com/contact.html](#)
- Port Blakely: [portblakely.com/us-forestry/public-access](#)
- Weyerhaeuser: [weyerhaeuser.com/timberlands/recreational-access/](#)
- Bascom Pacific LLC (no website available)

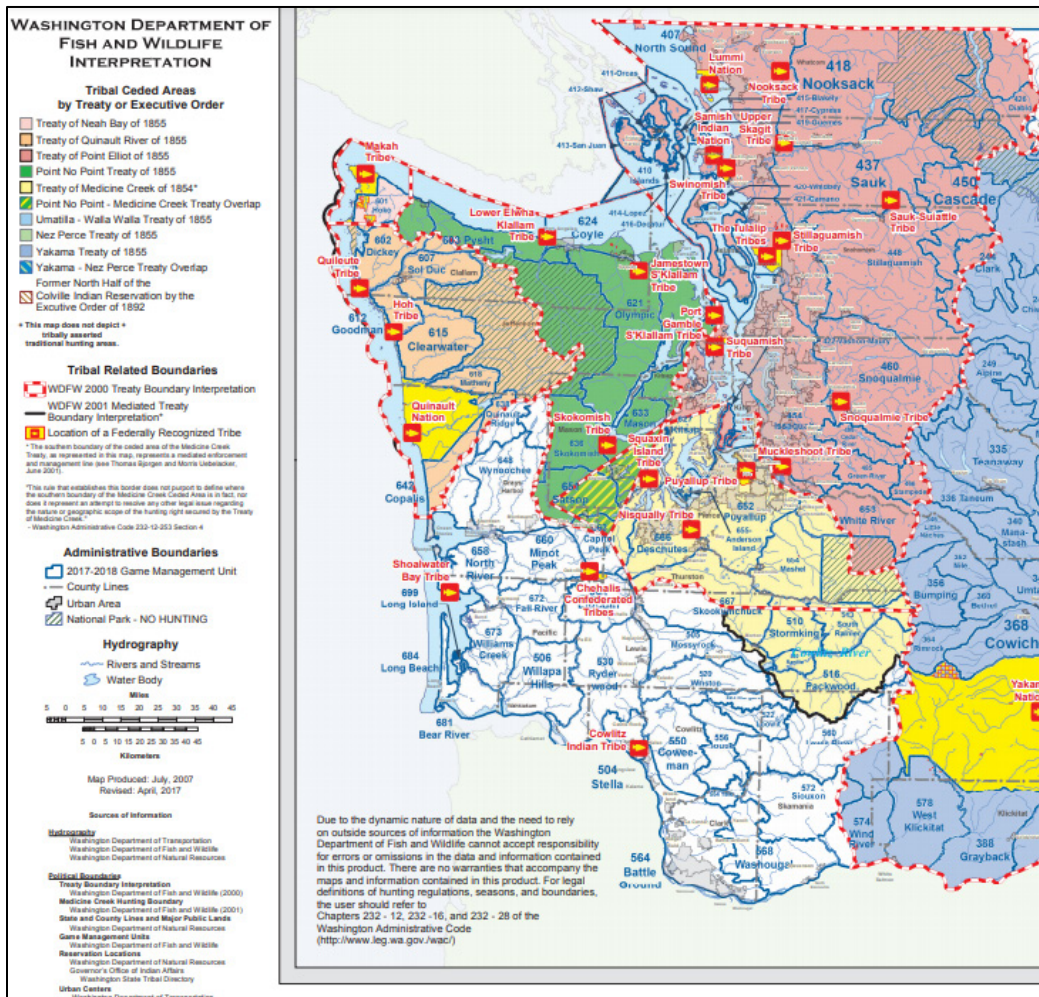
Anderson Island (GMU 655) is almost entirely privately owned with the exception of various small parks that either the Anderson Island Park and Recreation District or [Pierce County](#) own. Hunting and trapping is prohibited on all parks owned by Anderson Island; for location and rules reference [Anderson Island Parks & Recreation District](#). Hunters and fishers visiting Anderson Island should secure permission on private property for access.

TRIBAL HUNTING

District 11 is within the ceded area of the Treaty of Medicine Creek of 1854 and the Treaty of Point Elliot of 1856 (see graphic below). WDFW and tribal governments cooperatively manage wildlife populations. Treaty tribes with off-reservation hunting rights can hunt within their ceded area or traditional hunting areas. Tribal hunting often occurs concurrent with WDFW hunting seasons. Tribal governments set their own seasons and bag limits. Tribal Enforcement personnel are responsible for ensuring compliance with tribal hunting regulations, which may differ from state regulations. Four tribal hunting co-management agreements include provisions regarding hunting on private industrial timberlands (Point Elliot Agreement, Quileute Agreement, the Skokomish Agreement, and Squaxin Island Agreement).

Current copies of those agreements can be found at:
wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/tribal/wildlife

Tribal big game harvest Treaty reports are available at
nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/



ROAD CLOSURES

The following road closures are in effect in District 11:

GMU	Name	Roads closed	Purpose	dates
653*	Greenwater River/ White River	USFS Roads 7010, 7012, 7013, 7160, 72	Elk winter range	Dec. 15-May 1
		USFS Roads 70 (beyond MP 10.3), 7060, 73	Winter Recreation Sno-Park	Dec. 15-May 1
	Greenwater River	USFS Roads 7012-240, 7020, 70-223, 7080-210	Wildlife closures	Year-round
654	Mashel	Manulife/ORM/Hampton /Muckleshoot forestlands	Private industrial timberland	Year-round except special permittee access**
		DNR Elbe Hills Road 5	Disabled Hunter Program	Sept. 1-March 1 except special permittee access**
667	Skookumchuck	Portions of Skookumchuck Wildlife Area	Restricted dam operation area with exception of Disabled Hunter Program	Year-round except special permittee access***

*Non-motorized traffic is allowed beyond all these gates.

**Visit Manulife website for fee access program for these areas ([Hancock Recreation](#))

***Visit [WDFW disabled hunter road access entry program](#) for these areas

HUNTING ORGANIZATIONS

Below is a list of known hunting organizations active in District 11. If you know of an organization that should be included in this document, please let us know.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION

Website: [Home](#) | [Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation \(rmef.org\)](#)

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WASHINGTON WATERFOWL ASSOCIATION

Grays Harbor Chapter (Thurston/Lewis counties)

washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Grays-Harbor

Southwest Chapter (Pierce County)

washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Southwest

WASHINGTON MULE DEER FOUNTAIN

muledeer.org/state/washington/

Puget Sound Blacktail Chapter - WA 0115

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EYES IN THE WOODS

eyesinthewoods.org/

WASHINGTON BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

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DUCKS UNLIMITED—WASHINGTON

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WASHINGTON OUTDOOR WOMEN

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P.O. Box 1656, Bellevue, WA 98009-1656

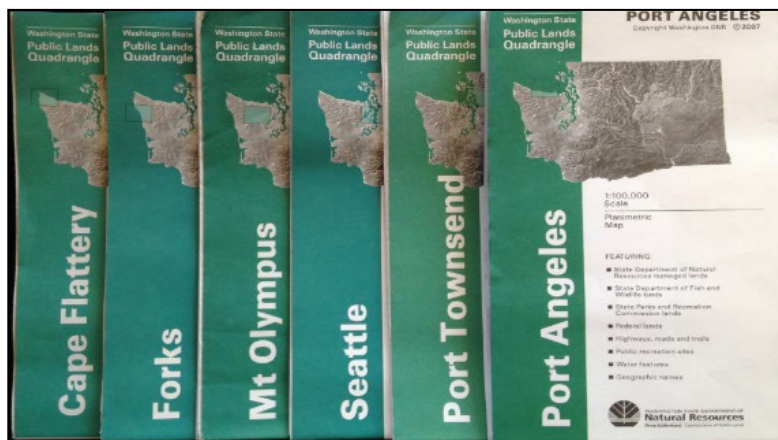
ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Hunters and anglers can find maps and land ownership information at the following:

- [Pierce County](#)
- [Thurston County](#)
- [Lewis County](#)
- [WDFW statewide](#)
- [WDFW hunt planner](#)

DNR maps have some of the best combination of land ownership and current roads. However, be aware of DNR and private forestland ownership exchanges, which may not show up on older maps. To reference current DNR ownership, visit [DNR Map Resources | WA - DNR](#).

To order DNR maps online visit: [Recreation Guide](#)



Maps of the two state forests within District 11, Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forest, as well as other DNR-managed lands can be found at [Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests | WA - DNR](#).

Questions regarding store purchase of maps can be directed to 360-664-4343. Call the DNR office in Enumclaw if you have a question about a road in District 11 at (360-802-7055).

Other maps that can be helpful for select areas include:

FOREST SERVICE ONLINE

Many USFS maps can be downloaded for free here [Maps | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

District 11 USFS Maps

Maps of the two national forests found in District 11, the Gifford Pinchot and the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie national forests can be downloaded or purchased here:

[Gifford Pinchot National Forest - Maps & Publications \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest - Maps & Publications \(usda.gov\)](#)

Topographic maps can be custom built and printed at CalTOPO: [Map the Backcountry with CalTopo](#)

OnX App: Many hunters use the OnX mobile phone app for on-the-go hunting map application especially since maps can be downloaded for use when cell service is not available: [onX: GPS Map Apps for Hunting, Hiking & Off-Roading \(onxmaps.com\)](#)

WDFW strongly encourages hunters to read more in-depth **WDFW hunting management and planning materials** by visiting the following:

[WDFW Hunting webpage](#)

[WDFW Game Management materials](#)

[The 2015-2021 Game Management Plan](#)

*note updated Game Management Plan process has begun in 2023

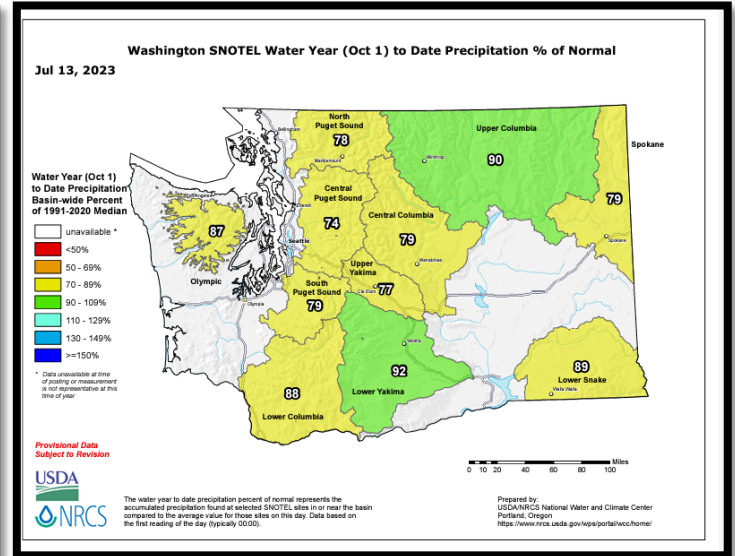
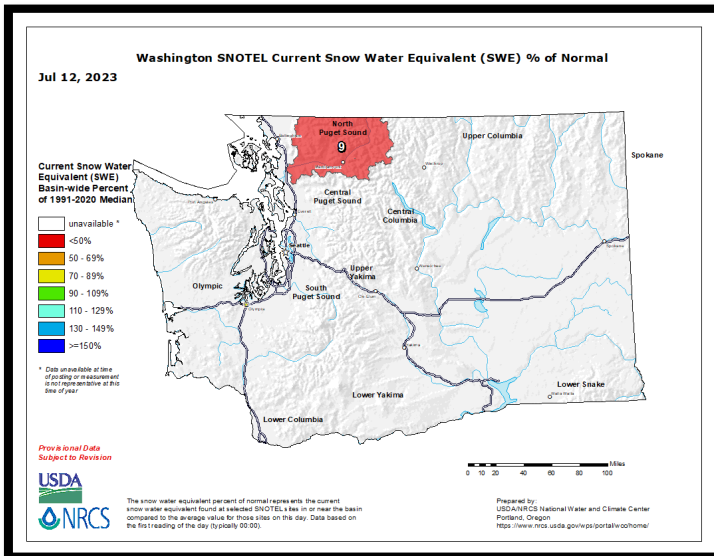
[The Game Status and Trend Report](#)

[Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#)

[Places to Hunt](#)

2023 FORAGE MOISTURE CONDITIONS AND FIRE

Snowpack moisture is the most reliable indicator of moisture levels that contribute to forage persistence for both large and small game through hunting seasons. This moisture level also affects the rate and intensity of the fire season, which has additional impact to forage persistence. The precipitation percent of normal from October 2022 to July 2023 is 74-92% over the area of the state where data is available. This may be attributable to late season snowfall in 2023. The best measure of moisture for browse is the Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) and as a comparison to percent of normal. Unfortunately, the SWE is only available for the North Puget Sound at the time of this publication but might be reflective of the remainder of the state and is currently at <50% of normal. Low snow moisture continuing throughout summer and into fall 2023 in Washington will affect forage going into the 2023-24 hunting season. 2023 wildfires are likely to further impact huntable areas of the State, but perhaps less so in District 11, which encounters fewer fires. For the most current information on climate trends and status for Washington state, visit the Office of Washington State Climatologist [here](#)



Snowpack moisture as percent of median and total precipitation October 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021 (Natural Resources Conservation Service). To learn more, visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service webpage [here](#).

The National Park Service released the following park SWE for the three national parks in Washington, including Mount Rainier in District 11:

A Snowpack Snapshot

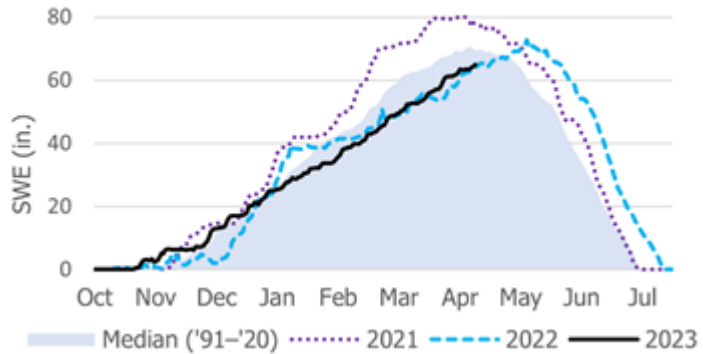
Mountain snow in this area typically reaches its maximum in mid-to-late April, marking the beginning of the long summer melt. In the NCCN, snowpack is monitored with the help of both automated SNOTEL sites and traditional snow surveys completed on a pair of skis. While the actual quantity of water contained in the snow (known as snow-water equivalent, or SWE) varies widely from site to site, together these measurements offer a glimpse of how 2023 compares to recent years:

Mount Rainier National Park

April 1 2023 snowpack as a percentage of the 1991–2020 median:

Cayuse Pass SNOTEL: 89%
Paradise SNOTEL: 88%

Mount Rainier Snowpack: Average of SNOTEL sites

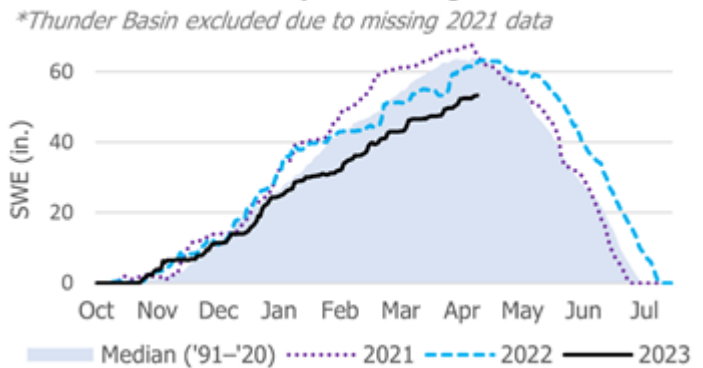


North Cascades National Park

April 1 2023 snowpack as a percentage of the 1991–2020 median:

Brown Top SNOTEL: 76%
Beaver Pass SNOTEL: 75%
Easy Pass SNOTEL: 80%
Thunder Basin SNOTEL: 94%
Park Creek Ridge SNOTEL: 83%

North Cascades Snowpack: Average of SNOTEL sites

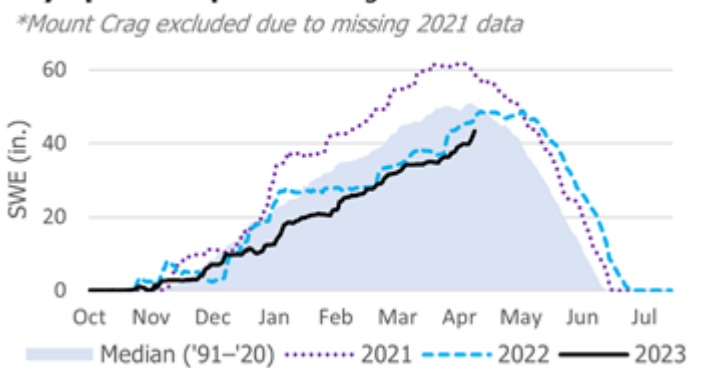


Olympic National Park

April 1 2023 snowpack as a percentage of the 1991–2020 median:

Deer Park Snow Survey: 60%
Hurricane Snow Survey: 66%
Cox Valley Snow Survey: 69%
Waterhole SNOTEL: 65%
Mt. Crag SNOTEL: 119%
Buckinghorse SNOTEL: 74%

Olympic Snowpack: Average of SNOTEL sites

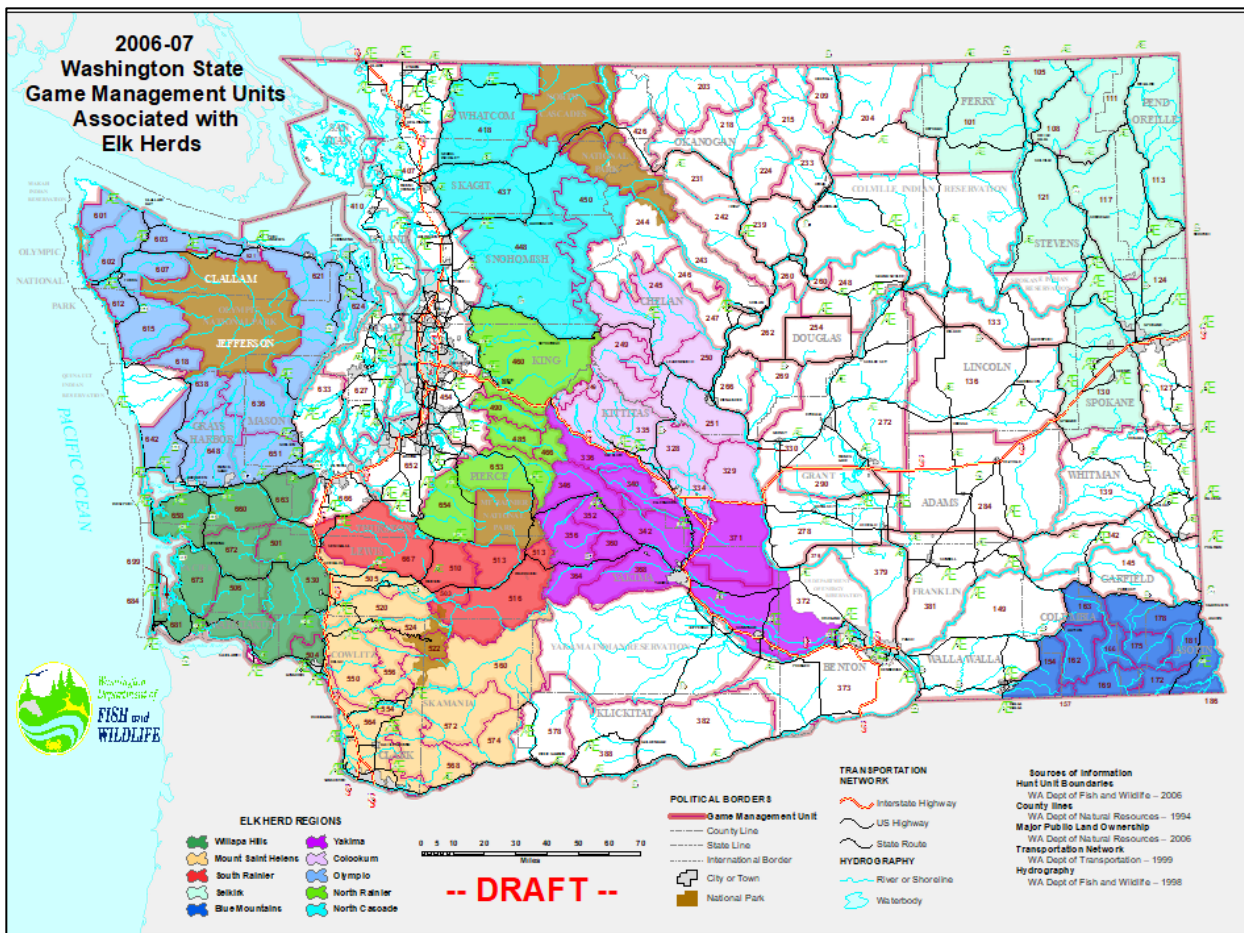


What comes next? The planet is emerging from a long-lasting La Niña climate pattern, which began in late 2020. For the Pacific Northwest, La Niña generally means overall cooler and wetter conditions due to a northerly-veering jet stream. As fall and winter approach, however, we are projected to shift toward warmer, drier El Niño conditions.

On a longer scale, warming trends have driven snowpack across the West down [15–30% since mid-century](#), with further [dramatic declines projected](#) for the Olympics and Cascades in coming decades. As these global trends leave their mark on NCCN parks, snowpack monitoring offers us a tool to better understand the present and plan for the future.

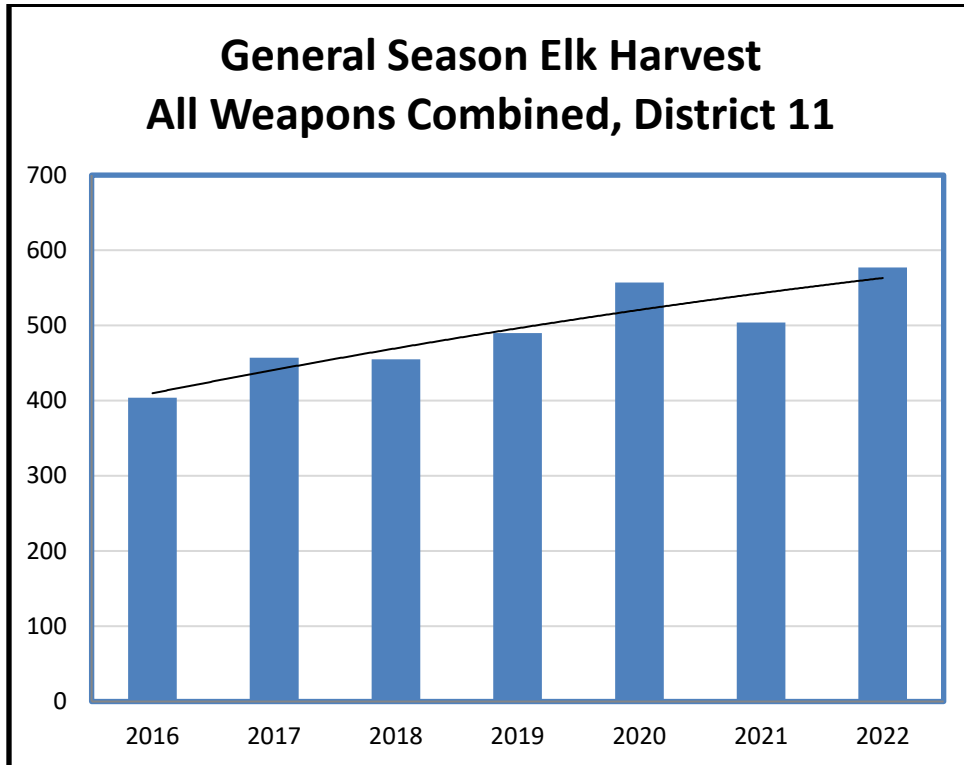
ELK

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainer high country and follow river drainages to low elevations during the hunting season. The most complete overview of each of these herds can be found in either the [North Rainier Elk Herd Plan \(2020\)](#) or the [South Rainier Elk Herd Plan \(2002\)](#).



The 10 elk herds of Washington State.

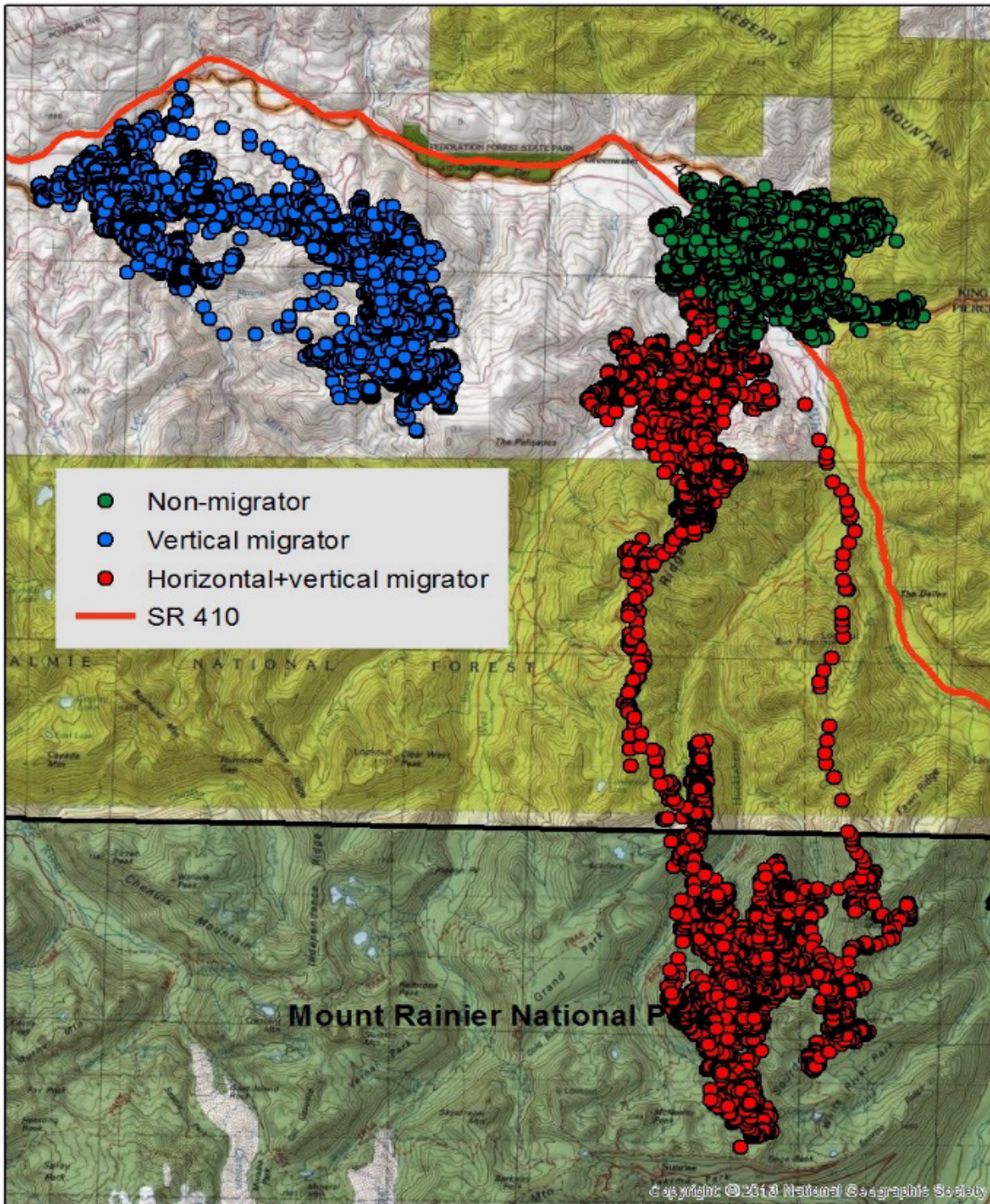
Elk harvest has continued to increase in District 11 and the availability of elk should continue to increase in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier Elk Herds continue to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 20 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in the North Rainier herd. Hunters annually report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt. The GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) subherd of the South Rainier Elk Herd has also increased over the years.



Some elk that summer at mid and high elevations within Mount Rainier National Park migrate out of the park to lower elevation winter range prior to any snowfall, some at the first snowfall, and some remain until there is deep snow, with the majority migrating when there is less than a foot of snow on the ground (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe unpublished data). Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. WDFW encourages hunters to scout for elk leaving Mount Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area, the White River into the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, and the Nisqually River to the southern part of the district. Be aware; hunting is not permitted within Mount Rainier National Park.

USFS-forested areas in GMU 653 off Highway 410, including roads 71, 73, and 74, Bullion Basin/Pickhandle Basin, and Big Crow Basins east of Crystal Mountain Ski Resort (outside ski boundaries once ski season officially opens) offer good opportunity for high-elevation, rugged elk hunting with plenty of robust elk. Hunters can also access this area via the Pacific Crest Trail to the east. Elk begin to come down to the lower elevations bordering H-410 in October when the first higher elevation snows begin, forcing elk to lower elevations. Some resident elk remain at lower elevations year-round but will be joined by the migratory portion of each herd. The White River drainage from Haller Pass west to the White River and both north and south of that area all support high numbers of elk. The timbered areas behind the Greenwater Fire Station along H-410 frequently has elk. Hunters must walk into this area after the gate closes on December 15 (see Road Closure section). High meadows off H-410 such as Grand Park are traditional rut areas for elk and elk may remain in those areas until heavy snows force them lower. Elk across these areas in GMU 653 have been hunted under a bull-only permit hunt since 2006.

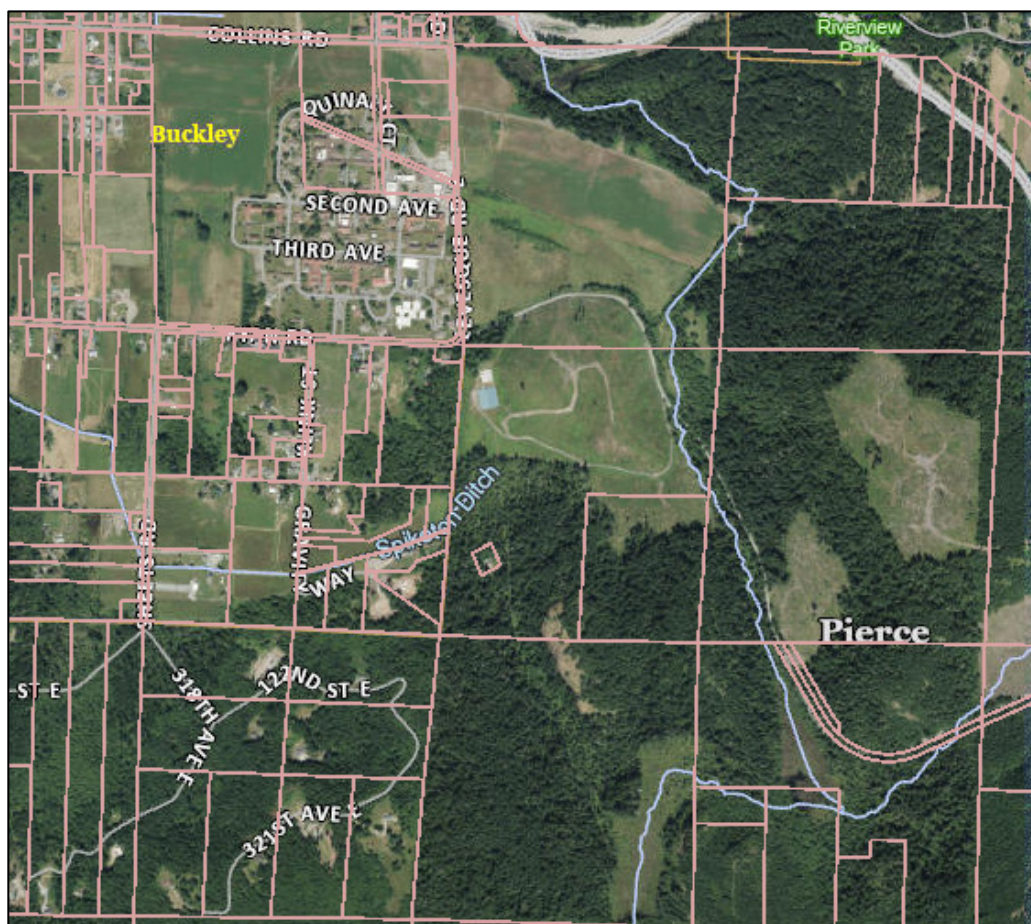
0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles



Examples of elk migration for 3 GPS-marked elk in GMU 653, showing non-migrator, vertical migrator, and horizontal+vertical migrator. The horizontal+vertical migrator (57% of study animals) moves to Mount Rainier National Park in summer. The vertical migrator (23%) moves to higher elevation in summer that is adjacent to winter range, but also may use its winter range in summer. The non-migrator (20%) uses the same range year-round. (research provided by Muckleshoot Tribe of Indians unpublished data).

USFS, which permits the Crystal Mountain Ski Resort, reminds hunters that service roads built and maintained by the ski resort are not open to the public. Hunters may ask for permission from the resort to haul out a harvested animal. Hunting is allowed in the [Clearwater](#), [Glacier View](#) and [Norse Peak Wilderness Areas](#) of the district following hunting regulations found [here](#).

Hunters are also likely to find elk outside the western boundary of Mount Rainier National Park in the Carbon River drainage in GMU 653 and accessed via USFS roads south and east of the towns of Wilkeson and Carbonado to the national park boundary. Fewer roads characterize this area but also fewer hunters and recreationists. Be aware that this landscape rises steeply to the east but also provides a decent road network that may be worth scouting, especially timber harvest areas. Obey posted signs regarding quarry truck traffic and especially the speed limit. Forestland between Highway 165 and 162 is dominated by private commercial timberlands that Manulife manages that require a fee access permit. Private commercial timberlands in this area that Weyerhaeuser, Olympic Resource Management, and Fruit Growers Association own are NOT open for public access. A small area of non-developed public land that Washington State Department of Social and Health Services manages lands along Buckley's eastern boundary, which is completely fenced, is NOT OPEN for hunting.



Washington State Department of Social and Health Services lands open for hunting (White River School District).

The Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests and University of Washington Charles Lathrop Pack Experimental and Demonstration Forest (Pack Forest) in GMU 654 are good prospects for deer or elk and can be accessed by foot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. Pack Forest managers caution hunters to be aware of students conducting research in the forest any time of the year. The Elbe Hills State Forest has limited vehicle access during the elk season as follows: entire 5 Road is closed, the 8 Road is open from Ashford to Scott Turner Road, and the 6 Road is closed except for hunters with a disabled access permit (see Road Closure section). Much of the Tahoma State Forest is also closed to vehicle access due to the ski hut management program and various road and bridge washouts. Hunters can legally walk, bike, or horse ride behind locked gates for hunting unless otherwise posted. DNR's Elbe Hills State Forest also provides access for disabled hunters through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early archery, two early muzzleloader, and two modern firearm disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on this state forest through this program.

Subherds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and [Skookumchuck Wildlife Area](#) (GMU 667). WDFW encourages hunters to scout the area from the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is allowed only under specialized permits provided through the Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP). Only elk and waterfowl hunting are allowed on the mine; elk hunting is an escorted hunt only and waterfowl hunting is open but is managed through a sign-up process (see Waterfowl Section). TransAlta, which owns the mine, is once again providing one senior and one disabled permit hunt on the mine for a total of 10 permits over two weekends (reference WDFW Hunting Regulations on applying for special permit hunts). The WDFW Skookumchuck Unit also provides access for disabled hunters through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early muzzleloader, one late muzzleloader, and two modern firearm disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on the unit through this program.

Some elk can occasionally be found and hunted on WDFW's [West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area](#) and on [Joint Base Lewis McChord](#) (JBLM) military property in Thurston County near the town of Rainier (GMU 666). Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through Northwest Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744) or through the [JBLM website](#).

In northwestern Thurston County, elk are found off Delphi Road SW and neighboring power lines (GMU 666). Elk cannot be hunted on property owned by USFWS near 123rd Avenue SW in the Black River refuge of GMU 666 (e.g., former Weaks Dairy) but can be hunted by landowner permission on private lands surrounding the refuge property.



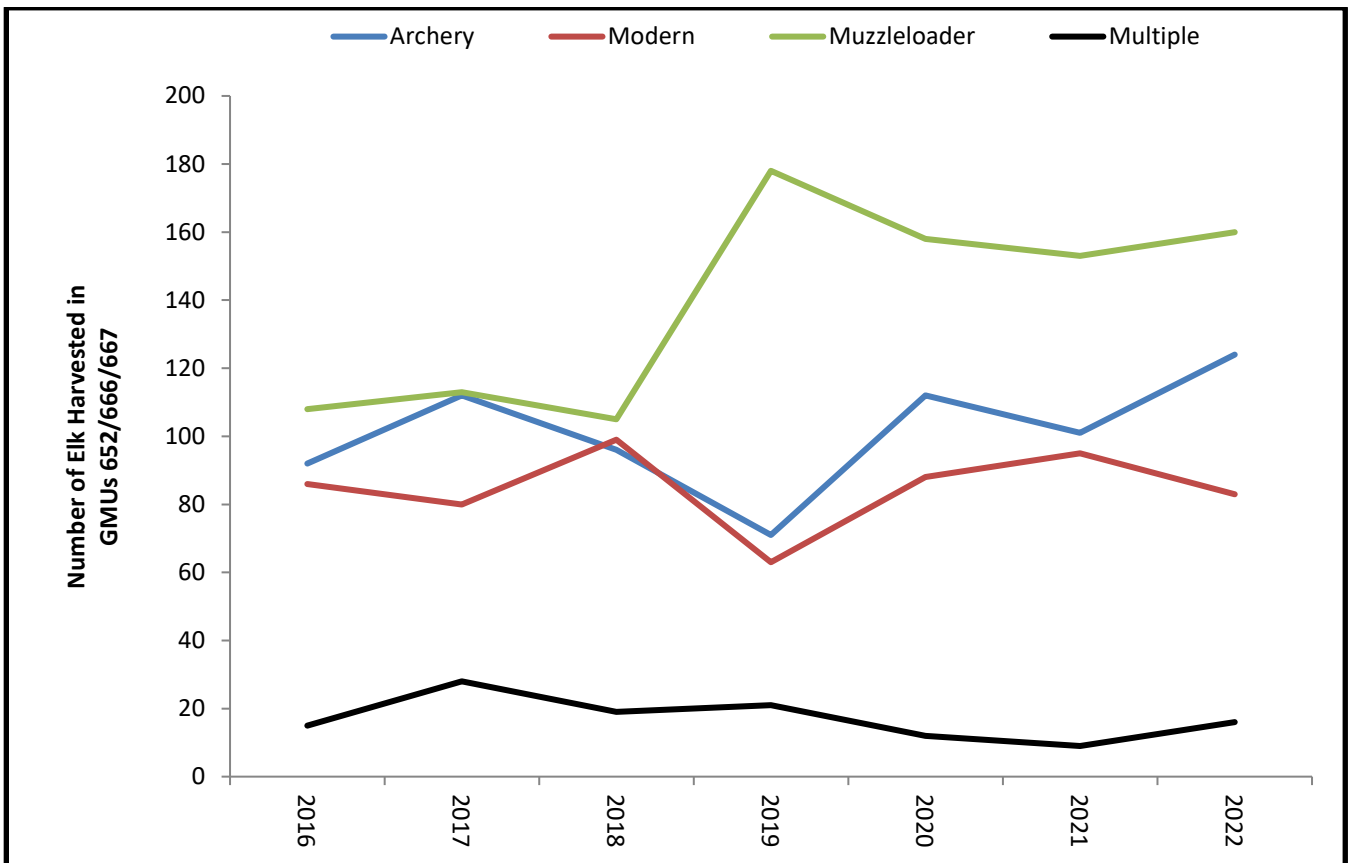
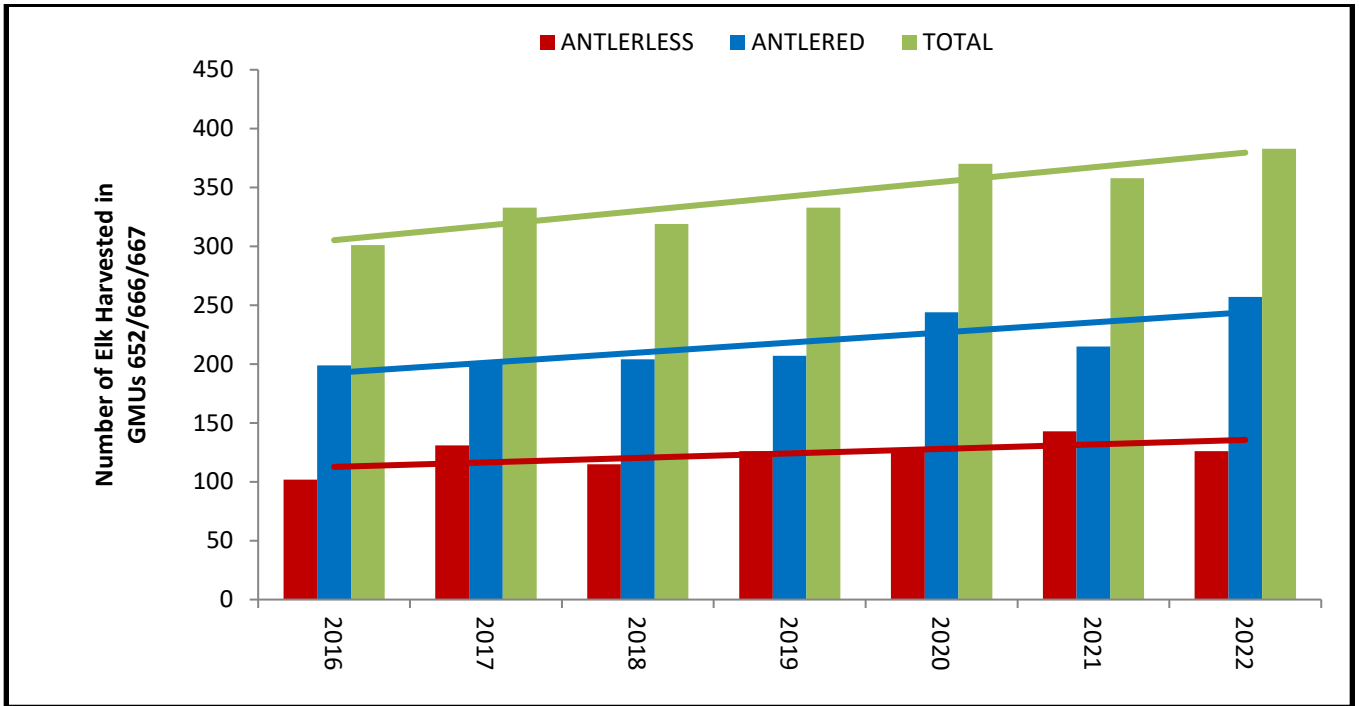
North Rainier elk wintering in the Crystal River Ranch area, District 11.

Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Road SW). Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation. Hunters must request permission to access private lands and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g., visit property and ask for permission). Elk Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced in size to encompass primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. There were several new hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aimed at conserving elk for tribal purposes on the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 was expanded and provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season; both early and late archery and muzzleloader seasons; and three separate winter antlerless hunts allowing up to 10 elk per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is made up mostly of agricultural lands,

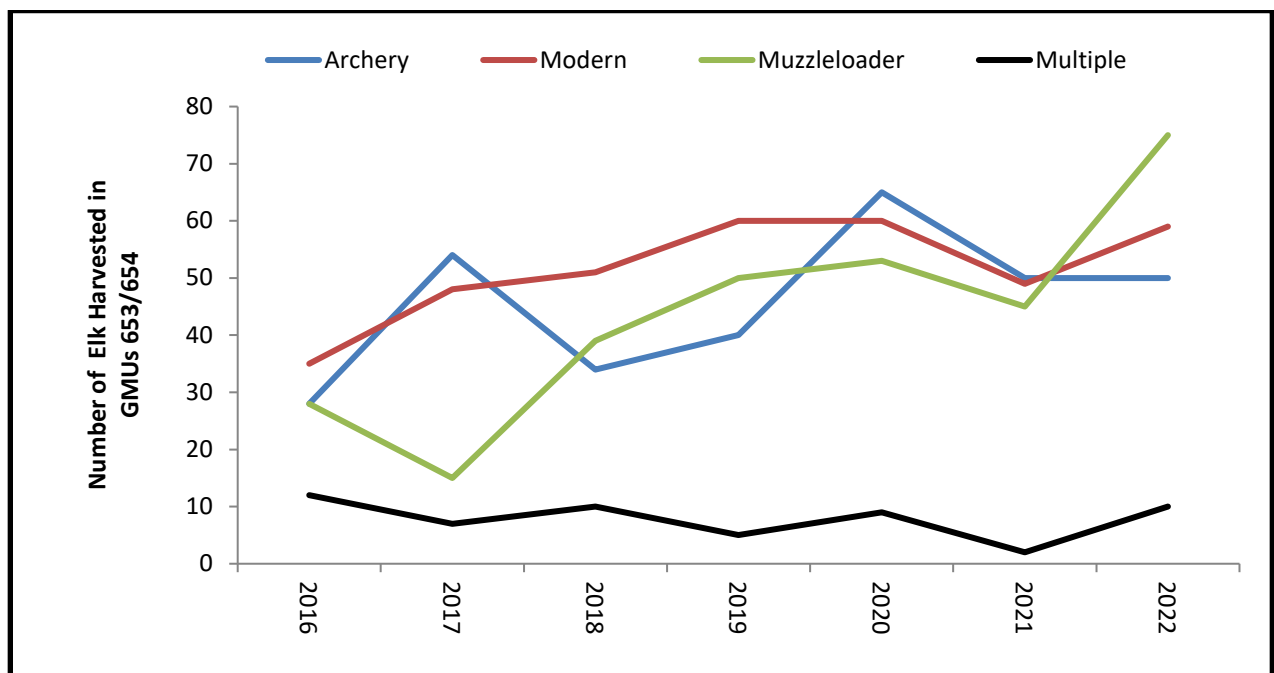
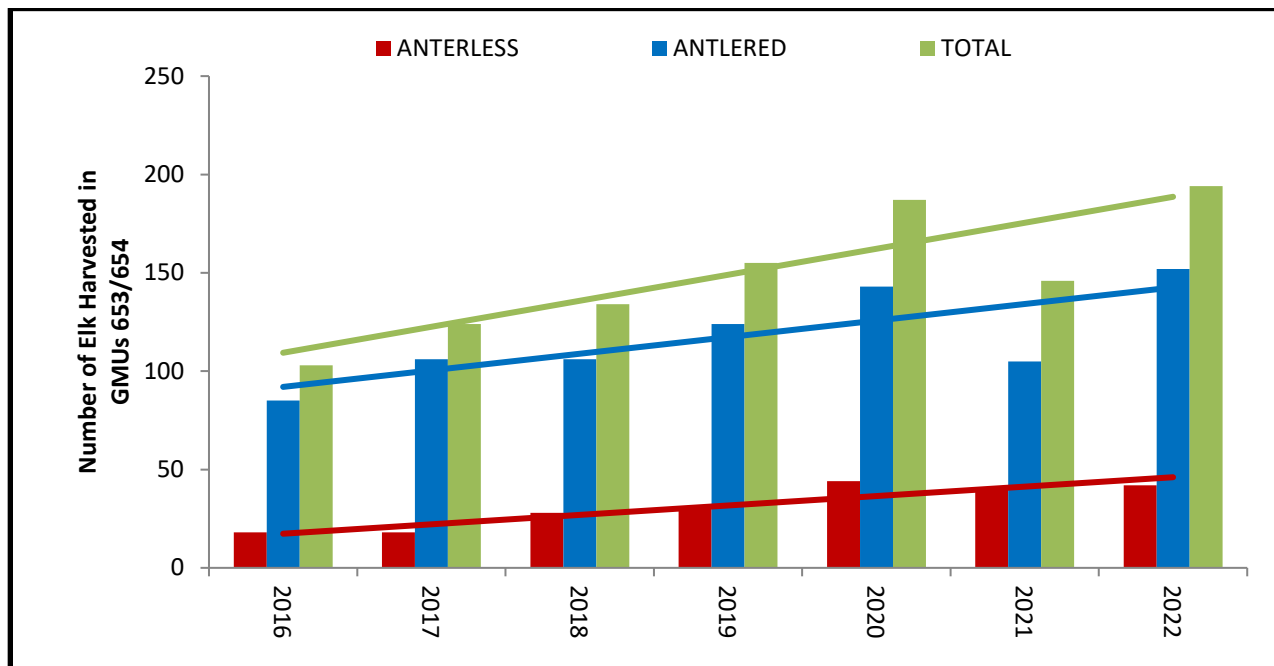
hobby farms, and ranch homes, and supports about 150-200 total elk. Access to these properties is limited and hunters interested in these hunts are encouraged to obtain access before applying for these permits.

Two senior permit elk hunts (10 permits total) for controlling private property damage are also provided in the Hanaford Elk Area 6069 of GMU 667. Finally, general Coastal Region (Region 6) Master Hunter elk permits are also available. Hunters drawn are often sent to damage properties in both the Buckley/Enumclaw and Hanaford area, as needed, and elsewhere in the region but must be available to hunt on a 24-hour notice.

General season elk harvest has been increasing over the past seven years within GMUs 652, 666, and 667 (combined these make up Elk Population Management Unit 62) with a slight decline for modern firearm in 2022. This makes for good prospects for harvesting an elk in those GMUs. Muzzleloaders typically have the highest harvest over those years followed by archery and modern firearm.



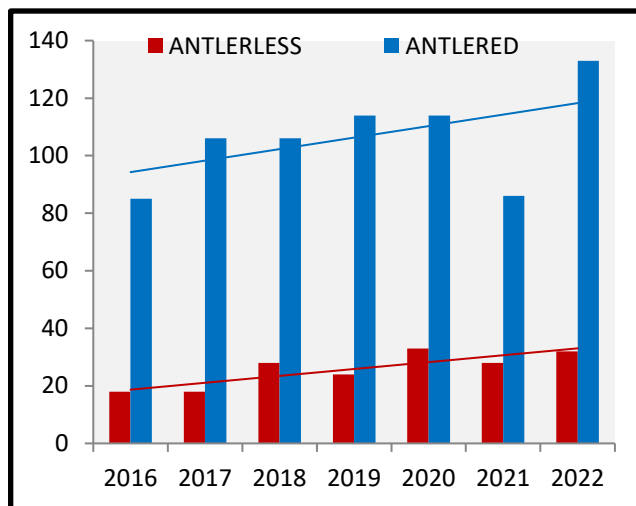
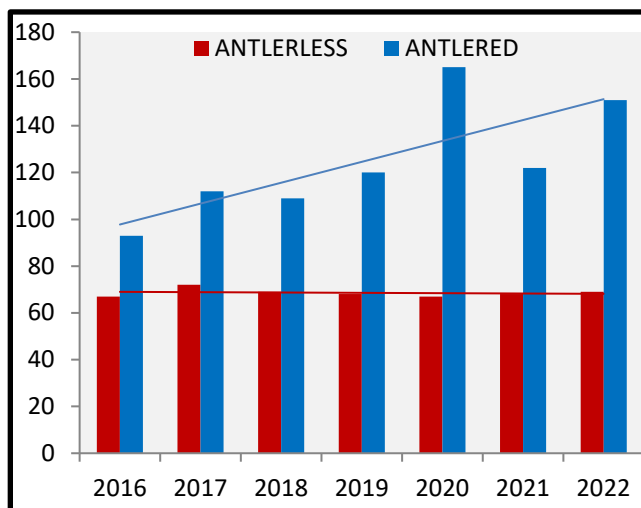
Elk harvest trends have also increased in GMUs 653 and 654 over the past seven years (combined these make up Elk Population Management Unit 67) with the same slight decline in 2021. Antlerless harvest is only permitted in GMU 654 of PMU 67 (cow harvest not allowed in GMU 653) and this harvest trend is increasing slightly spurred by damage removal hunts for elk to abate increasing property damage caused by an increasing elk subherd. District 11 changed the boundaries of Elk Damage Hunt Area 6054 in 2019 to focus the hunt on those properties experiencing damage.



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Manulife managed forestland (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653) all support elk but require a vehicle access permit from the company directly (see Private Commercial Timberland for information). Individuals who buy a Manulife recreational access license may enter a free drawing to participate in the GMU 654 limited elk hunt each year. Eleven (11) recreational access licenses are drawn to hunt elk on the Kapowsin timberlands as follows: five (5) modern firearm, three (3) archery, and three (3) muzzleloader. One recreational access license holder is also drawn to hunt elk on the Eatonville timberlands under the GMU 654 elk season. No recreational access is allowed on the Buckley timberlands in GMU 653 during any bull elk season. Interested hunters who have purchased a Manulife access license will find the drawing application [here](#) (open the PDF titled “Promotional Contest of Chance”). Hunters must be drawn for a WDFW bull elk permit to hunt elk on the White River timberlands in GMU 653. The Kapowsin and Eatonville drawing occurs in early May and once winners have been notified, names are posted on the Manulife recreation website. Only drawn permittees can hunt elk on the Kapowsin or Eatonville timberlands during elk seasons.

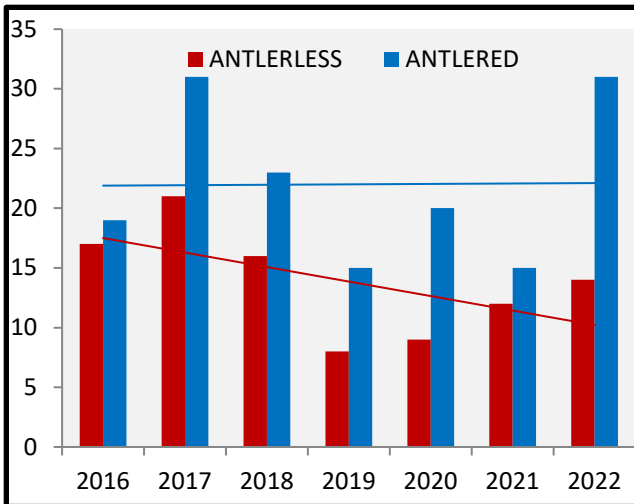
Hunters harvest the greatest number of elk in District 11 in GMUs 652 and 654 (see charts below). Harvest spiked in GMU 652 in 2020 possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed hunters more recreation time. The increase may also be due to the additions of archery and muzzleloader opportunity in the 6014 elk damage hunt area of GMU 652. GMUs 666 and 667 both have significantly lower harvest because of fewer elk in both GMUs and difficult access onto private properties in GMU 666.

GMU 653 is restricted to a bull-only permit season during general firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The only allowance for antlerless harvest is in that section of elk damage area 6014 that overlaps GMU 653 in the northeastern portion of the GMU near Buckley. Trends in elk harvest in the GMU 653 permit hunt have fluctuated slightly over the past six years except for a slight dips in 2017 and 2020. Hunter success has averaged 65% in this permit hunt making it a good prospect for those lucky enough to be drawn for the hunt.

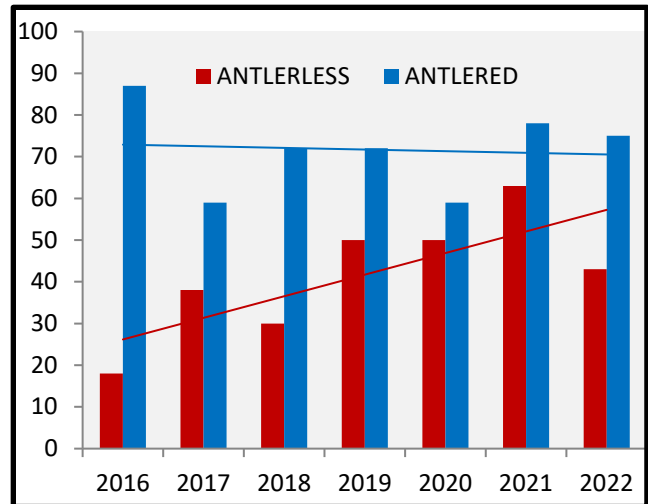


GMU 652 general season harvest (all weapons combined)

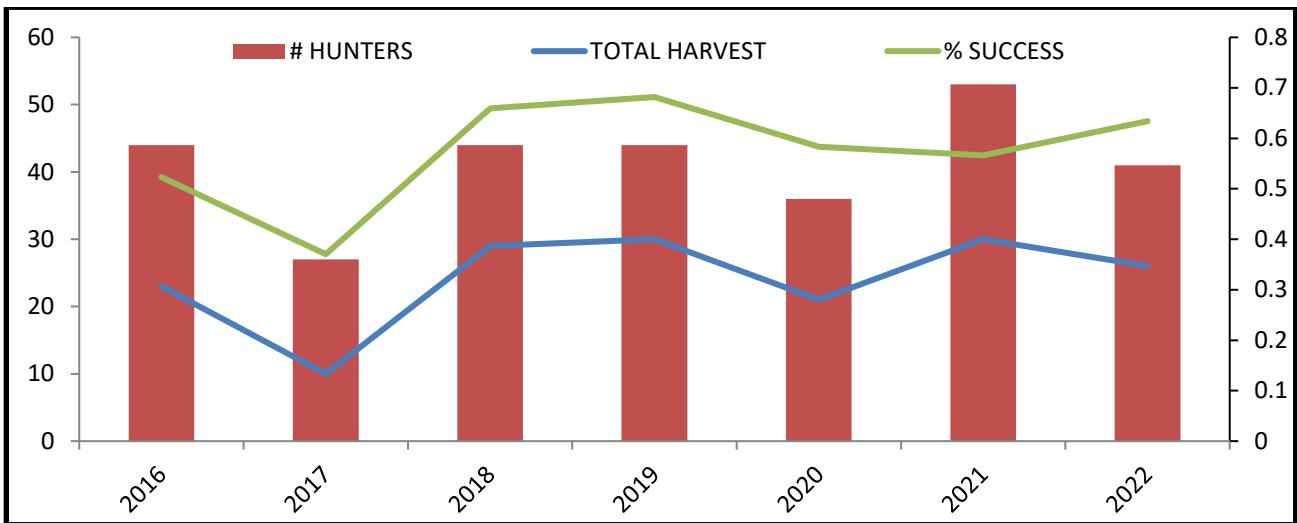
GMU 654 general season harvest (all weapons)



GMU 666 general season harvest (all weapons)

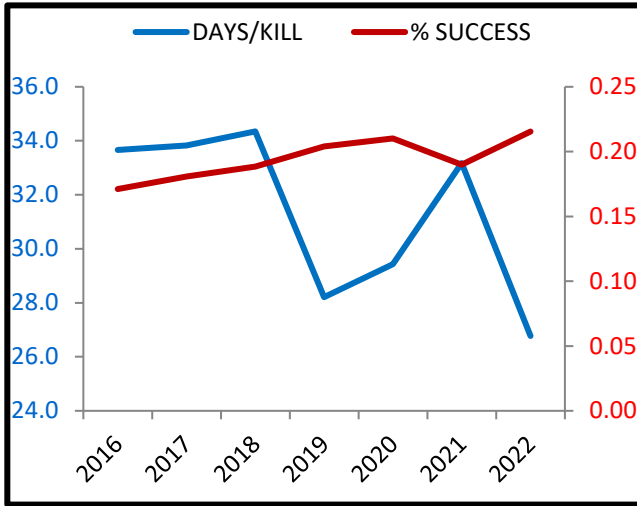


GMU 667 general season harvest (all weapons)

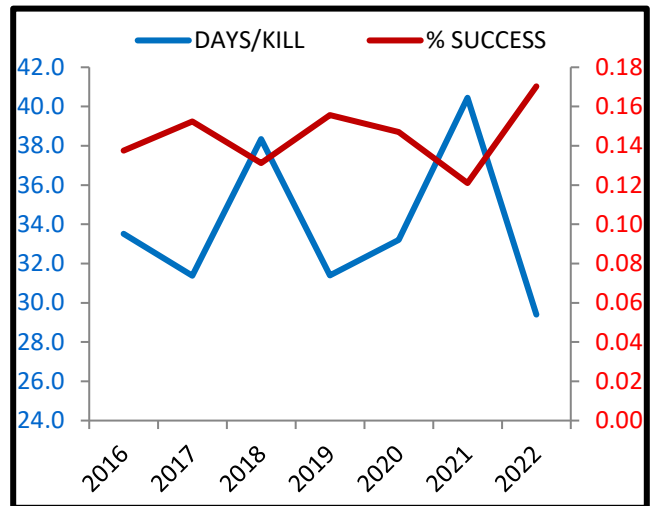


GMU 653 bull only permit hunters, harvest, and success (all weapons)

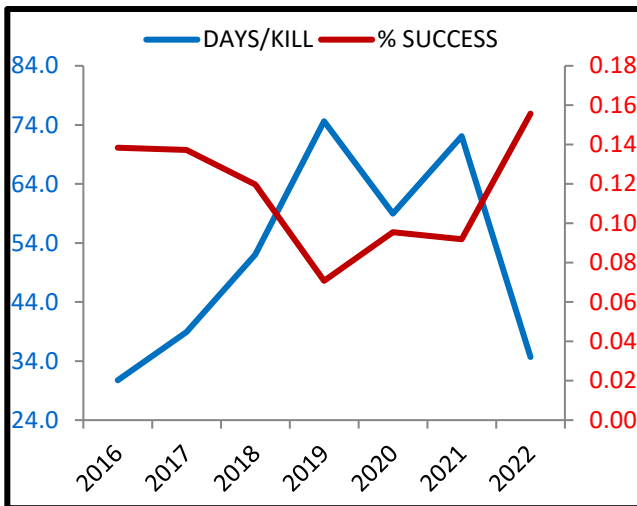
Hunter success is expressed as both the percentage of hunters that reported successfully harvesting an elk and by the number of days it took to harvest an animal in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (GMU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk; reference charts below). The 6-year trend shows an increasing success rate for every District 11 GMU. This is tracking elk population recovery in both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. GMU 667 has the lowest success rate while GMU 652 has the highest with the exception of the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt, which is holding steady at around 65%. This is a rugged, high alpine hunt, but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit. That success is followed by GMU 652 currently around 20%, GMUs 654 and 666 around 16% (note significant increase in 666 in 2022) and finally GMUs 667 around 10%.



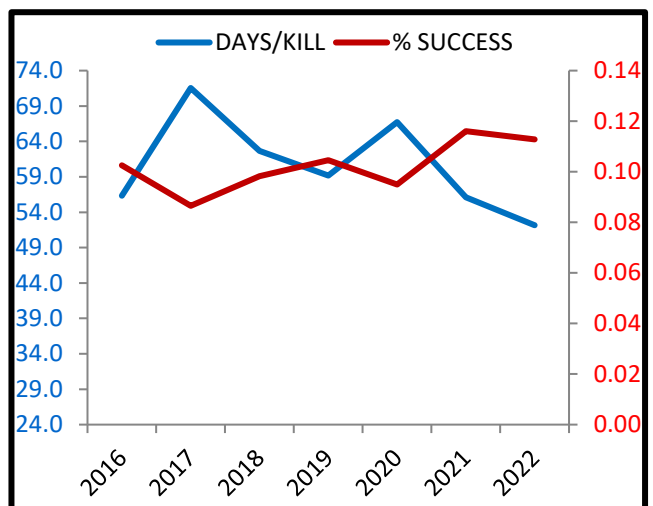
GMU 652 general season (all weapons combined)



GMU 654 general season (all weapons combined)



GMU 666 general season (all weapons)



GMU 667 general season (all weapons)

GMU 653 bull only permit hunt success in chart previously.

ELK BACTERIAL HOOF DISEASE - TAHD

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within District 11. While elk are susceptible to many conditions that result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area including elk from the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds that occupy District 11.

TAHD is more prevalent in the South Rainier elk herd of Lewis and Thurston counties in District 11 and less prevalent in the Pierce County GMUs associated with the North Rainier elk herd. This is likely due to the South Rainier's proximity to the core of the disease, the Saint Helens elk herd. WDFW has confirmed the presence of TAHD from elk sampled in all GMUs of District 11 except for Anderson Island, which has no elk.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but no evidence shows that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male, or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

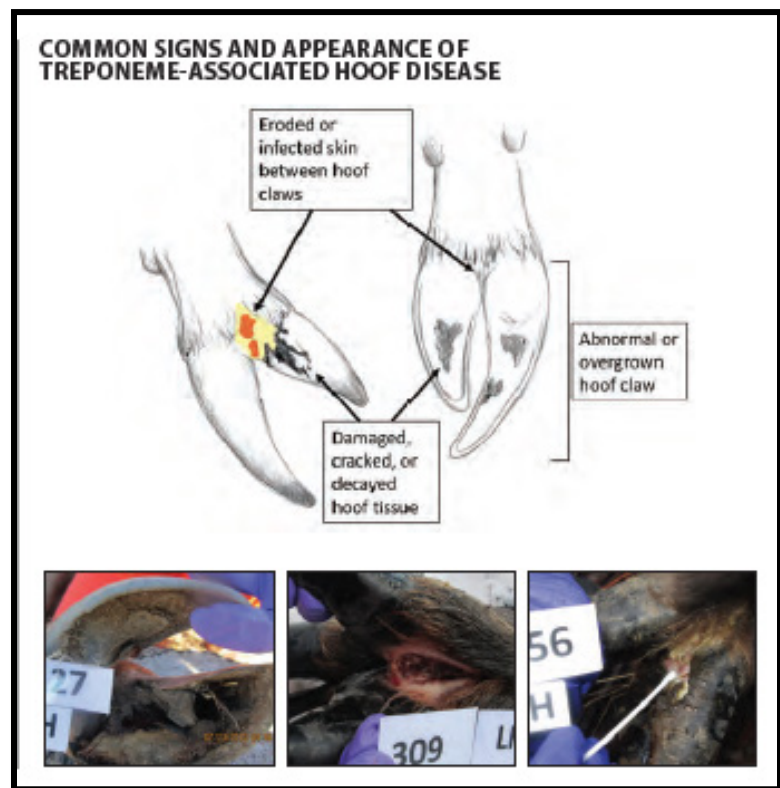
How hunters can help: In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600-series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The objective of this program is to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of September 1 – December 31 are awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder. This incentive-based program is continuing in the 2023-24 season. Additionally, WDFW is offering special permits under the Master Hunter permit category that are intended to target diseased elk. Reference this WDFW [page](#) for updated information on these incentive based hunts.

What hunters can do to help:

- **Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600-series GMUs**
- **Turn in elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington**
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the Department’s online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

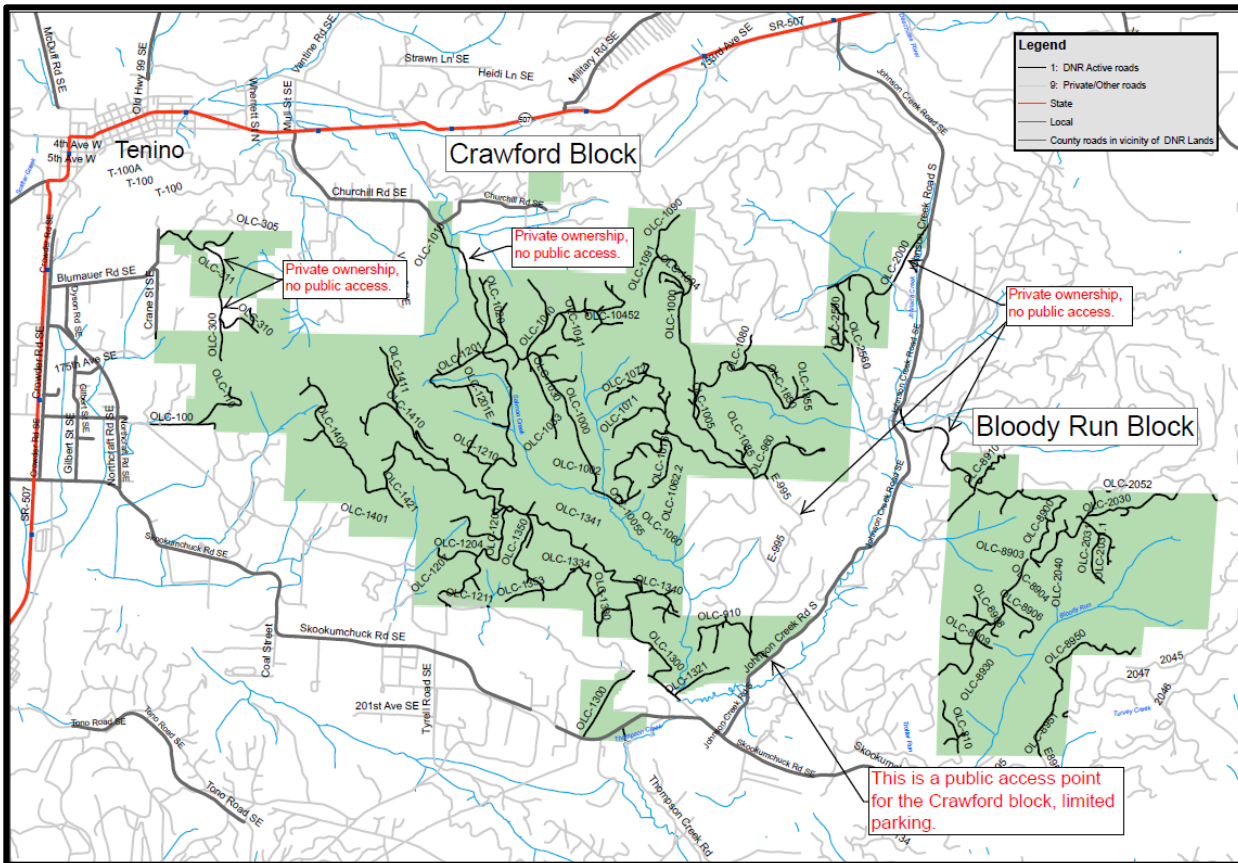
WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, Tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD.

For more information about TAHD, reference WDFW’s [website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found in the annual Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.



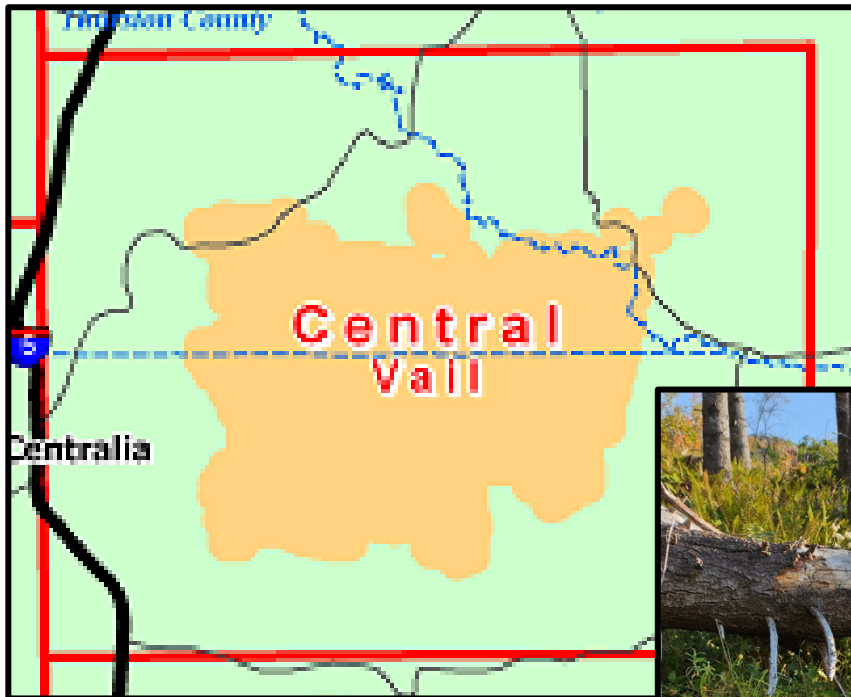
DEER

Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited. The Department does not conduct surveys annually, and when it does, surveys have typically been done in the highest quality location in the District and Region (Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667). Commercial and state-managed timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, timberlands worthy of scouting for both deer and elk include Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm and DNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks in GMU 667; Manulife managed properties (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653); DNR's Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMUs 654) and DNR and USFS-managed lands (scattered across District 11).



WDNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks.

Hancock (now Manulife) has a 2-point minimum buck harvest restriction for all deer seasons and weapon types on all its timberlands except for the White River Tree Farm. Further, the Kapowsin and Eatonville permits do not allow general season antlerless deer hunting. Antlerless deer harvest is only allowed if the Licensee is drawn from the Youth, Disabled, or 65 and Over WDFW special permit categories. Manulife’s reasoning is “an effort to increase deer populations over time and ultimately provide a better hunting experience, long term.” There are no additional deer hunting restrictions on the White River, except for the winter motorized access restriction.



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm.



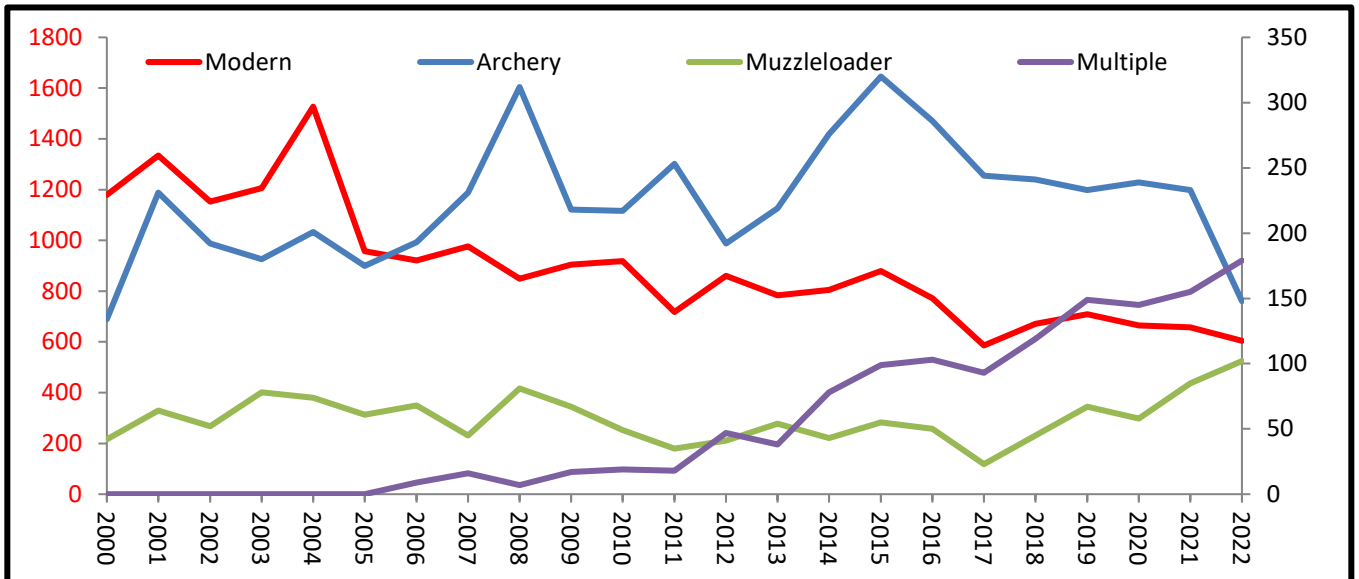
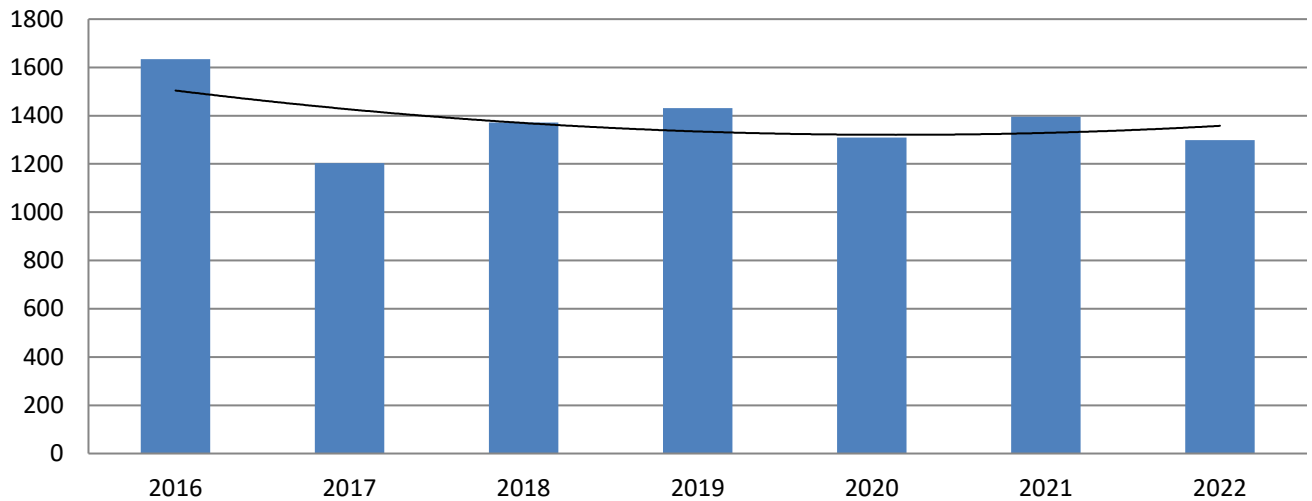
Local youth hunter with a nice buck harvested in GMU 667 (see her bear on front cover)

Hunters can find high-elevation trophy black-tail hunting experiences in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654. Hunters can access these areas via USFS road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (see description under Elk). DNR's Elbe Hills State Forest in GMU 654 provides access for disabled hunters through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early archery, six modern firearm, two late modern firearm, one late muzzleloader, and two late archery disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on this state forest through this program.

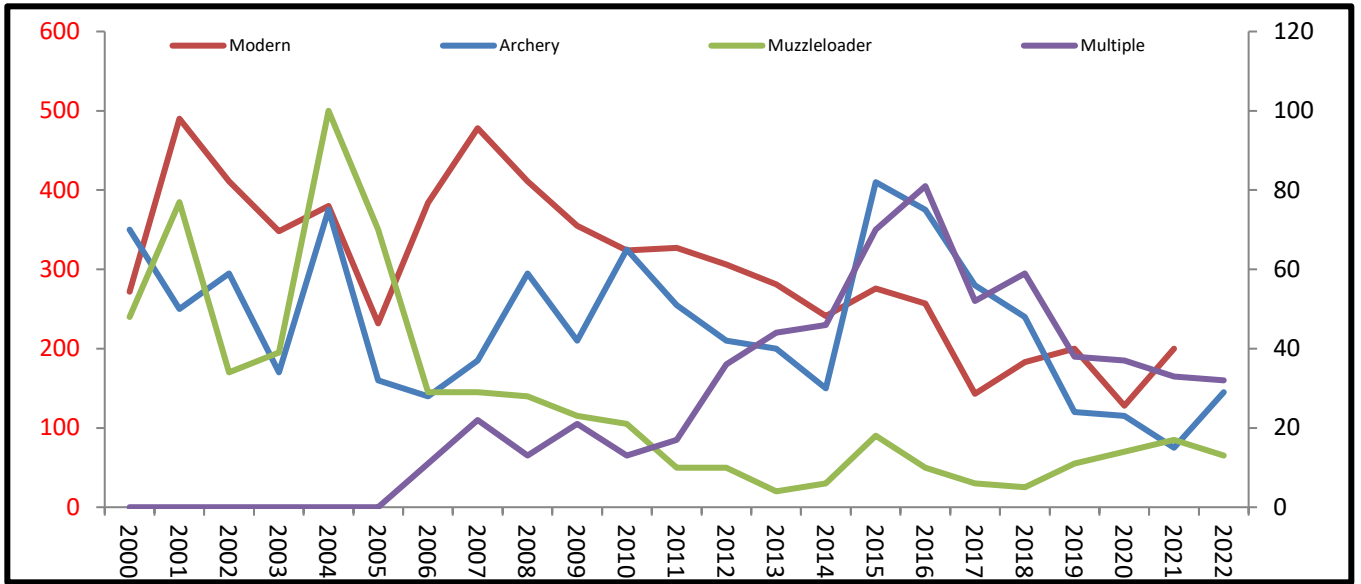
Deer harvest in District 11 is average for the state but fairly high for western Washington. Deer harvest across District 11 has been holding steady over the past 7 years (see graphs below). Declining harvest occurred in GMUs 652, 654 (although steady last 6 years), 655 (from spikes in 2018-19), and 666 (although steady last 4 years). One factor in these trends is the decreasing number of deer hunters in the District; deer hunters declined from approximately 10,000 in 2000 to just over 5,000 by 2022. GMU 653 has a fluctuating but increasing trend. GMU 667 has remained stable over the past 7 years and has significantly higher harvest than any other GMU in District 11. Hunter harvest success has remained fairly stable across the District with the exception of GMU 654 over those same years.

Harvest regulations have altered somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the years, which plays a role in harvest trends. Limited access combined with antler and doe restrictions may ultimately increase deer numbers over time especially in GMUs 653 and 654 where success is around 15% compared to roughly 20% in GMUs 652 and 666. GMUs 655 has the highest success rate in District 11 at around 50% with limited numbers of hunters suggesting that those hunters lucky enough to obtain access onto private lands on Anderson Island are being relatively successful. Be aware that 655 has a much lower overall harvest than the remaining GMUs in the District. GMU 667 had the second highest harvest success in District 11 at about 30% annually, suggesting that while Weyerhaeuser's access permit requirement is limiting overall hunters, those that do obtain a permit are doing well. That is occurring despite GMU 667, which includes Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm, hosted some 2,100 hunters in 2022 (the most heavily hunted deer area in the district). GMU 652 and 666 are comparable both in number of hunters and hunting success which is not surprising considering they are both urbanized GMUs. Anderson Island (GMU 655) was previously Deer Area 6014 and had antlerless permit hunts only. The entire island became GMU 655 in 2013 and has since provided both general seasons (both sex) and antlerless permit hunts. Thus, the increase in harvest is not surprising, keeping in mind that the island has significantly lower harvest of all GMUs in the district. Ferry logistics and property access reduce the actual harvest despite plentiful deer on the island.

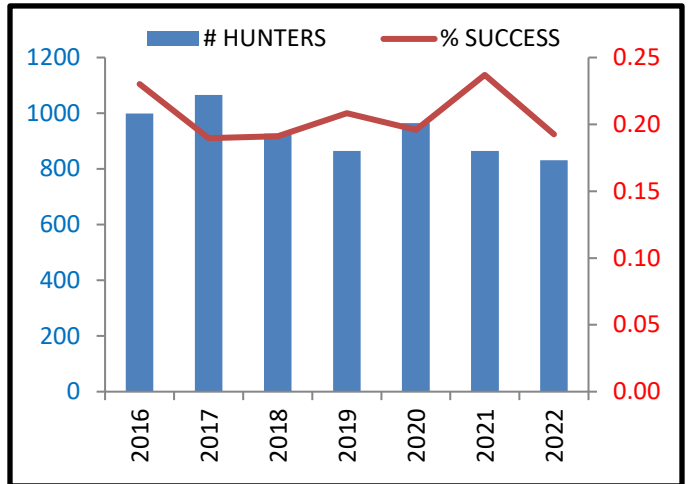
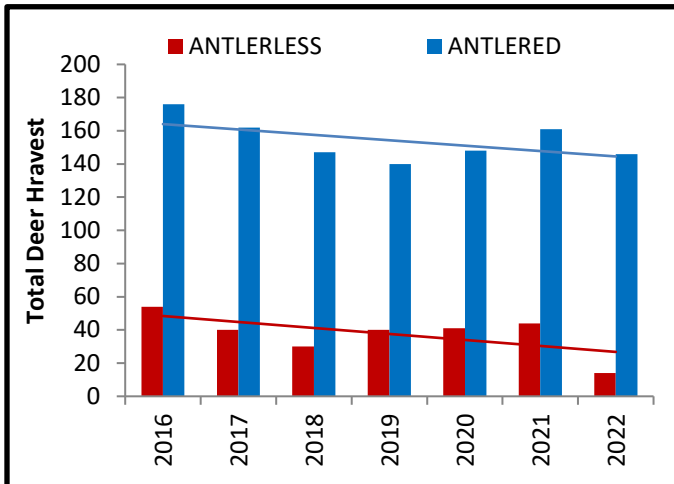
General Season Deer Harvest All Weapons Combined, District 11



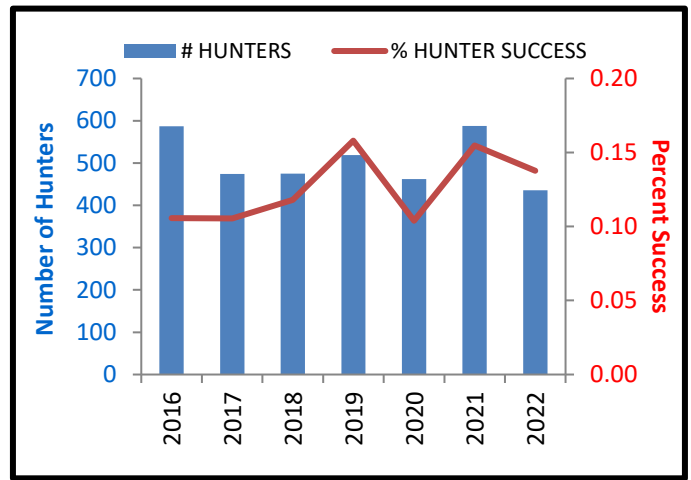
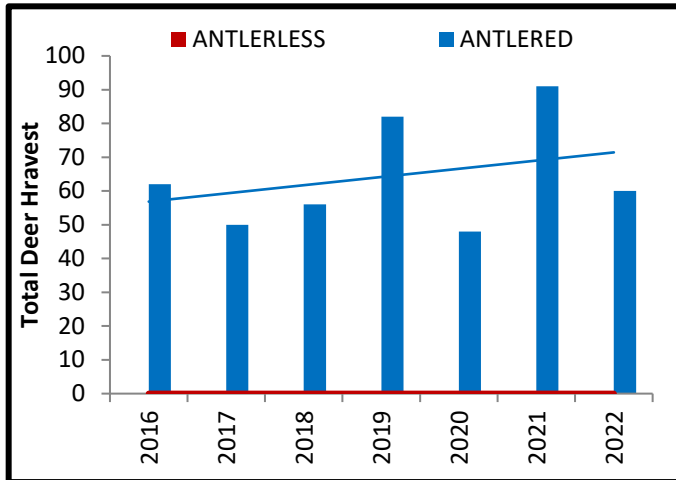
Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 62 (comprised of GMUs 652, 655, 666 and 667). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.



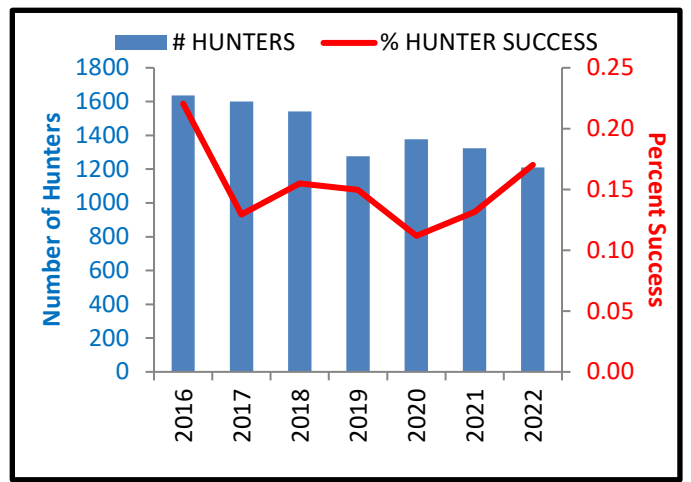
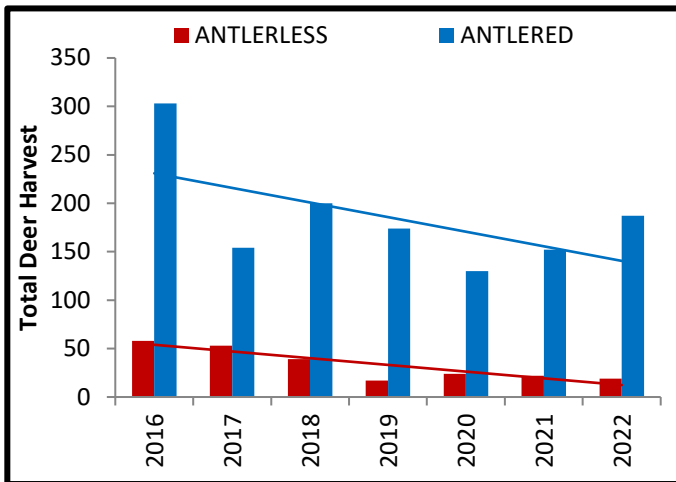
Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 67 (comprised of GMUs 653 and 654). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.



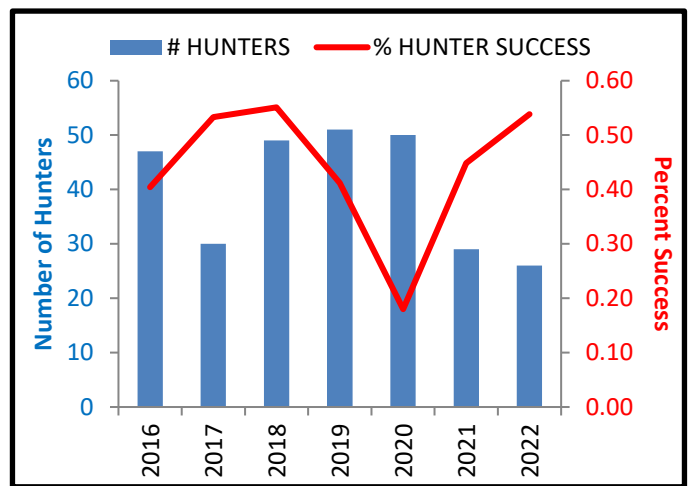
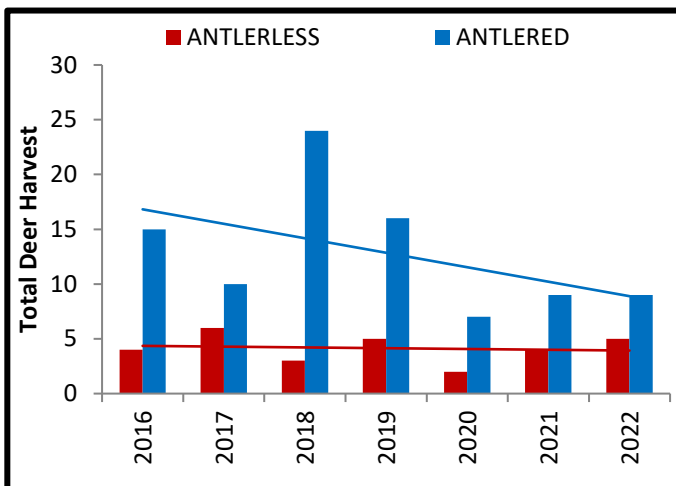
GMU 652 (Puyallup) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



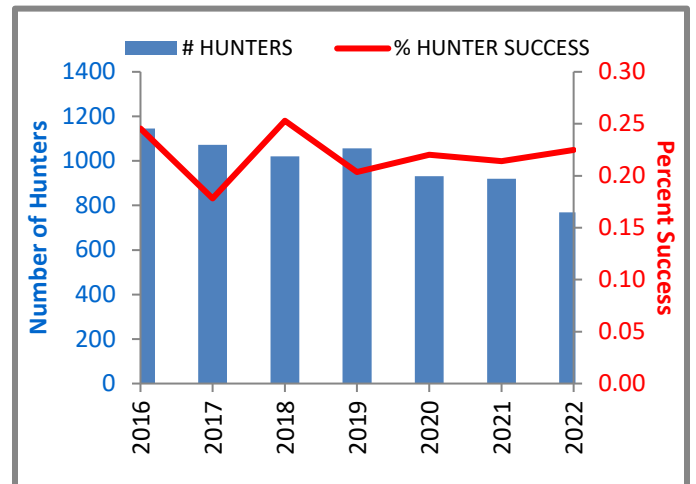
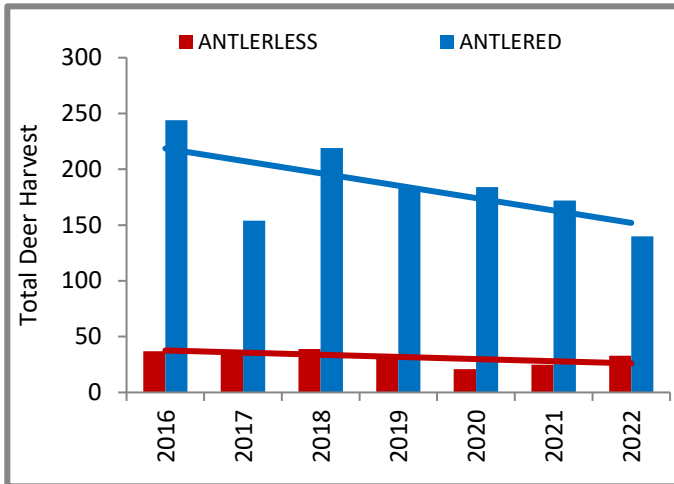
GMU 653 (White River) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



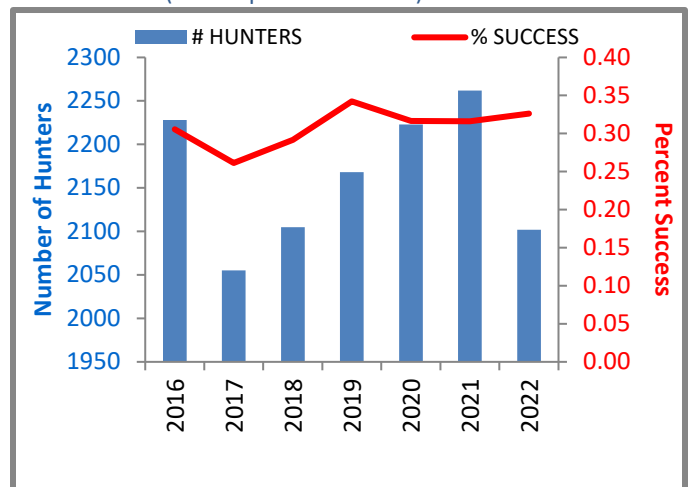
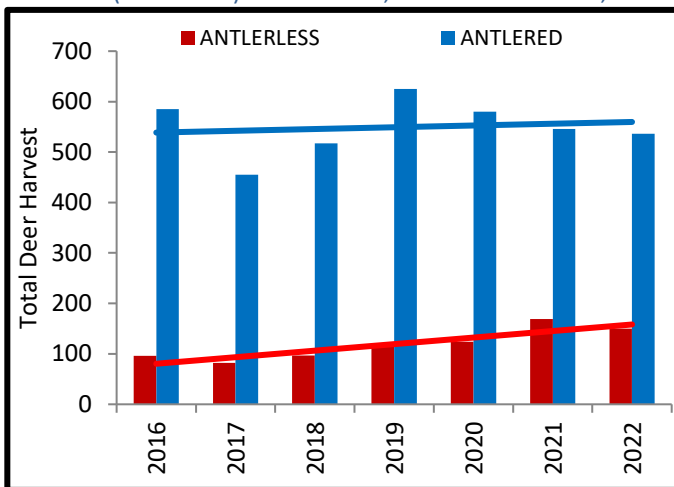
GMU 654 (Mashel) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



GMU 655 (Anderson Island) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



GMU 666 (Deschutes) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



K. Hailstone with her first spike (2017)

BEAR

WDFW's goals for black bear management are to:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage black bear and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize threats to public safety from black bears, while at the same time maintaining a sustainable and viable bear population.
3. Manage black bear for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography; and
4. Manage populations statewide for a sustained yield. Wildlife managers use three statistics to assess black bear harvest:
 - Proportion of females harvested (no more than 35-39% of harvest)
 - Median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years)
 - Median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years)

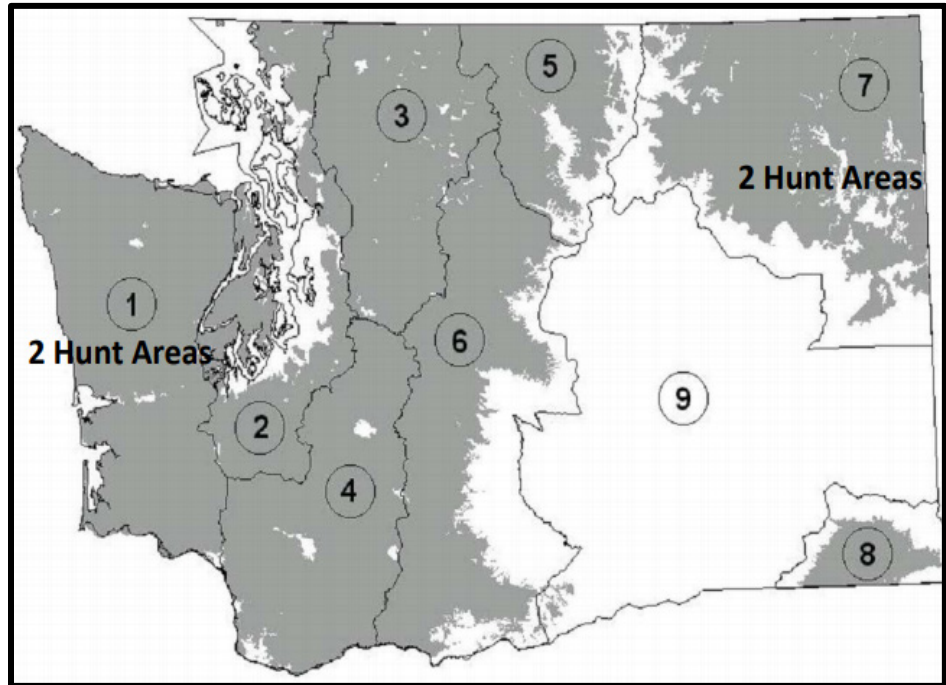
WDFW does not conduct annual surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size and instead uses harvest data trends for population estimates or indices. Wildlife managers believe black bear populations, which occur across the district but are most prevalent on commercial timberlands in GMUs 653 and 654, are stable in District 11.

For management purposes, the state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions. District 11 contains parts of two Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs): South Cascades (BBMU #2 containing GMUs 653 and 654) and Puget Sound (BBMU #4 containing GMUs 652, 655, 666, and 667). Each of these BBMUs also contains additional GMUs outside the boundaries of District 11. A spring bear hunt season is currently not provided in Washington (reference WDFW link [here](#)).



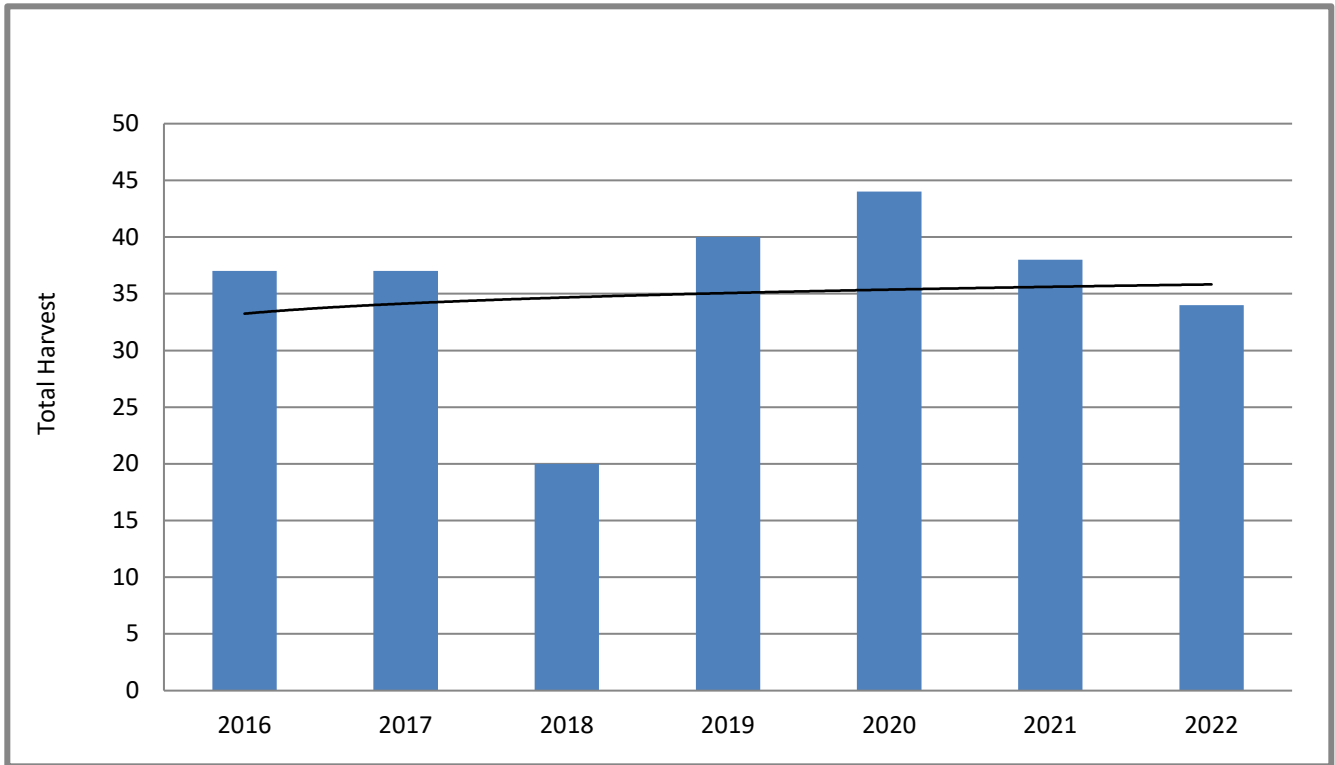
Local District 11 hunter T. Cavin displaying his spring harvested cinnamon black bear.

Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Manulife managed lands (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMU 654), and Joint Base Lewis McChord offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district.

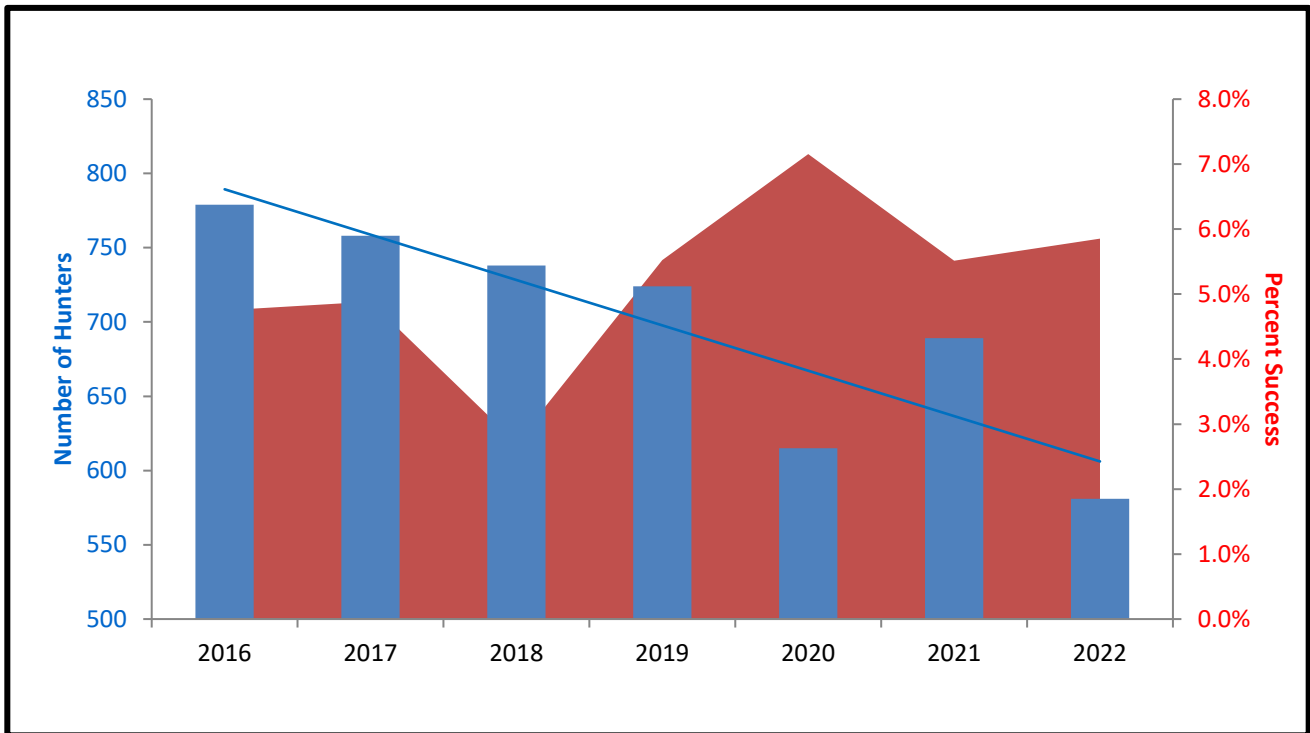


Black bear management units (BBMUs) in Washington State.

General fall season bear harvest in the GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (GMUs 652, 655, 666, 667 combined) have remained stable over the past 7 years except for 2018, which saw a one-year significant decline. Although bear hunting is legal in GMU 655 Anderson Island, bear have never been reported harvested nor hunters reported hunting the island. The number of hunters hunting this BBMU has been declining since 2019 which may have influenced increasing success rates for those that continue to hunt this BBMU. Success across District 11s portion of this BBMU was 6% in 2022, primarily driven by success in GMU 652 (7.6%) and GMU 653 (8.6%). Prospects for harvesting bear in GMU 652 and 653 are good for the 2023 season while in GMUs 666 (3.2%) and 667 (4.7%) much less so. Last winter’s snowpack and the resulting soil moisture levels should result in good berry and mast production this year.



Puget Sound BMMU General Fall Bear Harvest (GMUs 652, 666, 667 only combined).

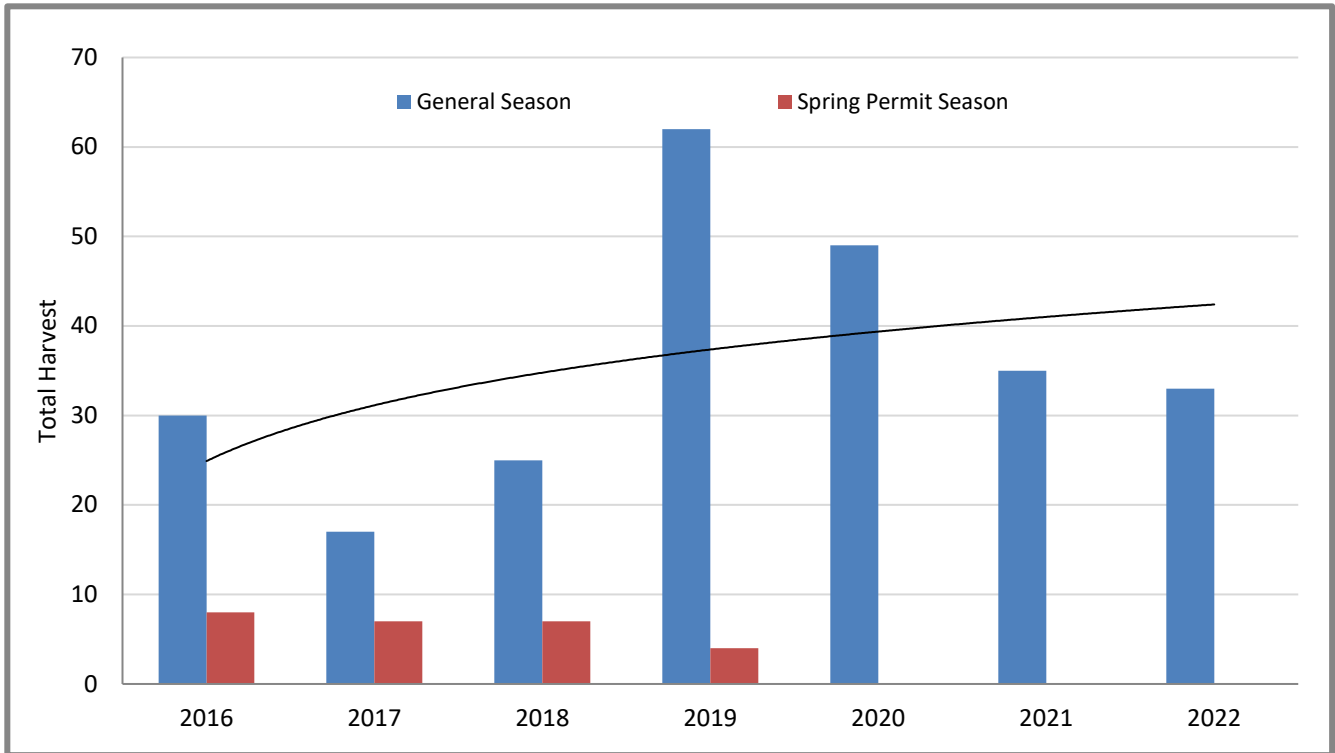


Puget Sound BMMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMUs 652, 655, 666, 667 only combined).

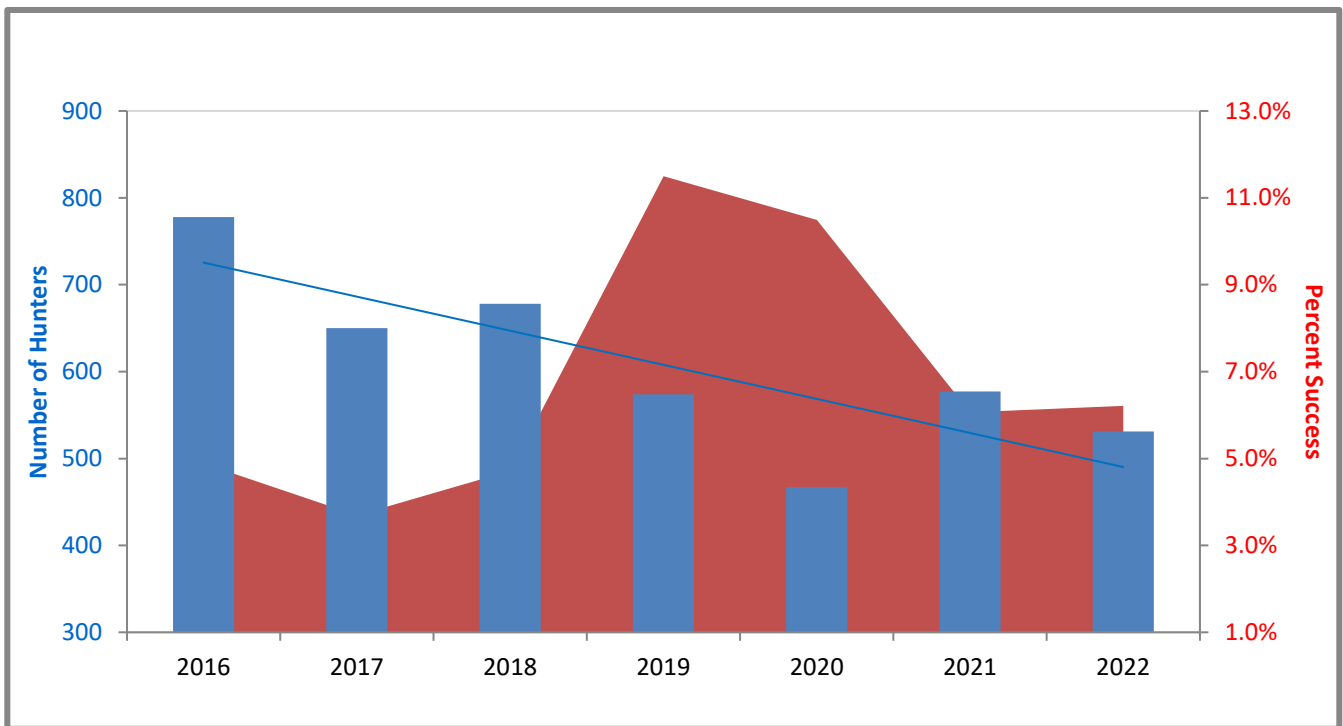
BBMU	GMU	Total Fall Male Harvest	Total Fall Female Harvest	Total Harvest	Total Number Hunters	Average Hunter Success	Total Hunter Days	Average Days/Kill
Coastal #2	652 - Puyallup	61	26	87	1139	7.64%	10,288	118
	655 – Anderson Island	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	666 – Deschutes	17	11	28	864	3.24%	7,955	284
	667 - Skookumchuck	98	37	135	2,881	4.69%	27,527	204
South Cascades #4	653 - White River	79	37	116	1,342	8.64%	9,380	81
	654 – Mashel	90	45	135	2,630	5.13%	21,931	162

Black bear harvest statistics by GMU for the Coastal and South Cascades BBMU, past 7-year totals and averages.

Bear harvest in District 11 and portions of the South Cascades BBMU (GMUs 653 and 654 combined) remained stable from 2015-2018 and then increased threefold in 2019 in response to an earlier start date (August 1) and a new two-bear bag limit statewide. This high has continued to decline since. In response to the new regulations, hunter success rates doubled in 2019 compared to the previous six years despite a decline in the number of hunters. The Kapowsin spring bear season was eliminated in 2020 (previously averaging six bears harvested per year) and statewide in 2022. Number of hunters declined and then stabilized around 550 in 2021 but success rates have been declining since a high in 2019.



South Cascade BBMU bear harvest (GMU 653 and 654 portion only combined. Kapowsin spring bear permit season was eliminated in 2020).



South Cascade BBMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMU 653 and 654 portion only combined).

In 2019, WDFW developed a rigorous monitoring protocol to estimate black bear population densities on a large scale. Using the results of the North Cascades density analysis (Welfelt et al. 2019), WDFW developed a sampling design that relies on selecting 2-3 project areas annually across the 17 WDFW districts where bears occur. Within each project area, the Department establishes density estimates based on non-invasive DNA collection through bear hair samples.

As wildlife managers conduct more surveys, additional capture results will further inform the model, therefore making density estimates more robust. In 2020, District 11 applied this protocol within GMU 654 to obtain a more accurate bear density estimate. The resulting density estimate was 16.9 bears/100 km² and the estimated population obtained by extrapolating that density across available habitat in GMU 654 was 142 (with 114 greater than 1-year-old). For GMU 654, the 5-year average harvest was 23 bears (6 in spring and 17 in fall), which would yield an average harvest rate of 20 percent; an additional 0-15 bears are taken annually for timber damage removals for a combined mortality rate up to 33 percent of the estimated population in that unit. The district is eager to conduct the same project in its remaining five GMUs over time to aid bear management and harvest analysis.



IMPORTANT BEAR HUNTING CONSIDERATIONS

WDFW strongly urges bear hunters not to shoot sows with cubs. Cubs tend to lag behind sows and may not be easily seen. Cubs may also be present in trees or hidden in dense vegetation in the vicinity. Observe and be patient before shooting. The past few seasons, several orphaned cubs were reported in WDFW's Coastal Region (Region 6). Some were captured and taken to rehabilitation facilities. However, space and funds are limited for rehabilitation and the outcome for bears questionable so hunters should avoid this by NOT shooting sows with cubs.

It is mandatory that hunters who harvest a bear, submit a premolar tooth for aging (per [WAC 220-415-090](#)). The use of hounds and/or bait to hunt black bear is prohibited statewide ([RCW 77.15.245](#)).

COUGAR

Cougar are widespread in the forestlands of District 11. Areas that support a lot of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for harvesting cougar. The statewide goals for cougar are: 1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage cougar and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations. 2. Minimize human/cougar conflict. 3. Manage cougar for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, wildlife viewing, and photography. 4. Manage statewide cougar populations for a sustained yield. 5. Improve our understanding of predator-prey relationships.

WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012 by shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougar harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines (see the WDFW [website](#)). The intent was to have a longer season, without any hunting implement restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline. The harvest guideline is based on cougar social structure research dynamics. WDFW administers this hunt structure within 50 PMUs. District 11 comprises three PMUs made up of GMUs containing similar habitats and having similar cougar population objectives: GMUs 652/666, GMUs 653/654, and GMU 667. Cougar hunting is not provided in GMU 655.

In 2019, in response to concerns that cougar populations levels were getting too high in certain areas of the state, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission directed WDFW with to create various options for cougar management. A subcommittee of WDFW staff crafted options, which can be referenced [here](#). Ultimately, the previous cougar hunting quota system set to harvest 12-16% of the population was adjusted in the 19 GMUs in the state with the highest number of cougars. Within these GMUs, the upper limits of the quota were expanded. This change in management

does not affect GMUs in District 11, which remain at the same quota level as previous. Subadult cougars will no longer count toward the cougar harvest guideline.



Local District 11 hunter D. Colvin with his cougar harvested in GMU 667 (2022).

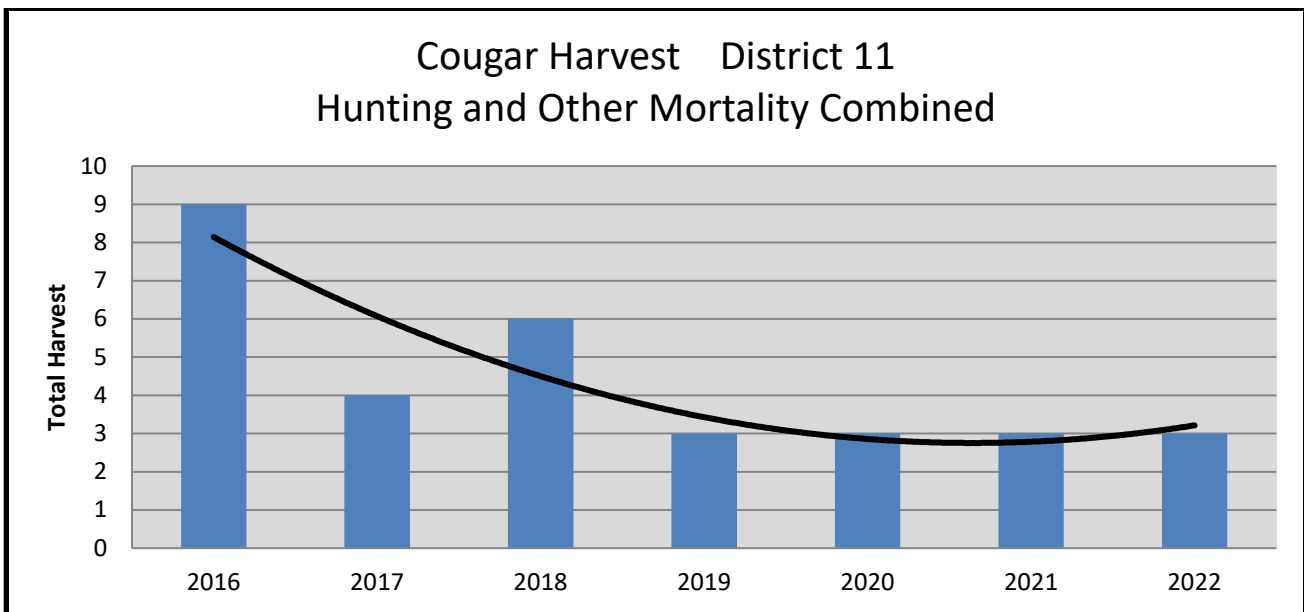
Two general cougar seasons are offered:

- Early: Sept. 1 – Dec. 31
- Late: Jan. 1 – April 30 OR when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever occurs first.

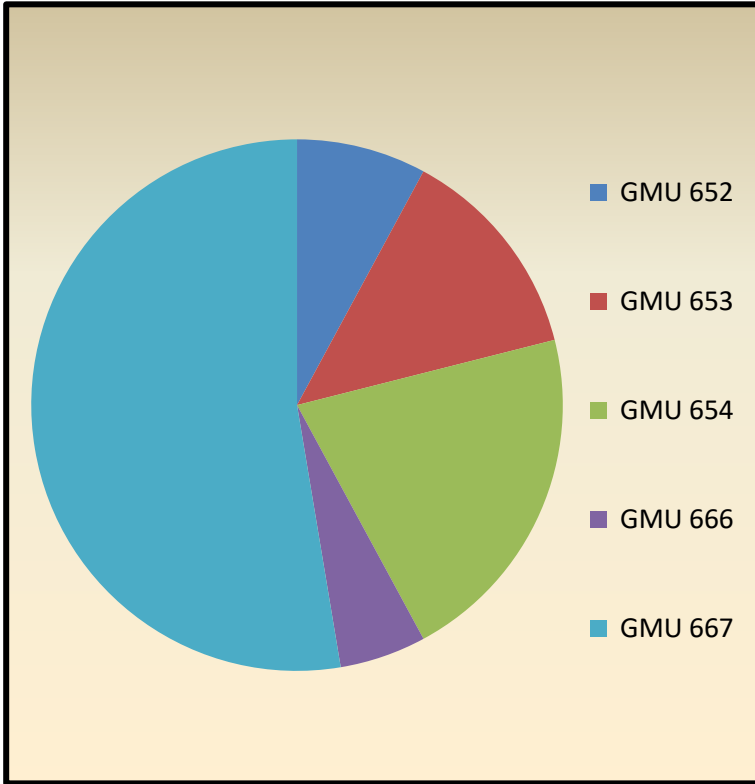
To hunt cougars after March 31 in a unit open for cougar harvest, **hunters must buy the current year’s hunting license and cougar tag for the year they intend to hunt** (Meaning a valid 2023-24 cougar license and tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2023). WDFW examines harvest numbers starting Jan. 1 and may close any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline. WDFW advises anyone planning to hunt cougar after Jan. 1 to confirm the cougar season is open in the desired hunting area by visiting the [WDFW website](#). Hunters can call 1-866-364-4868 to determine if a specific hunt area is open after Dec. 31.

GMUs 652 and 666 have no cougar harvest quota limit, GMUs 653 and 654 have a quota of four to five cougars (combined), and GMU 667 has a quota of six to seven cougars. When the lower level of each quota is reached, the District 11 biologist determines if other non-hunting forms of mortality have occurred and whether the GMU should be closed.

Following a significantly high year in 2016, cougar harvest has remained stable over the last seven years in District 11, averaging four cougars harvested per year (all mortality combined). Annual harvest is often a reflection of hunter participation and winter conditions; a poor snow year can significantly affect cougar harvest success. Downward trends may reflect the annual hunting pressure more so that a reduction in the cougar population. Three cougars were reported killed in the district in 2022 not including tribal harvest. The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the district. Prospects for hunting cougar in the district remain fair.



Cougar harvest District 11 general season and other mortality combined.



Cougar harvest ratios by GMU in District 11, 2016 to present (all mortality).



Three juvenile cougars captured on District 11 trail cameras in GMU 653 (2023)

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually less than 80 pounds) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. WDFW strongly encourages cougar hunters to search for possible multiple tracks when pursuing an animal. Female cougars may have kittens in trees or in dense vegetation nearby. Please be very observant and patient before shooting. During the 2015 – 2016 season, WDFW enforcement officers and biologists had to capture two orphaned cougar kittens near Joyce. One kitten later died, and the other kitten



will remain in captivity at a zoo. Remember, if you harvest a cougar, there are mandatory reporting and sealing requirements. Voter initiative 655 banned the use of hounds to hunt cougars in the state in 1996. Hunting of the aid of hounds is prohibited statewide except during cougar management removals authorized by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

MANDATORY REPORTING/SEALING

All successful cougar hunters must report their cougar harvest to the cougar hotline at: 1-866-364-4868 within 72 hours of harvest and have the cougar pelt sealed within 5 days of notification. This is the same hotline hunters can use to check if Cougar Hunt Areas are open or closed. A premolar tooth and tissue sample will be taken. Reference the [Washington Big Game Hunting Seasons and Rules](#) for more specific details about cougar sealing requirements.



Local District 11 hunter L. Burgett with her first cougar harvested on the Vail Tree Farm, GMU 667, 2022.

COUGAR OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Fatal cougar encounters are extremely rare. With the increase of human populations, development patterns, and increasing human presence in rural areas, it is essential to raise public awareness and keep both people and cougars safe. Please reference WDFW's [Cougar web page](#) to learn more about cougar/human interactions.

SMALL GAME: BOBCAT, FOX, RACCOON, COYOTE, RABBIT

NOTE for all small game data provided below: WDFW fundamentally changed the method for small game data collection and analysis in 2023 (for 2022 data) compared to previous years. The change should increase the accuracy of small game harvest and hunter data and provide a measure of true annual variation. However, because this is a new method, comparing 2022 data to previous years should be done with caution (i.e., changes in trend may reflect the method rather than the actual harvest/hunter effort). County level estimates should be compared relative to each other or as proportions of the statewide estimate and not to past estimates (but comparing to long-term averages could be appropriate). Moreover, estimates are likely lower in 2022 than prior for some species/counties both for statewide and county small game data due to the change in method. It is unknown at this time if this new method will become the norm as it will be tested in 2023 and 2024.

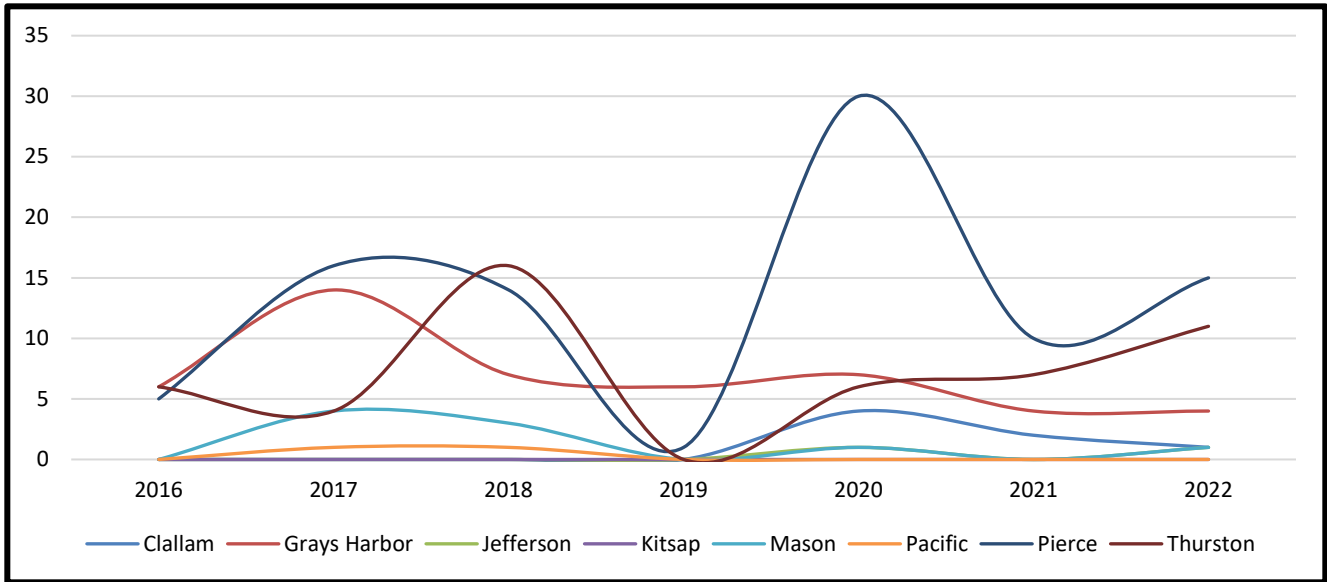
BOBCATS are plentiful in the wooded lands across District 11 and many hunters successfully harvest bobcat each season. Bobcat may be hunted statewide with no bag limit from September 1 – March 15. A small game license is required to harvest a bobcat. Bobcats are exempt from hunting hour restrictions except it is unlawful to hunt bobcat at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons that occur in October and November in both eastern and western Washington. Hunting or pursuing bobcat with dogs is prohibited in Washington. **Successful bobcat hunters or trappers must contact a WDFW office**

to have the bobcat pelt sealed and submit the associated harvest report to the WDFW by April 20 of each year. The bobcat hide must not be frozen so a seal may be attached. No one may possess an open WDFW bobcat seal unless it has been cut by a licensed taxidermist or fur dealer who has received and invoiced the pelt for processing.

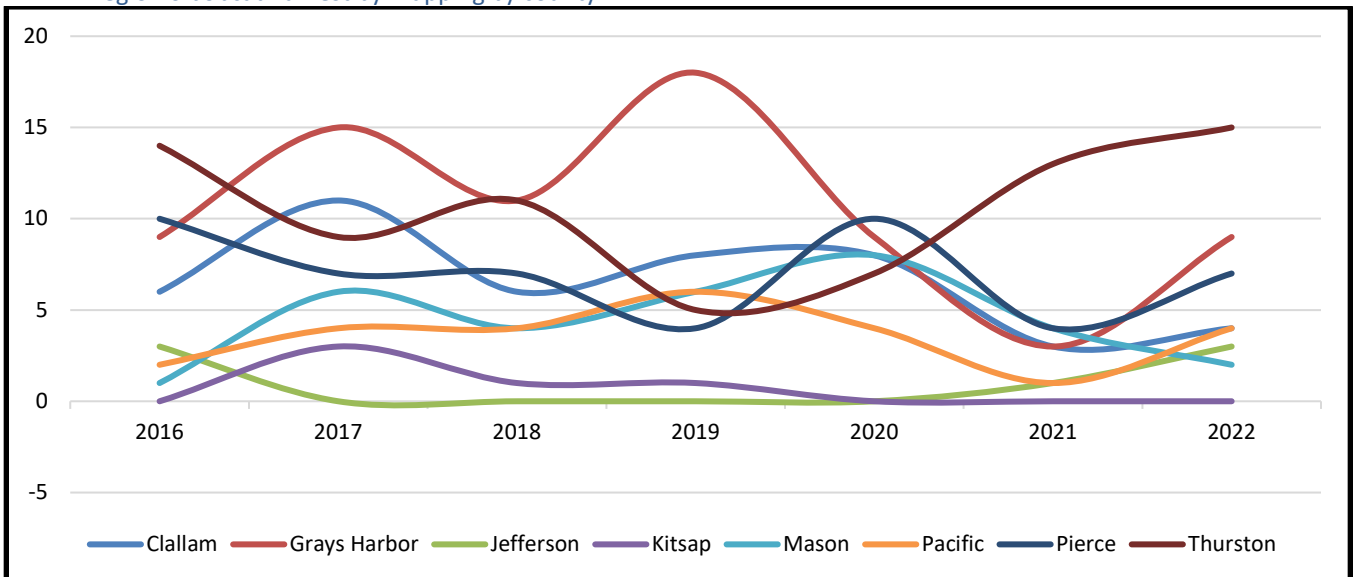
Generally, more bobcats are harvested through hunting than trapping in Region 6 (see charts below). Pierce and Thurston counties both provide great opportunity for harvesting bobcat and typically have the highest rates of harvest in the region. Harvest trends increased in 2022 and prospects for hunting or trapping bobcat in 2023 remain good. Public and private forest remain the best locations for locating and harvesting bobcat in the district and the region.



Local District 11 hunters with a beautiful bobcat harvested in GMU 667, Vail Tree Farm.



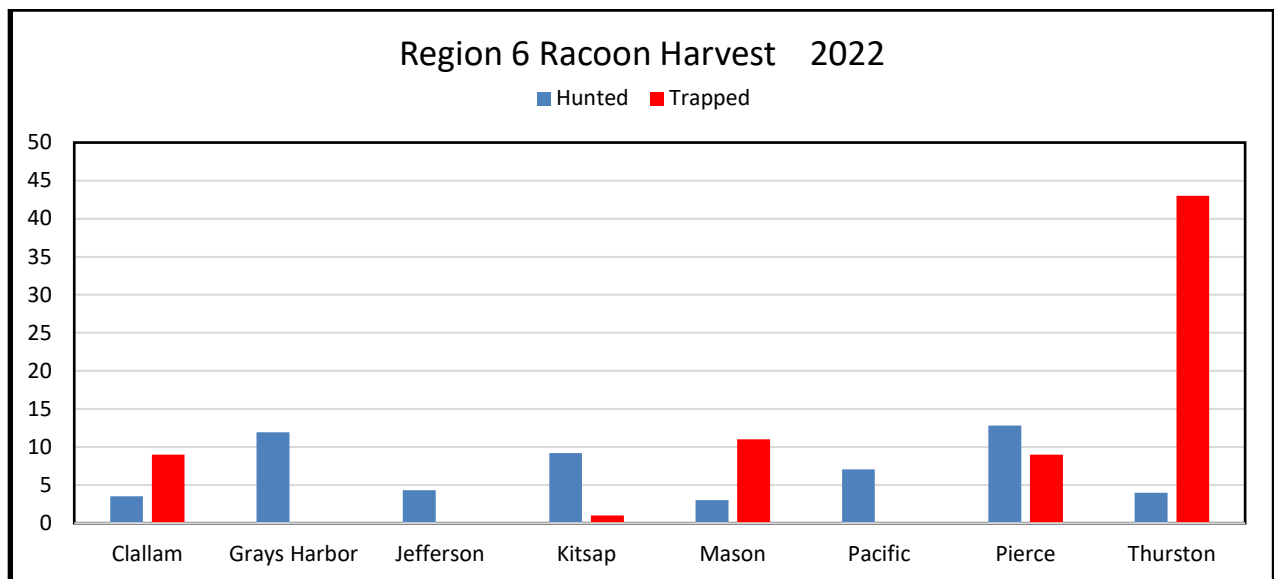
WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by Trapping by county.



WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by Hunting by county.

RED FOX (*VULPES VULPES*) are native to central and eastern Cascades but introduced in the western Cascades. Although not considered abundant, they may be found on farmlands, developed areas and forested areas of District 11. People can hunt them with no bag limit from Sept. 1 – March 15 with a small game license across the district except for the exterior boundaries of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and Gifford Pinchot national forests. Very few red foxes are harvested across Region 6 including District 11. The Cascade red fox (*Vulpes cascadenensis*), an endemic subspecies that occupies alpine and subalpine habitats in the southern Cascade Mountains including Mount Rainer in District 11, is a rare to vulnerable [species of greatest conservation need](#) and a [priority species](#) to WDFW and cannot be hunted.

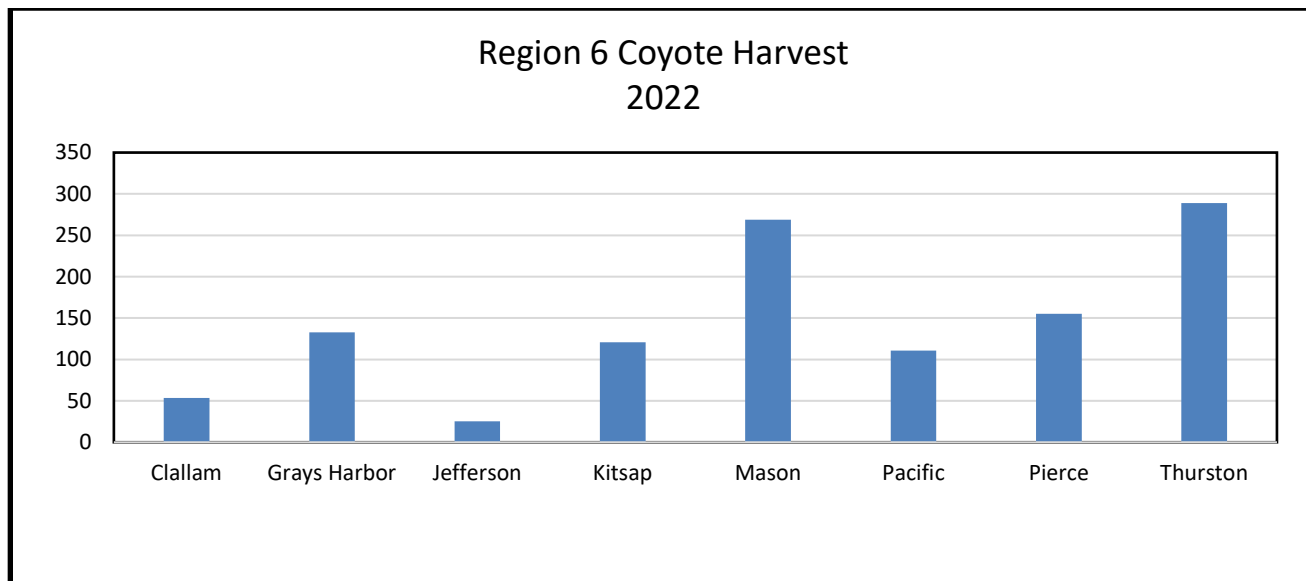
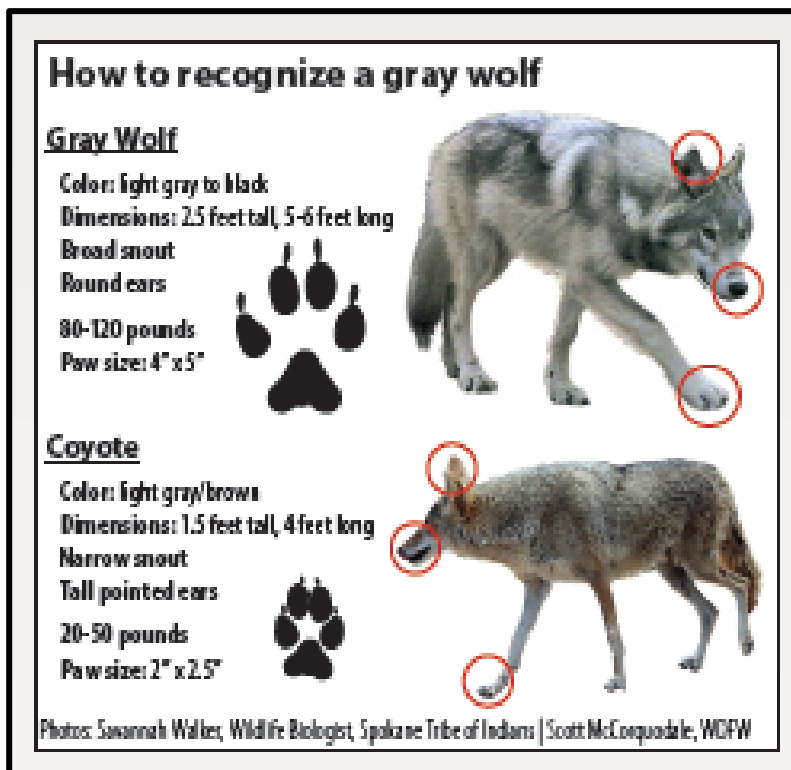
RACCOONS are also very plentiful across District 11, particularly around suburban neighborhoods where they feed on garbage, fallen fruit, dogfood, artificial pond fish, and various other opportunistic food sources. They are helped by a lack of natural predators within these areas. Raccoons are also found in the less developed forests of the eastern district. Raccoons can be hunted across the district with no bag limit from Sept. 1 – March 15 with a small game license. Dogs may be used to hunt raccoon and they may be hunted at night, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt with dogs or at night during the months of October or November during the dates established for modern firearm deer and elk general seasons in eastern and western Washington. Raccoon harvest data prior to 2022 was highly biased; 2022 data is more accurate and is provided below. Most raccoon harvest is via hunting with only a few trapped as nuisance animals annually except for Thurston County (at least in 2022).



WDFW Region 6 raccoon harvest by Hunting by county, 2022.

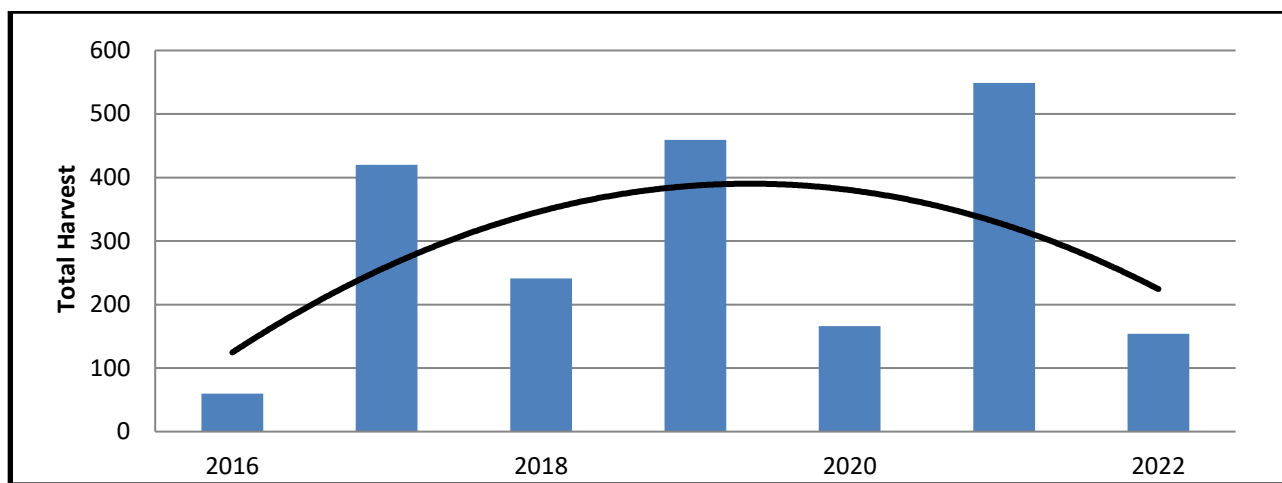
COYOTES are another small game animal abundant across District 11, both in the urban and non-urban areas. They have also benefitted from a lack of large predators in the urban and suburban areas. Coyote are an unclassified species and can be hunted or trapped without a bag limit year-round under a small game or big game hunting license. Coyote may be hunted at night with lights year-round, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt coyote at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons that occur in October and November in eastern and western Washington. The use of dogs to hunt coyote is prohibited. Hunters could mistake wolves as coyotes, especially juvenile wolves. Wolves are protected under both federal and state law and MAY NOT be shot or killed. Be sure of identification if you are hunting coyote. Report all wolf observations [here](#).

Most coyote in the state are harvested via hunting with only a very few killed via trapping as nuisance animals. Coyote harvest data prior to 2022 was highly biased; 2022 data is more accurate and is provided below. Thurston County in District 11 provides one of the highest coyote hunting opportunities.



WDFW Region 6 coyote harvest by hunting by county, 2022.

COTTONTAIL RABBIT: District 11 provides the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in Region 6, and some of the best in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce, Thurston, and northcentral Lewis counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the District fluctuates depending on hunter annual participation. The average harvest in Pierce and Thurston counties combined over the past 6 years has remained steady at around 300 annually but significantly increased every other year. Cottontail populations cycle from highs to lows but normally on a 7–10-year basis and not annually; so this data reflects participation and success more than natural population cycles. Pierce and Thurston counties’ success rates are comparable most years but do vary with normally more hunters in Pierce than Thurston. Lewis County has much less harvest than either Pierce or Thurston. Prospects for cottontail hunting in District 11 remain high.



Cottontail rabbit harvest; Pierce/Thurston counties only (combined).



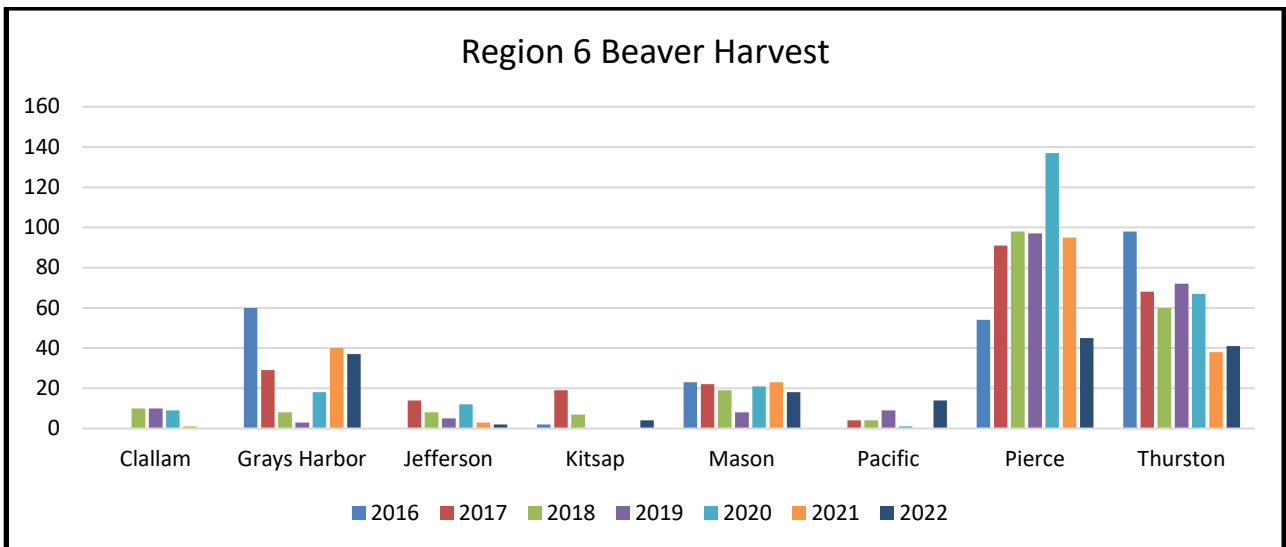
Falconer J. Knudson with his newly banded peregrine falcon, Pierce County. Falconers often hunt rabbits and other prey with their beloved raptors.

SMALL GAME: BEAVER, WEASEL, MARTEN, MINK, MUSKRAT, RIVER OTTER

NOTE for all small game data provided below: WDFW fundamentally changed the method for small game data collection and analysis in 2023 (for 2022 data) compared to previous years.

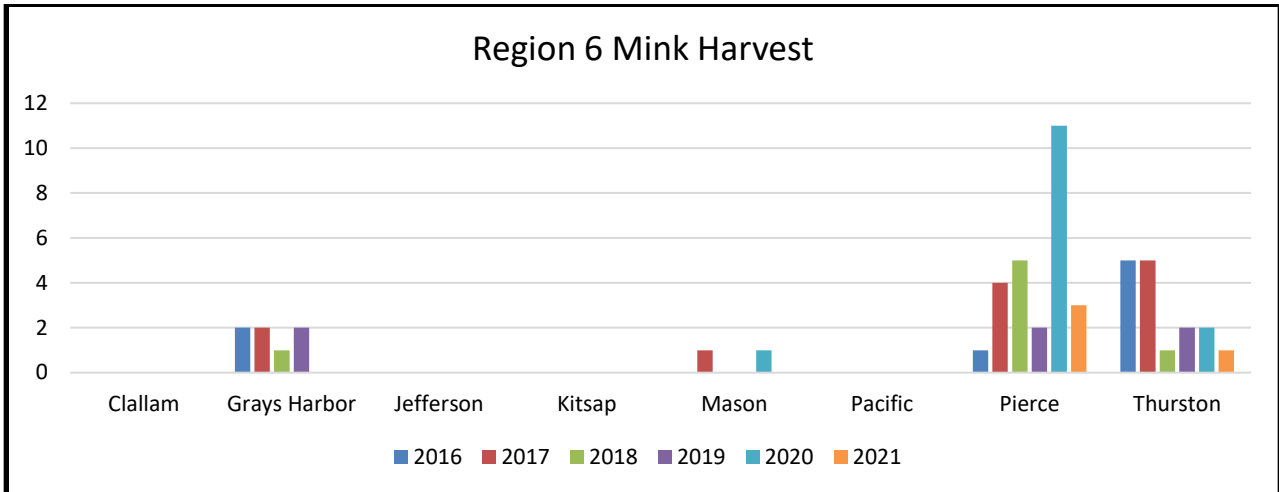
BEAVER, WEASELS, MINK, MUSKRAT, SKUNK AND RIVER OTTER are all plentiful across Region 6, including District 11. Long-tailed weasels occur in District 11 primarily on pasture, cropland, fields, and grasslands although few are harvested in the district or region. Hunters may only harvest beaver, weasel, marten, muskrat, and river otter by trapping with a [trapping license](#) during the trapping season (Nov. 1 – March 31). Skunks are an unclassified species and can hunted or trapped year-round without limit.

Beaver harvest in Thurston and Pierce counties (District 11) is the highest in Region 6 by a significant amount. Considering lakes, wetlands and waterways exist across the region, the difference is likely due to more hunter participation and more removal of nuisance beaver in these highly urbanized counties.



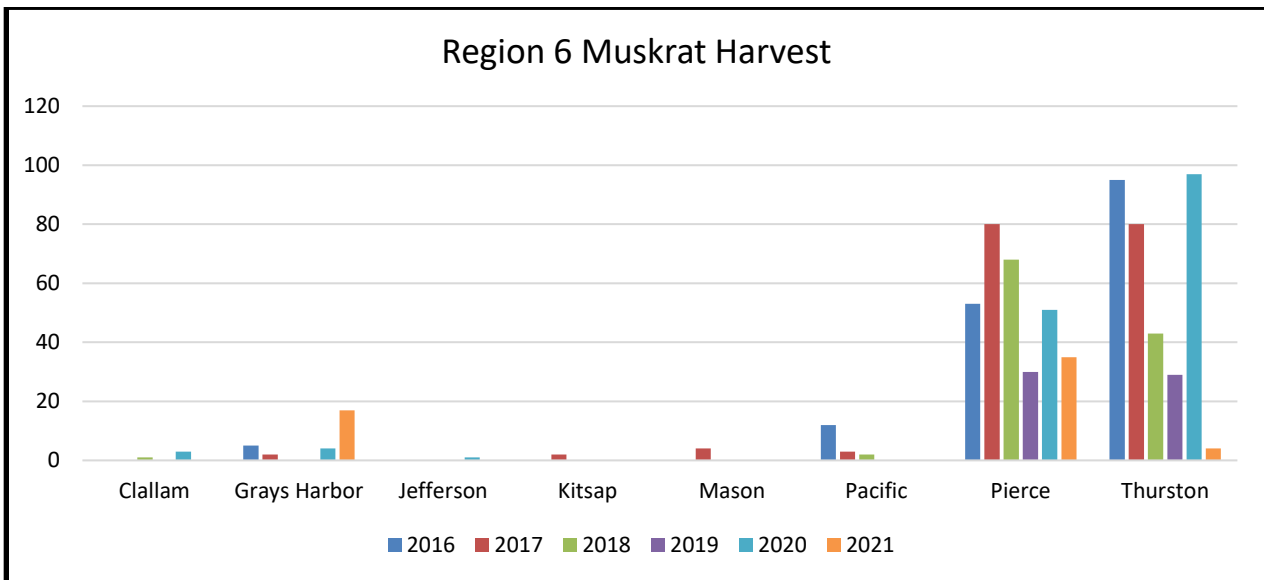
WDFW Region 6 beaver harvest by trapping by county.

Mink are common across Region 6 but not plentiful. Regardless, District 11 typically provides the most, and sometimes only, annual harvest in the region.



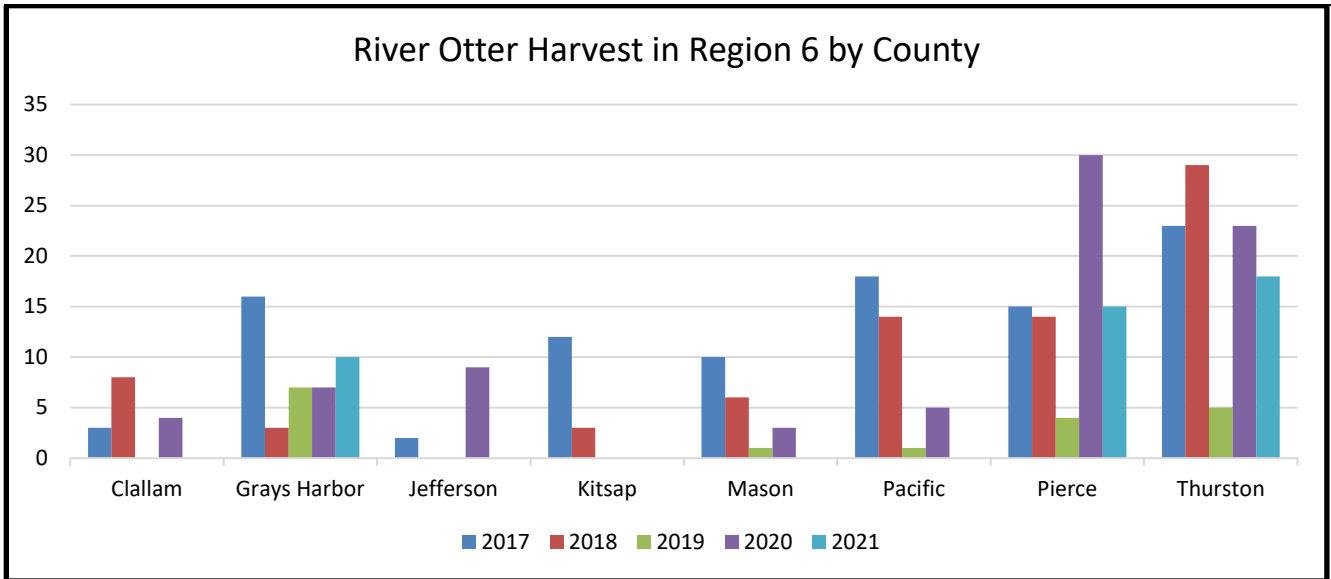
WDFW Region 6 mink harvest by trapping by county.

Muskrat are also common across Region 6 but few hunters specifically target them and most are likely trapped incidentally to other species. District 11 typically provides the most annual harvest in the region.



WDFW Region 6 muskrat harvest by trapping by county.

River otter (*Lontra canadensis*) is plentiful in the freshwater lakes, streams, and wetlands across District 11 and less so in the saltwater of the Puget Sound inlet. Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) are found in the saltwater of Puget Sound and the outer coast and cannot be trapped or hunted. **Successful river otter trappers must contact a WDFW office to have their otter pelt(s) sealed and submit the associated harvest report to the WDFW by April 20 of each year.** Pelts must be presented in a way that the hide can be sealed. No frozen hides or carcasses will be accepted (see [Trapping Regulations](#)). Pierce and Thurston counties within District 11 consistently provide some of the highest trap rates for river otter within Region 6.



WDFW Region 6 river otter harvest by trapping by county.

AMERICAN MARTEN inhabits eastern District 11 as part of the Cascade population, which is considered stable. American martens are difficult to trap; none were reported harvested 2018-2022. Fisher may be misidentified as a marten; fishers are a protected species in Washington under both federal and state law and **MAY NOT** be trapped or killed. Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten. Report all fisher observations [here](#) or by emailing wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov.

Identification of Fisher and Marten in Washington

Fishers are protected under both federal and state law and may not be trapped or killed.
Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten or mink.

Pelage Colors
 Fisher — dark brown with lighter shading on head, back of the neck and back.
 Marten — light brown to brown (cinnamon, russet), with creamy brown/ beige face and occasionally chest with darker brown legs, feet and end of tail.

Size
 Fishers are bigger, darker and have noticeably longer and fuller tails than marten. Fishers tails average 14-15 inches in length and Martens tails average 6.5-7.5 inches in length.

Ear Shape
 Fishers — rounded “teddy-bear” shaped ears
 Martens — more pointed ears

Elevation
 Fishers and martens overlap in elevation. Therefore, elevation should not be used as an indicator of species presence.

FISHER





Photo by Paul Bannick

MARTEN



WDFW Staff

Trapping Information
 Use cubby boxes, with a closed front and 2.5 inch entrance hole, to avoid catching fishers.

DUCKS

The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, primarily Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Waterfowl Population Status report for 2022, habitat conditions during the 2022 Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey deteriorated relative to 2019, the last survey year due to the COVID-19 (SARSCOV-2) pandemic. For the latest information regarding waterfowl species status, reference the USFWS' [2022 Waterfowl Status report](#)



fws.gov/refuges/RefugeUpdate/MarApr_2012/fourflyways.html

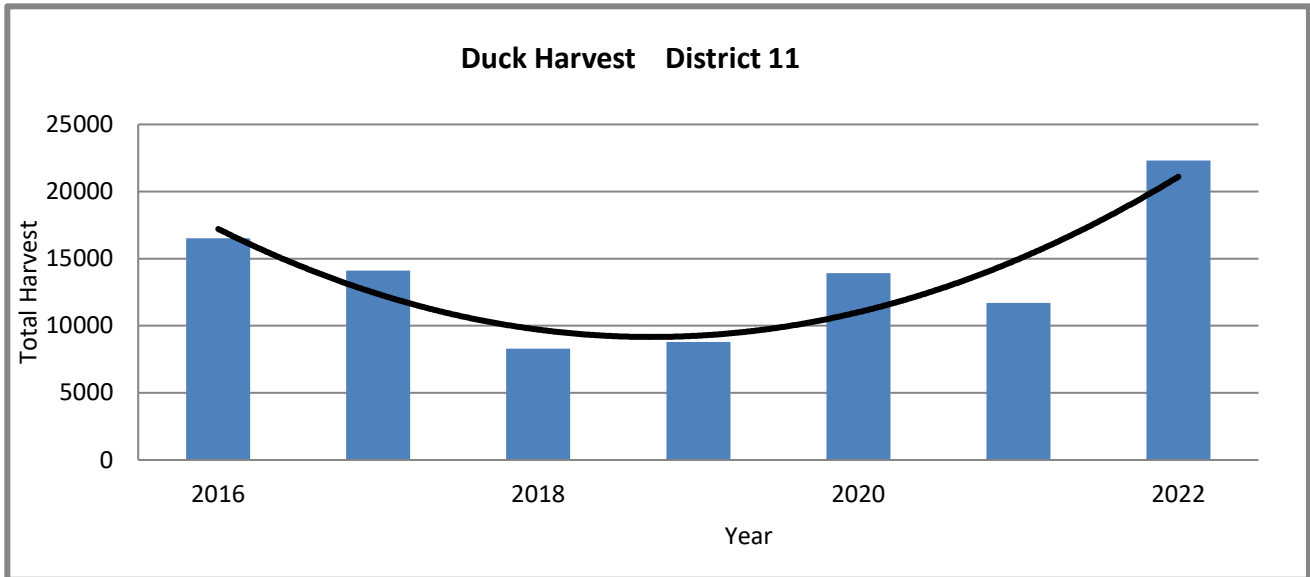
Total duck breeding population estimates were down 12 percent in Washington in 2022 compared to 2019, the last time the surveys were conducted but 13% higher than the long-term state average (1955-2019). In Washington for 2022, the total duck estimate was unchanged from the 2019 estimate and the long-term average (2010–2019). Prospects for waterfowl hunting in District 11 remain good.

Information on the **Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Surveys and the Mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory** can be found [here](#). Population trends for ducks found in District 11 are:

Species	Breeding Population Estimate Trend North America
Mallard	Estimated abundance was 7.2 ± 0.2 million, which was 23% below the 2019 estimate of 9.4 ± 0.3 million and 9% below the long-term average of 7.9 ± 0.04 million.
Green-winged teal	The estimated abundance was 2.2 ± 0.2 million, which was 32% below the 2019 estimate of 3.2 ± 0.2 million and similar to the long-term average.
Gadwall	Estimated abundance was 2.7 ± 0.1 million, 18% below the 2019 estimate and 30% above the long-term average of 2.0 ± 0.2 million.
American widgeon	The abundance estimate for American widgeon (<i>Mareca americana</i> ; 2.1 ± 0.1 million) was 25% below the 2019 estimate and 19% below the long-term average of 2.6 ± 0.02 million.
Northern shoveler	Estimated abundance was 3.0 ± 0.2 million, 17% below the 2019 estimate of 3.6 ± 0.2 million and 15% above the long-term average of 2.6 ± 0.02 million.
Northern pintails	Northern pintail (<i>Anas acuta</i>) abundance (1.8 ± 0.2 million) was 21% below the 2019 estimate of 2.3 ± 0.1 million and 54% below the long-term average of 3.9 ± 0.03 million.
Scaup (combined)	The combined estimate of lesser and greater scaup (<i>A. afnis</i> and <i>A. marila</i> ; 3.6 ± 0.2 million) was similar to the 2019 estimate and 28% lower than the long-term average of 5.0 ± 0.04 million.
Canvasbacks	Abundance estimate of 0.6 ± 0.05 million was similar to the 2019 estimate and the long-term average.

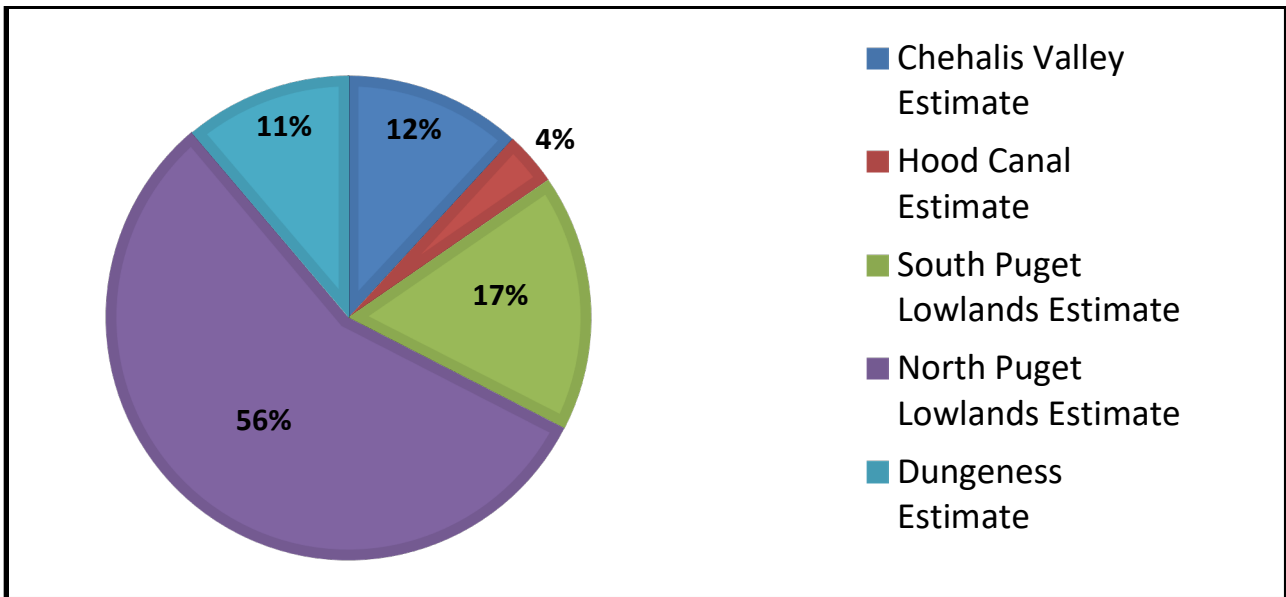
Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, off Anderson Island (GMU 655), and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in south Puget Sound. Duck harvest in District 11 has increased over the last few years following a noticeable decline in 2018 and 2019. A decline in hunter participation may partially explain that decline considering breeding duck surveys show an increase in breeding ducks in the district over the past 7 years.

Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily because of Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. Hunting prospects for waterfowl hunters remain good in the District in 2023 with the best prospects being in Thurston County.



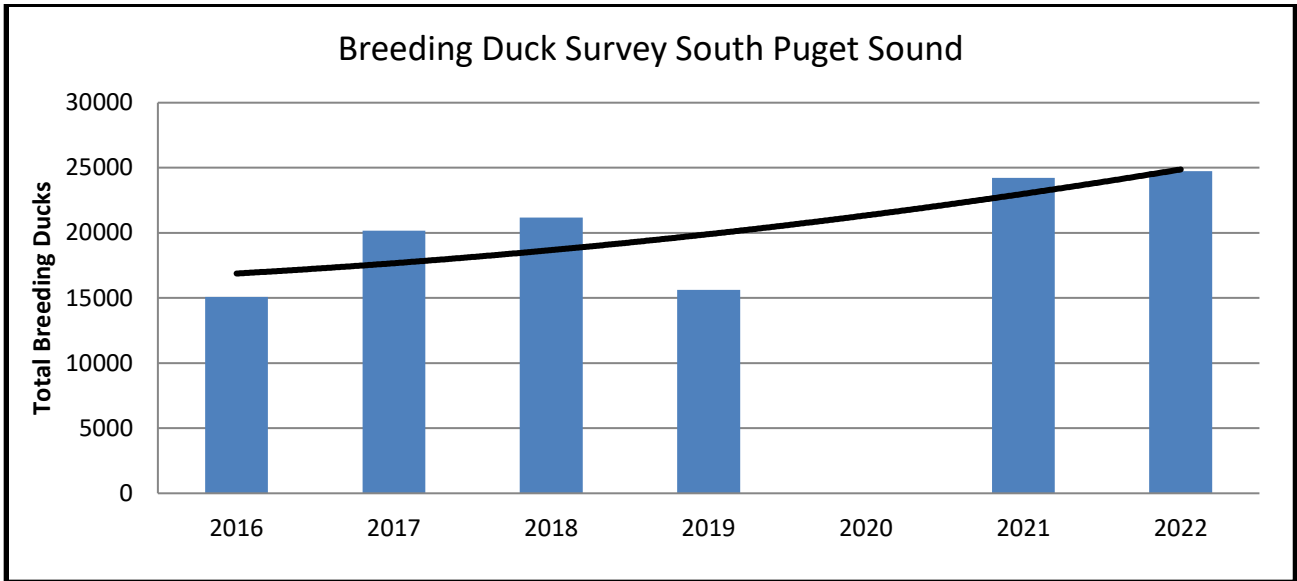
Combined duck harvest in District 11.

The south Puget Sound lowlands have the second highest percent of breeding ducks in western Washington according to WDFW’s annual breeding duck surveys. Typically, breeding season duck estimates are highest in North Puget Sound with Hood Canal having the least. District 11--the South Puget Lowlands—normally supports the next highest concentrations of breeding ducks which makes the District a great place to hunt for waterfowl.



WDFW breeding duck survey results for Western Washington, 2023

Breeding duck surveys in the south Puget Sound, which encompasses District 11, show an increasing trend since 2016 with a slight decline in 2019 (duck surveys not conducted in spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on flights). Prospects for duck hunters remain stable to increasing for 2023.



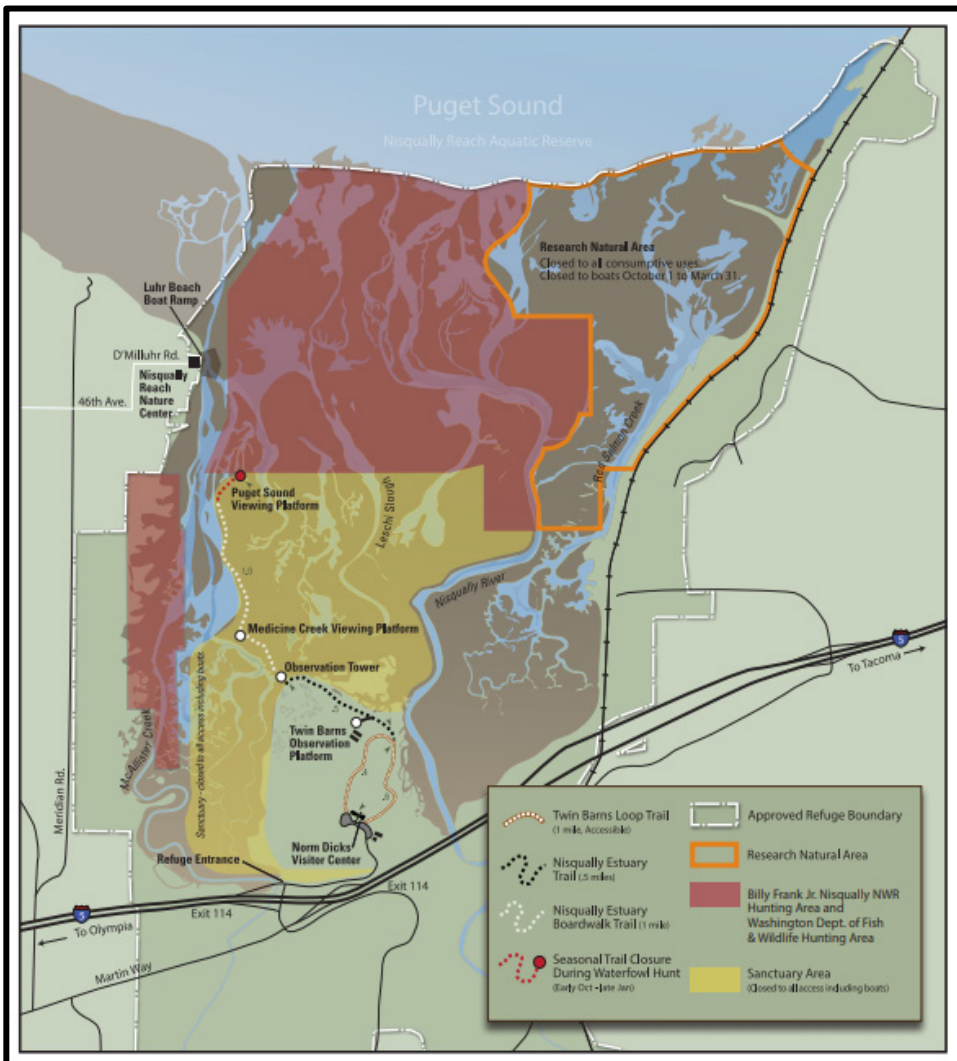
WDFW breeding duck survey, South Puget Sound.

The Washington Duck Breeding Population Survey is the basis for tracking trends in breeding waterfowl and can be read in detail in the annual [WDFW Game Status and Trends reports](#). The revised survey design for western Washington estimated the total breeding duck population at 97,823 (SE 10,318) in 2023. Mallards were the highest for 2023 survey at 59,012 (SE 9,404), followed by green-winged teal at 9383 (SE 2,206), bufflehead at 6,826 (SE 1,402) and wood duck at 5,752 (SE 676). The greatest factor influencing brood production in the district continues to be habitat loss due to development and increasing human disturbance. Wildlife managers expect waterfowl numbers to remain stable in District 11.

WHERE TO HUNT WATERFOWL IN DISTRICT 11

Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge

One of the best waterfowl hunting areas in District 11 is the [Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge](#), located on the border between Pierce and Thurston counties. The USFWS has 570 acres of refuge waters and tidelands open to waterfowl hunting at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. This includes an expanded area in 2020 that extends north of and adjacent to the previous hunt area. This provides a total of 1,197 acres of USFWS and WDFW-managed lands within the Refuge



boundary that are open to waterfowl hunting. Hunting access is by boat only. The estuary restoration area (Sanctuary) and Research Natural Area (RNA) remain closed to hunting and boating to provide adequate wildlife sanctuary. Full regulations and the refuge hunting brochure can be downloaded and printed the [Refuge hunting page](#).

[Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge recreation map.](#)

Centralia Mine

Centralia Mine provides limited entry quality hunting opportunity. This limited hunt is managed as a sign-up on a first come basis. In early September, the mine sends out a notice to all its employees (TransAlta employees) informing them of the date and time the sign-up is opened. Only TransAlta employees are allowed to sign up for the first week the calendar is released, after which the public may sign up for hunting any calendar dates still available. All hunters must sign up in person at the main Centralia Mine security gate shack. Hunting is allowed on Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays that fall within the waterfowl season. Hunters are required to check in at the security gate on their day of hunting. Hunters cannot sign up for others and are limited to two days per person (and towards the end of the season can sign up for additional two days if there are still dates available). Hunters are required to sign a waiver. Hunters are only allowed to hunt on one site located in a hay field immediately east of the mine facilities (see map below). Digging pit blinds is not allowed. Hunters can only hunt waterfowl and not big game. Hunters can send questions to bill_scheer@transalta.com.



Centralia Mine waterfowl hunting area map.

Lakes and Flooded Agricultural Fields

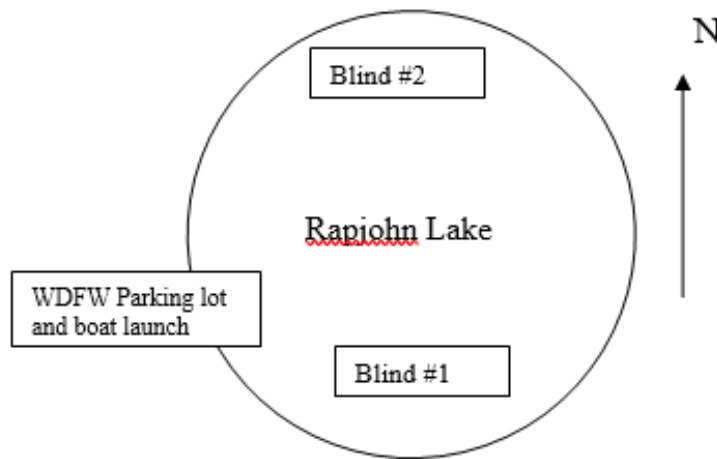
The following lakes and agricultural fields have the highest mid-winter waterfowl counts in District 11 and may be good sites to scout for waterfowl hunters (be advised of those in **firearm restriction areas**—see Introduction section):

Pierce County: American Lake, Lake Bay, Flett Dairy, Hylebos Waterway, Kreger Lake, Lake Chalet, various fields around McKenna, Puyallup Valley ag fields, Spanaway Lake, Steilacoom Lake, Waughop Lake.

Thurston County: Black Lake, Capitol Lake, Case Road at 113th, Evergreen Valley, Lake Lawrence, Long Lake, McIntosh Lake, Pattison Lake, Smith Prairie, Zeller Loop Road.

Puget Sound shorelines: District 11 has abundant marine shorelines both on the mainland and the various islands of the south Puget Sound. The small inlets throughout across those shorelines support high numbers of ducks and seabirds and may be hunted provided they are not within firearm restriction areas.

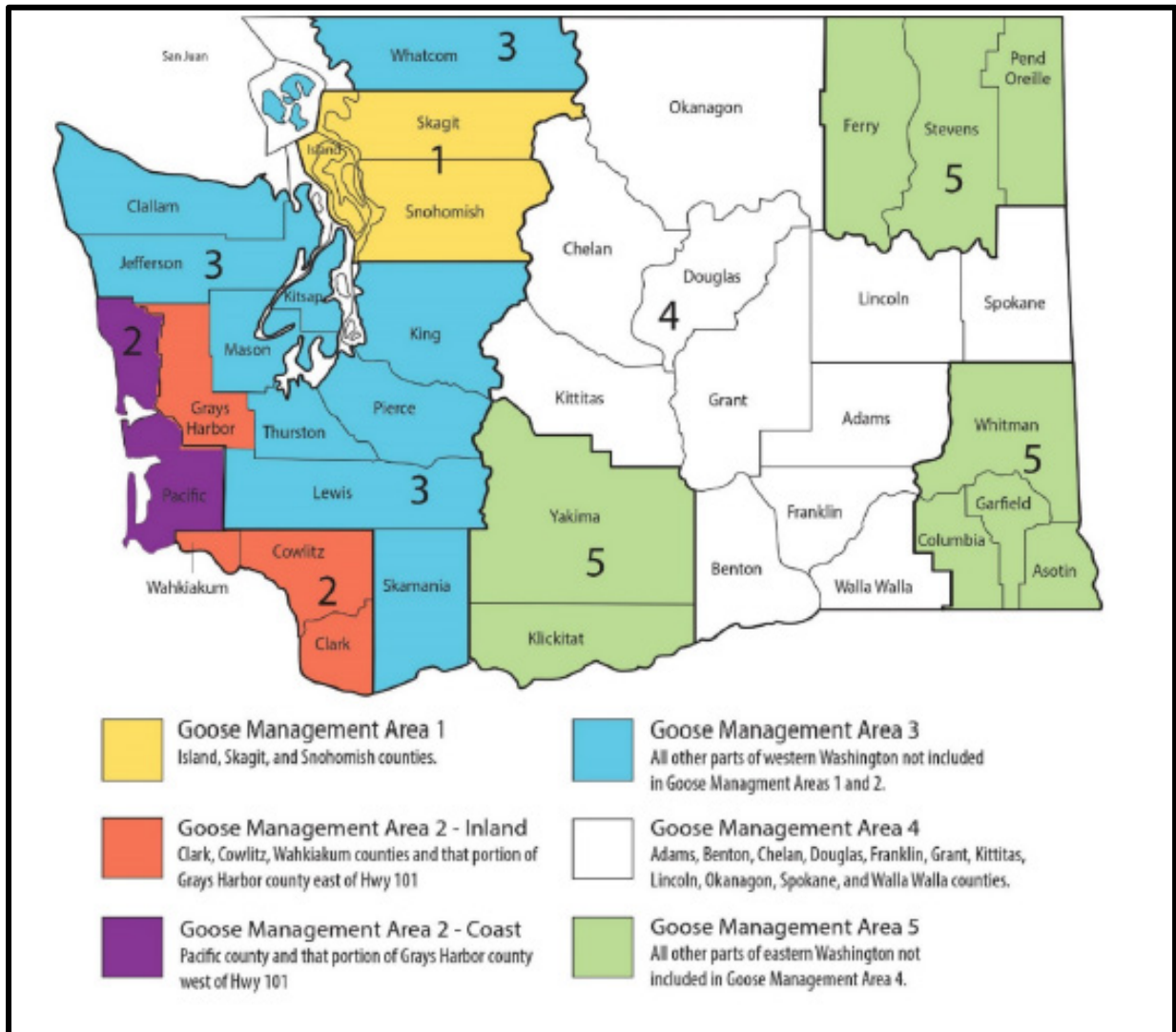
Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies in the district that are surrounded by housing. Hunters are urged to obey all hunting regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county firearm restriction area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



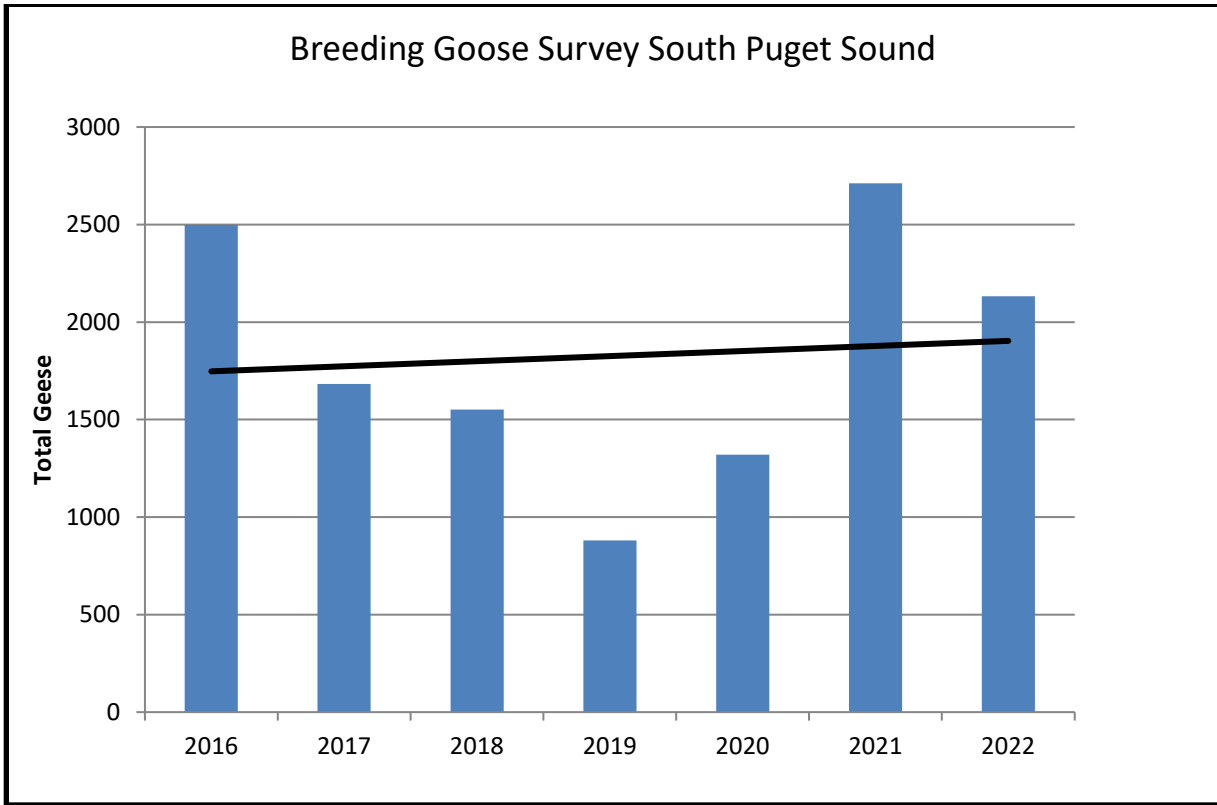
Members of the Washington Waterfowl Association assisting with construction of the Rapjohn Lake duck blinds, 2018.

GEESE

Most goose hunting opportunity in District 11 is for Canada geese. All of District 11 is within the Goose Management Area 3 with an open season Sept. 5-10 with a daily bag limit of 5 and possession limit of 15 Canada geese. Canada Geese are all types of Canada geese including cackling, Taverner's and Aleutian geese. White geese are snow and Ross' geese.

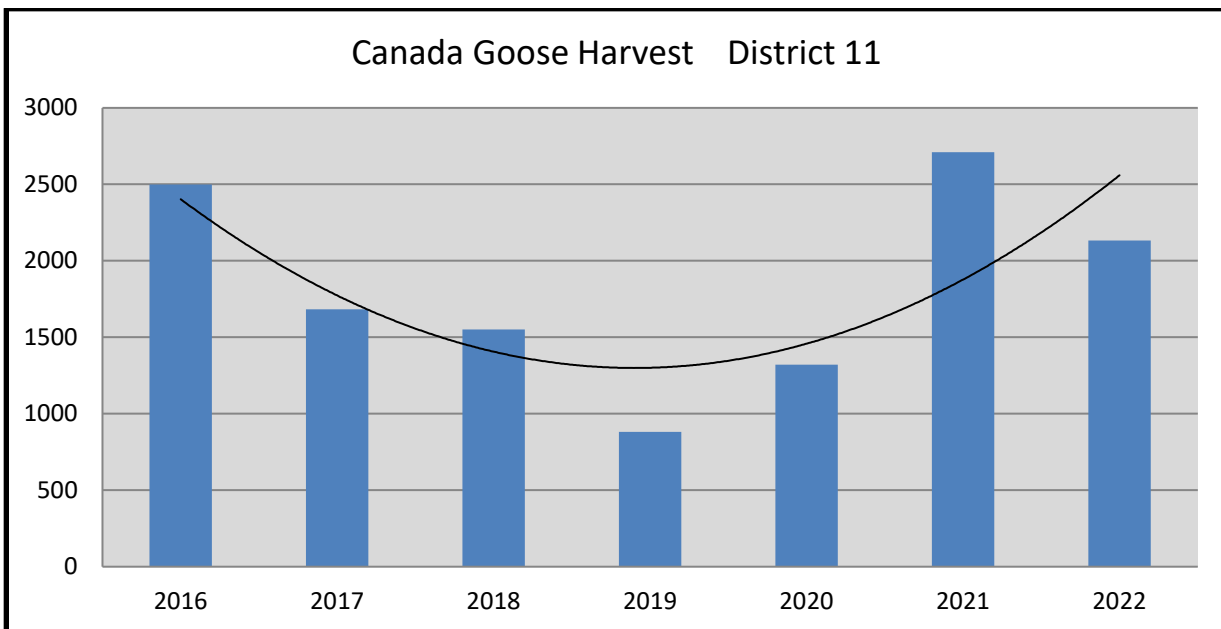


Resident geese are increasing in distribution, especially within urban and rural areas. Goose breeding survey trends have been relatively stable in the South Puget Sound since 2017 with the exception of 2021 (surveys were not conducted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 epidemic). Prospects for goose hunters in District 11 remains stable to slightly better in 2023.



WDFW breeding goose survey South Puget Sound.

Areas reported earlier for good waterfowl hunting include good goose hunting, particularly the inland (e.g., western) agricultural fields of Pierce, Thurston, and Lewis counties. The goose harvest in the District rose sharply in 2021 and remained high in 2022. Prospects remain good in 2023.



Canada goose harvest in District 11.

SWANS are protected by federal and state laws and are closed to hunting statewide. WDFW encourages all waterfowl hunters to know all identification features for swans as compared to snow geese.



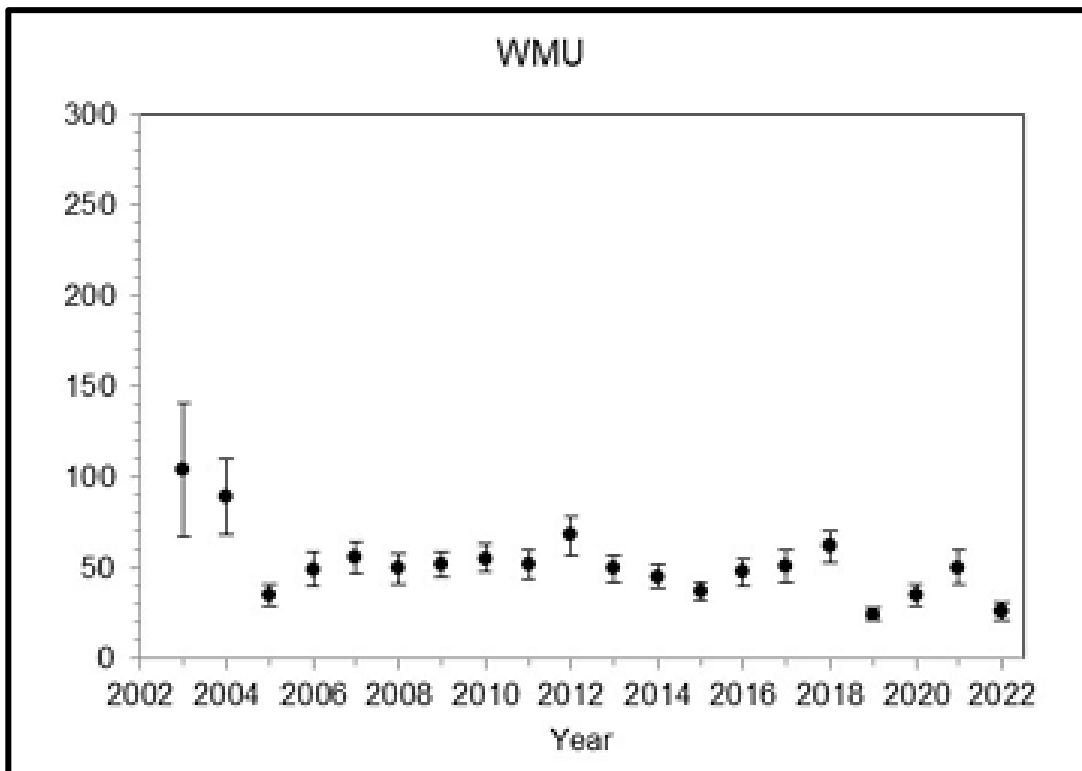
MOURNING DOVE

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit:

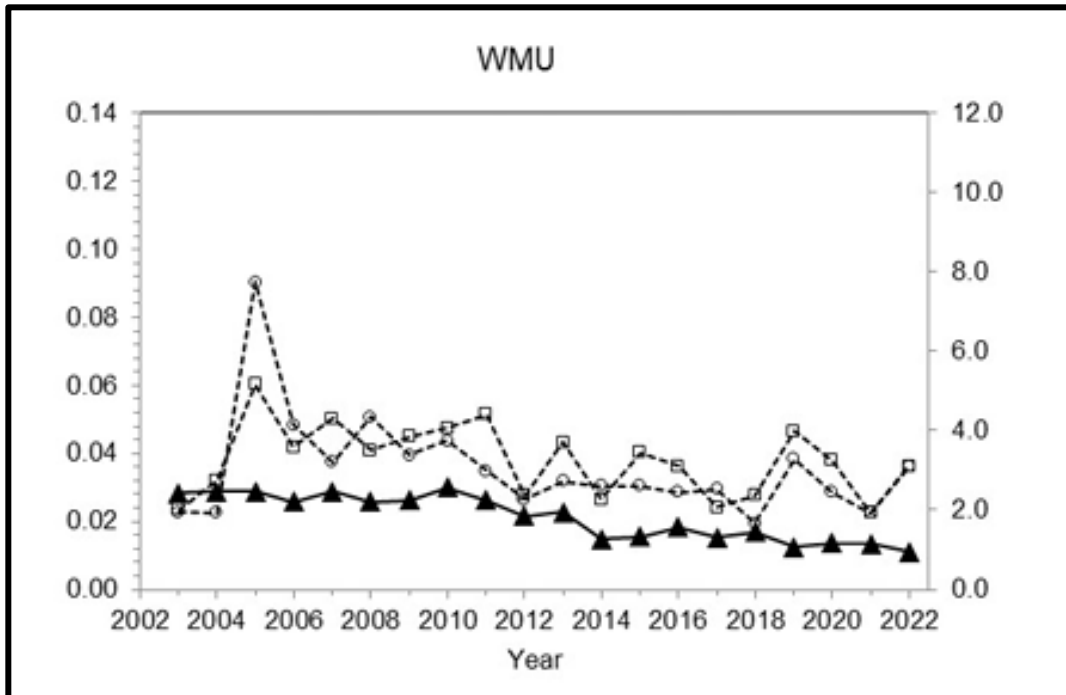
- [Upland Bird Hunting webpage](#)
- [The Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)
- [Where to Go Upland Bird Hunting](#)

WDFW uses the annual USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status Report to analyze trends in mourning dove populations. The report summarizes trends in the number of doves heard and seen per route from the all-bird Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and provides absolute abundance estimates based on band recovery and harvest data. Harvest and hunter participation are estimated from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP).

BBS data suggested that the abundance of mourning doves over the last 57 years decreased in the western management units, which is composed of the seven western states, including Washington, but remained unchanged during the most recent 10 years. Estimates were lowest in 2019 and 2022. The most recent estimates indicate that there were 161 million mourning doves in the U.S. immediately prior to the 2021-22 hunting season. Abundance estimates were highest in the central and eastern U.S. management unit in 2022 and lowest in the western management units.



Estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the western management units combined, 2003–2022. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data.

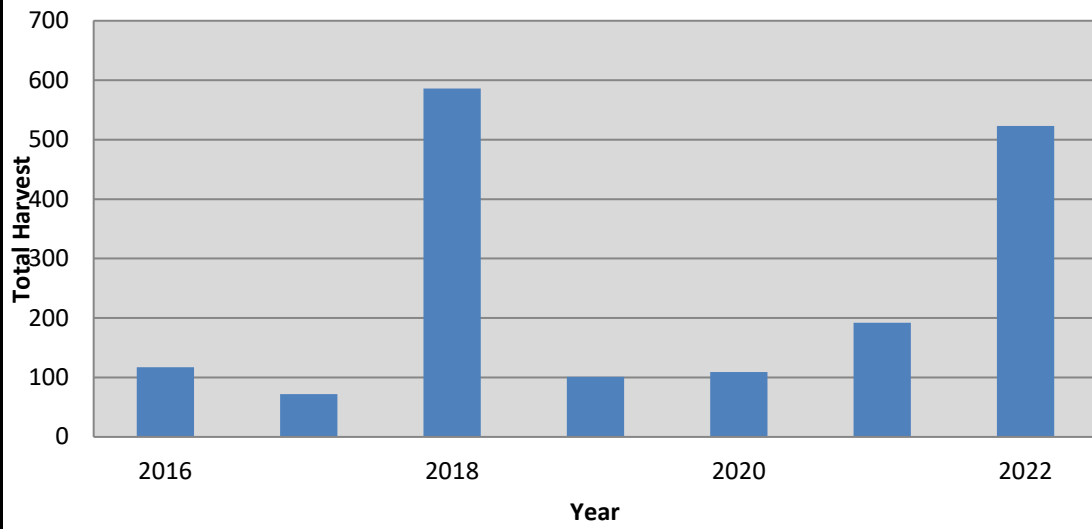


Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove in the western management units combined, 2002–2022. Harvest rates presented separately for hatch-year and after-hatch-year (USFWS 2022).

Approximately $31,100 \pm 5,000$ mourning doves were harvested by $3,400 \pm 500$ active hunters in the 2021-22 season in Washington, for an average of 9.1 ± 1.9 doves per hunter according to the USFWS report. This is a slight decrease over 2021-22 estimates. More information on mourning dove and other migratory bird harvest and data collection can be found [here](#).

District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area in Washington, averaging 242 doves harvested per year over the past 7 years (Figure below, WDFW collected harvest data). This includes only Pierce and Thurston counties of District 11 since GMU 667 of Lewis County, which is part of District 11, cannot be separated from the remainder of that county. Mourning dove harvest exponentially increased in 2018 and 2022 in District 11. Lewis and Thurston counties traditionally provide higher harvest in the District, with Pierce County less. Harvest depends greatly on hunter participation, which fluctuates year to year. Using the new WDFW harvest data collection and analysis methodology (see explanation providing previously under Small Game section) the harvest estimates for 2022 were 174, 143, and 111 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties respectively. A total of 81 hunters reported hunting dove in District 11 in 2022 (Lewis County included). The best locations for dove hunting in the District are agricultural areas, especially orchards.

Mourning Dove Harvest
District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only)



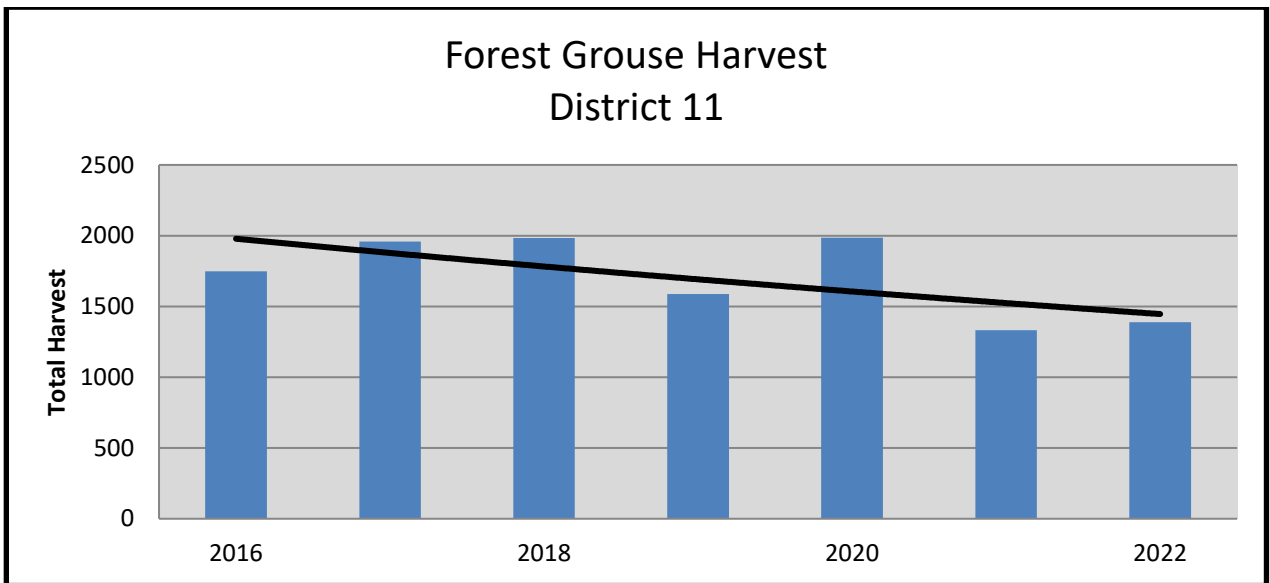
Mourning Dove harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).

FOREST GROUSE

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit the weblinks listed previously under Mourning Dove.

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails, and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting will be near fruiting shrublands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Forest roads use to support timber harvests are particularly good locations since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. Look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse. Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500', particularly in forest habitats near streams and rivers, young forests (5-25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMU 654), Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 663).

Forest grouse harvest has trended downwards in District 11, primarily caused by declined in harvest in 2019, 2021 and 2022. Harvest has averaged 1,712 grouse annually over the past 7 years in the District. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and then Thurston counties.



Forest grouse harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).

A hunter must buy either a big game license or a small game license to hunt grouse. Grouse hunting is included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs Sept. 15 through Dec. 31, with a daily bag limit of four of any species (to include not more than three of each species) and a possession limit of 12 (to include not more than nine of any one species).

WDFW collects wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse (spruce, ruffed, dusky and sooty species) during the Sept. 1 – Dec. 31 hunting season. The goal of this collection effort is to build estimated population trend datasets for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse harvested into wing collection barrels placed around the state or by bringing them to the closest WDFW district or regional office. Wing and tail collection locations and instructions can be found [here](#). Hunter participation in wing submission declined in District 11 in 2022 versus 2021, the first year of the program (74 total wings vs 57, respectively). The annual analysis and results of wing monitoring can be found in the [WDFW Status and Trends reports](#).



Number of Wing Bags Collected in 2022 at District 11 Barrels					
Barrel Name	Collection Month				
	September*	October	November	December	Total
North Vail	0	29	9	1	39
Skookumchuck	0	0	1	0	1
West Vail	0	10	6	1	17
Total	0	39	16	2	57

*First Check Occurred October 4th

PHEASANT

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining populations of pheasants primarily due to the wet climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting pheasant in western Washington is dependent upon releases of pheasants in the fall. District 11 is fortunate to contain three of the 24 pheasant release sites in western Washington. For that reason, pheasant hunters continue to have great prospects for harvesting pheasant in this district. In addition, WDFW often releases pheasants into District 11 via the network of collaborators used across the state. The shorter distance means less travel time, stress, and fatigue for the birds prior to release. According to WDFW's pheasant production manager, this equates to more consistency and stronger birds at release, which should improve hunting opportunity for District 11 hunters.



Game farm-produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites, which are described and mapped the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) and the [Upland Bird Hunting](#) websites. The release program uses state (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federal (JBLM) managed lands in District 11.

Note: to protect wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is now required for all upland bird, dove and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant

release sites statewide. Hunters visiting any of these release sites may possess and use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Some of these sites have further restrictions. Reference the [Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) for more information.

The following outlines the pheasant season in western Washington:

<u>Youth only season:</u>	Sept. 16 – 17, 2023
<u>65 or over and disabled:</u>	Sept. 18 – 22, 2023
<u>General Season:</u>	Sept. 23 – 30, 2023 (last pheasants released on Thanksgiving morning)
<u>Extended Season:</u>	Dec. 1-15 includes both Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck wildlife areas (no pheasants released)

Western Washington pheasant hunters must choose to hunt only on odd-numbered or even-numbered weekend days from 8 - 10 a.m. at all units of Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek Wildlife Areas with a daily bag limit of two (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). Hunters must indicate their choice of odd-numbered or even-numbered weekend days on the Western Washington Pheasant Permit by choosing "odd" or "even." Hunters who select the three-day option, hunters possessing a valid disabled hunter permit, hunters 65 years of age or older, and youth hunters may hunt in the morning on both odd-numbered and even-numbered weekend days.

Youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult 18 years of age or older, and the adult must have an appropriately marked pheasant permit if hunting. An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at the Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek wildlife areas and JBLM release sites from December 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as the general season. Pheasants are **not** released as part of the extended season. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. Additional information on hunting pheasants can be found on the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program website noted above.

Pheasant release in western Washington will be similar to last year, with an estimated 37,000 pheasants to be released at 24 pheasant release areas in 2023 compared to 35,741 in 2022. Be aware that total production could still be affected by seasonal temperature fluctuations and other mortalities in 2023 and these are estimates only. Approximately 1,800 pheasants (5% of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays beginning Sept. 16 through Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 3,600 pheasants (10% of total production) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 120-135 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays.

WDFW pays close attention to balancing management of [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#) and the recovery of [state and federally listed species](#) on WDFW-managed lands while simultaneously maintaining and maximizing recreational access and opportunity. This is particularly true where remnant native prairie remains on WDFW wildlife areas in the South Puget Sound including on Scatter Creek Wildlife Area where some areas are off limits to hunters so, please **obey all posted signs**. The same balance of needs is a goal on the federally managed JBLM remnant prairies. While WDFW and JBLM have been able to keep lands open for pheasant hunting, some areas must be closed to access or seasonally or permanently to allow for species and habitat recovery. This will remain in place and may increase as funds coming into the Agency allow for further recovery efforts.

Approximately 3,800 pheasants (10% of total production compared) will be released on JBLM training areas as those areas become available. Military training and listed species management dictates which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. There were 4,782 pheasants released on JBLM during the 2022 season. The Department anticipates the same number or slightly higher to be released in 2023 but it will depend on military, recreation, and environmental scheduling. There are special access processes in place for JBLM including:

NOTICE: JBLM has changed its recreational access management system in 2023. Starting this year, JBLM will be implementing a computer and smartphone-based platform called iSportsman. Read here the details [iSportsman coming to JBLM | Article | The United States Army](#) and [here](#).

JBLM PHEASANT RELEASE

Pheasant release site hunting at JBLM will consist of a morning hunt (8–11 a.m.) and an afternoon hunt (1–4 p.m.). Wednesday, federal holiday, Thanksgiving Day through the following weekend, areas are a single release all-day hunt. Reservations for pheasant hunts will start in the morning on the day before the hunt on a first-come, first-served basis. WDFW reminds pheasant hunters to wear minimum of 400 square inches of blaze orange visible front and back. Parking – All individuals MUST park by designated sign-in board. Parking in any other areas is prohibited. On residual non-release days, you may park anywhere, but ensure that parking doesn't impede safety or conflict with other hunters. Pheasant release sites, and a listing of areas open for both pheasant and waterfowl hunting can be found at iSportsman site.

JBLM YOUTH AND SENIOR ONLY PHEASANT HUNT

Youth Hunt (Under 16 years old); Senior Hunt (65 years and older): Check Washington state regulations for September dates for junior and senior hunts. A state hunting license will be required, and successful completion of the Washington Hunters Education Program is required. Youth must be accompanied by an adult (at least 18 years or older). Volunteers will be assigned to assist all youth and hunting dogs will be available. Normal sign-up/reservations are required as well as a JBLM Lewis registration permit. A special pheasant area will be set aside for senior hunters, 65 years and older, in accordance with state regulations. This senior area will be made available only if enough sites are available to the public.

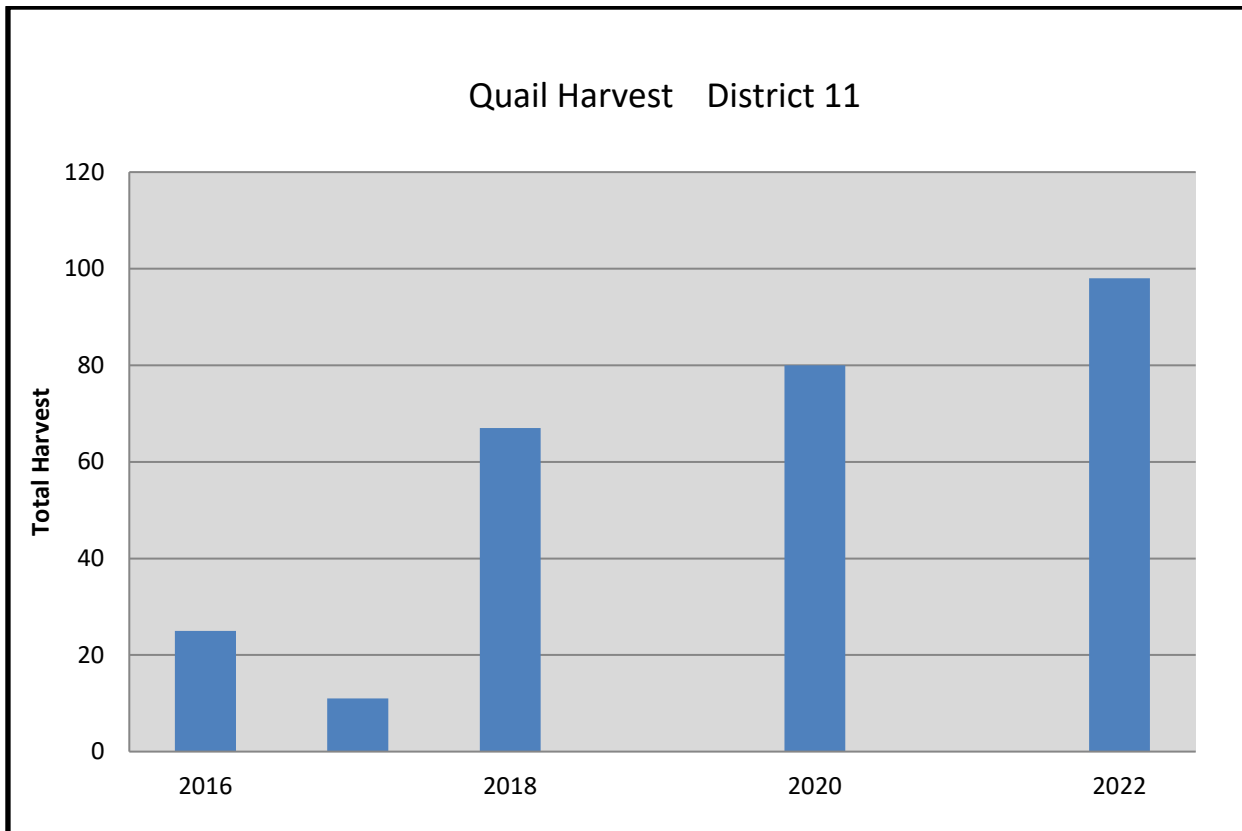
Youth pheasant hunt dates will be identified in accordance with state regulation. All youth who qualify must also register as all other hunters with iSportsman. Youth hunters may sign up for the hunt 14 days before the scheduled event. Call the Northwest Adventure Center with questions (253-967-5200). Pheasant hunters are not allowed to enter their hunting area prior to one hour before start time of a.m. or p.m. hunt. Pheasant hunters must sign in and out by the posted official time.

QUAIL

For information on hunting quail in general, please visit WDFW's [Quail Hunting](#) web page.

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit the websites listed previously under Mourning Dove.

Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 fluctuates annually dependent on the number of hunters participating often reaching zero (as occurred in 2019 and 2021). As example, only eight hunters hunted quail in the district in 2017 and the harvest reflects that effort. Regardless, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in western Washington where hunters hunt quail. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of the Key Peninsula, Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. Where private property access is limited, seek out state (WWDNR) and county forestland. The western Washington California (valley) quail season runs end of September through end of November, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs the same season with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four.

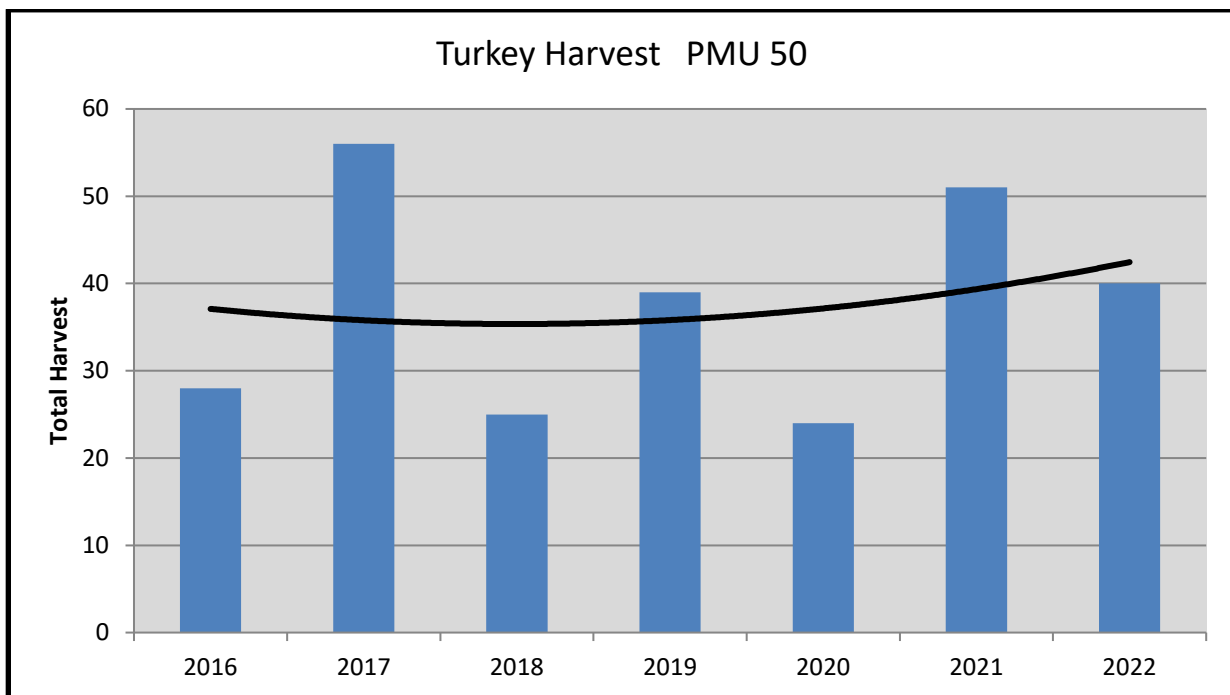


TURKEYS

Information on hunting turkey in general can be found in the [2022-23 Washington Game Bird Hunting Regulations](#) and WDFW's [Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) booklet.

Turkey are rare, dispersed in District 11 and are not managed specifically for hunt opportunity in this district. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern sub-species of wild turkey in the district and harvest reflects hunter participation year to year. Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Unit 50, within which District 11 lies, has fluctuated since 2016 averaging 38 turkeys harvested annually over the past 7 years.

WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula, Pierce County; Rochester, Grand Mound, and Tenino, Thurston County; and along the Johnson Creek Corridor, Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. Annually, most of the turkey harvest occurs in the Skookumchuck Unit (GMU 667), followed by a few in Deschutes (GMU 666) and Puyallup (GMU 652).



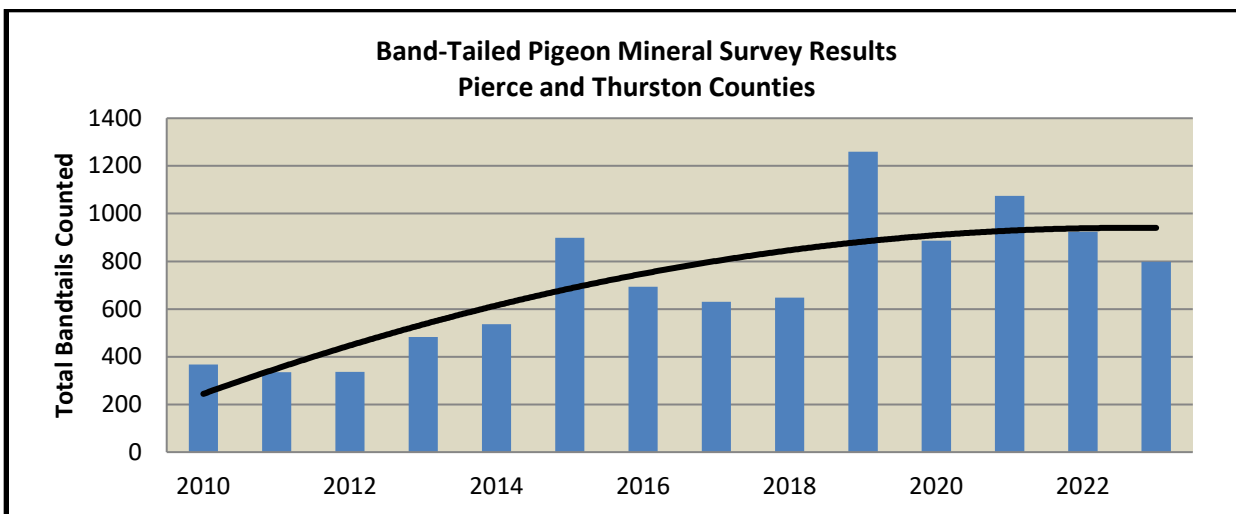
Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Management Unit 50, which includes District 11.

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit WDFW's [Upland bird hunting](#) page, the [Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#) booklet, and [Where to go upland bird hunting](#) page.

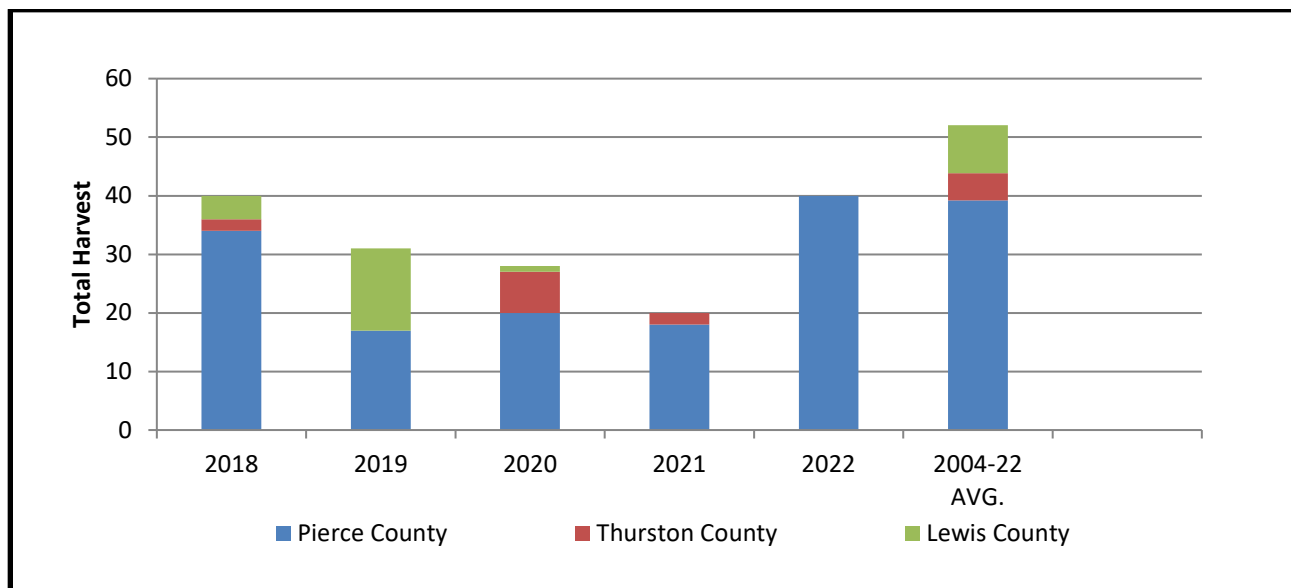
Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they feed mainly on berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits. Band-tailed pigeons frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in 5-to-10-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests used by band-tails is hard to predict. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites. Upon finding a good site, sit patiently and wait for pass shooting opportunities to occur. Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season. **Please contact WDFW if you know the location of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Pierce, Thurston, or Lewis counties.**

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at the 16 mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities. Band-tailed pigeon estimates based on mineral site surveys have been trending upwards in District 11 since 2015 and have been significantly higher since 2019. Prospect for harvesting bandtails in District 11 in 2023 remain good.

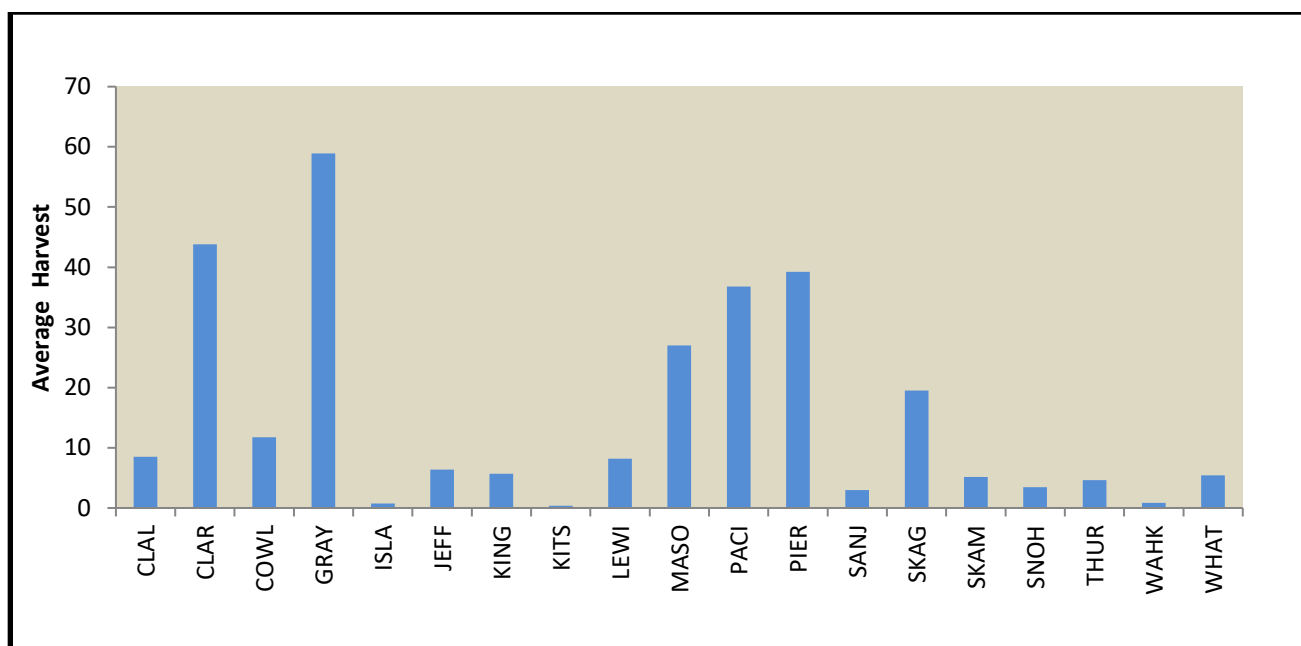


Annual band-tailed pigeon mineral site survey results, Pierce and Thurston counties only of District 11.

Pierce County is usually in the top 6 counties in the state in terms of total bandtail harvest and thus prospects for hunting band-tailed pigeons in the district are good. Pierce County harvest is traditionally much higher than Lewis or Thurston counties. The best hunting locations for band-tailed pigeons in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston county boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines of District 11.



Band-tailed pigeon harvest comparison by county for District 11.



Average annual band-tailed pigeon harvest for each Washington county over the years 2004-2022.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Since band-tail seasons were re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization. Harvest must be submitted using harvest cards submitted to WDFW after the season has closed. Hunters should review the 2023 Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

RESEARCH

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of District 16 and 17. WDFW fitted a total of 11 birds with transmitters that it programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.

The goal of this project is to conduct research on band-tailed pigeons in areas without identified mineral sites that could allow WDFW to fulfill the following objectives; 1) Identify new mineral sites to allow the agency to more accurately index our statewide population via Mineral site surveys 2) more expertly manage our band-tailed pigeons harvest seasons to potentially allow an expanded hunting opportunity, 3) provide detailed information on resource selection to inform how to manage habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research project has led to the discovery of a new mineral site location in Grays Harbor County. Hunters and members of the public are funding this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. The existing project is expected to continue through the year 2025 across various districts within Region 6.

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

CHRIS ANDERSON, District Biologist
MIKE SMITH, Assistant District Biologist



DISTRICT 12 HUNTING PROSPECTS

King County

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DISTRICT 12 GENERAL OVERVIEW



District 12 is comprised of six game management units (GMUs), including 422 (Vashon/Maury Islands), 454 (Issaquah), 460 (Snoqualmie), 466 (Stampede), 485 (Green River, open to appropriate deer and elk permit holders only), and 490 (Cedar River, currently closed to state hunters). Land ownership in the district is a checkerboard of private, state, and federal properties. The densest private (urban and suburban) developments are found in the Issaquah Unit (GMU 454), while private agricultural properties are primarily located in the northwestern part of the Snoqualmie Unit (GMU 460).

A great tool for determining property ownership and boundaries can be found using King County [iMap](#). We also suggest the [WDFW Hunt Planner webmap](#).

Tacoma and Seattle each own and operate municipal watersheds in southeast King County, totaling about 250,532 acres that supply drinking water for their cities. One is in the Green River drainage (GMU 485), one is in the Tolt River drainage (a portion of GMU 460), and the other is in the Cedar River drainage (GMU 490).

The largest huntable area is U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land, but industrial timber companies also have large properties in the area. Private, state, and federally owned lands are managed primarily to produce timber. USFS lands are managed for multiple uses, including timber, recreation, and wildlife, with a current emphasis on growing and managing old-growth forests.

Lands across District 12 are especially popular for a variety of year-round recreation activities. Always respect safety corridors and [No Shooting Areas](#). Remember to be a good hunting and outdoor steward. Be courteous and respectful of others to support quality experiences for everyone. Hunt in a manner that seeks to avoid negative interactions with other users whenever possible, such as avoiding busy trails and hunting during early morning hours. Please pick up after yourself and don't leave a gut pile out in the open – cover, bury, or hike it out and dispose of it properly. For the benefit of all fish and wildlife, strongly consider utilizing copper or non-toxic ammunition even in locations and for game species where it is not required. Similarly, shotgun shells with biodegradable wads are becoming more available and are less harmful to the environment.

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [WDFW](#) and [DNR](#) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

ELK

Hunters should place greater emphasis on riparian forest habitats and agricultural areas throughout the district, as well as public lands adjacent to such areas. Many of District 12 elk reside on private land, so make sure you have permission before you hunt.

Game Management Unit (GMU) 460 (Snoqualmie) provides good hunting opportunities in areas of the unit. Hunters are advised to scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated with restricted access. Many elk in the GMU are found (at least at times) on private property in valley bottoms (refer to Elk Area 4601 below), and elk density is much lower in the mountainous eastern portion of the unit. Hunters should network well in advance to gain access to hunt private properties. Please be mindful of residences, domestic animals (pets/livestock), and other non-target objects downrange when hunting these areas. Hunters should plan for safe shooting lanes. A map of [King County no shooting areas](#) is available online and a description of firearm restriction areas can be found on page 90 of the [hunting regulations pamphlet](#).

Elk Area 4601 is almost entirely comprised of private property and may hold half the elk in the Snoqualmie Unit. Elk Area 4601 was formed in 2009 and antlerless opportunity was added during permit seasons to help reduce the elk population in and around North Bend and Snoqualmie. Since 2014, general season archery and muzzleloader hunts in Elk Area 4601 have included opportunity for antlerless harvest as well. Antlerless opportunity was added to modern firearm in 2021 to allow property owners (and those with permission) to harvest without the need for special permits. In the interest of safety in this area, hunters are strongly encouraged to consider using muzzleloader or archery equipment during the modern firearm season.

Elk in GMU 454 (Issaquah) continue to be managed with liberal seasons designed to reduce vehicle/elk collisions and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly developed areas. Much of this unit is in private property. Pre-season planning and networking may be most important for hunters trying to gain access in this unit. Hunters should also be mindful of safety concerns and firearm restrictions in this unit. Bowhunters should have an advantage in gaining permission.

GMU 466 (Stampede) is a mix of private, state, and USFS lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). There are some old-growth stands on USFS lands, with second-growth timber dominating much of the unit. While elk are sometimes present here at higher densities than other mountainous areas in District 12, providing the chance for exceptional experiences, hunters should be prepared for up to a 2,500-foot elevation change and steep terrain in this unit. Though many forest roads exist, road conditions and access vary considerably. Early snowfall in the unit has the potential to strand hunters, but also the potential to aid in success.

GMU 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled-access portion of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Elk are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2023 season, ten (10) any bull, five (5) antlerless, and two (2) youth antlerless elk tags are available for hunters through the draw system.



Figure 1. Elk in GMU 460 – Photo by Chris Anderson



Figure 2. Group of elk in King County – Photo by Mike Smith

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online on [WDFW's harvest report webpage](#).

Elk Hoof Disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the North Rainier elk herd range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009–2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, and western Lewis County. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including the North Rainier elk herd area.

All of District 12 is within the North Rainier elk herd range. WDFW has received sporadic reports of limping elk throughout District 12 for several years. However, the presence of TAHD has only been confirmed within District 12 from elk sampled in GMUs 454 and 485.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

WDFW is implementing an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest elk with hoof disease (TAHD), thereby potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The program has two complimentary but independent components:

- WDFW is offering an incentive permit opportunity to hunters that harvest a diseased elk during general or special permit seasons. Hunters can participate in the program by submitting the hooves from their elk harvest at one of many drop-off locations. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (i.e., abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit. The incentive special permits will include multiple bull permits in western Washington. The season dates will be Sep. 1-Dec. 31 and the incentive permit draw will be held prior to the special permit application deadline. All participating hunters will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.
- Additionally, WDFW is offering special permits under the Master Hunter permit category that are intended to target diseased elk. These permits are offered as a second elk opportunity for antlerless elk using any weapon type (except during overlapping general seasons where they are restricted to the general season weapon type) and are not restricted to private land. Under this permit, Master Hunters must submit all four hooves from their harvest to WDFW for inspection. Elk harvested by Master Hunters under this permit cannot be submitted through the incentive program described above because selection for this permit is itself an incentive.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit [WDFW's webpage](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet or on the [WDFW webpage](#).

DEER

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has not conducted black-tailed deer population surveys for several years throughout District 12. However, anecdotal observations and annual harvest statistics indicate hunting prospects can be quite good where hunting is allowed on private and public lands.

Game Management Unit (GMU) 422 covers all of Vashon and Maury islands. Hunting access on Vashon and Maury islands is mostly on private agricultural and hobby farm properties. King County's [Island Center Forest](#) may open to public hunting pending county decision-making; please contact the county for details. Hunters must take time to network with communities and property owners for opportunity and access. More opportunities (incorporated in recent years) will continue in the second deer special permit category for GMU 422. Please refer to the current [Big Game pamphlet](#) for updated listings of these opportunities.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife continues to manage deer in Game Management Unit (GMU) 454 (Issaquah) with liberal seasons designed to reduce vehicle/deer collisions and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly developed areas. More opportunities were recently added in the second deer special permit category for GMU 454 with the addition of Deer Area 4541 (North Issaquah). Please refer to the current [Big Game pamphlet](#) for updated listings of these opportunities. This unit (and corresponding deer area) is about 90% private land and hunters continue to have a problem with access. Success in this unit may well depend on getting to know your neighbors and raising the subject of hunting as a means of protecting their fruit trees and vegetables. Firearm restrictions are in place because landowners are concerned about safety. Bowhunters should have an advantage in getting permission.



Figure 3. A black-tailed deer buck in GMU 454, damaging landscape plantings

Game Management Unit 460 (Snoqualmie) has good hunting opportunities throughout most of the unit. However, hunters should scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated with restricted access. Forest management on these lands is favorable to deer and high-quality opportunities are available. Hunters should focus on early seral forests (less than 30 years old) next to mid (40-80 years old) or late-successional (greater than 80 years old) stands. Hunters should focus on riparian forest habitats that supply ample forage and cover. Backcountry hunting opportunities also exist in the eastern portion of the unit, including the High Buck Hunt within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Hunters here should be mindful of very high recreational presence. By reviewing maps and scouting, quality alpine experiences can still be found, especially in smaller basins not accessed by major trails.



Figure 4. Deer in King County – Photo by Chris Anderson

Game Management Unit 466 (Stampede) is a patchwork of private, state, and U.S. Forest Service lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). It consists of second-growth timber, with some old growth on U.S. Forest Service lands. This unit has a lot of steep ground, with about 2,500 feet in elevation change. Though many forest roads exist, road conditions and access vary considerably. Be prepared for early winter snowfall, which has the potential of stranding hunters, but also the potential to improve success.

Game Management Unit 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled access area of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Deer are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2023 season, five any buck tags in the Quality category, three any buck tags in the Youth category, and two any buck tags in the Hunters with Disabilities category are available for state hunters through the draw system.

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found on WDFW's [Deer Harvest Reports](#) webpage.

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020. AHD was then found on Orcas and San Juan Islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart islands. In the fall of 2021, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife confirmed AHD on Whidbey Island. However, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has NOT detected AHD in District 12 at this time.

AHD is caused by a viral infection and is transmitted by direct contact between deer, either through bodily fluids or possibly airborne routes. This makes it more likely for the virus to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people – from contact or by consuming the meat. However, the use of disposable gloves is always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should use discretion before harvesting deer in AHD-impacted areas to avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer. AHD symptoms include rapid or open mouth breathing, foaming or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation. Should hunters in District 12 encounter live or dead deer with signs of AHD, please report them through the [Department's online reporting form](#). More information on AHD is available at [WDFW's Wildlife Diseases webpage](#).

BEAR

For management purposes, the state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMU). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions. Portions of three BBMUs are within District 12. GMU 454 is in BBMU 2, GMU 460 is in BBMU 3 and GMUs 466 and 485 are in BBMU 4.

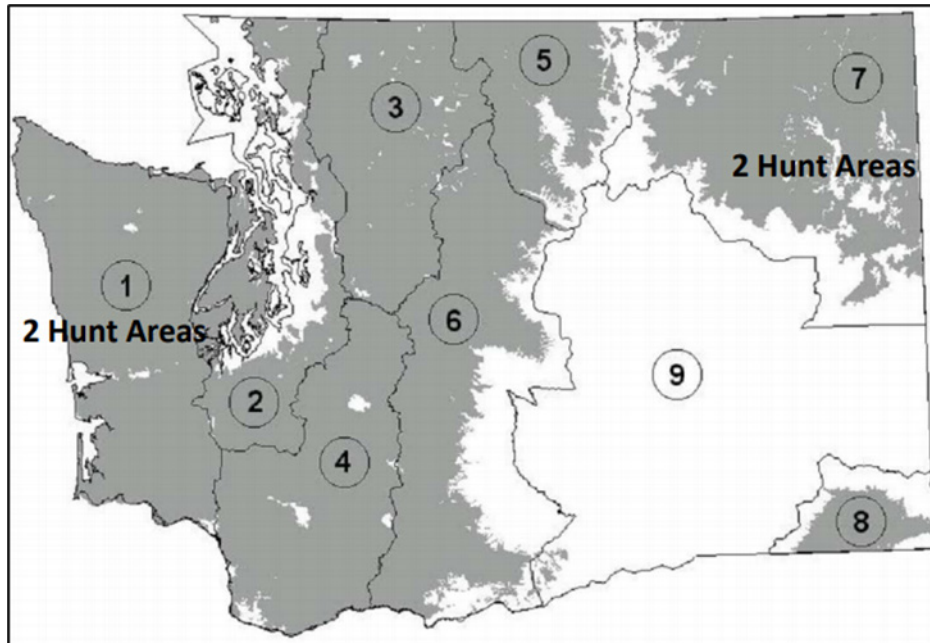


Figure 5. Black bear management units (BBMU) in Washington.

ALL successful bear hunters must submit the first premolar tooth from their harvest within five days of harvest, or by December 1, 2023. Teeth should be sent using WDFW's pre-paid and self-addressed mortality envelope which can be obtained at any [WDFW regional office](#).

Prior to shooting, hunters are encouraged to observe bears for a time sufficient to determine they are not accompanied by dependent cubs that may be following behind.

Black bears inhabit much of District 12, but like elk, many are on private lands. Hunters should ensure they have permission to hunt where they're interested. Bears are often at lower elevations early on, including riparian areas, before they move higher as the season progresses, which can offer opportunities for hunters on public lands. Berry production has been good in the district this season. Scouting to locate berry patches and recent bear signs, then returning to monitor these areas during cooler morning and evening hours when bears are more active can be effective.



Figure 6. A black bear in King County – Photo by Chris Anderson

Hunters in District 12 harvested 82 bears during the fall season in 2022. Thirteen percent (n=27) of hunters in GMU 454, 11% (n=39) in GMU 460, 11 % (n=12) in GMU 466 and 13% (n=4) in GMU 485 reported harvesting a bear. Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics can be found online at [Bear Harvest Reports](#).

COUGAR

The harvest guideline for GMU 460 is four to six cougars. For GMUs 466, 485, and 490 the guideline is two to three animals (GMU 485 is only open to deer or elk special permit holders and GMU 490 is closed to state hunting). There is no guideline for GMU 454. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Director may close the late cougar hunting season on or after Jan. 1 in either of these units if the cougar harvest meets or exceeds the guideline. Starting Jan. 1, hunters may hunt cougar until the area harvest guideline is reached, or April 30, whichever occurs first. Each cougar hunter must verify if the cougar late hunting season is open or closed in areas with a harvest guideline. Cougar hunters can verify if the season is open or closed by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline at 1-866-364-4868 or visiting [WDFW's website](#). The hotline and website will be updated weekly beginning Jan. 1, 2023. Hunters must have a 2024-25 cougar license and tag to hunt cougar in April 2024.

PHEASANT

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will release game farm pheasants this fall on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. Site maps are available in the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Pamphlet](#). Hunters must use the non-toxic shot on all pheasant release sites.

Hunting hours for pheasant in Western Washington are from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. This includes the Stillwater, Cherry Valley, and Crescent Lake units of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. For the rest of the hunting season, normal hunting hours (a half-hour before sunrise to half-hour after sunset) will apply.

QUAIL

There are few quail in District 12.

FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (blue) grouse are found throughout the public and private forests of District 12. Forest management in much of District 12 is still favorable for grouse. Hunters looking to harvest ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, early seral forests (5-30 years old) with ample berry crops in the understory, and riparian forest habitats. Sooty grouse hunters can expect the greatest success along trails and ridgelines above 2,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands with abundant huckleberries.

Adult female and juvenile grouse are especially vulnerable during early September. Beginning in 2021, grouse seasons have been adjusted to limit harvest of these individuals. More information [is available in this blog post](#). The season will be open Sep. 15, 2023, through Jan. 15, 2024.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) collects wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse (spruce, ruffed, dusky, and sooty species) during the hunting season. The goal of this collection effort is to build estimated population trend datasets for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Other factors will also be evaluated, including wildfire and weather patterns that may contribute to changes in harvest and overall populations at the species level.

Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse harvested into wing collection barrels placed around the state or by bringing them to the closest WDFW district or regional office. Visit the WDFW [forest grouse collection webpage](#) for more information and collection barrel locations.



Figure 7. A male sooty grouse displaying on the Snoqualmie Tree Farm, GMU 460 – Photo by Chris Anderson

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE

Although not a managed game species, Eurasian collared doves (an exotic species) are now in District 12. People can hunt Eurasian collared doves year-round with a big or small game license. The best way to hunt them is to seek landowner permission in lowland agricultural areas that have a barnyard setting where birds roost in trees but go to the ground to feed. Hunters should be sure they are hunting in compliance with any firearm restrictions and a manner compatible with existing infrastructure (buildings, farm equipment, or power lines).

TURKEY

Wild turkeys are rare in District 12, without predictable concentrations of birds. Harvest prospects are low even with considerable effort. Hunters must use #4 shot or smaller to hunt turkey.

WATERFOWL



Figure 8. Northern pintail in GMU 454 – Photo by Mike Smith

Harvest opportunities should be good, dependent on weather conditions through the season. The best waterfowl hunting opportunities continue to be in the lower Snoqualmie Valley, with public access on WDFW's Snoqualmie Wildlife Area (Cherry Valley, Stillwater, and Crescent Lake units). Hunters can only enter and hunt units between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. during the pheasant season. More opportunities are in the Kent Valley. Hunters are encouraged to work with local private landowners to get access to one of District 12's many rivers and agricultural valleys and improve their waterfowl hunting success. Refer to the [Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Regulations](#) for season dates and hours.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, visit the webpage, [Let's Go Waterfowl hunting](#).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Firearms restriction areas in King County

Centerfire and rimfire rifles are not legal for hunting west of Highway 203 (Monroe-Fall City), the Fall City-Preston Road to I-90, I-90 to Highway 18, Highway 18 to I-5, and I-5 to Pierce-King County line. They are also not legal for hunting on Vashon and Maury islands. For more information, refer to page 90 of the [2023 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). There aren't many shooting areas in King County per county ordinances. Please contact your local sheriff for specific locations.

2023



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KURT LICENCE, District Wildlife Biologist



Figure 1: Blakely Island black-tailed deer. Photo by Bruce Congdon

2023 DISTRICT 13 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Snohomish, San Juan, and Island Counties; Skagit County
Islands

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DISTRICT 13 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 13 contains all of Snohomish, Island, and San Juan counties, along with the islands of Skagit County (Figure 2). This includes most of Game Management Unit (GMU) 448 (Stillaguamish), the southern section of GMU 450 (Cascade), and the southern section of GMU 407 (North Sound) in Snohomish County. The San Juan Islands and Island County are divided into several GMUs including 411 (Orcas), 412 (Shaw), 413 (San Juan), 414 (Lopez), 415 (Blakely), 416 (Decatur), 417 (Cypress), 419 (Guemes), 420 (Whidbey), 421(Camano), 423 (Henry), and 424 (Stuart). GMU 410 contains all other San Juan County islands not already listed above.

District Wildlife Biologist Kurt Licence was welcomed to the district in 2022. Kurt studied Animal Physiology and Behavior at Arizona State University and has managed a variety of game and non-game species in Arizona, Oregon, and Washington. He looks forward to serving all hunters of District 13, so please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions or just want to say hello at (360) 503-1086. **Additionally, if you have photos of harvested or free-ranging wildlife in the district or have contacts to share regarding potential hunting access opportunities in District 13 please send them to kurt.licence@dfw.wa.gov.**

The 2022-23 winter trended cooler than average years and closely resembled the previous two winter outlooks consistent with La Nina conditions. Cool wet weather and snowpack in the North Puget Sound region remained near 100% of the 30-year median until March. In May, a sudden warming trend melted much of the snowpack in Washington which is in stark contrast to last year's spring storms that boosted the region to 143% of normal snowpack. As such, an increased risk of wildfires earlier in the summer and into the fall is predicted and supported by the evidence of an early wildfire season in Canada. Hunters should pay close attention to all rules on public lands and watch for any closures that might be implemented at the last minute if fire dangers get too high. If this happens, notices may be posted at property gates and on land manager/incident management websites ([Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Fire Management](#), [InciWeb](#), [Washington DNR Wildfires](#), [WDFW wildfire information](#)).

Remember to be a good hunting and outdoor recreation steward. Be respectful of others. Don't hunt areas where there is heavy, regular recreation use. Please pick up after yourself and don't leave a gut pile out in the open – cover, bury, or hike it out and dispose of it properly. For the benefit of all fish and wildlife, strongly consider voluntarily utilizing non-toxic ammunition even in locations and for game species where it is not required. Similarly, shotgun shells with biodegradable wads are becoming more available and are less harmful to the environment. Also avoid using natural deer/elk urine scent lures to limit the spread of communicable wildlife diseases like [Chronic Wasting Disease \(CWD\)](#). Although CWD has not been detected in Washington, natural deer/elk scent lures could be a source of CWD entry into the state. CWD is spread through infected animal body fluids and natural scent lures can be produced from high-risk sources (commercial cervid facilities in CWD positive areas).

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting for various species and game management units are available online at [Game Harvest Reports](#).

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Private Lands Access Program partners with landowners to provide the public with hunting access on private property. District 13 Private Lands Access Program sites are focused on providing waterfowl hunting opportunity through the Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program, and deer hunting access in District 13. We are continuously seeking to increase deer hunting access to private properties in San Juan and Island counties. WDFW will post sites as they become available [online](#). Hunters interested in waterfowl and deer hunting access should check the website regularly for updates.

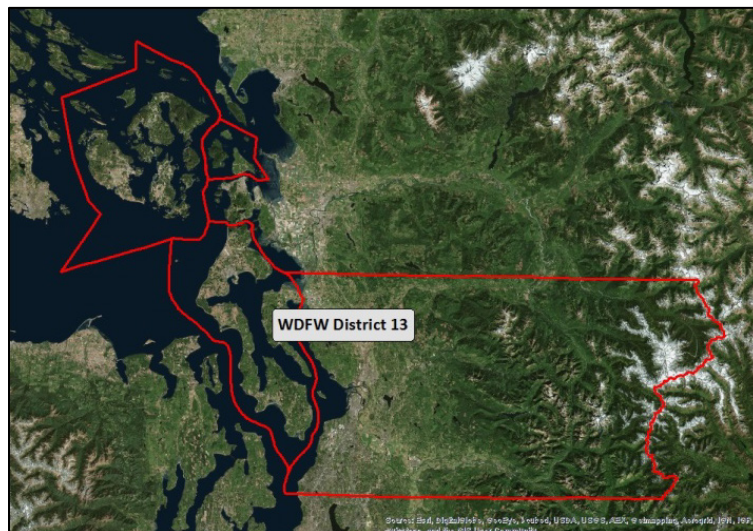


Figure 2: Map of District 13 in Washington State

SNOHOMISH COUNTY

In Snohomish County, a great online mapping tool called [SCOPI](#) can help hunters determine property ownership and boundaries.

Much of the eastern part of District 13 is public land, managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Two USFS ranger districts will have information on [road and trail conditions](#) for GMUs 448 and 450: the Darrington Ranger District (360-436-1155, north county) and the Skykomish Ranger District (360-677-2414, south county). Many roads have been decommissioned or are not maintained regularly; visitors should check the status of roads before heading to the National Forest. Trail conditions also vary, and information on specific trails, as well as many useful maps, are on the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Recreation webpage](#).

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Northwest Region (360-856-3500) manages the rest of the open public land for hunting in Snohomish County. Hunters should be aware that many access roads to DNR lands have gates, and they should contact DNR to get the latest information about gates, available access routes, and road conditions. DNR land at Ebey Hill near the Jim Creek Naval Station is surrounded by private property and therefore, is largely inaccessible to the public. Hunters can find additional information about this site on the [DNR Recreation webpage](#).

Several private industrial timberland owners also manage land in GMU 448 (Stillaguamish). Their ownerships are shown on the Snohomish County Assessor's maps (SCOPI). Many roads are closed to motorized vehicle traffic, but some allow free walk-in or bike-in access. Hunters should scout areas early and be aware that parking at access gates may be very limited. Never block gates or drive beyond any open gate unless you are certain the gate will stay open until you return. Active logging is happening in some areas, so gates may be open in the morning, but closed and locked later in the day. Some access gates on private industrial timberlands will have signs that specify ownership and the rules that apply to the property. Hunters should follow all "No Parking" signs, as local landowners will tow vehicles found on their property.

Industrial timberlands in Snohomish County previously owned by the Weyerhaeuser Cooperation were sold to Hampton Lumber last year. Hunters should visit the [Hampton Lumber website](#) for more information regarding access to these lands.

Much of the Snohomish County portion of GMU 407 (North Sound) is dominated by homes on small acreages or farms. Hunters should secure permission from landowners to hunt on private land and should be mindful of where houses, livestock, outbuildings, and high human use areas are in relation to where hunting will take place. Portions of GMU 407 west of Highway 9 and Highway 203 are under firearm restrictions. Hunters should research land ownership and understand firearm limitations prior to hunting. A complete description of firearm restricted areas is on page 90 of Washington's 2023 [Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). A map showing no shooting areas and shotgun only areas within Snohomish County is available [online](#).

SAN JUAN AND ISLAND COUNTIES; SKAGIT COUNTY ISLANDS

Very little public land exists within San Juan or Island counties or the islands of Skagit County, and firearm restrictions are in place in each jurisdiction. Ownership maps for San Juan County are available online from the [county assessor's office](#).

Hunting within San Juan County requires written permission from the landowner by county ordinance. In the San Juan Islands, access to islands not served by the Washington State Department of Transportation ferry system is by private boat or commercial water taxi. Private boat owners should check in advance on ownership and rules that may apply to docks and landings within the San Juan Islands, as most are privately owned. San Juan County owns and maintains eight docks with floats and eight boat ramps, and leases two outer island moorage docks. The San Juan County Visitor's Bureau provides a variety of road and dock maps [online](#).

Small groups of feral mouflon sheep have moved to Stuart Island. Mouflon are classified as harmful exotic wildlife ([WAC 220-640-200](#)). European rabbits occur on Orcas, San Juan, and Lopez islands. European rabbits are feral domestic mammals and thus are not under the authority of WDFW. WDFW does not regulate hunting mouflon or European rabbits. If hunters get written landowner permission and follow all local ordinances, these species may be hunted at any time, and there is no bag limit; however, firearm restrictions still apply.

Ownership maps for Island County are available through the [Island County assessor's office](#). Ownership maps for Skagit County islands are available [online](#).

ELK



Figure 3: Photo by Karen Schmoll.

District 13 does not have an established elk (*Cervus canadensis*) herd within GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) or GMU 450 (Cascade) boundaries. Individual elk are seen occasionally in Island County and the eastern part of Snohomish County. Small bands occur infrequently along Highway 2 at the south end of GMU 448. These groups typically range between the towns of Baring and Grotto, but sometimes move as far west as Sultan.

Elk sometimes travel south of GMU 437 (Sauk) onto the Sauk Prairie and areas west of Darrington and east of Highway 9 in the north end of GMU 448. However, their presence is occasional and unpredictable. Elk harvest in GMU 448 is restricted to three point minimum, bull only.

Twenty-four hunters reported hunting in GMU 448 in 2021, but no elk were harvested. The last elk harvested in this unit were in 2018. Hunters planning to hunt in GMU 448 should plan on careful scouting and be aware that elk in the unit are presumed to be tied to the North Cascades elk groups to the north and the North Bend groups to the south and are thus only present sporadically in areas of GMU 448 within District 13.

GMU 450 is not open for elk hunting, although small groups may spend some time at the higher elevations found in the GMU, most likely in summer months.

DEER



Figure 4: Whidbey Island Black-tailed deer; Photo by Tasha Bunch

ADENOVIRUS HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE

As of mid-June of 2023, Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) has not been detected in District 13. In 2021, an AHD outbreak impacted black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) in several of the district's GMUs. AHD is caused by a viral infection and is transmitted by direct contact between deer, either through bodily fluids or possibly airborne routes. This makes it more likely for the virus to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

AHD was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020. AHD was then found on Orcas and San Juan islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart islands. In the fall of 2021, WDFW confirmed AHD on Whidbey Island.

Deer populations in impacted areas may appear noticeably smaller in some GMUs and unchanged in others compared to previous years. For example, deer harvest success on San Juan and Orcas islands dropped significantly (84% and 93% respectively) between 2020 and 2021, while harvest on Blakely Island increased slightly (Figure 5). In 2022, harvest increased slightly or stayed the same for all GMUs previously documented to have AHD. Deer have historically been overabundant in the San Juan Islands and on Whidbey Island creating wildlife management concerns associated with habitat degradation and disease dynamics. As such, reduction in deer abundance in these areas continues to be a district goal. WDFW will therefore

be maintaining all scheduled deer hunting seasons in AHD-impacted areas for the 2023 hunting season.

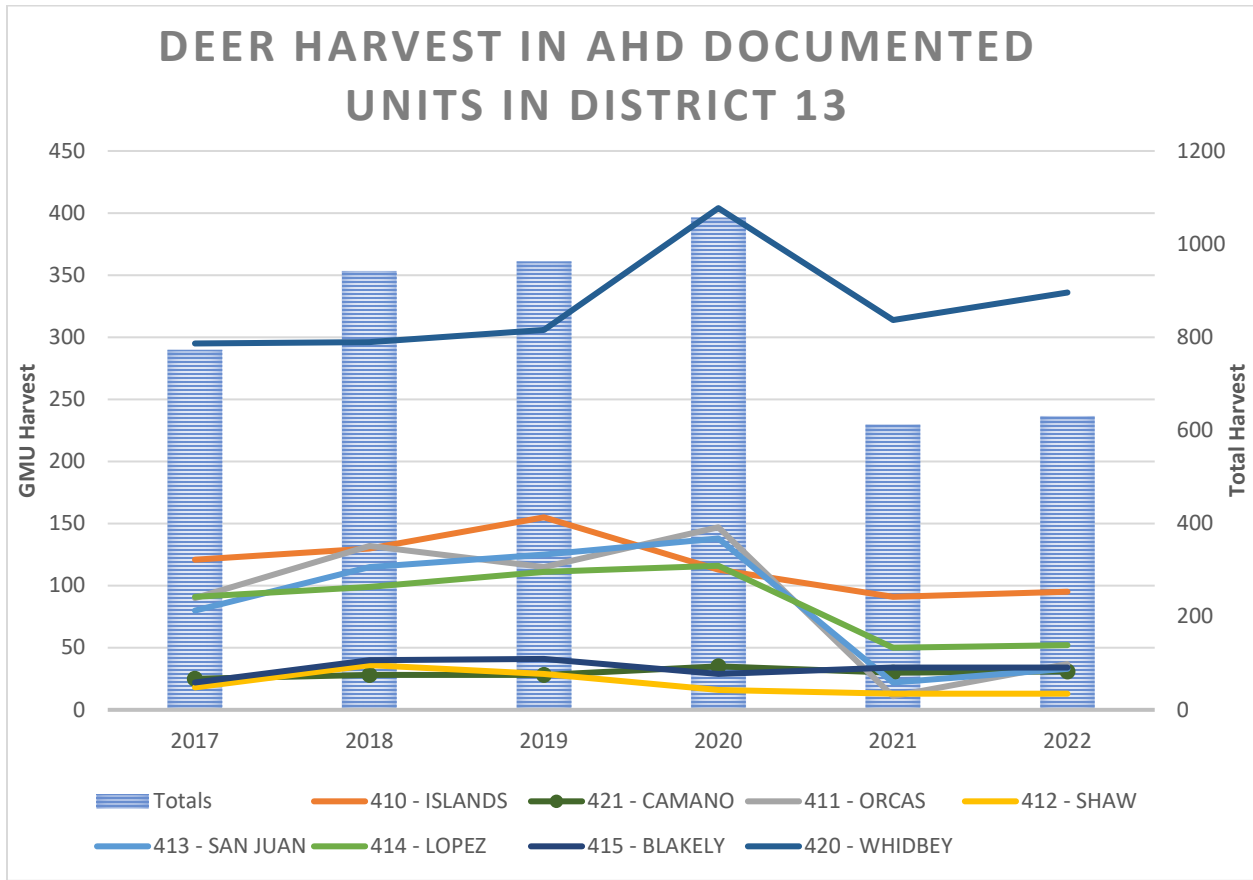


Figure 5: Deer harvest in AHD impacted GMUs in District 13 2017-2022

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people from contact or by consuming the meat. However, the use of disposable gloves is always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should use discretion before harvesting deer in AHD-impacted areas to avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer.

AHD symptoms include rapid or open mouth breathing, foaming, or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation. For more information on AHD, please visit the WDFW [website](#). If you suspect AHD in a deer you've encountered, please report your sightings [here](#). To limit further transmission of AHD, potentially infected carcasses should be disposed of by checking with local municipalities for disposal locations and methods, or by burying the carcass. Please do not haul the carcass to a different place on the landscape and dump it, as it risks spreading the disease to new areas. Feeding of deer should also be avoided.

BLACK-TAILED DEER GMUS 407, 448, 450

District 13 includes GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) and portions of GMU 450 (Cascade) and 407 (North Sound). In 2022, 1,028 people reported hunting during the general deer seasons in GMU 448 and had a 14% success rate for a total of 119 harvested animals. Hunters who take the time to scout and learn the area will increase their likelihood of success. Hunters should plan and familiarize themselves with local conditions, including weather well in advance of hunting season.

Parking and walk-in access to DNR and private forest land is available at the intersection of Menzel Lake Road and the P-5000 Road. This gate is 4.6 miles south of the intersection of Alder Place and Menzel Lake Road in Granite Falls. Parking may be limited at other gated access areas in this general area. Hunters need to obey “No Parking” signs, as these signs are on private property and owners may tow vehicles found on their property.

At the south end of GMU 448, walk-in access is off the Sultan Basin Road. This area has mixed public and private ownership, and hunters should pay close attention to signs showing areas where discharging firearms is prohibited. Access to DNR lands requires a Discover Pass, as noted on signs and most DNR properties are gated (Figure 6).

Vehicle access is available on USFS roads throughout Snohomish County, but hunters should consult the [USFS website](#) for information on road conditions and closures.



Figure 6 : Typical DNR signs

GMU 450 includes portions of Districts 13 and 14. In 2022, 83 people reported hunting in the unit, and only two deer were harvested. Both deer were harvested using modern firearms. GMU 407 includes portions of Districts 12, 13, and 14. Most of the unit is private land, and some areas are firearm restricted. Hunters should consult page 90 of Washington’s 2023 [Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#) for more details on firearm restrictions in Snohomish

County. [The Snohomish County map](#) shows county ordinance no shooting areas and shotgun-only areas.

BLACK-TAILED DEER ISLAND UNITS

Beginning in 2013, WDFW divided GMU 410 into several new units assigned to individual islands to provide more accurate harvest information and assist with developing management strategies for each island. GMU 410 now includes those few remaining islands that were not assigned an individual unit number. Islands in GMU 410 are not accessible by ferry, some do not have deer, and others are privately owned and prohibit public hunting. The GMU numbers for each island are as follows.

GMU 411—Orcas Island	GMU 412—Shaw Island
GMU 413—San Juan Island	GMU 414—Lopez Island
GMU 415—Blakely Island	GMU 416—Decatur Island
GMU 417—Cypress Island	GMU 419—Guemes Island
GMU 420—Whidbey Island	GMU 421—Camano Island
GMU 423—Henry Island	GMU 424—Stuart Island

Although accurate reporting for the island GMUs is improving, some hunters continue to misreport their hunt unit. This makes it extremely difficult to assess accurate harvest numbers for each island. We ask that hunters carefully review their harvest reports prior to submitting them. Accurately reporting the correct GMU, will advance our understanding of harvest on each island so that we can improve deer management.

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS 410-419



Figure 7: Blakely Island Buck; Photo by Eric Long

Public access within the San Juan Islands (San Juan and Skagit counties) is extremely limited, especially on Shaw, Blakely, Decatur and Guemes islands. Deer on the islands have historically been plentiful but typically smaller than their mainland relatives. Most hunting occurs on private property. In San Juan County, by county ordinance, written landowner permission is needed to hunt on private property.

WDFW is negotiating hunting access on some islands and will post properties as they are enrolled. We anticipate having at least seven properties available between Orcas, Lopez, and San Juan islands in 2023. More properties may be enrolled by the beginning of the season, check the WDFW Private Lands Access Program website for updated information. Enrolled properties will be open for the modern firearm season and run through the end of the year. Available sites will be posted by mid-September. Sites will include Mt. Grant on San Juan Island, owned by the San Juan County Land Bank. The Hunt by Reservation system offers a quality hunt experience by limiting the number of days a site is hunted while guaranteeing the site will be available to the reservation holder. To make a reservation and see available sites, visit the [WDFW hunting access link](#), create an account, choose a hunting site that is in the Hunt by Reservation category, and book the reservation. Reservations become available two weeks prior to the hunt day at 8 a.m. A fast internet connection improves the chances of securing a reservation. For questions about the Private Lands Access Program (PLAP), contact Rob Wingard, WDFW Private Lands Access Program biologist, at 360-755-7608.

Small parcels of public land are open to hunting on Lopez Island (GMU 414) and Stuart Island (GMU 424) on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands within the San Juan Islands National Monument. Hunters should call Brie Chartier 509-220-5976 for information.

The San Juan County Land Bank manages Lopez Hill on Lopez Island, which continues to allow limited hunting. Lopez Hill will be open for hunting from Sept. 1 through Oct. 31. More information is on the [Lopez Hill website](#) and the [San Juan County Land Bank website](#). For questions and county-required written permission, contact Outreach Coordinator Tanja Williamson at tanjaw@sjclandbank.org.

WDFW manages about 157 acres around, and including, Killebrew Lake on Orcas Island (GMU 411). Much of the property is made up of the lake itself or associated wetlands. Hunting is allowed on this property, but hunters should be aware of property boundaries and stay within WDFW boundaries (Figure 8). Parking is limited to a small pull-off area on Killebrew Lake Road.

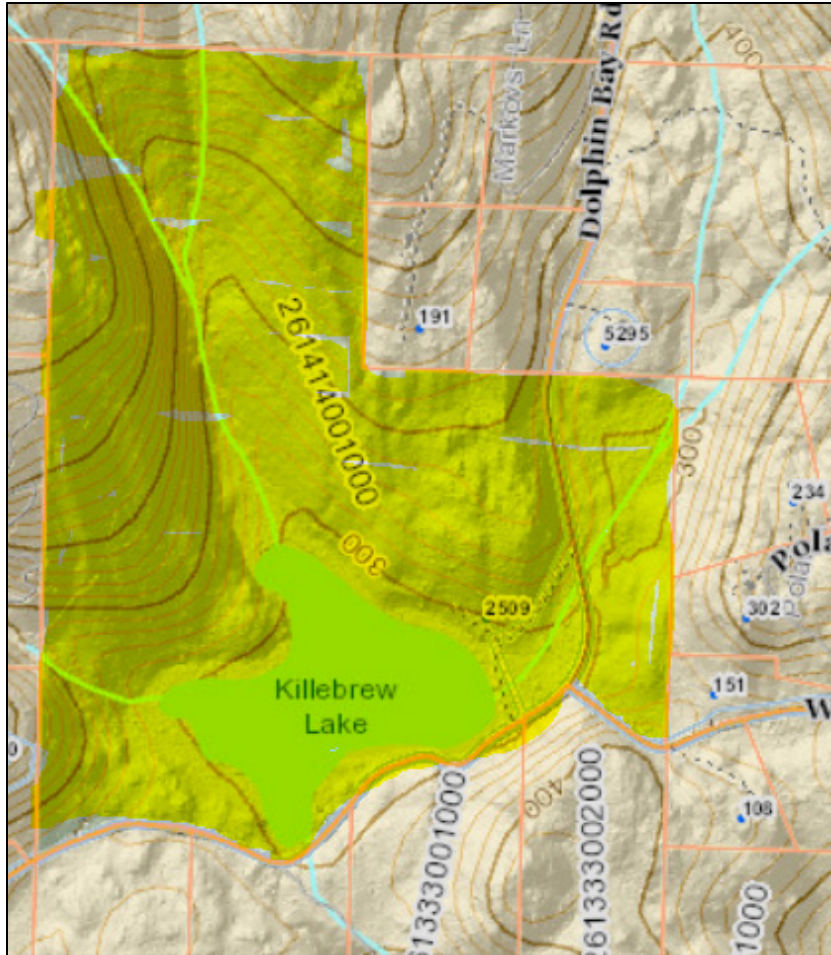


Figure 8: WDFW Killebrew Lake ownership highlighted in yellow

Overnight camping is not allowed in the National Monument, at Lopez Hill, or Killebrew Lake. Please check [Washington State Parks](#) and [San Juan County Parks](#) for camping information.

Cypress Island (GMU 417) is mostly owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), but some parcels are privately owned. Deer hunting is permitted on the DNR-owned land but hunting for other species is prohibited. Also note that Cypress Island is not included in the firearm restriction areas. Maps, trails, and access rules are [online](#). Cypress Island is not serviced by a ferry. Boat moorage and camping is available at several DNR maintained sites. Additional information is available on DNR's [website](#). DNR also owns a relatively small parcel at Cattle Point on San Juan Island (GMU 413); hunting is prohibited at this site.

GMU 420 (WHIDBEY ISLAND) AND 421 (CAMANO ISLAND)

Deer are abundant, but very little public land is available for hunting on either Whidbey or Camano islands. Hunters should get permission from landowners before hunting on private property. [The Island County Public Works Department](#) owns a few small parcels that make up most of the public hunting lands on Whidbey and Camano islands. Hunters should contact them directly for maps and restrictions at 360-679-7331.

WDFW partnered with Whidbey Camano Land Trust to allow deer hunting on the Trillium Community Forest property. The Trillium Community Forest is open to hunting for the modern firearm, late modern firearm, late archery, and late muzzleloader seasons. The Trillium Community Forest is closed to other recreational activities when it is open to hunting. Hunters should contact the [Whidbey Camano Land Trust](#) for additional information regarding maps and more information. A [map](#) that can be filtered to show properties open to hunting is also available on the Whidbey Camano Land Trust website.

Island County Parks manages several properties that allow hunting. These include Camano Ridge, Putney Woods, Portions of the Greenbank area, and the Kettles Trails area. [Use the Island County Parks webmap](#) and filter by hunting available to view these areas. Be very careful with property boundaries, especially at Kettles because the western boundary is shared with Fort Ebey State Park where hunting is not allowed.

Deer hunting at Naval Air Station Whidbey (WNAS) is open for archery only to military personnel. All hunters need to buy the installation hunting permit (\$13) and pass a background check. This is the required authorization for access and to carry a firearm. For more information, contact WNAS Biologist John Phillips at 360-257-4024. Additional information is also available [online](#).

BEAR



Figure 9: Photo by Greg Greene

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) can be found throughout Snohomish County and hunters can pursue a range of hunting experiences in the district during the long season. WDFW encourages hunters to carefully observe bears prior to shooting to ensure there are no dependent cubs with the targeted bear. Successful bear hunters must submit an upper premolar tooth from the harvested bear to WDFW by Dec. 1, 2023. The Department uses the collected tooth samples to determine the age of harvested bears which helps inform bear harvest management. Hunters can also look up the age of their harvested bear [online](#). Tooth collection envelopes are available at all

[WDFW regional offices](#). Additional information on black bear hunting regulations and tooth submission requirements can be found on page 68 of Washington's [2023 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet](#).

Black bears spend most of their time in heavily forested areas, however, most harvests occur in open areas such as clear-cuts and alpine meadows. Harvest opportunities in these open areas are often driven by berry production which can vary annually by location and elevation. In lower elevations, successful hunters often access gated timberlands on foot or by mountain bike where they focus on clear-cuts and decommissioned logging roads. Hunters also find success and memorable experiences pursuing black bears in high elevation alpine meadows by targeting bears feeding on huckleberries.

Black bear harvest and success rates were slightly above the previous year during the 2022 season in GMUs 407, 448, and 450. During the 2022 season, 264 hunters harvested 26 bears in GMU 407 (10% success), 556 hunters harvested 66 bears in GMU 448 (12% success), and 76 hunters harvested 24 bears in GMU 450 (32% success). Males comprised over 60% of the harvest in the three GMUs combined.

COUGAR



Figure 10: Photo by Rich Beausoleil

GMUs 448 and 450 are hunt areas with a harvest guideline of eight to 11 cougars (*Puma concolor*) for 2023. In these GMUs, the WDFW Director may close the cougar late hunting season after Jan. 1 if cougar harvest meets or exceeds the guideline. Cougar hunters may hunt from Jan. 1 until the hunt area harvest guideline is reached and the GMU is closed by the Director, or until April 30, whichever occurs first. Each cougar hunter must verify if the cougar late hunting season is open or closed in GMUs 448 and 450 by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline at 1-866-364-4868 or visiting our [website](#). The hotline and website will be updated weekly. Hunters need a 2024-2025 cougar tag to hunt cougars in April 2024.

MOUNTAIN GOAT

Due to declines in annual mountain goat (*Oreamnos americanus*) population estimates, special permits are no longer available for the 2023 hunt season in the Boulder River North goat hunt area, which is within the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. All goat permit holders in the nine years the unit was open were successful, except last two years. In 2018, 2019, and 2020 hundreds of [mountain goats were moved from Olympic National Park and released into the North Cascades](#) (Figure 11). These goats are wearing radio collars, and some may move into the Boulder River North Unit.



Figure 11: Mountain goat translocation; Photos by Matt Hamer

PHEASANT

Pen-raised pheasants will be released this fall on release sites, which are mapped in the [Western Washington Pheasant Program booklet](#). In Snohomish County, public pheasant and waterfowl hunting is available on the Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units of the [Snoqualmie Wildlife Area](#). There are two access sites on the Ebey Island Unit (Figure 12). The primary access site is off Home Acres Road just off Highway 2 (marked 'Main Parking Lot' below). The west side of the property can be accessed through the WDFW parking lot near the intersection of Home Acres Road and 43rd Street SE. Pheasants will be released on both the west and east parcels of the unit. The middle portion is open for hunting, but a motorless watercraft is required. The public is not allowed on the dike. This is private property owned by Drainage District 1.

The Crescent Lake Unit has two parking areas along Crescent Lake Road. The Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units will each get 35-45 birds. They will be released on Friday and Saturday evenings, and on a varied schedule for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings. All pheasant release sites on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area will be open and follow the 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. hours. Early entry and late exit are not allowed. The Ebey Island Unit has limited public access during the non-hunting season and bird dog training is not permitted. Dogs are not allowed except while hunting. Bird dog training is allowed on the Crescent Lake Unit at designated sites.



Figure 12: Parking and pheasant release areas available at Ebey Island

In Island County, pheasant release sites on Whidbey Island include Bayview, Outlying Field (OLF) Coupeville, and Sea Plane Base (SPB) sites. WDFW partners with private landowners to provide pheasant release sites at Bayview, Arnold Farm and Zylstra Road. Hunters should check [online](#) for the location of specific sites. Fifteen to 20 birds will be released on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings, except for Bayview, where releases will be Saturday and Sunday mornings. The Bayview pheasant release site is only open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays.

The SPB (Upper and Lower Game Ranges) and OLF Coupeville on the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station will be open this year. Access to the SPB pheasant release site is open to all hunters. All hunters (military and civilian) need to buy the installation hunting permit (\$13). This is the required authorization for access and to carry a firearm. Check in at the Torpedo Road gate and sign in and out of the logbook for the Sea Plane Base and at the logbook in the parking lot for OLF Coupeville. Civilian hunters will need to submit to a background check before hunting Navy property. As a result, people should plan well in advance and all hunters should check with WNAS Biologist John Phillips at 360- 257-1009 for updated rules and requirements and to be sure that no sites are closed for safety and security reasons during the pheasant season.

BAND-TAILED PIGEON



Figure 13: Band-tailed pigeon roost by Creative Commons Zero

Hunters can harvest band-tailed pigeons (*Patagioenas fasciata*) Sep. 17 through Sep. 25 in the 2023-24 hunting season. A migratory bird authorization card is required, and the daily bag limit is two birds. The birds are in managed forest lands, coastal shorelines, and alpine habitats with mixed conifer age classes that provide feeding areas next to roosting areas. These types of habitats are often on private timberlands, federal forests, or DNR lands so expect the same gated conditions described above. Band-tailed pigeons have strong affinities for the same areas, so scouting before your hunt is important. Mandatory harvest reporting deadline for band-tailed pigeon is Sep. 30, 2023.

GROUSE

Ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) is the most common grouse species in District 13, with sooty (blue) grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*) found at higher elevations. Ruffed grouse are found at elevations below 2,500 feet. Both species favor mixed timber habitats, often near water and ridgelines. Hunters should look for mixed conifer and hardwood areas, especially in riparian areas, to find grouse. Abandoned or low use logging roads are good places to look for grouse as well.

In 2019, WDFW's Region 4 (North Puget Sound) began collecting the wings and tail fans of harvested grouse. From the collected wings and tail fans, biologists can infer the sex, age, and species of the harvested grouse. This information will increase our understanding of grouse harvest trends and will be used to inform future grouse management decisions. Hunters are encouraged to voluntarily submit wings and tail fans at collection sites (Figure 14). Collection site locations are listed on WDFW's [website](#).

Grouse season dates for the 2023 season will open on Sep. 15 and will remain open until Jan. 15, 2024. This adjustment to season dates was made to limit the harvest of adult female and juvenile grouse which are especially vulnerable during early September.



Figure 14: Ruffed grouse and grouse wing collection site

WATERFOWL



Figure 15: Spencer Island hunt; Photo by Kory Vaught

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, refer to WDFW's Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting webpage. WDFW recently published a [web map application](#) depicting the abundance of marine birds throughout Washington's Salish Sea waters. The application also details abundance trends for game and non-game focal species. Hunters may find the application valuable when planning future outings.

Annual breeding waterfowl surveys were completed this year for the second time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Surface feature and mallard counts were high in the Northern Puget Lowlands this year, signaling that local breeding conditions were favorable because of the cool, wet spring. As always, weather conditions during the fall and winter will influence where birds congregate and how the waterfowl migration progresses. Waterfowl hunting in District 13 should be productive if weather conditions are favorable. Typically, we see a slow start to the hunting season. During mild winters, ducks tend to stay in more northerly areas of British Columbia. However, as colder fronts move in and conditions become colder and wetter, hunters can expect increasing numbers of waterfowl to arrive in District 13.

AVIAN INFLUENZA

Avian Influenza (bird flu) is a viral illness commonly found in birds. Wild birds can carry several avian influenza viruses, many of which do not seriously affect them. Several different bird flu strains have been identified around the world, including Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) strains. During spring of 2022, HPAI spread quickly in all four flyways, including the Pacific Flyway which includes District 13. This strain of HPAI has been found in backyard poultry flocks, commercial poultry, wild waterfowl, and wild and captive raptors (hawks, falcons, etc.).

The risk to human health from avian influenza strains is believed to be minimal. However, it is important to note that there have been no known cases of humans contracting the HPAI virus from healthy, free-flying wild birds anywhere in the world. Also, there is no evidence that properly cooked waterfowl (or domestic poultry) can sicken people. While it is unlikely that hunters could contract HPAI from wild birds, bird hunters who have domestic poultry or other birds at home, or who may visit domestic poultry markets or exhibitions (such as fairs), are asked to take special precautions to ensure that all equipment (boots, clothes, vehicles, dogs, etc.) are cleaned and disinfected to prevent the spread of diseases like HPAI.

If you observe sick or dead wild birds, report it on [WDFW's online reporting tool](#). Hunter harvested birds will be tested during fall hunting seasons. Please cooperate with biologists if they should ask to test your harvested birds and see page 32 of the [2022-2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information.

SNOHOMISH COUNTY

Public waterfowl hunting is available on the Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. There are two access sites for the Ebey Island Unit. The first access site is off Home Acres Road near Highway 2, known as the Main Parking Lot. Access the west side of the property by using the WDFW parking lot near the intersection of Home Acres Road and 43rd Street SE. During pheasant hunting season, waterfowl hunters and all other users may only enter and hunt the Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Early entry and late exit are not allowed. The Crescent Lake Unit has two parking areas along Crescent Lake Road that provide access. The Ebey Island Unit has limited public access during the non-hunting season. Bird dog training is not permitted, and dogs are not allowed at the Ebey Island Unit during the nonhunting season. Bird dog training is allowed on the Crescent Lake Unit at designated sites.

The Spencer Island Unit of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area is accessible by boat and walk-in access. Parking for the Spencer Island Unit will be a quarter mile back from the bridge to the island near the sewage treatment facility buildings. Parking is not allowed on the road or areas near the bridge. There is a 15 shot (on person) limit per hunter in this unit.

Smith Island Estuary Restoration site is owned by Snohomish County who has partnered with WDFW to provide waterfowl hunting access to the intertidal 270 acres. The parking lot has seven spots available, and the site is "Register to Hunt" to track the amount of use at the property. Please be mindful that the property is tidally influenced, and water levels can change dramatically. A small hand launch is available. Please check the [WDFW Private Lands website](#) for more detailed information about the property.

The [Leque Island Tidal Restoration project](#) was completed during the fall of 2019 and the unit is open again for waterfowl hunting. Hunters with small boats that can be hand-launched can access the unit from the western parking lot south of SR 532 along Davis Slough. There is an additional parking lot and walking path along Eide road on the eastern edge of the unit for hunting access. Be sure to observe the “No Shooting Safety Area” along the eastern walking path and be courteous to the variety of users in this area. The city of Stanwood is currently building an additional boat launch at Hamilton Landing Park that will provide access to the unit for larger boats.



Figure 16: Snohomish County Leucistic Mallard; Photo by Kyle Probst

At this time, we have tentative agreements with landowners for eight Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program sites, located primarily in the Stillaguamish Delta. These sites are all found on private lands enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. Two Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program sites will be “Hunt by Reservation” and one of these sites was planted with barley. More sites may be added in the fall. More information about individual sites, including maps and access rules, are on the [WDFW Hunting Access website](#). Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program sites on private lands will open as crop harvests are completed and other conditions are met, so not every site will be available on opening day. We expect all sites will be open by mid-November. For questions about the Private Lands Access Program (PLAP), contact Rob Wingard, WDFW Private Lands Access Program biologist, at 360-755-7608.

The Hunt by Reservation program offers a quality hunt experience by limiting the number of days a site is hunted while guaranteeing the site will be available to the reservation holder. To make a reservation, visit the [WDFW hunting access link](#), create an account, choose a hunting site that is in the “Hunt by Reservation” category, and book the reservation. Reservations become available two weeks prior to the hunt day at 8 a.m. A fast internet connection improves the chances of securing a reservation.

Robust numbers of snow geese coming into Washington are likely this winter. In addition to the traditional high concentrations in the Stanwood area, snow geese are expanding in Snohomish County, and we expect that at least 5,000 to 10,000 birds will spend some time in the Snohomish River system. The 2022-23 snow goose season is Oct. 15 – Nov. 27; Dec. 10 – Jan. 29; and Feb. 11 – 21. However, Leque Island and that portion of Snohomish County east of Interstate 5 will be closed Feb. 11 – 21, 2023. The Port Susan Game Reserve, which restricted Canada goose hunting, was eliminated in 2016. Hunters should consult page 26 of the [Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game pamphlet](#) for additional closures on state-managed lands and should check the [WDFW Hunting Access website](#) for potential additions to snow goose sites that may be added to the Private Lands Access Program.

PORT SUSAN BAY

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) allows hunting over tidelands under their ownership at Port Susan Bay. However, the restored area and a 150-yard buffer around it is off-limits to hunting, and there is no hunting access from TNC property (Figure 17). For further information regarding hunting TNC ownership, contact the TNC Puget Sound Stewardship Coordinator at 360-419-3140 or washington@tnc.org.



Figure 17: Map of restricted hunting area owned by The Nature Conservancy

WHIDBEY ISLAND

Access to public lands on Whidbey Island is extremely limited. Hunters should be aware that Deer Lagoon is closed to hunting by a county ordinance that restricts the discharge of firearms. The Whidbey Camano Land Trust owns parcels at Crockett Lake and Dugualla Bay, and their ownerships are closed to hunting. Land Trust Dugualla Bay parcels are shown in Figure 18 below. Hunters should contact the [Whidbey Camano Land Trust](#) with any questions about boundaries and ownership at Crockett Lake.

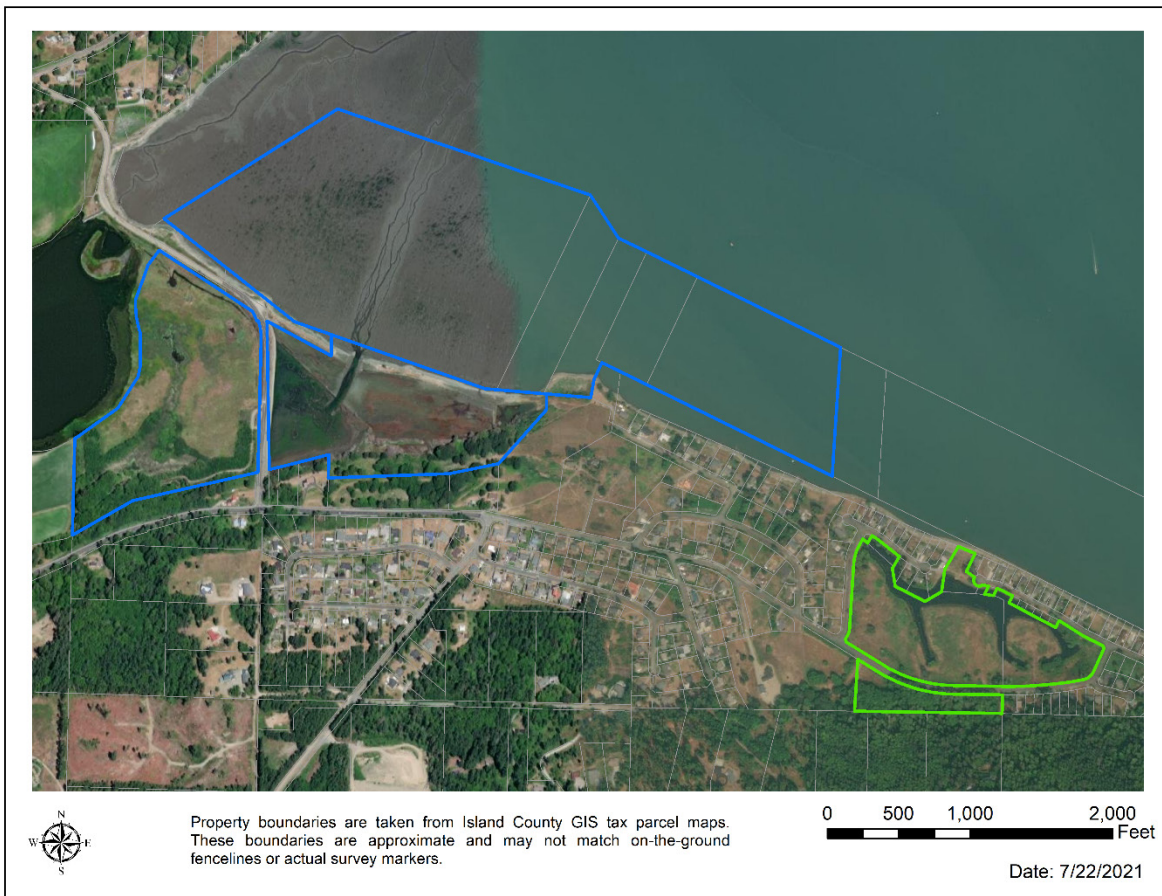


Figure 18: Whidbey Camano Land Trust (blue) and Dugualla Community (green) parcels closed to hunting at Dugualla Bay

Waterfowl hunting on Naval Air Station Whidbey Island is open to military personnel and their guests. All hunters (military and civilian) need to buy the installation hunting permit (\$13). This is the required authorization for access and to carry a firearm. Access the duck blinds by entering the Sea Plane Base (SPB) gate. Non-military guests must be in the same vehicle as the military hunter. For more information, contact WNAS Biologist John Phillips at 360-257-4024.

CAMANO ISLAND

Iverson Spit Preserve is managed by Island County Parks, within the Island County Public Works Department (Figure 19). Hunting is allowed at Iverson Spit outside of the dike in the intertidal area. Questions about the preserve should be directed to the Island County Public Works Department at 360-679-7331.



Figure 19: Iverson Spit Preserve Park boundaries

The tidelands near English Boom County Park on the north end of Camano Island include some privately-owned parcels. Hunters wanting to access tidelands in this area must obey all signs showing private ownership, no trespassing, or no hunting. These signs are legitimate, legal, and show which parcels are privately owned and therefore not open to the public.

2023

ROBERT WADDELL, Wildlife Biologist
CALLIE MOORE, Assistant Wildlife Biologist



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**



Snow geese take flight at the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters' Unit. Photo by Robert Waddell / WDFW

2023 DISTRICT 14 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Skagit & Whatcom Counties

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DISTRICT 14 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 14, comprised of Skagit and Whatcom counties, is the most northwestern in the state. The district's western extent is associated with the marine waters of Puget Sound and features a vibrant and varied agricultural land base. The lowlands of the Skagit Flats and western Whatcom County support abundant wildlife species and populations. Most notable are the diverse and large flocks of resident and wintering waterfowl species, offering world-class hunting opportunities.

The Skagit and Nooksack rivers are the two primary river systems in the district. They are fed by the Cascade Mountains and flow into Puget Sound. Most lower-elevation forested uplands within these watersheds are owned or managed by private timber companies and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). These lower-elevation working forests provide reasonable to excellent big game hunting opportunities for elk, black-tailed deer, black bear, and cougar. Federally owned public lands, such as the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park, comprise many higher elevation forest lands within the district, including the Ross Lake National Recreation Area, where hunting is allowed. These federal lands are associated with the North Cascade Mountains and support game species such as mountain goats, black bears, and black-tailed deer.

We suggest the [WDFW Hunt Planner Webmap](#) for access information and e-scouting.



Figure 1. View of the North Fork Nooksack River in Whatcom County – Photo by Robert Waddell

From north to south, the core game management units (GMUs) that comprise District 14 are Nooksack and Diablo (GMUs 418 and 426), which are mainly in Whatcom County, and Sauk (GMU 437), which is almost entirely within Skagit County. Portions of North Sound, Stillaguamish, and Cascade (GMUs 407, 448, and 450) also fall within the district boundaries (Figure 2).

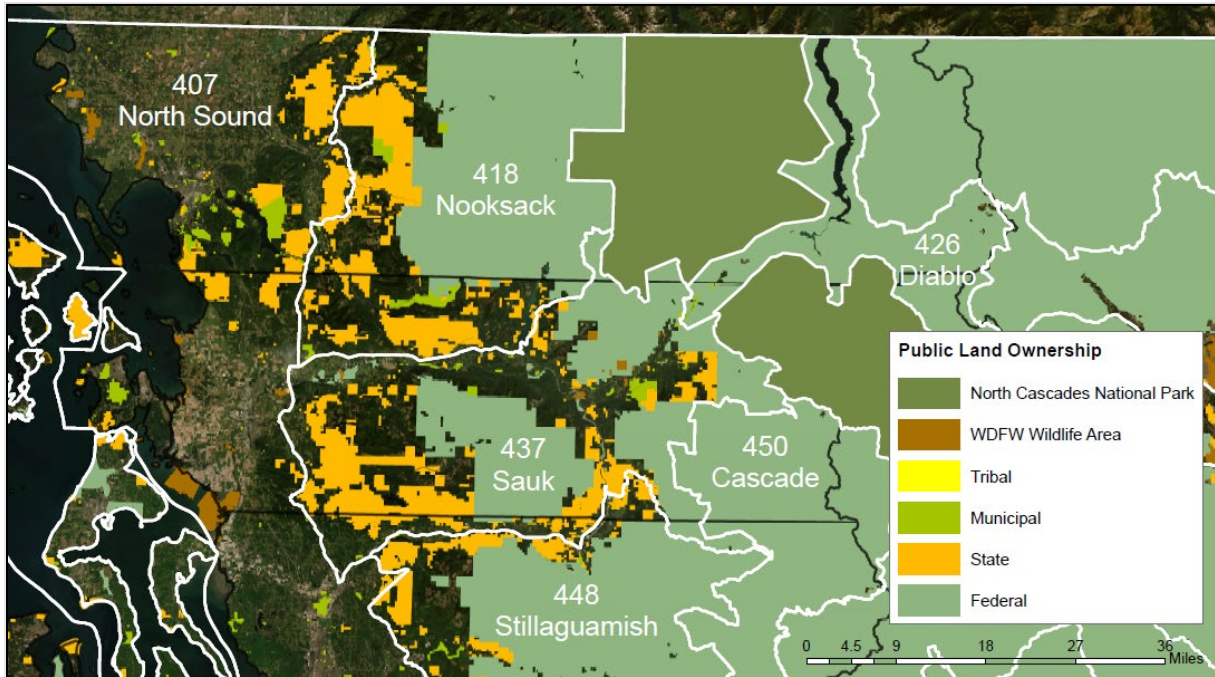


Figure 2. Game Management Units (GMUs) in Skagit and Whatcom counties

Among the many hunting opportunities within this district, perhaps the most notable are:

- Both saltwater and inland waterfowl hunting opportunities with the highest harvest of ducks and geese in Western Washington. Statewide, it boasts the second-highest duck and goose harvest.
- The state's most diverse waterfowl species hunting opportunities include hunts for lesser snow geese, Canada geese, Pacific black brant, long-tailed ducks, and scoters.
- Extensive walk or bike-in access to public and private forest lands that do not currently charge an access fee for hunting big game and/or forest grouse.
- Special permit only, quality bull elk hunts within the North Cascades elk herd, with trophy quality animals, liberal season dates, and high success rates.
- Once-in-a-lifetime mountain goat harvest opportunities for six Mt. Baker Wilderness Area permit holders.

Lands across District 14 are famous for a variety of year-round recreation activities. Always respect safety corridors and No Shooting Areas. Remember to be a good hunting and outdoor steward. Be courteous and respectful of others to support quality experiences for everyone. Hunt in a manner that seeks to avoid negative interactions with other users whenever possible, such as hunting during early morning hours and avoiding busy trails. Please pick up after yourself and don't leave a gut pile out in the open – cover, bury, or hike it out and dispose of it properly. For the benefit of all fish and wildlife, strongly consider utilizing copper or non-toxic ammunition even in locations and for game species where it is not required. Similarly, less environmentally harmful shotgun shells with biodegradable wads are becoming increasingly available.

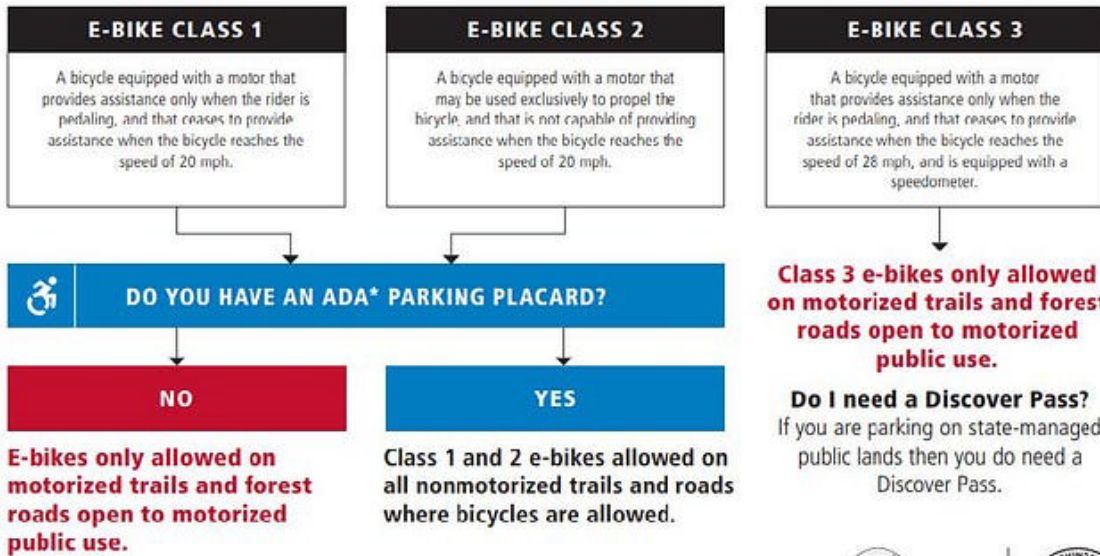


Figure 3. Johannesburg Mountain looming over the Cascade River Valley – Photo credit Callie B. Moore

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each public or private landowner to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [Electric-assisted bicycles on WDFW-managed lands](#) for the most recent information.



Current Electric-Assisted Bicycle Rules



MTI-E-BIKES PHOTO: COO, ENGLISH

* ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. RCW 46.04.169, RCW 46.19.030. Temporary e-bike policies are implemented by WA Bill 5452 (2020) effective July 25, 2021. Violators are subject to civil or criminal prosecution under WAC 332.52 and other applicable law. Fines up to \$99 may be issued if violated.



CURRENT SPECIES STATUS

The primary big game species in District 14 are elk, black-tailed deer, cougar, black bear, and mountain goat. Each species remains open for hunting with restrictions, as outlined in the [Washington 2023 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet. Over-the-counter tags for cougars are available for the entirety of District 14. Over-the-counter tags are also available for elk (GMUs 407 and 448 only), black-tailed deer, and black bears. Elk hunts in GMUs 418 and 437 and all mountain goat opportunities are managed as special permit-only hunts. Tag availability is based on the sensitivity of each species and their populations to hunting. For elk, the population estimate for the North Cascades elk herd remains below the population objective, and mountain goats have low reproductive rates that limit harvest opportunities in most North American populations.

Like most of Western Washington, District 14 does not host native upland game bird populations (other than forest grouse) and is not managed for these species. However, WDFW will continue implementing a pen-raised pheasant release program in Skagit and Whatcom counties during the 2023–2024 hunting season. District 14 has healthy populations of forest grouse, including ruffed, dusky, and sooty (formerly blue) grouse. Hunters after forest grouse enjoy a liberal season from Sep. 15 – Jan. 15.

Due to high overall population sizes and stable reproductive rates of waterfowl, states within the Pacific Flyway will continue to enjoy a liberal hunting season structure for most species with ample hunting days and bag limits. Northern pintail's decrease to a one-bird daily bag limit still applies this season in response to population estimates for this species falling below established threshold limits. Other restrictions for sea ducks will continue into this season.

The statewide closure to the harlequin duck harvest implemented last season will continue in 2023-24. Electronic calls are ONLY allowed during white-goose only season segments in Goose Management Area 1 from Feb. 10-20, 2024.

All waterfowl hunters must apply for and possess a special migratory bird authorization when hunting lesser snow geese, Pacific brant, and sea ducks, which include long-tailed ducks; surf, white-winged, and black scoters; and common and Barrow's goldeneye. Additionally, a harvest report card must be submitted by each hunter by March 20, 2024, regardless of harvest success. Please reference page 26 in the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information on the required Authorization and Harvest Record cards.

ELK

The North Cascades (Nooksack) elk herd (NCEH) continues to grow and expand into areas of formerly unoccupied habitat, including agricultural areas where elk-related crop damage can occur. A post-hunt survey conducted in March resulted in an estimated population of around 1,600 elk within the herd's core area. The 2023 survey indicated a bull-to-cow ratio of 18 bulls per 100 cows, within the WDFW objective of 12–20 bulls per 100 cows. The calf-to-cow ratio was estimated at 22 calves per 100 cows. A calf-to-cow ratio of 40 calves or greater per 100 cows is considered excellent calf recruitment. For more information on elk management within this herd, visit the [WDFW North Cascades Elk Management webpage](#).



Figure 4. Successful hunter with a mature bull in GMU 437 – Photo by Ron Howard

The WDFW population objective of approximately 2,000 elk has yet to be met. Since establishing a very limited hunt of this population in 2007, hunting opportunities have been few but have increased to the current levels that have been in place for a few years. The current harvest strategy provides some recreational and damage-related harvest while allowing the population to continue to grow.



Figure 5. Mature GMU 418 bull – Photo by Kurt Russell

The North Cascades elk herd offers some of the best special permit bull hunting opportunities in Western Washington. Archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm hunters fortunate enough to draw one of 50 available permits have the chance to harvest a bull elk with an “any bull” tag in GMUs 418 and 437 (29 permits in GMU 418 and 21 permits in GMU 437). Securing applicable access permissions and sufficient scouting are essential for a successful hunt.

Due to limited hunting pressure and lengthy seasons, the annual harvest success rate since 2007 has been relatively high, ranging up to 100% depending on the hunt method type. During the 2022-23 season, the harvest success rate in GMU 418 for all hunt method types combined was 62%, with 18 of 29 permit holders harvesting a bull elk. At least 11 of these bull elk had antlers with five points or better (nine bulls had antlers with six points or better). In GMU 437, eight of 21 permit holders harvested a bull elk for a 38% success rate for all weapon types combined. At least five of these bull elk had antlers with five points or better.

The [WDFW Private Lands Access Program](#) has partnered with Sierra Pacific Industries to provide access to their properties within GMU 418 for all GMU 418 elk special permit holders. This program will provide information about access to these lands to permit holders before the 2023 hunts. Within GMU 418, hunters looking for the highest chance of success should focus most of their efforts within the core elk area that includes: a northern boundary from Acme due east to Baker Lake, an eastern boundary along the western shorelines of Baker Lake, and Lake Shannon to Highway 20, a southern boundary along Highway 20 to its juncture with Highway 9, and a western boundary of Highway 9 from Sedro-Woolley to Acme. However, hunters may find pockets of elk, including some high-quality bulls, outside this core area.



Figure 6. Elk on private property in Skagit Valley in GMU 437 survey of North Cascades elk herd
– Photo By Robert Waddell



Figure 7. WDFW and Tribal Co-Manager aerial– Photo by Robert Waddell

Hunters who draw a special permit in GMU 437 are no longer restricted to hunting in Skagit Valley within the former Elk Area 4941 boundary. Though permitted hunters may access the entirety of GMU 437, most elk likely will be in the northern third of the GMU, with many in Skagit Valley on private property. Therefore, securing access to private property in the valley and islands in the Skagit River can increase your chances of success in this GMU.

Master Hunters and youth, senior, and disabled hunters who draw one of the 28 permit opportunities for antlerless elk should consider securing access to private lands within Skagit Valley, where opportunities are likely to be best. In 2022, 12 of 28 permit holders harvested a cow elk for a 43% success rate. All Special Permit holders for GMU 437 will be mailed a letter with tips regarding hunting on private land in Skagit Valley before the 2023 hunts.

General season harvest opportunities for any elk in GMU 407 (North Sound) in Skagit and Whatcom counties and bulls with a three-point minimum in GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) in Skagit (District 14) and Snohomish (District 13) counties exist on both private and state lands. However, elk densities in these two units are low, and hunting pressure may push elk into adjacent GMUs that remain closed to general harvest. In 2022, four cows and 16 bulls were reported harvested in GMU 407. No elk were reported harvested in GMU 448 during the 2022 season. Hunters seeking public land access opportunities for these general season elk hunts should visit the [WDFW Hunt Regulations Web map](#) for more information.

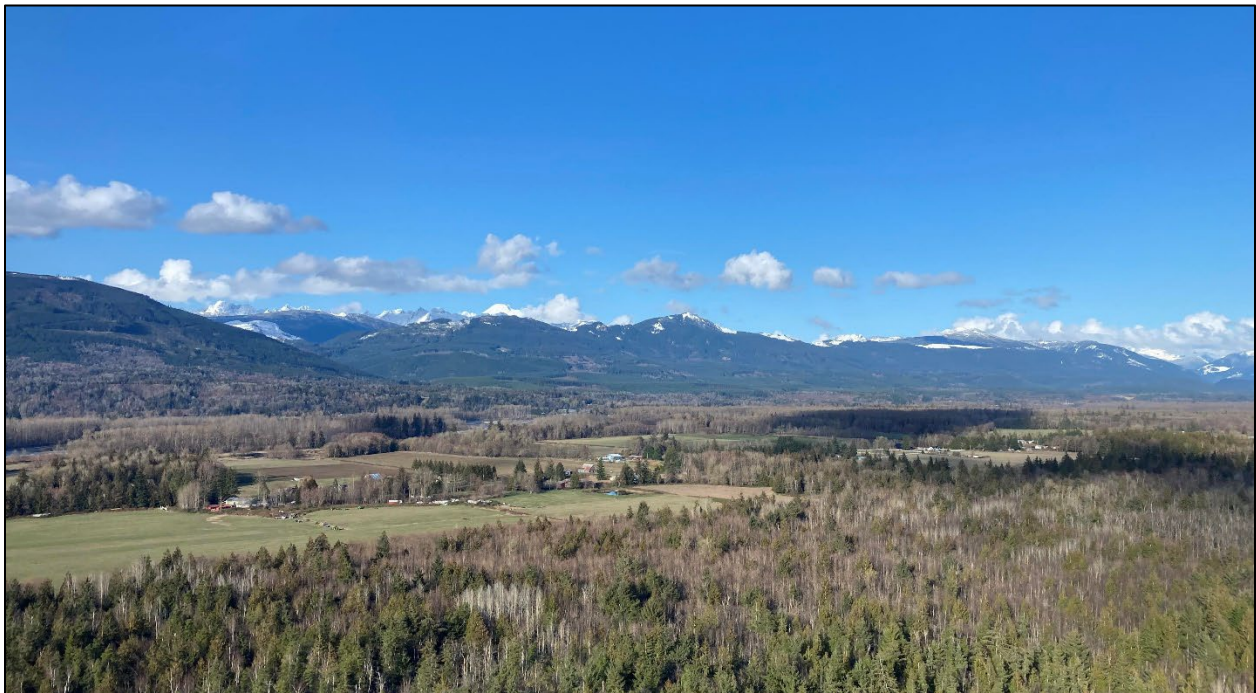


Figure 8. Skagit Valley from a helicopter during the 2023 spring North Cascades Elk Herd population survey
– Photo by Callie B Moore

GMU 407 tends to have greater numbers of elk than GMU 448, but access to private property may be vital to getting a real opportunity. Most elk in GMU 407 occur in and around Acme Valley, with a few elk found west of the South Fork Nooksack River or north of the community of Van Zandt along Highway 9. The public area most likely to yield success for hunters in GMU 407 is the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Van Zandt Dike property northeast of Acme that borders private property in Acme Valley to the east. Though hunting pressure can be high, hunters who scout, do their homework and hunt away from roads are likelier to harvest an animal. When hunting Van Zandt Dike, hunters should know the DNR property boundary and not trespass onto private property without permission or enter GMU 418.

Interested parties can find annual harvest reports and harvest statistics online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). Hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2023–2024 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington since 2008, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the North Cascades elk herd area. Several conditions can result in limping or hoof deformities. However, research conducted by WDFW and a panel of scientific advisors from 2009–2014 found that hoof abnormalities in this region were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria. This bacterium is known to cause a hoof disease in cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis.

Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington, where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis County. The disease is less prevalent in elk herds further away from the core affected area, like the North Cascades elk herd in District 14. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are apparent:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease is highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, including young or old or male or female elk.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to an elk's hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and hunters practice good hygiene during harvest, processing, and cooking, it is considered safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven ways to treat it in the field. Similar conditions in livestock have been successfully treated by cleaning and bandaging hooves and giving them foot baths, but this is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.



Figure 9. A biologist examines an elk hoof with elk hoof disease

How hunters can help:

WDFW has implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage westside (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing the prevalence of the disease over time. This program aims to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in Western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in Western Washington will be awarded with Sep. 1 – Dec. 31 season dates. Additionally, all participants will receive a waterproof license holder.

So, what can hunters do to help?

- **Harvest a limping elk** from any 400, 500, or 600 series GMUs
- **Turn in your elk hooves** along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in Western Washington. In District 14, the collection barrel will be located at the following location:
- **Report elk observations** of affected and unaffected elk on the Department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires** after hiking or driving off-road in a known affected area to help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas. Remove all mud from shoes and tires before leaving your hunting site.

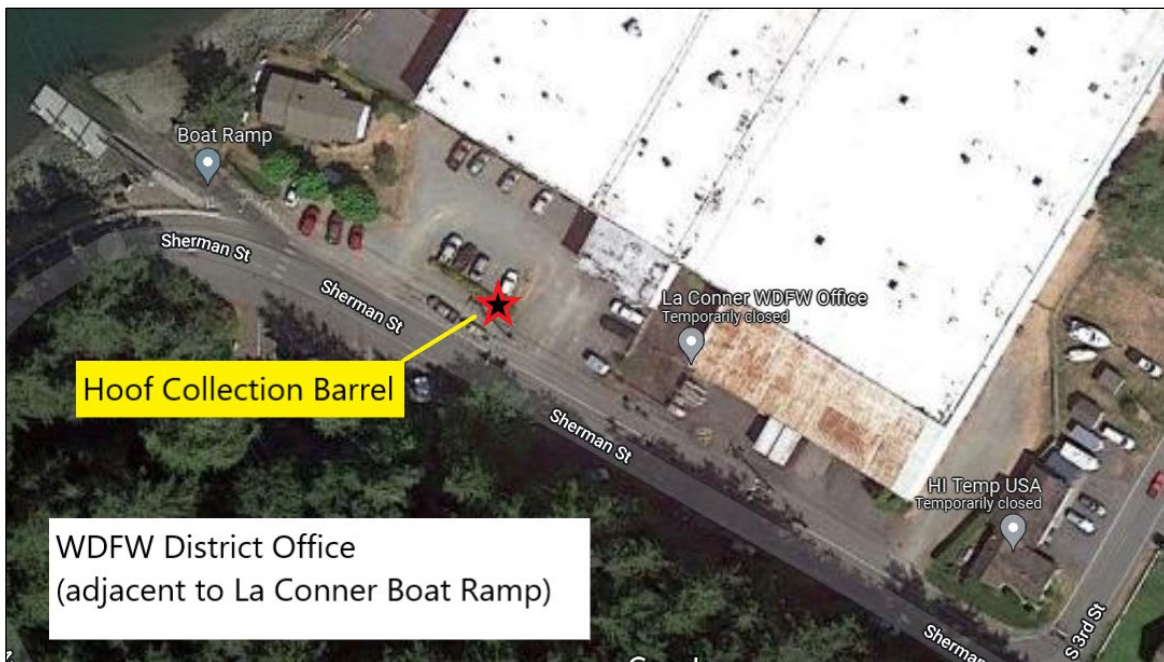


Figure 10. WDFW District Office at 111 Sherman St, La Conner, WA 98257

- WDFW works with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, Tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit the [WDFW elk hoof disease webpage](#). Additional details on TAHD and this incentive program can be found on pages 65 and 66 of the [Washington 2023 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet.

DEER

WDFW is not conducting black-tailed deer surveys currently in District 14, primarily due to the difficulty in accurately surveying deer in dense, Western Washington habitats. However, biologist observations and other anecdotal reports support the general notion that black-tailed deer population numbers and densities are down in GMUs 418 (Nooksack), 426 (Diablo), 437 (Sauk), and 450 (Cascade). In contrast, portions of GMU 407 (North Sound), the most urbanized GMU in the district, have high local deer densities that can cause damage to private properties.



Figure 11. A female black-tailed deer and her fawn feeding in a field in Skagit County – Photo by Brent Moran

Hunters reported 692 harvested deer during the 2022 general season in the primary GMUs within District 14 (GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437). This harvest number is similar to the 686 deer harvested during the 2021 season. From a hunting perspective, GMU 407 provides the best opportunity to harvest deer successfully in the district. In 2022, 482 deer (83 does and 399 bucks) were harvested in GMU 407 during the general season hunts. Regarding the number of deer harvested, the next best option for hunters is GMU 437, with 142 deer (16 does and 126 bucks) harvested during the 2022 general season. Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online at [Game Harvest Reports](#).

The drastic difference in harvest rates between GMU 407 and other GMUs within the district is related to the number of hunting days available, deer densities, and ease of access. GMU 407 provides hunting opportunities that the other GMUs do not, and hunters have learned to take advantage of it. Though some public land opportunities exist in GMU 407, the key to a successful harvest in this GMU is securing the appropriate permission to hunt on private land and scouting the area before the hunting season. Hunters who intend to hunt deer in developed areas should review page 90 of the [Washington 2023 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet and check with local jurisdictions regarding firearm restrictions.

Modern firearm hunters in District 14 may apply for a permit only quality buck hunt during the late season in GMUs 418, 426, and 437. These quality buck tags provide some of the best opportunities for success among deer hunters in the district and allow hunters a chance to hunt bucks during the rut. Permit hunter success rates during the 2022 season were 12% in GMU 418, 10% in GMU 426, and 20% in GMU 437 for hunters who participated. Sixty tags were issued, and hunters reported harvesting nine bucks for a 15% success rate overall.



Figure 12. A young black-tailed deer – Photo by Stephanie Pelham

WDFW negotiated access to Sierra Pacific properties for six of the 25 permit holders in GMU 418 during the 2022 season and likely will provide the same opportunity for 2023 hunters. Hunters who draw a quality buck tag for GMU 418 will be provided details by mail about how to be included in a lottery-style drawing for one of six available chances to win access to Sierra Pacific properties in the GMU.

For those seeking a more remote and rugged trophy black-tailed deer hunting experience, high elevation areas in the Mt. Baker Wilderness in GMU 418 and Glacier Peak Wilderness in GMU 450 are open for the High Buck Hunt from Sep. 15 – 25. These areas can be accessed by using U.S. Forest Service (USFS) roads and trail systems. Hunters should be prepared for thick and steep terrain and heavy concentrations of hikers and other recreationists during fair weather. Ample scouting is required to determine where deer are concentrated, as well as to avoid crowds. Smaller alpine basins and lightly forested ridges not accessed by main roads and trails can be productive. Visit the following link for more information on [road and trail conditions in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest](#). **Note that the Noisy-Diobsud Wilderness Area is NOT open to the High Buck Hunt.**

Within District 14, some hunting opportunities exist on private industrial timberlands and public property managed by Washington DNR and the USFS. However, some areas may be gated due to timber theft, dumping, vandalism, etc. Many of these gated areas can be accessed on foot or with mountain bikes, allowing those willing to do the work an opportunity to hunt deer that do not receive as much hunting pressure.

Deer hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2023–2024 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

ADENOVIRUS HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE

WDFW documented an Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) outbreak in black-tailed deer in several island GMUs within District 13 and Skagit County in District 14 in 2021. AHD is caused by a viral infection transmitted by direct contact between deer, through bodily fluids, or possibly airborne routes. This makes the virus more likely to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

The disease was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020 and then on Orcas and San Juan islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart Islands. On Whidbey Island, WDFW responded to and investigated the deaths of several deer that displayed symptoms consistent with AHD. The disease was confirmed in Anacortes in Skagit County in July 2021. District 13 and 14 biologists continue to actively monitor for the presence of this disease in any island and mainland deer populations. As of late August 2023, there have been no confirmed cases of AHD this year.

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people through contact with or by consuming the meat. However, disposable gloves are always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer in AHD-impacted areas. Hunters should note that AHD symptoms in deer include rapid or open-mouth breathing, foaming or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation. This disease is fast acting, so a deer that dies from this virus does so within three to five days of contracting it.

If you see a deer displaying any of these symptoms, please report the location of the sighting on the [WDFW Sick, Injured, or Dead Wildlife reporting page](#). Please visit the WDFW Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) webpage for more information on AHD.

BEAR

Black bears live in diverse forested habitats throughout the state, from coastal rainforests to the dry woodlands of the Cascades' eastern slopes. In general, black bears are strongly associated with forest cover, but they occasionally use relatively open country, such as clear-cuts and the fringes of other open habitats.



Figure 13. A black bear captured on a WDFW trail camera in Skagit County.

Black bears are common in District 14, though formal estimates of the population in this district were unavailable until recently. In 2021, WDFW biologists conducted a population monitoring effort in GMU 418 (Whatcom County) to obtain a more accurate population density estimate for this area. Using hair snare "corrals (Figure 14), biologists collected more than 1,300 hair samples from 92 individual bears (52 females and 40 males). They obtained an estimate of 28 bears/100 km² (i.e., 28 bears/39 mi²) in GMU 418. In addition, hunter harvest reports and age data obtained from premolar teeth submitted by successful hunters are used to determine age and sex ratios and infer population size and trends. This information helps WDFW set bear harvest guidelines.

Hunters harvested 168 bears during the fall 2022 hunt in GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437. This is an increase from the 123 bears harvested during the 2021 season. Hunters experienced a 14% overall success rate in the four GMUs, and more than 50% of the harvest occurred in GMU 418.

District 14 hunters that choose to hunt in GMUs 418 and 426 will be hunting in a grizzly bear recovery area identified by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC). This federal/state working group includes WDFW.

Before hunting, bear hunters must pass the annual WDFW [online bear identification exam](#) with a score of 80% or higher. Proof of successful exam completion or an equivalent test from another state must always be on your person when afield.

Opportunities for harvesting a black bear in District 14 have more to do with access and berry production than does the previous year's harvest. Road access behind gates is available by walking or mountain bike, with abundant younger age class clear cuts that attract bears. Hunters willing to pursue bears during the early season at higher elevations can hunt in classic alpine environments where bears forage on abundant huckleberries, increasing the potential for spot and stalk opportunities.



Figure 14. One of the hair snare corrals used during the 2021 bear density estimation study in GMU 418.

The WDFW Private Lands Access Program has partnered with Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) to facilitate vehicle access to a section of SPI lands on a reservation basis during August 2023 for bear hunting. This limited-entry section is nearly 15,000 acres and stretches from Highway 542 to the U.S. – Canada border. To reserve your spot, visit the WDFW [Hunt by Reservation](#) webpage and search for Black Mountain. Hunters must make a reservation for each date they hunt the property and for each party member. Fifty (50) reservation permits are available daily. The continuation of this opportunity depends on each hunter's understanding and following all access rules.



Figure 15. A black bear walks down a Forest Service road in the spring – Photo by Douglas Boze

All successful fall black bear hunters statewide MUST submit a black bear premolar tooth per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department within five (5) days of harvest or by Dec. 1, 2023. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw. Tooth envelopes are available at all WDFW offices.

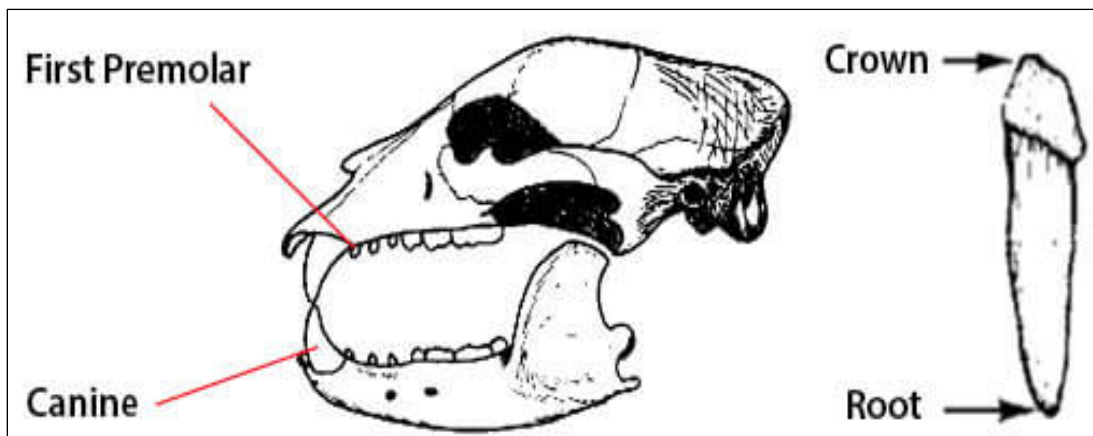


Figure 16. Location of a black bear's first premolar for required tooth submission to WDFW

Bear hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2023–2024 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

COUGAR

Cougar hunting opportunities in District 14 are opportunistic, with most cougars harvested by hunters that happen upon them while pursuing other game animals. The primary prey for cougars in the district is black-tailed deer, so hunters who spend time in areas with more deer will increase their chances of seeing and harvesting a cougar.

A hunter who wishes to harvest a cougar must possess a valid big game license, including the cougar species option, before harvesting a cat. The use of dogs to recreationally pursue and harvest cougars is illegal statewide. Hunters may harvest cougars during the early (Sep. 1 – Dec. 31) and late (Jan. 1 – April 30) season.

Hunters should note that most GMUs in District 14, except for GMU 407, are restricted by a cougar harvest guideline. GMUs 418, 426, and 437 have a harvest restriction of 10–13 animals, while a total harvest of 8-11 animals is permitted in GMUs 448 and 450. In these restricted cougar harvest GMUs, WDFW can close the late hunting season after Jan. 1, 2024, if they meet or exceed management threshold guidelines. During the late season, cougar hunters may hunt from Jan. 1 until the hunt area harvest guideline has been met or until the end of the season on April 30, whichever occurs first. The hunter is responsible for verifying if the cougar late hunting season is open or closed by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline (1-866-364-4868) or visiting the WDFW webpage for [Cougar Hunting Area Openings and Closures](#). The hotline and webpage will be updated weekly beginning Jan. 1, 2024. During the 2022–23 season, the cougar harvest did not exceed management threshold guidelines in any District 14 GMU, and it remained open until the mandatory closure date.

Hunters should remember that a 2023 hunting license is valid from April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024. Thus, a hunter wishing to harvest a cougar in April 2024 must purchase a 2024–2025 hunting license/cougar tag (WAC 220-415-100). Additionally, all successful cougar hunters must report cougar harvest to the WDFW hotline (1-866-364-4868) within 72 hours of harvest and contact a WDFW office to arrange to have the pelt sealed within five (5) days of the notification of kill. Hunters must also report their harvest in the [WDFW Wild System](#).

Cougar hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2023–2024 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more.

MOUNTAIN GOAT

The Mount Baker area has one of the largest concentrations of mountain goats in Washington. Mountain goat hunting in this state is a once-in-a-lifetime harvest opportunity and a limited-entry tag only a few lucky individuals draw in any year.

Drawing a goat tag is a commitment to spend a fair amount of time in rugged, high-elevation terrain that can be as treacherous as it is awe-inspiring. To increase the success and enjoyment of the hunt, hunters should anticipate spending time researching online and scouting the unit in person before the season opener. This hunt is physically and mentally challenging, so prospective hunters are encouraged to determine if they are up to the challenge before applying for a permit.

In 2023, six special permits were issued for the three mountain goat hunt areas in District 14: Chowder Ridge, Lincoln Peak, and Avalanche Gorge. A single tag holder will have exclusive access to the Chowder Ridge hunt area north of Mount Baker. The remaining five permit holders (two in Lincoln Peak and three in the Avalanche Gorge hunt units) may share these units with the winners of the statewide auction and raffle permits. Permit holders can legally harvest a female mountain goat (nanny), however WDFW and most state wildlife agencies **strongly** encourage hunters avoid it. This is because the species is slow to reach sexual maturity (three years) and has a slow production rate (does not bear young every year). This leads to the population's health relying heavily on the number of mature females in a population because they have a better chance of producing young that will survive. Thus, mountain goat populations are very sensitive to the harvest of nannies. Mountain goat hunt applicants drawn for a permit can only purchase their license after completing the WDFW online mountain goat gender identification training., hunters who draw a permit must review provided educational material and make all efforts to harvest a male (billy).

Harvest success rates for the three Mt. Baker hunt areas are generally 50% or greater in any year, and has produced some mature goats of exceptional quality. During the 2022 season, hunters harvested one female in Chowder Ridge and one male in Lincoln Peak for an overall success rate of 33%.



Figure 17. Hunter with his Mt. Baker goat – Photo by Clint Easley/Shane Vander Giessen



Figure 18. Two mountain goats in the North Cascades - Photo by Greg Green

A hunter who kills a mountain goat in Washington must present the head with horns attached for inspection within ten days of harvest to a WDFW Regional or District office or a location designated by a WDFW representative. Call a WDFW Regional or District office to schedule an appointment with a biologist for inspection. After inspection, hunters may keep the head/horns of a lawfully harvested mountain goat in Washington for personal use.

Heavy precipitation since November 2021 has caused washouts and other travel issues on some U.S. Forest Service (USFS) roads and trails in District 14. Hunters are encouraged to reference the following interactive map from USFS to get the status of roads and trails within each goat hunt unit before your hunt begins: [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions.](#)

UPLAND BIRDS

Upland bird opportunities available to hunters within District 14 include WDFW-released ring-neck pheasant on designated release sites, sooty grouse, ruffed grouse, California quail, band-tailed pigeons, mourning doves, and an ever-growing population of Eurasian collared-doves. Although some of these species are quite similar, each offers a unique opportunity to hunters throughout the state. For more general information on upland bird hunting in Washington, follow these links for a summary of [upland bird seasons](#), find ideas for [where to go upland bird hunting](#), and find information on [the basics of upland bird hunting in Washington](#).

PHEASANT

The [pheasant release program](#) in Western Washington provides upland bird hunting opportunities in areas that cannot sustain naturally reproducing populations due to our cool, wet climate and lack of grain farming. This program encourages participation from new, young, and seasoned hunters. Approximately 35,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released yearly at 27 sites throughout Western Washington. Pheasant releases will occur at three sites in District 14 this fall.

Whatcom County has two pheasant release sites, one at the WDFW Lake Terrell Wildlife Area and the other at the adjacent Alcoa Intalco Works. Volunteer members perform releases on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday of each week during the season, with approximately 300 birds released each week between the two sites.

The third site in District 14 is in Skagit County at the Samish Unit. Releases will occur once before the youth hunt and the other before the senior hunt. No further releases will occur after this. However, hunters may pursue the remaining on-site pheasants until the opening of the statewide waterfowl season (Oct. 14; see page 20 of the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet). This site is closed after this date to minimize conflicts between pheasant and waterfowl hunters since the unit is managed and used primarily for waterfowl hunting.

To hunt at these sites in District 14 or other pheasant release sites in Western Washington, hunters must purchase a Western Washington pheasant license, but a small game license is not required to participate.

Additional requirements to hunt pheasants and other upland birds include:

- Must wear a minimum of 400 square inches of hunter orange or fluorescent hunter pink clothing
- Use and carry only non-toxic shot for all upland bird hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide

Please refer to the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet and [WDFW's Pheasant Hunting webpage](#) for more detailed information.

FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (blue) grouse are found on public and private forest lands throughout District 14. Ruffed grouse are the most widespread grouse species in the district and statewide. They are most abundant in lowland secondary succession coniferous and deciduous forests under 2,000 feet of elevation. Therefore, hunters after sooty grouse should seek higher elevation sites along trails and ridgelines above 2,000–3,000 feet within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. Also, areas with berry-bearing plants like huckleberry and grouse whortleberry should be sought when hunting this species. To find more information, check out the [hunting forest grouse](#) page.

During the 2021-2023 season setting rulemaking process, the WDFW Commission adopted a decision to delay the forest grouse season two weeks from the original opening date of Sep. 1 to the new season dates of **Sep. 15 – Jan. 15**. The rule was recommended by WDFW biologists based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. Setting the season back to Sep. 15 helps protect brood hens that are more vulnerable to harvest during early September. More information is [available in this 2021 blog post](#).



Figure 19. A male ruffed grouse along a road – Photo by Michael Schroeder

During the 2021 hunting season, hunters reported successfully harvesting 1,795 grouse in Skagit County and 1,027 in Whatcom County. The reported harvest decreased by 18% in Skagit County compared to the five-year long-term average, probably due to a 14% decrease in reported hunter participation and the later season start date. However, in Whatcom County, the reported harvest increased by 8% based on the same long-term average, despite a slight decrease (1%) in reported hunter participation. For the 2023 season, hunters should expect reliable hunting conditions when effort and time are put forth.

WDFW Forest Grouse Wing & Tail Collection

Biologists collect wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse throughout the season using designated collection sites. This collection effort contributes to a long-term statewide dataset that allows for a better evaluation of population trends and age-ratio data necessary for the local management of forest grouse species. Grouse hunters in District 14 can help with this effort by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse they harvest into one of our collection barrels located statewide ([WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection sites](#)). In District 14, collection sites are at the following locations:

- Whatcom County - SE corner of the Welcome Grocery Store building (5565 Mt Baker Hwy, Deming, WA)
- Skagit County – Cascade Mercantile (31387 SR 20, Lyman, WA)

Please be sure to use the provided bags at the site and to fill out all necessary information. If these locations are inconvenient for hunters, we suggest looking through the statewide wing barrel site list on our website's [Forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) webpage or calling your local, [regional office](#) for information.

DOVE: MOURNING & EURASIAN COLLARED

To hunt mourning doves, hunters must possess a small game license and a state migratory bird permit. The season runs from Sep. 1 – Oct. 30, with a daily bag limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45. Dove harvest in District 14 is low, with a little more than 400 birds harvested in Skagit County and a little more than 100 birds harvested in Whatcom County during the 2021 season. To maximize success, we recommend that hunters take the time to scout cut grain fields that will attract doves.

While hunting mourning doves, hunters can harvest an infinite number of Eurasian collared-doves because they are a non-native species. Hunters can also pursue this species year-round because of its non-native status. In contrast to mourning doves, this species tends to occupy more developed areas. Therefore, we recommend that hunters take the time to properly scout and acquire landowner permission in lowland agricultural areas with barnyard settings.



Figure 20. Comparison between a mourning and Eurasian collared dove

Hunters should take the time to learn how to correctly identify Eurasian collared doves from mourning doves on the ground and in flight, as they can often be challenging to identify on the wing by inexperienced birders/hunters. Eurasian collared doves are much larger than mourning doves, but size can be difficult to gauge when only one species is present. Aside from the diagnostic black collar on the backs of their necks and overall lighter color, they also have a squared tail, while mourning doves have a pointed tail. Identification is especially crucial when hunting Eurasian collared doves outside the mourning dove season to prevent the accidental take of a species out of season.

Hunting Eurasian collared doves requires only a small or big game license. As for all hunting activities, hunters should confirm that the area they plan to pursue has no firearm restrictions and be mindful of people, buildings, farm equipment, or power lines while hunting.

BAND-TAILED PIGEON

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest of Washington's pigeons and doves and are native to the state. Harvest trends for this species have been declining for some time. The decline is likely linked to decreases in hunter interest and participation. Hunting this species requires more tact than hunting other species in the pigeon/dove family. Finding areas that birds pass over, the sites they use for grit, and any mineral springs can increase success. They have a fruit and seed diet and are fond of elderberries, cherries, and other fruiting trees. Finding where they feed and pass, shooting as they enter and leave a site is a commonly used tactic.

Another solid hunting strategy is to target managed forest lands with mixed stand age classes that provide feeding areas with adjacent roosting areas. Additionally, band-tails are more challenging to bring down than mourning and Eurasian collared doves, so staying hidden and reducing your movement when hunting is essential to getting them in range and getting a good shot.



Figure 21. Adult band-tailed pigeon in a bird bath – Photo by Creative Commons

District biologists perform mineral site surveys annually in mid-July at historic mineral sites throughout the state. In District 14, two sites are actively monitored, one in Whatcom and the other in Skagit. Biologists use these surveys to monitor changes in the local breeding population, allowing them to anticipate trends in the regional population. However, the open season (Sep. 17–25) usually corresponds with fall migration, when northern birds move into this area. Making predictions about the quality of the hunting season for this species is difficult without an analysis of flyway-wide survey results, which takes time and isn't released before the hunting season.

A small game license, state migratory bird permit, and migratory bird authorization card with band-tailed pigeon harvest report card are required. The daily limit is two (2) birds with a six (6) bird possession limit. The mandatory harvest reporting deadline for this species is Sep. 30, 2023.

WATERFOWL

IMPORTANT REGULATIONS IN THE 2023–24 SEASON

- **Harlequin Duck remains CLOSED** to harvest statewide.
- **Electronic calls are allowed** during white-goose only season segments in GMA 1 (Feb. 10-20, 2024)

SPECIAL HUNTING DATES

YOUTH HUNT - Open species include Canada geese, white-fronted geese, ducks (including scaup), and coots. white geese, brant, and snipe are not open during this hunt. Youth hunts will be held in Western Washington on Sep. 24, 2023. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt. Please refer to page 26 of the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet. The youth hunt is open to hunters under 16 years of age (must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old who is not hunting).

COMBINED YOUTH, VETERANS & ACTIVE MILITARY HUNT - Open species include Canada geese, white-fronted geese, white geese, brant, ducks (including scaup), and coots. These hunts will be held statewide on Feb. 3, 2024. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt. Veterans and Active Military are individuals who have served in the active military, naval, or air service and those discharged or released under Honorable conditions. The active-duty military also includes National Guard and Reserves members on active duty (other than for training). During the hunt, these hunters must have one of the following on their person (a copy is sufficient): DD214, Veteran Benefit Card, Retired Active Military I.D., or Active-Duty I.D. card. Please refer to pages 21 and 27 of the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for bag limit details for this hunt.

DABBLING DUCKS

The Washington Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey is conducted yearly and is an index of breeding abundance since all areas of the state cannot be sampled. This year's survey was conducted April 24 – April 27 in Western Washington. The district falls within the North Puget Lowlands survey area.

Statewide spring precipitation values in 2023 were generally drier than average but were not as dry as last year. A third of the North Puget Lowlands were classified as being abnormally dry. April brought enough rainfall to form widespread areas of standing water during the survey period but may have occurred too late to increase nesting success. The statewide population estimate of all ducks was 7% less than the 2022 survey but 4% higher than the long-term average. The 2023 Western Washington estimate of 97,823 was the highest since the survey began in 2010. Numbers were 14% higher than in 2022 and +53% higher than the long-term average. This was the first year that Western Washington had a higher mallard estimate than Eastern Washington. One factor contributing to the high mallard estimate in Western Washington was the high number of grouped mallards. In 2023, grouped mallards comprised 27% of the statewide BPI compared to 8% in 2022, a more typical year.

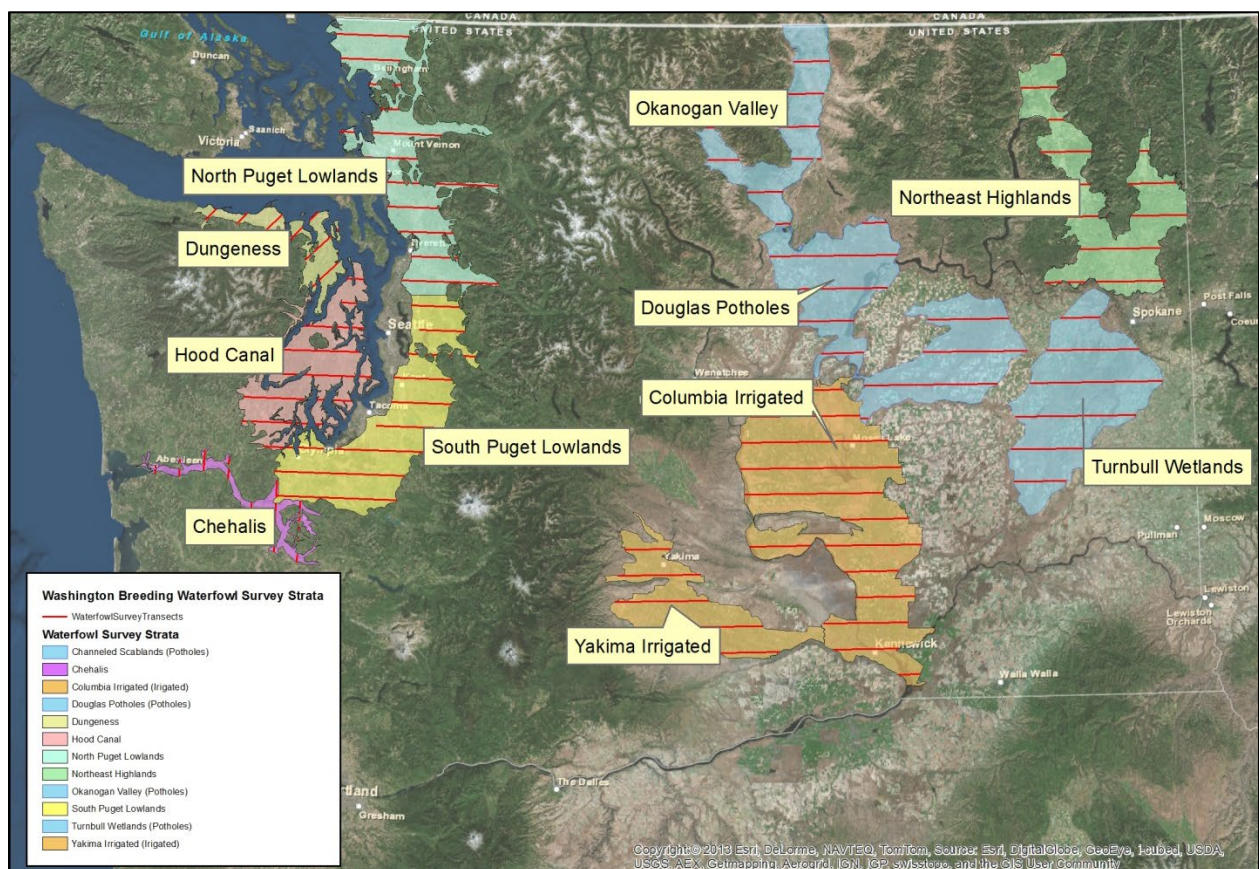


Figure 22. Washington State breeding waterfowl strata and long-term Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey transects.

Based on 10-year average data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's annual [National Migratory Bird Harvest Survey](#), Skagit County boasts the second-best harvest in the state and 36th out of the 3,115 surveyed U.S. counties. During the same time, Whatcom County ranked a respectable 7th in the state and 137th nationwide for duck harvest. During last season, Skagit County remained the state's second-best duck harvest county (following Grant County), with a harvest of 49,770, which is ~9% higher than the five-year average but 1% lower than last year. Determining the factors that influenced this slight decline in harvest is difficult. However, extremely wet conditions in most of November and the continual resumption of more regular life schedules after the Covid-19 pandemic are thought to have played a role. The Whatcom County harvest was 24,409, up 7% from the five-year average, but was 12% lower than the previous season.

Hunters have several resources to help them get started if they want to hunt waterfowl in District 14. If you are new to hunting waterfowl, please visit the WDFW webpage [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) for an excellent introduction. Hunters are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program](#) webpage and [Hunt Planner Web map](#). The web map is a tool that provides information on Washington's hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

Another resource for those planning to hunt the popular Skagit Wildlife Area and its many units productive for waterfowl hunting is the [WDFW Skagit Wildlife Area Hunting Guide](#).

The national waterfowl breeding population survey was resumed in the spring of 2022 after a two-year hiatus because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year was one of the latest springs across most of North America and had abundant precipitation. This resulted in optimal to excellent duck breeding conditions in the west and mid-continent flyways, producing the waterfowl that winter in Washington. This should result in average to above-average recruitment, increasing hunter success during the upcoming season.

Early-season hunting opportunities in District 14 are generally more successful in saltwater marshes. On opening day, hunters can expect a mixed bag of species, including the less common blue-winged teal and wood duck, since they do not leave for their southern wintering grounds until later in the season. Then, large numbers of northern breeding ducks start to arrive in late October and November when colder weather pushes them south.

The bag limit for northern pintail is a one-bird daily limit. This change was made for the 2020-21 season because population estimates fell below federal management thresholds and have yet to rebound. Although this district supports a large northern pintail population, this is not typical in many other areas of the country and therefore does not accurately reflect the species' population status across North America.

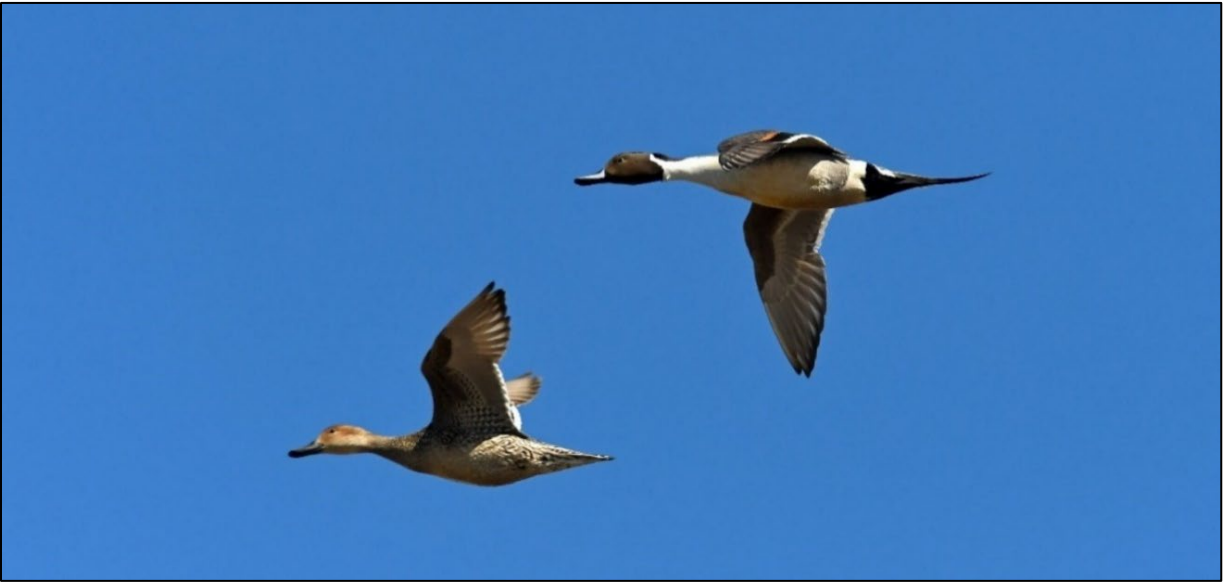


Figure 23. A northern pintail pair midflight on a clear day at the Island Unit – Photo by Alan Bauer

This year's general season will run from Oct. 14–22 and Oct. 25, 2023–Jan. 23, 2024, except for scaup, which is open from Nov. 4 – Jan. 28, 2023. Bag limits are restricted to seven (7) ducks. The species-specific daily bag restrictions mean a hunter cannot harvest more than two (2) hen mallard, one (1) pintail, two (2) scaup (when open), two (2) canvasback, and two (2) redhead statewide. For sea ducks in District 14, bag limits should not include more than two (2) scoters, two (2) long-tailed ducks, and two (2) goldeneyes. For more details, refer to page 19 in the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet. Please acquire all the appropriate authorizations and harvest record cards for the species/areas you are pursuing. Refer to the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information. In addition, authorizations and harvest record cards are available at WDFW license dealers or online using [WDFW's Wild System](#). Hunters are responsible for selecting each harvest record card for the species they intend to hunt.

Mandatory Bird Authorizations & Harvest Record Cards

MANDATORY HARVEST REPORTING DEADLINES:

Band-tailed Pigeon
September 30, 2023
Sea Duck, SW Canada Goose,
Snow Goose (GMA1), Brant
March 20, 2024

To improve management of certain limited migratory bird species, you are required to possess a Migratory Bird Authorization and Harvest Record Card(s) if you are hunting those species (see page 11).

Immediately after taking a band-tailed pigeon, brant, sea duck (scoters, long-tailed duck, goldeneyes) in western Washington, snow goose (Goose Management Area 1) or any goose in Goose Management Area 2 — Coast & Inland into possession, you must fill out the required harvest record card information in ink within the designated spaces provided.

You must report hunting activity on your harvest record cards to WDFW using the online reporting system at: <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login>, or by mailing the cards to:

WDFW, Wildlife Program — Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141 Olympia, WA 98504.

Reports need to be postmarked by the reporting deadlines even if you did not harvest any birds. Please note that you must comply with these reporting requirements or you will be required to pay a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card the next year.

Figure 24. Mandatory harvest reporting for sea ducks

SEA DUCKS

When pursuing intertidal and saltwater areas for sea ducks and diving ducks in Skagit County, hunters can use public boat ramps in Conway, the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit on Freshwater Slough, or under the twin bridges that cross over the Swinomish Channel on Highway 20. In Whatcom County, public boat ramps are available at most harbors, including Blaine, Squalicum, and Fairhaven. Birch Bay State Park is another popular access point for sea ducks and brant hunting. Boat access can significantly improve hunting options and success, but caution and preparation for a successful, enjoyable, and safe hunt are imperative.

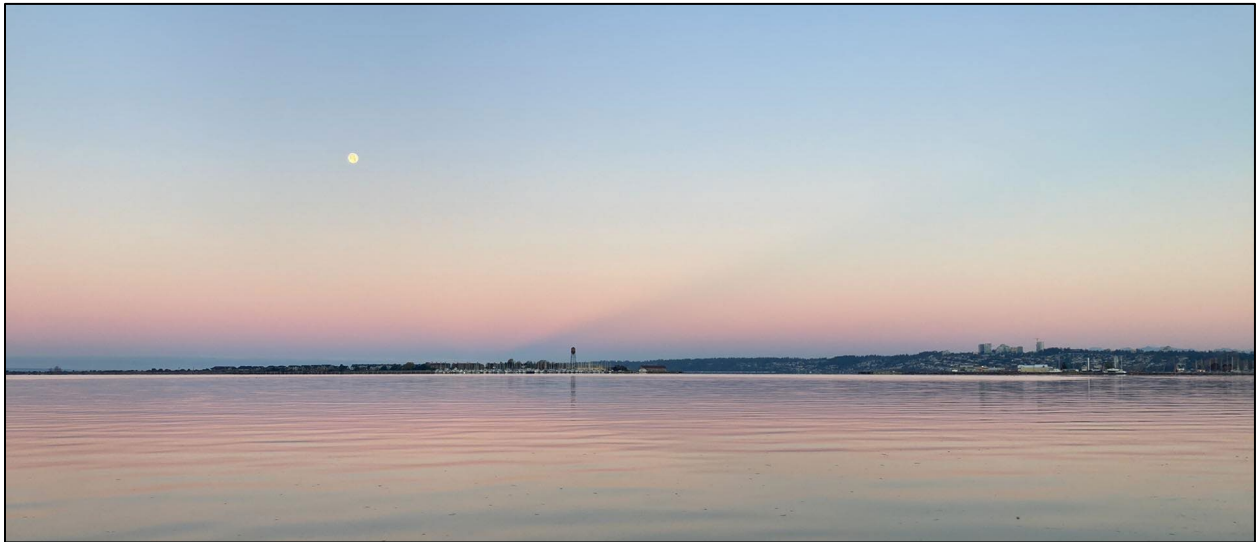


Figure 25. Bellingham Bay at sunrise in November 2022 during scoter capture project – Photo by Callie Moore

PACIFIC BRANT

Skagit County has a historic and well-known tradition of Pacific brant (including black brant) hunting. Brant wintering in Padilla and Samish bays mainly belong to the sub-species referred to as western high arctic brant, also known as grey-bellies. This sub-species nests in a small area in the western Canadian high arctic and is vulnerable to excessive harvest because of their limited nesting and wintering grounds. Historically, open season dates have been determined by aerial surveys to prevent overharvest. The survey is flown to determine a wintering population estimate and is then compared to current management thresholds established by the agency. In previous years, the estimate dictated whether there was a six-day season (if surveyors counted more than 6,000 birds), a three-day season (between 3,000 – 6,000 birds), or no season at all (under 3,000 birds).

In 2019, the agency established a guaranteed two-day season for Skagit County to make it more predictable for hunters. In the 2020 season, this strategy was used again, but the dates were split to optimize the potential for favorable weather. This brant season setting structure was used until this season, when the status of the season will, again, be determined by the winter survey results. This change was made because the 3-year population average for this survey is below the 3,000 bird management threshold. The survey is flown in late December-early January to provide biologists with the data necessary to determine if any harvest would be sustainable for the population. Survey results and possible season dates will be provided via a WDFW news [release](#). Hunters can subscribe to the [WDFW email list](#) to receive news releases and other Department information.

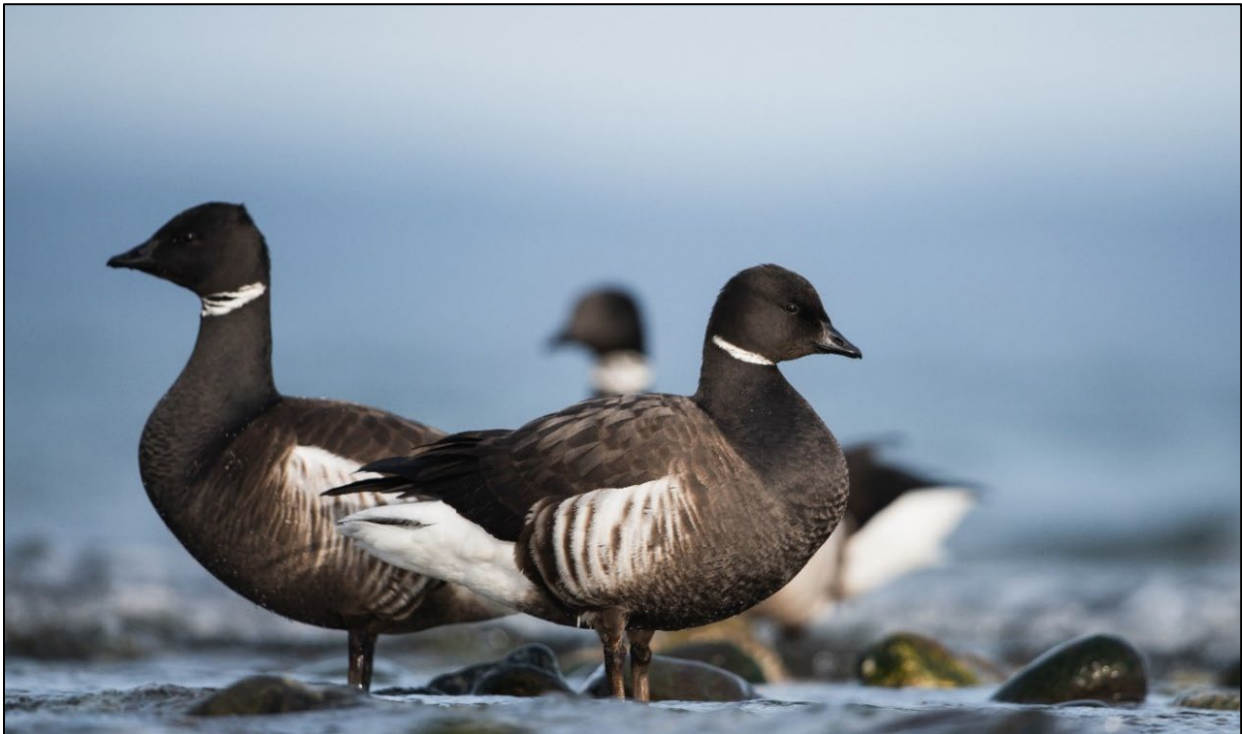


Figure 26. Brant loafing on a gravel bar in Puget Sound – Photo by Ryan Askren

In Whatcom County, the population is primarily made up of black brant, a more abundant and less vulnerable population to overharvest than grey-bellies. Clallam County exhibits similar subspecies patterns; thus, the two counties have been grouped for brant management. The guaranteed season dates for these two counties are Jan. 20, 24, and 27.

Like last year, only Whatcom County will be opened for brant hunting on the special Youth, Veterans, and Active Military hunt day on Feb. 3, 2024. Whether Skagit County is open for brant harvest on this day will be determined by aerial survey results, like the regular brant season. A special migratory bird authorization card is required to hunt brant during the general and special seasons. Lastly, the mandatory harvest reporting deadline for brant is March 20, 2024. Data obtained from these reports are essential for managing this species.

Location and strategy are vital for successful brant hunting. These birds will congregate in feedings areas where eelgrass is exposed at low tide, often near estuaries, spits, and mudflats, then head to open water nearby to "loaf" during high tide or after being pressured. Depending on the location, successful hunters use layout blinds, small boats, kayaks, and various decoy configurations, including long lines, to intercept these iconic geese during their daily routine.

CANADA GEESE

Skagit County consistently boasts the second-highest overall Canada goose harvest in Washington after Grant County. Skagit County goose harvest was 34% more than Grant County. Last season, hunters reported harvesting 1022 birds during the early goose season and 6161 during the regular season, making up almost 5% of the statewide harvest. While Whatcom County ranks 6th with 540 during the early season and 2920 during the regular season. Cumulatively, the district accounts for around 7% of the statewide Canada goose harvest.

This year, the early Canada goose season will occur Sep. 2–7, 2023, and offers early season hunting opportunities for hunters in Goose Management Area 1, which covers both Skagit and Whatcom. Please refer to page 26 of the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more detailed information about Goose Management Areas. During this early season, bag limits are set at five (5) birds per day, with a possession limit of 15. Higher limits are in place because early seasons target and decrease the population of resident birds, while later seasons see an influx of migrating geese.

This season's Western Washington Youth hunting date is Sep. 23, 2023. Hunters under 16 can harvest Canada geese or white-fronted geese during this hunt, with a bag limit of four (4) for Canada geese and ten (10) for white-fronted geese. The regular open season occurs from Oct. 14–Nov. 26 and Dec. 9–Jan. 28. Possession bag limits are four (4) per day, with a possession limit of 12. The **mandatory** harvest reporting deadline for Canada geese harvested in Washington is March 20, 2024.

LESSER SNOW GEESE

Snow goose hunting is another mainstay of waterfowl hunting in District 14. It provides a very different alternative to hunting dabbling ducks. Whatcom County was added to Goose Management Area (GMA) 1 during the 2020-21 season. This change was made because the population is healthy and stable, which is evaluated using data collected on the breeding grounds and during winter aerial surveys of the Skagit-Fraser River Delta. These regulations will continue for the 2023-24 season. so hunters in Skagit and Whatcom have a liberal bag limit of 10 white geese per day and a 30-bird possession limit.

The winter Skagit-Fraser River Delta snow goose aerial population survey was flown at the end of February 2023. The count was approximately 30,000 lower than in 2022. This was greatly affected by a widespread avian influenza outbreak that started in November 2022. The outbreak caused substantial mortality, and based on mortality clean-up efforts, juvenile birds seemed to be especially vulnerable. If the productivity on Wrangel Island, Russia, is good, hunters can expect the population to be similar to or slightly less than the population that arrived in the fall of 2022. Should conditions on the breeding grounds result in poor productivity, a slight to medium population decrease is expected.

Hunters interested in harvesting snow geese should seek access to multiple properties before the season. The early season is the best time to lure geese, particularly juveniles, with decoys. In this area, flocks stay within a several-mile home range but do not necessarily return to the same field they were feeding in the previous day. Due to their large numbers and aggressive feeding, the species exhaust a food source quickly. Hunting in corn stubble is a widespread technique at the beginning of the hunting season. As the season progresses, snow goose diets diversify, and geese begin to feed in a variety of crop fields, including winter wheat, hay or silage, and potatoes. Snow geese are most abundant on public and private land on Fir Island in District 14. However, geese do spend time in areas on either side of Interstate 5, north of Burlington and in the Edison area. Snow geese routinely rest on saltwater bays throughout District 14. Flocks fly low enough during severe weather, opening up opportunities for pass shooting on various public and private lands and waters. For ethical reasons, hunters should avoid wounding or failing to retrieve waterfowl.



Figure 27. A flock of snow geese erupting from a field in Skagit Valley – Photo by Callie Moore

No changes have been made to this year's season structure for white geese (lesser snow, Ross', and blue geese) in GMA 1, which covers the entire district. The 2023–24 season will continue to include a late hunting season for white goose only from Feb. 10–20, 2024. One closure will be observed during the season from Nov. 27 – Dec. 8 to allow for the February hunt. Electronic calls will **ONLY** be permitted during the white-geese-only season in GMA 1 from Feb. 10-20. Electronic calls are not permitted during any other open goose season.

Hunters will need a federal migratory bird stamp (if over 16 years of age), a small game license, a state migratory bird permit, and a special migratory bird authorization with GMA 1 snow goose harvest record card. You must [report hunting activity](#) on your harvest record cards to WDFW using the online reporting system or by mailing the cards to WDFW, Wildlife Program — Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141 Olympia, WA 98504. The deadline for submission is March 20, 2024.

Submission of harvest record cards is mandatory for hunters that request them, **even if you did not harvest birds**. These reports must be postmarked by the reporting deadline to avoid penalties. You must comply with these reporting requirements to avoid a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card next season. The deadline is strictly enforced because WDFW must collate the data, develop preliminary reports, and provide the information to department biologists across the state to set permit levels for the coming hunting season.



Figure 28. A flock of snow geese using a Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program site – Photo by Rob Wingard

Hunters should note that many WDFW-managed lands and National Wildlife Refuges are closed to goose hunting during this late-season opportunity (refer to page 26 in the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet). All standard regulations regarding plugged shotguns, non-motorized decoys, and bag limits apply during both seasons. The bag limit for the late white geese season is 20 birds, with a possession limit of 60.

Whatcom and Skagit counties hold certain waterfowl species that could be confused with snow geese. Several thousand trumpeters and tundra swans reside throughout western parts of District 14 from mid-fall through spring. Waterfowl hunters must be able to distinguish between mature or juvenile swans and their snow goose counterparts, which can be a challenge for inexperienced hunters. With proper species identification and patience, there should be little confusion between the species. Hunters should review waterfowl identification materials to sharpen their skills before the season begins. Under state and federal laws, harming swans in Washington State is illegal. Emperor geese have been documented infrequently in District 14. They, too, are closed to harvest in the lower 48 states under federal migratory bird regulations.



Figure 29. Differentiating swans from snow geese

HUNTER ACCESS

Access to private lands for big game hunting opportunities remains limited. Because of experience with theft, vandalism, dumping, and other problems, private industrial timber companies generally do not allow vehicular access. Many timber companies limit public access to walk-in opportunities only, while some do not allow access. Less hunting pressure on these walk-in-only sites results in good hunting opportunities for those willing to use bicycles or hike behind locked gates when private companies allow this type of access.

One exception is Sierra Pacific Industries, which owns significant private industrial timberlands in Skagit and Whatcom counties. For the 2023–24 season, WDFW has facilitated access on Sierra Pacific properties in GMU 418 for special permit bull elk, some quality black-tailed buck permit holders, and fall general season bear hunters at a designated site near Black Mountain (under the Hunt by Reservation system).

Weyerhaeuser-Columbia Timberlands Corporation (Weyerhaeuser) sold properties throughout northwest Washington to Hampton Lumber. You can purchase a permit for motorized and non-motorized access to their forests in the North Cascades by following the links on the [Hampton Lumber](#) website.

Because much of the land in District 14 is private property, hunters should obtain permission to hunt from landowners. For safety, hunters must always be mindful of where houses, livestock, and outbuildings are situated. Portions of District 14 GMUs are under firearm restrictions. Hunters should research land ownership and understand local firearm limitations before hunting.

The Private Lands Access Program has negotiated access for hunters on dozens of private properties throughout Whatcom and Skagit counties. For the 2023-24 season, WDFW staff members have enrolled several deer and elk general season hunting sites in GMU 407 and continue to pursue more access opportunities. The Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program has over 60 sites on private lands for the upcoming waterfowl season (30 in Skagit County and 29 in Whatcom). These sites offer open field or blind-only hunting, primarily targeting dabbling ducks. While most of these sites are Register to Hunt (note that sites are first-come, first-served), several are enrolled in the Hunt by Reservation system. Register to Hunt sites are very similar to Feel Free to Hunt sites (first-come, first-served), but you must complete a registration card when you use a site. Properties Enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program become available for public hunting once the agricultural practices are finished for the year. Because of this, many sites will not be open for the opening day of the waterfowl season. Our lands access program is constantly working to create more public access, so more sites may be added to the program before the season starts. Information on hunting access and these new sites will be available online via the [WDFW Hunting Access webpage](#).



Figure 30. Duck party of mallards, wigeon, and Northern pintail – Photo by Brad Otto

The Hunt by Reservation program offers a quality hunting experience by limiting the number of days a site is hunted while guaranteeing the site will be available to whoever books the reservation. To reserve a Hunt by Reservation site, visit the [WDFW Hunting Access Webpage](#), create an account, choose a hunting site in the Hunt by Reservation category, and book your reservation. Reservations can begin at 8 a.m., two weeks before the hunt day. A fast internet connection improves your chances of securing a reservation.

Private Lands personnel have worked with landowners to grow forage for wintering waterfowl at some sites to provide additional feed for waterfowl. For those lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, this can generate some excellent hunting.

More information about individual sites, including maps, access rules, and the program, may be found on the WDFW [Places to go hunting](#) webpage. Waterfowl hunt units on private lands will open as crop harvests are completed, and other conditions are met, so only some units will be available on opening day.

In addition, the WDFW Private Lands program has developed and enhanced hunting opportunities on WDFW-managed lands. The five hunt sites are found on land managed by the Skagit Wildlife Area. They include South Padilla Bay (Bayview 1, 2, and 3) and Samish River (Edison East and West).

PUBLIC LANDS

Vehicle access by big game hunters to certain Washington Department of Natural Resource (DNR) lands in Skagit and Whatcom counties may be impacted by logging activities during the upcoming hunting season. Access to Van Zandt Dike and Alger Hill Road via Skarrup Road at Parson Creek Road may be restricted by the DNR to manage access during times of active logging. Even if potential closures prohibit the use of vehicles, hunters are allowed access to these areas on foot, mountain bike, or by horse so long as they are respectful of active forestry operations.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) national forest lands offer some vehicular access throughout Whatcom and Skagit counties. Many road systems have been closed due to flood-related damage, and some roads are subject to seasonal road closures. USFS plans to decommission or abandon a significant portion of its managed road network on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. These closures further restrict vehicular access to upper-elevation habitats for big game and forest grouse hunting. For updated USFS road and trail information, use the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions Map](#).

Among the WDFW-managed lands in District 14, waterfowl hunters should consider the Headquarters, Island, Samish (also known as the Welts property), and Johnson/Debay's Slough units in Skagit County, and Tennant Lake, Nooksack, and Lake Terrell wildlife area units in Whatcom County. All these sites are managed for waterfowl and provide walk-in and boat access, with some blinds available. Hunters can visit the WDFW [Wildlife Areas](#) webpage and search WDFW wildlife areas and units by name, county, and region for more information on each location.

SKAGIT COUNTY

For more information on hunting the Skagit Wildlife Area and its various units, please see our [Skagit Wildlife Area Hunting Guide](#) (updated August 2022).

Island Unit

The Island Unit totals approximately 268 acres and is a popular waterfowl hunting site. During the November 2021 flood event, a significant breach occurred on the east lobe of the unit. This area is now intertidal, with daily tides and river levels inundating the site like the surrounding marsh. The unit's west lobe was unaffected by the flood event and is still managed for enhanced waterfowl forage. Hunters can still hunt the entire unit, but because the east lobe of the Island Unit is now intertidal, hunters using this part of the Island Unit should reference a tide chart and Skagit River gauges before going out in the field.

The Island Unit is accessible by boat only. Hunters typically launch from the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit or the Skagit County Parks boat launch under the Conway bridge. Be aware that river conditions, even short crossings, may be challenging or dangerous for small boats during high flows and large ebb tides.



Figure 31. A standing cornfield on the Island Unit –
Photo by Alan Bauer

Samish Unit

The Samish Unit has 410 acres of grass, seasonal wetlands, and agricultural fields. Approximately 193 acres of barley, fava beans, and corn are planted on the site. Funding for the agricultural enhancements on this unit is provided through the Washington State Duck Stamp program. There are 23 shallow ponds and swales developed in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. Water control structures also allow a high percentage of the area to be flooded with sheet water during the hunting season. The Samish Unit is north of Highway 20 and can be accessed from the parking lot on Samish Island Road.



Figure 32. View of a hunting blind at the Samish Unit on a nice fall day – Photo by Alan Bauer

This site is very popular for waterfowl hunting, and all blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis. In addition to the existing permanent blinds, temporary blinds will be installed at locations varying yearly, depending on crop plantings and water conditions. Be sure to check the map on-site for the most updated information.

Telegraph slough

The Telegraph Slough Unit is a freshwater wetland created when highway construction crossed the Swinomish Channel to Fidalgo Island. WDFW and the Department of Natural Resources have a land-use agreement to manage the wetland for waterfowl hunting and wildlife observation opportunities. Parking is available off State Route 20, and several small ponds and channels are present depending on water levels. Still, hunters should be familiar with private property boundaries.

Johnson/DeBay's Slough Hunt Unit

The Johnson/DeBay's Slough Hunt Unit is 23 acres and can be a productive hunting site. The unit is planted with barley and corn, depending on the year. Due to its small size, the unit can only accommodate four to five hunting parties. Because this is a field hunting site, it should be hunted with decoys. Temporary blinds are installed in various locations each year, depending on the plantings and water conditions. The blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.



Figure 33. Location of Johnson/DeBay's slough blind and parking lot on the hunt unit

Skagit Bay Estuary

The Skagit Bay Estuary Unit starts at the bayfront edge of the delta of the Skagit River (North to South Forks). It extends south towards Stanwood along the north shore of Camano Island or the South Bay area. A large portion of this area's first-class and second-class tidelands are owned by WDFW (approximately 16,000 acres), with private ownerships interspersed. The property provides prime waterfowl hunting from a boat or by foot during low tides. WDFW manages two game reserves in this area, Skagit Bay Delta and Fir Island Farm Reserves.

The diverse Skagit Bay topography includes open saltwater, mudflats, low marsh (grass), and a high marsh of cattails, brush, and taller woody vegetation. The entire area is a maze of channels, cut by both tidal action and currents from the various sloughs of the Skagit River delta. Most bay front hunters set up on the edge of the vegetation line and in the higher marsh, channels, and backwaters. Some hunters prefer to hunt the open water on Skagit Bay.

The entire bay front can offer good shooting, but the most heavily used sites are on the South and North Forks of the Skagit River, downstream from the more popular boat launch access of Skagit Headquarters Unit (WDFW) and Conway Launch (Skagit County). For information about walk-in access options, refer to the [Skagit Wildlife Area webpage](#) for more details.



Figure 34. View from Fir Island Farm Reserve – Photo by Robert Waddell

Large tide swings in Skagit Bay and nearby areas present challenges for waterfowl hunters every season, and both boat and walk-in hunters must be familiar with local tide tables and have a plan for their day before every hunt. Walk-in hunters should pay particular attention to deeper ditches and sloughs that may prohibit return routes or prevent the retrieval of downed waterfowl.

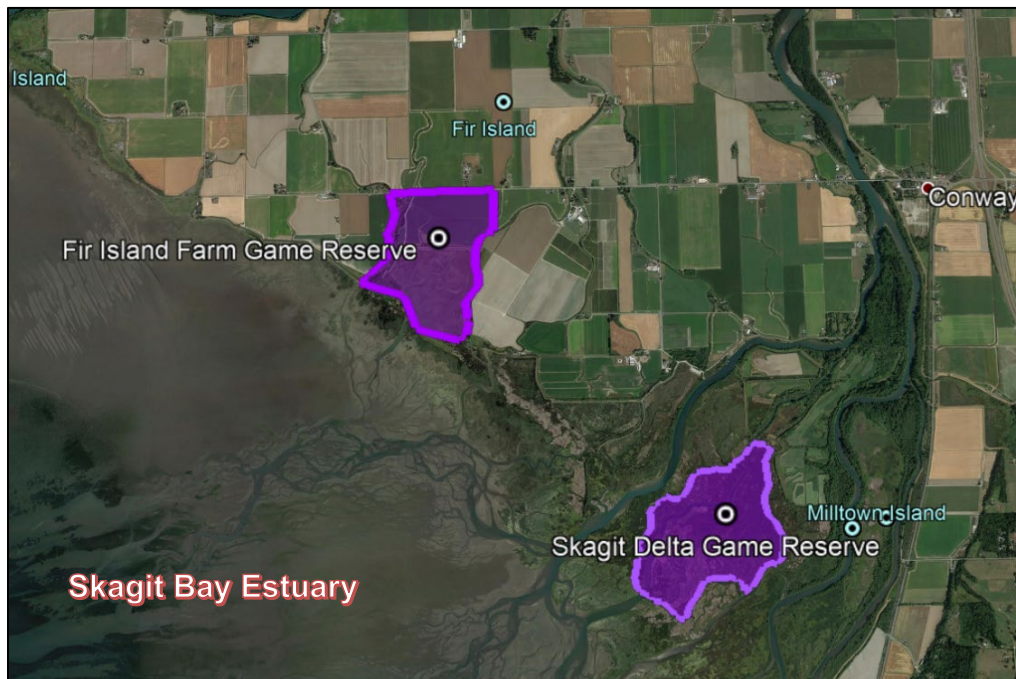


Figure 35. Map of game reserves within the Skagit Wildlife Area

WHATCOM COUNTY

Lake Terrell Unit

The Lake Terrell Unit of the Whatcom Wildlife Area is an important and productive waterfowl hunting site. This unit has over 15 permanently constructed hunting blinds, all on a first-come, first-served basis. One ADA-accessible hunting blind was built by the Whatcom County Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association. To make a reservation for this blind, visit the [WDFW Private Lands Hunt by Reservation webpage](#) and search for “Lake Terrell Disability Access Site”.



Figure 36. Lake Terrell Unit – Photo by Robert Waddell



Figure 37. Lake Terrel Unit blinds – Photo by Richard Kessler

Tennant Lake Unit

The Tennant Lake Unit of the Whatcom Wildlife Area has three waterfowl hunting blinds available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters can sign in on the day of the hunt at the sign-in box at the top boat launch to let others know which blind they will be using. This site is reliably productive throughout the hunting season.

Figure 38. View from one of the three blinds at Tennant Lake – Photo by Richard Kessler



Nooksack Unit



Figure 39. View of the pond on the Nooksack Unit

The Nooksack Unit is located south of Slater Road at the Nooksack River. It is heavily used during the waterfowl hunting season. At the north end of the unit is a 120-acre agricultural field that is usually planted with corn, potatoes, and barley during the spring. Upon harvest, ten acres of corn and 15 acres of barley are left standing to provide winter waterfowl forage, providing for a high-quality hunting area. Several permanent hunting blinds and temporary stand-up blinds are located within the farm field, with all blinds on a first-come, first-served basis. An ADA-accessible blind is available at the Nooksack Unit. To make a reservation for this blind, visit the [WDFW Private Lands Hunt by Reservation webpage](#) and search for “Shady Lane Disability Access Site”.

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

BRYAN L. MURPHIE, Wildlife Biologist



DISTRICT 15 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties

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DISTRICT 15 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 15 includes Mason, Kitsap, and the eastern part Jefferson counties, and is one of four districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that collectively comprise the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) coastal region, referred to as Region 6. District 15 consists of all or portions of six game management units (GMUs): 621 (Olympic), 624 (Coyle), 627 (Kitsap), 633 (Mason), 636 (Skokomish), and 651 (Satsop). A portion of GMUs 621 and 624 fall within District 16. A portion of GMUs 636 and 651 fall within District 17. The most hunted landscape in District 15 is industrial forestland, commonly characterized by multi-aged forests consisting primarily of Douglas fir and red alder. However, hunting opportunities exist from alpine meadows above timberline to marine areas at sea level in Hood Canal and Puget Sound.

A range of species provide hunting opportunities in District 15, including elk, deer, mountain goat, bear, cougar, waterfowl, grouse, rabbit, quail, coyote, and bobcat. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest for most game species in District 15 during the 2022 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2021 season and the five-year average. The methods used to estimate small game harvest changed in 2022 and are reported as draft values, at this time. Find specific information on harvest trends in the appropriate species section of this document.

Table 1. Estimates of the 2021, 2022*, and 5-year average annual harvest for most game species hunted in District 15 are shown. Waterfowl and small-game harvest totals are the combined totals for Mason, Kitsap, and Jefferson counties. The methods used to generate harvest estimates for small game changed for the 2022 season and are presented as draft values at this time. For cougar, only general hunting season harvest is shown. *2022 harvest data was not available for cougar at time of printing this report

Species	Harvest		
	5-year avg.	2021	2022
Elk	33	28	21
Deer	1,734	1,845	1,555
Mountain Goat	n/a	1	0
Bear	87	67	96
Cougar	10	9	n/a
Ducks	5,068	n/a	6,565
Canada Goose	338	n/a	562
Snipe	79	n/a	4
Grouse	2,670	n/a	2,355
Mourning Dove	50	n/a	206
Quail	64	n/a	82
Snowshoe Hare	2	n/a	4
Cottontail Rabbit	60	n/a	32

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

All elk in District 15 are Roosevelt elk. Only three GMUs, 621, 636, and 651, offer reliable elk hunting opportunities. There are no known elk herds currently in GMUs 627 or 633, but the Department occasionally receives reports of elk sightings in these units. Elk in GMU 624 occur mostly near the town of Sequim, where harvest is conducted through the conflict section. Periodically, WDFW receives reports of an elk elsewhere in this unit, but nothing that suggests a reliable elk hunting opportunity exists away from the Sequim herd.

As for GMUs, 621, 636, and 651, the quality of elk hunting is fair. These units are usually within the targeted range for bull:cow ratios but are below population objectives in all three GMUs. There are at least 250 elk in GMU 621 and 200 elk in GMU 636. GMU 651 has around 300 elk. Although we are currently below objectives in the number of elk across these GMUs, individual herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict. Treponeme Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is notably present in GMUs 636 and 651. In 621, only two elk have tested positive for TAHD.



For more detailed information on the status of Washington's elk herds, hunters can reference the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report, which is available for download on the Department's website.

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

It depends. If you are looking for a general season hunt and have the resources to buy a timberland access permit, then GMU 651 is your choice in District 15. If you are looking for a special permit bull hunt and do not mind navigating the intricacies of hunting around small private land parcels, you might select GMU 621. If you are looking for a special permit bull elk hunt that has only a few permits and decent public land hunting, then you might choose GMU 636.

Elk hunting in GMU 621 is by special bull permit only. In 2023, eight rifle, four archery, and three muzzleloader permits are available. Each permit season provides additional days to hunt compared to the general season. WDFW recommends hunters look for elk along the main river drainages that flow into Hood Canal, including the Dosewallips, Duckabush, Hamma Hamma, and North Fork Skokomish rivers. The Lilliwaup Swamp area of Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) managed land provides decent public land hunting. Elk in the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers remain in the lower river valleys and on nearby valley ridges year-round or will migrate to summer range in Olympic National Park (ONP). Recently, some elk from the Duckabush herd have been moving south to new areas between the Hamma Hamma and Duckabush rivers. The Hamma Hamma group spends most of the year on land owned by the Hama Hama Company. Elk in the Lilliwaup are generally non-migratory and spend the year in and around Lilliwaup Swamp. In the past, WDFW has recorded elk movement from Lilliwaup Swamp north into the North Fork Skokomish drainage, where a different group of elk is known to reside. This group uses the North Fork Skokomish River valley in Olympic National Park above Lake Cushman, often wintering near the northern end of the lake before migrating to summer range in the Mount Skokomish Wilderness. DFW has also documented elk movement between the upper Wynoochee River drainage and the North Fork Skokomish.

GMU 636 is open to hunting by special bull permit only. In 2023, five rifle, four archery, and one muzzleloader permits are available. Each permit season provides additional days to hunt compared to the general season. Elk in GMU 636 reside in the upper Wynoochee River valley around Lake Wynoochee, the South Fork Skokomish River valley, and near the town of Matlock. Elk around Matlock and on the lower stretch of the South Fork Skokomish River are primarily non-migratory. In the upper Wynoochee Valley, WDFW has recorded elk movements into Olympic National Park during the summer. Occasionally elk over-winter in the North or South Fork Skokomish River valleys. WDFW has recorded elk from this area moving as far south as the WDFW forage fields along the Wynoochee River in GMU 648.

GMU 651 has the only decent general season elk hunting opportunity in District 15; however, hunters will need a private timber company access permit to get into where most elk reside in this GMU. Elk in this GMU are non-migratory. GMU 651 is open to general season hunting for all weapon types, including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters.

Tribal hunting occurs in District 15; often accounting for 50% or more of the total elk harvest in the district (see Figure 1 below). Thus, actual hunting pressure in these units is greater than the number of special permits would suggest and hunters looking for an elk in any of these GMUs could encounter tribal hunters.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Elk and hunter numbers are not likely to fluctuate dramatically between years. Hunter success data for GMUs 621 and 636 can be a little misleading because of the small number of permits available. Five-year averages by weapon type in GMU 621 are 62% for archery, 43% for muzzleloaders, and 69% for modern firearm hunters.

In GMU 636, muzzleloader hunters report the highest success at 80%, followed by rifle hunters at 62%, and archery hunters at 30%.

GMU 651 is open for general season hunting during the early archery, modern firearm, and late-muzzleloader seasons. Legal elk is 3-point minimum bull except antlerless elk are legal in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. Five-year averages by weapon type in GMU 621 are 7% for archery, 6% for muzzleloaders, and 8% for modern firearm hunters.

The number of elk harvested in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 is shown in Figure 1, while general season trend data for hunter numbers in GMU 651 is presented in Figure 2. Antlerless elk harvested during a hunting season in GMU 651 has averaged 2 since 2013 in both the state and tribal seasons.

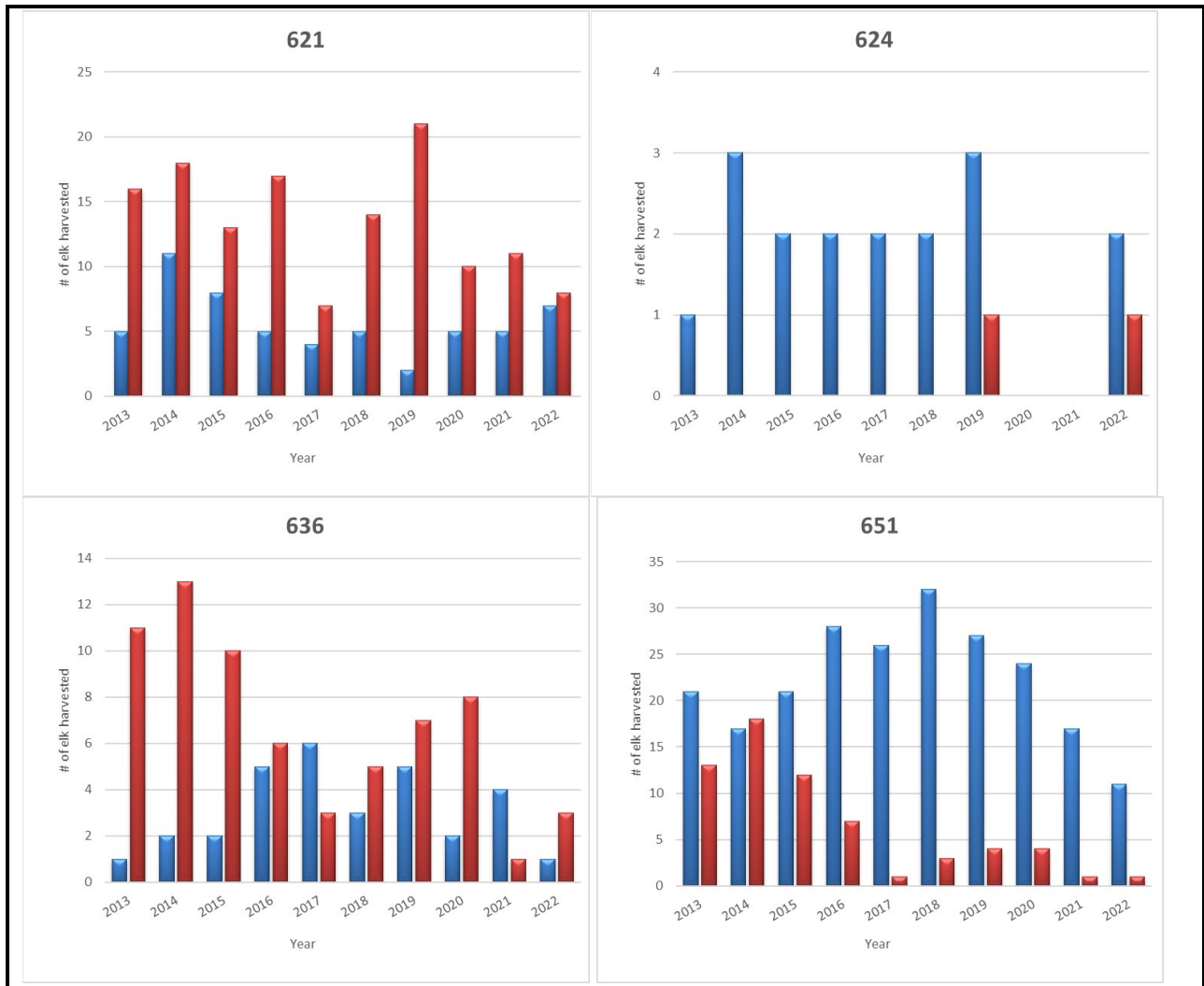


Figure 1. Total State (blue) and Tribal (red) elk harvest in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 during 2013–2022.

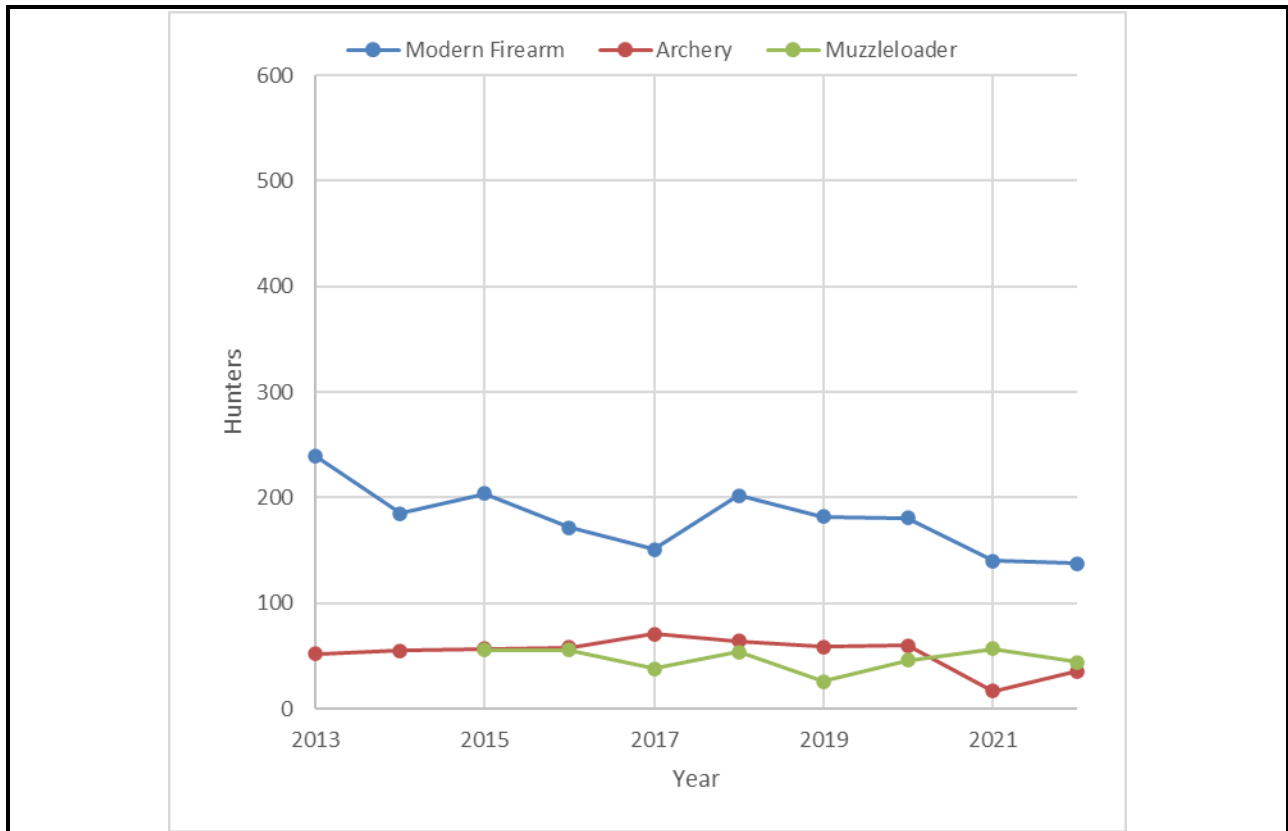


Figure 2. Elk hunter numbers during the general hunting seasons in GMU 651, 2013–2022.

ELK AREAS

There are two elk areas in District 15: Elk Area 6061 (Twin Satsop) and Elk Area 6071 (Dungeness). Elk Area 6061 was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic elk damage issues, while Elk Area 6071 was established to limit elk hunting to support public safety.

Current hunting regulations allow the harvest of 3-point minimum bull or antlerless elk during the general early archery season in Elk Area 6061, while elk hunting in Elk Area 6071 is through the Master Hunter program on a limited basis.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

None.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) is the only species of deer in District 15. The Department's objective for deer in District 15 is to maintain productive populations while providing for multiple uses, including recreational, educational, and aesthetic (WDFW Game Management Plan 2008). Buck harvest is any antlered buck, while antlerless harvest is limited to certain weapon types and/or by permit.



Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 15. Instead, harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort are used as an index to trends. WDFW recognizes the limitations of this approach and is currently evaluating new techniques for monitoring black-tailed deer populations independent of harvest data.

For more detailed information related to the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters can reference the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report, which is available for download on the Department's website.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

There are ample general season deer hunting opportunities for hunters in District 15. All GMUs in this district have general and permit season hunting opportunities, starting in September with the early archery season and the Olympic Wilderness high buck hunt, which is open to modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters.

Field observations and recent harvest trends suggest good deer hunting potential exists in GMUs 621, 627, and 633. GMU 651 remains a popular hunting unit, but portions of this GMU owned by Green Diamond Resources require an access permit. Hunters may find good deer hunting in lower elevation habitats in GMU 636, but deer density in this unit appears to decline at higher elevations. Hunters will need a Green Diamond Resources access permit to hunt those areas in GMU 636 around Matlock; elsewhere no access permit is required and much of the unit is USFS land.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

It is uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 15, where severe winter weather resulting in large die-offs rarely occurs. Hunter numbers also typically don't change dramatically from one year to the next. Consequently, the best predictor of future harvest during general seasons available are recent harvest trends, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Figures 3 through 5 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 15, as well as what they can expect to encounter regarding hunter success and hunter numbers.

DEER AREAS

Deer Area 6020 is in GMU 624 and was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic damage issues. This GMU is open to general season any deer harvest for all three weapon-type user groups. Additionally, 40 Second Deer permits are available for archery hunters in this area.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

There are very few changes anticipated for deer hunting in District 15, although the Department adjusted permit levels for some hunts.

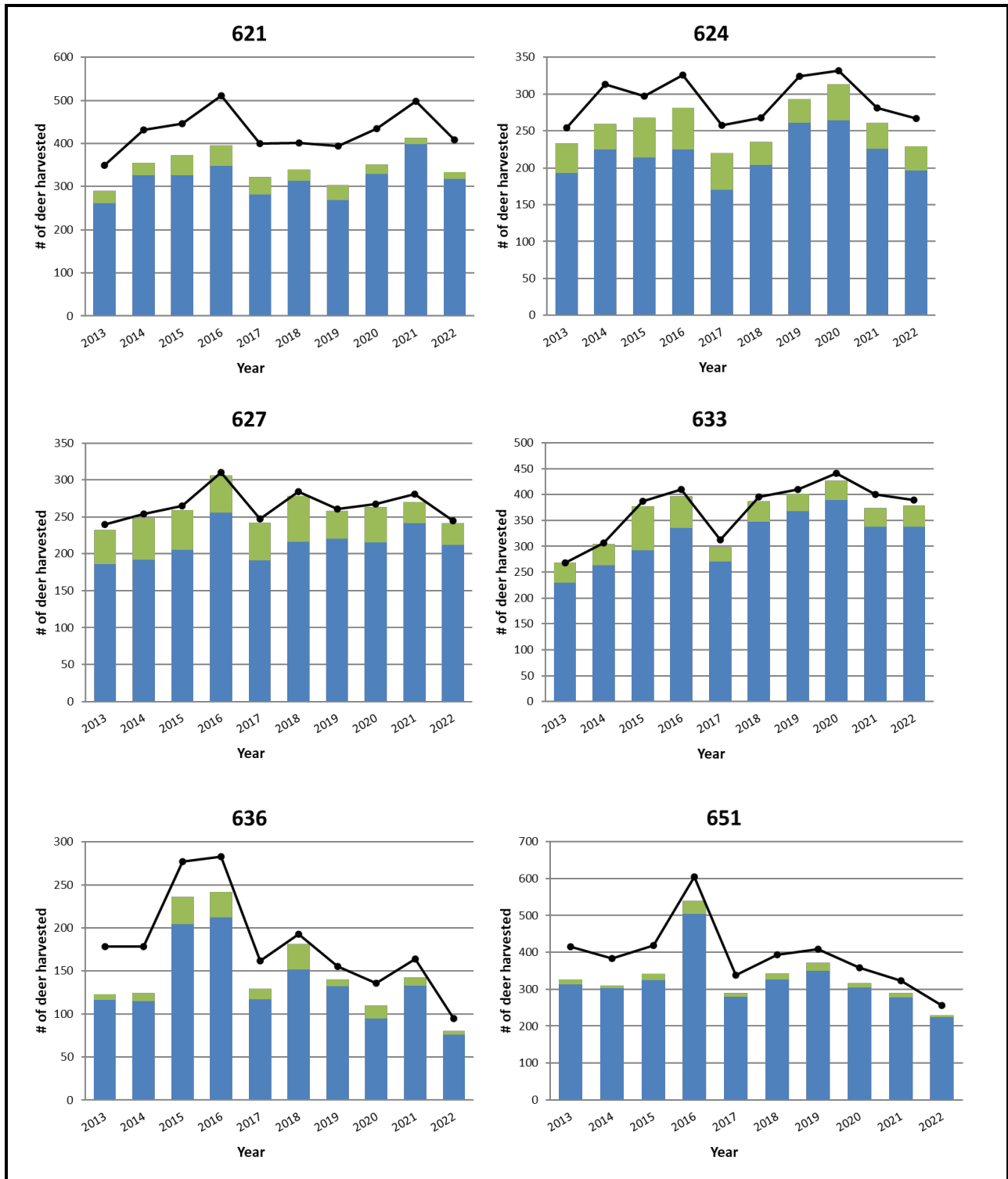


Figure 3. Trends in the total number of buck (blue) and antlerless (green) deer harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons combined, 2013–2022. Total deer harvest (black line) includes harvest from state general and permit seasons plus Tribal harvest.

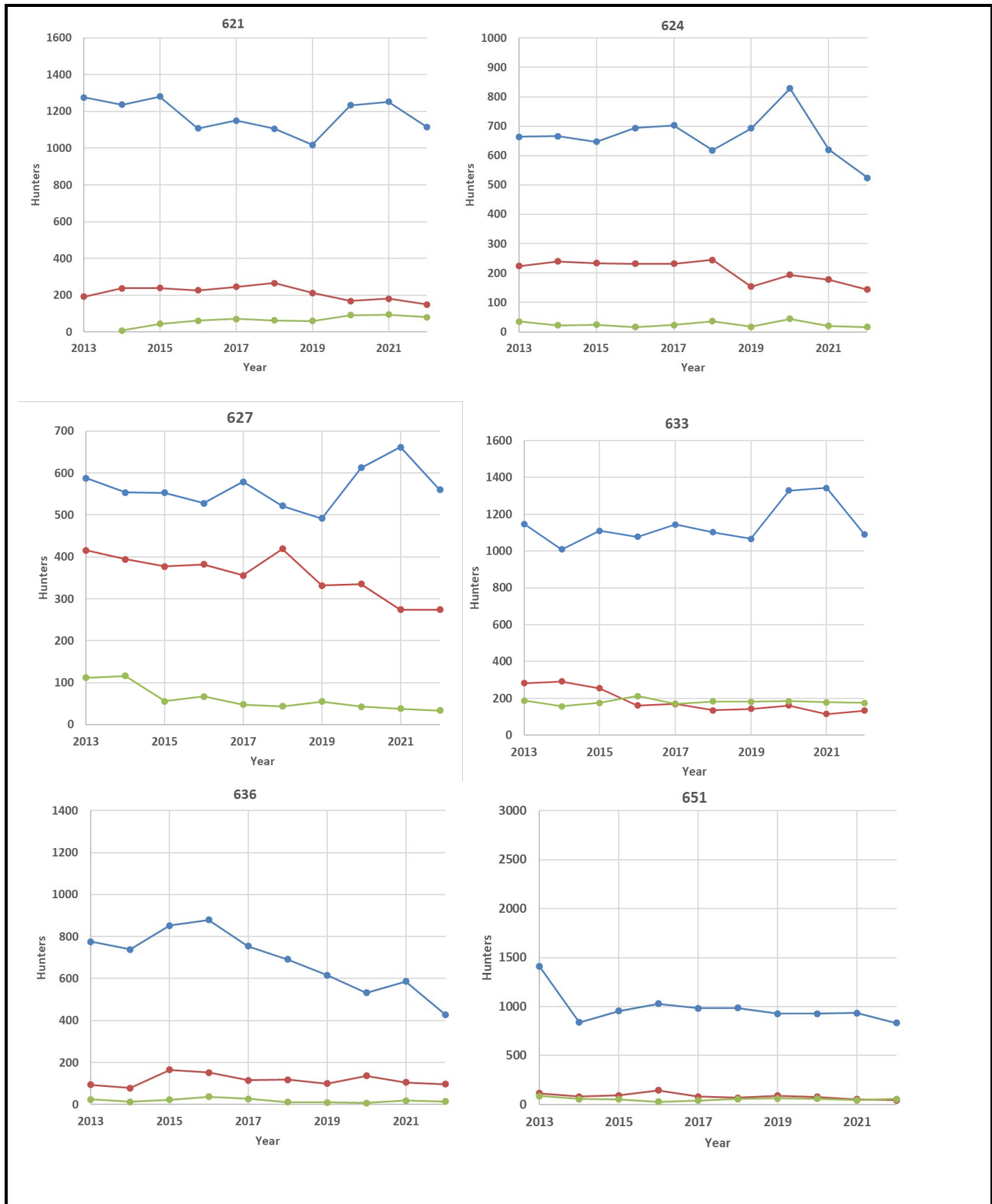


Figure 4. Trends in hunter numbers during general modern firearm (blue), archery (red), and muzzleloader (green) deer seasons in District 15, 2013–2022.

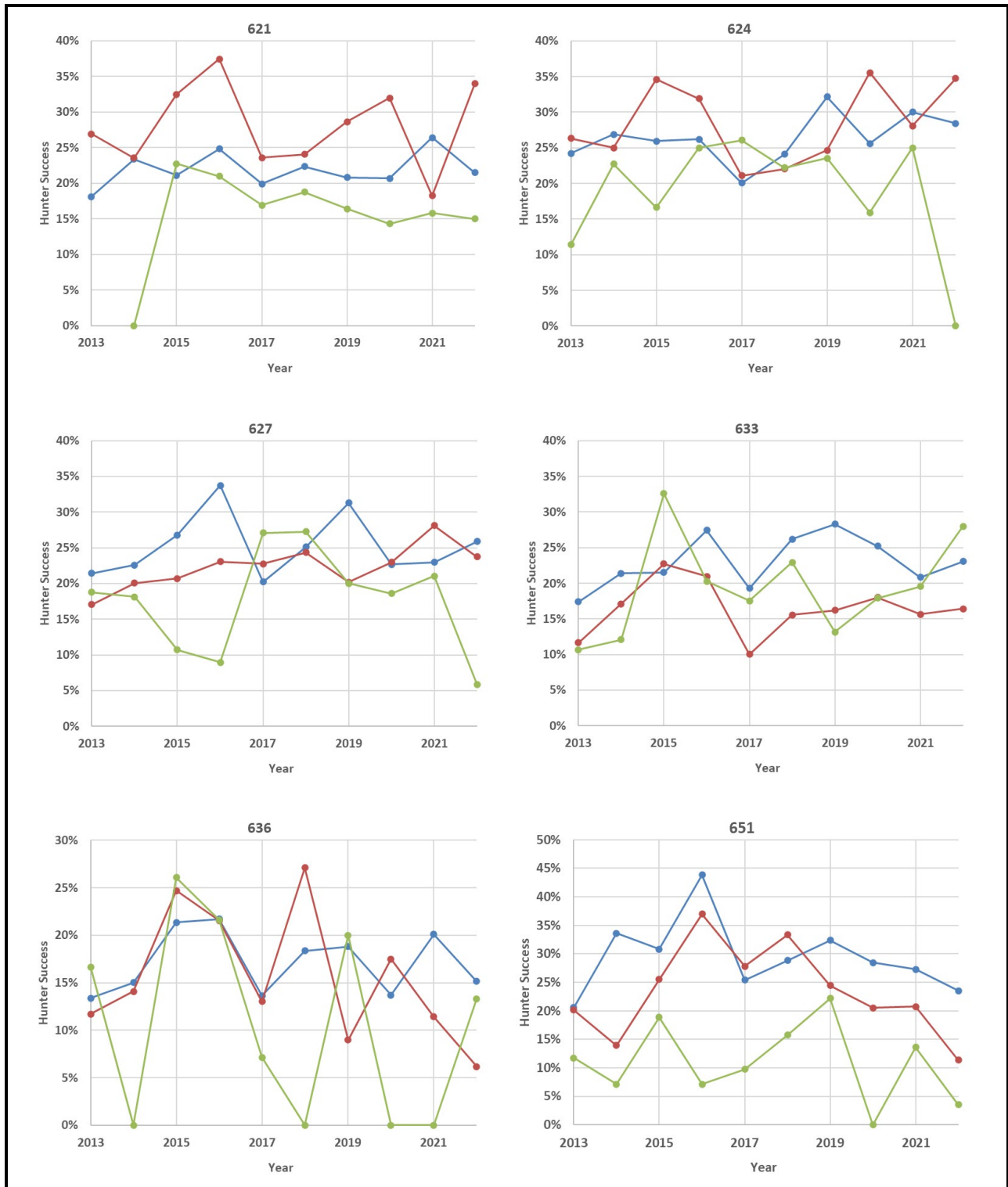


Figure 5. Trends in hunter success rates during general modern firearm (blue), archery (red), and muzzleloader (green) deer seasons in District 15, 2013–2022.

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears occur throughout District 15, but population densities likely vary among GMUs. The best opportunities to harvest a black bear likely occur in GMUs 621, 633, and 636.

District 15 contains part of the Coastal Black Bear Management Unit (BBMU) (GMUs 621, 636, and 651) and part of the Puget Sound BBMU (GMUs 624, 627, and 633). The current black bear hunting season guidelines for these BBMUs are designed to maintain black bear populations at their current level. The fall black bear hunting season for all District 15 units is Aug. 1 to Nov. 15. Hunters can buy up to two bear tags during each license year.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Most bear harvest in District 15 comes from hunters harvesting a bear opportunistically while hunting other species like deer and elk, although some hunters do specifically hunt bears. Hunter success in District 15 has averaged 8% in the Coastal BBMU and Puget Sound BBMU over the last five years. However, hunter success is likely higher for those hunters who specifically hunt bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while they are deer or elk hunting.

Bear harvest in District 15 increased in 2022 (Figure 6). At the GMU level, bear harvest is usually highest in GMU 621 (Figure 7). GMUs 621 and 636 offer the most accessible public land in the district and hunting the higher-elevation huckleberry patches could be a good strategy.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission suspended spring bear permit hunts for 2023.

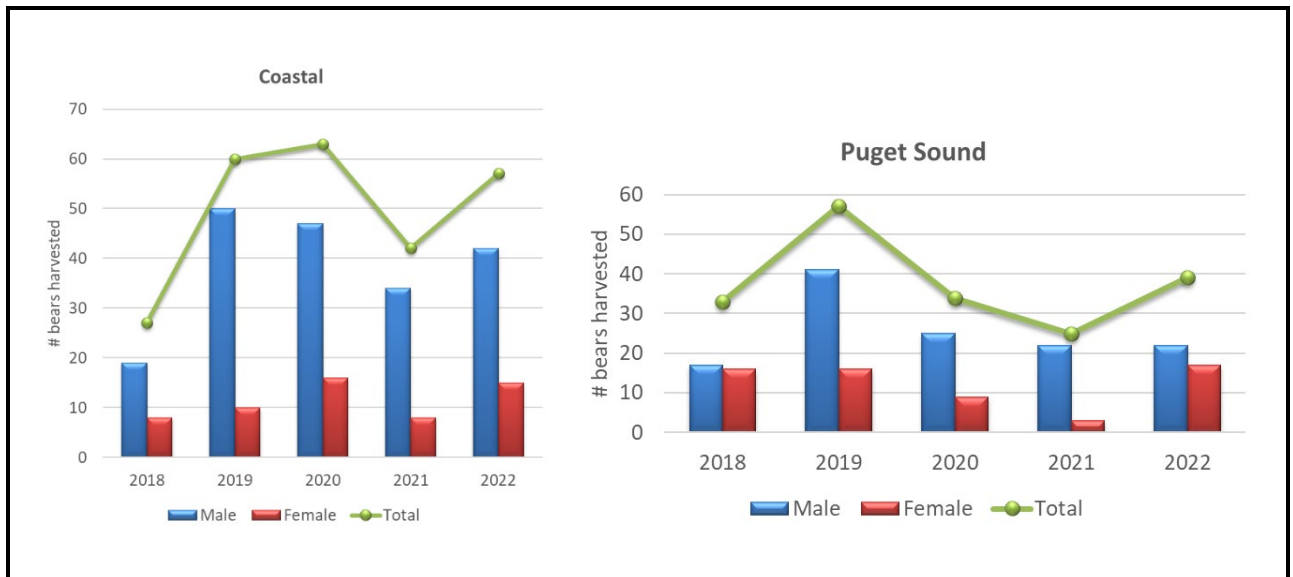


Figure 6. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 15, 2018–2022. Bears removed for other reasons are not included.

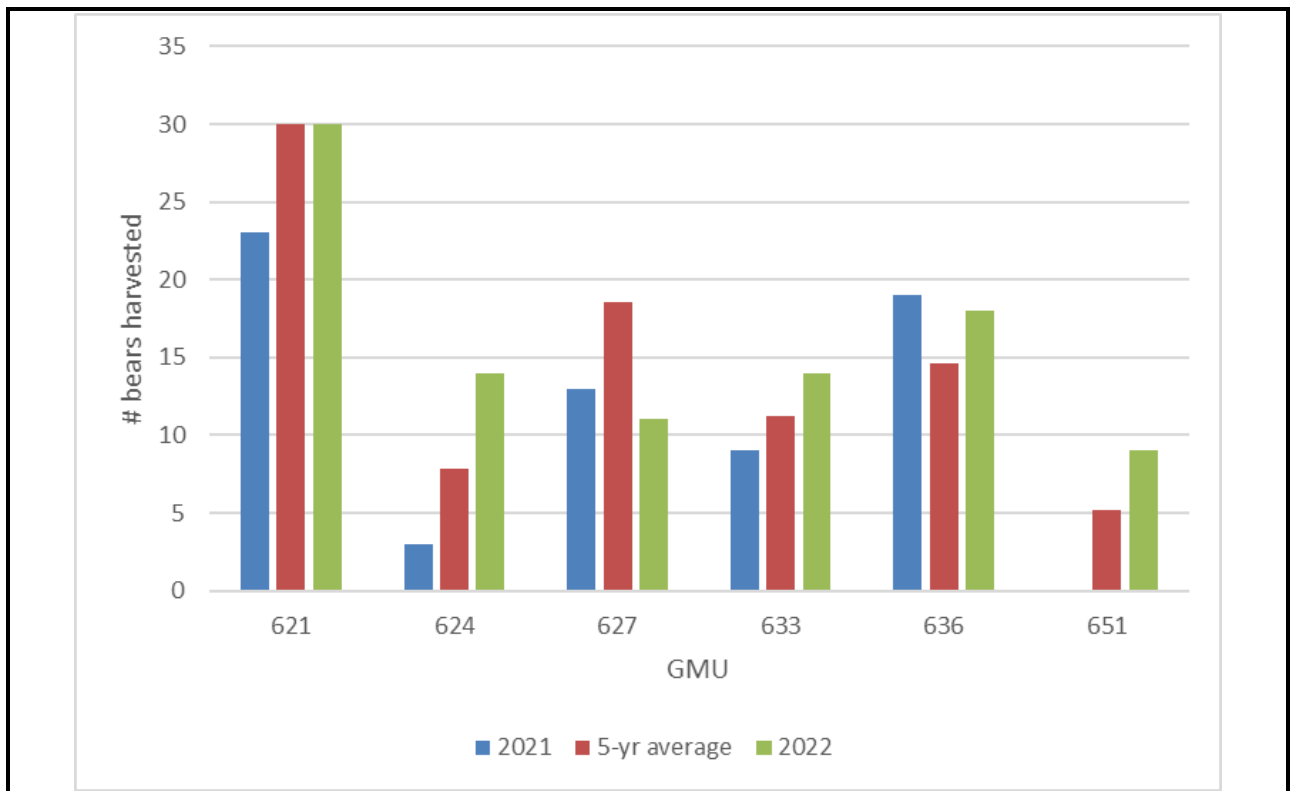


Figure 7. The number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2021 and 2022 seasons in District 15. The five-year average for total number of bears harvested in each GMU is also included.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 15. WDFW established harvest guidelines with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population (Table 2). Early season dates are Sep. 1 through Dec. 31. Late season dates from Jan. 1 to April 30 are dependent on the level of cougar harvest in each hunt area. After Jan. 1, WDFW may close any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline for that unit. Anyone planning to hunt cougar after Jan. 1 should confirm the cougar season is open in the desired hunting area by calling 1-866-364-4868. Harvest guidelines for 2023 and the general season cougar harvest by hunt area for 2021-22 is shown in Table 2 (2022/2023 cougar harvest data was not available at the time this report was written).



Photo courtesy of S. Murphie

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline 2023	2021/22 Harvest
618, 636, 638	3-5	1
642, 648, 651	6-8	8
621, 624, 627, 633	None	6

Table 2. Harvest guidelines and the reported 2021-22 harvest for the three cougar hunt areas located in District 15.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Most cougar harvest comes from opportunistic encounters while hunters are pursuing deer, elk, or other activities, meaning total cougar harvest in District 15 can vary from year to year (Figure 8). Since 2016, the number of cougars harvested during hunting seasons has averaged nine.

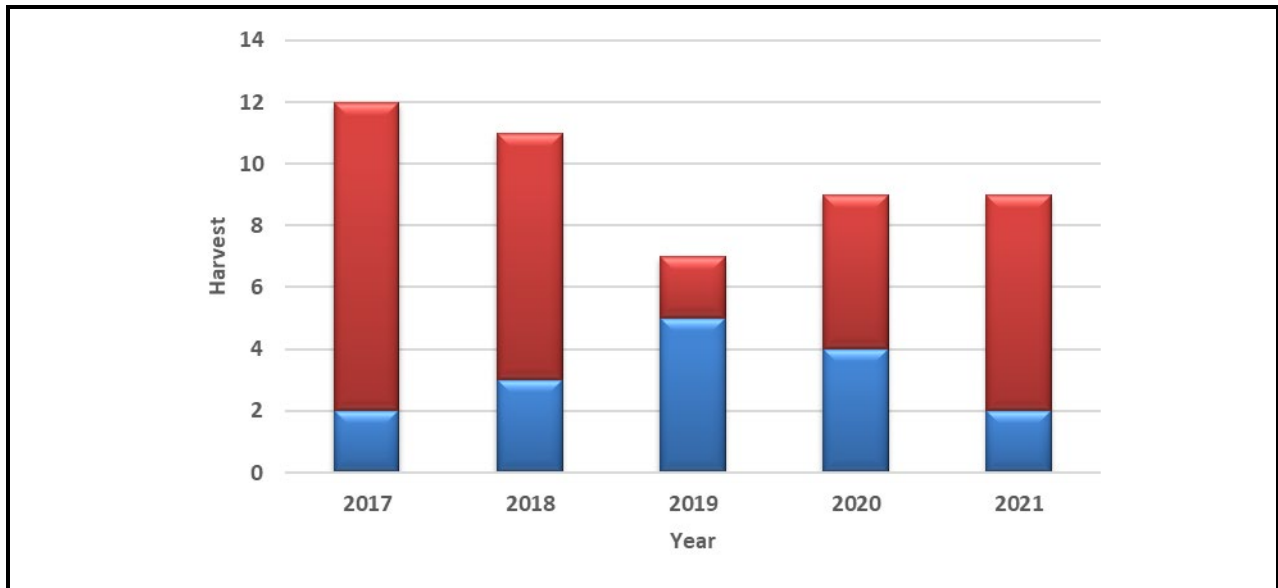


Figure 8. The estimated number of male (blue) and female (red) cougars harvested by hunters annually in District 15 (all GMUs combined), 2017 – 2021.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

None.

MOUNTAIN GOAT

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Mountain goats were introduced into the Olympic Mountain range prior to the establishment of the Olympic National Park (ONP) in the 1920s. Mountain goats thrived in the Olympic range, rapidly expanding their distribution and abundance to over 1,000 goats by 1983. Concerns over the negative effect of an abundant introduced goat population on high-elevation endemic plants and soil erosion, prompted the Olympic National Park to relocate 407 goats to other ranges outside the Olympics in the early 1980s. A mountain goat hunt

outside ONP ran from 1983 until 1997, and 119 goats were harvested. WDFW closed the Olympic goat hunt in 1997. The population rebounded from these management actions and were expanding their range and abundance to wilderness areas outside the ONP by 2014. To again address concerns over the negative effect of an abundant introduced goat population on high-elevation endemic plants and soil erosion, the ONP, United States Forest Service (USFS), and WDFW initiated efforts to remove mountain goats from the Olympics.

WDFW established a new permit hunt in 2014. This permit hunt ran from 2014 until 2018 and 15 goats were harvested. WDFW suspended the permit hunt during a joint management action to remove mountain goats from the Olympics by ONP, USFS, and WDFW, which began in 2018. This project included, aerial captures and relocation, aerial lethal removals, and a ground-based lethal removal activity, and concluded in 2022. A total of 548 goats were removed (Happe et al. 2023). WDFW held a permit hunt in 2021 with 25 permits available, but only one adult male goat was harvested. Tribal hunters harvested 9 goats during this timeframe.

This activity was conducted across the Olympics in and out of the park with many removals coming out of the WDFW permit hunt area on USFS lands. It is currently thought that most remaining goats are in remote areas of Olympic National Park and few, if any, are left outside the park accessible for hunting. WDFW will continue to assess where goats are outside the park to determine if a new permit hunt opportunity exists.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

No hunt in 2023. Future hunts may be recommended should mountain goats be found in huntable locations.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

Several duck species use District 15. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall, mallard, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, and common goldeneye, are also present on fresh and salt water. Nesting wood ducks can be located throughout the district early in the season and can



provide a unique hunting opportunity. Sea ducks, including scoters, Barrow's goldeneye, long-tailed ducks, canvasbacks, and harlequin ducks inhabit Hood Canal and other saltwater areas.

POPULATION STATUS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species. Wintering duck populations in Washington usually represent 10% or more of the total flyway population.

District 15 hunters can expect similar hunting opportunities during the 2023 season. As in recent years, hunter success is often dependent on rainfall and storm events during the waterfowl season. A lack of flooded farm fields can sharply reduce hunting opportunities in District 15. Alternatively, the marine waters of Hood Canal can offer some good waterfowl hunting opportunities.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Public hunting access exists at the mouths of the Duckabush, Quilcene, and Union rivers. Many of the undeveloped lakes and marshes on the Tahuya Peninsula's DNR-managed land offer walk-in hunting opportunities for mallards, ringnecks, and scaup.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

None.

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

The subspecies of Canada geese most likely to be found in District 15 include western, lesser, Taverner's, and cackler. White-fronted and, occasionally, snow geese can also be encountered.

POPULATION STATUS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Like ducks, goose numbers in the district are largely driven by weather. The more severe the weather, the more likely the northern subspecies can be seen in the area. Anecdotal observations suggest that local westerns are stable or slightly increasing.

Goose hunting opportunities in District 15 are expected to be like trends observed during the last few seasons. Most geese are taken on private farm fields and securing permission is essential. When funding exists, WDFW attempts to lease fields that regularly attract waterfowl.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Same as those listed under ducks.

FOREST GROUSE

GENERAL INFORMATION AND POPULATION STATUS

Although grouse occur throughout the district, Mason County offers the most hunting opportunity. The Olympic National Forest and Skokomish GMU are two of the more popular grouse hunting areas. Blue (sooty) grouse tend to occur in the coniferous forests at higher elevations, while ruffed grouse can occur throughout the district in coniferous and mixed forests. In the fall, either species can be found feeding on berries like salal, Oregon grape, and huckleberry. More ruffed than sooty are harvested in District 15.

WDFW has not conducted any standardized or formal surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 15; however, a new effort is being planned for 2024 to survey sooty grouse.

HARVEST TRENDS

The number of grouse harvested in District 15 has been consistently low in Kitsap County and highest in Mason County recently (Figure 9). Grouse harvest in Jefferson County includes areas in District 16. A total of 2,355 grouse were harvested in 2022.

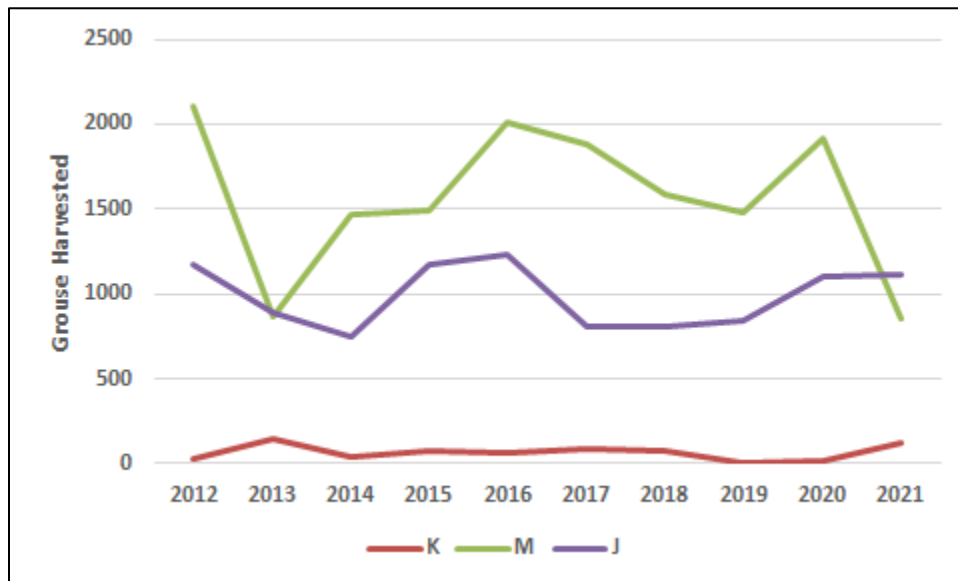


Figure 9. The number of grouse harvested in Jefferson, Kitsap, and Mason counties during 2012 – 2021.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

None.

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are found below 1,000 ft. in elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

POPULATION STATUS AND HARVEST

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 15 mineral sites where band-tailed pigeons congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tailed pigeon populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.

Although band-tailed pigeon harvest statewide is down from 2009 harvest levels, the trend has been increasing since 2015. The number of band-tailed pigeon hunters continues a downward trend. In District 15, harvest is highest in Mason County, followed by Jefferson County (includes east and west Jefferson County), and Kitsap County where little to no harvest is reported.

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Often, band-tailed pigeons congregate in areas with red or blue elderberry, which are typically most abundant in five to 10-year-old timber harvests. Hunting can be exceptionally good in these areas. The key to harvesting band-tailed pigeons is scouting. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites and then sit patiently and wait for shooting opportunities as they occur. Band-tailed pigeons often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. In addition, they show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return year after year. However, many of these sites are difficult to find because they are not abundant and occur in obscure areas. If hunters are lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tailed pigeons are congregating, they will likely have success hunting these locations for years to come.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

None.

PHEASANTS

There are no viable populations of wild pheasants in District 15. All pheasant hunting opportunities in District 15 are associated with the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program, which provides an upland bird hunting opportunity and encourages participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, the program releases 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants at 25 sites, and three of those sites (Hunter Farms, Belfair, Trask Lake, and the Mason Lake (Sgt. Mak) site are in District 15. Release site locations and other details can be found on the [WDFW website](#). In 2022, hunters harvested 1,848 pheasants in District 15.

QUAIL

Although frustratingly unpredictable, hunters are mostly likely to find quail in District 15 in two to six-year-old timber harvests, under power lines, and in tall scotch broom stands throughout Mason and Kitsap counties. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird. Some locations include the DNR parcels on the Tahuya Peninsula northwest of Belfair and the industrial timberlands between Shelton, Matlock, and McCleary. Walk-in opportunities are also numerous on timber company timber harvests around Mason Lake. The time to scout is in the spring and early summer when the males are quite vocal. In 2022, hunters harvested 82 quail in District 15.

TURKEYS

Although turkeys are occasionally seen, District 15 doesn't have any established turkey populations. Introduction programs were discontinued because populations did not appear to expand, and habitat suitability models indicated District 15 habitats were not likely to support viable turkey populations. Occasionally, single birds are spotted, but WDFW doesn't recommend this district for successful turkey hunting.

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species and furbearers that inhabit District 15 but were not covered in detail include eastern cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, bobcat, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot. Crows are also abundant in District 15.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

Although District 15 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities, they do exist on lands administered by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and USFS in all District 15 GMUs. Most hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, in District 15 occur on private industrial forestlands owned by several timber companies, which allow access for hunting under a range of restrictions. All hunters are encouraged to check ahead of time to determine if any landowner restrictions apply to the area they plan to hunt.

Information provided below is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) or the specific landowner if they have questions related to recreational access. Although other companies own land in District 15, the two primary private timberland companies with land in District 15 are Green Diamond Resources and Rayonier. Both Green Diamond Resources and Rayonier require access permits to recreate on some their lands in Kitsap, Mason, and Jefferson counties. Hunters should visit the appropriate landowner website for more information on requirements for accessing their lands.

GMU 621 (OLYMPIC)

Access in GMU 621 is good for deer hunters and challenging for elk hunters, as most elk are found on lower-elevation private lands along the major river valleys. This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, DNR, and USFS. Access to USFS land is generally allowed year-round. DNR land is accessible to motorized vehicles or walk-in only in some areas. Most private timberlands are non-motorized access. All private agricultural lands require owner permission to hunt.

GMU 624 (COYLE)

Other than the resident elk herd in the Sequim area, the Coyle Unit is usually considered a deer area. Although there are scattered timberlands publicly owned by DNR, most are privately owned. The largest property manager is Rayonier. Although some DNR and private mainlines may be open to motor vehicles, most hunting access is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicle. Rayonier requires an access permit to hunt on most of their land in this GMU.

GMU 627 (KITSAP)

The Kitsap Unit is a highly developed area, with private property throughout. However, there is still hunting opportunity on forestlands owned by DNR and Rayonier. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized means, except that DNR allows all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use on designated trails on some of its land in this unit. Rayonier requires an access permit to hunt their land in most locations.

GMU 633 (MASON)

The Mason Unit is best known as an area for deer. DNR has land throughout, with extensive holdings on the Tahuya Peninsula. In the Mason Unit, most of the deer hunting occurs on private property controlled by the Green Diamond Resource Company and Manke Lumber Company. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles, except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of their land in this unit.

GMU 636 (SKOKOMISH)

This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, and USFS. Green Diamond Resource Company is the largest private timberland owner in this unit, and they generally open most areas to motorized use from September to the end of December. They do require an access permit for a section of their land near Matlock. Fire danger risk and active logging operations may delay gate openings. For areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

Upper elevations and those portions of this GMU in the upper Wynoochee River and Skokomish River Valleys are primarily USFS, with most areas open year-round for vehicle access. The USFS prohibits motorized access during the winter in some areas to minimize disturbance to elk.

GMU 651 (SATSOP)

Green Diamond Resource Company is the largest private timberland owner in this unit, and they require hunters to purchase an access permit to hunt a large section of this GMU. Some of their land may be open to motorized access without a permit from September to the end of December, while other portions may allow walk-in hunting without an access permit.

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

WDFW also negotiates hunting access opportunities with smaller private landowners, usually on farm land for waterfowl or pheasant hunting. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) or periodically check for updated information on [WDFW's Hunter Access website](#) for the most current information about private lands access in District 15.

PUBLIC LAND RESOURCES

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES – OLYMPIC REGION

olympic.region@dnr.wa.gov

360-374-2800

411 Tillicum Lane, Forks, WA 98331-9271

[Website](#)

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES – SOUTH PUGET SOUND REGION

southpuget.region@dnr.wa.gov

360-825-1631

950 Farman Ave. N., Enumclaw, WA 98022-9282

[Website](#)

U.S. FOREST SERVICE – HOOD CANAL RANGER DISTRICT – QUILCENE

(360) 765-2200

295142 Highway 101 S., P.O. Box 280, Quilcene, WA 98376

[Website](#)

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 15 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be challenging to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. Some online tools and resources can provide valuable information to help solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list of a few resources available to the public. Parcel ownership can also be accessed from the county assessor's webpage and viewing the parcel maps. Alternatively, private companies found online offer other map products.

WDFWS HUNTING REGULATIONS WEB MAP

WDFW's Hunting Regulations web map provides hunters with a great interactive tool for identifying hunting seasons and locating tracts of public land within each GMU. Access from WDFW's hunting website can be found [here](#).

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands are DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website [here](#).

2023

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Assistant District Wildlife Biologist



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 16 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Clallam and West Jefferson Counties

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District Biologists Shelly Ament and Anita McMillan collaring a deer fawn.

District 16 includes Clallam and western Jefferson counties on the Olympic Peninsula (Figure 1). The district has eight game management units (GMUs). Two eastern GMUs, Coyle GMU 624 and Olympic GMU 621, extend into eastern Jefferson County, which is within District 15. Reference the District 17 Hunting Prospects for information on Matheny GMU 618.

Each GMU in District 16 has its own unique mix of land ownerships: private residential, private agricultural, private forest industrial, state, and federal forest, and park lands. Higher-elevation forestlands are primarily in public ownership: U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Olympic National Park (ONP). Lower elevation foothills are generally private industrial forest lands and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) managed lands.

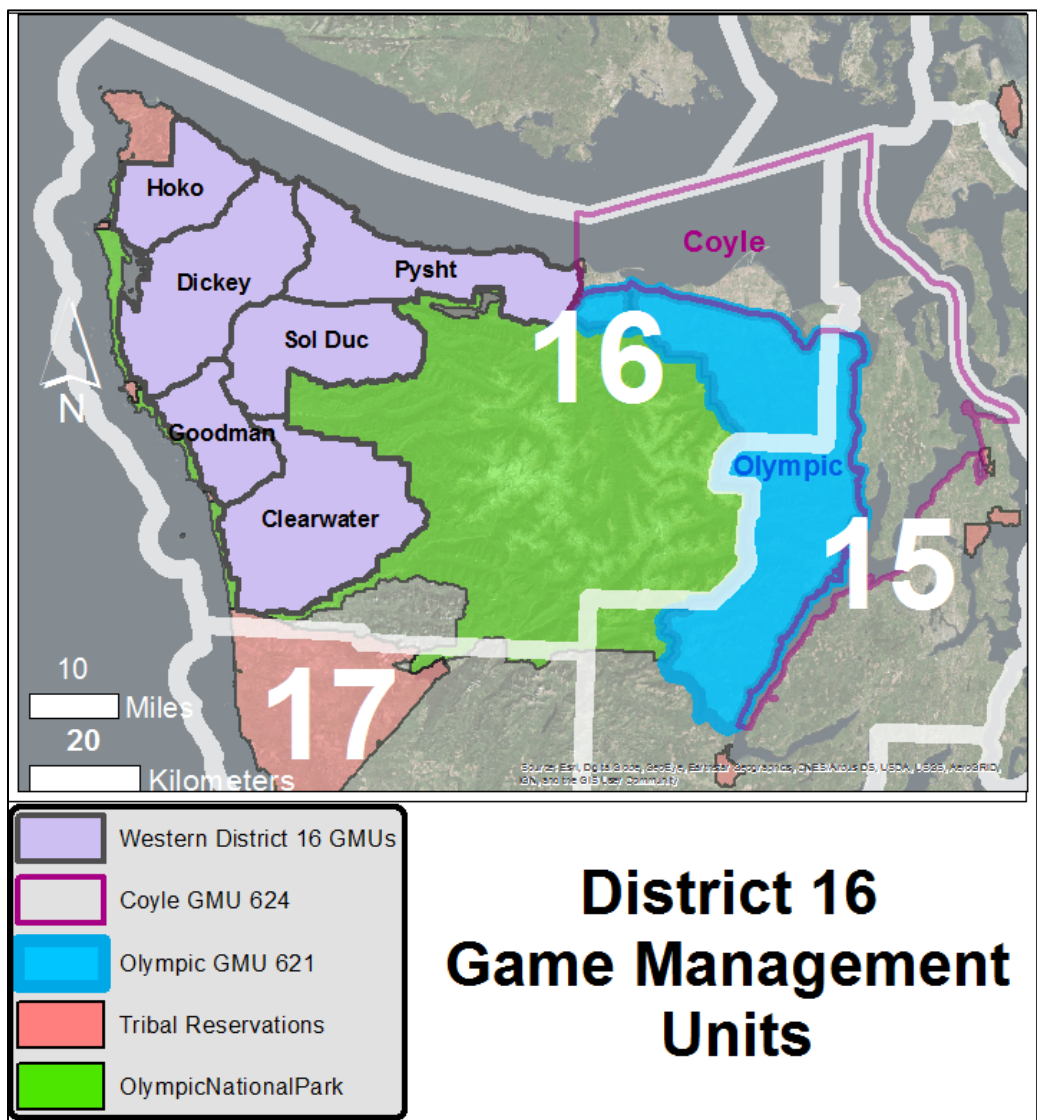


Figure 1. District 16 GMUs. Coyle and Olympic GMUs extend into District 15

Table 1. District 16 Deer and Elk Annual Harvest

District 16* Deer & Elk Annual Harvest									
Species	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Elk - Bulls Total	235	196	281	323	306	213	213	286	213
Elk - Bulls State	160	126	208	226	229	135	141	184	123
Elk - Bulls Tribal	75	70	73	97	77	75	72	101	90
Elk - Antlerless Total	51	51	50	70	50	27	44	29	27
Elk - Antlerless State	20	14	8	28	26	2	3	4	2
Elk - Antlerless Tribal	31	37	42	42	24	25	41	25	25
Deer - Bucks Total	871	1081	1120	1115	967	872	1115	982	987
Deer - Bucks State	771	976	995	1000	867	775	993	884	881
Deer - Bucks Tribal	101	105	125	115	100	97	122	98	106
Deer - Antlerless Total	77	105	110	124	97	149	189	150	130
Deer - Antlerless State	48	69	85	78	66	117	138	115	84
Deer - Antlerless Tribal	29	36	25	46	31	32	51	35	46

*Includes GMU 601, 602, 603, 607, 612, 615, 621, 624 (GMU 621 & 624 are in both District 15 & 16)

Table 2. District 16 Game Species Annual Harvest

District 16 Game Species State Hunter Annual Harvest									
Game Species	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
BEAR	118	90	119	152	94	101	87	66	66
COUGAR	2	9	8	5	12	2	8	5	2
DUCKS (Clallam & Jefferson Co)	5744	10365	7208	8682	6999	6057	11540	8093	7253
GEESE - September (early season)	88	84	388	96	154	149	272	97	136
GEESE (late season)	223	432	353	364	318	183	713	355	331
BRANT - Clallam County	90	180	156	46	89	90	Closed	Closed	Closed
FOREST GROUSE (Clallam & Jefferson Co)	1761	3814	3153	6868	2958	2590	4374	4794	5356
MOURNING DOVE (Clallam & Jefferson Co)	8	0	30	51	36	0	54	67	11
QUAIL (Clallam & Jefferson Co)	17	22	101	43	31	150	236	164	500
SNIFE	0	77	213	0	0	0	45	4	0
HARE/RABBIT (Clallam & Jefferson Co)	15	20	185	32	71	54	60	45	54

Includes GMU 601, 602, 603, 607, 612, 615, 621, 624 (harvest in entire GMU, including harvest in District 15)



EAST DISTRICT 16

The eastern portion of the district is the Dungeness Basin (western GMU 624 Coyle and northern portion of GMU 621 Olympic). The Dungeness watershed offers a rich habitat diversity in high elevation, rain-shadow mountains to lower watershed. The prairie is now a rural mix of small and large farms with scattered developments. The lower basin has some private duck hunting club ownerships and a few public waterfowl hunting areas. Waterfowl hunting opportunities have expanded in the eastern portion of the district in recent years. The Dungeness Basin and the smaller watersheds east of the Elwha are areas where deer abundance results in frequent complaints. Highly visible deer occur in the Coyle and Olympic GMUs as well as lower elevation forestlands with an ideal ratio of forest openings. Some of the Olympic GMU habitat includes large areas of USFS mature forest habitat that offers less forage for ungulates. Deer Area 6020, where there are “any deer” regular seasons, typically features more deer for harvest. Access to private ownership poses a challenge for hunters in District 16 and hunters need to obtain permission to access target properties.

WEST DISTRICT 16

The west end (Hoko, Dickey, Sol Duc, Goodman, and Clearwater) has the bulk of elk in the district, while deer are sparse in these same GMUs. Various sub herds of elk are located within District 16. Many elk herds are year-round residents that remain in lower elevation habitats. Some herds regularly migrate into higher elevations, most always on ONP. Hunters are likely to find harvest opportunities as elk move out of ONP during the hunting season. The ONP areas vary from the Outer Coast Park strip to the eastern portion of the Clearwater (GMU 615), which includes a large block of DNR-managed land that borders ONP.

Varied hunting opportunities exist within District 16, from waterfowl hunting on designated shoreline and wetland areas along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, to forest grouse, deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on private commercial and public forest land. Both state (DNR) and federal (USFS) lands provide hunting opportunities for a variety of species within the district.

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

The elk within District 16 are Roosevelt elk. District 16 encompasses various sub herds of the Olympic elk herd, one of ten herds identified in the state. Elk numbers peaked in the late 1970s, with a conservative estimate of about 12,000 elk outside of Olympic National Park based on historical harvest information. Past elk population estimates were based on a combination of harvest data, telemetry studies, and mark-resight surveys. These techniques yielded a 2000 fall population estimate of about 8,600 in the GMUs surrounding Olympic National Park. The current population of the Olympic elk herd is likely lower.

Overall, the elk harvest opportunity is for 3-point minimum. Much of the elk hunting within the eastern portion of the district is restricted to a limited entry (state hunters – permit only, 3-point minimum, bull-only harvest) with antlerless harvest used as a damage management tool when necessary. Elk hunting opportunities are generally good west of the Elwha River, with possibilities on DNR-managed lands, USFS lands, and private timberlands. However, several areas limit vehicular access or require permits to access. Hunters should obtain permission to hunt on private lands and must obey all posted signs and regulations. Some elk herds migrate down from high alpine meadows in Olympic National Park to lowland winter range. Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. Hunters often scout for elk that leave ONP and travel along major river drainages. Keep in mind that it is unlawful to hunt in ONP.

Along with elk come some challenges with elk damage, some of which WDFW manages using harvest and hunting pressure. WDFW's conflict specialists manage these elk damage areas and frequently use master hunter permittees to put pressure on the herds and encourage habitat use patterns that limit damage and support public safety. If interested, review the information to sign up for the [Master Hunter Permit Program](https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/master-hunter). wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/master-hunter

Radio-Collars and Markers: Local elk studies and ongoing monitoring require marking elk using transmitting markers or other tags. The radio-collar or ear tag markers should be marked with contact information identifying it as property of WDFW, university or other researchers. Recovering radio-collars from marked animals can provide biologists with valuable information. Please return any radio-collars from animals you harvest. When drugs are used to capture an animal, it is marked with an ear tag printed with directions to call the Department before consuming the meat. If you harvest an animal that you can't consume due to potential drug residues in the meat, the Department will re-issue your original transport tag, special permit, or special permit points as appropriate. For more information reference page 46 of the 2023 WDFW Big Game pamphlet.

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Hunters can harvest elk from any of the District 16 GMUs. Past harvest records can help to inform which areas hunters should consider for future harvests. Harvest has been one of the reliable measurements the Department uses to monitor elk on the Olympic Peninsula. WDFW generates game harvest report data using mandatory hunting reports, follow-up phone surveys, and permit reports. For other species, the small game hunter questionnaire, trapper report of catch, and cougar pelt sealing also inform data. The [2022 Game Status and Trend Report](#) wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02367 and [game harvest reports](#) are available on the WDFW website.

West District 16 – The Clearwater (GMU 615), Dickey (GMU 602), Goodman (GMU 612), and Sol Duc (GMU 607) have the highest elk harvest in District 16. These units contain large areas of public land, much of it without restricted access. Be aware that all these GMUs include gated roads, some of which allow hunter access and others that are closed to public access.

The Hoko (GMU 601), Pysht (GMU 603), and Coyle (GMU 624) have very limited opportunities for general season hunters. Most of these units contain private land and many of the roads on timberlands are gated. Elk groups in GMU 603 (Pysht) have increased slightly in the recent years.

A thesis on elk with research conducted in the Hoko (GMU 601) and Dickey (GMU 602) is available [online](#).

East District 16 – The Olympic GMU 621 is limited to state permit elk and tribal elk harvest. WDFW doesn't recommend GMU 624 (Coyle) as an elk hunting destination because it features limited opportunities. The season remains open for 3-point minimum. The elk population and associated hunting opportunities may increase in GMU 624 but are most likely outside of District 16.

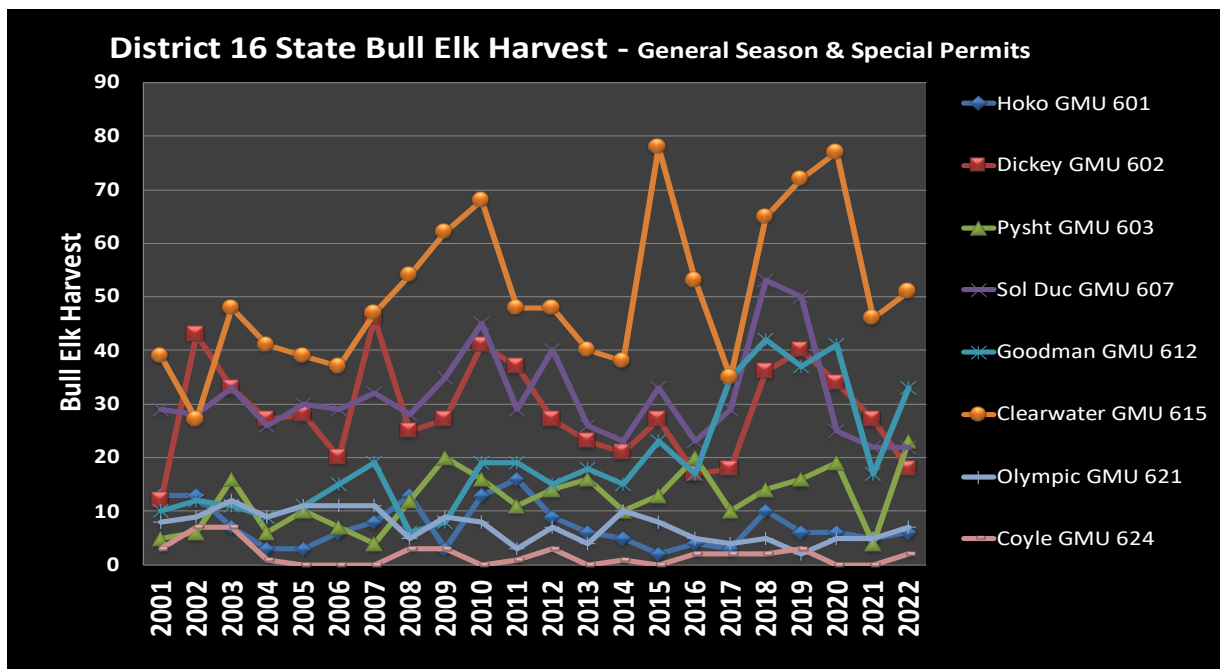
WDFW establishes hunting seasons not only to allow recreational use, but also to manage elk populations' habitat use patterns within the district. The Department designed Elk Area 6071 within GMU 621 and 624, to specifically address challenges with the Dungeness/Sequim elk herd. Harvest within Elk Area 6071 is limited to damage control, occasionally involving Master Hunter elk hunts from the Region 6 permit list. Reference District 15 [Hunting Prospects](#) for more information on elk harvest within GMU 621 and GMU 624.

DISTRICT 16 ELK HUNTING AND HARVEST RECORDS

Hunters can reference [annual harvest reports](#) on the WDFW website. The reports represent harvest, hunting effort, and success, which mandatory hunter reports and follow-up surveys help to inform for a correction factor of non-response bias.

Bull Elk Harvest

The distribution of Olympic Peninsula elk harvest reflects the general elk abundance, with most harvest occurring in the western GMUs. The west end elk are well distributed, with herds scattered throughout the GMUs. The east Olympic Peninsula elk herds are not as well distributed, with herds having distinct use patterns within watersheds. Hunting the east Olympic Peninsula elk takes more deliberate planning to find the herds and make the most of elk harvest opportunities. The entire GMU 621- Olympic is permit only for state hunter elk harvest.



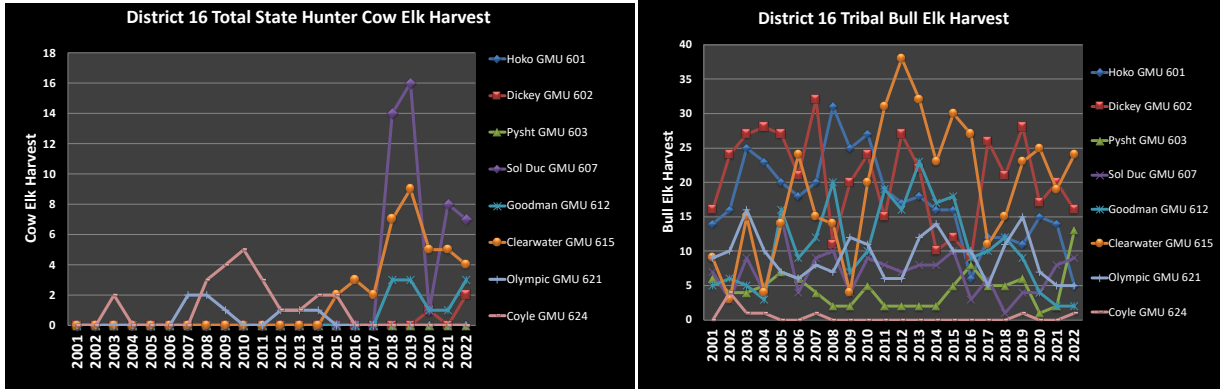
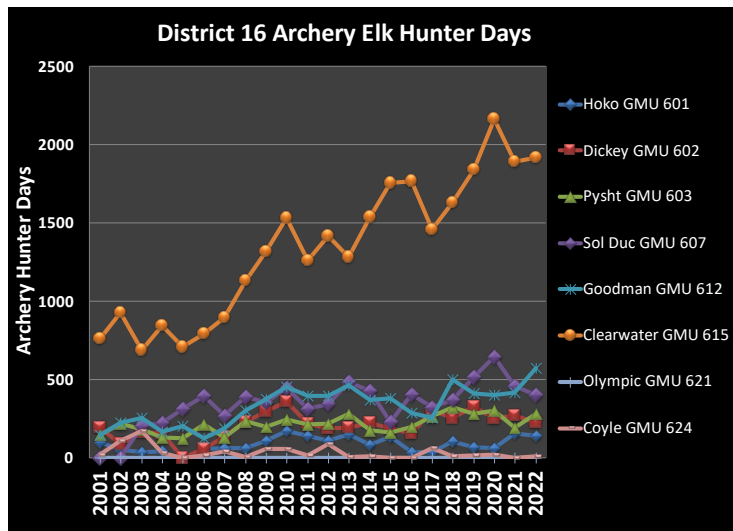


Figure 2. District 16 State Bull and Cow Elk Harvest and Tribal Bull harvest (**DRAFT** for Tribal harvest data; find updates at nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/).

The bull elk harvest within the western GMUs (GMUs 602, 607, 612 and 615) consistently contributes the highest bull harvest levels, while the northwestern to eastern GMUs (GMUs 601, 603, 621, 624,) consistently have low bull harvest levels, rarely reaching a GMU harvest of 20 bull elk annually (Figure 2).

Archery Elk Hunting

Archery elk hunting in District 16 predominately occurs in GMU 615 (Figure 3). GMU 602, GMU 603, and GMU 612 have much fewer archery hunter days, ranging between 200 and 400 days annually. GMU 601, GMU 621, and GMU 624 had the lowest level of archery hunter days at less than 200.



Muzzleloader Elk Hunting

Muzzleloader elk hunting was concentrated in GMU 602 and 607 for many years (Figure 4). This changed in 2015 when muzzleloader elk hunting opened in GMU 615 and GMU 612. As the total days spent in GMU 612 and 615 continue increasing the overall trend in muzzleloader elk hunter days increased. GMU 615 has the bulk of those days.

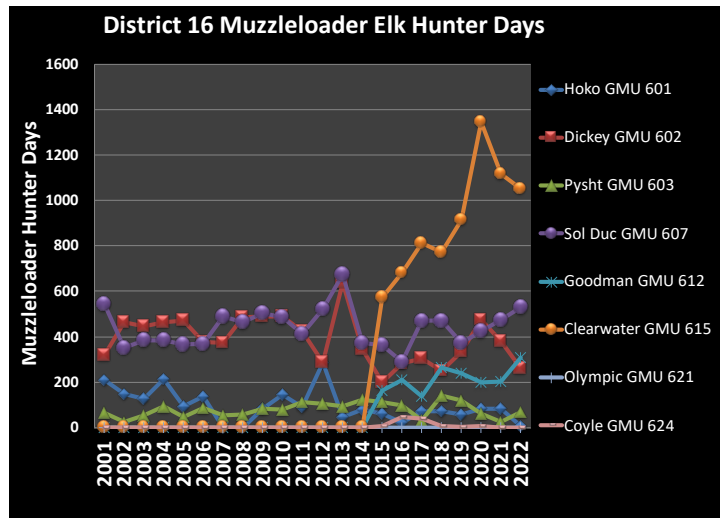
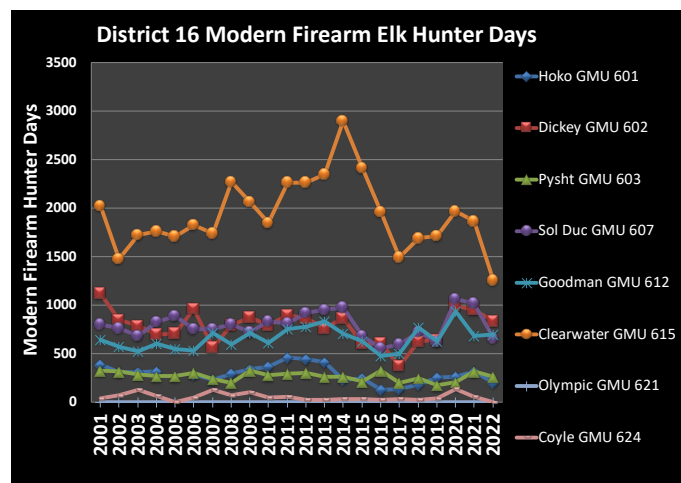


Figure 4. Muzzleloader elk hunter days by GMU.

Modern Firearm Elk Hunting

Total modern firearm elk hunter days decreased since 2014. GMU 615 modern firearm hunting pressure dropped in half from a 2014 high to a 2017 low. Simultaneously there was a noteworthy 600-day increase in muzzleloader hunting and a 200-day increase in archery hunting. The total number of state hunter days remains constant, shifting pressure from modern firearm to archery and muzzleloader.



GMU 601 (Hoko) Elk Hunting

Since 2011, Hoko bull elk harvest has remained below 30, which is typical for this GMU (Figure 6). Overall state hunter participation in GMU 601 is primarily modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters.

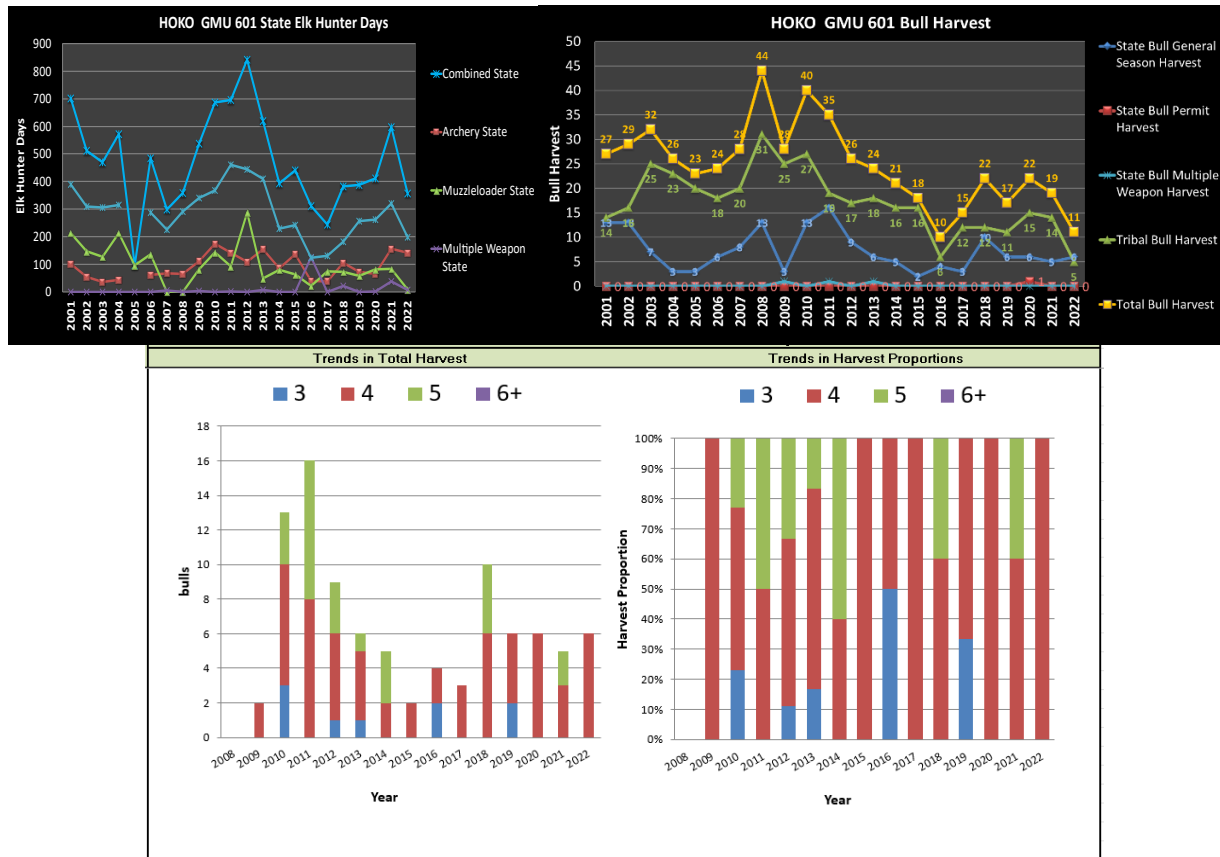


Figure 6. Hoko GMU 601 State elk hunter days, bull harvest and bull elk harvest antler proportions. (DRAFT for Tribal harvest data; find updates at nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/).

GMU 602 (Dickey) Elk Hunting

The Dickey GMU's total bull harvest decreased since 2019 from 68 to 34. State hunter days (combined) ranged from 1000 in 2017 to 1700 in 2020 and 2021 (Figure 7).

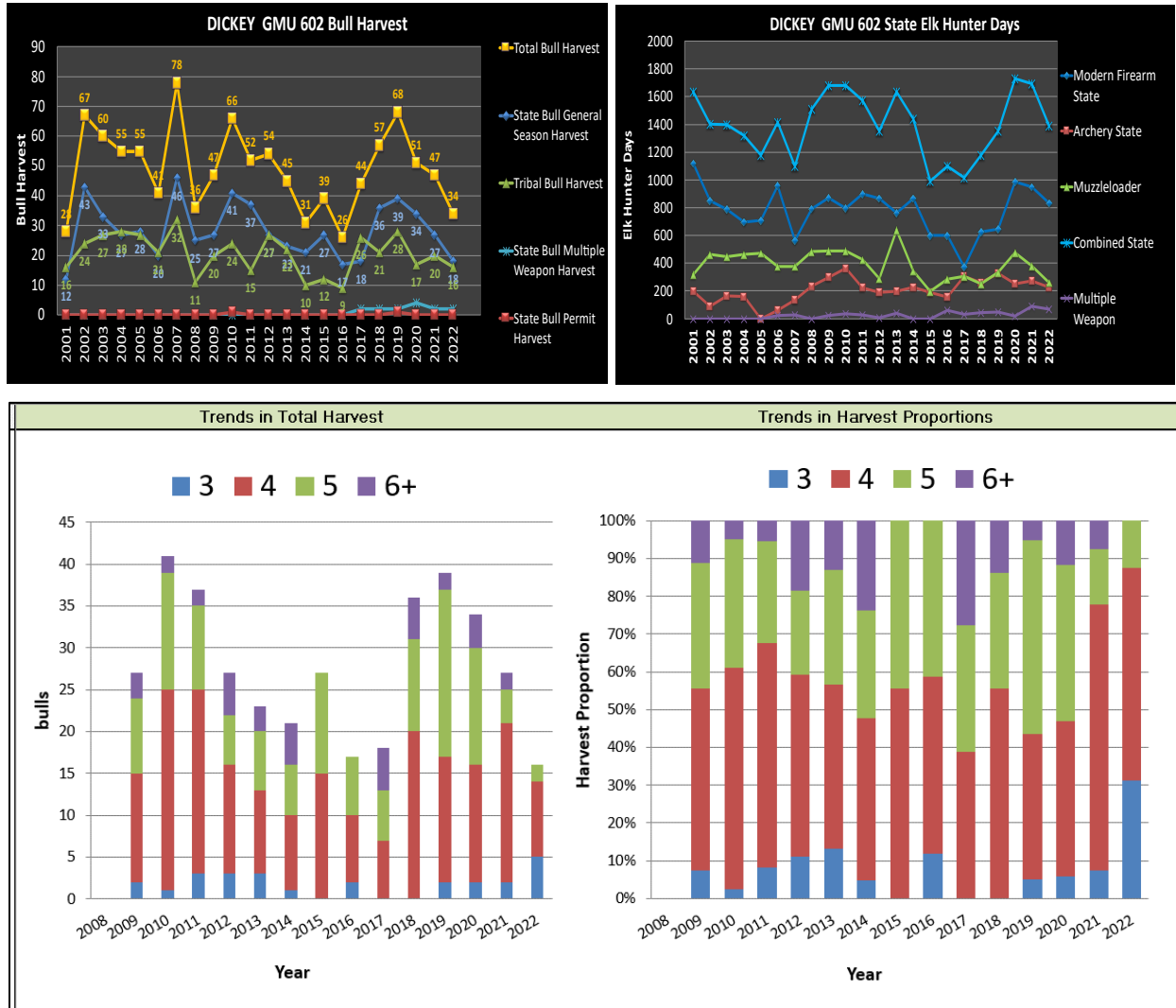


Figure 7. Dickey GMU 602 Bull Elk harvest, State Elk Hunter Days, Harvest Proportions by antler point. (DRAFT for Tribal harvest data; find updates at nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/).

GMU 603 (Pysht) Elk Hunting

Elk abundance in GMU 603 has increased for the last three decades. During the 1990s, it was uncommon to observe elk in GMU 603. As the elk population continues to increase, hunting opportunities are expanding, with the harvest trend increasing since 2001. Most of the elk population increase occurs within the western portion, on Merrill and Ring Pysht Tree Farm and other private forestlands. There are also some herds within the Elwha Watershed, with occasional observations of elk use within the newly formed Elwha floodplains. The Joyce vicinity elk herds have increasing conflict situations arising.

Modern firearm hunters maintain a success rate of around 5 to 10% (Figure 8). Hunter pressure has remained relatively constant since 2001, with the bull harvest rising to 36 in 2022.

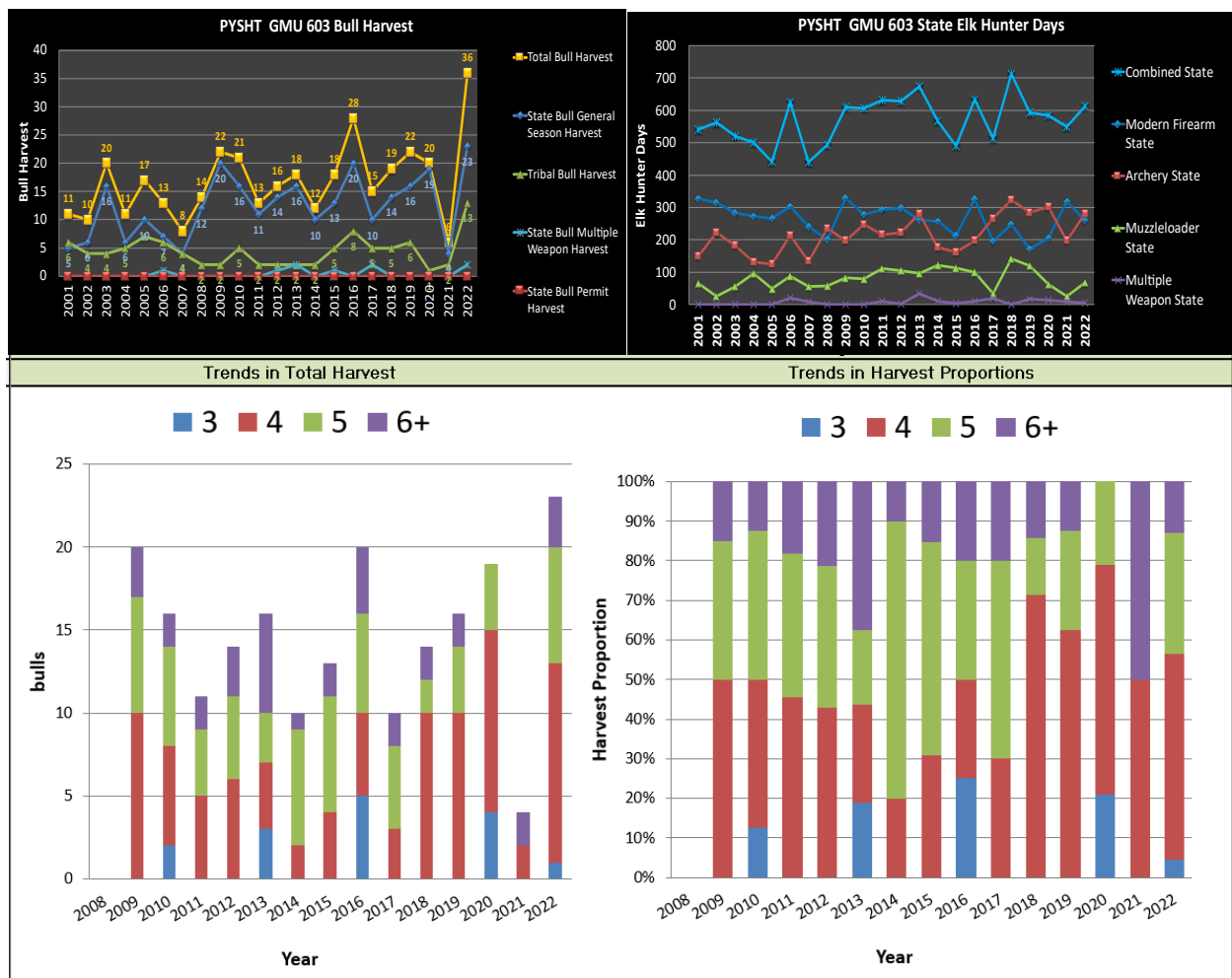


Figure 8. Pysht GMU 603 Bull Elk harvest & state elk hunter days; Antler point proportions in harvest by state hunters. (DRAFT for Tribal harvest data; updates nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/).

GMU 607 (Sol Duc) Elk Hunting

State hunters account for most of GMU 607's bull elk harvest with tribal harvest accounting for 29% in 2022 (Figure 9). State hunters harvest about 30 bulls annually and tribal hunters take less than ten bulls annually. The state bull harvest topped at 53 in 2018 and 48 in 2019. In 2018, with a new antlerless elk permit opportunity, state hunters harvested 14 elk in 2018 and 16 elk in 2019, dropping to 1 elk in 2020.

Hunter success in GMU 607 is usually around 5% to 20% for all participating state hunters with hunter success for all groups dropping in 2020 (Figure 9).

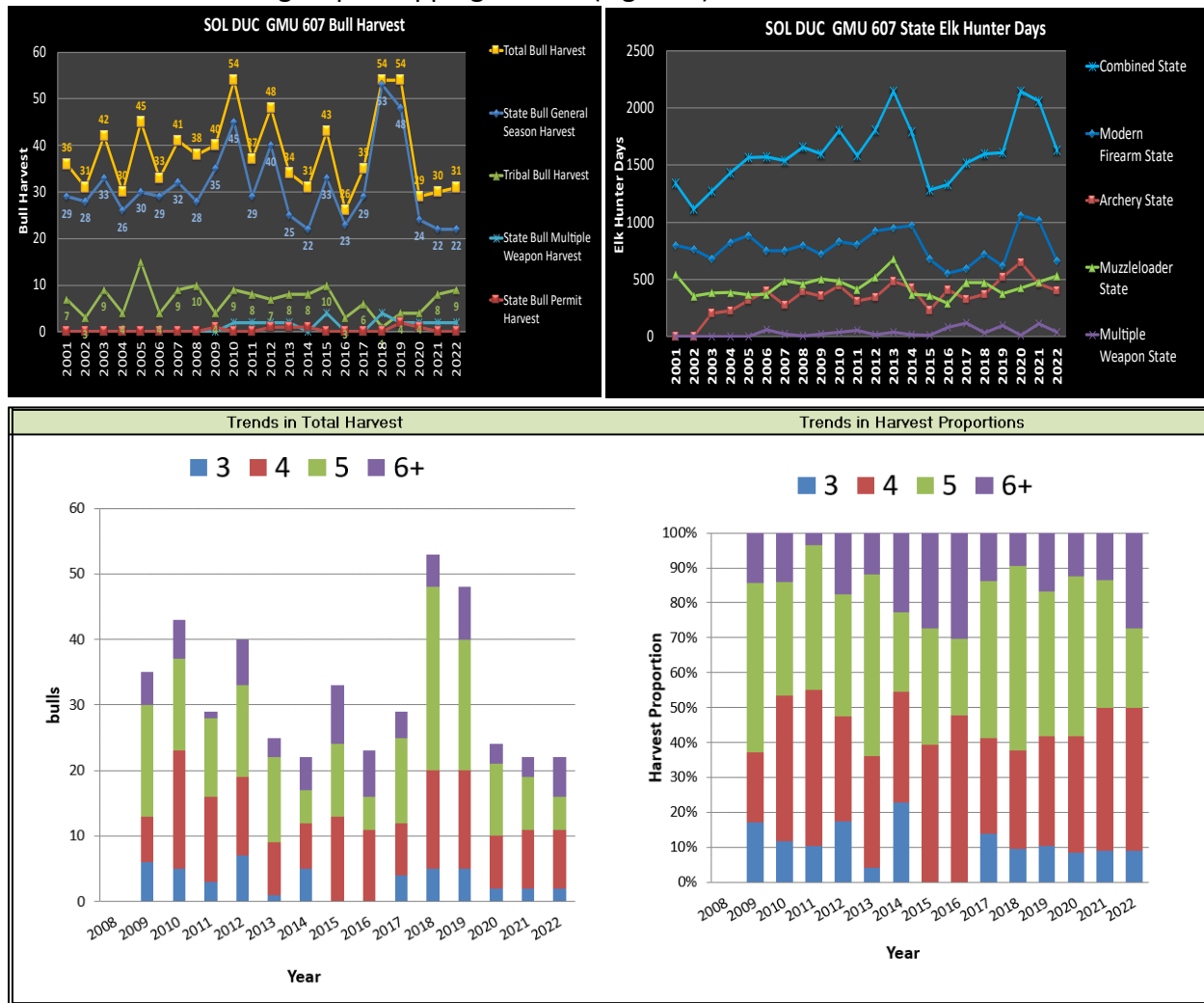


Figure 9. Sol Duc GMU 607 bull and antlerless elk harvest, state elk hunter days, and proportion of state harvest by antler points. Tribal Bull harvest (**DRAFT** for Tribal harvest data; find updates at nwfc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/)

GMU 612 (Goodman) Elk Hunting

State bull harvest in Goodman has maintained harvest numbers between 35 and 41 since 2017, dropping to 16 in 2021 (Figure 10).

Total state hunter days in GMU 612 remains constant over the years. In recent years the total has increased to 1,300-1,600. In 2015, a new Muzzleloader season opened in GMU 612, resulting in a modest amount of muzzleloader hunter days (Figure 10). The antler point proportions are shown in Figure 10.

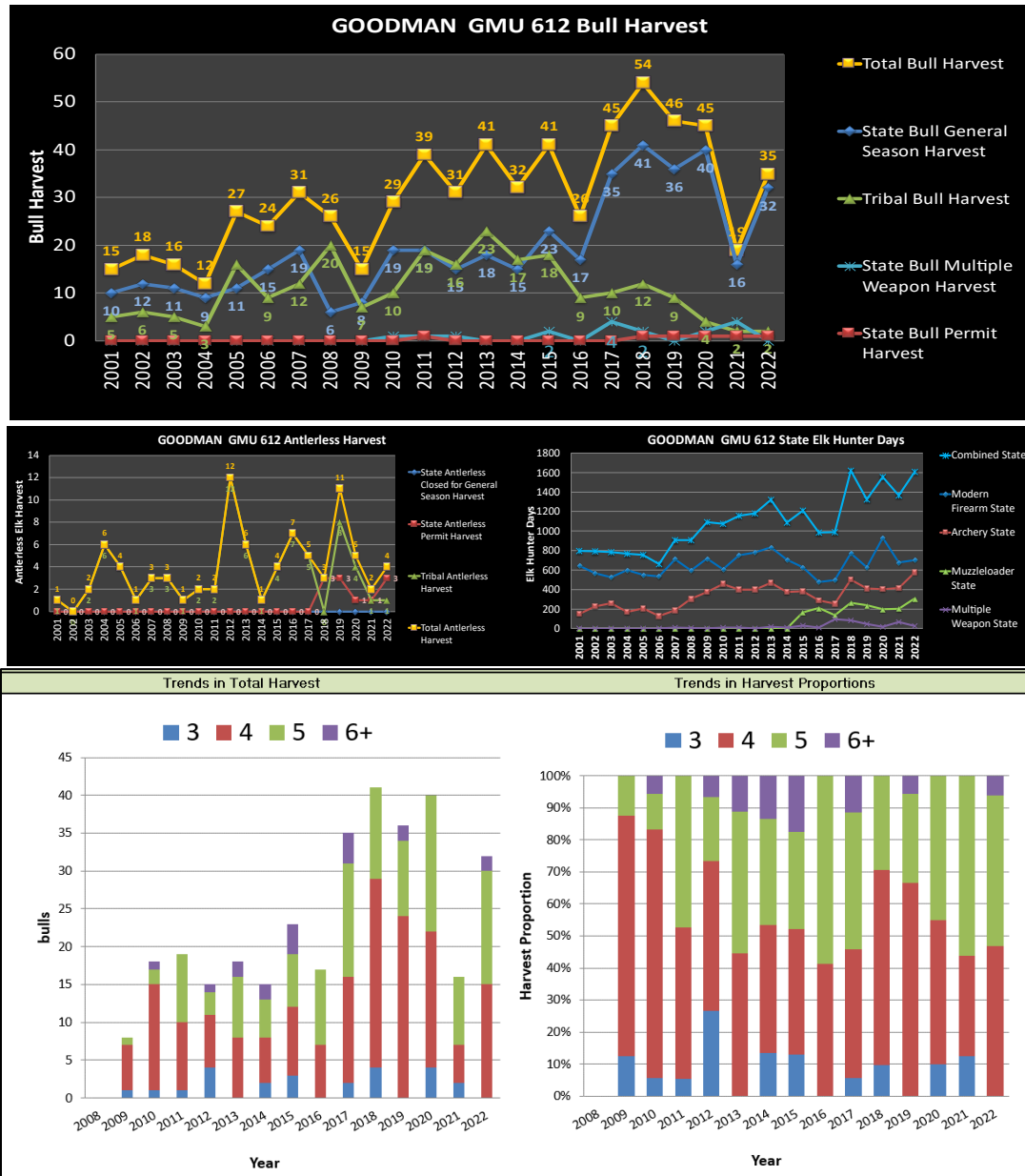


Figure 10. Goodman GMU 612 bull and antlerless harvest, state elk hunter days, and proportion by antler points in state hunter harvest. (DRAFT Tribal harvest data; updates nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/)

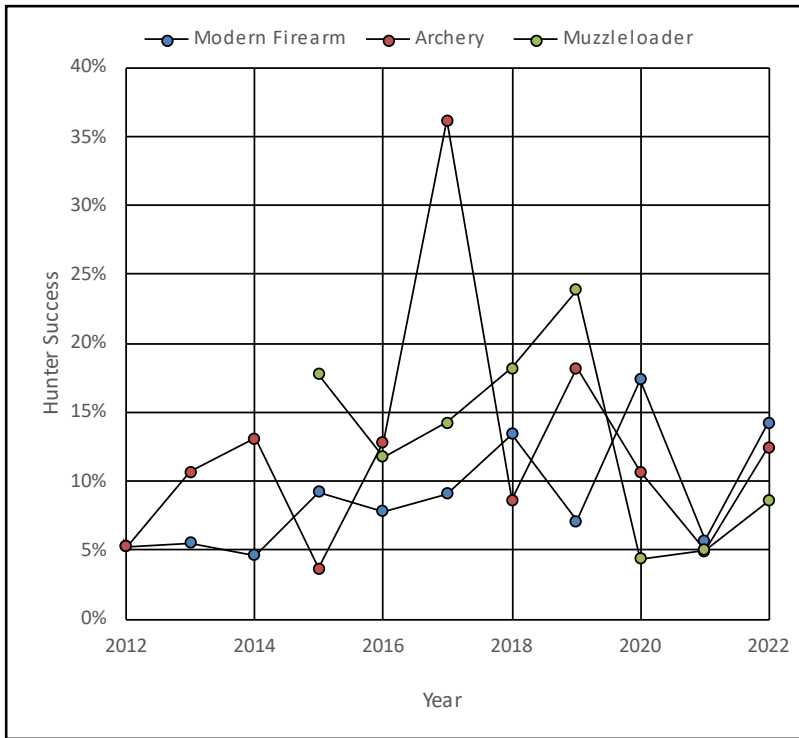


Figure 11. Goodman GMU 612 State Hunter Success.



GMU 615 (Clearwater) Elk Hunting

GMU 615 has had the most elk harvest of all GMUs in District 16 since 2003 (Figure 2). The total elk bull harvest trend has fluctuated considerably in recent years, with a low of 46 in 2017 and a high of 102 in 2020 (Figure 12). The Clearwater total bull harvest was 75 in 2022. State harvest dropped from 75 to 50 between 2020 and 2022.

The overall total number of hunter days has remained constant even after the 2015 Muzzleloader season opened (Figure 12).

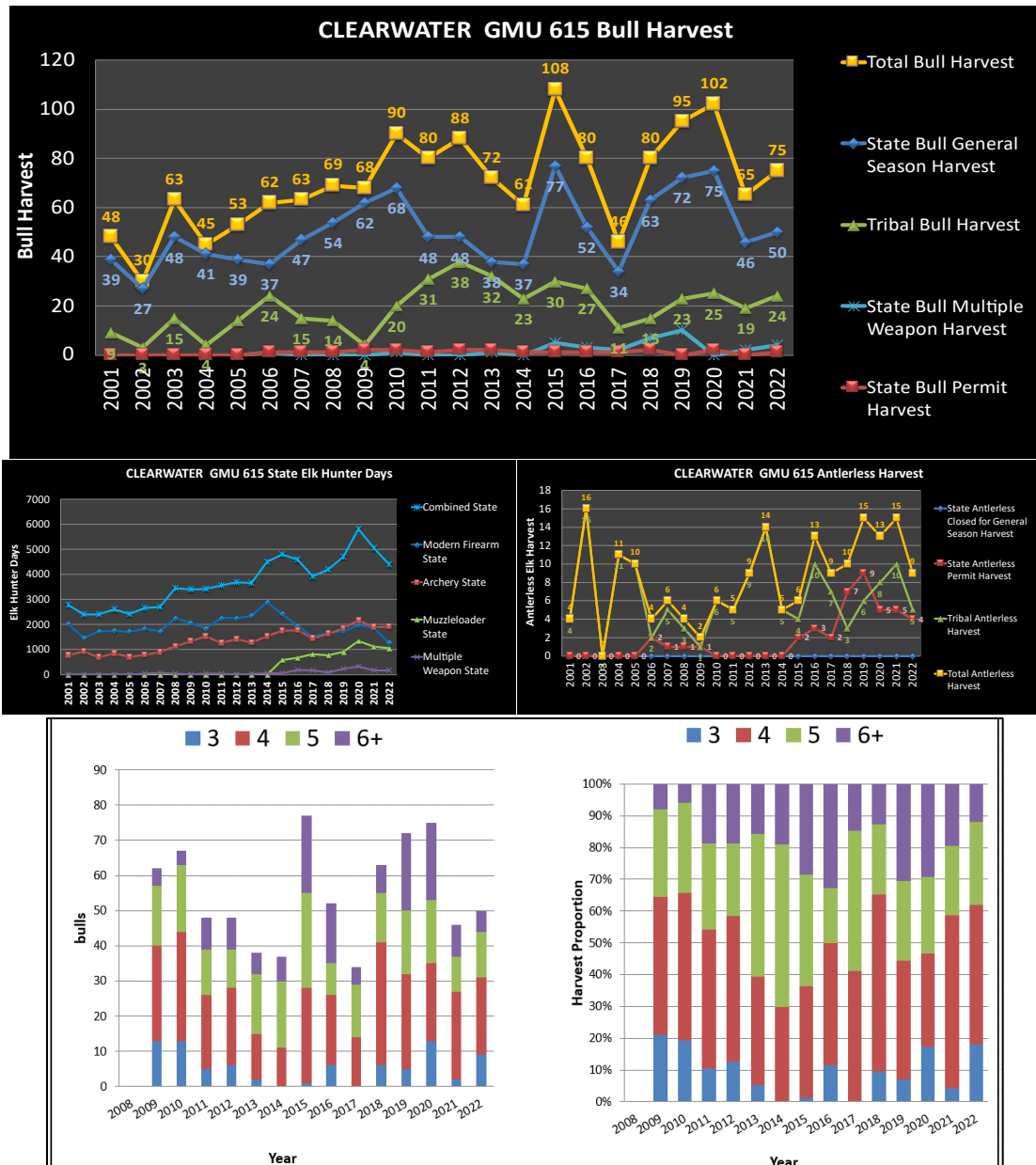


Figure 12. Clearwater GMU 615 bull and antlerless harvest, State elk hunter days & proportion of harvest by antler point; **DRAFT** Tribal harvest data; updates nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/.

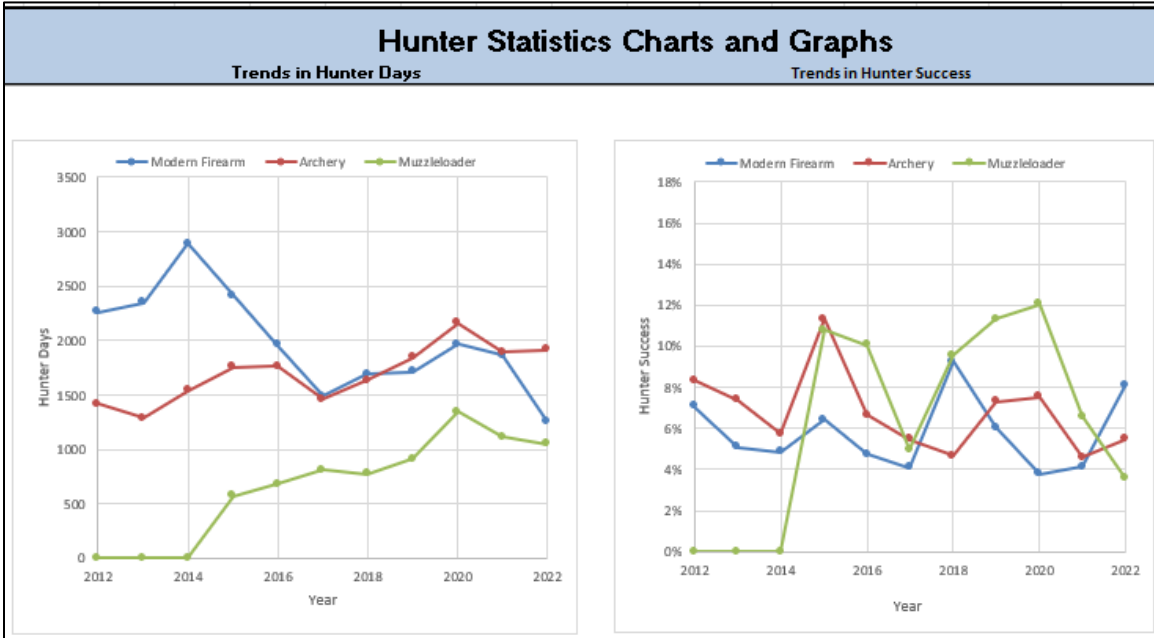


Figure 13. GMU 615 bull elk State hunter days and success.

GMU 621 (Olympic) Elk Hunting

Olympic GMU 621 elk hunt opportunity is limited to permit hunts and an occasional damage hunt harvest. Permit hunts can be a great opportunity, if the weather and elk use patterns are favorable. Most of the hunting opportunity in Olympic GMU 621 is within District 15. Please review the Hunting Prospects for District 15. Harvest is generally between ten and twenty bull elk (Figure 14).

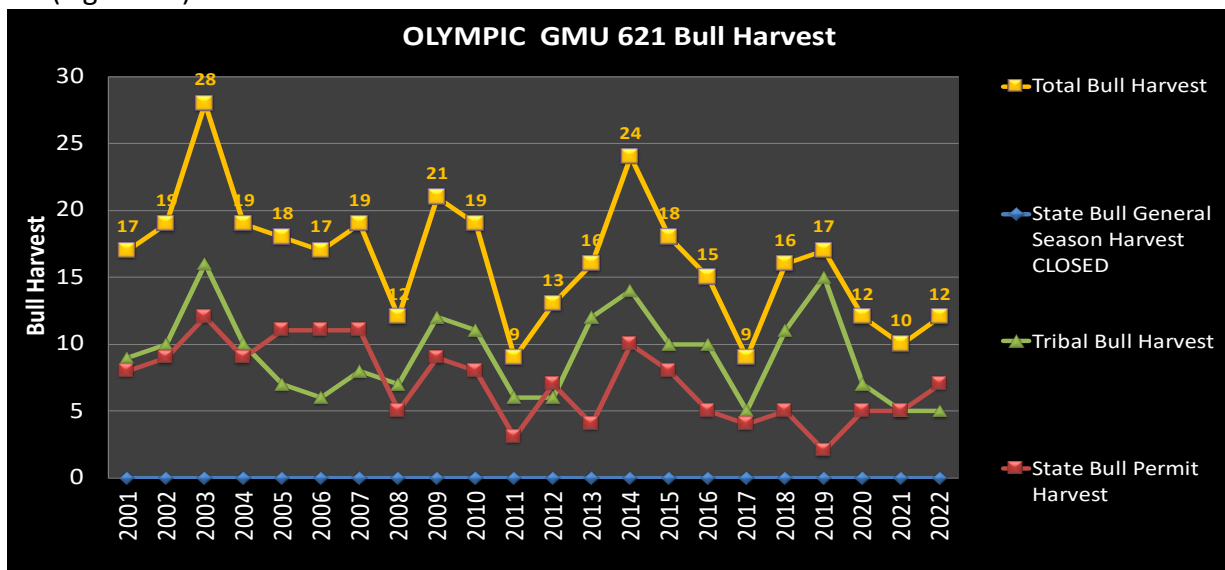


Figure 14. GMU 621 bull harvest from 2001 to 2022. (DRAFT for Tribal harvest data; find updates at nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/)

GMU 624 (Coyle) Elk Hunting

GMU 624 is not a prime elk hunting GMU with extremely low harvest (Figure 15). Small elk groups that may have split off from the Dungeness herd or other east Olympic Peninsula elk herds offer the main source of GMU 624 elk. Over the years, WDFW has received reports of small groups of elk in various locations within GMU 624, mostly within District 15. Reference District 15 [Hunting Prospects](#).

Much of the ownership in these areas is private, typically small farms. Securing permission for hunting in much of this area can be difficult. When the Legislature tasked WDFW to consider closing the GMU to elk hunting due to the lack of opportunity overall, WDFW decided to retain the hunting season, which can be a tool to resolve some damage control. If elk abundance increases in this GMU, elk harvest opportunity should increase as well.

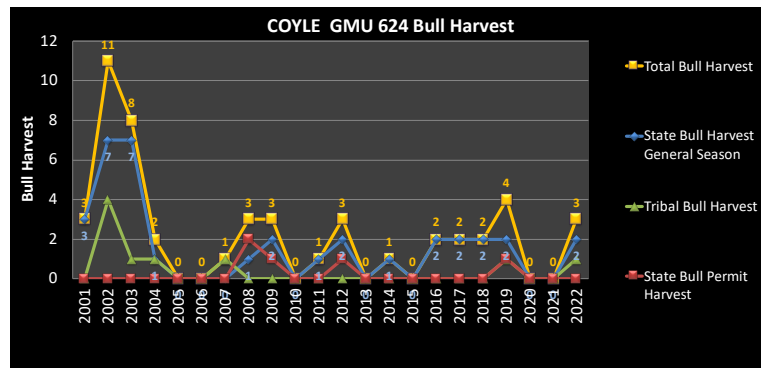


Figure 15. GMU 624 bull harvest from 2001 to 2022. (**DRAFT** for Tribal harvest data; find updates at nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/).

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES AND NOTEWORTHY REGS

WDFW has adopted night hunting and hound hunting regulations during deer and elk hunting seasons in recent years. Reference page 21 of Washington’s Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Unmanned Aircraft: (WAC 220-413-070) “Using Aircraft” to include unstaffed aircraft. Page 87 of Washington’s Big Game Hunting Regulations.

“It is illegal to:

- Use an aircraft, including unmanned aircraft to spot, locate, or report the location of wildlife for the purpose of hunting.
- Hunt game animals, game birds, or migratory birds on the day one has operated an unmanned aircraft.”

Using Dogs: (WAC 220-413-060) Hunting wild animals (except rabbits and hares) with dogs (hounds) during the months of October or November during the dates established for modern

firearm deer or elk general seasons in Eastern and Western Washington is prohibited. Page 87 of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations.

Prohibited Hunting Methods: Page 87 of Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations:

- Hunt game birds or game animals with anything other than a firearm, a bow and arrow, a crossbow, or by falconry.

People with disabilities: Note new regulations referenced on page 92 of Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, WDFW has received dramatically increasing reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the Olympic Elk Herd area. While elk are susceptible to many conditions that result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including elk from the Olympic herd.

All of District 16 falls within the Olympic elk herd range. TAHD is most prevalent among elk on the southern end of the Olympic Peninsula, however recent detections on the northern end confirm the disease is spreading to other portions of the Olympic elk herd range. WDFW has confirmed the presence of TAHD from elk sampled in GMUs 603, 607, 621, 624, 636, 638, 648, and 651.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male, or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

- Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs
- Turn in your elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington.
- Report elk: Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the Department's online reporting form.
- Clean shoes and tires: Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage westside (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. This program aims to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of Sep. 1 through Dec. 31 will be awarded. Additionally, participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, reference WDFW's [Elk hoof disease in Washington state](#) webpage. Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations.

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

WDFW monitors black-tailed deer populations by tracking the harvest and hunting effort and gathering data on survivability, recruitment, and mortality rates using collared deer studies and aerial census methods.

According to Dr. Cliff Rice, a lead researcher for western Washington black-tailed deer studies, some of the largest does captured in western Washington were captured west of the Dungeness on the lower foothills in a mix of DNR and private land.



WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

Western District 16

Western District 16 is generally sparse of deer. This area includes GMUs 601 (Hoko), 602 (Dickey), 603 (Pysht), 607 (Sol Duc), 612 (Goodman), and 615 (Clearwater). Observations and published reports indicate that deer population numbers and density are generally low throughout the district west of the Elwha River. West Olympic Peninsula tribes dropped antlerless harvest in the western GMUs in 2010. Following are links to some deer research in the Hoko GMU:

- [Factors affecting the survival of black-tailed deer fawns](#)
- [Abstract of a study on the influence of hair loss syndrome \(HLS\) on black-tailed deer fawn survival](#)

Eastern District 16

Eastern District 16 includes the northwestern portion of GMU 621 (Olympic) and the northern portion of GMU 624 (Coyle), which extend east and south into District 15 (eastern Jefferson County). Because WDFW records the data on harvest by GMU, the harvest figures presented here include all GMU 621 and 624, extending into District 15. The portion of District 16 east of the Elwha River has black-tailed deer populations that are readily observed (presumably due to higher densities) and in many areas can often be observed in groups, especially in the vicinity of farmland. In these areas, the deer are often considered to be a nuisance by property owners and agricultural operations, especially in GMU 624. Reference the [Deer Areas](#) section on Page 40 & 106 for more information about Deer Area 6020.

GMU 624 does have firearm restrictions, with no centerfire or rimfire rifles allowed. Read more about that in the [Firearm Restrictions](#) section on Page 90 of the 2023 Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations.

The mid and lower elevations of GMU 621 have high densities of deer as well, with some scattered blocks of DNR ownership that offer hunting on public land. private industrial timberlands and DNR-managed lands are largely gated due to timber theft, dumping, vandalism, and other problems. However, hunters can access many of these roads on foot or mountain bike. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

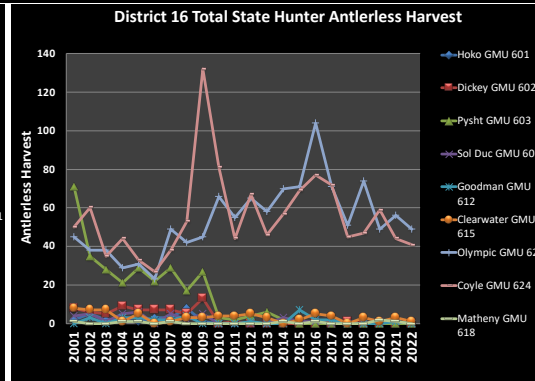
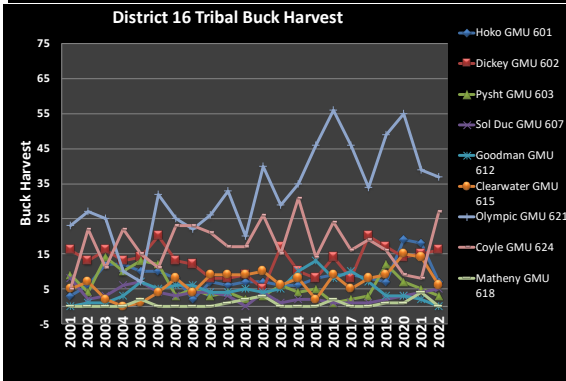
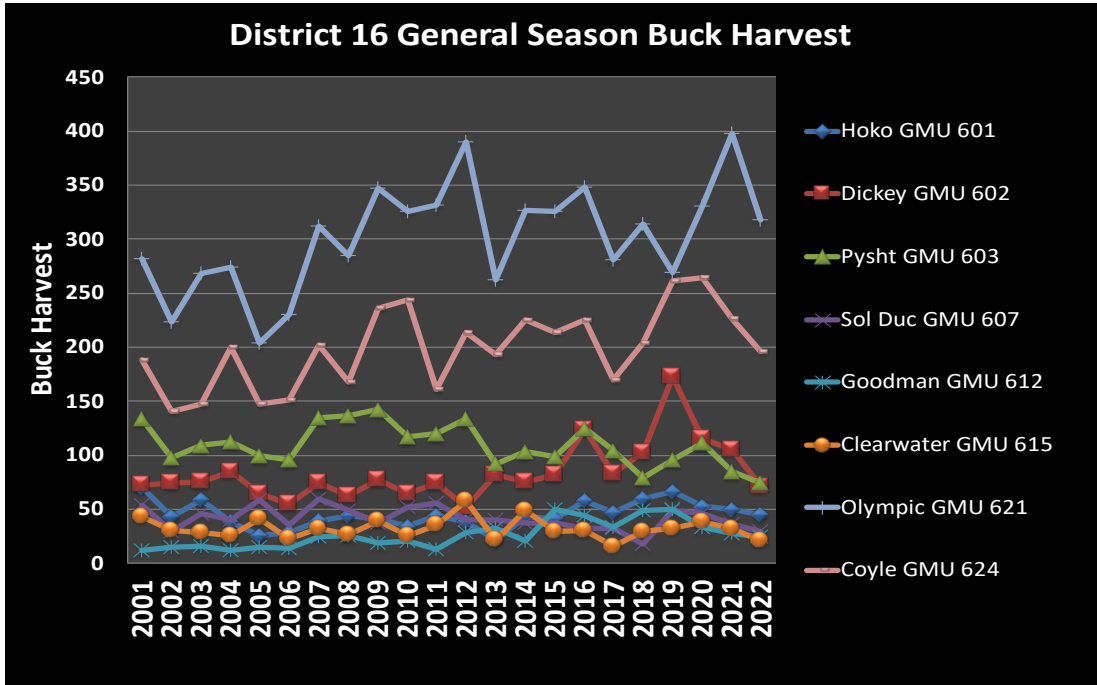
The key to a successful harvest is securing the appropriate permission to hunt on private land and scouting the area prior to the hunting season. Hunters who intend to target deer in developed areas would be well advised to check with local jurisdictions regarding firearm restrictions.

DISTRICT 16 BLACK-TAILED DEER HUNTING AND HARVEST RECORDS

[Annual harvest reports](#) and harvest statistics for deer based on hunter reporting can be found on the WDFW website.

Reference the [District 15 Hunting Prospects](#) for more information on GMU 621 and GMU 624.

Buck harvest within District 16 GMUs is highest on the eastern half and lower as one goes further west. The four GMUs with the lowest buck harvest are Clearwater, Goodman, Pysht, and Hoko, the most western GMUs in the District (Figure 16). Tribal harvest ranges within 5% to 20% of the total deer harvest in District 16 GMUs.



Total 2022 Buck Harvest	
200+ bucks	Olympic GMU 621
71-200 bucks (In each GMU)	Coyle GMU 624 Dickey GMU 602 Pysht 603
< 70 bucks (In each GMU)	Hoko GMU 601 Sol Duc GMU 607 Goodman GMU 612 Clearwater GMU 615

Figure 16. District 16 general state season buck harvest, tribal buck harvest, state hunter antlerless harvest; GMU categorized by level of total buck harvest. (**DRAFT** for Tribal harvest data; find updates at nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/)

ARCHERY DEER HUNTING

Archery deer hunting in District 16 is concentrated in GMU 621 and GMU 624 (GMUs 621 and 624 are in both District 15 and 16).

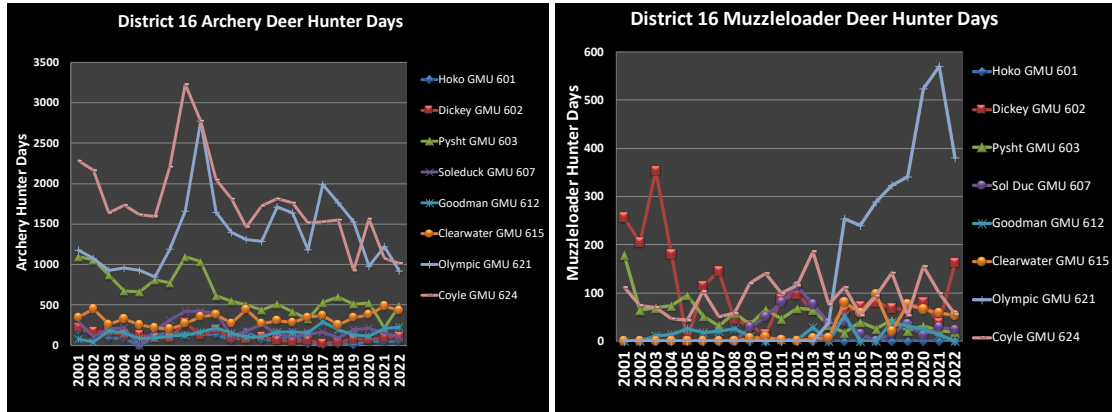


Figure 17. District 16 archery and muzzleloader hunter days.

MUZZLELOADER DEER HUNTING

Muzzleloader deer hunting has recently increased in GMU 621, while all the other GMUs in District 16 reportedly receive less than 200 hunter days annually (Figure 17). Other GMUs remain consistent with the amount of muzzleloader hunter days.

MODERN FIREARM DEER HUNTING

Modern firearm hunters have maintained a steady participation level in the GMUs in District 16 (Figure 18).

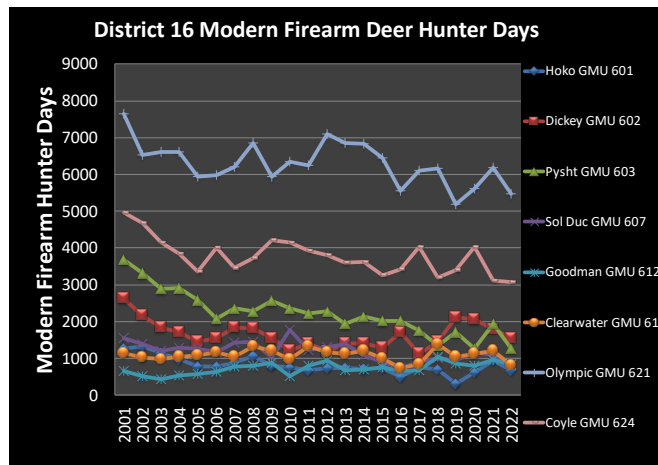


Figure 18. District 16 modern firearm deer hunter days.

DEER AREAS

WDFW established Deer Area 6020 over 20 years ago to allow hunters to harvest does to help reduce deer conflicts north of Highway 101 between Port Angeles and eastern Miller Peninsula. The Department allows doe harvest within Deer Area 6020 during general seasons. This area is primarily private land, but it is worth inquiring with landowners about hunting access. Note that much of the state-managed land on Miller Peninsula is state park land where hunting is not allowed. Refer to the firearm restrictions section of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet if you are considering this area. The entirety of GMU 624 within District 16 (Clallam County) has [firearm restriction](#) regulations. No hunting is allowed with centerfire or rimfire rifles.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

WDFW adopted night hunting and hound hunting restrictions as well as permits during deer and elk hunting seasons in recent years. Reference page 87 of Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Unstaffed aircraft: Wording has been added to WAC 220-413-070 "Using Aircraft" to include unstaffed aircraft. Reference page 87 of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

People with disabilities: Note new regulations referenced on page 92 of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.



Deer observed walking along a beach grassland.



GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

WDFW's black bear management goals are to:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage black bear and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize threats to public safety from black bears, while at the same time maintaining a sustainable and viable bear population.
3. Manage black bear for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography.
4. Manage populations statewide for a sustained yield. For management purposes, the state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions.

District 16 is located nearly entirely within the designated Coastal Black Bear Management Unit (BBMU) except for GMU 624, which is in the Puget Sound BBMU. This area is mostly private land with firearm restrictions. Fall black bear hunting is allowed in all GMUs within the district. The current black bear hunting season guidelines for both the Coastal BBMU and Puget Sound BBMU are designed to maintain black bear populations at their current level. The fall black bear hunting season for all District 16 units is Aug. 1 to Nov. 15, 2023. Hunters can buy up to two bear tags during each license year.

Wildlife managers use three statistics to assess black bear harvest:

- Proportion of females harvested (no more than 35-39% of harvest)
- Median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years)
- Median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years)

WDFW doesn't conduct annual surveys to monitor black bear population size trends and instead uses harvest data trends for population estimates or indices. Wildlife managers believe that black bear populations are stable in District 16. Black bears occur throughout District 16, but population densities vary among GMUs.

In 2013, the Department began work to estimate black bear density statewide. This research originated in the North Cascade Mountains using two detection methods, non-invasive DNA collection using barbed-wire hair collection and physical capture and deployment of global positioning system (GPS) collars. Results showed that while density varied by human development and habitat productivity, it averaged 20 bears/100 km² in western Cascades and 19 bears/100 km² in eastern Cascades (Welfelt et al. 2019). In the western Washington study area, average total density estimates (including cubs) were nearly 50% lower than expected prior to this research (20 vs 39/100 km²). Because these results showed that density could vary widely by habitat types within limited areas, WDFW determined that density should not be extrapolated to a statewide or even region-wide black bear density given the variability of habitats. Thus, the Department needs more data to evaluate which habitat and management factors are associated with variations in bear density at a broad scale.

A non-invasive DNA collection project has been conducted in various GMUs within the state. Biologists conducted this hair collection effort within the Clearwater GMU during June and July of 2022. Over 1000 hair samples were collected from bear and other wildlife species. A total of 92 bears (38 female and 54 male) were assigned individual identity from the hair samples collected. The agency will be able to determine the density of bears/100km² for this managed forest land. With multiple density estimates in a variety of habitats, WDFW can examine what habitat and human factors are associated black bear density across Washington State and estimate statewide population abundance more accurately. Continued sampling will also allow for appropriate inferences to be made regarding harvest levels and the effects of management actions.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

District 16 black bear harvesting prospects remain good to excellent. Although some hunters specifically target black bears, hunters harvest most bears opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest and hunter success can vary quite a bit from one year to the next. The variability in the district is likely higher for hunters who specifically hunt black bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while deer or elk hunting.

During the 2022 season, hunters harvested 80 bears within District 16 GMUs. Hunters harvested an additional 30 bears in GMU 621 (Olympic) and 14 bears in GMU 624 (Coyle), both of which include a portion of District 15. Hunter success during the 2022 season ranged from 9% in GMU 607 (Sol Duc) to 15.4% in GMU 618 (Methany). There was an increase in the number of bears harvested in GMU 603 (Pysht) and GMU 612 (Goodman) from last season. As usual, the highest black bear harvest in the district occurred in GMU 602 (Dickey) and GMU 615 (Clearwater). During the 2022 fall hunt, a total of 16 bears were harvested in GMU 602 (Dickey) and a total of 22 bears were harvested in GMU 615 (Clearwater). Hunters can reference summaries of BMU and GMU harvest reports in two tables (Table 3 and Table 4). The harvested report table also represents the percentage of male and female black bear harvest.



Table 3. Black bear 2022 harvest and hunter effort for District 16 GMUs.

WASHINGTON						
STATEWIDE BLACK BEAR HARVEST STATISTICS						
FOR THE 2022 HUNTING SEASON						
BMU	Bear Management Unit Name	Total Harvest	Number Hunters	Hunter Success Rate	Hunter Days	Days/Kill
1	Coastal	377	3,335	11%	32,612	87
2	Puget Sound	126	1,413	9%	11,935	95

Table 4. Black bear 2022 harvest reports for District 16 GMUs.

GMU	Fall Male Harvest	Fall Female Harvest	Total Harvest	Number Hunters	Hunter Success	Hunter Days	Days/Kills
BMU 1 (Coastal)							
601 - HOKO	5	2	7	51	13.8%	344	49
602 - DICKEY	13	3	16	125	12.8%	881	55
603 - PYSHT	9	2	11	117	9.4%	974	89
607 - SOL DUC	2	5	7	77	9%	368	53
612 - GOODMAN	11	0	11	87	12.6%	872	79
615 - CLEARWATER	15	7	22	213	10.4%	1,477	67
618 - MATHENY	2	4	6	39	15.4%	214	36
621 - OLYMPIC	21	9	30	261	11.4%	1,757	59
BMU 2 (Puget Sound)							
624 - COYLE	8	6	14	80	17.6%	657	47

HOW TO LOCATE AND HARVEST A BLACK BEAR

DNR and federal (USFS) lands continue to provide the best opportunities for bear hunting within the district. WDFW encourages hunters to scout for signs of bears (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Access behind gated roads is largely available to those willing to walk or mountain bike, and there are ample numbers of timber harvests/younger age class regeneration units that will attract bears. At higher elevations, those willing to hike in and pack out can pursue bears in classic environments where spot-and-stalk opportunities await. The USFS website has forest health maps that identify areas where bear damage has been detected from aerial surveys. Hunters can find the [aerial forest health detection maps](#) on the USFS website.

Scouting is an extremely important factor that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 16. Although black bears are common and occur in some areas at high densities, they are seen infrequently because of the thick vegetation that dominates the Olympic Peninsula landscape. Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types, so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. In the early fall, hunters should focus their efforts at higher elevations and in open terrain (hillsides, etc.) and timber harvest areas. Huckleberries ripen throughout the summer, but in the early fall the most remaining berries are typically at higher elevations. A good berry patch yielding much fruit would be a good place to hunt. Bears can also look in recent timber harvests that contain many berry-producing shrubs, including huckleberries, serviceberries, snowberries, blackberries, salmonberries, thimbleberries, and salal berries. During the fall, hunters need to find openings with these characteristics and hike through them to see if there is any bear sign. If they do find fresh sign, odds are there is a bear frequenting the area. If hunters are patient and sit for extended periods of time watching these areas, they stand a reasonable chance of harvesting a bear. Since the Olympic Peninsula experienced a very cool spring and late summer, it can be expected that bears may move into berry foraging areas later than usual this season.



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

WDFW strongly urges bear hunters not to shoot sows with cubs. Some cubs that accompany their mother's may tend to lag behind and may not be obvious to hunters. Bear cubs (weighing 30-50 lbs.) may also be present in trees or well-hidden in dense vegetation in the vicinity. Please observe and be patient before shooting. In past hunting seasons, WDFW received several reports of orphaned cubs in Region 6. Some of these cubs were captured and taken to rehabilitation facilities. The use of hounds and/or bait to hunt black bear is prohibited statewide ([RCW 77.15.245](#)).

MANDATORY SUBMISSION OF TEETH

It is mandatory (per [WAC 220-415-090](#)) that all successful bear hunters submit a premolar tooth with a tooth envelope, available at WDFW offices. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth (toward the throat) of the upper jaw. The tooth should be submitted within five days of harvest, or by Dec. 1, 2023.



GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 16, but local densities can vary among GMUs. WDFW manages cougars in District 16 to maintain a stable cougar population. The statewide goals for cougar are:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage cougar and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize human/cougar conflict.
3. Manage cougar for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography.
4. Manage statewide cougar populations for a sustained yield.
5. Improve WDFW's understanding of predator-prey relationships.

Since the 2012 – 2013 hunting season, WDFW changed cougar harvest management throughout Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intent was to have a longer season, without any hunting implement restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline. WDFW administers this hunt structure within 50 population management units (PMUs). District 16 includes PMU 42, 43, and 45.

To accomplish harvest goals, WDFW established an early and a late general season for defined hunt areas. The early season is Sep. 1 through Dec. 31, and no harvest limits apply even if harvest exceeds the guideline. Beginning in the 2015 hunting season and then continuing in 2021, WDFW extended cougar season dates through April 30. In this late season, (Jan. 1 through April 30), harvest guidelines apply for hunter-harvested cougars only. However, to hunt cougars after March 31 in a unit open for cougar harvest, hunters need to buy a new hunting license and cougar tag. WDFW examines harvest numbers starting Jan. 1. If the guideline is met or exceeded, the PMU may not open for the late season. Cougar harvest is monitored during the late season and managers close any hunt areas that meet or exceed the harvest guideline. Over the past five years, an average of 74% of the PMUs remained open to hunters through April 30. Closures occur on the PMU level, resulting in less impact to hunter opportunity. WDFW advises anyone planning to hunt cougar after Jan. 1 to confirm the cougar season is open in the desired hunting area.

Hunters can call 1-866-364-4868 to determine if a specific hunt area is open after Dec. 31. For more information related to the harvest guidelines management approach, please visit the [Cougar hunting area openings and closures](#) page on the WDFW website. The agency recently formed an internal group to assess the results of implementing the cougar harvest hunting structure. Table 5 provides the harvest guidelines for each District 16 hunt area for 2023 – 2024. This table also provides the cougar harvest for the 2022 – 2023 season for state hunters.

Table 5. Cougar Harvest Guidelines for 2023-2024 and State Hunter Reported Harvest for 2022-2023.

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline	
	2023-2024	2022-2023 Harvest
PMU 42 - 601, 602, 603, 612	4-6	1
PMU 43 - 607, 615	3-4	1
PMU 45 - 621, 624, 627, 633	None	0

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 - 2024 SEASON

Most cougar harvest within the district comes from opportunistic encounters while hunters are pursuing deer, elk, or other activities. The total cougar harvest in District 16 can vary from year to year. Table 6 presents total cougar hunting and other mortality while Table 7 presents status and trend report information as well as harvest totals and mean averages for the past three seasons (2017 – 2020). Hunters harvested nine cougars within the district during the general cougar hunt last season. During the general hunt, hunters harvested two male cougars in PMU 42, zero cougars in PMU 43, and zero cougars in PMU 45, which includes a portion of District 15. These totals don't include tribal harvest and other mortality. Reference the [Washington Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#) for more information regarding cougar hunting in specific GMUs within the district.

Cougars are widespread in the forest lands of District 16. Areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk provide great opportunity for hunting cougar. GMU 621 consistently has the highest cougar harvest in the district. The other GMUs' cougar harvest numbers fluctuate each year. With the yearly variation, it is hard to predict future harvest, but cougar sightings in the district continue to be somewhat common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the harvest. Under the continuing harvest management guidelines, the two district hunt areas, PMU 42 and PMU 43, have not met their harvest guideline in the past ten seasons. However, during the 2020-2021 late season cougar hunt in PMU 43 the harvest guideline of four cougars was met and the unit was closed to further cougar hunting on Feb. 26, 2021. This highlights that hunters should monitor closures and plan accordingly. One hunter that WDFW's assistant district biologist contacted to seal his cougar was not aware that there was a harvest guideline for the area where he had harvested his cougar.



Table 6. Total cougar harvest 2022 – 2023 for PMUs within District 16 (and a portion of District 15) by state hunters and other mortality. The harvest of male and female cougars is represented. Tribal hunting not included.

PMU 42 – (GMU 601, 602, 603, and 612)										
GENERAL HUNTING				OTHER MORTALITY				COMBINED		
Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Total		
2	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3		

PMU 43 – (GMU 607 and 615)										
GENERAL HUNTING				OTHER MORTALITY				COMBINED		
Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Total		
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		

PMU 45 – (GMU 621, 624, 627, and 633)										
GENERAL HUNTING				OTHER MORTALITY				COMBINED		
Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Total		
0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	3		

Table 7. Cougar harvest in District 16 (and portion of District 15) for 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23.* Tribal harvest or other sources of mortality not included.

Cougar Status and Trend Report				
	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 – 2023	3-Year
	HARVEST	HARVEST	HARVEST	Mean Harvest
GMUs 601, 602, 603, 612	1	3	2	2
GMUs 607, 615	4	2	0	2
GMUs 621, 624, 627, 633	6	4	0	3.33
Total	11	9	2	

Hunters harvest most of the cougars that WDFW seals each season while out deer or elk hunting. However, during the 2019-2020 season, several hunters were successful when specifically targeting cougars after snow events. One hunting team was fortunate to harvest adult male cougars a few weeks apart in two different locations within GMU 615. Enforcement officers in the district report low cougar hunting pressure in most GMUs in previous years. WDFW removed several cougars in District 16 last season due to depredation concerns with livestock and domestic animals. Two male cougars were removed in GMU 624, one male cougar was removed in GMU 621, and one male cougar was removed in GMU 603. Conflict issues were higher in GMU 624 (Coyle) and GMU 603 (Pysht) than other management areas within the district.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually less than 80 pounds) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. WDFW strongly encourages cougar hunters to search for possible multiple tracks when pursuing an animal. Female cougars may have kittens in trees or in dense vegetation nearby. Please be very observant and patient before shooting. During the 2015 – 2016 season, WDFW enforcement officers and biologists had to capture two orphaned cougar kittens near Joyce. One kitten later died, and the other kitten will remain in captivity at a zoo. Cougar hunters must follow mandatory reporting and sealing requirements. Voter initiative 655 banned the use of hounds to hunt cougars in the state. Hunting with the aid of dogs is prohibited statewide except during cougar management removals authorized by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and for research purposes.



NOTABLE CHANGES

The Cougar Harvest Guideline for GMUs 601, 602, 603, and 612 was changed three years ago and will remain at four to six. The Cougar Harvest Guideline for GMUs 607 and 615 was also changed from four to a range of three to four and this harvest guideline is still in effect. Subadult cougars no longer count towards the cougar harvest guideline. A valid 2024-25 cougar license and tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2024.

MANDATORY REPORTING/SEALING

Successful cougar hunters must report their cougar harvest to the cougar hotline at: 1-866-364-4868 within 72 hours of harvest and have the cougar pelt sealed within five days of notification. This is the same hotline hunters can use to check if cougar hunt areas are open or closed. A premolar tooth and tissue sample will be taken. Reference the [Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations](#), page 69 in the Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations 2023 for more specific details about cougar sealing requirements.



COUGAR OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

WDFW is committed to minimizing human-wildlife conflict. With the increase of the human population in Washington, there are more recreationists in cougar habitat, an increase in small livestock farms near residences, along with intentional and unintentional feeding of wildlife around homes. It is essential to raise public awareness and keep both people and cougars safe. A young male cougar killed a mountain biker near North Bend in the spring of 2018. This type of incident is extremely rare and was only the second known human fatality from a cougar in Washington state. In late July 2023, an 8-year old boy was attacked by a cougar while camping at Lake Angeles in Olympic National Park. The boy was only slightly hurt and the cougar was never found. Please reference WDFW's [cougar web page](#) to learn more about cougar/human interactions or contact a WDFW Regional Office for a copy of the 2018 "Discover Washington's Cougars" brochure.

SMALL GAME: Bobcat, Raccoon, Coyote, Rabbit

BOBCATS are plentiful in the wooded lands across District 16 and many hunters successfully harvest bobcat each season. Bobcat may be hunted statewide with no bag limit from Sep. 1 through March 15. **A small game license is required to harvest a bobcat.** Bobcats are exempt from hunting hour restrictions except it is unlawful to hunt bobcat at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons that occur in October and November in both eastern and western Washington. Hunting or pursuing bobcat with dogs is prohibited in Washington. **Successful bobcat hunters or trappers must contact a WDFW office to have the bobcat pelt sealed and submit the associated harvest report to the WDFW by April 20 of each year.** The bobcat hide must not be frozen so a seal may be attached. No one may possess an open WDFW bobcat seal unless it has been cut by a licensed taxidermist or fur dealer who has received and invoiced the pelt for processing.

Bobcat harvest through trapping in Region 6, which includes District 16, had been trending upwards since 2014 until the Covid 2019 pandemic resulted in trappers either not trapping or not having access to public and private properties (Figure 19). The harvest then peaked in 2020, possibly reflecting trapper effort since Covid provided the public more recreation time but declined significantly in 2021. Generally, more bobcats are harvested through hunting in Region 6 than trapping. Both Clallam and Jefferson counties both provide great opportunity for harvesting bobcat. Within the region, the harvest of bobcats in Clallam County has consistently been lower than other counties (Figure 20). The prospects for hunting or trapping bobcat in 2023 and 2024 remain steady. Public and private forest remain the best locations for locating and harvesting bobcat.

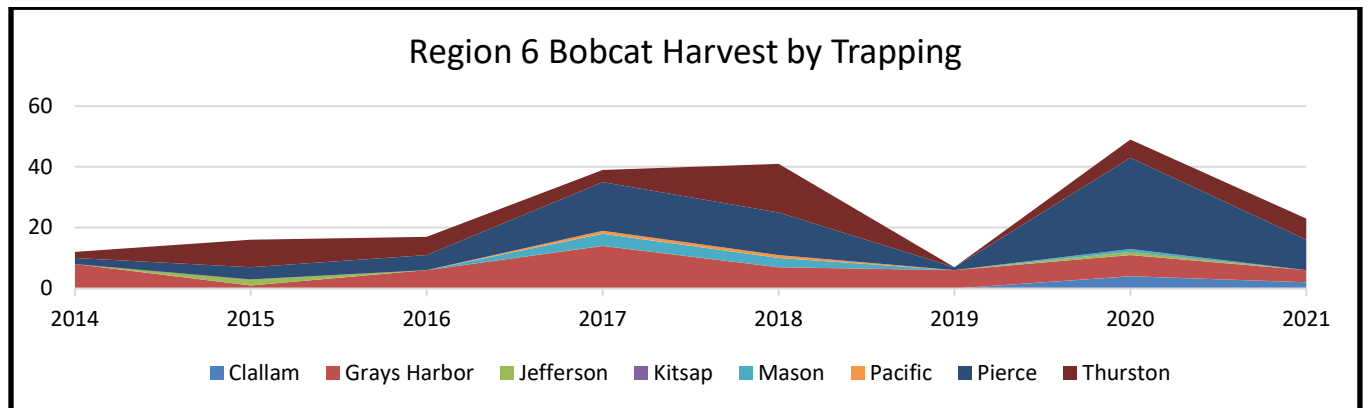


Figure 19. Region 6 bobcat harvest by trapping by county 2015-2021.

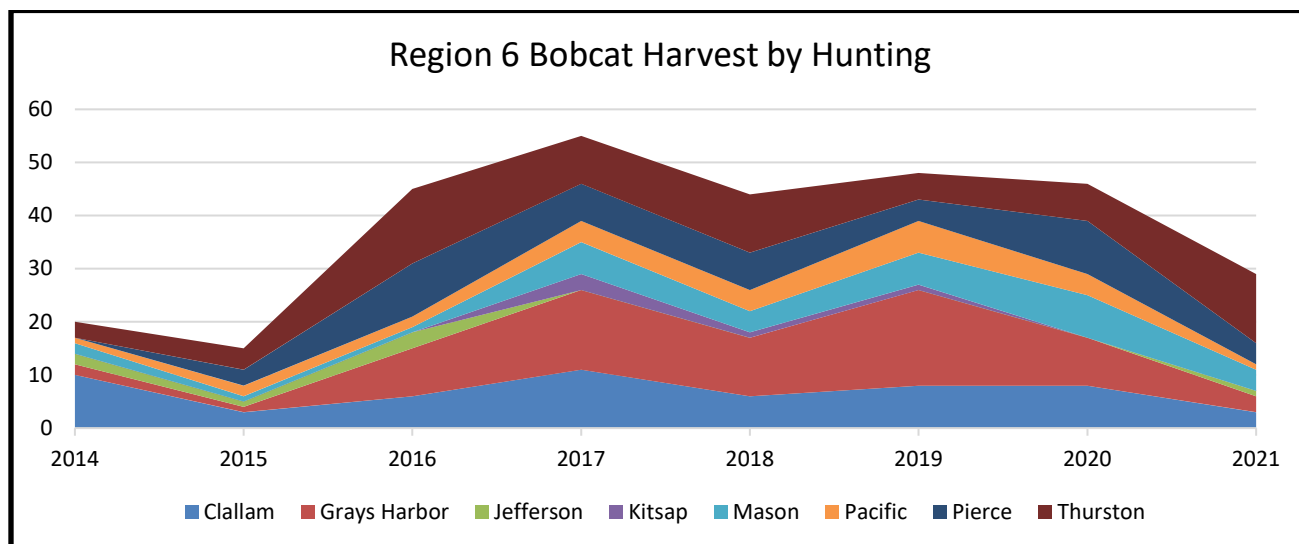
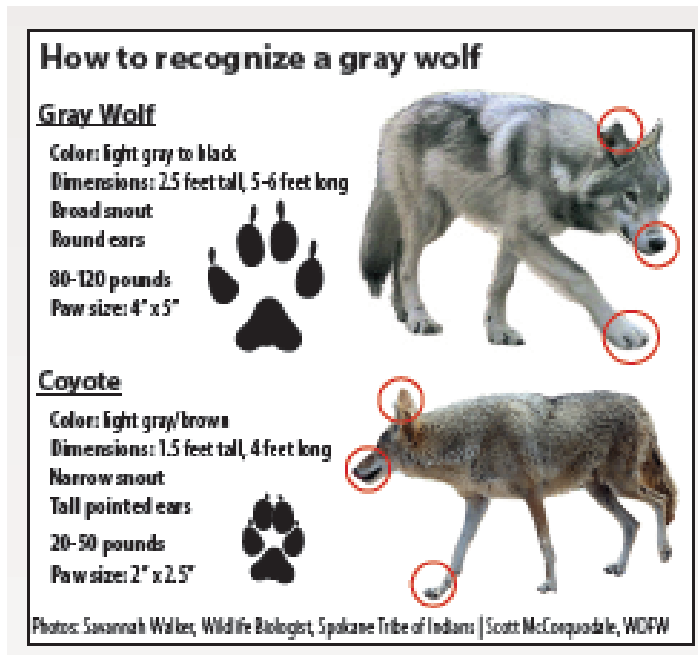


Figure 20. Region 6 bobcat harvest by hunting by county 2014 – 2021..

RACCOONS are also very plentiful across District 16, particularly around suburban neighborhoods where they eat garbage, fallen fruit, dogfood, artificial pond fish, and various other things. A lack of natural predators within these areas helps to perpetuate this. Raccoons are also found in the less developed forests of the western portions of the district. Raccoons can be hunted across District 16 with no bag limit from Sep. 1 through March 15 with a small game license. Hunters may use dogs to hunt raccoon and they may be hunted at night. **Special note:** It is unlawful to hunt with dogs or at night during the months of October or November during the dates established for modern firearm deer and elk general seasons in eastern and western Washington.

COYOTES are another small game animal abundant across District 16, both in the urban and non-urban areas. They have also benefitted from a lack of large predators in the urban and suburban areas. Hunters may hunt coyotes without a bag limit year-round under a small game or big game hunting license. Hunters can also hunt coyotes may be hunted at night with lights year-round. **Special note:** It is unlawful to hunt coyote at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons that occur in October and November in eastern and western Washington. The use of dogs to hunt coyote is prohibited. Wolves are back in Washington State and are protected under both federal and state law and MAY NOT be shot or killed. WDFW hasn't confirmed any wolf sightings in District 16. However, be sure of identification if you are hunting coyote or bobcat. Report all wolf observations [here](#).



SNOWSHOE HARE and COTTONTAIL RABBIT: Most of the rabbits encountered on the Olympic Peninsula will be snowshoe hare (reference range maps below). Snowshoe hare are readily observed along forested roads in the western half of District 16, and will be found throughout the district, usually along forested edges. Annual district harvest of hares and rabbits is erratic, ranging from zero to over 300. The opportunity is always there, with a harvest per unit effort expected to range between .25-.70 per day.

During 2022 estimates of hunters and harvest are as follows:

- Snowshoe hare harvest
 - Clallam County - 4 harvested by 11 hunters,
 - Jefferson county - no hunter reports.
- Cottontail rabbit harvest
 - Clallam County - 5 harvested by 11 hunters.
 - Jefferson County – 9 harvested by 17 hunters

More information on the snowshoe hare and other rabbits can be found at the following links:

- [Snowshoe hare](#)
- [Eastern cottontail](#)
- [European rabbit](#)
- [Nuttall's cottontail](#)

SMALL GAME: River Otter, Weasel, Marten, Mink, Muskrat, Beaver

BEAVER, WEASELS, MINK, MUSKRAT, AND RIVER OTTER are all plentiful across Region 6, including District 16. Martens less so. Long-tailed weasels occur in District 16 primarily on pasture, cropland, fields, and grasslands. River otter (*Lutra canadensis*) is plentiful in the freshwater lakes, streams, and wetlands across District 16 and are frequently observed along saltwater shorelines of the coast and Strait of Juan de Fuca. Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) are found along the outer coast and occasionally along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. This species is protected and cannot be trapped or hunted. Hunters may only harvest beaver, weasel, marten, muskrat, and river otter by trapping with a [trapping license](#) during the trapping season (Nov. 1 through March 31). **Successful river otter trappers must contact a WDFW office to have their otter pelt(s) sealed and submit the associated harvest report to the WDFW by April 20 of each year.** Pelts must be presented in a way that the hide can be sealed. No frozen hides or carcasses will be accepted (reference [Trapping Regulations](#)). Clallam and Jefferson counties within District 16 generally have some of the lower trap rates for river otter compared to other Region 6 counties (Figure 21).

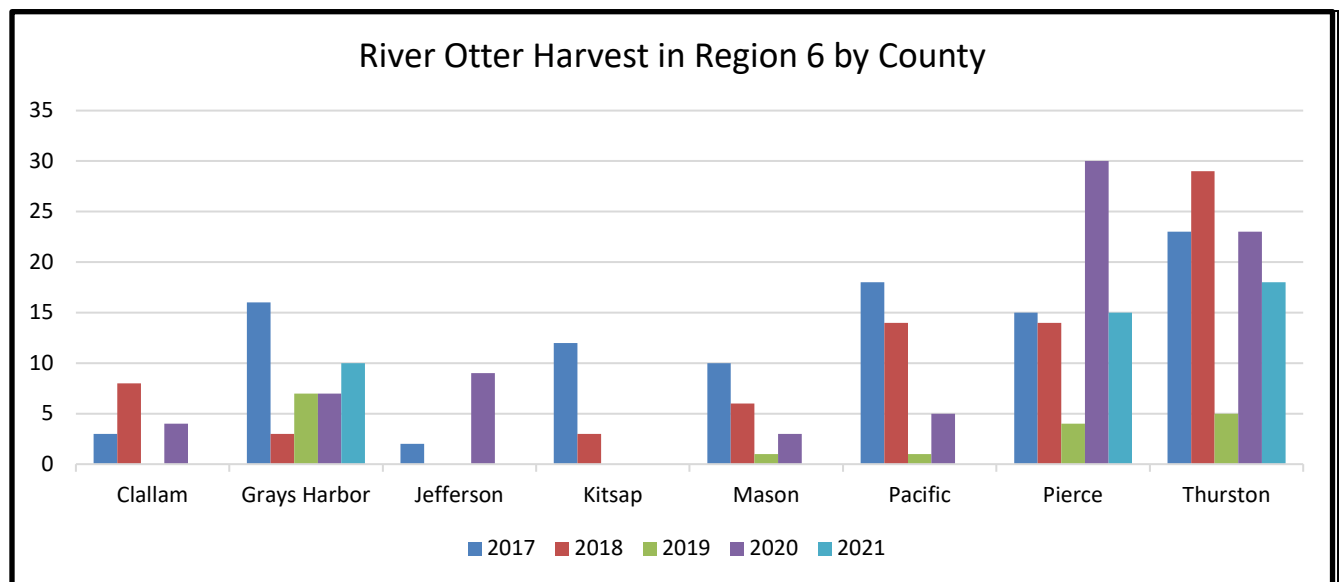


Figure 21. Region 6 river otter harvest by county 2017 – 2021.

AMERICAN MARTEN sightings are quite rare in District 16. There is a closure of marten trapping on the Olympic Peninsula in Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, and Grays Harbor counties to protect low-density coastal Pacific martens (*Martes caurina*). Efforts are underway by the U.S. Forest Service and others to document and monitor fisher on the Olympic Peninsula. They are a very difficult species to find. Fisher may be misidentified as a marten; fishers are a protected species in Washington under both federal and state law and MAY NOT be trapped or killed. Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten. Report all fisher observations [online](#) or by emailing wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov.

Identification of Fisher and Marten in Washington

Fishers are protected under both federal and state law and may not be trapped or killed.
Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten or mink.

Pelage Colors

Fisher — dark brown with lighter shading on head, back of the neck and back.
Marten — light brown to brown (cinnamon, russet), with creamy brown/ beige face and occasionally chest with darker brown legs, feet and end of tail.

Size

Fishers are bigger, darker and have noticeably longer and fuller tails than marten. Fishers tails average 14-15 inches in length and Martens tails average 6.5-7.5 inches in length.

Ear Shape

Fishers — rounded "teddy-bear" shaped ears
Martens — more pointed ears

Elevation

Fishers and martens overlap in elevation. Therefore, elevation should not be used as an indicator of species presence.

FISHER





Photo by Paul Bannick

MARTEN



WDFW Staff

Trapping Information

Use cubby boxes, with a closed front and 2.5 inch entrance hole, to avoid catching fishers.

Figure 22. Identification of fisher and marten.

BEAVER harvest by trapping in Clallam and Jefferson counties has usually been lower in Region 6 compared to more highly urbanized counties such as Pierce and Thurston (Figure 23). Considering lakes, wetlands and waterways exist across the region, the difference is likely due to less hunter participation and less removal of nuisance beaver.

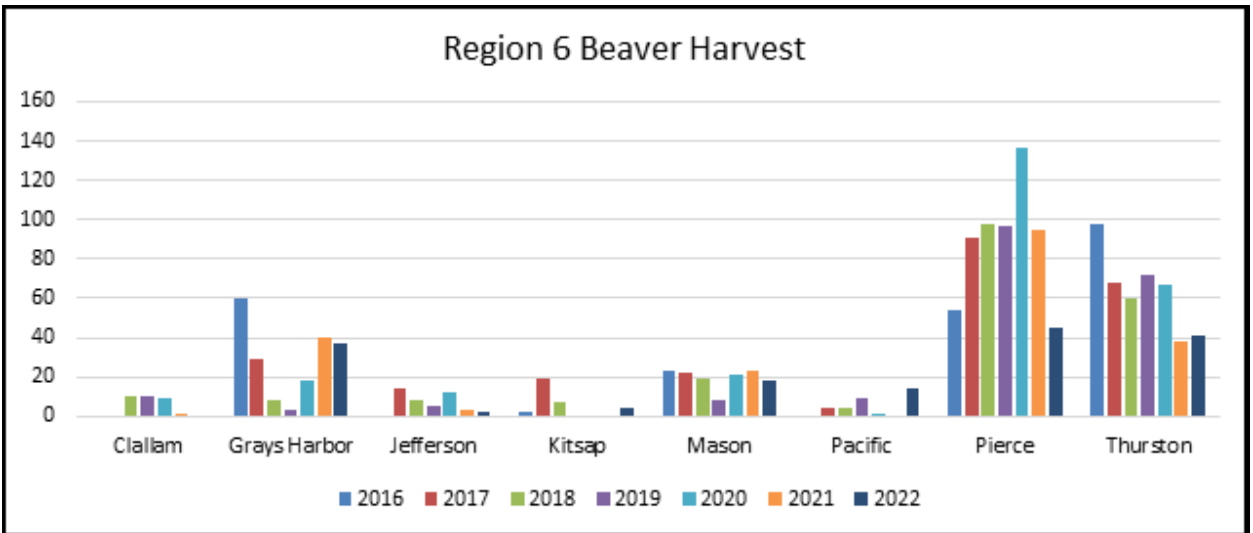


Figure 23. WDFW Region 6 beaver harvest from trapping by county 2016 - 2022.

COMMON SPECIES

Many species of ducks are found in District 16. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall, mallard, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, and common goldeneye, are also present on fresh and saltwater. Nesting wood ducks can be located throughout the district early in the season and can provide a unique hunting opportunity. Sea ducks, including scoters, Barrow's goldeneye, long-tailed ducks, canvasbacks, and harlequin ducks inhabit the Strait of Juan de Fuca, protected bays, and other saltwater areas.

Keep in mind that trumpeter swan numbers have increased in the Dungeness Valley in the past ten years, and they have been documented near the Dungeness River mouth. Surveyors counted 298 trumpeter swans, including 60 juveniles, in Clallam County in January 2022. The numbers of swans counted during weekly, daytime surveys have been stable December 2022 through January 2023, which suggests a strong location fidelity for the population of swans in the Dungeness Valley. The percent of juveniles observed, around 15% average in recent years, was low last winter, ranging from 5% to 10%. We understand that the late wet spring in the Trumpeter Swans' breeding grounds delayed nesting last season. Freezing temperatures and harsh Arctic conditions may have increased the mortality of juvenile swans before they had fledged or during migration.

WDFW encourages waterfowl hunters to know all identification features for trumpeter swans and snow geese. It is illegal to shoot trumpeter swans. Please reference the [Northwest Swan Conservation website](#) to help with swan identification.

CONCENTRATION AREAS

Much of the waterfowl hunting opportunity in District 16 is east of Port Angeles, centered in the Lower Dungeness Basin. The basin has a high density of wintering waterfowl and holds about 7% of the western Washington breeding waterfowl population, even amidst the ongoing development of open space habitats. Fortunately, a rich mix of farmland, wetlands, coastal habitats, and conserved open space retain the necessary food and cover for many wintering waterfowl. Concentrations of waterfowl in freshwater habitats diminish drastically west of the Elwha and Lyre rivers.

POPULATION STATUS

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species (Figure 24). Wintering duck populations in Washington usually represent 10% or more of the total flyway population. Midwinter waterfowl survey counts in District 16 represent about 2% of all waterfowl counted in the state. Midwinter populations include resident and migratory populations. The following link provides a report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that details more information on the population status for the Pacific Flyway: [Waterfowl Population Status, 2022 \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/waterfowl/population-status-2022). This report summarizes the most recent information about the status of North American waterfowl populations and their habitats to facilitate the development of harvest regulations. The annual status of these populations is monitored and assessed through abundance and harvest surveys. Unfortunately, the 2022 federal report was not available to reference at this time.

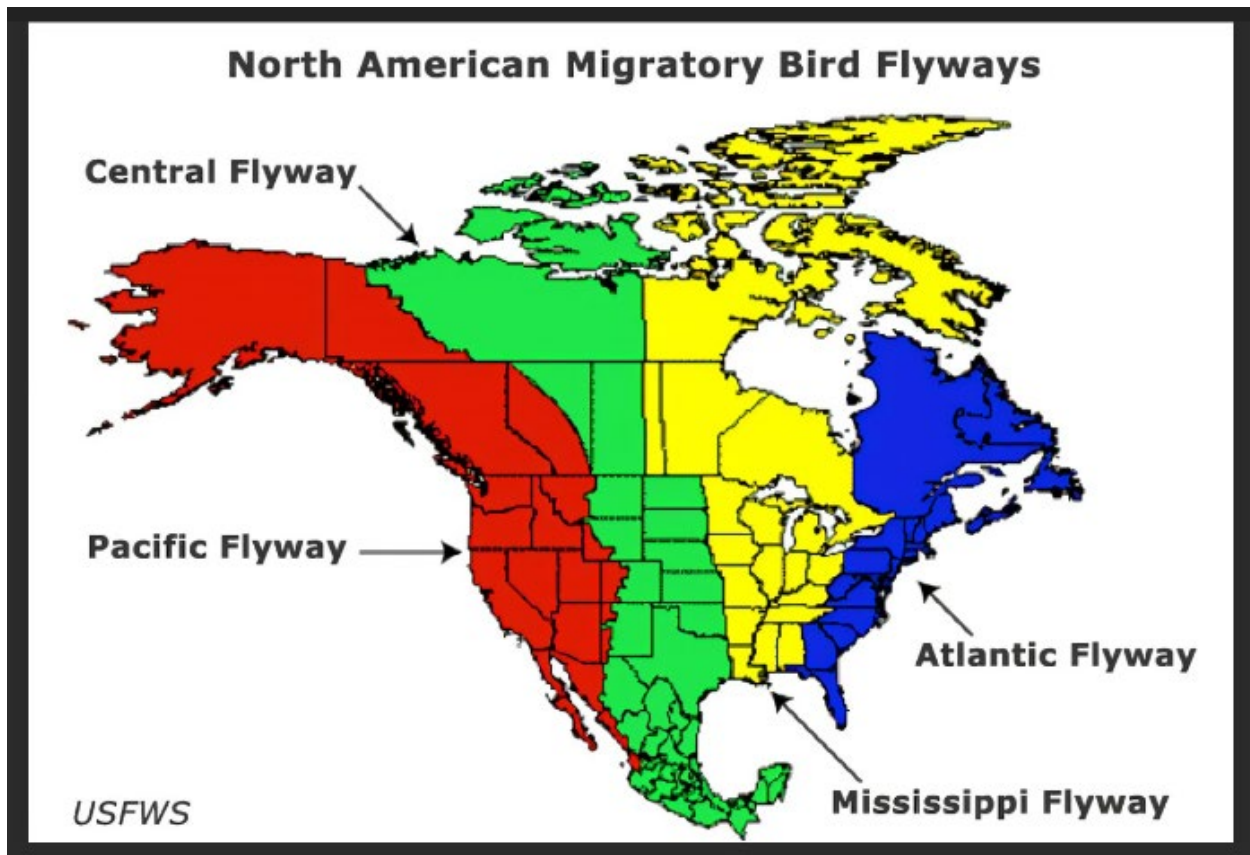


Figure 24. North American migratory bird flyways

In the past, district biologists focused on conducting mid-winter ground count surveys to document high waterfowl concentration areas in Clallam County. Breeding duck populations in western Washington were not monitored until 2010, when WDFW developed and began flying established transects in five select areas of Western Washington. The Department conducts these surveys during April and early May. The survey includes the east and west areas of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The Dungeness area, including the Dungeness National Wildlife Area, is surveyed as part of the East Strait of Juan de Fuca transect route (Figure 25). Surveys did not occur in 2020 and 2021 due to impacts of the coronavirus. In April of 2023, WDFW estimated the total duck breeding population in the Dungeness area was 7,843, which is significantly higher (83%) than the 2022 estimate of 4,278. The four species with the highest numbers observed during the surveys were mallard (4,100), wood ducks (891), green-winged teal (713), and bufflehead (594). The number of mallard ducks estimated in 2023 was a 92% increase than what was estimated by WDFW in 2022. One factor contributing to the high mallard estimate for the Dungeness and all western Washington was the high number of grouped mallards observed.

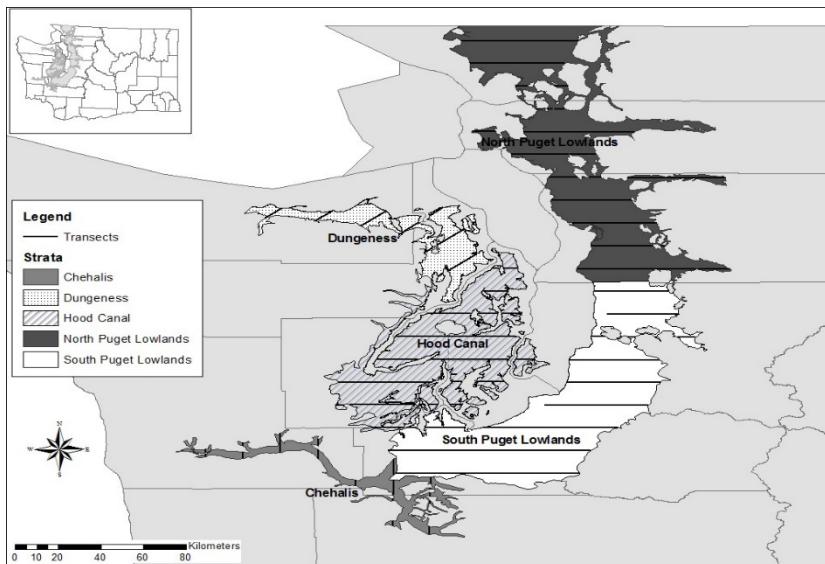


Figure 25. Aerial breeding waterfowl survey transects flown in Western Washington

The Dungeness count has been 4% to 15% of the total breeding ducks in Western Washington from 2010 to 2016. The counts (by species) of the Dungeness area (2014 to 2018) are provided in Figure 26. More recent data for the Washington breeding waterfowl population monitoring can be found in the [2022 Game Status and Trend Report | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). The greatest factor influencing brood production in the district continues to be loss of habitat to development and increasing human disturbance. Waterfowl numbers are expected to remain moderate in District 16. For more information, reference [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#).

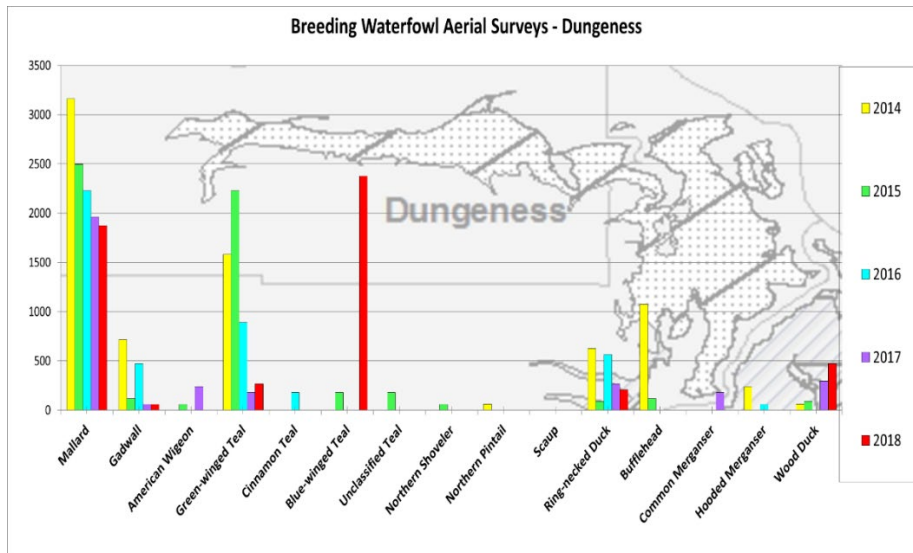


Figure 26. Breeding waterfowl survey counts - with background map showing Dungeness aerial transects, including nearby Elwha, Chimacum, and Quilcene habitats.

Sea ducks have had restrictive bag limits due to concerns about low recruitment rates in sea ducks, increasing interest in sea duck hunting, and the unknown impact of reduced sea duck bag limits on compensatory species, particularly Barrow’s goldeneyes led to the measure. There had been a significant increase in the harvest of harlequin ducks for the few seasons prior to 2022 in Clallam and Jefferson counties. Due to management concerns over the health of the population, the harlequin duck hunting, like initiated last season, will not be allowed during the 2023-2024 season.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The duck harvest in Washington declined steadily from over 1 million in the late 1960s, to a low of 242,516 in 1993-94. However, duck harvest rates in Washington have stabilized over the past ten years, averaging about 438,170 ducks annually. The 2020-21 Washington duck harvest of 426,092 was a 20.9% increase compared to the 2019-2020 harvest of 352,347, which was the lowest since the 2004-05 season. The most recent revised survey design for Western Washington conducted in April 2023 estimated the total breeding duck population at 97,823. This was the highest since the survey began in 2010. Mallards numbered 59,012, followed by green-winged teal 9,383, wood duck 5,752, and ring-necked duck 4,666 (Figure 27). For more information reference the Waterfowl Section of [2022 Game Status and Trend Report | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). Please check the WDFW website in the future for the 2023 version of this report.

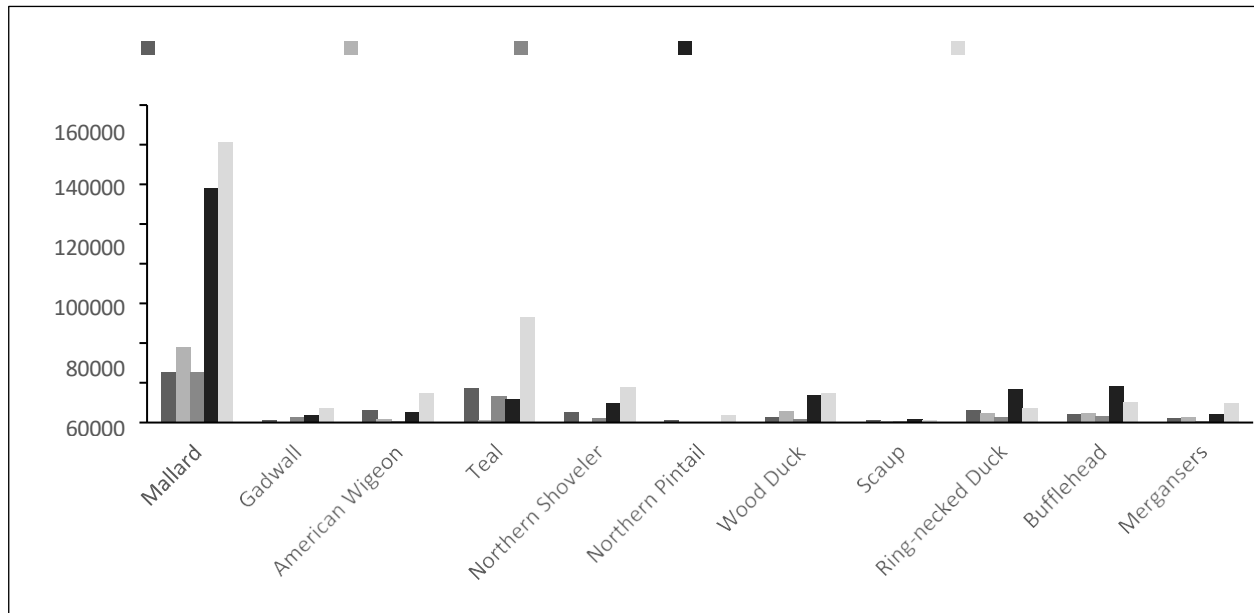


Figure 27. Western Washington duck breeding population survey results by species and strata, 2022.

During the 2022-2023 season 258 hunters who spent 1,533 afield in Clallam County harvested 3,014 ducks. For Jefferson County, 237 hunters who spent 1,431 days afield harvested 2,732 ducks. **It is important to note that estimates are not comparable to the previous years due to the new volunteer reporting online that was piloted by WDFW this past season.** District 16 hunters can expect similar hunting opportunities during the 2023-24 season.

The restrictive bag limits for most sea ducks were maintained for western Washington in 2022-2023. The harvest survey 2020 -2021 indicated a total harvest of 1,729 sea ducks representing a 32.6% decrease from the 2019-20 season. Notably, the number of hunter days was estimated at 2,153 days afield, which would be the third highest estimate since mandatory harvest reporting began in the 2004-05 season. For the 2022-2023 season, species composition, based on compliant and noncompliant harvest report components, was estimated as: 805 scoters (Surf 550, White-winged 170, and Black 85), 139 long-tailed ducks, and 351 goldeneyes (Burrows 179 and Common 172). The primary harvest areas included Island, Mason, and Whatcom counties. A total of 112 sea ducks were harvested in Clallam County and a total of 109 sea ducks were harvested in Jefferson County last season. Be sure to check the [Game bird and small game regulations | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#) in the 2023 season pamphlet for additional requirements before hunting sea ducks (long-tailed ducks, scoter, harlequin, and goldeneye) in western Washington. Hunters can also reference the [sea duck management strategies draft publication](#) from 2013.

District 16 has limited access for waterfowl hunting. Some locals in the western portion of the district jump shoot in pools and side channels of the west end rivers, along with other small ponds and flooded gravel pit areas. As in recent years, hunter success is often dependent on rainfall and storm events during the waterfowl season. A lack of flooded farm fields can sharply reduce hunting opportunities within the district.

Hunters can find the Office of the Washington State Climatologist website [here](#). The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) September temperature outlook has increased chances of above normal temperatures statewide. The outlook for precipitation is less insightful with equal chances of above, below, or near-normal temperatures.

The three-month outlook September through November is indicating higher chances of above normal temperatures across Washington State. The odds are highest in eastern Washington, with chances between 50 and 60% on the three-tiered scale. For September through November precipitation, there are higher chances of below normal precipitation statewide. The odds are slightly higher for Western Washington, between 40 and 50%, compared to eastern Washington.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

Public saltwater hunting opportunities are more numerous than freshwater options in District 16, albeit more difficult in many ways. The regulations and landownerships, including tideland ownerships, make it necessary for hunters to plan ahead. The USFS Dungeness Wildlife Refuge has areas that are closed (Figure 28). Hunting is not allowed on the refuge and some of the refuge boundaries can be difficult to determine in the field.

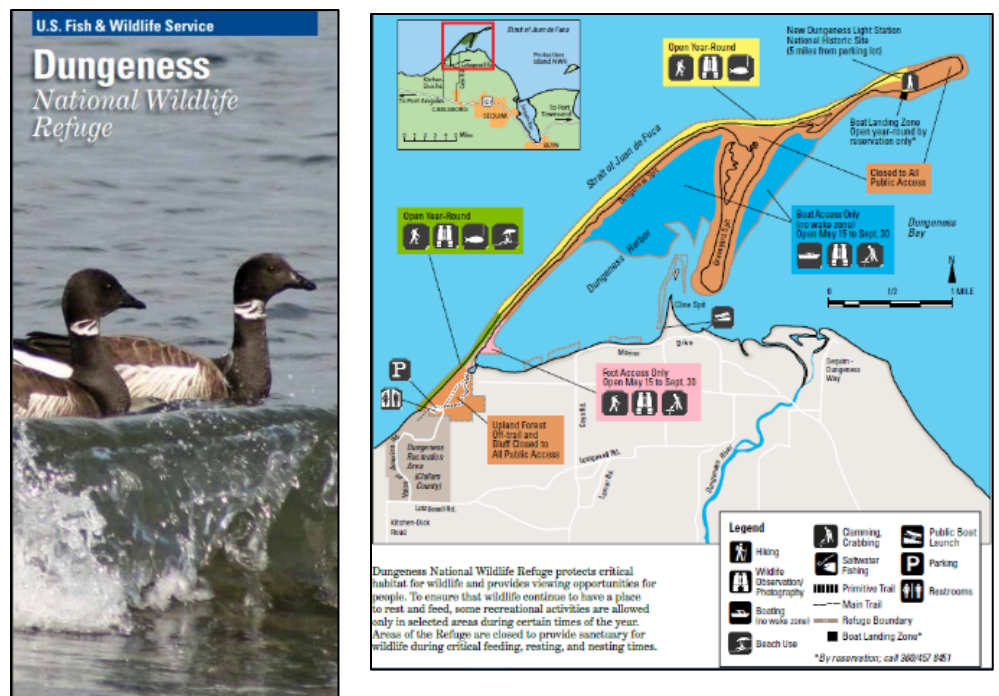


Figure 28. Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge map showing closed areas.

***IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR HUNTERS WHO HUNT FROM A BOAT–** When hunting from a boat, hunters should ensure the boat anchor is not down on private tidelands without permission. Boat hunters shouldn't go onto private land without permission to retrieve any

waterfowl shot. However, hunters should be aware they could run the risk of violating the wastage law if they do not retrieve the waterfowl they have shot. Therefore, it is essential hunters be aware of property ownership, especially when hunting from a boat.

Shoreline and tidelands: There are some private landowners who allow limited hunting access along the saltwater shoreline. Typically, local signs refer to a phone number or contact information, and in some cases the signage spells out the conditions of access. Because these vary from year to year, hunters must make a tour of the area and find out the current arrangements. Hunters should make sure they will have the ability to retrieve ducks, keeping in mind the ownerships where they have permission to hunt and the adjacent ownership where they do not have that permission.

The DNR quadrangle maps display the category of tidelands, with different shades of blue for different public tideland ownerships (Figure 29).



Figure 29. Portion of DNR quadrangle map displaying public tidelands in blue.

For Clallam County, hunters can use the assessor maps to determine tideland ownership. Assessor maps are available online [here](#) (Figure 30).

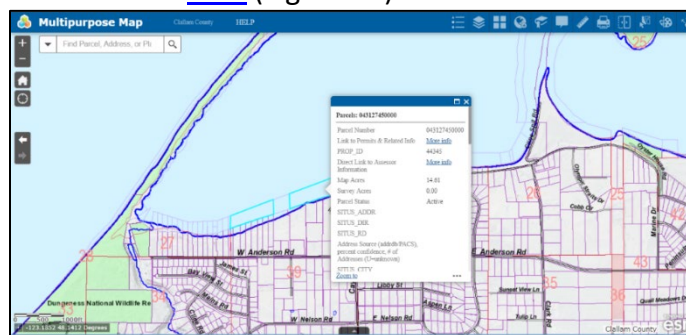


Figure 30. Clallam County website with parcel information on tidelands.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Most all freshwater waterfowl hunting areas in the Dungeness Basin are on private lands. Public land hunting opportunities have changed at the Lower Dungeness Unit at the mouth of the Dungeness River. Some hunters find hunting opportunities in the near-shore areas of bays and along the shoreline of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, both on foot and by boat. Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies and along the saltwater shorelines in the district. WDFW urges hunters to obey all state and county regulations at sites near residential areas to avoid potential future closures.

North Olympic Wildlife Area includes the [Dungeness Unit](#). This unit contains multiple disjointed parcels about five miles north of Sequim. Hunting opportunities are offered ONLY at the River's End property. Access to private lands previously available is no longer available. WDFW is still evaluating the hunting activity the reduced size area can accommodate. Consult the wildlife area unit webpage for information updates. River's End Property is located north of East Anderson Road, and west of the Dungeness River. This is about 50 acres north of East Anderson Road and west of the Dungeness River. Public access is supported by a small parking area, an information kiosk containing site rules, and a restroom.

Be advised:

- Due to popularity, waterfowl hunting at this site is subject to several rules. Hunting is restricted to Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and state and federal holidays. Hunting is restricted to one designated point on WDFW-managed land that is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Occupancy of a hunt point is limited to a maximum of four people.
- River's End: It is unlawful to have in possession more than 15 shotgun shells or to fire (shoot) more than 15 shells in one day on this unit (WAC 220-414-050).
- Firearms Restriction Area: Per Clallam County Regulations Chapter 15.16 FIREARMS DISCHARGE RESTRICTIONS - RESTRICTED SHOOTING AREA 1 (North of 101). The area north of Highway 101, and bounded on the west by the Elwha River, on the south by Highway 101, on the east by the east county line, and on the north by the Strait of Juan de Fuca.
- Towne Road and Three Crabs Properties: Hunting management decisions are on hold until further review and planning.

COMMON SPECIES

Canada Geese: Most goose hunting opportunity in District 16 is for Canada geese. Resident geese are increasing in distribution, especially within urban and rural areas. Habitats like the Port Angeles Coast Guard base, Civic field, and nearby estuaries have had increased usage by Canada geese. In the last ten years, the Department has noticed a Canada goose expansion into wetlands that geese previously didn't use to WDFW knowledge.

Brant: If brant numbers are sufficient, brant hunting this upcoming season will be open from Jan. 20 to Jan. 27 in Clallam County with a daily bag limit of two brant and a possession limit of six brant. This will be a change from the past four years when the hunting days were three select days (Saturday/Wednesday) during the month of January. The date for the youth, veterans, and active military brant hunters in Clallam County will be a day the first week of February, with a daily and possession bag limit of two brant.

Brant hunting was closed in Clallam and Jefferson counties for many years. Brant management was complicated by the difference in productivity of subpopulations, some enduring high nesting failures that led to restrictions on the hunting grounds. The 2014 report on management of brant in Washington is available [here](#). The January 2018 season was the first season that brant hunting was open in Clallam County for decades. WDFW estimated the harvest within Clallam County to be 90 brant in 2018 and 89 brant in 2019. To compare, the 2019 harvest in Skagit County was estimated to be 241 brant, Whatcom County was 48 brant, and Pacific County was 72 brant. The season for brant has continued the past few years, after winter counts had consistently placed the three-year average above the 1,000 brant winter population threshold required to consider opening a county to potential harvest, per WDFW Game Management Plan objectives. Hunters harvested a total of 90 brant during the January 2023 season. This harvest number was one half of the harvest number reported in 2022. WDFW checked and measured many of the harvested brant from Clallam County during the 2018 –



2020 seasons to further assess the brant populations. WDFW also collected feathers specimens DNA analysis during the 2018 – 2020 seasons.

POPULATION STATUS

Canada geese populations continue to increase on the east side of the district.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Twenty-two hunters harvested 61 Canada geese in 33 days afield during the 2022-2023 September hunt. During the regular seasons, 85 hunters harvested 181 Canada geese for 407 days afield. Goose numbers are increasing year-round, providing more hunter opportunity by the local production.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

Within small acreages and patchy ownership, WDFW doesn't advise pass shooting geese. Local hunters were quite successful in previous seasons using a decoy spread and blinds. Hunters must obtain permission to hunt on private lands and follow all [firearm regulations](#). Many agricultural fields have residential properties nearby, so hunters must be aware of all safety concerns.

Please be respectful of private landowners and avoid conflicts with other recreational users in the area. Hunters are likely to find brant along the Dungeness shorelines that hold eelgrass. Brant also occur in other locations from Port Angeles to Sequim Bay. It will be worthwhile to become familiar with the other regular uses in potential brant hunting areas to avoid a location that will have conflicting uses on the few days the hunt is open.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Most goose hunting opportunities are on private agricultural lands in GMU 624.



SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Hunting within any of the forest lands throughout District 16 should offer good opportunities for harvesting grouse. Hunters may find prime forest grouse hunting on DNR and USFS lands within the district. Grouse harvest in Clallam County is one of the highest county totals within Region 6.

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout public and private forest lands in District 16. The chances for harvesting sooty grouse increase at higher elevations. Hunters can expect the greatest success along trails and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet, within timber stands with huckleberry and other forage plants. Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (five to twenty-five years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types.

The effect of spring weather on chick production and survival is a well-known factor influencing variation in populations across regions and years. During the peak of hatching (late May-early June), wet and windy weather reduces chick survival due to exposure as well as reducing insect populations at the time when young grouse need a high-protein diet. Conversely, drought conditions can also reduce forage opportunities. Loss or changes in forest habitat may also be affecting populations and harvest opportunities.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Grouse hunting in District 16 continues to decline, a trend WDFW has documented since 2009. Clallam County grouse harvest peaked in 2009 at 6,350 by 1,202 hunters, with Jefferson County 2009 harvest at 3,839 grouse by 1,502 hunters. The 2022 harvest totals for Clallam County were 1,184 grouse by 732 hunters. A total of 577 grouse were harvested by 374 hunters in Jefferson County during the 2022 hunting season.

In 2020, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved changing the grouse season to Sep. 15 through Jan. 15, beginning with the 2021 season. Delaying the start of the season by two weeks (without reducing the total season length) is intended to increase grouse abundance and availability to hunters by protecting breeding-aged females (hens) while they are still caring for their broods. Forest grouse broods typically become independent of the hen in mid-September. In the early season before broods break up, hens appear to be at higher risk of harvest than breeding aged males based on hunter-submitted wing and tail samples. Increasing hen survival should lead to an increase in population abundance and hunter opportunity.

Samples collected from grouse hunters provide an additional metric for monitoring forest grouse population trends. A wing and tail from a harvested grouse can provide the information necessary to identify species, sex, and age of the bird. District 16 is within the Olympic Forest Grouse Monitoring Zone (Figure 31). During the 2021 season, within the Olympic Monitoring Zone, 56% of the harvest were ruffed grouse and 44% of the harvest were blue grouse.



District 16 biologists will be collecting grouse wings and tails again during the 2023 season to help evaluate the harvested populations. The information for hunters to collect from the harvest is the date and location (GMU). This information will need to be filled out on provided envelopes. There are various ways hunters can contribute their harvested grouse wing and tail. Hunters can contact local WDFW employees to provide their wings/tails. Another option is to drop them off (with filled out envelopes, provided) at these wing/tail barrels. There will be three grouse wing/tail collection barrels set up within District 16 during the grouse hunting season. The locations of these sites can be found on WDFW's [Forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) page. Thanks in advance for helping WDFW with grouse monitoring.

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining populations of pheasants primarily due to the wet climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting pheasant in western Washington is dependent upon releases of pheasants in the fall. District 16 does not have viable populations of wild pheasant and there are no longer any pheasant release sites in the district. Information on current pheasant release sites: wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations/pheasant-release

There is a fair abundance of California (valley) quail in the eastern portion of District 16. They are quite common in the Dungeness Valley but hunting opportunities can be challenging due to predominately private ownership. Quail, like the deer, thrive in the Dungeness habitats that include a mix of open grass, shrubs, and forest. Some quail hunting opportunities can be found on public lands located in the lower foothills in clear-cuts or any early successional habitats. During 2022, hunters harvested 9 in Clallam County, and 8 quail were reported harvested in Jefferson County. The western Washington, California (valley) quail season runs end of September through end of November, with a daily mixed bag limit of ten and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. Reference the [Game bird and small game regulations | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#) for more information.

WDFW doesn't manage District 16 for wild turkeys and the species remains relatively rare here. WDFW receives occasional reports of individuals or small groups of turkeys within GMU 603. These are likely domestic turkeys that escaped from a farm that raised turkeys in the Joyce area. District 16 biologists did receive a report of a small flock of turkeys in the Dungeness area in the summer of 2022, but they were also determined to be domestic turkeys. Unfortunately, basically no prospects for hunting wild turkeys exist in District 16.

District 16 has not been a major dove hunting area, although eastern Clallam County has a lot of doves. To complicate matters, the Eurasian collared dove, an introduced species, is becoming very prevalent in east Clallam County. There was no reported harvest of mourning doves in Clallam or Jefferson counties during the 2021 season. However, during the 2022 season, nine hunters reported harvesting eight mourning doves in Clallam County across 14 days. The 2022 USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status report [Mourning Dove Population Status, 2022 | FWS.gov](#) contains more information.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 ft. elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

POPULATION STATUS AND TREND

Band-tailed pigeons were quite abundant in District 16 historically. Local hunters reported seeing clouds of band-tailed pigeons in drainages, such as McDonald Creek, on the east side of District 16 back in the 1950s. Hunters will find them throughout the district using forest habitats. WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 16+ mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. There is currently only one historic mineral site in District 16. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Hunters report relatively low band-tailed pigeon harvest in this district (sometimes zero), but the resource is available throughout the district in good numbers. Bag limits were ten birds per day until 1950, when statewide harvest was estimated at 90,000 birds. However, overharvest and habitat changes caused significant decline in overall numbers. The band-tailed pigeon harvest in Clallam County has averaged nine birds per year for the period 2004-2020. During the same period for Jefferson County, the total average harvest per year is seven birds. There was no band-tailed pigeon harvest reported during the 2022 season.

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Band-tailed pigeons are most prevalent in District 16 along marine estuaries, shorelines, and forested areas where they forage on berries. They frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in five- to ten-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests used by band-tails is difficult to predict. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites. Upon finding a good site, hunters will need to sit patiently and wait for possible shooting opportunities to occur.

Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season.

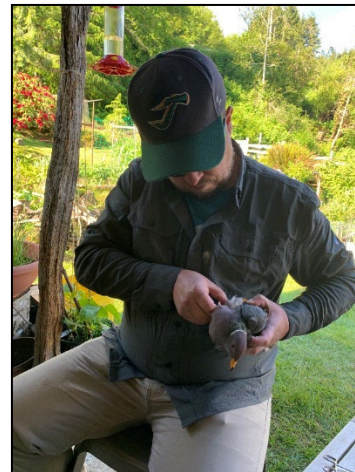
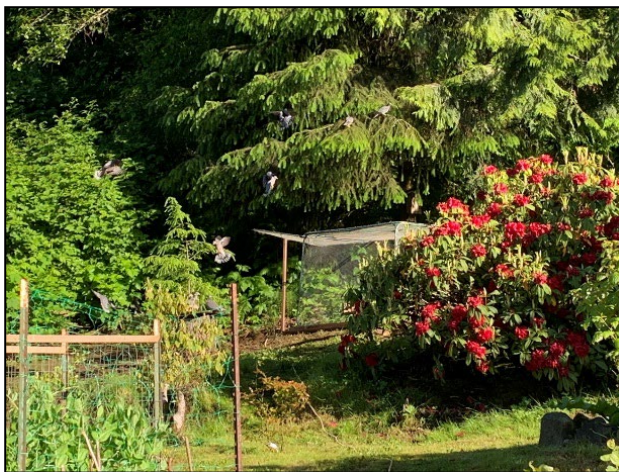
Only one historic mineral site was known to exist within District 16. However, at least three new suspect mineral sites were located during a special research project that was initiated in 2021. Please contact District 16 biologists if you may know the location of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Clallam or Jefferson counties.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Since band-tail seasons re-opened in 2002, hunters are required to buy a migratory bird authorization, along with all required hunting licenses and the band-tailed pigeon harvest card. It is mandatory to report all band-tailed pigeon harvest to WDFW after the season has closed. Hunters should review the [2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes. More information about population monitoring and harvests is available in the [2022 USFWS band-tailed pigeon population status report](#).

RESEARCH

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of District 16 and 17 (Grays Harbor and Pacific counties). The Department has fitted a total of 28 birds with transmitters that are programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.





The goal of this project is to conduct research on band-tailed pigeons in areas where mineral sites have not been identified, which would allow WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

- More accurately index our statewide population via mineral site surveys.
- More expertly manage our BTP harvest seasons to potentially allow an expanded hunting opportunity.
- Provide detailed information on resource selection to inform how to manage habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research project has already led to the discovery of new mineral sites in Grays Harbor County. There are now three locations in Clallam County that have been identified as possible new mineral sites. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist joined WDFW biologists in July of 2023 to further investigate these sites. Hunters and members of the public are funding this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. WDFW expects this project to continue through 2025 across various districts within Region 6. WDFW biologists are looking for new trapping locations near Forks or Port Townsend. Please contact District 16 biologists if you may know of concentrations of band-tailed pigeons on properties at these locations.

District 16 is within the ceded area of numerous treaty tribes on the Olympic Peninsula. WDFW and tribes cooperatively manage wildlife populations. Tribal hunting often occurs concurrent with WDFW hunting seasons. Tribal governments set their own seasons and bag limits. Tribal Enforcement personnel are responsible for ensuring tribal hunting regulations are followed, which may differ from state regulations.

Tribal big game harvest reports are available on the [Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission website](#).

These diverse mixtures of ownerships and jurisdictions also present different combinations of firearm restriction regulations and ordinances. The three main firearm restriction regulations most relevant to hunters are the following:

- WDFW – Firearm Restriction - unlawful to hunt wildlife with centerfire or rimfire rifles in “The portion of the GMU 624 (Coyle) within Clallam County.” Page 90 in the 2021 Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.
- [Clallam County Code Clallam County Firearms Discharge Restrictions](#)
- [Jefferson County Code Jefferson County Shooting in the County](#)

Make sure you have acquired the necessary permits to drive on public and private land in the area you decide to explore.

Public Access Permits: Here are some public access permits to be aware of and that you may need depending on your destination.

[Discover Pass](#) State parks, DNR, and WDFW



[Federal Agency-Interagency Annual Pass](#)



[Federal Agency Interagency Volunteer Pass](#)



Some landowners have enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. Those lands provide additional hunting opportunities for the public. Reference the private lands section for more details or visit the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#).

The interagency passes include access on National Park Service, USFS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation lands. Keep in mind that many public lands on the Olympic Peninsula are not open to hunting, including Olympic National Park, Washington State Parks, and Clallam County parks.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Private timberlands have various access and road closure procedures, so it is prudent to determine current ownership for a target location and the requirements to obtain permission to hunt. Merrill and Ring Pysht Tree Farm in GMU 603 made a drastic change a few years ago will not be allowing access for deer hunting. A lottery system is used for the small number of access permits they issue for elk hunting season. The other forest industry ownerships have various access systems in place. Hunters are encouraged to scout the areas they are considering hunting and pay close attention to the signs on all roads. Signs are often the landowner's primary method of informing the public on which areas are open to hunting.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES

Rayonier, Inc.

Website: rayonier.com/

IFP Office 360-452-1351

Forks Office 360-374-6565

Port Angeles 360-457-2329

Information on Rayonier Access Permits:

- property.rayonierhunting.com/Permits/PermitsHome.aspx
- property.rayonierhunting.com/AvailableAreas/FindProperties.aspx

Green Crow

Website: greencrow.com/contact-us/locations/

360-452-3325

727 E. 8th, Port Angeles, WA 98362

Merrill and Ring

Website: merrillring.com/contact-us/

360-452-2367

Email: contact@merrillring.com

813 East 8th Street, Port Angeles, WA 98362

OTHER MAJOR LANDOWNERS

Hoh River Trust

Facebook: facebook.com/The-Hoh-River-Trust-74841050447/

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION – OLYMPIC PENINSULA CHAPTER

Website: rmef.org/where-we-conserve/?state=WA
5705 Grant Creek
Missoula, MT 59808 Phone: (406) 523-4500

JEFFERSON COUNTY SPORTSMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Website: jeffersoncountysportsmen.org/wp/
Email: info@JeffersonCountySportsmen.org
P.O. Box 737, Port Townsend, WA 98368

SPORTSMEN FOR WILD OLYMPICS

Website: SportsmenForWildOlympics.org
Email: info@sportsmenforwildolympics.org

WAPITI BOWMEN ARCHERY CLUB

Facebook: facebook.com/Wapiti-Bowmen-180948655312545/
Email: wapitibowclub@gmail.com
374 E Arnette Rd, Port Angeles, WA 98362

EYES IN THE WOODS

Website: <http://www.eyesinthewoods.org/>
P.O. Box 2406, Olympia, WA 98507

WEST END SPORTSMEN'S CLUB-FORKS

Facebook Website: facebook.com/pg/West-End-Sportsmens-Club-354953248029561/posts/
Phone: (360) 374-5420
Sportsman Club Road, Forks, WA 98331

WASHINGTON BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

Website: backcountryhunters.org/washington_bha
Max Cole, West Side Co-Chair
Email: washington@backcountryhunters.org

DUCKS UNLIMITED OLYMPIC DISTRICT

Website: ducks.org/washington/wa-content/state-contacts/?poe=stateHomeIcon

Chairman Mike Luecht

Email: papaluke@wavecable.com

IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA GREATER SEATTLE CHAPTER

Website: iwla.org/local-chapters

A. William Way

Phone: 425-868-4759

Email: bway@watershedco.com

3451 E. Lake Sammamish Ln. N.E., Sammamish, WA 98074

WASHINGTON BRANT FOUNDATION

Website: wabrant.org/

Maynard Axelson

Phone: 360-445-6681

Email: info@wabrant.org

15929 Fir Island Rd, Mt Vernon, WA 98273

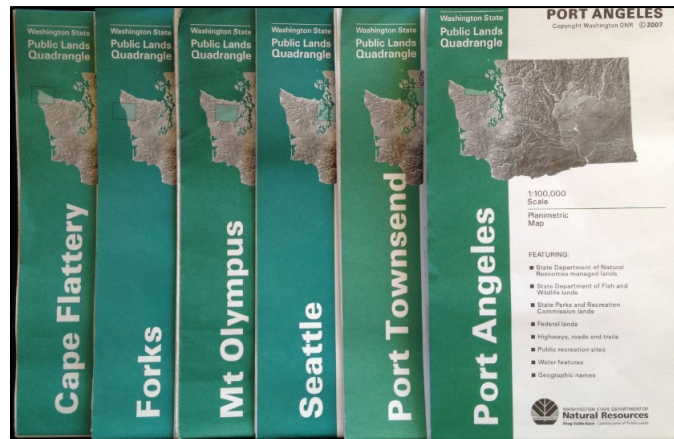
WASHINGTON OUTDOOR WOMEN (WOW)

Website: washingtonoutdoorwomen.org washingtonoutdoorwomen.org/workshops/

P.O. Box 1656, Bellevue, WA 98009-1656

If you know of an organization that should be included in this document, please let us know.

WDFW recommends a set of these DNR maps, which you can order [online](#).



These DNR maps are available to buy at Swains and Browns in Port Angeles and Thriftway in Forks but can also be ordered online or by phone.

These DNR maps have some of the best combination of land ownership and current roads. However, keep in mind there have been several DNR and private forest land ownership exchanges in recent years that won't show up on these maps. [DNR's website](#) has current DNR ownership displayed.

Other maps that can be helpful for select areas include:

[Forest Service Free Online Maps](#)

Forest Service maps can be obtained free online at

[Forest Service Maps to purchase](#)

USFS sells forest district maps that are very useful, as are the custom correct maps shown on the same page.

East end of WDFW District 16 is the Hood Canal Ranger District/North End map.

West end of WDFW District 16 are the Pacific Ranger District/North End and South End maps.

OnX App: The OnX Cellphone App has been the go-to tool for information on land ownership in recent years. One main issue is areas with no cell service could make the tool useless. If you preplan when you have service, you can save the aerial background for the areas you will encounter poor cell coverage and then still use the App without cell service.

2023

ANTHONY NOVACK, District Wildlife Biologist
SCOTT HARRIS, Private Lands Biologist
MARISSA CENT, Assistant District Wildlife
Biologist



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 17 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Pacific and Grays Harbor counties

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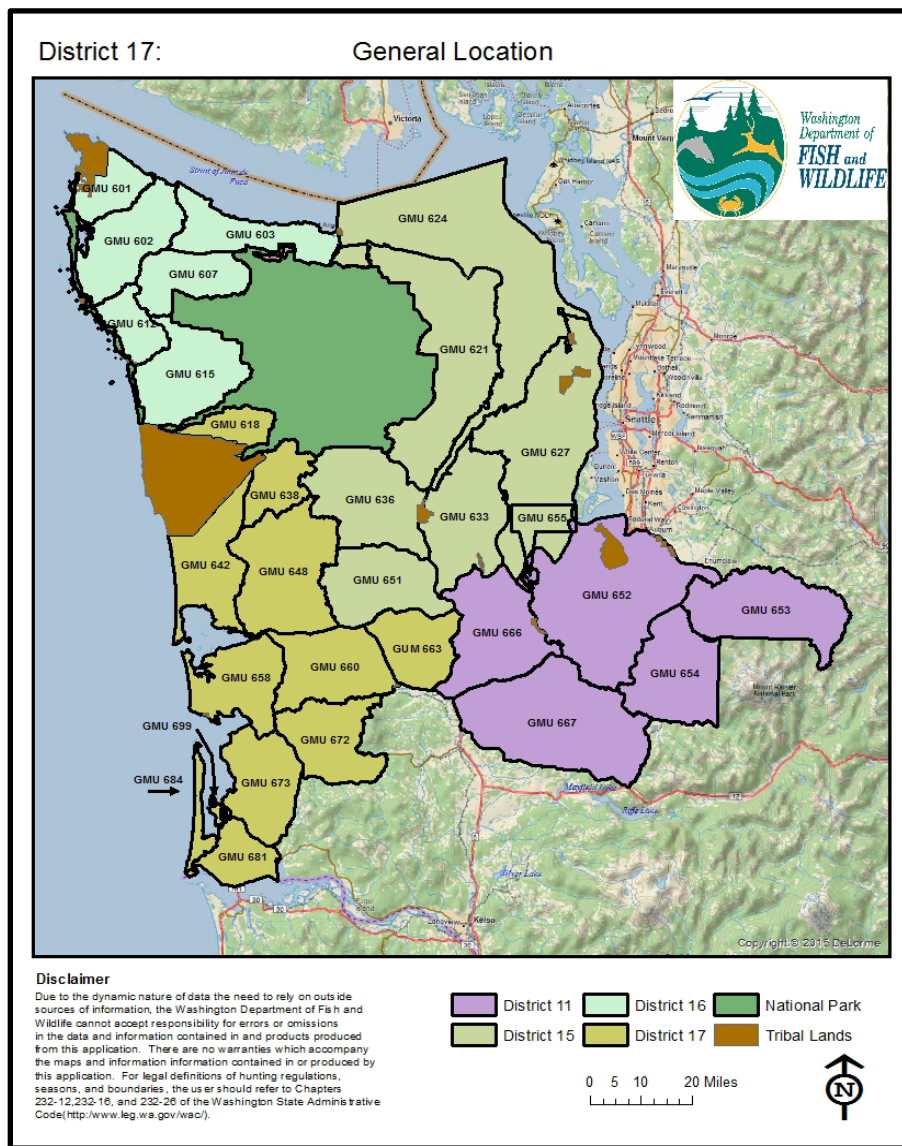
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DISTRICT 17 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 17 includes all of Pacific and Grays Harbor counties and is one of four management districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that makes up Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) coastal region, commonly referred to as Region 6. The northern portion of District 17 (north of Highway 12) includes the southwestern portion of the Olympic Mountains, while the southern part of the district is situated in the Willapa Hills.

District 17 is in southwest Washington and consists of 12 Game Management Units (GMUs): 638 (Quinault Ridge), 648 (Wynoochee), 660 (Minot Peak), 672 (Fall River), 681 (Bear River), 699 (Long Island), 618 (Matheny), 642 (Copalis), 658 (North River), 663 (Capital Peak), 673 (Williams Creek), 684 (Long Beach).



Four administrative districts and their associated GMUs within WDFW Region 6

The landscape in District 17 is dominated by intensively managed industrial forest land characterized by second and third-growth forests. These lands are primarily dedicated to producing conifers such as Douglas fir, western hemlock, and occasionally cedar. Some tree stands focus production on red alder. Other habitats in the district range from sub-alpine habitat in areas adjacent to Olympic National Park to coastal wetlands along the outer coast.

District 17 is best known for elk hunting opportunities in the Willapa Hills and waterfowl hunting opportunities around Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and in the Chehalis and Willapa river valleys. High-quality hunting opportunities exist for other game species, including black-tailed deer, black bears, and forest grouse. The following table shows the estimated harvest for the three most popular big game species in District 17 during the 2017-2022 seasons. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

	Harvest year					
Species	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Elk	Total = 626 Bull = 506 Cow = 130	768	766	748	856	733
Deer	Total = 1,310 Buck = 1,142 Doe = 168	1562	1,476	1,674	1,542	1,258
Bear	190	142	139	202	123	109

Table 1. Total hunter harvest for selected game species during 2022 and previous five years in District 17.

ELK

SUMMARY

Success rates: Range widely depending on weapon type, GMU, and land access.

Recent trends: Decrease in harvest and hunter effort. Decline in modern firearm elk hunters.

GMUs with highest elk harvest in rank order: GMU 673, 658, 660, 681.

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

The subspecies of elk in District 17 are Roosevelt elk. Unlike other areas in Western Washington, Rocky Mountain elk were never introduced into the area, and Roosevelt-Rocky Mountain elk hybrids do not occur. Washington has ten distinct elk herds. A portion of two elk herds occur in District 17:

- Olympic elk herd (GMUs 618, 638, 642, and 648)
- Willapa Hills elk herd (GMUs 658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, and 699).

Elk hunting in District 17 varies from marginal to excellent depending on the GMU. GMUs associated with the Willapa Hills elk herd area, specifically GMUs 658, 672, 673, and 681 offer the greatest harvest opportunities.

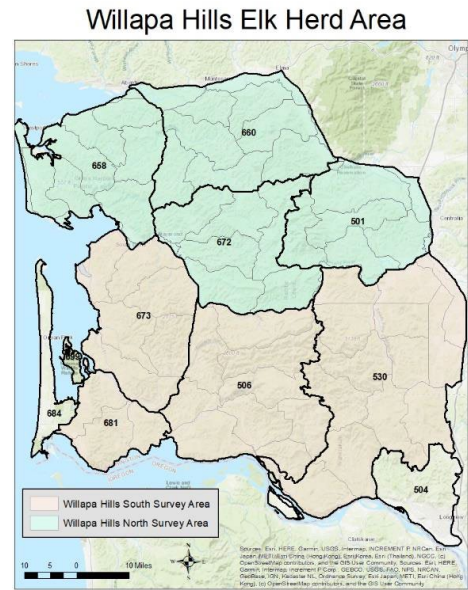
WDFW manages elk at the herd level and sets regulations at the GMU level. In general, each herd occupies several GMUs that collectively define the range of a population that minimizes interchange with adjacent elk populations.

WDFW manages District 17 with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing elk herds. To meet that goal, WDFW's objective is to maintain herds at a minimum ratio of 15 bulls to 100 cows in the pre-hunting season population and a minimum of 12 bulls to 100 cows in the post-season population. Portions of the district (such as GMU 684) must balance overall herd objectives with the equally important mission to minimize human-wildlife conflicts. Elk can cause severe impacts to commercial crops such as hay or cranberries.

WDFW doesn't use formal population size estimates to monitor elk populations across the entire district. Instead, WDFW uses harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort to supplement formal indices or estimates. This approach has limitations for monitoring trends in population size. Therefore, WDFW has a more detailed monitoring strategy specifically for the Willapa Hills elk herd to:

- Determine elk population trends
- Quantify cow to calf ratios
- Quantify bull to cow ratios

In 2023, WDFW conducted surveys across both the northern and southern portions of the Willapa Hills, which included portions of Region 5, District 10 to estimate overall abundance and ratios of calves and bulls to cows at the GMU, subherd (i.e., north vs south), and herd scales. Typically, limited funding and the large herd area requires surveying the north and south subherds in alternating years (see map). This year, the Department had sufficient funding to survey the entire herd area. Results from the 2023 Willapa Hills Elk surveys are found in the table below.



South-Subherd GMUs	Calf/Cow ratio	Bull/Cow ratio
506 Willapa Hills	32:100 = (32 calves per 100)	11:100 = (11 Bulls per 100)
530 Ryderwood	41:100	18:100
681 Bear River	36:100	18:100
673 Williams Creek	26:100	15:100
Willapa South Total	34:100	15:100
North-subherd GMUs		
658 North River	29:100	18:100
660 Minot Peak	31:100	15:100
672 Fall River	30:100	16:100
Willapa North Total	29:100	17:100
All GMU's (North and South)	32 calves per 100 cows	16 Bulls per 100 cows

Table 2: Subherd GMU ratios.

Survey results from 2023 show a healthy and stable elk population throughout the Willapa Hills. Both calf to cow and bull to cow ratios for the Willapa Hills herd area are robust, indicating a productive herd with decent harvest opportunities. WDFW will conduct yearly surveys of the Willapa Hills elk herd to sample different segments of the landscape.

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Probably the most frequent question the Department gets from hunters is “which GMU should I hunt?”. The answer depends on the hunting method and the target hunting experience. For example, GMU 699 is a small unit closed to both modern and muzzleloader hunters. Another example is that archery hunters are not allowed to harvest antlerless elk in every GMU.

Some hunters are looking for an opportunity to harvest a mature bull. Large mature bulls are found in District 17 but aren't very abundant. WDFW directs hunters seeking mature bulls to spend their efforts in either the Quinault Ridge (638), Matheny (618), or adjacent Clearwater (615) GMUs. All three GMUs are adjacent to Olympic National Park (ONP) and have the reputation of producing some very nice bulls. The best success for five-point or better bulls is garnered by the September rifle permit hunters in either the Quinault Ridge (638) or Matheny (618) GMUs.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high densities of elk, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario doesn't readily exist in any GMU open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 17. Those GMUs with the highest elk densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of elk. For other hunters, they might prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of elk if that means there are also very few hunters. Note that many industrial timber companies have begun limiting access or charging a fee to access their land. This change has effectively, and sometimes dramatically, reduced hunter density on those lands.

Archers should consider that antlerless elk seasons are not uniform across all GMUs. Antlerless elk may be harvested during the general season in six GMUs, and three GMUs are open during early and late archery seasons. These differences are important when comparing total harvest or hunter numbers among GMUs. Muzzleloader seasons are not uniform either. Some muzzleloader seasons are open during the early muzzleloader season, while others are only available during the late muzzleloader season. Hunters should keep these differences in mind when interpreting the information provided in figure 2 through 4.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Elk populations do not vary much from year to year, especially in District 17, which lacks the severe winter weather conditions that might result in a winter die-off. Consequently, WDFW expects the number of elk available for harvest to be similar in size to the 2022 season. Elk harvest appeared to be higher in 2018 compared to prior years so, a slight decline in elk harvest for 2019 was not unexpected. Hunter numbers do not typically change much from one year to the next, but recent actions by private timber companies to charge for access have reduced hunter numbers in those areas affected.

Weather can be dramatically different from year to year and has the potential to influence harvest rates. As an example, 2012 and 2021 were a hot and dry summers by western Washington standards, which produced extreme fire danger warnings and caused many timber companies to close their lands to public access during the latter part of the general early archery season and the entire early muzzleloader season. Washington has witnessed record high temperatures in early summer this year, so conditions could result in extreme fire dangers in fall 2023. The best predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success.

Long-term harvest data (along with survey data) generally indicates that elk populations are stable in District 17. However, 2022 saw the lowest total elk harvest since 2008. This dip could indicate that even more elk are available in 2023. One possible factor – the Department noted fewer modern firearm hunters were afield in 2022 (>10% decline). For more detailed information related to the status of Washington’s elk herds, hunters should reference the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Figures 3-4 are detailed charts on historic elk harvest for District 17.

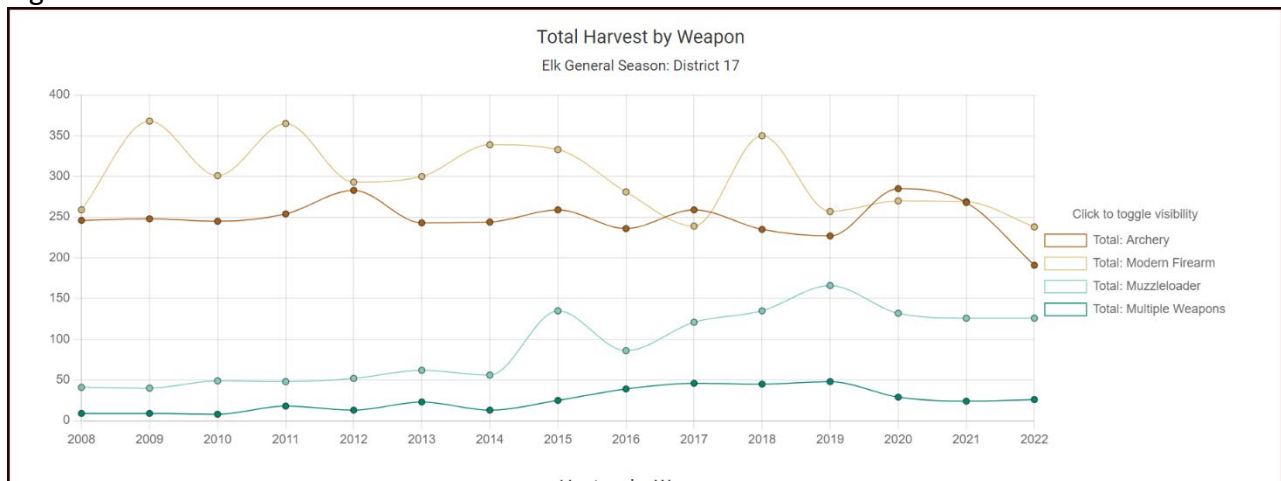


Figure 3. District 17 elk harvest totals. Total elk harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Harvest totals do not include tribal harvest.

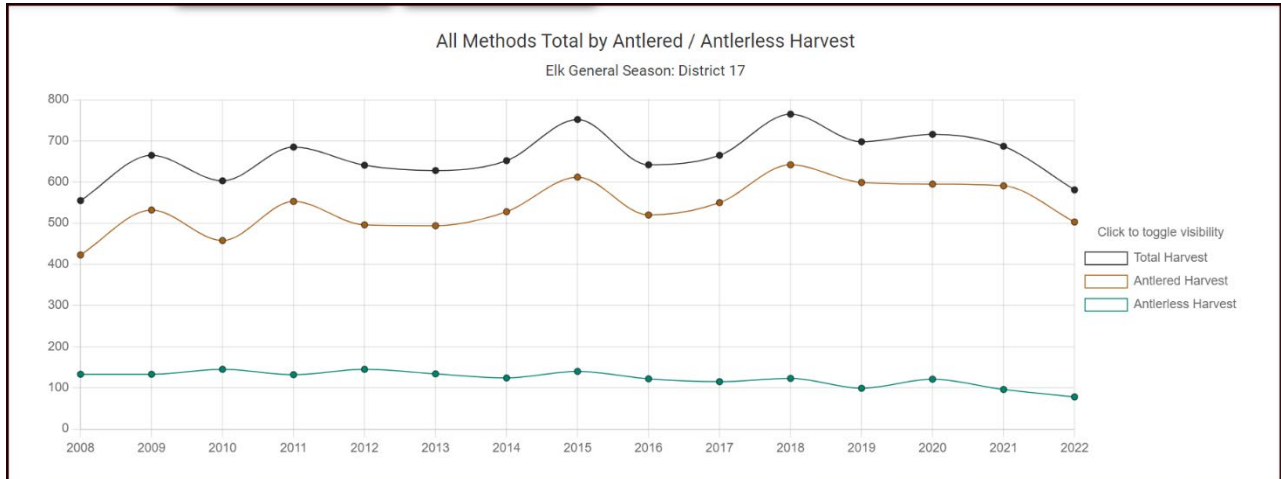


Figure 4. District 17 elk harvest totals for antlered and antlerless elk. Total elk harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Harvest totals do not include tribal harvest.

HOW TO FIND ELK

When hunting elk in District 17, hunters need to research and spend time scouting before the season opens. Predicting where elk are located is especially difficult after hunting pressure increases. Many hunters spend their time focused on timber harvests. Elk often forage in timber harvests and are highly visible when they do. Those highly visible elk often attract other hunters. Consequently, timber harvests can get crowded in a hurry. Many elk (especially bulls) will infrequently visit timber harvests during daylight hours. Instead, they may spend most of their day in closed canopy forests, swamps, or regeneration stands.



Corey Bronckhorst with elk taken from GMU 673 during the 2016 archery season.

Some generalities can be made about the landscape that will increase the odds of locating elk. When going to a new area, hunters are encouraged to cover as much ground as possible. Note areas where you see signs along roads and landings. Landings are often not graveled, making it easy to see fresh tracks. Scouting will reveal which areas hold elk and where to focus more intensive efforts.

After identifying areas with abundant elk signs, hunters should focus on areas that provide cover and are near timber harvests. During early seasons, when it is warm, these cover areas often include swamps, creek bottoms, river bottoms, or any place near water. Once the season progresses and temperatures cool, elk are less attracted to water, and locating them becomes more difficult. Hunting pressure also can force elk to use areas that provide thicker cover or are more inaccessible to hunters because of topography.

Later in the season, consult a topographic map and find benches located in steep terrain with thick cover. Elk often use these benches to bed down during the day. Finally, don't let a locked gate (provided that non-motorized access is allowed) keep you from going into an area to search for elk. Frequently, these areas hold elk that have not received much hunting pressure, making them less skittish and easier to hunt. A popular approach to hunting behind gates is to use mountain bikes with trailers. Biking on timber company lands is facilitated by high densities of maintained gravel roads.

ELK AREAS

There are two Elk Areas in District 17: Elk Area 6010 (Mallis or Raymond) and Elk Area 6064 (Quinault Valley). Nearly all permit opportunities in District 17 are antlerless elk hunts and are associated with these Elk Areas. Elk Area 6010 was established in a location with chronic elk damage problems, and its primary purpose is to provide antlerless harvest opportunities that help control the growth rate of herds in localized agricultural areas.

Elk Area 6064 was established to help foster solutions between landowners and elk hunters. Special restrictions apply in each Elk Area. In Elk Area 6064, only master hunters are allowed to hunt elk during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons.

Elk Area 6010 was established to alleviate elk damage on private agricultural lands. Elk Area 6010 also contains tracts of public or private timber company lands where elk are not problematic. For the best opportunities, hunters are advised to visit and scout the area well in advance of their hunt and make the effort to speak with farm owners in the area regarding accessing their property.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Several private timber companies in District 17 charge a fee to access areas previously open to the public. Property ownership changes irregularly. Hunters should contact landowners in areas

they intend to hunt and determine the company's current policy. See private lands access section for more information.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the Olympic and Willapa elk herd areas. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area.

Hoof disease is found throughout District 17 in both the Olympic and Willapa Hills elk herd areas. TAHD appears to be more prevalent among elk in the Willapa Herd area and southern end of the Olympic Peninsula. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male, or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene. It is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The objective of this program is to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for

the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of Sep. 1 – Dec. 31 will be awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

To help combat TAHD in elk, hunters can:

- **Harvest a limping elk** from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.
- **Turn in their harvested elk hooves along with complete registration forms** at one of several collection sites in western Washington.
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. The Department's website has more information about [TAHD](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.

DEER

SUMMARY

Success rates: Depend on weapon type and GMU hunted. For the entire district, hunter success generally ranges from 15-20%.

Recent trends: Observable decrease in harvest last year compared to the year prior.

GMUs with highest harvest: 660, 663, 672, 648

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Columbian black-tailed deer (black-tails or black-tailed deer) are the only species of deer in District 17. Deer hunting opportunities in District 17 range from marginal to very good. The best opportunities to harvest a black-tailed deer in District 17 occur in GMUs 663, 648, 672, and 660.

In Washington, black-tail harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. All areas of District 17 are managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing deer populations while minimizing conflicts with people. Management objectives include maintaining deer populations to have a minimum of 15 bucks per 100 does in the post-hunting season population.

WDFW does not attempt to survey deer populations to estimate their total numbers in District 17. Harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort help to supplement a formal population size estimate. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor population size trends, and the agency is currently evaluating new approaches to monitor black-tailed deer populations.

Finding an effective way to monitor black-tailed deer populations has been an ongoing management challenge. Black-tailed deer are secretive and use densely vegetated habitats. Their ability to remain unseen substantially lowers the probability of detection through aerial surveys. The small number of deer observed results in insufficient sample sizes to monitor population trends or demographics (buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios).

Overall deer harvest has varied widely over the long-term (2008-2022) with a low point of 1,095 animals harvested in 2011. The most recent high point was 2016 when 1,837 were harvested. That was followed by another low of 1,258 in 2017, then varied between 1,476 and 1,674 through 2021. Last year (2022) was back down to a total estimated 1,310 bucks and does. Long-term trends in harvest data seemed to indicate somewhat stable deer populations. The seemingly steep decline from 2016 to 2017 is surprising and without an obvious biological cause. For more detailed information on the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should reference through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trends Report](#).

ANTLER POINTS AND AGE

Prior to mandatory reporting in 2001, WDFW staffed field check stations to gather information of age structure. Hunters have frequently asked if there is a correlation between age and antler points. During the fall of 1979, tooth samples were collected from bucks harvested in western Washington and sent in for cementum annuli aging. Of the total of 36 buck deer tooth samples collected, 25 (69%) were spikes and two points. The remaining bucks sampled were at least three points or better (31%), with four of the three points being 2.5 years old at time of harvest.

A more accurate assessment of the age of buck deer harvested in Western Washington has occurred recently. WDFW collected hundreds of tooth samples from successful black-tailed deer hunters during the 2019 and 2020 season. Reported number of antler points was submitted with each tooth, and samples were sent to a laboratory for analysis of cementum annuli to determine age. A table of the results is plotted below. Generally, the number of antler points increases with age. However, a 3-year-old buck may still be a spike, and an 11-year-old buck could be a 2 point. Conversely, a yearling could have 4 points.

Max Antler Points (1 side)	Average Age – Rounded to nearest ½ year	Total # of Submissions
1 (Spike)	1 Year	65
2	3 Years	120
3	4 Years	97
4	4 ½ Years	65
5	5 Years	30
6	6 Years	4

Table 6– Average age of black-tailed bucks harvested in Washington state in comparison to the highest number of reported antler points.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

The best GMU to hunt deer in depends on the hunting method and the target hunting experience. Some hunters are looking for the best chance to harvest a large, mature buck, while others want to harvest any legal deer or simply be in an area with few hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have:

- High numbers of deer
- Low numbers of hunters
- High hunter success rates

Unfortunately, the perfect scenario does not exist in any GMU that is freely open to the public during any season within District 17. GMUs with the highest deer numbers tend to have the highest hunter numbers as well.

For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them to avoid a GMU with many deer. Others prefer to hunt areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if they can avoid other hunters.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Deer populations do not change dramatically between typical years. Winter weather conditions rarely cause winter die-offs within District 17. Consequently, the Department anticipates the total quantity of deer available for harvest to be similar to previous seasons.

Hunter numbers do not change dramatically between typical years unless hunting regulations are significantly modified or access is closed. The best predictor of expected general season harvest is recent trends in:

1. Harvest
2. Hunter numbers
3. Hunter success

The following chart provides trend data for harvest statistics. Total harvest is consistent with low harvest years occurring in 2011 (1,095 deer taken) and 2017 (1,259 deer taken). Boom years occurred in 2009 when almost 2,000 deer were harvested by hunters and 2016 when an estimated 1,838 deer were harvested.

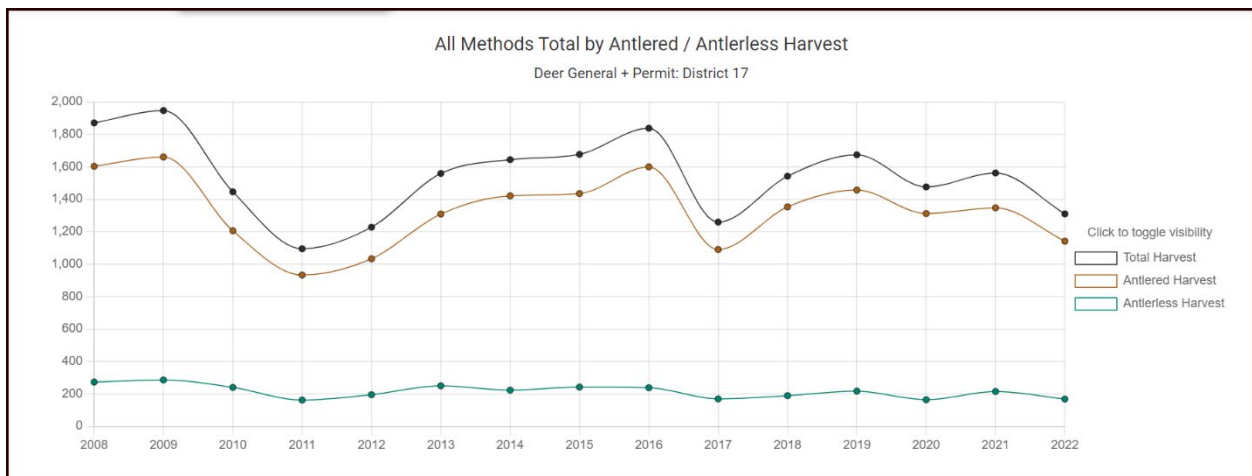


Figure 7. District 17 deer harvest totals. Total buck and antlerless deer harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Harvest totals include special permits but does not include tribal harvest.

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT BLACK-TAILED DEER

The key to harvesting a black-tailed deer in District 17 is scouting. black-tailed deer are present throughout the district and in nearly every habitat type. Deer numbers differ among habitat types and the highest deer densities are associated with 3- to 9-year-old timber harvests. These young tree stands provide large amounts of both cover and food.



Dana Morgan with spike deer taken during the late firearm season in GMU 663

Many hunters will focus efforts on new timber harvests. Deer in these areas are much more visible than most other habitats. However, deer know they are exposed and typically visit timber harvests at night, early dawn, and dusk. Hunters should also explore areas near these openings. Those areas with cover are more likely to contain deer for most the day. Large amounts of deer sign in an area indicate deer are in close vicinity.

Over several years, WDFW fitted female deer in Capitol State Forest (GMU 663) with GPS collars as part of a larger WDFW study throughout western Washington. The goal of this study was to better understand the effects timber management practices have on deer survival and productivity. These GPS collars automatically upload the deer's location via satellite several times a day. The data gives biologists a detailed look at black-tailed deer movements and habitat use.

None of the deer monitored in WDFW's doe study used an area larger than .38 mi² (243 acres). The average home range size was .14 mi² (86 acres). Some deer used an area no bigger than 45 acres in size during an entire year. If a hunter sees signs of deer in an area, but no deer, they need to be patient or change their approach.

The traditional approaches to hunting black-tailed deer include still-hunting or sitting patiently in high-use areas (timber harvests, highly traveled trails, or funnels) until the deer appears. A less well-known, or less-used, technique is rattling and grunting to simulate two bucks fighting over a doe. The rattling technique is more common with mid-west and eastern white-tailed deer hunters but can be effective on black-tailed deer as well. A quick internet search on the technique yields plenty of evidence to illustrate its effectiveness when conditions are right.

Buck movements tend to increase during the rut and, they are less wary than during other parts of the year. The last week of October and first week of November seem to be those periods of time when male deer are most susceptible to harvest. Starting in 2017, WDFW initiated a buck mortality study, which would pinpoint the activity periods and survival rates for male black-tail deer in western Washington. Results of this effort are still awaiting analysis.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Several private timber companies in District 17 are shifting to fee-access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Typically, these companies will post signs at primary roadways, but hunters should be aware of changes. WDFW advises hunters to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the individual company's current policy regarding land access. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears are present throughout District 17. Bear numbers vary among GMUs, and the harvest can change noticeably from year to year. The best places to harvest bears usually occurs in GMUs 648, 660, and 663. Other GMUs worth mentioning are 618, 638, 658, 660, 672, and 681.

Bear seasons are primarily designed to maintain stable black bear populations. Spring seasons are directed to areas where black bear cause measurable damage to young commercial timber stands or other sites of human-bear conflict. The existing bear populations are not expected to have much impact on big game herds. Three statistics used to assess black bear harvest are:

- Proportion of females harvested.
- Median age of harvested females
- Median age of harvested males

WDFW initiated surveys in 2019 to estimate bear density in portions of Region 6. The initial study area was in the Fall River GMU (672). The resulting estimates are expected to help the agency formulate management objectives and understand the relationship between the number of bears in the area and the habitat characteristics and annual harvest rates. For Fall River, the bear density was estimated at just under eight bears per 100 square kilometers of bear habitat in the summer of 2019.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Most bears are probably harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Overall hunter success is low, but annual harvest can vary widely from year to year, and 2019 and 2020 had some of the highest harvest rates for the past 10 years. Depending on the GMU hunted, between 4 and 15% of bear hunters in District 17 were successful in 2019. Since 2001, overall hunter success for this district has typically ranged from 4% to 8%. District-wide, bear hunter success in 2019 was 11%. Hunter success rates are likely higher for those that specifically hunt bears compared to hunters that take bear incidentally during deer or elk season.

Annual bear harvest in District 17 increased from 2002 to 2008. Harvest declined sharply during the 2009 season but rebounded in 2010. Bear harvest has since remained generally stable to increasing, although 2014 was a low year and 2019 was a high year. Last year, 2022, was another high year for bear harvest.

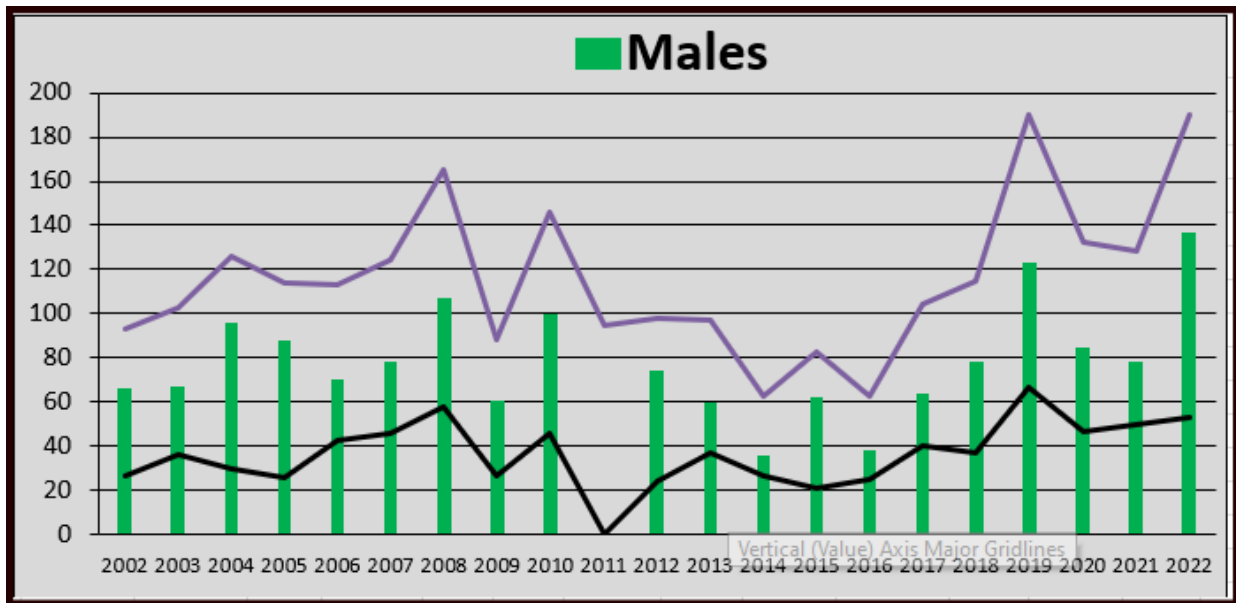


Figure 8. Trends in the number of male (green) and female (black line) black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 17, 2002–2022. Harvest estimates do not include bears harvested during historic spring permit seasons nor bears removed because of conflicts with people or timber damage. Note - The sex of harvested bears was not available for 2011.

More bears are typically harvested during the general season in GMUs 648 than any other GMU. GMU’s 642, 658, 660, 663, 673, and 681 are also regular producers of bears during the general and spring permit hunting seasons.

HOW TO FIND BLACK BEAR

Black bears are common and occur at high densities in some locales. However, bears in District 17 are seen infrequently because of thick vegetation dominating the landscape. Consequently, scouting is extremely important when hunting for black bears.

Black bears occupy a variety of habitat types, and it can be difficult to narrow down where to find them. Because bears have an incredible sense of smell, hunters should focus on open terrain. When out in the open, a bear can be seen from a distance without alerting it. In dense cover, a bear is likely to smell a hunter before being seen and move to avoid an encounter. Bears are often located in timber harvests with a lot of berry-producing shrubs. Examples include:

- Elderberries
- Salmonberries
- Huckleberries
- Blackberries
- Salal berries

During the fall, hunters should seek timber harvests with these types of shrubs and search for bear sign. Fresh signs indicate a bear is visiting that stand. Patient hunters who watch these areas for extended periods of time can increase their chances of harvesting a bear.

NOTABLE CHANGES

Bear Season starts Aug. 1 across all parts of the state.



Bear photo from GMU 672 survey site

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 17, but densities vary among GMUs. WDFW manages cougar populations in District 17 primarily to maintain a stable cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW shifted away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested and implemented a standard season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intended goal was to allow a longer season without weapon restrictions. Cougar seasons will close for a specific area once harvest reaches or exceeds a harvest guideline.



To accomplish harvest goals, WDFW established a series of hunt areas with standard season dates of Sept. 1 through April 30. The Department assesses harvest numbers are starting Jan. 1. Any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed. Anyone planning to hunt cougar after Janu 1 should take a moment to confirm the cougar season is still open. Harvest guidelines for each hunt area located in District 17 are provided in Table 8.

Starting in 2019, WDFW convened an internal group to assess the results of implementing the harvest guideline hunting structure. The harvest guidelines were changed for the 2021-2022 season to only account for adult harvest.

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline
618, 636, 638	3-5 adults
642, 648, 651	6-8 adults
658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, 699	8-11 adults

Table 9 Harvest guidelines for hunt areas located in District 17.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Cougar harvest in District 17 varies greatly. The variability may be due to the prohibition on hound hunting and trapping. Deer and elk hunters mostly harvest most cougars opportunistically. Since 2001, the average number of cougars that hunters harvest District 17 is six animals. Young animals are overrepresented in the harvest. Most cougar harvest in District 17 has occurred in GMU 642, 648, and 651.

NOTABLE CHANGES

Subadults no longer count toward the cougar harvest guideline. WDFW reminds hunters that the season ends April 30, unless closed early. A 2023 tag and license are required after March 31, 2023.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 17. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, mallard, green-winged teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, and common goldeneye, are present but occur in low numbers. Nesting wood ducks are often in the Chehalis River Valley early in the season and provide a unique hunting opportunity. Hunters occasionally find sea ducks, including scoters and long-tailed ducks, in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor.

Mallards are Washington's most abundant species of duck. Consequently, mallards constitute the majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically $\geq 50\%$). In contrast, American wigeon are the most abundant species of duck in District 17. During recent aerial survey flights of Willapa Bay, American wigeon typically comprised 50 to 60% of the ducks observed. Hunters should expect to primarily harvest American wigeon, northern pintail, and mallard. Green-winged teal are abundant early in the season but decrease in numbers as the season progresses.



MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY

Hunters find very few ducks during late spring and early summer. Beginning in mid to late September, birds within the Pacific Flyway will migrate south from Alaska. (Note – hunters have harvested banded ducks marked from the Central Flyway along coastal Washington, indicating that some movement between flyways does exist). Duck numbers will continue to increase until peaking in late October and early November. The migrating ducks are believed to concentrate in District 17 as resting areas. They do not appear to remain in the district for long periods of time. Consequently, the number of ducks located inside District 17 likely varies daily. Total duck numbers decline precipitously once the flow of migrants from Alaska has stopped. By the December holiday season, duck numbers are typically 5% of what they were at the end of October. Unlike eastern Washington, weather doesn't alter migration chronology in coastal Washington. Regardless of the weather, duck numbers decline at about the same point in time each year.

CONCENTRATION AREAS

In general, waterfowl concentrations occur in Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and the Chehalis and Willapa River valleys. The exact locations where duck concentrations occur depends on many factors (hunting pressure, weather, food, etc.) that can change daily.

Waterfowl concentrations shift around the bay each winter. Small, forested wetlands also provide areas where migratory ducks may congregate. In the river valleys after large soaking precipitation events, hunters can find dabbling ducks in areas where sheet water has accumulated. The number of ducks that can use these small bodies of water can be surprisingly high. Hunters should scout a few days before hunting to locate where concentrations of ducks are currently located and/or where sheet water is likely to occur.

POPULATION STATUS

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species. Breeding duck populations in western Washington weren't monitored until 2010, when WDFW developed and began flying established transects in five select areas of western Washington. WDFW flies surveys in April and early May. One of the selected areas occurs in District 17 and is associated with the Chehalis river valley.

Surveys have not occurred in recent years to help protect public safety during the coronavirus. In 2019, the breeding population in the Chehalis river valley was estimated at 4,130 ducks, which is lower than the 6,841 estimated in 2018. Mallard numbers during the spring breeding flights remained the same, and American wigeon numbers decreased for the second year.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

Breeding duck numbers in Alaska are the biggest factor affecting duck hunters in Washington. Unfortunately, surveys were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Historic harvest can provide insight into probable hunting opportunity. Overall, harvest trends since 2016 have been rising slightly and are more similar to the average total number of ducks harvested since 2010. For instance, the 2016 season was noteworthy for having low numbers of ducks in October. Harvest, especially for Grays Harbor, again ticked up in 2018 compared to the 2016 season. Duck hunter harvest was below average in 2021.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

Duck hunting techniques should vary depending on where hunters choose to hunt. Traditional setups work best when hunting inland waters around ponds, rivers, or feeding areas. Birds are most active in early morning and late afternoon, as they move between resting sites and feeding areas.

The tides influence hunting the coastline of Willapa Bay or Grays Harbor. Regardless of the time of day, ducks along the coastline tend to move very little at either low or high tide. Hunters can expect very little movement during tidal extremes. However, bird activity and opportunities increase when the tide is going out or coming in. A perfectly timed tide can provide success to coastline hunters at 3 p.m., unlike traditional waterfowl hunting areas that are typically limited to early morning and late afternoon. For more information, reference the [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#).

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Many WDFW wildlife areas in District 17 offer good waterfowl hunting opportunities. The following map is intended to provide hunters with the general location of these wildlife areas, but hunters should visit the [WDFW waterfowl hunting page](#) or the Go Hunt application for more detailed information.

The website includes waterfowl information related to location, current waterfowl management activities, and common species. Other public land opportunities occur on the [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#).

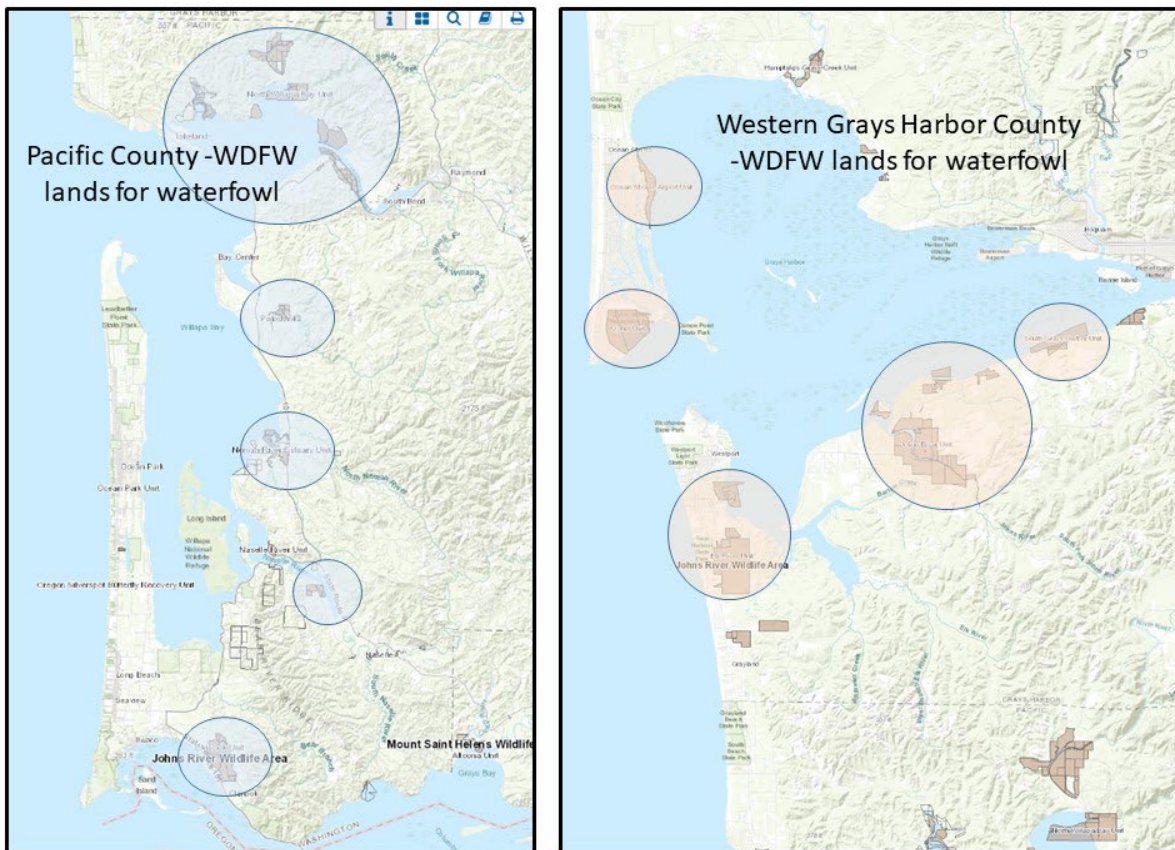


Figure 10: WDFW lands and waterfowl hunting areas within western portion of District 17.

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

The sub-species of Canada geese found in District 17 include western, dusky, lesser, taverner, Aleutian, Vancouver, and cackler. Hunters can find large numbers of black brant in Willapa Bay beginning in late January and early February. Occasional flocks of snow geese and white-fronted geese occur infrequently.



MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

The timing of migration for geese in District 17 is nearly identical to that described for ducks. Few geese reside locally in the district. Starting in September, waves of migrant geese begin showing up from Alaska. One distinct difference between ducks and geese is that goose numbers do not decline in late November as sharply as duck numbers. Many geese choose to stay the winter in the agricultural areas of District 17 where they find food. Brant is distinct from the other species of geese and, are mostly found in Willapa Bay starting in the latter half of December or early January.

Most geese aggregate in areas of agricultural lands around the Willapa and Chehalis river valleys. Some properties routinely have geese on them. Generally, the specific fields where geese concentrate changes on a weekly basis. The Chehalis and Willapa river valleys are not expansive, so relocating geese is not difficult. Hunters are likely to find brant, in contrast to other geese, almost exclusively in close vicinity to areas where eel grass is found.

POPULATION STATUS

Very few geese breed in District 17. Consequently, WDFW does not survey for breeding geese within the district. Long-term goose nest surveys have occurred elsewhere in Washington. Portions of the lower Columbia River have small but relatively stable breeding populations.

Wintering populations of geese are hard to survey effectively, because geese forage widely in agricultural areas that make them difficult to locate. The number of geese observed in Washington during the midwinter-waterfowl surveys has been relatively stable since the early 2000s.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Historically, most goose harvest has occurred in Grays Harbor County during the regular season. A decline in the goose harvest for Grays Harbor County in 2015 may partially be attributed to its inclusion into Goose Area 2. Pacific County goose hunters have long been required to obtain

southwest goose authorizations, and the number of Pacific County hunters has not changed significantly. The Department expects that the number of Grays Harbor County goose hunters will gradually increase as hunters obtain their southwest goose authorization.

Given the current trends in goose populations farther north, the goose hunting opportunities in District 17 are expected to remain consistent. Hunters can expect to harvest an average of one or two geese per day.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

Goose hunting is almost standardized. Goose hunters find agricultural areas where geese feed and set up well before daylight in portions of the field where geese are known to concentrate. In District 17, feeding geese tend to congregate in pastures containing cattle operations. Most goose hunting opportunities occur on private property. Hunters must obtain permission before hunting private lands.

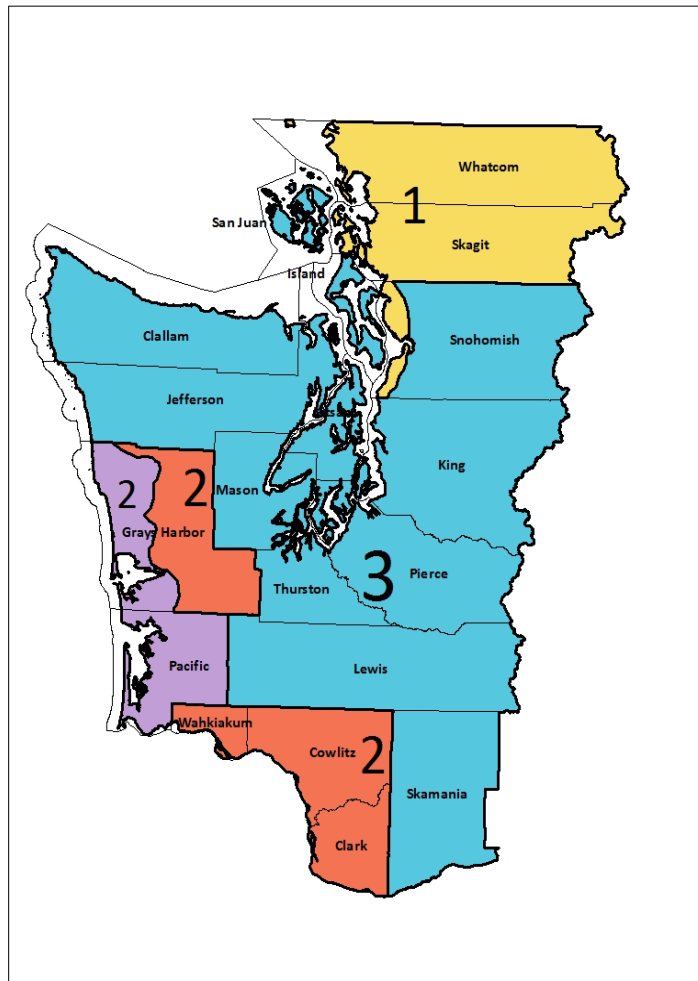
During the early September goose hunting season, noticeable concentrations of western Canada geese have been observed in and around Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay. These areas tend to congregate molting geese earlier in the season and those recently molted birds seem to continue to use those areas throughout the early season. Recent goose surveys conducted in August 2019 around Baker Bay, near the town of Chinook, documented many geese. Many of the areas where geese are found require boat access, but favorable goose hunting can occur near shore using traditional methods.

Inclement weather may force local and migratory geese further upland and into river valleys. This tends to occur more frequently during the regular goose season that starts in October. High easterly winds may force the birds to land in fields where they become less exposed to the wind but are more vulnerable to hunters.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Both Pacific and Grays Harbor counties are contained within **Goose Management Area (GMA) 2** (reference map below). Special regulations apply in GMA 2 to prevent harvest of dusky Canada geese. These special regulations include:

- Hunters must possess a valid migratory bird hunting authorization for **Goose Management Area 2** to hunt geese, except during the September goose season.
- February and March seasons are closed on WDFW Wildlife areas and USFWS Wildlife refuges.
- Hours are 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours to 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours. If a hunter takes a Dusky Canada Goose, the authorization will be invalidated and the hunter will not be able to hunt geese in Goose Management Area 2 for the rest of the season, including the special late goose season.
- Beginning in 2018, a Mandatory Harvest Report Card was issued for hunters to record the number and species composition of their daily bag. Hunters are required to report their harvest onto this report card as soon as practical, after harvesting a goose.



WDFW strongly recommends that hunters review the most recent Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Season pamphlet to ensure they are following current regulations. Pamphlets are available at any retailer that sells hunting licenses or [online](#).

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Many wildlife areas in District 17 provide a chance to hunt geese. Check the earlier map or view WDFW's "[Let's go waterfowl hunting](#)" publication for more details. Additionally, some landowners have enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. Those lands provide

additional hunting opportunities for the public. Reference the private lands section for more details or visit the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#).

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

None for 2023.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

District 17 has two species of grouse: ruffed grouse and blue grouse (sooty). Ruffed grouse are the most abundant and occur at lower elevations and valley bottoms. Throughout the west, ruffed grouse typically prefer habitats that support abundant deciduous shrubs or small trees, particularly along stream corridors and other areas along rivers. These thick, somewhat impenetrable habitats provide protective cover for ruffed grouse. West of the Cascade Range stands of red alder can provide suitable habitat conditions for ruffed grouse. Blue grouse can be found in higher elevation habitats, but overlap does occur. Blue grouse are usually found in the uplands at elevations above 2,500 feet and may exceed 6,000 feet. Across Oregon and Washington, blue grouse prefer coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir and true fir. At higher elevations, birds are primarily found in western and mountain hemlock, lodgepole pine, and white bark pine. The Ruffed Grouse Society has developed an interactive map for blue and ruffed grouse habitat on national forest land.

Note – the map only assesses a small portion of land in District 17 that belongs to the US Forest Service. State and private lands are not portrayed. The map is only a guide to habitat and may not accurately predict where grouse can be found.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW no longer conducts surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 17. The Department uses harvest data trends to supplement formal population estimates. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch per unit effort (or “grouse per hunter day”) is the best indicator of population trend. In District 17, grouse harvest per hunter day has ranged from .12 to .038 birds per hunter day. The 2018 rate was 0.20 birds per hunter day, slightly higher than the .12 birds per hunter day in 2017.

To obtain better information on grouse population status and demographics, WDFW conducted a pilot effort in 2016 to collect grouse wings and tails from harvested birds in portions of Grays Harbor County. Results from the 2018 season are listed below (figure 9). This collection effort is expected to continue through 2023 with collection barrels located at strategic locations in the district.

Species	Female	Male	Unknown Sex	Juvenile	Yearling	Adult	Breeding Age*	Total collected
Ruffed	1	3	8	8	0	0	4	24
Blue	25	19	0	31	2	9	2	88
Totals	26	22	8	39	2	9	6	112

Table 11. The number, sex, age, and species type of forest grouse harvested in Grays Harbor County during the 2018 hunting season, Sep. 1 – Dec. 1.

***Breeding Age denotes birds with molt patterns that showed they were of breeding age but that could not be distinguished as yearling vs adult.**

Collecting grouse wings and tails helps the Department to monitor species, sex, and age ratios in the harvested population to inform production and composition. WDFW encourages hunters to contribute to these collections. Hunters can reference wing collection barrel locations on the [WDFW website](#). The table below identifies the percentage of birds harvested throughout Washington by species. Hunters in District 17 will either be in the Olympic or Southwest zone. Species by zone:

Zone	BLUE	RUFFED	SPRUCE
North Central	52%	29%	20%
North Puget Sound	38%	62%	0%
Northeast	16%	78%	6%
Olympic	44%	56%	0%
South Central	76%	24%	0%
Southwest	22%	78%	0%
Unknown	53%	47%	0%
Total	36%	59%	5%

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Grouse harvested in District 17 has gradually been declining since 2019. Hunters harvest most grouse in Grays Harbor County. Grouse wings samples reveal that hunters harvest a higher percentage of blue grouse in Grays Harbor County compared to Pacific County. This higher take of blue grouse may be related to the amount of Grays Harbor County's higher accessible terrain, which tends to be more characteristic of blue grouse habitat and has a significant amount of USFS lands.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

A generally effective way to hunt grouse is by walking roads and shooting birds as they flush or after they roost in a nearby tree. Grouse are present in higher densities along roads with little traffic. Consequently, hunters should target roads behind locked gates or those that have been decommissioned. To learn more about hunting grouse, please reference [WDFW's upland bird hunting publication](#).

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Forest grouse season starts two weeks later than many previous years. The season runs from Sept. 15, 2022 - Jan. 15, 2023, to protect brood hens with chicks.

PHEASANTS

The Western Washington Pheasant Release Program provides all pheasant hunting opportunities in District 17. District 17 doesn't have self-sustaining pheasant populations. The release program primarily provides an upland bird hunting opportunity and to encourage participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released at 25 sites. Two of those release sites (Chehalis River and Chinook) are in District 17. The Chinook Release Site is in Pacific County, and the Chehalis River Release Site is in Grays Harbor County. Reference the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) publication to learn more.

In a typical year, the program releases around 1,000 pheasants from the Chinook site and at Brady. A special youth hunt will occur in September as well as a senior hunt (age 65 and older). Pheasant releases end on Dec. 15. Hunters should be aware that special regulations apply on western Washington pheasant release sites. Notably:

- Hunters must buy a western Washington pheasant license.
- Non-toxic shot is required.
- Hunting hours are between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The Department has additional information about [Pheasant hunting in Washington](#).

QUAIL

Mountain quail rarely occur in District 17. This district doesn't contain any sizable population, and sightings are rare. The few sightings that occur are usually located in five- to 10-year-old timber harvests with abundant shrub cover and pine saplings. Some sightings occur in brushy cover located near agricultural land. In 2022, hunters reported very few quail harvests in Grays Harbor County and none in Pacific County.

TURKEYS

District 17 doesn't feature sizable turkey populations. Generally, hunters will report less than 30 turkey harvests for all southwest Washington during any given year. The only area wildlife managers knew to have any number of birds in District 17 was in the Willapa River Valley on DNR-managed land in the southern part of GMU 672. Any other flocks that occur in District 17 are small (<15 birds), occur on private agricultural lands, and are thought to be pen-raised birds that nearby landowners release.

Most turkeys found in in District 17 are eastern wild turkeys. About 400 eastern wild turkeys were introduced into southwest Washington from 1987-2000. Introduction was discontinued because turkey populations did not grow or expand, and habitat suitability models indicated southwest Washington habitats were not likely to support viable turkey populations.

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

POPULATION STATUS AND TREND

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 16+ mineral sites where band-tails congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.



HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

Band-tailed pigeon harvest in District 17 once measured thousands of birds. Bag limits were 10 birds per day until 1950, when statewide harvest was estimated at 90,000 birds. However, overharvest and habitat changes caused significant decline in overall numbers. Harvest in District 17 has previously accounted for 30% of the statewide harvest. Annual harvest in Grays Harbor County averaged 80 birds for the decade following 2002, which was the highest average annual harvest among the 19 counties where band-tails are harvested. The maximum total harvest for District 17 since hunting resumed in 2002 was 265 birds. The total statewide harvest has never exceeded 2,100 birds.

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Band-tailed pigeons frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in five- to 10-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests that band-tails use is difficult to predict. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites. Upon finding a good site, sit patiently and wait for harvest opportunities to occur.

Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season.

WDFW wildlife managers knew of only one mineral site within District 17 prior to 2021, when WDFW identified additional sites as part of a newly initiated research. Please contact WDFW if you know the location of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Pacific or Grays Harbor counties.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Since band-tail seasons re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization and submit their harvest to the Department using harvest cards after the season has closed. These regulations will apply in 2022 as well. Hunters should review the 2021 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

RESEARCH

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of District 16 and 17. WDFW has fitted 28 birds with transmitters that are programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.

This project will help the Department to expand knowledge of band-tailed pigeons in areas where mineral sites have not been identified, which would allow WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

- More accurately index the statewide population via mineral site surveys.
- More expertly manage our band-tailed pigeons harvest seasons to potentially allow an expanded hunting opportunity.
- Provide detailed information on resource selection to inform how to manage habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research has helped the Department identify new mineral sites in Grays Harbor County. Hunters and members of the public are funding this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. The existing project is expected to continue through the year 2025 across various districts within Region 6.

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 17, but aren't covered in detail, include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot.



Photo of coyote taken by Bob Ehlers during the 2015 season in GMU 648.

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

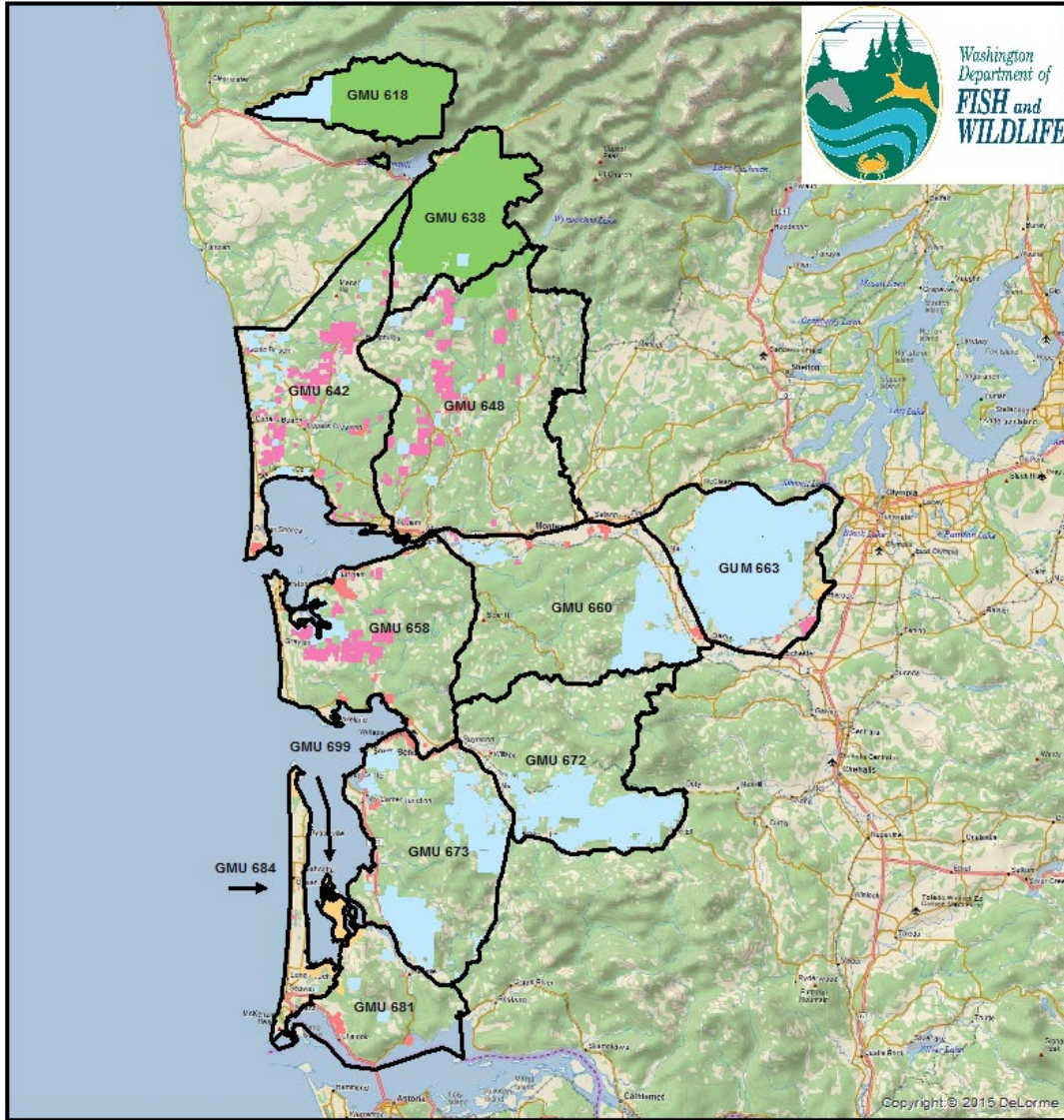
District 17 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities. However, public land opportunities do exist on lands administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), WDFW, and Grays Harbor County.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include 618, 638, and 663. Large tracts of DNR-managed lands also occur in GMUs 660, 672, and 673. The USFWS Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occurs in portions of GMUs 681 and 684. GMU 699 is an island, and the entire GMU is part of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

Most of all other public land opportunities in District 17 occur primarily on WDFW wildlife areas or on lands managed by Pacific and Grays Harbor counties. For more information related to the location of WDFW wildlife areas, visit [WDFW's hunting access website](#). For more information on resources available to locate public lands please reference the Online Tools and Maps section below.

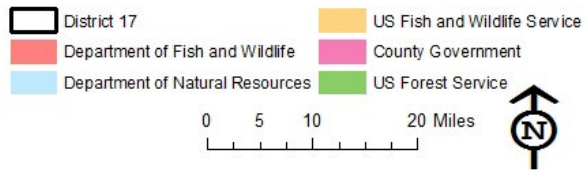
District 17:

Major Public Lands



Disclaimer

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Location of public lands open to public access within each GMU of District 17.

PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Most hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, occur on private industrial forestlands. Timber companies that own large tracts of land and are the most well-known include Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Hancock, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global. However, hunters should be aware that there are many other smaller timber companies with operations in District 17.

WDFW recognizes that some great hunting opportunities occur on private industrial forestlands and works cooperatively with private timber companies to maintain reasonable public access during established hunting seasons. Private industrial forestlands have always been open for public access, but hunters should always remember they are being granted access to private property and access to that property is a privilege.

There has been an increasing trend of timber companies restricting public access and shifting toward a permit system to limit the number of hunters that hunt on their lands. One of the primary reasons for access restrictions and the loss of access is hunter disrespect of the landowner rules. When hunting on private industrial forest lands, WDFW reminds hunters to remember the following:

HUNTING ON PRIVATE LANDS IS A PRIVILEGE, SO TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT

- Obey Posted Signs
- Leave Gates As You Found Them
- Pack Out Trash
- Be Courteous

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT ACCESS FOR THE 2022 SEASON

There are a variety of fee access programs in place, and they vary by area and by company. However, all current programs at the time of this writing fall into three general categories: permit-unlimited, permit-limited, and leases. These fees will also apply to all other outdoor recreational activities, including hiking, camping, mountain biking, and fishing. General descriptions of these three programs are as follows:

Permit-Unlimited: Hunters will be required to purchase an access permit, but there will be an unlimited number of permits available. Only holders of a valid permit will be allowed to recreate in areas associated with the permit.

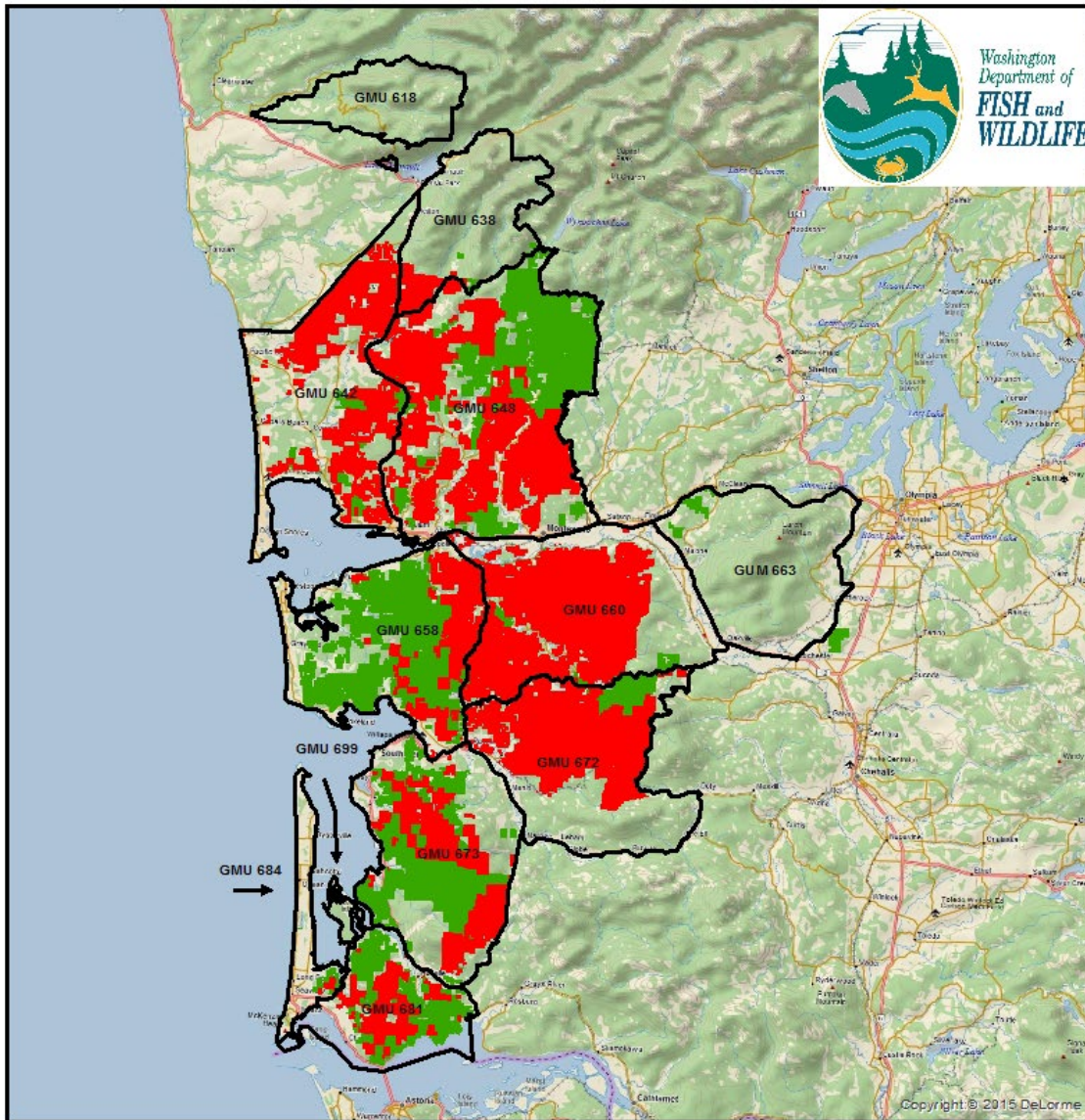
Permit-Limited: There will be a set number of permits available on a first come, first served basis. Only people who have secured one of the limited permits will be allowed to recreate in areas associated with that permit. Permit cost is anticipated to be several hundred dollars. Weyerhaeuser implemented this type of system was implemented by in their Pe Ell Unit (GMUs 672 and 506) during the 2013 season.

Leases: Designated tracts of land are leased to an individual or groups of individuals, and only the lessee and their families are allowed to access that track of land. The cost of a lease can be several thousand dollars.

Hunters need to be aware that many timber companies are charging these access fees in areas where they have historically offered free access. Consequently, it is very important that hunters take the time to contact landowners in areas where they plan to hunt, so they know whether the company's access policy for that area has changed.

The following map represents areas in District 17 where WDFW knows timber companies will be requiring a fee to recreate on their property. However, the broad implementation of access programs by several timber companies since the 2013 season has been a very dynamic process that always seems to be changing. It is important to highlight that the map represents what has been presented to WDFW as of August 4, 2017. It is very possible that some of the areas presented as free access (green) could become fee access (red) areas by the time hunting seasons begin on September 1. Thus, hunters should use this map as a general reference and should understand it is ultimately their responsibility to contact the appropriate timber company to determine how hunter access will be managed in the areas they plan to hunt.

District 17: Private Forest Lands Access



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-  District 17
-  Private Forest Lands - Fee Access
-  Private Forest Lands - Free Access

0 5 10 20 Miles



Private timber company ownership in District 17, including free access (dark green) and permit and fee required (red) lands. The map represents data available on Aug. 4, 2017, and may change at any time.

BASIC ACCESS RULES

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forestlands vary by company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide these rules on signs at access points (gates), on their website (if they use one for public communication) or will provide them to hunters who call to inquire about access (see below for contact information). However, WDFW encourages hunters to follow some basic rules if they find themselves in an area, they are unfamiliar with and are in doubt about specific landowner criteria. The following are intended to be general guidelines of the basic access rules that are commonplace on many private industrial forestlands. Timber companies may have restrictive rules in place, and it is ultimately the responsibility of hunters to make sure they are familiar with those rules.

- ✓ Respect the landowner and other users.
- ✓ Read and obey all posted signs.
- ✓ A logging road without a sign does not mean it is open for public access.
- ✓ Drive slowly with headlights turned on when driving on roads opened to public access.
- ✓ Avoid areas of active timber harvests.
- ✓ No camping, littering, off-road-vehicles (ORVs), off-road driving, target shooting, or forest product removals.
- ✓ An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.
- ✓ Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors that propel or assist the rider.
- ✓ Private forest lands are usually closed to public access during hours of darkness.

All users of private forest lands need to be aware that failure to obey landowner rules can result in prosecution for trespassing and or even a *persona non grata* from the landowner.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ACCESS ALLOWED BY MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Hancock: Hancock industrial forestlands have different levels of access based on management areas. All Hancock industrial forestlands in GMUs 658, 673, and 681 are only open to non-motorized access. During modern firearm seasons, they will open some key main lines to disperse hunters and allow access to interior areas.

Rayonier: Rayonier currently has three levels of access: seasonal permit, recreational lease, and general permit access. For seasonal permit and recreational lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to access rules established by Rayonier. Areas under general permit access require the purchase of a permit from the company. District 17 GMUs with Rayonier lands include 638, 642, 648, 658, 673, and 681. Maps and other information are available on their website.

Forest Investment Associates (FIA): FIA owns large blocks (more than 30,000 acres) of former Rayonier land primarily in Pacific County (GMUs 673 and 658) with some parcels in Grays Harbor County. FIA will respect leases and permits associated with those Rayonier lands. Other FIA lands are open for hunting. AFM manages the permit system for much of the FIA holdings.

Green Diamond: Green Diamond manages hunter access using the dot system and posts access rules at their gates. All of their lands in District 17 are currently open to non-motorized public access. As hunting seasons approach, they will usually begin opening additional roads to public access if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Green Diamond ownership are 642, 648, 658, and 660.

Campbell Global: Campbell Global uses the dot system to manage hunter access and posts access rules at their gates. As hunting season approaches, Campbell Global will normally open some roads to motorized access for the hunting seasons if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Campbell Global-managed timberlands are 648, 658, 672, 673, and 681.

Weyerhaeuser: Weyerhaeuser currently has three levels of access in District 17: general access permit areas, enhanced permit areas, and lease areas. For permit and lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to rules established by Weyerhaeuser. District 17 GMUs with Weyerhaeuser ownership are 648, 658, 660, and 672.

The Nature Conservancy: The Nature Conservancy owns more than 6,000 acres in Pacific County in GMU 681. There is open walk-in access during most of season. Vehicles are not allowed.

SPECIAL NOTICE FOR ARCHERY AND MUZZLELOADER HUNTERS

Private timber companies have traditionally opened their lands to modern firearm hunters during established seasons. Archery and muzzleloader hunters should be aware they may not have full access, particularly vehicle access. Access levels change and can vary by season, year, or landowner. Most often, access is influenced by industrial fire classification issued by DNR. Hunters are urged to respect the landowners and adhere to any access restrictions the landowners have implemented.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE “DOT” SYSTEM

Several timber companies in District 17 use the dot system. Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global all use this system. The dot system is a system of colored dots posted at the start of a road to indicate what level of access is allowed beyond that point. It is intended to give the public a clear understanding of what roads are open to public motorized access.

Normally under the dot system, access is granted for daylight hours only. Landowners usually understand that some hunters will go in an hour or so early to get to their hunting areas and sometimes they may come out a little late. Hunters should always stop and read signs. While

several landowners use the dot system, they all have their own minor differences. In some cases, landowners will close gates in the evenings to prevent unauthorized access.

- Red Dot – no motorized access
- Yellow Dot – Motorized access on weekends only
- Green Dot – Motorized access for licensed vehicles on maintained roads
- No Dot – Some landowners use this, and it means the same as a red dot.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES

Some landowners have hotlines and/or websites where hunters can find information about public access. However, many of these landowners do not have staff members dedicated to answering hunter questions. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to public access on private industrial forest lands.

Timber Company	GMUs	Phone Number
Hancock (<i>no website</i>)	658, 673, 681	1-360-795-3653
Hancock	Various other GMUs	1-800-782-1493
Rayonier	Various	1-360-533-7000
Green Diamond	Various	1-360-426-3381
Weyerhaeuser	Various	1-800-636-6531
Forest Investment Associates	658, 673	404-261-9575
Grays Harbor County	642, 648, 658	<i>No phone number</i>
Olympic Resource Management	642, 648, 658, 673	<i>No phone number</i>
Lewis and Clark Timberlands	684	<i>No phone number</i>

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

One of the most common questions the Department gets from hunters is, “what is hunter access like in the GMU I want to hunt?”. Generally, this question is referring to the amount of motorized access and not access in general. It is important to differentiate the two, because hunters enjoy a high level of access in all District 17 GMUs. However, the type of access varies between motorized and non-motorized access.

The Department developed the following rating system for District 17 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they are thinking of hunting. Access ratings are specific to the level of motorized access allowed and does not refer to the level of access in general. Several GMUs have some type of fee access areas that grant the permit or lease holders a higher level of access. The following ratings are based on a hunter not having a lease or permit.

More information about each rating is available below:

- **Excellent** – Most, if not all, of the main logging roads are open, as well as most of the spur roads.
- **Good** – There is a mix of open and closed roads, with some main logging roads open, but many of the spur roads are closed to motorized access.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is closed to motorized access but may be open to non-motorized access.

Information provided is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Information is updated when available. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to hunter access that have not been answered.

GMU 618 (MATHENEY) – ACCESS RATING: EXCELLENT

GMU 618 is dominated by federal lands included in the Olympic National Forest. The minority of land not managed by the USFS is under state management via the DNR.

GMU 638 (QUINAULT RIDGE) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

The majority of GMU 638 is associated with the Olympic National Forest and managed by USFS. There are numerous small landowners in areas outside of the national forest. Much of the more productive areas of this GMU are private lands not considered industrial forest lands. The Quinault Valley is not recommended for hunters who are not familiar with landownership boundaries. Rayonier also has some signed recreational lease areas.

GMU 642 (COPALIS) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

The primary landowner in this GMU is Rayonier. They have recreational lease, seasonal permit, and general access areas in this GMU.

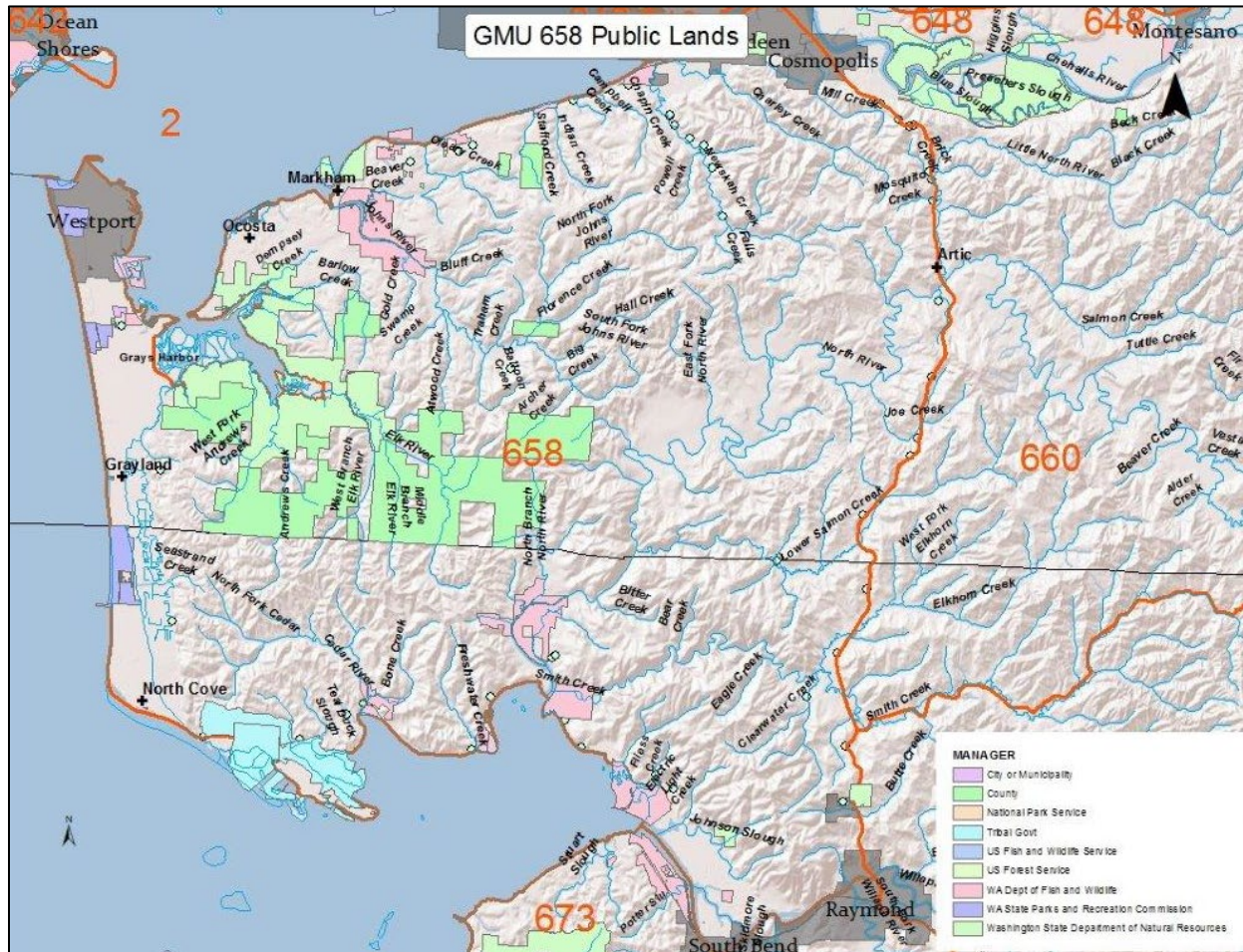
GMU 648 (WYNOOCHEE) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

Overall, GMU 648 consists mostly of private industrial forestlands, but there are also several smaller landowners. Primary landowners in GMU 648 include Weyerhaeuser, Rayonier, Green Diamond, Fruit Growers, Grays Harbor County, and Campbell Global. A portion of the GMU comprises the Hoquiam and Aberdeen watersheds, which are closed to all public access. In addition, several landowners have a cooperative road management agreement with WDFW. Hunters should be advised to read and follow all posted signs. Rayonier has a few leased access areas in this GMU signed. Most Rayonier lands in this GMU are managed under their general access program.

GMU 658 (NORTH RIVER) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

Primary landowners in GMU 658 are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Grays Harbor County, Campbell Global, Green Diamond, and DNR). Overall, access is good but will vary among landowners. The majority of Hancock property will be gated, but some main logging roads will be open during the general modern firearm season. DNR lands in this GMU are surrounded by private forest lands but are accessible by non-motorized access across private timberlands. Many of the landowners surrounding the public lands will open gates for reasonable access to public lands for hunting seasons once fire seasons are over. Rayonier has some recreation leases and general access areas in this GMU. Access to Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU is restricted to permit and lease holders.

Note – WDFW recently added 1,500 acres to the Elk River Unit just south of Westport and east of Twin Harbors State Park. These lands are not yet included in the following map.



GMU 660 (MINOT PEAK) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

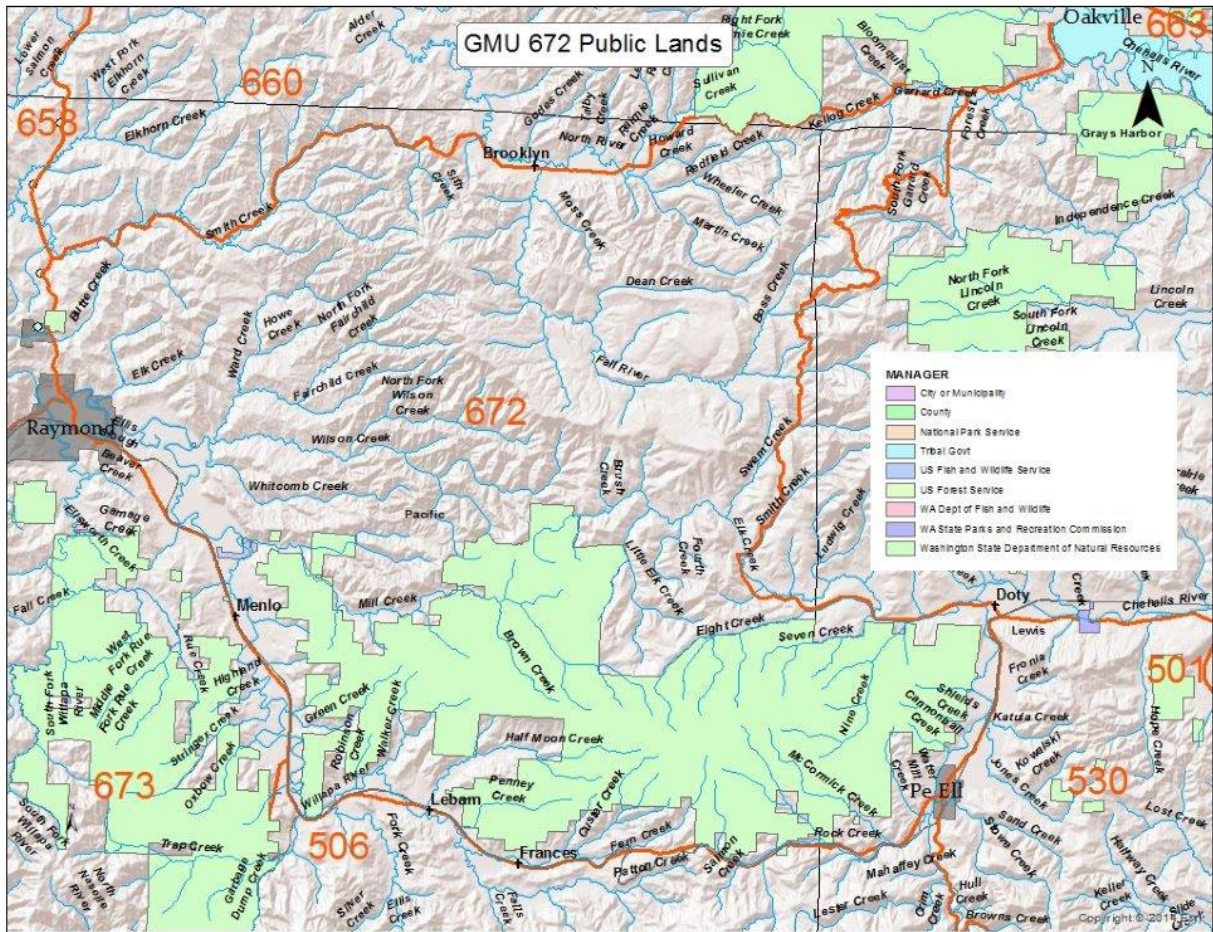
The primary landowner in GMU 660 is Weyerhaeuser. All its lands in this GMU are managed under their general access permit program. A small portion of this GMU is owned by DNR. To prevent elk from being pressured onto farms in the Chehalis Valley, motorized access is limited on DNR-managed lands.

GMU 663 (CAPITOL PEAK) – ACCESS RATING: EXCELLENT

The majority (more than 80%) of GMU 663 is owned and managed by DNR, and most roads are open to motorized access during the modern firearm deer season. This area also has ORV trails. Hunters are advised to make sure they read and adhere to all posted rules.

GMU 672 (FALL RIVER) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

The primary landowners in GMU 672 are Weyerhaeuser and DNR. All Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU are only accessible to permits holders.



GMU 673 (WILLIAMS CREEK) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

Access in this GMU is quite variable and depends on the landowners. Primary private timberland owners are Hancock, Forest Investment Associates (FIA), Hampton, and Campbell Global. DNR also owns large tracts of land. In most areas, Hancock will limit access to only include non-motorized but will open a few of the main logging roads during the general modern firearm season to disperse hunters and allow some interior access. FIA has recreational lease and fee access areas in this GMU available through the [American Forest Management company](#).

GMU 681 (BEAR RIVER) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

Hunters can expect a lower level of access than in the past. The dot system is used by some owners, but it is not consistent because of the checkerboard ownership. Primary private landowners are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, and The Nature Conservancy. Rayonier has some leased lands in this GMU and some general permit access areas. Portions of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 681, and hunters planning to hunt on refuge lands

should [contact the refuge](#) before doing so, as special regulations do apply in some areas. Hunters can also call the refuge at 360-484-3482. Nature Conservancy lands are open to hunting, but motorized access is restricted. Weyerhaeuser has recreational lease and permit access areas in this GMU.

GMU 684 (LONG BEACH) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

Except for Leadbetter Point, the majority of this GMU consists of private property. Hunters are advised to make sure they have permission to access private property before they actively hunt in GMU 684. Portions of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 684, and hunters planning to hunt on refuge lands should [contact the refuge](#) beforehand or call 360-484-3482, as special hunting regulations apply.

[Lewis and Clark Timberlands](#) owns some property in the unit. Access is allowed via a no-cost permit.

GMU 699 (LONG ISLAND) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

The entire GMU is owned and managed by the USFWS. Access is by boat only, but camping is allowed in designated areas. Hunters should contact the [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#) for more details or call 360-484-3482.

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

There are several private landowners in District 17 enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, cooperative agreements with these landowners have not been finalized. Most landowners are expected to renew their cooperative agreements for the 2021 hunting season. Hunters are encouraged to check [WDFW's Hunter Access website](#) or call the Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) to periodically check for updated information.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 17 are a checkerboard of ownerships, and it can be challenging to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. Fortunately, there are several online tools and resources available. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources:

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands is [DNR PLQ maps](#), which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website.

ONLINE PARCEL DATABASES

Hunters can search Pacific County tax parcels using [Mapsifter](#), which is a user-friendly mapping program that allows users to zoom in to their area of interest, click on a parcel, and identify who owns that parcel.

Hunters can search Grays Harbor tax parcels on the [Grays Harbor County website](#).

Private industry has downloadable mobile applications, which can be user friendly and highly functional when afield.

WDFWS "PLACES TO GO HUNTING"

WDFW's updated web page includes additional information on "[places to go hunting](#)". This page provides additional information on various hunting opportunities including large format printable GMU maps.