



SEPTEMBER 22, 2023

Blue Mountains Black Bear Density Study

In the summer of 2021, bear hair snare corrals were used to help determine black bear density in the Blue Mountains. Biologists overlaid a 9 km² grid cell matrix on a topographic map and selected accessible sites within 36 contiguous grid cells across 4 Game Management Units (162, 166, 169, & 175). The GMUs were chosen for public land access and represented GMUs with average harvest rates and presumed average density for the Blue Mountains.

In June, corrals were created using 2 strands of barbed wire placed around 3-5 trees. The strands of barbed wire were placed at heights to obstruct both adults and cubs. Logs and sticks were piled in the center of each corral to hold the lure, which consisted of a mix of cow blood and fish oil. This provided an olfactory lure with no food reward for the bears. The

lure was applied when the corrals were constructed and every 10 days after when the corrals were checked. Staff conducted 4 repeat visits to each corral to establish mark/recapture frequency of bear DNA. During each check the barbed wire was thoroughly checked and all hair was removed & collected in individual envelopes. The frequency of repeat and novel DNA detections were used to establish bear density estimates.

The results estimate the total density of black bears at 34.8 bears/100 km², which is similar to black bear density estimated in Northeast Washington (31.1 bears/100 km²).



Wooten Floodplain Management Plan

The WT Wooten Floodplain Management Plan did not receive any funding in the 2023-35 Biennium so no lake rehabilitation projects will be moving forward at this time.

In cooperation with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe, WDFW is conducting an assessment of the Tucannon River and associated infrastructure from Camp Wooten ELC to just north of the WT Wooten Headquarters. The assessment will be used to drive the designs of the future projects involving the lakes, campgrounds, and powerline. A kick-off meeting will be occurring this fall to gather public comments regarding the future of the Tucannon Lakes.

2020 Flood Event

Repairs from the 2020 flood event are ongoing. This spring the campground that was buried under 13 feet of debris was cleared and was reopened as Campground 9.

WDFW is still working towards drilling an irrigation well at the WT Wooten Headquarters to no longer have to chase the Tucannon River as it continues to move around on the floodplain.

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Cummings Creek Fire 9-8-23

The lightning storm that passed through the Tucannon Valley on Thursday, September 7 resulted in a wildfire starting and burning on Friday, September 8. The smoke from the fire was first seen around 2PM and Wildlife Area Manager Dingman received a phone call from DNR at 2:30PM. The fire was located on Hatchery Ridge above the Tucannon Fish Hatchery and burned both sides of the ridge into the Tucannon and Cummings Creek. DNR called in air resources and they responded in full force. There was a scout plane circling above the fire, a smoke jumper crew parachuted into the fire, 2 helicopters were dipping water out of Rainbow Lake, a lead plane was guiding 5 Fire Boss planes and 4 tankers over the fire to drop water and retardant. Forward progression of the fire was stopped at about dark on September 8, and the hotshots remained on the fire overnight. A DNR Strike Team arrived just after dark and took over on the fire the morning of September 9. They remained on the fire mopping up and checking for hot spots until the morning of September 11 when they were dispatched to a different fire. Local DNR crews remained on the fire for several more days to complete mop up.

The fire was mapped at 84 acres in size. Fall weed spraying with a helicopter is being planned for the burned area to try to get ahead of the yellow starthistle and cheatgrass infestations in that area.



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 PROTECT AND
 PERPETUATE FISH,
 WILDLIFE AND
 ECOSYSTEMS WHILE
 PROVIDING
 SUSTAINABLE FISH
 AND WILDLIFE
 RECREATIONAL AND
 COMMERCIAL
 OPPORTUNITIES.

Large Wood Projects

Phase 2 of the large wood project planned for the section of Tucannon River from the Hatchery bridge to the fish trap was completed in August.

No new large wood projects are planned on the WT Wooten Wildlife Area at this time.

Bighorn Sheep Update

Current population size is 14 sheep, with 2 lambs surviving out of the 5 born last spring. The sheep are still outside the elk fence and have spent the past few years on Don Howard's property.

Weed Spraying

WDFW received the RMEF grant again this year to continue treating noxious weeds with the helicopter. The funds will be used this fall to aerially treat 360 acres of yellow starthistle on Abels Ridge on the WT Wooten Wildlife Area.

WDFW also received grant funds from the Mule Deer Foundation to treat 225 acres along Blind Grade and Oliphant Road. This area will also be sprayed this fall using a helicopter.

Wolf Update

There are currently 6 wolf packs in SE Washington: Touchet (8 members), Columbia (5 members), Tucannon (8 members), Grouse Flats (4 members), 139 Group (7 members), and Butte Creek (6 members). Captures are continuing as the opportunity arises to try to get working collars in each of the packs. Due to the dynamic nature of packs in newly colonized areas, pack numbers will likely fluctuate now that most of the suitable habitat is occupied.

Due to depredations on livestock, 2 members were removed from the 139 Group in August.

Elk Calf Mortality Study

WDFW conducted a third year of the study this spring/summer to look at elk calf survival. A total of 115 elk calves were captured between May 18 and June 15 and fitted with radio-telemetry collars. The collars were tracked daily by technicians and mortalities were investigated to attempt to determine the cause of death.

No update was available at the time of this newsletter.

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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The W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area consists of 16,481 acres in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. The main valley contains the Tucannon River, along which are located 8 man-made lakes which were constructed in the 1950s. The lakes are stocked with hatchery raised rainbow trout for a put-and-take fishery. There are 10 campgrounds located on the Wildlife Area.

The area was historically a major big game wintering location and lies adjacent to National Forest lands. The bulk of the land purchases occurred from 1941-1944. The elk fence was constructed in the 1960s.

Current management objectives and problems are similar to past goals and problems which include providing maximum winter-range forage conditions while meeting recreational use demands. At the present time there is a harvest season of some type taking place 12 months of the year within the boundaries of the wildlife area.



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